#MournHub and @GrieveWatch: mediating monarchy and mourning in the digital age

Abstract

Queen Elizabeth II's death in September 2022 prompted a predictable saturation of representations across all UK media. A lot of 'traditional' media, like the BBC, largely assumed, and hence attempted to reproduce, a hegemonic and unified response of national mourning. But some social media representations exposed a struggle over meaning, displaying ambivalence or even outright negativity towards the British monarchy and 'national' mourning practices. This article uses #MournHub and @GrieveWatch as two critical case studies to explore the complex meanings of the Queen's death across different communities and spaces. Doing so, this article illuminates the ambivalences of 'national' mourning, the intersectionality of class, race and national identity in shaping the tenor of people's responses to the Queen's death, the commercialisation and corporatisation of memorialising death and nationhood, the changing forms of royal mediations, and the careful staging of royal events.

Keywords

Queen Elizabeth II; British monarchy; death; mourning; BBC; representation; ideology; social media; protest; national identity

Introduction

In 1952, during the planning of Queen Elizabeth II's (hereafter the Queen's) coronation ceremony the following year, an argument was raging between courtier and politician organisers, the media, and the public. The disagreement was about how much of the coronation would be mediated using the newly established technology of live television. Winston Churchill, then-Prime Minister and member of the organising committee, was staunchly against it. He contended 'modern mechanical arrangements' should be banned from the coronation, because 'religious and spiritual aspects should [not] be presented as if it were a theatrical performance' (Easton, 2013). Such arguments centred on control of the representations of monarchy, limiting what the public can or cannot see to maintain a 'mystique' around the institution. In response, *the Daily Express* and the BBC lobbied for live coverage by claiming it would invest the monarchy with 'a new kind of legitimacy' if the public were given a sense of proximity and intimacy to the monarch (XXX), because it would mean people can see and feel royal power. Ultimately, live television was allowed to convey most

aspects of the coronation ceremony and procession, with the more spiritual aspects (for example, the anointing) removed as a compromise because it was claimed this was too intimate.

From the advent of live television at her coronation, the Queen reigned over a period of significant technological advancement, perhaps more so than any other monarch in British history (XXXX). Never was this more evident than in the global mediation of her death, seventy years after her coronation, in September 2022. BBC News rolled out 24/7 coverage on their news channels, including 24/7 live footage of the Queen's coffin lying in state in Westminster Abbey, where members of the public were filing past to pay their respects (BBC, 2022). This is in stark contrast to those debates about maintaining 'mystique' and intimacy at the coronation. The coverage of her death led to some critics dubbing the BBC '#MournHub' as a play on PornHub, a pornography website, to satirise the voyeuristic coverage. Similarly, the Twitter account @GrieveWatch was established by an anonymous user to document (and mock) the comments, videos, images, dedications and tributes to the Queen in British culture.

This article explores mediations of the Queen's death in September 2022. Many newspaper headlines and television reports in 'traditional' UK media were suggesting a hegemonic and unified response; for example, *the Daily Mail* headline on 9 September read '*our* hearts are broken' (Vine, 2022), and *the Sun's* read '*we* loved you ma'am' (The Sun, 2022; my emphasis). However, analysis of some social media suggests the public response was more mixed, with many displaying ambivalence or even outright negativity towards the British monarchy and 'national' displays of mourning, demonstrating the everyday production of nation and its contestations (Billig, 1995). Using #MournHub and @GrieveWatch as critical case studies, the article seeks to understand what these critical representations of the Queen's death tell us about royal mediation today, given the complexities of the digital age to which the monarchy has (had to) adapt, and the affordances (Bucher and Helmond, 2018) of social media platforms which facilitate ideological struggle over meaning.

In both public commentary and scholarly analysis, there is a dearth of research on anti-monarchy, or even just not explicitly pro-monarchy, public responses. The form these responses take, the contexts they arise in, the media affordances that give rise to them, and the discourses they draw on are all important for understanding the nuances of royal mediation today, and the changing relationship between the monarchy and its subjects. More recently, we have witnessed the tensions between monarchy, social media and 'traditional' media when the

'traditional' media reported widely about celebrations for King Charles III's coronation (Cobham and Thomas, 2023), but largely failed to mention the thousands of republican protestors who lined the street of London and elsewhere across the UK (Bubola, 2023).

#MournHub and @GrieveWatch were chosen as case studies due to their large following on social media, and because they crossover multiple social media websites. #MournHub is used as a meme, and a hashtag on Twitter and TikTok (although not all of the posts relate to the Queen, and the hashtag existed before her death for various non-monarchy-related posts). @GrieveWatch only exists on Twitter, but the account posts content from other social media websites as part of its commentary. While the article names the two case studies because they do not identify any individual person, other individual users are anonymised. Within the two case studies, I chose a sample of posts to analyse in detail based on two theoretical themes that were most prevalent: 'a united nation' and 'commodified grief'. Each of these reveal how different communities and spaces are responding to the Queen's death, and to the media's representation of the event. To analyse, I used discourse, textual and visual analysis.

Mediating monarchy

Monarchies have developed their use of media alongside technological expansion. Tudor monarchies were mediated using coins and portraiture (Sharpe, 2009); Queen Victoria featured in newsreels (Plunkett, 2003); and twentieth century monarchies made use of mass-produced souvenirs (Owens, 2019). During Queen Elizabeth II's rule, the monarchy has featured on television, in paparazzi photographs, on news websites, and on social media (XXX). Very little has been written about social media and the monarchy, beyond a spate of work analysing representations of, and (abusive) comments about, Meghan Markle (Ward, 2021; Orgad and Baldwin, 2021). But media form is important because each of these technologies afforded the monarchy increasingly intimate contact with the public, moving from posed portraits affixed to walls and designed to last centuries, to fluid, instant snapshots or videos that people scroll past on their phones. This shifts people's engagement with the institution, as we saw in the anxiety about live television at the coronation. There is a careful balance between allowing access, and thus allowing people to see and feel the monarchy in a way that makes it feel familiar; and maintaining distance so that the institution's mystique is not fractured (XXX).

