Douglas Davies' Transcultural Model of Grief

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Grief research on continuing emotional bonds between the deceased and the bereaved has mainly used concepts and theories developed in the Western world with a few exceptions from the Majority world as well. The concept of dividuality or multiple personhood of a bereaved person is used in various Asian societies. The aim of this chapter is to analyse what Davies means with his model and to evaluate the transcultural nature of it. The results of this chapter show that Davies stresses embodied rituals because the starting point of dividual personhood is the inner complexity of a person. Davies challenges a Western word-centred individual to reconstruct identity and find new meaning in life after bereavement. Dividual grief is a good beginning when searching for transcultural models of grief. It is, however, not based on first-hand empirical research on a specific culture, which makes the transcultural aspects in it very descriptive. I am waiting for practical theological colleagues from the Majority world to start formulating models of grief based on their own cultural backgrounds. Models that are strongly grounded in a specific culture are really needed in order to understand such a central theological topic.

Introduction

Grief research has focused on continuing emotional bonds between the deceased and the bereaved for the past twenty years (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996; Valentine 2008; Klass 2006). This research has mainly used concepts and theories developed in the Western world with a few exceptions from the Majority world as well (Steffen and Klass 2018; Evans et al, 2017). Another example of searching for transcultural aspects of grief is the new dividual grief model of Douglas Davies. The concept of dividuality or multiple personhood of a bereaved person is used in various Asian societies (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988). The aim of this chapter is to analyse what Davies means with his model and to evaluate the transcultural nature of it. I use the concept transcultural and not the more widely used transnational, since the focus is on cultural elements connected with grief and not on physical border crossings as such (Purnell 2012). I will not link this paper into the discussion on decoloniality, which to-

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gether with the discussion of transculturality, would be too extensive to cover in a single chapter.

Professor of religious studies Douglas Davies from Durham University in the UK has studied various aspects of death and dying (see for example Davies 2004; 2008; 2015b) but only a few have studied his writings. Barry Fry only touches on grief in his study on Davies' "words against death" theory (Fry 2015). Terence Turner studies Davies' analyses on grief but this is before his formulation of the dividual model (Turner 2005). Davies received a commem-

orative volume for his long career; two of the articles in it deal with rituals of death. Anders Bäckström compares the Swedish and British funeral rituals and Valerie DeMarinis describes rituals connected with abortion (Bäckström 2017; DeMarinis 2017); neither of them examines grief. I found that there is a significant gap in knowledge and thus wanted to focus on those publications of Davies' that deal with grief and especially, dividual grief.

Data and Method

Two books and one article of Douglas Davies' that deal with grief form the data of this chapter. The first and most important source is the 3rd edition of *Death, Ritual and Belief* in which the dividual model is explicitly introduced in chapter three (Davies 2017, 75–78.) The previous editions from 1997 and 2002 dealt correspondingly with grief but in them Davies had not yet introduced the model. The other book that is central for the topic is *Emotion, Identity and Religion* in which Davies discusses grief in detail in chapter four (Davies 2011, 95–120). The third source is an article entitled "Emotions, Grief, and Reality-Unreality in Human Mortality," which seems to work as a background for dividuality (Davies 2015a). In these two earlier sources, Davies does not yet use the notion of dividual but already connects grief to communities, reciprocity, and to the discussion on continuing bonds. In order to understand Davies' model fully, the other parts of these written sources are important, not just those parts in which he explicitly deals with grief. In addition to the written material, I have discussed the model with Douglas Davies.[1] These discussions were not documented research interviews; therefore, I will not have direct reference to them.

I analysed the data using systematic concept analysis and focused on the main concepts and how Davies uses them (Nuopponen 2011). I gave special attention to the cultural background of the notion of dividuality which is also the starting point of this chapter. Subsequently, I discuss rituals of memory and meaning making after bereavement. The chapter is wrapped up by an evaluation of the transcultural elements of the model.

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Dividual identity and relationships with the bereaved

The starting point of dividuality is an approach to personhood that is radically social. Davies found the notion of dividuality through reading the work of McKim Marriott in India where he found that a person was not defined as an individual but as a dividual person (Marriott 1976; Davies 2017, 75). In addition to Marriott, Davies refers to Marilyn Strathern and her studies in Melanesia. Probably the most quoted definition of a Melanesian person can be found in Strathern's work: "Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them" (Strathern 1988, 12). Strathern's definition notes that a dividual person is at the same time also an individual, which is not much discussed by Davies. Strathern additionally stresses that multiple personhood symbolizes collective life as a unity (Strathern 1988, 13). This collective approach is essential in order to understand dividuality.

