



CHAPTER 4: SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS*

Whether dealing with violent deaths in major disasters or in armed conflict, issues concerning the socio-cultural order of a community are valid. The inability to perform rituals condemns a family to a second death: the symbolic death of their loved one for the lack of a tomb that perpetuates his or her name and confers social worth to the deceased and his or her inclusion in the generational continuity of a family.

INTRODUCTION

The human being is united in social groups by a variety of bonds, which means that his or her death, outside of the biological event, has profound implications. This chapter addresses the implications related to socio-cultural aspects of communities that support the recommendation made by the Pan American Health Organization, and that governments and authorities should be aware of, to avoid taking incorrect decisions about the disposition of bodies in critical moments such as disasters with massive fatalities.

Death is a transcendent event for any social group. The beliefs with respect to an afterlife, relationships between the living and the dead, the desire to offer respect and honor the deceased, the mystery and the fear that surround the unknown, the change in routine, and the grief inherent in the death of a human being shape the funeral customs characteristic of a culture.

The disappearance or loss of a loved one is followed by an emotional, physical, and subjective reaction, known as grief. Grief is an objective state of deprivation, of being stripped of everything. It is a complex and changeable phenomenon involving many factors. Disposal of the dead body in human society is surrounded by ritual acts performed around the body, funerals, and general commemorative rituals that benefit stages of the grieving process.

Although the funeral is only a small part of this process, it is essential because of its public nature. It is through public ritual that society accepts and pays attention to the grieving process.¹ Public rituals around death strengthen the social bonds with the hope of shared survival. Such acts fight off death through continuity of the social group: funerals give the members of society the impression that death is culturally

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1 Irion, Paul E. "The funeral and the bereaved." In: C. Allen Haney, Christina Leimer, Juliann Lowery, *Spontaneous memorials: violent death and emerging mourning ritual*. <http://www.adec.org/pubs/omega.htm>.

controlled and regulated;² they help society confront the death of its members and mend the trauma of loss.

Rituals also have a personal and private impact on the mourners: they provide an opportunity to express their loss in a prescribed way and to accept the reality of their loss, which requires disposing of the presence of the body.

When isolated deaths occur within the normal context of social development, the relatives and social groups comply with funeral rituals without hesitation, in the manner proscribed by local customs. However, when a catastrophic event occurs with many deaths, whether caused by natural phenomena or by human activity, social groups are unable to act “naturally” or “as usual.”

When tens or hundreds of corpses are present, such intense social pressure results that there is a tendency to make decisions that neglect the needs of the group and individual to conduct proper funeral rituals. This has a significant impact on the mourning process. The effects of disrupting normal rituals and the unresolved mourning of a society are thought to be decisive factors in the recurrence of episodic outbreaks of violence. The map of violence in the world shows similar antecedents throughout history, although they may be attributed to a variety of causes at different times.

Currently, the levels of proficiency in the scientific study of death and in the development of technology provide alternatives in managing mass fatalities in disasters. It is possible for survivors of major disasters to recover the bodies and to proceed with the rituals that will help them confront and resolve their grief, both privately and collectively.

THE FUNERAL RITE

Society is a system of relations built between individuals who are bound by sympathy and utility, whose life together is regulated by customs and norms. Death is the most powerful and mysterious of the changes that affect the cycle of human life, it is a hazard that has the power to destroy family structure and break the ties of a community. The death of the human organism, a biological phenomenon, does not involve the disappearance of the affective ties and interrelationships—of all sorts—of the deceased with the members of the social group. Thus, to the extent that human beings have developed their capacity to conceptualize, they construct and live in a mental reality in which their relations to the deceased persist, dynamic and unchanged, until mourning is appropriately carried out.

The origin of worship of the dead is intimately tied with the very birth of civilization and is closely related with it: the desire to keep and perpetuate absent people and things compelled humans initially to create pictorial and sound representations, and later to develop words. These words permitted and permit humankind to address conceptual aspects of the world. Thus, the idea of “another life” or “the beyond,” is

2 Bauman Z. *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. Cited in Jon Davies, *War Memorials*, in: Clark C (ed), *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers for the Sociological Review, 1993, 15. Available at: www.uea.ac.uk/~j024/unsoc/beingdead.pdf.

conceived as an invisible world, inhabited by the souls of the dead and by gods and demons, as manifest in the power of nature. The “beyond” is related to the appearance of religion (from the Latin *religare*, “to bring together”) that serves as the basis for social bonds.

Rituals involve the symbolic use of body movements and gestures to express and articulate meanings about a social situation. They are used to structure the society, initiate people into a community, guide human behavior, give significance to important aspects of life, commemorate transitions, and connect emotion and reason through a physical act. The rituals are pillars of social organization and provide for communication whose function it is to maintain control of events that, otherwise, could cause serious disruptions in the social performance of the group.

Rituals often have religious meaning but this is not an intrinsic feature. The aspect that defines them is that they comprise more or less fixed, invariable sequences of formal acts and utterances that are not entirely defined by the practitioners. When responses to crisis are ritualized through these traditional, conventional, and relatively long-lasting customs, the sensation of familiarity contributes to a feeling of comfort and of control of the situation.

It is believed that ritual begins as a spontaneous response to a given situation in order to meet the needs that people cannot express.³ This is why rituals are so important in crisis situations in which the question of meaning initially stems from emotional more than rational factors.

The funeral belongs to the group of the so-called “rites of passage,” a term coined by the Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep,⁴ that facilitate the important transitions in human life. Three phases of passage from one stage to another are described: separation, marginalization, and reincorporation. In separation there is ritualized removal of the individual from society. This is followed by a period of transition during which the individual is marginalized and is the most uncertain of the stages for the persons undergoing the transition. They do not have a clearly defined role, their position is vague and indeterminate, and they are in a state of limbo with respect to their normal social role. This phase ceases with reincorporation, when the individual is accepted back into society with his or her new status.

The threat that death poses for society can be seen through the funeral as a rite of passage of two kinds. For the deceased it is the transition between life and death, which is conceived as heaven, a spiritual world or another life. The survivors perform the ceremonies and their social status and identity are related with that of the deceased person. The survivors abandon some roles and lose some status as a result of the death, but they also assume new roles.

