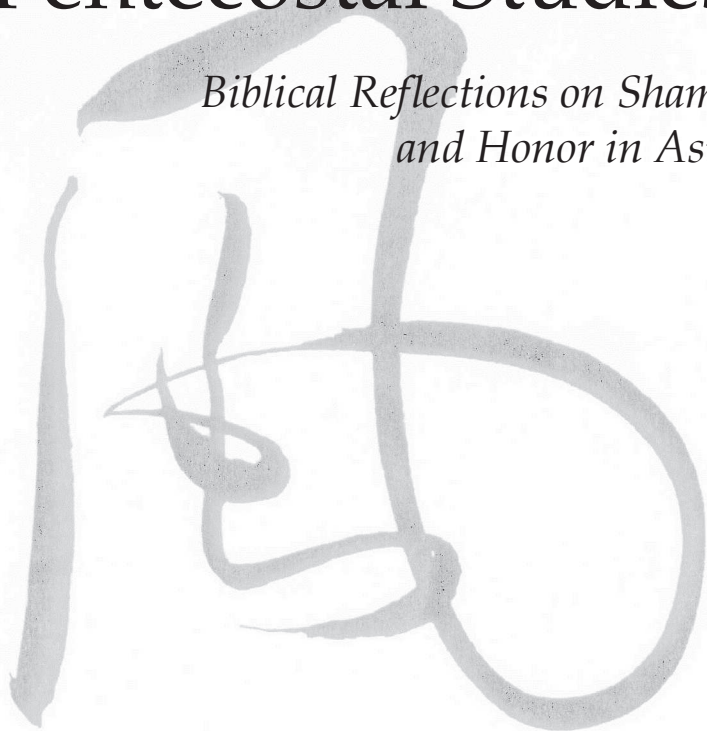


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*Biblical Reflections on Shame
and Honor in Asia*



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Expressions of Honor and Shame in Lamentations 1

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Abstract

This paper is a threefold reading of Lamentations 1 through an honor-shame perspective. First, it explores some characteristics of the Mediterranean culture as well as honor-shame references in the Old Testament in general. Second, it gives a close reading of Lamentations 1 through the perspective of honor-shame. Third, it offers some contextual reflections of the study. This study is significant because there is no complete study on the book of Lamentations through an honor-shame perspective. A close reading of the book of Lamentations reveals cultural norms of honor as well as expressions of honor that counter those common in that culture.

Honor and Shame in the Mediterranean Culture

A community of faith contains a diversity of perceptions of honor. Despite group ideals, not everyone will understand honor the same way. Some want to avoid shame while others try to earn honor by showing off their vulnerabilities. A community will despise some and honor others.

Anthropological and sociological studies of the Mediterranean culture, especially their study on the concepts of honor and shame, are helpful in biblical studies.¹ Many anthropological studies on Mediterranean society tend to generalize the notions of honor and shame. Such studies show that Mediterranean cultures are agnostic, male-centric, and function by codes of honor and shame. In those communities, group ideals are more important than those of an individual. There is limited good available, so people compete to obtain wealth and honor.² For example, the Arab culture is characterized by

¹Renata Rabichev, "The Mediterranean Concepts of Honour and Shame as Seen in the Depiction of the Biblical Women," *Religion & Theology* 3, no. 1 (1996): 52.

²Jean G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965); David G. Gilmore, ed., *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington: American Anthropological

their honor-shame-vengeance syndrome, externalized personality, factionalism, and collective culture. It is Arabic-language bound and eschatologically oriented. For Arab Muslims, honor is a supreme value. Shame is to be avoided constantly. Suspicion and neighborly hatred are common expressions.³ Some of these traits may be attributed to certain Asian societies as well.

