Is transcendental healing of painful memories possible? a reflection on the role of pastoral counseling and storytelling

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Article Information

Abstract
This study examines the contributions of pastoral counseling and storytelling in healing and restoring painful memories. The study applies Louw's life story and Lartey's relationship-oriented models as the theoretical framework. The data were collected through participant observation, document analysis, and the researchers' long years of experience in pastoral ministry and counseling. The finding reveals that storytelling remains a powerful tool for healing wounded memories. The pastoral counseling and storytelling create a safe space for seekers to interact, find the emotional strength to reignite healing processes, reclaim their volition, and create retrospection that reconnects the healing seekers with their painful memories. The study recommends that government should prioritize memory healing programs, partner with the Church, chiefs, and relevant organizations through sponsorship, provide counseling centers for hurting men to voice out and seek healing in their communities, regulate churches, and reduce violence shown on the South African media in the name of telling our stories or entertainment.

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1. Introduction

The human being is a storytelling being, and storytelling is part and parcel of human nature. It helps humans traverse life's complex social problems. Those telling stories allow for the opportunity to practice, through their recreation, human problem-solving skills. Storytelling is an African communication and understanding form of oral tradition, informal education, and folktales. This study's literature highlights the crime statistics of the last decade and blames the increase on the painful memories of South Africa's past history. Through pastoral counseling, this study examines how storytelling enhances individual and group learning as a powerful instrument of healing for the abused, traumatized addicts and those hunted by painful memories of the past.

This article draws from a qualitative study conducted to fulfill a master's degree in Ministerial Studies/Practical Theology from the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This study seeks and evaluates storytelling in pastoral counseling vis-a-vis the healing process of wounded memories in a society with proliferated philosophies, perceptions, and perspectives. South African society remains racially divided, with elements of hatred, domestic violence, political instability, capitalism, xenophobia, homophobia, and patriarchy that have left many broken. As such, this study addresses the key question of How do storytelling and pastoral counseling contribute to the healing of a painful past or memories? To answer the question, two sub-research questions were developed. These include how does storytelling contribute to the healing of a painful past? What is the role of pastoral counseling in the healing of painful memories?

The significance of this study includes the expectation...
that it would contribute to the strategic search on how to resolve the skyrocketing drug and alcohol addiction, increasing level of hate, "streetkidism" or "para", domestic violence, crime, broken homes and relationships, suicide and xenophobic attacks in South Africa (Atwoli, 2015; Africa Check, 2017). These traverses tend to undermine the effort to overturn crime and uplift the country's mental health and human development index (HDI) (Okoye & Mensah, 2021).

The study is expected to contribute to the existing literature on promoting pastoral counseling and the healing of painful memories in the world's developing nations.

2. Literature

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS – September 2014) has indicated an alarming increase in crimes in South Africa from 2012 to 2017 (Africa Check, 2017). The 16,259 incidents of murder in 2012/13, have increased drastically to 17,068 murders in 2013/14 (ISS, 2014). In 2015/16, exactly 18,673 murder incidents were recorded, which amounted to 4.9% increase from the 2014/15 record. The rate of murder has increased from 32.9 in 2014/15 to 33.9 in 2015/16 (Africa Check, 2017). These numbers were steadily increasing, and many people ascribe such escalating crime to poverty and the legacy of the country's political past (SSA, 2021). The rate of reported sexual crimes was recorded as 62,649 cases in 2013/14, although slightly lower than its highest rate in 2008/9, which recorded 70,514 cases (ISS, 2014). Although it was not clear whether the crime declined or victims were too scared to report cases or incidents, which is arguably the questions lingering or came to mind. The number of aggravated robberies increased from 105,888 cases in 2012/13 to 119,351 cases in 2013/14, which shows a 12.7% increase with extra 13,463 cases in the following year (SSA, 2021).

In evaluating and analyzing all these alarming increases in crime statistics, the ISS reckons that social factors influencing crime and violence include the high levels of inequality and the normalization of violence in homes, neighborhoods, media, and schools (ISS, 2014). Sequel to the country's alarming crime rates, the rate of suicide has enormously increased to rank the country with the eighth-highest suicide rate globally. According to the SA Federation for Mental Health (2014), out of the one million suicides recorded globally, South Africa has approximately 8000 suicides yearly. The research conducted by the Depression and Anxiety Support Group (DASG), as published in Health 24 (2014), indicates that one in five teens thinks about harming themselves in South Africa over the slightest stress. 34% of black youth have thought of using suicide as an option in responding to stressful life situations such as divorce (of their parents), relationship conflict, academic underperformance, and general life difficulties (Africa Check 2017). The trauma associated with criminal behavior can affect how victims view themselves, their world, and their relationships (Hill 2003: v). Hence, the victims of crimes live with painful and traumatic memories which continue to manifest various psychotic behavior in them (Atwoli, 2015).

