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'It's God's will': consolation and religious meaning-making after a family death in urban Senegal

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Title: ***It's God's Will*****: Consolation and religious meaning-making after a family death in urban Senegal**

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Abstract
Little empirical work has been conducted on geographies of loss in majority Muslim contexts to date. Based on qualitative research, this paper explores consolation and religious meaning-making after a family death in urban Senegal. We draw on in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of 59 family members in two cities, Dakar and Kaolack. Drawing on Klass' (2014) multi-faceted understanding of consolation and religious solace, we explore participants' narratives of the death of a relative, and discuss the role of co-presence and practices of remembrance in providing consolation. The frequent use of 'God's will' and other religious refrains and investing the moment of death with religious significance appeared to provide solace and help participants accept the death. The co-presence of family and community members was crucial in helping to share their pain and provide practical and material support that enabled family members to 'keep going' and 'get by' in poor urban neighbourhoods. Alongside the often welcome sense of presence of the deceased, prayers, offerings and religious ceremonies on the anniversary of the death were an important means of remembrance and the expression of continuing bonds that provided consolation. The research demonstrates the extensive, often taken-for-granted, ways that religious beliefs, the worldview and wider community shape cultural narratives of a family death and may limit the expression of grief and the extent to which negative impacts on surviving family members' lives can sometimes be acknowledged.

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Chapter 10

'It's God's Will': Consolation and Religious Meaning-Making after a Family Death in Urban Senegal

Ruth Evans, Sophie Bowlby, Jane Ribbens McCarthy, Joséphine Wouango and Fatou Kébé

Introduction

This chapter explores consolation and religious meaning-making after a family death in the Muslim-majority context of urban Senegal. Little empirical work has been conducted on geographies of loss in Muslim-majority contexts and published in English to date. Yet research in Muslim-majority societies can destabilize normative and homogenizing understandings of Islam and of Muslims (Mills and Gőkariksel, 2014; Falah and Nagel, 2005). Indeed, Wikan's (1988) comparative research in two Muslim-majority communities in Egypt and Bali highlights the cultural diversity in the expression of religious practices, which shapes and organises responses to loss. Recent geographical work on religion has explored the intimate space of the body and the ways bodily performances, for example in prayer, ritual, dress and so on, are shaped by different sets of formal or informal rules, norms and expectations (Gőkariksel, 2009). However, such work has not explored issues of consolation in Muslim-majority societies.

As Maddrell (2009) has observed, while bereavement, like religion, is often compartmentalised in designated spaces and times, it is nevertheless ongoing and pervades everyday life. Yet few studies to date have explored the everyday significance of death within the familial and social context. Research in the Minority world[1] has been heavily driven by a focus on individualised psychological processes of what may be understood to be 'normal grief' and any indications of need for professional interventions. In studying death in Senegalese families, we have drawn instead on Klass' (1999) notion of 'responses to death' in order to move away from the dominant Minority world discourse of the experience of the death as an individualised journey of 'grieving' (Rosenblatt and Bowman, 2013). Cacciatore and De Frain (2015) suggest that, in African societies generally, it is the community consequences of death that are centralised.

Recent literature from the Minority world has called for more attention to be paid to the material dimensions of death and absence (Hockey et al., 2010; Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010) and pointed to the significance of continuing bonds with the deceased (Klass et al, 1996; Steffen and Coyle, 2011; Silverman, in press). Such continuing relationships with those who have died may be expressed through activities, thoughts and practices and are shaped by relationships in life, the nature of the death and socio-cultural differences (Klass et al, 1996; Howarth, 2007). Klass (2014) suggests that the most common source of solace comes in the continuing bonds the living maintain with the dead.

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This chapter discusses the findings of our qualitative research on responses to death, care and family relations in urban Senegal, where the vast majority (94%) of the population identify as Muslim. A minority of the population are Christians (4%), mainly Roman Catholic, or animists or other religions (2%) (ANSD, 2013). Sufi-Islam is often practised through affiliation to a variety of hereditary brotherhoods (four main ones) which have a significant political presence, while Catholicism is part of the French colonial legacy. Islamic and Christian practices regarding burial, funeral, mourning and inheritance have mingled with indigenous cultural practices that vary according to ethnic group (Sow, 2003).

