The Traditional Understanding of Grief Among Ameru in Kenya: A Diakonia Perspective

Elizabeth Mukiri Mukaria, (MA Student-VID, Norway)
&
Andrew Ratanya Mukaria, PhD, (Researcher - Oslo, Norway).

Abstract

The main objective of this article is to explore the Ameru indigenous ways of overcoming death and grief. Death and grief have always been the most challenging thing throughout the history of human beings, and even within contemporary society. The Ameru culture provided room, space and meaning of death and life after death to both the dead and to the living. The culture was an integral part of Ameru, especially on matters of death and grief. The culture provided values found to be helpful to the well-being of the Ameru people, in a holistic way especially in the period of grief and bereavement. The article explores these meaning and how they can be relevant to the contemporary society, which ethos are guided by the Church. Today, the church plays the central role in overcoming grief and bereavement. In meaning making, there is a need for contextualization. Contextualization is an attempt to present the gospel in culturally relevant ways. For this reason, this article tries to explore some of the Ameru ways of overcoming grief and how this can be relevant to the contemporary Church diakonia work and counseling of grief.

Key Words:
Death, Grief, Diakonia, Ameru-traditions, Church, Diakonia work and counseling of grief.

Introduction

This article explores the traditional understanding of grief among the Ameru[1] people of Kenya, and its implications to the contemporary Diakonia work and counselling to the grieved among churches in Meru. Diakonia is understood in accordance with Nordstokke (2009) meaning Christian faith in action. Diakonia is an integral part of the church mission in today's world. It is also the fundamental self-understanding, and self-reflection of the church within the changing contexts (Nordstokke, 2009). Diakonia explores the context, and further impacts the context. Nordstokke shows that "diakonia has changed from one generation to the next

[1] The term 'Meru' and 'Ameru' will be used consecutively. Ameru defines a group of people in Kenya, while Meru defines the place where these people live.

according to the contextual conditions" (Nordstokke, 2009: 16). Within this understanding, this article investigates the tradition culture of the Ameru people of Kenya in case of grief, within the contemporary church context.

The study is based on the constructivist assumption that the bereaved individuals and families construct the meaning of the death of a loved one, shaped by their cultural context but not determined by it. In times of grief or crisis, it is relevant and necessary to understand the context of the bereaved and those suffering in order to help them out. Bowlby-West argues, "clergy, rabbis, bereavement counsellors and all 'helping' professionals should be encouraged to see a bereaved person in the perspective of the system and the family-community system. The people grieve is partly determined by cultural and psychosocial origins." (Bowlby-West, 1982: 280). However, since culture is dynamic, the present Ameru culture was impacted[2] by Christianity and colonial experiences. The encounter introduced the Christian ways of addressing grief among the Ameru community in Kenya, however, some elements of the traditional meaning and understanding still plays a great role.

Understanding grief
The study explores the concept of grief. Death being a natural part of life, grief is something which follows every person's death. Death of a loved one comes with shock, pain, desperation, stress, which are all part of grief. Stroebe, Hansson, Schut, and Stroebe argue that "grief is a term applied to the primary emotional (affective) reaction to the loss of a loved one through death. It is normal, a natural reaction to loss" (2008: 5).

According to Gross (2016), grief is a universal reaction to everyone who has been bereaved, "grief is commonly associated with death, it is also used in everyday communication in a much broader context (as when a parent pleads with his/her teenage son or daughter to 'stop giving me grief" (2016: 2). However, the universal aspect does not give a uniform approach to how people grieve the death of their beloved one. Thus, to Walter (2007), grief is influenced by the social structures and Cultures. Walter divides social structures of grief into modernity and postmodernity, and those of culture into modernism and postmodernism

Gross (2016) further argues, grief may encompass any 'loss'. Though he argues that the most commonly regarded understanding is in relation to 'bereavement'; involving a physical and bodily experience, whether individual or in a form of cultural group. Grief intensity varies among individuals, with a distinction between what can be referred to as normal or complicated grief (CG) (Gross, 2016).