Technological advancement has also expanded forms of anti-monarchy protest. The English Civil War in the seventeenth century was mediated through woodcut illustrations depicting

political cartoons (British Civil Wars, n.d), and the printing press produced broadsheet newspapers printing debates on, for example, the legal powers of the monarchy and Parliament, or the religious implications of the war (Washington, 2018). During Queen Victoria's reign, printing pamphlets was relatively inexpensive, and they advertised anti-monarchy public lectures and regional clubs (D'Arcy, 1982). For Elizabeth II's coronation, Scottish citizens objected to her moniker as 'the second' Elizabeth (as she was the first Elizabeth to rule in Scotland or the United Kingdom) by mass producing memorabilia celebrating the coronation of 'Elizabeth I' (Morra and Gossedge, 2016). By 2022, social media had become a space for the remediation of participation and the production of discourses which compete with the 'dominant' narrative.

'Affordances' describes the relationship between technologies and users: what technologies allow people to do (Bucher and Helmond, 2018). Social media platforms facilitate acts of resistance through user-generated content and digital remix cultures like memes, hashtags and short videos, which are a 'source of knowledge-sharing [and] meaning-making' (Sobande, 2019: 157) and can subvert social norms. This does not necessarily mean that social media will lead to political transformation: there is some debate about social media protest and its activist potential given issues like 'hashtag activism' which prioritise ease of engagement (Wellman, 2022). However, social media at least opens space for more critical discussion of monarchy on a mass scale that is immediate, far-reaching, and easy to replicate. Social media is also not constrained by the ideologies of 'traditional' media. For example, the BBC produces largely favourable content on the monarchy because, as I argue (XXX and see below), the monarchy and the BBC have a mutually beneficial relationship and shore each other up as institutions of state. Social media facilitates the conditions for alternative perspectives and voices, which alters how people engage with monarchical representations.

Mediating (National) Mourning

The saturation of representations of mourning for the Queen is reminiscent of other 'hyper-commemorative spectacles' (Withers, 2020: 430) of national remembrance, like red poppies used to commemorate soldiers who have died in wars, as an 'affective activity used to foster cohesion… an 'imagined community' constructed through practices of mourning' (ibid). Drawing on the work of Roland Barthes, Carolyn Kitch (2002: 296) argues that the death of John F Kennedy and his son John F. Kennedy Jr. illustrate how mediated narratives of mourning retold over time 'become collective memory and, in some cases, myth' about the

death's role in imaginaries of national identity. Many scholars have discussed the spectacularisation of Princess Diana's death as a vehicle for (re)producing nation and collectivity (Kear and Steinberg, 1999; Scott, Wilson and Woodhead, 1999).

Jed R. Brubaker et al (2013: 153) have argued that social media is one of the 'new social spaces' where death and mourning are negotiated. Social media platforms offer space for memorialisation (Church, 2013), collective grieving practices (Forman et al, 2012), publicly expressing emotion (Giaxoglou et al, 2017; Gibson, 2015) and policing of others' mourning (Sabra, 2017; Wagner, 2018). Upon the death of public figures, audiences and fans use social media to connect virtually, share grief, and celebrate the life and work of their idol (Bennett, 2010; Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet, 2012; Van den Bulck and Larsson, 2019). Some work on these topics mobilises work from fan studies to describe social media sites like Twitter as democratic spaces where fans engage in meaningful conversation with one another and create united communities (Hoe-Lian Goh and Sian Lee, 2011). But Hilde Van den Bulck and Anders Olof Larsson (2019) argue that – whilst it is true that celebrity deaths tend to initiate a spate of public interest, as evidenced by massive surges in hashtag trends about the person – little is known about the actual emotions of those engaging with material about celebrity deaths, nor to what extent the posts are just isolated individuals commenting as opposed to united communities. That is, we cannot necessarily infer *the intent* of public response, even if we can measure *the extent* of public interest.

These findings are vital for documenting the complex ways that audiences engage with media texts, where we cannot assume audiences are a homogenous mass (Hall, 1994). Similarly, scholarship on national identity formation has shown how affective belonging is complex and 'messy' (Berlant, 2011: 15; see also Ahmed, 2010). Angharad Closs Stephens' work on 'affective atmospheres' at spectacular national events, for example, describes how nationality can be experienced with 'varying tonalities and intensities' (2016: 184). Nations and nationalisms arise from 'incoherent and ambiguous oscillations between attachment and detachment, affection and disaffection' (Antonsich et al., 2020: 3). There is no 'original' national identity, rather discourses of national identity and/or nationalism 'invent… nations where they do not exist' (Gellner in Anderson, 2006: 6) through 'system[s] of cultural representation' (Hall, 1992: 292). Audiences engaging with or creating media, then, reveal ideological struggle over meaning.

Therefore, the Queen may have been a trending topic on UK social media in September 2022, but we cannot assume the tenor of response. Indeed, researchers who surveyed those waiting in 'the Queue' to view the Queen's coffin lying in state in Westminster Abbey (see below) found that, rather than being homogenously united in grief, like some of the media reports on the Queue claimed, some queuers said they just wanted to experience the atmosphere for 'fear of missing out' (Hoerst and Vestergren, 2022). There were thousands of people in the Queue, and although some of course experienced genuine grief, they had many different reasons for attending. Therefore, the many representations of the Queen's death, and the struggle over its meaning, have consequences within and for the public imaginary.