In that way, crime is recycled or perpetuated in the society of South Africa (SSA, 2021). Non-governmental organizations have been at the forefront of fighting possible consequences of sad memories. The Church, too, has been hands-on with pastoral care and counseling. Storytelling remains a major tool as it creates a listening atmosphere that generates support and a psychologically therapeutic scenario that tends to remind seekers that they are not alone, irrespective of how awful a life-challenging situation presents itself (Miller, 2011:1). This gives credence to the significance of pastoral care, counseling, and emotional healing in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.1. Pastoral Care and Counselling in the Healing Process

Pastoral care and pastoral counseling have been considered synonymous and same time, different (Onwuegbuchulam, 2016). The two have a common purpose for the human souls or void (Stansbury, 2012). Although contemporary arguments consider them distinct, pastoral counseling is part or branch of pastoral care (Olajede, 2014). Everly (2000) argues that pastoral care includes clerical functions to guide and sustain a congregation.

While pastoral counseling is a narrowed clerical role of ministering to an individual in need by applying special (or learned) skills. The former is likened to a general practitioner, while the latter is likened to a specialist or a counselor (Ezenwanne & Mitchelle, 2015). Larrey (2003:30) expresses that the essential elements of pastoral care are means of helping people gain relief from the crisis. Hence, pastoral care training and practice recognize a transcendent dimension of human life through which relief and coping mechanisms are communicated (Moyo 2014). The theologians and development specialists recommend that partnerships between the government and non-governmental organizations should be considered for providing effective pastoral care and counseling to optimize effective and empathic support (Lee, 2010; Bojuwoye & Sodi, 2010; Miller, 2011).

2.2. Healing of Painful Memories through Storytelling

Horsdal (2012) acknowledges that telling one's painful story to others in a safe environment can open up a healing journey. For instance, the telling of one's story of woundedness to a person in a safe environment opens the door to a journey of healing that leads to a better life, solution finding which is mentally and psychologically therapeutic (Moyo, 2014:5). In Matthew 18 verses 19 to 20, the Scripture also emphasizes that where two or three people have gathered in my name, I (i.e., God) am there in their midst. This implies that the vision of problem-solving, prayer, spirituality, and heaven is a vision of community and sharing (Matt: 6: 9—13).

The gathering and sharing of worship, testimonies, discussions, and listening to one another do not merely bring opportunities for reconciliation, psychologically healing process, and power of forgiveness to an individual but also have a spiritual undertake that rehabilitates and uplifts the soul (Matt. 18: 19—20). Support groups and pastoral counseling opportunities enable victims of abuse, and crime, among others, not to forget, cover, and bury the pains but to cope or manage the pains toward redeeming the painful past (Vorster, 2014b). The Church plays a significant role in the
process through pastoral initiatives and support components (Lee, 2010).

3. Theoretical Framing

Louw's Life Story (or Narrative) and Larrey's relationship-oriented models were the theoretical frameworks adopted by the study. Louw's theory prioritizes telling and listening to personal experience as the basis of understanding and dealing with the individual (Louw, 2000:309). Personal experience encompasses the life experiences an individual finds interesting in his/her real-world interactions. Louw's model acknowledges that individuals live within a distinctive context linked to specific events that influence his/her life (2000:309). The storytelling approach explores the painful experience of the victim(s) in which the trained personnel facilitate the healing procedures that enable the victims or seekers to connect with themselves (2000: 32). This process helps the victim(s) to acknowledge the source(s) of their brokenness and pain, build a trustful within and amongst seekers that creates in them a nourishing and joyful relationship with themselves and God (2000:33). According to Louw, this process is practical and works with the mental faculty of the wounded (2000).

