



Suicide and Agency in African Communitarian Societies: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Basotho Culture

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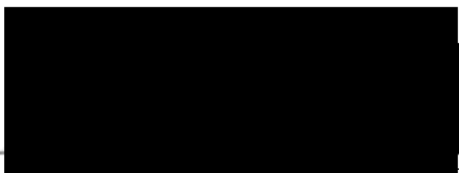
Declaration

I, Lemohang Tebeli, hereby declare that: “Suicide and Agency in African Communitarian Societies: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Basotho Culture” is my original work that has not been submitted for any form: degree/diploma or examination at any other university. And all the citations, sources or references used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged.



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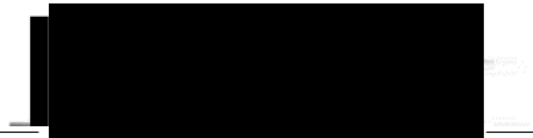


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STATEMENT BY THE SUPERVISOR

This research paper has been submitted **with**/without my approval.



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Dedication

I dedicate this study firstly to my mother (Puseletso Rebecca Mosimane) and my little sister (Tshiamo Mosimane); I love you. Secondly, to my best friend, Sbongimpilo Mdabe, who gave me great unwavering support, Thank you.

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I want to express my appreciation to the following people for playing a significant role in my journey towards the completion of this study:

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Abstract

This thesis delves into the nuanced interplay between individual agency and communal responsibilities in addressing suicide, with a particular focus on suicide prevention within African Communitarian Societies (ACS), notably examining the Basotho culture as a case study. The study aims to fill the gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of how cultural practices, social structures, and traditional healing modalities within ACS contribute to suicide resilience and suicide prevention. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of limited communitarianism as a guiding framework for understanding and addressing suicide issues within ACS. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the research illuminates the intricate dynamics between individual autonomy and communal well-being in the context of suicide. Key arguments in the study revolve around the communal practices of the Basotho people, which serve as a testament to their understanding of suicide and well-being as collective responsibilities. The study underscores the significance of integrating cultural sensitivity and community engagement into suicide prevention strategies, advocating for the respect of both individual autonomy and communal responsibilities. In this thesis, I seek to argue that Limited Communitarianism is a viable framework that helps understand the idea of suicide better; hence, suicide is not just an individual act or issue but goes beyond to being a communal one. With this theory, it can be seen that the individual's rights and dignity are advocated for since limited communitarianism takes each person's individuality seriously and accords the right to determine their own actions.

General Introduction

In the complex tapestry of African Communitarian Societies (ACS), the delicate equilibrium between individual autonomy and collective well-being has been a subject of nuanced exploration. Rooted in this context, limited communitarianism emerges as a theoretical framework that navigates the intricate interplay between individual rights and community dynamics. This work endeavours to unravel the profound implications of limited communitarianism within ACS, particularly in suicide prevention, with a specific focus on the Basotho culture. Limited communitarianism, characterised by the quest to uphold a delicate balance between individual rights and community well-being, acknowledges the significance of individual autonomy while emphasising that actions should not harm oneself or the community. The philosophical foundations of limited communitarianism underscore the protection of fundamental rights, including the inviolable right to life. Within ACS, this framework challenges reductionist views of personhood, emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals within communal bonds.

Suicide, as a manifestation of extreme individual despair, disrupts the sought-after balance of limited communitarianism. Recognising suicide not merely as an individual act but as a complex interplay between personal struggles and communal interconnectedness, this study delves into how limited communitarianism fundamentally shapes our understanding of suicide within ACS. The Basotho culture serves as a focal point, offering practical insights into the application of limited communitarianism in the prevention and intervention of suicide. Central to limited communitarian thought is the concept of collective responsibility, emphasising the community's active role in shaping an individual's identity and well-being. In the context of suicide prevention, this perspective underscores the idea that the community should intervene when an individual's actions contradict their well-being and metaphysical identity. The study explores how this collective responsibility can be harnessed in practical terms, drawing from the Basotho cultural context.

Acknowledging that suicide transcends individual consequences, this research scrutinises the profound implications of suicide on the Basotho community within the limited communitarian framework. Beyond the immediate emotional and psychological aftermath, limited communitarianism highlights the strain on communal bonds and shared values. The Basotho culture, with its distinctive characteristics, serves as a lens to examine how suicide disrupts social cohesion and communal values, necessitating collective healing and support.

While limited communitarianism provides a compelling framework, its application faces challenges. The challenges addressed include the tension between individual autonomy and community values, diverse cultural landscapes within ACS, defining community boundaries, ethical dilemmas in community intervention, and the need for adequate support. The study critically evaluates these challenges, recognising the necessity for context-specific adaptations.

This study aims to extend the application of limited communitarianism in ACS, mainly through an in-depth analysis of suicide prevention strategies within the Basotho culture. The subsequent chapters will explore the historical and cultural context of the Basotho people, examine the practical implications of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention, and provide recommendations for culturally sensitive interventions. Through a multidisciplinary lens, this research contributes to both theoretical discourse and practical approaches in addressing suicide within the intricate web of ACS.

Chapter One initiates a thorough exploration of suicide, delving into history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and law. Guided by influential thinkers like Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Albert Camus (1913–1960), it dissects human thought on suicide, addressing psychological complexities, legal implications, societal reflections, and philosophical musings. The chapter critically examines philosophical viewpoints such as existentialism, utilitarianism, and deontology to comprehend self-inflicted mortality. While encompassing global perspectives, the chapter uniquely considers the Basotho people’s viewpoint in South Africa, unravelling cultural nuances that shape their perception of suicide.

Chapter Two undertakes a nuanced exploration of death, dying, and suicide, revealing profound insights into the essence of life. The chapter is bifurcated into two interconnected segments. The first part delves into the communal values and beliefs shaping individual agency within African societies, referencing scholars like Kwame Gyekye (1939–2019), John Mbiti (1931–2019), and Kwasi Wiredu (1931–2022). Shifting focus in the second part, the chapter explores the philosophical aspects of agency, drawing from thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Albert Camus (1913–1960), and Thomas Beauchamp (1939). Through this dual exploration, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics governing perceptions and actions related to mortality and suicide.

Chapter Three will delve into Basotho culture, where life is viewed as a sacred journey woven into spirituality and communal interconnectedness. Part One explores foundational elements

like language, oral traditions, and naming practices, shaping the intricate tapestry of Basotho life known as *Bophelo*. Part Two unfolds the philosophy of life as a divine gift, a narrative of gratitude and communal interdependence. The role of ancestors and the cultural principle of *Botho* emerge, guiding Basotho's ethical framework and approach to suicide, including the complex issue of suicide.

Chapter Four will explore limited communitarianism and its application to understanding suicide in African Communitarian Societies (ACS). This theory emphasises both individual qualities and their contribution to communal well-being. In ACS, personhood is not solely determined by being human but requires specific attributes. The chapter delves into the application of limited communitarianism in analysing African traditional beliefs about suicide among the Basotho people, aiming to understand perceptions and contribute to effective suicide prevention within ACS. The exploration begins with examining the concept of personhood in the African context, addressing actions, duties, and community relations.

Chapter Five extends the discussion on limited communitarianism to practical applications in suicide prevention within ACS, with a focus on the Basotho culture. Building upon the theoretical groundwork laid in Chapter Four, this chapter explores how limited communitarianism can inform strategies that respect individual autonomy while fostering community involvement in preventing suicide. Through case studies and reflections on challenges and opportunities, Chapter Five offers insights into culturally sensitive approaches to suicide prevention within specific cultural contexts of Basotho.

Chapter One: Understanding Suicide

1. Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, few phenomena elicit as much contemplation, concern, and diverse perspectives as the act of suicide. A profound and complex subject, suicide has traversed through history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and law, leaving in its wake a myriad of interpretations. As we set out on this journey of discovery, we delve into the deep complexities surrounding suicide, guided by the insights of eminent thinkers such as Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Albert Camus (1913–1960). This chapter ventures into the intricate web of human thought, dissecting the psychological underpinnings, legal ramifications, societal reflections, and philosophical musings that have shaped our comprehension of this sombre phenomenon. From the psychological intricacies of perceived burdensomeness to the legal debates on autonomy, our journey traverses the multifaceted dimensions that weave into the fabric of suicide. Unravelling the rich tapestry of philosophical viewpoints, we ponder existentialism, utilitarianism, and deontology, discovering how these frameworks cast shadows and light on the enigma of self-inflicted mortality. Based on a pursuit of comprehension, this chapter not only explores global perspectives but extends its gaze to the unique vantage point of the Basotho people of South Africa. As we navigate the labyrinth of perspectives, we unravel not only the complexities that shroud suicide but also the cultural nuances that shape how it is perceived among the Basotho.

This chapter will follow the following structure to understand the concept of suicide: firstly, it will examine the etymology of the concept. Secondly, it will offer a cursory overview of the historical context of suicide to pave a path for understanding the concept/idea in the Basotho culture. Thirdly, having offered a historical account of how suicide was understood, it will attempt to portray the philosophical debates in and around the concept of suicide. The idea of suicide is not solely a philosophical concern but other fields of inquiry that provide insights into understanding the concept of suicide; thus, this chapter also tries to alert readers to how other fields of inquiry perceive suicide. Finally, this chapter will offer some insight into how the Basotho understand the idea of suicide.

1.1 The Concept of Suicide: Definitions and Terminology

The notion of suicide has been one of the most debated notions throughout history. The person's decision to live or die by their own hand and not as a result of protecting others in

times of ordeals has been called the “fundamental question of philosophy”. It has been the focus of work by most significant philosophers throughout history, with the likes of Plato, Kant, Sartre, Locke and Hume, among many (Camus 1955 in Matthew et al. 2012:1). This debate spills into the broader realm of philosophy with the contemplation of the meaning of life, death and the implications of agency. In this quest to understand life, death, agency, and other notions concerning the human person, suicide became one of the pressing issues, mainly because of its mystery. The mystery here is regarding one’s desire to die and not just a desire but also the execution of that desire. This phenomenon has made it challenging to understand whether life’s value is universal, and if it is, then how can one explain suicide? Before delving into the exploration of suicide and its contemplation within Basotho culture, it is first worth noting that suicide does not have one universally accepted definition per se. However, it is often defined simply as ‘an intentional self-inflicted death’ (Kaplan & Sadock 1998:864; Corwell et al. 2003:160), a definition solely based on its etymology. Etymologically, the term suicide, deriving from the Latin word *suicidium*, from *Sui caedere*, means ‘to kill oneself’ (Oxford Dictionary). It is “an act with a fatal outcome that is deliberately initiated and performed by the deceased him-/herself in the knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome, and with the outcome being considered by the actor as instrumental in bringing about desired changes in consciousness and social conditions” (Pietersen et al. 1993:155). This act is often intentional and may result from several reasons, which include despair, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, alcoholism, drug abuse and any number of other challenges (Paris 2002:738; Hawton & Heeringen 2009:373). A leading American psychologist, Edwin Scheidman, defines suicide as “the conscious act of self-induced annihilation, best understood as multidimensional malaise in a needful individual who defines an issue for which the suicide act is perceived as the best solution” (Shneidman 1987: 64). This shows that, suicide is not some random or pointless act but rather an option perceived by the individual as a way out of existential distress.

Suicide is not a disease as some people still view it, nor is it, in the view of the most detached observers, an immoral act, an attitude that will be explored later in the paper as expressed by most African cultures. Finally, it is unlikely that any one theory will ever explain the varieties and complexities of human self-destructive behaviour. Therefore, it would probably be more persuasive to say that suicide always involves an individual’s tortured and tunnelled logic in a state of inner-felt, intolerable emotion (Leenaars 2010:8). Suicide can also be a result of either a lack of social integration, excessive integration with society or economic and social adversity

(Kaplan & Sadock 1998:869; Maris et al. 2000:26-61). However, despite all the factors that can be brought forward to explain it, suicide is still an unacceptable act in many societies across the globe. In many countries, attempting suicide is a criminal offence, according to the report by WHO. In four of the countries in the report – the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Guyana and Kenya – the will of someone judged to have killed themselves may be discounted (Grace 2021:1). This is because the law protects every life from harm regardless of who is doing harm.

Notwithstanding the above, the notion of suicide brings about many questions, particularly those involving the rights of the individual over their own lives and the authority of the traditionally accepted moral codes and ethics regarding death in society. Some of the questions include those investigating if there could be a chance where suicides may be justified, such as in the case of an individual with a terminal illness and whether doctors should be given the right to assist death in such cases (Bosch 2003:237-240; Maris et al. 2000:26-28). Szasz (2002:57-60) maintains that the right to die should be considered a fundamental human right and that any attempt by anyone to intervene infringes this right. This view is supported by the argument of Existentialist philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, who emphasise individual freedom and responsibility. From this perspective, suicide may be seen as a legitimate exercise of one's freedom and the ultimate assertion of one's individuality. In Heidegger's view, one's encounter with death profoundly highlights the question of Being. This is because, for Heidegger, "only humanity 'has' the distinction of standing and facing death because the human being is earnest about Being (Seyn): death is the supreme testimony to Being (Seyn)" (Heidegger 1993: 230). Therefore, Heidegger says, "Death opens up the question of Being" (Heidegger 1993: 284). From this argument, we see that it does not matter how that death comes about since Heidegger does not also entertain the cause of that death. So, with this, Existential philosophers such as Heidegger would not see anything wrong with suicide.

1.2. Historical and cultural context of suicide

The understanding and views of suicide have evolved with the years and have been influenced by a litany of factors. In ancient times, a person who committed suicide without the approval of the state was denied the honours of a normal burial. This individual would then be buried alone, on the outskirts of the city, without a headstone or marker (Szasz 1999:11a). During this time, suicide was not just a choice of an individual but had to be declared or approved by the authority. Suicide was, at this time, often a method deemed to be acceptable, especially when dealing with military defeat (Maris 2000:97-103). In Ancient Rome, while suicide was initially

permitted, it was later deemed a crime against the state due to its economic costs (Dickinson & Leming 2010:290).

Suicide was later regarded as a sin in Christian Europe and was condemned at the Council of Arles in 452 as the work of the Devil. In the Middle Ages, the Church had drawn-out discussions on the edge where the search for martyrdom was suicidal, as in the case of the martyrs of Córdoba (Kits and Lewis: 2018:169). Amid all these arguments on suicide and occasional official rulings, the Catholic doctrine was not entirely settled on the subject of suicide until the later 17th century under the influence of French legislation. A criminal ordinance was issued by Louis XIV of France in 1670 on the notion of suicide, where he emphasised that the dead body of the one who committed suicide is to be drawn through the streets, face down, and then hung or thrown on a garbage heap and all of the person's property confiscated (Durkheim 2000:69). Despite this, the attitude and approach to suicide had already begun to change during the Renaissance. In the Renaissance, this attitude and approach to suicide began to change. This is evident in John Donne's (1572-1631) writings titled *Biathanatos* (1608), where he presented one of the earliest modern justifications for suicide. In this work, Donne builds his argument on the actions of Biblical characters like Jesus, Samson, and Saul. He appeals to rational and natural arguments to support the idea that suicide could be morally acceptable in specific situations like those he highlighted from the Bible (Donne 1930:258, Maris 2000:540).

In African Communitarian Societies (ACS), which will be defined and understood in this paper as social structures where individual agency and communal responsibilities are intertwined in intricate ways, suicide was generally viewed as a disgrace and a violation of human dignity. This is because death is considered a rite of passage for those who die at an acceptable (old) age (Umoh 2012:14). The act of taking one's own life was seen as a rejection of community and family, as well as a lack of respect for the sanctity of life. This is because for Africans, what happens to the individual happens to the entire group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual; hence, Mbiti would say that the individual can only say, "I am, because we are, and since we are; therefore I am" (Mbiti 1990:106). In some cases, it was also believed to bring spiritual harm to the individual and their community since death in any group apart from the very old is considered unnatural and premature (Umoh 2012:14). In East Africa, suicide is a terrible event for family and close friends (Swift 1977:118). Although there is relatively little information on the causes of suicide in sub-Saharan Africa, there are indicators that the rates are rising, particularly among young people, and that the majority of

cases result from overwhelming social factors (Lister & Wilson 1990:807-809; Nwosu & Odesamni 2001:259-262; Ndosi et al. 2004:207-211).

There were certain circumstances in which suicide was accepted or even encouraged. For example, some cultures believe that taking one's own life in times of severe illness or chronic pain could be an act of dignity, as it allows the individual to end their suffering and preserve their dignity (Simmons 2018:436). For philosophers such as Brandt (1980) and Beauchamp (1993), the person continuing to live in pain with loss of dignity outweighs other considerations counting against their suicide (Brandt 1980:66; Beauchamp 1993:75-76). Similarly, in several Asian cultures, suicide was seen as an acceptable response and an honourable act to whatever the individual or the community was going through. During the Vietnam War, Buddhist monks set themselves on fire in protest (Kitagawa 1989:9-11). The Hindu code of conduct condones suicide for incurable diseases or great misfortune (Weiss 1994:169). In other cultural traditions like those in India among the Brahman and royal castes, a widow has to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre to remain connected to her husband rather than to become an outcast in society and also for the husband and wife to be blessed in paradise and their subsequent rebirth (Tousignant et al. 1999:1426). In Japan, suicide is taken as a culturally acceptable response to disgrace and dishonour (Iga 1996:87-102; Sakuta 1995:141-153).

In Africa, the question of death remains one that is not comfortable to discuss. This is because Africans do not like facing the reality of death and often do not encourage the contemplation of death, be it their death or the death of their loved ones (Howarth and Leaman 2003:114). It is somewhat taboo to think of or discuss one's death, and this includes contemplating suicide. Hence, people in ACS did not write their living wills or set aside money for their funeral while still alive, contrary to the practice in the Western world (Ekore & Lanre-Abass 2016:371). Generally, ACS tends to view suicide as a complex and multifaceted issue, and opinions about its morality and acceptability vary depending on context and cultural beliefs.

1.3. Philosophical Debates on Suicide

For centuries, philosophers have pursued understanding existence. Philosophers have equally strived to study and understand the meaning of life and death. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant (1785), John Stuart Mill (1859), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) and John Rawls (1971) have argued and advocated for respect for an individual's inherent worth, autonomy, freedom, and self-determination. Utilitarian philosophers, such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, argue that an action is morally right if it produces the greatest happiness for the most significant

number of people (Bentham 1830: 309-310, Mill 2015:7-9). From a utilitarian perspective, looking at suicide from this standpoint, it is more likely that utilitarianists would view suicide as an act that does not necessarily strive to produce the greatest happiness for the most significant number of people. However, this position can be argued based on the basis of an individual whose existence is filled with pain and misfortune. Even so, from that perspective, the death of such an individual is unlikely to produce the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people as much as it is likely to produce rather understanding and less mourning to those who knew their ordeals. It is true that such death also may bring about grief to the family, and as such, suicide may be seen as morally wrong due to the pain caused to one's loved ones.

Deontological ethics, as articulated by Immanuel Kant, hold that some actions are inherently right or wrong, regardless of the consequences (Kant in Benlahcene et al. 2018:31-32). According to this perspective, suicide may be seen as morally wrong because it violates the moral duty to preserve one's own life. As Aristotle articulated, virtue ethics holds that a virtuous person will choose actions that align with the virtues of courage, wisdom, and justice (Aristotle in Simpson 1992:502). From this perspective, suicide may be seen as morally wrong because it lacks the courage to face and overcome life's challenges and fails to act justly towards oneself and others. Existentialist philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, emphasise individual freedom and responsibility. From this perspective, suicide may be seen as a legitimate exercise of one's freedom and the ultimate assertion of one's individuality. In Heidegger's view, one's encounter with death profoundly highlights the question of Being.

