

Migratory grief, as partial, recurrent and multiple grief

Abstract

It is proposed that migratory grief has specific characteristics compared to other grief, especially grief for the death of a loved one, a classic reference for grief. When someone dies, they disappear, but in migration the mourning is due to a temporal-spatial separation. This means that grief is in turn recurrent, it remains active throughout the subject's life due to contact with the country of origin and its culture. It is also maintained that migratory grief is a multiple grief, pointing out that there are seven griefs in migration: family, language, culture, land, social status, group belonging and the physical risks linked to migration.

Keywords: specific characteristic of migratory mourning, partial, recurrent and migratory mourning

Volume 8 Issue 2 - 2024

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Received: March 20, 2024 | Published: April 11, 2024

Introduction

I point out in this text that migratory grief has a series of specific characteristics that differentiate it from other grief, and that these specific characteristics would be universal, they occur in all migratory grief, in all types of migrations.¹ These characteristics, as I will explain below, would be

- I. Migratory grief is a partial grief
- II. Migratory grief is a recurrent grief
- III. Migratory grief is a multiple grief

Migratory grief is a partial grief

There is a key fact that differentiates migratory grief from grief for the loss of a loved one, the classic reference for the concept of grief. And in the case of migration, "the object" of mourning - the country of origin and everything it represents - does not disappear, it is not lost for the subject, since it remains where it was and there is the possibility of continuing to contact with the. What's more, there is the possibility of returning one day, definitively, to the place of origin. That is to say, migratory grief is more a grief for a separation than for a disappearance. Two basic elements would delimit migratory grief: time and space. Immigration grief is a grief for:

The time: That is, the period in which the immigrant is abroad and in which innumerable changes occur, both in the country of origin and in the immigrant's own person. It is that old story, told so many times, of the immigrant who, upon returning to his country of origin, finds that his compatriots tell him that they see him differently, even that "he is no longer one of their own."

I remember the case of an Italian who explained with regret how when he returned to his country, after years of living abroad and longing to return to his country, when addressing a man at a gas station he had

congratulated him on his excellent level of Italian. "I'm Italian, you know?" he answered him. That is, in his own country they no longer even recognized him as one of their own. Time had taken its toll.

The space: The distance that separates the immigrant from his country of origin. In any case, although it is true that the greater the physical distance between cultures there tends to be more cultural clash, we must not forget the so-called "narcissism of small differences". Thus, sometimes when we find ourselves in front of someone who is from a very different culture, since the difference is so obvious, we tend to look for and emphasize what unites us in order to communicate. However, frequently, when we meet someone from a very similar culture, "those from the other side of the river" we tend to emphasize what separates us, we mark and exaggerate the difference.

Total grief, grief for the loss of a loved one, is the type of grief that has been most studied and its approaches tend to be frequently applied to other griefs without further ado, in a simplistic way, but we consider that nevertheless in Cases such as migration deal with situations different from the loss of a loved one, the reference point for grief.

Thus, twenty years after someone's death, the memory tends to fade because the interaction with the deceased has disappeared, but an immigrant who has been away from his or her country for 20 years usually continue to maintain continuous ties with the country of origin.

That migratory grief is a partial grief does not mean that it is a simple grief. Migratory mourning does not resemble the great mourning that has permeated the pages of literature. The grief that is experienced in migration is very different, for example, from the grief that we know through history and literature, In total mourning there is disappearance of the object. In migratory grief there is only separation.

It could be objected that the case of the refugee is different. But the refugee can hope that one day the political situation in his country will change and return, and that he can also maintain contact with his culture, (something that a deceased person cannot do).

Migratory grief is a recurring grief. the man who wears two watches

We have seen in the previous section that migratory mourning is a partial mourning, in which more than a loss - in the strict sense that the person is faced with something or someone who disappears forever - what happens during migration. It is a separation in time and space, since it is feasible to maintain contact with the country and culture of origin. The fact that migratory mourning is a partial mourning means that the process of change is different - in our opinion more complex - than the process that takes place when the loss to be elaborated is the death of a loved one and the Contact with him is interrupted forever.

In the case of migration, the coming and going in relation to the object (The country of origin) gives rise to the processes of elaboration of separation to operate recurrently. Thus, it is very common to find that a trip to the country of origin, a phone call or the information that reaches the immigrant rekindles ties with the country of origin. And I write "rekindle" because these links remain active throughout the immigrant's life, sometimes more consciously, sometimes more unconsciously.

The comeback fantasies

These links with the country of origin are often expressed through fantasies of return, which persist in one way or another and are reactivated by a whole series of life events that also mobilize migratory grief, giving rise to the subject goes back to his culture of origin. Thus, it is not uncommon to find immigrants who seemed integrated and who, as a result of professional failure, emotional frustration, feeling discriminated against... change, "back down", and return to dressing in the traditional way of their culture. Fantasies of return are closely related to the recurrence of migratory grief.

