**Rituals and Collective Psyche**

**A Psychoanalysis of Passional Cultures**

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**Brief Description**

Similarities among rituals may be found all over the world, even if they are associated with different religious beliefs and social contexts. They share similar practices, symbols, and traditions. This study focuses on three mourning rituals within three religious contexts and explores their behavioral and symbolic similarities. Studying the (mythical) narrative of the incident that led to the emergence of these rituals and the history of their changes and evolutions explores the elements behind the similarities between the most important religious mourning rituals in Iran and Spain within three religious contexts: Zoroastrian, Catholic Christian, and Shia Muslim.

The mourning actions fall on a broad continuum, ranging from no-risk or low-risk self-harming behaviors, such as tearing up clothing, refraining from shaving or cutting one’s hair to high-risk behaviors, such as self-laceration, skin-burning, self-flagellation, finger-cutting, or self-immolation. The majority of mourning rites are performed to commemorate a religious figure’s gruesome and tragic death. The more horrible that character’s death, the more high-risk acts are included in such mourning rituals. All three rituals under this investigation include low to high-risk self-harming such as chest beating and self-flagellation.

Examining these religious mourning rituals that include self-harming, we also encounter similarities in the myths and narratives of those figures’ lives. The myths that underlie the rituals all revolve around a similar life cycle, including an unusual birth, extraordinary talents or abilities, pure blood (never a commoner; descended from a prophet's or king's line), being adored in their youth while possessing and exhibiting the best virtues, going through impossible hardship, torture, and cruelty, and finally sacrificing their lives for their people and/or their belief or faith.

These striking similarities in mourning ritual practices and narratives among communities without shared boundaries, history, or religious beliefs signify deeper, much older factors and elements that go beyond social interaction, religion, and geography. The propensity to generate and adopt certain myths and rituals (as symbolic representations of the collective consciousness) similar among different communities points to shared elements of their collective unconscious; features that seem hereditary and pass through generations like cultural DNA.

There must be meanings, motives, and concepts- probably older and deeper than the current tradition, despite the often vast religious and contextual differences resulting in the same symbols and rituals. This argument is fortified by the study of religious mourning rituals, including self-harming, in which their respective religions have forbidden any act of harming the human body.

There is a psychoanalytical mechanism by which individual meanings, beliefs, and motives are represented as symbols and behavior (Obeyesekere, 1990). The same mechanism applies to a community's collective concepts, emotions, and motives (deep culture) generated by their symbols, rituals, and social norms and behavior (surface/visible culture). What I call *deep culture* is part of what Jung names the collective unconscious. It is the *collective deep culture* that relates to certain archetypes among others based on its shared concepts, meanings, and emotions, and therefore generates or absorbs certain beliefs, traditions, symbols, and rituals across time, place, and other differences. As a result, if two communities are similar in their collective deep culture, in other words, they share the same deep motives, concepts, and emotions; they are similar in the representation of that deep culture which reflects in their social norms and behaviors, symbols, and rituals.

Returning to the mourning rituals, this study aims to explore the shared elements of collective deep culture among three similar mourning rituals across time and place in Iran and Spain, two countries that never shared borders, nor actual religion during their respective histories. The Holy Week ritual (La Semana Santa) in Spain has been studied by several scholars and historians. Mitchell (1990) distinguished between these ceremonies and celebrations in southern Spain and the rest of the country, attributing a different culture among Andalusians, which he calls a passional culture, from how the rest of Spain practices these same ceremonies and celebrations.

Based on the similarities between the mythological narratives, symbols, and religious behaviors between this Catholic ritual of Andalucía, and the two other mourning rituals examined in this project from the Zoroastrian, and Shia contexts, this study explores the shared collective components of their respective deep culture and examines them through the categories of their shared deep and surface collective aspects.

The sources I use to study the emergence and the evolutions of these three rituals and their respective myths are history and literary textbooks written in Farsi, Spanish, and English, as well as images of the murals and paintings that show these rituals in ancient historic sites. I will use some specific and new terms that I define in the coming section.

**Terminology**

**Collective Consciousness:** is what Durkheim calls a set of shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society. In other words, it is "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society." (Durkheim, 2014) In contrast to the collective unconscious as a set of shared values and beliefs in the unconscious of a society’s individuals.