Our research[2] aimed to investigate the material and emotional significance of a death of a close adult relative for family members of different genders and generations. We identified a purposive sample of 30 families living in Dakar and Kaolack who had experienced an adult relative's death in the previous five years. In-depth interviews were conducted with 59 family members including 30 children and youth (aged 12-30) and with 23 key informants, in addition to four focus groups. Participatory workshops were held with 45 family participants and with 29 government and non-governmental representatives and Muslim religious and local leaders to gain feedback on our preliminary findings and the policy implications.

Drawing on Klass' (2014) understanding of consolation and religious solace, this chapter explores participants' narratives of the death of a relative and the role of co-presence and religious practices in enabling meaning-making[3] and the (sometimes constrained) expression of grief and continuing bonds, which provided consolation to bereaved family members. We first discuss the conceptual framing and how this relates to responses to death.

Conceptual framing: consolation and religious solace

Klass (2014: 3) suggests that three elements are helpful when seeking to understand the religious worlds of bereaved people:

> First, encounter or merger with transcendent reality; that is, the sense that there is something beyond our mundane existence that we can, at least for moments, experience as an inner reality. Second, a worldview that provides the cultural narratives in which our individual life narratives are nested. A worldview gives meaning to the events and relationships in our lives. Third, a community in which transcendent reality, our worldview and our own experience is validated.

He suggests that this triune structure is evident in many religious traditions, including Islam. For example, 'Allah is the God who can be found but who cannot be understood by human intelligence; the Prophet Mohammed was given the revelation to which humans should conform their lives; and the Ummah is the community of all those who submit to Allah' (ibid: 3). As we demonstrate, our findings support Klass' argument that consolation happens within each of these elements.

Klass (2014) understands consolation as social and inherently inter-subjective, in the same way as grief. Solace is characterised by 'the sense of soothing' and being comforted in the midst of sorrow's hopelessness and despair: 'Solace alleviates, but does not remove distress' (ibid: 6). Tracing the etymology of consolation-related words, such as *comfort* from the Latin *fortis*, meaning 'strong' or 'powerful' and the prefix *com* from *cum*, meaning 'with', highlights the relational nature of the verb to comfort, that is, to strengthen or find strength together (ibid: 6). Swedish and German interpretations (*Trostworte*) reveal that comfort

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words, consoling words, are those which restore trust: 'Solace is found then, within the sense of trusting or being connected to a reality that is outside the self' (ibid: 7).

Klass (2014) shows how this understanding of solace can be found in human relationships, cultural resources, religious meanings and continuing bonds. For example, solace is found through human relationships which are characterised by non-judgemental co-presence, in which the 'helper' is open to the pain, becomes available and is present (ibid: 8). This aspect relates most clearly to the second element in the understanding of religion outlined above. Solace may also be found in cultural resources; 'in sorrow, many people find consolation in the sense that they participate in something that transcends present space and time' (ibid: 9). This relates to the first and third elements outlined above. Further, religious faith and rituals often provide consolation through a sense of religious connection to a transcendent reality beyond our mundane existence. This may include prayers to the saints for the wellbeing of the dead found in some Christian and Muslim traditions, practices such as lighting memorial candles, holding church services (Klass, 2014), saying aloud the *kaddish* prayer in the Jewish community and the annual marking of the *yahrzeit* anniversary of the death (Silverman, in press), and in our research, holding a recital of the Koran and making offerings to others in memory of the deceased. Thus, as Klass suggests (2014), the religious sense within solace is multi-faceted.

Following this conceptual framing, in the next sections, we explore our empirical findings from urban Senegal. We focus on participants' narratives of a family death, the spiritual meaning-making they engaged in and the role of religious practices and co-presence in providing consolation.

Narratives of the death and religious meaning-making

Interviewees had diverse kin and in-law relationships with the deceased family member. The largest proportions of the sample had lost a husband, a mother or a father. Most of these relatives had died in middle or older age, although several had died in their thirties. Interviewees often talked at some length and in some detail about the events surrounding their relatives' deaths. However, participants rarely gave a detailed medical narrative or explanation of the 'cause of death', in the way that might be common in the Minority world (Valentine, 2008) (see Table 1). Many young people did not know the cause of their relative's death and both adults and children mainly talked of symptoms rather than specifying diseases. Only one interviewee explicitly said that they had a '*certificat de décès',* an official death certificate for the deceased issued by the town hall and few mentioned the '*constat de décès'*, or death notice, which is mandatory and usually issued by a doctor.