Unlike Heidegger, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer argues that "the fear of death is the beginning of philosophy, and the final cause of religion" (Schopenhauer in Durant 1977: 328). Schopenhauer, influenced by Kantian philosophy, delved into the metaphysical aspects of existence with a notably pessimistic outlook. While aligning with Hume in rejecting moral objections to suicide, Schopenhauer paradoxically condemned the act (Schopenhauer in Durant 1977: 329). His philosophical stance is rooted in a deep understanding of the inherent suffering and striving that defines the human condition. Schopenhauer's pessimism, as articulated in his seminal work "The World as Will and Representation", led him to view suicide as a peculiar affirmation of the relentless striving inherent in human existence. For Schopenhauer, life is an endless cycle of desire, suffering, and ceaseless striving. In contemplating suicide, an individual, according to Schopenhauer, is paradoxically affirming the very will to live that

causes suffering. Suicide, in this view, becomes a tragic acknowledgement of the inescapable nature of human striving and the impossibility of true liberation from the will.

Humans appear to have had awareness from their early consciousness that none of us get out of this life alive, and that death is inevitable; however, they have equally believed that there is life after death (San Filippo 2017:99). This understanding stands as one of the reasons why one was buried with his or her belongings with the anticipation that they will need them in life after death (San Filippo 1998:54). Many ancient people believed that death was a change in existence in which the essence, the soul, of the individual passes from this realm to another realm (San Filippo 2017:99). Characteristically African metaphysical theorizing about death has mostly followed the same trajectory – that death is transitional, and that one can somehow survive bodily death (Mbiti 1970:430a; Wiredu 1992:134; P'Bitek 2011:66). Wiredu (1992:143), arguing from the perspective of the Akan of Ghana, states that living a full and meaningful life is a condition for becoming an ancestor, at least in most cultures and communities in Africa. He further posits that a person whose life is cut short by an accident or an 'unclean' disease or any other untoward circumstance, such as suicide, does not gain access to the country of the dead; as a result, he or she becomes a neighbourhood ghost, an occasional source of frightening apparitions, until such an individual can come back to be born again to try to work out a complete life (1992:143). This 'second chance', as we will call it in this paper, should be well lived, with morals and not cut short by anything but instead lived to the fullest.

Motsamai Molefe (2020a:113), arguing more closely to this, adds that even the death of a child is considered a bad death. It is not treated with elaborate grieving and burial mainly because the child never had a chance to pursue a life of virtue. Molefe (2020b: 113-114) further argues that "it would be contrary to the spirit of the morality of personhood to celebrate such a life" (2020b:113-114). Suicide, in this regard, is seen not to have attained any moral achievements, therefore unnatural, and this being the case, one who commits suicide can also be said to have gone against all the norms and standards set by the community. Those who commit suicide are often buried in separate locations, away from the normal burial place from the rest of the community members, indicating that they have separated themselves from the community (Attoe 2022:5). African Philosophers like Sophie Oluwole and John Mbiti argue that life is a gift from the divine, and as such, it is not for humans to decide when to end it (Oluwole 1991: 441-452, Mbiti 1970a:92). This notion of the 'life as a gift' is emphasised by Mbiti when he argues that suicide is not just a physical act but a spiritual one as well. Taking one's own life is tantamount to rejecting that 'gift' and also disrupting the delicate balance between the living

and the dead, which can bring harm to the whole community (Mbiti 1970:93a). Paulin Hountondji (2004:119-123) also notes that African communities view the human person as a dynamic and interconnected being, and suicide disrupts that interconnectedness and can bring harm to the community as a whole. This is why one who commits suicide is rejected by the community, cursed, and never admitted as an ancestor.

Even with the above argument, it should not be seen as though Africans and African Philosophers disregard individual autonomy or agency and place more value on community needs. African Philosophers like Kwame Gyekye (1992:126a) have argued extensively that individual autonomy is an essential aspect of personhood and that individuals have the right to pursue their own interests and goals. This shows that in many African societies, the person's individuality is respected, and one is allowed an opportunity to live a life that makes them happy. However, this life should be consistent with the norms and standards of the community. Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984:117a, 1990:234) also argues that individuals have a certain degree of autonomy and agency, which must be respected. This individual autonomy is not a central value in African culture. Instead, individuals are seen as interdependent members of a larger community. Here, individuals are made aware that they are not apart from the community but a part of the community, and by recognising that, the individual, living out their autonomous individuality, takes into consideration what is acceptable to the community and what is not. Mogobe Ramose (2003:213a) also argues that individual autonomy is an essential aspect of human dignity and that individuals have the right to make their own choices and decisions; however, this autonomy is not absolute but must be balanced with a sense of social responsibility and concern for others.

1.4. Perspectives on Suicide

The use of the term suicide can be traced to the 17th century when this kind of action gained more popularity not just as a phenomenon that sought to be understood but more of a trend that needed attention (Maris et al. 2000:30). Since then, the understanding of suicide began adopting different interpretations all of which were based on how different fields of studies sought to comprehend it. These different understandings were based on various philosophical, sociological, psychological, existential, and legal interpretations, amongst others. From these perspectives, we will then see which influenced our current understanding and, above all, how the Basotho people of South Africa view and understand suicide. Beyond philosophical concerns, there are a few more points of view that offer insight into suicide, including psychological, legal, and sociological perspectives.

Firstly, from a psychological perspective, suicide is often viewed as a symptom of underlying mental health issues, such as depression or trauma (Nock et al. 2008:110). Psychology defines suicide as the intentional act of taking one's own life (2008:113). Suicide is now viewed as a significant public health problem, accounting for over 800,000 people's death deaths globally each year (World Health Organization, 2019). Making a study for understanding the underlying factors contributing to suicide a critical one. One psychological theory that has been widely used to explain suicide is the interpersonal theory of suicide (Joiner 2005:56). This theory proposes that an individual's desire to die by suicide is a result of the combination of two factors: perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (Joiner 2005: 60). Perceived burdensomeness refers to the belief that one is a burden to others and that one's death would be more beneficial than one's continued existence while thwarted belongingness refers to the feeling of social disconnection and lack of belongingness. Another theory that has been used to explain suicidal behaviour is the hopelessness theory. This theory suggests that suicide occurs when an individual experiences a sense of hopelessness, which arises from the belief that their situation is unlikely to improve in the future (Abramson et al. 1989:358). Hopelessness is often associated with depression, a common mental health issue that is strongly associated with suicide (Hawton and Heeringen 2009:191). Other psychological factors that have been identified as risk factors for suicide include impulsivity, aggression, and emotional dysregulation (Fazel & Grann 2006:1397). These factors are often associated with personality disorders and substance abuse, which are also strongly associated with suicide (Ilgen et al. 2010:1152-1158). From this, it can be deduced that individuals who attempt or complete suicide often experience feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and disconnection from others.

Secondly, the legal perspective is another field that attempts to understand suicide. It should be recognised that legal opinions on suicide vary by society. Regarding the legal view of suicide, it should first be noted that the legal perspectives regarding suicide differ from society to society. In many countries, including the United States, suicide is not considered a crime (Lerner & Miceli 2016:8-9). However, in some jurisdictions, suicide is still considered a criminal act, and individuals who attempt it can be punished (Lerner & Miceli 2016:9). The reason here is that suicide is seen as a form of self-harm and also a psychological problem. Individuals who attempt it are often subject to involuntary psychiatric commitment or other forms of intervention (Bridgeman 2017:27). However, Human rights principles such as

autonomy and privacy have been used to argue for the decriminalisation of suicide and the legalisation of assisted dying (Emanuel & Onwuteaka-Philipsen 2017:576).

Thirdly, the social perspective of suicide also brings to the argument the whole notion of stigma and taboo. This is because of how societies and cultures understand both the concepts of death and life. Durkheim (2000:70-84), one of the leading sociologists in the study of suicide, argues that social and cultural factors have a significant impact on an individual's susceptibility to suicide. He posits that suicide could be attributed to either insufficient social integration, an overly strong connection to society, or challenging economic and social conditions (Kaplan & Sadock 1995:27, Maris et al. 2000:61). Drawing from Durkheim's argument, it can then be argued that suicide is a form of an end result of a process begun by a lack of something. It is worth noting that suicide occurrence differs by gender, age and geographical area (Saxena et al. 2014: 255). In high-income countries, the suicide rate is reported to be three times higher in men compared to women, particularly middle-aged men (with a male-to-female ratio of 3.5), whereas in low-income countries, the ratio is 1.6 (Saxena et al. 2014: 256). In the South African social context, studies have found that the correlates of suicidal behaviour were mostly the presence of other mental health histories of suicide attempts, socioeconomic problems, dysfunctional social support and interpersonal relationship problems (Khasakhala et al. 2013:1-8; Shilubane et al. 2012:177-189; Obida et al. 2013:222-225; Maphula & Mudhovozi 2012:104-116). This is indicative that suicidal risk factors can exist at several levels and multiple interaction points. The WHO 2012 report noted that whenever risk factors are present, it should be anticipated that there will be high incidents of suicidal behaviour.

1.5. The Basotho People's Understanding of Life, Death and Suicide

The Basotho people, who primarily reside in the mountainous region of Lesotho and South Africa, have a unique cultural perspective on death and suicide. Their approach to these topics is deeply influenced by their cultural beliefs, traditions, and social structures (Gosalia 2021:409). In the Basotho culture, death is regarded as a natural part of the life cycle and is often approached with a sense of acceptance and respect. The Basotho people believe in the continuity of life beyond death, with ancestors serving as a vital link between the living and the spiritual realm (Gosalia 2021:412). In the African cultures in general and Basotho culture specifically, when one dies by suicide, the elders perform rituals to appease and cleanse the land. The family of the victim is expected to perform rituals to prevent suicide from occurring again in the same family (Kanu 2014:27). However, the act of suicide is generally discouraged and considered a tragic outcome, aligning with the broader cultural value of respecting life and

the interconnectedness of individuals within the community (Gosalia 2021:413). The Basotho people did not see and understand death as something evil or bad but rather as something enigmatic and beautiful, an event that finally reconnects one to their departed family members. However, this excludes death through suicide. The Basotho funeral rite is full of ritual practices that punctuate the ceremonies from sickness to death and burial, which are absent in the presence of suicide. Therefore, there is no option in the rite for suicide. When a person is seriously sick and on the point of death, the Basotho performed a recovery rite in the form of propitiatory sacrifice to appease the ancestor(s) the sick person might have offended (Opong 2004:29). These rituals are centred around the belief that death is a significant transition, and they seek to ensure a positive journey to the afterlife for the deceased. Based on these cultural practices, one can argue that suicide has no place within Basotho culture. Below are the four ways this study highlights which Basotho people understand both death and suicide. Firstly, Basotho people's rituals, such as the propitiatory sacrifices and prayers, are performed with the intent to preserve and extend life as alluded to by Opong (2004:29). These rituals emphasise the importance of life and well-being. These rituals are conducted when individuals are seriously ill, and the community earnestly seeks their recovery (Opong 2004:29). Suicide, as an act that intentionally ends one's life, contradicts this reverence for life and goes against the cultural norm of seeking recovery and well-being of the individual.

Secondly, the rituals involve the active participation of the community in prayer and sacrifice for the sick and those near death (Opong 2004:29). Family members and community members express their willingness to support the individual and pray for their recovery (Sechefo 2000:14-15, Opong 2004:29). Suicide, on the other hand, is often a solitary act that can lead to isolation and lacks the communal support and care seen in these rituals. It deviates from the collective approach to addressing illness and death within the culture. Thirdly, the rituals highlight the belief in a strong connection with ancestors and departed family members. They seek to appease the ancestors and ensure a peaceful transition for the dying person. Suicide disrupts this connection, as it may be viewed as an act that disturbs the spiritual harmony and balance of the community.

Fourth and finally, the Basotho rituals view death as a natural and expected transition in life, and they seek to make this transition positive and harmonious (Opong 2004:29). Suicide, in contrast, is often perceived as an unnatural and tragic event. It disrupts the natural order and can be seen as an inappropriate departure from the expected course of life. It is a life cut short,

and as a result, it hinders the attainment of the revered status of an ancestor and disrupts the cultural and spiritual harmony and, above all, the natural transition.

1.6 Conclusion

As we strive to comprehend the intricacies of suicide, we have traversed diverse landscapes of thought, from psychological intricacies to philosophical conundrums, legal debates, and societal reflections. The echoes of Durkheim's sociological insights resonate alongside Mill's defence of individual liberty and Kant's categorical imperative. We have grappled with existential absurdity and pondered the utilitarian calculus, contemplating the multifaceted nature of this enigmatic act. Yet, in the labyrinth of perspectives, a unique cultural tapestry emerges—the Basotho perspective—where death is embraced with rituals, reverence for life is paramount, and suicide finds no place in the sacred rites. As we navigate these intricate threads, it becomes clear that the understanding of suicide transcends singular disciplines; it is a mosaic woven by the collective wisdom of psychology, law, philosophy, and culture. In contemplating suicide, we confront the profound questions of existence, morality, and the intricate dance between individual autonomy and societal bonds. Though the complete unravelling of the enigma of suicide may elude us, this exploration illuminates the diverse facets that contribute to our collective comprehension of this complex human experience.

Chapter 2: Suicide: Community and Agency

2. Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, the exploration of death, dying, and suicide unveils profound insights into the essence of life itself. This chapter embarks on a two-part journey that is distinctive yet interwoven. The first segment delves into the concept of community and its intricate relationship with death, dying, and suicide. Here, we navigate the communal values and beliefs that shape individual agency within the broader context of African societies, drawing inspiration from notable scholars such as Kwame Gyekye (1939–2019), John Mbiti (1931–2019), and Kwasi Wiredu (1931–2022). The second part of this chapter shifts its focus to the notion of agency and the role of the individual as an agent in the context of suicide, death, and dying. Rooted in philosophical discourse, this section draws from the profound contributions of thinkers such as Sartre, Camus, and Beauchamp. Through a philosophical lens, we unravel the complexities of agency, autonomy, and the existential freedom individuals wield in the face of life's inherent meaninglessness. This dual exploration aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics that govern our perceptions and actions surrounding mortality and suicide.

2.1. An African Community Perspective of Suicide

In exploring the community's perspective on suicide, it is essential to examine historical and cultural contexts that have shaped communal attitudes and responses to individuals who take their own lives. A striking example is found in ancient Athens, where the act of suicide carried profound consequences for one's postmortem treatment. In this city-state, an individual who committed suicide without the approval of the state or community was denied the customary honours of a regular burial. Instead, the person would be relegated to a solitary resting place on the outskirts of the city, devoid of any commemorative headstone or marker (Szasz 1999:11a). This historical practice underscores the significance placed on communal approval and adherence to societal norms, even in matters concerning death. Similarly, this communal perspective on suicide echoes through the lens of ACS. In ACS, individuals who took their own lives were subject to a similar form of communal censure. The denial of a normal burial to those who died by suicide was a pronounced consequence. Their bodies would not be laid to rest with the rest of the community members, marking a distinctive separation in death that mirrored a societal rejection (Szasz 1999:11a).

For ACS, a person whose life is cut short by an accident or an ‘unclean’ disease or any other untoward circumstance, such as suicide, does not gain access to the country of the dead; as a result, he or she becomes a neighbourhood ghost, an occasional source of frightening apparitions, until he can come back to be born again to try to work out a complete life (Wiredu 1992:143). Adding complexity to this metaphysical narrative is the quest for rebirth. The denial of entry into the country of the dead and the designation as neighbourhood ghosts suggest a belief in the cyclical nature of life and death within ACS. In this state, individuals await an opportunity for reincarnation, presenting a chance for redemption through another life cycle. This cyclical perspective intertwines deeply with cultural understandings, offering a glimpse into how the community envisions the continuity of life beyond physical death.

However, this metaphysical perspective takes a distinct turn when considering suicides within ACS. Suicide is not only viewed as a premature departure from life but also as a departure from shared moral frameworks and spiritual harmony. Motsamai Molefe (2020a:113) further nuances this perspective, asserting that even the death of a child is considered unfavourable since it’s a death that came upon a life not well or long enough lived. The lack of elaborate mourning rituals for a child is rooted in the belief that they never had the opportunity to embark on a virtuous life, making celebration contrary to the spirit of the morality of personhood (2020:113-114a). Ifeanyi Menkiti, defending the communitarian ethos, argue that people use the neuter pronoun to refer to a child rather than the personal pronouns him or her because the child has not yet attained personhood (Menkiti 1984:171-182). He also stated that when a child dies, the funeral ceremonies are brief; however, this is not the case for an adult. According to African communitarian ethos, when an older person dies, an elaborate funeral celebration occurs, symbolising that the older individual has achieved personhood and has now become an ancestor who lives among the people. Meyer Fortes (1987:257), adding on to this, also posits that among the Tallensi people of Northern Ghana, “No one can be certainly known to have been a full human person until he is shown, at the time of his death, to have been slain by his ancestors and therefore to deserve a proper funeral”. This unfavourable categorisation extends to suicides, perceived as lacking moral achievements. In such cases, individuals who take their own lives are often laid to rest in separate locations, away from the customary burial grounds of the community. This spatial segregation symbolises a self-imposed departure from the communal fabric, highlighting a perceived transgression against communal norms (Attoe 2022:5). The community’s response to suicides underscores a departure from shared moral

standards, leading to the spatial segregation of those deemed to have violated communal norms even in death.

In the ACS, the repercussions extended beyond the deceased, as the family of the individual who committed suicide faced the risk of being shunned by the community. The rationale behind such severe consequences lies in ACS's deeply ingrained communal values and beliefs. Contemplating or discussing one's death in these communities, including the consideration of suicide, is deemed somewhat taboo. This cultural perspective is evident in the absence of practices such as writing living wills or allocating funds for funerals while alive, a departure from the customs observed in Western societies (Ekore & Lanre-Abass 2016:371). Within these societies, suicide is widely perceived as a transgression against fundamental tenets, explicitly violating the sanctity of life, human dignity, and the intricate interconnectedness shared between the realms of the living and the dead. The act of taking one's own life is interpreted as a profound rejection of community and family bonds, indicative of a perceived lack of respect for the sacredness of life itself. This communal perspective on suicide within ACS is intricately tied to the broader philosophical and cultural fabric of these societies. Individuals are inherently born into a community, reflecting an orientation toward others. This fundamental aspect is encapsulated in the Akan proverb emphasised by Kwame Gyekye (1997:12), "A person is not a palm tree to survive alone", underscoring the essence of human interdependence. Within this societal framework, individual capacities, talents, dispositions, goals, and needs find fulfilment through interactions with others (adapted from Ekore & Lanre Abass, 2016:371; Gyekye 1997:12). The interconnectedness of individuals within the community stands as a foundational principle in ACS, emphasising the communal bonds that both shape and sustain the collective. Expanding upon Gyekye's argument and drawing upon the cultural context of the Akan people in Ghana, it may be asserted that suicide disrupts this intricate equilibrium, posing a formidable challenge to the communal values that accord precedence to the preservation of life and the holistic welfare of the community.

The notion of suicide as a violation of communal values is underscored by the communal response to such incidents. By withholding the customary burial rites, the community sends a powerful message of disapproval, reinforcing the collective stance against the act of suicide. The denial of a shared resting place for individuals who died by suicide is not merely a physical separation; it is a symbolic manifestation of the rupture caused by the perceived betrayal of communal bonds. Furthermore, the impact on the family of the deceased is profound. The risk of social ostracism faced by the family adds another layer of consequence to the act of suicide.

In ACS, where the community plays a central role in individuals' lives, being shunned by the community can have significant social and psychological ramifications for the surviving family members. The communal response to suicide is, therefore, not confined to the deceased alone; it reverberates through the social fabric, affecting the family and community dynamics. To comprehend the gravity of the communal perspective on suicide in ACS, it is imperative to delve into the underlying cultural and philosophical foundations. The communal values that emphasise the sanctity of life and the interconnectedness of individuals within a community contribute to the stigmatisation of suicide. The repercussions faced by those who take their own lives and their families are deeply embedded in the communal consciousness, reflecting a collective commitment to preserving the integrity of the community and upholding shared values. In examining the historical practices of ancient Athens alongside the contemporary communal responses within ACS, a common thread emerges—the significance of communal approval and adherence to societal norms in matters of life and death. The act of suicide, seen as a deviation from communal values, invites communal censure and exclusion. This communal perspective not only reflects the severity with which these societies view suicide but also highlights the intricate interplay between individual choices and communal repercussions.

