Abstract

Death is a reality for all biological life. For human beings, death can be a struggle in various ways, from coming to terms with its reality, to dealing with the passing of a loved one, and disposing of the remains. It therefore tends to be a topic that is daunting to many people, who often feel they need to avoid speaking or even thinking about it.

The focus of this study is mainly to examine the ways in which the disposal of the dead is handled in various cultures, and as a result of personal or social philosophies, along with the legal requirements inherent in body disposal. The personal feelings that such disposal unleashes are also examined. Interviews with both professionals in various fields connected with death and people from everyday life who have had personal experience of losing a loved one have revealed many different views and insights. Particularly, participants in the study were recruited from the Bloemfontein area, as this was more convenient for the researcher, who herself resides in the city.

Some of these insights emerged from how different cultures view death and how they choose to dispose of their loved ones' remains. Some unusual disposal methods include the sky burial and cannibalising the remains. For the Western world, the eco burial has gained popularity in Europe and the United States. In South Africa, the only legal disposal options are cremation and burial.

Religious institutions, culture, and funeral directors have a large amount of influence over disposal choices. This can create financial, social, and environmental problems, including the odious state of cemeteries in the City of Bloemfontein. Also, families can feel obliged to pay for a lavish funeral by cultural pressures as well as instigation by funeral parlours.

Other relevant terms regarding the choice and feelings around death and disposal include selective importance, place attachment, ideas around immortality, and attitudes towards death. All these are examined in terms of the interviews conducted to come to a conclusion relating to which personal views drive the choice of disposal method in addition to the collective ones mentioned above.

It should be noted that, while this study is particularly apt in the time of COVID-19, the work was begun and all interviews concluded before the outbreak. An in-depth study of individuals dealing with the virus and its consequences could therefore not be conducted. However, a significant amount of current literature has been examined and relevant insights are offered throughout the study. For example, people in densely populated areas have not been able to attend funerals for their loved ones, and crematoriums are obliged to work overtime in order to dispose of victims of the virus.

The core conclusion is that speaking and thinking about death can bring closure not only to the bereaved, but also to the general population when coming to terms with the reality of death that is in all our future. Throughout the study, it is also made clear that dealing with and disposing of the dead remains a highly personal matter for those most directly involved.

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SOCM 8900

Master of Arts with Specialisation in Sociology

Socially constructed death rituals and decision-making regarding disposal after death

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation submitted in completion of the degree Magister Artium at the University of the Free State is my own, original work and has not been submitted previously at another university, faculty or department.

I furthermore concede copyright of this dissertation to the University of the Free State.

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To my spouse, thank you for your unwavering support, encouragement and love, and thank you for being strong when I could not be.

Finally, many thanks to all participants that took part in the study and enabled this research to be possible.

Dedication

In memory of my late mother Lorina, 15-06-1950 to 08-11-2019. You were my first friend and sometimes my only friend. I was not ready for you to leave. Thank you for always believing in me, cultivating my love for knowledge and teaching me that it is okay to be the weird kid. I love you, always.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Harriet Martineau (1838) stated that the "knowledge and goodness" of a community can be observed in the cemetery for the reason that, how a community views life will be visible through how they represent death. Martineau continues, "the brief language of the dead will teach him (the traveller) more than the long discourses of the living". Warner (1959) echoes this sentiment by stating that information gathered through visiting cemeteries is "collective representations" that reveal "basic beliefs and values of what kind of society it is". However, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the way some societies came to view and respond to death and its related rituals have changed drastically. This pandemic brought about disruption in many aspects of daily life, and especially in the ritual of death (Vanamee, 2020). Bailey and Walter (2015) hypothesise that the natural social response to death is to practise a form of departure that normally manifests through the exercise of some type of funeral. However, the choice of disposal method, place of disposal and its related rituals are dependent on numerous factors. With the sudden increase in mortality rate due to COVID-19, combined with lockdown regulations and contamination protection strategies imposed by numerous countries across the globe, individuals and communities have been forced to deritualise their response to death. Followers of the Islamic faith are unable to carry out the custom of bathing the deceased before burial, Mexicans are deprived of *velorios* (wakes) and in India, the common sight of cremation pyres next to the Ganges River has disappeared (Felter and Maizland, 2020). In COVID-19 epicentres, the Jewish custom of burial within 24 hours has been disrupted due to morgues and funeral homes operating at over capacity. Communities are searching for new ways to honour the dead and substitutions to the traditional funeral. Religious institutions across the globe have instated online ceremonies and drive-by funerals. Undertakers in Scotland have requested the revival of the old custom of bowing when a hearse passes (Felter and Maizland, 2020). The duration of the current protective measures are unknown, and in addition, so are the lasting effects on the bereaved and communities. This is a stark and rather unprecedented example of the manner in which death rituals can change rapidly as dictated by contextual societal circumstances, necessities and obligations.

Problem Statement

Cemeteries have become more than places to bury the dead or inter the remains of loved ones. It is a space where those who have passed are remembered, symbolising a place that protects the stories of the past. During the last decade, much attention has been paid to determining and stating the environmental impact of socially constructed death rituals (Tshabalala, 2004; Guttman *et al.*, 2011; Jonker and Olivier, 2012). Although alternative disposal methods and eco-friendly burial options appear to be the solution to address this growing concern, it is of paramount importance to first explore and understand the underlying factors and motivations behind disposal choices.

According to records held by The Genealogical Society of South Africa (2017), the Free State Province of South Africa currently has more than 115 cemeteries that include urban, rural, farm and private cemeteries. Many are already used to capacity and have fallen into a state of disrepair, and many others are nearing this condition. Declining cemetery space has become a global concern (Davies and Mates, 2016; Magubane, 2017). When a cemetery reaches capacity, its revenue reduces drastically, yet its expenses continue (Tshabalala, 2004). The availability of funds is thus crucial to maintaining the area. Tshabalala (2004) states that, if a cemetery does not have a perpetual care fund, its income becomes depleted, maintenance becomes near impossible, and it falls into an appalling state of disrepair.

The declining burial space is however not a new phenomenon in South Africa. In 1979, the City Council of Pretoria commissioned an investigation with respect to the attitudes of white South Africans residing in Pretoria concerning alternative disposal methods. According to Retief (1981), the city of Pretoria, during the year of inquiry, had only 39.5 hectares of space left that could be utilised for cemeteries, which equalled approximately 47 700 graves, and was estimated to last for only 15-16 years. Today, 40 years later, the city of Pretoria has indeed reached its burial capacity. Township cemeteries in the Pretoria area have no burial space left, and residents are apparently now conducting illegal burials in any available space. During 2019, the city of Tshwane (Pretoria) undertook a desperate attempt to alleviate challenges related to burial space (Moatshe, 2019). Unused land and land owned by national government has been identified in order to expand existing cemeteries or to site new cemeteries.

The current COVID-19 outbreak in South Africa and the associated growing death rate have authorities in the eThekwini districts (Durban) struggling to find sustainable solutions for the lack of burial space in the city (Lutchman, 2020). The city of Durban has a total of 66 cemeteries, of which 57 have reached their burial capacity and have closed. Although the city has six crematoriums to possibly alleviate the burial space problem, cremation remains unpopular in some communities (Lutchman, 2020).

A study conducted in 2004 determined that the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality had only 52.55 hectares of burial space left (Tshabalala, 2004). In 2016 alone, the number of Free State households that reported a death occurrence in the past 12 months were 28 307 (Statistics South Africa, 2016). This consequently resulted in at least 28 307 corpses in need of disposal throughout the province in only one year. This not only suggests a need for cultural change regarding disposal methods, but it implies that a shift in behaviour and responsibility with regard to cemeteries and the manner in which the dead is disposed of, is sorely needed.

South Park Cemetery is currently the largest cemetery in the Bloemfontein metropolitan area. This cemetery has shown tremendous growth since its establishment in 1970 (Tshabalala, 2004). The illustration below shows the expansion of the South Park Cemetery from 2002 to 2017.

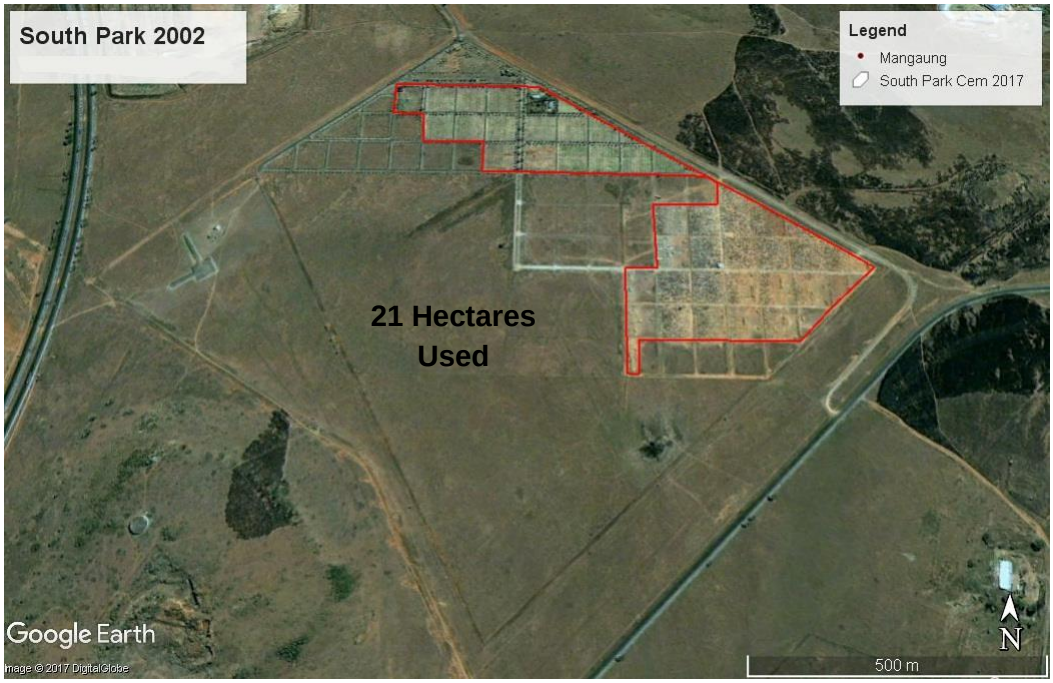

Figure 1: South Park Cemetery Bloemfontein 2002

(Source: Google Earth Pro)

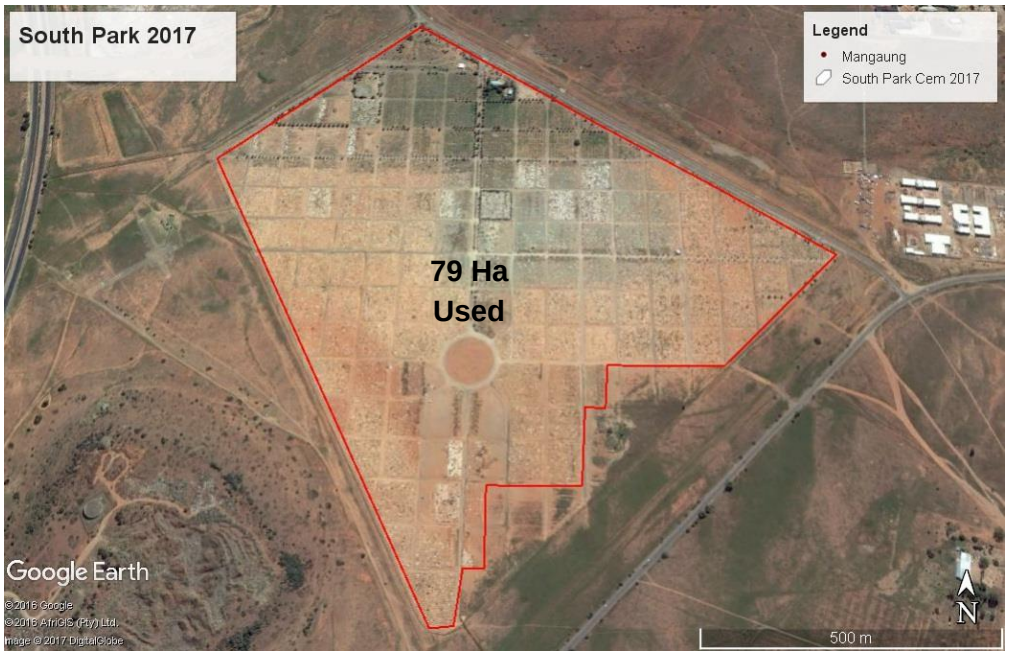

Figure 2: South Park Cemetery Bloemfontein 2017

(Source: Google Earth Pro)

Cemeteries are filling up at an alarming rate, and identifying suitable areas for new cemeteries is proving to be a challenge for many municipalities across South Africa. However, before one

can campaign for alternative, more eco-friendly disposal methods or changes in behaviour when it comes to disposal practices and choices, it is of the utmost importance to determine the motivation behind the existing practices and death-related behaviour. Only with a thorough understanding of the driving factors behind behaviour, traditions and practices, can alternative, eco-friendly, disposal methods be investigated and proposed. The purpose of this research project is to explore the motivating factors behind the disposal choices of different cultural groups and religions in South Africa, more specifically within the Free State province. This research will furthermore determine how the current condition of cemeteries is affecting place attachment, thoughts on mortality and the relationship with the deceased. How could individuals making use of cemeteries possibly make a valuable contribution in attempting to address the existing problems? By adopting individual and corporate responsibility and cultivating a pro-environmental attitude while respecting and incorporating personal opinions of religion, race and culture, society should be able to make a decisive difference in the *status quo* of cemeteries and in the process preserve and protect the environment.

Research Questions

The following research questions were identified to conduct the study:

1. How do our convictions regarding mortality or immortality shape our choices when it comes to decisions about disposal after death?
2. To what extent and in what ways does societal pressure by religious or cultural affiliations influence our decisions of disposal options and their related rituals?
3. To what extent and in what ways does our level of place attachment influence our choices of disposal and our attitudes towards cemeteries?

Definition of Terms

For better understanding, terms used in this research project are conceptually and operationally defined.

Casket/Coffin: According to Glaser (2009), the terms casket and coffin refer to the container in which the dead is placed for burial or cremation. Caskets and coffins are manufactured primarily from wood and steel with a cloth lining.

Cemetery: Mytum (2014) describes cemeteries as "formal burial locations where a number of interments have taken place". It is a site of inhumations in various forms, such as burying the dead with or without coffins or the burial of cremains with or without a container. Terms that are commonly associated with the term "cemetery" are graveyard, churchyard or burial ground.

Cremation: Davies (2009) describe cremation as "the process of burning the human corpse until only some bone fragments and ashes remain."

Funeral: According to Dennis (2014), a funeral is an event during which family members and friends gather to honour the decedent's life before burial or cremation. The event can have a religious or cultural inclination.

Cremains: Brennan (2014) defines cremains as "the cremated remains of a corpse disposed through the modern process of cremation".

Green burial: According to Brennan (2014), a green burial is an interment that takes place without the use of materials that are considered harmful to the environment. It is also referred to as woodland, natural or ecological burials.

Chapter Review

This study comprises of a literature review, a theoretical as well as a practical component that describe the chosen methodology as well as the research findings.

Chapter Two provides the theoretical foundation for the study. Relevant theories have been identified and are discussed extensively. The construction of death, death systems, sense of place or place attachment, immortality, memorialisation and the relationship with the dead are identified theories that are discussed in depth.

Chapter Three provides the intellectual background of existing literature that serves as the starting point for this study. The historical overview of cemeteries and cemetery development,

methods of disposal, the commodification of death, social responsibility, environmental impacts and the legal determinants relating to body disposal in South Africa, are discussed.

Chapter Four describes the methodology used in this study, including the research design, participant selection, sampling design, the data analysis procedure, challenges experienced during the data collection phase, validity and reliability, as well as ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter Five comprises of participant demographics as well as empirical data in the form of direct citations from the various participants. These are analysed in order to grapple with the research questions.

Chapter Six concludes the study and discusses the most salient issues that came to the fore by analysing the data provided by participants. .

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework: A grave affair

Introduction

Death is the most persistent phenomenon in society and could be described as "the only certainty in life" (Van Brussel and Carpentier, 2014). Death is biological in nature; Giddens (1979) describes it as the ultimate biological essentialism and the moment when human obsession with control finds its ultimate limit. Death is however, more importantly, involved in the social structures that given society has constructed, and it has a profound effect on these structures. Death disrupts the established social patterns of the community or group in which it occurs, forcing the community or groups to restructure and develop new patterns to harmonise the death phenomenon and decrease the possible destructive impact on the group (Vernon, 1970). Motta (2011) suggests that the concealment of the dead for hygienic reasons is one of the earliest known practices; this custom is however more than just a practical action, as it also involves a moral obligation (Vernon, 1970).

Constructing death

All human beings can expect to experience death; it has an "absent presence" woven into all social systems. How people deal with death varies significantly among cultures and individuals. Death can be defined by concepts, ways of thinking and words. The social constructivist view implies that death holds different meanings for different people, and this meaning has the ability to change over time for each individual and even for entire groups. Whatever happens to a person after death, or what a group or community believes happens, is their social reality: a subjective or symbolic reality for that specific group or community. The symbolic reality is taken into account when deciding what will happen after the passing of a member of that community. The beliefs of a group inevitably influence, both manifestly and latently, the living group from which the dead have departed (Vernon, 1970). The constructed funerary rituals of a specific group or community thus serve as an equilibrium-producing process by which the group or community "absorbs" the death of a member (Leming and Dickenson, 2011).

Death systems

In 1977, Robert Kastenbaum introduced the concept of the "death system". Kastenbaum (2001) defined this as "the interpersonal, sociocultural, and symbolic network through which an individual's relationship to mortality is mediated by his or her society". Through the concept of the death system, Kastenbaum attempts to move death away from an individual concern towards a larger context. This allows one to understand the role of death in the preservation and change of the social order.

The death system has a number of components in any given society. These components include people, places, times, objects, symbols and images (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001).

People form part of the death system due to the fact that death is inevitable. All human beings will at some stage of their existence be involved with death, whether it is their own or that of others. Some individuals, however, have roles that are more consistent in the death system. These individuals earn their livelihood by providing services that revolve around death or are frequently used by the death industry (e.g. coroners, funeral directors, florists, doctors and estate lawyers) (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). A funeral director describes a typical situation of his trade as follows: "When I walk into a room, Death walks in with me. That is how people react to me" (Kastenbaum, 2018). The response of the public to individuals working in the death industry affirms the individual's "embeddedness in the death system" (Kastenbaum, 2018). There are also individuals in a variety of occupations that indirectly form part of this component of the death system. The scientist developing military weapons, which could ultimately lead to the death of others, the butcher, involved in the slaughter of animals for human consumption, clergymen who, on occasion, perform funerals and last rights to the dying form part of the death system.

Certain **places** in society have become identified with death. These places include funeral homes, cemeteries, morgues, crematoriums and other religious/non-religious infrastructure that deal with the dead (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). Individual experiences and ideas influence the places associated with death (e.g., the passing of a loved one in the hospital may change a family member's association of the hospital to a place of death rather than a place of healing)

(Kastenbaum, 2018). Historical places such as the Anglo-Boer (South African) War battlefields or modern places such as the N2 highway from East London to Mthatha, also known as the "highway to hell" due to the high number of recorded road accident deaths, form part of this component of the death system. Kastenbaum (2018) asserts that, once a place has become associated with death, the sentiment towards that place changes.

With regard to **time**, death also has its occasions. Although the calendar and clock indicate each passing moment and day with equal disinterest, certain days or holidays are associated with a time to remember the dead and are treated in a special manner. The Mexican tradition of *El Día de los Muertos* (The Day of the Dead), Good Friday in the Christian tradition, and Halloween, in the American culture, are examples. It is however important to note that different family systems, cultural groups or individuals may hold other traditions in honouring and remembering their deceased loved ones (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001).

There are numerous **objects** associated with death. The hearse, coffin, tombstone, mourning clothes and even the death certificate are among the noticeable objects in the death system (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). Hunting trophies (or in Kastenbaum's opinion, "death souvenirs") and instruments of capital punishment displayed in museums are also objects of the death system (Kastenbaum, 2018). Kastenbaum (2018) states that objects that have no direct connotation with death can be "recruited" into the death system, and by doing so, their meaning is transformed while the objects themselves remain the same (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes and pharmacological substances).

As with objects, **symbols and images** within the death system are diverse. It includes the funeral service, the way we conduct ourselves in a cemetery and the language we use when speaking of the dead (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001; 2018). In some Western cultures, and in many African cultures such as the Bapedi tribe in Limpopo, the black armband and black funeral attire are symbols of death (Kastenbaum, 2018; Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, 2014). Kastenbaum (2001; 2018) posits that the death symbols used by different cultures or individuals are significant of their attitudes towards death. Kastenbaum (2018) noted that, with regard to language, society traditionally refers to the death of an individual as "a person has passed on", "expired", "departed" or "went to their reward". There has however been an

increase in dismissive expressions such as “he croaked”, “snuffed it”, “bought the farm” or even “became worm food”. The use of both euphemistic and dysphemistic terms when referring to death serves to keep a distance between the living and the reality of death (Kastenbaum, 2018). Although the topic of death is on occasion discussed more openly in modern society, there is still a tendency to “code” the topic with symbolic or evasive language. e.g., medical staff in a hospital will refer to the death of a patient as “sending a patient to Ward 19”, where the hospital only has 18 wards.

Functions of the death system

The question can now be posed: what functions are served by the death system? According to Kastenbaum (1977; 2001), the death system fulfils a sequence of important functions. These functions include warning and predicting death, preventing death, caring for the dying, disposing of the dead, social consolidation after death, making sense of death and killing.

The function of **warning and predicting death** takes on many forms and refers to the different structures within a society that warns individuals or communities about approaching dangers (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). One of the core functions of a society is to protect its members; therefore warnings and predictions are issued in an attempt to mitigate possible threats (Kastenbaum, 2018). Warnings and predictions within a society can be based on folklore, religion or science, and the expected threats may be accurate, exaggerated or imaginary. The response to the warnings and predictions issued is dependent on the specific society; they have the option to respond accordingly or to completely ignore the “alarms” (Kastenbaum, 2018). An example of an unheeded warning with its origins in folklore is that of the Trojan horse. The people of Troy chose to ignore Cassandra, the town soothsayer’s plea to destroy the wooden horse, which ultimately had disastrous consequences for the community (Alexander, 2009). A society might thus find it difficult to determine the gravity of a warning and might on occasion make the wrong decision (Kastenbaum, 2018). Tornado watch broadcasts, lightning prediction systems implemented at schools, and even the daily weather report are modern examples of this function of the death system. In the age of social media, the occurrence of “fake news” and “hoaxes” concerning warnings and predictions can complicate the individual or community response to the possible threat. The function of warning and predicting death has noticeably manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial death predicting models of COVID-19

drew a correlation between COVID and the Spanish flu. Ioannidis, Cripps and Tanner (2020) state that "the Spanish flu caused >50 million deaths with mean age at death being 28. We all lament the current loss of life. However, as of June 8, total COVID fatalities are 410,000 with median age 80 and typically multiple comorbidities. Despite involving many excellent modellers, best intentions, and highly sophisticated tools, forecasting efforts have largely failed." In consideration of the foregoing, the president of South Africa, with incomplete data on the social interaction dynamics in South Africa and armed with international statistics, implemented an unprecedented nationwide lockdown in an attempt to "flatten the curve" (Muller, 2020). Despite the lockdown and protective measures implemented, the death forecast of the South African COVID-19 Modelling Consortium (SACMC) and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) remain unchanged at a projected 40 000 deaths by November 2020. The opacity of the South African COVID-19 response plan consequently causes uncertainty among citizens resulting in the fear of death.