The most frequently mentioned biomedical references concerned chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure/hypertension, diabetes and cancer. Interviewees rarely mentioned discussing their relative's diagnosis or cause of death with doctors or healthcare professionals providing treatment. As Boubacar, an NGO worker, commented about his brother's illness: 'those are questions we don't ask'. A minority of participants made reference to 'mystical illnesses' and/or reported that they had taken their relative to a traditional healer, although the use of traditional healers may have been under-reported, given the intimate and private nature of patient-healer relationships and therapeutic landscapes (Bignante, 2015).

Table 1: Narratives of relative's illness and/or death

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'Explanation' of relative's death	Number of interviewees[4]
Medical term used eg diabetes, hypertension, cancer	22 (37%)
Description of physical symptoms	17 (29%)
Did not specify/ did not know	16 (27%)
Religious explanation	15 (25%)
Accident or assault	4 (1%)

The majority of interviewees gave detailed narratives of the events leading up to their relative's death, the moment of death and how they heard the news. This suggests meaning-making around the death that may not be intended as a 'causal' explanation in more Anglophone terms (Sogolo, 2003). Several interviewees whose relatives had died in old age thought that their relative had felt that they were going to die or wanted to die, which was often manifested in a reluctance to seek medical treatment. Some interviewees referred to older relatives' sense of premonition and preparation for death. Samba (aged 51), whose grandmother had died in her 90s, drew on a notion of 'death sickness':

> Maybe she had 'death sickness'. We told her on that day that we were going to take her to the hospital. She used to say "I'm satisfied because I've seen my grandchildren".[...] That's why she refused when we wanted to take her to the hospital.[...] She knew she was going to die.

Interviewees' accounts of unexpected deaths of younger relatives who were only ill for a short period of time or who had been killed violently or in an accident, were experienced, understandably, as a great shock. Such deaths were more difficult for family members to share with close relatives and to accept and make sense of, in comparison to the deaths of relatives who had chronic illnesses or who died in old age. In the case of a family whose relative had been killed in a violent assault, news of the death was met with fear. Some interviewees appeared to make sense of such unexpected deaths by drawing on events leading up to the death that they felt provided a warning or sign of the potential danger facing their relative. This suggests that notions of destiny or fate, inflected with religious and cultural meanings, may be drawn on for meaning-making when faced with sudden, untimely deaths. Prothmann's (2017) research with young men in urban Senegal, for example, suggests that fate was often seen as 'God's will, ineluctable and transcendent' and explained with the Wolof phrase, '*Ndogalu Yàlla'*, translated here as the 'Judgement of God', whereby life is regarded as predestined and caused by God, who had already chosen an individual's day of death.

Many interviewees drew attention to deaths which had occurred during religious festivals, such as Tabaski, Tamkharit, Magal, Gamou, Ramadan (Muslim festivals) or Easter (Christian festival), or on Fridays (significant to Muslims). As Abdoulaye's (aged 30) account suggests, the religious significance of the day his mother died and his religious faith helped him to accept her death:

> It was hard but I trusted in God and what's more, she died on the day of Tabaski. Everybody wants to have this day [to die] so I thank God. She did a lot of good things

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> and I know only God can reward her. [..] She died at prayer time.[...] I thank God; it's Divine will.[...] Everyone has their day.

The use of the phrase 'trust in God' here illustrates Klass' (2014) idea that religious solace is found by trusting in a transcendent reality. The phrase, 'Everyone has their day' highlights the sense of theistic predetermination of the day of death (Prothmann, 2017).

Some interviewees' narratives of the death included religious practices such as reciting the Koran and placing it on a relative's head at the moment of death. Investing the moment of death with religious significance appeared to provide solace and help participants accept the death. Supporting Klass' (2014) understanding of the three elements of the religious worlds of bereaved people, an encounter with a transcendent reality at the moment of death, the religious worldview that gives meaning to the death, and the faith community, all seemed to validate people's experiences.