Significant Old Testament studies utilize the honor-shame paradigm,⁴ but I am not familiar with any monograph on the book of Lamentations from an honor-shame perspective. One may argue that reconstructing ancient culture based on modern Mediterranean nomadic communities may have little impact on biblical studies. However, the honor and shame models found in Mediterranean, Arabic, and Indian cultures considered in this article may be helpful in presenting a deeper interpretation of the Bible. Honor is a cultural script so scholars naturally approach the biblical text with their own perception of honor and shame. Hence, an understanding of honor can be a heuristic tool in understanding and interpreting the cultural script of the biblical context.⁵

Association, 1987); and J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, eds., *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³David Bukay, "Understanding Arab-Islamic Politics: Advocating the Case of the Political Culture Approach (B)," *Modern Diplomacy* (June 2, 2016), http://modern diplomacy.eu/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1468:understanding-arab-islamic-politics-advocating-the-case-of-the-political-culture-approach-b&Itemid=566 (accessed 05 June 2016).

⁴Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, eds., *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible*, Semia 68 (1994); Lyn M. Bechtel, "Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel," in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays In Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 79-92; Lyn M. Bechtel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16, no. 49 (1991): 47-76; Lilian R. Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 149-75; Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live? The Problem of the Moral Self in the Book of Ezekiel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 130-57; Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "Shame and Self-Knowledge: The Positive Role of Shame in Ezekiel's View of the Moral Self," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 143-73; Margaret S. Odell, "An Exploratory Study of Shame and Dependence in the Bible and Selected Near Eastern Parallels," in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective: Scripture in Context IV*, ed. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., William W. Hallo, and Bernard F. Batto (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon, 1991), 217-33; Timothy S. Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Brian Peterson, "Ezekiel's Rhetoric: Ancient Near Eastern Building Protocol and Shame and Honor as the Keys in Identifying the Builder of the Eschatological Temple," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 4 (2013): 707-31.

⁵Darin Land, "Honor Then and Now," (class lectures, Valenzuela: AGST-BSOP, Summer 2016).

Honor provides an estimation of one's worth as well as society's recognition of such worth. It can have personal or external value. Julian Pitt-Rivers writes, "Honour is a value of a person in [one's] own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is [one's] estimation of [one's] own worth, [one's] claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, [one's] excellence recognized by society, his right to pride."⁶

Honor is both ascribed by birth and achieved by noble deeds or confrontations. Zeba Crook suggests a change in nomenclature from ascribed and acquired honor to attributed and distributed honor.⁷ Shame is the humiliating experience of having one's honor stripped away. There may also be positive shame that guards one to avoid further shameful acts.

According to Renata Rabichev, the values of honor and shame also differ between men and women. A man's honor rests on his authority within his family and his courage within society. A man must be noble and potent in sex, and avoid shame in society. Men are held responsible for protecting the honor of their women.⁸

A woman's honor can be destroyed by sexual shame. She must carefully avoid committing shameful acts. However, a woman's honor also reflects on her household's honor, especially on the men, who include her husband, father-in-law, and brothers. When she violates her honor through adultery, her guardian's honor is at stake. To avoid shame, a woman must remain sexually pure, avoiding sex before marriage. She should marry young and bear children.⁹

The distinction between the shame of a man or a woman will be significant to the study. In Lamentations 1, Daughter Zion's shame is seen as the result of the inability of her male guardians (including God) to protect her.

Honor and Shame in the Old Testament

In Old Testament references to honor and shame, the Hebrew word *chavod* refers to the weight of one's dignity, splendor, and esteem—one's honor. The Hebrew word *bosh* refers to shame stemming from an immoral act or loss in battle. Shame is a failure to do justice, a loss of virtue, violence, hatred, stealing, laziness, etc.¹⁰ Honor is given to the

⁶Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J. Peristiany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 21.

⁷Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 591-611.

⁸Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," 4.

⁹Rabichev, "The Mediterranean Concepts of Honour and Shame as Seen in the Depiction of the Biblical Women," 52-54.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 57.

people of superior rank. The young one honors the elder (Lev 19:32; Isa 3:5; Lam 5:12), worshippers honor deity (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16; Hag 1:8; Mal 1:6), a child honors a parent (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16; Ezek 22:7), the living honor the dead (Isa 14:18), and minor deities honor Yahweh (Ps 29:1-2). Honor can be gained by military conquest (Exod 14:4, 17-18; 2 Kings 14:10), and shame by defeat and exile (Isa 23:9; Nah 3:10; Lam 1:8). Honor is a public phenomenon. Loss of honor results in shame (Isa 16:14; 23:9; Jer 46:12; Hos 4:7; Lam 1:6, 8).¹¹

