

## THE RESILIENCE AND SURVIVAL OF AFRICAN NATIVE POETRY ACROSS GENERATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The survival of African native poetry in the face of colonialism, cultural suppression, and the dominance of Western literary traditions demonstrates the resilience of Africa's oral heritage. While indigenous poetic forms were historically dismissed as inferior and excluded from formal literary discourse, they have continued to thrive within African communities. Guided by Oral Tradition Theory, this study explores the factors that have sustained African native poetry across generations despite these historical challenges. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study generated data through focus group interviews and cultural analysis. The findings indicate that African native poetry survives through oral performance, communal participation, and intergenerational transmission, particularly during cultural events such as funerals, weddings, initiation rites, and traditional celebrations. The study further reveals that African native poetry functions as a repository of indigenous knowledge, cultural memory, moral values, and collective identity, enabling communities to preserve and transmit their heritage. It argues that the resilience of African native poetry lies not only in its adaptability but also in its enduring relevance to the social and cultural life of African societies. The study contributes to ongoing debates on the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems by reaffirming the significance of oral traditions in sustaining Africa's literary and cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** African native poetry, Oral Tradition Theory, oral performance, indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, intergenerational transmission.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature plays a significant role in preserving the history, values, and identity of societies. In many African communities, poetry has traditionally functioned as an important form of oral literature used to educate, entertain, and unite people. Indigenous poetry was performed in communal spaces where it marked important life events, praised leaders, conveyed wisdom, and addressed social issues affecting communities. The introduction of colonial education systems and Western literary standards altered the perception of African oral literature. Greater emphasis was placed on written forms of poetry, while indigenous poetic traditions received limited academic recognition. This shift created challenges for the preservation of African native poetry and contributed to the belief that oral forms were less valuable than written literature.

However, African native poetry continues to exist in many communities despite these challenges. Its continued relevance suggests that it serves purposes that extend beyond artistic expression. This study explores the factors that have enabled African native poetry to remain relevant over time and examines its contribution to the preservation of African cultural heritage and identity across generations.

#### Problem Statement

African native poetry cannot be fully captured, documented, or published in the same manner as written Western poetry, regardless of the efforts made to preserve it. This challenge largely stems from the fact that indigenous African poetry does not conform to many of the formal requirements and conventions established by modern Western literary standards. Its uniqueness lies in its oral nature, performance style, cultural context, and communal significance, which cannot easily fit into conventional Western poetic frameworks. As a result, many contemporary African poets often produce modern poetry in African languages while ensuring that their work aligns with recognised Western poetic structures and literary

devices. This trend risks overshadowing authentic indigenous poetic forms. There is, therefore, a pressing need for scholars and cultural practitioners to collect and document African native poems from different clans and communities. Although such compilations may not attract widespread readership, they would serve as valuable instruments for cultural preservation and the safeguarding of African indigenous heritage for future generations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

African native poetry has historically served as an important form of oral literature that preserves cultural values, history, and identity within African communities. According to Finnegan (1970), African oral poetry is deeply rooted in performance, communal participation, and oral transmission rather than written documentation. She argues that indigenous poetry often exists within ceremonies, rituals, and everyday social interactions, making it an essential component of African cultural life. This perspective highlights why African native poetry continues to survive despite limited written preservation. Scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), have criticised colonial education systems for promoting Western literary traditions while marginalising African indigenous knowledge systems. Colonial administrators and missionaries often viewed oral literature as primitive and inferior compared to written literature. As a result, African poetry that followed Western structures gained greater academic recognition, while traditional oral poetry was excluded from formal educational institutions. This contributed to the decline in documentation and scholarly attention given to indigenous poetic traditions.

Chinua Achebe (1988) emphasises that African oral traditions remain central to cultural identity because they reflect the lived experiences, beliefs, and values of African communities. Indigenous poetry continues to be performed during important cultural events such as weddings, funerals, initiation ceremonies, and traditional leadership gatherings. These performances reinforce social cohesion and ensure that cultural knowledge is transferred from older generations to younger ones.

