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13 Conclusion

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The (hitherto) burgeoning academic discipline of event management developed from and feeds into a vibrant global industry, employing millions of people around the world (Eventbrite, 2018). As events management has professionalised, different sectors of this diverse industry explore interconnections between practice and theory. This book focuses on the sociological, cultural and anthropological perspectives of funerals as events. Yet there also exist events management and practitioner perspectives, not only from within the traditional funeral industry, but also from more diverse celebrations and memorials of death in contemporary practice, as well as historically. Despite the wide variety of events studied or addressed by event scholars and event managers, very few consider death from a perspective of event studies or events management. But death is the one event that none of us can evade. Death is articulated through the events that surround it, through ways in which the end of life is marked (whether that be the life of an individual, a group, or a community), and through evental structures across and between diverse cultural, ideological and societal contexts. There are considerable faith and non-faith practicalities to attend to in the highly stage-managed events of commemoration or memorialisation, from a state funeral or a day of remembrance, to the loss of someone personally close to us.

Origins of the Book

The inspiration for this book, Funerals as Events, has emerged from our teaching. It began through the preparation of a component within a second-year events management module, ‘Celebration, Ritual and Culture’, developed for undergraduate students at the UK Centre for Events Management. Commencing delivery in 2013, the module was devised to reflect on celebrations, which make vital contributions to the cultural elements of different societies. We reflected on theories underpinning celebrations, including the role of ritual and cultural contexts. Our plan was to address specific types of event throughout the life cycle (weddings, celebrations of birth, initiation, and death), providing students with an opportunity to consider critically the associated rituals found in a variety of religious, ethnic, political, geographical, and national contexts. The origins and impacts of such events on society, as well as their basis in and contribution to the global events industry, are also reviewed. We aimed to address the event management elements of funerals and memorials. This topic was conceived as part of the initial concept of the module (along with ‘Wedding Week’, ‘Pilgrimage Week’ and ‘Carnival Week’). We hoped to encourage events management students to consider how they might contribute to the ways in which their communities produce and experience celebrations of life events, including funerals and memorials, making such events individual, personal and meaningful, whilst respecting the requirements of diverse populations.

As module tutors, we built on our learning each year, taking into account feedback from students and external specialist participants, notably from relevant practitioners from within the UK events industry. In 2017, I was inspired by attending the biennial national funerals conference of the Church of England, ‘Taking Funerals Seriously’ (Church of England, 2017), which included a visit to the exhibition managed by and for the National Association of Funeral Directors (2017). With the successful model of ‘Wedding Week’ under our belt, we planned the following semester’s ‘Funeral Week’, using the same structure. We began with specialist input to introduce the topic, followed by a ‘speed-dating’ style approach that enabled the students to meet in small groups to learn from a wide range of industry experts. The plan was to follow this with a ‘death cafe’ event and a ‘behind the scenes’ visit to the local crematorium. That first year, we noted highly emotional responses from a significant

proportion of the students. In our review of the module, we followed up the formal module evaluation with a request for specific feedback, with the aim of developing the structure and style of the session for the following year. We have explored the learning from pedagogical delivery by module tutors and implemented changes over a four-year period, including more successfully reframing the session as 'Memorial Week' and introducing an assessment option to plan a memorial event, with faith and non-faith alternatives.

One of our UKCEM graduates, Becky Hughes, now creates and promotes public engagement in the funeral industry. She also contributes to Memorial Week in our module, offering a briefing session that enables students to interpret the memorial assessment briefing. Becky observes that in the UK, "death is widely regarded as a taboo subject within a culture which often struggles to discuss sensitive subjects". Coupled with the traditional values of the funeral industry, and the country's increasingly diverse culture, promoting funeral products presents challenges.

Considering real and imagined funerals, and identifying emerging trends in practice, the contents of 'Memorial Week' include reflection on the following topics: Celebrating, commemorating and memorialising death through events; the role of the funeral director as event manager; co-creation of funeral events; national, international and historical commemorations of death; vigils and responses to terror attacks; sustainability and woodland burials, marketing a funeral business and the benefits of funeral fairs for industry professionals. Working in small groups, the students themselves have dug deep into global cultural reserves, researching historical and contemporary celebrations and festivals, and in that time their focus on death, dying and memorialisation of death has been notable. They have presented their analysis of international death commemorations, from celebrity funerals (comparing the symbolism of flowers at the funerals of Margaret Thatcher and Michael Jackson) to exploring the Mexican Day of the Dead festival. One of the first groups researching the range of funerals wrote that:

> *"The funeral ritual is a public, traditional and symbolic means of expressing our beliefs, thoughts and feelings about the death of someone loved. Rich in history and rife with symbolism, the funeral ceremony helps us acknowledge the reality of the death, gives testimony to the life of the deceased, encourages the expression of grief in a way consistent with the culture's values, provides support to mourners, allows for the embracing of faith and beliefs about life and death, and offers continuity and hope for the living." (2013)*

Over the seven years of the module, many groups have chosen to study cultural and religious practices around extant death rites of passage. Their research has encompassed studies of international historical and contemporary funeral practices, following the funerary rituals of religious and tribal communities: the meaning of Hindu death customs and beliefs within the Samsara framework, the wheel of rebirth; the Mexican Day of the Dead celebration; sharing the cultural perspectives of students in the group by exploring Chinese Buddhist funerals; the Shamanic endocannibalism burial rituals of the Yanomami, the largest isolated tribe in South America – a practice also performed by Amazonian Wari and Fore tribes; the Haitian origins of the Voodoo Fête for a Lwa; the annual Indonesian Ma'nene festival of the Torajan tribe with the eleven centuries-old ceremony of cleaning corpses to honour their ancestors; the Famadihana ritual of turning the bones of the dead from Madagascar; the Japanese Senkotsu ritual of bone washing; the rituals of the Igorot tribe in the Philippines, where the dead are tied to a 'sangdel' chair to receive visits as their mourning families pay their respects… and

others. And so, this book encapsulates the spirit of our module, developing and broadening international themes from a wide range of cultural and sociological perspectives.

The Coronavirus Pandemic

Then, in the midst of writing and editing this book, came 2020, the year of the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic, with lockdowns around the world, has brought many more deaths, and restrictions on the final moments with the dying, with the preparation, disposal and burial of bodies, and it has interfered with mourning rituals. The official global timeline of the Coronavirus began on 31 December, 2019, when the Chinese Government alerted the World Health Authority to the existence of a new virus (WHO, 2020). In February 2020, a public health epidemiologist in Hong Kong warned that the Coronavirus could infect up to 60% of the world's population (in the UK, this would be equivalent to some 45 million people), if it was not controlled (Boseley, 2020).

Throughout March and April 2020, many nations entered Lockdown 1. In countries such as the UK, the millions of people aged 70 or over and those who are immuno-compromised or clinically vulnerable were placed in self-isolation (BBC, 2020). People who were isolating were not supposed to leave their homes, even to buy food.

By the end of October 2020, 189 countries or regions had been infected with the virus, with more than 1 million deaths and rising, as the second wave swept across the globe (Johns Hopkins University of Medicine, 2020). In early May, the UK death toll not only overtook that of other European countries (Campbell et al, 2020) but also attained the second highest number of COVID fatalities in the world (the USA had already reached first place). Despite considerable growth in infection rates and deaths, on 13 May 2020, the UK Government announced their plan to reopen schools, businesses and other organisations (www.gov.uk, 2020). A government task force was established to identify and address the issues facing places of worship for all faiths (www.gov.uk, 2020). At that point, places of worship were to remain closed, with some exceptions, such as monasteries and religious communities, and the British Government issued specific guidance relating to funerals, shown below:

> "Funerals may be held, but it is advised that they be conducted in line with guidance from Public Health England.
> Burial grounds and cemeteries can remain open. Grounds surrounding crematoria may also remain open, including gardens of remembrance.
> Providers of funeral services, such as funeral directors and funeral homes, may remain open." (British Government Guidance on Funerals and Religious Spaces in the Pandemic, from www.gov.uk, 2020)

In the UK, houses of worship – churches, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, temples – undertook significant and detailed health and safety risk assessments within their planning processes to reopen, and by October 2020, many still remained closed at the start of Lockdown 2 as the second wave progressed around parts of the world.

The initial announcement by the UK government that the bodies of all COVID-19 deaths in hospitals would be cremated as soon as possible after death (Fairbairn, 2020), was quickly retracted after leaders of several faiths protested that this was against the requirements of their religions. In the UK, local government authorities have the responsibility for controlling local crematoria. Subsequently the national decisions were devolved to local authorities, who received the same complaints (Fairbairn, 2020). These changes were introduced to take

account of the anticipated expansion in the numbers of deaths, and therefore of funerals. Initially, some local authorities decided to impose direct cremations, allowing no ministers of religion to accompany the deceased or even to pray and commend their bodies to be cremated. However, these decisions were immediately reviewed following protests from faith communities (Bradford Council, 2020). Faith representatives negotiated with their local emergency planning teams to provide extra capacity for faith leaders to take shortened cremation services, developing duty rotas to cover each crematorium. However, this 'worst-case' scenario planning was mostly not required, so the usual approach of funeral directors continued. It is important to note here the range of practices of different faith groups in preparing the body of the deceased and in funerary practice, some of which are required by religious precepts.