#MournHub: A United Nation?

Anticipated media representations of the Queen's death were set out in minute detail in a lengthy document written many years before, held by Buckingham Palace, the government and the BBC. This was leaked in *the Guardian* by journalist Sam Knight (2017) and exposes the labour that goes into preparing for a public figure's death, including everything from pre-prepared 'sombre' playlists for radio stations to play between her death and the funeral, to the exact number of seconds it will take for the cortege to travel across London. These plans demonstrate an attempt to set out a discursive structure for how the week will play out.

We witnessed the BBC plan in action from UK lunchtime on 8 September 2022, when regular programming on BBC News was interrupted to cover 'the Queen's declining health' (BBC News, 2022a). This continued until the announcement of her death at 6.30pm, and throughout the next 11 days until her funeral. The BBC quickly positioned itself as at the centre of the event. On BBC News bulletins, presenters wore black, the programme's theme music was changed to a slower and more sombre melody, and the opening sequences featured footage of the Queen's coffin (Knibbs, 2022). At the coronation, the relatively new BBC (and at the time, the only television channel) took the reigns as the 'official' broadcaster. This set out the BBC's position as a privileged royal broadcaster, as the institutions of BBC and monarchy legitimated each other's elite position in the national imaginary (XXXX). Despite there now being thousands of broadcasters globally, the BBC remained the principal broadcaster of the funeral on 19 September 2022, with BBC One peaking at 19.5 million viewers, BBC Two 2 million viewers, ITV 5.3 million viewers, and Sky News 934,000 viewers (Waterson and Thomas, 2022).

Coverage of the Queen's life and death, and the wider royal family, dominated BBC television, radio, and website throughout the mourning period. This included a 24/7 live stream of the Queen's coffin lying in state and members of the public filing past it at the Palace of Westminster. The livestream was designed for people to 'pay their respects virtually' if they could not travel to London (Brazier, 2022), benefitting from technological affordances to experience the event from diverse locales. The tone was hushed, and members of the Sovereign's Bodyguard, officers from the Household Division, and (briefly) members of the royal family, undertook 'the vigil', a ceremonial guard of the coffin, in full uniform.

The coverage of the Queen lying in state used the iconography of spectacular royal events (Strong, 2005) to convey intimate coverage of - what is depicted as - a key national moment from the centre of the British state (Dayan and Katz, 1994). However, the constant reverence on BBC drew critique on social media. On 14 September, BBC News' Twitter posted a short video showing the Queen's coffin arriving at the Palace of Westminster. In response, one user posted a meme which depicted the BBC logo (white text on red background) edited so that underneath appeared a logo for 'Mournhub'. This Mournhub logo is, itself, an edited version of the logo for PornHub, a pornography video website. Editing logos in this way can be understood as a form of culture jamming, 'a form of media activism that subverts and reworks the intended meaning of existing media texts' (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2012: 113). It has taken two recognisable corporate symbols and edited them to create new meaning: in this case, that the BBC's constant coverage of the death is voyeuristic, and that it is imposing mourning on the public.

The coffin livestream is an interesting example in relation to the 'MournHub' critique. In contrast to the royal iconography and majesty on display, the livestream format is reminiscent of the peak period of reality television in the early 2000s, specifically *Big Brother* (2000-), where contestants would live in a house together cut off from the rest of the world. Channel 4's sister channel, E4, would broadcast 24/7 livestream footage from the *Big Brother* house, as an extra to the daily 'main show' which showed edited highlights. The live footage would largely be made up of mundane shots of the housemates eating or sleeping. Likewise, on much of the live coverage of the Queen's lying in state, nothing would happen beyond an endless stream of people slowly filing past the coffin, with the occasional changing of the guard or various celebrities joining the mourners (and these made it onto the edited clips on the main BBC News). Given the aforementioned anxiety around giving 'too much' public access to the

1953 coronation, it is testament to the extent of techno-social change over the last seven decades that the 24/7 livestream was launched, especially by a national broadcaster like the BBC. Reality television typically represents ultimate voyeuristic pleasures, allowing viewers intimate access. Helen Wood, for example, describes the 'voyeuristic titillation' of MTV's Geordie Shore, which allows the middle-classes to imagine 'the fantasy' of working-class life (2017: 42). For the Queen to be included in this demonstrates our changing attitudes towards media, and to the monarchy itself, given that we now *expect* to have access to the institution that would previously have been unthinkable. It blurs the line between majesty and popular entertainment.

The Mournhub meme makes a further critique about inequality, particularly in terms of social class. Beneath the BBC and Mournhub logos, added text reads: 'you WILL grieve peasants' (sic). Here, the elite institutions of monarchy and BBC are contrasted with members of the public as 'peasants' to suggest a classed hierarchy of privilege and respect, to which the public are forced to bow. This parodies the way that 'the Queue' was represented in mainstream media, which seemed to suggest a flattened class hierarchy because 'we're all in this together'. The Queue was a line of people waiting to enter the Palace of Westminster for the lying in state, which at times reached ten miles across central London, and quickly became a national mediated spectacle (Reuters, 2022). Reports covered its length, the time people waited for, the weather, the variety of people, the public amenities, celebrities or public figures joining, and its management. Interactive maps on television news showed its movement, the majority of which used a birds-eye view of central London with a squiggly line documenting the Queue, which again proposes central London as a symbol of, or shorthand for, the British state. Talking to people in the Queue and remarking on their shared patience and 'love' for the Queen became a mainstay of the week's media coverage (Channel 4 News, 2022). One notable moment was when celebrity David Beckham waited for 14 hours. In an ITV interview he said that '*everybody* wants to be here to be a part of this experience and celebrate what Her Majesty has done for *us'* (Victor, 2022; my emphasis), articulating a feeling of togetherness and equality. Along similar lines, when television presenters Holly Willoughby and Phillip Schofield, and various MPs, appeared to skip the Queue and enter via a back door, there was media coverage of how it was unfair because everyone else was (apparently) participating on equal terms (Parkinson, 2022). Right-wing journalist Dan Wootton claimed that it showed 'there is one set of rules for the Westminster establishment and another for us mere mortals' (@GBNews, 2022), creating an 'us' versus 'them'. Of course, suppositions of equality are ironic given the