Some components of the death system intend to **prevent death**. This intention is visible in the development of Western medicine, the deployment of firefighters and police officers in every town and city, researchers striving for preventions and cures, and upgraded health and safety procedures in the workplace (Kastenbaum, 2018). Advances in medicine resulted in the control of contagious diseases that once had a high death toll (e.g., bubonic plague, smallpox). Kastenbaum (2018), rather sardonically, noted

> People don't want much these days. All they expect is to live forever and, well, maybe to be young forever, too … I guess it is our fault for knocking off typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria, tuberculosis and whatever. They (the public) expect us to cure everything now. I guess we almost expect it, too.

The "war" against death is however frequently conducted selectively by following the general societal trends of unequal opportunity and discrimination (Kastenbaum, 2018). Individuals with a higher social status make better candidates for death prevention efforts. The Associated Press (2002) reports that women form the lower socio-economic class in the United States are less likely to be diagnosed and treated for breast cancer, resulting in more deaths from this segment of society. Individuals also form part of the "war" on death, as many deaths occur due

to personal lifestyle decisions and practices (e.g., substance abuse or unsafe sexual practices that could lead to contracting sexually transmitted infections). Braveman *et al*. (2011) mention a variety of mechanisms through which social status might cause inequality in health. These mechanisms include psychosocial differences such as feelings of discrimination, competence, stress, mastery and depression. The anti-vaccine movement also serves as proof of the failure of the death system's warning and prediction function, as well as the function of preventing death as the neglect or refusal to vaccinate children put entire societies at risk of resurging diseases such as whooping cough and measles (Kastenbaum, 2018).

The function of **caring for the dying** is an apt example of cultural change. During the 1800s, the average life expectancy of a person was approximately 50 years of age. The main causes of death were infectious communicable diseases such as smallpox and diphtheria (Stanhope and Lancaster, 2014). Consequently, death was quicker, often only days after the onset of illness, and it was customary for the family to provide care for the dying individual, as most deaths occurred at home in a familiar environment (Lowey, 2015). The focus of medicine shifted during the 1900s, and substantial advances in technology, education and medication affected the way death was viewed (Lowey, 2015). Diseases that were once known to end in certain death could now be cured or prevented by means of antibiotics and immunisations. Fewer individuals were dying at home and professional health care workers in a medical environment, such as hospitals, replaced traditional familial care (Lowey, 2015). New cultural forms emerged, such as hospices, to fulfil the function of caring for the dying (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). In 1948, the first formal hospice to provide end-of-life care was established in London (Terranova, 2017). End-of-life care is provided to a person who is nearing the end of life or is at the end of life. At this stage, death is anticipated and medical care is shifted from cure to comfort (Lowey, 2015). An important facet of decision making by the terminally ill patient is the preferred place of death. Research conducted by Tang (2003) found that 87% of terminally ill patients prefer to die at home rather than at a hospice or hospital. Keeping this in mind, Gruneir *et al.* (2007) noted that 53% of terminally ill patients still die in the hospital or hospice setting. This could be attributed to the fact that many terminally ill patients have strong feelings about not wanting to "burden" their family by dying at home, despite their own preference (Gott *et al.*, 2004).

A task that all societies must perform is that of **disposing of the dead**. This function includes all the practices surrounding the removal of a body and the different methods of disposal (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001; 2018). The funerary processes practised by individuals, cultures and societies are significant of the overall cohesiveness and stability of the culture/society in which the death has taken place. It is furthermore an indication of how the individual, society or culture view death (Kastenbaum, 2018). When a death occurs in a health care establishment, the establishment will implement various measures to "cloak" the removal of the body to the morgue. This is indicative of our fundamental attitudes towards death. It indicates a fear of being "contaminated" symbolically, spiritually or physically, by death (Kastebaum, 2018). Kastenbaum (2018) refers to this as "avoidance of the corpse" rituals. Death systems sustain changes with every new generation; there is subsequently a definite challenge in understanding and accepting others' points of view when dealing with the disposal of a body. This could lead to intergenerational conflict regarding disposal methods and other death related decisions (Kastenbaum, 2001; 2018).

The death of a person does not merely subtract an individual from society. It challenges the society to adjust and unite after death. The function of **social consolidation after death** is therefore extremely important. The impact of death on a society is determined by the size of the society in which the death occurred. In large societies, the death of an individual can more easily be absorbed without much readjustment, but in small societies, the death of an individual is a challenge to the survival of the entire group (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). In industrial societies, the impact of death is mitigated by removing workers from the system by means of retirement that consequently lessens the impact on the organisation (Kastenbaum, 2001; Doka, 2003). Various other structures within a society, such as support groups, grief counselling and spontaneous memorialisation, support efforts for consolidation after death (Doka, 2003).

The ways we develop to understand death or **make sense of death** is an important function of the death system. The practice of conducting a funeral for the deceased allows death to be interpreted according to a specific faith or cultural conviction. These convictions and understandings regarding death are passed down through generations and become embedded in our actions when confronted with death (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001). Most individuals, when confronted with death, can call upon a range of culture- or religion-specific death system

explanations (e.g., “It was God’s will”). The function of making sense of death becomes imperative when death challenges our basic interpretations and assumptions of the world (e.g., the unexpected death of a child).

The last major function of the death system is **killing**. Death is brought about in many ways, and every death system has norms that stipulate how, when, and for what reason an individual may be killed. The interpretation of crime (killing/murder) depends on the culture in which it is committed, and the authority to make decisions about life and death is not an individual right but often rests with a political body (Kastenbaum, 1977; 2001; 2018). Mbembe (2003) developed the concept of “necropolitics” focusing on those “deemed allowable targets for death”. These individuals are not part of the living society and do not enjoy the same protection but are subject to “sanctioned death”. Mbembe (2003) uses the example of prisoners on death row who are not treated with the same respect as regular members of society; this also applies to the aged, the marginalised, or terminally ill, who are often subjected to societal isolation and are “sacrificed” because of unequal dispensations around the world (lack of proper education, nutrition, shelter, health care, etc.).

It is important to note that death systems are by no means static. They constantly evolve to deal with changes in different societies. This has never been more globally evident than the current realities surrounding COVID-19 and witnessing preventable (mass) deaths even among socio-economic groups where this is normally not the case. The fluidity of death systems thus implies that customs, rituals and beliefs regarding disposal have the potential to change (Kastenbaum, 2018). These potential changes may present themselves in any of the functions of the death system. For example, due to the changing causes of death and increasing longevity, new institutions such as hospices and nursing homes have been established.

Sense of place/place attachment

Place attachment is a multifaceted concept, and various scholars from different disciplines such as geography, psychology and social ecology have proposed frameworks in an attempt to understand the phenomenon (Low and Altman, 1992). The theory of place attachment has its origins in the work of Ainsworth (1967) and Bowlby (1969). Bowlby (1969) developed attachment theory to conceptualise the collective human need to form close affectional bonds.

Ainsworth (1967) hypothesised that attachment is expressed in behaviour, with her most influential work defining individual differences in attachment called "attachment styles". Gaining the interest of sociologists and human geographers, Tuan (1974) expanded on the existing theory of attachment by applying it to person-place bonding and uses the terms "topophilia", or "love of place" to describe this emotional link between places and people. Applying a phenomenological approach, Relph (1976) suggested that the experience of place is subjective, and the meaning of place is constructed individually. He elaborated by stating that "place rootedness leads to a sense of deep care and concern for that place".

Cemeteries are the meeting point between the living and the dead, as they often serve as the final resting place for loved ones. We attach personal meaning, often laden with emotion, to the places where we choose to bury and visit those who have passed. We can however not stand in total oblivion to the larger space in which the expired members of society are laid to rest. Cemeteries are generally sited close to human settlements (Rugg, 2000). In South Africa, urban and rural cemeteries have historically been planned as spacious landscaped gardens (Salga, 2016). Rapid urbanisation resulted in the expansion of residential areas, causing many cemeteries to become part of the urban landscape. When a cemetery reaches its capacity, its revenue reduces drastically, yet its expenses (maintenance) continue (Tshabalala, 2004), and unmaintained cemeteries in residential areas become a potential hub for criminal activity. Cemeteries in South Africa have become a toxic tangle of contradicting priorities. Historical preservation, crime, cultural traditions, religious traditions, social class and environmental problems are all bundled into one when it comes to the country's urban and rural cemeteries (Clark, 2015). These contradicting priorities might reshape the way citizens feel about these spaces.

Seamon (2013) posits that place in itself does not determine human behaviour, nor is it just a physical environment. It is rather a "normally unnoticed phenomenon of person-or-people-experiencing place". The formation of physical place is a social process inspired by the activities and interactions in it. Place is thus both a psychological/emotional and physical concept. It is however important to note that a "sense of place" is not imbued in the physical setting, but rather in the human interpretations of the setting (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001). We have no single sense of place. We attach our own set of cultural perceptions to the places

where we live. These attached cultural perceptions shape how we respond to these places and, in certain circumstances, we reshape the places to fit our preconceptions (Cross, 2001).

Altman and Low (1992) describe place attachment as "a positive bond that develops between groups or individuals and their environment". This relationship stretches beyond preference, cognition or judgment. Scannell and Gifford (2010) propose a three-dimensional framework of place attachment. The framework suggests that the concept of place attachment is multidimensional, consisting of person, place and psychological processes. The tripartite model of place attachment will be used in this research project due to the person, place and process components.

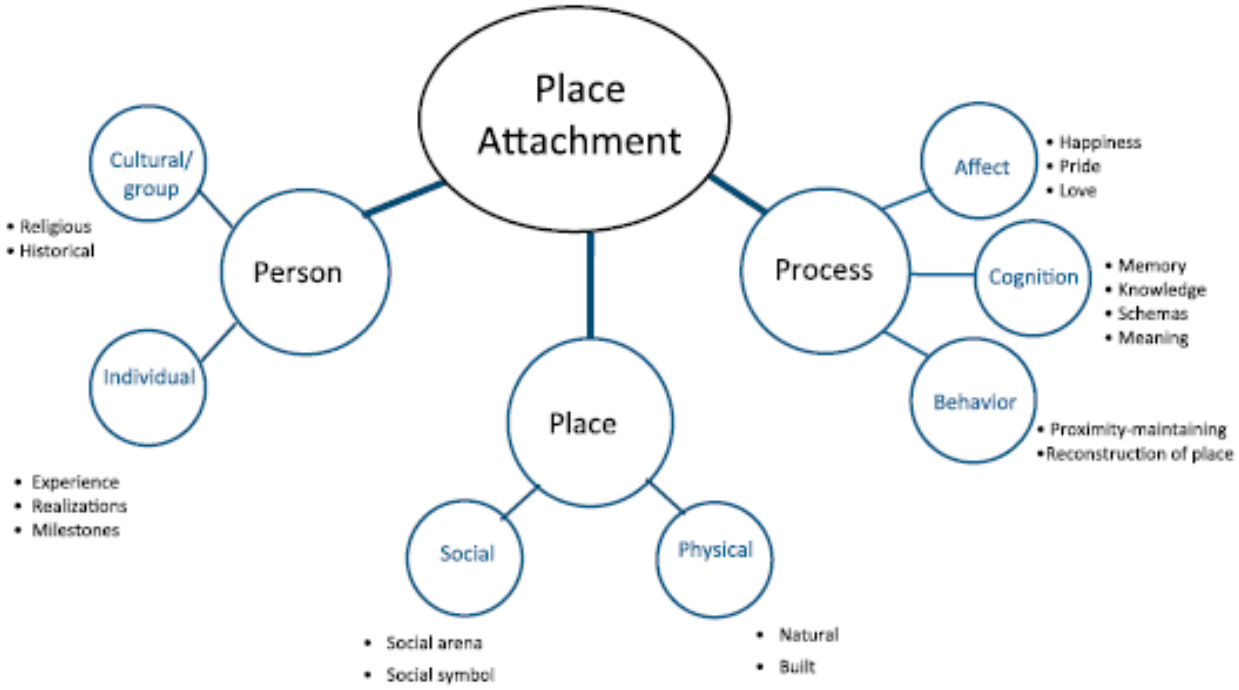

Figure 3: The tripartite model of place attachment

(Source: Scannell and Gifford, 2010)

The "person" dimension includes both collective and individual place attachment. At the individual level, place attachment comprises the personal connections a person has to a specific place. This attachment is furthermore stronger for places that bring to mind special memories (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). According to Manzo (2005), "it is not simply the places themselves that are significant, but rather what can be called 'experience-in-place' that creates meaning". Collective place attachment refers to the symbolic meanings attached to a place that

are shared among community members. This attachment is a "community process," through which groups become attached to a place where they practise and preserve their cultures (Low and Altman, 1992). Culture, in turn, links members to a place through shared values, beliefs and experiences (Scannell and Gifford, 2010).

The dimension of "place" is undoubtedly the most important dimension of place attachment. Low and Altman (1992) have examined place attachment at various geographic levels and consequently divided it into two levels: physical and social. Riley (1992) emphasised that place attachment is an "affective relationship" between the landscape and people. By measuring social and physical place attachment at different spatial levels, Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) found that the social dimension of place attachment far exceeds the physical dimension. The physical level can however not be ignored, as the physical characteristics of a place are central to attachment due to the fact that it provides features and resources to support one's goal (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981).

The third dimension of place attachment is concerned with the ways in which groups and individuals relate to a place. According to Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), person-place bonding unquestionably involves an emotional connection. Hummon (1992) defines sense of place or place attachment in a sociological sense as "people's subjective perceptions of their environment and their more or less conscious feelings about those environments. Sense of place is inevitably dual in nature, involving both an interpretive perspective on the environment and an emotional reaction to the environment. Sense of place involves a personal orientation towards a place, in which one's understanding of place and one's feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning".

Orr (1994) states that individuals will act responsibly towards their immediate environment if a sense of rootedness is present. Walker and Chapman (2003) surveyed 258 visitors to a Canadian National Park and by means of regression analysis found a direct link between place attachment and pro-environmental behaviour such as volunteering in park projects. Research conducted by Kaltenborn (1998) supports these statements. By surveying 300 residents in Spitbergen, Norway, Kaltenborn found a substantial correlation between the strength of an

individual's place attachment and his/her willingness to contribute to solutions for environmental problems. Vaske and Kobrin (2001) achieved similar research results in a study conducted among the Colorado youth, and subsequently hypothesised that place identity mediates the relationship between place dependence and environmentally responsible behaviour.

The COVID-19 pandemic has however temporarily changed the way people relate to place. Low (2020) argues that the protective measures of social distancing deprive human beings of so-called "third places". The sociological concept of "third places" refers to semi-public and semi-private places that promote community identity, civic engagement and social association. These places are neither home nor work and include places and gatherings such as restaurants, houses of worship, neighbourhood festivals and burial societies. Low (2020) is of the opinion that "public spaces expand our relationships and liberalise our world, third places anchor us to a community where we are recognised". COVID-19 lockdown restrictions across the globe have individuals and communities sheltering in fear of contracting the virus. The Coronavirus, however, challenges not only our economic, mental and physical well-being but also out social health.

Taking the above into consideration and in view of the fact that cemeteries attach individuals to places and families (Baptist, 2013; Vanderstraeten, 2014), the theory of place attachment is applicable to this research project.

Immortality, memorialisation and relationship with the dead

"There probably never lived a true soul which could bear the thought that at death everything comes to an end" (Kant, cited in Sturesteps, 1991).

Societies across the world could be divided into two distinct groups. Firstly, the "Mortalists" who reason that to be human is to be mortal and that it is necessary to reconcile with the inevitable reality of death, including their own. The second group is the "Immortalists" who are determined to consider imaginative and sometimes improbable ways to "cheat" death

(Jacobsen, 2017). The concept of immortality implies not just living for an extended period of time, but literally living forever (Kagan, 2012). The quest or hope for immortality can only be found among the human race and is directly connected to the human awareness of inevitable death: we not only know that we must die; we are also conscious of the fact that we know. Stanislaw (1967) commented on the intimate connection between immortality, life and death by stating that "the first condition of immortality is death".

Pathways of immortality

Numerous scholars hypothesised about the human quest for immortality and the motivation behind this driving force. In perusal of the available literature, major pathways in the writings of Brown (2017) and Lifton (1996) became apparent. The human race has, throughout history, sought immortality in six different ways, namely through religion and spirituality, culture, genetics and nature, creativity, experiential transcendence, and medicine. Cave (2013) suggests that the history of civilisation has been moulded by quests for "survival".

The first identified pathway is **religion and spirituality**. Most religious and spiritual practices display a belief in life after death, and although different religions "ensure" immortality in different ways, all express the aspiration to conquer death by placing their faith in a higher authority (Lifton, 1996). Brown (2017) echoes these sentiments by stating that people throughout history have believed in survival after death in some attenuated forms (as spirits or ghosts) and that the pathway providing this form of survival is religion or spirituality. The motivation behind the religious and spiritual quest for immortality is important, as religion binds large social groups and encourages ritualistic behaviour (Bowker, 1997). This religious symbolic immortality, as it is referred to by Lifton (1996), can be achieved by the acceptance that one's mortal demise is not the end and that there is continuity in some manifestation of immortal existence, for example, by ending up in heaven or in hell (Vigilant, 2009). The acceptance of the spiritual transcendence of death allows individuals to face mortality void of terror and anxiety (Vigilant, 2009).

The second identified pathway to immortality is **culture**. This pathway refers to the continuity of family heritage through the transference of memories and practices and cultural patterns from one generation to the next. The deceased's life thus continues through his or her

descendants not only through blood relations but also in the memories of children, relatives and other associates (Lifton, 1996). Lifton and Olson (2005) state that it is a form of "biosocial immortality that occurs through the continuity of one's family and other important social groupings". Brown (2017) elaborates by stating that this cultural transmission occurs actively or passively in a variety of social structures, where a component of the mind or behaviour is passed from one person to another in institutions such as families, schools, churches, the workplace and universities (Brown, 2017). This cultural transmission can be conserved in inanimate objects such as books or art, which, when experienced, will enter the brain and consequently into the memory. Vigilant (2009) suggests that when specific religious or cultural norms, worldviews, and ethical doctrines connected to ethnicity or race are transmitted from parents to their children, these social facts become "an unbroken chain of shared ethos between the past and the future".

Immortality can also be sought through **genetics** (survival of the genes) (Cave, 2013). This has been defined in terms of a family name, inheritance, and legacy. Genes directly link us to our ancestors and descendants, and evolution has endowed us with a desire to survive and consequently reproduce to ensure the survival of humankind (Brown, 2017). Cemeteries serve an important purpose in this pathway to immortality, as every headstone, plaque or memorial serves as a reminder of a person who once existed, linking us directly to our ancestors with whom we share our genetic profiles. Symbolic immortality is also exemplified by nature. Nature is without limits and will survive for as long as the earth does. Following the atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, all the trees appeared dead, but in the following springtime the cherry trees blossomed again; this reflected nature's ability to regenerate. The human race participates in eternity through understanding and appreciating the persistent life and death cycles of nature (Lifton, 1996).

Creativity is the fourth identified pathway to immortality. This type of immortality is achieved by making considerable and memorable contributions to science, medicine, education and art. The immortality of the person thus lies in everlasting influences of any kind on other human beings (Lifton and Olson, 2005). Vigilant (2009) elaborates by describing creative symbolic immortality as "personal accomplishments" that serve as a lasting inspiration for others long after one's death. Artists such as Picasso, Pollock and Van Gogh are examples of individuals

who have achieved superior levels of creative symbolic immortality. Every new generation rediscovers their work and ascribes new interpretations or simply uses it for inspiration in their own creations (Vigilant, 2009). It is furthermore possible to achieve creative symbolic immortality through the transferring of knowledge. Lecturers and educators share their knowledge, and in doing so they continue their existence in the minds of future generations. Vigilant (2009) continues by stating that the close relationships that form between counsellor and client, mentor and apprentice and the physician and his/her patient could result in a non-familial bond that has the potential to lead to a sense of symbolic immortality as an expression of the bond of social influence.

Experiential transcendence is believed to be the most important expression of symbolic immortality (Vigilant, 2009). Experiential transcendence refers to powerful experiences whereby individuals are immersed to the point of temporarily losing themselves psychically. It refers to instances when an individual feels especially alive and temporarily absorbed in the present moment without thinking about the past or future (Vigilant, 2009). For some parents, the experience of childbirth, in Christianity the experience of being "born again," or in Eastern religion the experience of reaching Nirvana, and the moment of orgasm during intimate encounters are all experientially transcendent (Vigilant, 2009). Jaśkiewicz (2014) hypothesises that a person with a strong sense of experiential symbolic immortality is more likely to be motivated by values reflecting hedonism.

The last identified pathway to immortality is **medicine**. This pathway refers to the pursuit to literally live forever (Brown, 2017). Despite a multitude of attempts, the human race is yet to succeed in achieving biological immortality. Medicine, however, has developed to such an extent that the life expectancy of humans has increased by 2.5 years per decade (approximately six hours a day) (Oeppen and Vaupel, 2002). Riley (2001) commented on this phenomenon by stating that lifespan is increasing "because society as a whole has focussed on removing or reducing causes of death". The current COVID-19 pandemic has, to an extent, "infected" the latest medical response to illness. Prasad (2020) argues that, in response to the life-threatening pandemic, medical research has abandoned all protocol in an attempt to rapidly find a suitable vaccine. Although COVID-19 is contagious and infectious disease with a variety of unknown properties, it is however the non-biological "superinfection" spreading in the minds and hearts

of academics and physicians that is of greater concern (Prasad, 2020). Prasad (2020) states, "the superinfection has led us to forget longstanding principles of evidence-based medicine, abandon logic and clear-headedness, and lower the bar for adopting unproven standards of care". Prasad (2020) is of the opinion that healthcare professionals is "throwing everything but the kitchen sink" at this new illness and the root cause for their actions is fear - fear of the unknown pandemic that has become part of our everyday lives and ultimately the fear of death.

Reviewing the major pathways to immortality, it becomes clear that most members of the human race hope to create a form of immortality through their deeds, philosophies and heritage, whether it be material or ephemeral. Kastenbaum (2016) however notes that immortality is susceptible to time and circumstances in the sense that the remembering individuals themselves eventually die. Achievements become vague and memorials and buildings are demolished and defaced. "Every generation contributes by its selective remembering and forgetting" (Kastenbaum, 2016).