In a nutshell, the community perspective on suicide within ACS draws a poignant picture of the profound consequences that befall individuals who take their own lives. Denied the dignity of shared burial space and ostracised from the communal fabric, those who die by suicide face a form of communal censure that extends beyond the grave. This perspective is rooted in communal values and beliefs prioritising life's sanctity and the interconnectedness of the living and the dead. Understanding suicide from this community perspective provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between individual agency and communal values within the rich tapestry of African Communitarian Societies

2.2. African Communitarian Perspective on Death and Dying

Africans have always associated or viewed death in terms of their ancestors. According to this belief system, deceased people are thought to exist in another world and may reincarnate, allowing them to return to this world by taking on a new body (Omoregbe 1993:174). This viewpoint emphasises how traditional African beliefs emphasise the cyclical nature of life, viewing death not as a definitive conclusion but as a passage to a new stage of existence that embraces the potential of rebirth in later incarnations. For those who die at a respectable, usually advanced age, death is seen as a ceremonial transition (Umoh, 2012). In the event of a

death in Africa, consultation with deceased ancestors through divination is a customary practice to discern the cause, with spiritual elements, including witchcraft, ancestral displeasure, or divine retribution, often ascribed to the cause of death, contrasting with explanations based on medical or physical factors (Eyetsemitan and Eggleston 2002:151). Furthermore, in African traditional beliefs, it is believed that existing in the world of the dead confers mystical powers on the dead, giving them the capacity to bestow blessings or curses, as well as the ability to give or take life. This cultural viewpoint draws attention to the spiritual significance that traditional African beliefs place on death and the connection between the living and the dead.

Following death, an individual transitions to a spiritual realm, acquiring a new form that mirrors their earthly body but possesses the ability to function as an ancestor. The aspiration to become an ancestor after death is regarded as a commendable objective for every individual, with the belief that such a status is unattainable if one did not lead a purposeful life or had their life prematurely ended, for instance, through an accident or unnatural circumstances (Wiredu 1992:174). In the traditional African perspective, individuals express a preference for a gradual and natural death, as it provides the opportunity to address unresolved matters, reconcile with family members, and bid farewell, facilitating a smoother transition into the spirit world (Lanre-Abass 2008:23).

Moreover, any death outside the realm of the elderly is perceived as unnatural and premature within African cultural contexts (Umoh, 2012:13). This cultural belief underscores the significance attached to a life well-lived and the notion that a natural, gradual death allows for the fulfilment of social and familial responsibilities, contributing to a more seamless transition to the ancestral realm. The preference for a prolonged, natural death aligns with the cultural value placed on completing life's journey and attending to social connections before transitioning to the spirit world. Following the belief that the ultimate purpose of life is to transition into the esteemed role of an ancestor after death, an individual must receive a proper burial. Failing to fulfil this crucial ritual may condemn the individual to become a wandering ghost, unable to navigate the afterlife effectively and posing potential threats to the living (Howarth and Leaman 2003:74).

Corroborating the essence of the African conceptualisation of death, Dancy and Davis (2006:187-211) posit that death signifies the tangible separation of the individual from the community of the living. They further assert that funeral rites and ceremonies are pivotal in highlighting this enduring separation, with meticulous attention devoted to executing these

rituals to avoid causing unintended distress to the departed (Dancy and Davis 2006:187-211). The emphasis on a proper burial extends beyond the physical act; it is deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs surrounding the afterlife. In the African worldview, ensuring a seamless transition to the ancestral realm is not merely a formality but a safeguard against the potential consequences of neglecting these rituals. The notion of becoming a wandering ghost underscores the precarious state of an individual who has not undergone the prescribed burial rites, emphasising the importance of these cultural practices in securing a harmonious passage to the afterlife.

Furthermore, the emphasis on funeral rites as a means of acknowledging and respecting the irreversibility of death highlights the intricate interplay between cultural beliefs and social practices within African communities. The careful execution of funeral ceremonies serves not only as a mark of reverence for the departed but also as a mechanism to preserve the spiritual equilibrium of the community, recognising the delicate balance between the realms of the living and the ancestral spirits.

The death rituals and mourning practices within African societies exhibit a rich diversity due to the coexisting religious and cultural traditions (Koenig and Marshall 2004:546). Rooted in communalistic values, African societies stand in contrast to the concept of advance care directives, which is often viewed through the lens of “atomistic individualism” (Lanre-Abass 2008:23-49). This term denotes the philosophical perspective that considers the isolated individual as the primary reality, emphasising individuality as the natural unit within a socially constructed composite (Sanchez-Gonzalez 1997:283).

In the African context, individuals undergo upbringing that instils a profound sense of belonging and interconnectedness from an early age. This upbringing fosters a strong sense of obligation towards a broader community of individuals. Consequently, African traditions tend to downplay the significance of advance care directives in end-of-life decision-making for incapacitated patients. Instead, the responsibility for such decisions is entrusted to the individual’s family members, leading to a process that can be marred by unhealthy disagreements as events unfold (Lanre-Abass 2008:23-49).

This cultural perspective reflects a collective ethos where decision-making is considered a shared responsibility tied to familial bonds. The emphasis on communal ties and familial interconnectedness contributes to the reluctance to adopt individualised directives, as they might be seen as disrupting the cohesive decision-making process within the family unit.

Exploring this divergence in end-of-life decision-making sheds light on the intricate interplay between cultural values, familial dynamics, and the role of individual autonomy within the context of African societies. The preference for familial decision-making over advance care directives is deeply embedded in the fabric of African communalism, raising important questions about cultural relativism, ethical considerations, and the adaptability of Western models of individual autonomy in diverse global contexts.

Africans exhibit a cultural aversion to confronting the stark reality of death, fostering a reluctance to engage in contemplation about their own mortality or that of their loved ones (Howarth and Leaman 2003:59). The discussion and consideration of death are treated as taboo, leading to a notable absence of practices such as drafting living wills or allocating funds for funerals during one's lifetime, in contrast to the norms observed in Western societies. Death, within the African perspective, is perceived as an adversary to life, instilling a belief that life must be safeguarded at all costs, even in seemingly hopeless situations. This cultural inclination is reflected in the disinclination of the average African to discontinue life-sustaining treatments once initiated and a general resistance to any form of artificial termination of life (Mbiti 1999:5). The avoidance of discussions related to death and the preservation of life at all costs reflect deeply ingrained cultural values within African societies. This cultural stance influences individual attitudes toward end-of-life decisions and has broader implications for healthcare practices and ethical considerations within the African context. The collective reluctance to engage in conversations about death raises questions about cultural perceptions of mortality, the role of autonomy in healthcare decision-making, and the potential clash between traditional values and modern medical ethics. Exploring these cultural intricacies provides valuable insights into the foundations of African perspectives on life, death, and the ethical considerations surrounding medical interventions. The tension between preserving life at any expense and the evolving landscape of bioethics presents a complex interplay that necessitates a nuanced understanding of cultural contexts, beliefs, and their impact on African end-of-life care practices.

The cultural perspective that emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals within African communities extends to the treatment of the elderly and the transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next. The notion that "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1990:131) reflects a communal identity where the experiences and guidance of the elderly shape the collective consciousness. In alignment with this cultural ethos, the elderly in African societies often provide verbal instructions to their children regarding their care at the

end of life. These instructions encompass various aspects, including preferences for avoiding prolonged hospital stays and expressing a desire to pass away in the familiarity of their own beds and in the comforting embrace of their children at home. Additionally, directives about the conduct of burial ceremonies and preferred burial locations contribute to the holistic nature of these end-of-life discussions.

However, cultural and spiritual beliefs, coupled with the influence of paternalistic medicine, create a reluctance among individuals, particularly the middle-aged, to engage in conversations about end-of-life decisions while still in the prime of their lives. The prevailing cultural ethos fosters an aversion to contemplating mortality prematurely, while paternalistic medical practices, characterised by a lack of empathy and a perceived erosion of trust, further contribute to this reticence. The connection between these cultural beliefs and the reluctance to discuss end-of-life decisions is evident in the communal nature of African societies, where the wisdom and preferences of the elderly shape not only familial dynamics but also influence broader cultural practices. This interplay underscores the significance of understanding cultural contexts when navigating discussions about healthcare decisions, autonomy, and trust in medical settings within African communities.

2.3. Agency and Suicide

The term “agency” finds its linguistic roots in Latin, originating from the word *agens*, the present participle of *agere*, which denotes “to do” or “to act” (Blackburn 2023:173). This etymological foundation links agency to the fundamental concept of action and engagement. In philosophy, “agency” assumes a multifaceted and fundamental role about an individual’s intrinsic capacity to act, make choices, and exert a causal influence on the world (Smith 2001:519). The concept of agency is inherently interwoven with inquiries into free will, moral responsibility, and the essence of human existence. This is because the concept entails many nuances which go beyond an individual’s ability to act, but more as an action and a responsibility the agent has. It has been understood as a capacity which can be possessed without being exercised or manifested; for example, when we are temporarily unconscious, we possess the capacity but we are not exercising it; therefore, those who possess this capacity are ‘agents’, as opposed to non-agents, but they are not playing the role of agents when they are not exercising it (Ferrero 2022:3). The concept of agency denotes an active rather than a submissive stance and refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and shape their life circumstances (Haffejee & Theron 2019:686). Van Breda (2016:36) elaborates further, stating that it also relates to the power that an individual has at a micro level to exercise

authority over personal fate and influence their life in general. Therefore, agency, in its essence, refers to the capacity of individuals to make choices and take actions based on their own intentions, desires, and beliefs (McBride 2009:176). It is the inherent ability of humans to act as autonomous agents in their lives, exercising their will to determine the course of their actions. It embodies the idea that individuals have a degree of control over their actions and the freedom to make choices that reflect their values and preferences (Babcock and Bandura 2001:34).

Agency implies that individuals are not passive recipients of external forces but active participants who possess the power to influence their own destinies. It represents a cornerstone of human dignity and ethical decision-making. Agency, on that same line, is the mechanism through which autonomy is enacted and expressed. Human autonomy is predicated on the exercise of agency; without agency, individuals would be deprived of the ability to express their autonomy and self-determination. Agency, therefore, is not merely a desirable trait but a fundamental aspect of human existence, enabling individuals to assert their independence and shape their lives in accordance with their values and goals (Ryan & Deci 2000:68).

The connection between agency and individual decision-making is profound and intricate. Agency is the driving force behind the choices individuals make in their lives. When individuals exercise agency, they engage in a deliberative process in which they evaluate various options, consider their personal values, beliefs, and desires, and ultimately make decisions that align with their perceived best interests (Baumeister and Vohs 2016:268). This decision-making process is influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Internally, emotions, cognitive processes, mental health, and personal values all play a role in shaping an individual's decisions; externally, societal norms, cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and social influences exert varying degrees of impact on decision-making (Fiske and Molm 2010:341-346). In the context of suicide, understanding agency becomes particularly crucial. Suicide represents an extreme and irreversible decision, and comprehending how agency functions in this context is essential for grasping why some individuals choose to end their lives while others do not. Agency allows individuals to deliberate upon and ultimately act upon their own intentions, even when those intentions lead to tragic outcomes, such like suicide.

This intricate relationship delves into the complex interplay of individual actions and intentions, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing suicidal

behaviour. The intricate and multifaceted connection between agency and suicide stems from the widely held consensus that agency encompasses the initiation of action by the agent, as posited by Setiya (2007:57). This can be seen emphasised by the desire-belief versions of the view which asserts that initiation by the agent consists in causation by the relevant desire-belief pairs (Goldman 1970:422-432; Davidson 1971:43-61; Dretske 1988:199-216). According to more recent versions, initiation consists of causation by the relevant intentions (Brand 1984:361-385; Bratman 1987:695-706; Bishop 1989:158; Mele 1992:119-126, 2003:174; Enç 2003:506-530). Here, the argument lies in how agency, the capacity for autonomous decision-making and action, is at the heart of understanding the motivations and choices individuals make, including decisions related to suicide. To explore this more clearly, this study makes the following projections, which aim to share perspectives on how agency and suicide intersect.

2.3.1. Projection One: Initiation of Action and Suicidal Behaviour

The intricate relationship between agency and suicidal behaviour demands a focused exploration into the initiation of action, where desires, beliefs, intentions, and motivations intertwine (Setiya 2007:299). This becomes particularly relevant when scrutinising suicide, a process involving contemplation, planning, and the execution of self-harm, all intricately linked to an individual's agency. Philosophical perspectives examining desire-belief pairs, as presented by scholars like Goldman (1970), Davidson (1971), and Dretske (1988), offer invaluable insights into the motivations underpinning suicidal tendencies. For instance, those contemplating suicide may grapple with desires for relief from pain or suffering, such as depression, coupled with specific beliefs regarding the effectiveness of suicide in achieving that relief. Unravelling the interplay between desires and beliefs is essential for comprehending the rationale behind suicidal thoughts and actions.

Building on this foundation, a closer examination of intentions and decision-making, informed by recent philosophical literature (Brand, 1984; Bratman, 1987; Bishop, 1989; Mele, 1992, 2003; Enç, 2003), adds another layer of insight. Intentions, defined as an individual's deliberate commitment to a course of action, provide profound insights into why some individuals opt for suicide as a course of action (Brand 1984:385). Delving into the decision-making process leading up to suicide sheds light on the psychological and philosophical dimensions contributing to this tragic choice.

Moreover, the nexus between agency and autonomy, as emphasised by Beauchamp and Childress (2001:134), introduces another critical dimension—autonomy. Autonomy, the

ability to make self-determined choices, is intrinsically linked to agency. This prompts the question: How does an individual's agency intersect with their autonomy in the context of suicide? While some argue for the autonomy of individuals to make decisions about their own lives, including the choice to end their lives (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001:136), opposing views call for interventions to protect individuals from making irreversible decisions during times of crisis. This introduces ethical dilemmas surrounding autonomy and the duty to safeguard vulnerable individuals (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001:137).

In essence, Projection One meticulously navigates the intricate web of agency in the context of suicidal behaviour, drawing insights from philosophical perspectives on desire-belief pairs, intentions, decision-making processes, and the complex interplay between agency and autonomy. This nuanced examination enhances our understanding of the factors influencing individuals on the path toward self-harm and suicide.

2.3.2. Projection Two: Desire-Belief Pairs and Motivations

Philosophical inquiries into desire-belief pairs and their role in the initiation of action provide a nuanced understanding of the motivations underpinning suicidal tendencies (Goldman, 1970:432; Davidson, 1971:61; Dretske, 1988:216). This exploration aligns with the broader examination of agency and suicide within the African communal context, shedding light on the intricate interplay between individual motivations and communal values. In the African worldview, where life is perceived as interconnected with the community, desires for relief from pain or suffering take on communal dimensions. The desires of an individual are not solely personal but are influenced by the community's collective experience. For instance, the communal ethos of ubuntu emphasises shared responsibility and mutual support. Therefore, desires for relief may extend beyond individual concerns to encompass the community's well-being.

Communal values likewise influence beliefs about the effectiveness of suicide in achieving relief. The communal framework provides individuals with a set of shared beliefs that shape their understanding of life's challenges and coping mechanisms. In contemplating suicide, an individual may draw on communal beliefs, such as the significance of collective strength, resilience, and mutual support. Alternatively, they may grapple with conflicting beliefs, recognising the communal disapproval of suicide but feeling compelled by personal anguish. As highlighted by philosophical perspectives, understanding the interplay between desires and beliefs adds complexity to the African communal lens. The motivations behind suicidal

tendencies become entwined with the communal fabric, where individual desires and beliefs are both influenced by and contribute to the collective ethos.

This communal perspective challenges a simplistic individualistic understanding of suicide motivations. It underscores that desires for relief and beliefs about suicide's efficacy are not isolated expressions of personal struggles but are embedded within the broader context of communal life. The motivations for suicide, when viewed through the desire-belief framework, offer a profound exploration into the complexities of individual suffering within the interconnected web of communal values. Moreover, the tension between individual agency and communal expectations is heightened in the realm of suicidal motivations. While desires and beliefs drive individual actions, the communal gaze places these motivations under scrutiny. The act of contemplating suicide is not merely a reflection of personal despair; it becomes a negotiation between individual agency and communal norms.

In essence, the philosophical exploration of desire-belief pairs in the context of suicide, when intertwined with the African communal perspective, enriches our understanding of the motivations behind self-harm. It emphasises that desires and beliefs are not solely products of individual psychology but are deeply influenced by the communal milieu, introducing a layer of complexity to the philosophical discourse on agency and suicide.

2.3.3. Projection Three: Intentions and Decision Making

Recent philosophical perspectives on agency, particularly those centred around intentions (Brand 1984:361-385; Bratman 1987:695-706; Bishop 1989:158; Mele 1992:119-126, 2003:174; Enç 2003:506-530), offer a profound lens through which to analyse the decision-making process leading to suicide. In the African communal context, where the individual is intricately linked with the community, the examination of intentions and decision-making adds a layer of complexity to our understanding of suicide. Intentions, characterised as a deliberate commitment to a course of action, become pivotal in comprehending why some individuals opt for suicide as a course of action (Brand, 1984:370). In the communal framework, where intentions are not solely shaped by individual desires but are influenced by communal expectations, the formation of intentions leading to suicide becomes a delicate interplay between personal agency and communal norms.

The decision-making process leading to suicide, when viewed through the lens of intentions, unravels the psychological and philosophical dimensions contributing to this tragic choice. In the African communal ethos, where the individual's well-being is intimately tied to the

collective, intentions to end one's own life are not merely personal reflections of despair. They become reflections of a negotiation between individual autonomy and communal expectations. The communal nature of intentions is particularly pronounced in the African philosophy of ubuntu, emphasising interconnectedness and shared humanity. In the context of suicide, intentions are not isolated expressions of personal autonomy but are entangled with the ethical fabric of communal life. An individual's deliberate commitment to self-harm is a reflection not only of personal struggles but also of the communal challenges and expectations that shape their agency.

Moreover, the examination of intentions sheds light on the ethical dimensions of suicide within the African communal context. Intentions, when guided by communal values, can enhance a sense of purpose and contribution to the collective well-being. However, they can also exert constraints on personal ambitions that deviate from communal norms. The communal expectations, as reflected in the intentions leading to suicide, highlight the delicate balance individuals must navigate between personal autonomy and communal obligations. The decision to end one's life is not a solitary act of agency but a negotiation between personal desires, communal expectations, and the ethical principles that govern communal life.

In essence, the philosophical exploration of intentions and decision-making in the context of suicide, when interwoven with the African communal perspective, provides a rich understanding of the motivations and ethical considerations behind self-harm. Intentions, rather than being solely individualistic expressions, become a complex interplay between personal agency and communal values, adding depth to the philosophical discourse on suicide within the African cultural milieu.

2.3.4. Projection Four: Autonomy and Suicidal Choices

The intricate relationship between agency and autonomy, deeply ingrained in philosophical perspectives, unfolds with particular significance in the context of suicidal choices within the African communal framework. The interplay between autonomy and agency introduces ethical dilemmas that echo the communal and existential dimensions of suicide. Autonomy, the ability to make self-determined choices, forms the bedrock of individual agency (Beauchamp & Childress 2001:138). However, the application of autonomy to suicidal choices in African communal societies necessitates a nuanced understanding of the ethical considerations surrounding individual freedom and communal well-being.

On one philosophical spectrum, there exists an argument advocating for the autonomy of individuals to make decisions about their own lives, including the choice to end their lives (Beauchamp & Childress 2001:138-139). This perspective aligns with existentialist views, emphasising radical freedom and the individual's right to define their essence (Sartre 1946:265). In the African context, this autonomy-centric approach recognises individual agency as a fundamental aspect of human existence. However, on the opposing end of the spectrum, ethical concerns call for interventions to safeguard individuals from making irreversible decisions, especially during times of crisis. This perspective, embedded in the communal ethos, posits that the interconnectedness of individuals within the community necessitates collective responsibility for preventing actions that may harm the individual or disrupt communal harmony.

