

CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING THE SCENE

Religion that is pure and undefiled before
God and the Father is this: to care for
orphans and widows in their affliction....

James 1:27

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will be discussing briefly the background, inspiration and commitment to this research as well as curiosities and aims that guided me during this study. I will also situate the theological and epistemological framework from wherein the study was done, as well as discuss the preferred ways of practice and the research methodology that was followed. This chapter also provides an outline and discussion of the steps or destinations on the journey (Reinharz 1992:211), where the stories of the “research participants merge[d] with that of the researcher in order to create new stories” (Bishop 1996:26). Lastly, in this chapter I will shortly be outlining the chapters of the research report.

1.2 THE BACKGROUND TO THIS RESEARCH

She returned home to find her home stripped. Every piece of furniture they had struggled to buy, the ornaments she lovingly collected, clothing, crockery, even down to the brush for cleaning the toilet and pumice stone for scrubbing feet all gone. The work of thieves? No. It is just a common case of greedy brothers who gather like vultures after a man’s death, taking all his wealth and leaving the partner, who has helped him accumulate it, destitute.

Sunday Mail quoted by Charity Chakanetsa 1992:88.

When I came back from evening prayer, the car and my children were nowhere to be seen. I was hurt. They could take the car but not my children. No.

(Sekai 2004)

As background to this research, I drew on my experience as a pastoral therapist who had assisted a number of widows therapeutically. I used this experience to highlight the need of widows to have their voices heard and to create a community of concern where they would be able to question, address and deconstruct societal practices that silence their voices, and to create the opportunity to re-author their alternative preferred widowhood stories.

1.3 THE INSPIRATION OF THIS RESEARCH

Although the understanding of widowhood denotes a gender-neutral concept, which in theory applies to both women and men (Aphane, Gwaunza & Kasonde 1995:1) in this study widowhood focused on women. The term widow refers to a woman who has lost her husband by death, and has not married again (The American heritage dictionary of English language 2000). The people I included in this study were such women. Widowhood tends to impact more traumatically upon women than men, altering forever the way they are seen by society and affecting their self-image (Owen 1996:8).

Women are already marginalised by their gender in a patriarchal society. Specific gender roles for women are that they must be submissive to their husband, must never have any authority over a man and must, therefore, keep silent (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:103). Widows are marginalised still further, both as women and as human beings. Their position can lead to additional marginalisation through increased poverty, especially when they themselves are not working and when the property left behind by their husband is taken by their in-laws, leaving them entirely without material support.

Widows in Zimbabwe, as a group are the poorest of the poor and possibly the most vulnerable (Shenje 1992:53; Wermter 2004:4). In this research, I was curious to hear the voices of widows and learn from them. Potash (1986:v) argues that although widows constitute as much as 25 percent of the adult female population in many African societies, they have been a topic of little interest to researchers. The available literature on widows focuses almost entirely on cultural norms of widow remarriages and little is known about the widow themselves (Potash 1986:v). As well, I was

curious to know what helped them survive. As a feminist and narrative therapist in training I am convinced that I have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of my knowledge/power to ensure that the widows are able to live their preferred ethical stories, by listening *to* them, but not deciding *for* them, and engaging in participatory solidarity *with* them (Kotzé 2002:18).

1.4 MY COMMITMENT

Since I have assisted widows therapeutically I experienced the desire to introduce these widows to a discourse that would enable them to see how they are situated by these discourses and story-lines that constitute widowhood. I wanted them to identify the cultural and historical production of widowhood in which they can become stuck and marginalised (Grobbelaar, Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:169). My aim was to introduce widows to the possibilities of becoming producers of their own culture. I did not want them to “be mesmerized by the great lament of contemporary culture” (White 1997:222). I hoped to introduce them to the possibility of becoming writers and readers who make themselves, and are made, within the discourses available to them; of recognising the interaction between themselves as fictions and the fiction of the culture which is constantly being (re)spoken, (re)written and (re)lived (Davies 1993:2).

I wanted each widow to discover her preferred identity as a widow. Furthermore I wanted them to develop their own preferred practices and be able to celebrate their own identities. My hope and desire was also to see them as participants of the study share in addressing cultural discourses and social practices that promote injustice or that create oppressive situations and deconstruct them. This became my commitment embodied in this study.