Larrey's relationship-oriented model is the second framework utilized by the study, focusing on the renewal of relationships (Larrey, 2003:86). Larrey's relationship-oriented model reckons that we are relational beings (Larrey, 2003:84) such that human crises arise and escalates when these relationships are broken. Hence, when we start building this relationship within and outside a person but with persons with similar worldviews and trained personnel, things start fixing themselves out mentally and psychologically (Larrey, 2003). This framework encourages the regeneration of human interpersonal relationships bearing in mind that a human person is a relational being (2003:84). Larrey's model reinforces the significance of restoring communal support systems where individuals relate to a community of persons with similar context, goal, and prevailing circumstances (Larrey, 2003). In the African context, communal living and sharing are resourceful, and seeking support outside oneself is considered befitting and releasing (Lapsley, 2014). This model or framework enables a pre-established background or parameter to analyze the data in a communal-relationship context. Thus, using pastoral counseling through the support-group workshop is a different kind of relationship that convey to seekers the journey of healing.

4. Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative approach using an exploratory approach through interpretive inquiry. The interpretive inquiry is whereby the researcher(s) interpret what is written, read, seen, and understood through the researchers' backgrounds, history, contexts, and frameworks (Creswell, 2009:17). The exploratory variables seek new information and assume the study is relatively a new area of inquiry (Van Vyck, 2012). Document analysis, participant observation of various support group workshops attended by the researcher, and the researcher's long years of experience in pastoral ministry and counseling were combined to gather relevant information. Document analysis represents a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) documents such as mission statements, vision, and modus operandi (Bowen, 2009). In this study, document analysis allows the collection of data from written sources, spoken language, participant observations of relevant healing workshops, and electronic review of support group video clips (Van Vyck, 2012). Participant observation enables the researcher to compare the practice to the contents of evaluated documents.

The researcher also gathers information by drawing from personal experience and endeavors in pastoral training, ministerial theology, and counseling, as well as his interaction with the victims of emotional brokenness. Thematic content analysis was employed to analyze and sequentially present collected data. The ethical approval was secured from the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethical council before embarking on the project.

The major limitation of this study is being bound by the ethics of confidentiality of both the university ethics committee and that of the healing organizations to keep particular information classified (i.e., even when the researcher is granted access to the information, yet the information gathered would not be displayed as part of data presentation) since certain information was reserved for a category of trained staff, personnel or executives. This limitation led to the information displayed in this report being more of a document analysis and a summarized version of workshop outcomes through a thematic analysis. Knowing that this is a very sensitive zone/topic, the researcher strictly adhered to the ethical instructions by the ethical authorities of the university and those of the individual organizations consulted. The researcher relayed the information gathered using the interpretive approach (Creswell, 2009). Hence, the content of the stories or group-sharing outcomes will be systematically presented in this article, given the specification of the ethical requirements. Using the sub-research question, the finding has two sections (A and B).

4.1. Section A

Section A responds to the sub-question: how does storytelling contribute toward healing a painful past? The following themes emanated:

4.1.1. A deeper understanding of one's crisis

It happens during and after normal stressful transitions in one's life's journey, such as birth, puberty, adolescence, marriage, examination, menopause, divorce, retirement etc. (Health 24, 2014). Storytelling tends to ease the level of anxiety without which human beings may not be able to understand certain things about their lives as Paul puts it:

... I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... I can do what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do ... (Romans 7:14-25, NRSV).
In other words, a problem shared is a problem solved as sharing calms human brokenness (Moyo 2014). Every human person is in some ways like all others, like some others, and like no other (Lartey 2003:171). In reality, when a problem or challenge gets easier when shared, as the fear and feeling of being alone makes the problem unbearable, this is a law in nature. The same law of nature is applied to sharing stressful and painful memories or experiences with others (Sharing one’s crisis unavoidably creates moments of transitions, passages, growth, and development (Denis, 2011 a).

4.1.2. Facilitates the possibility of healing painful memories
Experience has shown that even though human events may be forgotten, most often the painful human experiences are still remembered and can subsequently evoke bitter emotions repeatedly (Denis, 2011a: 7). The need for the healing of memories recognizes that our life is miserable when we continue living under the influence and control of painful memories. Often times, humans tend to suppress the remembering of painful emotions intentionally or unintentionally but continue to suffer the consequences of such suppressed emotions because those are not healed (Ward 2014). Like energy which cannot be destroyed, painful memories can only be converted into normal ones through storytelling counselling and support groups processes.

