



## DREAMS AND GRIEF PROCESS IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN AFRICA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Death is as old as life itself. The unpredictable psychological feeling called grief is usually accompanied by emotional setbacks such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and yearning. Within these emotions also lie the reality of dreaming about the deceased. Thus, this study aimed to assess the role of dreams in grief process among selected communities in Africa and was guided by Nyerere's philosophy of Ujamaa. The study used a phenomenological design with a sample size of 31 respondents from the Igbo (Nigeria), Tabwa (Democratic Republic of Congo), Muganda (Angola), Agni Morofoue (Cote D'ivoire), Luo (Kenya) and Gusii (Kenya) cultures. The results of the study were interpreted using content analysis. The findings showed that dreams served the roles of comfort, encouragement, warning, revelation, and spiritual presence during grief process. The results also showed that dream images can be interpreted in three ways; positively, negatively or altered image interpretation, each having its emotional effects. Prayers, purification, libations, and ritualistic sacrifices are some of the communal healing techniques for dreams having a negative image interpretation. The study therefore recommends that detailed analysis be combined with empathetic intuition and creative imagination in dream interpretation as many African communities place great importance on dreams.*

**KEYWORDS:** Dreams, Death, Grief, Africa, Communities.



## INTRODUCTION

Death is a part of life and can occur without warning to the young and old alike. Grief follows every person's death. Stroebe, Hansson, Schut, and Stroebe (2008) argued 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. In bereavement literature, the concept of continuing bonds has received growing attention, especially its function in coping following death. (Field & Friedrichs, 2004). Despite the permanence of physical separation, the bereaved can be emotionally sustained through a continuing bond with the deceased (Field, Nichols, Holen, & Horowitz, 1999).

Scientifically, death refers to a point at which biological functions of a once living organism are terminated. It could simply be referred to as the cessation of living of a certain biological being, in this case, a human being. However, most grief and loss counselling approaches, while acknowledging the impact of death on families and groups, are usually focused on the individual's experience and recovery. Individual frameworks speak of the stages of a person's response to a significant loss in their life as a progression from denial to acceptance. Understanding grief and loss broadens the lens to consider the variations in how different communities respond to death and the grief process. Each community's experience of loss is seen in the context of intergenerational relationship patterns. The unfortunate circumstances surrounding loss and grief seem to manifest themselves even among animals. For example, chimpanzees exhibit silence behavior around the dead member, gorillas use sign language and even express sadness about the deceased member, elephants display destructive unusual habit on seeing motionless member, some deer mostly sniff and poke while looking at their lifeless deceased among others.

Sigmund Freud, who is considered the first psychologist to delve into the world of dream interpretations, did not present any case material on the resolution of grief through assessing dreams. Freud's concept of grief work remained largely within the psychoanalytic circle until 1944, when Erich Lindemann (1979) began the contemporary discourse on grief. He defined acute grief as a psychiatric syndrome. Lindemann, a leader in the mental health movement in psychiatry, accepted the grief work model uncritically. That is, he thought that the task of grief was to sever the bonds with the dead, thus freeing the survivors to form new relationships that served individuals in their changed social environment. The concept quickly became popular. Lindemann thus codified the underdeveloped ideas about grieving in Freud's essay, thereby giving the culture the concepts to make grief an individual matter for which psychiatric and psychological concepts and diagnoses provided the best explanations and paths to resolution.

Garfield (1996) explains that dreams about the deceased tend to vary based on where the mourner is in the grieving process; how long the loved one has been gone, our relationship with them, and how they died. Wray (2005), who has done extensive research on dreams, identifies four of the most common types of grief dreams. The first is the visitation dream in which the deceased comes to spend time with the bereaved. Next is the message dream. Here the deceased appears in our dreams to give us information, alert us to a situation, or simply tell us that they love us. Reassurance dreams, the third type, are those in which the message is comforting and positive. In fact, most grief dreams are positive. Wray's final type of dream category is trauma dream, which can be distressing. These tend to occur when death has been particularly disturbing such as with murder or an accident.



