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# Analyzing The Symbolism Of Solidarity Communication Through Condolence Rituals In Mostaganem: A Communicative And Media Approach

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## Abstract:

This study investigated the relationship between communication and social solidarity by understanding the solidarity symbolism through condolence rituals in Mostaganem. It aimed to identify the nature of communication within the context of social solidarity in condolence rituals in Mostaganem. It used an ethnographic method, using participant observation as a tool. The results include **material dimensions** as providing food supplies; **empathetic dimensions** represented in repeated visits to the family of the deceased by friends, relatives, and neighbours for three days; **cooperative dimensions** encompassed friends and relatives who come together to take the deceased out of the hospital, assist in the burial permit process, the digging process, and women's help in the kitchen; and **communicative dimensions** which covers the announcement of the death and condolence via social media. These dimensions appear within communication types that translate the symbolism of solidarity. These types are showcased in personal, collective, formal, and digital communication.

**Keywords:** Social Solidarity, Nature of Communication, Condolence Rituals, Material Dimensions, Empathetic Dimensions, Cooperative Dimensions, Communicative Dimensions.

## I- Research Methodology

### 1.1. Statement of the problem

Society is a social fabric constituted by individuals and consists of a group of systems and laws which determine the societal standards that entail those individuals. Moreover, society depends on the latter to stay solid and that is through a set of values like acquaintance, support, and cooperation which show a society's culture. Everyone adheres to those values because of how functional they are. One of those values is social solidarity, which is the integration of a group of individuals due to common links tying them together. In an ordinary society, solidarity is built on common values and affinity as Durkheim calls it mechanical solidarity. In modern society, its main function is integration because it is considered the main source of social solidarity due to its ethical nature. Thus, the need for organisation, cohesion and solidarity are ethical needs.

This need for social solidarity emerges during times of crises such as the death of a society

member or a relative. The function of social solidarity is manifested in material dimensions such as fund offering and food aids. It can also be manifested in empathic dimensions such as frequent visits to the deceased's family members and comforting them. The cooperative dimensions can only be established through communication types. In this research, we will study the different dimensions of social solidarity in condolence rituals: material, empathic, cooperative, and communicative dimensions through the nature of communication in the rituals of condolence in Mostaganem.

### 1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To reveal the nature of communication within social solidarity in the rituals of condolence in Mostaganem.
- To recognize the dimensions of social solidarity in condolence.
- To focus on the symbolism of social solidarity in condolence rituals.
- To understand the function of social solidarity in its three dimensions.

### 1.3. Reasons for Choosing the Research Topic

- Living through the phenomenon and our field observation of the importance of communication within social solidarity in times of crisis.
- Our cognitive and scientific tendencies towards the anthropology of communication generally and the aspects of interaction specifically.
- A topic of researchers' interests and scientific/university specialization.

### 1.4. Importance of the Study

- The significance of the topic itself: the nature of communication, social solidarity, and condolence rituals; this trio is a fertile field for scientific research.
- Social solidarity occupies a crucial part in the individuals' lives and one of the basic social aspects.
- The importance can also be demonstrated through other studies of the same subject providing depth about the topic.

### 1.5. The Study Key Concepts

**The nature of communication:** Communication is a dynamic and circular process. The sender encodes the message using a channel towards the receiver who decodes that message and generates feedback. In turn, the receiver re-encodes, transmits, and decodes the message.

(الرحمن، 2011، صفحة 16).

**Social solidarity:** It is a type of integration among a group of individuals due to common bonds between them. In a simple society, solidarity is based on shared values and affinity or as Emile Durkheim calls it "Mechanical Solidarity" in his book on the division of labour in society. This division

is established through groups and in turn leads to the creation of professions. This social model involves social cohesion which is the consequence of the individuals' compatibility with a common psychological model of the concerned society.

(خوالي، 2022، صفحة 100)

**Condolence:** To help the unfortunate be more patient by fulfilling their rights, drawing closer to them, alleviating their sorrow, and making their hardship easier to bear.

(الخريجي، 1994، صفحة 07)

**Empathy:** It is a central notion in psychology. It's one of its main focuses since it's crucial to building successful personal relationships of all sorts: intimate, domestic, professional, social, and others. The lack of empathy can be indicative of some mental and psychological disorders such as anti-social personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder. This notion has been heavily studied in scientific research as scientists discovered that there's a brain region related to altruism. They also found that altruism relates to happiness and both physical and mental health because it decreases stress and psychological pressure and increases natural pain relievers (endorphins) (Rogers, 1989, p.429).