Similarly, Kunene (1970) argues that African oral poetry possesses unique artistic qualities that should not be measured using Western literary standards. Its strength lies in performance techniques such as repetition, rhythm, symbolism, audience interaction, and storytelling. These characteristics make African native poetry adaptable and resilient across changing social and historical contexts.

Recent studies on indigenous knowledge preservation further suggest that oral traditions remain relevant because communities continue to value them as sources of identity and heritage. Scholars argue that the survival of African native poetry depends on intergenerational transmission and continued cultural practices. However, there remains limited research specifically examining why African native poetry continues to survive despite historical marginalisation. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the factors that contribute to its resilience across generations.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Oral Tradition Theory and Postcolonial Theory, which provide a suitable lens for understanding the resilience and survival of African native poetry across generations. Oral Tradition Theory is central to this study because African native poetry is largely preserved through oral performance rather than written texts. Finnegan (1970) explains that oral literature is transmitted through speech, memory, performance, and communal participation. Indigenous poetry is often performed during funerals, weddings, initiation ceremonies, and traditional gatherings, where cultural knowledge is passed from older generations to younger ones. This theory helps explain how African native poetry continues to survive despite limited written documentation. The theory also highlights the importance of performance elements such as rhythm, repetition, storytelling, and audience participation, which make indigenous poetry memorable and adaptable to changing social contexts. The study also draws on Postcolonial Theory, particularly the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), which examine how colonial systems promoted Western literary traditions while marginalising African indigenous knowledge systems. African oral poetry was often viewed as inferior because it did not conform to Western literary standards. Despite this marginalisation, African communities continued practicing indigenous poetry as a way of preserving their cultural identity.

Together, these theories help explain both the methods through which African native poetry survives and the historical challenges it has overcome. They provide an appropriate framework for examining its continued relevance across generations.

### **Study Site and Sampling**

The study was conducted at Ga-Motodi village, a rural community located in the Burgersfort area, approximately 10 kilometres from Praktiseer township, where the former Dr C.N. Phatudi College of Education is situated. Administratively, Ga-Motodi falls under Ward 20 of the Fetakgomo Tubatse Local Municipality within the Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province. Ga-Motodi was purposefully selected as the study site due to its rich and sustained engagement in indigenous cultural practices. The community is well known for its annual cultural celebrations, the use of African praise names, initiation school traditions, and the oral transmission of folktales and indigenous poetry to younger generations. In addition, the local royal household plays a central role in coordinating and overseeing cultural activities through an established cultural organising structure. In line with the objectives of the study, participants were selected using purposive sampling. The sample comprised six female participants drawn from the community's cultural leadership structure, including the woman leader, her deputy, and four assistant members. These participants were selected based on their active involvement in planning, guiding, and sustaining cultural practices within the community, as well as their broader role in community cultural development and empowerment initiatives.

Prior to data collection, participants were fully briefed on the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy were clearly explained and assured. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, in accordance with ethical research principles that respect autonomy and informed decision-making (Manandhar and Joshi, 2020).

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the factors contributing to the survival of African native poetry across generations. A case study design was used to gain an in-depth understanding of how indigenous poetry continues to exist within selected African communities despite historical marginalisation. The study targeted traditional poets, community elders, and cultural practitioners with knowledge of indigenous poetry. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant and rich information. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to the resilience and preservation of African native poetry. Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for cultural values were observed throughout the study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The study utilised semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis as the main data collection methods, in line with the qualitative case study design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with traditional poets, community elders, and cultural practitioners to gather detailed information on how African native poetry has survived despite colonial marginalisation and Western literary dominance. This method allowed participants to share their experiences on oral transmission, cultural identity, and preservation practices. Focus group discussions were used to collect views from community members across different generations regarding the relevance and transmission of indigenous poetry during cultural events such as funerals, weddings, and traditional ceremonies. The discussions provided diverse perspectives on the continued significance of African native poetry.