The fact that, in a situation of separation, people try to avoid pain by returning to the known and safe object (the country and culture of origin) is quite understandable psychologically. The fact that there is a real possibility of "backing out" clearly fuels the validity and intensity of return fantasies, especially when things are not going well in the host country. Other griefs interact and reactivate migratory grief. These comeback ideas are far from strange. 80% of the Spaniards who went to Germany returned.

However, being able to express and elaborate these fantasies of return can have a protective and helpful function in the elaboration of migratory grief. And, in this sense, it is more positive that fantasies of return are expressed, rather than denied. From this protective perspective of fantasies of return, I remember the case of a Colombian immigrant who told us "having the fantasy of returning in my head helps me resist better, without it I would sink and I would have to leave now."

The influence of globalization

Furthermore, in the current context, the recurrence of migratory grief is strongly favored by globalization, which facilitates very intense contact of the immigrant with the culture of the country of origin (internet, social networks, telephone, satellite television...). And this contact rekindles the bonds. In this way, the historical context in which we find ourselves favors that migratory mourning becomes something unfinished and very complex to elaborate. We consider that from this perspective we tend towards interculturality.

In this way, it is not strange that you meet someone from your country abroad and notice that he knows things about your city that you do not know and do not have time to find out.

They explained to me that recently the city council of Santa Fé in Bolivia, a city with a lot of emigration, had installed a camera that

permanently recorded everything that happened on the main street, with that camera connected to the city hall's website, so that the countrymen of Santa Fé, wherever they are in the world, they can constantly see what is happening in the social life of their city, as if they were sitting on a terrace having a beer and watching people go by. 1 While 70 years ago the emigrants who went to America from Europe were disconnected from their family, from their land... now, after leaving here, they can be in contact almost permanently to their loved ones.

Another factor that favors the recurrence of migratory grief is the effort made by the immigrant to send money to his family, to his country of origin. The same money that the emigrant sends to his country of origin binds him to it. No one sends a good part of salary and ignores what happens there.

The man who wears two watches

One of the clearest expressions of this recurrence of migratory grief and the maintenance of the immigrant's link with the country of origin was shown to me by an Ecuadorian immigrant who wore two watches on his wrist: one with Spanish time and another with the time on his country. He lived on both continents at the same time.

And that almost permanent contact rekindles the ties. In this way, the historical context in which we find ourselves modifies the characteristics of migratory grief and encourages it to become something unfinished and very complex to elaborate.

Migratory grief is a multiple grief. the seven griefs of migration

Family and loved ones

It is the aspect that perhaps most quickly comes to mind when referring to migratory stress and grief: farewells, hugs... These separations are very important for human beings because they affect attachment, which is an instinct, following Bowlby's² approaches (1986), author who integrates and combines psychoanalytic and cognitive aspects. But as we will point out, there would be different degrees of problems in relation to this grief, thus, it is not the same for a young single man who is starting a new life to leave home as for someone who leaves behind small children.³

Likewise, in all grief we consider that there are two parts, one part of mourning for what is left behind, in this case, the distance, the separation from loved ones, culture...and another part the stress, the effort to adapt and get ahead in the host country.

The language

Learning the language of the host country has aspects of pleasure and satisfaction, but it also requires effort. It must be taken into account that the situation is more difficult when the immigrant has deficits such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, illiteracy, in older people or in contexts in which they cannot access linguistic contact with natives or learning courses of the new language. Migration must involve, on the one hand, the decrease or loss of contact with the mother tongue and, on the other, the effort to learn and adapt to the new language or languages of the host country.

The culture

Understood in its broadest meaning, and which would encompass values, customs, cosmopolitanism ...etc. Language is closely linked to culture but language is not the same as culture: thus a Spaniard and a Cuban speak the same language but we consider that they are from different cultures. As in the case of language mourning, it is considered that every person who emigrates has the capacity to establish contact

with the new culture, if they do not have previous personal deficits and are in an environment that does not hinder said contact.

Nisbert 2003 propose there are Holistic cultures. They preferably see the whole and the relationship between the components. In a pond they look at whether there is harmony between the parts, in the proportions Analytical cultures. They preferably see isolated elements. In a pond they look at how many fish there are.

The earth

Luminosity, colors, smells, landscape, temperature, etc. are aspects that have relevance on an emotional level and that affect the subject above all when they migrate to very dark and cold places that create problems relevant to adaptation, since today we know well from anthropology. that human beings come from Africa, from warm climates. the temperature receptors of our skin are still today designed to adapt to the climate of East Africa, where we come from. Studies on the psychology of happiness indicate that by correlating all the variables, people who live in warm climates are happier.