The tension between these perspectives crystallises in the ethical dilemmas surrounding autonomy and suicide within the African communal context. The question of whether individuals should have the autonomy to decide their own fate, even in the profound act of suicide, becomes a moral quandary that transcends individual agency and delves into the communal fabric. The African communitarian emphasis on shared responsibility and interconnectedness challenges the pure autonomy-centric view, suggesting that autonomy is not divorced from communal considerations. In African societies, autonomy is not absolute but intertwined with communal expectations and ethical norms prioritising collective well-being. The existentialist perspective on suicide further complicates this ethical interplay. Existentialists, such as Sartre (1956:57), view suicide as the ultimate exercise of individual freedom—a choice to confront the absurdity of existence. Within the African communal context, where autonomy is entangled with communal values, the existentialist view clashes with the communal emphasis on the sacredness of life and collective harmony. The philosophical discourse on autonomy and suicidal choices, when contextualised within the African communal framework, highlights the delicate balance between individual freedom and communal responsibilities. Autonomy is not a standalone principle but is shaped by the communal norms that govern the ethical considerations of life and death. In navigating these complexities, the ethical dilemmas surrounding autonomy and suicide bring into focus the need for a holistic understanding that respects individual agency while acknowledging the communal context in which such agency is exercised. The synthesis of autonomy and communal values becomes imperative in unravelling the philosophical intricacies of suicidal choices within the African cultural milieu.

From the above projections, it can be deduced that agency serves as a pivotal crossroads where profound philosophical inquiries converge, offering profound insights into the core facets of human existence, including freedom, choice, and the influence of the communities in which we dwell. Existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus argue that individuals possess radical freedom to define their own essence and create their values (Sartre 1946:266). This perspective contends that individuals are not bound by predetermined roles or external influences but are, in fact, condemned to be free and, above all, to act freely. However, it is worth noting that some existential philosophers do not see the phenomenon of suicide as a question for philosophy as much as a concern for mental health professions (Roberts & Lamont 2014:874). While there exist a number of explanatory models as to why suicide ought to be understood within this context, the most common explanation proposes that the symptoms of mental illness, such as cognitive distortions, irrationality and impulsivity, just to mention a few, are an important causal factor in the person committing suicide and that without these symptoms being present, the person would not have killed themselves (Mishara & Chagnon 2011:612). This is supported by thinkers like Pilgrim (2010:176), who argue that when and if a person commits suicide, the “balance of their mind” was faulty at the fatal moment or that they had a prior mental disorder, which made them particularly prone to self-sacrifice.

Existentialists assert that human existence is marked by a profound sense of responsibility for one’s own choices and actions (Camus 1942:513). In the context of agency, existentialists emphasise that individuals have the autonomy to exercise their agency and make choices that reflect their authentic selves. The existentialist perspective on agency underscores that individuals are the architects of their lives, responsible for their decisions, and accountable for the consequences (Flynn 2006:355). However, this existentialism’s view of agency has profound implications for understanding suicide. According to Sartre (1956:57), the act of suicide represents the ultimate exercise of individual freedom, a choice to confront the absurdity of existence by choosing one’s own destiny. In this view, agency in suicide reflects an assertion of existential freedom in the face of life’s inherent meaninglessness.

On the other hand, the communitarian view, in contrast to existentialism, strongly emphasises the role of community and social bonds in shaping individual agency. Communitarian thinkers, including Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, argue that human beings are inherently social creatures whose identity and values are deeply intertwined with their communities (MacIntyre 1999:20). This perspective posits that our agency is not isolated but emerges within the context of communal life. Communitarianism contends that the community provides the

framework within which individuals develop their agency. In this view, the community's norms, values, and traditions significantly influence an individual's choices and actions (Taylor 1996:201-215). Agency, therefore, is not solely a product of individual will but emerges through an intricate interplay between the individual and their social environment. Within communitarianism, the understanding of agency in the context of suicide diverges from existentialism. Communitarianism suggests that suicide is not solely an expression of individual freedom but an unacceptable act, a taboo and a violation of the sacredness of life (Wiredu 1980:126, Ramose 2003:249, Mbiti 1991:174 and Molefe 2020:21a). This African communitarian understanding places a strong emphasis on the collective, emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals within a community (Mbiti, 1969:64). The agency in African communitarian societies is not viewed as a solitary endeavour; it is deeply intertwined with the well-being of the community as a whole (Menkiti 1984:133-145). This collective approach to agency is a cornerstone of African communities and has far-reaching implications for decision-making, personal aspirations, and self-determination.

African communal values and beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping individual agency (Bantwana & Zanré, 2019:172b). These values are diverse and multifaceted, varying across regions and cultures. In East Africa, the concept of Harambee embodies the spirit of collective effort and community self-help (Khasiani, 1969:233). This practice encourages individuals to work together for common goals, thus affecting the way personal agency is exercised within the community.

Moreover, African societies' communal values and beliefs influence individuals' expectations and obligations (Menkiti, 1984:171). These communal expectations can both empower and constrain individual agency. While individuals are encouraged to contribute to the community, these same expectations may limit their personal pursuit of goals outside of the communal context. In the context of Harambee, the spirit of collective effort can be observed in various community projects (Khasiani, 1969:241). Individuals come together to pool resources and skills for projects like building schools, clinics, or infrastructure improvements. This collective approach shapes the way personal agency is perceived and exercised. It underlines the importance of community involvement and shared responsibility, where individual aspirations are deeply intertwined with the well-being of the community as a whole.

However, as Menkiti (1984:211) suggests, the communal values and expectations within African societies can create a delicate balance for individuals. On one hand, they encourage

active participation in communal activities, which may enhance one's sense of purpose and contribution to the collective well-being. On the other hand, they can exert constraints on personal ambitions outside of these communal contexts. This reflects the intricate interplay between the empowerment and constraining of individual agency within African communitarian values and beliefs. Now let us look at the role of family, community, and spirituality in shaping Agency.

2.4. Family

The extensive body of scholarly work on the role of the family in African communitarian societies aligns seamlessly with the broader exploration of African communal values and beliefs that play a pivotal role in shaping individual agency (Bantwana & Zanré, 2019:70). According to Smith (2001), the family unit is recognised as a cornerstone of agency, echoing the sentiment that communal values are deeply ingrained in familial dynamics. Families provide emotional support, guidance, and a profound sense of belonging, reflecting the interconnectedness of individual agency and communal values.

Similarly, the extended family system, a common feature in African societies, mirrors the communal ethos by expanding the sphere of familial influence. The wisdom and advice of elders, as highlighted by Smith (2001:519), are integral components that shape decision-making within the family unit. This familial guidance aligns with the broader communal expectations outlined by Menkiti (1984: 229), where individuals are encouraged to contribute to the community, drawing a parallel between familial and communal obligations.

In the context of Harambee, the collective spirit of effort and community self-help (Khasiani, 1969:242) resonates with the collaborative dynamics observed within extended family structures. Both emphasise the importance of collective involvement, shared responsibility and the intertwining of individual aspirations with the well-being of the community as a whole. As exemplified in community projects, the collective approach reflects the communal values underpinning familial and community relationships, influencing how personal agency is perceived and exercised.

However, it is crucial to recognise the limitations that the family can impose on individual agency, particularly in terms of personal choices. While families provide support and guidance, their influence may extend to the point of constraining individual autonomy, especially in critical life decisions such as marriage, career choices, and financial matters. On the one hand, familial support may enhance one's sense of purpose and contribution to the collective well-

being, but on the other hand, it can exert constraints on personal ambitions outside of these communal contexts.

In navigating personal choices, individuals may find themselves at the intersection of familial expectations and individual aspirations, facing the challenge of balancing communal responsibilities with personal agency. This dynamic reflects the intricate interplay between empowerment and constraint within the broader framework of African communitarian values and beliefs, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which family influences, while providing support, can also limit individual agency in pursuing personal goals.

2.5. Community

Communities play a pivotal role in shaping individual agency within African communitarian societies, serving as a source of social identity and support (Gyekye, 1992:122). The concept of Harambee, particularly prevalent in East Africa (Khasiani, 1969:235), stands as a vivid illustration of the collective spirit within communities. Harambee embodies the idea of collective effort and community self-help, urging individuals to collaborate for shared goals and thus influencing the exercise of personal agency. The communal dynamics within communities empower individuals through shared responsibility and support. Gyekye's exploration emphasises how communities provide a sense of belonging and identity, fostering an environment where individuals feel connected and supported in their endeavours (1992:115). The collaborative nature of Harambee, as discussed by Khasiani (1969:234), amplifies this communal support, encouraging individuals to contribute their skills and resources for the collective good.

However, within the context of communal values, the collective nature of agency inherent in community life can present limitations on personal ambitions. While communities offer a sense of belonging and support, the communal values that bind individuals together may also constrain personal agency when aspirations deviate from communal norms. The expectations and shared values within communities, as illuminated by the concept of Harambee, can create a delicate balance for individuals.

As communities encourage individuals to work together for common goals, an inherent tension exists between collective well-being and personal ambitions that may diverge from communal values. Though empowering through shared responsibility, the communal nature of agency can potentially restrict individual autonomy when personal goals challenge the communal

framework. This tension highlights the complex interplay between the empowerment and constraint of individual agency within the communal context.

In a nutshell, communities in African communitarian societies contribute significantly to shaping individual agency by providing social identity and support. The concept of Harambee exemplifies this communal ethos, fostering collective efforts for shared goals. While communities empower individuals through shared responsibility, the collective nature of agency within these communities may simultaneously impose limitations on personal ambitions that deviate from communal values. This intricate balance reflects the nuanced dynamics of individual agency within the communal fabric of African societies.

2.6. Synthesis: Community, Agency, and the Human Tapestry

The exploration of community within African communitarian societies, as illuminated by scholars such as Gyekye (1939-2019), Mbiti (1931-2019), Wiredu (1931-2022), Khasiani (1969), and Smith (1965), paints a vivid picture of interconnectedness and shared responsibility. Gyekye's (1992:122) assertion that communities serve as sources of social identity and support lay the foundation for understanding how communal values permeate various aspects of individual lives.

Mbiti's (1969:89) contribution deepens this understanding by positing that agency is not a solitary endeavour but intricately intertwined with the community's well-being. This interconnectedness, as emphasised by Wiredu (1980:159), introduces a delicate balance where communal expectations both empower and constrain individual agency. The extended family system, a common feature in African societies, amplifies communal expectations, providing emotional support while potentially constraining individual autonomy in critical life decisions (Smith, 2001:519).

The concept of 'harambee', elucidated by Khasiani (1969:240), stands as a testament to the collective spirit within African communities. This collective effort, encouraging individuals to collaborate for shared goals, exemplifies the intertwining of individual aspirations with the well-being of the community as a whole. While communal dynamics provide a sense of belonging and support, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential constraints imposed on personal ambitions that deviate from communal norms. The delicate balance between empowerment and constraint within familial and communal contexts underscores the complexity of individual agency within African societies.

Shifting the focus to the philosophical realm, the exploration of agency in the context of suicide, death, and dying unravels profound insights. Existentialist thinkers like Sartre and Camus, along with ethical perspectives from Beauchamp, guide us through the complexities of human agency and existential freedom. Sartre's (1956:79) assertion that suicide represents the ultimate exercise of individual freedom lays the groundwork for understanding agency as a tool for confronting the absurdity of existence. In contrast, Camus (1942:264) questions the rationality of suicide in the face of life's inherent meaninglessness, introducing a nuanced reflection on the relationship between agency and the search for meaning.

Beauchamp and Childress (2001:112) inject an ethical dimension into the discourse, emphasising autonomy as a critical aspect of agency. The ethical dilemmas surrounding autonomy and the duty to safeguard vulnerable individuals, as discussed by Beauchamp, add layers of complexity to the philosophical inquiry. This ethical framework prompts us to consider the right to make irreversible decisions during times of crisis, challenging the existentialist perspective on absolute individual freedom. Projections One and Two provide a practical lens through which to examine agency in the context of suicide. Desire-belief pairs, intentions, and decision-making processes elucidated by scholars such as Goldman (1970), Davidson (1971), Brand (1984), and Bratman (1987) unravel the intricate interplay of motivations and choices in the decision-making process leading to suicide. The interplay between communal dynamics and individual agency forms the foundational structure of the human experience. In the synthesis of these two explorations, the tapestry of human existence emerges as a complex narrative woven with threads of community, agency, suicide, death, and dying.

At the core of this synthesis lies the acknowledgement that communal values deeply influence individual agency within African societies. The interconnectedness of individuals within communities shapes their choices, aspirations, and sense of purpose. The delicate balance between communal support and potential constraints mirrors the intricate dance of empowerment and limitation within the fabric of human agency. Philosophical inquiries into agency, guided by existentialist reflections and ethical considerations, contribute layers of depth to our understanding. The assertion of individual freedom by Sartre, the questioning of rationality by Camus, and the ethical dilemmas posed by Beauchamp add rich hues to the tapestry. Projections One and Two illuminate the intricacies of human choices, desires, and beliefs in the profound decision-making process leading to suicide. As we view the completed synthesis, it becomes evident that the interwoven threads of community and agency shape the

spectrum of human existence from birth to the inevitability of mortality. The communal tapestry and individual agency converge in a narrative that defines how individuals navigate life, death, and the profound choices that define their existence.

In a nutshell, it is imperative to recognise the holistic understanding that emerges from the exploration of community, agency, and the complexities of suicide, death, and dying. The communal values within African societies amplify the interconnectedness of individuals, underscoring the communal support and potential constraints on personal agency. Simultaneously, philosophical reflections on agency offer profound insights into the nature of human freedom, ethical considerations, and the existential search for meaning. The synthesis of these two realms reveals that the human experience is a tapestry woven with threads of community, agency, existential reflections, and individuals' profound choices. This synthesis invites us to delve further into the rich complexities of human existence, unravel the nuances of communal influence on individual agency, and contemplate the ethical and existential dimensions that shape our choices. As we continue exploring the interplay of community, agency, and the enigma of mortality, we embark on a journey of understanding what it means to be human.

2.7. Conclusion

As we traverse the complex terrain of community and individual autonomy in relation to death, dying, and suicide, the contributions of renowned scholars illuminate the contours of our understanding. In the realm of community, Gyekye and Mbiti shed light on the communal values that shape individual agency, emphasising the interconnectedness of personal aspirations with the well-being of the collective. Wiredu challenges us to consider the delicate balance between individual autonomy and communal expectations, highlighting the nuanced ways familial and communal influences empower and constrain individual agency. Turning our gaze to agency, existentialist thinkers such as Sartre and Camus invite us to contemplate individuals' profound responsibility for their choices and actions. Beauchamp's exploration of autonomy within the ethical framework introduces ethical dilemmas surrounding the right to make irreversible decisions during times of crisis. Through these philosophical lenses, we discern the agency's role in initiating actions, decision-making processes, and the complex interplay between individual freedom and societal norms. In the confluence of these two explorations, a richer comprehension emerges—a tapestry woven with threads of community values, individual agency, and existential reflections on life and death. Together, these perspectives offer a holistic view of the human experience, allowing us to navigate the intricate

web of choices, responsibilities, and the collective tapestry of existence that defines our journey from birth to the inevitable embrace of mortality.

Chapter Three: Basotho Culture and Suicide

3. Introduction

In the Basotho culture, life is not merely a biological existence but a sacred journey intricately woven into the fabric of spirituality and communal interconnectedness. Part One of this exploration delves into the foundational elements of Basotho identity, examining the profound influence of language, oral traditions, and the cultural significance of naming practices. This linguistic and cultural backdrop sets the stage for understanding the intricate tapestry of Basotho life, wherein everyone's journey, known as *Bophelo* (Life), transcends mere existence to become a communal and spiritual odyssey.

Part Two further unravels the complexities of *Bophelo*, shedding light on the Basotho people's deeply ingrained philosophy that life is a deliberate gift from the divine. The sacred journey of *ho phela* (to live) unfolds as a narrative of gratitude, communal interdependence, and recognition of individual uniqueness within the broader community. An exploration into the role of ancestors adds depth to this narrative, emphasising the enduring connection between the living and their forebears. The concept of *Botho*, a fundamental cultural tenet, emerges as a guiding principle that intertwines the collective responsibility of individuals toward the community, shaping Basotho's ethical framework and approach to suicide challenges.

3.1. Understanding Basotho Culture

The Basotho, a nation with a rich cultural heritage, trace their origins to the pre-historic age (Mohale 2019). Originally known as Sotho speakers, they migrated from northern Southern Africa, forming diverse tribes like the Batswana, BaPedi, and Basotho. For the Basotho people, identifying oneself through clan names is central to their identity, signifying specific ancestral origins, with clans like Bataung, Basia, Bafokeng, Makgolokoe, and Bakoena. Historical events, battles, and mythical beliefs are deeply rooted in Basotho oral traditions, expressed through totems (*Liboko*), praise songs (*Lithoko*), and storytelling (*Litšomo*) and in these, a clear history, philosophy and the origins of each tribal group can be found including family odes used to identify and differentiate one clan from the other (Mohale 2019). Until 1822, the Basotho people lived together in peace until they were invaded by fugitive Nguni people who had fled from Natal. The Basotho people suffered great losses under the attacks of armies led by Shaka and Mzilikazi. Numerous tribes followed Moshoeshe and headed further south into the country, seeking refuge at the unconquerable Thaba-Bosiu, meaning mountain by night. The story around this mountain was that it would grow into an unclimbable mountain at night,

providing safety for the Basotho people against attacks. Moshoeshe, the first leader of the Basotho people, accepted all those who had survived the attacks and was able to build the Basotho nation as we know it today (Mohale 2019:26).

For the Basotho people, there were three things which were and continue to be central to their union: harmony and support, namely *lithoko*, *liboko* and *litšomo*. *Lithoko*, inspired by war and conflicts, predominantly centres on esteemed chiefs guiding their communities to triumph in battles. *Litšomo*, on the other hand, were traditionally narrated by grandmothers to their grandchildren by the fireside during the evening and served as an educational method. These tales were employed to impart wisdom to young children, cautioning them about aspects to avoid or be mindful of in life (Mohale 2019:28). Moreover, they emphasised the significance of seeking support from family or clan in times of difficulty, highlighting that facing challenges alone could lead to drastic actions, such as suicide. The utilisation of totems or family odes, *liboko*, among the Basotho people holds immense significance, contributing significantly to the desire for a harmonious life deeply integrated into the cultural fabric. *Liboko* acts as a vital link to ancestral roots, fostering a sense of belonging, cultural pride, and unity. Desiring to be mentioned among *liboko* becomes a powerful motivation for Basotho men, symbolising one's connection to a lineage with rich traditions, shared values, and a collective history.

Living in harmony within the framework of *liboko* involves embracing the cultural teachings embedded in these family odes. The knowledge passed down through *liboko* includes guidance on navigating life's challenges, emphasising the importance of reliance on family and clan support. The Basotho understanding of interconnectedness and communal harmony, as reflected in *liboko*, underscores the idea that facing difficulties collectively is paramount. This communal approach to problem-solving is deeply ingrained in the Basotho worldview, contributing to a desire for a harmonious life grounded in shared cultural values.

Conversely, the negative impact on family odes is palpable when faced with tragedies such as the death of a child or suicide. These events, also called 'bad death' by Molefe (2020a:113) and Wiredu (1992:143), disrupt the harmonious narrative woven into *liboko*, causing profound emotional and spiritual distress within the affected family. Death, especially in the form of suicide, is viewed with great sorrow and often carries a stigma within the community.

