

The Cry and Mourn of Men



Ethnoculture

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to make an introduction of the existence of this ancient phenomena. This ritual is performed in the northern part of Albania, and is still being performed in our days. In the introductory part of the paper we will give the readers a general information about what this ritual is about, what is the meaning of the word "gjama". What is all this ritual about and in what regions is it performed. Which are the parts of this ritual, to whom is this ritual performed. How is the text of this ritual and the special choreography which is performed only by men.

1. Introduction

Men's cry and mourn is a burial ritual, which is done by a group of men from a village or province, that comes as an ancient rule, through which, the sorrow and respect for the dead is expressed with very expressive and spectacular voice and dramatic move. Since this is done only by men, it is called the cry and mourn of men.

The complete ritual of the cry and mourn of men has survived so far only in the region of Dukagjin. It contains an ancient genesis, bringing to our days certain elements of prehistory.

In the Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary, in the letter "GJ" it is written: "the crying and mourning men are folk singers that start the ceremony by beating their chests, scratching their faces and pounding the ground with their hands".

In fact, the crying and mourning men who do cut the face and pound the earth, are not only singing folks, but a rather large group of men, which can amount to one hundred or more, from the same village. Hand in hand, completely synced in sound and motion, they perform the rite, as we shall describe below. I think it's called so in attempt to compare the loss of the deceased to the wail of the weather, the cry of the Earth or the sea: a sign that can lead to major disasters.

In Dukagjin, and also, in some other regions of Albania, it is said that "men are bewailing, are mourning, are crying." Its Latin equivalent must be sought to the term *gemitus* (or *Gemert*) that carries within itself a number of connotations such as *mosques*, *whimper*, *death throes*; *roar*; *noise*, *sorrow*, *poison*, *grief*, *sadness*. Prof. E. Çabej rates this word with meanings such as: *disaster*, *calamity*, *death news*, *mandate*, *thunder*, *roar*, *cry*, *lamentation*, while Von Thallocszy writes that the word "gjëmuem" includes meanings such as to wail or break into crying, when implying of deep pain of the body or unbearable grief; to cry with all one's might".

Hence it can be understood clearly that "to cry and mourn" means to roar, to scream, to brawl, to break, to weep with great, unbreakable sorrow.

In the first dictionary of ethnomusicology, Prof. Ramadan Sokoli defines the cry and mourn of men as "some lamented and outcry among the highlanders at a funeral ceremony, scratching their faces and beating their chests, rhythmically."

It is a technique of cry and gesticulation, which models the natural suffering culturally expressed in the context of the funeral. The screams unfold the powerful reaction of the "primitive" surprise; the eternal protest, pain, the anxious self-blame of the human in the face of death.

In some other regions, such as Malesi e Madhe, Puka, Mirdita, Lezha, Triesh, Gruda, Plava, and Gjakova, during the funeral ceremony of the men, there are traces and elements of the cry and mourn of men, like scratching of the faces or beating of the chests, but this is not the cry and mourn of men of which we are

talking about. These people, in some cases, are called "gjamatarë", crying singers, and are well known individuals who are called in the funerals to write verses that praise the dead. Sometimes their verses exceed the praise and deeds that the deceased has accomplished during life, causing unexpected reactions on the gathering crowd or specifically the family members. Such a singer gets his pay in almost every funeral. Of course, this is too far away from the ancient cry and mourn of men.

2. The real performance of the cry and mourn of men

As many scholars have sometimes described the cry and mourn of men as the ritual of scratching of the face and beating the chests that is practiced in some regions, I find quite a big distinction between them.

In my study, the cry and mourn of Men means the collective funeral ritual made of 7 to 15 men that can go up to over 100 people, who all perform at the same time a collective lament by a well-defined pace. There are somewhat small differences that vary in the regions around Dukagjin where this ritual is still performed.

In these regions a person, often known as the singer, and in some places and as the crier, uses a long text, according to a certain rhythm, or writes verses, scratches his face and beats his chest walking towards the dead.

Such a phenomenon occurs in the provinces of Kelmendi, until recently in Gjakova, Rugova, Decani, the Krasniqe Gash, Mirdita and Lezha up to the provinces of southern Albania.

One such ritual begins about 100 m. away from the dead, is listened very carefully by the participants and, as we say, interpreted by a specialized person who is named "Singer or Crier".

He starts the ceremony with aooooohhhh. Woe is me for you o continues with carefully braided lines, where the deceased's qualities are identified, walking towards him, occasionally beating his chest with fists or scratching his face until he comes close to the place where the dead lays and "embraces the dead". At this point, one of the family members of the dead person invites him to raise and enter inside the house of the deceased.

Things have changed now. This person is now free to perform ritual on behalf of anyone and this is a paid job. To give importance to the dead, often false woven verses are created, not showing so much fairness to the qualities of the dead. This brings reaction and resentment to the bereaved.

In one case, while the singer was praising the dead with qualities that the deceased had never had, he was offered coffee to remind him that he went too far. He then adjusted his lines and added that he was talking about qualities that every man should have. The misunderstanding led to nearly a physical conflict.