very premise of the Queue in the first place is to honour a woman deemed so superior to 'ordinary people' that everyday lives should be completely disrupted because of her death. Wootton's suggestion that Willoughby, Schofield and various MPs are part of the 'establishment' seems to suggest that the Queen, and indeed he himself as a journalist with a significant platform, are not. Such populist rhetoric destabilises classed hierarchies, feeding into representations of the royals, and elite celebrities, as 'just like us' (Billig, 1992; Littler, 2017; XXXX). In BBC coverage, no attention was given to this inconsistency, and indeed many times the 'service' of the people committed to queuing was likened to the 'service' of the Queen during her long reign (BBC News, 2022b). This was part of a broader closing down of critical commentary, and worked to construct a purportedly unified public. MournHub speaks back to such assumptions, critiquing the classed inequalities inherent in the public mourning for a Queen.

#MournHub was then adapted as a hashtag on TikTok. Here, it was used more broadly to satirise general media coverage of the Queen, plus the reaction of the British public. In one TikTok video (2022a), the user films themselves flicking through television channels and finding coverage of the Queen's funeral on every single one. The caption reads 'RIP but c'mon #MournHub', signalling the user's frustration with the blanket coverage. The song playing over the video is the so-called 'coffin dance song' – actually Tony Igy's 'Astronomia'– featured in many TikToks following its original popularisation when it was played over a YouTube video featuring six men dancing while pallbearing, as part of Ghanian tradition (Team Udayavani, 2020). The clip is usually used in a darkly comedic way, with videos of people suffering mishaps ('fails') followed by the dancing pallbearers meant to be holding the coffins of those in the 'fail' clip. Its use when attached to #MournHub makes a point about global funeral cultures and different affective experiences of mourning, and suggests that the user considers the blanket television coverage a 'fail'.

Another trend in #MournHub is people of colour displaying their bewilderment and/or frustration at the coverage. One TikTok user (2022b) posted a video with the text 'when a brown person is mourning the queen', which features them moving the camera closer to their face with a raised eyebrow and confused expression. The song playing is 'nathan nakamura was here', used in trends that typically feature individual shots of groups of friends in different locations. This song may be used to produce a sense of community – suggesting the user is one of many people of colour confused by the public reaction to the Queen. The caption for the

video reads ‘Ur grandparents confused asf…’ (‘asf’ stands for ‘as fuck’), referring to older, colonised people classified as not white who were subjects of the British Crown during the British Empire, and therefore victims of or witnesses to the many crimes of colonial rule. Similarly, in the TikTok video ‘Nigerians mourning the queen’ (2022c), the user is filmed wrapped in a duvet performing a mock emotional tribute to the Queen. They pretend to sob, refer to her as their ‘mama’, sing ‘why is the world so wicked?’ and ask, ironically, ‘why did she have to die so young?’. At the time of writing, the video had been watched 189,000 times and had 5028 likes. Comments show many people posting the crying laughing emoji.

These users reveal fissures in the idea of ‘national mourning’, and complicate ideas of national identity, that are displayed as commonsense by the BBC. They also reveal the unique implications of the Queen’s death, in comparison to other celebrities. Monarchy’s history and present relationship to former colonies and dependencies, current realms, and the Commonwealth, means that ‘Britishness’ extends beyond state borders. Catherine Craven and Elena Zambelli (2023) have considered migrant and diasporic communities’ feelings towards the monarchy as bound up with feelings of exclusion stemming from Brexit; Eva Cheuk-Yin Li (2023) explored Hong Kongers’ responses to the Queen’s death in the context of decolonisation and resinicisation; and Allison O Ramsay (2023) analysed Caribbean realms abolishing the monarchy due to its colonialist legacies. Whilst at the time of the Queen’s coronation, post-war social welfare provisions were transforming standards of living and Britain headed a united Commonwealth; in 2022, Brexit had damaged Britain’s global relationships, the UK nations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) look towards votes on independence, social welfare has been eroded to plunge millions into poverty, and global far-right movements have given rise to increasing racism and xenophobia. Within the monarchy itself, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have left the institution amidst racist and sexist media coverage and public commentary, and the Queen’s son, Prince Andrew, has been accused of sexual abuse of a trafficked minor. The constant and monolithically favourable coverage of the BBC fails to encapsulate those groups who might *not* feel part of the ‘nation’ on the terms set out by the funeral of a Queen.

Diana Taylor described Princess Diana’s funeral in 1997 as ‘imperial theatre’, because it signified ‘a deliberate staging of the restoration of order, carefully modelled on previous, orderly funerals’ (in Kear and Steinberg, 1999: 201). The careful choreographing of the Queen’s funeral, and the sombre coverage in the mainstream media, seems to stage similarly.

