STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE

by

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DECLARATION

“I declare that STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references”

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MERCY SHUMBAMHINI                                                                 DATE
ABSTRACT

A group of four widows undertook this research journey with me. They reflected on their widowhood experiences. Narrative and participatory practices guided our conversations. Participatory, contextual, postmodern, liberational feminist theology, poststructuralism and the social construction theory of reality informed this work.

Reflective and summarising letters after each group meeting played a central part in the research. The letters were structured to make visible the “taken-for-granted” which informed the widows about who and what they are. The alternative stories of preferred widowhood practices that emerged during and between sessions were centralised in the letters. Elements of transformation, hope and empowerment surfaced as counter stories to the culture of oppression, providing the scaffolding for re-storying their lives. The group formed Chiedza Widows Association in order to support other widows who are still marginalised.

Key terms: Widowhood, Shona culture, Participatory approach to theology, Deconstructing cultural practices, Narrative pastoral practices, Widows’ ritual, Participatory action research, Inheritance, Pastoral care, Community of care.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandmother, (mother of my father, the late Cecilia Shumbamhini (nee Chipango) d. 1976). She was widowed for 27 years and was able to raise her kids alone. I say to her well done *ambuya* (grandmother) you have been brave. I know now what you have gone through as a widow. I would have loved to hear your own story.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research journey came into being through the creative interchange of many people to whom I am indebted and grateful:

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My heartfelt thanks to Maria, Rofina, Kate and Musline for everything. I learned a lot from you. My vision and world has expanded since you became part of my life. Thank you for sharing the uniqueness and passion of your stories in an effort to inform other widows who have been marginalised.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF PLATES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1: BUILDING THE SCENE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

1.3 THE INSPIRATION OF THE RESEARCH

1.4 MY COMMITMENT

1.5 RESEARCH CURIOITY

1.6 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

1.7 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

1.7.1 Participatory approach to practical theology

1.7.2 Contextual approach to practical theology

1.7.3 Feminist theology

1.7.4 Postmodern theology

1.7.5 Liberation practical theology

1.7.6 Pastoral care as ethical care

1.7.7 Pastoral care as ecological care

1.8 EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS RESEARCH

1.8.1 Postmodern epistemology

1.8.2 Poststructuralism

1.8.3 Social construction

1.8.4 Language
1.9 PREFERRED WAYS OF PRACTICE IN THIS RESEARCH

1.9.1 Narrative approach

1.9.2 Participatory approach

1.9.3 The “client is the expert”: A not knowing approach to therapy

1.9.4 Deconstruction of knowledge/power practices

1.9.4.1 Accountability practice

1.9.4.2 Transparency practice

1.9.4.3 Feedback practice

1.10 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.10.1 Qualitative research

1.10.2 Narrative research

1.10.3 Participatory action research

1.10.4 Feminist action research

1.11 RESEARCH JOURNEY

1.11.1 Step One: Finding the necessary participants

1.11.2 Step Two: Negotiating the journey

1.11.3 Step Three: Telling stories

1.11.4 Step Four: Externalising conversations

1.11.5 Step Five: Deconstructing cultural discourse

1.11.6 Step Six: Use of personal journals

1.11.7 Step Seven: Reflective summary of group discussions

1.11.8 Step Eight: Reporting the research

1.11.9 Step Nine: Ethical considerations

1.11.10 Step Ten: Reflection on my personal journey

1.12 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT
CHAPTER 2: STORYING THE UNSTORIED - THE WIDOWS BREAK THEIR SILENCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION
2.2 THE UNSTORY
2.3 THE WIDOWS TELL THEIR STORIES
   2.3.1 Maria’s Story
   2.3.2 The participating team’s reflections on Maria’s story
   2.3.3 Rofina’s story
   2.3.4 The participating team’s reflections on Rofina’s story
   2.3.5 Kate’s story
   2.3.6 The participating team’s reflections on Kate’s story
   2.3.7 Musline’s story
   2.3.8 The participating team’s reflections on Musline’s story
2.4 MY REFLECTIONS
2.5 GROUP MEETINGS
2.6 CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE WITH THE PARTICIPANTS
2.7 THE GOLDEN THREAD OF DOING HOPE
2.8 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 3: WEAVING THEMES TOGETHER CO-CONSTRUCTING NEW KNOWLEDGE

3.1 INTRODUCTION
3.2 SHONA CULTURE
3.3 PATRIARCHY
3.4 WIDOWS’ RITUAL
3.5 ISOLATION
3.6 INHERITANCE
3.7 IMPACT OF WIDOWHOOD ON CHILDREN
3.8 RESISTANCE
3.9 RESPONSES OF IN-LAWS AND EFFECTS OF THIS ON WIDOWS
3.10 WHAT HELPS THE WIDOWS TO SURVIVE
CHAPTER 4: THE HIDDEN TREASURE – AUTHENTIC IDENTITY  
4.1 INTRODUCTION  
4.2 NARRATIVE THERAPY  
4.3 EXTERNALISING CONVERSATIONS  
4.4 DECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL PRACTISES  
4.5 RE-AUTHORING CONVERSATIONS  
4.6 METAPHORS  
4.7 LETTER WRITING  
4.8 THICKENING THE ALTERNATIVE STORY  
4.8.1 Outsider witnesses  
4.8.2 Re-membering conversations  
4.8.3 Expanding the conversation  
4.9 RITUAL AND CELEBRATION  
4.10 CONCLUSION  

CHAPTER 5: FOLDING BACK  
5.1 INTRODUCTION  
5.2 THE CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY  
5.3 RESEARCH CURIOSITY  
5.3.1 How widows “unstory” their widowhood experiences  
5.3.2 How widows resist dominant cultural practices constituting their widowhood  
5.3.3 How widows story their “not-yet-said” widowhood practices  
5.4 PARTICIPANTS’ REFLECTIONS  
5.4.1 Narrative and participatory therapies  
5.4.2 Group work  
5.5 LETTERS  
5.6 DECONSTRUCTION OF MY POWER
LIST OF PLATES

FIGURE 1: Maria’s picture  26

FIGURE 2: Rofina’s picture  28

FIGURE 3: Kate’s picture  31

FIGURE 4: Musline’s picture  33

FIGURE 5: Musline’s picture of ladder symbolising hope for her  76

FIGURE 6: Five candles burning our symbol for hope of Chiedza Widows’ Association  84

FIGURE 7: A picture of the participants and myself  84

FIGURE 8: An African clay pot, Maria’s metaphor  85

FIGURE 9: A fruit, Rofina’s metaphor  85

FIGURE 10: An eye, Musline’s metaphor  86

FIGURE 11: Green leaves, Kate’s metaphor  86

FIGURE 12: Three stones representing power sharing throughout the research process and the ashes symbolising what the participants went through.  99