Archer (2008) argues that the more profound the loss, the more profound the grief will be. Grief comes with different manifestations such as; hopelessness, anxiety, anger denial, guilt, incapacitating fatigue, difficult in controlling emotions, lack of concentration, loss of interests in people and activities and feeling overwhelmed (Archer, 2008). Archer further shows that a period of grief may equally bring healing or complication. Religion (whether tradition or Christianity in this case of Ameru) plays a key role in helping those bereaved to overcome their grief. Religion serves as a source of comfort; in meaning making through the healing process restoring hope.

Another known theorist and one of the leading researchers on grief, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) and Kessler (2005), shows that there is no formula to grieving, rather categories and stages that people go through when experiencing grief. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) established these five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, there is no uniformity in the process of grief among

---

[2] By impact in this case I mean effects or impressions. The encounter between the Christianity and African traditional cosmologies produced a new situation, a situation with its unique characteristic.

individuals. These stages may shift back and forth, and not necessary going in sequence. I present each below:

The first stage denial is where a bereaved individual may choose to avoid thinking about the loss or refuse to accept that the loss has occurred. In this stage, the world is meaningless for the bereaved person overwhelmed by the grief. Kubler-Ross and Kessler argue that in this stage, denial allows the bereaved person the much reality they can handle.

The second stage anger is emotional, which can be directed to various issues and personalities. It can be directed to the deceased, to self, to the system such as medical professionals, police etc. The anger is even directed to God, where the bereaved may ask, 'where is God in this? God where were you when my husband died? Kubler-Ross and Kessler opine that this stage is necessary, for it often helps in self-regulation. Emotions in this stage help the bereaved person in dealing with grief experiences.

Bargaining is the third stage, this is most directed to God, or any other supernatural being. The bereaved person here wonders and presents some questions like; why me God, why him/her, why not me? The bereaved try to demand an exchange for themselves, a habit or behaviour, or anything precious to bring back the deceased person. However, Kubler-Ross and Kessler state that this is a short-lived moment of 'what ifs, held in regrets', where some individuals may even seek forgiveness.

The fourth stage is depression, the typical reaction to this is crying, feeling sad, avoiding eating, contact or any joy of kind. The stage is filled is filled with emptiness, and everything losing meaning and value. Kubler-Ross and Kessler argue that this is the most normal, and important part of the grief. For those who do not experience this stage, might experience some form of depression outside the bereavement period.

Lastly, is acceptance. Acceptance is when the bereaved acknowledges and comes into a term with the reality, that indeed the loss has occurred, and life must go on. In most cases, they eternalize hope, that their deceased person is in a better place, or rested well. Acceptance comes with making sense, with the rationalization of the whole idea and meaning of death.

The study investigates the pre-Christian Ameru culture, when Christianity approaches to grief did not exist. The conceptual understanding and meaning of the grief were no different. The practices to overcome grief were equally meant for the best of the people the way Ameru people knew it, which contemporarily conflict the modern and Christian practices (Nthamburi, 1982). One should understand that like any other human group, Ameru people did experience pain of losing their loved ones. Therefore, they had ways and approaches in which they grieved their loved ones in accordance with the culture and religious practices in order to bring healing and meaning making. It was the norms of the Ameru people which provided decorum, social exchange and divine healing in times of bereavement and grief.

Study Methodology
This study explores the traditional understanding of the grief in Meru Kenya. It focuses on the meaning, activities and period through which, and how the Ameru people of Kenya grieved their loved ones. Gathering material to aid the study is done through document analysis (Bryman, 2012) and content analysis approach. The aim is to explore what has been written about the Ameru by historians, anthropologists, sociologists and theologians on matters of grief and post death healing.

The content analysis is done through; books and articles dealing with grief within the Ameru culture and within the wider understanding of the concept. In the content analysis, the study takes note of any study on grief. It explores grief in general as well as, the study explores the understanding of grief held in different contexts, but from a specific perspective of the Ameru traditional conceptual understanding of the grief. The study takes

notes of the cultural influences on how people grief. It explores the phenomenon of grief as a religious, social and cultural issue, from a human perspective.