The concept of shame frequently appears in psalms of lament. Shaming others or averting shame is a primary concern of those prayers. The lament prayers often address God's honor. They offer a triangulation of shame between Yahweh, the enemy, and the Psalmist. The enemy-Psalmist relationship is built on notions of limited good and agonism. The Yahweh-Enemy relationship concerns the convergence of patron-client relationship, limited good, and agonism.¹²

The Yahweh-Psalmist relationship presupposes a patron-client relationship, according to W. Dennis Tucker, who says the communal laments in the Bible such as Psalms 44, 74, and 79 are based on patron-client relationships. In patronage culture, a patron possesses political, economic, and cultural resources; a client gains access to those limited resources through a reciprocal relationship. When a patron fails to protect his client, his honor is at stake. When a client fails to prove a personal relationship, his or her reputation suffers. The communal laments of shame accuse Yahweh the patron of failing to protect his client Judah. They plead to God to avert their shame as well as his. In addition, these laments strive to restore a client-community relationship between God and his people by addressing the shame of the patron.

Saul M. Olyan sees Lamentations 1 in a covenant context, where Judah laments that there was none to comfort her. Her ally nations should have joined her mourning rites and comforted her, but they became disloyal and joined her foes. They rejoiced at her fall.¹³ T. R. Hobbs responds to Olyan, saying that the honor-shame paradigm in the Old Testament should be seen in the light of patron-client model rather than Suzerian-vassal relations. Israel is shamed when Yahweh the patron fails to protect his client.¹⁴ Though Hobbs makes no mention of Lamentations 1, the patron-client model can be an effective model to study

¹¹Saul M. Olyan, "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 2 (1996): 204.

¹²W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., "Is Shame a Matter of Patronage in the Communal Laments?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31, no. 4 (2007): 465-80.

¹³Olyan, "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment," 215-217.

¹⁴T. R. Hobbs, "Reflections on Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 3 (1997): 501-503.

Lamentations 1. The strong pleas and imprecations against enemies that are prevalent in its communal laments seem less appealing in a political covenant context.

The notions of honor and shame have hardly impacted the Old Testament studies in comparison to New Testament studies.¹⁵ Most studies on Lamentations make only a passing reference to its honor-shame context. For example, Norman K. Gottwald observes reversal motifs (1:1-3) in the book as depicting its honor-shame context.¹⁶ For Kathleen O'Connor, the very portrayal of God as punishing and violent shows its honor-shame culture.¹⁷ Dianne Bergant sees a public mockery itself as much more humiliating than the reason for derision in the honor-based cultures.¹⁸ According to Robin Parry, the Gentile nations' entrance to the temple in 1:10 implies gang-rape as they have entered into the vagina of Jerusalem.¹⁹ Adele Berlin affirms that in the ancient world, seeing someone's nakedness is shameful and indecent (v. 10).²⁰

Honor and Shame in Lamentations 1

The five poems of Lamentations are largely acrostic, intending to describe the totality of suffering and facilitate memorization. The authorship of the book is unknown. (Jeremiah, Ezra, Baruch, and others have been proposed.) It is possible that one poet or a group of poets creatively compiled various expressions of suffering and contained them within acrostic poems. Lamentations is an emotive response to the destruction of the temple in 587 BC by the Babylonians. However, it never mentions the enemy nation as Babylon: it may have been shameful to name the enemy who tore down Judah's honor.

The twenty-two triplets of Lamentations repeatedly portray Zion's dishonor. The word, "Alas!" is a funeral dirge term and vividly expresses how honor is lost. The threefold comparison—the city full of people and the city sitting alone, prominent among the nations and a widow, and the ruling princess and a forced laborer—all heighten the loss of honor. Not only honor is lost: it is a shame that there was no one to comfort Daughter

¹⁵Olyan, "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment," 202.

¹⁶Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 53.

¹⁷Kathleen O'Connor, *Lamentations & Tears of the World* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 120.