According to the DSM-5-TR (2022), the criteria for prolonged grief disorder include distressing symptoms of grief that continue for at least 12 months following the loss of a close attachment and that the grief response is characterised by intense longing/yearning for the deceased person and/or preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the lost person to a clinically significant (ie, impairing) degree, nearly every day for at least the past month. Moreso, as a result of the death, at least 3 of the 8 symptoms identified by the DSM-5-TR must be present. The burden of these symptoms causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The duration and severity of the bereavement clearly exceeds social, cultural, or religious norms for the individual's culture and context. In addition, the symptoms are not better explained by major depressive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, or attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (eg, medication or alcohol) or to another medical condition. However, the DSM does not state whether or not dreams about a deceased loved one culturally differ especially in Africa. It is noteworthy that the DSM is heavily influenced by Western Psychologies.

Across Africa, different tribes have unique beliefs about the dead and continuing bonds. According to Ivy (2020), in Kenya, the Luhya have various beliefs regarding to death. This is from their profound belief that an outcome of something or just an undertaking that is crucial and which might happen in a future that is not so far could be easily told through various portents or omens. One of the most common presages in this tribe includes the sighting of an antelope. This to the Luhya people implies that the person will be very lucky on his or her journey. Unfortunately, however, should one see a night owl while on a journey, then that is a signal of a looming death in the family. This harmful omen must be driven away therefore by the use of a firebrand. On the same note, should an owl be heard near one's homestead, it would as well be a signal of a looming death in that homestead, and therefore a firebrand has to be used again to drive the owl away. During the whole mourning period, especially before the burial of a deceased person, a bonfire is usually lit. Two days prior to the burial of a deceased person, especially if the person was fully grown and was capable of making his or her own decisions, some matters relating to debts that a deceased person had are discussed. At the bonfire, it is agreed on who is to pay any debts that the deceased was holding prior to their death.

Death in Igbo African ontology is a continuum (Anuolam, 1993). The dead continue to exist in the consciousness of the living. Existentially, the community does not consider them gone and lost (Ikwueme & Onwuegbuna, 2018). Since death is at the very core of the meaning of existence among men, Ndigbo deciphered the meaning of death from the concept of self in Igbo ontology. Subsequently, the meaning of death cannot be grasped without understanding the concept of self in Igbo ontology. Since death is the ultimate experience of the self, it is necessary for its meaning to be derived from the interpretation of the self.

Mbiti (1990), in his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, aptly captured the Luo belief about death when he wrote, "Death is conceived as a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. The only major change is the decay of the physical body, but the spirit continues to live within the community." The Luos believe that life begins in immortality and ends in immortality. This cycle starts at *tipo* (spirit) to *ringre* (body) and back to *tipo* (spirit). Therefore, death is merely a rite of passage, an opening to another life. When one dies, the only variation is that the body perishes, while the spirit lives on, retaining the individual's identity. A family or community which is faced with a kind of death, must learn to adjust to the loss of



a loved one. This process of adjustment takes time. According to Okpalaenwe (2017), strangers do not recognize this, and feel that it should be a time for you to get over it and rejoin the land of the living...they don't just get it.

Dreams are parts and parcels of human life and experience. They could be very normal and healthy parts of every human being. However, though they could be full of meanings, it can be very difficult or even impossible to understand them fully because they speak to us in symbolic and imagery languages. They tell us something about ourselves and about our significant others. Some major questions one can ask himself/herself after a dream are as follows: what does this dream mean? Where does it come from? Hence, dreams are subject to different and diverse interpretations depending on cultures, religions, worldviews, and theories. If you are to understand someone's dream, you need to understand that person; by listening to him/her deeply and sharing his/her context. Dreams have a meaning, but this meaning is centred in the dreamer and his/her worldview; and they can have a significant impact on the dreamer's waking life.

However, few studies have investigated the long-term effect and role of dreams during the grieving process among African communities. Thus, this paper attempts to explore the concepts concerning dreams about the dead in grief process among selected African communities.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study was to assess the role of dreams in grief process among selected communities in Africa.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by Nyerere's philosophy of *Ujamaa*. Julius Kambarage Nyerere proposes *Ujamaa*, meaning familyhood—the “being-with” philosophy or the “we” instead of the “I—spirit” (Okoro, 2004). Hallen (2002) opined that Nyerere argued that there was a form of life and system of values indigenous to the culture of pre-colonial Africa, that was distinctive if not unique and that had survived the onslaughts of colonialism sufficiently intact to be regenerated as the basis for an African polity. Thus, for Nyerere, the basis of African identity is the African culture, which is communal rather than individualistic. Nyerere was in agreement with other actors of this period on the path to full recovery of Africa's lost identity.