**Document analysis** was used to review existing written materials such as books, journal articles, cultural records, and previously documented oral poetry collections. This helped the researcher to contextualise findings within existing scholarly work and to trace how African native poetry has been represented over

time. The combination of these methods ensured triangulation of data, improving the credibility and depth of the study's findings.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews were used as a primary data collection method to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of the resilience and survival of African native poetry across generations. This method was suitable because it encourages interactive discussion, allowing participants to build on each other's responses and generate richer insights into shared cultural practices. The focus groups comprised elders, traditional leaders, community members, and youth, who were purposely selected based on their knowledge and involvement in indigenous cultural practices. Separate groups were formed where necessary to ensure free expression, particularly between older and younger participants, so that generational perspectives could be clearly captured. Each focus group discussion was guided by a semi-structured interview schedule covering topics such as the role of African native poetry in ceremonies, modes of transmission, performance practices, and its relevance in contemporary society. Discussions were conducted in familiar local languages to ensure clarity and cultural authenticity.

All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and supplemented with field notes to capture non-verbal communication such as gestures, tone, and audience interaction. The data generated from these discussions provided in-depth qualitative insights into how African native poetry is preserved, performed, and sustained within communities.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected through focus group interviews and document analysis were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis method suitable for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns within textual data. This approach allowed the researcher to systematically examine participants' responses and existing documents to understand the resilience and survival of African native poetry across generations. The analysis process began with transcription of audio-recorded focus group discussions, followed by repeated reading of transcripts and documentary materials to gain familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then generated by identifying meaningful statements related to the transmission, performance, cultural significance, and preservation of African native poetry. These codes were further organised into themes, such as oral transmission across generations, cultural identity and heritage, performance and communal participation, and the impact of colonial marginalisation. The themes were refined and compared across data sources to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation.

Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework of Oral Tradition Theory and Postcolonial Theory. This helped to explain how African native poetry continues to survive despite historical and structural challenges, ensuring that the findings were grounded in both empirical evidence and existing scholarly perspectives.

### **Cultural Analysis**

The cultural analysis shows that African native poetry in Ga-Motodi is deeply embedded in everyday cultural and ceremonial life. It is actively performed during events such as initiation ceremonies, funerals, weddings, and royal gatherings, where it serves to transmit values, preserve history, and strengthen communal identity. The royal household and female cultural leaders play a key role in sustaining these practices, particularly through storytelling, praise names, and guidance of younger generations. This highlights the importance of women as custodians of oral tradition in the community. The poetry is highly performative, using rhythm, repetition, and audience participation to enhance memory retention and intergenerational transmission. Overall, its survival is closely linked to its cultural relevance and continuous use in community practices.

## **5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

African names are often accompanied by poetic expressions that embody cultural meanings, ancestral identity, and communal heritage. If African communities continue to give their children indigenous names

associated with poetic narratives, African poetry is likely to endure despite modern challenges. In Ga Motodi, the use of praise names as substitutes for personal names further strengthens the preservation and continuity of African poetic traditions. This practice reflects the deep connection between naming systems and oral poetic heritage.

Similarly, the continued use of African surnames plays a significant role in sustaining indigenous poetry. Many African surnames function as clan names and are often linked to clan praises, which are inherently poetic in nature. For example, the Ramohlale clan possesses its own distinct clan poem, which differs from those of clans such as Mamabolo and Bopape. These clan-based poetic expressions preserve historical narratives, values, and identity across generations. Therefore, if African names, surnames, and praise traditions remain part of everyday cultural practice, African poetry will continue to survive and flourish across generations. The main findings for discussion include: Praise poetry, Naming and survival, Clan poetry, Initiation poetry, and Lamenting poems in funerals.