¹⁸Dianne Bergant, *Lamentations*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 40.

¹⁹Robin Parry, *Lamentations*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), Kindle version.

²⁰Adele Berlin, *Lamentations*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Kindle version.

Zion. The close allies whom Judah cherished betrayed her. Daughter Zion is humiliated; she is left with no one on her side.

Religious festivals were honorable celebrations. However, for Zion there was nothing to celebrate. Her joy turned to anguish. Her only hope is Yahweh, yet knowing that Yahweh is the main source of her suffering is painful. The statement, “All of Daughter Zion’s splendor has departed . . .” (v. 6) shows how Zion’s glory has been lost. This glory points to the kingdom that God established through David: the so-called “forever” kingdom of David has lost its honor.

The fall of Zion shows that the honor that God intended in the Davidic covenant is not the honor that the people envisioned. His honor establishes his righteousness in the earth, not political power. Zion is humiliated to see how the enemies’ delight over her fall, a repeated humiliation similar to the later mockery of Roman soldiers of the already-beaten Jesus. The enemy took away all Zion’s honor and filled the void with dishonor.

Perhaps Daughter Zion is trying to restore her honor by admitting that she committed sin (v. 8). To protect her integrity as well as Yahweh’s, she acknowledges her predicament: her honor is to realize her shame. Comparing Zion’s peril to a woman’s menstrual flow points to the amount of dishonor Zion has experienced (v. 9). Once chosen as a royal priesthood, she becomes unclean. Treated as a Gentile by Gentiles is still more shameful for Israel (v. 10). If all of Zion’s valuables were taken away (v 10), how could she exchange them for a morsel of food (v. 11)? Possibly Zion’s enemies took away the young maidens for a cheap price. If so, Zion’s glory has been lost to the extent that she feels desolate or raped.

Zion cries out, “Look, O Lord, consider that I have become worthless!” (v. 11b). Zion tries all the more to guard her lost honor. While passersby mock her present peril, Zion quickly restores God’s honor by acknowledging that her fault resulted in her condition. She says that the LORD did everything in his anger to afflict her because she sinned so much against God: “My sins are bound around my neck like a yoke . . .” (v. 14b). Thus, Zion’s outbursts over her dishonor are intended to restore God’s honor. Zion firmly states that the LORD is right to judge (v. 18). God’s honor is Zion’s and therefore she pleads God to restore her (vv. 20-22). Strong imprecations against Judah’s enemies, addressed to God, are Judah’s prayer to restore her honor. They are not so much intended to afflict the enemies as to restore her lost honor for the sake of God’s honor. It is possible that Judah seeks reciprocal honor from God: God is obliged to restore Judah’s honor because Judah has restored the honor of God.

Seen from honor perspective, the book of Lamentations as a whole is not simply a memoir of loss but a cry over the loss of honor. Beyond mere outbursts of suffering experienced, it defends God's honor; it acknowledges that the client's honor is dependent upon the patron's honor. It is not just a lament with harsh imprecations, but a petition seeking reciprocity. God, whose honor is restored, is obliged to restore Judah's lost honor in return.

Honor Radicalized in Lamentations 1

In the book of Lamentations, Judah cries aloud over her dishonor. Her exile under Babylon in 587 BC was an experience of disgrace. Her dishonor is vividly expressed in the very first chapter of Lamentations. Once a princess, Judah is now forced to become a laborer. Her majesty is gone and her allies despise her. Her nakedness is exposed to public view. She lost her resources at the hands of the enemies and became dependent, begging for food. Her honorable elders and priests are put to shame. However, the exile is interpreted on account of God's anger. God defended his honor by punishing the law-breakers. In God's affliction of Judah, her identity as God's people still exists.²¹

However, the book of Lamentations contains four voices crying out their shame before God instead of hiding it. In Lamentations 1, these voices seem radical in nature. The *voice of sympathy* does not shy away from crying shame (vv. 1-4, 17). The *voice of tradition* does not give up God's honor (vv. 5-9a, 10-11a). The *voice of Zion* protests to God instead of bearing her problem passively (vv. 9b, 11b-16). And the *voice of hope* turns to God instead of turning against the enemy (vv. 18-22). Each voice counters the others. Such exchanges are not surprising, given a linguistic context where challenges and responses were common expressions. For example, the voice of tradition defends God's honor by pointing out Zion's sin thereby countering the voice of despair. The voice of Zion resists the voice of tradition's accusation of her sin, protests to God that her suffering is beyond what she deserves, and accuses God as the main culprit. The voice of hope, in contrast to the voice of Zion's outbursts, affirms God's righteousness and pleads for God's justice.