The concept of *Ujamaa*, when applied to this study, underscores the centrality of family hood and unity between living and dead members of the community. Thus, it seeks to re-establish the precolonial communal values of traditional African society with the community at its core. The translation of *Ujamma* as “family hood” then reveals its meaning which transcends the idea of the nuclear family and recognizes the family to which we all belong. This family is beyond the tribe, the community, the nation, or even the continent to embrace the whole society of mankind, alive or dead.



## METHODOLOGY

The researchers used a qualitative paradigm and phenomenology approach. Data collection was carried out through interviews and focused group discussions, which were recorded and transcribed following all the professional and ethical procedures and considerations. The target population were people from six African cultures; Igbo (Nigeria), Tabwa (Democratic Republic of Congo), Muganda (Angola), Agni Morofoue (Cote D'ivoire), Luo (Kenya), and Gusii (Kenya). Using a purposive sampling technique, data were collected from 31 persons, 5 from each selected community, using an in-depth interview guide. The inclusion criterion for this study was that the participant must have experienced dreaming about the deceased. Gender equality was considered when choosing the respondents. Each of the respondents described the dream and its attached meaning. Then, two community elders interpreted the dreams and gave the community meaning. The use of qualitative methods for this study facilitated the gathering of narratives data related to the participants' cultural experiences. Themes that emerged based on the recurrence of responses to in-depth questions among the study participants were descriptively and thematically analysed.

The researchers ensured the trustworthiness of the qualitative research instruments before the data collection process by thoroughly passing through expert checks at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Department of Counseling Psychology. The researchers also presented preliminary data collected, and analyzed to the respondents so that they could ascertain that they are a true representation of their experience. Finally, the data were transcribed, coded and themes extracted for interpretation and recommendations.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1. Demographic Variables of the Participants**

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	16-30 years	4	12.9%
	31- 40 years	5	16.1%
	41- 60 years	13	51.6%
	61 and above	9	29.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	15	48.4
	Female	16	51.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results in Table 1 show that the age of the participants was evenly distributed from 16 years old to above 61 years old. The genders were also complimentary. This indicates that the phenomenon of dreams in grief is experienced by people of different age brackets and genders. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) asserts that gender inclusion in research is a key factor in determining whether society is healthy.



The findings of the study were presented according to themes that arose from the data analysis. Themes including comfort, encouragement, warning, revelation, and spiritual presence during grief process were recurrent during data analysis.

### **Comfort**

Participants reported experiencing dreams that brought a sense of comfort, reassurance, and solace. These dreams often involved the deceased offering guidance, support, or simply a comforting presence during challenging times. Dreams that relate to the theme of comfort were described by participants as follows;

*“In my dream, I saw that my late grandmother was clothed in white from top to bottom and she was seated among many other people clothed in white. This gathering seemed to be a celebration because some of them were laughing and dancing. This dream has consoled and comforted me. I feel peace and great joy in my heart. I think that my grandmother is in a better place, a more comfortable one. She is happy”* (Participant AM05, Personal Communication 24/11/2023).

*“My husband was coming to talk to me and ask me to take care of the children. Whenever I had some challenges with my family, he came to comfort me. The dreams gave me some happiness as I was missing my husband. At the same time, the dreams were creating a sense of missing him and remembering him all the time”* (Participant TA02, Interview 24/12/2023).

*“(In my dream), we were in a group gathering, and he (my brother) appeared smiling and very happy. He started sharing jokes. His bright, wide smile and the humour he brought made me believe that he is happy wherever he is. In a positive way I felt calm seeing him happy”* (Participant LU01, Personal Communication 27/12/2023).

*“Two years after her death, I met my mother (in my dream) wearing a wedding gown. She advised me to be of good cheer. She spoke to me tenderly. A white gown signifies peace, harmony and concern with loved ones on earth. Speaking tenderly signifies intimacy and love. The white gown and her tenderness comforted me knowing that she was at peace. I grieved less over her departure”* (Participant IG06, In-depth Interview 02/01/2024).

Although the symbols in the dreams may differ, the feeling of comfort was reported by the participants. Dreams served as means of reaffirming and reassurance.