4.1.3. Provides creative opportunities to tackle bitterness and anger in family and relationships
In South African context, the bitterness, anger or the rage of apartheid will take time to be extinguished (Vorster, 2014b). Creative ways of telling our painful stories on media determine the headway toward healing of the brokenness hearts, families and human relationships, the circle of abuses, violence and social inequalities that currently permeate South African society. For instance, the Kumbuluekhaya TV program helps in finding close family members displaced by the legacy of the past.

4.1.4. Addiction
In overcoming drug and alcohol addiction requires a support group, healing workshops and counselling sessions which cannot be possible without storytelling. The victims of bitter memories clung to addiction as a form of solace or ‘coping’ mechanism (Health 24, 2014). Addiction impairs the power of volition as described:

*a man or woman whose power to exercise rational volition has been seriously eroded by drugs [alcohol], and whose life is instead organized largely – even exclusively – around the pursuit and satisfaction of his [her] addiction (quoted in Schaler 2000:3).*

4.1.5. Domestic violence
Domestic violence remains the greatest cause of breaking relationships in South Africa (SSA, 2021). Just as children from violent homes internalized violence, they are prone to continue perpetuating violence thereby creating a cycle of stress and victimization (Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2000:131). As women and children pay the biggest price, storytelling goes a long way in creating awareness that translates into combating policies and healing strategies (2000:120). Storytelling brings together the perpetrators and victims of emotional pain and traumatic experiences into memories-healing experiences (Field, 2008:150).

4.1.6. Restoration of morality
Gallagher (2006:328) indicated that morality ‘is never a blind’ where the truth is exposed. Thus, ‘morality’ and human conscience die a natural death where storytelling is omitted or relegated to nothingness. To get healed from brokenness, the ardent need to rebuild and regain our sense of morality, values, and sacredness becomes a *sinequanon* (2006:328). Storytelling becomes a vehicle that carries this phenomenon on a larger scale through healing workshops, counseling, and support group (Ward, 2014). Thus, the story shared by seekers is nothing but the truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life…” (Jn 14:6); whenever light appears, the darkness vanishes immediately.

4.1.7. Storytelling sustains the healing process and miracle
Ward (2014) acknowledges that the healing process takes time, and one needs ‘patience and persistence. In the middle of the emptiness and nothingness created by sad memories or traumatic experiences, one needs to buy time, have the mind stimulated and energy of his or her volition restored. Sharing and listening to stories keeps the seeker going and persistent for healing. Ward asserts:

*Healing takes time. [Therefore] be as persistent as the Canaanite woman who would not let Jesus ignore her condition. She did not take ‘No’ for an answer … healing may take longer … because it is not always easy to let go of deep-seated feelings or grudges…. (Ward 2014).*

In South Africa, the deep-seated grudges are still there as a result, violence has become common and used as entertainment even in the media (Van den Berg 2014). Although the healing process takes a long time, effort and willingness determine the pace at which one gets healed (Ward 2014). Hence, this is the point where South African society falls short, given the amount of violence being broadcasted on the media in the name of storytelling or entertainment, the healing process can say to be neutralized.

4.1.8. Storytelling helps in balancing emotions
Demartini (2006:3) assert healing process requires one to practice the balancing of one’s emotions. ‘Balancing of emotions’ encapsulates sharing one’s painful emotions or stories where one feels safe (2006:3). Since humans can change their minds and opinions, they can as well change their perceptions and feelings of their life events (2006:3). Balancing of emotions incorporates the process and experiences that change one’s perception which includes focusing on the positive aspects of one’s life experiences (Ward 2014).

4.2. Section B
This section responds to the sub-research question: *What is the role of pastoral counselling in the healing of painful memories?*
4.2.1. Organizations consulted

The organizations consulted which have healing of the painful memory and counselling as part of their vision and pastoral practice are as follows:

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)
- The Diakonia Council of Churches (DCoC)
- The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA)
- The Thukela-Amajula-Mzinyathi Christian Council (TAMCC)
- The KwaZulu Regional Christian Council (KRCC)
- The iJubilee Connexion
- The Ujamaa Centre
- Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA)
- The Vuleka Trust
- The Thandanani Children’s Foundation (TCF)
- The Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM)
- and The Journey into Healing (JIH)
- The Sinomlando and Thandanani centres