In the Jewish faith, the body of the deceased undergoes a ritual washing (rechitzah), purification (taharah) and dressing (halbashah). This preparation for burial is completed by a specialist taharah team, accompanied by prayers, liturgy and silence (Light, 2016). Traditional Jewish burial is done using a simple wooden casket (or no casket, just a shroud). Embalming the body and cremation are not supported as Jewish practices. The immediate family typically sits 'shiva', as, for seven days, friends and neighbours provide meals and sit with the bereaved (Light, 2016). According to Biblical injunction (Deuteronomy 21:23), the burial should take place within 24 hours of death, with a eulogy or 'hesped' recited at home or at the cemetery. In September 2019, a new website was launched to allow Jewish families to share the eulogies written for funerals and shivas (Grabiner, 2019; www.hesped.org). A memorial stone is usually laid on the first yahrzeit (anniversary of death) or a year after the burial. The pandemic has affected some of these ritual practices, for example those who have been infected by the COVID-19 virus and subsequently died, cannot receive the ritual purification, which means their bodies cannot be washed or placed in a shroud. The global pandemic has disproportionately taken thousands of Jewish lives, and as funeral services take place online and shiva is suspended, the Jewish community has suffered greatly.

Islam also requires specific religious practices on the dead. Muslim practice also includes ritual washing, preparing the body of the deceased for burial in a white cotton shroud, followed by a burial as soon as possible after death, without a coffin, typically within 24 hours (Hirji, Hirji & Lakasing, 2020). Muslim communities have adapted these rituals to apply social distancing and implement infection control measures. The section below lists the obligatory burial rituals in Islam for a deceased Muslim (adapted from Hirji et al, 2020).

- Ghusl: the body of the deceased is cleaned with soap and water, followed by ritual washing, which must be done a minimum of three times. It is important to ensure that water reaches all parts of the skin, hence the body must be turned during this process. Some practices also involve applying gentle pressure on the abdomen to expel bowel contents.
- Kafan: shrouding of the deceased in white cotton sheets.
- Salat al-Janazah: congregational prayer for the deceased, usually attended by large numbers according to Islamic tradition. Congregants stand close together to pray for the deceased.
- Burial: it is obligatory for Muslims to bury their dead as soon as possible after death, typically within 24 hours. It is recommended that the washed and shrouded body is buried without a coffin, with the face of the deceased facing Mecca.

Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, Ghusl and Kafan were mainly carried out by elders of the community. During the pandemic, Muslim communities have adapted burial rituals and

obligations, to include younger members of the community undertaking Ghusl and Kafan rituals to safeguard the health of the over 70's, wearing appropriate PPE, and abiding by social distancing regulations (Hirji et al, 2020). With those over the age of 70 implementing rigorous social distancing, Muslim communities have swiftly trained and organised teams of younger volunteers to conduct this vital role, and media platforms such as Zoom have proved invaluable in providing this training.

Hinduism, the third largest religion in the world, acknowledges a diverse range of beliefs. This is in contrast to those faiths with a shared creed. Hinduism allows three types of funerals: Agni Dah (cremation, which is the customary practice), Bhu Samadhi (burial), and Jal Samadhi (water burial). Both burial and water burial are mainly reserved for Sadhus and infants under two years old. Hindu practice also includes ritual washing of the deceased, avoiding unnecessary touching of the body, and cremation as soon as possible after death, preferably within 24 hours. Three days after the cremation, the ashes are usually scattered over water (river or sea). For Hindus, the role of crematorium staff remains sensitive to the religious needs of the deceased and their families. Rituals that do not require the body to be touched, such as reading from scriptures, sprinkling with holy water, are still permitted. However, bathing and embracing the dead body is no longer allowed. Large gatherings at funerals have been restricted for all faiths, whether at a cemetery, crematorium or place of worship.

The changes to normal practice resulting from the pandemic have been significant. Prior to the pandemic, in the UK, faith leaders have increasingly been asked to lead funeral services in a funeral parlour rather than in a place of worship or at the graveside or in the crematorium. The Church of England requires a full funeral to follow either in church, in the cemetery or graveyard, or at the crematorium. Detailed below is Paragraph 1 of Church of England Canon B38 (Church of England, 2019). This directs every minister to 'observe the law', without any qualification or limitation as to the origins of that law, secular or otherwise. Paragraph 2 of Canon B38 requires that every minister is under a duty to bury according to the rites of the Church of England the corpse or ashes of a deceased person in the churchyard or burial ground or cemetery under their control provided that the person has a right of burial and the churchyard or burial ground is not full or closed.

