The Politics of Mourning the (de)Humanised

Introduction

Mourning is associated with loss and it exposes the human condition to vulnerability. The symbolism of mourning announces damage and harm—that something or someone has been taken away. Mourning is a feeling that is universal and is not limited to racial or gender prejudice. But when mourning is exclusively labeled for those who are human and becomes a process of experiencing human vulnerability then it begins to exclude others which are not deemed as human. Mourning thus becomes only about those who are regarded as human. Accordingly, the body and mind become sites of violence and invariably mourning. Butler asks a pertinent question *What makes for a grievable life?* (Butler 2004: 20). In her question more questions arise *whose life*? and *why is life grieved upon?* In these questions one should consider the dimension of the human condition in relation to its exposure to violence, its vulnerability to loss and the consequence of mourning the follows (Butler 2004). This dimension of the human condition foregrounds human vulnerability.

The purpose of this paper is to extract meaning and understanding in how significant happenings that are unknowable and knowable in political life create grievable moments. For this reason it is central to this discussion to explain what constitutes a political life. To begin there is no universal definition of a political life but in efforts of understanding the term, political refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance, it is an organised control over a human community. What constitutes as political life is the manner in which people live in groups and make decisions. Therefore, politics and life cannot be separated political decisions are made in the spectra of life and pertaining to life. Hence, in this discussion the spectacle of life in itself will be examined as a political entity. To be politicised is to be made controversial, it denotes to making ones' needs as though they are unnatural and undeserving. It makes one's actions appear as unjust and unlawful. A politicised life is often denoted to any action that is about affirming oneself, one's humanity and thus maintaining restoring dignity becomes a politicised action. Evidently, persons of such undertakings are often, if not always regarded as threats to the status quo. Throughout history these persons' are categorised as ill-disciplined, unruly, illegitimate and rebels and they end up indicted as those that need to be humanised because they lack human capabilities such as discipline. This discussion will delve into the link between a politicised, depoliticised, humanised and dehumanised life and explain how mourning can emerge in such circumstances.

The first section explains how humanisation and dehumanisation transpire, the second section is an interpretation of exile as a tool of dehumanisation particularly in the content and context of oppression and the last section provides a critical argument of how the dehumanised and evidently the exiled are subject to mourning that is violent.

Interpreting vulnerability for the humanised and dehumanised

"The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well" (Butler 2004: 26). Butler explains that the body is exposed to vulnerability, the body is predisposed to judgement. With that in mind there are varies struggles that have arisen for rights over bodies. The body is exposed to a world of *others*, it is further exposed to inscriptions informed by *others*. In the formation of agency and will of the body, Butler posits a critical question if one were to deny body proximity of *others* and exclude itself from the position of an unwilled physical interaction would that result in a body that enjoys autonomy without being exposed to social conditions? (Butler 2004). To be human is to have reason, agency, superiority, it is to live freely and above all it is to embody freedom. It is to be vulnerable to the conditions of life, it is to be susceptible to mourning. Humanity is having wholeness and autonomy (Mc Robbie 2006). To be human is to be prevailing in ways of valuing life, it is to have freedom to move and thrive without being subjected to coercive force (Yancy and Butler 2015). There is a hierarchy of humanity that results in a discourse of dehumanisation, it produces the effects of dehumanisation and it establishes the boundaries of humanity. The dehumanised are removed from the realm of reality. Those who are excluded are categorised as unreal, they surfer the violence of derealisation. Butler (2004) understands derealisation as a discourse that considers certain lives as disposable and not human. It is lives that do not fit into the frames of human, their dehumanisation occurs first at this level, at the following level it gives rise to physical violence which unfolds and exposes itself through a physical manifestation of dehumanisation such as exile. Dehumanisation ends up forging a culture that perpetuates the violence of exclusion and oppression.

Butler (2004) notes that grievable lives are lives that are acknowledged. These are lives that considered as a loss, these are lives that are summarised, humanised into obituaries. These are lives that are worth noting, preserving and qualifying of recognition. Butler makes reference to an obituary which functions as an instrument in which grieving is publically distributed—she makes an example of the war causalities during the Gulf War of 200 000 Iraqi children were

killed. There were no obituaries for the causalities. Alike during the apartheid era in South Africa many lives were lost during protests but in newspaper article's only human lives would be accounted for. Lives that matter are publically grieveable lives. These would include white security personnel or white citizens, these are lives that matter because they are human. The dehumanised are those who do not have obituaries, who are not acknowledged as loss, whose life is not grievable, whose life does not really qualify as life (Butler 2004). In fact the dehumanised cannot have obituaries because they never really died, because to die means to have lived and only humans live, hence the dehumanised never lived—they exist in a present-absent continuum. Thus, this informs how you cannot mourn those who are not human and you cannot mourn those who never lived.