Although BBC coverage attempted to nod towards multiculturalism by including close-up shots of, for example, people of colour filing past the coffin, the funeral still evokes whiteness, class privilege, wealth and a particular 'English' formation of national identity that centres London and Westminster geopolitics. #MournHub is used to make alternative narratives visible, fracturing ideologies of a united public and demonstrating the limitations of the monarchy – and institutions like the BBC – for providing a coherent sense of national identity.

@GrieveWatch: Commodified Grief

Like #MournHub, the Twitter account @GrieveWatch was set up by an anonymous user to provide critical comment on the mainstream footage of the Queen's death.[1] The account ironically describes itself as 'monitoring, assessing and promoting appropriate displays of patriotic grieving', and the majority of the account is dedicated to tweeting and retweeting examples of tributes to the Queen from corporations, organisations, public figures, individuals and media outlets, usually accompanied by sarcastic comment. At the time of writing, the account had 86,000 followers. The account's pinned tweet (2022a) features the text 'Babe are you ok? You've barely touched your RIP Queen Elizabeth II Carved Mourn Melon #mournmelon', with a photo of a watermelon carved with the words 'RIP Queen Elizabeth' displayed on someone's windowsill in front of a framed photograph of the Queen. Another post reads 'Glorious tribute in South Devon' (2022b), with the accompanying photo of the words 'RIP Ma'am' scratched onto a stained chalkboard which is mounted on the metal fence around a car park.

Erika Doss has described these kind of tributes as 'memorial mania' (2010), a growing trend of spectacular cultural memorials to document the death of public figures, a phenomenon many scholars trace to the death of Princess Diana and the outpouring of public emotion (Richards et al, 1999). Penelope Papailias suggests that for some scholars, this is nothing more than 'kitsch consumerism of grief tourism' (2016: 438), but her assessment is that it can be understood as 'an extension of the experience of mediated witnessing in the era of networked digital media', whereby 'affective participation in events… awakens a sense of shared vulnerability and connectedness' (ibid.). In this sense, people creating tributes are not

[1] It is interesting to note that the same anonymous user set up @giantpoppywatch (the accounts reference one another), an account dedicated to monitoring representations of the red poppy used to commemorate soldiers. Their critique thereby highlights the cohesion between national practices of remembrance and mourning in creating hegemonic readings of the monarchy.

necessarily doing so out of love for the Queen, but rather a need to feel connected to others and part of the national mood ('fear of missing out'), as constructed by the mainstream media.

'Memorial mania' (Doss, 2010) goes some way to account for the amount of corporations that offered tributes to the Queen. This can also be understood as what Eva Illouz (2018) discusses as the commodification of emotions, or 'emodities', whereby capitalist commercial culture creates commodities designed to facilitate performative emotions. @GrieveWatch (2022d) posted a photo depicting a large billboard next to a UK motorway (usually reserved for corporate advertising) with a photo of the Queen against a black background and the text 'Rest in Peace Your Majesty. All of us here at Poundland mourn your loss, and honour your life of service'. Poundland is a budget variety store chain. Another post (2022e) shows two screengrabs from the Instagram account for Bar Luca in Sydney, who are advertising a new burger with the caption 'We're going regal with this weeks special for Lizzy. Ma'amburger' (sic), which @GrieveWatch commented on with a sarcastic '#poignant'.

Corporate memorialising of celebrity death as an 'emodity' (Illouz, 2018) is not new. Magdalena Kania-Lundholm (2019) details one of the first instances in a Coca-Cola advert in 1991, where Elton John sung with a reanimated Humphrey Bogart, Louis Armstrong, Cary Grant and Groucho Marx. More recently, the 2016 death of music icon Prince was commemorated by Google and Snapchat temporarily turning their logos purple. The public is generally accepting of this, Kania-Lundholm argues, until the link between the public figure and the corporation is too tenuous, so it becomes obviously promotional. The profile of Poundland as a budget store subverting its usual bright, primary colour advertising with sombre black, and Bar Luca randomly inventing a new burger, perhaps fall into this category. These corporations are seen to be leaning on the Queen as an advertising tack, disrupting the 'mystique' of monarchical power, and therefore their grief is not 'authentic'. Meanwhile, the BBC memorialising the Queen is understood as fitting because of its status within the nation.

On the other side of the scale, some corporations purposefully *stopped* promotion as part of their commemoration. Lingerie chain store Ann Summers put black gowns on their window mannequins to cover up their usual sexy underwear, with a black and white photo of the Queen in front (@Tom_Routly, 2022). Center Parcs prompted public furore when they announced they would entirely shut their parks on the day of the funeral, so guests would have to find somewhere else to stay (Belam, 2022). Meanwhile, Channel 4 did not show any advertisements

on their channels on the day of funeral, instead displaying a black screen with text saying that this was 'as a mark of respect'. @GrieveWatch commented (2022f), 'No commercials allowed, so please sit in silence for a few minutes and watch this commercial for the divine supremacy of the Windsors' bloodline'. The tweet points out the inconsistency in promotional cultures around the Queen's death: in essence, the whole funeral is precisely staged to promote the continuity of the monarchy as an institution. The long planning document (Knight, 2017) was needed because the transferral of power between monarchs is a potentially tricky time (with incredible potential political use), in this case because the status quo of a long-reigning and very popular monarch was fractured, and people were faced with coronating a new (less popular) monarch with all the implications this has for democracy and the nation state. Staging the funeral was, in part, ensuring that mourning was being displayed 'appropriately', as a blueprint for other media to copy, and to attempt to set the public mood. While Ann Summers seemed to suggest that advertising underwear was tacky and offensive, advertising the monarchy is seen as representative of public 'love' for the Queen, and actually is not understood as advertising at all.