### Praise Poems

Praise poems are mostly attached to praise names and African names. Consider the following poems attached to praise names:

| Matswiri                       |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Ke Matswiri Nonyana ya Boroka, | He is Matswiri, a bird from Boroka, |
| Ke Nonyana mpetlampetla,       | He is the plump and heavy bird.     |
| Nonyana Senyamaswi,            | The bird that defecates milk,       |
| Ge e ka nya morogo,            | If it defecates digested leaves,    |
| E a hlola.                     | It brings misfortune.               |

### The Role of Indigenous Names in Preserving African Praise Poetry

The continued survival of African praise poetry is closely tied to indigenous naming practices. Traditional praise poems are often derived from African names, clan identities, and ancestral heritage. As long as African communities continue to bestow indigenous names on their children, the preservation of praise poetry across generations remains possible. These names embody cultural meanings that connect individuals to their family lineage, history, and traditions. As Kwesi Yankah (1989) argues, names in African societies are not merely labels but serve as important markers of identity, history, and cultural continuity.

However, the growing preference among some parents for Westernised or modern names poses a challenge to the continuation of this tradition. Such names may lack the cultural significance embedded in praise poetry and ancestral rituals. The following names have complete cultural significance, as well as the fact that females are given different names from males:

| Mokgadi (Female name)            |                                               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Ke mokgadi letapa go lema,       | She is Mokgadi, the laziest to plough,        |
| Go ja go feta le bašomi          | But she eats more than the hard workers.      |
| Moedi (Female name)              |                                               |
| Ke Mmakoto mogetlageti,          | She is Mmakoto, the restless,                 |
| Se ya ka legapa nokeng,          | Who uses the clay piece to collect water,     |
| Ka motšega ke tšhaba go šilafala | With the clay pot, I am scared to get soiled. |
| Malesela (Male name)             |                                               |
| Ke Malesela Mokgobokwana         | He is Malesela Mokgobokwana,                  |
| Rantsha ya go ja legokgo         | Rantsha, who eats the cream.                  |
| Matome (Male name)               |                                               |
| Ke Matome thate'a kheepe,        | I am Matome, the main tree branch.            |
| Ka rema ga tee ka letšhetša,     | I chop once and stop,                         |

Ka tšhaba more go oma.

I am scared to kill the whole tree.

During ancestral ceremonies, indigenous names are often invoked because they are believed to be recognised by ancestors. Therefore, preserving African naming traditions remains essential for ensuring the continued survival and relevance of African praise poetry.

### Clan Poems

Clan poems are typically associated with the entire clan, meaning that members of the same clan share a common praise name, identity markers, and oral poetic tradition. This shared heritage reinforces collective identity, ancestral lineage, and cultural continuity across generations. For instance, the **Ramohlale clan** shares a totemic identity linked to the elephant, symbolising strength, memory, dignity, and endurance. As a result, all members of the clan identify with the same clan praises, which are performed in praise, greeting, or ceremonial contexts. This oral tradition serves not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a means of preserving history and reinforcing unity within the clan. Consider the following Ramohlale clan poem:

### Ba ga Ramohlale

|                                                   |                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ba ga Ramohlale, ke Ditlou tša Bolepye,           | We are of the Ramohlale clan, the elephants of Bolepye.                            |
| Re dikaparaphiri, Kaparabosawana                  | We are those who cover themselves with mystery, the fierce and powerful ones.      |
| baloi ba go tšhabe,                               | Witches fear us.                                                                   |
| Botse o tšhabje ke mankuke moloi wo mogolo.       | Rightfully feared by Mankuke, the great witch.                                     |
| Re ba ga dinkgo ga di ome,                        | We are the ones whose pots never dry (we are always provided for),                 |
| Wa hwetša di omile,                               | If you find them dry,                                                              |
| Tseba gore bjala bo fedhe.                        | Know that the beer is finished.                                                    |
| Ke rena ba ga Ramohlale wa lekgwahla,             | We are the Ramohlale of the high ridge,                                            |
| Ramohlale wa sekhulwana,                          | Ramohlale of Sekhulwana,                                                           |
| ke ditlou tše dikgolo,                            | we are the great elephants,                                                        |
| ditlou tše di tšwago Bolepye.                     | The elephants that come from Bolepye.                                              |
| Bolepye wee...ke Bolepye Ga-hlakudialewa,         | Bolepye, oh yes... it is Bolepye of Ga-Hlakudialewa,                               |
| maoko a jelwaitšweng ga gabo sekgatša sa Maratha. | The place of strong hands, the home of the Maratha warriors.                       |
| Re makatše matšwakgole,                           | We are astonishing strangers,                                                      |
| Re matšwa ba ba masepela ka lekoko,               | We are those who move with dignity in society,                                     |
| Re bana ba sempa, ra kgaogana re bahu re fedile.  | We are children of endurance; if we separate, we are as good as dead and finished. |
| Mpedi wee... re Bapedi ba lesenkeni la matabole.  | Mpedi oh yes... we are the Bapedi of the stone ridge of Matabole.                  |
| Re Bapedi batswala ba Mmaposa thaba-ntsho,        | We are Bapedi, descendants of Mmaposa of Thaba-ntsho (Black Mountain),             |
| wa namela yona o bona Bokgaga.                    | If you climb it, you will see Bokgaga.                                             |
| Ramohlale, o se fete letswalo tseleng,            | Ramohlale, do not let fear stand in your way,                                      |
| kgomo ga e fete namane e e tswetše.               | A cow does not go beyond its own calf                                              |

### Poetic Analysis of the Ramohlale Clan Poem

It is important to note that the poem presented above belongs to the broader Ramohlale family clan. In many African communities, each clan possesses a distinct clan poem that serves as an important marker of identity, heritage, and collective memory. For instance, the Mogashoa clan has its own clan poem, just as

the Mamabolo and Maponya clans maintain theirs. These clan poems often serve as instruments of social cohesion, emphasising unity, shared ancestry, and a sense of belonging among clan members.

Another significant feature of clan identity is the association with totemic animals. Members of the same clan often identify with a particular animal that symbolises their clan. These animals are typically regarded as powerful, respected, and sometimes feared, reflecting qualities admired by the clan. The table below illustrates selected clans and their associated totemic animals:

| Clan name      | Totemic Animal        | English Version          |
|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Ramohlale Clan | Ditlou tša Bolepye    | Elephants of the North   |
| Malatji Clan   | Dinoko tša Phalaborwa | Porcupines of Phalaborwa |
| Mamabolo Clan  | Dikolobe tša Bjatladi | Wild hogs of Bjatladi    |
| Mogashoa clan  | Bahwiti ba Mmarulela  | Bahwiti ba Mmarulela     |
| Mothiba Clan   | Bakone                | Bakone                   |
| Nchabeleng     | Ditau                 | Lions                    |

It is therefore not surprising to find members of the Mamabolo clan being addressed as *Kolobe* (wild hog). Once an individual is identified as *Kolobe*, community members can immediately recognise their clan affiliation as Mamabolo and may further associate them with Ga-Mamabolo, an area situated North of Polokwane, near the headquarters of the Zion Christian Church. In this way, African names and clan names function as important cultural markers, often revealing an individual's origin, lineage, and linguistic background.

The continued survival of African names and clan poetry demonstrates their enduring cultural significance. In communities such as Ga-Motodi, parents continue to give their children indigenous names while preserving the practice of reciting praise poems and clan names. This intergenerational transmission strengthens cultural continuity and ensures that these traditions remain relevant despite increasing Western influence. Notably, some participants interviewed in this study indicated that they do not possess Western names and identify exclusively through their African names, further illustrating the resilience and sustainability of indigenous naming practices.

