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Ra mufi ari tluriwi: Is the tradition of honouring a person's final wishes still upheld in the context of a changing South African society?

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In an African context, the concept of death inspires discussions about rituals and ways of remembering the departed, with the latter being influenced largely by how they lived, including what they loved and spoke about. The prevalence of the saying *ra mufi ari tluriwi* among some South African black communities, like the Vatsonga and Vhavenda, is often received with mixed expressions and feelings, in which the bereaved family are often confronted with a difficult choice between doing and not doing what is requested by the deceased. As much as this saying conveys the respect held by the living for the wishes and the instructions expressed by the deceased prior to their departure, it also raises issues of the feasibility and acceptability of what is being claimed to have been the deceased's proposal or plan. It becomes more debatable if it is about the funeral and the possessions the deceased left behind, especially if the plan or words of the deceased are not written as was the tradition in the African context. The wishes of the deceased may be about how his or her burial should be conducted and arranged or about what he or she leaves behind in the form of inheritance. Recalling what the deceased said or proposed becomes more subjective, and the engagement about that may prolong or even disrupt the funeral arrangements, depending on the contestations of the veracity of the raised matter. This article intends to find out if the practice of honouring and respecting the wishes of deceased people is relevant and valid within contemporary society prior to and after their funerals. The study will adopt structured interviews with the cultural representatives in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Contribution: The research reported in this article was carried out with the intention of an unbiased examination of the circumstances relating to the carrying out of the wishes of the deceased.

Keywords: death wishes; African; deceased; traditions; culture.

Introduction

One of the common practices among most Africans is the respect and honour that they give to the deceased, sometimes even more than they did when the person was still alive. Baloyi (2014) emphasised this point when arguing that people would travel to distant areas, which they might not have done for any other reason, for the sake of paying their last respects to the deceased. Prioritising the honour and respect for the wishes of the deceased is believed to avoid future regrets as well as misfortunes and bad luck. It was believed that this honour and respect for the wishes of the deceased would not stand in the way of ancestorship. Otherwise, instead of becoming ancestors, the dead would become a wandering ghost to torment the living family members (Ekore & Lanre-Abass 2016; Hove & Baloyi 2024; Khosa-Nkatini 2022; Mekoe 2019).

The last wishes of a dying person hold considerable weight among the living within African communities. In many instances, people express undocumented wishes and instructions concerning how they would like things to be carried out after their death. In these communities, death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible or spiritual realm; during this process, the spirit, which is the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves on to live in the spirit ancestors' realm (King 2013). Respect and honour for the wishes of the deceased by the living were also indicated as an avoidance of future regrets (Umahi 2013).

The professional study of psychology in Africa has been and is still dominated by Euro-American approaches (Nwoye 2023), and consequently, views on and conceptions of death in

psychology tend to be based on traditional Euro-American epistemological paradigms, and many Western psychological theories are regarded as universal (Matoane 2012). In the study reported on in this article, we considered the relationship between the dead and the living in African culture, with the respect with which the deceased person is viewed being similar across African cultures and traditions. We also considered the impact of other cultures and religions in this context. Africans do not favour thinking about, planning for and facing the reality of death. It is not common in African communities for a person to discuss their anticipated death with the rest of the family members. However, it is common for elderly parents to give verbal instructions as to how their funerals should be conducted. Dorsey (2022) makes the observation that besides the wishes of the deceased person being of normative significance, their preferences in terms of what they valued and wished for are significant not only for their peaceful death but also in offering closure to the bereaved.

Problem statement

In his book entitled *Is it Moral to Respect the Wishes of the Dead, Above the Living*? Barry Lam argues that there should be moral reasons to reject or accept a community or society that establishes legal defence to protect the wishes of the dead (Lam 2017:2). Without delving too much into the details of such an argument at present, it is important to note that his argument raises a point which people from other cultures, such as African cultures, would challenge. The issue discussed in this article is whether the practice of honouring the wishes of the dead remains important within some African cultures, such as those of the Tsonga and Venda people living in the northern part of South Africa. Due to these contestations, some African cultures find themselves confused and often diluted by Western culture, and people are slowly turning away from traditional practices relating to death and final wishes. Of course, this is not to argue that the very old practices would be kept as they were for contemporary people, as culture is dynamic and evolving.