However, the singer, after receiving the invitation for such ritual, gets some data about the deceased, on which he prepares the lines. These lines are often used in different funerals.

Of course, this is not the cry and mourn of men that we are talking about, but it does incorporate some of its elements.

I guess once, and only for not a very distant period of time (in some cases, according to the elderly of those regions, there existed the real cry and mourn of men but for various reasons it has been transformed).

The researcher, Mr. Mehmet Fadili, stresses out that, in the area of Kelmendi has evolved a lot. In the early twentieth century the way of the execution of the cry and mourn of men evolved, moving from a collective activity to an individual one, where men perform alone, one after the other, or a one man performing the cry followed by a singer performing the verses. Moving towards the bed of the dead in groups, as soon as they reach the front yard of the house, the performer took off his hat named *qeleshe*, placed his arms in his waist, and started the cry, looking gloomy with eyes cast to the ground. Later and this performance evolved some more. The crier would come accompanied by other men and women or only men. As soon as he started to perform the cry, they separated, and in silence everybody would listen to the cry and mourn man. He would say few words called "tenjehura", (L.D. note) pause with "eh, eh, eh,,," followed by chest beating, etc., then he would stop, to

continue his lines until he would come close to the deceased, still speaking while beating his chest with fists, and sometimes scratching his face with nails, in a motion starting from the top down. He would smash the chains of his vest or he would tear (rip, note L.D.) pieces of his vest. Once he was finished his lines, if he was a relative to the deceased, he would fall over and hug him. If he was not related to the deceased, he would put his hand on the deceased's chest to pay respect, and then he would return to his friends, who were stationed on the trail of the courtyard, and all together would go to the bereaved, to comfort them.

Comparing the collective ceremony that took place in the late nineteenth century with individual one which started at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, we notice that the collective ones were short ceremonies, five to ten minutes. The best Individual performances have reached up to 30 or more minutes, including gestures and actions. Individual ceremonies were prolonged when the writing technique was introduced as well as the mania for pretense.

Praising this technique as the continuation of the Cry and Mourn of Men, we will pay attention to at Men's Collective technique.

When we talk about The Cry and Mourn of Men will recognize at first where it takes place. Researchers have set several "stops".

For the first stop almost everyone agrees. It is a place well known for each village in Dukagjin. It is the spot defined as "përkundruell", "face", ie is the place in the deceased property from where from where most of the village can be seen. This point serves to call when they have company, when they say farewell to the bride, when they say good bye to the guests, when they have to notify the villagers etc. Here, from this point, "the verbal notifications were issued, accompanied with a shot of a gun in all cases, except for "Gjama". Father Gjon Karma says that The Cry and Mourn of Men starts at the far end of the property, called bayrak, which, to a certain way agrees with the explanation we gave above.

The second stop is the place from where you can see the house of the dead. Father Gjon Karma defines "this second spot is where the house of the deceased can be seen".

The third stop is in the courtyard of the dead, which is the square previously defined for such ceremony.

The fourth stop is in front of the coffin. To pass on to the fourth stop, which is around the dead, the ritual makes some changes in execution (Gjon Karma determines that : " when they bound over the dead body").

Each stop except the last one, performs the same ritual that can be developed, according to the importance of the dead, from 3 to 5 times.

Each group has a leader. Men remove hats, scarves, stay in lines and can ask to be joined by the family members if they have a small number of participants. The women stick back ready to fill their pauses with cries.

Under the direction of the leader, the group performs as one. "Bending over their knees with their hands on their hips dandling from right to left, which is like a sling that will hurl at extreme heights the collective cry of 30-40 explosive vocations 'au' 'eu', 'heigh' 'ou', 'hou', to be released gradually to a lower pitch lowing down until extinguished ". Once extinguished the initial thundering call, everyone stand straight, and " looking upset" they perform all synchronized, the vigorous curl right- down and left-up to reveal the next powerful call in the order, this time worded: "I mjeriune per ty." The calls and sighs of men are combined each time with new gestures, which increase again the horror of the event through self-mutilation: "fisting hairy chests in rhythm ...", "tearing of the skin on the faces " with the "fingernails cutthrowing the blood towards the dead", putting a finger over the hole of the nose and the other hand close to the ear to help the voice come out stronger. I guess it is an action, which aims to stop the tears.

According to the importance of the deceased, such ritual is repeated three to five times at each stop. The last move, the one around the coffin, is different because it is performed on knees. Two elements are added in the choreography of this piece: the beating of the earth with the right hand while the left hand remains on the

belt and the bending of head on the same level with the dead. Finally, they hug the dead, and are directed to the interior premises by the family members.