Immortality can however also be achieved through the actions of surviving family or community members through their relationship with the deceased. This is not a deliberate attempt at immortality by the deceased.

Continuing Bonds

Vernon (1970) argues that, from the moment of conception, human beings participate in the social process of living and dying, and after death, the experiences with the living do not come to an end, but are symbolically continued through what each individual, religious or cultural groups would consider "appropriate" ceremonial rituals and behaviours. Klass (2014) acknowledges this sentiment by stating that, although the physical life of the deceased is over, the effect they had on those around them lives on. The bonds and attachments people have with individuals in their lives continue even after death. Thus, the death of a loved one does not dissolve their relationships with those who remain. According to Klass (2017), the dead are not only present in the individual memories of those who knew them, but also in the collective memory. Collective memory is maintained by ritual performance (Connerton, 1989). In the sociology of Durkheim (1912), the "remembered dead" are collective representations.

According to Klass (2017), bonds with the deceased play an important role in social solidarity in tribes, ethnic groups and families. This attachment to the deceased has been labelled a "continuing bond" in the bereavement literature (Root and Exline, 2014). A continuing bond is defined as "the presence of an ongoing inner relationship with the deceased person by the bereaved individual" (Stroebe and Schut, 2005).

Klass (2014) indicates that these continuing bonds might be experienced by linking objects, prayer and ritual, memories and enriched identification.

Physical objects that are connected to the deseased person's life and death can "link and evoke the presence of the dead" (Klass, 2014). These linking objects can be temporary or more permanent, such as a grave where people can visit and feel close to the person who has passed. Tombstone inscriptions often feature as reminders of mortality, lessons in faith, and words of comfort for the survivors (Vita, 1999). Due to the fact that physical memorials require physical attendance and may be exposed to desecration, the World Wide Web has become an alternative space to memorialise the dead (Veale, 2004). These online memorials offer mourners the opportunity to edit and update content and result in a memorial with a lifespan that is not subject to the degradation of a physical space (Veale, 2004). Graham *et al*. (2015) posit that a gravesite memorial "uses its carved stone, inscriptions and position in place to imply a mode of relations that is modern, structured, objectified, formal and transient: the dead remain spatially sequestered, socially dead and bureaucratised". Web memorials however imply a mode of relations that is to some extent different, and according to Graham *et al*. (2015), it is a neo-modern, networked, personal and subjective mode in which the dead are spatially desequestered; they are socially alive and individualised.

Most cultures have **religious elements** that link the living with the dead, for example a tombstone in the churchyard or flowers on the grave of a loved one. By having a connection to a "higher power", whether it be God, Allah or Buddha, people feel connected to someone who has died (Klass, 2014). The deceased is believed to continue living on another plane or spiritual realm (Walter, 2017).

In the event of a traumatic or unexpected death, **memories** can be painful; however, after the initial grief subsides, memories could be a valuable aid in comfort for families and friends of

the deceased. These memories could be invoked by visiting the gravesite, site of death, the decedent's favourite place or by simply looking at a photograph (Klass, 2014).

Klass (2014) defines **enriched identification** as an event where "a significant person who has died is integrated into one's representation of the self in such a way that it is very difficult to distinguish the two." Enriched identification thus entails, for example, the family role the deceased member played in the family system that is now transferred to a family member in the next generation. Klass (2014) uses the example of an individual that, after the death of her mother, disposed of her own crockery and started using her mother's china dishes. The deceased may also live on as role models; for instance, when facing a certain situation, family members would refer back to how the deceased might have managed such a situation.

Klass and Goss (1999) argue that, in different societies, the use of continuing bonds will be linked to their acceptability by cultural or religious customs. Further research conducted by Klass (2001) suggests that the use of continuing bonds is normal and in some cases, the social group expects it of the bereaved.

An example of continuing bonds incorporating both a *physical object* as well as a *religious element* is displayed in Figure 7 below. Both elements present in this example have the potential to invoke *memories*. The epitaph reads: "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Figure 4: Continuing bonds by linking objects

(Source: Nada Laurie, 2018)

The concept of continuing bonds is directly related to place attachment, as discussed in a previous section of this chapter. According to Jonsson and Walter (2017), there is a definite relationship between continuing bonds and particular locations. This implies that specific locations exist where the bereaved feels closest to the deceased. Jonsson and Walter (2017) hypothesise that culture dictates where the bereaved must locate the deceased, but individual choices and experience will vary. Often the bereaved finds solace in ordinary places of death and mourning, also known as "deathscapes" (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010) such as cemeteries, memorial benches, household and roadside shrines, while for others, continuing bonds are not necessarily rooted in place and might evolve over time (Jonsson and Walter, 2017). If human behaviour reacts to symbols, people can respond both to symbols relating to the dead and those relating to the living. A distinctive feature of the use of symbols is that the symbol referent does not have to be physically present or even exist in order to use it in a meaningful way (Vernon, 1970). For as long as the community or society may choose, the definitions of the dead remain alive and functional. The sentiment is echoed by Kastenbaum (2001, 2018), that death systems and beliefs constantly evolve to deal with the changes in societies.

Foster *et al*. (2011) performed a comparison of continuing bonds by parents after the death of a child. The research found that 97% of parents chose reminders of the deceased purposefully, consciously and voluntary. The nine evident purposeful reminders were: visual representations of the deceased (photos), communicating with the deceased (talking, writing letters, and praying), spending time with the personal belongings of the deceased (clothing and bedding), thinking about the deceased, visiting locations the deceased occupied while alive, performing activities honouring the deceased, performing activities the deceased would have chosen, visiting cemeteries, and keeping the ashes of the deceased.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the theoretical framework relating to death rituals and decision-making regarding disposal after death was considered. The death systems of Robert Kastenbaum, the theory of place attachment, immortality, memorialisation and the relationship with the dead are determining factors identified in decision making regarding disposal after death.

Death must be understood in a larger context, as it fulfils manifest and latent functions and changes or, in some instances, maintains the social order. Every culture and society has some type of death system with its own constitutive elements and functions that determines the extent to which the culture or society denies or accepts death. These death systems reflect the presence and significance of social processes and infrastructure of human interactions with death, dying and bereavement. The death systems in every society or culture will thus influence not only the reaction to death but also the disposal methods used when death occurs.

In reviewing this chapter, it is clear that the perceptions and emotions people attach to cemeteries as places of individual and cultural significance will differ vastly among individuals and cultural groups; the level of place attachment will furthermore influence the choice of disposal method and/or place. Each family group or society will deploy different methods of dealing with the loss of a member, whether through continuing bonds or an attempt to immortalise the deceased individual.

In the next chapter, literature related to the research topic will be discussed extensively.

Chapter 3

About life, death, and cucumber sandwiches

Introduction

In Chapter Two, the chosen theoretical underpinnings were developed and discussed. The following chapter will focus on the historical overview of burial and cremation internationally and in South Africa. Alternative methods of disposal, as well as the influence of the funeral industry on decision-making, will be discussed, and finally, the legal implication regarding disposal will be explored.

Historical overview of cemeteries and cemetery development

The term "cemetery" derives from the Greek word "*koimeterion*" and the Latin word "*coemteterium,*" both meaning "sleeping place". It is also closely related to terms such as burial ground, churchyard, graveyard and the Greek term "*necropolis*". By removing all religious and cultural associations from the term, Mytum (2014) defines cemeteries as "formal burial locations where a number of interments have taken place". Kastenbaum (1977) states that the manner in which a body is "deposited" into the earth not only says something about the person who has died, but it also shows what particular societies make of death.

For most of history, the Western world has considered a cemetery as "the last great necessity" (MacLean and Williams, 2009). Kearl (1989) states that a cemetery is a cultural institution that symbolically displays a community's beliefs. It is also a sacred place where the dead are allowed to rest undisturbed. In the historical sense, cemeteries were central to community life because it provided a physical place where community members could visit and remember the deceased and pay their necessary respects (MacLean and Williams, 2009). Modern cemeteries are defined by Rugg (2000) as "specifically demarcated sites of burial, with internal layout that is sufficiently well ordered to allow families to claim and exercise control over a particular grave space, and which facilitate the conducting of appropriate funerary ritual ... [and] are principally secular institutions which aim to serve the whole community". Contradictory to the sentiments stated above, Baudrillard (1993) hypothesises that cemeteries can be seen as "death

ghettos", where the dead are segregated from the living; consequently death and the dead are repudiated or, in a sense, abolished.

Globalisation has caused the expansion of new ethnic and immigrant communities from a variety of cultures and religions with a range of practices and views regarding death and disposal, which were previously only practised within the specific group or culture (MacLean and Williams, 2009). This is directly related to the fluidity of death systems as discussed in Chapter Two. The Egyptian practice of mummification could be used as an example of the influence of globalisation on death systems. With the influx of Christianity in the year 400AD, funerary practices started to evolve into more Westernised methods, and although the practice of mummification still continued under Christianity to a lesser extent, it was completely eradicated after the arrival of the Arabic people in 642AD introducing the religion of Islam (Schuster and Dunham, 2014).

Today, the significance of the cemetery is more complex due to the emergence of alternative disposal methods, changes in cultural practices, changing attitudes towards death, and evolving cultural symbolism. In some cultures, it is not deemed unusual or disrespectful for families to bury a loved one and never return to the grave (MacLean and Williams, 2009). According to Fogli (2004), the main functions of cemeteries are firstly a place of transformation and to deposit dead bodies without any danger to public health, a place where individuals can visit and remember a deceased person, and lastly, it is a symbol of the historical memory of a collectivity.

The development of cemeteries in South Africa cannot be separated from the country's history of racial segregation. During the formal years of apartheid (1948-1994), the South African government formalised and implemented numerous legislations based on racial classification. The Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950 divided the heterogeneous population of South Africa into three main racial groups, namely Whites, Natives and Coloured people (Posel, 2001). Definitions of the racial groups provided by the apartheid-era Population Registration Act was relatively broad and defined the races as follows:

Coloured Person: "a person who is not a white person or a native" (Population Registration Act No. 30, 1950).

Native: “a person who in fact is or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa” (Population Registration Act No. 30, 1950).

White person: “a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person” (Population Registration Act No. 30, 1950).

According to the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Prohibition on Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, the Immorality Act of 1950 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, the different races, as classified above, were not allowed to live, work or socialise with each other (Christopher, 1995; Posel, 2001). The Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950 was rescinded in 1991 (Population Registration Repeal Act No. 114, 1991). This did however not erase the already drawn racial lines within South Africa.

Due to the racially segregated past of South Africa, certain funerary traditions and customs became associated with certain races/ethnic groups. For the purpose of this research project, it is thus important that a distinction be made between races within the South African context to create a better understanding of the research topic. For the purpose of this research, the term “Black African” will be used to refer to members of all black African indigenous groups such as Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana, as well as any person who, regardless of their skin colour, identifies with an indigenous African culture as described above. The term “Coloured” will be used to refer to a specific ethnic group of those not identifying as either “Black African” or “White” but not of Asian descent. The term “White” will be used to refer to persons of ancestral European descent or traditionally considered to be part of the Caucasian race.

During the apartheid era, the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 stipulated that the different races must be buried in separate cemeteries allocated by the government to a specific ethnic group (Christopher, 1995). However, the origins of racial segregation in South Africa can be traced back to 1686 when Dutch Baron van Rheede instated the first colour discriminatory laws (Van Schoor, 1951).

Historically, the black indigenous African groups buried the deceased members of their group in the squatting position (Maloka, 1998). Burial took place as soon as possible after death.

Leading up to the funeral, the grave was dug, the body washed in preparation for interment, and the corpse was guarded at all times in order to deter witches. The deceased would then be buried with seed for sowing and grass to build a dwelling in the "afterlife". Communal spaces for burial did not exist, and the deceased was buried in the cattle-kraal, close to the deceased's residence, or in the forest (Maloka, 1998). With the arrival of Christian missionaries during the 1830s and external colonial influences from Europe, the black indigenous African groups' attitudes towards death changed, which led to a change in their mortuary rites. The European concept of cemeteries was introduced, the Western practice of horizontal inhumation replaced the traditional way of burial, and the use of coffins became popular, especially among those in higher socio-economic classes (Maloka, 1998). However, there seems to be a dearth of information regarding the burial practices of the indigenous populations of South Africa as well as practices dating back to the pre-apartheid era.

The first official cemetery in Bloemfontein (where part of the fieldwork was conducted), was opened in 1850. The Forthill cemetery, now known as the President Brand cemetery, was reserved for military funerals and a variety of religious denominations but was also earmarked for the white citizens of Bloemfontein (Botes, 2014). Located behind the "Tweetoringkerk" (church with two spires) another cemetery exclusively for white members of the Dutch Reformed Church was sited, but was closed in 1892 due to neglect, and the 48 graves were moved to the Forthill Cemetery (Wood, 1946; Botes, 2014). The Forthill Cemetery was expanded and included the first Jewish cemetery in the Free State, sited in 1871 (Botes, 2014). According to historical records (Schoeman, 2010; Botes, 2014), the Forthill cemetery was in an atrocious state, with shallow graves polluting the groundwater and the smell of decomposing corpses polluting the air. From these historical accounts, it is clear that cemetery neglect and capacity challenges have been constant throughout the history of cemeteries in the Bloemfontein area. The Forthill Cemetery was decommissioned in 1901, and a new cemetery was opened to the south of Bloemfontein, now known as the Memoriam Road Cemetery.

Members of the black African and Coloured ethnic groups in Bloemfontein initially had no specific area allocated for burial, and consequently, expired members of the communities were buried in small informal cemeteries close to residential areas. The residents of the historic Waaihoek Location (where the African National Congress was founded in 1912), were buried

between Lovedale and Fort Hare Street in Batho. Today, there is only an empty lot with no visible gravestones. In 1896, an official cemetery between Memoriam Road and the Hamilton Shooting Range was allocated to the black African and coloured communities in Bloemfontein; today it is known as the Phahameng Cemetery (Groenewald, 1989; Tshabalala, 2004; Botes, 2014).

The South Park Cemetery was commissioned in the early 1970s, and the Bainsvlei Cemetery was commissioned in 1982. Both are open to all races and religious groups and are still in use (Tshabalala, 2004). The Storm Avenue cemetery in the Bainsvlei area was commissioned in 1980 and is used for the sole purpose of pauper burials, the inhumation of medical research cadavers, and the disposal of incinerated coffin remains from the crematorium (Tshabalala, 2004).

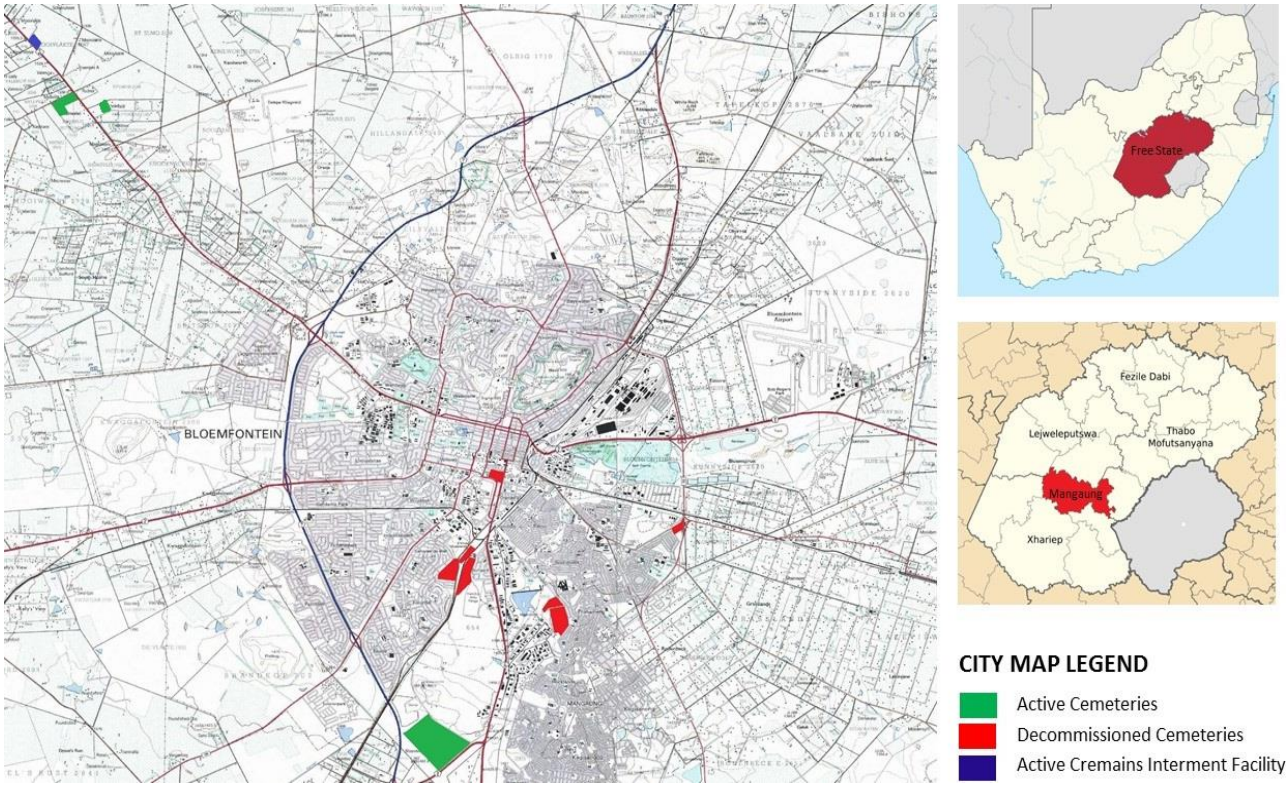

Figure 5: City of Bloemfontein with cemeteries indicated

(Source: Adapted from Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping, South Africa)

Traditional and alternative methods of disposal of the dead

The methods of disposal of the dead have historically been diverse, ranging from the ordinary to the bizarre. Customs and traditions that are often deemed unusual play an important role in understanding the relationship cultures have with the dead and how they view and deal with death in their communities. As the following section will show, there have been distinct changes in habits over time. The following methods will be discussed: inhumation, cremation, burial at sea, cryonics, preservation, endocannibalism, green burials, the sky burials of Tibet, and the practices of the Torajan ethnic group. This section will focus on the methods of disposal.

Inhumation is the action or practice of burying the dead. According to Molyneux (1985), the practice is thought to have occurred as early as the middle Palaeolithic era and that it pre-dates the existence of cemeteries (Tshabalala, 2004). Inhumation is practiced in accordance with the socio-cultural and religious aspects of different groups or societies (Dixon, 1994). The following types of inhumation will be discussed: Below-ground horizontal inhumation, below-ground vertical inhumation, above-ground mausoleum inhumation and above-ground high-rise inhumation.

Below-ground horizontal inhumation is the most common and widely used form of burial (Tshabala, 2004). Regulations pertaining to grave depth and width vary amongst countries. Traditionally, the preferred depth of a grave was six feet (1.82 meters); this practice has its origin in 1665, England, during the outbreak of the Bubonic plague. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London declared that, "all the graves shall be at least six feet deep", as a preventative measure to stop the spread of the Black Death (Defoe, 2016). In South Africa, provincial and municipal by-laws state the acceptable burial depths and number of bodies allowed per grave within the designated cemeteries. The City of Cape Town requires a minimum burial depth of 1.4 meters for all graves (City of Cape Town: Cemeteries, Crematoria and Funeral Undertakers By-law, 2011). The Manguang by-laws (Bloemfontein and surrounding areas) require the depth of 1.82 meters for an adult grave and 1.37 meters for a child's grave (Mangaung Local Municipality By-laws, 2008).

A proposal for below-ground vertical inhumation was aired in Cape Town during 1977 as a potential solution to reduce burial space (Molyneux, 1985). This was however not a feasible option for the city, due to the high water-table. To bury a person of 1.8m in height would require a grave of at least three meters in depth (Molyneux, 1985).

Above-ground mausoleum inhumation became popular in the United States of America in the mid-19th century. Mausoleums offer a cheaper, simpler and more compact form of burial that can be incorporated into existing cemeteries or memorial parks (Sloane, 1991). Currently, in the United States, mausoleums are added to cemeteries that have reached their below-ground burial capacity in order to accommodate more corpses without cemetery expansion (Bazzell, 2004).

Cremation is the process of incinerating a corpse to ashes (Davies, 2009). The practice of cremation dates from the Neolithic period, 7000 years ago, through the Bronze Age to modern times. Pre-modern cremation was performed on open-air pyres, after which the ashes were collected in urns for secondary disposal (Davies, 2014).

Mitford (1998) states that cremation is not an end in itself, but a process that prepares the human remains for inurnment in a beautiful and everlasting memorial. French anthropologist Robert Hertz echoes this sentiment by stating that the process of cremation itself is seldom a single rite, as it often involves a secondary process dealing with the cremains (ashes). This secondary process allows for the reorganisation of a society after the death of a member. The ashes may be scattered, buried or even ingested (Davies, 2009). Savedge (2016) suggests various methods for dealing with cremains. Apart from inurnment and the interment of ashes, cremains can be turned into a tree, be inserted into a stuffed toy, mixed in with tattoo ink, moulded into a semi-precious gemstone, baked into pottery items, added to paint to create a portrait of the deceased, manufactured into a vinyl music record, and even made into pencils. The secondary process of dealing with cremains differs vastly among religions and cultures. According to Woznicki (1998), the Yanomami of Brazil cremate their deceased tribe members on open pyres, the ashes are collected and mixed with a banana paste, after which it is consumed by the remaining members of the tribe in order to save the soul of the deceased. In American Hip Hop culture, the members of Tupac Shakur's musical group mixed his cremains

with marijuana and “smoked him out” as a last tribute to their fallen member (Rao, 2017). South African music artist Brenda Fassie was claimed to have snorted the ashes of her late mother mixed with cocaine (How We Killed Brenda, 2007).

The heterogeneity of the South African population has had a tremendous effect on the development of cremation in the country, as each segment of the population has its own beliefs with regard to the afterlife and funeral customs (Molyneux, 2005). Traditionally, open pyres were used for cremation by the Hindu population in South Africa, and in 1918, the first furnace-type crematorium was built by the municipality of Johannesburg specifically for the disposal needs of the Hindu population in the surrounding area. According to Dennie (2003), this was a cultural milestone for the Hindu community. In 1926, The S.A. Crematorium Company built a second crematorium in the city of Durban within the municipal Stellawood Cemetery, and it was under private ownership for nearly 40 years. During 1932, the city of Johannesburg built the third crematorium in South Africa, and it is still functional to this day (Davies and Mates, 2016). The fourth crematorium was opened in the Maitland Road Cemetery, Cape Town, during 1934 and was managed by the Board of Trustees of the Cape Peninsula Cemeteries up until 1999, when it was privatised. The fifth and final crematorium to be built during the pioneering years in South Africa was in Brakpan in 1945.