### Initiation Ceremonies

During this important communal function, young initiates recite their praise poems. These kinds of praise poems have a unique structure and patterns because they display an introduction, body, and conclusion. Consider the following initiation praise poem:

#### Matsepe's (1978:37) Poem

##### Kgoroši

*"Kgomo e a tshwa!"*

*"E gangwa ke mang?"*

*"E gangwa ke nna kgoroši ya masogana".*

*Yo a hweditšego diphala di eme sekgobotho,*

*Lerumo la gagwe la hlaa tše pedi di bobetše,*

*Lethebo la tšona ka le iša ka mošate.*

*Le be le ile kae ka ntwā ya maloba,*

*Mo ke amogilego manaba dikgomo le mathopša*

*Nna serokolwana se sennyane se ikokeletšago ka monkgo?*

*Bagešo ba re ke nna mohweleretšhipi*

*Wo o paletšego dilepe di kgobokane.*  
*Ke ile ke tsena bogwe lekope la ka la lla mahlomola*  
*A bongwana hloka pelo tšholla megokgo o Fokotše moro wa hlogo,*  
*Ka hwetša ba bogwe ba betšana ka dirumula,*  
*Ba re e lego gona le sa potološwa ke eng le.*  
*Tsebe go etla kgakgatha?*  
*Tlogelang mahufa, baagelani, gobane a yona pula ke marumo.*  
 ("The cow is spitting!")  
 "Who is milking the cow?"  
 "it's milked by me Kgoroši, leader of the boys".  
 Who found the African gazelles standing in a group?  
 His spear killed two sleeping gazelles.  
 I took their skins to the king's palace.  
 Where were you during the previous tribal war,  
 When I impounded the enemies of their cows and slaves,  
 I, the small medicine that inherits its greatness by its smell,  
 My people say I am an ironwood,  
 Who survived the abundance of axes,  
 I once entered my in-laws' homestead and my instrument lamented,  
 Children cried and reduced the soup of the head,  
 I found all my in-laws throwing at each other with burning sticks,  
 They were surprised at what was causing all the conflicts,  
 Not knowing that the great man is coming,  
 Stay away from jealousy and neighbors because it's raining spears).

### **Analysis of Initiation Poetry**

During the initiation period at Ga-Motodi, normal community activities are temporarily suspended as a sign of respect for this sacred cultural practice. Social events such as weddings are postponed, loud music is prohibited, and community members are forbidden to make external fires. This restriction is largely symbolic, as the only fire permitted is the sacred fire maintained in the mountains, where initiates are kept warm during the winter initiation season. During this period, young boys are taken to the mountains for initiation training, while women, girls, and mothers remain in the village to prepare food for them. *Baditi* (caretakers of the initiates) regularly travel between the mountains and the village to collect food, particularly porridge. In addition, some forms of hunting are undertaken to supplement their diet with protein through small animals such as rabbits and squirrels.

Access to the initiation site is highly restricted, and it is considered taboo for girls, women, and uninitiated males to visit the initiates. Within the cultural belief system, it is also believed that witches may attempt to challenge the authority of the traditional healer who oversees the initiation process; however, community members believe that such attempts often fail because of the healer's spiritual power and protection. Beyond

physical endurance, initiation schools serve as institutions of indigenous education where boys are taught discipline, resilience, social responsibility, and the values associated with manhood. They are also instructed in their clan histories, praise names, and cultural identity.

At the conclusion of the initiation ceremony, families gather at the royal kraal where initiates publicly and confidently recite their clan praises before elders and relatives. This performance is often accompanied by gifts and public celebration in recognition of their transition into manhood. The recitation of praise poetry during initiation ceremonies plays a significant role in preserving African oral traditions, as it reinforces cultural identity and ensures that indigenous poetic forms are transmitted from one generation to the next. This demonstrates how initiation schools remain important spaces for safeguarding African cultural heritage in the face of modernisation and Western influence.