The cry and mourn of the shepherds was a very particular ritualone. It was performed when the deceased had been a shepherd. The description of such a ritual is done by the scholar F. Mehmeti, who writes that:

"The cry and mourn of man in the cemetery were of two types: the common one to be performed for all the dead and the special one was just for shepherds (seems strange to be performed only for the shepherds, but we should not forget that at that time the majority of villagers were pastors. (Note LD). The shepherd's ritual cry and mourn was accompanied by the sounds of the livestock's bell for a herdsman and the soundthe bells for a goatherd man. The common ritual was performed with the women accompanying the cry withejhe, ejhena ... A man, a professional one, would ring the bells. At the end of each verse, when women finished the third time of "ejhe", the person who rang the bell (carrying two: one in the right hand, the other on the left), would ring them in such way that the ring would fell out once on one side of the bell. When the cry and the Mourn man would shouthis own interjections "eh, eh, eh" and he would begin to beat his breast, the bell would ring strongly on both sides for several times. Each ring in this case was double (in both sites). So, the gestures of the crying and mourning man, his exclamations, as well as women's choir, was accompanied by a few double lashes of the bells, called, "këmborë". These bell rings were disconnected from each other. The cry and mourn of men ceremony was performed in very high voice and heard from far away. The cry and mourn of shepherds ceremony was more melancholic and touching."

3. To whom The Cry and Mourn of Man's ritual was performed

This ritual is named so because it was performed by a group of males to honor the loss of a male individualwho died of natural death or remained (killed). Differentiations were made in some cases, when the dead fell at war to defend his country, or for a man in "za", which means for a sage man, (wise persons who were able to carry responsibly and with dignity the role of elders in different trials), or for a man that died young, or for someone who left no heir, or was killed to protect the honor and the Canon of Leka. Changes were not in the rite, but simply on the number of repetitions of this rite.

As for the determination of when this ceremony should be performed based on the age of the deceased, there are different opinions. One interviewee says:" The smallest age when this ceremony was performed has been for a one 6-year-old, who was killed "under his bed covers"(meaning that he was killed at night, in sleep). The host askedfor the dead to be vestedwith traditional woolen pants calledtirq (çakqir) and the cry and mourn of man ritual to be performed, because "he did not want to ruin the purpose of the murder, which was the blood feud." He wanted to recognize this death as taken in order to end the blood feud between the two families". Based on this story, I think that this ceremony is associated with "the manhood" of a child.

There was a difference also in the case when the deceased was a shepherd. It was called the Cry and Mourn of Shepherds. Wider description for such ritual will be given in the section of rites.

The Cry and Mourn of Women. To this question one interviewee said, "Yes, yes, the ritual was performed to women once, but by his own brothers and family. They would start their cry by saying "un` Woe to you, your brother". It was performed to honor the loss of young women, powerful women("n'zâ") or women who did not have children.

4. The symbolism of gjama

Prof. Mark Tirta in his book "Mythology among Albanians, writes: "In the folk tradition has been the belief that the man who dies," switches life", eats, drinks, hears, sees and talks the same way as on this life. The deceased hears (gjamën) the cry and mourn of men and women. When the cry derives the best sound, the dead rejoices with a smiling face.

According to the conversations I have had and based in the ceremonies I have followed, the highlanders surely believe that the dead listens, and is happy when a good farewell ceremony is performed. I think the Cry and Mourn of Men ceremony is associated with the pagan beliefs of this world. The dead is called as if it were alive, orders to the other life are given to him, people who are present are mentioned stressing their duties and qualities, the problems that the deceased did not resolve in his living time are listed.

They certainly have changed, emphasizes Professor Tirta when he writes that "the cry and mourn of men and wailing of women have in their core the ritual nature that is associated with defined imaginations of supernatural beliefs, and in their evolution they have undergone profound changes, the ceremonies have taken the terrestrial touch, actual and artistic commitment to the dead".

We see this phenomenon not only in the northern highlands, but also in all the regions of Albania. The scholar named V. Iazuli, who has tracked the ritual of the Arvanites of Greece, brings us examples of women that in their cries, they speak to the dead and giving him/her orders about the afterlife.

At funeral ceremonies besides the rites expressing grief by beating the chests with fists, scratching the faces and bleeding the skins, we find other rites that bring a sense of optimism. It is believed that the deceased feels released and leaves this world more relaxed when he hears sayings such as: "...and thy sons will get engaged, will bring home brides, children will be born..." It seems sarcastic, but in the environment where they live, the bearing of children means renewed life. The name of the deceased will be passed on to grandchildren yet to be born. In a way, we have a revival of the spirit of the dead in the generations to come.

In my research, I met this notion not only in the countryside, but in the city also. I have heard a widow, whose husband had died young, leaving her with little boys and girls, talking to the deceased as if he was alive. She began to count the troubles of this world, complaining, "how did you leave me alone with little children to raise on my own...etc." to continue: "but do not fret for they will grow and get educated and marry, etc. ".

This scene seemed so pointless to me, and I always wanted to find explanations to justify that woman. I did not quite understand if she so comforted herself, or tried to send her deceased husband to the other life peacefully as she could.

Now I know that the woman really believed that her deceased husband was listening to her, and she was trying to create a spiritual connection by talking about their shared dreams, trespassing the limits of life, set by death.

Thus, unwittingly, I have accepted the pagan and very ancient nature of mankind. I have accepted the feeling that will exceed the modern times reaching the limits of eternity.

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