The Canons of the Church of England, B 38 Of the burial of the dead

1. In all matters pertaining to the burial of the dead every minister shall observe the law from time to time in force in relation thereto, and, subject to this paragraph in general, the following paragraphs of this Canon shall be obeyed.
2. It shall be the duty of every minister to bury, according to the rites of the Church of England, the corpse or ashes of any person deceased within his cure or of any parishioners or persons whose names are entered on the church electoral roll of his parish whether deceased within his cure or elsewhere that is brought to a church or burial ground or cemetery under his control in which the burial or interment of such corpse or ashes may lawfully be effected, due notice being given; except the person deceased have died unbaptized, or being of sound mind have laid violent hands upon himself, or have been declared excommunicate for some grievous and notorious crime and no man to testify to his repentance; in which case and in any other case at the request of the relative, friend, or legal representative having charge of or being responsible for the burial he shall use at the burial such service as may be prescribed or approved by the Ordinary, being a service neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter: Provided that, if a form of service available for the burial of suicides is approved by

the General Synod under Canon B 2, that service shall be used where applicable instead of the aforesaid service prescribed or approved by the Ordinary, unless the person having charge or being responsible for the burial otherwise requests.

3. Cremation of a dead body is lawful in connection with Christian burial.
4. (a) When a body is to be cremated, the burial service may precede, accompany, or follow the cremation; and may be held either in the church or at the crematorium. (b) The ashes of a cremated body should be reverently disposed of by a minister in a churchyard or other burial ground in accordance with section 3 of the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 1992 or on an area of land designated by the bishop for the purpose of this sub-paragraph or at sea.
5. When a body is to be buried according to the rites of the Church of England in any un-consecrated ground, the officiating minister, on coming to the grave, shall first bless the same.
6. If any doubts shall arise whether any person deceased may be buried according to the rites of the Church of England, the minister shall refer the matter to the bishop and obey his order and direction.
7. A funeral service at a crematorium or cemetery shall be performed only in accordance with directions given by the bishop. (Church of England Canon B38, 2019)

Faith leaders and ministers are often invited by close family members into the home of the bereaved to say prayers, as well as into hospitals, care homes, hospices, and undertakers' chapels. For the Church of England, approved liturgy can be used as well as extempore prayers (using your own words), at the minister's discretion. Such prayers provide much needed comfort and support to bereaved families.

The time allowed for cremation services was limited and some church denominations responded by developing a shortened approved liturgy for a 15-minute service. In Lockdown 1, the number of mourners for funerals was limited to ten people. However, as there were concurrent restrictions to movement for anyone over 70, as well as on those with medical conditions, this limitation on numbers did not seem to be overly problematic for many funerals. Most crematoria offered a live-streaming service, usually subject to an additional fee. This enabled mourners – family and friends – to watch the funeral service online, synchronously, from anywhere with online access. The video recording of funeral services was also made possible, for families to watch, at a later date. Burials were limited to close family at the graveside. The number of funerals with few or no mourners, for example, where the family lived some distance away, combined with the restrictions on visiting patients with Coronavirus, have focused on post-pandemic memorial services and adversely impacted on the mental wellbeing of survivors. The introduction of live streaming continues to become part of the 'new normal', as, outside of lockdown, places of worship re-opened for services, weddings and funerals.

Nelson-Becker & Victor (2020) identify the importance of not being alone when ill or dying. Around the world, restrictions due to the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic resulted in many people dying without the comfort of having family members surrounding them in their last days and hours. Some may not even have had medical staff to care for them. There are certainly examples of the bodies of people who have died alone, being discovered days and even weeks after death. Many families who mourn are devastated by grief, and angry that they were not able to say goodbye or have meaningful funerals for their loved ones.
By June 2020, the number of additional deaths in the UK (compared to the previous year), reached over 60,000. During the pandemic, many government decisions regarding funeral

rites found broad opposition from faith groups, as the importance of appropriate commending of the dead became apparent. All funerals were limited in duration and perhaps more importantly, in the number of mourners allowed. Even though there is space for some elements of religious ritual, a fifteen-minute slot at a crematorium where mourners must observe social distancing protocols hardly provides redress for the pain and sorrow of those family members who have been unable to sit with relatives as they lay dying. No funerals were allowed in places of worship during the first lockdown, limiting services to crematoria chapels and at the graveside in cemeteries. Deaths during the pandemic, whether from Coronavirus or not, were impacted by the imposed government restrictions. From people dying without the company of family or friends, or even alone during lockdown, to funerals that minimise attendance and duration, the pandemic is initiating problems for the future wellbeing of many who are bereaved.