In addition to relationships, Davies defines dividuality from an intrapersonal perspective in which the complexity of the inner identities of a person are central (Davies 2017, 75–76). This aspect of complex inner identities of a dividual person Davies explains further with the following quotation in which he refers to both Marriott and Christine Valentine: "Marriott argued that … understanding many aspects of social life in India would be enhanced by approaching the notion of a person not as individual but as 'dividual'. In this context, echoing Valentine above, 'individual' described a person as self-contained and, despite networks with other individuals, remaining firmly bounded and almost insular" (Davies 2017, 75; see also Valentine 2008, 4–5, 83, 104). Davies further clarifies the complex inner identities of a person with a reference to Durkheim's notion of *Homo duplex*. Davies writes, "… society is so represented with an individual as to lead to a more expansive sense of embodiment" (Davies 2017, 76; see also Durkheim 1915). Relations are thus important to the dividual person but dividuality is more than just what a person's relations are since the inner processes of a person are an important part of the model.

Davies continues to discuss the difference between an individual and a dividual person: "… the dividual person is a more dynamic and interactive entity than the individual. … our interplay with the worlds around us matters a great deal in making us who we are and making it what it is" (Davies 2017, 76). In addition to the interplay with a person and their surroundings, dividuality seem to point to the continuing bond between the bereaved and the deceased person (Davies 2017, 75–76).

In other parts of *Death, Ritual and Belief*, Davies gives the impression that there is also a communal dimension of grief in the definition of dividuality (Davies 2017, 22, 51). In other words, he not only focuses on the emotional bond between the bereaved and the deceased persons but also on the role of other members of the grieving community. Davies does not, however, explicitly refer to communal aspects of grief while defining dividuality. This communal aspect of grief is important in individualized Western contexts.

According to Davies, grief involves emotions connected with death in which there is both a personal and social dimension. When stressing the social and religious identity of a dividual person, Davies refers frequently to Emile Durkheim (Davies 2017, 64; Durkheim 1915). Additional central theoretical backgrounds are the psychological theories of attachment of Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby (Freud 1984; Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1980). Davies makes a clear division from Freud and his use of grief work and seems to put more stress on communal support of grief than on individually focused grief work. Davies links communal support with funeral and memorial rituals (Davies 2017, 56–57). Davies is much more positive towards Bowlby's attachment theories and seems to build dividuality partly on that.

Davies criticizes the Western postmodern emphasis on individualism, and, from that point of view, his choice to search for terminology from non-Western communal cultures makes more sense. According to Davies, grief has become increasingly individualised especially in Western societies (Davies 2017, 75). Davies is the first to utilize the dividual concept in grief research, but, as discussed previously, he did not invent the notion, as it has been utilized in other research previously.

Post Mortem Bonds in Rituals of Memory

Rituals are valuable as part of grief support, Davies proposes (Davies 2017, 75). He further explains that the rituals of memory influence a person holistically and acknowledge the body (Davies 2017, 198–199; Davies 2011, 1, 52, 247–249). This makes rituals especially important in bereavement. Narrative memory is hence an important part of Douglas Davies' dividual model. He explains this aspect further when referring to studies on biography in bereavement (Walter 1996; Walter 1999). Davies perceives autobiography as an important tool for memory through which the bereaved can reconstruct a bereavement narrative of the lost loved one. In many non-Western societies, memory and oral narratives are a natural form of grief therapy, which is revealed by recent research as well (Nwoye and Chinwe 2012; Nwoye 2005).

Davies argues that embodiment is central in grief in which the bereaved reconstructs holistically their own life history and relationship to the deceased (Davies 2017, 74; Davies 2011, 103). Davies explains this reconstruction of identity with a reference to Christine Valentine's *Bereavement Narratives*. Davies writes, "She describes how some interviews seemed to create 'space for the deceased person', so much so that she gained 'a feeling of his or her presence between us'" (Davies 2017, 74 refers to Valentine 2008, 172). At the beginning of her book Valentine further explains her approach to grief: "Instead it recognises how people's relationships with their loved ones may survive the life-death boundary, the focus being placed on how bereaved people make sense of, and manage, the changed nature of their relationship with deceased loved ones. Bereavement is thus conceptualised as an ongoing process of negotiation and meaning-making" (Valentine 2008, 3–4). With these examples, Davies connects dividual grief to the traditions of continuing bonds and rituals of memory.