**Collective Unconscious:** represents that part of the mind containing memories and impulses of which the individual is not aware, yet common to humans as a whole and originating in the inherited structure of the brain. This is what the Jungians and the field of Depth Psychology contend connects humans to their ancestors and each other through a shared set of beliefs, emotions, and experiences.

**Deep Structure of Culture:** It is a systematic mechanism composed of the shared concepts, motives, emotions, and beliefs of a community that also serves as the basis of their collective unconscious. The components of this mechanism determine the creation, acceptance, and adaptation of certain archetypes, motives, and concepts. This is a term that I have developed and will be applying throughout this project.

**Surface Representation** **of Culture:** Whatever is represented in the collective consciousness of a community as a shared or approved behavior, symbol, ritual, or myth is called the surface representation of a culture. It is a byproduct of the deep structure mechanism. This is a definition I am presenting for the specific use of the terms I have in my project to contrast with the deep structure.

**Intrapsychic Mechanism:** I have adopted this term from Intrapsychic conflicts, and I apply it as the circulating mechanism of internalizing concepts, emotions, and motivations into the unconscious and representing them through the consciousness, in other words, the term presents the interconnectedness of different levels of the psyche.

**Psychoanalysis of Culture:** In this study, by the psychoanalysis of cultures, I refer to the analysis of the collective consciousness and unconsciousness of a community combined as a whole; and their interconnectedness, understood as well as interpreted through what I am calling the Collective Psyche of a culture. This analysis studies the intrapsychic mechanism of the collective- in contrast with that of an individual- in which the shared values and sentiments of a community are represented symbolically in their consciousness as myths and rituals.

**Passional Culture:** A subcategory of cultures presented in this study. Passional cultures share similar archetypes, represented in their national and religious figures, and analogous mourning rituals that include self-harming ritual behaviors to simulate “the passion” or the affective and cognitive charge, those archetypes went through. The term is derived from Timothy Mitchell’s study on the Holy Week ritual in Andalucia, southern Spain, identifying a passionate culture in Andalusians distinguished from other regional and historic Spanish cultures.

**Thesis and Scope**

Inspired by Jung’s collective unconscious and archetypes theories and Obeyeskere’s psychoanalytical method in cultural anthropology, this is a study of what I call “psychoanalysis of passional cultures”. It starts by exploring the reasons for the emergence of certain archetypes that vary across cultures and ponders the similarities of the religious rituals (here, mourning rituals) throughout different religions. It delves down into the founding level of the culture’s structure to discover the shared elements of a community’s collective unconscious that led to the emergence of certain symbolic acts and behaviors.

I also argue that the deep structure of the collective unconscious passes through generations and generations much like something I would call cultural DNA and has such a powerful impact on the community’s consciousness that in cases of forced or willing religious conversion, it adapts and disguises old narratives and rituals into new stories, beliefs, and ritual traditions.

**Thesis Echelon**

1. Specific cultural contexts, due to their collective unconsciousness imply certain collective values (concepts, motives, emotions), 2. The collective values are represented as symbolic acts and narratives in a community’s consciousness 3. The influence of the collective unconsciousness represented symbolically in the society’s collective consciousness (myths and rituals) goes beyond the current religious and political contexts of the community. 4. The psychoanalysis of cultures is possible through studying symbolic representations (myths and rituals) that lead to the deep structure of a community’s shared meanings, motives, and emotions (regression and progression). 5. Cultures are categorizable through the psychoanalysis of their deep structure and surface representation. This research studying similar mourning rituals and their respective archetypes and myths among three different religions presents the “passional” category for the cultures in which the mourning rituals include self-harming as a simulation of the passions the archetype represented in the savior figure went through according to the (mythical) narrative with similar milestones or key turning points in the religious figures narrative of their life.

**Methodological Approach**

This study links Durkheim’s Collective Consciousness to Jung’s Collective Unconscious to apply a new analysis of a culture’s “Collective Psyche”. It also extends Gananath Obeyesekere’s psychoanalytical method in his *Work of Culture* (1990) from a mechanism by which an individual’s deep concepts and motives are transformed into symbolic representations of the shared meanings, motives, and emotions of a community as signified in their symbolic acts (rituals), and narratives (myths).