Research methods and design

This research employed the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews of selected participants in Limpopo province, South Africa. The study interviewed eight selected participants from Contralesa Malamulele, a group with which our Erosion Research Team[1] is working as a way to obtain the muted African epistemologies. These included representation from va Tsonga and va Venda traditional leaders. There were four female and four male respondents who participated in this study. These participants are aged 50 years and above. Data were collected through interviews, and the respondents used their indigenous (first) languages to respond to interview questions. The study participants consisted of traditional leaders and elderly people from Collins Chabane Local Municipality (Malamulele area, Limpopo Province). The motivation for selecting these participants is that the Congress of Traditional Leaders in South Africa is one of the organisations that fully support and protect culture and tradition. This can also be justified by the parliamentary seat that they have in the South African government. To accommodate all the participants in our study, some of whom were illiterate or semi-literate, we made use of interview and storytelling approaches in gathering information. In traditional African culture, at night, while gathered around the fire, older people would narrate and tell stories to the children. This was a way of transferring knowledge to the younger generation. Storytelling as a cultural representation in research contexts is usually referred to as narrative inquiry (Lee 2009; Stake 2000). The study used a thematic analysis of the data, which had been promoted by Braun and Clark in psychology (Braun & Clark 2008). This is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis 1998).

Neuman (1997) argues that research methodology is what makes social science scientific. The qualitative method was considered most suitable for this study to arrive at quality knowledge and information; this method provides participants with an opportunity to interact and connect with researchers to share the knowledge the participants have. It also offers both the participants and researchers the opportunity to be listened to. Indigenous methodology can be defined as research by and for indigenous peoples, using techniques and methodologies derived from the traditions and knowledge of those peoples (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson & Sookraj in Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008). In support of the qualitative-relationship nature of the-being-of-Africans, Lee (2009) maintains that within each indigenous group there are multiple sites from which to intervene, which require a range of research projects that are ethical towards, respectful of, by and with indigenous people's qualitative approaches. Kovach (2010) concurs with Lee (2009) that indigenous methodologies can be situated within the qualitative landscape because they encompass characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches.

The use of storytelling in clinical therapeutic contexts has also been used by other indigenous communities, such as the Maori (Lee 2009). In our interaction with our study participants, they narrated their stories in the context of therapeutic conversations. The simple random sampling method was used to sample the eight traditional leaders who participated in the study.

Limitation of the study

Our study did not focus on death itself, nor on funerals and bereavement practices within African communities, but rather on last wishes and their implications for the living. The study naturally lent itself to comparison with other cultures, such as Western and ancient Middle Eastern cultures.

1.Erosion refers to the information converted from the data gathered by Erosion Research Team interviewing Contralesa members of Malamulele Region by means of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, which are all stored in safe by the Primary Investigator who is challenging patriarchal understanding that impinges on women's rights in the church and society in this article.

Ra mufi ari tluriwi

At the heart of the study on which this article is based is the Tsonga saying, which says, '*Ra mufi ari tluriwi*', translating into 'The wishes of the deceased must not be undermined or ignored'. The traditional band called 'Boxa Mhaka' has a song entitled *ra mufi ari tluriwi*, after learning it from the Xitsonga idioms (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

A person's last wishes may be separate from a will, in which case, they are not legally binding. However, honouring a person's last wishes is a demonstration of respect and love and can provide a sense of closure and comfort to their loved ones. Wishes often would relate to funeral arrangements, the way the body is to be managed, and obituary information. Also included may be messages to loved ones, requests relating to their final days, information such as the location of the person's will, and the distribution of their assets. A person's last wishes may be expressed verbally or take the form of a letter of wishes or advanced directives.

