

4th World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance- WCPCG-2013

Going Gentle into That Good Night* : Indigenous Therapy on Death in Kenya

Muchugu Kiiru

Abstract

Through personal resonance with texts written on explicit and implicit indigenous therapeutic interventions on death and bereavement primarily on Kenya, this paper examines indigenous therapy on death and bereavement before the advent of modern counselling theories and practice in the country. In the process, it explores therapeutic implications of religious belief and ritual practices to death not only as an acceptable occurrence as a result of disease or age but also as a bizarre occurrence as a result of homicide or suicide. In the course of the exploration, it discusses therapeutic interventions traditional health helpers have employed to help individuals cope with death and bereavement and to bring about homeostasis in both the individual and the society. At the same time, showing why the therapeutic strategies work, the paper argues that the strategies are integral to a worldview that helps and helps share and directive in orientation like therapy operating from behavioural theoretical perspectives. In the end, it evaluates the efficacy of, indicating some lessons we can draw and learn from, these indigenous therapeutic interventions that are still alive in a changed and changing Kenya.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

Keywords: indigenous therapy, Kenya

1. Introduction

According to Lake (1998) death is “the inevitable finality of our lives” (p. 1) while bereavement “renews all the purposes of our lives” after death takes away people close to us (p. 2). Both death and bereavement are live, and sometimes public, issues in Kenya, as evident from a number of court cases relating to the place of burial of the deceased (Cotran 1995 & Nyamongo 1999). Though therapy has not been the concern of the cases, implications for therapeutic interventions are intertwined with the proceedings and the outcomes of the cases.

I have employed an interactive, reflective strategy with texts--similar to what Masson (1997) does--in a bid to show my place in the research, as well as my growth as a person, and the implication all this has on me as a practising counsellor. My view is that therapy is useful. To this end, my exploration of indigenous therapeutic interventions on death and bereavement demonstrates their unique nature and function in the ritual of the people.

Corresponding Author: Muchugu Kiiru
E-mail: muchugukiiru@gmail.com

The people take the interventions for granted, as is evident in a court case that sought to determine where a lawyer should be buried (Egan n.d., Cohen & Odhiambo 1992, Cotran 1995, & Ojwang & Mugambi 1989). Explaining some burial rituals, witnesses during the court case would answer that the rituals *are* because they *have been*; thus, to the question that burial “customs discriminate against the women,” a witness simply replied, “Those are the customs” (Egan, n. d., p. 49).

My brief incursion into other cultures helps to accentuate not only the universality of therapeutic interventions on death and bereavement yesterday and today but also the particular therapeutic role indigenous therapeutic interventions have played, and continue to play, in my society. As a result of the universality and the particularity, the crisis of change individuals find themselves in today (Mbiti 1992) are by extension a crisis of appropriate therapeutic interventions on issues, such as death and bereavement, in their lives.

The body of the paper narrates my resonance with texts, primarily texts exploring, explicitly or implicitly, indigenous therapeutic interventions, on death and bereavement in my society. On the whole, the texts comprise what resonates in me as being significant to therapy on death and bereavement. In the end, the body of the work comprises reflections and interactions that imply or indicate my place in, as well as my growth as a result of, the research on death and bereavement, and the implications this has on me as a practising counsellor. I indicate some implications for counselling in the conclusion of the study.

My MA special study in Counselling Studies at the Durham University, I decided at the beginning of the academic year in May 2000, would be on death and bereavement in Kenya. I would explore the subject relative to the relationship between, on the one hand, indigenous therapeutic strategies and, on the other, counselling theory and practice. This comparison, I told myself, was virgin territory that, hopefully, would enrich counselling in Kenya. As a result, I was determined to give the 'pioneer' work the best I could within the constraints of time and literature.

In the event, by July 2000 I had built a small library of texts touching on or dealing with death and bereavement.

Despite the availability of this wealth of material, I was unable to immerse myself wholeheartedly into the literature on “questions and answers on death and dying” (Kübler-Ross 1974) because I must have been uncomfortable with getting close to experiences of death, as well as the cocktail of emotions death excites. Uncomfortable to become intimate with death and bereavement, I ran away from the intimacy through denial spawned by the fear death aroused in me.

By the end of January 2001, however, the discomfort was behind me; I had read, initially tentatively, quite a lot of the literature I had collected. The literature stirred up remembrances of my experiences of death and bereavement. As a result of the literature and the experiences, death and bereavement became well-known companions to be accepted and respected, not alien monsters to be denied and resisted.

Interactions and Reflections

I discovered Leakey (1977) in early February 2001, soon after discovering and scanning Mwiti (1999) in January 2001. I was excited that Leakey (1977) had devoted over 60 pages of his work to the death and disposal of the dead by the Kikuyu. Kenyatta (1968) and Gatheru (1964) had already given me snippets on death and bereavement among the Kikuyu; now, I was going to learn a lot on a community with which I have close cultural ties, for I hail from the Kikuyu. Leakey (1977) gives me some gems; he informs me that people in the society accepted death as a matter of course:

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1117191>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1117191>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)