One explanation for this is that the monarchy and the BBC are, as institutions of state, considered as outside of corporate commercial cultures. Representations of the British *royal family* pivot on the ideology that royals are, at least in part, 'just like our family', with family melodrama and personal 'scandals' that detract from their political wealth and power. The UK tabloids more commonly report on Princes William and Harry 'falling out' than they report on the monarch's wealth or political influence (XXXX), and the Queen was positioned as the nation's 'grandmother'. The BBC also occupies an ideological space separate from global elite corporations, attached to notions of national identity and heritage (although it is attracting increasing criticism, see Mills and Sinclair, 2017). This is despite the fact that, as scholars have noted, both of these institutions operate in much the same way as global conglomerates, with profit motives and bureaucratic governance (Mills, 2016; XXXX). Both institutions hide their corporate characteristics behind their symbolic status in the national imaginary, so 'memorial mania' is seen as appropriate and befitting the national mood. @Grievewatch exposes these institutions as producing 'emodities' (Illouz, 2018).

Conclusion

This article has considered the ideological struggles over meanings of Queen Elizabeth II's death. 'Memorial mania' (Doss, 2010) saturated global media in the weeks following her death,

across both mainstream media channels like the BBC, to personal and business social media accounts posting tributes. Like the red poppies which have become increasingly ubiquitous, to the point where it is 'almost obligatory for anyone in the public eye or media to wear a poppy in November' (Andrews, 2014: 109), likewise public mourning for the Queen became ubiquitous to signify, and shape, national belonging.

The 'traditional' media representations largely assumed a unified public response of grief and respect. But the case studies of #MournHub and @GrieveWatch have shown the limitations of such representations for accounting for the multiplicity of audience responses. On social media, displays of ambivalence or negativity towards public mourning and the broader monarchical institution demonstrate the complexities of affective belonging to the nation, and the 'incoherent and ambiguous oscillations between attachment and detachment, affection and disaffection' (Antonsich et al., 2020: 3). People's responses were shaped by their own intersectional identities and histories, which are not accounted for in assumptions of homogeneity, as #MournHub demonstrates. The analysis of @GrieveWatch showed that not everyone uncritically accepted public displays of grieving, nor corporations that commercialised memorialising death and nationhood. This was seen as too obviously an 'inauthentic' portrayal of national mourning, as opposed to broadcasters like the BBC who are widely thought to have the cultural credibility to 'represent' the national mood. In response, @GrieveWatch gestured towards the ways in which *all* public mourning of the Queen is promoting something: the reproduction of monarchy.

There remains a distinct lack of research into people's *actual* responses to the British monarchy within the UK, and even more so on a global level; this lack of research is even starker with regards to anti-monarchy responses. #MournHub and @GrieveWatch reveal the value of such research, and demonstrate that people's responses are complicated, informed by their social positions, their histories, and their relationship to the British nation. Anti-monarchy ideology or protest tell us a lot about the complexities of national identity in the context of so-called 'Global Britain', and against the background of coloniality. Research on how, when, and who resists normative discourses on monarchy is vital for us to understand the extent of democratic participation in the media and in public culture more broadly, and the complexities of royal mediation today.

**

References

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness.* Durham [NC]: Duke University Press.

Andrews, M. (2014). 'Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance: Commemoration Is Always Contested.' *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, 58, pp. 104–115.

Antonsich, M., Skey, M., Sumartojo, S., Merriman, P., Stephens, A.C., Tolia-Kelly, D.P., Wilson, H.F. and Anderson, B., (2020). 'The spaces and politics of affective nationalism'. *Environment and Planning C: politics and Space*, *38*(04), pp.579-598

Arnold, M, M Gibbs, T Kohn, J Meese, B Nansen and E Hallam (2017). *Death and Digital Media.* London: Routledge

BBC (2022). 'BBC streaming Queen Elizabeth II lying in state', BBC News, 14 September, < https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-62900500> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

BBC News (2022a). 'Queen's Health Concerns', 8 September, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDYS_K6rL58> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

BBC News (2022b). 'Queen's lying-in-state: Scout's 'great honour' to lead queue', 15 September, < https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-62913022> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

BBC News (UK) (2022). 'Queen Elizabeth II's coffin…'. Twitter, 14 September, < https://twitter.com/bbcnews/status/1570051939584413698> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Belam, M (2022). 'Out of respect': the worst examples of public mourning for the Queen'. The Guardian, 15 September, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/15/out-of-respect-the-worst-examples-of-public-mourning-for-the-queen> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

Bennett, J (2010) 'Michael Jackson: celebrity death, mourning and media events', *Celebrity Studies*, 1 (2), pp.231-232

Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Big Brother (2000-). Channel 4.

Billig, M. (1992) *Talking of the royal family*. London: Routledge.

Billig, M (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. London: Routledge

Brazier, T (2022). 'BBC launching dedicated international stream of Queen lying in state ahead of funeral', Metro, 14 September, <https://metro.co.uk/2022/09/14/bbc-launching-dedicated-stream-of-queen-lying-in-state-ahead-of-funeral-17372593/> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

British Civil Wars (n.d). 'Political Pamphlets & Cartoons', < https://britishcivilwars.ncl.ac.uk/propaganda-printing/political-pamphlets-cartoons/> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Brubaker, J. R., Hayes, G. R., & Dourish, P. (2013). 'Beyond the grave: Facebook as a site for the expansion of death and mourning'. *The Information Society*, 29, pp.152–163

Bubola, E (2023). 'Anti-monarchists see an opportunity to prove their point in the coronation events'. *The New York Times*, 6 May, < https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/06/world/europe/charles-coronation-antimonarchists.html> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2018). The affordances of social media platforms. *The SAGE handbook of social media*, *1*, pp.233-253.