Essentially, the dehumanised surfer disenfranchised grief, this is "grief experienced by those who incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly mourned or socially supported" (Doka 1999: 37). Doka notes that humans can experience significant loss, as a result of that loss grief is experienced, but grief is the acknowledged differently, basically it is acknowledged in a hierarchal manner. Doka's work was focused on how societies have different sets of norms in regard to grief there are certain "grieving rules" and that these rules are codified as personnel. He explains a number reasons as to why grief is disenfranchised. His reasons warrant a close examination because they express how grief is justified differently and by that virtue these reasons help determine and account for how grieving, attached to loss can advocate dehumanisation. Firstly, Doka (1999) mentions when a relationship is not recognised; grief can be disenfranchised in situations whereby the relationship between the bereaved and deceased is not based on recognisable ties. Secondly, when the loss is not recognised; when it is not socially defined as significant. This second reason is highly significant in how Bulter (2004) explains grievable lives, since loss and grieve account for the vulnerability of humans it thus means loss is highly associated with vulnerability. Vulnerability has to be recognised and perceived in order to have an ethical and authentic encounter with grieve. But there is a possibility that vulnerability is not recognised, when it is not recognised then the loss experienced by unvulnerable becomes disenfranchised loss. Loss that is unrecognisible is loss experienced by the dehumanised. This is because vulnerability is a precondition for humanisation, and humanisation takes place differently depending varying norms of recognition. This makes vulnerability operate in a particular framework in the precondition for experiencing loss and grieve is to be human, consequently making loss and grieving exclusively a human condition. By that it limits grief and loss to be determined by a set of conditions which fluctuate between

recognised and unrecognised vulnerability. The third reason Doka (1999) mentions is that the griever is not recognised. This reason ties in well with the former. He explains that there are institutions that do not recognise the loss or need to mourn. The last reason to consider is when grief is disenfranchised when an individuals' method of grieving is not validated. This means when grieving occurs in a manner that is not socially acceptable. But when grieve and loss are perhaps the precondition of vulnerability and evidently only humans experience vulnerability then validated grieve is only known by the human. It is only the vulnerable that are subjected to loss and mourning and that predisposes them to their humanness. Those outside of the framework of vulnerability are subjected to unending dehumanisation.

Exile as the perpetual condition for the dehumanised

Exile is a political condition that is painful and unjust. Said (1999) reveals that is a political condition and a critical concept. Exile is banishment, it is political action that forces a person or group of people to depart from their own country. Living in exile means living in a space in which you are always aware that it is not your home. Being in exile means constantly feeling an absence of belonging. Barbour (2007) warns that exile should not be thought of as a humanistic element because by so doing it trivializes the suffering it causes. Said (2000: 174) notes "exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death but without death's ultimate mercy". He explains the intensity of exile and likens it to death but death seems more bearable and merciful because it has an ending to it. Whereas the ending of exile cannot be known in some instances. This makes life in exile provisional, temporary and vulnerable because one cannot know when it will end. It conditions a life that is not static. Life in exile is nomadic and lived on the periphery – those in exile have to create their own structures own meaning (Barbour 2007). Said notes that exile fosters a conscientious subjectivity, an independence of mind, a critical perspective and originality in vision. This is because, one has to construct and imagine a life outside of exile, one has to interpret the potential value of exile. Those who are in exile have to look beyond the existential and epistemological condition it has. Exile has an alienating and desolate feeling associated with it (Zelaza 2005: 3).