In his symbolic-interpretive approach, Obeyesekere shows how culture and an individual's psychodynamics intertwine in one’s experience of life. The mechanism consists of a symbolic transformation of private and individual motives and meanings into what he calls a collective representation of symbolic forms. These collective representations are rituals and behaviors publicly accepted by the community. Therefore, if personal symbols are those symbolic forms invented by the culture to objectify the intrapsychic conflicts of the individual, collective representations deal with the more recurring demands faced by a plurality of individuals. (1990, 269). As Obeyesekere studies the ascetic and self-harming behaviors of individuals he explains the psychoanalytical transformation of an individual’s unconscious meanings and motives into behaviors in which the community involves or at least accepts them, a process whereby painful motives and affects ... are transformed into publicly accepted sets of meanings and symbols. (Obeyesekere 1990, 147). Hence, the tripartite application of the theorists and methods this study brings together in the examination of mourning rituals and practices from Zoroastrianism, Shi’a Islam, and Spain’s Catholic Christianity.

Furthermore, in Obeyesekere’s method, painful motives and effects transform into sets of symbols and acts which are commonly approved by the community. This transformation is intertwined with an individual’s psychodynamics and culture (including religious experience). In other words, what an individual does is affected by the group’s motivations. This is what Durkheim called “Collective consciousness”.

Applying the same terms Obeyesekere adopted from Freud’s Dream Work Theory, my analysis consists of mutual impact and causation between the collective unconscious and a community's symbolic representations (rituals, and myths). Rooting back from the symbolic representations to the community’s collective unconsciousness is called **regression**. In regression, the deep structure of the culture made of collective motives, meanings, emotions, and beliefs are being studied at different levels. After understanding the archaic values and systems of meaning of community, moving forward to the symbolic manifestations (rituals and myths) is called **progression**.

This research analyzes the collective Psyche of a community through regression psychoanalysis. This mechanism navigates symbolic representations of rituals such as the specific acts, symbols, and traditions and the myths and narratives related to those rituals in order to access the collective values, archetypes, concepts, and emotions of the community called the deep structure of their culture. This approach not only presents cultural psychoanalysis but also through a comparative method, allows us to link the cultures that share similar symbolic representations as analogous in their deep structure (collective unconsciousness) which makes it possible to categorize cultures based on their psychoanalysis.

**Theoretical Base**

This research applies and compares Jung’s theories of archetypes. A part of the psychoanalytical view of culture is the culture’s respective myths and mythical figures to which this study applies where I discuss the archetype theory of Jung as manifesting across different times and places as human universal but yet different in terms of their emergence and adaptation in communities according to their respective collective cultural Psyches. It challenges the universality and primordiality of the theory of archetypes and argues that archetypes evolve as humanity evolves.

By acknowledging yet not essentializing the implied universality of archetypes in Jung’s theory, this study explores the reasons for the emergence or adaptation of certain archetypes in different cultural contexts alongside the theoretical lenses and methods of the other scholars whose own work I draw upon and apply to the main focus of this study.

Thus, by using Obeyesekere's psychoanalytical method, this study expands on his theory of symbolic anthropology of culture. In his theory, an individual's deep meanings, motives, and emotions are transformed into symbolic representations practiced or approved by the community and the wider culture in which these all manifest. Extending that, this study explores the same mechanism where deep impulses, concepts, and motives shared by the whole community (deep structure) are transformed into symbolic narratives (myths) and behaviors (rituals).

Similarly applicable to this project is Timothy Mitchell’s study of Holy Week rituals in Andalucía, southern Spain, in which he used the term *passional* to identify these key aspects of Andalusian ritual culture as passionate and distinguished from that of the rest of Spain. This dissertation uses his interpretative framework of southern Spain’s culture to examine three mourning rituals in the context of their associated myths, symbols, and practices, including self-harming acts, and within the religious contexts of three different religious traditions: namely Zoroastrianism, Shi’a Islam, and Catholic Christianity to argue that the passional culture is a subcategory that exists, not only among southern Spain’s Catholics but also among other different religious contexts across a range of times and places. My use of the term passional culture draws on Mitchell’s idea to spell out a subcategory of cultures in its intrapsychic analysis inspired by Obeyesekere’s concept of “*The Work of culture*” mentioned above.