Advantages of final wishes

Final wishes can offer guidance as to where and how to conduct the funeral, the time of the burial and the people who should attend the funeral. They can also offer guidelines for the distribution of the deceased person's assets. In the absence of the final wishes of the deceased person, those left behind may find the situation more stressful, and disputes and divisions among family members may arise. Honouring a loved one's last wishes can help the bereaved find peace and closure. It has been observed that in the Western world, most people at the end of their life communicate their wishes through their doctors (2021). In some countries, it is legally permissible that the doctors, counsellors and psychiatrists prepare the dying to die peacefully with the assurance that their wishes were understood and will be carried out.

The difference between a person's final wishes and their will in the African context

A person's will is a legal document that sets out how they would like their assets and affairs to be managed after they pass away. It is an important part of estate planning and can help ensure that a person's wishes are carried out. It provides specific instructions about what is to happen to their possessions, stating whether the deceased leaves these to another person, a group, or perhaps, even to charity.

Final wishes, by contrast, are not documented and are communicated verbally to the living. The deceased will have made their wishes known to one or more people in the family in the hope that following their deaths, these will be carried out. Unlike a will, the expression of a person's final wishes does not involve any lawyers.

Beliefs relating to death

Makgahlela (2016:1) states that death comes to all living creatures, including human beings, while Radzilani (2010) explains that while death is an expected and irreversible part of life, it nevertheless has a negative impact on the lives of family members and close relatives. However, different people respond to death in different ways, in part as a result of the religion they are affiliated to.

In African culture, death marks a separation of body and spirit and is viewed as a transition to another world. It is a way of passing from one life to another and, in so doing, reconnecting with the ancestors. According to this belief, death is not a punishment but instead a transformation to a beautiful world where there is no pain.

Perceptions and conceptions of death in any cultural system are based on certain philosophical presuppositions and worldviews (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014); this applies equally to indigenous cultures in Sub-Saharan Africa. Given that there are cultural differences in conceptions of the person, conceptions of humanness tend to vary across cultures as well (Park, Haslam & Kashima 2012). Therefore, from an indigenous African ontological viewpoint, death does not imply an end to life but instead marks the beginning of another phase of being (King 2013). People believe that when a person dies, they are reunited with all their people who have died previously.

Nwaigbo (2010:236), citing Baloyi (2008), notes that rituals are a form by which various ethnic and religious groups express their faith and beliefs. Rituals are cultural performances and rites of passage that mark life experiences. Properly construed, rituals are an expression of people's thoughts, emotions, social organisation and cultural identities. Tshoba (2010) makes the observation that people find rituals (bereavement rituals in particular) helpful, and she states that most cultures have prescribed bereavement and mourning rituals to help the bereaved to adjust.

Some findings from empirical work

The study was conducted at Collins Chabane Local Municipality in November 2024 among the traditional leaders, under the auspices of Contralesa. The study used semi-structured interviews with eight selected participants from Contralesa Malamulele, a group with which our Erosion Research Team[2] is working as a way to obtain the muted African epistemologies.

These included representation from va Tsonga and va Venda traditional leaders. There were four female and four male respondents who participated in this study. These participants are aged 50 years and above. Data were collected through interviews, and respondents used their indigenous (first) languages to respond to interview questions. The data collector and/or researcher translated all the responses into English. However, some of the respondents' responses were

2.Erosion refers to the information converted from the data gathered by Erosion Research Team interviewing the Contralesa members of the Malamulele Region by means of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, which are all stored in safe by the Primary Investigator who is a coauthor in this article.

a mixture of English and their first language. All responses were then consolidated, and the information represents the ideas and opinions of respondents. The researcher captured all the information from respondents on the writing pads. The number of interviewees was eight, and the following are questions (in vernacular language in italics) and their responses. How many responded negatively or positively: *'Swivula yini leswaku ra mufi ari tluriwi*? [What does it mean that the word of the deceased must not be undermined?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