The funeral ritual has the greatest emphasis on the liminal period—from the Latin *limen* or threshold—the term used to describe transitions characteristic of the rites of passage. When passage through this threshold is interrupted, the assumption of socially important roles is altered, causing damage to the social framework. It may

3 Irion, Paul E. *The funeral and the bereaved*. In: C. Allen Haney, Christina Leimer, Juliann Lowery, *Spontaneous memorials: violent death and emerging mourning ritual*. <http://www.adec.org/pubs/omega.htm>.

4 Van Gennep, Arnold. *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960; Cited by C. Bourchier (Ref. 18). Available at: grad.usask.ca/gateway/archive13.html.

take several generations to evaluate the magnitude of this damage, because its effects are not immediately seen.

In short, funeral rites serve to redistribute the roles of the deceased among the survivors, adjusting the social roles of those who remain in order to ensure the continuity of the group. In the initial phase of mourning the funeral rite serves as a means of social control by establishing a pattern of behavior that assists the survivors to keep their emotions in check, to reduce their anxiety so that they can manage a new situation, and, in the long term, to be rewarded with new status and new roles that are publicly acknowledged. If we take into account that, in addition to all of this, it affirms to the mourner that they will be accepted once again into the world of the living, and that their isolated condition is not permanent, we have a glimpse of the inevitable upheaval caused by the omission of this ritual.

Changes in funeral rites through history

The funeral rite has changed throughout history, from abandonment of the body in the natural environment in prehistoric times, through burial in common graves, up to the funerals we usually practice in Western society today. Initially, the dead were buried near their homes; cemeteries do not appear in cities until the seventeenth century. In the Middle Ages, the dead were left with their faces uncovered and, with the exception of aristocrats and clergy, were buried in common graves which remained open which allowed the deposit of other bodies. Subsequently, it was popular to prepare death masks that were exhibited in the home or in the church where a vigil took place. Attempts at preserving the identity of the deceased can be seen through these customs, but it was not until the twentieth century that the idea of emphasizing the name and identity of the deceased took hold.

Philippe Ariès, the modern French historian, in his excellent book *The Hour of Our Death*,⁵ examines the evolution of cultural perceptions about death in Western societies, their relation to funeral rites, and their impact on the life of the community. He recounts that the social perception of death has gone through stages that reflect the culture as it is lived in each epoch. For example, in medieval Christian culture, death was considered a collective destiny, ordinary, unavoidable, and not especially frightening; it was confronted with resignation and a mystical faith. In view of the fact that many deaths were natural and expected, a ritual was strengthened that, in the romantic era, progressively gave more importance to feelings of grief and its manifestations. This situation changed with the great world wars when the perception of a “natural order,” whereby the parents die first and then the children, gives way to the so-called “inverted death,” and it is the parents who bury the children.

It is said that this situation influenced perceptions about death in the twentieth century. A radical change in the traditional ideas about death has occurred, a change in which death no longer plays a central role in daily life and its importance is minimized in the public sphere. The subject of death has been eliminated; it is somewhat painful, prohibited, and even disgraceful; it is a subject that is embarrassing; there is

5 Ariès, Philippe. *The hour of our death. A landmark history of western man's changing attitudes toward death – and thus his perceptions of life itself – over the last thousand years.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1981.

the expectation that it be treated with discretion, and not discussed in public. The reasoning is that death should be tolerable for the survivors, unaccompanied by strong or noisy emotions that annoy the society. Ariés calls it “invisible death” and relates it to the need for the social machinery to replace the soldier fallen at the front by another, as one game piece replaces another.

Changes in funeral rituals over time are slow, usually taking place over several generations, and when they do appear it is between long periods of calm,⁶ when established customs can facilitate change. The omission of a community’s own rituals due to the haste caused by the pressures inherent in a disaster and because of the difficulty of carrying out rituals, presents a situation of extreme pain for the community that parallels the “invisible death” described for situations of war.

Influence of culture, religion, and history on funeral rites

Another factor regarding rites and commemorations is that they reflect, at a given time, contemporary society and the traditional customs from which they originated. The changes in rituals are imperceptible over the course of one or even several generations, as we have just seen. The traditional component of ritual gives significance to death *within a culture*, thus helping to heal and strengthen so that life can go forward in a very complex and changing world. On the contrary, an interruption in the observance of the rite reveals that major historical changes are in progress. Let us briefly look at some examples that manifest cultural and historical differences in this area.

According to the customs of the indigenous Wari population in Brazil, who practice endocannibalism, close family members eat the body or, if it is decomposed, they burn it in order to avoid putting it into a cold grave. They view burial with as much horror as cannibalism is viewed by those who do not practice it. Despite how strange and alien this practice may seem to our culture, it is noteworthy that both of these rites prescribe special treatment for a body that neither appreciates nor benefits from the efforts of its fellow humans.

Let us contrast this historically with what occurred in the Andean region during the Spanish conquest. This was a time of catastrophic displacement of the indigenous peoples, who formed the “vanquished” group. This was followed by a period of acculturation, of collaboration with the Spanish, and of assimilation into the dominant system, and their own society and the culture were destroyed.⁷ The indigenous people were forced to assimilate Christianity, the religious expression of those who dominated them, and they attempted to comprehend their new situation which was created by the traumatic experience of submission.

Rituals in the indigenous cultures that occupied Latin America before the Spanish conquest played a supporting role and were a point of reference for those people, to

6 Ariés, , op. cit. pg. xvi, preface.

7 Riveros E., María Elena. *Religión e identidad en el pueblo Mapuche*; presented at the seminar on "Problems of Latin American Culture," Prof. Grinor Rojo. Available at www.uchile.cl/facultades/filosofia/publicaciones/cyber/Cyber5/textos/riveros.html.

the extent that colonizers considered that their destruction was essential for progress. The Franciscans who colonized Central America beginning in 1523 described it: “We burn everything ceremonial and suspicious.”⁸

Today, ancestral customs are only observed in the few tribes that still subsist as communities and continue to keep their traditions, although many have not managed to escape from outside influence. Respect for deeply rooted local traditions gains increasing importance in communities that are on the verge of disappearing.

Due to the historical importance of these cultures, we present a brief account of some of them here. They have been extensively documented in anthropology and history reports about funeral rituals and customs in which death, the soul, and its passage to the afterworld were represented in rites of passage.