**Significance and Contribution to the Discipline**

My dissertation is an interdisciplinary perspective on the study of culture. It offers a new psychoanalytical approach to cultural studies through myths and rituals. Its method analyzes myth and ritual as the surface representations of community in its collective consciousness to delve into the deep structure of its culture, in its collective unconscious. The deep structure passes through generations much like a cultural DNA that can be studied as a recent discipline: psychoanalysis of culture. This metaphor of cultural DNA explains some of the reasons for the perdurability of certain rituals in this study, –mourning rituals– despite religious conversion, social changes, and separation across different times and spaces, even though the ritual contains acts prohibited by the religion.

The components of a culture, such as specific archetypes, religious beliefs, myths, and rituals, are determined by the deep structure of the collective unconsciousness, which is mainly composed of the emotions, meanings, motives, and values shared by the collective. This is a realm that connects cultural studies to mythology, and anthropology. It makes it possible to understand why specific beliefs, traditions, archetypes, and rituals are generated or adopted in certain communities and not in others, which will be contributive to a wider understanding of these complex dynamics in religious studies. The study of symbolic representations of a collective’s deep structure, what Durkheim calls the collective consciousness, also connects ritual studies to sociology.

Therefore, a combined archetypal and historical perspective is critical for exploring the complex ways in which deep structure forms and changes. Exploring the deep structure of a culture, through its symbolic representations not only explains the emergence and survival of certain religious beliefs but also explains the changes the local peoples and cultures made in the religion the colonizers imposed on them. It demonstrates why and how one and the same religion was adopted and developed to fit the deep structure of different cultures. The history of cultural, political, and geographical colonization as well as the history of natural disasters, slavery, famines, wars, women’s subjugation, and genocides leave their trace as a collective trauma on the cultural DNA of a community.

**Proposed Chapter Outline**

**Chapter 1**

This chapter introduces mourning rituals that include self-harming within diverse religious contexts. It considers the similarity among their actions, symbols, and narratives and explores previous comparative studies that were relatively successful in explaining these similarities within the same geographical and cultural contexts, and two different traditions, but failed to discover the relation among similar mourning rituals across places and cultures. It states the thesis and argument of this study and its significance and importance in an interdisciplinary field.

**Chapter 2. Siavashan, Zoroastrianism**

This chapter will focus on the first and oldest ritual under study: Siavashan. The chapter will explore Siavashan from three aspects: religion, myth, and ritual. The religion study explores pre-Zoroastrian, and Zoroastrian roots of the ritual alongside its persistence during Islamic dominance. The myth section is dedicated to the study of mythical narratives of Siavash in the pre-Zoroastrian and Zoroastrian periods and similar myths and archetypes prior to or parallel to that of Siavash. The last section of this chapter explores the history, symbols, and practice of this ritual.

**Chapter 3. La Semana Santa, Catholicism**

This chapter Will explore the second mourning ritual which is practiced in many catholic countries. It explains the reason for studying this ritual in Spain with a focus on the southern part of the country. Like the previous chapter, it constitutes three main aspects: The religion, which studies beliefs and religions in pre-Roman, pre-Christian, and Christian Iberia. The myth part explores pre-Christian archetypes with similar features to Jesus’s life in Iberia and Levant and compares them with Christian archetypes. The last section of this chapter investigates the history, symbols, and practice of the Holy Week (Semana Santa) in Spain.

**Chapter 4. Ashoora, Shi’ism**

This chapter considers the most recent mourning ritual among the three. It will explore the emergence, flourishment, and observance of this ritual in a country other than its motherland from three perspectives: religion: beliefs, and traditions in pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabia comparing the latter with Iran after the dominance of Islam; myth: pre-Islamic archetypes in the Arabian peninsula and Mesopotamia; and ritual: history of Ashoura, its symbols, and practice.

**Chapter 5. Theoretical Base**

This chapter explains in detail the theories that will be used and extended to develop a new approach which I call the psychoanalysis of cultures. It will include Durkheim’s collective consciousness; Jung’s archetype, and collective unconscious; and Obeyesekere’s anthropological method in the psychoanalysis of individual symbolic behavior. It will distill down the main aspects of the theories involved and at which points they will be expanded or developed in this study.