### **Encouragement**

Dreams may also convey messages of encouragement, motivating the dreamer to persevere through difficulties. Deceased loved ones may provide guidance and words of affirmation, instilling a sense of confidence and strength. Participants narrated their dreams and the images in the dreams;

*“So I could see him (my grandfather) in a dream, coming to me, hugging me like a father. So in that dream, I could experience some joy... we could share a lot. Now that I was serving in a distant country, he could always ask how is life out there, and I could remember the kind of challenges I was passing through, I could share with him. So in the process of trying to give me solutions to such problems, I could feel relieved. But now, being a dream”* (Participant GU02, Personal Communication 27/12/2023).



*“I saw my father dressed in a white robe. He conversed with me and assured me that the hard times I was facing would soon be over. Then, I awoke... White robe stands for peace and harmony. The dream encouraged me to continue the struggle”* (Participant IG04, In-depth Interview 27/10/2023).

### **Warning against Impending Dangers**

Dreams are often perceived as a conduit for forewarning. Deceased loved ones may appear in dreams to convey messages of caution, advising the dreamer about potential dangers or challenges on the horizon. Participants who had this experience describe them as follows:

*“I saw a casket with my father inside being carried on the head and a crowd of angry mob moving into the village. Casket means death, danger, or trouble for the family. Mob, not in procession means communal crisis”* (Participant IG03, Personal Communication 29/11/2023).

*“About one year before the birth of my baby boy, I dreamt that my wife had delivered a baby boy, but the child died after delivery. As soon as I saw him packed in a carton for burial, I wept then I woke up. Birth of a baby means rejoicing for the family. Death of the baby means danger and fear for the life of the little one. Sight of the corpse indicates a close relationship with the departed. Burial of the dead means the death of the boy. The dream deepened my grief and devastated me emotionally”* (Participant IG05, Personal Communication 02/01/2024).

*“My dad warned me in a dream about a particular danger in the family, which was a disaster that would happen through a thunder storm. My dad was a catechist, and he tasked me as the eldest son to avert this danger by warning my brothers who were yet to repent”* (Participant GU03, Personal Communication 04/01/2024).

### **Revelation of an Evil Past**

Some dreams may serve as a means of revelation, uncovering hidden or suppressed information about the deceased individual's past. These dreams can bring closure, understanding, or the opportunity for forgiveness.

*“In my dream I saw my late wife seated in the middle of the compound crying. She was clothed in red robe and was weeping bitterly which made me also cry in the dream. I woke up with tears flowing from my eyes. I feel like the death of my wife was not simple and natural death”* (Participant AM01, Personal Communication 29/11/2023).

*“I saw my sister in a dream, and she requested for postmortem. This made me doubt the cause of her death. I feel her spirit needed to be appeased.”* (Participant LU04, Personal Communication 27/12/2023).

### **Specific Instructions**

Dreams about the deceased may contain specific instructions for the dreamer. In this case, the dreamer may understand such instructions or requests that are not shrouded in symbols. As some participants narrated, the dreams contained instructions that were either interpreted or later understood without interpretation.

*“This particular one is about my mother...she came in my dream and talked to me and she was telling me obviously about living harmoniously, love of everybody, much of she said was about*



*peace, harmony, family. And then in the end, she gave me a request. She asked me to take care of my younger brother” (Participant GU01, Personal Communication 27/12/2023).*

*“The dream was about my father telling me to be responsible for the whole family. He took me to the various parts of the farm and showed me the area of each of his wives (my mothers) as I am the first born in the family” (Participant LU03, Personal Communication 27/12/2023).*

*“I dreamt that I was under a pear tree plucking bitter leaves. My elder sister who died after a brief illness came and gave me a basket filled with fresh pear and told me to share it with my brother. Then, I woke up from sleep. I felt refreshed seeing her in my dream as she brought so much comfort to me. My community believes that whenever a loved dead one appears to you, he/she wants to reveal some important things to you” (Participant IG01, Personal Communication 29/11/2023).*

### **Spiritual Presence**

Dreams may also serve as a direct encounter with the spiritual realm, emphasizing the ongoing connection between the living and the deceased. The dreamer may feel the palpable presence of the departed, fostering a sense of continuity and interconnectedness.