In November 2020, a group of faith community leaders wrote to the British Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson, to express their deep concerns at new restrictions imposed on places of worship in the second lockdown that commenced after midnight on Thursday 5 November. This lockdown, like the first, banned public worship. The letter states that:

> *"Common worship is constitutive of our identity, and essential for our self-understanding. Without the worshipping community, our social action and support cannot be energised and sustained indefinitely. Our commitment to care for others comes directly from our faith, which must be sustained and strengthened by our meeting together in common worship. Worshipping together is core to our identity and an essential aspect of sustaining our mission and our activity. Common worship is also necessary to sustain the health and wellbeing of faith community members." (Welby et al, 2020)*

Signed by Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Anglican, Catholic and non-denominational Christian faith leaders, the letter continues by urging the government to recognise the positive impact of public worship and faith community relationships on people who are "coping with trauma, grief and loss" (Welby et al, 2020). However, in the second lockdown, whilst public worship services and weddings were cancelled completely, funerals and any associated religious, belief-based or ceremonial rites were allowed, with up to 15 mourners present, indicating a lesson learned by government from the previous lockdown (UK Government, 2020).

Under the COVID Rapid Response Scheme, the UK academic research funding organisation, Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has invested in an ongoing faith research project that aims to assess the impact of British ritual innovation that is resulting from the pandemic (BRIC-19, 2020). It asserts the efficacy of religious rituals, citing ritual theorists as well as the UK government. During the COIVD-19 pandemic, clergy have been recognised as key workers. BRIC-19 states that:

> *"Funerals, weddings, birth rituals, and holiday observances are vital to people's psychological wellbeing and sense of community, especially given the sense of unease created by the pandemic." (BRIC-19, 2020)*

The paramountcy of funerals is implied by their heading of this list of religious activities and rituals that impact on the wellbeing of those affected by the pandemic. As services and public worship has moved online, the BRIC-19 project is collecting data to identify how these ritual innovations can benefit people of faith beyond the pandemic. Meanwhile, faith leaders themselves are providing and sharing resource toolkits for support in the case of emergency, death, and disaster. Whilst some documents were drawn up in response to a local airship disaster, they also anticipate implementation following the death of the monarch and have been brought into use during the pandemic (Bailey, 2017).

From a professional practitioner perspective, a research study developed in 2018-19 when former NHS surgeon, Sarah Jones moved into funeral directing, establishing an independent funeral directing business – Full Circle Funerals. Jones was concerned about the impact of poorly managed and delivered funerals on the bereaved. The research questioned how a 'good' or 'poor' funeral experience might have consequences for the long-term wellbeing of the bereaved. Working collaboratively with the Institute of Cemetery and Cremation Management, the Good Funeral Guide and the National Society of Allied Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF), the results were released in September 2019. The report found that funerals could exacerbate and underline rifts in family relationships. Whilst acknowledging that a funeral is, to an extent, 'for' the bereaved, the person who died provides the main focus of the event: "The funeral was a gift to that person, and it was important to get the gift right." (Rugg & Jones, 2019, p61). The report concluded that:

> *"The families themselves were also engaged in the 'emotional labour' of the funeral, and worked hard to ensure that it was sufficiently personal, that the tone was right, and a 'goodbye' was properly expressed. The period of time between the death and the funeral was very important to many respondents, in being a time when much of this labour took place, and where the families could actively engage with and order their memories of the person who had died. It is important, therefore, that this period is not too limited or rushed." (Rugg & Jones, 2019, p61)*

In the year of the pandemic, families were subject to much stronger levels of emotional labour: often there was no opportunity for goodbyes, prior to and after death, and the time between death and funeral left little opportunity for mourners to actively engage with the process – combined with strict limitations on travel. All of these factors have very serious implications for the level of complexity in the bereavement process. And yet cynics might ask, what is the use of a 'good funeral guide' or 'natural death handbook' under such dire circumstances?