Apart from the participating widows and myself as the researcher, who else could benefit from this study? When I was formulating my commitment many questions came to my mind. Would this study be able to contribute to the field of practical theology and pastoral therapy? Would this research contribute in transforming our society towards more ethical ways of being? Would this work help us in deconstructing the boundaries (Gerkin 1991; White 1991; Wolfreys 1998; Sampson

1989) set by dominant discourses such as the patriarchal type? My purpose and desire of this study was to enable the widows discover new ways of authoring their lives through participation in the study as the experts of their own stories.

1.5 RESEARCH CURIOSITY

I have been inspired by the stories of the widows whom I have listened to, I became curious about:

How widows

- ❖ “unstory” their widowhood experiences (Laird 1991:437);
- ❖ resist dominant cultural practices constituting their widowhood;
- ❖ story their “not-yet-said” widowhood practices (Anderson & Goolishian 1992).

I formulated these curiosities before engaging in conversations with the participants.

1.6 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

My aim in this research was to gather a group of four widows who were inspired by a desire to talk about experiences and widowhood practices. Informed by my research curiosity, I formulated the following aims:

- ❖ To explore with the participants the influence of societal views and practices regarding widowhood and examine how these practices have affected them.
- ❖ To co-construct preferred stories, questioning cultural views and practices that affected them and to engage in re-authoring their widowhood.
- ❖ To co-construct new knowledges regarding widowhood and enable transformation of oppressive practices.

1.7 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

1.7.1 Participatory approach to practical theology

A participatory approach to practical theology links with the ideas of the contextual, social construction and postmodern approaches with an emphasis on inclusion, participation and a practicing theology rather than constructing a theology. Participative practical theology is a conversational encounter in which every one has a voice and can participate as meanings are created (Kotzé 2005). This position ensures that practical theology is contextual, local and pluralist. The Bible is also a participant, as are different interpretations of the Bible. God is an integral participant in the conversation, but it is not possible to control or pin down her/his participation. In such an approach one would not need to come to conclusions and to define beliefs in a set of statements or doctrines. The conversational narratives that emerge, like the biblical story of God, can be open-ended and ongoing: It does not stop with the end of biblical texts. Rather it concerns the activity of God in all of history; a story that continues in the present and is to be fulfilled in the future (Gerkin 1986:48-64).

A participatory approach to theology refers to a shift from the general to the local, from mainstream Western theology's claim of universal validity (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:5) to true participation among all participants of practical theology. For this research, I chose a participatory theology because it takes the ethical position of introducing previously unheard voices to the realm of theology. As such the previously marginalised voices of widows can now be heard in this report.

In my journey with the widows, I accepted the presence of difference and other-ness in experience. I also listened to their unheard voices and interpreted these voices constructively. I tried to ensure that there was space in the telling for the participants' God as they were experiencing him/her. As Griffith (1995:127) remarks: "...if 'I think I know' the basic story of someone's experience with God, I am probably beginning to close off therapeutic possibilities. I then risk joining those forces of cultural oppression that would instruct and censor what could be spoken".

Therefore, I am convinced that within this practical theological approach the co-researchers and my own unheard voice, as the voices of the so-called non-theologians will have made a contribution. Bosch (1991:427) refers to "local theologies" hereby privileging the theological reflections of non-theologians, which are in many ways more credible statements of faith because of their contextual and personal mould. Our

journey was a conversational encounter in which each one had a voice and could participate as meanings were created. The criterion for evaluating our praxis was not: does this fit in with the bible or with the doctrine? But: who benefits from this and to whose interests is it? (Kotzé 2002:8).

1.7.2 Contextual approach to practical theology

I also chose a contextual approach of doing practical theology in this research because it starts from the life situation of people, “the cultural experience or observation (praxis)” and proceeds from there to reflection (Bosch 1991:421). This is a grass-roots approach rather than a top-down attitude that leads to action. By implication, theology can only be done credibly if it is done *with* those who suffer; the emphasis is on *doing* theology (Bosch 1991:424). Therefore my “commitment” to these widows “as the first act of theology” (Bosch 1991:424) was especially important, as both the society and the Christian community have marginalised the widows.