In contrast, some younger women expressed fear when their relative died at home. Diami (aged 26) was sweeping the house at the time and went to check on her mother. She felt 'so afraid' that she did not think her mother had died, but when she realised, felt alone at this moment: 'I felt very bad because I only had my mother'. As others have noted (Walter, 1999; Dunn et al, 2015), death can be seen as a threat to social cohesion, as well as breaking and disrupting familial relationships and support networks, with the risk of isolation. Jacquemin (2010) suggests that rather than being a choice, solitude and isolation in Africa (more than elsewhere) appears to be a sign of a loss of social status and support, and implies greater suffering (see Evans et al, 2017 for further discussion).

A striking idiom used frequently by participants was *'it's God's will'*. When asked about their feelings about a relative's death in interviews, a quarter of participants (see Table 1), mainly middle and older generation adults, made reference to *God's will* in making sense of the death or said that it was God's decision that their relative should depart the earth at that time. Abdoulaye (aged 30, Muslim) was one of the few young people who drew on this religious framing of the death, when asked, Q: Can you tell us what you felt at the time of your mother's death? "*It's like everybody. It's very hard but I left everything in God's hands.[...].It's God that brought her onto earth and God who took her back, and nobody will escape that day"*.

The frequent use of such religious refrains, including, 'it's God's will' [Wolof: *ndogalou yalla;* French: *c'est la volonté de Dieu*], 'it's Divine Will' [Wolof: *ndogalou yalla la*; French: *la volonté Divine]* and 'it's in God's hands' [Wolof: *si lokho yala*; French: *c'est entre les mains de Dieu*] suggests that religious beliefs and worldviews associated with Islam and Catholicism, inflected with Senegalese cultural framings, provided the predominant frames of reference that enabled participants to engage in meaning-making about the death. Such socio-cultural framings appeared to help participants accept the death and resign themselves to its inevitability, providing consolation. For example, Cheikh, an older man (aged 77) whose mother had died, had sleeping problems, an embodied manifestation of his grief, but appeared to find solace and peace in his religious beliefs: 'It was hard. I couldn't sleep at first but in the end I realised it was God's will'. Similarly, Safietou, a mother (aged 50), made sense of her son's death (when he was 23) and her sense of powerlessness in the face of this through her religious faith:

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> Being Muslim, I can only trust in God. It's He who'd given him to me, it's He who took him. I can do nothing. There's a moment when you hold back; you pray for his soul and appeal to Him … Ultimately you pull yourself together.

Many family members felt powerless when faced with the inevitability of death, but appeared to be comforted by prayer and the wider religious and cultural context that gave meaning to their experiences. N'diouga (63 year old widower) explained that the word *'Mounieul'* in Wolof, meaning endurance, was often used in relation to the need to accept death:

> Like they say in Wolof, *'Mounieul'* [you must endure/ persevere]; that is, you must be aware that everything perishes so it's not worth creating a drama. You must remain strong; everyone does, yes, even women.

de Klerk (2013) observes a similar notion in Tanzania that refers to a counselling/ advice-giving practice that is particularly apparent at funerals and is used to comfort bereaved relatives; *oyegumisilize* means 'forgetting' or 'enduring', from the Kiswahili for 'being tough' and 'being healthy'.

Alongside this strong cultural imperative to 'persevere' and 'remain strong', a Roman Catholic priest suggested the Wolof value of '*Natu/ Nattu'*, meaning a test of faith, or in some interpretations, a curse from God (Prothman, 2017), was important in understanding a person's ability to accept a death in the Senegalese cultural context. Thus, being able to accept the death through a religious framing could be regarded as a judgement of a person's depth of faith and commitment to their faith community and religious practice:

> You feel the depth of the person's faith. It's when we're tested. It's for that, in Wolof they say '*Natu'*. *Natu* is something we say that measures your faith. God does it to measure your faith; to see how far your faith goes; the depth of your faith.

For many participants, religious beliefs, practices and belonging to a religious community were intrinsically bound up with a relational sense of self, familial and communal responsibilities and the need to survive and 'keep going'. This supports Klass' (2014) relational understanding of religious solace, characterised by the inter-weaving of religious faith, practice and community.

It was also apparent, however, that some people felt they could not accept the death, even though this might be going against the teachings of religion. As Ibrahima (aged 44) commented about his mother's death two years previously:

> …this gap we're still feeling until now. Sorrow; I'm even ashamed to think of her to tell you the truth, because I still haven't accepted this death. I pretend that she's still here. That's what helps us to keep going.