Channel 4 News (2022). '"I waited for hours in 'the world's longest queue' to see the Queen's coffin". YouTube, 17 September, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiZZnxt0wBo> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Church, S. H. (2013). 'Digital Gravescapes: Digital memorializing on Facebook'. *The Information Society*, 29, pp.184–189.

Cobham, T and R Thomas (2023). 'Royals fans from as far as Australia among huge crowds to celebrate King's coronation'. *The Independent*, 6 May, < https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/royal-family/coronation-charles-camilla-crowds-travel-b2333885.html> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Courbet, Didier & Marie-Pierre Fourquet-Courbet (2014). 'When a celebrity dies …Social identity, uses of social media, and the mourning process among fans: the case of Michael Jackson,' *Celebrity Studies*, 5 (3), pp.275-290

Craven, C. & Zambelli, E. (2023). Subject to change: What do EU citizens in the UK, and British diasporas, think about king and country?, April 4, The Sociological Review Magazine. https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.agxc8110

D'Arcy, F. A. (1982). 'Charles Bradlaugh and the English Republican Movement, 1868-1878'. *The Historical Journal*, *25*(2), pp.367–383.

Doss E (2010). *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Easton, M (2013). 'Coronation 1953: Magic moment the TV cameras missed'. BBC, 4 June, < https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22764987> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Forman, A. E., Kern, R., & Gil-Egui, G. (2012). 'Death and mourning as sources of community participation in online social networks: R.I.P. pages in Facebook'. *First Monday*, 17. doi:10.5210/fm.v0i0.3935

Gal, Noam, Shifman, Limor and Kampf, Zohar (2016) '"It gets better": internet memes and the construction of collective identity'. New Media & Society. 18 (8): pp. 1698-1714.

@GBNews (2022). 'Once again there is one set of rules…'. Twitter, 15 September, <https://twitter.com/GBNEWS/status/1570511755431878660> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Gerbaudo, P and E Treré (2015) ‘In search of the ‘we’ of social media activism: introduction to the special issue on social media and protest identities', *Information, Communication & Society*, 18:8, pp.865-871,

Giaxoglou, K., Döveling, K., & Pitsillides, S. (2017). ‘Networked emotions: Interdisciplinary perspectives on sharing loss online’. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61, pp.1–10

Gibson, M. (2015). ‘YouTube and bereavement vlogging: Emotional exchange between strangers’. *Journal of Sociology*, 52, pp.631–645

@GrieveWatch (2022a). ‘Babe are you ok?’. Twitter, 15 September, < https://twitter.com/grievewatch/status/1570352125833793537?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

@GrieveWatch (2022b). ‘Glorious tribute in South Devon’. Twitter, 20 September, < https://twitter.com/grievewatch/status/1572157933177249792?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

@GrieveWatch (2022c). ‘What’s the point of queueing for the Queen…’. Twitter, 20 September, < https://twitter.com/grievewatch/status/1572148257031061506?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

@GrieveWatch (2022d). ‘The M6, junction 9’. Twitter, 20 September, < https://twitter.com/grievewatch/status/1572151582715957249?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

@GrieveWatch (2022e). ‘Ma’amburger’. Twitter, 19 September 2023, <https://twitter.com/grievewatch/status/1571762802095960066?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

@Grievewatch (2022f). ‘No commercials allowed…’. Twitter, 19 September, <https://x.com/grievewatch/status/1571932732459982848?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

Hall, S. (1994). Reflections on the encoding/decoding model. In J. Cruz & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Viewing, Reading, listening: Audiences and cultural reception* (pp. 253–274). Westview Press.

Hoe-Lian Goh D, Lee CS (2011) ‘An analysis of tweets in response to the death of Michael Jackson’. *Aslib Proceedings* 63(5), pp.432–444.

Hoerst, C and S Vestergren (2022). ‘Queuing for the Queen or Queuing for the Queue? The creation of shared identities, friendships, and history’. University of Sussex blogs, 26 September, < https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/crowdsidentities/2022/09/26/queuing-for-the-queen-of-queuing-for-the-queue-the-creation-of-shared-identities-friendships-and-history/> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Illouz, E (2018). *Emotions as Commodities: Capitalism, Consumption and Authenticity*. London: Routledge

Kania-Lundholm, M (2019). 'Digital Mourning Labor: Corporate Use of Dead Celebrities on Social Media'. In *Death Matters,* eds. Holmberg, T, Jonsson, A and Palm, F. London: Palgrave, pp.177-197

Kitch, C (2002). '"A Death in the American Family": Myth, Memory, and National Values in the Media Mourning of John F. Kennedy Jr.', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly,* 79(2), pp.294-309

Knibbs, J (2022). 'BBC News change iconic upbeat theme tune during Queen's mourning period' , Daily Star, 17 September, <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/tv/bbc-news-change-iconic-upbeat-28016839> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Knight, S. (2017) '"London Bridge is down": the secret plan for the days after the Queen's death.' *The Guardian,* 17th March. [Accessed 17 March 2017] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/16/what-happens-when-queen-elizabeth-dies-london-bridge.

Li, E. C.-Y. (2023). Hong Kongers' mourning for Elizabeth II: Colonial nostalgia and the (impossible) project of decolonisation [Online], April 4, The Sociological Review Magazine. https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.mucj9993

Littler, J. (2017) *Against Meritocracy: Culture, power and myths of mobility*. London: Routledge.