*“Several times, like more than three times, my husband comes at night in my dreams. Last night he came and told me to get him something to eat. After we had eaten, he slept with me in the same bed and we ended up with having sexual intercourse....Our community holds the view that the dead are still with/among us. So we believe in the spiritual presence of all who have physically left this world.” (Participant AM01, Personal Communication 24/11/2023).*

*“Ten years later after my mum's burial, I had a dream that she came back home, but never spoke with me or any of us. The dream made me aware that, though mum is physically dead but spiritually alive and with us. It helped me heal from grieving period.” (Participant LU03, Personal Communication 27/12/2023).*

### **Importance of Dreams**

Dreams are considered a powerful medium for communication with the spiritual realm, especially with the deceased. All participants shared the cultural and spiritual importance of dreams in their communities and the role of dreams in connecting the living with their dead loved ones. Participants described this importance in the following words;

*“My community believes that dreams are real and not just imagination. It can bring blessing or curse. It is very important because the dreams will determine how people will live and handle each situation... The dead are not far from our community. They are part of the family and community.” (Participants MU02 & MU03, In-depth Interview 23/12/2023).*

*“The community attaches a great importance to dreams. We believe that dead people talk to the family through dreams.... The fact that I did not have dreams about my dead wife became an issue in the family. I was given many qualifications. They were saying that I was not loving her; that I had done something for not dreaming about her. This situation provoked my frustration and depression” (Respondents TA02 & TA05, Interview 24/12/2023).*





*“Dreaming about a deceased brings some concerns but also consolation, depending on the content of that dream. In this case, it calls for more attention and care for the place where the deceased was laid to rest”* (Respondents AM03, Interview 24/11/2023).

### **Positive and Negative Image Interpretations**

Dream interpreters shared their experiences of how dream images can be positively or negatively interpreted and their impact on the dreamer's emotional well-being and sense of connection.

*“Dreams can be interpreted negatively or positively, depending on the meaning the community and the dreamer give to the symbols and images in the dream, and the meanings attached to them. They can be sources of worries, healing, consolation, blame, sorrow among others”* (Participant AM01, Personal Communication 24/11/2023).

*“According to the Gusii culture, dreams can be positive (if an elderly person dies in good terms with his family or people, clan etc., they say he passes on “lying or sleeping on the right side (orarire buya)”). In this case, there is a celebration. However, when an elder dies with unresolved issue against his family or neighbor, he is termed to sleep on the left side. In this case, there is need for sacrifices to ward of misfortunes and bad dreams that may follow”* (Participant GU05, In-depth interview 04/01/2024).

### **Altered Image Interpretation**

Altered image interpretation of dreams involve unique or unconventional images that challenge traditional interpretations. This section investigates instances where dreamers encounter altered representations of the deceased, exploring the cultural, psychological, and spiritual implications of such experiences.

*“I saw grandfather in my dream. He had come to visit us at home. But he was full of human feces. He came and was holding my hand asking me if I were well and whether our needs are catered for. As I wanted to call my parents to come and see him, I woke up.... Human feces mean prosperity, success and richness”* (Participant AM06, Personal Communication 24/11/2023).

*“My dream about my father came one week before his death. I saw him dressed in white and sitting on an elevated place (like a mountain) with signs of cloud around him. My dad spoke to me telling me “allow me my boy to go just like my fathers have gone”. On waking up, I was troubled with the meaning of the dream, imagining that my dad could be dead. Having used a lot of resources during his health challenge, it seemed he was appreciating me for the care I accorded him. However, the message I received that morning from home was that my dad looked well and wanted me to share a meal with him. This triggered mixed emotions in me.”* (Participant GU04, Personal Communication 04/01/2024).

As one dream interpreter rightly highlighted;

*“Sometimes, images in dreams are considered an opposite of the reality. Hence, deep grief in a dream can mean joy for the living. On the contrary, joy in dreams can denote grief in reality”* (Participant IG03, Personal Communication 29/11/2023).



## Communal Healing Techniques

Dreams serve as a collective experience that transcends individual boundaries. Some communal healing techniques employed within African societies to navigate grief, support one another, and foster a sense of interconnectedness were shared by the respondents.