4.2.2. Overview of activities

The truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) helps heal and reconcile individuals into a life of emotional well-being using workshops, policy papers, pastoral care procedures, and prayers (Dziva & Ngoetjana, 2011). TRC also uses healing of memories and reconciliation consortium which consists of different support groups that approach healing from different spectrums that include (1) the Diakonia Council of Churches (DCoC) which conducts stress and trauma healing workshops and debriefings; (2) the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) which incorporates different churches and other partner communities in working together towards a transformed society of freedom, equality, human dignity and mutual respect; (3) the Thukela-Amajula-Mzinyathi Christian Council (TAMCC) which builds local clergy to support individual and group activities healing the wounds of political violence, and tensions between farmers and farm dwellers; (4) the KwaZulu Regional Christian Council (KRCC) which offers capacity building for people who need healing of memories from political, domestic and taxi violence, and those affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic; (5) the Ujamaa Centre which instills hope and nurture positive living among HIV/AIDS infected people through workshops, awareness creation and community-based supports; (6) the iJubilee Connexion which contributes in the healing of refugees, explores ways to eliminate xenophobia and encourage churches and families to integrate refugees; (7) the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) which mobilises the youth to participate in capacity building processes and healing of memories sessions on masculinity and male-chauvinism; (8) the Vuleka Trust which helps organizations and people in dealing with issues of diversity and intolerance (e.g. homophobia, racism, xenophobia, masculinity etc.); (9) the Thandanani Children’s Foundation (TCF) which provides supports and empowerment to the children that are orphaned due to HIV/AIDS; (10) the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM) which offers healing of memories workshops to the memory-wounded persons and trains people to be competent facilitators of healing of memories sessions; (11) the Journey into Healing (JIH) which conducts a journey into healing workshops, and also trains seminarians, priests and nuns into being efficient facilitators of the healing workshops; (12) the Sinomlando and Thandanani centers provide healing through the Memory Box program (Ntsimane, 2006:14); and (13) the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM), and sister institution Journey into Healing (JIH) that offer workshops for healing interventions (IHOM 2009). Thus, in their similarities, these organizations recognized that South Africa’s past is just wounded, but such wounds have affected (and continue to affect) the present and future lives of its citizens (Dziva & Ngoetjana, 2011:2-3). The support groups engage in a collective effort to provide healing of memories and emotional pain in a community and pastoral-oriented fashion. Hence, these healing groups are non-governmental organizations with allies with different religions; they reach out to families and communities using volunteer lay and religious people, clergy, and other skilled or professional operatives (Onwuegbuchulam, 2016). Since the dawn of democracy, their program has enabled families to reunite through forgiveness, reconciliation, and recovery of lost human willingness to heal their painful memories (Ntsimane, 2006:7).

4.2.3. Workshops and methods

The general methodology used for the workshops is guided by similar principles (Denis, 2011b). Firstly, a team of skilled or trained facilitators is provided who use emotional movies, drama, personal storytelling, prayer, and songs to trigger painful, traumatized, hurting experiences and memories (Denis 2011b:21). This process is intended to evoke emotions and prepare participants mentally and psychologically for the healing (2011b:21). Thus, the process provides a safe space. The participants are put into small groups to share their stories such that the individual begins to build trust and mental strength. Each group is accompanied by a trained or skilled facilitator who directs the session accordingly. The climax of the session is when each participant receives ample opportunity to share his or her story while others listen in empathy (2011b: 21). Most times, the facilitator is a survivor trained to use their healing experience to support other group members (2011b: 21). The facilitators help each storyteller to clarify and get in touch or connect with their own stories. The ethics of confidentiality binds the stories shared in every group. A debriefing is made general from the experiences of particular groups. The workshop facilitator emphasizes aspects of the healing process as a brief reflection that would ignite unique personal introspection toward healing (Nell 2011). The healing exercise is concluded with a ritual of Prayer Service, which includes making one's Mandala using clay or other symbols (Vorster, 2014). Mandala is a Sanskrit word for a healing circle, and it is a symbol of the self, unity, completeness, and perfection (Vorster, 2013:83). Mandala also serves as a symbol of healing and unity of the mind to particular individuals, e.g., flower, rock, sea, leaf, sand, tree, river, wood, fire, wind, etc. (see Viljoen, 1994:82; Vorster 2014a).
4.2.4. Role of pastoral counseling

