

Reflecting on death through song among the Shona people of Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

Singing is undertaken by individuals and the community in dealing with real life experiences including death. Death is a reality which humans and animals are not immune to. It defines the end of life and brings pain to humanity. However, humans have mechanisms to deal with pain caused by death, and singing is one of them. The article examines how song is used to tackle the inevitable incidence of death. In this study, traditional and contemporary popular songs were purposively sampled to analyse and reflect on the nature of music used to cope with death. The study engaged 20 people, among them musicians and the elderly. Basing on Kubler-Ross' (1969) five stage DABDA model of dealing with grief, the paper contends that Shona people celebrate life and death through song. Through singing, the Shona express ways of dealing with death. Some Shona beliefs in life after death inform the paper with ways of dealing with pain and how subsequently the Shona people come to accept the reality of death. The bereaved also exhibit some spirited embodiment, and reverence of the departed regardless of their earthly conduct. The study concludes that through song, the Shona people draw solace, hope, and peace of mind with regard to life after death. The frame of mind that accepts the imminence of death is embraced by many as they prepare for death through preparatory moves in taking funeral and general insurance policies. The engagement into singing tends to weaken the sting of death.

Key words: acceptance, beliefs, dance, death, denial, grief, song