Davies proposes that funeral and other memorial rituals help to work through emotions; in his words, "Funeral ritual and events following death help channel these emotional changes of relationship to the otherness of others and reveal the value of reciprocity for understanding emotion and memory" (Davies 2011, 103). According to Davies, among those religious traditions that motivate beliefs on afterlife, hope of eternal life is also included among these emotions (Davies 2011, 103; Bäckström 2017). In the previous references to the two sources of this

chapter, Davies explicitly discusses religious identity, life after death, and the connection between rituals and the transcendent. In other parts of these books, he connects them more implicitly with dividual grief.

Davies discusses the rituals of memory on a theoretical level and does not refer to empirical studies on rituals of grief even though such studies are available. Here I would mention two studies on personalization of funeral rituals that fit well into dividuality (Ramshaw 2010; Schäfer 2007). These studies deal with the questions of memory through ritual and investigate in what way personalization can increase the relational process of bereavement. Additionally, they suggest that personalized rituals, which include aspects of memory and biography, make it even more meaningful to the participants. These are all things that the dividual model also stresses.

Davies discusses reconstruction of identity through rituals of memory, but he does not consider whether transformation of the bond is part of the dividual grief model (Davies 2017, 74). Recent grief research has purported that the question is not solely one of reconstruction but rather of transformation of the bond through various rituals. For example, Brenda Mathijssen found in her study among bereaved people in the Netherlands that not all bereaved people wanted to continue the bond with the deceased. According to Mathijssen, continuing the bond is not the goal for all bereaved, but instead, many see a need to transform the relationship with the deceased and to find new relationships in their lives as well. This transformation of a relationship was possible through everyday rituals of clearing the home of some of the objects of the deceased and changing the place of photos (Mathijssen 2018, 2–4, 5–8).

According to the dividual model of grief, the bereaved receives support through rituals of memory. Davies seems to see the bond between the deceased and the bereaved as continuous and accordingly does not indicate a need to transform this bond. In order to gain a full picture of the model, the following section studies Davies' understanding of meaning making after bereavement.

Meaning making after bereavement

Meaning making after bereavement is central to Davies' dividuality even though he does not deal with

it in the short chapter in which he defines the model. In his other book, *Emotion, Identity and Religion,* he ultimately links grief and meaning making together (Davies 2011, 84, 96, 99). Additionally, the subheadings of both books include existential questions with words of faith and hope. According to Davies, the attachment bond to the bereaved had been so meaningful that there is a need to relate this loss to meaning in life (Davies 2017, 57). These questions are also central for practical theology (Louw 2014; Lester 1995).

Davies refers to Durkheim's notion of *anomie*, which, according to him, explains the emotions of the bereaved. In the words of Davies, "… grief involves a kind of anomie, as a person experiences a decrease in vitality and a corresponding depletion in identity" (Davies 2011, 98). According to Davies, it is important that the bereaved does not remain in a feeling of powerlessness but through the rituals of memory and through the support of a community can find new meaning in life. Davies purports that grief is not a sickness but is a normal part of life (Davies 2017, 65–67). This approach seems to imply that the positive emotions are strongly represented in the dividual model in comparison, for example, to the attachment theory of John Bowlby which otherwise seems to be central to Davies. Bowlby's second volume is titled *Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (Bowlby 1973) and the third volume is *Sadness and Depression* (Bowlby 1980). Davies deals correspondingly with negative emotions in his writings; for example, while he discussed hope, he also considers hopelessness (Davies 2017, 89; Davies 2011, 200–203). Guilt is another emotion that can be grouped under negative emotions (Davies 2017, 55, 215). Davies' model of grief deals with grief that is a normal part of everyday life, not with traumatized grief which needs treatment.

