Call for Special Issue Paper

Ubuntu, dignity and death: reimagining funeral care and collective responsibility within indigenous communities

Publication date: December 2026

The Journal of Ubuntu/Nyingi waUbuntu invites submissions for a special issue that critically interrogates the intersection of Ubuntu philosophy, death, dignity and funeral justice, with particular attention to indigenous communities confronting socio-structural barriers to burying their loved ones. Within many African epistemologies, dignified burial transcends ritual formality, it constitutes a profound moral act rooted in relationality, communal obligation and the affirmation of shared humanity. To bury the departed with honour is to safeguard both the dignity of the deceased and the moral fabric of the living.

However, escalating funeral costs, entrenched socioeconomic inequality and fragile social protection mechanisms (if any are presently accessible), have generated a distressing reality: families who are unable to inter their loved ones timeously or in culturally meaningful ways. The resulting disruption is not merely logistical or financial, it is ontological, axiological and communal, fracturing bonds of belonging and undermining the ethical architecture of Ubuntu.

This special issue seeks to foreground Ubuntu-informed, culturally grounded and community-led frameworks that respond to funeral precarity in ways that strengthen indigenous systems of care. We invite contributions that explore how communities can act collectively through:

- Revitalised mutual support structures, including burial societies and stokvel collectives.
- Intergenerational knowledge transmission, ensuring that cultural rites are preserved and adapted with integrity.
- Faith-based and indigenous leadership collaboration, facilitating inclusive and restorative communal support.
- Community-based grief circles and post-funeral healing dialogues, grounded in restorative practices and collective mourning/ *Ubuntu* and collective grief: reimagining mourning and healing as shared communal practices.
- Culturally anchored aftercare rituals, such as remembrance gatherings, cleansing ceremonies, communal meals and ancestor-honouring practices that reinforce continuity between the living and the departed.
- Culturally relevant frameworks for social service professionals to guide practice responses to families in need, particularly those with precarious and sporadic incomes who are unable to bury their loved ones with dignity.
- Extended families adopt collective approaches that prevent neglect during times of need, embracing funeral care as a shared responsibility through the lenses of *Ubuntu* and *Ubudlelane*.
- Intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge on mourning, ritual, and funeral care, with particular attention to how Ubuntu-informed practices of dignified death are taught, sustained, and expected within African Indigenous communities.

Particular attention is encouraged toward post-funeral, culturally embedded practices aligned with *Ubuntu*, especially for families who lack sustained access to psychosocial or spiritual support services. What models of communal accompaniment, ancestral acknowledgment and restorative solidarity can be institutionalised or revitalised? How might indigenous philosophies guide policy frameworks that recognise funeral care as a matter of social justice rather than private burden?

We are especially interested in scholarship that resists deficit-based portrayals of indigenous communities and instead highlights collective agency, resilience, ethical reciprocity and community-driven innovation. Contributions may engage theoretical, empirical, policy-oriented, or practice-based perspectives that advance humane, contextually grounded and socially transformative responses to death and loss.

Through this special issue, we seek to reimagine funeral care not as an individualised obligation but as a shared moral undertaking, reaffirming that within *Ubuntu*, dignity in death is inseparable from collective responsibility in life.

Instructions to authors

The December 2026 issue of the *Journal of Ubuntu/Nyingi waUbuntu* will feature approximately 10–16 articles. Prospective contributors are invited to submit abstracts to Mzukisi.xweso@nwu.ac.za. Submissions will receive a response by April 2026 and authors will be duly notified of the feedback. If accepted, authors will be requested to prepare and submit their full manuscripts in accordance with the *Journal of Ubuntu/Nyingi waUbuntu* submission guidelines, which are outlined as follows:

- Review this call, select a topic with a suitable title and identify co-authors if desired (you can do it alone).
- Draft your abstract and agree with co-authors, if applicable
- Abstract: ±200 words, no references or subheadings: write in Times New Roman, font size 10 and single line spaced; Put key words; Put names of authors and their contact details, each in a single line; Put all the details on one page in this order: Title, Author Details, Abstract and Key words
- Maximum length of full papers: 5000 words maximum:https://ubuntu.africasocialwork.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Template-JoU_Authors.docx
- Introduction: One paragraph only, ending with article structure
- Conclusion: One paragraph, no references
- Prioritise African and Global South literature
- Develop or propose African-centred frameworks where possible
- Follow ASWDNet formatting guidelines for headings, subheadings, citing and references: https://africasocialwork.net/aswnet-guide-to-writing-journals/
- Ensure careful proofreading prior to submission
- Authors conducting literature reviews should include a brief list of databases and key African sources consulted.

Who should submit?
We invite contributions from:
- Scholars of *Ubuntu* and African philosophies
- Social work and community development practitioners
- Scholars within theology and related disciplines
- Anthropologists and sociologists
- Philosophers
- Health workers
- Authors who would like to include the African diaspora as their focus on inquiry
- Cultural experts
- Grassroots organisers and burial society leaders
- Early-career researchers and practitioner-scholars are strongly encouraged to submit.

Important dates

Opening of abstracts	16 March 2026
Deadline of abstracts	16 April 2026
Responses to contributors	16 April 2026
Submission of full papers	30 July 2026
Editorial and peer review process from	August – November 2026
Publication of journal articles from	December 2026

Closing note

Death reveals the deepest truths about how societies value dignity, belonging and humanity. In contexts where families cannot bury their loved ones, *Ubuntu* is not merely philosophical, it becomes a moral imperative for action. This special issue seeks to illuminate pathways for restoring dignity in death through collective responsibility, relational care and culturally grounded innovation.

Editor-in-Chief

Dr Mzukisi Xweso

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