From the year 1946, the provision of cremation facilities grew rapidly, with local authorities constructing crematoria in most major cities and towns across South Africa.

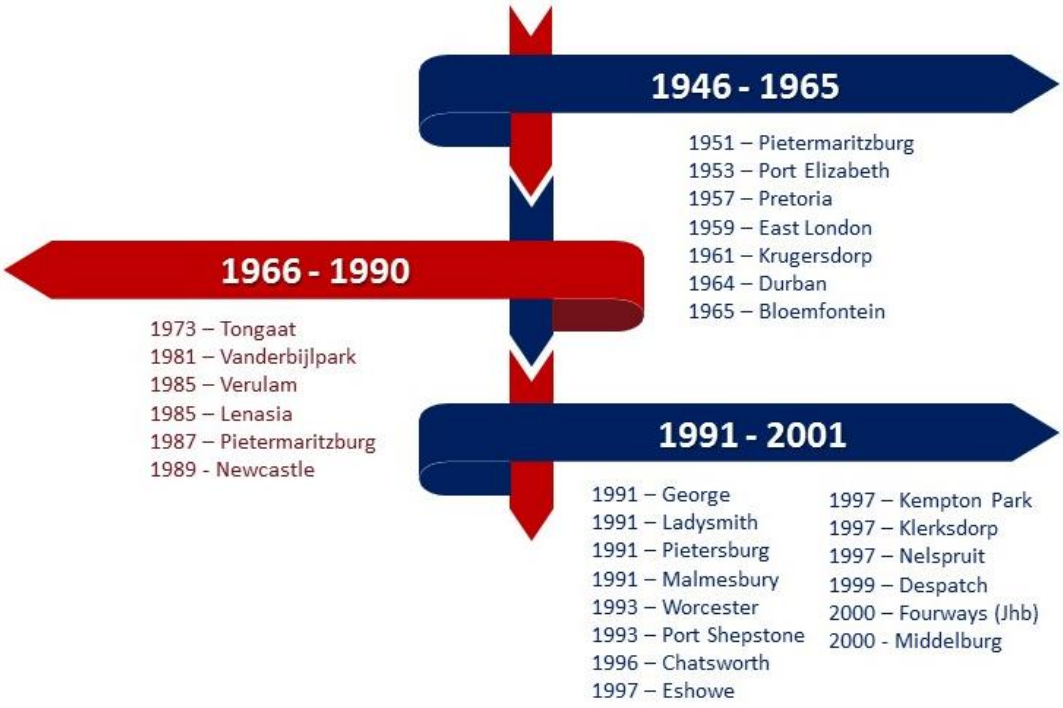

Figure 6: South Africa Crematoria Timeline

(Source: Adapted from Davies and Mates, 2016)

Attitudes towards cremation among the different population groups in South Africa have changed drastically over the years. Traditionally, black African societies have considered cremation as disrespectful treatment of the dead, and this outlook is shared by many cultural groups in which ancestors play a significant part (Brennan, 2014). Although the black African population in South Africa still seemingly prefers burial as their primary disposal method, recent years have seen a small increase in cremation by this population group, although it is still statistically insignificant (Molyneux, 2005). A study conducted in the United States during 2005 showed that African Americans are less accepting of cremation than Caucasian Americans. Buchanan and Gabriel (2015) hypothesise that, as a result of the oppression of the slave trade, religion and social cohesion play a significant role for African American individuals, and that they could possibly be less accepting of non-traditional methods of disposal. There is apparently also a misconception in the African American community that cremations are not accompanied by a funeral service (Buchanan and Gabriel, 2015). Roos (2003) postulates that many African cultures are opposed to cremation, as it is a sign of disrespect to their deceased. In the South African context, Zwane (2011) echoes this sentiment in a study conducted amongst the Zulu people in KwaZulu Natal. Zwane (2011) indicated that black African cultures, with specific reference to the Zulu culture, are opposed to cremation

due to the belief that death is not the end. A family member who passes becomes an ancestor and provider for the family, and it would be disrespectful to have the person cremated, as it would be problematic when the person is to be resurrected on "judgement day" (Zwane, 2011).

The initial interest of the white population in the practice of cremation was mainly for public health measures in an attempt to contain the bubonic plague epidemic that afflicted Johannesburg during the early 1900s (Dennie, 2003). However, the cremation of corpses belonging to people who classified as white in a Hindu crematorium elicited debate, and by 1921, the white cremation movement campaigned for the erection of a separate crematorium for the use of "whites only". By 1932, the first crematorium exclusively for the use of the white population was opened in Johannesburg, and during that same year, 174 white corpses were cremated (Dennie, 2003). Although the establishment of a "whites only" crematorium did not produce an immediate rush for its services, the sanitary properties of this practice persuaded many to adopt the practice of cremation (Dennie, 2003). In South Africa, approximately 85% of cremations are performed for people who are classified as English-speaking Caucasians (Molyneux, 2005). As a result of their mostly Calvinistic backgrounds, Afrikaans-speaking Caucasian South Africans have traditionally believed that cremation is anti-Biblical and the way of the heathen. Reverend Gawie van der Merwe of the Dutch Reformed Church (Van der Merwe, 2000) suggests that the practice of cremation was traditionally frowned upon by the Dutch Reformed Church due to the fact that it was historically used to punish witches, individuals with heretical beliefs, and Christians apprehended while conducting missionary work (Van der Merwe, 2000). This population group has, however, to a large extent readjusted their beliefs, and are now increasingly opting for cremation, especially individuals living in metropolitan areas (Molyneux, 2005).

The "coloured" population has traditionally preferred burial as a disposal method, but in recent years (since 1981), increasingly started adopting the practice of cremation. This change in attitude could be attributed to churches encouraging a different approach towards funerals and their related financial implications (Molyneux, 2005). Through active promotion of cremation among the coloured and white population in the City of Cape Town, combined with educating local church leaders, the annual figure for cremations rose from 2000 in 1978 to more than 6000 in 1986 (Molyneux, 2005). This success achieved by the City of Cape Town serves as

proof that, with adequate training and awareness campaigns, attitudes with regard to disposal methods could be adjusted while preserving cultural practices and traditions.

There are numerous alternatives to traditional burial and cremation, such as burial at sea, cryonics, embalming, plastination, endocannibalism, green burials, sky burial and the burial rites of the Torajan.

Burial at sea implies that a corpse is deposited into a body of water (Stewart, 2009), which has been practised for thousands of years (Fitzpatrick, 2004). This practice could be a deliberate disposal choice or out of necessity. Although mostly practised by sailors and fishermen, in England it is the right of any citizen to choose burial at sea as their disposal method; it must however, comply with environmental policies and regulations. The person buried at sea may not be embalmed and should be clad in biodegradable clothing (Bell, 2016). Sea burial in Australia is regulated under the Environmental Protection Act, and a sea dumping permit must be acquired. Only citizens with a proven connection to the sea, such as navy personnel or fishermen, are granted permission for burial at sea (Australia, Environmental Protection Act 1981). Sea burial in South Africa is regulated by the National Health Act No 63 of 1977 and is under strict control of the Director-General; it is the right of any South African to request a burial at sea.

Cryonics is the preservation of a body by means of freezing to stop decay. The practice of cryonic freezing is based on the assumption that, with the advancement of science, it will be possible to revive bodies in the future (Stewart, 2009). The first Cryonics Institute was founded by Robert Ettinger in 1976, and the first person to be frozen was Dr James Bedford, whose body is still preserved in cold storage today (Stewart, 2009). Initially, bodies were cooled down to -196°C; this process however inflicted permanent damage. A newer technique called vitrification has since been implemented, whereby body fluids are replaced by protective chemicals limiting the damage caused by the freezing process (Stewart, 2009). According to the Cryonics Institute (2020), they currently have a total of 1859 members worldwide with only one member in South Africa.

Embalming/Mummification is the practice of preserving bodies by postponing decomposition (Bolt, 2009). Modern embalming is intended to postpone the decomposition process for a short period of time and is aimed particularly at sanitation, preservation, and presentation to improve the visual appearance of the deceased. This practice involves replacing the blood of a deceased person with a mixture of formaldehyde, glutaraldehyde, methanol and humectants. This practice is predominantly used in the United States of America, where the viewing of the body and open casket funerals are general practice.

The process of mummification is intended to preserve the body permanently. The mummification of a body can occur due to natural conditions or human intervention. The earliest recorded intentional mummification of a body can be found among the Chinchorro of Chile, with mummified remains dating back to 5000 B.C. The practice of mummification was popular in Egyptian culture. The process included the removal of the brain and internal organs, after which the body was dehydrated by means of Natron (a salt like mineral). The body was then wrapped in bandages and placed in a sarcophagus. The practice of mummification by the Egyptians fell in disuse after the arrival of Christian missionaries, and Christianity became the dominant religion in Egypt in the third century A.D. (Schuster and Dunham, 2014).

Another less known method of disposal is that of **plastination**. The preservation technique of plastination was invented by Gunther von Hagen in 1977. During the process of plastination, all bodily fluids are replaced with plastic to preserve the body. These bodies are odourless and can be displayed in any desired position, making them a valuable teaching aid in medical training. The exhibition *Body Worlds* in 1995 was the first public display of plastinated bodies (Stewart, 2009). The Toerien Anatomy Museum at the University of the Free State, South Africa, houses a collection of plastinated bodies used for research purposes; the museum and its oldest plastinised content date back to 1972 (Correia and Wessels, 2014).

Sanderson (2001) defines **endocannibalism** as the act of eating the members of one's own group. According to Campbell (2013), researchers observed the practice of endocannibalism by native tribes in Madagascar during the 19th century. Dead relatives are eaten to prolong contact with the deceased, to absorb their good qualities and to assist their transition to the realm of the ancestors (Campbell, 2013). The Wari tribe residing in the Amazon, South

America, included mortuary cannibalism into their funeral rites until the 1960s. Tribe elders explain this custom by stating that "cannibalism altered memories and the emotions of grief in ways that helped them deal with the loss of a loved one" (Conklin, 1995). Other occurrences of mortuary cannibalism have been recorded where the dead have been consumed for survival purposes as a last resort in times of disaster, war or accidents (Bolt, 2009). A well-known example is that of the Uruguayan Air Force plane crashing in the Andes Mountains in 1972, leaving a rugby team stranded and starving, forcing them to commit the act of cannibalism (anthropophagy) by consuming their deceased team mates to survive (Canessa and Vierci, 2016).

Green burials can also be referred to as "natural", "ecological" or "woodlands" burials (Brennan, 2014). The concept of green burials relies on the supposition that all materials considered harmful to the environment must be avoided, and only materials with minimal lasting damage must be used (Brennan, 2014). According to Brennan (2014), the origins of the green burial movement can be traced back to the late 1980s in Great Britain. The industry has since grown in popularity, with Great Britain leading the way with 250 natural burial sites, as opposed to Germany with 25, and the United States with only 13. Green burial however still remains the less favoured option (Brennan, 2014). The origins of the green burial movement in South Africa can be traced back to 1989, when the Memorial Parks Group bought a 40 hectare property next to the N2 highway in Somerset West, Western Cape. This property was intended to serve as a natural green cemetery, but due to complications regarding managerial negligence and delays with regard to environmental impact studies, the project was abandoned in 1991. The property has since been sold to the Asla Construction Group (Brice 2017, personal communication, 21 April). In 2011, the Fouché family established a private green cemetery at the Wiesenhof Dam, Stellenbosch, Western Cape (Willemse, 2015). Claiming it to be the first South African eco-cemetery, Legacy Parks intended to offer a place where interment can take place as naturally as possible and a "final address in a place of natural, peaceful tranquillity, where your loved ones know that your final resting place will be maintained forever" (Die Bolander, 2011). In 2016, with 139 natural and ash burials already conducted and 220 burial spaces reserved, Legacy Parks received notice of closure due to a land dispute. This short history, littered with failure, should however not be considered indicative of future endeavours of the green burial movement in South Africa.

Sky burial or *Jhator* ("giving alms to the birds") is probably one of the most controversial methods of disposal. According to Martin (1996), the practice dates back to the 14th century, although other unsubstantiated sources claim the origin to be as early as 357 BC (Martin, 1996).

The practice of sky burial arose due to specific features of the Tibetan Plateau's natural ecology (Bauer, 2014). For the greater part of the year the land surface of Tibet is frozen, making it impossible to excavate graves for burial; furthermore fuel such as wood to use for cremation purposes is considered a scarce resource (Bauer, 2014).

When a person passes, the body is cleaned and bound with rope in a crouching position and placed in the corner of his/her house for a period of three days (Sangay, 1984). In ancient Tibetan villages, domestic animals are kept away from the body because it is believed that the warm fur of a cat or dog could turn the deceased into a walking corpse. Older houses have doorways not more than 1.5 meters high to prevent walking corpses from exiting the house due to the belief that a walking corpse is unable to bend, and once it has fallen over it is unable to get up (Sangay, 1984). The corpse is removed from the house at dawn and taken to an elevated area used specifically for sky burial. The clothes are removed and the flesh of the deceased sliced with a ritual flaying knife. The hair of the deceased is removed and destroyed separately. The vultures will then consume the flesh of the deceased person (Martin, 1996; Bauer, 2014). Any remaining bones are pulverised and mixed with barley flour; this mixture is set out for consumption by other birds of prey such as crows and hawks (Martin, 1996:359). The person is thus returned to nature.

The **Torajan ethnic** group is situated within the Pangala region in the South Sulawesi of Indonesia. Although the Torajan are predominantly members of the Christian faith, they still adhere to the traditions of their ancestors (*Aluk to Dolo* meaning "the way of the ancestors") (Doughty, 2017; Sieber, 2017). When a family member dies, the corpse is preserved and turned into a mummy with a mixture of tea leaves and tree bark placed on the skin, and oil poured into the corpse's mouth and throat. Recent methods of mummification by the Torajan include preserving the body with a mixture of formaldehyde, methyl alcohol and water (Doughty, 2017). Due to extremely high funeral costs (between US$50 000 and US$500 000, depending on the social status of the family), it is not uncommon for families to keep the dead at home for weeks, months, years or even decades until they can afford the funeral expected of them by their community (Doughty, 2017; Sieber, 2017).

Every three years, the Torajan celebrate the *Ma'nene* festival, or the "ceremony of cleaning corpses" (Tsintjilonis, 2007). During this celebration, graves are opened and the deceased relatives are taken out of their coffins, the remains are carefully cleaned and redressed, broken coffins are repaired, gifts are offered to the deceased, and family photos are taken before they are returned to the grave (Doughty, 2017; Sieber, 2017). According to archaeological research, this unique method of honouring and celebrating the dead dates back more than 900 years (Sieber, 2017).

From a young age, the Torajan are taught to accept death as part of their life journey. Adults and children of all ages take part in the festival, and in doing so, the tradition of *ma'nene* will continue (Tsintjilonis, 2007; Doughty, 2017; Sieber, 2017). Sieber (2017) notes that *Ma'nene* is not about death; "it is a celebration that goes beyond mortality."

The business of death

The undertaker is often seen as the representative of death on earth and is consequently a constant reminder of human mortality (Molyneux, 1985). The funeral industry however plays a significant role in the disposal choices of the communities it serves.

Commodification of Death

During the past two centuries, with the emergence of the professional undertaker, families and individuals are compelled to purchase goods and services to pay their last respects to the dead, turning death into a commodity in modern society (Venbrux, 2009). Waugh (1948) first brought attention to the extreme commodification of death in California in the United States of America in her book *The Loved One*. According to Waugh (1948), regardless of the condition of a corpse, funeral undertakers across the United States made embalming and displaying the body in an expensive coffin compulsory. In 1963, Mitford (1998) changed the public image of the American funeral industry by revealing the industry's exploitation of the "grief stricken and vulnerable survivors of the newly dead". Mitford (1998) suggested that funeral service providers develop cunning methods to sell unneeded goods and services to maximise profits

and that the funeral industry has a hegemonic grip on consumers with regard to the immediate events following the death of an individual. The Ombudsman for the South African Council of Churches, Eugene Roelofse stated that,

> they (the undertakers) are nothing more than merchants in coffins and many of them exploit the reverence they enjoy and switch their morals and sympathies on and off as they see fit. If you do not pay, his (the undertaker) sympathy will disappear and he will not hesitate to drag you to court. If the public sees the funeral parlour as a merchant, they (the public) will be more economical in their dealings (Molyneux, 1985).

The exploitation of consumers by the funeral industry is by no means a new phenomenon. Three reports written more than 170 years apart indicate that the bargaining power is in the hands of the undertaking sector and not the consumer. In 1843, Edwin Chadwick launched a special inquiry into the practice of interment in towns in Britain. He wrote that

> the circumstances of death do not admit of any effective competition or any precedent examination of the charges of undertakers or any comparison and consideration of their supplies; there is no time to change them for others that are less expensive and more in conformity with the taste and circumstance of the parties (Chadwick, 1843).

In 1975, the Bureau of Consumer Protection in the United States of America published a report on funeral industry practices:

> Once the consumer comes to the funeral home, a number of sales techniques of varying unsavouriness are used to increase the amount he spends. Some of these methods are common to many industries, and normally we rely on the forces of competition and the good sense of consumers to punish those who use them and reward those who do not. This does not work for funerals because the bereaved purchaser is not emotionally able to bargain and is seldom even aware the he is being deceived or exploited (Federal Trade Commission, 1975).

A report by the Consumer Federation of America, written in 2017, states:

> it is difficult enough to comparison shop under the time pressure a funeral creates in addition to the emotional stress of making arrangements in grief. Few consumers have the time or inclination to physically visit four or five funeral homes when a death has occurred in the family. Naturally, funeral homes have profit in mind and are likely to quote the consumer a price for their full-service offerings (they call this a traditional funeral), while failing to disclose that less expensive burial and cremation options are available (Slocum, 2017).

Similar advances in the commodification of death are manifest around the globe. Research conducted in 2004 by Krishna *et al.* (2004) found that 63% of households in rural Kenya declined into poverty due to substantial funeral costs. During 2015, funeral costs in the United Kingdom increased by 3.9%, with the average funeral costing more than £3500. Consequently, one in ten people in the UK becomes indebted in an attempt to give their loved ones a dignified funeral (Schopen, 2015). According to the most recent SunLife (2020) Cost of Dying Report, the escalation of funeral costs from 2008 to 2020 in the United Kingdom is as follows:

Table 1: Funeral costs UK 2008 – 2020

Year	Basic Funeral Cost (in GPB)
2008	£2549
2009	£2733
2010	£2857
2011	£3091
2012	£3284
2013	£3456
2014	£3590
2015	£3693
2016	£3897

2017	£4078
2018	£4271
2019	£4417
2020	£4601
TOTAL INCREASE 2008 - 2020	80.52%

(Adapted from SunLife, 2020)

Research conducted from 2003 to 2005 by Case *et al*. (2013) established that, in South Africa, black African households, on average, spend more than the equivalent of a year's income on an adult funeral (measured at median per capita black African income). Households cannot afford funerals commensurate with social expectations of the community; consequently, bereaved family members become indebted in an attempt to hold on to their social status (Case *et al.,* 2013). Mokoena (cited in Mathe, 2019) states that "death is a sacred thing for us as black people, but has become such a big expense for us because of the way our community is set up. We are constantly worrying what people will say if we did not have money for tea or other things."

Individual and corporate social and environmental responsibility

Inadequate service delivery and municipal negligence are problems in almost every province of South Africa (Mdlongwa, 2014). Local governments face serious challenges such as a lack of human resource skills, corruption, maladministration, financial constraints, a lack of knowledge, a lack of awareness, and the slow rollout of services, all of which hamper effective service delivery (Mdlongwa, 2014). It would however be unfair to completely shift the blame for the atrocious condition of cemeteries onto local government alone.

The International Organisation for Standardisation (2010) defines social responsibility as "the responsibility of an organisation or individual for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment". This definition implies that a company or individual cannot function as a single entity acting in self-interest but should rather adapt to its social and physical

environment, acting in the best interest of all. This implies that a balance must be maintained between "profits" and contributing to society. After considering numerous definitions of corporate environmental responsibility, Huckle's (1995) definition was found most suitable for the purpose of this study:

> Corporate environmental responsibility is the obligation of decision makers to take actions which protect and improve the environment as a whole, along with their own interests.

This definition implies that service providers in the "business of death" have a responsibility not only towards their own interest but also towards protecting and improving the environment as a whole. This sentiment is echoed by Van Niekerk (1998), who adds society to the definition,

> …social responsibility is the obligation of both business and society (stakeholders) to take proper legal, moral-ethical, and philanthropic actions that will protect and improve the welfare of both society and business as a whole.

Enderle and Travis (1998) suggest that endeavours by corporations to advance environmental health should be sustainable and recommend The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) definition "to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs".

In 2005, a multi-faith environmental group was established. The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) has a broad spectrum of membership, including faith leaders from African Traditional Healers, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Baha'i, Buddhists, Quakers and a range of Christian denominations. SAFCEI is committed to "supporting faith leaders and their communities in Southern Africa to increase awareness, understanding and action on eco-justice, sustainable living and climate change". In their publication, "Sustainable Funeral Rites" (2018), SAFCEI provides information to the general public as well as those in the industry of death on more environmentally friendly and sustainable funerals.

Africa's largest Mutual Assurance Society, AVBOB, which, has been in operation for 100 years in 2018, launched its corporate social investment (CSI) arm in 2013. The AVBOB foundation has made charitable contributions to numerous organisations and individuals in need and have recently shifted their focus to the sustainable socio-economic development of the communities in which they operate (AVBOB, 2018). Unfortunately, no Corporate Environmental Responsibility (CER) has been embarked upon by this company with regard to South African cemeteries.

The Sonja Smith Funeral Group (Pty) Ltd. (SSFG), situated in Pretoria, South Africa, radically altered the way in which remains are interred, with a perfect balance between corporate environmental responsibility and corporate social investment. With a focus on the environment, the SSFG introduced an environmentally friendly approach to interment by providing fully biodegradable coffins and cremation vessels manufactured by local artisans (Towards a softer, greener, more compassionate interment future, 2011).

Planning for future cemeteries remains a huge challenge (Tshabalala, 2004). It does however not change the fact that we have existing cemeteries that are of great importance to several religious and cultural groups. In South Africa, the shocking condition of our cemeteries due to municipal negligence, shortage of funds and general human deviance has become a common sight throughout the country. Residents and community members have shifted the blame and responsibility onto local government and demand action (La Vita, 2015; Madumo, 2015; Mouton, 2015; Van Zyl, 2015), while others, such as Rabbi Silberhaft, considers it his personal "holy obligation" to restore broken Jewish graves and cemeteries to allow those that have passed to rest with dignity (Belling, 2017).

This raises the issue of determining the reason for these divergent attitudes towards cemeteries and whether these different attitudes could be attributed to different levels of place attachment. Furthermore, can service providers in the "business of death" not make a significant difference by taking social responsibility and implementing more environmentally friendly and sustainable practices at an organisational level?