All participants responded the same way to the question, defining and explaining their understanding of the phrase *ra mufi a ri tluriwi* [deceased must not be undermined]. The person makes their wishes clear before passing on and expects those by whom they are survived to carry out all these wishes. Some of these wishes relate to where and how the person would like to be buried, who should attend the funeral, what time the burial should take place, and so on. If the person owned assets and property, they may leave some instructions as to how these are to be shared or distributed among the beneficiaries. This is when a loved one has particular wishes with regard to how things need to happen when they are no more. This is besides having control over the whole process. Some people may even request that no funeral be held, which may upset or anger the living relatives, as the funeral is regarded as a time for celebrating the life of the deceased and a time to offer comfort to the mourning family. Summary of the response majority: *'Imani a nga na malunghelo yo vula leswi na swona hi loko ku humelele yini*? [Who is supposed to give instruction or make these final wishes?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024)

Five of the participants indicated that anyone is eligible to make wishes and leave instructions as to how their families must act and share the assets and how to conduct their funerals. This is an African way of drafting a will that is not documented and does not need a lawyer to execute. However, most of the time, this drafting is performed by the older generation. People are more used to respecting the wishes of older people than of younger people. African communities tend to respect a deceased person more than the living, and people try to understand what is being said or communicated. The remaining three participants said that wishes are mostly made by elderly people who anticipate leaving or passing away at any given time: *'Xana vanhu va swilandzelela naa?* [Do families carry out these wishes and instructions?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

Four of the participants positively agreed that people do follow this instruction. However, the remaining four indicated that it is difficult to say, but some families do follow the instructions precisely because there is a belief that if they do not carry out the wishes and instructions, some bad things might happen in the family: *'Loko lava va nga sala voka vanga swi landzeleli* [*va ri tlula*] *ku humelela yini*? [What are the consequences of disobeying the dead?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

All eight participants said that there is a strong belief among some traditional people that if one disobeys the instructions of the deceased, something bad will happen to them. This could take the form of a bad omen or even death. Some people might experience misfortune affecting themselves and even their children. There is a strongly held belief that one should adhere to whatever a dying person says so as to avoid bad things happening to oneself. The traditional people believe that the dead person will block one's success and prosperity if their final wishes are not carried out as expected or directed: *'Hi kuya hi ndzavuko wa vatima* (*Vatsonga*) *xana kuna mpimo wa malembe ya munhu loyi anga fanela ku nyika swileriso anga se hundza e misaveni*? [Is there any age limit for expressing one's final wishes?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

All participants were in agreement that tradition and culture do not dictate or set a limit in terms of the age at which people are eligible to make a final wish and to give instructions as to how things are to be carried out when they are gone. Any person may give instructions as to how they want their funeral to be conducted and the process of handling the whole bereavement. However, it is common practice in African culture to set greater store by what is said by older people than by young people. This is because older people are wise and mature, and whatever they say is regarded as being of value: *'Hi swihi switandzaku swa loko ra mufi roka ringa landzeleriwi.* [What are the consequences of not adhering to the wishes of the dead?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

Six of the participants indicated that it is believed that bad things might happen in the family, such as sickness, lack of prosperity and success, and, at worst, the death of family members. Therefore, family members are expected to adhere to all the instructions and wishes as stipulated to avoid such consequences. The worst things might happen, and the only remedy then is to consult with a seer, prophet or traditional healer, who will consult with the dead person for instructions as to what is to be performed to remedy the situation. This act may include performing a ritual to appease the dead, after which life will return to normal again. The other two participants said that bad things may happen only to those who believe it, and this was based on the different religious beliefs that the people have: *'Xana ku lerisiwa leswinene tsena kumba na swo ka swinga ri swinene swa lerisiwa ke?* [Are final wishes good or bad?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