Merck, M. (1998). After Diana : Irreverent elegies. London ; New York: Verso.

Mills, T. (2016). *The BBC : Myth of a public service*. London: Verso.

Mills, T and Sinclair, I (2017). 'The BBC is neither independent or impartial: interview with Tom Mills'. openDemocracy, 25 January, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/ourbeeb/bbc-is-neither-independent-or-impartial-interview-with-tom-mills/> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

Morra, I. and Gossedge, R. (eds) (2016) *The New Elizabethan Age: Culture, Society and National Identity after World War II*. London: IB Tauris.

O'Shaughnessy, M and J Stadler (2012). *Media and Society: an Introduction.* Melbourne: Oxford University Press

Orgad, S. and Baldwin, K. (2021). "How Any Woman Does What They Do Is Beyond Comprehension": Media Representations of Meghan Markle's Maternity. *Women's Studies in Communication, 44*(2), pp.177-197.

Owens, E (2019). *The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932-53.* London: University of London Press

Papailias, P. (2016). 'Witnessing in the age of the database: Viral memorials, affective publics, and the assemblage of mourning'. *Memory Studies*, 9(4), pp.437–454.

Parkinson, HJ (2022). ‘So, have you reached a verdict on TV’s Holly and Phil?’. The Guardian, 23 September, < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/23/holly-willoughby-phillip-schofield-this-morning-queue-queen> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Plunkett, J. (2003) *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ramsay, A. O. (2023). The Barbados effect: Will other West Indian nations ditch the British monarchy, too? [Online] , April 4, The Sociological Review Magazine. https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.yxuz5801

Reuters (2022). ‘Thousands track 'mother of all queues' for Queen Elizabeth online’. 15 September, < https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/thousands-track-mother-all-queues-queen-elizabeth-online-2022-09-15/> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Richards, J., Wilson, S. and Woodhead, L. (eds) (1999) *Diana: The Making of a Media Saint*. London: IB Tauris.

Sabra, J. B. (2017). ‘“I hate when they do that!” Netiquette in mourning and memoralization among Danish Facebook users’. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61, pp.24–40

Sharpe, K. (2009) *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England*. London: Yale University Press.

Sobande, F. (2019), Memes, digital remix culture and (re)mediating British politics and public life. IPPR Progressive Review, 26: 151-160.

Stephens, AC. (2016). ‘The affective atmospheres of nationalism’. *Cultural Geographies*, 23(2), pp.181-198.

Strong, R. (2005) *Coronation: From the 8th to the 21st Century*. London: Harper Perennial.

Team Udayavani (2020). ‘Ghana Pallbearers: the story behind the viral Coffin Dance meme’. Udayavani, 6 July, < https://www.udayavani.com/english-news/ghana-pallbearers-the-story-behind-the-viral-coffin-dance-meme#:~:text=The%20dance%20became%20popular%20when,uploaded%20it%20on%20the%20youtube.> [Accessed 03 June 2023]

Kear, A. and Steinberg, D. L. (eds) *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief*. London: Routledge

@Tom_Routly (2022). ‘@GrieveWatch big pants…’. Twitter, 18 September, <https://twitter.com/tom_routly/status/1571565492908834816?s=46&t=v51O1nF10rf-VV3P7d6KkA> [Accessed 18 August 2023]

The Sun (2022). ‘We loved you ma’am’, *The Sun*, 9 September, p.1

TikTok (2022a). ‘RIP but c’mon #MournHub’. <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMYyN4gWU/> [Accessed 01 June 2023]

TikTok (2022b). ‘When a brown person is mourning the queen’. <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMYyNu53N/> [Accessed 01 June 2023]

TikTok (2022c). ‘Nigerians mourning the queen’. < https://www.tiktok.com/@realjosh2funny/video/7141303114111421701> [Accessed 01 June 2023]

Van den Bulck, H., & Larsson, A. O. (2019). ‘‘There’s a Starman waiting in the sky’: Mourning David #Bowie on Twitter’. *Convergence, 25*(2), pp.307–323

Victor, T (2022). ‘David Beckham admits queue error after waiting in line since 2am to pay respect to Queen’. Mirror, 16 September, < https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/david-beckham-spotted-waiting-line-28008971> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Vine, S (2022). ‘Our hearts are broken’. *Daily Mail*, 9 September, p.1

Wagner, A. J. M. (2018). ‘Do not Click “Like” When Somebody has Died: The Role of Norms for Mourning Practices in Social Media’. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(1)

Ward, J. (2021). ‘Making Black motherhood (in) visible: The importance of race, gender, and nation in the mediation of Meghan Markle on Instagram’. *Women's Studies in Communication, 44*(2), pp.231-251.

Washington, B (2018). ‘A Pamphlet War in England, 1641-1643’, Folger, 19 June, < https://www.folger.edu/blogs/collation/pamphlet-war-in-england-1641-1643/> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Waterson, J and T Thomas (2022). ‘More than 29m people in UK watched Queen’s funeral, TV data shows’, *The Guardian*, 20 September, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/20/about-250000-people-queued-to-see-queens-coffin-in-london-says-minister> [Accessed 17 August 2023]

Wellman, M. L. (2022). Black Squares for Black Lives? Performative Allyship as Credibility Maintenance for Social Media Influencers on Instagram. *Social Media + Society*, *8*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221080473

Withers, D-M (2020) ‘Wounding poppies: hyper-commemoration and aesthetic interventions’, *Critical Military Studies*, 6:3-4, pp.429-433

Wood, H. (2017). ‘The politics of hyperbole on Geordie Shore: Class, gender, youth and excess’. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *20*(1), pp.39–55.