## 1.6. Procedural Concepts

**Solidarity Symbolism:** We defined it in three dimensions, each divided into indicators. **Material:** fund and food aids.

**Empathy:** frequent visits to the deceased's family and consolation.

**Cooperation:** cooperation with men outside, and women on the inside.

**Communication:** spreading the word about the condolence: the memorial for men, phone calls, or social media.

**Condolence Rituals:** a set of procedures performed by individuals mainly due to its symbolic value. These rituals are determined by tradition and heritage of the community (most of which are religious). This term generally signifies a series of steady and ordered actions starting from the death announcement to the full week—which is a relative notion as it could be more than a week- and it was divided into dimensions:

**First dimension (First day):** bringing the deceased from the hospital, settling the burial paperwork, bringing somebody to perform El Ghusl (the act of washing the deceased's body), buying El Kafan (a shroud), buying food supplies, El Arida, and then preparing dinner for the neighbours at night.

**Second dimension (Second day):** visiting the cemetery in the morning with the deceased's family, then visiting them at home in the afternoon.

**Third dimension (Third day):** Sebo'o. Relatives, friends, and neighbours visit the deceased's family for condolence and give them financial or food aids.

**Fourth dimension (during that week):** repeated visits to the deceased family to console them; especially on the first Friday, after going to the cemetery.

**Fifth dimension (during that year):** checking on them during fists and giving them Eid pastry. Making sure not to invite them to any weddings that year.

### **1.7. Research Method**

This study was a qualitative research which involves gathering unquantifiable data. We used the Ethnographic method as one of the qualitative methods to reveal the interpretative dimensions and to delve deeper into the research sample. Ethnographic studies seek to “describe, analyse, and explain society's or individuals' culture or a certain system, focusing on actions, beliefs, languages, and the lifestyle of that society, individuals or system”.

(قندليجي، ايمان، 2009، صفحة 255)

This method was designed to gather people's perspectives, behaviours, and beliefs in social environments. Therefore, it was suitable for this study.

### **1.8. Research Tool**

In this study, we used participant observation which is a research technique where the researcher takes on the role of a participant in the social lives of the individuals being studied. The researcher engages in the same activities as them and must fully join the community, to live under the same circumstances and influences as them over the course of the study. Alain Touraine said: "the purpose of participant observation is to understand the other by sharing similar circumstances." It is the appropriate technique for the nature of this study which mainly focuses on rituals and empathy and aims to uncover the symbolism of social solidarity in condolence rituals. We also held an interview as a qualitative research. It is "a direct technique used to explore people's incentives and the common causes for their behaviour according to each case".

(أنجرس، 2004، صفحة 197)

As for the reason behind choosing this research tool, it is because it allows us to study each sample deeply.

### **1.9. Research Population and Sample**

Our research population was the people of the city of Mostaganem.

Study sample: we used non-probability sampling.

## **2. Data Analysis**

### **2.1. Material Dimensions**

The functions of social solidarity are shown in condolence rituals through providing fund aids from friends, relatives, and neighbours. This function generally includes the poor, the middle class and even the rich out of empathy. It also appears in offering food supplies, vegetables, Couscous, and meat

on the first day for lunch preparations because the deceased's family would be busy. At night, neighbours prepare Couscous with meat where each neighbour brings two fully equipped tables (plates, forks, spoons) that could fit 10 people.

On the third day, also called "Sbo'o" (some families settle for two days due to the social and economic state), relatives and close friends offer vegetables and meat or a considerable sum of money varying from 10000 to 100000 Algerian dinars. However, neighbours contribute with sugar and coffee because they are largely consumed as well as M'semna, Rfiss, Ka'ak and Lamouna as they are offered to the guests during the period of condolence. This offering could mean returning the favour because that family had been there for them in times of happiness or sorrow before.

The material dimension can also be showcased through offering pastries in Eid El-Fitr as well as "Rfiss" on El-Mawlid of that year.

**2.2. Empathetic Dimensions:** this dimension is represented in the frequent visits to the family of the deceased by friends, relatives, and neighbours for three days, while the deceased's family stays with each other for three days too. Psychological studies have shown that when the family of the deceased narrate the events of the death and talk about the deceased, they feel better on a psychological level. "Empathy occurs when we see another person suffering, so we simulate their suffering and express the same feelings that they express, so that we can know first-hand what they are feeling. The simulation theory is based on the presence of sub-nerves in the front of the brain called "mirror neurons", and they are activated when an individual imitates another person. When we empathize and adopt another point of view, it means we have imitated and emulated it. In order to actually imitate others, we must adopt their point of view in the brain first, and that is when those nerves come into play" (Chambon & Cardino, 2003, p. 80).