All participants were in agreement that wishes are sometimes good and sometimes bad. While still alive, people take note of how they are being treated and respond through their last wishes and the instructions they leave behind. For instance, if children misbehaved, were rude and caused trouble to everyone while the person was alive, the deceased might not leave any of their assets or property to their children, and worst of all, might exclude a child from attending the funeral as a punishment. However, by contrast, a parent may be able to bless their children while still alive or on their deathbed. In some instances, they can distribute their assets or possessions among their children while still alive: *'Loko munhu o tlula swileriso ivi ku humelela swinwana swoka swi ngarikahle swa koteka leswaku endzaku ka nkarhi a kombela kurivaleriwa eka mufi naa?* [Is there a remedy, or can people do

something to appease the dead to obtain forgiveness?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

Six participants said that according to African traditions and culture, the only way to appease the dead is through connecting with the ancestors, which needs to be performed first by consulting the traditional healer (*sangoma*), who will then give instructions as to how things must be done. This process will also include sacrifices to the deceased, who will then decide whether to forgive. This process is sometimes costly and needs to be carried out and complied with, as it is the punishment meted out by the dead person. Those being punished are expected to conduct themselves differently and show some remorse for their behaviour. This act will earn them forgiveness and favours from the deceased. The other two participants said that dealing with the consequences of disobedience of the instructions of the dead depends on your belief: '*Xana swileriso leswi swingava swi vula ku biwa kumbe ku panichiwa ka lava va nga sala naa?* [Are these final wishes and instructions a form of punishment of the living?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

All participants responded that, to some extent, yes, this is a way of making sure that the living does, in fact, carry out the deceased person's instructions. Sometimes people do not listen and take someone seriously while they are still alive and living among them but do take them seriously when they instruct them from the grave. In African culture and traditions, people respect and obey the dead more than the living, which is why people make their final wishes known. It is also customary within African culture to consult a traditional healer or *sangoma* when somebody has passed on, especially if the deceased was elderly. People believe that the dead will communicate with their family through the *sangoma* and give instructions as to how the burial should be carried out. Some will inform some of the family members about their wishes, and these family members will, in turn, pass the message on to the rest of the family after the person has passed away, but this situation usually causes divisions and fighting in the family. Some people find it difficult to accept and believe that these messages and instructions are really from the deceased. Some people write their final wishes down so that these will be read to every family member when the time is right, and more especially, after their death: '*Lava vantshwa* (*vatsongo*) *va switiva swilu leswi xana*, *kuna ndlela yo vadyondzisa xana* [Are the youth aware of this tradition, or are any lessons provided for the youth with regard to this tradition?]' (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024).

All participants indicated that the youth are not familiar with this practice, because it is not usually spoken about, as it is regarded as sacred. There is no formal teaching or orientation provided for young people, but they learn about this practice as they grow up. They gain first-hand exposure only when this involves them directly, or when they are grown up and see this being applied in the family. This is regarded as a practice meant for adults, as dictated by African culture and tradition.

Results

The study was carried out through questionnaires and structured interviews within Contralesa members under the Collins Chabane Local Municipality, with participants being traditional leaders as custodians of culture and traditions within the Tsonga and Venda communities. The study brought to light a very strong African belief and set of practices regarding a person's wishes expressed prior to their death. All participants emphasised the importance of respecting and carrying out the final wishes and instructions of the dying person (Erosion, pers. comm., 2024), as there are negative consequences associated with not doing so. This practice has been observed for generations and will continue. This trend ties in with the belief that after death, people pass through to another realm, with the deceased being given the same respect as those who are still living. Mbiti (1990) explains that this does not constitute ancestor worship but is a way of honouring the deceased. Even though Africans did not draft wills and write down their wishes, the practice of giving instructions as to what should happen following their death is a long-established one. It is argued in this article that the fact that African knowledge was not written down for colonial reasons does not mean that it did not exist. From a counselling perspective, Welsch and Gottschling (2021) are of the opinion that in managing the last phase of life, taking care of the dying patient's wishes is very important as it can also relieve the patient and his or her family of unnecessary burdens.