Narratives of oppression are eminent through exile, Adesanmi (2004) notes that these narratives are created by what he refers to as "territorial integrity of oppression". He explains this as the manner in which oppression has molded itself into occupying territory an aspires to an insidious notion of spatial and temporal schematics. Thus, exile becomes a tool of oppression. It marks

lines that separate the exile and nonexile. The exiled are marked by a discontinuous state of being, solitude and loneliness, efforts of acculturation and community are difficult to establish (Zelaza 2005: 9). Exile is marked by the tension between absence and presence—exile is thus also forged between this tension. When in exile you are groundless hence you foster a careful subjectivity, critical perspective on independence because you are decentered and nomadic. Zeleza (2005) argues that the exiled therefore find themselves in a "perpetual deferment of constructing home in the hostland of turning exilic condition into diasporic condition in which the 'here' and 'there' of the original rupture are inverted as the homeland assumes existential primacy and the old retains ontological affinity" (2005: 9). This condition that Zeleza speaks of, it forces one to rift between becoming and being. The notion of becoming explains a state in which the exiled are in a continuous process of becoming. This is a position of never achieving one's full potential rather one is always on a journey of attaining belonging and acceptance in the host land. The exiled seek are forced to seek acceptance because the host land labels them as outsiders. The exiled find themselves within an ontological dimension of oppression (Freeman 2015). Exile is a persistency of a place that immerses one into loneliness and creates an urge for a continuous attainment of belonging.

The exiled suffer attunement, according to Heidegger (1962) attunement *(Befindlichkeit)* is "an ontological structure that constitutes both how we find ourselves *(sich befinden)* in the world and how we are faring in it" (Freeman 2015: 25). Heidegger's (1962) conception of attunement describes the manner in which an individual perceives and experiences themselves and fundamentally how the world perceives and experiences one. Attunement explains a condition in which one cannot be severed, isolated or experience the world from the context around it—basically one experiences the world within a particular context. Although Heidegger's writings were not particularly concerned in interpreting exile—his explanation of attunement is critical because it provides a valuable resource in mapping how the experiences of the exiled cannot be isolated the nonexiled. By Heidegger's thinking one cannot exist in the world isolated from others perceptions and by that it makes one's existence rely upon others. Thus it can be said that the nonexiled cannot exist without the exiled. There is an exaggerated sense of group cohesion among the exiled and it is accompanied by a passionate hostility towards those who are nonexiled. For the exiled it prompts creating a "new world" because one is already removed from their homeland and is simultaneously rejected by their host land therefore those who are in exile have a constant urge to (re)create. It is for this reason that Said (1993) acknowledges exile as an ontological and political space of freedom.

Freedom for the exiled is expressed through ontological grounds by assuming the position of attaining a way of becoming part of the group or attaining a feeling of belong in the host land. Yet, consequently through that process a secondary process emerges—the exiled (re)create a new world in their efforts of attaining acceptance in their host land and by that they occupy a political space. Hence, exile becomes an ontological and political space of freedom. Yountae (2017) explores the unfortunate gap between the ontological and political spaces, he proclaims it as the *abyss*. Yountae provides a detailed explanation of the origins of the term the abyss, in his explanation he mentions that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines abyss as "the bottomless chasm that bears a direct association with the primal formless chaos and the subterranean source of water in ancient Hebrew cosmology". In reference to this definition of the *OED* Younate attests that the abyss is often associated with the void or nothing. Although he does mention the importance of distinguishing the two terms; the void and nothing. The void indicates a state of being that in unoccupied either by a person or by any other visible content, it is something that is empty, lacking and destitute. The void can mean both the "space" is empty and emptiness itself. Yountae explains that etymological root of void, is *vacuus* which also means empty and nothingness, thus in this sense the meaning of void is closely associated with nothing. Yountae (2017: 9) further verifies that "if nothing points to the null state of existence, whether a person or a thing/matter, void presumes a previously occupied or filled state, if not an expectation of presence". Since the abyss is associated with void and nothingness, it therefore points to absence. The abyss is connected with moving through a passage, a self's passage into and out of the abyss, essentially moving from loss to possibility, from finitude to infinity. The definition of the abyss has philosophical implications on the human existence. In the context of exile the abyss represents a philosophical interpretation of exile. When Yountae explains that the abyss "indicates the indeterminate—if not finite—structure of being, the precariousness of the human epistemological and ontological foundation" (2017: 11).

Essentially, when in the abyss one experiences infinite solitude, this experience resembles that of exile. Both exile and the abyss resemble a space of groundlessness. Both spaces convey the pain of the colonial wound and a state of self in which one lives in a suspended presence not knowing what will unfold. When in exile one loses their material and political grounding—material loss of the self occurs in that there is a metaphysical condition of absence. The political loss of the self occurs as a result of historical and politico-economic ground within a context of oppression, particularly since exile is a tool of oppression (Yountae 2017: 8-12, 92).