The untimely death of an individual, particularly through suicide, disrupts the natural order and challenges the cultural continuity embedded in *liboko*. It introduces a narrative of pain and loss that contrasts sharply with the celebratory and proud tone typically associated with *liboko*. Such

tragedies can cast a shadow on the family's cultural standing, as the community may struggle to reconcile these events with the traditional values upheld in *liboko*. Essentially, the desire for a harmonious life, intertwined with *liboko*, reflects the Basotho people's commitment to cultural preservation and communal well-being. Tragedies, especially those involving death and suicide, disrupt this harmony, affecting not only the immediate family but also the broader cultural narrative encapsulated in family odes.

The other significant thing about the Basotho was and continues to be their traditional practices. The traditional Basotho practices of relying on agriculture and animal husbandry play a crucial role in fostering a community-centric lifestyle (Mohale 2019:32). This way of life contributes significantly to minimising incidents like suicide. Engaging in agricultural activities and tending to animals instils a profound sense of purpose and community contribution, especially among men and boys. Active involvement in sustaining the community's livelihood creates a meaningful connection, reducing the risk of feelings of isolation or purposelessness that can lead to suicidal thoughts. The interdependence emphasised by these traditional practices reinforces the communal bond. Individuals are integral to a collective effort to meet the community's needs, fostering a strong sense of belonging and shared responsibility. This communal approach acts as a protective factor against mental health challenges.

The physical nature of agricultural work promotes both physical activity and mental well-being. Regular engagement in physical tasks is associated with the release of endorphins, natural mood enhancers that reduce stress and anxiety (Mohale 2019:33-34). This physical activity contributes to lower rates of mental health issues and, consequently, a decreased risk of suicidal tendencies. The close connection to nature inherent in agriculture and animal husbandry brings additional benefits. The therapeutic effects of being outdoors and working closely with the land and animals provide a sense of calm and grounding. This connection to nature acts as a protective factor against psychological distress that might otherwise lead to suicidal thoughts. Participating in traditional practices also reinforces cultural identity and pride. The Basotho's connection to their cultural heritage through agriculture and animal husbandry serves as a source of resilience. Rooted in their culture and taking pride in their contributions, individuals are less susceptible to the psychological factors that can lead to suicidal ideation. The traditional Basotho practices contribute to a supportive community structure, physical and mental well-being, and a strong cultural identity. An identity that transcends death and continues in the afterlife.

From this, it can be noted that the Basotho culture shapes their understanding of life as a sacred journey that does not end in death (Gosalia 2021:411). This worldview is deeply rooted in their belief system, where spirituality intertwines with everyday experiences (Montinaro et al. 2016:1-8; Gosalia 2021:411). This perspective influences the Basotho people's responses to social challenges, providing them a sense of purpose and resilience amid adversities. Moreover, the cultural worldview affects how the Basotho people perceive various aspects of life. For example, communal harmony and interconnectedness are highly valued within the Basotho society, and this can be seen from the structured nature of their villages, reflecting a close-knit community living, which can impact social cohesion and interconnectedness even more. These values foster cooperation and support among community members in times of adversity (Montinaro et al. 2016:1-8). The significance of group affiliation further underscores the impact of culture on genetic diversity among the Basotho population (Montinaro et al. 2016:1-8; Gosalia 2021:411). Clan membership is patrilineally inherited, reinforcing a strong sense of belonging and contributing to a more homogeneous genetic makeup within specific groups.

The sacred journey concept implies a sense of purpose and interconnectedness, fostering a collective responsibility for each community member's mental, physical, spiritual and economic well-being. In the face of mental health challenges, including the sensitive issue of suicide, this cultural lens encourages empathy, understanding, and a shared commitment to supporting those who may be struggling. The interconnectedness inherent in the Basotho worldview is not limited to the living but extends to the deceased as well, emphasising a continuity of existence that transcends physical boundaries (Gosalia 2021:411). Furthermore, the cultural emphasis on the sacredness of life suggests a reverence for the inherent value of every individual. This perspective provides a counterbalance to the despair that can lead to thoughts of suicide. In the Basotho cultural context, the sacredness of life is not just an abstract principle but a lived reality that permeates social structures, family relationships, and community dynamics (Gosalia 2021:411).

As the Basotho people navigate the complexities of mental well-being and suicide, their cultural foundation becomes a guiding force. It shapes how they collectively approach these challenges, fostering resilience, support, and an environment where individuals feel connected and valued (Gosalia 2021:411). In essence, the Basotho culture serves as a repository of traditions and a dynamic force influencing their responses to contemporary issues, offering a unique and valuable perspective on mental health and suicide prevention.

3.2. Basotho's Cultural Understanding of Life (Bophelo) and Death (Lefu)

The Basotho's cultural understanding of life (Bophelo) as a sacred journey encapsulates a holistic worldview that is deeply intertwined with the striking landscapes of Lesotho. Their perception of *bophelo* is not merely a temporal existence but a dynamic and purposeful journey bestowed upon them by the divine (Mbiti 1999:121; Okolo 1992:477; Gosalia 2021:411). This intricate tapestry of cultural beliefs reflects a profound connection to both the tangible and intangible elements of their environment, influencing their values, rituals, and societal norms.

Rooted in ancestral beliefs, the Basotho's perspective on life and death goes beyond the physical dimensions, extending into the metaphysical realm. *Bophelo*, translated as life, is not considered a mere biological process but a divine gift meant to be cherished and lived with intentionality (Mbiti 1999:121-122, Okolo 1992:485). This perspective adds a spiritual layer to their daily experiences, emphasising the sacredness inherent in every aspect of their existence. At the heart of this cultural narrative are the ancestors, revered as intermediaries between the living and the divine (Matheolane 2023:154). The Basotho maintain a deep connection with their ancestors, viewing them as active participants in the journey of *bophelo*. Ancestors are not consigned to the past; instead, they play an ongoing role in shaping the present and influencing the future. This belief in the enduring connection with ancestors serves as a guiding force, infusing a sense of continuity and purpose into the lives of the Basotho.

The continuity of existence beyond the physical realm is a key theme in Basotho cultural beliefs (Matheolane 2023:156). Death, referred to as Lefu, is not perceived as the termination of life but as a transition to another realm. The linguistic nuances surrounding death, such as '*O se a re seile*' (he/ she has now left us) or '*O se a iketse boyabatho*' (he/ she has now gone to where people should go), illustrate the Basotho's acknowledgment of this transition. This understanding fosters a unique approach to grief and loss, emphasising the idea that the departed have not vanished but have joined a community of elders and ancestors. For the Basotho, a person does not cease to exist once they are physically dead; instead, they transcend to the spiritual world to live in the community of the living dead (Mbiti 1990:134; Bujo 1998:77). From the above, it can be deduced that for the Basotho people, the concept of the living dead holds significant cultural importance and is intricately woven into their beliefs and practices. When engaging in rituals at the graveside, the Basotho do not perceive it as connecting with the spirit of the deceased; instead, they communicate with the living dead by saying, 'I am talking to my father or mother or grandfather, not the spirit or body of my dead father or dead mother' (Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata 2014:236). This distinct approach

vividly illustrates that, within Basotho culture, the living dead are considered genuinely and authentically alive, existing with and among the living and exerting influence on their lives. As much as funerals within the Basotho culture are not merely mournful farewells, they are elaborate ceremonies that honour the deceased and facilitate their journey to the afterlife. This makes traditional burial sites spiritual waypoints, symbolising the interconnectedness between the living and the departed. This emphasis on rituals surrounding death reinforces the belief in the continuity of life, encouraging a harmonious relationship with the spiritual dimensions of existence.

Basotho's cultural understanding of life and death also significantly affects individual and collective well-being. The interconnectedness of lives within the community forms a collective tapestry where each individual's journey contributes to the overall richness of Basotho culture. This sense of interconnectedness fosters a communal responsibility for the well-being of all, as individuals recognise their unique roles within the broader narrative of *bophelo*. This concept of the unity of being implies that everything exists in cosmic order and harmony, as noted by Okwu (1979:19). In the African worldview, harmony between the spiritual and physical realms relies on mutual respect among their inhabitants for their respective roles and strict adherence to the associated protocols (Okwu 1979:19). The same is seen to be the same for the Basotho people.

In a nutshell, the Basotho people's cultural understanding of life as a sacred journey, interwoven with spiritual beliefs and a deep connection to ancestors, shapes a unique perspective on existence. *Bophelo* is not merely a chronological progression of events but a purposeful journey filled with meaning and gratitude. The continuity of existence beyond death adds a layer of richness to their cultural narrative, influencing their rituals, values, and societal norms. The landscapes of Lesotho not only provide a physical backdrop to their lives but also serve as a canvas for the intricate tapestry of *bophelo*, where the living and the departed coexist in a harmonious dance across the spiritual and temporal dimensions.

3.2.1. Life as Bophelo: A Sacred Journey

Extending on the above argument, the study now seeks to dwell more deeply on the notion of *bophelo* as a sacred journey of *ho phela* (to live) to address its nuances. As seen already, the concept of *bophelo* among the Basotho people transcends mere biological existence and takes on a profound spiritual and communal dimension. It encapsulates the understanding that life is not a random occurrence but a deliberate gift from the divine, as Mbiti has argued (Mbiti

1999:126), a sacred journey to be revered and celebrated. This perspective, deeply rooted in Basotho's cultural ethos, influences not only individual attitudes toward life but also shapes the communal fabric of their society.

Bophelo (life), deriving from the verb 'ho phela (to live)', is perceived as a precious and irreplaceable gift, demanding a profound sense of gratitude. This gratitude, in turn, fosters a culture of appreciation for the interconnectedness of lives within the community. The communal context becomes a vital component of Basotho's journey, emphasising that each individual's path is intricately woven into the broader tapestry of Basotho's existence (Matheolane, 2023:152). In this communal tapestry, the uniqueness of each person is celebrated. Every individual is recognised as possessing a distinct purpose and destiny within the collective narrative of *bophelo*. This recognition fosters a sense of individual agency and responsibility, as each person is seen as a contributing factor to the overall well-being of the community. The interconnectedness of lives becomes a harmonious dance where the contributions of each person enrich the collective experience.

The communal emphasis inherent in the concept of *bophelo* also underscores the idea that individual well-being is inseparable from the well-being of the community. Scholars like Menkiti have, therefore, gone on to even tie individual personhood to how well the individual tries to live communally and engage with the community (Fieser & Dowden). This communal interdependence creates a support system where individuals are not isolated entities but integral parts of a larger whole. Successes, challenges, and milestones are shared experiences within the Basotho community, reinforcing a sense of unity and collective responsibility for the journey of *Bophelo*. The sacredness of *bophelo* is not confined to moments of joy or success but extends to the challenges and trials encountered along the journey; hence, you have a saying in Sesotho like *bophelo ke ntoa* meaning 'life is a fight/struggle for survival'. Adversities are considered integral aspects of the sacred journey, providing opportunities for growth, resilience, and shared learning within the community. The communal approach to life's challenges encourages mutual support and fosters a sense of solidarity among the Basotho people. Moreover, the interconnectedness of *bophelo* goes beyond the living and extends to the spiritual realm. Ancestors, revered as active participants in the journey, are considered part of the collective experience. Their role in the spirit plane derives in part from their social position, status, and role as former members of the human world (Okwu 1979:20). This spiritual connection adds a layer of depth to the Basotho's understanding of life, emphasising that the journey is not confined to the physical realm but includes the guidance and influence of those

who have gone before. For the Basotho people, death is, therefore, like puberty, a biological development that should occur according to the chronology of births (Okwu 1979:20). In this perspective, death is not perceived as the termination of existence; instead, it is acknowledged as the quintessential rite of passage (Okwu 1979:20). In the cultural understanding of the Basotho people, death represents a transformative phase, akin to other life stages, emphasising the cyclical nature of existence within the broader narrative of *bophelo*, the cycle of life (Matheolane, 2023:154). This philosophical stance underscores the belief that life extends beyond the physical realm and that death serves as a transition rather than an ultimate endpoint. Therefore, *Bophelo* is more than a mere term; it is a guiding philosophy that shapes the Basotho people's approach to life. It emphasises gratitude, communal interdependence, and the recognition of individual uniqueness within the broader narrative of the community. *Bophelo* is a sacred journey where the living and the departed coexist.

3.2.2. The Role of The Ancestors

The belief in the enduring connection between the living and their ancestors is a central tenet of Basotho spirituality, adding depth and richness to their cultural understanding of life and death. In his book *Religion of South Africa*, Chidester explains that ancestors are regarded as relatives who have died yet continue to show interest in their surviving descendants (1992:9). Mbiti calls ancestors 'the living-dead' (1969:82), arguing that they are in-between life and death. Mbiti further posits that: "attention is paid to the living-dead of up to four or five generations, by which time only a few, if any, immediate members of their families would still be alive" (1969:82). When the last person who knows the particular living-dead also dies, then in effect the process of death is now complete as far as that particular living death is concerned. He is now no longer remembered by name, no longer a 'human being', but a spirit, a thing, and IT (1969:83)

The role of ancestors as guardians in the 'now' and in the afterlife is a testament to the ongoing relationship between the earthly realm and the spiritual realm. Hence, when a Mosotho is making *Mpho oa balimo* or *Mokete oa balimo* – a special ceremony of thanksgiving made towards one's ancestors for their protection, guidance, and favours, one invokes all their ancestors, inviting them to partake in the ceremony also, even those they did not have the opportunity to meet while they were still alive. For Mbiti, Ancestors are the closest link that the living have with the world of the spirit. He further posits that ancestors are also bilingual, possessing the ability to now speak the language of the living with whom they lived until their departure and also that of the spirits and of God to whom they are nearer ontologically (Mbiti

1969:82). Ancestors are not relegated to a distant or disconnected existence; instead, they are considered active participants in the lives of their descendants. The Basotho believe that the spiritual realm, where ancestors reside, is not separate from the tangible world but intricately interwoven with it. This interconnectedness emphasises a continuity of existence that extends beyond the physical boundaries of life and death.

Referring to the Sotho-Tswana context, Setiloane (1986:18) argues that this experience of contact with ancestors is about a person-to-person contact, not of a vision or apparition. When people talk about this experience, they usually talk in the following manner: *Ke ne ke etetsoe ke ntate maobane*, meaning I had a visit from my father yesterday. According to Magesa (1998:14), ancestors are in constant contact with God and humanity. Hence, the term living dead and their role in the Basotho culture is significant.

The concept of ancestors as guardians carries significant implications for the living. It instils a sense of reassurance and comfort, knowing that the departed loved ones continue to watch over, guide, and bless their lives. The connection with ancestors becomes a source of strength, wisdom, and support for individuals navigating the complexities of Bophelo, the sacred journey of life. This belief in ancestral guardianship also influences the Basotho's approach to decision-making and life events. Individuals often seek the guidance of their ancestors through rituals, prayers, and offerings. Communication with ancestors is viewed as a dynamic and reciprocal relationship, where the living express gratitude and seek advice, and the ancestors, in turn, offer protection and blessings.

The spiritual connection with ancestors is particularly evident in moments of celebration, such as births and weddings, as well as in times of hardship and loss. During significant life events, the Basotho honour their ancestors through rituals that acknowledge their continued presence and seek their blessings. In times of adversity, individuals may turn to their ancestors for strength and guidance, reinforcing the sense of interconnectedness across the realms. The belief in ancestral guardianship also plays a crucial role in shaping ethical behaviour within the Basotho community. There is a shared understanding that one's actions have implications not only for the living community but also for the ancestors. This ethical framework, grounded in the awareness of ancestral presence, contributes to a sense of collective responsibility and accountability.

Moreover, the concept of ancestors as guardians in the afterlife adds a layer of meaning to the mourning and remembrance of departed loved ones. Funerals, as significant ceremonies in

Basotho culture, are not only about bidding farewell but also about acknowledging the ongoing relationship with the deceased. The rituals performed during funerals symbolise the transition of the departed to the realm of the ancestors, reinforcing the belief in their continued guardianship.

3.3. The Basotho Culture on Community and Suicide

Understanding suicide within the context of Basotho culture is a complex endeavour due to the distinct cultural and social dynamics that shape this Southern African community and, above all, due to the limited literature on their ways of approaching this phenomenon. The Basotho, like many African communitarian societies, place a strong emphasis on collective well-being, interconnectedness, and communal values, which present both challenges and opportunities in addressing the issue of suicide. One of the primary challenges in comprehending suicide in Basotho culture is the prevalent stigma associated with self-harm (Marangu 2014:192). In this culture, suicide is seen and understood, as in many other African cultures, as a disgraceful act. Members of the cultures are taught this as a deterrent mechanism for future attempts. They are also taught that death is not the end but a transitional process through which an individual passes from this realm to another realm (San Filippo 2017:99), ultimately joining the desired village of the ancestors. Hence, suicide resulted in a loss of respect and status for the individual and their family and may even bring shame upon them. Like other African communities, the Basotho prioritise the collective over the individual, and individual actions are often perceived as having direct consequences on the community as a whole. Therefore, suicide may be viewed as a violation of the communal ethos, potentially leading to blame and shame on the family and the broader community.

However, amidst these challenges, Basotho culture offers unique opportunities for addressing the issue of suicide. The strong bonds and support systems within Basotho communities can serve as a foundation for intervention and assistance (Marangu, 2014:195). In times of distress, individuals in Basotho society often turn to their community for help, as the concept of *botho* (humanity) underscores the interconnectedness of individuals. This communal support system presents an opportunity for early detection and support for those at risk of suicide, provided the community is equipped with the necessary knowledge and resources. However, in the Basotho community, suicide is seen and understood as a phenomenon that affects not only the individual but also the rest of the community. This way of seeing and understanding suicide is helpful in identifying obstacles and facilitating factors before interventions (Barnett et al. 1997:622-629).

3.4. The Concept of *Botho* in Dealing with Suicide

At the heart of the Basotho culture is the fundamental concept of *botho*, often expressed through the term Ubuntu. *Botho* encompasses the interconnectedness of individuals within the community, emphasising the idea that one's well-being is intricately tied to the well-being of the collective (Mbiti 1969:125). *Botho* dictates that individuals have a profound responsibility to the community, their ancestors, and future generations. This sense of responsibility transcends the individual, making every person an integral part of the greater whole. In Basotho society, community well-being is paramount, and individual actions are measured against their impact on the collective.

One of the essential aspects of *botho* is the idea of mutual respect and support. Within the Basotho culture, individuals are expected to show compassion and empathy towards one another, which is deeply rooted in the belief that everyone is connected. This creates a strong sense of unity and solidarity within the community. When it comes to the concept of *botho* and suicide, it is essential to understand that taking one's own life is considered a severe violation of these communal values (Mbiti 1969:125). Suicide disrupts the harmonious interconnectedness of the community, and its repercussions extend beyond the individual who has taken their life. It results in blame and shame on the family and community, as the act of suicide is perceived as a betrayal of the responsibilities one holds to the collective.

Suicide is seen as a transgression against *botho* because it severs the individual's role in the community, preventing them from contributing positively to the collective's well-being. It is perceived as an act of abandoning one's duty to the ancestors, the community, and future generations. Therefore, suicide is met with social stigma, as it is seen as a breach of the fundamental principles of *botho*.

3.5. Basotho's Ancestral Beliefs and Their Role in Suicide Prevention

In examining suicide prevention within Basotho culture, a multifaceted understanding emerges, woven from the intricate threads of ancestral beliefs, social dynamics, and communal support systems. The Basotho people's profound connection with their ancestors serves as a cornerstone in shaping their perspectives on life and death. Ancestral spirits are not distant entities in Basotho culture; instead, they are active and concerned beings maintaining a continuous presence in the daily lives of their descendants (Makgoba 2014:148). This belief system, integral to Basotho spirituality and worldview, underscores the notion that ancestral spirits continue to wield influence over the well-being of the living (Ramose 2003:113).