Defining the Ameru People

According to Bernardi (2018), Ameru is a Bantu group of people currently living in the slopes of the Mount Kenya in the present Meru County, Tharaka Nithi County and minorities in the surrounding counties such as Isiolo, Embu and Laikipia Counties. The group is comprised of nine sub-tribes namely Iembe (Igembe), Tiania (Tigania), Imenti, Mwimbi, Miutini, Igoji, Muthambi, Chuka and Tharaka. Despite the nine sub-tribes, Ameru exists as one tribe and a group of people sharing common cultural values, tradition religion, language (though with differing dialects) and practices. Majority of the Ameru are now Christians, mostly, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic and Pentecostal, with traces adhering to the Islam and Ameru traditional believes and practices (ATR).

To Fadiman (1994), the Ameru mythology is fascinating. It describes their 'Jewish like' mythological exodus after their oppression by people called *Nguo ntune* (red clothes) in a place called *Mbwaa*. There is an exodus, with the Ameru crossing a river miraculously under the leadership of a Moses like charismatic leader called Koomenjue. To Fadiman, this story of Ameru was told even before their encounter with the Western missionaries and Christianity (Fadiman, 1994). Bernardi argues the Ameru migration was their survival; away from the *Nguo ntune,* and in the wilderness (Bernardi, 2018). Much of their cultural practices, and values; including how they handled death and bereavement emerged in accordance to their mythology and survival ability during the migration journey. Every aspect of their culture is fundamentally embedded in their exodus and migration.

Ameru were monotheistic society, who believed in one God *(Murungu)* as their creator and sustainer of all the existence (Nthamburi, 1982). Since God was remote from the ordinary human existence, prayers and sacrifices were the ways through which the Ameru people could reach God (Nthamburi, 1982). Those who have departed *(ancestors)* also acted as the link between the living and the Supreme God. Thus, the burial rites and the resting place of the dead was an integral part of the Ameru culture, religion and belief systems. This notion of the 'living dead' gave them strength in their social, cultural, spiritual and psychological healing, and bonded the community together (Bondi, 2015).

Death and Grief among – the Ameru People

According to Bondi (2015), and Mbiti (1969), in African society the conception of death is intricately tied to life. To most African communities (pre-Christian), life did not end with death. Death was just a rite of passage, to another existence the ancestral world. This transition did not alter or end the life or change the temperament of the person, but only causes a change in its form (Bondi, 2015 and Mbiti, 1969). Bondi argues that individuals who died, continued to "live" in the land of the ancestors and they continued to commune with their families as ancestral spirits *(nkoma cia bajuju).*

The goal of death in most African communities, including Ameru, was one to become an ancestor, so it can be argued that death comes because God intended it.[3] Those who died were given an "accurate" burial, bounded by abundant religious meanings and cultural understanding of the people, with clear formalities of the transition (Mbiti, 1969). Mbiti describes African life in two forms, what he refers to as *Sasa* (present) and *Zamani* (past) (Mbiti, 1969). Thus, the life of Africans, in most African communities was believed to be progressing from present to the past, and past to the present in a circulation motion of rebirth.

---

[3] This phrase *kwenda kwa Ngai* (God will or if God intends it) is still held today, even within the Christianity in the Ameru context

However, in some cases, the Ameru attitudes towards death differed depending on how the person had behaved/carried him or herself while alive, his or her social status and the cause of the death. So, not all deaths were 'equal' to say. Some deaths were more revered, and this determined their grieving and other related ceremonies. The character of an individual determined what they became after death; an ancestor or forgotten. If it was a death of good or 'accomplished' person *(akiri),* who died at an old age *(akuri).* Per the customs, the person was just viewed as 'sleeping' *(kumama),* and dwelling with the ancestors *(anoka na bajuju).* For life was a gift from God, and it was God's plan for one to live their lives in full. That live was to be lived in harmony with others, nature and for recreation purposes, not to be wasted selfishly.

In contrast, if the deceased had been a wicked, evil individual or died prematurely or in mysterious circumstances. The Ameru would say, 'the person will keep on wandering' *(Naara eretire, kaereraa na miti yawe iri ituro).* Even though the departed could enter the world of the dead and separated with the living, the person never became an ancestor. The person in this kind of death could not be named, thus, the cycle of life was discontinued. These were believed to be part of the tormenting spirits. Those who died in mysterious deaths or prematurely had to be 'cleansed', so that they may rest well and not come back to haunt or torment the living ones (Mbiti, 1969).