National Commemoration Events

In September 2020 I was invited to contribute to a 'Faith Action' webinar, a national roundtable event on bereavement, to consider a government proposal for a national commemoration event for the UK. Having taken two socially distanced cremation / funeral services during the first lockdown (including that of my own father), my practitioner, teaching and research perspectives were fully engaged. I began considering the complexity of the pandemic bereavement experience, with many deaths being unexpected, families experiencing multiple bereavements, families being separated from the people who were (and are) dying, as well as being separated from other bereaved people: their families and friends. I was aware from personal experience that international, regional, and even local, lockdown prevented attendance at funerals, and that the small numbers allowed at funerals restricted the numbers of attendees. Early on, some local authorities directed that there were direct cremations only. Focussing on health risks alone demonstrated a lack of consideration of religious beliefs and practices. Attendance was eventually increased from ten to 30 mourners, and in Lockdown 2 the number of mourners allowed was reduced again, to 15. There were vast differences between expectation and reality: for one family, mourning the loss of a beloved father was made more difficult firstly through lack of access during lockdown. The second variance was his and their expectation that when he died, his funeral would be held in Durham Cathedral, a place to which he had contributed over his working life and in retirement. Instead, his funeral took place in a local Yorkshire crematorium, taken by me, and attended by only five relatives. A son living abroad was only able to watch an online version,

livestreamed by crematorium staff via one static camera. Other relatives and family friends were excluded from this vital ritual.

The necessary restrictions imposed by national and local governments to manage the potential numbers of deaths envisaged and to prioritise the call on limited health services has had another impact on bereaved families in 2020. The events industry has contributed to many of us embracing a way of living that facilitates and privileges individual experiences, through many kinds of events. Funerals and other rites of passage (Davie, Heelas & Woodhead, 2003, p.93) have not been exempt from these developments. During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, traditional religious festivals of the past have morphed into the events and festivals that until this pandemic have dominated cultural expression, in what we might recognise as the 'eventization of life' today (Dowson, 2016). Experiential marketing organisations have made efforts to appeal to and engage customers and clients within distinct relationships. Lockdown has, more than ever, separated us into smaller silos of private individualisation through the Internet, as families, couples and singletons are banned from meeting together physically. Such lack of control over what happens, especially in bereavement circumstances, result in much more than disappointment, as the grieving process is extended. Under these dire conditions, it seems likely that any suggestions for developing a National Commemoration Event would be met with negative responses, including anger. If we define an event as an experience aimed at a specific group of people, we might ask how such a memorial might engage mourners, both physically face to face and online, in a direct experience.

What might such an event look like? Considerations in developing and planning such an event should include:

- Diversity in planning the event, crowdsourcing ideas.
- Inclusivity in language and actions.
- Ensuring that those of different faiths and none can contribute and engage.
- Consideration of 'spiritual' as well as 'religious' aspects.
- Weighing up the benefits of many local events rather than one national location focus.
- Broadening the time of the 'event' beyond one day or specific time, to launch an ongoing period.
- Deciding what timing is appropriate, without having foresight of when the pandemic will be 'over'.
- Acknowledging that people may need to express their grief (and have it acknowledged) sooner rather than later.

The purpose of such a memorial event would combine perspectives of a wide range of different stakeholders: bereaved people, faith adherents and faith leaders, charities, local and central government authorities. It would need to enable many people to engage, whether or not they consider themselves religious or within a faith. To begin such a journey towards recovery from grief involves extending hope. Could this emerge from a meaningful ritual activity that enables people to come together (virtually and locally) to publicly acknowledge their loss? In pre-pandemic times, people might come into church to light a candle and say a prayer, or write down a prayer and hang it on a prayer-tree, to be prayed for by a priest or prayer team. Allowing individual prayer in Lockdown 2 despite banning worship services at least recognises the need for people to make personal, individual responses to what is a double bereavement. As faith organisations support their own adherents through these challenging times, a commemoration event should aim to embody an experience for all, building community and fostering a sense of belonging, recognising and strengthening

identity and relationships. Now is a time to ask a hurting people what they need, to engage with people where they are. Communities exist within and beyond faith organisations, and there are many diverse institutions that can offer a welcoming space.

As the UK government moved towards reopening places of worship at the end of the first lockdown, the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England issued prayers of lament, thanksgiving and reconciliation, proposing three main themes:

- "Lament. Few communities have been unaffected by loss, illness and death. Fear and anxiety have been prevalent in households and communities. In the resources that follow, suggestions for a 'Service of Lament' (as distinct from a bereavement service) are provided. This can be used as a 'stand alone' service or elements of it incorporated into an occasion marking a community's journey in recovery.
- Thanksgiving. The emergence of the Thursday 'Clap for carers' was a significant experience both nationally and locally. Thanksgiving binds communities together, turning 'I' into 'we'. The contribution of carers and key workers who have given of themselves sacrificially needs to be honoured. Sharing stories of people and events during the crisis and lockdown is likely to form the kernel of any community celebration. Unsung heroes need to be applauded.
- Restoration. Naming the unexpected gifts of this crisis as well as its challenges, celebrating the rediscovery of the importance of the local, and the resurgence of neighbourliness will enable the journey of renewal and restoration. Consideration may be given to bring an act of worship to focus in some sort of symbolic act of restoration, entrusting ourselves to the God who leads us into his future: 'I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope' (Jeremiah 29.11)." (Church of England Liturgical Commission, 2020)