### Lamenting Funeral Poems

Among many African communities, respect for the deceased remains an enduring cultural value expressed through funeral rituals and ancestral practices. In some African traditions, the burial of a family member involves the slaughtering of a cow as part of ceremonial rites, symbolising honour, spiritual cleansing, and the preservation of ties between the living and the departed. Ngubane (2004) argues that African funeral rituals and ancestral practices serve not only spiritual purposes but also preserve oral traditions, communal values, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. In certain cases, the animal's hide may be used during the burial process to wrap the body of the deceased, replacing modern coffins. During these ceremonies, an elderly woman, often recognised as a custodian of indigenous knowledge and oral tradition, may stand to recite the deceased's praise poetry alongside clan praises. This performance not only honours the deceased but also imparts wisdom, moral guidance, and cultural teachings to those in attendance. Furthermore, the continued recitation of lamenting poems at funerals has played a significant role in sustaining African oral poetry traditions, ensuring their continuity despite increasing Western cultural influence and modernisation. Through such oral performances, community members are reminded of the deceased's lineage, identity, and continued connection to ancestral spirituality within African Traditional Religion (ATR) (Magesa, 1997; Kaschula, 2001). Consider the following poem:

|                                                |                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Iuu...iuu. O sepele gabotse, Molaodi.          | Iuu...iuu. Go well, Molaodi.                                |
| Ke Molaodi'a mmatselana' tswako,               | They are Molaodi'a mmatselana' tswako,                      |
| Ke batho ba mmamothopo'a noga,                 | They are people impersonates big snakes,                    |
| Matšhoša le ge e hwile.                        | Which scares even when dead.                                |
| Iuu...iuu. O se lebelele morago Ngwana' bomma. | Iuu...iuu. Never look back, my mother's child (my brother). |
| O tla ba hwetša, bo sa Mokgadi'a Maupe,        | You will find them, people like Mokgadi'a Maupe,            |
| Ke yena Mokgadi letapa go lema,                | She is Mokgadi, the laziest to plough,                      |
| Go ja go feta le bašomi.                       | But she eats more than the hard workers.                    |
| Ba tla go amogela ka atla tše pedi.            | They will welcome you with two hands.                       |
| O tsebe ngwana' bomma,                         | You must know, my brother,                                  |
| Mokgalaka ga a lebelele morago.                | Mokgalaka does not look back.                               |
| Iuu...iuu...iuu. Robala botse Senelo.          | Iuu...iuu...iuu. Sleep peacefully Senelo                    |

From the poem above, it is evident that the recitation is performed by a woman who is the deceased's sister. She expresses deep pain and sorrow, even though she can bid her brother farewell. In Northern Sotho, this woman is referred to as **Rakgadi**; in Tshivenda, she is known as **Makhadzi**; and in Xitsonga, she is called **Hahane**. Rakgadi is a significant and influential woman within the African traditional family structure. She is believed to have a special connection with clan ancestors and plays an important role in preserving cultural and spiritual practices. Important family rituals, such as **mephaso ya kgoro** (clan appeasements), cannot take place without her involvement. She also serves as a key negotiator in matters related to marriage and bride wealth.

Furthermore, the poem provides clues about the family's historical origins. This is reflected in the closing statement: "*Mokgalaka ga a lebelele morago*" ("Mokgalaka does not look back"). The term **Mokgalaka** is associated with the Kalanga people, a group with historical links to Zimbabwe. Therefore, although the origin of a family may not always be openly stated, cultural recitations such as these often preserve important historical information about ancestry, migration, and identity. This is why these poems must be preserved, written, and, most importantly, taught to the younger generations.

### Analysis of Lamenting Poems in Funerals

Whenever a family member passes away, it is customary that a person who has a strong connection with the ancestors to come forward to deliver a lamenting poem. This responsibility is often performed by **Rakgadi** (the paternal aunt), who is regarded as an important cultural figure with knowledge of the praise poems of all members of the clan. During the recitation, she begins by delivering the deceased's personal praise poem and later incorporates the broader clan praise poem. After presenting these two poems, she bids farewell to the deceased and assures him or her that, upon entering the ancestral realm, all those who passed before will be waiting to receive, welcome, and embrace them. She expresses these words as though the deceased is still present and able to hear her message. As Molefe (2009) explains, oral poetry among African communities functions as a medium through which social values, ancestral connections, collective memory, and cultural teachings are preserved and transmitted from one generation to another.