Memorialisation

According to Guttman *et al.* (2011), different features in cemeteries play important roles with regard to aspirations to immortality. Auger (2000) states that, in order to secure these attempts at immortality, humans construct symbols to "represent the connection between the living and dead". Coffins and tombstones consequently become the tools of remembrance and comfort for those who remain behind (Auger, 2000). It was traditionally believed in Europe that gravestones could sustain the memory of the dead, and in many African cultures, the process of coffin building is an essential part of the funeral process (Auger, 2000). Raymond (2018) reveals a new trend in the United States, where individuals choose the "do-it-yourself" option regarding the disposal of their own remains. This practice involves individuals building their own unique vessels of disposal in which they will either be buried or cremated when their final bell tolls. This indicates that cemeteries are more than just a disposal site for those who have passed, but that they hold great importance for those visiting them, and instruments such as tombstones play a role in assisting the living to remember and to grieve (Guttman *et al.*, 2011).

During the preliminary fieldwork for this study, the immortalisation of the dead through headstones and plaques became apparent. An example is displayed in Figure 6 below, which reads: "Rest in Peace, Manager of Ackermans."

Figure 7: An example of immortalisation of a deceased person

(Source: Nada Laurie, 2018)

The memorialisation of the departed appears to be an integral part of human nature. Molyneux (1985) states that cemetery and funerary architecture has existed for generations; not only does it reveal important information about the way of life of earlier societies, but it also serves as a

tourist attraction. According to Veale (2004), memorialisation can be traced back to the dawn of civilisation:

> Throughout prehistoric times and into recorded history, there is a common thread of honouring the dead … as early as 35 000BC, Cro-Magnon man practiced ritual funerals (Veale, 2004).

According to Casey (2000), memorialisation is "a way of coming to terms with ending and … it succeeds to the extent that it refuses to succumb to the sheer pastness of the past". Blustein (2018) echoes this sentiment and states that acts of memorialisation after traumatic events, such as death, is rooted in a desire to keep faith with the dead. Ignatieff (1988) states that memorialisation sustains a bond with the dead, which in turn enables the survivors to deal effectively with the loss.

Environmental Impact of Burial and Cremation

Cemeteries are not only the resting place for the expired individuals in societies but also the resting place for the coffins and caskets containing the remains. According to Jonker and Olivier (2012), the burial of every coffin poses an environmental and health hazard. Uslu *et al.* (2009) state that there are approximately 2.5 million burials conducted in the United States every year. The material used during these burials amount to 70 000m³ (24 720 t.) of coffin wood, 1 639 000 tonnes of concrete for graves, 2700 tonnes of coffin steel and 872 060 gallons (3 301 106 litres) of embalming fluid.

In 2012, the City of Johannesburg, South Africa reported that they conduct approximately 20 000 burials per year (Dambudzo, 2012). Dambudzo (2012) claims that many older cemeteries in South Africa were developed on geologically unsuitable land due to non-compliance with, or the non-existence of environmental management policies at the time of development. Illegal cemeteries in various municipal districts across South Africa are an additional concern with regard to their environmental impact (Dambudzo, 2012).

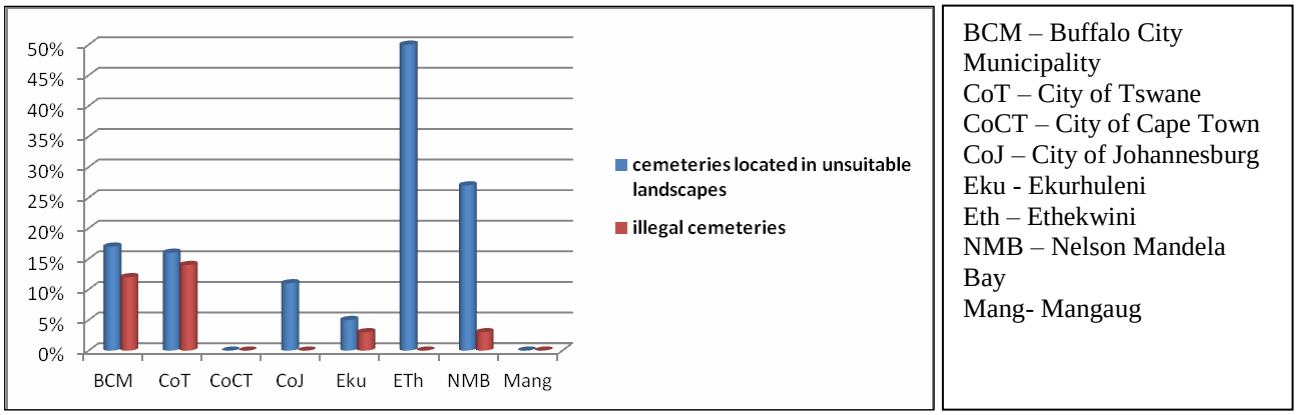

Figure 8: Municipal districts with illegal and poorly sited cemeteries

(Source: Dambuzo, 2012)

According to Dippenaar (2014), cemeteries pose a definite risk for groundwater pollution. In a study conducted at the Zandfontein Cemetery in Pretoria, South Africa, Jonker and Olivier (2012) found that the mineral composition of the soil inside the cemetery was significantly higher than what was found off-site and that the zones inside the cemetery with higher burial loads were most contaminated. According to Jonker and Olivier (2012), this indicates that cemeteries can be regarded as anthropogenic sources of pollution. Toxic chemicals are released into the soil and groundwater due to embalming practices, the construction material of the coffins, or caskets and poorly sited cemeteries. In an earlier study, Fischer and Croucamp (1993) found that decomposing human corpses will result in groundwater contamination due to particulates and pathogens produced during the decomposition process.

Air pollution is the main health concern of cremation (Guttman *et al.*, 2011:8). Recent studies have shown that trace quantities of toxic pollutants have become an area of concern concerning cremation practices. These pollutants largely originate from within the bodies that are cremated and may include mercury (amalgam tooth fillings), dioxin, hydrochloric acid, nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide (Rahill, 2008). The greatest contaminant, mercury, is highly volatile and can, at low levels of exposure, cause a variety of conditions such as neurological, heart, reproductive and immunological disorders (Zahir *et al.*, 2005). According to Smith (2007), the scattering of cremains (ashes) also holds potential environmental risk. The large amounts of nutrients contained in ashes can act as fertilizer, which, in some cases, have several negative effects on both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (Smith, 2007). According to

Guttman *et al.* (2011), the combined risk of both cremation and burial require definite changes in current practices to reduce potential impacts.

Legal, religious and cultural determinants influencing behaviour

This section will explore the legal, cultural and religious determinants influencing behaviour regarding death and disposal.

Legal determinants

This section outlines the current South African policy legislation frameworks regarding cemetery planning, management, development and different burial methods.

Currently, South Africans have a choice of only two disposal options, traditional burial or traditional cremation. The standard procedures for the available options are stipulated in various legislative documents such as the Constitution of South Africa, Municipal By-laws, the National Health Act of 2003, the National Water Act of 1998, the National Environmental Management: Waste Act of 2008, the Consumer Protection Act 68 of 2008 and the Heritage Resource Act.

The Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) guarantees:

a) The right to an environment that is not harmful to human health or well-being - Section 24 (a)
b) The right to have the environment protected – Section 24 (b).

Section 155 and 156 state the municipal requirements for the management and administration of cemeteries. Provincial governments are responsible for monitoring and supporting local municipalities in relation to cemeteries.

Section 152(1) (b), (d) and (e) require that the development of cemeteries must be planned in a sustainable manner to promote a safe and healthy environment and to ensure community involvement in the planning process. It is thus, by instruction of the Constitution, expected of

the Mangaung Local Municipality to plan and develop cemeteries to the benefit of its citizens and thereby to ensure maintenance and sustainability.

Figures 9 and 10 below show the contrary.

Figure 9: Neglect in South Park Cemetery Bloemfontein

(Source: Nada Laurie, 2017)

Figure 10: Unmaintained cremation wall: Memoriam Cemetery Bloemfontein

(Source: Nada Laurie, 2017)

The National Environmental Management (NEMA) Act 107 of 1998 states the principles for environmental protection. Principles directly related to cemeteries and crematoria are stipulated in Chapter 1 of the above-mentioned act and include, among others, the following:

- The needs of people (communities) must be given priority when environmental management matters are considered, and their physical, psychological, developmental, cultural and social interests must be served equitably.
- Development must be environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.
- Pollution and environmental degradation must be avoided; if not possible, it must be minimised and remedied.

The Mangaung Local Municipality By-Laws Relating to Municipal Cemeteries regulate the establishment and operation of cemeteries in the Mangaung Municipal District. The by-laws provide guidelines for the development of new cemeteries, operation and administration of current cemeteries, as well as regulations for disposal, exhumation and the cremation of human remains.

Chapter three of the by-laws states that no person may conduct, cause or allow the burial of a corpse, ashes or a cadaver outside a cemetery established and managed by the Council.

Chapter seven states that the Council shall be responsible for the maintenance of cemeteries to ensure that they remain in a neat and tidy condition. All memorial work must however be maintained in good order by the responsible person (family or undertaker, depending on the agreement).

Chapter nine of the by-laws states that any person using a cemetery does so at his or her own risk and that the Council cannot be held responsible for any damages, injuries or loss occurring whilst visiting or working in the cemetery.

The National Water Act No.36 of 1998 provides regulations governing the location of cemeteries to prevent or minimise water contamination. The Department of Water Affairs provides the following regulations:

Cemeteries should not be:

- located below the 1 in 50 year flood line of a river
- located in close proximity to water bodies (wetlands, pans, flood plains, estuaries)
- situated on unstable geological structures such as fault zones, seismic zones, dolomitic or karst areas where sinkhole formation is possible
- situated near sensitive ecological areas
- situated in areas characterised by flat gradients or shallow groundwater
- situated in areas with steep gradients, little soil cover or shallow bedrock
- located in areas of groundwater recharge
- situated in areas adjacent to or overlaying aquifers used for water supply purposes

The National Health Act No 63 of 1977 stipulates that no person shall bury a corpse on any premises that has not been registered by the local authority.

Cultural and religious determinants

According to Molyneux (2005), every segment of the highly heterogeneous population of South Africa has its own beliefs regarding funeral customs and burial rituals. Only through investigating and understanding the importance of these rituals can informed decisions regarding the introduction of alternative disposal methods be made. It is however important to remember that culture and faith are tangled to the extent that, for example, a member of a specific black African culture could be a member of the Christian faith.

Jewish observances

Lamm (2000) states that one of the first priorities of a Jewish community is to establish a cemetery, as cemeteries encapsulate the customs and traditions connected to the burial of

community members. According to Walsh (2015), all Jewish customs are focussed on treating the corpse of the deceased with respect. Consequently, practices such as embalming, cremation and autopsies are strictly prohibited, and viewing the corpse is considered disrespectful. Although, according to Jewish custom, burial must take place as soon as possible after death, while a funeral service is prohibited on the Sabbath (An Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs at the Time of Death, 2011). Roberts (2009) states that Jewish people are buried in plain wooden coffins without any metal trimmings, and for burials outside of Israel, Israeli soil is often added to the coffin to serve as a connection to the Holy Land. After the funeral service, the grave is completely filled by those present, as this reinforces the reality of the death (Roberts, 2009). Members of the Jewish faith are buried in a separate section of public or private cemeteries reserved for the sole use of the Jewish community (MacLean and Williams, 2009). Jewish law states that every grave must have a tombstone to remember the deceased, and the first anniversary of the death is celebrated by unveiling the tombstone (Walsh, 2015). The unveiling ceremony is usually held before the first *yahrzeit* (anniversary of death according to the Jewish calendar). The ceremony will typically include Hebrew and English readings as well as the *El Malei Rachamim* (memorial prayer). The unveiling ceremony lasts for 10 to 15 minutes and provides the opportunity for those present to share reflections and memories of the deceased (Freeman and Rank, 1998). It is customary for visitors to Jewish graves to place pebbles on the tombstone rather than flowers. This tradition is linked to biblical times when Jews were forced into a nomadic lifestyle and had to leave their graves in the desert with no one to tend them, and the only protection for the dead were piles of stones (Lamm, 2000; MacLean and Williams, 2009). Members of the Jewish faith are furthermore of the opinion that flowers, much like the body, wilt and die, but stones, like the soul, will exist forever. Evidence of this practice can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Figure 11: Jewish grave in South Park Cemetery, Bloemfontein

(Source: Nada Laurie, 2018)

Observing Black African culture

Black African traditions, concerning death, dying and disposal, draw from many cultures, religious and ethnic backgrounds (Walsh, 2015). In general, there is a high involvement of the family and friends of the deceased to not only offer support but also to share the grief. According to Barrett (2009), generally, black African cultures have a commonly shared belief in the afterlife in the form of ancestors. When an individual in the community dies, the person joins the ancestors and consequently resides in the spirit world (Barrett, 2009). It is customary for some African cultures to hold a "home going" service. This entails that the deceased spends his/her last night, prior to the funeral, at home. This suggests the conviction of going home to Jesus and being reunited with family and friends (Barrett, 2009; Walsh, 2015). Cremation, although practised by some, is less accepted in black African cultures (Walsh, 2015).

Barrett (2009) asserts that, according to the majority of black African traditions, it is the responsibility of the immediate family to ensure that the deceased is given a "proper" funeral. The "correct" funeral incorporates all the spiritual and cultural traditions of the group to ensure that the deceased will join the ancestors in the afterlife; should the cultural and religious traditions be neglected, it may cause the spirit of the decedent to wander and cause misfortune to the survivors (Barrett, 2009). Barrett (2009) emphasises that an expectation has developed

in many African cultures to hold costly and elaborate funerals, which consequently leads to social pressure to conform.

Hindu observances

According to the traditional beliefs of the Hindu faith, the deceased is cremated, as fire represents purity and power (Antyeshti Samskar Committee, 2009). The flames represent Brahma (the creator in the Hindu triumvirate), and the burning of the body will release and purify the spirit (An Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs at the Time of Death, 2011). According to the Hindu tradition, the deceased should be cremated "with the minimal loss of time from the time of death" (Antyeshti Samskar Committee, 2009). Holy men and children under the age of two years old are buried because they do not require purification by fire. Should a pregnant woman pass away, the deceased unborn child is removed and buried as close as possible to the place where the mother was cremated (Antyeshti Samskar Committee, 2009). An alternative to burial is the immersion of the corpse into a sacred river such as the Ganges River in India (McGee, 2004). The practice of immersion has however proved to be detrimental to the environment with regard to pollution and water-borne diseases (Agarwal, 2015).

According to a census conducted in 2001 (Statistics SA, 2001), only 1.2% of the South African population belong to the Hindu faith. It is however the disposal needs of this small portion of the population that resulted in the construction of the first crematorium in South Africa in 1918 as an alternative to traditional open pyre cremations (Davies and Mates, 2016).

Christian observances

Members of the Christian faith share a firm belief in some form of afterlife (Joyce, 2009). Joyce (2009) posits that there are more than 34 000 Christian denominations across the world, with the major five branches being Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Anglican and Restorationism. Members of the Christian faith may either be buried or cremated, depending on their personal preference or prescriptions by their specific denomination (An Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs at the Time of Death, 2011). The scattering of cremains is allowed and is sometimes encouraged; alternatively, the body or cremains must be buried and marked with a tombstone to remember the deceased.

Muslim observances

According to the Muslim tradition, earth burial is prescribed and must preferably take place within 24 hours of death (MacLean and Williams, 2009). As in the case of members of the Jewish faith, Muslims are buried in a separate section of the cemetery (Walsh, 2015). Embalming is not permitted, and typically, a body will be buried without a coffin unless it is required by local law. The body is placed inside the grave, resting on its right side, facing northeast to the holy city of Mecca. The grave is then sealed and only a marker is placed at the head of the grave. The purpose of this marker is practical rather than symbolic (MacLean and Williams, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the historical overview as well as current practices of burial and cremation in both the international and national context. Furthermore, alternative burial methods were discussed, as well as other factors influencing disposal, such as the funeral industry and the commodification of death.

Drawing from the international and national historical overview, there have been definite changes in funerary rituals due to religion, culture and economic influences. We can however learn much from different cultures and societies in terms of disposal and their attitudes towards death. The solution to declining burial space concerns, the exploitation of bereaved consumers, and the notion of social responsibility towards the spaces where we dispose of the dead could possibly lie in an integrated approach and collaboration among religions and cultures. This will not only provide a better understanding of the divergent attitudes towards death and the different death systems within cultures and societies, but also inform role players of possible sustainable solutions to different challenges. For example, consuming the dead members of our society or feeding their corpses to wildlife may not be an especially viable or moral solution in the modern era, but we can learn a great deal from the attitudes towards death driving these practices and the motivation behind “peculiar” practices (or any other practices). These could be an important learning instrument in how we can change the way we view death in contemporary society.

The following chapter will discuss the methodological approach implemented in this research project.

Chapter 4

Methodological Design

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the research process. This includes the method used as well as a justification for the use of this method. Secondly, participant selection, data collection and the process of data analysis will be explored. Lastly, the validity and reliability of qualitative research are discussed, including the way these two requirements were met in the study.

Research design

This research project adopted a qualitative research design because it was deemed appropriate to answer the research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that the choice of research methodology is determined by the nature of the subject under investigation as well as the research questions. For the specific purposes of this study, the qualitative design was found most suitable to answer the research questions. The qualitative design allows a researcher to access meaning and context while furthermore facilitating in-depth exploration (Babbie and Mouton, 2004). Qualitative research emphasises the holistic, dynamic and individual aspects of the human experience (Streubert and Carpenter, 1999). The qualitative design furthermore enables the researcher to collect descriptive data. This aids the researcher in an in-depth understanding of the subject under investigation (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Visiting cemeteries, speaking to undertakers, religious and cultural leaders allowed access to the "death world," which in everyday life largely remains a taboo subject.

According to Franzosi (1998), there is a wide variety of issues covered by the field of sociology, such as crime, culture, politics, religion, science, social interaction and social stratification. Erol-Işik (2015) elaborates by stating that these "spheres of knowledge require us to become involved with the ways in which people narrate themselves and others". Sociology focuses on how actions shape the lives of people (Franzosi, 1998); therefore personal accounts can be a valuable tool in understanding the underlying motivation behind these actions, as well as reflecting on people's perceptions, experiences and emotions. The qualitative approach is

therefore the most appropriate method of inquiry for this particular research project, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as multifaceted, which involves a naturalistic and interpretive approach to the subject matter. Through the use of the qualitative approach, it was possible to deeply engage and interact with the participants in order to generate rich, meaningful and useful data.

Burns and Grove (2001) define exploratory research as research conducted to gain new insights, discover ideas and to increase knowledge of the topic under investigation. Due to the general dearth of information in the field of sociological death studies in South Africa, this study is exploratory in nature in an attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge.

Selecting research participants

The participants considered appropriate to partake in the proposed study are a range of stakeholders, such as religious leaders (from an array of denominations and different religions), funeral undertakers, as well as ordinary citizens from different religions and cultures within the Mangaung municipality. This allowed me to obtain an angle from a variety of perspectives, including personal, religious and professional.

For this study, the inclusion criteria were:

Participants must reside in Bloemfontein, South Africa or in its surrounding areas (approximately 50 km radius). This criterion was added to ease the data collection process in the event of a follow-up interview.

The participant must have had "lived experience" in the field of death and death disposal. This includes working in the death industry, having dealt with death and death disposal in a personal capacity, being affiliated with a religious institution (that by default deals with death and death disposal). Participants needed to be willing and comfortable to speak about the sensitive topic of death. Death is ubiquitous and a reality for every person; it is however difficult to broach it in a frank manner.

For the purpose of this qualitative research study, I made use of nonprobability sampling. A group of participants was initially selected by means of purposive sampling, followed by the snowball sampling method. According to Creswell (2003), purposive sampling refers to the specific selection of participants that will aid the researcher in understanding the research problem and answering the research questions. This echoes the sentiments of Brink (1996) that purposive sampling requires that participants be selected according to their knowledge about the research topic due to their involvement and experience in the field of research. Palys (2008) refers to purposive sampling as a "series of strategic choices" made by the researcher to ensure that the best-equipped participants are chosen to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was consequently the most logical choice of sampling method for this research project, as it enabled me to target specific individuals within the "death world" in order to gather rich and valuable data.

According to Morgan (2008), snowball sampling is a useful instrument to pursue the goals of purposive sampling. Snowball sampling was chosen in this research study, as it is suitable to find populations in the death industry such as crematorium workers, morticians and desairologists (funeral cosmetologists and/or hairstylists).

Twenty-seven adult participants took part in the study. I personally recruited the participants. The participants consist of funeral undertakers (with service delivery to a wide variety of cultural and religious groups), crematorium staff, religious leaders and/or ordinary members of the congregations within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), Reformed Church, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church and Pentecostal Protestant Church. Social workers, health care workers, general members of the public belonging to different cultures, and psychologists in the field of trauma and loss, geriatric and palliative care were also included in the study. All the participants, with the exception of one, are situated in Bloemfontein.

Funeral undertakers were identified by means of a general internet search for "funeral parlours Bloemfontein". Using this method, I collected the contact information of eight funeral parlours in the Bloemfontein area. An email was sent to all eight potential participants, explaining the research and requesting a visit to the establishment. Of the eight funeral parlours, three responded positively, two declined a visit to the establishment, and three did not respond

at all. Visits were scheduled with the funeral parlours that responded positively by means of email at a time convenient for them. During the general visit to the funeral homes, interviews were scheduled with employees willing to participate. The interviews were digitally recorded with informed consent (Annexure A) from three participants only. One participant declined being recorded, and comprehensive notes were taken by hand during this interview.

One of the funeral undertakers referred me to the **desairologist** they make use of when the family request a viewing or open casket funeral, but the corpse is in a particularly bad condition. The person unfortunately declined a formal interview but agreed to an informal discussion regarding the nature of her work. The informal discussion yielded no useable data as no informed consent was signed.

Crematorium staff were contacted through the ICSA (Independent Crematoriums South Africa) head office. I was introduced to the ICSA Inland Manager at the SACA conference in 2017, where the foundation for a professional relationship was established. When I received ethical clearance from the University of the Free State to continue with fieldwork, I contacted him, and he assisted me in arranging interviews with the crematorium staff by means of email. Two crematorium staff members were interviewed with signed consent; both declined the recording of the interview and comprehensive notes were taken by hand. The current crematorium staff referred me to a person previously employed at the crematorium. She is no longer residing in South Africa and an interview was scheduled via email and was conducted by means of Skype with oral consent.

I contacted the **Dutch Reformed Church** in my municipal district and scheduled a meeting with the reverend. The church is located in an area close to a retirement home as well as a hospital with an oncology ward, consequently the reverend is closely involved in pastoral death counselling. An interview was scheduled and conducted with informed consent. I was referred to a member of the church council (Elder) that had a personal experience regarding the death and disposal of a loved one. The Elder agreed to an interview with informed consent but declined being recorded. However, notes were taken by hand during the interview. The same procedure of recruitment was followed for the **Reformed Church** in my ward. The church secretary agreed to an interview with informed consent.