The Incas, a name used by the rulers of the ancient Peruvian empire and by extension applied to the peoples who formed this empire and to the civilization that developed, had funeral rites that were particularly solemn. The corpse had to remain intact since the soul remained for some time near the body, and later followed its destiny. For the Sapa Inca (the supreme ruler) destiny was the sun itself; for noblemen it was the heavens or upper world, where they were free from all evil; for all others it was a world that was equally miserable as the one they inhabited before death. It was also believed that the souls of village people returned in animal bodies. The body of the Sapa Inca was seated in a golden chair that was placed in a chamber, and his women were buried alive in another chamber. After some time had passed they were embalmed and the mummy of the Inca was transferred to Coricancha or the Temple of the Sun.

In Aztec culture,⁹ for the deceased who were destined to go to Mictlán (the underworld) it was common to place the corpse in a crouched position, wrapping it in a shroud and tying it tightly. Before burning the mortuary bundle, a small stone was put in the mouth of the corpse (jade, in the case of the aristocracy). That stone symbolized the heart and was placed in the mouth so that it could be left as a jewel in the seventh region of the underworld, where it was thought that wild beasts devoured the human heart. They put a jar with water among the shrouds that had to serve for the journey. The spirit had to face extreme cold in one of the distant regions, where the wind was so violent that it cut like a knife. The deceased’s jewels and adornments were burned in a fire to help overcome the cold.

The heavy shroud would be used for the spirit to pass another test: the passage between two mountains that would fall to block the route. The deceased received objects of value that could be offered up to Mictlantecuhtli, the lord of the dead, or to his wife, Mictcacíhuatl, when the last stage of the difficult journey was completed. Besides the magic formulas and advice to the

8 Bautista Pomar J. *Relación de Texcoco*, México, Díaz de León, 1981; Cited by Gruzinski S, *La red desgarrada en la colonización de lo imaginario*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica de México, 1995. Second printing. Page 23. Available at www.todohistoria.com/informes/aztecascultomuerte.htm.

9 *Ibid.*

deceased about the correct path to reach the afterworld, it was the responsibility of the elderly to direct the funeral ceremonies, from ritual shrouding to the incineration of the corpse and burial of the ashes.

After the incineration, which was carried out while chanting songs, the elderly sprayed the human remains with water, placed them in an urn, and buried them in rooms of the house, including the small stone that had been placed in the mouth of the corpse. Miscellaneous offerings were included, along with the indispensable dog that would have to help its master in the journey beyond the grave.

According to the indigenous informants of the missionary Bernardino Sahagún, it was customary to put daily offerings where the bones of the dead were buried. The ashes and bones of the noblemen were not buried in just any room, but in a sacred place, usually close to a temple. The ritual apparatus in those cases was much more complicated and involved the deaths of numerous slaves.

There were very unique features in the funerals and burials of women who died in childbirth. After multiple washings, the body of the *Mocihuaquetzqui* (brave woman) was dressed in her finest clothing and at sunset, the hour of burial, the husband took the body to the courtyard of the temple devoted to the *Cihuateteo* (celestial princesses), where she would be buried. The relatives and friends of the dead woman formed the funeral retinue, all armed "with shields and swords and crying out as if urging soldiers into battle." Such posturing, besides being ritualized, had a practical function: they had to defend themselves against young warriors who would raid the entourage to seize the corpse, and cut off the central finger of the left hand and the hair, items to which they attributed magical powers that would give them bravery in battle and inspire fear in their enemies. Bandits also tried to seize the corpse for similar reasons in order to cut off the left arm. So the husband and other relatives of the deceased kept watch over the burial site for four nights.

In contrast with the Aztec or the Incas, who dominated vast areas, several independent Colombian cultures occupied relatively small areas in the Andean region and along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. They reached various levels of development and although they shared many features, they were very different in other aspects. Among the most significant were the *Tayrona*, *Sinú*, *Muisca*, *Quimbaya*, *Toliroa*, *Calima*, *Tierradentro*, *San Agustín*, *Nariño*, and *Tumaco* cultures.

Tierradentro and *San Agustín* flourished long before the Spanish conquest, while other cultures were supposedly at the apex of their cultural and social development when the Spanish arrived. *San Agustín* is one of the most extraordinary ceremonial centers in South America, notable for hundreds of monolithic statues and graves spread over a very broad area.

There, the primary burial included the construction of a tomb, small cylindrical pits where the flexed body barely fit, within which objects of the owner and food were placed for the passage to a new life. The second part of the ritual involved transferring the remains, by that time dry bone, to larger tombs

known as hypogea, which served for the collective burial of a human group, divided by social status. There, the remains of prominent tribe members were placed in serial underground burial chambers that were laboriously dug into the soft rock and decorated with painting on the walls and ceiling.

Currently in Colombia, most indigenous groups are not homogeneous and experience the same conflicts and characteristics as any other human community, with economic, ideological, political, and religious differences, etc. Within the same indigenous population we find Catholics and Protestants, as well as groups that do not practice either of these faiths. A large percentage of the indigenous population is undergoing “peasantization,” which is reflected in the lack of homogeneity of their rituals.

A major disaster can have a concrete affect on an indigenous group, in which case it is a priority to consider the most viable ritual in accordance with the living beliefs within a community, and which takes into account specific ethnological and cultural characteristics.

On 6 June 1994, an earthquake caused landslides resulting in extensive flooding of the Paéz River basin in the Cauca Department of Colombia.¹⁰ In municipalities that were declared disaster areas there is a concentration of indigenous Paez and Guambiano peoples. The human losses, including the dead and missing, were nearly 1,100 people. The earthquake caused dispersion of families, loss of relatives and friends, fragmentation of communities, and loss of farmland, houses, crops, animals, and other properties. The entire membership of the Wila council disappeared in the landslide, forcing the community to select new leaders in the midst of the emergency. During the days following the earthquake, it was a priority for both indigenous organizations and the State to reunite scattered families in the area affected by the disaster. In a variety of sources consulted, we have not found specific mention of funeral rituals related to this sad occasion.

In Catholic theology there are numerous allusions to physical death, to its eschatological significance, to the observance of ritual, and care of the grave. These types of judgments establish a frame of reference that is interpreted in different ways depending on attachment to a particular cult.

This is illustrated in Ecclesiasticus (Ch. 38 v.16-17): “My son, shed tears over the dead, and begin to lament as if thou hadst suffered some great harm, and according to judgment cover his body, and neglect not his burial. And for fear of being ill spoken of weep bitterly for a day, and then comfort thyself in thy sadness.”