Regarding more positive emotions, Davies suggests that the bereaved has to hold on to a sense of reality even during grief and mourning (Davies 2015a, 14). In order to explain what the sense of reality means, Davies quotes Clive Seale's argument that "takes grief to be but an extreme version of an everyday experience of 'grief' which is routinely worked upon in order to turn the psyche away from awareness of Mortality and continuation in life" (Seale 1998, 211 *apud* Davies 2015a, 14). This discussion comes very close to the "words against death" theory which Davies described in the second edition of *Death, Ritual and Belief.* The basic idea there is that rituals work as words against death, meaning

that through rituals a person does not focus excessively on the reality of death but also notes that life goes on even though bereavement has happened. Davies shares the notion of the importance of keeping a sense of reality and continuing with life routines in both of the source books of this paper (Davies 2011, 105–107; Davies 2017, 50–51). In Davies' model the dividual person thus reconstructs his/her identity after the bereavement, and this helps not to remain in the sorrow of grief for too long but instead to focus on the future as well. A similar trend is seen in parts of Africa, where the focus is on the spiritual nature of healing in grieving and in the resources the community offers to bereaved persons (Nwoye 2005).

Missing transcultural elements

Davies gives quite an optimistic picture of a dividual person. Other researchers of dividuality have been more critical in their analysis and have pointed out how partly contradicting identities of dividual and individual personhood influence the decisions and behaviour of a person (Hess 2006; Smith 2016). Furthermore, Davies seems to romanticize dividuality and does not consider the negative aspects of relational personhood. Relational personhood is also quite vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Brown 2006, 178). Dividual and partible personhood are closely related notions of the fractal person (Smith 2016, 671). Overall, dividuality in these studies which were based on empirical data from those contexts were the notion of dividuality is widely used, also involves negative emotions and fear, contradictory to Davies' use of the notion. Similar critical findings on relationality in the African context can be found from practical theologian Ester Acolatse. Acolatse formulates a new African relationality, which is partly based on traditional communality but acknowledges needs of our contemporary situation. She is especially critical towards gender inequality in traditional African societies (Acolatse 2009; 2010). There are also those African scholars, who are in line with Davies and promote the harmony of traditional societies without criticism (Chisale 2018). In my observation, Acolatse´s critical view, especially towards gender inequality, could also be applied to the notion of dividuality.

An important transcultural aspect of the continuing bond: a discussion on ancestors, is missing from Davies' model. When defining dividual grief,

Davies does not refer to ancestors even though in other parts of the *Death, Ritual and Belief* book he discusses ancestral beliefs in various cultures (Davies 2017, 33, 103, 109–136, 143). Other researchers stress that the role of ancestors is strong in dividuality and the bereaved have a responsibility to conduct burial rituals; otherwise, the deceased will not end up among the living dead but stay in between to bother those on earth. The examples concerning burial rituals of dividual persons also involve fear and negative feelings, not just the positive side of communal support (Hess 2006, 289–290, 293–294). Anglican bishop of Malaita, Terry Brown stresses that relationships with ancestors, not just relationships with those still living on earth are very important (Brown 2006, 174–175). Further, Brown connects the discussion of dividual personhood into theological discussions on Greek word *koinonia*. many times translated as fellowship or community. According to him, dividual personhood including ancestral beliefs, both positively and negatively affects how one understands and lives *koinonia* (Brown 2006, 178–179). Brown, thus, also raises a critical voice towards traditional notions of communality.

Davies' use of the dividual notion disjointedly from its cultural context brings some difficulties to the model as was discussed above. This is one of the challenges when using elements from another culture without studying the context accurately.

The contribution of dividuality to grief research

Davies constructs his model on the identity feature of attachment theories and additionally on some elements in the continuing bonds and narrative theories of grief, as has been previously discussed. Combining these various perspectives is essential in grief research even though Davies does not yet give a clear picture of how dividuality unites these perspectives in practice and what it means to the life situation of a grieving individual. Moreover, Davies is not the first to unite these perspectives when studying grief. For example, Cyril Schäfer came to the conclusion, in his study on New Zealand funeral directors' understanding of grief, that continuing bonds and narratives of memory are essential parts of personalized funerals (Schäfer 2007, 17). This was ten years before he wrote about dividual grief, which shows that it is not all that unique as a conceptuali-

sation. What is supplementary in Davies' model is the strong link to attachment and discussions of how this affects the reconstruction of the inner complexity of dividual personhood. Similar insights on multiple personhood and its effects to pastoral counselling is seen in Pamela Cooper-White´s relational theology (Cooper-White 2004; 2011).