In the Ameru community if an 'accomplished' individual died, despite bereavement and sense of loss, the occurrence was never seen as a breach of day to day life. Instead, it was accompanied by an inconspicuous and sombre period of mourning and rituals. The death of a 'virtuous person' marked the prosperous end (finish) to one cycle of life and was within the normal sequence of events (start). To the opposite, the death of a wicked person was marked as (unfinished) or person was a disastrous and perilous event, hence (finished) no continuity in the afterlife). Unfinished refers to those who had died prematurely, having not yet attained the status of elderhood and those seniors who died too early, or too mysteriously to observe the ceremonial transfer of power to the next generation, thus, these situations required certain rituals and cleansings.

After death, the Ameru people believed that a corpse should never be defiled. For if the corpse was defiled, the deceased was permanently severed from the living. The Ameru, therefore, practiced the ritualistic exposure of the dead when death was imminent. The Ameru never conducted burial the modern way. The body of a person could never be cremated or buried in the ground. As I stated earlier, the Ameru mythology was what defined every aspect of their culture.[4] Kajira Ibui (2014) argues, during the Ameru migration they had a good 'relationship' with nature (Ibui, 2014). Nature became the dwelling of the living and the dead.

Due to that bond, between human-nature, individuals would be taken into the forest or put in what was called the 'hut of death' build in the forest when perceived to be nearing death. This was an ideology of wholeness established between the living and the dead in a spiritual dimension which created a sense of connection and belonging to a transcendent network of God, Human and Nature.[5] Once they die, the wild animals consumed them, or they rotted in the forest. Thus, the eco-community between nature and human could be cemented, with the forest as the 'dwelling of the ancestors and as a sacred place.' On the other hand, if someone died in their home, the house had to be destroyed, and the body dragged out by a rope to the bush where it was abandoned (Bondi, 2015).

After death, there was a period of mourning and cleansing. Before the cleansing period, the community gave those bereaved a period of their own to mourn their loved ones. In this period, for the bereaved family, no

---

[4] Most cultural aspects emerged during the Ameru people exodus. Being on a journey and in haste they had no time to bury their dead, hence, they develop a strong communality with nature. The forest became their shelter, source of food, sacred place, and burial place etc.

[5] The idea brings in my mind one scene of the film Avatar, the 'sacred trees of souls'.

activity (farming, grazing far away from their home, contact with other people outside their families) could go on. The community, though at a distance, came in to aid the family and reassure them that all is well. Rituals were conducted to the living family members, who were shaven to signify the end of the grief period. Cleansing was done to those who have been exposed to the dead body, especially when a person's death occurred at home, mysteriously or at a young age (Bernardi, 2018).

The 'isolation' period of the bereaved and their family was to signify being left-as an expression of grief. It allowed the family to come together and relinquish the anger and pain of death. The period was of remembrance; though low tones and sombre moment. The period of the grief could run in an entire one farming season (Gikunda, 2018). With that one farming period being part of the; death period (body being taken to the forest), isolation period, and the last-period of being integrated back to the community through rituals and cleansing. The last period could include remarrying, or inheritance for both men and women (Gikunda, 2018).

The approaches taken to overcome grief, in general, were meant to prevent any negative thoughts in relation to the departed. It was a moment of self-detachment with reality and existence. Death was viewed as a transition and not departure, and in accordance with the will of God.

Burying the dead
I stated above, the Ameru never buried their dead, rather they laid them in the forested area after or before they died. The process of taking the body or the near to death person to the forest or the hut of death was to be done in accordance with the customs and traditions of the Ameru. It was the family's role to take care of their departing or those who had departed. Though the Ameru were sure that the person will be devoured by the wild animals, this was not supposed to happen in their presence. A requirement was for the body or the dying person to be carried carefully to the forest. Once in the forest, the body or the dying person had to be protected from being devoured by the animals until (if not dead) he/she dies, and the family members have left the forest.[6] The act of being taken to the forest by one's children, husband or wife ensured that every Meru man or woman was to be married and have children. Even to date, when a Meru person gets a child, one can state '*nkwona wa unthika* (I have begotten one who will bury me).