10 Wilches-Chaux G. “Particularidades de un desastre - características del terremoto y la avalancha del 6 de junio de 1994 y de sus efectos sobre las comunidades afectadas.” Corporación NASA KIWE, 27 June 1995. Available at: www.nasakiwe.gov.co/quepaso.php.

The book of Job (Ch.19, v. 25) makes allusion to the belief that on judgment day the souls will recover their bodies: "...I know that my redeemer lives and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

In the following discussion, our references to the Catholic religion are based on rituals used in Colombia, a country with a Catholic majority, and which can be extrapolated to other Latin American countries.

Catholics place great value on a "dignified" burial, which includes a religious ceremony, coffin (the best possible), and burial in a cemetery. Such importance is placed on this ceremony that, in many cases, neighbors and associates contribute money as an expression of solidarity to defray the costs.

A vigil is carried out which involves accompanying the corpse before burial either at home or at a funeral establishment. The purpose of the vigil is to make the difficult time after death more bearable, and since the body is exposed in the coffin it allows people to see it for the last time. The body is prepared or embalmed to delay decomposition and to make it appear "as if it were alive" during the funeral rites. During these ceremonies prayers alluding to "eternal rest" or "perpetual shining light" express the wishes of the mourners for the departed soul. With the exception of some groups, it is customary to send floral wreaths or bouquets with the name of the sender written on a wide purple or white sash.

The family members and associates of the deceased attend both the vigil and burial wearing dark colors to show sympathy for the loss of the loved one. Close family members, especially the widows, parents, and children keep "full mourning" if they dress for a period of time in black; when in "half mourning" clothing and accessories might be black, grey, or white.

During the funeral, the body is taken from the room where the vigil is held and taken to the church for the religious ceremony or funeral rites. Once the mass concludes, a procession of relatives, friends, and associates, led by a hearse, moves slowly to the cemetery in order to accompany the deceased to his/her "last dwelling place." Prayers are made invoking eternal life, and the coffin is placed in a prepared burial vault or a grave.

Cremation is increasingly common but is prohibited for those who die from unnatural causes until it is certified that there is documentation of a thorough examination of the body, that any physical evidence necessary for resolving the case has been preserved, and the deceased has been accurately identified. There is a trend toward replacing traditional cemeteries—considered depressing—by "cemetery parks" with green areas, trees, and gardens. The remains should be exhumed within five years and placed in an ossuary, or cremated and deposited elsewhere, including in the home of the deceased.

The subsequent mourning period includes the gathering of the closest family members and restrictions on recreational and social activities for a time. It is customary to hold special services for nine consecutive days following the death (the novena), and celebrate mass at the end of the first month and the first year after the death.

Mythology surrounding death—*algor mortis* or the cold of death—has been embraced in popular culture with the belief that the cold of the corpse is transferred to susceptible people such as to pregnant women and her fetus. It is also believed that the pale or ashen color of the corpse is acquired by those who, working in mortuaries or morgues, are “anointed by death”; these workplaces, as well as cemeteries, are considered to be mysterious, somber, and dirty. It is believed that a corpse’s decomposition pollutes the environment and poses a health hazard, not only for reasons of hygiene but out of fear of the afterlife. These myths, as we will discuss later, acquire such importance in the imagination of the community that it is possible to understand the decision-making that denies the performance of funeral rites.

For Judaism,¹¹ the *Shuljan Aruj*, a summary of Judaic law, sets the standards and principles of actions that Jews should satisfy for various circumstances of life. There are two central ideas in Judaic law: respect and reverence for the dead and the treatment of the afflicted and relatives. For the first, it is said that the human being has three sources: man, woman, and God; at conception, God transmits a part of his spirit to humans that returns to Him at death. Immediate burial conforms with the first of the tenets of rabbinic law.

The body is the container of the spirit and the spirit originates from God. This concept explains the meticulous care given the corpse (the order and respect in preparing and washing the corpse by specially designated people). The period from the time of death until burial is complete is called *onanut* which could be translated as “grief.” The necessary elements for the funeral rite should be simple and austere since the deceased should be presented before God in all of his or her purity and simplicity. Floral offerings are not made since they are considered a symbol of joy, and the body must be buried before *Shabbat*, or the Jewish day of rest.

The liminal features of mourning are noteworthy: there are specific instructions for the first seven days, the first thirty days, and the first year following death, as a way of marking the isolation and later reintegration of the mourner into the community. They encompass behavior, food that can be eaten, and standards for daily activities and for relationships.

In this context, autopsy violates the principle of respect for the dead and is only authorized when, according to the physician, new knowledge can be gained that would help cure others suffering from the same disease, or when the law requires it. In light of the expectation of resurrection, all of the body parts should be buried together, so in case of autopsy, it is important that loss of blood or tissue during the procedure be avoided, and after having conducted the necessary examinations, any fluids or tissues be buried in their entirety with the corpse.

Cremation has been considered abhorrent since Biblical times, and while not strictly forbidden by Jewish law, it is discouraged. Embalming is prohibited because it violates the principle of respect for the dead; in its place, the body is ritually washed so that it will be as clean and pure as it when it first arrived in the world. Cremation or embalming can only be authorized in special circumstances such as transfer of the body to another country.

11 Augman, Ricardo Alberto. *Sobre duelos enlutados y duelistas. Muerte y duelo: mirada al judaísmo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Lumen, 2000. Page 209.

In the United States there are relatively recent rituals, such as cremation, commemorations for the victims of AIDS sewn into a quilt, the wall of the Viet Nam Veterans Memorial,¹² the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and other monuments to the war dead. These rituals represent the values, beliefs, or lifestyle of the deceased and there is an increasing tendency to personalize the funeral, either placing photographs of the deceased in the room where the vigil takes place, or music enjoyed by the decedent, decorations with a car or favorite toy, and other objects that are incorporated into the gravestone.

Death is considered the most personal and irreversible act, and it is hoped that loved ones are treated and remembered in ways that express respect for their singularity or that reveal a special relationship with the deceased. Relatively recent changes include the trend for those attending the funeral to be more participative rather than passive during the ceremony as a way of emphasizing that the service could not be conducted without their presence. Traditional rites have been modified so that relatives can sing a special song, read a poem written for the occasion, or share a special experience or story related to the decedent.