The participant observation has shown the amazing network with which these organizations interact with the grassroots communities and their participants (Denis, 2011b). Lartey (2003:62) enumerates the characteristics of pastoral counseling and its important role in the healing process, including sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating, and empowering the seeker. In sustaining, the process enables participants to find strength and support in certain human situations through reflection and introspection. Hence, gathering and giving strength and support is targeted and achieved at every process step. This helps participants cope with the predicaments encountered and grappling with in their life's praxis (2003: 62). In guiding, participants grow by learning from others or being guided and supported by others (i.e., by the entire family). Reconciling brings participants back to healthier human relationships such that human relationship is (re)kindled. Thus, this involves reconciling people who have frightened and difficult issues in their lives and have drifted away from proper human interaction. Nurturing helps participants learn to live (or at least survive) in certain life situations. In liberating, the pastoral counselor helps participants free themselves from the shackles of crises and injustices surrounding them. Empowering enables and motivates participants to think and act in ways that bring freedom, proper participation, and contribution to society. Thus, it provides the means of moving people into positive and valuable actions (Lartey, 2003:62; Waruta & Kinoti, 2000).

5. Discussion

Meanwhile, in drawing strength from the exemplary life of Jesus’ ministry, pastoral counseling and ministry recognize the impact of the greater power of God when we (humans) are in search of healing (Jn 3:16). The Suffice once said that God put people on earth because [God] loves stories (Tutu, 2009). This implies that every aspect of human life is (re)created through a story is evident in the creation stories such that we get life through the "Word" which is God through Jesus Christ (Jn 10: 10, Jn 1:1). The vision of heaven, God, strength, and healing has always been the vision of community. The community meddles with relationships, interaction, and support; none of these can be possible without the word. God brought every creature into existence through word by the command, "Let there be light, and there was light ..." (Genesis 1:1-31, Genesis 2:1-4). This further manifests in the New Testament, where Jesus taught the disciples through parables and stories (e.g., the parable of the Good Samaritan) (see Luke 10:25-37) to insight them into deep thoughts of reflection and storytelling as moral action. This illustrates the power of storytelling and its connectedness with the creation and the Creator (Denis 2011 a). Storytelling also discloses the secret of sharing; thus, what can happen through sharing (either hurtful or gracious feelings) and experiences. Ward (2014) asserts that if one chooses to hold onto anger one (w)holistic healing becomes impossible. In other words, one must make an effort to liberate oneself from the bondage of the past painful memories by speaking up to reach wholeness.

Similarly, DeMartini (2006:2) argues that people should not constrain the healing power of unconditional love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and sharing, which is found in storytelling. An axiom infers that when "you let go; you let God" and to relate with others is tantamount to relating with God, which remains the work of pastoral operatives—thus, uniting the people with the source of their being (Ezenwanne & Mitchell, 2015; Onwuegbuchulam, 2016). Notably, living in brokenness and painful memories may intercept growth in an individual, others, and the entire community (Ward, 2014). African societies, in their various cultural practices, do practice counseling which comes informally through the assistance of elders, friends, family members, neighbors, and traditional leaders (Waruta & Kinoti, 2000:2). The connection between the informal (or culturally based) counseling processes should be intensified in South Africa. Experience has shown that many African individuals cannot link informal African counseling with formal counseling as such, they shy away from accessing formal counseling (Moyo, 2014). Most African cultural beliefs attach secrecy to sacredness and maturity, which is why men are discouraged from crying or voicing out. As such, Denis (2011b:28) argues that in some African cultures, healing of memories and counseling are often neglected because people are simply scared of opening 'a can of worms' or sharing with strangers their deep pain (2011b:28). Increased urbanization has been blamed for the increased of human stress. In contrast, civilization and capitalism have been blamed for the rising need for professional counseling (Waruta & Kinoti, 2000:3). This argument takes for granted that every society has issues relating to marriages, relationship, abuse, trauma, family dispute and oppression, which require people to seek specialized help (Louw, 2000).

In South Africa, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the experiences of conflict in the apartheid era and to remain aware that 'post-conflict South Africa is still a deeply divided country' (Dziva & Ngoetjana, 2011; Nell, 2011). The children of people marginalized during apartheid who live in abject poverty would find it difficult to write pleasant stories (Okoye & Monash, 2021). In order to re-write the ugly past, South Africa needs the government to boost people's socio-economic wellbeing and avoid bandaging the wound without first cleaning it. Firstly, the poor need their lives uplifted; education must be for liberation as well as education (Okoye & Menash, 2021). An integrated healing drive would then follow this.