Unusually among our interviewees, 'keeping going' here appears to be linked to pretending the death had not happened and seeking comfort in the sense of a continued presence of the deceased as a living person, which perhaps a religious perspective would discourage.

Co-presence and *'getting by'*

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Family and community solidarity was central to helping bereaved relatives to 'keep going' and 'get by' after a family death (Ribbens McCarthy et al, forthcoming). To understand its particular salience in the Senegalese context, it is vital to recognise the economic precarity of life for most people and the crucial nature of family and household ties to everyday economic survival in a context in which there is a minimal welfare state (Evans et al, 2016; see also Randall and Coast, 2015). Cultural values of *Solidarité* [in Wolof: *Dimbalanté*] and *Teranga* - terms that refer to mutual support and norms of unquestioning hospitality to any visitor - are socially approved and considered a widespread feature of life in Senegal (Bass and Sow, 2006; Gasparetti, 2011), although we were also told that these norms were weakening in the city. The significance of these values and relationships was highlighted by Boubacar (aged 44): 'Without the family, we're nothing. Without friends, we're nothing. Without neighbours, we're nothing'.

Consolation may be found simply in the demonstration that people of significance to the bereaved offer their condolences and share their loss. This sharing may be expressed through silent co-presence at their home during the mourning period. As N'della (aged 19), whose father had died, explained: 'The family is very important to me… It's because if I cry and I see them beside me, it's as if I have everything I need beside me'. Jackson (2004) argues silent co-presence in response to suffering may be especially valued in African societies as a form of healing that helps to restore the social world. Silent co-presence may also have been more important historically in the UK amongst those with few resources (Strange, 2005).

Co-presence may also be expressed through face-to-face talking and phone calls. Salimata, a 62 year old widow whose son had died in the month prior to the interview, said:

> Members of my family can't afford much but they all love me. The day he died they were all there; even those from the villages far away came. Those that couldn't come, they phoned me. Even today, there were two that phoned me.

Such (sometimes silent) actual or virtual co-presence may be understood as expressing care for the bereaved person but also as affirming that 'family' support is and will continue to be available. The bereaved person is recognised as part of the reciprocal web of care that can be offered by family relationships now and in the future, providing a sense not only of sharing the loss, but also of existential security. Solace is thus found in the widespread cultural narrative of *solidarité* which gives meaning to the death and strengthens reciprocal kinship and community support networks.

A sense of consolation and shared grief was particularly evident through the support provided by neighbours and friends during the funeral, which was sometimes spread over multiple days. For Muslims, the burial must take place within a day of the death and funeral gatherings often follow the burial, usually at the home of the deceased[5]. Relatives living some distance away, thus, may not always be present in the immediate aftermath. Neighbours, associates and friends living nearby as well as household members are available to help with the practical funeral arrangements, supply much needed material support in the form of food or money, in addition to providing emotional and spiritual support and advice:

> When a person dies all the neighbours, all your neighbours, your friends, everyone comes to share your pain. Everybody comes and gives something to help you with the

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> costs, we really live as a family, even neighbours are part of the family. (Djibril, aged 42, after the death of his aunt)

As de Klerk (2013) observes in Tanzania, comforting at the funeral may involve listening to the bereaved family members' story of the deceased's last days and narrating stories about others who have experienced loss and survived, so that the bereaved do not feel alone in their loss. Offering condolences and adhering to reciprocal norms of *solidarité* may provide solace by reaffirming the cultural narratives through which family members make sense of the death and relationships in their lives, thereby strengthening social cohesion (Klass, 2014; Dunn et al, 2015).

Tensions were also apparent, however, in some participants' narratives about religious and familial injunctions not to cry 'too much' or for 'too long', underpinned by understandings of the death as 'God's Will' and the need to 'stay strong' and 'keep going':

> You shouldn't exaggerate because everything has a limit...religion doesn't tolerate a person crying for so long [during the funeral period]… Of course, religion allows us to cry but if you persist, it's like calling into question Divine will. (Head of district, Guédiawaye).

This need to limit crying was articulated by both adults and young people, sometimes linked explicitly to religious beliefs, while at other times, it was linked to practical demands to continue everyday routines or not to upset children or other family members. Wikan (1988) suggests that suffering and sadness may be regarded as contagious and detrimental to all; to the self, other people, as well as to the soul of the dead, which leads to strong social sanctions and the need to look after the living. As de Klerk (2013: S489) observes, 'enduring' and being 'gently counselled that one's situation is entirely normal' silences emotions and creates social cohesion.