The importance of ancestors in African tradition and culture

For Itumeleng Mekoe (2019), the living dead or ancestors are regarded as guardians of morality among most African tribes. In most African cultures, ancestors have an important role to play in providing support to, giving direction to and influencing the lives of the living. They are viewed as the guiding angels who can always provide protection and blessings to their descendants. Even if a person dies poor and weak, their families expect them to transform their families for the better. This is a very strong belief that has been held by African communities throughout the ages. Some cultures believe that their ancestors exist somewhere, even though they are dead and not visible in their families. According to Msomi (2008), there are still some people who believe that if they do not honour the wishes of their deceased relatives, it haunts them in the form of misfortune or sickness. An example is a sick person who asked to be released from the hospital, saying he will never get healed before he goes home to KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) to first honour the death of his mother, who was buried in his absence.

Some go to the extent of creating a room believed to accommodate the dead person's spirit; this act is carried out to bring them closer to the family so that they can perform their duties for the living. Other communities will name a child after a deceased person in the belief that the dead person resides within the family through that child, and in this way, the relationship with the deceased is maintained.

Within African culture, post-burial rituals are considered necessary; if this process is ignored or the family decides to go against tradition, they will face the consequences. According to Mbiti (1990:158), the process of dying continues for as long as there is someone alive who knew the living dead and is completed when the last person to have known them dies, at which time the living dead loses personal immortality and acquires collective immortality as a spirit.

All participants from the Tsonga and Venda cultures agreed that the wishes of the dead must be obeyed and adhered to so as to avoid negative consequences; so, for instance, if a person has been banned by the deceased from attending the funeral, the family must make sure that this in fact happens. These wishes are communicated clearly to the affected person(s) in advance to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings.

In some cultures, ancestors are believed to reside in a specific realm or plane of existence, where they continue to play an active role in the lives of their descendants. In others, ancestors may be believed to reincarnate within the same family or clan, continuing their journey towards spiritual enlightenment through successive generations. The importance of ancestor veneration in African cultures reflects a belief in the interconnectedness of all life and in the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.

By maintaining a relationship with their ancestors, African communities seek to honour and preserve the wisdom and traditions of their ancestors and to draw strength and guidance from the collective experience of their forebears.

Theological perspectives on the wishes and instructions of the deceased

It is very clear that the Bible forbids and discourages consulting with the dead. The issue in this article is not about consulting with the dead but adhering to or undermining what they said and wished for before they died. The example of this is read from the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19–31). Therefore, the discussion has nothing to do with ancestral consultation or worship. From a theological point of view, there are some stories that depict the regard in which wishes as well as instructions were held. From the patriarchal period, there had been statements made by dying people, especially because they died at home, where they would be surrounded by their families and loved ones. The first example of this is found in Genesis 49:1–33, where we read that Jacob assembled all his 12 children and told them what was to happen to them in the future, evaluating the standing of each with him individually, and then either blessing or cursing them for their actions. At the end, Jacob confirmed his final wishes with them and instructed them that following his death, he wished to be buried in Mechpelah cave in Canaan, where Abraham and many others were buried. After addressing them in this way, Jacob died and was buried there as his last wish.

In Genesis chapter 50:1–14, we find an account of how Israel, Joseph's father, instructed his son to bury him in Canaan in a tomb that he had prepared for himself. Following his father's death, Joseph requested Pharaoh's permission to take his father's body for burial in Canaan as instructed. Joseph, the last son of Jacob, also made some statements before he died. Like his father, Joseph made his brothers swear to follow his burial instructions before he died. For that reason, in Exodus 13:19, Moses instructs the Israelites to take with them the bones of Joseph, who had expressed the wish to be buried in Canaan. Although this instruction had been given a long time prior to his death, they had an obligation to carry it out, as they had sworn an oath to Joseph. It looks like no one among the sojourning patriarchs wished to be buried in Egypt as, for them, it was the land of oppression and persecution. Even when enjoying the promises in Egypt, that did not make Joseph forget that God's promise to his forefathers was that their land is Canaan (Ex 50:24). Although such arguments are for another study, it is important to note that the giving of messages and instructions by the dying people to the living had been a practice even during ancient Hebrew times.