This pervasive belief in ancestral guardianship becomes a pivotal factor in suicide prevention within the Basotho community. The act of suicide, viewed as a betrayal of the sacred relationship with ancestors, is considered a profound transgression against the protection and guidance offered by these revered beings (Ramose 2003:115). By choosing to end one's life, an individual is perceived as shunning ancestral wisdom and blessings, thus disrupting the harmonious connection between the living and the spiritual realm. This disruption, according to Basotho cultural beliefs, can potentially invoke ancestral wrath, resulting in misfortune, illness, or other calamities befalling the community (Makgoba 2014:149). The fear of these consequences becomes a powerful cultural deterrent against suicide, shaping individual behaviour within the context of the Basotho worldview.

Furthermore, the act of suicide is met with pronounced social stigma within the Basotho community. It is perceived as an affront to *botho* community values and the ancestral beliefs that emphasise collective well-being. Families and communities grappling with the aftermath of suicide often face blame and shame, as they are perceived to have failed in their responsibilities to the individual who took their own life. This societal stigma adds a layer of deterrence, discouraging individuals from contemplating suicide due to the potential negative impact not only on their personal reputation but also on their families.

The communal approach to mental health challenges within the Basotho community suggests a collective responsibility and shared burden. The interconnectedness of lives implies that the challenges posed by mental health issues are not borne solely by the individual but are shared collectively. This communal perspective encourages community members to be vigilant and supportive of each other, fostering an environment where individuals facing emotional distress receive understanding and support.

Moreover, the cultural understanding of suicide within the Basotho community unveils opportunities for culturally sensitive mental health interventions. Suicide prevention efforts could be framed within the context of ancestral beliefs and the sacredness of life, seamlessly integrating traditional healing practices and rituals into modern mental health interventions. This holistic approach aligns with both cultural values and contemporary mental health principles, offering a comprehensive and culturally competent framework for addressing emotional distress within the Basotho cultural context.

Educational initiatives within the Basotho community could play a pivotal role in suicide prevention by raising awareness about mental health issues and reducing stigma. Emphasising

the interconnectedness of life, the importance of seeking help, and the cultural resources available for support can contribute to creating a compassionate and understanding community environment. These initiatives can be tailored to resonate with the cultural fabric of the Basotho people, fostering an environment that prioritises mental well-being and respects the sacred journey of Bophelo. Within the context of suicide prevention, this rich cultural backdrop takes centre stage, influencing individual choices and community responses. The belief in the continuity of existence beyond death, deeply rooted in Basotho spirituality, acts as a guiding principle. For individuals contemplating suicide, the prospect of disrupting the harmonious connection between the living and the spiritual realm serves as a powerful deterrent. This belief system provides a unique lens through which the Basotho interpret the gravity of self-harm, intertwining the consequences not only with personal well-being but also with the broader spiritual ecosystem.

Ancestral wrath, as a cultural concept, adds another layer of complexity to the understanding of suicide within Basotho culture. The fear of displeasure from ancestors underscores the cultural significance of preserving life and maintaining the sanctity of the sacred journey. This fear goes beyond the immediate consequences for the individual and extends to the potential ripple effects on the entire community. The prospect of ancestral anger, believed to manifest in misfortune or calamities befalling the community, acts as a collective deterrent, reinforcing the communal responsibility for individual actions.

Therefore, building on this communal ethos, mental health interventions that are culturally sensitive emerge as a promising avenue for suicide prevention. Framing suicide prevention efforts within the context of ancestral beliefs and the sacredness of life allows for a holistic approach. The integration of traditional healing practices and rituals into modern mental health interventions bridges the gap between cultural values and contemporary mental health principles. This fusion offers a nuanced and comprehensive framework that resonates with the cultural identity of the Basotho people.

3.7. Community Dynamics and Suicide Prevention

The strong sense of communal living within the Basotho culture serves as a robust foundation for addressing mental health challenges, particularly the sensitive issue of suicide. This communal ethos, deeply embedded in their cultural practices, manifests as a powerful force that shapes the collective response to individuals facing emotional distress.

Communal gatherings during various life events stand out as significant contributors to suicide prevention within the Basotho community. These gatherings provide a vital support network where individuals experiencing emotional turmoil can seek solace and understanding. The communal approach emphasises shared experiences, fostering a sense of belonging that is integral to mental well-being. In times of crisis or emotional distress, these gatherings become spaces where individuals can share their burdens, discuss their challenges openly, and find comfort within the collective embrace of the community.

One notable impact of this communal approach is the reduction of stigma associated with mental health issues. In a culture where open discussions are encouraged and embraced, individuals grappling with mental health challenges are less likely to face isolation and discrimination. The communal understanding that mental health struggles are part of the broader human experience helps dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions, creating an environment where seeking help is not only accepted but actively supported.

Moreover, communal dynamics play a pivotal role in suicide prevention by fostering open discussions and raising awareness. This can be traced to the Basotho proverb similarly linked to Ubuntu that *Motho ke Motho ka Batho*, translating, a person is a person because of other people. Ramose emphasises this state:

Motho can either protect nor promote life in existential vacuum. As a being ensnared in the wholeness of be-ing, *mo-tho*, he's always engaged in a situation of relationships. relationality is thus the basic mode of existence in the world. Unlike the cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*, the philosophy of the bantu speaking people affirms, *cognatus sum, ergo sumus*: I am related, therefore we are (Bujo 2001:22). In the Sesotho and Nguni languages, this is conveyed as *motho ke motho ka batho or umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye bantu*. (Ramose 2020:261)

As individuals come together to share their experiences, concerns, and triumphs, a collective consciousness emerges regarding the importance of mental health. This awareness contributes to breaking down the barriers that often hinder suicide prevention efforts, allowing for more effective dissemination of information, resources, and support systems within the community.

The communal gatherings, whether during celebrations, mourning periods, or crises, create a cultural space where mental health is not relegated to the shadows but is brought into the open. This cultural openness becomes a powerful tool for suicide prevention, as it encourages individuals to recognise and address mental health challenges early on, reducing the risk of suicide ideation or attempts.

In a nutshell, Basotho's strong sense of communal living, rooted in cultural practices, is a cornerstone in their approach to mental health challenges, specifically suicide prevention. Communal gatherings provide a supportive network, reduce stigma, and foster open discussions, creating an environment where individuals facing emotional distress can find understanding and assistance. This cultural approach reflects the interconnectedness within the Basotho community and serves as a model for effective suicide prevention strategies grounded in cultural sensitivity and collective well-being.

3.7. Connecting Life, Death and Suicide

The connection between life, death, and suicide within the Basotho culture is deeply intertwined with the broader African perspective on existence. The understanding of death as a transition to another form of life, as shared among various African societies, including the Basotho, underscores a continuity that extends beyond the physical realm. This perspective serves as a cultural lens through which the Basotho navigate the challenges of mental health, with suicide being a poignant manifestation of such challenges.

In the Basotho worldview, the concept of death as a transition implies that individuals maintain a connection to the living community even after their physical departure. This connection is not merely a memory but an active presence, with deceased individuals assumed to participate in the affairs of the living. It is within this framework that the challenges of mental health, and by extension, suicide, find a complex and nuanced context.

The communal value of ubuntu becomes a crucial aspect in understanding the dynamics of suicide within the Basotho community. Ubuntu emphasises a sense of shared humanity and collective responsibility for each other's welfare. This communal ethos is not confined to the living but also extends to the deceased. The belief in the ongoing connection with the departed community members enhances the sense of ubuntu, fostering an environment where individuals are intricately bound to one another, both in life and the afterlife. In the context of mental health challenges, the communal value of ubuntu becomes a potent force for suicide prevention. The collective responsibility embedded in ubuntu encourages a supportive community network where individuals facing emotional distress can find understanding, solace, and assistance. This interconnectedness provides a safety net for those vulnerable to the isolating effects of mental health struggles, mitigating the risk of suicide by fostering an environment of shared empathy and care.

Moreover, the cultural understanding of life and death as interconnected elements contribute to a holistic approach to mental well-being within the Basotho community. Mental health challenges are not viewed in isolation but as part of the broader fabric of existence, where communal support and collective responsibility play pivotal roles in preventing the tragedy of suicide. In essence, the link between life, death, and suicide within the Basotho culture reflects a profound awareness of the continuum of existence and the intricate connections that bind individuals together. The communal value of ubuntu, deeply rooted in their cultural heritage, emerges as a dynamic and essential aspect in navigating the complexities of mental health and fostering a resilient community that collectively addresses the challenges of suicide prevention.

3.8. Conclusion

In the tapestry of Basotho culture, life, death, and suicide are interwoven threads that create a rich and complex narrative. The sacred journey of Bophelo, with its roots in spirituality and communal values, provides a profound framework for understanding the nuances of Basotho's existence. The Basotho people's reverence for life, expressed through gratitude and interconnectedness, creates a harmonious dance where each individual contributes to the collective experience. Ancestral beliefs add depth to this cultural narrative, portraying the ongoing relationship between the living and the departed. The Basotho's approach to suicide, embedded in stigma yet balanced by communal support, reflects a delicate interplay of cultural dynamics. Botho, as a guiding principle, underscores the interconnectedness of individuals, making every person an integral part of the greater whole. The Basotho's communal ethos stands as a formidable force in suicide prevention, fostering open discussions, reducing stigma, and creating a supportive environment. The communal gatherings, whether in moments of celebration or crisis, serve as spaces where individuals find solace within the collective embrace of the community. In essence, Basotho culture unveils a holistic approach to life, death, and mental health, where the sacred journey of Bophelo extends beyond the physical realm. This cultural richness offers not only a lens through which to understand the Basotho people but also valuable insights for crafting culturally sensitive mental health interventions and suicide prevention strategies that resonate with the heart of Basotho identity.

Chapter Four: The Theory of Limited Communitarianism

4. Introduction

In this chapter, we will delve into the theory of limited communitarianism and its applicability to the study of suicide in ACS. It can be understood that limited communitarianism, as a theory, not only encapsulates the qualities that define a person but also highlights the manner in which an individual engages with their community, including how they contribute to the well-being of others. In an African communitarian context, the mere fact of being human does not guarantee one full personhood status. Instead, possessing certain qualities and meeting specific standards is essential to attain this status. Therefore, our study insists on incorporating an African theory that resonates with these communal values and beliefs. In African communities, there are often questions raised about the humanity of those at risk of suicide, mirroring the inquiries into the African traditional beliefs connected with this issue. Consequently, our focus is on exploring how these communities perceive the phenomenon of suicide and the reasons underlying these perceptions. This chapter begins by examining the concept of ‘personhood’ in the African context and delineating the factors contributing to an individual’s personhood within this framework. Subsequently, we delve into the infringement of the rights of individuals who may be at risk of suicide. The application of the communitarian theory, limited communitarianism, in our study’s analysis of African traditional beliefs regarding suicide within the Basotho culture is also a subject of discussion. This chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of limited communitarianism and how it can be harnessed for effective suicide prevention and intervention within ACS. To understand what we intend to archive here, we start by examining the concept of a person since it is this entity that is in question, as well as its action, duty, and relation to the community.

4.1. Personhood in African Communitarian Context

The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides several definitions for the word person, even though they mostly refer to human beings. The first definition of a person is a ‘human, an individual, a man, a woman’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The second definition of the term highlights that the word is also used to mean or describe one’s personality or character disposition, for example, whether one is a good person or a bad person, something crucial in African thought. This is because, for Africans, character is essential in deciding whether one is worthy to be regarded as a person or not. A person is also defined by Merriam Webster dictionary as an entity, ‘one (such as a human being, a partnership, or a corporation) that is recognised by law as the subject of rights and duties.

Anthony Appiah (2004:25), seeking to bring more African understanding on the question of a person, posits that different African societies “has at least one collection of ideas that I am going to call a theory of the person. A theory of the person is the collection of views about what makes human beings work”. For Appiah, grasping the concept of a person cannot be undertaken in isolation or detached from various other perspectives (Matolino 2008:52). He argues that such an endeavour would not result in a cohesive and well-structured understanding of what defines a person. Appiah emphasises that individuals must consider other significant aspects they deem crucial to their existence to fully comprehend the essence of what constitutes a person. He further states that:

For people interact, of course, not only with each other, but also with a world, both social and natural, around them; and are also widely believed to interact with the sorts of spirits, gods and the like that we are inclined to call “supernatural.” So, simply asking someone how they explain the things people do or what people need for survival is not generally guaranteed to produce a well-organized body of prepared doctrine (Appiah: 2004; 26).

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be inferred that Appiah acknowledges the intricacies associated with the concept of personhood. Moreover, there seems to be no immediate or obvious rationale to assert that a single word or phrase can function as a definitive definition of a person. Nevertheless, the concept of personhood in African thought has been the subject of diverse discussions and interpretations. One prominent perspective is that of Communitarianism. Within the framework of communitarianism, personhood is validated through an individual’s active engagement and contribution within their respective communities. It heavily relies on an individual’s capacity to fulfil social responsibilities. According to this viewpoint, one must exhibit loyalty to the community, prioritising its needs over personal ones and being willing to sacrifice individual needs for collective welfare (Matolino 2008:52-53). Moreover, communitarianism asserts that an individual should possess a moral character that aligns with the community’s values to attain personhood status. Within this context, any individual whose behaviour and actions demonstrate immorality is deemed either a diminished person or a non-person (Matolino 2008:54). This underscores the significance of moral rectitude in shaping the perception of personhood within the communitarian framework.

In his article ‘*Person and Community in African Traditional Thought*,’ Ifeanyi Menkiti endeavours to articulate what he perceives as an authentically African perspective on the

concept of personhood. Menkiti commences by highlighting distinctions between Western and African notions of personhood. He claims that:

whereas most Western views abstract this or that feature of the lone individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description “man” must have, the African view of man denies that person can be defined by focussing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather man is defined by the enviroing community (Menkiti: 1984; 171).

Menkiti challenges the reduction of the concept of personhood to a single slogan akin to the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*. He argues that the African approach to understanding personhood avoids the attempt to identify a singular character or isolated characteristics applicable to all individuals or ideal entities, urging that this determination is best left to the community. In his view, “the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be” (ibid). This underscores Menkiti’s emphasis on the communal dimension as paramount in defining personhood within the African context.

Menkiti argues that an individual’s self-awareness is intricately tied to the community, shaping the very essence of whom they become. According to Menkiti (1984; 172), the community stands as an enduring and persistent reality in the psychophysical world, and it is through this communal existence, individuals recognise themselves as durable and somewhat permanent entities within this world. This interconnectedness between the individual and the community, in Menkiti’s perspective, highlights the profound influence of communal life on personal identity. Expanding on this idea of Menkiti, it can be understood to suggest that actions such as suicide or any behaviour conflicting with the beliefs and norms of the community are considered morally wrong. This perspective emerges from the communal understanding that an individual’s identity is not isolated but intricately woven into the broader fabric of communal existence.

In the African context, community values often prioritise collective well-being over individual desires. Actions perceived as contrary to the communal ethos are viewed as detrimental not only to the individual but also to the stability and harmony of the entire community. Therefore, suicide, as an act that disregards the interconnectedness of life within the community, is seen not only as wrong but also as a breach of the moral rectitude that defines personhood in this cultural framework. This communal perspective also reflects the belief that individuals are part of a larger whole, and their actions carry implications for the community at large. By considering oneself as part of the community, an individual acknowledges a responsibility to

contribute positively to the collective well-being. Consequently, behaviours that jeopardise this interconnected harmony are deemed immoral, reinforcing the communal values that underpin Menkiti's understanding of personhood. For Menkiti,

As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be incompetent or ineffective, better or worse. Hence, the Africans emphasised the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e., become a person with all the inbuilt excellencies implied by the term (1984; 173).

Drawing on the perspective mentioned above, Matolino's contention gains heightened relevance as he echoes Menkiti's assertion that in Africa, the status of personhood is not automatically conferred at birth; instead, it is gradually acquired through one's journey within society. This process of societal integration, as elucidated by Menkiti, unfolds over an extended period, often aligning with the experiences and wisdom gained through advanced age (Matolino 2008:73). Furthermore, Menkiti underscores that achieving full personhood in the African context necessitates more than mere biological growth. It demands the demonstration of unwavering moral integrity, leaving no room for doubt. The transition from being perceived as an 'it' during infancy to attaining the recognition of 'him or her' as an adult is contingent upon fulfilling these ethical criteria. This underscores the nuanced and intricate nature of personhood within the African cultural framework, emphasising the significance of both societal integration and moral uprightness in the attainment of full personhood. Menkiti further posits that:

The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept the fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transform one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense—an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one (Menkiti: 1984; 176).

In essence, it can be noted that one cannot and does not become a person without the community and without abiding by what the community has set, its norms and standards, something suicide completely contradicts. Kwasi Wiredu, a prominent Ghanaian philosopher, advances the idea that personhood in the African context is inherently communal. According to Wiredu, it is not enough for an individual to possess specific attributes; true personhood is achieved by fulfilling social roles and responsibilities within one's community (Wiredu 1992:136). Thaddeus Metz, a contemporary philosopher, on the other hand, shifts the focus to

the moral underpinnings of personhood in African philosophy. He contends that personhood in the African context is closely tied to moral values and virtues (Metz 2012:19). Metz's perspective holds that being a person requires embodying moral qualities like compassion, integrity, and empathy (Metz 2012:24). Mogobe Ramose, a South African philosopher, unlike Wiredu and Metz, introduces us to the concept of ubuntu, a powerful idea that underscores the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. Ramose posits that personhood in the African context is deeply linked to practising ubuntu—cultivating harmonious relationships with others and actively contributing to the well-being of the community (Ramose 2020:263). Kwame Gyekye, another influential Ghanaian philosopher, contributes to our understanding of personhood in African philosophy by introducing us to the concept of relational personhood, where an individual's identity is intertwined with their relationships within the community. In Gyekye's view, being a person involves fulfilling social roles, maintaining moral integrity, and positively contributing to the community (Gyekye 1992:121). From the above perspectives, we can see that being a person, as Ikuenobe (2006: 58) alluded, extends beyond an individual's physical and mental attributes; it encompasses one's actions and demonstrates one's willingness to uphold specific social responsibilities for communal good. Thus, in his book *Personhood in African Philosophy* (2014), Bernard Matolino argues that the metaphysical conception and the communitarian conception denote the best characterisation of the notion of personhood. Now, the discussion moves to the theory of limited communitarianism as a theory that elaborates more on both the community and the individual.

4.2. On Limited Communitarianism

Before exploring the concept of limited communitarianism, it is worth understanding what we are talking about when we first talk about communitarianism alone. In pursuit of describing what communitarianism is, Arockia Raj (2016: 02) defines the community as a group of people who live in the same place or share certain characteristics. From this, it can be perceived that communitarianism is understood as a perspective that emphasises the importance of community, social bonds, and shared values in shaping individual identity, moral principles, and societal organisation. According to Coetzee and Roux (1998: 320), the African community consists of:

a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, biological and/or non-biological, who consider themselves primarily as members of the group and who have common interests, goals and values. The notion of common interest and values is crucial to an adequate conception of community, the notion in fact defines the community. It is the notion of common interest, goals and values that differentiate

a community from a mere association of individual persons. Members of a community share goals and values. They have intellectual and ideological, as well as emotional, attachment to those goals and values; as long as they cherish them, they are ready to peruse and defend them.

From the above, it can be said that community is, first of all, a shared space or a space shared among the people living together. It can also be said that a community is a group of people who not only share a common space together but also who share other things in common and are tied together by some social bond. Menkiti (1984:179-180) argues that communitarianism is a “collectivist sense,” which is attached by an “organic dimension that holds a relationship between the community and the individuals living there”. However, this relationship is not an equal relationship. This is noticed when Menkiti (1984:17) further argue, supported by other African thinkers like Kenyatta (1965: 180) and Senghor (1964: 49:93-94), that in “an African thought the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life”. This means that in the African understanding, no human being can live alone without the community. Similarly, Bujo (1990: 95) states that “in an African setting, the individual cannot exist without the community and that the community is the unity of individuals”. This can mean that a person living in an African communitarian setting must live in solidarity with other members of the same community. However, critics of communitarianism, such as Cohen (1995), argue that this philosophy may inadvertently restrict individual freedoms by prioritising community values. They point to the challenges in defining the boundaries of communities and balancing competing community interests.