Therefore, crying is considered symbolic sympathy with the family of the deceased who may need it more. There used to be a custom back in the day, which has disappeared since, and it is bringing a specialized woman whose end goal was to make the family of the deceased cry. In this society, those who do not come for condolences are boycotted by the family of the deceased, saying "ma yawkafch ma'ana fi cheda" meaning "they did not empathize with us during the crisis." What caught my attention in the Mosteghanem community is that they have a day called "gayla", which is the second day after the burial when women come to check on the family of the deceased with the phrase "Ki sbahtou" today, as if they are letting them know how much of a big deal death is; especially the first night after death. Neighbours also come over to spend the night consoling the family because it is a tragedy going from a human being to mere dust.

Additionally, empathy appears a year after death, and it is represented in visiting the family of the deceased on the first feasts after death because they know that the family of the deceased will remember their deceased, as well as not inviting them to weddings because in this society the duration of grief is one year - this is relative depending on the family - as it appears in the condolences of the close family not to go to weddings for a period of two months after death. If there is a wedding in the neighbourhood, they move it to another place out of concern for the family of the deceased.

**2.3. Cooperative Dimensions:** This dimension revolves around cooperation and it appears first in friends and relatives coming together for the removal of the deceased from the hospital or transfer procedures between the states which require administrative efforts. This reflects official communication, union in the process of permission for burial and the process of digging because the family of the deceased are in a psychological state that does not allow them to bear administrative troubles: there are people who take care of it.

Cooperation also appears in setting up of the tent "Gaitoun" where family and neighbours cooperate to erect it and bring chairs, as well as bring utensils and blankets, women's help in the kitchen, the process of preparing meals, and preparing "rfiss" and coffee. Nowadays, some families even hire women for these tasks. Neighbours open their homes and bring their utensils and mattresses.

This occurs in the first three days, but afterwards, relatives and neighbours help wash the bedding and return the items to their place. The idea here is that the family of the deceased remains as a guest of condolence, while the domestic and administrative burdens are taken care of by the family, friends and neighbours. This is where the collective and personal communication is shown.

**2.4. Communicative Dimensions:** It is the news spreading process about the death managed by the family either by phone and now the family of the deceased and friends post on social media pages due to the speed and effectiveness of these sites. Therefore, condolences have taken a different form through digital communication. This space allows colleagues and distant acquaintances to perform the duty of condolence.

However, the one thing that draws attention is that despite the tremendous development of information and communication technology, the city of Mostaganem still relies on an old means of communication, which is The Arida. The latter is an old custom that became famous in the region and circulated by the residents of the state of Mostaganem and used it as a means of news at the funeral of a resident of the city. It is a simple method that consists of the gathering of the families of the deceased, his friends and neighbours, starting from the neighbourhood of Souika in "tijdit", which represents the starting point, in which Al-Barah is in the first row, and then they start roaming through well-known and important points in the city which are inhabited by residents and shoppers.

Al-Barah is the person who calls and announces the death of so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, and the place and time of burial. He relies on his voice to communicate the information to the people there in Souika, Kadousel El-Madah, El-Matmar, the covered market, downtown, reaching the mosque of El-Badr where the family of the deceased forms a long line to receive condolences.

### **3. Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of observation data, It became clear that the nature of communication within the social solidarity in the condolence rituals in Mostaganem was represented in **material dimensions** like providing food aid, vegetables, couscous and meat as much as possible on the first day, on the third day relatives and close friends provide meat and vegetables or significant amounts

of money from 10,000-100,000, while close people and neighbours contribute in bringing foodstuffs on top of which is sugar, coffee due to its wide consumption, Msemna, rffiss and pastry. **Empathetic dimensions** represented in the frequent visits to the family of the deceased by friends, relatives, and neighbours for three days, while the family stays with each other for three days too. Psychological studies have shown that when the family of the deceased narrate the events of death and talk about the deceased they feel better on a psychological level. **Cooperative dimensions** manifested in the union of some friends and relatives in removing the deceased from the hospital, as well as the burial permit and the grave digging processes, the women's help in the kitchen, the process of preparing meals, and the preparation of rffis and coffee. **Communicative dimensions** are seen in the process of spreading the news of death and condolences on social media. These dimensions appear within the modes of communication that translate the symbolism of solidarity, including personal, collective, formal, and digital communication. Despite the huge development in information and communication technology, the city of Mostaganem still relies on an old-fashioned means of communication known as "Al-Arida".

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