Daughter Zion's lament is a polemic against male honor. The normally household-centered women of Mediterranean society gained status through their virginity and chastity.²² In contrast, Daughter Zion's nakedness was exposed in public, implying the loss of her power and

²¹D. A. deSilva, "Honor and Shame," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, 291-92 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

²²Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," 4.

wealth. She mourned that her male guardians failed to protect her. Her shame became the shame of her men, including God. As noted earlier, in an honor-shame society, a woman's honor was very much dependent upon her male guardians (father, brothers, or husband).

In honor-based societies, women bear their shame and trouble to defend their family honor. A woman is supposed to be passive, persevering in suffering. However, Zion steps beyond her cultural boundaries, protesting boldly to God that her pain is unbearable. She comes into the street, countering the voice of tradition's blunt accusation that her suffering is all her fault. Daughter Zion is unorthodox because she is not bound to her cultural notions of honor and shame. In a similar vein, the Shulamite woman in the Song of Songs is unorthodox, often crossing cultural boundaries. She is not bound by norms set by society. In the context of strict codes of sexuality that were imposed on women, her nudity and betrothal are not condemned.²³

Mediterranean cultures are shame cultures that emphasize female chastity and virginity. A man's honor depends on the acceptability of his woman's behavior, so a woman's shame is a man's shame.²⁴ Perhaps Daughter Zion intends that her cry of shame will inflict shame upon her menfolk, including God. Thus Zion's cry of shame would be intended as a polemic against male oppression in society. It is a subaltern cry against social oppressors. A woman's sexual shame assaults the masculine identity.²⁵

According to Bukay, both Judaism and Christianity internalize their guilt and sin. In contrast, Arab-Muslim societies externalize guilt by violence.²⁶ Regrettably, the Old Testament is often accused of containing much killing and unethical incidents. However, accounts of Old Testament warfare are theological narratives that highlight God's protection in times of extreme difficulties; they are theological portraits rather than ethical treatises. The Old Testament displays God's grace and love for humanity. It even protests to God to avoid violence against others. The book of Lamentations is such an example, decrying its shame and protesting to God, while internalizing its guilt. It does not externalize its shame through violence against people. Instead, it speaks violent words against God and to God. It turns away from taking up the sword against its enemies. Instead, strong imprecations against its enemies are said in the context of prayer, not in warfare.

²³Dianne Bergant, "'My Beloved is Mine and I am His' (Song 2:16): The Song of Songs and Honor and Shame," in Matthews and Benjamin, 23-40.

²⁴Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," 3.

²⁵Ibid., 11.

²⁶Bukay, "Understanding Arab-Islamic Politics: Advocating the Case of the Political Culture Approach (B)."

Contextual Relevance

In common with some Asian cultures, my own Indian society shares some parallels with Mediterranean cultures. It is predominantly a shame culture where shame is avoided. Public mockery is a severe shame. A life with dignity—that is, without shame—is an honorable life. In many parts of India, honor is associated with birth, wealth, family heritage, and community, and is male-biased. In some villages, patron-client relationships are apparent. Good is limited so people compete for honor.