Limited communitarianism, on the other hand, seeks to find a balance between the community and the individual. Developed by Bernard Matolino, limited communitarianism is an objection to radical and moderate communitarianism in a way that, unlike them, takes the individual seriously. Limited communitarianism advocates that there are some rights that should not be taken away from people or that can never be broken. Here, Matolino’s limited communitarianism is seen to argue for a different meaning or understanding of the community, that which puts the individual before the community. Matolino further argues that “individuals are entities and that they are worthy of respect as a creation of God and her identity proceeds from God” (Matolino 2014: 183). This can be understood to mean that the community should not dictate the life of an individual. However, it should not be taken as though limited communitarianism allows for an individual to act contrary or in opposition to the community, such as in the case of suicide. When coming to suicide, we understand that life has inherent value and significance that limited communitarianism advocates for and which suicide

contradicts and opposes. Limited communitarianism acknowledges the existence of “certain individual rights that are inviolable” (Matolino 2014:161), and these rights encompass various aspects of human existence, including the right to life. However, the act of suicide may be interpreted as a violation of this fundamental right, as it entails intentionally ending one’s life. Matolino distinguishes between metaphysical and social identity, stating that metaphysical identity is based on intrinsic attributes that make up an individual’s existence (Matolino 2014:166). When applied to the concept of suicide, it suggests that an individual’s metaphysical identity should be honoured and preserved. Therefore, taking one’s own life could be perceived as a rejection of one’s metaphysical identity, thereby contradicting the principles of limited communitarianism. It is also understood that limited communitarianism acknowledges the role of the community in shaping an individual’s identity and well-being (Matolino 2014:166-167). In the context of suicide prevention, this perspective emphasises the collective responsibility to protect and support individuals. This being the case, this theory, extending on its logic and method, can be redirected to argue that the community should intervene when an individual’s actions, such as contemplating suicide, contradict their well-being and metaphysical identity.

4.3. Limited Communitarianism and Suicide

The issue of suicide is a complex and multifaceted one, with its roots deeply embedded in personal struggles, societal pressures, and mental health challenges. Suicide is a global concern that affects individuals, families, and communities, with significant implications for public health and social well-being. Limited communitarianism, on the other hand, offers a unique perspective that prioritises individual rights, human dignity, and community well-being. Now, in this part, I seek to explore the relevance of limited communitarianism as a philosophical framework for addressing suicide, particularly within the context of ACS. I will do this by classifying two ways in which limited communitarianism (extending on its logic and method) is a relevant theory to use in dealing with the phenomenon of suicide in ACS.

4.3.1. Restoration of Human Dignity

One of the central tenets of limited communitarianism is the restoration of human dignity, as alluded to by its father, Bernard Matolino, in *Politics of Limited Communitarianism* (2017:118). Matolino argues that “limited communitarianism...takes seriously the individuality of each person and accords the right to determine their own station as they freely choose” however, he further emphasises that the same individual should “contribute meaningfully to the fashioning of their community in direct response to the pressures of realities that their environments immediately represent and present” (Matolino:2017:118). This

pivotal aspect of limited communitarianism emerges in the dual expectation that individuals while exercising this autonomy, are simultaneously urged to contribute meaningfully to the collective shaping of their community. Suicide, as an act of self-harm, based on this understanding of limited communitarianism, appears to stand in stark contradiction to the principles of limited communitarianism. It represents a cessation of the individual's potential to contribute meaningfully to the communal tapestry, a forfeiture of the opportunity to respond to the pressing realities that the community presents, and a denial of the inherent dignity embedded in the individual's capacity to shape their environment. By choosing to end one's life, an individual may be seen as abdicating their role in the communal project envisioned by limited communitarianism. Matolino's framework implies that individuals are not isolated entities; they exist within a dynamic interplay of personal aspirations and communal responsibilities. Suicide, therefore, can be perceived as a disengagement from this intricate dance, a relinquishing of the chance to participate in and influence the collective narrative actively.

As much as suicide has often been seen to arise from a profound sense of hopelessness and the erosion of an individual's dignity. The theory of limited communitarianism underscores the importance of reviving and safeguarding human dignity, which can serve as a potent deterrent against suicide. As much as from face value it might seem that Matolino gives an individual rights and freedom to rebel against the community, he does not; instead, he argues that 'limited communitarianism takes seriously When individuals feel that their dignity is recognised and respected within the community, they are less likely to consider suicide as a solution to their problems. Dignity and self-worth are vital components of mental health and overall well-being. The preservation of human dignity within the limited communitarian framework goes hand in hand with promoting a culture of empathy, understanding, and support. African communities, guided by the principles of limited communitarianism, can play a pivotal role in creating an environment where individuals are valued and respected, reducing the likelihood of suicide.

4.3.2. Balancing Individual Rights and Community Well-Being

Limited communitarianism, characterised by the quest to uphold a delicate balance between individual rights and community well-being, recognises the importance of individual autonomy while emphasising that individuals should not act in ways that harm themselves or the community. Suicide, as a manifestation of extreme individual despair, is seen as a violation of the community's well-being and not just an exercise of an individual's autonomous act. It disturbs the balance sought by limited communitarianism. It should be understood that the

balance sought by limited communitarianism is significant since this balance between individual and community interests provides a robust framework for addressing social issues affecting the individual, like suicide while respecting their rights. Suicide prevention efforts can also benefit from this approach by focusing on the empowerment of individuals to seek help and support within their communities without feeling that they are relinquishing their rights. Moreover, community members can play an active role in identifying and assisting individuals at risk of suicide, thus reinforcing the communal support network.

Limited communitarianism upholds the protection of fundamental rights, including the right to life as a right that is inviolable (Matolino 2014:166-168). Suicide involves the intentional and deliberate ending of one's life, which can be interpreted as a violation of this fundamental right. The theory can be seen to oppose suicide by recognising the intrinsic value and significance of life. Limited Communitarianism reinforces the notion that life should be preserved and protected. Within African communities guided by limited communitarianism, the right to life is a foundational principle that underscores the sanctity of human existence. Suicide prevention efforts can draw upon this principle to emphasise the irreplaceable value of every individual's life. By promoting this perspective, communities can work together to create a supportive environment that discourages suicide and encourages individuals to seek help in times of crisis.

4.4. Suicide in the context of Limited Communitarianism

Limited communitarianism provides a unique lens through which to comprehend suicide within the rich tapestry of ACS. At its core, limited communitarianism rejects a reductionist view of personhood, asserting that it extends far beyond individual attributes. Now, here, the study is going to elucidate how this framework fundamentally shapes our understanding of suicide within ACS. Central to limited communitarian thought is the concept of personhood, which transcends mere physical and mental attributes, as alluded to by Matolino (2014:166-168). The theory posits that true personhood is achieved not only by possessing specific individual qualities but also by actively engaging with communal responsibilities. In the context of ACS, where the community is an integral part of individual identity, limited communitarianism challenges conventional perspectives on suicide by considering it not only as an individual act but as a complex interplay between personal struggles and communal interconnectedness. The exploration of personhood within limited communitarianism is rooted in recognising that individuals are not isolated entities but integral components of a communal whole. It acknowledges that an individual's identity is intricately woven into the fabric of communal bonds, moral values, and shared responsibilities. By examining suicide within this

context, limited communitarianism prompts a re-evaluation of traditional understandings of ‘self-hood’ and individualism prevalent in many philosophical frameworks.

Furthermore, limited communitarianism navigates the delicate balance between individual agency and communal bonds. It acknowledges that individuals possess autonomy, but this autonomy is not divorced from communal obligations. In the context of suicide, this perspective challenges the notion that self-harm is solely an individual choice, emphasising the communal dimensions of mental health and well-being. It can be said that limited communitarianism prompts a nuanced understanding of suicide, wherein individual struggles are interconnected with communal dynamics. In essence, understanding suicide within the context of limited communitarianism requires recognising that personhood is not isolated but embedded in communal duties and responsibilities. This perspective invites a re-evaluation of prevailing views on mental health and suicide, advocating for a holistic understanding that considers the intricate relationships between individuals and their communities. Through this exploration, limited communitarianism emerges as a thought framework that not only sheds light on the complexity of suicide within ACS but also offers a foundation for developing culturally sensitive and community-driven prevention and intervention strategies.

4.5. Recognizing the Impact of Suicide on the Community

The acknowledgement that suicide transcends individual consequences and extends its repercussions to one’s family and community is fundamental within the limited communitarian framework. Although suicide is typically an independent or rather solitary act by the concerned individual, it invariably leaves families and friends in pain and forces them to cope with grief while trying to comprehend the possible motivation behind the death (Cerel et al. 2018:38). Having to go through the thought that a loved one or a community member has committed and died by suicide can be very traumatic to and for the community. In addition to all the feelings, Cerel et al. (2018:134) comment that beyond the typical emotions associated with the loss of a loved one, suicide introduces additional feelings and burdens to the community, including but not limited to, firstly extreme guilt for not preventing the suicide; secondly, failure because a person they loved felt unloved and committed suicide; thirdly, anger and resentment at that person who chose to take their own lives; and fourthly, distress over unresolved issues (many of which often exist in families where one person has a mental illness, which is common in people who die by suicide) Cerel et al. (2019:498).

While it is known that suicide has a long history of stigmatisation within many cultures, African cultures in particular, families of suicide survivors were and continue to be (in some places) often punished and ostracised by their communities (Colt 1991:547-567; van Hooff 2000:129-143). Now, here we examine the profound implications of suicide on the community, drawing from the principles of limited communitarianism to analyse how this act disrupts social cohesion, communal values, and overall well-being. Limited communitarianism, rooted in the understanding of personhood as intricately linked with communal responsibilities, highlights that every individual plays a role in shaping the community's collective identity. Suicide, therefore, is not viewed as an isolated event but as a rupture in the fabric of communal life. It disrupts the social dynamics and shared values that contribute to the cohesive existence of the community. This disruption is not only an emotional or psychological but also a tangible shift in the communal narrative. The impact of suicide on social cohesion within ACS is substantial. Limited communitarianism posits that communal bonds are vital for the well-being of individuals (Matolino 2014:166-167). In the aftermath of suicide, these bonds are strained, and trust may be eroded. This being the case, limited communitarianism emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals within a community and how the loss of one member through suicide reverberates, causing a ripple effect on the communal tapestry.

Communal values, another integral aspect of limited communitarian thought, are also profoundly affected by suicide. The act challenges the shared moral foundations that guide the community, prompting a re-evaluation of these values. Limited communitarianism, by recognising the communal impact of suicide, underscores the need for collective reflection and reintegration of communal values in the aftermath of such events. The emphasis on collective responsibility within limited communitarianism becomes particularly salient when addressing the aftermath of suicide. It is worth noting that the community is not merely a bystander in the face of individual struggles but an active participant. Therefore, limited communitarianism can be the best theory to be used in challenging communities to recognise and address the communal repercussions of suicide, urging them to engage in collective healing and support. This aligns with the theory's core tenet that the well-being of individuals is inseparable from the well-being of the community (Matolino 2014:166-167). In a nutshell, recognising the impact of suicide on the community within the limited communitarian framework is a call to action. It urges communities to go beyond individual grief and acknowledge the broader consequences of suicide on social cohesion, communal values, and overall well-being. Limited communitarianism, with its emphasis on collective responsibility, provides a conceptual

foundation for understanding and addressing the communal repercussions of suicide within the unique context of African communitarian societies.

4.6. Challenges and Objections

Limited communitarianism, as an approach used in this work to understand and address societal issues within ACS, particularly in the context of suicide, brings forth a unique set of principles that aim to strike a balance between individual rights and communal well-being. However, its application is not without potential challenges and objections. One significant challenge revolves around the tension between individual autonomy and the emphasis on community values inherent in limited communitarianism. While the theory recognises certain inviolable rights for individuals, critics may argue that its strong focus on community expectations and norms could still be perceived as restrictive, potentially impinging personal freedom. The objection here lies in the contention that individuals should have the autonomy to make decisions about their lives, even if those decisions contradict communal expectations. In the case of suicide, opponents might argue that personal autonomy should extend to the right to decide about one's own life, irrespective of communal values.

Another challenge arises from the diverse cultural landscape within ACS. Limited communitarianism, as a theoretical framework, may struggle to provide universally applicable guidance due to the rich tapestry of cultures and traditions across African communities. Critics could question the theory's relevance in societies with distinct beliefs about personhood, community, and the balance between individual and collective well-being. The objection here lies in the potential oversimplification of the complex cultural nuances within ACS, raising concerns about the misinterpretation or misapplication of the theory in culturally diverse contexts. Defining the boundaries of a community poses yet another challenge. Limited communitarianism places significant importance on community well-being, but the task of delineating who belongs to a particular community and who does not can be intricate. Critics may argue that without clear and well-defined boundaries, the theory may struggle to offer practical guidance on how communities should appropriately intervene in the lives of individuals, especially in cases related to suicide prevention. Ethical dilemmas surrounding community intervention in personal matters constitute a pressing challenge. While limited communitarianism advocates for collective responsibility in addressing suicide risk, critics may raise ethical concerns about the extent to which a community should intervene in the personal choices of individuals, particularly in matters as sensitive as mental health. The

objection here centres on potential infringements on an individual's right to privacy and personal autonomy, even when faced with potential harm.

Furthermore, emphasising community values and collective responsibility could inadvertently contribute to stigmatisation and social pressure. Individuals grappling with mental health challenges, including those at risk of suicide, might face heightened scrutiny and judgment within a framework that strongly underscores communal norms. Critics may contend that this aspect of limited communitarianism could exacerbate feelings of isolation and despair for individuals struggling with mental health issues rather than fostering a supportive environment. Lastly, there is the challenge of inadequate mental health support. While limited communitarianism emphasises the importance of community support, in practice, there might be insufficient mental health resources and infrastructure to address the complex issues associated with suicide prevention effectively. Critics may argue that relying solely on community intervention may be inadequate in addressing the underlying mental health issues contributing to suicide risk.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has comprehensively explored the theory of limited communitarianism and its relevance to understanding suicide within African Communitarian Societies (ACS). We began by examining the concept of personhood within the African communitarian context, highlighting the intricate interplay between individual attributes and communal responsibilities. Drawing on insights from philosophers such as Ifeanyi Menkiti (1940), Kwasi Wiredu (1931), Thaddeus Metz (1972), Mogobe Ramose (1948), and Kwame Gyekye (1939–2019), the chapter elucidated that individual characteristics do not merely determine personhood but is shaped by one's engagement with the community and adherence to communal values. Limited communitarianism emerged as a framework that seeks to balance individual rights and community well-being, emphasising the restoration of human dignity and the recognition of individual autonomy within the context of communal obligations. We explored how limited communitarianism challenges conventional perspectives on suicide by considering it not only as an individual act but as a complex interplay between personal struggles and communal interconnectedness. The theory underscores the importance of preserving human dignity and balancing individual autonomy with collective responsibilities, thereby providing a robust foundation for suicide prevention and intervention efforts within ACS. Furthermore, we discussed the profound impact of suicide on the community, emphasising the disruption it causes to social cohesion, communal values, and overall well-

being. Limited communitarianism prompts a collective reflection on the broader consequences of suicide, urging communities to engage in collective healing and support to address the communal repercussions of suicide effectively.

However, while limited communitarianism offers valuable insights and principles for understanding and addressing suicide within ACS, several challenges and objections must be considered. These include tensions between individual autonomy and communal expectations, cultural diversity within ACS, defining the boundaries of community, ethical dilemmas surrounding community intervention, and the risk of stigmatisation and social pressure. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the complex cultural nuances and diversity within ACS while promoting cultural sensitivity and community engagement in suicide prevention efforts. Looking ahead to Chapter 5, we anticipate a deeper exploration of the extension of limited communitarianism within the context of Basotho culture and its implications for suicide prevention. This chapter will delve into specific cultural practices, community dynamics, and traditional beliefs that influence perceptions of suicide within Basotho communities, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of integrating limited communitarianism into suicide prevention efforts within this cultural context. Overall, the theory of limited communitarianism holds significant promise as a framework for promoting mental health and well-being within ACS, emphasising the importance of preserving human dignity, balancing individual rights with communal responsibilities, and fostering collective support and resilience in addressing the complex challenges of suicide.

Chapter Five: The Extension of Limited Communitarianism and the Basotho Culture in the Suicide prevention

5. Introduction

In Chapter Five, we delve into the extension of limited communitarianism within the specific realm of suicide prevention and intervention in ACS. This chapter aims to elucidate how limited communitarianism, emphasising individual rights within communal contexts, can be practically applied to develop strategies that respect the individual's autonomy and foster active community involvement in preventing suicide. Building upon the theoretical framework established in previous chapters, particularly Chapter Four, which provided a comprehensive exploration of limited communitarianism and its relevance to understanding suicide within ACS, this chapter shifts the focus towards practical applications within the Basotho culture. By examining the cultural practices, community dynamics, and traditional beliefs that influence perceptions of suicide within Basotho communities, we aim to uncover opportunities and challenges in integrating limited communitarianism into suicide prevention efforts within this specific cultural context. Through case studies of successful interventions and reflections on challenges and opportunities, this chapter seeks to bridge theory with practice. By exploring how limited communitarianism can be adapted and extended within the Basotho culture, we strive to develop culturally sensitive approaches to community-based suicide prevention that resonate with individuals and foster collective well-being. Thus, this chapter continues our exploration of limited communitarianism within ACS, offering insights into its practical implications for suicide prevention and intervention efforts within specific cultural contexts.

5.1. The Principles of Limited Communitarianism: Application and Extension

Limited communitarianism offers a nuanced perspective that diverges from the individualistic orientation prevalent in Western societies. Rooted in the philosophies of ACS, this approach emphasises the symbiotic relationship between individual autonomy and communal welfare (Patel et al. 2010:385-386). Suicide, a complex and global concern, necessitates multifaceted interventions that consider cultural nuances and communal dynamics (Mann et al. 2005). In recent years, there has been a significant shift in recognising the pivotal role of community involvement, particularly within ACS, in addressing this pressing issue. The Basotho culture serves as a compelling model, exemplifying how limited communitarianism can be practically applied to develop strategies that respect individual autonomy while fostering active community engagement in preventing suicide. Within this cultural context, the communal support system is robust, with a strong emphasis on mutual aid, shared responsibility, and

collective healing. Traditional practices and beliefs play a significant role in shaping responses to mental health challenges, including suicide (Mahlomaholo et al. 2021:3259). These cultural assets offer valuable insights into developing suicide prevention strategies that resonate deeply with the values and norms of the community.

Historically, suicide prevention efforts globally have often been reactive, focusing predominantly on individual risk factors and interventions (Mahlomaholo et al. 2021:3262). However, the recognition of the social determinants of mental health has led to a broader understanding of suicide as a complex phenomenon influenced by systemic issues such as economic hardship, social inequality, and exposure to trauma. In ACS, where communal ties are strong and cultural practices are deeply embedded in daily life, addressing these broader social determinants becomes crucial for effective suicide prevention. The shift towards community-based strategies in ACS highlights the potential of leveraging communal resources, traditional knowledge, and social networks to enhance resilience and support individuals at risk of suicide. From the extension of limited communitarianism, it can be argued that the health and well-being of the individual cannot be fully realised without considering the health and well-being of the community as a whole. It is in this realisation that Matolino's argument stands out that individuals, in their individuality, should at the same time aim to "contribute meaningfully to the fashioning of their community in direct response to the pressures of realities that their environments immediately represent and present" (Matolino 2017:118). By engaging community leaders, traditional healers, and members in suicide prevention efforts, culturally appropriate, socially supported strategies can be developed (Patel et al. 2010:385-386). Moreover, the application of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention necessitates a re-evaluation of how mental health services are designed and delivered. Access to formal mental health care is often limited in ACS, and stigma surrounding mental illness can be a significant barrier to seeking help. Community-based approaches offer a pathway to overcoming these barriers, providing accessible, culturally sensitive support that reaches individuals who might otherwise be left behind. These strategies also provide the opportunity to integrate traditional healing practices with modern psychological interventions, creating a holistic approach to mental health care that honours the community's cultural heritage while providing evidence-based treatment.