Challenges were experienced in interviewing participants affiliated with the **Roman Catholic Church**. Bloemfontein has a total of three Catholic churches. I contacted the church management of all three, with no response. By chance, a missionary nun entered my office to discuss a matter unrelated to my research. I used the opportunity and requested an interview, which she accepted. The interview was conducted with signed informed consent; she however declined the recording of the interview. Notes were taken by hand.

Attending an event at the **Greek Orthodox Church** in Bloemfontein, I used the opportunity to request an interview with a member of the congregation. She accepted, and the interview was scheduled for a time convenient for her. The interview was conducted with signed informed consent. She referred me to a **Muslim** acquaintance, who agreed to an interview with signed informed consent.

In an attempt to secure an interview with a **social worker,** I contacted Engo Bloemfontein. Engo (previously NGMD) is a non-profit and non-governmental Christian organisation. Their core focus is the care of children, the elderly, families, people with disabilities and patients in need. I requested interviews with social workers active in the field of elderly care, trauma and loss. I was referred to three social workers, one of whom agreed to an interview.

An internet search for **psychologists** for interview purposes was conducted. Interviews were scheduled by means of email. One psychologist agreed to an interview with signed informed consent.

During the fieldwork phase of my research, I paid daily visits to the Oncology ward of a private hospital in Bloemfontein for personal reasons. Due to the regularity of my visits, I was able to build rapport with the **health care workers** in the ward. Two professional nurses agreed to interviews with informed consent.

General members of the public belonging to different cultures were identified with referrals from funeral undertakers, colleagues and friends. Interviews were scheduled with 27 participants by means of telephone or email.

The collection of stories

The stories were collected by means of open-ended, in-depth interviews. This method of data collection was chosen, as it allows the participants to share information in their own words rather than being guided by pre-established lines of thinking. Streubert and Carpenter (1999) regard in-depth interviews as the best method of exploring and gathering narrative material that may facilitate a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation. This type of data collection furthermore allowed me to retain a degree of control over the direction the interview took as well as the content under discussion (Annexure B: interview schedule) (Cook, 2008). The unstructured interviews yielded rich data, as participants were able to raise their views more freely. Follow-up interviews were conducted with research participants to facilitate data saturation and to clarify and build on the data gathered in earlier interviews.

Cemetery visits were made as a continuous activity throughout the data collection phase. During these visits, the data collection method of unstructured, non-participant observation was employed. In situ note taking and fieldwork reflections were used to collect data. The purpose of these visits was to discover themes of interest. Photos were taken of the cemeteries to record the deterioration or improvement of the premises, as this links directly to the theory of place attachment as described in Chapter Two. I could only ask my participants questions regarding the condition of our local cemeteries and their opinions and emotions regarding this if I was thoroughly aware of their current condition. These observations ended when theoretical saturation was reached. Data were recorded by means of photos, detailed field notes and research reflections.

The sensitive topic of death

Death is an emotionally charged subject and still a taboo topic for many individuals and communities. The challenge was thus to approach the topic of death wisely and not to offend or upset research participants. Although a large portion of the research participants, such as

funeral undertakers, crematorium staff, and religious leaders, are active within the death industry and consequently already have a proclivity to the topic under investigation, special attention was paid to conducting sensitive research.

I found the work of Lee and Renzetti (1993) regarding sensitive research relevant to my study. A sensitive topic is "one that potentially poses for those involved substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched, the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data" (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). The interview questions identified in my research could be perceived as an "intrusive threat," as it requires participants to reveal information about personal experiences and opinions that fall within the private sphere. Participants were therefore thoroughly briefed on the nature of the interview to enable them to make an informed decision whether they would like to continue with the formal interview or not. If the participant agreed to continue, I was still sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues from each participant. Any participant who declined an interview was in no way pressurised to participate. The contact details of counselling organisations were added to the informed consent form to assist participants in finding help should they require any.

Research on sensitive topics such as death could have far-reaching consequences for all individuals involved in the research process. These include the researcher, research supervisor, and finally the reader.

The **researcher** should consider the potential physical and emotional impact on themselves when faced with the personal experiences of others (McCosker, Barnard and Gerber, 2001). As mentioned, the topic of death has the potential to be an uncomfortable subject not only for the participants but also for the researcher. The researcher's frame of reference and exposure to sensitive topics will determine the extent to which the information received is internalised. It is thus important to schedule interviews accordingly to avoid overwhelming oneself and risk emotional exhaustion (Cowles, 1988).

Research supervision has many dimensions (McCosker, Barnard and Gerber, 2001). **Supervisors** and co-supervisors are often included in the research process due to their academic

expertise in methodology and theory rather than their knowledge of the topic under investigation. This poses a potential risk when dealing with sensitive research content, as all parties involved in the research process add their own individual positive and negative life experiences with potential significant responses to the data (McCosker, Barnard and Gerber, 2001). Just as the researcher may require support during a research project of a sensitive nature, so may the research supervisor. It is therefore important that counselling services are available for both the researcher and his/her supervisor(s) to assist them with any possible emotional and psychological distress. The University of the Free State has such services available free of charge to both students and staff members.

Dissertations and research articles are not only read by students and academics; consequently, the potential positive or negative impact on the **reader** must be assessed in addition to its academic importance.

Challenges experienced during fieldwork

Researchers undertaking qualitative research can often encounter numerous challenges. According to Dickson-Swift *et al.* (2007), these challenges include developing rapport, maintaining boundaries, reflexivity, managing emotions and developing friendships. Although the challenges are unique to qualitative research, they are frequently compounded when dealing with sensitive research topics (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). The following challenges were identified during fieldwork:

Many interviewees declined recording the interview due its sensitive nature. Reasons offered ranged from “I’m afraid I’ll say something wrong” to “I sound stupid on a recording”. This challenge was mitigated by means of meticulous note taking during the various interviews.

Some identified participants did not agree to an interview; this resulted in a possible challenge to source an adequate amount of research participants. The challenge was mitigated by extending the fieldwork timeframe for extra time to source new participants.

During the course of this research project, I suffered a personal loss with the death of my mother; as a result, I cannot be subjectively detached from the process. I mitigated the subsequent emotional challenges by honest discussions with my supervisory team and taking a short break from my studies. The loss I experienced, in retrospect, added to my understanding of the study of death and its related rituals. I was afforded the opportunity to witness the internal operations of the crematorium, and in doing so, I broadened my understanding of the motivation or aversion of family members to choose or avoid this specific method of death disposal. My personal loss brought together theory and practice in the sociology of death.

Data analysis procedure

According to Mouton and Marais (1991), data analysis is the process whereby a phenomenon is broken down into its fundamental parts to facilitate a better understanding. The recorded data were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to protect his or her identity. The data were then examined by means of a thematic analysis, as this method of analysis allows the researcher to identify emergent themes and patterns within the dataset and field notes (Braun and Clark, 2006). The Qualitative Data Analysis software QDA Miner was used to analyse data and to identify emergent themes. The QDA Miner software is a user-friendly research and qualitative data analysis tool for the manual coding of text. The software allows for transcribed interviews to be imported in MS Word format. Each uploaded document can be associated with numerical, categorical and date variables. The user defines codes and categories of their choice, and text segments are then added to a specific category in order to identify themes of importance. The themes identified were “selective importance”, “persuasions of immortality”, “religious, cultural and societal pressure”, “absence of place attachment” and “attitudes towards death”. After identifying themes, the narratives were sorted into a structured explanation and analysis. This is an important process, as making sense of the narratives provides it with meaning.

Trustworthiness and credibility

Rosenthal and Rosnow (2008) state that the construct of validity is usually associated with quantitative research and measures the extent to which explanations derived from the research data accurately captured the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher aims to ensure

validity, credibility, reliability and trustworthiness of the study by employing the methods of member checking and triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative research has the potential for researcher bias, as the researcher is often the data collector and analyst. This creates the possibility that the researcher could impose his/her own personal beliefs on all stages of the research process (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Mason, 2002). This potential for bias can however be reduced by applying the method of member checking, also known as participant validation (Birt *et al.*, 2016). The method of member checking entails that the transcribed interview or analysed data are returned to the participant to confirm its accuracy and consequently its validity and reliability. Only one participant agreed to a follow up interview, during which the verbatim transcription of the first interview was discussed. I furthermore attempted to eliminate any bias by continuously reflecting on the research process and by discussing findings with supervisors and fellow students.

The validity of research findings can further be improved by the use of triangulation. Schwandt (2007) defines triangulation as "a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, and/or multiple methods." The three-step triangulation approach suggested by Wargo (2014) was used in this research study.

- Step 1: Interviews were conducted and recorded when consented to by participants.
- Step 2: The recordings were transcribed and returned to the participants for participant validation.
- Step 3: The researcher collaborated with supervisors during data analysis in order to identify emergent themes.

The fact that such a wide variety of perspectives were obtained is an additional form of triangulation. Analytical memo writing as well as rigorous data analysis ensured a trail of the manner in which conclusions were drawn.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State. Ethical clearance number UFS-HSD2018/0523 was awarded (Annexure C).

Ethics is a set of principles and standards that guide social research. This study included human participants; therefore the following ethical principles of right to self-determination, right to confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to.

Burns and Grove (2001) state that the **right to self-determination** is based on the ethical principle of respect. This implies that participants had to be provided with adequate information with regard to the research, the participants had to be able to fully understand the information provided, and the participants must have had free choice to be able to voluntarily provide consent or to decline participation in the research.

The objectives of the study were extensively explained to the participants, after which written informed consent (Annexure A) was obtained. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequences. Participants were given the opportunity to ask question pertaining to the research to clarify any uncertainties.

It is the duty of the researcher to ensure that all private information obtained from participants are managed in such a way that their identities remain **confidential** (Burns and Grove, 2001). I therefore guarded against unauthorised access to the data. Data were only made available to myself, my research supervisor and co-supervisor.

Anonymity is achieved when a researcher does not link a participant with specific data in the research (Burns and Grove, 2001). I implemented strict security measures to protect data and to ensure that participants would not be identified. Interview transcriptions and signed informed consent forms are kept in a locked safe to which only I have access. Pseudonyms were assigned

immediately after the interviews had concluded, and the audio recordings are stored on a password-protected computer.

Fieldwork for this research project was undertaken before the onset of COVID-19, and this can therefore not be factored into the discussions.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined how the research was conducted, clarified the process and guidelines of participant selection, the method used to collect data, as well as the data analysis approach. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study were discussed. The next chapter describes the data analysis process.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

The topic of death constitutes a source of discomfort for many individuals, possibly due to the fact that it is one of the last remaining taboos of our time. That is why it is important to broach this subject to its core to explore the motivation behind individual and communal actions regarding death related practices. We fear the unknown that is death. In this chapter, by linking theory and narratives, I attempt to make sense of the topic of death in a structured and meaningful way.

Participant demographics

The following participants took part in the study:

Table 2: Participant demographics

	Participant	**Description**	**Age Range**
1	Alex	Crematorium employee	30-39
2	Alice	Coloured : General member of public	20-29
3	Caren	Spiritual – Not affiliated with any specific religion	40-49
4	Charl	Mortician	50-59
5	Cheryl	Crematorium Employee	30-39
6	Clara	White: Postgraduate student	40-49
7	Conrad	Mortician	50-65
8	Eve	Elder in DRC	65+
9	Fatimah	Member of the Muslim Faith	20-29
10	Fran	Funeral home employee	50-65
11	Henry	White: General member of public	65+
12	John	Self-declared clairvoyant and medium	30-39
13	Judy	Reformed Church: member of congregation	30-39
14	Karabo	Northern Sotho: Student	20-29
15	Ketha	Sotho Culture: Student	20-29

16	Liza	Pentecostal Protestant Church: church member	20-29
17	Martha	Sotho: General worker	50-65
18	Mata	Zulu Culture: Shop owner	40-49
19	Nick	Mortician	50-65
20	Pearl	Psychologist	40-49
21	Rene	White: Self-proclaimed atheist	30-39
22	Reverend Frank	Clergy in DRC	50-65
23	Sr Mary Clarence	Roman Catholic Church	65+
24	Susan	Professional Nurse	40-49
25	Thinane	Tswana Culture, student	30-39
26	Toula	Greek Orthodox Church	40-49
27	Wilma	Coloured: Accountant	40-49

Qualitative Findings

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe qualitative analysis as the process of making sense of research participants' opinions and views and finding corresponding patterns, themes and regular similarities. The following themes where identified:

Theme 1: Selective importance

Theme 2: Persuasions of immortality

Theme 3: Religious, cultural and societal pressure

Theme 4: Absence of place attachment

Theme 5: Attitudes towards death

Theme 1: Selective importance

The first identified theme is that of selective importance. Selective importance implies that religion, rituals and culture are important until they become inconvenient or are overruled by logistical matters. This implies that funerary rituals and practices have the potential to change. This theme is closely related to the fluidity of death systems, as described by Kastenbaum (2018).

In the Greek church, it is always burial. If you want to be cremated it's a big procedure that you got to get hold of the high priest in Athens (Greece). So, it is quite a big procedure. Cremation is mostly for more practical reasons such as remains needing to go back to Greece or maybe being scattered in a garden. So mostly for logistical reasons. Toula - Greek Orthodox Church.

The quote above is closely related to the "person" dimension of place attachment, as discussed in Chapter Two. The person dimension includes both collective and individual place attachment and refers to personal connections that an individual or community may have to a specific place, in this scenario, Greece. The quote also illustrates the fluidity of the death system. Toula states that, within the Greek Orthodox Church, it is "always burial" but deviation is allowed for logistical reasons. This correlates with the writings of Kastenbaum (2018), stating that death systems are by no means static and that customs, rituals, and beliefs pertaining to disposal practices have the potential to change.

Cremation, in my experience as funeral director, is most prevalent among the white population. We do however get black people that opt for cremation from time to time, but it is mostly for practical reasons. For instance, black residents of Lesotho that die in South Africa are mostly cremated because is it easier and less expensive to transport ashes over the border than an entire corpse. Conrad: Mortician.

Conrad here illustrates the fluidity of the death system. In this specific scenario, logistical matters, rules and processes with regard to transporting human remains over international borders force individuals to temporarily adapt their beliefs and customs, since it has become an inconvenience. This once more indicates that death related and funerary customs, beliefs and rituals can change.

As the eldest son in my family, I had to make the arrangements when my mother passed seven years ago. She did not have a large funeral policy, so I had her cremated because it's cheaper, and I don't earn a big salary to be able to contribute thousands just to

please the family, and I think the ancestors will understand my predicament. The family is still angry with me. Thinane: Tswana culture.

As discussed in Chapter Two, one of the functions of the death systems in any given society is that of "disposing of the dead". The manner in which this disposal is conducted is indicative of the individual or community's fundamental attitude towards death. Death systems sustain changes with every new generation, resulting in a challenge with regard to understanding and accepting each other's point of view when dealing with the disposal of a body (Kastenbaum, 2018). As a member of a younger generation, Thinane (quoted above) decided to deviate from the cultural norm. His choice of disposal method was motivated by financial constraints or possibly by the inconvenience of being the person responsible for the act of disposal.

We had two black cremations in the past two weeks. One was a baby, a stillborn, the other was a young man in his early twenties. It was a silent cremation, so there was no funeral service or anything; it was just his mother that arrived with the coffin. She told me that her son had a mental illness and that he spent most of his childhood and adult life in psychiatric institutions. She's having him cremated even though it is against her culture because the family sees him as an embarrassment, so she just wants to get it over with. Alex: Crematorium.

The mother referred to above experienced cultural pressure to deviate from the traditional form of disposal practised by her cultural group. It was her view that from their cultural point of view, the deceased was not deserving of the customary rituals due to his mental health difficulties. His condition, and by default his death, were perceived as an inconvenience for the immediate and extended family. The deviation from the norm is thus justified.

The quotes below illustrate selective importance regarding disposal choices where logistical or other reasons resulted in deviation from the norm.

In our church, burial is the prescribed method. One of our elders was an extremely large man, and when he died, his family had to have his coffin custom built because he

couldn't fit in a normal sized one. The funeral home then told them that they had to pay extra for a bigger grave, and they had to rent extra equipment to help lower the coffin into the grave. They got permission from the church to have him cremated instead. They still had to buy the big coffin, and they paid a little extra for the cremation, but all in all they saved about R11 000. Liza: Pentecostal Protestant Church

The financial implications related to an oversize burial prompted the family to deviate from their religious and cultural funerary practices. The financial position of the family in question is unknown; their decision could thus be based on either financial limitations or thrift.

Most black cremations we receive are stillborn babies. A couple, coming to fetch the ashes, told me that they prefer to cremate their stillborn children because funerals are expensive, and they refuse to spend money on someone (their baby) *that they don't know. Cremation is the cheaper alternative for a child they have not had the opportunity to get acquainted with. Alex.*

The quote above could also be indicative of attitudes towards death. According to the crematorium employee, the family is of the opinion that an "unknown person" - in this instance, their stillborn child - is undeserving of financial contributions to uphold cultural customs. This could however be an isolated incident and may not be indicative of an entire culture or race's attitude towards the death of an "unknown individual". The decision made by the family is however indicative of the fluidity of their particular cultural death system.

People often try to save money when it comes to funerals or cremations. When a family or person is financially challenged, they may apply for a pauper's burial or cremation, which means that they don't have to pay, or they pay a severely reduced price, and most of the time the municipality will cover the costs. Most of our pauper burials take place in the Storm Avenue cemetery in Bainsvlei; that is also where the medical cadavers and coffin remains from the crematorium are buried. We have had many instances where a family would apply for a pauper's burial but a day or so later, they will erect a huge

and expensive tombstone for the person. They use the system to avoid paying for the funeral so that they can use the money for something else. Nick: Mortician.

Escalating funeral costs, as mentioned in Chapter Three and in the paragraphs above, force communities, families and individuals to find innovative and sometimes stealthy methods to bury their loved ones at a reduced cost or at no cost at all. By implementing these methods, the finances available to them can be strategically applied to still conform to society's expectations of them and ultimately "socially equalising" their departed loved one in death.

The quote below from Martha however indicates a different way of thinking about funerals and their related financial implications. Although she experienced financial challenges with regard to the affordability of an appropriate funeral (according to her beliefs), she refused to deviate from the cultural norm of burial, and due to possible societal expectations, an economical funeral was not a consideration.

We don't have a lot of money. My husband works in people's gardens and I clean the houses. We are the only ones in the family that have jobs so we have to look after everyone. When my grandmother died, I wanted to give her a big funeral because she was a good person. I belong to a stokvel (an informal South African savings/investment society), *so I got some money there and the rest I got from a cash loan place downtown* (Bloemfontein, Central Business District). *I gave my nkgono* (Sotho for grandmother) *a nice funeral. Martha: General member of public.*

Cases of unidentified illness or pandemics might have an influence on disposal methods, as mentioned by Cheryl below.

"When I worked at the crematorium, we had a body come in from the government morgue. It was a young woman that died of some or other unknown brain thing. We received instructions to cremate her immediately, and as soon as she enters the cremator, we must evacuate the building because they are not sure if whatever she had was contagious. The family had no say in whether they wanted her buried or cremated.

The emergency cremation was done for public health and safety reasons. Cheryl: Crematorium worker.

The case referred to above appears to be an isolated incident. The disposal method was enforced by local government, as it was a matter of public safety. This enforcement of a certain method of disposal is indicative of the influence of local and national government on funerary practices. The government has the authority to change the existing disposal practices regardless of culture, religion, or personal preference.

The world is currently facing the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in large numbers of infections and consequently significant numbers of deaths. The World Health Organisation (WHO) published interim guidelines on 24 March 2020 to assist countries with the disposal criteria for citizens that perish due to COVID-19 infection. The WHO states that cadavers are only infectious in the case of haemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola, Cholera and Marburg. COVID-19 is an acute respiratory illness transmitted through droplets, close contact, faeces and fomites (objects or materials which are likely to carry infection, e.g. clothing). COVID-19 is however, a new virus and the disease progression has not been entirely determined. The WHO recommends that all corpses be handled with caution. Family members and friends are discouraged from handling the corpse for hygienic purposes. Cremation for individuals that died of a communicable disease is not compulsory, and the dignity, cultural and religious traditions of people must be respected at all times (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Despite the WHO guidelines, Frayer, Estrin and Arraf (2020) report that burial rituals drastically changed across the globe due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Countries affected by COVID-19 have imposed restrictions in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus. These restrictions include social distancing, bans on large social gatherings such as weddings and funerals, and restricting the use of public transport.

In Iraq, Muslim mourners are experiencing a delay in burials. The Islamic faith prescribes same day burial whenever possible, and the families are closely involved in the preparation of the body for burial; due to the pandemic restrictions, these practices are no longer possible.

Paramilitary forces have intervened and now conduct the burials according to Islamic rites in the holy city of Najaf in a cemetery reserved for COVID-19 victims (Frayer, Estrin and Arraf, 2020).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, India introduced new guidelines for the disposal of dead bodies. Funeral attendance has been limited to a maximum of 20 mourners. In the Hindu holy city of Varanasi, open pyre cremations on the banks of the Ganges River have been suspended, and families are unable to transport the bodies or cremains of their loved ones as a result of the nationwide lockdown (Frayer, Estrin and Arraf, 2020). Jaswal (2020) reports that cremated remains are piling up at crematoriums across India. Traditional sky burials are however admissible, as they do not involve the gathering of large groups of people.

According to Pickrell (2020), China placed a ban on all funerals, burials and activities involving the corpses of COVID-19 victims. China's National Health Commission (NHC) issued regulations stating, "all victims who succumb to the virus must be cremated at the nearest facility. No farewell ceremonies or other funeral activities involving the corpse shall be held". Families in the virus epicentre, Wuhan, have however not been able to collect the cremated ashes of their loved ones due to lockdown restrictions. While families are allowed to reserve specific timeslots during which they can collect the cremains, they must be accompanied by a government official.

The Philippine government decreed that the mortal remains of COVID-19 victims must be cremated within 12 hours, except in cases where cremation is forbidden by religion. If the deceased person is a member of the Muslim faith, the body should be sealed in a body bag and buried within 12 hours in the nearest Muslim cemetery, with full funeral rites. The imposed funerary restrictions have a tremendous impact on the predominantly Catholic population of the Philippines, as a traditional wake can last three to seven days (Frayer, Estrin and Arraf, 2020).