Since exile is a tool of oppression, it consequently means there is an oppressor involved in enacting its oppressive nature. There is a known agent that enforces and monitors exile upon others. The distinction between the exiled and nonexiled has to be noted in reference to interpreting the power dynamic relations between those who are exiled and nonexiled. Because through these relations of power— the relationship of the oppressor and oppressed emerges. It is through this relationship that an opportunity to unmask the exiled and nonexiled is granted. This reveal is granted by understanding *whom is* subjected to exile *whom is not.* Exile is the condition of the oppressed, the work of Said (1993) well explains this. It further pronounces that exile unfolds as psychological, existential, physiological and is an embodied dimension of oppression. In form and practice the oppressed are denied personal autonomy, the oppressor imposes a world view paradigm onto the oppressed, which denies them the power to direct their own lives. Freire (1968) wrote seminal work on oppression—in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he explains the link between oppression and dehumanisation. He attests that the oppressor is dehumanised by the act of oppression while the existential reality of oppression and the internalisation of the image of the oppressor dehumanise the oppressed (Freire 1968). Hence exile is interpreted as a condition for the oppressed and evidently the dehumanised.

The oppression is enacted through loss, nothingness and void. Among the consequences of exile is loss, the entanglement of being groundlessness is caused by loss. Loss takes place when one has a conscious encounter with the other (Yountae 2017: 75). According to a Hegelian understanding the other is directly a symbolic of the loss. Hegel's philosophy in *Phenomenology of Mind* posits that "the Other Self is the only adequate mirror of my own self-conscious self; the subject can only see itself when what it sees is another self-consciousness" (Berenson 1982: 77). Hegel explains that self-knowledge cannot only come from introspection alone, one cannot examine a single self and reach significant conclusions isolated rather introspection must include an examination one's relationships with others. This is because the self does not exist in complete isolation of other selves, but the Self exists amongst other Selves. But in the context of exile when selves are separated and examined on different paradigm's a distinction of selves emerges. There is significance in understanding who is deemed as human and who is not and what warrants humanity in an individual, because the status of the human and dehumanised distinguish the possibility of being exiled or not. It is therefore important to consider and interpret the conducts of humunisation and dehumanisation.

The violence of mourning

Violence is the living condition of the dehumanised. The state of violence is the aftermath the dehumanisation. Violence is the manner in which human vulnerability unfolds as control without limit over the will of others and expands itself as a way of life upon those who do not experience vulnerability. It enacts itself by means of acting on others, putting others at risk, causing damage to others and threatening to erase others (Butler 2004: 28-29). Violence aims at eliminating those outside of the framework of human, it is the tool of separating the human and dehumanised. Violence is enacted against those who are unreal. But it can be argued that violence fails to exclude, threaten or remove the dehumanised from recognition or reality because they are already negated and removed. The dehumanised are confined to peculiar position, they are encountered with violence again and again, firstly as the dehumanised who do not have vulnerability and secondly as those who cannot be grieved because they never lived they were never human. other humans who expunge do not have vulnerability. They cannot surfer death because they never lived and therefore they cannot be mourned. Violence then becomes a destabilising effect caught in a 'boomerang perception" meaning it is self-generative and continuous. Hence violence becomes an inexhaustible for the dehumanised, it is endless, the dehumanised are neither dead nor alive thus violence does not end. As such violence is much like living in exile, it a position that denies one humanity at an unending continuum. In light of illuminating living in exile, through violence the tentative period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa provides a great example of how mourning is violent for the dehumanised.

In 1993 South Africa was in a pivotal moment of political transformation, this period marked by an ambivalent moment which emerged as part of establishing a new lawful nonracial society through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This was a nonjudicial body aimed at providing a temporal and material space for victims and perpetrators of all forms of violence generated through and by apartheid. The commission was composed of three sets of hearings; the victims, amnesty and reparations hearings. The purpose of the commission was to encourage confessions of politically motivated violence. The commission was set as "a place as they say, for the work of mourning to take its time" (Christianse 2003: 373). Essentially the commission was designated as a place in which those who had experienced losses during the apartheid era to come forth and mourn publically at the guise of confessions and amnesty. Apartheid was constitutionalised racism, it defined social, political and economic relations based on racial boundaries. Christianse (2003) explains that individuals were racially marked, individuals

could only be individuals in their capacities as representatives of defined categories. By apartheid's logic their individuality was statistical. They were reduced to numerical object. This occurs as an ideological structuring process of which the human in this case the apartheid security police, the white man, the white woman, the superior versus the dehumanised, the black man, the black woman, the inferior are deemed opposites in the ontological hierarchical structure of being (Yancy 2008).