The burial of a non-married (singles) and barren women (it was rare to have a barren man, normally his circumcision agemates fathered on his behalf) was most challenging. A childless person, non-married or a person who died in a mysterious way (accidently, drowned, or bitten by a snake etc) was to be pulled with a rope to the forest by an undertaker (*mweenji*)-which means 'barber/shaver'. These kinds of deaths were mostly considered to be bad luck. Pulling the body by a rope to the forest signified an act of pulling away curse (*muuiro*) from the family, community and people. Once in the forest, the similarity with any normal death was that the body could never be devoured by wild animals until the undertaker had departed. It was his role to ensure that the body was protected in accordance with the traditions and customs. Failure to adhere, and the body was devoured by animals the curse went to the undertaker than the family. It was after the return of the family members or the undertaker from the forest when other rituals took place. These practices are gone, where the typical Ameru burial is through a dug grave; a practice introduced by the European Christian missionaries.

---

[6] This is a belief held by some Ameru (Christian or not) to date. One of our neighbor's grandfather died at home. The grandfather used to stay in his own traditional hut (*aruu*), a distance for his children's homes. When in the morning the family learned of the death, they had to establish that he was never bitten by rats while dead, which could bring a curse to them.

Mourning

The mourning period within the Ameru was not only a family affair but a community affair. Though the immediate family of the bereaved could be isolated, the community supported them in all aspects. The family had to be silent, while the community acted. This is something witnessed even to date as far as burial and mourning is concerned. In contemporary society, following the tradition approaches of the Ameru it is spoken, "no person buries him/herself." Thus, funds and resources for the burial are taken care of by the community. The community caters for all the expenses which may include hospital bills incurred by the deceased and other burial necessities. These are some of the common practices of mourning from the traditional Ameru culture incorporated in the contemporary mourning. Others which are visible are, not leaving their homes or socializing (isolation), abstaining from sexual activities, not talking, laughing, singing or playing loud music. The Ameru mourning period was of the absolute silence.

Healing after death and grief

To Ameru, the healing from the grief and bereavement came through rituals and cleansing. The cleansing was done for the entire family; men, women and children. This was done in order to wade away the spell of death. The belief was if such things were never done, they resulted in what is called *'muiro'* (a form of curse). After the period of death, there was isolation. Those bereaved had to be restored back, after being isolated by the rest of the community. The period of isolation was followed by the cleansing rites and shaving off their hair to signifying a 'separation from the death' (*kwenja rukuu),* generating new meaning of life after death (Fadiman, 1994).

Rituals were done to restore hope and bring back life to normal following death. They were necessary to wade away 'death's uncleanliness' (*muuiro).* As was held earlier, death, according to the Ameru though a transition (rite of passage) making it a celebration; it severed life from the living to the realm of the living dead. Thus, to maintain a harmony between the living and the living dead, rituals of the transition were to be done which signified a 'rebirth'. The rituals gave a psychological reassurance to the living that their dead ancestors will not remain or come back to haunt them. Instead, the departed with rest in peace and protect the family. If the rituals were not done accordingly, they amounted to dishonour.

One such ritual was a sexual act. According to the Ameru culture, when a man or a woman lost a wife or a husband, they had to engage in sexual rituals. Death was viewed as a contaminant, and sex, in this case, did not only signify cleansing but also signified rebirth. Anything that touched the body of the deceased was also to be cleansed with milk and honey. Items which belonged to the deceased person were also discarded, signifying a departure. All these practices were done to wade away misfortune and elements of death. There were meant to reassure those left behind that all is well, and life must continue. Finally, an animal was sacrificed to put the dead soul to rest by appeasement (Fadiman, 1994).

Life after death according to Ameru

After life means what happens after death. The Ameru life did not stop at the death. Once the departed ones are gone, they joined the realm of the living dead-ancestors. This was their belief of the afterlife. There was no punishment to those who have departed. Punishment of all the wrong doings happened here and now. Irrespective of a persons' earthly behaviours, if the correct burial rites for the person were observed his afterlife was equal to the rest. However, there were some exception cases of the wrong doers. Those who were witch, murderers, thieves, or broken the community codes and taboos, their behaviour followed them even in the afterlife. These became the wandering and tormenting spirits, and no naming could be done after them (Fadiman, 1994).