In the United States of America, former President Trump initially implemented a lockdown with "stay at home guidelines" in an attempt to curb the spread of the Coronavirus. However,

the larger cities, and specifically the most densely populated city of New York, are experiencing challenges with regard to body disposal. The majority of New York residents prefer cremation, and crematoriums have extended business hours. In an attempt to rid the backlog of bodies resulting from COVID-19 deaths, the state of New York has relaxed air-quality regulations, allowing cremators to burn for extended hours (Brown and Allen, 2020). In April 2020, New York was the epicentre of the pandemic in the United States, with 513 deaths per 1 million of the population and 9973 COVID-19 infections per 1 million (data from 14 April 2020). The United States in total has a mortality rate of 3.9% due to the virus (Worldometers, 2020). The office of the Chief Medical Examiner of New York has arranged for refrigerated trucks and temporary tented morgues to house bodies. New York now has the capacity to store 3500 corpses. As a result of the body backlog, Hart Island (home of the city's pauper cemetery) has been identified as a site for temporary interments (Brown and Allen, 2020). With church and funeral services cancelled, families are gathering through the use of technology by using video applications such as Zoom and Skype to complete certain funerary rituals. Rabbi Arthur Schneier of Manhattan stated, "it is important to honour the dead, but another conflicting principle is the sanctity of life" (Brown and Allen, 2020).

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy enacted an emergency national law that banned all religious and civil ceremonies, including funerals, in an attempt to stop the spread of the disease in the European epicentre (Larnaud, 2020). This is an unprecedented step in an overwhelmingly Catholic country. Open casket viewings and the placement of personal effects in coffins as well as any contact with the deceased are banned under the new emergency national law. Due to the fact that the virus can survive for several hours on the clothing of the deceased, corpses are sealed immediately after death, which deprives families of the opportunity to "say goodbye," and since many family members are in quarantine themselves, the person dies alone and is buried or cremated without any witnesses (Bettiza, 2020). Bettiza (2020) accounts that caskets are piling up in hospitals and that churches and the military have been deployed to assist in the transportation of bodies, as cemeteries in certain villages have reached their maximum capacity. Castelfranco (2020) reports that more families in the northern regions of Italy are choosing to cremate the deceased in fear of contracting the virus from the dead.

The paragraphs above are examples of how the fear of death can influence a society and ultimately their disposal choices. Gire (2014) states that "people who are afraid of dying tend to do whatever it takes to ensure that they stay alive". Moore and Williamson (2003) argue

that, from a sociological perspective, the fear of death is not innate, but a learned reaction. According to Vernon (1970), the fear of death is a result of an individual's experiences, and Charmaz (1980) echoes these sentiments by stating that cultural and social conditions may generate a fear of death. This fear also extends to the way in which the dead are disposed of.

> *The families of oversize people usually ask for cremation, even if it was against the person's* (the deceased*) wishes. It is cheaper than burial, but it is mostly chosen to spare the deceased embarrassment. Imagine all your family, friends and colleagues gathered around the grave and here you are being lowered into the hole with an industrial crane. It's embarrassing for both the deceased and the family. Nick: Mortician.*

The physical attributes of the deceased and the consequent financial implications associated with these is, in the above-mentioned quote, the deciding factor in choosing a disposal method. Funerals and memorial services are for the living; they provide an opportunity for the surviving loved ones to bid farewell. It is however also a public affair, and from the quote above, it would appear that family members would go to great lengths to keep up appearances and hold on to any possible social status they might have within their community or extended family.

> *Usually, when a body is severely decomposed by the time it is discovered, we urge the family to go the cremation route. Black, white or coloured, it doesn't matter. You can't put a person like that in a coffin and then drive to the church and then to the cemetery, have the coffin sit there until the service is done and only then bury it. You know, many cultures insist on taking the body home for the Friday night before the funeral; there are no cooling facilities, the coffin just sits there in the house or shack for more than 12 hours. Once the decomposition process has started, you can't stop it; we try to delay it, but the body and eventually the coffin will start leaking fluids, even though we take preventative measures, and that is something no one wants to experience. That is not the way to remember a loved one. Charl: Mortician.*

Due to the physical "damage" of certain corpses, funeral directors urge loved ones to abandon the traditional disposal method of burial as well as the related funerary rituals such as the going

home ceremony (as discussed in Chapter Three). This is done by the funeral undertakers in an attempt to lessen the possible trauma a family might experience. The suggestion by the undertakers to deviate from the norm is not financially driven; it is motivated by appropriateness.

As described in Chapter Two, the death system is not static; it has the ability to change. The opinions above could be indicative of the changing death systems in society and the influence of communities, families and the government on the progression of change. The discussion above furthermore contains the components of the death system of people, places, time, objects, symbols and images. The functions of the death systems apparent from the discussion is warning and predicting death, preventing death, disposing of the dead and in some cases social consolidation after death.

Theme 2: Persuasions of immortality

The second identified theme is "persuasions of immortality". This theme directly links the narratives to the theories of immortality, memorialisation and relationship with the dead, as discussed in Chapter Two.

> *When you die, it's always nice to leave a legacy or whatever, but people remember you in their hearts and in their heads; you don't necessarily want to go to a big tombstone and put flowers every week. Toula: Greek Orthodox Church.*

The above narrative directly relates to the writings of Klass (2014) regarding continuing bonds. Toula refers to leaving a legacy that is not connected to a physical object such as a tombstone. Klass (2014) however noted that physical objects can "link and evoke the presence of the dead". Remembering someone who has passed in your "heart and head," as quoted above, can however never be void of physical objects that invoke memories of the departed. Memories or more specifically, "remembering," can, according to Klass (2014), be elicited by a favourite place or even a photograph of the deceased.

There is no point in burying the dead. Someone, somewhere in the future will just dig it up to make room for people to live. Look what happened in Cape Town in the early 90s. They dug up a bunch of graves in the Woltemade Cemetery to make room for the road to be expanded. That cemetery is so old I do not think the people buried there have any living relatives left, so the municipalities and contractors can basically do what they want with the graves. Leave a legacy that is not connected to a tombstone. Rene: Self-proclaimed Atheist.

Atheists generally do not believe in any form of an afterlife; there is no heaven or hell. After death, the person just ceases to exist. Their afterlife lies in the memories of those who knew and loved them and the contributions they made to the "world". Atheists are thus, in theory, Mortalists living in the "now," reconciled with the inevitable reality of death. That being said, the reference to leaving a "legacy" by Rene above directly links to the writings of Lifton (1996) and Brown (2017), and the four major pathways to immortality. The method of disposal may not matter, but it would appear as if every individual, regardless of his or her religious or non-religious standing, has the desire to be remembered, or alternatively stated, gain immortality.

Our son was murdered here in Bloemfontein in 1998. In his last Will and Testament he asked to be cremated and that the ashes be scattered in Maitland Street (now Charlotte Maxeke Street, Bloemfontein, CBD*). Luckily, the document was not legal because it was not signed by a witness, so we decided to have him buried; the church also encouraged us to do so. We thought it would be a good idea because then we would have a place to visit him. His tombstone will be there forever even after we have gone. We put a photo of him on the stone so people can see his face. It is now 20 years later and we regret our decision. We can't visit him anymore. The grass is too long to get to the grave, and it is too dangerous for us to go to South Park* (cemetery) *alone at our age. They* (the criminals) *even removed the photo to steal the bronze frame it was in. Eve: DRC*

There could be a difference between the way loved ones want to remember the deceased and the way the deceased wants to be remembered. Last wills and testaments stipulate the final

wishes of the deceased; surviving loved ones are however under no obligation to honour these wishes. In the quote of Eve above, it is clear that their needs as parents to remember and visit the deceased in a certain manner took precedence over the final wishes of the deceased. Again, in this narrative, continuing bonds of physical objects, religious elements and memories become apparent. The departed are to a certain extent vulnerable to the ethical or in some instances unethical decisions and behaviour of the surviving family members or members of the community, regardless of their final wishes.

According to the lawyer, Conradie (personal communication, 9 April 2020), a person's wishes with respect to the disposal of his/her body are legally binding in South Africa if it is stipulated in a valid final will and testament. It is the duty of the court to determine the validity of the deceased's last will and testament if any dispute should occur. The disposal wishes of the deceased must however be practicable and in line with national law and provincial by-laws. The executor of the estate must ensure that the decedent's wishes are executed correctly. An example of a dispute regarding the disposal of a loved one is the case of Bukula and Another v Nkosi, (2014). The deceased was buried by his wife, whom he married under Civil Law. The second wife, married under African Customary Law, applied to the court to have the deceased exhumed in order to rebury him in a location of her choice. The deceased left no specific disposal instructions. The court concluded: "The applicant alleges that she has a *prima facie* right to bury the deceased because he was her husband. A party who is married by civil law is not competent to conclude a marriage with another person. The deceased could therefore not enter into a valid customary marriage with Me Bukula because when the alleged customary marriage was concluded, the deceased was still married to Me Nkosi by civil law. That marriage was only dissolved by the deceased's death on 11 May 2014. She has therefore failed to show that she has a *prima facie* right to bury the deceased."

Theme 3: Religious, cultural and societal pressure

> *Funerals are for the living. It is important for family and friends to have that last farewell. In fact we* (the church) *encourage people to have a funeral or memorial services rather than silent cremations, regardless of the deceased's final wishes. Rev Frank: Dutch Reformed Church*

In the quote above, Frank encourages ritualistic behaviour, as described by Bowker (1997) in Chapter Two. He furthermore encourages members of the congregation to disregard the wishes of the deceased, ultimately influencing their disposal choices to suit the will of the church. This can have a possible ripple effect on individuals receiving end-of-life pastoral counselling. This is indicative of the influence of religion on disposal practices and choices.

> *There is a lot of influences coming from everywhere. People have businesses, you get funeral parlours and florists that want to give you R2000 worth of Barberton Daisies. Then you get people that want to shine brighter than the other person by spending that R2000 on flowers and having a lavish funeral. It's stupid because you must remember that you are paying respect to the one that you've lost. It takes the focus away from the actual purpose of the funeral. Toula.*

> *When I started in this occupation just a little more than 35 years ago, I was a different person. It was just a job; you learn not to become emotional or attached to the grief of others. I would give them my best funeral pitch because that is the most expensive option and sell them very expensive coffins because, you know, I got commission. About 21 years ago, my son passed away, and my whole world changed. I realised that you can't make informed decisions about things in a time of such tremendous grief, especially when the person who died never left any instructions for burial or cremation. It was wrong of me to use their* (the customers') *grief to supplement my salary. Nick: Mortician.*

The commodification of death is influencing behaviour as well as yielding to the cultural pressure of having a lavish funeral to show how much the deceased was loved. According to Case *et al*. (2013), funerals are of great importance in South Africa. The purpose of funerals in African cultures is not only to honour the dead, but also to mark the decedent's and his/her family's status within the community. Funerals furthermore serve to strengthen bonds with community members and extended family. For these reasons, funerals are often elaborate and expensive. Case *et al*. (2013) also found that the position a person held within the household

will determine the funeral expenditure. For example, the head of the household will have a more expensive funeral than an extended member of the family or non-family members.

Toula implies that, by succumbing to the practice of conspicuous consumption, the meaning behind funerary rituals are lost. The surviving family is however not solely to blame; funeral homes and affiliates exert a tremendous amount of pressure from a business standpoint under the pretence of "expert guidance in a time of grief". With slogans such as "we will help you honour and cherish the life of a loved one" and "give your loved ones the dignified send-off they deserve", grieving consumers are almost shamed into spending more than they can often afford. Death is, after all, an extremely lucrative business. Funeral costs in the United Kingdom have increased 3.7% for the year 2020, with consumers now paying more than £4900 for a basic burial. In South Africa, the Independent Crematoriums South Africa (ICSA) increased basic cremation costs in 2020 with up to 30%, depending on the services rendered. The quote above from Nick, a mortician, serves as further confirmation that individuals employed in the business of death are not always as principled as we believe them to be.

> *I think if you had a good relationship* (with the deceased) *you are more likely to spend more on things like a coffin and tombstone and stuff. From an Islamic perspective, it doesn't really matter; we are all buried the same way with the same respect. We are all equal in death. Fatimah.*

Islam prohibits lavish funerals due to their belief that everyone is equal in death. The Quran, Surah 49, Verse 13, reads, "O mankind we have created you from one male and female and made you into nations and the tribes that you may know one another. Surely the most honourable among you with Allah is the one who is the most righteous. Verily Allah is all-knowing all aware" (Quran, 49:13). Mirza (2020) interprets this verse as "The whole universe is dominion of almighty Allah and all the people are his creatures. Everyone is born equal and will die equal." Every person will thus be judged on the basis of deeds and merit.

The quote by Fatimah above indicate that those unfamiliar with funerary practices outside their frame of reference will fall victim to the fabricated status or wealth provided by conspicuous

consumption. The teachings of Islam regarding funerary practices serve as proof that religious education could shape and change behaviour with regard to disposal practices.

> *It is human nature, I think, to connect physical things. I mean, when I visit a loved one in the cemetery and I look at these big grand tombstones that look like monuments and you see the mountains of flowers on it, you can't help but think that this person was loved very much by his family, or you think that he must have been an important person when he was alive. Most people that see this monument and flowers did not know the person that died so they will assume the same. I think that immediately gives a person a higher prestige than he really had. Maybe that is what families have in mind when they buy the stones and things, I don't know. Ketha: Sotho Culture and Zion Christian Church.*

From the quote above it would appear that surviving relatives, friends or community members use death as an economic and social equaliser or to award a person a higher status in death than he/she held in life. Families are often subject to pressure from their cultural groups to have large and expensive funerals.

> *Mixing religion and culture is a sign of fear or not strong enough faith. When you belong to the Roman Catholic Church or any other Christian church, God should be enough. There is no need to slaughter things or to pay tribute to ancestors or to have a large tombstone. Look at how we* (the nuns) *are buried, it's only our names and sometimes death dates on a stone the size of a brick, that's it. You should live your life the right way, you will not impress God with lavish funerals. You will only maybe impress your fellow man, but that is not important. You do not need to dilute the faith with culture. Sister Mary Clarence: Roman Catholic Church.*

In the quote above, Sister Mary Clarence draws on religion to dispel the practice of conspicuous consumption in funerary practices or any other "wayward" practices that do not align with the Christian faith. By not "diluting the faith", her immortality is vested in her higher power (God)

and leading a life of humility even in death. The influence of religion on death practices and disposal choices is once again apparent.

> *A friend's mother passed away, and my partner and I attended the funeral. He had this huge pull-up banner made with his mother's photo on it. It must have been very expensive. I thought it was a nice gesture and that it shows how much he loved his mother; my partner on the other hand thought it was too showy and that they* (the family*) are trying too hard to illustrate their love for the deceased and maybe show off their money. My partner said that it is disrespectful to commodify a loved one's death to make yourself look good. I guess it's true if you really think about it. Alex.*

It is impossible to be aware of the motivation behind the grieving son's consumption choices through observation. The actions and practices of others are open to the personal interpretation of the observers. While several individuals may perceive his actions as honourable and driven by his relationship with his late mother, others may perceive his actions as excessive. The personal opinions of the observers will depend on their frame of reference.

> *I think in general the coloured community is very much set in their Christian values. We bury because that is what the church prescribes. I think the younger generations will maybe go for cremation as a cheaper option, but I think the change will have to come from the church. Liza: Coloured culture - Pentecostal Protestant Church*

Liza's quote above refers to change being instigated by the church. This correlates with an initiative of the City of Cape Town during the 1970s (as discussed in Chapter Three). By staging interventions with church leaders in both coloured and white communities, there was a strong increase in cremation figures.

> *People seek to be remembered in strange ways. I design the tombstones for our company and I have had some strange requests. Many people believe that by erecting large and impressive stones, everyone will remember them. Yes, when the stone goes up and is unveiled there is a buzz about it in the community or in the media for a few*

days, but that too eventually dies down. Look at that TV guy Joe Mafela, his tombstone cost just a little under R300 000, it has a plasma TV, a couch and a coffee table, all made out of the most expensive granite. His grave has more furniture than I had in my first flat. It was just one last attempt by his family to show that he is, in their opinion, superior to others. Today the hype has died down and it is just another grave. Nick

From the quote above, it is clear that the immortality gained, and in certain cases the superficial higher status of the family gained by expensive funerals (conspicuous consumption), is ephemeral. As mentioned by Kastenbaum (2016), immortality is susceptible to circumstances and time. How communities and individuals react to and remember symbols of immortality cannot be predicted. Communities contribute to an individual's immortality by their selective remembering.

Theme 4: Place attachment

The theme of place attachment suggests that individuals form close personal and emotional attachments to certain places. The expectation would be that burying a loved one in a certain place, such as a cemetery, would automatically provide an attachment to that place. However, certain religions and cultures dictate that the dead must be buried, but the municipality of the district determines the specific location of the burial site (cemeteries). The probability then exists that place attachment would be absent. The theme of place attachment can be combined with social responsibility. Who takes responsibility for the areas in which the dead are interred? The municipality is tasked with cemetery maintenance, but it is also the responsibility of the individuals and companies making use of these spaces to assist with maintenance. Cemeteries are, after all, communal spaces.

The quotes below describe not only the condition of cemeteries but also how it is perceived by cemetery users and the general public. Some individuals and communities take responsibility and clean the areas themselves, regardless of financial and other challenges, while others take extreme measures such as requesting exhumations in an attempt to give their loved ones a decent final resting place.

In my experience, most people choose cremation because it is easier and because they don't want to go to cemeteries anymore. It has become ugly, dusty spaces filled with criminals and litter (in the Bloemfontein area). *It has become so bad that people are considering exhuming their loved ones. I had an exhumation earlier this week* (August 2019) *in South Park Cemetery. The husband died in 1999 and his wife is now quite elderly as well. His remains will be cremated tomorrow and then be given to his widow. She applied for the exhumation because she can't visit her husband in the unsafe environment* (cemetery), *and she said that she does not want to be buried in a place looking like that. Conrad.*

As a result of the general neglect of municipal cemeteries, individuals cease to have or retain place attachment. Through the force of circumstances, surviving family members find alternative ways to keep their deceased loved ones safe.

Chapter Nine of the South African National Health Act of 2003 stipulates the procedures and conditions for exhumations. All exhumations and reburials must be authorised and permitted by the relevant local government authority. A magistrate must, in all circumstances, issue a court order permitting the exhumation and reburial. An exhumation order will only be approved with a reburial or cremation certificate. The following conditions apply for exhumation:

"No person shall exhume any human remains, unless for the: (a) removal from the original grave to a new grave acquired in the same cemetery, (b) removal for burial in another cemetery, (c) removal for cremation, (d) removal for forensic examination of the deceased, (e) transfer from a public grave to a private grave, (f) for legal reasons, such as crime related investigations, or (g) for archaeological reasons. (4)The local government shall grant a permit for an exhumation on condition that the exhumation of the human remains shall only be done by a registered undertaker, such undertaker shall be based in the jurisdiction of the local government issuing the exhumation permit referred to in this regulation" (National Health Act, 2003).

We have to get buried. It doesn't really matter how the cemetery looks. The ancestors, elders and church expect it of us. We sometimes go to the grave and clean it a bit, you know, washing the stone and taking out the grass but we can't go every week or every month even, the transport is very expensive. We have to go as a group because it is

dangerous to go alone, especially for women. It is actually the municipality's job; they get paid to clean the cemetery but they never do. That place (South Park Cemetery) *is so big and in such a mess, it will take them* (the municipality) *a year to get it clean. Mata: Zulu culture.*

Even if place attachment is entirely absent, cultural pressure to conform to the traditional methods of disposal forces younger generations to adapt.

My dad passed away when I was still in high school. We had him buried because that is what our church prescribed. It has been almost 20 years, and we haven't been back to his grave. It's only his earthly vessel that is buried there; the person that he was, his soul, is already in heaven. There is no use visiting a grave. If you want to speak to deceased loved ones, you can do it the same way you pray. They will receive the message. Judy: Reformed Church

The quote above indicates that, for Judy and her family, disposal was of a practical nature. There is no sense of place or linking of objects. They have no need for physical objects such as a tombstone to feel close to or to remember the deceased.

One of the big funeral homes in Bloemfontein had a funeral in the Memoriam Cemetery in August. They provided water in little blue plastic bottles to the people attending the funeral. When the funeral was over, they started packing everything up, but they left all the empty water bottles there on the ground. They were right next to the dustbins. It was a typical windy August day and from experience, we know that even the tiniest piece of trash will blow deeper into the cemetery or accumulate against the fences. It looks bad when people come to visit or drive by. My colleague walked over to them and asked if they were going to pick it (the empty water bottles) *up. They replied that it was the municipality's job, and they left. Alex*

The quote above is an example of shifting responsibility in order to avoid taking social responsibility. The industry of death earns their income from burials and cremations; the

upkeep of local cemeteries is therefore a shared responsibility. This is not an issue of place attachment, but of sustainable and ethical business practices and taking pride in one's work.

> *We had an exhumation request this week. The person was buried in South Park Cemetery eight months ago in the newer section by another funeral undertaker in Bloemfontein. The family was upset because the area where the person was buried was not being maintained by the undertakers or the municipality, so they wanted the deceased moved to our block. We have garden services that tend our block to keep it neat. The exhumation was very bad. You know, eight months is not a long time; we usually don't exhume within three years after burial because decomposition of the body takes a while depending on the soil and many other things. The family had a definite shade of green on their faces when we lifted that coffin out of the ground, but they stayed. They moved back about 100 metres to try and get away from the smell but they stayed. That is how important it was to them to have the person they love moved to a better area in the exact same cemetery. Conrad: Follow up interview.*

Sense of place takes the foreground in the narrative above. It was not only important to the family that their loved one rests in a well-kept part of the cemetery, but it was also important for them to be able to have place rootedness in the area where he/she is buried.

> *My mother requested to be cremated, and when she passed away I was glad that she opted for the cremation route. I don't know if I would have been able to bury my mother in South Park Cemetery, or any other cemetery in Bloemfontein, for that matter. It's dirty and right next to the rubbish dump, so all the plastic bags and trash blow into the cemetery and get stuck there. If burial was her last wish, I honestly don't know if I would've been able to honour that wish. I know it sounds disrespectful, but I love my mom too much to subject her to such a place. Her ashes are now safe in my house. Later when I am ready, I will scatter her ashes some place nice that she would've liked. Caren: Spiritual.*

The atrocious condition of local cemeteries in Bloemfontein resulted in a lack of place rootedness or place attachment. Caren (quoted above) would consider disregarding her mother's final wishes rather than agreeing to bury her in a Bloemfontein cemetery.

> *My parents are buried in Fauresmith. I try to visit them at least two times a year; luckily, my sister still lives in town, so she visits them every second Sunday and cleans their grave and also the surrounding ones. You know just pulling weeds and sweeping and so on. It is our duty to look after those that are no longer with us, even if they are not related to us. You know every single grave in there is someone's someone and maybe the family can't visit regularly or maybe they don't have any family left anymore, so we try to keep it nice for when people do come so they can see we (the community) care. Wilma: Coloured culture.*

The community takes pride in their area of residence; they care not only for the living but also for the deceased. The actions of this specific community echo the sentiment of Martineau (1838), "how a community views life will be visible through how they represent death". The deep sense of place attachment of the community to their local area is apparent. It can therefore be stated that a sense of place attachment will most definitely lead to environmentally responsible behaviour.