The hierarchical structure of being is intensified by the colonial gaze, this is the gaze that discerns with clarity about how relation between the human and dehumanised should unfold. Yancy (2008) acknowledges that the gaze reinforces the truth of racist categories and that racist categories reinforce the gaze. The gaze draws clarity based on a racially discursive interpretation of the superior and inferior relations. The colonial gaze provides valuable knowledge of how existential phenomenology is bounded on discourses that interpret advanced, recognised, good and civilised methods as those defined and measured in western terms. Moreover the theoretical amplification of vulnerability, exile, mourning and most significant the humanised vis-à-vis the dehumanised provides a pretext to the violence of mourning.

As evident by example of the TRC, it was a commission aimed at providing a public and recognisable space for mourning. Even so it yields violence, it makes the assumption that prior to the establishment of the commission there was no loss and grief experienced, particularly because this loss and grieving was not recognised. It also presumes the notion that if loss is not recognised then mourning cannot occur. The aims of the TRC then become questionable—how can mourning only begin in 1993 when the TRC was established? were people[dehumanised] not allowed to mourn or be mourned prior to the TRC? did their mourning end when the TRC ended? how do they mourn now when they are still dehumanised? These questions probe the notion of vulnerability as something that requires recognition from another. These questions rise demand and attention in answering the question posed by Butler (2004), *What makes for a grievable life?* Because lives that are grieveable are those that are mourned—those not mourned encounter mourning that is violent. The dehumanised are denied mourning, they suffer a structural denial of mourning, mourning is recognised through a hierarchical structure of being. This is when mourning becomes violent for the dehumanised, because their mourning is not recognised. The dehumanised experience mourning in a discriminating manner, because their necessity to mourn turns into violence (Das 2001). Their mourning is lived in real time when a mother and her son's reality are: At any moment she might lose her reason for living. Although the human/white liberal's imagination likes to feels temporarily bad about black suffering, there

really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as the dehumanised/black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black, no grieving while black. What is more is that the dehumanised surfer, and Wilderson (2008: 97) asks *what does it to surfer?* It means to be ontologically positioned at incompatible differences with the humanised, in which their actions are justifiable. For instance, when states are involved in protecting citizens [humans] and their power from insurgency and terrorism as similar to the apartheid era when security forces did everything in their power to protect the status quo. Such violence is acknowledged as attesting to the vulnerability of human life. This is a clear instance in which state power and its violence is acceptable because of the claim of vulnerability. Foucault (1979: 9) notes that "justice no longer takes public responsibility for the violence that is bound up with its practice". This is when power becomes a dominant mode of production in normalising the nature of relations between the humanised and dehumansied.

Hence, occurrence's such as the TRC should perhaps be thought of as spaces of recognition. Butler (2004: 44) pronounces that "when we ask for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are, as we already are, as we have always been, as we were constituted prior to encounter itself". When asking for recognition it does not solicit asking to be humanised, rather it is an act of becoming, it instigates transformation, it petitions one's life as worthy, as vulnerable in relation to the Other. It presents a (re)claim to one's humanity. Then perhaps commissions of the nature of the TRC can represent a space that begins the process of restoration for the dehumanised.

Concluding remarks

By way of concluding mourning is about grieving loss, it is experienced through vulnerability. But when mourning is made an exclusive feeling and act, by virtue it excludes certain individuals. Mourning then is reduced to a discriminatory measure, that is based on boundaries of relation between the human vis-à-vis the dehumanised. Moreover, it results in the manifestation of violence for the dehumanised because they are excluded from the notion of vulnerability as humans. The experiences of the dehumanised are not accounted and recognised with value and morality, hence violence prevails in their being. But of course this cannot an accurate understanding of how mourning manifests. For this reason vulnerability as a

precondition for being human should be re-examined, because of its underlying marginalisation. Hence, it is necessary for further analysis with regard to how vulnerability is perceived. This analysis by its nature should be one that is vigilant because mourning and vulnerability is a subjective feeling. More research would require a delicate historical account of knowledge's of how mourning and vulnerability is understood in the past, present and future.

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