Indeed, many interviewees emphasised the importance of 'keeping going' and 'getting by' [French: *se débrouiller*] to ensure personal, household and family survival, which we suggest is linked both to the religious worldview and to families' material circumstances within poor urban neighbourhoods. In this respect, we noticed among many interviewees a hesitancy to acknowledge that changes had occurred following the death. When probed further about changes in their lives, many nevertheless pointed to many significant, often negative changes. When we discussed this hesitancy in the feedback workshops, the explanations offered by participants concerned the need to maintain the family's material wellbeing and status in the same way as before, alongside religious understandings. Thus Toufil, a young widow (aged 25) who had moved back to live with her natal family following her husband's death, said: 'It's badly regarded if someone dies and one says that there have been changes. So you will try to do what that person there did for you'. Acknowledging changes appeared to reflect poorly on the ability of surviving relatives to 'persevere' and continue to support the family in the way their deceased relative had done.

Other participants alluded to religious understandings. A young woman (aged 20) said, 'When someone dies, one shouldn't say negative things about them. It's a sin'. Another young woman (aged 21) in a different workshop linked the reluctance to talk about changes to the belief that the death was 'God's will'. Thus, continuing to grieve and acknowledging that the

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family's circumstances had become more difficult following the death could be regarded as a failure of the 'test of faith' [Wolof: *Natu*] and an inability to provide for their family.

The difficulty of acknowledging publicly that a death had led to emotional distress and created economic or practical strains in the ability to support bereaved family members may reinforce the pressure to 'be strong' and limit a bereaved person's ability to express their grief. But, as we have indicated, the co-presence and support of family and community members and interwoven religious beliefs and meaning-making about the death offered crucial sources of consolation. We acknowledge, however, the specific nature of our sample, recruited through local intermediaries, and the inevitable cultural repertoires of presenting a 'good death' that takes place within the community, near relatives (Ndiaye, 2009), both which are likely to have influenced participants' narratives. As we discuss in the next section, consolation was also often found within religious practices of remembrance and the expression of continuing bonds. In these ways, grief and difficulties could be acknowledged, albeit within a wider religious and cultural context that sought to regulate emotions and foster social cohesion.

Continuing bonds and practices of remembrance

Continuing bonds, that is, 'the relationship that individuals, communities and cultures maintain with those who have died' (Klass, 2014: 11), are inherently relational. Perhaps because their expression affords a degree of agency to both the living and the dead, continuing bonds and practices of remembrance may offer considerable consolation to bereaved family members. The act of remembering can be seen as a way of thinking, style of behaviour or conduct which affects people's feelings, actions and physical wellbeing (Klaits, 2005; de Klerk, 2013). In our research[6], prayers were by far the most significant practices of remembrance and continuing bonds for the dead. As Saer, a young Muslim man (aged 22) said, 'If somebody's died, you can only say prayers for them'. For Muslims, daily prayers included praying for all deceased relatives:

> I wake up every morning at 5am. I do my ablutions and I pray for him and my deceased relatives, and for all the other deceased Muslims (Nogaye, widow, aged 46).

Thus, the practice of praying connected the living to the dead, and the particular deceased relative often became identified with the wider set of deceased family members, and with the dead more broadly. An imam explained that in Islam, prayers are regarded as for the benefit of the dead:

> It's said in religion that when someone dies there are angels who come to ask him questions and he'll answer…. These prayers we do for him can allow him to answer easily.

Djibril (aged 42) suggested that the practice of daily prayers encouraged reciprocal continuing bonds and mutual care between the living and the dead:

> They say in the Muslim religion that everybody, all our relatives that have died, watch over us, because when we pray and say prayers for them, they too do the same for us, so she [my deceased mother] continues to watch over us.

A Muslim young woman elaborated further:

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> Each time you pray, if you pray for the deceased, they will receive the prayers. They too pray, in return, so that you stay alive for a long time so that you can continue to pray for them.

Praying could also bring a welcome sense of presence of the deceased, as one Muslim young woman said: 'It's as if the person is next to you. They are a kind of memories'. This suggests that prayer affords not only an encounter with God, but also a means of becoming closer to a deceased relative and to the 'transcendent reality' of the dead more generally.