5.1.1. Importance of Cultural Sensitivity in Applying Limited Communitarianism to Suicide Prevention

Cultural sensitivity is paramount when applying limited communitarianism to suicide prevention, as it ensures that interventions are respectful, appropriate, and effective within the cultural context. Recognising and integrating cultural beliefs, practices, and norms into suicide prevention efforts can enhance the acceptability and impact of these interventions. For instance, with its rich traditions and communal practices, the Basotho culture offers valuable insights into how community engagement can be mobilised to support individuals facing mental health challenges. Lovero et al. (2023:7-8) underscore the significance of cultural sensitivity in global mental health initiatives, arguing that understanding the cultural dimensions of mental health can inform more effective and sustainable suicide prevention strategies.

The role of culture in shaping perceptions and behaviours related to mental health and suicide cannot be overstated. Cultural norms and values influence how mental health issues are understood, how symptoms are interpreted, and how help is sought. In many ACS, mental health challenges may be perceived through a spiritual or communal lens, with traditional healers and community elders playing a crucial role in the healing process. Integrating these cultural perspectives into suicide prevention strategies can facilitate a more holistic approach that resonates with the community's values and beliefs. For example, Mosotho et al. (2008) demonstrate how understanding the cultural context of depression among Sesotho speakers in South Africa can inform targeted, culturally congruent mental health interventions. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity in applying limited communitarianism to suicide prevention acknowledges the diversity within communities and the need for tailored approaches that address specific cultural, linguistic, and societal nuances. El Halabi et al. (2020:3) highlight the mediating role of culture and religion in the characteristics of attempted suicide across different regions, emphasising the need for suicide prevention strategies that are informed by and adapted to cultural contexts.

5.1.2. The Argument for Extending Limited Communitarianism to Suicide Prevention

The argument for extending limited communitarianism to the issue of suicide prevention is compelling, rooted in its capacity to provide a balanced and culturally sensitive approach. In ACS, like the Basotho Community of South Africa, where communal ties are robust and individual well-being is deeply intertwined with collective welfare, limited communitarianism emerges as a fitting framework that honours both individual autonomy and community engagement. This extension is not merely theoretical but instead grounded in practical

application and cultural relevance. Limited communitarianism offers a paradigm that respects the autonomy of individuals while recognising their embeddedness within communal networks. As Patel et al. (2010:385-386) elucidate, this approach emphasises the symbiotic relationship between individual autonomy and communal welfare, advocating for a middle ground that acknowledges the importance of both. In the context of suicide prevention, this balance becomes particularly crucial, as interventions must navigate complex cultural nuances and communal dynamics.

Within the Basotho culture, where communal support systems are deeply ingrained in the fabric of society, limited communitarianism finds fertile ground for implementation. The Basotho culture exemplifies this interconnectedness, with strong traditions of mutual aid, shared responsibility, and collective healing (Mahlomaholo et al. 2021:3266). Within this cultural context, limited communitarianism offers a framework for developing suicide prevention strategies that resonate deeply with the values and norms of the community. By leveraging communal resources, such as traditional healing practices and social networks, limited communitarianism enables the development of interventions that are not only effective but also culturally congruent and socially supported. As Matolino (2014:166-167) argues that communal bonds are vital for the well-being of individuals, it can be deduced that the well-being of the individual cannot be fully realised without considering the well-being of the community as a whole. This holistic approach aligns with the principles of limited communitarianism and underscores its relevance in addressing the complex issue of suicide within ACS.

In a nutshell, the extension of limited communitarianism to suicide prevention offers a compelling framework that respects individual autonomy while fostering community engagement. Grounded in the principles and practices of ACS, this approach holds promise for developing culturally sensitive and socially supported interventions that address the complex interplay of individual and communal factors contributing to suicide risk. As communities like the Basotho demonstrate, limited communitarianism offers not only a theoretical framework but also a practical pathway towards effective suicide prevention within ACS.

5.2. Strategies for Community-Based Suicide Prevention

Community-based suicide prevention strategies offer a holistic and culturally sensitive approach to addressing the complex issue of suicide. Implementing limited communitarianism, leveraging the roles of community leaders, traditional healers, and family structures, and

conducting community education and awareness campaigns are pivotal components of these strategies. Drawing on the Basotho practices provides a rich context for effectively understanding and implementing these strategies. Implementing limited communitarianism in suicide prevention requires a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between respecting individual autonomy and prioritising communal responsibilities. This approach is instrumental in devising suicide prevention strategies that are not only effective but also culturally sensitive, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the unique socio-cultural fabric of each community. The Basotho practices, rooted in the African philosophical concept of Ubuntu, emphasise interdependence and collective well-being and offer a valuable framework for this integration, highlighting the potential of community engagement in enhancing individual care.

Patel et al. (2010:390) argue for the significance of community involvement in mental health interventions, advocating for a model that closes the treatment gap for mental disorders by harnessing the strengths and resources of the community. This community-based approach to mental health care aligns with the principles of limited communitarianism, proposing that the collective capacity of the community can be leveraged to support individuals facing mental health challenges, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of suicide prevention efforts. Mahlomaholo et al. (2021:3260) reinforce this perspective by demonstrating how community-based interventions in Lesotho have effectively addressed mental health challenges, including suicidal behaviours, by creating a supportive environment that encourages individuals to seek help and reduce stigma. These interventions, grounded in the communal values and practices of the Basotho people, illustrate the potential of community engagement in mitigating suicide risk and fostering mental well-being. The concept of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention extends beyond merely leveraging communal resources; it involves a fundamental shift in how mental health issues are perceived and addressed within the community. This shift necessitates a move away from individualistic approaches toward more collective solutions that recognise the interconnectedness of individual and community well-being. Fazel and Grann (2006:1401) discuss the broader societal impacts of untreated mental health conditions, suggesting that community-wide strategies can play a crucial role in preventing suicide by addressing the underlying social and economic factors contributing to mental health challenges.

Cultural sensitivity is paramount in implementing limited communitarianism in suicide prevention. Makama (2022:74) explores the cultural challenges faced by childless Basotho married women, highlighting how deeply ingrained cultural norms and expectations can impact mental health. Suicide prevention strategies that are culturally congruent and responsive to the

specific needs and values of the community can facilitate more effective interventions by ensuring that they resonate with the target population. Community-based interventions also offer an opportunity to integrate traditional healing practices with modern healthcare systems, enhancing the cultural relevance and acceptability of mental health services. Pitikoe (2017:109) and Moloi (2022:54) emphasise the role of traditional healers in providing mental health support within African communities, suggesting that these practices can complement formal healthcare services by offering culturally congruent care. This integration requires careful coordination to ensure that individuals receive comprehensive care that respects both traditional and modern medical paradigms.

Moreover, implementing limited communitarianism in suicide prevention involves addressing the stigma associated with mental health issues. As Mahlomaholo et al. (2021:3261) highlight, community education and awareness campaigns can play a critical role in changing societal attitudes towards mental health, encouraging open discussions, and reducing the stigma of seeking help. These campaigns can leverage communal communication channels, including cultural narratives and traditional teachings, to promote understanding and acceptance of mental health challenges. The involvement of community leaders and traditional healers in suicide prevention efforts is another critical aspect of implementing limited communitarianism. These individuals, who hold significant influence within the community, can advocate for mental health awareness, mobilise resources, and facilitate access to care. Their endorsement of suicide prevention initiatives can lend credibility and legitimacy to the efforts, encouraging broader community engagement and support.

5.3. Integrating Strategies for Holistic Suicide Prevention

Integrating these strategies into a comprehensive suicide prevention framework necessitates a collaborative approach that involves all sectors of the community. From the mobilisation of community leaders and traditional healers to the engagement of families and the implementation of targeted education campaigns, each component plays a vital role in building a supportive environment that can effectively address the multifaceted issue of suicide. Integrating individual and community approaches in the context of suicide prevention necessitates a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between respecting individual decisions and ensuring community welfare. This balance is particularly critical in societies where the interdependence between individual well-being and communal health is deeply ingrained. The concept of limited communitarianism offers a valuable framework for navigating this balance, advocating for strategies that harmonise personal autonomy with

collective responsibilities. According to Patel et al. (2010:385-393), engaging community resources and leveraging communal strengths are essential in addressing the treatment gap for mental disorders. This approach not only underscores the importance of respecting individual decisions but also ensures that the community's welfare is taken into account, thereby creating an environment where individuals are supported both on a personal and communal level.

The intricate relationship between individual choices and communal well-being is further complicated by the cultural backdrop against which these decisions are made. Pridmore and Pridmore (2020:137) discuss how cultural influences significantly shape gender-specific suicide rates, indicating that individual mental health issues, including suicidal behaviours, are deeply intertwined with the cultural and communal contexts in which they occur. This insight underscores the importance of adopting suicide prevention strategies that are culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific needs and values of the community. Such strategies must strike a careful balance, ensuring that individual rights are protected while fostering a supportive community environment that can effectively mitigate the risk of suicide.

5.4. Challenges and Opportunities

The application of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention, particularly within ACS and beyond, presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. This approach, which emphasises the balance between individual autonomy and communal responsibilities, requires careful navigation of cultural nuances and societal norms to effectively address mental health issues and prevent suicide. However, the successful integration of limited communitarianism into suicide prevention strategies also offers substantial opportunities for enhancing community engagement and building more resilient support systems.

5.4.1. Challenges in Applying Limited Communitarianism to Suicide Prevention

One of the primary challenges in applying limited communitarianism to suicide prevention is the potential conflict between individual rights and communal norms. In many ACS, communal norms and values play a significant role in shaping individual behaviours and decisions. However, when it comes to mental health and suicide prevention, these communal expectations can sometimes clash with the need to respect individual autonomy and confidentiality. Patel et al. (2010:393) underscore the importance of community involvement in mental health interventions but also highlight the challenge of ensuring that such involvement does not infringe on individual rights. This delicate balance requires strategies that honour communal

values while safeguarding personal autonomy, particularly in sensitive areas such as mental health care and suicide prevention.

Another challenge is the varying degrees of acceptance and integration of traditional healing practices with modern healthcare systems. Lovero et al. (2023:9) discuss the potential of traditional healers in providing culturally congruent mental health support but also note the difficulties in aligning these practices with evidence-based medical treatments. The scepticism or outright rejection of traditional healing practices by modern healthcare practitioners can hinder the development of integrated care models that leverage the strengths of both approaches for suicide prevention.

5.4.2. Opportunities for Enhancing Community Engagement in ACS and Beyond

Despite these challenges, the application of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention also presents significant opportunities for enhancing community engagement. By acknowledging the value of communal practices and traditional healing within ACS, suicide prevention strategies can tap into existing support networks and cultural assets to foster a more inclusive approach to mental health care. Mahlomaholo et al. (2021:3264) demonstrate how community-based interventions can effectively address mental health challenges, suggesting that similar strategies could be adapted for suicide prevention. Engaging community leaders, traditional healers, and family structures in these efforts can amplify the reach and impact of suicide prevention initiatives, creating a more supportive environment for individuals facing mental health challenges.

Furthermore, the emphasis on communal values and collective well-being inherent in limited communitarianism offers a framework for building stronger, more cohesive communities that can better support their members. This approach not only enhances the capacity of communities to address mental health issues but also strengthens social bonds and resilience, reducing the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health problems.

5.5. Recommendations

To effectively integrate limited communitarianism into broader suicide prevention strategies, several recommendations can be considered. First and foremost, there is a need to encourage the development of integrated care models that encompass both traditional healing practices and modern medical treatments. Such models recognise the inherent value of traditional knowledge in mental health care and promote collaboration between traditional healers and healthcare professionals. As emphasised by Patel et al. (2010:387), integrating traditional

healing practices into mainstream mental health services can enhance the accessibility and acceptability of care among communities where such practices hold significant cultural relevance. Therefore, studies should be conducted to explore the efficacy and acceptability of integrated care models within ACS, with a focus on understanding community preferences and the impact of such interventions on suicide prevention efforts.

Secondly, suicide prevention programs should be tailored to reflect the cultural values and norms of the communities they aim to serve. This necessitates active engagement with community members throughout the program development and implementation phases. By involving community members in co-creating these programs, stakeholders can ensure that interventions are culturally sensitive, relevant, and responsive to the population's unique needs (Mahlomaholo et al. 2021:3265). This participatory approach not only fosters community ownership of the initiatives but also increases the likelihood of program acceptance and sustainability over time. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate communities about the importance of suicide prevention and the role it can play in supporting individuals at risk.

Furthermore, ongoing education and awareness campaigns are essential for combating the stigma surrounding mental health issues and suicide within ACS. These campaigns should utilise communal channels of communication and cultural narratives to promote understanding and acceptance of mental health challenges. By challenging misconceptions and stereotypes, communities can create a more supportive environment wherein individuals feel comfortable seeking help for their mental health concerns that could lead to suicide. Education initiatives should target various stakeholders, including community leaders, healthcare professionals, and the general public, to foster a collective understanding of mental health and promote help-seeking behaviours.

Finally, there is a need to prioritise training healthcare professionals and traditional healers in culturally competent care practices. This training equips practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide care that respects individual and communal values, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of suicide prevention efforts (Patel & Prince, 2010). Culturally competent care encompasses an understanding of cultural norms, beliefs, and practices and the ability to adapt interventions to meet the population's diverse needs. By investing in training programs that prioritise cultural humility and sensitivity, communities can ensure that mental health services are delivered ethically and effectively. This then allows individuals to

contribute meaningfully to the fashioning of their community in direct response to the pressures of realities that their environments immediately represent and present (Matlino:2017:118).

Therefore, the integration of limited communitarianism into suicide prevention strategies requires a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach. By fostering collaboration between traditional healers and healthcare professionals, tailoring interventions to reflect community values, combating stigma through education initiatives, and promoting culturally competent care practices, communities can harness the potential of limited communitarianism to address the complex issue of suicide within ACS. Through concerted efforts at the study, awareness, and practitioner levels, communities can work together to create environments that support mental health and well-being for all individuals.

5.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter explored the extension of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention efforts within the Basotho culture. It highlighted the importance of community involvement, cultural sensitivity, and the integration of traditional practices in developing effective strategies that respect individual autonomy while fostering collective well-being. The chapter emphasised the need for a balanced approach that considers both individual rights and communal responsibilities in addressing mental health challenges and preventing suicide. The exploration of limited communitarianism within the context of suicide prevention, particularly through the lens of the Basotho culture, provides insightful perspectives on the integration of individual and communal approaches to mental health. This chapter has navigated the delicate balance between individual autonomy and communal responsibilities, elucidated the role of cultural narratives, traditional healers, and communal coping mechanisms in enhancing mental resilience, and addressed the challenges and opportunities presented by the application of limited communitarianism to suicide prevention strategies. The findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that honour both the individual's rights and the community's collective welfare.

The potential of limited communitarianism, as exemplified by the Basotho culture, to serve as a model for culturally sensitive suicide prevention is significant. Basotho's integration of traditional practices, communal support systems, and respect for both individual and communal needs offers a blueprint for developing effective suicide prevention strategies that are deeply rooted in cultural understanding and community engagement. This approach respects the community's cultural identity and leverages its inherent strengths to create a supportive

environment for individuals facing mental health challenges. Reflecting on the insights garnered, it becomes evident that the principles of limited communitarianism and the practices inherent in the Basotho culture provide a valuable framework for addressing the complex issue of suicide in a culturally resonant and effective manner. By prioritising cultural sensitivity and community engagement, these models offer pathways to more holistic and inclusive mental health care and suicide prevention strategies.

In light of these findings, a call to action is extended to researchers to further explore and implement community-based suicide prevention strategies. Researchers are encouraged to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which cultural practices and communal support systems impact suicide and resilience, providing empirical evidence for guidance. This study urges to recognise the value of cultural and community assets in suicide interventions, creating supportive frameworks that facilitate the integration of traditional and modern approaches. Community leaders, including traditional healers and local authorities, are pivotal in mobilising community resources, advocating for culturally sensitive mental health services, and fostering environments where seeking help is destigmatised. The journey towards more effective and culturally sensitive suicide prevention strategies is ongoing, and the principles of limited communitarianism and the practices of the Basotho culture offer promising directions. By embracing these models, the global community can develop suicide prevention strategies that not only mitigate the risk of suicide but also enhance the overall well-being and resilience of individuals and communities.

General Conclusions

The journey through the exploration of limited communitarianism within ACS, particularly in the context of suicide prevention and mental health care, has been an illuminating endeavour. This thesis embarked on a comprehensive analysis of cultural practices, social structures, and traditional healing modalities within ACS, with a particular focus on the Basotho culture, to unravel the intricate dynamics between individual agency and communal responsibilities in addressing mental health challenges. Throughout this research, it became evident that ACS is characterised by deeply ingrained communal values and interconnected social structures that significantly shape mental health perceptions and interventions. The Basotho culture, with its emphasis on *botho* (humanity) and collective well-being, serves as a compelling example of how communal practices contribute to mental health resilience and suicide prevention. Social gatherings, storytelling, and traditional music and dance, as integral aspects of Basotho culture, provide individuals with a sense of identity and belonging, which is crucial to maintaining mental health. As highlighted by Mosotho et al (2008:35-43), “through collective rituals and communal support, individuals facing mental health challenges are provided with a buffer against the isolating effects of depression”. Family and extended family networks emerged as pivotal sources of emotional and psychological support within Basotho society. The concept of *botho* extends to how mental health issues are perceived and addressed, with families coming together to support members experiencing challenges. The study on the experiences of widowhood among Basotho women in Johannesburg by Moloi provided insights into how communal support extends to bereavement and mourning, reflecting the Basotho’s collective approach to coping with loss and trauma, fundamental to their mental well-being.

All the community members were identified as significant stakeholders in the mental health landscape within ACS, offering services that blend spiritual, medicinal, and psychological support. Their role in providing culturally congruent care complements formal healthcare services, offering alternative pathways to support individuals facing mental health challenges. As noted by Pitikoe (2017:104-112), “community members and leaders play a crucial role in providing mental health support within African communities, offering culturally congruent care”. Community-based interventions, such as dialogues facilitated by local NGOs and health organisations, serve as platforms for raising awareness about mental health issues and reducing stigma. These initiatives leverage communal practices, such as *pitso* (public meetings), to engage community members in discussions about mental health, fostering a supportive environment that encourages individuals to seek help. Additionally, programs targeting youth

mental health highlight the proactive steps taken by the Basotho community in integrating mental health awareness into traditional educational settings, emphasising the importance of seeking help and supporting peers.

The concept of limited communitarianism, developed by Bernard Matolino, emerged as a guiding framework for suicide prevention within ACS, advocating for strategies that respect individual autonomy while recognising communal responsibilities. Implementing limited communitarianism in suicide prevention requires a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics and societal norms to effectively address mental health challenges and reduce the risk of suicide. As Patel et al. (2010:385-393) emphasised, “engaging community resources and leveraging communal strengths are essential in addressing the treatment gap for mental disorders”. However, the application of limited communitarianism in suicide prevention also presents challenges, including potential conflicts between individual rights and communal norms, as well as varying degrees of acceptance of traditional healing practices within modern healthcare systems. Overcoming these challenges requires collaboration among stakeholders, ongoing education and awareness campaigns, and policies that support the integration of traditional healing practices with evidence-based medical treatments.

Moving forward, it is imperative to continue the dialogue on culturally sensitive approaches to mental health care and suicide prevention, with a focus on community engagement, capacity building, and the promotion of resilience within ACS. By embracing the principles of limited communitarianism and drawing upon the cultural strengths of ACS, suicide prevention strategies can be more holistic, inclusive, and effective. As this research has demonstrated, the journey towards culturally sensitive and effective suicide prevention is ongoing, requiring ongoing dialogue, innovation, and collective action to promote the well-being of individuals and communities in diverse cultural contexts.

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