A significant and emotionally intense moment occurs when the coffin is lowered into the grave, as this is the time when the lamentation is performed. Within Northern Sotho cultural beliefs, this moment carries deep spiritual significance. It is believed that if a person who shares the same woman as the deceased witnesses the lowering of the coffin, that person may also follow the deceased within a few months. Similarly, it is traditionally considered taboo for a person to witness the burial of a mother-in-law or father-in-law.

In some cultural interpretations, if the deceased was believed to have been bewitched, the lowering of the coffin is viewed as a moment when the person responsible for the death may experience consequences, including physical collapse or death. This belief is connected to the Northern Sotho expression "*letlalo la motho ga le bapolelwe kgakala*" (a person's skin is not removed far from home), which conveys the idea that misfortune or death within a family is often believed to be connected to someone close to the family, sometimes even a relative. As a result, when a family member passes away, some families traditionally consult a **traditional healer** to seek understanding of the circumstances surrounding the death, identify possible causes, and perform protective rituals for the deceased and the family. These practices may involve the use of traditional medicines and symbolic objects believed to provide protection and spiritual support. In some communities, the deceased may be placed in contact with a porcupine thorn as part of a traditional protective practice, symbolising the deceased's ability to defend themselves against those who may intend to harm or desecrate the corpse.

Traditional poetry therefore, serves as an important repository of African knowledge, beliefs, values, and historical memory. It carries teachings about identity, ancestry, relationships, and cultural practices. For this reason, traditional poems should be collected, documented, preserved, and taught to younger generations to ensure the continuity and protection of cultural heritage.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Documentation and Preservation of African Native

There is a need for systematic documentation, recording, and archiving of African native poetry from different communities. Since much of this poetry exists through oral performance, audio recordings, written transcriptions, and digital archives should be developed to preserve indigenous knowledge, cultural expressions, and historical experiences for future generations.

**B. Inclusion of African Native Poetry in Education Systems**

Schools and universities should integrate African native poetry into literature curricula alongside Western literary traditions. This will promote recognition of indigenous poetry as a valuable literary form and encourage younger generations to appreciate and continue practising their cultural heritage.

**C. Strengthening Oral Transmission Between Generations**

Communities should create platforms where elders, traditional poets, and young people engage in cultural activities such as storytelling, ceremonies, and poetry performances. Since African native poetry survives through oral tradition, strengthening intergenerational knowledge transfer is essential for its continuity.

**D. Promotion and Protection of Indigenous Languages**

The preservation of African native poetry requires the protection and promotion of African languages in which these poems are created and performed. Researchers and writers should encourage the use of indigenous languages to maintain the original meanings, symbolism, and cultural significance of the poetry.

**E. Recognition of African Native Poetry as an Independent Literary Tradition**

African native poetry should be studied and valued according to its own cultural principles rather than being judged only by Western literary standards. Academic institutions should recognise oral performance, communal participation, and cultural functions as important literary features that contribute to the survival and identity of African poetry.

**7. CONCLUSION**

This study has demonstrated that African native poetry has survived across generations despite historical marginalisation during the colonial and missionary eras, which privileged Western literary forms over indigenous oral traditions. Its resilience is largely attributed to its deep-rootedness in African cultural practices, communal life, and identity formation. The findings show that African native poetry continues to thrive through oral performance, intergenerational transmission, and its use in significant social and cultural ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, and communal gatherings. Although African native poetry does not conform to conventional Western poetic structures, it remains a vital medium for expressing lived experiences, cultural values, and indigenous knowledge systems. Its oral nature, far from being a limitation, has enabled its adaptability and continuity within African communities. However, the absence of extensive documentation poses a risk to its long-term preservation.

It is therefore concluded that the survival of African native poetry is inseparable from African cultural identity and communal practices. Sustained efforts in documentation, education, language preservation, and cultural recognition are essential to ensure that this rich oral tradition continues to thrive and remain accessible to future generations.

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