Prayers were also an important continuing practice of care for the deceased among Catholics, with some pointing to the deceased's presence in receiving their prayers. Simone, a Catholic widow (aged 39) commented: 'He receives my prayers […] We don't see him, but he sees us'. As well as daily prayers and special Masses, many Catholics spoke of visiting the cemetery as a particular place for praying. However, amongst Muslims, it was very noticeable that it was only men who said that they visited cemeteries. Several Muslim interviewees mentioned reciting the Koran together regularly as a family as a way of caring for the deceased.

Some young people of both Muslim and Catholic religious affiliations saw continuing to pray and to care for other family members as practices which continued the wishes of the deceased. Albertine (aged 19, Catholic) said:

> [I] pray every night before going to sleep because he [her father] was a man who believed in God, who loved his religion… I pray for him, for the house, for my brothers and sisters and everybody. I do that for him because he liked his children to pray and so on.

Similiarly, Magatte, (aged 17, Muslim) said that she was learning the Koran to fulfil her deceased father's wishes. Religious practices thus offer a way to continue relationships with, and to please, the deceased.

An important practice of continuing bonds with the deceased, particularly for Muslims, was the giving of food or money to others as offerings or alms on significant religious days such as Fridays or during Ramadan or other religious festivals:

> During the month of Ramadan, each day I prepare *ndogou* [what Muslims prepare for the breaking of the fast, usually coffee, milk or African herb tea, with bread and dates] and I give that to elderly people because my husband died during the month of Ramadan (Athia, aged 56 widow, husband died three years ago).

Muslim interviewees said that they bought particular foods or prepared dishes that the deceased had enjoyed, which was given to others in the household or community (often children or older people) in remembrance of the dead. Others wished to give regular offerings on Fridays, but could not afford to.

Both Muslim and Catholic families gave accounts of religious ceremonies to remember their relative on the anniversary of the death or on a special religious occasion. Reciting the Koran was a central Muslim practice at such events. Several Catholics requested Mass to be said in

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church, when they could afford it and marked the anniversary of the death in particular ways. These included going to the cemetery with other family members to say prayers and light candles for their deceased relative, while others remembered the deceased particularly on All Saints Day. Many workshop participants said that religious ceremonies organised on the anniversary of the death were occasions when they or other family members could express their grief, as one Catholic young woman commented, ‘When you organise a mass, it’s inevitable you will cry’.

A common feature of continuing bonds is the sense of the presence of the deceased (Klass, 2014). Several interviewees in Senegal acknowledged that they continued to feel their relative’s presence, which seemed to be a source of consolation: ‘I feel her presence from time to time. I was very close to her’ (Allassane, man, aged 36, mother died two years previously). Similarly, a young woman whose mother had died ten years previously commented:

> I continue my life but I think of her when I sleep, when I walk. She is always beside me. She accompanies me in everything I do, so I feel her presence, despite the fact she has disappeared.

Steffen and Coyle's (2011) research with those of Christian and no religious affiliation in England found that the sense of presence was consoling to bereaved people when the continuing bond was understood within a framework of spiritual and religious meaningfulness. However, a conflict was often observed between their felt experience and culturally available explanatory frameworks. In our research, participants' responses about feeling the presence of their deceased relative were often rather brief, perhaps because this continuing spiritual connection to the deceased was difficult to reconcile with the dominant religious framing and cultural imperative to accept the death as ‘God's will’. Nevertheless, one older widow expressed how her memories of shared moments with the deceased were ever-present and the impact of the loss did not subside over time:

> I think each time you wake up and you remember she used to do that or he used to do this, that affects you all the time. It’s as if it were today. Even if it’s five years or something like that.

This powerfully conveys how the pain of grief and memories of the deceased are most often felt in the everyday mundane places and activities of a life shared together and may continue over the lifecourse, despite the solace often found in religious beliefs, practices and belonging to the wider family and community. This throws light on the earlier historical understanding of grief as being ‘unconsoled’ or ‘*ungetrőstet’* in Freud's words, to which Klass (2014: 2) draws attention. It also highlights the importance to the living of their on-going relationships with the deceased.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how participants in Senegal found consolation in *human relationships* characterised by non-judgemental co-presence, *cultural resources* provided by religious and cultural narratives and rituals, and *religious solace* by participating in something that transcends present space and time. Religious and cultural narratives about *Solidarité/ Dimbalanté* (solidarity/ mutual support), *Teranga* (hospitality), *Muñul* (perseverence) and *Natu* (test of faith) provided the key frames of reference or ‘worldview’

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(Klass, 2014) that enabled bereaved family members in urban Senegal to make sense of their relative's death and be consoled, despite the pain of their loss. The frequent use of 'God's will' and other religious refrains and investing the moment of death with religious significance appeared to provide solace and help participants accept the death. An encounter with a transcendent reality at the moment of death, the religious worldview that gives meaning to the death and the faith community, all seemed to validate people's experiences.