The ceremony has become more informal owing to the spontaneous participation of those attending and certain practical aspects such as scattering ashes after cremation takes place. As a reflection of the increased mix of cultures, there is a trend toward secular rather than sacred ceremonies.

THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF THE CORPSE AND BURIAL

It is clear from this brief review that the corpse has a symbolic value of great power for families and communities of every culture and creed. This symbolic value comes from the power that the corpse elicits as a material object, and which is explained by our notion of reality as the image that we have of objects and, in general, of perception through the senses. Culture is built on certain symbolic foundations determined by the close and permanent bond between the object and its representation.

The bond that the members of a family maintain with their dead is of a symbolic and religious nature, which is established through the material objects that remind us of them; this meaning does not exist outside of this evocative power. The grave fulfills the function of intervention and, in addition, as the exercise of a right, which is expressed by constructing a grave, maintaining it, and visiting it. This is similar to the relationship believers have with objects of worship: it is the exercise of the right to conserve the material object which is the depository of symbolic evocation. The State has the duty to guarantee the exercise of this right.¹³

As we have seen, all religions have their own forms of ritual that allow their believers to understand the significance of what cannot be directly experienced. Ritual participation is known as the “right to worship” and the ability to perform all

12 Leimer, Christina. *Funeral and memorial practices in a new era*. The Tombstone Traveller's Guide. Copyright, 1996-2002.

13 Cifuentes, Eduardo. Fallo de la Corte Constitucional Colombiana por acción de tutela (24-III-94). *¿Quién tiene derecho a exhumar un cadáver? El derecho a la inhumación en casos forenses en medicina legal*, vol. 7, pages 5-17.

of those acts, ceremonies, and practices through which we manifest belief in the supernatural or in the importance of the human being as a participant in the succession of generations.

One can deduce from the text above that any act disrupting the exercise of worship is extremely serious for the believer since it cuts off communication with the "other world," it hinders the faithful in fulfillment of their obligations, and it inhibits the healing aspects of individual and collective mourning.

The importance of worship derives from the importance of religion itself, which is understood as belief in something to which the individual is subordinate and completely dependent. It gives specific meaning to all acts of existence, and establishes bonds among the individuals of the social group.

The importance of worship, as an element that is inseparable from belief, has led to the inclusion of religious worship as a fundamental right in constitutional charters. In this way, protection of freedom is expanded from simple recognition of a belief to the full acceptance of the acts of worship. This also applies to the freedom not to participate in any form of worship and to honor neither the body nor the person at a funeral, but the idealized personification of the objectives of the social group. Burial and exhumation of corpses tend to be regulated by religious authorities, but in the absence of this type of tradition or belief, the care of the corpse, including rights of burial and exhumation, are the responsibility of the State and not a church.

The custom of creating graves has a fundamental and profound significance. An inscription of the name and in some cases a photograph, statue, or epitaph memorializes the deceased. As has been said, the grave functions first as an evocation of the deceased, and second, as a symbol of social stratification due to the tomb's size, shape, materials, location, etc. Tombs represent families, and the value of the materials in the tomb represents the degree of family esteem for the deceased.

Death is the object of an entire religious elaboration derived from the mystery surrounding the end of life. The corpse serves, then, as the means for mythical re-creation of the deceased and of its new intermediary relationship with a higher being when the soul has had the privilege of salvation. From this standpoint, the idea of building tombs is a response to the personal need for transcendence and perpetuation.

Burial also has undeniable anthropological importance. The human being deals more easily with death when there is certainty that the corpse will rest forever in one site. The disappearance of a person implies enormous suffering when there is no expectation that he or she survives and the dead body is not found. This phenomenon has been well researched in terms of the psychological situation of relatives of the "disappeared." The inability to overcome grief impedes psychological and social recovery and maintains the family member in a paradoxical state of unbearable hope. The certainty, even in extreme situations, of knowing that a loved one is dead provides a measure of tranquility: to bury the dead is also a symbolic act by which humans recognize their temporal condition and surrender to the changing fortunes of life.¹⁴

The three ideas mentioned above: social differentiation, religious belief, and anthropological characteristics, can present simultaneously or separately. In any case,

¹⁴ Ibid.

religious belief is the greatest bond that an individual has with symbolic power since it is directly related to the practice of worship which is protected as a fundamental, and immediately applicable right.

MOURNING AND RITUALS IN DISASTER SITUATIONS

We have discussed in general terms the foundations for the practice of funeral rites and the need to complete the stage of mourning as a period of transition after the death of a loved one. Moreover, we saw how every culture and social group expresses themselves through specific customs that require a certain period of time to complete. These customs are so deeply rooted that they are unavoidable and difficult to replace when it is not possible to perform them in the traditional manner. Without exception, these rites emphasize and remember the identity of the deceased. While critical, in major disasters with massive fatalities these rites are sometimes not given the highest priority and are often postponed or even omitted.

The experience of violent death in armed conflict, for example, sheds light on the importance of identity. Although identifying the dead body might be feasible through traditional methods, relatives sometimes choose not to claim a body to give it a proper burial out of fear of being associated with the deceased and subject to reprisal from the authorities.

In these circumstances and when a name is not provided, the corpse is buried without any identification by the State. Various studies reveal the difficulties of mourning in cases where someone has disappeared, a situation that is aggravated when there is the possibility of political homicide or other suspicious circumstances. Thoughts about the suffering and pain inflicted on the loved one cannot be verified or discarded when the identified corpse is not available. When rituals cannot be conducted the family is sentenced to a second death, the symbolic death of their loved one, and this for the lack of a tomb that perpetuates his or her name and confers social worth to the deceased and his or her inclusion in the generational continuity of a family.¹⁵

Whether regarding violent deaths in major disasters or in armed conflict, all of the above referenced socio-cultural considerations about the right to ritual and to mourning on the part of family members remain valid. To give in to the pressures that everyone experiences, and that one sometimes shares, translates in the medium- or long-term into a variety of sequelae that will seriously affect the social group. If the right to identity is not preserved for the dead, legal, financial, and emotional consequences will have a serious effect on family members, as well as the community at large. In major tragedies, the person who mourns often does not even know the victims but feels the need to participate in the ritual, as illustrated in cases such as the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

The lack of identity of the dead also implies that family members cannot bury the body according to valued rituals, or to cry for their loss in order to move ahead with the closure that comes from honoring the corpse. The missing person is remembered

¹⁵ Ibid.

as if he or she were still alive; there is no definite confirmation of the events surrounding the death, leaving a void that causes painful and unending speculation. No less important is the need for the death to be certified so that family members can proceed with inheritance and civil procedures.

