

STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE

by

MERCY SHUMBAMHINI

**submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

**with specialisation in
PASTORAL THERAPY**

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. D J KOTZÉ

CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF. J P J THERON

JUNE 2005

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”

.....

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:

To God for the life, enthusiasm, opportunities and wisdom in making choices.

To my supervisor, Professor Dirk Kotzé, for his wonderful support and dedication to narrative and participatory practices. Dirk, your ethical ways of working with people has inspired me, this is something I take with me and hope to make my yardstick.

To my religious congregation for giving me this opportunity to pursue theology as a second profession and for all the financial assistances which went with it.

To my family for their unconditional support and encouragement.

To Blessing Mutero and Madalena Mesquita from Mary Ward Children's Home for their support and hard work in helping me with typing and technical assistance with the computer. They have been always there when I needed them.

To my dear Sr. Christopher CJ for proof reading. She is such a brave woman. She laboured with me through many hours of reading every draft and also in sharing and confirming some of the insights.

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

CONTENTS	PAGE
DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF PLATES	xi
CHAPTER 1: BUILDING THE SCENE	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH	1
1.3 THE INSPIRATION OF THE RESEARCH	2
1.4 MY COMMITMENT	3
1.5 RESEARCH CURIOSITY	4
1.6 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH	4
1.7 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH	4
1.7.1 Participatory approach to practical theology	4
1.7.2 Contextual approach to practical theology	6
1.7.3 Feminist theology	7
1.7.4 Postmodern theology	7
1.7.5 Liberation practical theology	8
1.7.6 Pastoral care as ethical care	9
1.7.7 Pastoral care as ecological care	9
1.8 EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS RESEARCH	9
1.8.1 Postmodern epistemology	9
1.8.2 Poststructuralism	10
1.8.3 Social construction	11
1.8.4 Language	11

1.9	PREFERRED WAYS OF PRACTICE IN THIS RESEARCH	12
1.9.1	Narrative approach	12
1.9.2	Participatory approach	13
1.9.3	The “client is the expert”: A not knowing approach to therapy	13
1.9.4	Deconstruction of knowledge/power practices	13
1.9.4.1	Accountability practice	14
1.9.4.2	Transparency practice	14
1.9.4.3	Feedback practice	15
1.10	THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	15
1.10.1	Qualitative research	15
1.10.2	Narrative research	16
1.10.3	Participatory action research	16
1.10.4	Feminist action research	17
1.11	RESEARCH JOURNEY	17
1.11.1	Step One: Finding the necessary participants	17
1.11.2	Step Two: Negotiating the journey	18
1.11.3	Step Three: Telling stories	19
1.11.4	Step Four: Externalising conversations	19
1.11.5	Step Five: Deconstructing cultural discourse	19
1.11.6	Step Six: Use of personal journals	20
1.11.7	Step Seven: Reflective summary of group discussions	21
1.11.8	Step Eight: Reporting the research	21
1.11.9	Step Nine: Ethical considerations	22
1.11.10	Step Ten: Reflection on my personal journey	22
1.12	OUTLINE OF THE REPORT	23

CHAPTER 2: STORYING THE UNSTORIED -THE WIDOWS BREAK	24
THEIR SILENCE	
2.1 INTRODUCTION	24
2.2 THE UNSTORY	24
2.3 THE WIDOWS TELL THEIR STORIES	25
2.3.1 Maria’s Story	26
2.3.2 The participating team’s reflections on Maria’s story	27
2.3.3 Rofina’s story	28
2.3.4 The participating team’s reflections on Rofina’s story	30
2.3.5 Kate’s story	31
2.3.6 The participating team’s reflections on Kate’s story	32
2.3.7 Musline’s story	33
2.3.8 The participating team’s reflections on Musline’s story	34
2.4 MY REFLECTIONS	35
2.5 GROUP MEETINGS	36
2.6 CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE WITH THE PARTICIPANTS	37
2.7 THE GOLDEN THREAD OF DOING HOPE	40
2.8 CONCLUSION	42
CHAPTER 3: WEAVING THEMES TOGETHER	44
CO-CONSTRUCTING NEW KNOWLEDGE	
3.1 INTRODUCTION	44
3.2 SHONA CULTURE	45
3.3 PATRIARCHY	47
3.4 WIDOWS’ RITUAL	49
3.5 ISOLATION	50
3.6 INHERITANCE	51
3.7 IMPACT OF WIDOWHOOD ON CHILDREN	53
3.8 RESISTANCE	54
3.9 RESPONSES OF IN-LAWS AND EFFECTS OF THIS ON WIDOWS	55
3.10 WHAT HELPS THE WIDOWS TO SURVIVE	56

3.11	GOD	58
3.12	PASTORAL CARE	60
3.13	CONCLUSION	62
CHAPTER 4: THE HIDDEN TREASURE – AUTHENTIC IDENTITY		64
4.1	INTRODUCTION	64
4.2	NARRATIVE THERAPY	65
4.3	EXTERNALISING CONVERSATIONS	66
4.4	DECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL PRACTISES	69
4.5	RE-AUTHORING CONVERSATIONS	70
4.6	METAPHORS	75
4.7	LETTER WRITING	77
4.8	THICKENING THE ALTERNATIVE STORY	78
4.8.1	Outsider witnesses	79
4.8.2	Re-membering conversations	80
4.8.3	Expanding the conversation	82
4.9	RITUAL AND CELEBRATION	83
4.10	CONCLUSION	87
CHAPTER 5: FOLDING BACK		89
5.1	INTRODUCTION	89
5.2	THE CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY	90
5.3	RESEARCH CURIOSITY	90
5.3.1	How widows “unstory” their widowhood experiences	91
5.3.2	How widows resist dominant cultural practices constituting their widowhood	91
5.3.3	How widows story their “not-yet-said” widowhood practices	92
5.4	PARTICIPANTS’ REFLECTIONS	92
5.4.1	Narrative and participatory therapies	92
5.4.2	Group work	94
5.5	LETTERS	95
5.6	DECONSTRUCTION OF MY POWER	96

5.7	REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	97
5.7.1	Reflecting on the qualitative research process	97
5.7.2	Reflecting on participatory action research	98
5.8	THE INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS ON MYSELF	100
5.9	WHAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM THE JOURNEY	101
5.10	IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL PRAXIS	102
5.10.1	Church and community	102
5.10.2	A challenge for practical theology	103
5.11	WHAT'S NEXT	103
5.12	CONCLUSION	104
	 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 106
	APPENDIX A: Invitation to participants	
	APPENDIX B: Information sheet for participants	
	APPENDIX C: Consent form for participants	
	APPENDIX D: Contract form for Chiedza Widows' Association	

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