*Many things could be done when one encounters negative images in a dream about a deceased. However, in this specific case, the bereaved, the dreamer (the wife) should cook some food especially what her husband loved and leave some for him in the sitting room (at the area where he used to seat to eat) and take another portion to the grave of the husband. Some prayers of purification and libation should be made to chase away any evil spirit (Participant AM01, Personal Communication 24/11/2023).*

This healing technique is also corroborated by other respondents who explained that:

*“The community prays to the ancestors. Sometimes there is a need to beat the dreamer with a cane, smoothly, as a way to drive away any misfortune. The community also could place a plate with food for the dead person to get fed” (Participant MU01, In-depth Interview 23/12/2023).*

*“Most of the time, the community gives some relief activities and rituals. They might give the dreamer a company in order for him/her to forget about the deceased. They can recommend someone to move to their family home in order to be with others, or ask siblings to come and stay with the widow or widower. In special cases, rituals are practiced” (Respondent TA05, Interview 24/12/2023).*

*“Some people offer ritualistic sacrifices. Some people use sacrifices to ward off warnings that accompany a dream... Traditional dream interpreters are usually sought to explain the meaning of the images in a dream. The community will consider the person who had contact with the departed as having something to do with the death of the deceased. They may subject the dreamer to various means to establish the cause of the death” (Participant GU01 and IG04, In-depth Interview 27/10/2023; 24/12/2023).*

## DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study synergize with the belief among African communities that there is an inseparable communion between the two worlds of the living and the living-dead which denotes a sense of cosmic oneness as reported in the findings. Metuh (1987) explains that there is a continuous exchange and interaction between beings in the universe irrespective of the realm (visible or invisible) to which they belong. Just as the Christian hope in the resurrection of the dead helps to explain reasonably the idea of life after death, so also, has the belief in the continuous interaction between the living and the living dead among Africans helped to rekindle the hope in the life after death. This idea also translates into the hope that everything does not end in death, but that death is only a temporary separation and a transition into a continuous existence in the world of the living dead (Mmaju, 2022). Because of this belief that the dead members of the family are not completely gone, but remain part of the family, some cultures in Africa choose to bury their dead family members inside the house or in front of the main house. This further drum home the message that the deceased is still a member of the family, whether in life or in death.



From the results of this study, one must recognize that death and grief in the African culture are not merely events that happen on the surface. Just as Balk (1999), Benore & Park (2004) and Frankl (1959) noted in the literature, deaths in the African culture present moments of meaning making. Some deaths pose a challenge to individuals and communities because the events surrounding such death seem to make no meaning. Therefore, the individual or community seek to find meaning about such death through dreams.

In the reviewed literature, Wray (2005) identified four of the most common types of grief dreams. These include visitation dreams, message dreams, reassurance dreams, and trauma dreams. This research tends to agree with Wray that most dreams about a deceased loved one fall under the reassurance types where the dream is mostly positive. However, it also disagrees that trauma dreams occur when the death has been particularly disturbing as with murder or an accident. This is because, from the results of this study, the deceased can send a message about an impending doom or reveal something which is not related to his or her death.

The data from this study also support the idea of Sanford (1978) that dreams may refer to relationships with other people. A dream of a familiar person always raises the question of whether the dream refers to our relationship with that person, or whether that person represents a like quality in us. Only the total context of a particular dream would be able to provide answers to the questions. Despite these, the images in dreams contain a healing power. Healing in dreams becomes evident if the dreamer is in danger of being overwhelmed. In other words, dreams help individuals direct their attention towards something. As Sanford (1978) puts it; a dream gives us an image of what it is we should ponder. In this way, dreams can lift us beyond the narrow confines of our ordinary conscious life, and present us with a larger picture (p.34).

Dreams have played a significant role in African cultures, serving as a bridge between the living and the deceased. The belief in the spiritual realm's influence on dreams is deeply rooted in many African societies, where ancestors are revered and considered vital intermediaries between the earthly and supernatural realms. The nature of dreams involving deceased individuals and the diverse themes that emerged in this study show the rich understanding of the complex interplay between dreams and the deceased in African cultures.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributed to a broader understanding of dreams in African cultures, specifically those involving deceased individuals. Although Western psychologies may perceive the experiences of dreaming about the deceased as pathological, the owners of these experience in Africa do not see it as such. Therefore, this shows how important these experiences could be in grief work and healing.

The effort to interpret and understand dreams in the context of grief process is not equivalent to solving a mathematical equation, in which a single, unambiguous result is produced at the end of the process. Dream interpretation is a situation where a detailed analysis is combined with empathetic intuition and creative imagination. Dreams are always rooted in the personal life of the dreamer, so attention must be given to the current life circumstances of the dreamer, including his or her personality characteristics, family life, physical health, and romantic relationships.



This study recommends similar studies on the topic with a larger sample size and longitudinal studies with other African cultures.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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