Current technology makes it possible to identify decomposed or fragmented corpses with a very high degree of certainty so that families can confirm the death of a relative and discard the belief that because the body has not been seen, there is a chance that “he/she is still alive.” Technology confronts the person who is grasping at the hope that someone has survived (because “not seeing is not believing”) with reality. It also has increased expectations about death investigation and the exposure and punishment of crimes since reliable identification of the victims and investigation of physical evidence at a crime scene make it possible to pursue legal charges against those responsible. This also applies to intelligence work which is of special importance in prosecuting terrorist acts.

We can not overemphasize that, despite the first and spontaneous decisions taken in emotionally charged situations, it is essential when processing a case to take the time needed to respond to the psychosocial needs of the people and communities that suffer from a disaster or an event with mass fatalities, with the aim of satisfying basic physical and security requirements. Only through proper management of an event can we reduce the emotional burden of the losses and stimulate social recovery.

Before making any decision regarding the final disposal of the bodies of those killed as a result of major disasters, the current thinking of a society with respect to the deaths and their need to conduct funeral ceremonies or rites should be taken into account.

Mourning the loss of loved ones can easily be extended to animals since humans, especially in old age and in childhood, maintain important bonds with and affection for their pets. In many instances affection for an animal is as strong as for other humans. The loss of animals also represents important cultural and economic repercussions experienced by disaster victims.

We recall here the flood disaster that hit an indigenous population in Murindó, Colombia, in 1992. The greatest concern of the disaster victims was the loss of their animals because they provided sustenance for their families.

When planning assistance for a population after a disaster, the emotional bonds and interdependence that tie people to animals, whether pets, livestock, or simply species with which humans coexist need to be taken into account.

UNRESOLVED GRIEF

Currently there is a better understanding of the importance of the perception of death, individual and collective grief caused by death, and the rituals through which emotions are modulated. The long-term impact that these three elements have on the

development of a strong and harmonious social fabric is difficult to perceive for those dealing with response to a critical situation where there are many deaths, and generally in circumstances where there are major impacts on the public.

Although funerals are usually valued for their personal, religious, and social meaning, they also contribute to potential cohesion or political strife. The symbolic reaffirmation and reconstruction of social hierarchy after the death of an authority or political leader is the most common example of political aspects of a funeral. Rituals surrounding the death of common people were also the genesis of profound social change, as, for example, the revolt of slaves in North America who were denied the practice of ancestral rituals to honor the memory of their dead. It is evident that if the respect shown to the dead helps to define the respect owed to the living, the forms of ritual are an expression of society and its values.¹⁶

Accepting a death that occurs as a result of a natural phenomenon is inescapable, and the causes are beyond human control. Grief in these situations is attended by resignation. In contrast, violent deaths resulting from the abuse of power initiate very complex personal processes that have social impacts which are not well understood. We can approach this subject by recalling the importance of the Roman games in which the community, organized as the State, created and demonstrated, through the sacrifice of the gladiators, its power over death and thus reaffirmed the social order and its capacity to face a variety of external threats.¹⁷ Similarly, the power to properly perform funeral rituals in the case of violent deaths that require legal investigation helps to restore society's confidence in its own institutions.

For this reason, violent deaths, which generally affect young people, deserve special consideration. In the long term, social control in situations of this nature is chaotic for the community owing to the difficulty of giving meaning to such deaths and, as mentioned elsewhere, because it is often impossible to conduct appropriate funeral rituals during the conflict situations that exist in many countries.

The unresolved grief associated with disappearance or traumatic death of loved ones can be found in the genesis of new deaths that generate new mourning with a series of problems and questions from the mourners. The progression of these incidents helps to explain why programs for conflict resolution attempted in each country have such poor results. This vicious cycle prevents healthy mourning and inhibits the community's ability to return to the important matters of life.

When the complex cultural features that surround funeral rituals and their meaning for the social group are ignored in a major disaster situation, the community seeks alternate ways to express their grief; these are not always fruitful, inevitably are more difficult, and have far-reaching and unpredictable repercussions.

16 Burrell D, Andrien K. "Death and slavery: reading slave funerals as sites of political contestation." *History 700: Seminar in World History*, 22 December 1997. <http://dave.burrell.net/slave.html>.

17 Grant, Michael. *Gladiators* (1967). Wiedemann, Thomas: "Emperors and gladiators" (1992). Hopkins, Keith. "Murderous games," in *Death and renewal: sociological studies in Roman history* (1983). http://itsa.ucsf.edu/~snlrc/encyclopaedia_romana/gladiators/gladiators.html.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE RAPID DISPOSAL OF CORPSES

Those who have to make decisions about disposal of a large number of the bodies of those killed simultaneously or over a brief period of time, are not always aware of the considerations outlined in the above text and, even if they are aware of them, they are suddenly subject to such pressure that they tend to disregard such concerns. Various justifications are used, ranging from the mythical, to the “scientific,” and to State authority, all of which neglect psychological aspects, forgetting that these are primordial and closely linked to human nature.

Using public health arguments, priority is given to “solving” the biological decomposition of bodies which are thought to be environmental contaminants. With short-sighted urgency, the response is to use common graves to quickly and indiscriminately bury the bodies without identifying them, rather than individualizing them in a way that would make it possible either at the time of the event or *a posteriori* to establish their identities and clarify the circumstances of their death.

Fire is considered to be purifying (as was believed in Celtic and other cultures). Using this criterion, the extreme measure of incineration is resorted to in situations of mass fatalities. This is often ineffective and very expensive considering the required fuel and the fact that it will take place in the open. In addition, incineration prevents both the investigation of the event and the possibility of ever returning the bodies to their relatives.

The notion of filth and disease transmitted by dead bodies is a deep-rooted myth that is culturally defended, at least in part, by the social project of public health. This is based on hypotheses about hygiene which, diluted and fragmented, were introduced into the culture and community action and originated in the development of industrialization and the scientific paradigm, which crystallized during the nineteenth century in the west.