> *I would like to do the tree thing. I saw this video on Facebook where they put you in a thing that looks like an egg and then you become a tree. Imagine if my whole family does that we can become like a little forest maybe in a place like the Kruger National Park or someplace where the animals and birds can live in and around us. That would be nice, but I don't know if something like that would ever reach South Africa. Clara*

The quote above contains elements of place attachment, the need to be with family in familiar surroundings. Individuals are aware of alternative methods of disposal; South Africa however has limited choices available for consumers. The environmental impact as well as the affordability and practicality of alternative disposal methods need be taken into consideration. From an environmental point of view, burial consumes too much land space, and cremation

releases high levels of CO2 into the atmosphere. According to Kalia (2019), the most environmentally friendly method of disposal is that of "resomation" also known as alkaline hydrolysis. This is the process of "dissolving" a body into recyclable materials. Due to the variety of cultural and religious beliefs regarding disposal and the afterlife, this is not a viable option in our current context. Green burials or woodland burials, although more environmentally friendly regarding coffin construction, still pose a challenge with regard to space.

Theme 5: Attitudes towards death

Attitudes towards death comprise of two prevalent factors, the "fear of death" and the "avoidance of death". The fear of death relates to negative feelings and thoughts regarding death and the dying process. Death is feared for a variety of reasons, such as self-deficiency, pain and suffering, lost opportunities and the unknown properties of death and dying. Avoidance of death refers to the avoidance techniques individuals employ to refrain from thinking and talking about death (Nozari and Dousti, 2013).

A third factor concerning attitudes towards death is that of respect. The Latin saying "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est*" (Of the dead nothing but good is to be said) is appropriate. McGuinness and Brazier (2008) state the following:

"those who argue that the dead have no interests fail to reflect on the nature of death. Death is not akin to a switch that once 'off' means that the dead person ceases to matter at all. Death is described by some as, and can traditionally be seen to be, a socially constructed event. Death rituals have formed an important part of the grieving process. Throughout history there has been an expectation that in death the body will be respected as a symbol of the living person".

In contrast to the statement above, Grayling (2013) suggests that "respect for the dead is a hangover from a past in which it was believed that the dead might retain some active influence on the living and that one might re-encounter them either in this life or a putative next life".

Religion and culture have a profound influence on attitudes towards death and on how the dead are treated. The fear of death, death denial, and frame of reference will determine actions when dealing with the deceased.

> *My father committed suicide about 14 years ago. He never made any special requests for burial or cremation. To be honest, we never spoke about it at all. We had him buried somewhere in South Park Cemetery. I can't remember where exactly; I have not been back to the grave since the day of the funeral. I do however see him on a regular basis, but that is a totally different discussion. John: Self-declared clairvoyant and spiritual medium.*

The refusal to visit the grave of his late father is possibly indicative of death denying behaviour. The hypothetical clairvoyance and ability to see and speak to the departed, serves as further proof of his denial, or it is simply a method implemented to process the loss of an important figure in his (John's) life.

According to Walter (2009), there exists a variety of ways in which individuals relate to the dead, which might entail the experience of communicating with the dead. Communication is a social activity; communication with the dead can consequently be socially framed. It is not uncommon in societies to have relationships of mutual care between the living and the dead. In Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, the dead require assistance from the living to complete their journey to heaven. This assistance is provided in the form of prayer. In East Asia and many countries in Africa, including South Africa, the dead require assistance to acquire their status as ancestors. This is done by means of specific funerary rituals and shrines. In return, the ancestors can be consulted for guidance. Ancestor veneration reflects a continuing bond beyond the grave. In Africa, the relationship with ancestors appears to be more one of fear than care. According to Ellwood and Alles (2007), obedient followers who preserve the traditional sacred values of the ancestors will be blessed; they (the ancestors) will however become vengeful against those deemed unworthy. Asante and Mazama (2009) elaborate by stating that the ancestors must be feared, and failure to appease them will incur their wrath, resulting in drastic life changes. "Ancestors possess powers which can cause or prevent misfortune" (Uchendu, 1976). These alleged powers instill fear in followers.

Many societies and individuals believe that the boundary between the living and the dead is relatively permeable, and conversing with the dead is an accepted practice. Depending on an individual's belief, whether it is a specific religion or culture, the deceased is expected to vacate the material space of the living to "cross over" into the afterlife. The living may however decide to cling to the dead. Spiritual mediums and clairvoyants claim to bridge the above-mentioned permeable boundary in order to make contact with the dead.

> *I think we as a modern society in general don't have respect for death, the dead, and the associated rituals anymore. I think maybe you get two types of people, those that have lost someone close to them, like a parent or sibling, will have more respect and empathy, but others will perceive it as an inconvenience. You attend funerals of distant family or colleagues not because you want to pay your respects or because you have empathy, but more as an obligation that needs to be completed. That is why people don't go to cemeteries anymore, because it takes up what they perceive as their valuable time. Pearl: Psychologist.*

> *People have no respect for death anymore. When I started in this business, people would stop and pay their respects when you drive by with the hearse and the funeral procession following you. Now it has become an inconvenience for people when you drive slowly with a few cars following you. The other day, I was on my way to Bainsvlei Cemetery when a guy with a bakkie became so impatient that he literally pushed me* (the hearse) *off the road so that he could pass. That is why our cemeteries look the way they do. There is no respect for death or the dead anymore. Conrad.*

Kastenbaum, discussed in Chapter Two, notes that objects, symbols and images are components of the death system. How people react to or use those objects, symbols and images reflects how individuals or societies view death. How individuals conduct themselves in the presence of death is thus indicative of how they perceive death; negative reactions could indicate an attempt to keep a distance between themselves and the reality of death. Having a dismissive attitude towards death and the grief of others, individuals might try to avoid facing their own mortality and the mortality of loved ones. These avoidance techniques could then be

perceived as forms of disrespect or callousness. Alternatively, it could simply be that death and its related rituals have become an inconvenience for those with busy lifestyles or an almost unfathomable occurrence, unless people are directly confronted with it.

The quote below however indicates the contrary.

> *We have a small cemetery on the farm, only six graves. It is very old. I think the people were buried there in my grandfather's time, I'm 70 now, so it must be more than a hundred years ago. There are no headstones or names, so no one really knows who it is. It was most probably farm workers because all our family members are buried in the town cemetery. I put a fence around it* (the farm cemetery*) to keep the cows out, and we clean it up about once every three months. It's in the middle of the veldt so it gets overgrown quite quickly. The weirdest thing is that even though nobody knows the people buried there, the women on the farm place wild flowers on the graves every month. Henry: General member of public.*

As discussed in Chapter Two, celebrating and honouring the dead is a phenomenon that can be found across religions and cultures. The quote above reflects the farm community's attitude towards death. Cemeteries remind us of death and our own mortality. The property owner is showing respect to the unknown decedents by keeping the informal cemetery space neat and tidy. The other residents on the farm (the women in particular referred to above) follow his example by placing wild flowers on the graves. By showing respect to the dead, we unconsciously hope that we will be treated with the same respect when we pass.

> *I think the condition of our cemeteries is a reflection of how we are as people. I mean, who takes responsibility? Are we that nation to take care of things and to look after things, even those that are gone? You make time to go see those who have left us. You make the time to pray for them, so I think it is a personality thing. I think the way we view death, it could sort of go together as well. I mean, death is becoming less sensitised and it is, you know, just one of those things so the cemeteries have also become just one of those things. Fatimah: Muslim.*

South Africa is currently experiencing numerous challenges with municipal service delivery, which includes cemetery maintenance. The lackadaisical attitude of both provincial government and the general public regarding cemeteries is indicative of the general attitude not only towards death, but also public spaces in general.

> *My grandfather was buried on our family farm. He was supposed to be buried next to my grandmother in Zastron* (Free State). *He bought the plot in the town cemetery long ago, but the municipality buried someone else there without telling us. So now grandma rests next to Mr Mofokeng, and my grandpa is buried alone on the farm. He wanted to exhume grandma to bring her to the farm, but he passed away before he got around to it. We thought of moving her* (grandmother) *to the farm, but in the end decided not to. It doesn't really matter, it is just our earthly remains and now that both of them are gone, they won't know the difference. Susan.*

The quote above expresses the participant's attitude towards death: "now that both are gone, they won't know the difference". It was inconvenient for the family to honour the wishes of their late grandfather and religion ("just our earthly remains") is used as justification.

> *We absolutely have to get buried. Even if I decide I want to be cremated, when I die the older people in my family will make sure I get buried. I think the younger generations want to change the tradition. You know, it's very expensive to have such big funerals, but the older people will never ever allow this. Karabo: Northern Sotho culture.*

Younger generations have a different attitude towards death and disposal. Culture, religion, and societal pressure however leave them without the choice to adapt tradition.

> *I don't know what is wrong with people. When someone passes, we* (the funeral home) *go fetch him or her* (the deceased) *and bring them back here. The family then decide on a funeral or cremation. Cremations are often not done on the same day as the memorial*

service because sometimes the crematorium is fully booked. Anyway, the family has to come back to collect the ashes from us. We have a whole storeroom full of little ash coffins that have never been collected. I'm not exaggerating, I can go show you. There are more than 100 ash coffins in there that the families just never made the time to come and collect. Some of them have been here for more than five years. How do you just leave your loved one at a funeral parlour? Fran: Funeral home receptionist.

The neglect of family and/or friends to collect cremated remains of loved ones from funeral homes can be due to numerous reasons. Perrin (2020) reports that ashes are often not collected because grieving family members do not wish to face the finality of the death of their loved ones, and ash collection would be a too traumatic final step. Many individuals do not stipulate final wishes regarding their mortal remains. This leaves family members uncertain, and consequently the ashes remain uncollected. Cremated remains are often left uncollected due to religious restrictions. During 2016, the Vatican prohibited members of the Catholic faith from keeping cremains of loved ones at home. According to the Vatican (Sherwood, 2016), parishioners are furthermore not allowed to scatter cremated remains, divide cremains between family members or manufacture mementoes from cremated human remains. The Pope insists that ashes must be stored in a cemetery. In many cases, families or individuals choose cremations as disposal option due to its reduced cost compared to burial. Forcing families to bury cremated remains will result in additional funeral costs. It would thus be a more economical option to leave ashes in the care of the funeral home.

Conclusion

Having a lavish funeral and erecting a big stone might be the only way a family can ensure the immortality to a loved one. This is why gravestones have names and dates. While societal pressure does play a role, in the end, the way those who remain behind process loss and grief is a determining factor in the choice of disposal. Place attachment appear to play a diverse role in the choice of disposal method. When faced with logistical challenges, many individuals or groups may choose the uncomplicated route of disposal, even if it is against their cultural practices or religion. The attachment displayed by individuals that tend to the graves of loved ones, in my personal opinion, is not to the place (cemetery or gravesite) but to the person buried there. Place attachment is more likely to be present when a person requests the scattering of

cremains at a special location. Death and disposal are multi-faceted, with many influencing factors.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Introduction

This research aimed to explore socially constructed death rituals and their influence on disposal choices. The research was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine how our convictions regarding mortality (or immortality), shape our choices with regard to disposal after death.
2. To explore the extent and ways in which societal pressure by religious or cultural affiliations influence our decisions with regard to disposal options and their related rituals.
3. To define the degree and ways our level of place attachment influences our choices of disposal and our attitudes towards cemeteries.
4. To determine the extent and ways in which service providers in the "business of death" can make a sustainable difference in the condition of our cemeteries.

Factors influencing disposal choices

The main determining factors influencing disposal choices, as identified in Chapter Five, are the fluidity of death rituals and funerary practices, persuasions of immortality and attitudes towards death, religion, cultural and societal pressure.

Death rituals, as discussed in Chapter Two, are social constructs. Ferguson (1995) posits that these social constructions emerge as unplanned consequences of human actions. They are "products of human actions, but not human design" (Ferguson, 1995). Social constructs incorporate beliefs and values that groups or individuals have about the construct; the constructs can however be altered by means of human interaction. Altering attitudes towards death and disposal could possibly result in altered constructs regarding disposal methods. From the data collected, it became apparent that by applying selective importance funerary customs that, in some instances, appear to be culturally or religiously "carved in stone", can be challenged and changed. As mentioned by Kastenbaum (2018), the death systems are by no means static and have the ability to change as society changes. The fluidity of death rituals and

funerary practices allow for the reconstruction of death related behaviour which, in turn, could lead to a sustainable solution to the current burial space challenges faced throughout the world.

Persuasions of immortality and attitudes towards death emerged as salient issues during data analysis. Data analysis has shown that individuals and groups have divergent attitudes towards death. Attitudes towards death can be directly linked to persuasions of immortality. Death and its associated components, as contained in the death systems of Kastenbaum (2018), serve as a reminder of our own mortality. Although "*Memento Mori*" is a reminder we all desperately need, thinking about or being reminded of our own mortality causes discomfort and might provoke negative reactions, such as behaviour that might be deemed disrespectful towards the dead. This behaviour could in turn be interpreted that we, as humans, are desensitised towards death. If individuals and communities were indeed not disconcerted by death, disposal choices should, in theory, be uncomplicated. It is however, regardless of our personal emotions about death, an extremely difficult decision.

Religion, cultural and societal pressure, as proven by the data analysis in Chapter Five, play a significant role in disposal choices. Religious affiliations or the lack thereof, cultural attachments and the society in which we function, have regulations, principles and expectations regarding the disposal of the dead. Surviving loved ones will do what is best for them personally in an attempt mitigate the loss. The influence of religious institutions, cultural groups, and the general society has an extreme impact on individuals in a period of grief, and these individuals are often not capable of making informed decisions. The surviving family members or loved ones revert to culture and religion, thus depriving themselves of making their own decisions, and consequently often neglect honouring the wishes of the deceased.

This research has shown that a certain level of place attachment that leads to environmentally responsible behaviour and a higher sense of social responsibility does indeed exist among a small group of individuals. This is in accordance with research by Orr (1994), Kaltenborn (1998), Vaske and Kobrin (2001), and Walker and Chapman (2003), as described in Chapter Two.

The theory of continuing bonds, as described by Klass (2001) plays a significant role in disposal choices. Participants reported visiting the graves of loved ones, communicating with the deceased, and keeping the ashes of the deceased; this echoes the research results by Foster *et al*. (2011).

We all have unique experiences with life and death, and it is thus impossible to predict individual reactions in the event of death. The socially constructed practices and ideas regarding death and disposal is the only "resource" available to guide us in times of uncertainty, loss and grief.

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Annexure A

Interview Consent Form

Research project title: **Socially constructed death rituals and decision-making regarding disposal after death.**

Researcher: Nada Laurie

Research Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken at the University of the Free State require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and be informed as to the way in which the information contained in their interview, will be used. The purpose of this research project is to explore the motivating factors behind disposal choices associated with death practices with a specific focus on the Free State Province. This research will furthermore determine how the current condition of our cemeteries is affecting place attachment, thoughts on mortality and our relationship with the deceased. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. By signing this form you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded and a transcript (typed document of our interview) will be produced
- the transcript of the interview will be analysed by Nada Laurie as researcher
- access to the interview transcript will be limited to Nada Laurie and her academic supervisors
- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets, will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify you, is not revealed
- the actual recording will be destroyed after completion of the study
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

The interview will take approximately 40 minutes. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time without incurring any form of penalty.

By signing this form I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
4. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

_____

Printed Name

_____ _____

Participant's Signature **Date**

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature **Date**

In order to facilitate the analysis of our conversation, I would also like to obtain consent from you to audio record our interview. This will ensure that I do not miss important information that we exchange during our conversation.

I, _____ (signature), agree to the recording of the interview.

Contact Information
If you have any further questions about this study, please contact:
Nada Laurie at 051-401 2555 or laurien@ufs.ac.za

What if I have concerns about this research?
If you are worried about this research, or if you are concerned about how it is being conducted, you can contact the following persons:
Dr K de Wet (Research Supervisor) at dewetk@ufs.ac.za
Charné Vercueil (University of the Free State Ethics Committee) at 051-4017083 or vercueilcc@ufs.ac.za

What if I need help?
If you feel that you need help in dealing with personal issues of grief, loss or trauma please contact:
The Befrienders Bloemfontein at 051-444 5000 or befrienders@wsinet.co.za (response within 24 hours)
The South African Depression and Anxiety Group at 011-234 4837 (between 08h00 and 20h00 Monday to Sunday) or visit their webpage at www.sadag.org

Annexure B

Interview schedule

Group 1: Religion

Welcome, putting individuals at ease.

Introductions (names) and backgrounds

Explain the interview process

Short description of the purpose of the interview:

- To explore how our convictions regarding mortality (or immortality), shape our choices with regards to disposal after death.
- To determine the extent and ways in which societal pressure by religious or cultural affiliations influence our decisions with regards to disposal options and its related rituals.
- To examine the degree and ways in which our levels of place attachment influence our choices of disposal and also our attitudes towards cemeteries.

Review and confirm consent: you have signed the consent form and as agreed we will record the discussion

Do you have any questions before we start?

Questions

To which religious institution do you belong?

How long have you been part of this institution?

What is your specific role within the institution (clergy, management, etc.)?

Does your religious institution prescribe the use of either cremation or burial?

Depending on answer:

If burial, why?

If cremation, why?

Please describe the rituals prescribed by your institution in the event of death as well as disposal after death.

Any lenience by institution for deviation from prescribed method of disposal?

Is there a specific place (private cemetery, cemetery block, memorial wall, garden of remembrance) where remains must be buried or cremains be interred?

Depending on answer:

If so, what is the significance of said place?

Who is responsible for maintaining said place?

What is the institution's responsibility towards the bigger area in which above mentioned space is situated?

In your opinion, is the condition of our local cemeteries a result of a lack of place attachment and rootedness or is it a mere product of bad administration by local government?

In your opinion, is the condition of our cemeteries a reflection of how we view death in our communities and ultimately our country?

Is death and its related themes openly discussed in your institution?

In what ways, if any, are cultural beliefs incorporated into your religious teachings (e.g. ancestor worship)?

Do you think that teachings on immortality urge individuals to choose certain methods of disposal?

Do you think that personal opinions regarding immortality influence choices regarding disposal after death?

In your opinion, how much influence does the relationship with the deceased have on disposal choices?

Can these choices be influenced by culture and society regardless of the final wishes of the deceased or prescriptions by the religious institution?

Is it possible that methods of disposal and its related actions can become more of a routine that a ritual? (*Routine: we do it because that's how it has always been done, even if the reason behind it has been forgotten or lost*)

Taking the current burial crisis in South Africa into consideration, do you think that there is anything that the religious institutions can do to alleviate the problem?

Interview schedule

Group 2: Industry

Welcome, putting individuals at ease.

Introductions (names) and backgrounds

Explain the interview process

Short description of the purpose of the interview:

- To explore how our convictions regarding mortality (or immortality), shape our choices with regards to disposal after death.
- To determine the extent and ways in which societal pressure by religious or cultural affiliations influence our decisions with regards to disposal options and its related rituals.
- The degree and ways in which our levels of place attachment influence our choices of disposal and also our attitudes towards cemeteries.

Review and confirm consent: you have signed the consent form and as agreed we will record the discussion

Do you have any questions before we start?

Questions

How long have you been working in the death industry?

What is your specific role within the company?

Can you provide a quick overview of your clientele? (race, culture, religion, age)

Does the choice of disposal differ from metropolitan to rural areas? (for all races and cultures)

Depending on answer:

If burial is preferred, why? (in your opinion/experience)

If cremation is preferred, why? (in your opinion/experience)

Is there any noticeable trends in methods of disposal?

In your opinion, who is responsible for the upkeep of cemeteries and do you, as a vendor in the death industry, take any responsibility with regards to these spaces?

Is there a specific place (private cemetery, cemetery block, memorial wall, garden of remembrance) that is used exclusively by your institution?

Depending on answer:

> Who is responsible for maintaining said place?
>
> What is the institution's responsibility towards the bigger area in which above mentioned space is situated?

In your opinion, is the condition of our local cemeteries a result of a lack of place attachment and rootedness or is it a mere product of bad administration by local government?

In your opinion, is the condition of our cemeteries a reflection of how we view death in our communities and ultimately our country?

Do you think that personal opinions regarding immortality influence choices regarding disposal after death? Tell me more about out of the ordinary disposal requests you receive?

In your experience, to what degree, and in what ways, does culture and society (societal pressure, conspicuous consumption) influence disposal choices?

Is it possible that methods of disposal and its related actions can become more of a routine that a ritual? (*Routine: we do it because that's how it has always been done, even if the reason behind it has been forgotten or lost*)

Taking the current burial crisis in South Africa into consideration, do you think that there is anything that vendors in the death industry can do to alleviate the problem?

Interview schedule

Group 3: Culture

Welcome, putting individuals at ease.

Introductions (names) and backgrounds

Explain the interview process

Short description of the purpose of the interview:

- To explore how our convictions regarding mortality (or immortality), shape our choices with regards to disposal after death.
- To determine the extent and ways in which societal pressure by religious or cultural affiliations influence our decisions with regards to disposal options and its related rituals.
- The degree and ways in which our levels of place attachment influence our choices of disposal and also our attitudes towards cemeteries.

Review and confirm consent: you have signed the consent form and as agreed we will record the discussion

Do you have any questions before we start?

Questions

To which cultural group do you belong/ with which cultural group do you identify?

Do you belong to a specific religious institution?

Is there a prescribed method of disposal in your culture?

Depending on answer:

If burial, why?

If cremation, why?

Any lenience for deviation from prescribed method?

Is there a specific place (private cemetery, cemetery block, memorial wall, garden of remembrance) where remains must be buried or cremains be interred?

Depending on answer:

If so, what is the significance of said place?

Who is responsible for maintaining said place?

In your opinion, is the condition of our local cemeteries a result of a lack of place attachment and rootedness or is it a mere product of bad administration by local government?

In your opinion, is the condition of our cemeteries a reflection of how we view death in our communities and ultimately our country?

Is death and its related themes an open subject within your cultural group?

In what ways, if any, are religious beliefs incorporated into cultural beliefs (e.g. ancestor worship)?

Do you think that cultural belief regarding immortality urge individuals to choose certain methods of disposal?

In your opinion, how much influence does the relationship with the deceased have on disposal choices?

Can these choices be influenced by religion and society regardless of the final wishes of the deceased or prescriptions by the cultural group?

Is it possible that methods of disposal and its related actions can become more of a routine that a ritual? (*Routine: we do it because that's how it has always been done, even if the reason behind it has been forgotten or lost*)

Taking the current burial crisis in South Africa into consideration, do you think that there is anything that we as the general public and specifically those with a strong attachment to cultural values can do to alleviate the problem?

Annexure C

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

UFS·UV
THE HUMANITIES
GEESTESWETENSKAPPE

Faculty of the Humanites

30-Jul-2018

Dear **Mrs Laurie**

Ethics Clearance: **Socially constructed death rituals and decision-making regarding disposal after death**

Principal Investigator: **Mrs Nada Laurie**

Department: **Sociology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2018/0523**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted from 30-Jul-2018 to 30-Jul-2019. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Asta Rau
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of the Humanities

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