The co-presence of family and community members in the immediate aftermath of the death was crucial in helping to share their pain, provide practical and material support and provide consolation that enabled family members to 'keep going' and 'get by' in poor urban neighbourhoods. The threat to social cohesion that a family death posed, in terms of the potential breaking up, and disrupting of, family relationships and resulting isolation, was thereby alleviated and bereaved family members were consoled that the reciprocal web of care would continue to support them.

For both Muslims and Catholics, prayers and religious ceremonies on the anniversary of the death were central practices of remembrance that enabled the embodied expression of continuing bonds with those who had died. The regular practice of prayer seemed to enable not only an encounter with the 'transcendent reality' of God (Klass, 2014), but also brought people closer to their deceased relative, whom they often identified with the wider set of deceased family members, and with the dead more broadly. Regular offerings, in the form of giving food the deceased had liked to others on Fridays or during particular religious festivals, as well as holding recitals of the Koran, were particularly important to Muslims, while Catholics found solace in requesting a Mass or lighting candles in remembrance of the deceased. The living thus continued to feel connected to the dead through observing highly embodied practices on a regular (often daily, in the case of prayers) basis in everyday (non-sacred) spaces of the home and neighbourhood. Such practices of remembrance interweave religious and African cultural understandings and affirm the meanings the bereaved make of their relative's death and their relationship with the deceased, whilst also strengthening bereaved relatives' connections to reciprocal kinship and community support networks among the living.

We argue elsewhere (Ribbens McCarthy et al, forthcoming) that responses to death can only be made sense of through an holistic approach, and in resource-constrained settings, such as the poor urban neighbourhoods where families participating in our research lived, the emotional and spiritual dimensions of loss and consolation were intrinsically interwoven with the material and social dimensions. While many participants spoke of the comfort their faith brought, and of their trust in God, which helped to resign themselves to what had happened, religious informal rules about the expression of grief also formed part of the social regulation of emotions. Crying too much or refusing to 'be strong' and 'keep going' might be viewed as a failure to accept the death, recognise God's will or to live up to the test of faith (*Natu*) that was involved. This demonstrates the extensive, often taken-for-granted, ways that religious beliefs, the worldview and the wider community shape cultural narratives of a family death and may limit the extent to which negative impacts on surviving family members' lives can sometimes be acknowledged in the Senegalese context (Evans et al, 2016). Thus, as Klass (2014: 15) observes, 'Consolation soothes and alleviates the burden of grief, but does not take away the pain'.

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Endnotes
1. We use the terms Majority and Minority worlds to refer to the 'global South' and 'global North' respectively, to acknowledge that the 'majority' of the world's population and land mass are located in the former and to highlight the extent to which contemporary global power and knowledge is located in contexts that are historically and numerically specific. We recognise, however, that this dichotomy is problematic and risks homogenising and obscuring extensive diversities.
2. See http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/deathinthefamilyinsenegal and Evans et al. (2016) for more information.
3. We understand 'meaning-making' here in terms of hermeneutic approaches which put human meaning-making centre stage, as (often taken-for-granted) efforts towards sense-making. See Ribbens McCarthy et al (forthcoming) for further discussion.
4. Due to our methodology, researchers did not ask all participants about medical explanations for their relative's illness. Findings are based on relatives' self-reports and so more stigmatised illnesses or causes of death, such as HIV, mental illness or suicide may be under-reported. Two family members' accounts are provided of one relative's illness/death, although their responses were not necessarily consistent. Religious explanations have been counted independently of the other categories, as these were sometimes drawn on in addition to other accounts, at later stages of the interview.
5.See Evans et al (2016) for more extensive discussion of funeral procedures.
6. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss widowhood mourning practices. See Evans et al (2016).

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