Honor levels vary according to caste. Caste discrimination is still prevalent in many villages. A high-caste community is honored by lower-caste people. A male child brings honor to a family because he is expected to bring wealth into the family. In contrast, a girl child takes the wealth of the family to her husband's family. Female infanticide is still practiced in remote areas. According to Hinduism, a man can perform a religious rite to get his parents into *moksha* (afterlife). However, a woman can never get to heaven alone. One of the shortcuts for a woman to go to heaven is to join the pyre of her husband (*sati*).²⁷

As far as public lamentation is concerned, expressing grief in public is limited to women, and it is considered shameful. A man must be strong and not shed tears or show his vulnerability. However, Tamil communities observe a public lamentation called *oppari*. Women from low-caste communities usually perform this weeping song at funerals. No higher-caste woman would join such a public expression of grief. *Oppari* is often seen as a performative grief, an emotional outburst, and a sign of weakness. However, it gives low-caste women who are often restricted to their home an opportunity to venture outside their homes to lament their agony and oppression. While other communities see such practice as a disturbance, the low-caste community sees such practices as honorable and as part of their heritage. Though this cultural practice has traditionally only been performed by women, more recently, men have begun to sing religious laments as well.

Many women among low-caste communities are illiterate and poor; many husbands are drunkards and wife-beaters. Their life is a daily challenge. The women work for *coolie* (daily wages). Along with daily work at construction sites or agricultural fields, they are expected to do all household chores. They gain honor by living within the parameters given them by fate. They must persevere, live their challenging life, and accept death when it happens, as opposed to living a dignified life. In the past, high-caste communities ill-treated low-caste women. Women were not allowed to wear a bra or blouse but only a *sari* (a long cloth that is

²⁷The *sati* practice was abolished by the Indian government in 1829. In Nepal, *sati* was banned only in 1920.

tied around the waist and covers the body). These women were forced to carry water pots only on their heads rather than their waist, so that lustful men would eye their breasts. In some villages even today, low-caste people may not wear sandals or shoes or walk on the streets of high-caste people. “Two-tumbler” system (separate tumblers for high caste and low caste people in a tea shop) is still practiced in some villages.

Oppari is a cry for justice. In this oppressive society, *oppari* gives these women an opportunity to cry out as much as they want, expressing their burdens and sufferings. After a long *oppari*, the women feel relieved: they have poured out all their anguish. Their tears are their comfort. *Oppari* is also counter-cultural: while many communities prefer to hide their shame, *oppari* publically proclaims loss and shame. Though women are considered weak and dependent, these low-caste women can raise their voice in *oppari* and cry out their distress. While the community sees an obedient and passive woman as honorable, *oppari* singers proclaim their miseries aloud and seek justice. In and through *oppari*, women cross their cultural boundaries, venting their emotions with unorthodox outbursts. However, the *oppari* tradition is vanishing.

Summary and Conclusion

Honor is both an estimation of one's worth and society's confirmation of it. Like in certain other cultures around the world, the Mediterranean culture is an honor-shame culture where people compete for honor and avoid shame. A woman's honor affects her male guardian, as does her shame. However, one should not generalize honor for the whole community since a community is complex and diverse.

Lamentations shares the cultural notions of honor and shame of the Mediterranean. Lamentations is not a mere outburst of emotions: it is a cry of shame and a plea for restored honor. Lamentations 1 cries its shame: Daughter Zion's allies did not offer support. She mourns her lost honor. Zion seeks to defend God's honor because her honor depends on the honor of her patron—God. Therefore, In Lamentations 1, crying her shame is radical in nature. God is approached with harsh words. Yet instead of seeking vengeance, she takes her accusations and expressions to God.

The patron-client relationship is the backdrop of communal laments. The personification of Jerusalem as an afflicted woman connotes severe shame to all Judean men, women, and their God. However, Lamentations differs radically from Judah's cultural notions of honor. In the context where shame is avoided, Daughter Zion cries aloud her lost honor. In the context, where lost honor of a deity is lamented, Lamentations defends God's honor by acknowledging Judah's sin. In *surroundings* where

violence was used to restore one's dignity, Lamentations turns to God and protests to him.

In some Indian cultures, public grief is shameful and considered a woman's place. Public lamentation rituals provide an opportunity for women whose activities are usually restricted to their houses to vent perceived injustices and grief outside of their homes. Their cry mourns loss and seeks justice. Therefore, in its counter-cultural stance of honor, the book of Lamentations may be closer to the accepted context of my Indian context than to those of the Mediterranean cultures.

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