Reflecting Kubler-Ross and Kessler five stages of grief and Ameru response

First, in denial, the Ameru people give the bereaved space and time to erase the memories of their departed. According to the psychologist Sigmund Freud, as argued by Archer (2008), the bereaved must separate their

thoughts and feelings from the deceased person in order to move on in their life. Only through the process of detachment may the bereaved finally experience improvement and recover their health back from their grief.

Secondly, anger, the Ameru conceptualization of the death as a rite of passage was quite important in grief recovery. It assured and gave the bereaved family hope for their departed and those living. This helped people to heal from the negative effects of the grief and positively embraced hope. Religion, such as Christianity currently play that role in assuring hope in coping with grief. Hope serves as a source of comfort, and support system.

The third bargain, the Ameru rituals played a significant role in the healing process of the bereaved families. The Ameru rituals for the bereaved incorporated some elements which restored and refreshed the spirit. Rituals portrayed concern, empathy, compassion, and care for those who are suffering as part of the community. The ritual elements tied together the pain, trauma, physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual effects.

Fourth, depression, the place of family and community was integral, even to the contemporary in overcoming grief and bereavement. The Ameru people committed themselves physically, spiritually and materially, giving assistance, hope and support to the bereaved family.

Firth beliefs in the afterlife brought acceptance. This was a belief and naming in ancestors, which assured the Ameru people that their departed ones lived among them. Death was believed not to be the end, but merely a transition and a passing to another realm. This brought acceptance that though dead, their loved ones continued to live among them.

Diakonia work of grief in Ameru perspective
What can the church learn from the Ameru cultural way of overcoming grief in diakonia way?
I stated in the introduction part that diakonia has a contextual dimension. In Meru, the church has now taken the central role initially held by the tradition religion and culture of the Ameru people. Diakonia is central to what it means to be the church. It is the core of the gospel in practice. Diakonia is a theme of the service we do other people, which is found through living in relationship with other human beings. Nordstokke, 2009, from the World Lutheran Foundation (LWF) (argues,

> Diakonia is central to what it means to be the church. As a core component of the gospel, diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons, who are created in God's image. While diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbour in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms and transforms (LWF 2003b:6).

Diakonia is an act of reaching to all people, and mostly to those suffering, experiencing pain, and in need of healing and restoration. The mission of the Church has its origin and mandate from Jesus Christ. The Church was commissioned by Jesus Christ, an idea which taken in totality was within the role of the Triune God under *Missio Dei*[7]. Healing and restoration are roles of the church within its holistic ministry. From the Ameru understanding and working among the bereaved, we show a concept of the *ubuntu*[8]. *Ubuntu* can be replicated in the Christian practices in the *koinonia*.[9] Through Christ, among the gifts that are given to those who have

---

[7] *Missio Dei* is a Latin word which means Mission of God. Missio Dei is a concept which argue that mission is not the work of the Church, but an attribute of God. For God is a missionary God.
[8] Ubuntu is a philosophy of shared humanity. An aspect of seeing yourself through the other person. Thus, sharing each other's success, failures, fears and pains.
[9] Koinonia symbolizes unity of the body of Christ-the church. It is state of fellowship of the believers. Thus, like Ubuntu, Christians in koinonia share their success, fears and pains.

accepted Him or those called by His name are forgiveness of sins, a relationship with God the Father, freedom from the power of Satan, the gift of the Holy Spirit, a fellowship of believers (Greek: *Koinonia*), and eternal life. Thus, *Koinonia* has a central place in the lives of believers and church.

Overcoming grief among the Ameru people was an *Ubuntu* issue, and never a role of the bereaved individuals. Everybody in the community was treated as kin. Grieving involved the entire family and the community. It was never the responsibility of an individual to visit a counsellor, rather the community visited the bereaved counselled and brought healing to them. No one could be left on their own or claim that they can do it on their own. Since bereavement did not only affect an individual but the entire social fabric. It was a society and community responsibility. As held, though much has changed, the community still plays a clear role in the grief period. Ameru still holds that *uti muntu waithiika* (no one buries himself or herself), meaning no family can bury their kin on their own. It was a community responsibility to carry the burden, on behalf of the family in the challenging times.