It is essential that Davies includes meaning reconstruction in his model. It is an important opening towards studying meaning making in bereavement even though he does not yet operationalize specific study designs nor does he reflect on the implications for clinical practice. James Gillies and Robert Neimeyer (Gillies and Neymeyer 2006, 44–49, 53–56) designed an integrated model of meaning reconstruction pathways based on large sample of previous studies and identified three activities of meaning reconstruction in the grieving process: sense making, benefit finding, and identity change. Davies' dividual model contributes to at least two of these, specifically, to sense making through rituals of memory and identity change, which in dividuality is essential.

The existential discussion connected to dividuality could have been more transparent. In particular, when the primary concept of dividuality is transcultural, the existential discussion could also include transcultural issues of grief as Valentine, for example, does in her study (Valentine 2008, 4). Another topic connected with the existential discussion that simultaneously raises interest and some misgiving, is the practice of speaking against death. Tara Bailey and Tony Walter have gone even further in their analyses of funerals as rituals against death and they write: "Whereas Davies analyses the power of professionally delivered ritual words against death, our data reveals how admired is the courage exercised by non-professionals in speaking against death…We thus argue that funerals symbolically conquer death not only through words delivered by ritual specialists, but also through those who knew the deceased congregating and speaking (Bailey and Walter 2016, 149). They thus follow the same line as Davies that it is important to speak against death, but they focus on those who knew the deceased well. Terence Turner does not, however, agree with Davies on the "words against death" theory. Turner criticizes Davies for being primarily informed by Christian religious concerns (Turner 2005, 252–253). I agree with Turner that Davies seem to identify with Christian religious concerns which he should more openly express and justify in his writings.

Davies' holistic approach to complex issues has been admired in previous research. Valerie DeMarinis writes, "He manages to create a perspective for understanding complex phenomena whereby the interactions among individual components as well as between these components and the larger structure can be understood" (DeMarinis 2017, 107). DeMarinis continues, "Davies has incorporated a sophisticated understanding of both the complexity of and the necessity for understanding the dynamic and life-long interactions among experience, emotion and embodiment in terms of how meaning is made, especially existential meaning (DeMarinis 2017, 108). Davies had not created his model of dividual grief when DeMarinis wrote her text but I approve of her point that Davies' perspective for understanding complex phenomena is also valuable when studying the complexity of grief as long as models are properly defined.

When I evaluate the dividual model, its weakest point is in its definition. Both books that are sources for this paper are widely used as course books. For this usage they fit well; they offer a wide perspective on the study of death and the role of emotions. But they do not go very deep into any specific topic; in this case the dividual model is merely mentioned, not deeply formulated. In spite of this lack of proper definition, I see the dividual grief model as a good first attempt to search for transcultural approaches to grief.

Concluding remarks

Douglas Davies' model on dividual grief would be challenging to understand only through *Death, Ritual and Belief*, even though it is the only source in which he explicitly defines and discusses the model. Emotions and identity are essential in order to understand the discussion on dividuality and it was thus also necessary to focus on the other sources. Davies is presently only in the process of formulating the model and this makes it even more essential to look at his previous writings on grief that influence his understanding of the importance of rituals of memory in the reconstruction of dividual personhood after bereavement.

The results of this chapter show that Davies stresses embodied rituals because the starting point of dividual personhood is in the inner complexity of a person. Mourning gives a person an opportunity to reconstruct an identity through narrated rituals.

A bereaved person needs the support of the community in this reconstruction. Davies challenges a Western word-centred individual to reconstruct identity and find new meaning in life after bereavement. The themes Davies raises: bereavement, grief, beliefs on afterlife, meaning of life and rituals of memory are all central theological themes. As a religious studies scholar Davies does not use theological analyses or Biblical argumentation to justify his model. However, Davies' model is very useful for practical theology as well.

Dividual grief is a useful beginning when searching for transcultural models of grief. It is, however, not based on first-hand empirical research on a specific culture, which makes the transcultural aspects in it very descriptive. I am waiting for practical theological colleagues from the Majority world to start formulating models of grief based on their own cultural backgrounds. Models that are strongly grounded in a specific culture are really needed in order to understand such a central theological topic.

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