**Chapter 6. Grounding Theory and Method**

Inspired by the theories and the method explained each in detail in the previous chapter pointing out the parts in which this study approaches differently, this chapter develops the mentioned theories together to bring them together into a new theory of the collective psyche. It also presents a new method based on the symbolic anthropology of culture, by which three mourning rituals including self-harming within three different traditions will be explored both at unconscious and conscious levels. This chapter will also include terminology that explains the definition of some terms that will be used frequently related to the new perspective this research has on the psychoanalysis of cultures.

**Chapter 7. Conclusion**

Drawing on the data about the three mourning rituals found in the history, literature, art, images, and their practices including self-harming, outdoor processions, religious drama, and animal sacrifice, this chapter will apply the psychoanalytical approach to these acts, symbols, and myths as the representations of the collective consciousness to discover shared values, concepts, emotions, and impulses of that collective laying in their unconscious. Relying on the similarities both on the surface representation and the deep structure of each culture, this chapter will propose that: 1. Cultures generate or adopt certain archetypes and rituals according to their cultural deep structure. 2. Cultures with similar symbolic representations of myth and rituals have also similarities in their cultural deep structure or collective unconsciousness. 3. Cultures are categorizable based on the study of similarities between their surface representations and deep structure. 4. This classification is possible through a psychoanalytical mechanism that transforms a community's shared meanings, motives, and emotions into symbolic acts (rituals) and narratives (myths). 5. This psychoanalysis explains the reason while archetypes and rituals are universal phenomena, the communities develop or adapt only certain types according to their shared cultural unconsciousness. 6. This chapter will also present the subcategory of passional cultures according to the study of three mourning rituals from three different religions, and their analogous savior-figure archetypes (life, passion, and cruel death), symbols (innocent blood, death, and resurrection), and practice (religious drama, street processions, and self-harming acts).

**Bibliographic Method**

Most of the readings mentioned in this research’s bibliography come from the books I chose for my two Comprehensive exams on Mythology and Ritual Studies; and also, the books and readings I chose for my papers for Independent Studies on “History and Origin of the Holy Week”, “Religious Pageant: Taziyeh”, and “Anthropology of Religious Rituals”.

**Sources:**

I have utilized the University of Denver and Taylor (Iliff School of Theology) Libraries as well as Google Books and Iran’s National Library search engines. As my research focuses on the myths and rituals of Spain and Iran, I have used books and articles in their respective original languages (Persian, and Spanish), I have frequently used the Prospector and Interlibrary Loan services to access non-English readings. For Persian readings, besides the National Library of Iran, I have also used my previous universities’ library databases (Allameh Tabatabaei and IAU of Isfahan), and the portals for dissertations, theses, and articles on Noormags, and ISID.IR. For the images I need, I will use Artstor and I will make an appointment with Ms. Peggy Keeran to look for the images I need as searching for them might be difficult. ATLA Religion Database is another digital source I have used along with E.journals available through the University of Denver Libraries website. I have searched for articles and conference lectures related to my research through Google Scholar as well. I will be using the anthropology database in case those prove useful. Another source I have used to search for dissertations and theses is PQDT. The methods I have used include:

* Searching by Keywords like (Mourning Rituals, Ancient Cultures Rituals, Archetype Theory, Iberian Mythology, Ancient Cultures Mythology, etc.)
* Searching by the name of the scholars like (Jung, Eliade, Durkheim, and Obeyesekere)
* Searching by the name of the mythical figures and their respective rituals, or parts of the rituals (Siavash, Jesus, Hossein, Siavashan, Sug-e-Siavash, Ashoura, Ta’zieh, Muharram, The Holy Week, La Semana Santa, las Procesiones, La Fraternidad, Las Cofradías, اسطوره سیاوش، سوگ سیاوش، تاریخ مراسم عاشورا)
* Searching thematically within the discipline (Cultural Anthropology, Symbolic Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Ritual Studies, Mythology, Cognitive Studies).
* Utilizing the bibliography of the books and articles used for mentioned papers, independent study course materials, and comprehensive exam reading lists.
* Suggestions from my advisor and my readers of comprehensive exams.
* In the advanced search by the year of publication
* Suggested readings on the University of Denver libraries page related to the specific book I searched.

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