The church may equally manage to mobilize and encourage the congregants to a diaconal action, in relation to caring for the bereaved. The ministry of the church in caring (Latin: *caritas*) for the bereaved should be driven by love (Greek: *Agape*). The Church concern for the suffering should be inspired by God's love and the love for human beings. Local churches may come up with 'death kitties or charitable organizations' to support the bereaved, now that there is a change from the traditional way of abandoning the body in the forest, to burying coffins, mortuary payments and other burial requirements. In some cases, some individual church members may commit themselves to the needs of their fellow congregants and practice diakonia in a supportive manner in a period of bereavement. It should be a total commitment, motivated by love rather than being driven by ego or showing off.

To the Ameru, the death of an individual was not only a rite of passage, but a moment for every member of the community to stand, act and be counted. Diakonia is also Christian faith in action. Counselling people who are grieving should be a role of Christians and Church as a community of faith and fellowship of believers. The communal action of attending the funerals brings healing and emotionally strengthens the bereaved family. The Church can create such a support system, for when one member suffers, all members suffer.

Lastly, the approach to grief should be contextual. This is where the church can take account of the cultural place of grief to restore hope, inspire and encourage. On expenses, the church should educate people on the meaning of death and the afterlife, rather than incurring lots of expenses in expensive coffins, dresses, and burial ceremonies. These practices which were never part of the Ameru culture are to some extent becoming injurious to the family resources. On pastoral role and care, the priest or pastor presence in the family of the bereaved should be equated to the position of *'mweenji* (cleanser). The role should be to bring spiritual healing, be a caregiver, bring forgiveness and restore hope by '*cleansing*' the family from the fear of death.

Bibliography
Archer, John. "Theories of Grief: Past, Present and Future Perspectives", in *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention,* edited by Margareth S. Stroebe, Robert O. Hansson and Wolfgang Stroebe (eds), 45-65. Washinton DC: American Psychological Association, 2008.

Bernardi. B. *The Mugwe: A Failing Prophet (2nd., Ed).* Abingdon: Routledge, 2018

Bondi, Vyonna. "Death and Burial in the Africa Context: A Case Study on Kenyan Customs and Kenya Customary Law." In *Hitchhiker's Guide to Law*, 2015, accessed November 10, 2018. https://hitchhikersguidetolaw.wordpress.com/2015/06/15/death-and-burial-in-the-african-context-a-case-study-on-kenyan-customs-and-kenyan-customary-law/.

Bowlby-West, Lorna. "The impact of death on the family system." In *Journal of Family Therapy, vol.5, 1983, pp. 274-294,* accessed on November 11. 2018*.*
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1046/j..1983.00623.x.

Gross, Richard. *Understanding Grief: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Fadiman, Jeffrey A. *When we began There were Witchmen: An Oral History from Mount Kenya*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.

Ibui, Alfreda Kajira. (2014). "Wild Plants' Use Behaviour in Meru, Kenya." In *Journal of US-China Medical Science, vol.11. No. 1 (serial No. 93), 2014, pp.37-41*, accessed on November 11, 2018. http://www.davidpublisher.org/Public/uploads/Contribute/55094606aff2f.pdf.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On death and Dying*. London: Routledge, 1969.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth and David Kessler. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the meaning of Grief through the Five stages of Loss*. New York: Scribner: 2005.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969.

Nthamburi, Zablon J. *A History of the Methodist Church in Kenya*. Nairobi: Uzima, 1982.
Nordstokke, Kjell (ed). *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment*. Geneva: The Lutheran World Foundation, 2009.

Stroebe, Margareth S., Robert O. Hansson, Henk Schut, and Wolfgang Stroebe (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention.* Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2008.

Walter, Tony. Modern Grief, Postmodern Grief. In *International Review of Sociology-Revue Internationale de Sociologie vol. 17, 2007, pp.123-134*