Social status

It covers everything related to papers, work, housing, access to opportunities, etc. Migration in general seeks to improve social status, but this aspect should not be understood only from an economic perspective but also in relation to access to cultural goods, freedom, etc. Also there are individuals who emigrate for personal reasons.

In general, when you emigrate you lose social status, “you put yourself last in line,” as a young Moroccan explained to us. The problem is that in the migrations of the 21st century... for many people, today there is not even a queue to join. If improvement does not begin to occur within a few years, the person becomes demoralized and goes into crisis. He feels that so much effort has been for nothing. The immigrant has invested the best years of his life in the effort, he goes into debt, etc.

The immigrant must also grieve for certain aspects of status that he leaves behind, since frequently, for example, the housing was better there, or the case of many teachers, graduates, professionals in the country of origin, who find that They must work in the host country as laborers, caretakers, etc., feeling very frustrated by their new situation, especially when they see that it is not possible to get out of it.⁴

Contact with the membership group

It refers to issues related to prejudice, xenophobia, racism... People usually identify with some group they belong to and in migration that identification changes when they come into interaction with other groups. From anthropology it is pointed out that all human groups have certain prejudices towards other groups. This trend is very well explained by evolutionary psychology, which shows how humans have lived much of our evolutionary history in small groups, family clans, in constant competition with other similar groups of humans for generally very scarce survival resources. Survival outside the group was impossible. This long history has left in us a great need to belong to some group and a tendency to prejudice towards other groups (hence the jokes that we like so much caricaturing neighboring towns). The problem arises when these attitudes translate into xenophobic or racist behavior. The existence of prejudice has been intensely studied from social psychology, pointing out that it also serves to simplify the analysis of social life, which has great complexity.

Risks to the physical integrity of the person

It refers to the risk that those who leave their environment and emigrate face, facing numerous environmental changes, often hostile.

Physical integrity is a basic psychological need, like attachment. Dangers in migratory journeys, with violence, especially for women. Also the immigrant must assume the risk of work accidents due to dangerous work, domestic accidents due to living in overcrowded conditions (especially in immigrant minors), fear of being expelled (there is an expulsion brigade in the police), mistreatment, sexual abuse due to their immigration status, helplessness, risk of contracting new diseases, either because there are no defenses against them or because there are no adequate hygienic conditions, or protection against the cold, existence of malnutrition, etc.

To finish, let's visualize again the scheme of the seven duels that we have seen on the previous pages.

Scheme of the seven griefs of migration

- I. The family and loved ones.
- II. Language
- III. Culture
- IV. The earth
- V. The social status
- VI. I Saw the contact with the belonging group
- VII. The risks to physical integrity

It should be noted that differences can be observed in the importance of each of these griefs. In the extra-community migrations that we are currently attending to at SAPPRI (Servicio de Atención Psicopatológica y Psicosocial a Inmigrantes y Refugiados (in the harbour of Barcelona, we observe that are the grief for family, social status and the physical risks are the most important. which are related to more than 80% of the complaints we deal with in our center, generally coming from people who are encountering serious difficulties in their migration. However, in several hundred in-depth interviews about the migratory process carried out at the University of Barcelona and aimed at already settled immigrants, well connected socially and who have been successful in their migratory project, we have seen how their processing difficulties are very much focused on. more (more than 70%) in aspects linked to language, culture and contact with the ethnic group.

If these griefs are experienced in an extreme situation, they are the basis for suffering from the so-called Ulysses Syndrome, Immigrant syndrome with Chronic and Multiple Stress (Chistodoulou 2019, Bianauchi et al 2015).⁵ The assesment of these griefs is very important and for that they have been designed two instruments; the Ulysses scale⁶ and the Kayak Test.⁷

When migratory grief cannot be worked out satisfactorily, it gives rise to mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder, etc. However, the majority of migrants are resilient people and can process migratory grief, even experiencing difficult circumstances of loneliness, fear, helplessness... In this case, the suffering they experience leads them to suffer from Ulysses Syndrome, Immigrant Syndrome with chronic and multiple stress (Achotegui 2002) which is extreme migratory grief, but it is not a mental disorder, but rather a reactive response to the intense stress they experience.⁸⁻¹³

Conclusion

Three very relevant specific characteristics of migratory grief are pointed:

- I. Migratory grief is partial grief, being a different grief than grief for the death of a loved one. When someone dies they disappear, but in migration grief is due to a temporal-spatial separation.

- II. As a consequence of the fact that migratory mourning is a mourning for a temporal-spatial separation, the mourning is in turn recurrent, it remains active throughout the life of the subject due to contact with the country of origin and its culture.
- III. Migratory grief is a multiple grief, pointing out that in migration there are seven griefs: family, language, culture, land, social status, that of the group to which one belongs, and that of physical risks linked to migration.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The autor declares there is no conflicto of interest.

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