Lament is for those people we have lost, and also for ourselves as mourners; thanksgiving is for the lives of those we have lost and for all that they have contributed, both to society and to our lives; restoration enables us to move on with hope. Yet for some people, this mourning may not be for people's lives, but for other losses: of relationships, of jobs and careers, of companionship and company as many people are completely isolated, lacking human touch or being face to face with another person for months, for income or financial stability, for mental wellbeing – or perhaps even for a loss of faith itself.

The Christian church is not unfamiliar with rituals of community and individual grieving. The 2nd November is All Souls Day, which follows All Saints Day (the day after Halloween). This time usually begins a season of remembrance, with services and opportunities to reflect on and recall those we have known who are with us no longer, and to participate in ritual acts that enable us to sit with remembering, to reminisce, to honour those we have known and cared for. Remembrance Day (11th November, and the Sunday prior) is commemorated across Europe, remembering the dead of two World Wars and of contemporary times. In the UK, this a time when people are drawn to community reflection, wearing a poppy (red or white), whilst every local village and parish has a service of remembrance, with two minutes' silence, broken by the 'Reveille' sounded on a trumpet, and organisations and individuals bring wreaths or crosses decorated with poppies. The red poppy now symbolises and memorialises not only the dead of past wars, but deaths from ongoing peacekeeping and wartime activities. The levels of traumatic stress that are arising from the 2020 pandemic could benefit from large-scale collective and active participation in agreed meaningful ritual/s, in order for us, eventually, to move on. Such rituals and any commemorative events

should be multi-faith, ecumenical and inclusive of those of no faith, generating hope for the future.

Whilst in the UK, lockdown introduced new rituals, such as the Thursday evening doorstep ‘Clap for Carers’ and displaying a rainbow in your window to support the NHS, we consider here a theoretical perspective. Italian anthropologist, Alessandro Falassi developed a typological framework of ritual types (1987), theory that can be applied to the practical context of life during the pandemic as well as to a national commemoration event. Such rituals can aid the processing of memories, as we memorialise this period of time as a whole. We have been living in a liminal space since March 2020, in a “time out of time” (Falassi, 1987, p.4) or “special temporal dimension devoted to special activities” (ibid). We have experienced “symbolic abstinence” (Falassi, 1987 p3) as we have done things that we do not “normally do” (ibid), and abstained from things that we would “normally do” (ibid) in our daily lives.

Falassi’s ritual types are described below with relevant considerations for this context:

- Rites of valorization (for religious events, this is called sacralization; modifies the usual and daily function and meaning of time and space). The idea of a national commemoration event could provide the beginning of a new season of grieving, and recognition of the suffering of so many throughout the pandemic.
- Rites of purification (cleansing, chasing away evil by fire / holy water / sacred relics / symbols). The handwashing ritual is real cleansing to protect against the coronavirus. Purification offers us the opportunity to offload our cares. While some religious practices involve purification of the body of the deceased in fire, most mainstream religions involve some kind of ritual washing of the body, accompanied by prayer, to cleanse it prior to burial or cremation. During the pandemic these rituals have been curtailed or amended for health and safety reasons, to stop the spread of the virus. Could a national commemoration event be viewed as an act of purification? Any material objects that become part of a shared ritual could be perceived as sacred relics. The prevalence of the rainbow displayed in windows is gaining such provenance.
- Rites of passage (marking transition from one stage of life to another, e.g. initiations). This includes the loss of a loved one, loss of relationships, of freedom, livelihoods and income, and even loss of faith.
- Rites of reversal (symbolic inversion, e.g. masks and costumes; gender misidentification; role confusion; using sacred places for profane activities). This aspect is substantial – from the closure of places of worship during lockdown, when kitchen tables became altars, and holy communion was denied, to the mass of event venues standing empty from the initial lockdown with no end in sight to the reopening of the events industry. This mundane time drastically represents the mutability of what is normal. A commemoration event would not celebrate this time, but through rites of reversal, would capture it in a way that facilitates the acknowledgement of individual and collective grief and bereavement.
- Rites of conspicuous display (objects of high symbolic value put on display, touched or worshipped; used in processions; guardians and social / political / religious elite display their powers). This aspect could be represented in many forms, from an object displayed on your person (whether branded on clothing, or on skin as a tattoo), to a representational gesture, symbolic of suffering. It could be part of a collective activity, a transitioning point in grief. In August 2020, event venues were lit with red lighting, as thousands of events technical professionals demonstrated in cities like

Manchester, pushing large flightcases of the equipment they would normally be operating at festivals, gigs and other live events. Closure and other restrictions on places of worship as well as limitations on rites of passage such as weddings and funerals could result in conspicuous display of such rituals once they are permitted.