Thus, references that are known by the public, such as “bacterial proliferation,” are in keeping with the fear, for example, of possible water pollution following massive fatalities. This results in a variety of explanations and strategies that fluctuate between the scientific and the preposterous, the popular and personal, the useful and the convenient in light of what is dubious and where there are conceptual gaps. In the previous context, the corpse is seen as the depository of maximum possible filth and its contaminating potential is used as justification to obtain a rapid burial.

An example of this, provided by the Pan American Health Organization, describes how, despite rational knowledge, unfounded notions prevail:

“After a landslide, the recovered corpses were being placed in the street. The president of the country arrived with his personal physician who, upon viewing the scene, ‘counseled’ the president to immediately have the area fumigated in order to prevent the spread of disease. Even though the public health professionals who were present knew that fumigation was pointless, they could not go against the order.”

We see the historical burden that combines ecological concerns with the symbolic, in an attempt to isolate the dead and death to a limited space both symbolically and in its physical contact with individuals (living and healthy). The effects of death can be discerned, but not the manner in which the death occurred. (“The dead left in the open reek, and those who live with their dead can become ill, and the water becomes foul when in contact with these many dead.”)

The eagerness to resolve the situation also leads to medicolegal autopsies which, because they are carried out under difficult conditions where it might not be possible to use correct techniques, are inadequate for the objectives of legal investigation. In other cases, the magnitude of a tragedy or the difficulty in accessing the site of the event result in a premature declaration of the tragedy site as sacred ground, without any attempt at recovery of the corpses.

In addition to the above reasons, there are those of a psychological nature that act on the unconscious plane and confront us with the reality of our own vulnerability or that of loved ones; this makes the vision—frequently characterized as Dantesque—of scores of dead bodies unbearable. The human being, to a certain extent, structures the mental image of itself, through recognition of the image of the body of its fellow human. Perhaps for this reason there is no human society that does not have a relationship with the dead: it respects them, buries them, and guards them.

That image of the self is the source of identification with the dead; “they should be preserved because I am, or because they have to do with me.” There is a mirror image at stake: I take on the other (as in a mirror), and the other takes on me (specular image).¹⁸ It is obvious, then, that to share a space with a corpse or, worse, with a number of them, causes such great anguish that it overwhelms the most rational approaches to the problem. These approaches are based on scientific knowledge and often form a part of advance plans that are then quickly put aside: the one who is there, being attended to, could be me, so it is necessary to bury the body rapidly, to remove it from view, and to conceal it.

The rapid appearance of putrefaction confronts the human being even more directly with its mortal end.¹⁹ This aspect is overwhelming and is perceived to be unmanageable using the available resources. The response is to apply the hurried measures already mentioned, thereby preventing appropriate investigative and ritual processes, while the measures are defended with semi-scientific or political justifications.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES

In this section we present vignettes of events where the response to disasters illustrates socio-cultural aspects already referenced and their impact on decision-making. We collected representative experiences with the hope that they can help those who must confront similar events. Being aware that such situations are possible can strengthen the resolve to resist immediate and inevitable pressures and to offer the

18 Massota O. *Lecturas de psicoanálisis Freud y Lacan*. Chapter 5: Identificaciones. Editorial Paidós, Colección Psicología Profunda, vol. 154, Second printing, 1995, page 64.

19 Ariès, *op. cit.*

community, in the long-term, a better chance at repairing the damage suffered as a result of a disaster.

The needs posed by a professed religion or by the emotional tension experienced by all involved in a disaster should be attended to promptly and calmly by experienced personnel who are trained for this purpose. As discussed in the chapter on psychological aspects (Chapter 5), expressing sympathy about the tragedy provides a modicum of relief, and a rapid change in attitude. It is necessary to extend the training of personnel from various social disciplines—psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, etc.—to serve the community and families in these difficult circumstances.

An aviation accident resulted in 160 deaths; all victims underwent medicolegal autopsies and all were identified. Initial processing took 5 days and a team of about 40 people.

Despite the fatigue of the forensic team—after 24 hours of uninterrupted work—they always found the time to listen and respond to the concerns of family members: a) the team understood the urgency of the timely delivery of bodies so that the funeral ritual could be carried out before Saturday, a day that is sacred for the Jewish community; b) they attended to demands that seemed unreasonable to them, such as examining and delivering the requested bodies even though arrangements could not be made in the early morning for transfer to their places of origin; and c) they explained the technical procedures to individuals who requested the delivery of a fragment of any body, regardless of whether it was from a family member.

Paradoxically, when the team responded to the most irrational requests from the bereaved, they were also shown the greatest gratitude and relief. The attitude, which was initially aggressive, changed among those who waited for the two days from the time of the accident until the accident scene was processed.

Another difficulty was the anxiety of the local authorities who for the first time were dealing with an event of such magnitude. They called attention to the initial slowness of the work being done in the morgue, which they did not understand either in terms of its complexity or necessity. Nor did they understand that the forensic team did not have protection and at times were physically threatened. It was helpful to confront the authorities with the fact that without the technical work and organization of the morgue it would be impossible to decide which remains were to be delivered to which family.

In difficult circumstances it is still possible to achieve satisfactory results by applying basic technical and scientific concepts. These include having a complete file that makes it possible to identify corpses as soon as elements for comparison are available, including: photographs, dental charts, fingerprints, records of distinctive marks, basic anthropological variables (e.g., sex, height, approximate age, race), and samples for DNA typing. The final destination of unidentified remains can be controlled by burying them so that they can be exhumed when identification is possible, so they can be returned to their relatives and finally buried in accordance with their beliefs.

In the case of warfare in a rural area of Colombia,²⁰ there were 17 fatalities—5 women and 12 men between 18 and 23 years of age—among the guerilla fighters. Autopsy showed that all the victims presented injuries by projectiles from high-powered firearms. As family members did not come forward to assist in identification or to claim the bodies, the bodies were buried in duly marked, individual graves in the local cemetery along with the appropriate identification files.

Government authorities should understand the socio-cultural basis for healthy mourning in order to avoid the unfortunate consequences that have occurred, historically, in poorly handled cases. These consequences have ranged from simple pilgrimage to the site of the event, to serious changes in the community caused by the rupture of social ties among large numbers of affected people. This is illustrated in the analysis of what happened during the First World War, when Victorian society prohibited mourning and repatriation of corpses of those killed in battle:²¹

For patriotic and nationalistic reasons in Britain, it was necessary to show that the horrible deaths of so many young men in the First World War occurred for a just cause; this was done through collective celebrations instead of individual burials which, because of the difficulty and high costs of repatriation of the corpses, were even prohibited. The use of black as a symbol of mourning was discouraged, and black armbands were replaced with white ones.