What is also important is the narration that all these wishes were kept by the living. In other words, it can still be said that the rod of the deceased was important to be followed even in those biblical times. Even though the few biblical stories about the wishes of the dying people suggest that there was in the ancient biblical times a practice of honouring and respecting the wishes of people who made instructions before they died, the Bible did not make a ruling to instruct everyone. But happily, it also does not condemn those who honestly adhere to the instructions, especially as they do not instruct one to do something against God's word.

Discussion

The study reported on in this article acknowledges that the argument by Lam (2017) indicates there is a possibility of either rejecting or honouring the wishes of the dead, depending on the importance of the message left. It is a fair judgement to say that Lam (2017) did not wish away the wishes of the dead but put it in the hands of those involved to make such a decision in the family, while advocating that such decisions must not be used to determine the voting of the living should that need arise. It should be noted that these are his own convictions and beliefs, which do not really represent all cultures around the world. It is his opinion, which might have been influenced by his own socio-political context. African culture and traditions relating to death are embedded in long-held beliefs and attitudes, are very complex, and vary from community to community. We support the opinion that diversity is not easy to implement, but if properly applied, it can also be a resource (Leung 2012). As much as a written will is respected and honoured, the unwritten will in an African context deserves equal respect, as has been the case in the past for generations. It is important to respect a person's last wishes and preserve both tradition and culture. Post-burial rituals are crucial because, without them, the dying process is not

complete, as some of a person's final wishes are carried out after burial. Those who decide not to perform them properly, or who do not perform them at all, choose to upset and ostracise the invisible members of their families.

It is unfortunate that these cultural practices are passed on from one generation to the next orally and that there are no written records which can be consulted in this regard.

The African attitude towards death, like that of any other culture in the world, should be respected and preserved for the benefit of future generations. African youth should be made aware of or trained to know and understand their tradition and culture with regard to final wishes and funerals, so that they are not taken by surprise. The study revealed that the carrying out of a person's final wishes should not be interpreted as ancestor worship and that these wishes are often intended to benefit and bring peace to the bereaved family.

Further research is recommended to obtain the views of community members of all ages on this subject, and in that way, ensure adequate representation. This research will also contribute to preserving the beliefs, culture and traditions of the African community, as the youth are the leaders of tomorrow and will then be custodians of this very culture. Continued engagement, conversation and discussion concerning practices relating to death are necessary. According to Diaspora Insurance News (2020), respecting the last wishes of the dead is a question of ethics, respect, honesty and integrity, and these wishes should be upheld for the sake of dignity, fulfilment, preservation and positive memories.

Conclusion

The study reported in this article was conducted to explore the traditions associated with the saying *Ra mufi ari tluriwi* within the context of a changing South African society and involved interviews with the traditional leaders within the Collins Chabane Local Municipality (Malamulele area) in Limpopo. The practice under consideration has been observed for generations and is part of the culture and tradition of the Tsonga and Venda people residing within the Collins Chabane Local Municipality. A reading of the Bible suggests that this practice was also common during the time of the Patriarchs, with Jacob and his son Joseph providing examples of how instructions were given to their family as to what must be performed when they died. In the contemporary Western world, drawing up a will is common practice and an accepted way of conveying instructions regarding a person's funeral and the disposal of their wealth or property. While there is a correlation between biblical, Western and African traditions in this regard, it was not the intention of the study to ascertain which was derived from which. The intention behind the study was in part to suggest that cultural diversity should be welcomed within African society, in which people of different groups must be allowed to preserve their own cultures and traditions, especially as and when their practices are not in opposition to their faith.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRediT authorship contribution

Magezi E. Baloyi: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision. Hasani P. Shikolokolo: Formal analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and/or available from the corresponding author, Magezi Baloyi.

Disclaimer

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