Moreover, Lapsley sees the atmosphere of the healing workshops as a safe place to 'vomit the poison' that had filled someone's heart through storytelling (Nell, 2011:48). Thus, in the process of telling one’s story, participants vomit the bitterness that hinders, prevents or delays them from being healed. This present generation has to get in touch with their wound. The pastoral care and healing of wounded-memory facilitators must be encouraged (Denis, 2011a:5). Although citizens may still remember the painful experience when healing has taken place, such painful incidents would no longer be a threat or threat cause distress in their lives (Ward
Pastoral counseling and storytelling have challenges in Africa (Denis, 2011a:14). Often, the individual encounters the difficulty of unaffordability or getting access to his or her emotional experiences of pain which elongates the process of healing (2011a:14). Storytelling in a mixed healing group, may be hindered when one struggles to articulate one’s story in a second language (2011a). This problem applies to a pastoral counseling encounter where the seekers struggle to express him or herself in a second language to accommodate the language of the counsellor who is from a different language background. This, however, explains why many African people prefer to share their pains in communal or family reconciliation rituals. The challenge is that the structure and flow of contemporary social life have changed to some extent, making it less attractive for families to meet together for such family healing, informal reconciliation, and rituals. The formal counseling platform has been criticized for encouraging individuality because it allows an individual the freedom to work through his or her healing without having to informally commune with family members (Denis, 2011b). The African healing organizations struggle a lot with funding as if their contribution is less important to society. Despite their services being offered free of charge, the availability of funds for running those workshops determines their efficiency or limitations.

6. Recommendation

South African government should prioritize the healing of memories programs and make it an ongoing project by including a necessary financial budget that would subsidize the expenses of the Institutions, thereby expanding the healing structures across South African communities. This country wants to protect women from violent men but isolates neglect and sacrifices men’s protection. Men’s counseling drive and facilities is a sine qua non in the South African context. It should be provided in men’s workplaces, schools, mines, and local communities to provide men with the opportunity to speak out their stories and anger.

The government should regulate the level of crime shown in South African media in the name of telling our story or entertainment (the age limit and warnings are not enough). Thus, a serious censoring policy should be extended to the production nomenclature of this entertainment program. The flaunting of violence on the media (or TV) is taking the nation backward. The media artists should be more creative by initiating programs like Khumul’ ekhaya that would encourage social cohesion, love, reconciliation, laughter, humor, forgiveness, and motivation for the rediscovery of the beliefs in the transcendent healing God.

The Church and government should partner to extend the healing and rehabilitation programs to the street kids and “paras”. One could see what is happening in the streets of South Africa, Philadelphia in Pennsylvania (USA), and other places where people in their productive age are stuck on the street abusing drugs. Policy intervention is needed to overture the overwhelming spread of “streetkids” or “para” worldwide.

Philosophy may need to be (re)introduced in South African primary and high schools as thinking has become a challenge to the young generation in recent years. Definitions of family, sexual orientation, and relationship should be expanded in the national policy to widen the options where people’s life preferences and rights are being respected to increase human happiness and well-being. The Church must be regulated. The church operatives must be mandated to have theology qualifications (preferably a related degree) from a reputable university, just like in the teaching profession, before being licensed to lead a church. This ensures that the Church and its leaders are part of the solution, not the problem.

7. Conclusion

This study argued that storytelling and pastoral counseling are powerful tools that can be used to provide healing of painful memories both at the community and individual levels. The importance of integrating the African informal counseling method and the pastoral counseling approach is critical. For instance, the integration of traditional peacekeeping, forgiveness, and memory healing rituals in the society in a way that functions not as an alternative but as a roadmap to formal counseling in South African society. Unfortunately, the modern Church (es) seems to be sleeping with the magicians or rather. The magicians seem to have found a new stage that makes some religious and pastoral practices appear as scams. This situation does not help promote religion’s pastoral agency in African society. It is surprising that a moral institute such as the Church with supposedly trained moral superiors has no “dos and don’ts” that we witness atrocities being committed or perpetuated in the Church by so-called church leaders. Although not every Church is found guilty, one wonders why the regulation of the Church has not been actualized.

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