The results of these governmental decisions were seen in the pilgrimages of up to 140,000 people traveling to the “Devastated Regions” in Europe every year, attempts at plundering the graves in order to recover the bodies, and the so-called “delayed grief” reactions. Furthermore, there was a national obsession with death, manifested by commemorations and monuments aimed at demonstrating to society that the sacrifice had been worthwhile. While this approach was considered to have been successful during the fighting, British society emerged from the war confused and troubled, with many members left with unresolved grief about mourning that could not be publicly expressed and in need of rituals that could truly reincorporate the bereaved back into society.

The events described below following the crash of an Israeli airplane into a residential area with a high percentage of immigrants in Amsterdam illustrate the transforming possibilities of collective mourning over loss when the symbolic features of a community are united in a highly secularized society.²²

In October 1992, an Israeli cargo plane crashed into a residential area of Amsterdam. Although it was feared that there were some 250 dead, rescue

20 This refers to conflict in Ricaurte, a settlement three hours away from Pasto, capital of the Department of Nariño, Colombia, on 13 August 2003.

21 Bouchier, Christine. “Rituals of mourning: bereavement, grief and mourning in the First World War.” M.A. Program, Department of History, University of Calgary. Available at <http://grad.usask.ca/gateway/archive13.html>.

22 Nugteren, Albertina. “Comportamiento ritual público y colectivo después de los desastres: ¿una manifestación naciente de religión civil?” Tilburg University, Netherlands. Paper presented at the Conference on “Spiritual Supermarket,” Religious Pluralism in the Twenty-First Century, London School of Economics, April 2001. <http://www.cesnur.org/2001/london2001/nugteren.htm>.

operations reduced that number to 43. The dead and injured were mainly immigrants, many of them illegal. One week after the crash, public mourning rituals took place with the involvement of some 40,000 people of all races and creeds. There was a procession that more than 13,000 people attended; it was nonpartisan, without political placards or slogans; church bells rang throughout the country, and children carried black balloons or flower garlands. The memorial service, with the participation of many cultures and religions, lasted two hours and a half. The speakers were dignitaries and representatives from the afflicted neighborhood, who cited Christian, Moslem, Jewish, and Hindu religious texts. Music from six different cultures was performed, and religious sentiments were discreetly expressed. A spontaneous monument appeared: a tree that survived at the site of the crash and “had seen it all.”

CONCLUSIONS

For a variety of reasons, there is a normal reaction of anguish both privately and collectively when there are many fatalities as the result of a major disaster. There are now technical and scientific resources that make it possible to manage mass fatalities, and to respect the importance of a community's ability to carry out their own rituals.

Acceding to these rituals implies avoiding hastily taken actions of mass burial or incineration, which would preclude identification of the victims and return of the bodies to relatives who require the physical presence of the body in order to perform funeral rites. Even for highly fragmented or charred remains it is possible to individualize the remains by using two resources: the development of data files that will permit identification at later stages when the information necessary for comparison is made available, and control of the disposition of the remains, ensuring that it is possible to retrieve them when necessary.

Throughout this chapter we have reviewed the importance of assisting the mourning process by supporting the rituals that each culture has developed in order to relieve pain and heal grief. Efforts made in this regard will be repaid many times over in the long term through repair of the social fabric affected by the disaster, and will thereby prevent devastating psychological and social consequences.

Of continual concern in the world press is the proper management of corpses to administer justice in criminal cases, to maintain historical memory, and to achieve the moral and economic reparations that are key to the resolution of hatred and long-lasting conflicts. It is the political and governmental agencies that should recognize this need in order to make decisions that will lessen the violence and disturbances brought on by unresolved grief. Processes not carried out according to the guidelines discussed here give rise, in the long run, to major emotional disorders and even to expenditures such as the high cost for exhumation of corpses from common graves in the attempt to achieve the aims mentioned above.

Government authorities should understand the socio-cultural basis for healthy mourning in order to avoid the unfortunate consequences that have occurred, historically, in poorly handled cases.

To relieve the psychological sequelae of disasters and achieve management objectives, it is possible to design and carry out simple, organized, and systematic medicolegal investigations that are adapted to the special circumstances surrounding a disaster. In addition to the benefits already mentioned, such investigations will provide the opportunity for scientific examination of injuries and help to process cases which might require legal action.

In our experience, regardless of the diversity of cultures, rituals, and creeds, relatives of disaster victims particularly value the efforts taken to return the corpse to the family. This also is true of the ceremonies performed at the site of the death when family members are unable to claim the body or ceremonies that respect the traditions of a particular religion or group. Culturally, a funeral is more than simply disposing of a corpse: it satisfies the intense desire to give some meaning to a death when we are forced to confront it, and gives dignity and meaning to the loss of a human being.

When disasters strike a community, a city, or a nation, there is mass public mourning that involves large numbers of people, often of heterogeneous characteristics. Despite this, when such an event is properly managed it is possible to create an environment that allows commiseration, expressions of sympathy, and consolation through collective commemorations that offer the relief that ritual provides.

On these sad occasions, as well as after the untimely deaths of celebrities such as Olof Palme, Princess Diana, or Yizhak Rabin, a temporary community is created, and one belongs to this community only because of a tragedy. First, Rousseau, and then Durkheim applied the term “civil religion” to manifestations of the “positive multitudes” who value collectivity as an ideal in itself. Unexpected deaths create moments of collective mourning that can become community protest. Burial becomes the ritual to channel the grief, express social support, handle the loss, and dilute the anger. Even though the collective expression is about desperation and vulnerability, it also allows the expression of compassion and sympathy, and provides an occasion to share a moment of solidarity.

Thus a community can express sympathy to family members and take part in something that is larger than them, and collectively receive solace from the company, the words, the music, and the flowers in the presence of grief that is a part of human fragility.

“For a civilization to deserve that name, all of life must be valued, including the (absent) life of the dead”.²³

23 Reyes, Mate (2000). *Memoria de Auschwitz*. Chapter 2: El campo, lugar de la política moderna, Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2003, page 78.

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