- Rites of conspicuous consumption (usually involve food and drink, prepared in abundance, include ritual food). Lockdown and its impact on the economy prompted a growth in demand for food banks, as more people experienced food poverty. In contrast, online socialising developed with friends and family eating together virtually.
- Ritual dramas (retelling of myths and legends or historical re-enactment). Ritual that recalls our loss, such as the act of tying a ribbon around a tree, becomes an opportunity to re-tell our story, as a ritual drama. The old question, 'What did you do in the War Grandad?' could morph into a request to hear the retelling of stories about what people did during the Great Pandemic of 2020.
- Rites of exchange (from commerce – buying and selling – to gift exchanges and charitable donations). The pandemic lockdowns have forced reliance on local suppliers that can be more easily accessed, as well as on online suppliers such as Amazon. New creative skills have been called into play to create masks, using diverse materials. Birthdays and other celebrations are celebrated virtually, from the delivery of Afternoon Tea during a Zoom call, to food hampers and flowers. The development of a shared symbol of commemoration would likely involve some kind of material artefacts, which would need to be sourced, such as t-shirts, lapel pins and ribbons.
- Rites of competition (constitute cathartic moments in the form of games). Online gamification of activities has grown through the pandemic restrictions on meeting together in person. Quiz nights and other online activities have enabled families and friends to spend time together, whilst strangers have become friends.
- De-valorization rites (take place at the end of the event. Restoring normal time and space, closing ceremonies. Formal / informal farewells). A ritual activity becomes a ceremony of transition, of closure. A final national (or international) event would have an end but would provide a transitioning point to other local events and activities, with ways to indicate observers' virtual presence.

A possible template for a commemoration event could be taken from the response to the terrorist suicide bombing at the end of Ariana Grande's concert at Manchester Arena on 22 May 2017 (BBC, 2017a), that killed 22 people and injured 116. Less than 24 hours later, the population of greater Manchester came together in an act of solidarity. Politicians and faith leaders, poets and musicians demonstrated their solidarity with the families of those who had perished in the attack (BBC, 2017b). People laid flowers and lit candles, later adopting Manchester's bumble bee as a symbol, which soon spread from t-shirts to tattoos. The initial half-hour vigil encompassed contributions from Mayor, Andy Burnham, and the Bishop of Manchester, Rt. Rev. David Walker, who succinctly captured the feelings of a hurting city:

> *"We are still grieving and we are angry, but we can direct those feelings in a positive direction. Our grief can help us draw close to those who have lost loved ones at this time ... Whether they were local people or from father away, from now on, they are Manchester too." (Pidd, 2017)*

The vigil ended with an ode to the city recited by the poet Tony Walsh, which concluded:

> *"This is a place that has been through some hard times. Depressions, recessions, repressions and dark times. But we keep fighting back with Greater Manchester spirit, northern grit, Greater Manchester lyrics. And it's hard times again in these streets of*

our city. But we won't take defeat and we don't want your pity because this is the place where we stand strong together with a smile on our face, Mancunians forever." (Pidd, 2017)

But whatever the event, a recognition of bereavement during the 2020 pandemic is vital. A ribbon is not enough.

The future of funerals and events

The themes in this book begin to consider the connection of the individual to death events, as well as the impact of death events on the community. There are wide cultural connections, with enthralling stories from around the world. Personal experience abounds, relating the ongoing impacts of death in different communities. The book examines how some societies approach and respond to death and the meaningful rituals that are expressed, through a broad interpretation of 'event'.

Sadly, the 2020 pandemic has foregrounded death, and has begun to highlight the important contribution of the role of events in commemorating those we have lost. The contribution of this book is timely, as future research considerations expand. In 2019, our initial request for interest resulted in over sixty responses from around the world, encompassing cultural diversity and geographic reach, academic scholarship and practitioner perspectives. The chapters included in this volume form a contribution to the future possibilities of the study of death, events, and the evental narratives articulated.

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