Theological conversations (Collett 2003:22) should entail a “talking with”, an “in there together” process in which the issues at hand are co-explored towards resolution and hope. Helping people to attain a voice requires a theology that actively resists all the cultural forces that work against people’s finding their “local knowledge” to bring about change for themselves and the contexts in which they live (Neuger 2001:230).

This form of practical theology, with its “from below” communication style, suggests that religious information can no longer be passed down to people, but that communication should involve the experiences and expectations of the people themselves (Rossouw 1993:900).

Throughout the research, as co-researcher, I was committed to paying attention to the stories of the widows in their own contexts.

1.7.3 Feminist theology

As an African, Shona and religious woman of Roman Catholic affiliation, I am interested in choosing a theology that is relevant to my situation. Patriarchal oppression and marginalisation of women is an issue in Shona Christianity (Chimhanda 2000:5). Feminist theology allows a variety of women to tell their stories and to write theology from their own perspective (Fulkerson 1994:13). It represents a radical critique of patriarchal religious and theological thinking with the result that women and men benefit through this kind of partnership (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:6). I agree with the notion that feminist pastoral practices are liberating as they seek “justice, peace, healing and wholeness for all in partnership” (Ackermann 1991:96).

Feminist theology aims at moving the voiceless and the hidden into the center of theology. Feminist scholars like Ruether (1993), Ackermann (1988), Oduyoye (1995), Kanyoro (2000), Edet (1992) and Keane (1998) just to name a few, have campaigned using their own voices because women’s stories offer credible grounding in experiences and also provide ideas for feminist participation in the transformation of society at large. This challenges me to move from “being right to doing right” (Rossouw 1993:903) or “to go beyond the luxury of merely *thinking* commitments, to *doing* commitments with the widows (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:5). In this research journey, space has been created for the widows to story their not-yet-said widowhood practices (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:34-38).

1.7.4 Postmodern theology

This research has also been positioned within the frame of postmodern theology, where every “person imagines God personally and differently, although this does not exclude the religious feeling that my God is also your God” (Herholdt 1998:225). God is therefore seen as “Divinity-in-Diversity, female/male, black/white, and so forth” (Bons-Storm 1996:130). In my research journey I was open to new ideas and views on God because I am convinced that each person’s relationship with God is unique. According to this type of theology we need not be passive recipients of God’s plan for us, “all people are afforded the right to some human input that co-determines the ‘plan’ for their lives” (Herholdt 1998:217). Hence, many people whom I have walked

with in therapy, including participants in this research, believe they are the passive recipients of God's will; what happens in their lives is beyond their control.

The potential for spiritual growth is so much greater when people actively engage in the spiritual meaning and making of experiences in their daily lives (Tong 2004:15). I value Griffin's notion (quoted in Tong 2004:16) that:

God is not simply calling us to accept actuality, but to respond creatively to it. God especially calls us to respond to our environment [which could include the presence of overwhelming and unbearable pain in relation to the loss of a loved one] in terms of those possibilities through which truth, beauty, goodness, adventure and peace will be embodied and promoted.

1.7.5 Liberation theology

Liberation theology differs from classical models of dialogue in that it does not hide its preferential option for the poor (Ngwane 1994:114-122). According to Pattison (1994:2) liberation theology is practical, contextual and action-guiding, not remote, theoretical and academic. Gutierrez (1988) and Brown (1978) emphasise that to know God or to love God is to do justice. Theology should be viewed from below, in which the poor and the marginalised of the society are the agents of their own history through empowerment (Gutierrez 1977). Hence this research aimed to empower the widows. Liberation theology claims that it is in the life and situation of the poor that God is to be found, that God is at work (Brown 1978:61). The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament, a God who becomes incarnate. "Emmanuel God among us" (Mt 1:23). God bends down to the poor, marginalised and oppressed of the society. Widows are the **anawim** (*poor of Yahweh*), which was the climax of Christ's mission agenda (Lk. 4:18-19; Is 61:2; Chimhanda 2000:163; Shumbamhini 2004:1). Bishop Desmond Tutu (quoted in Gutierrez 1995:xiv) argues:

All liberation theology stems from trying to make sense of human suffering when those who suffer are the victims of organised oppression and exploitation, when they are emasculated and treated as less than what they are: human persons created in the image of the Triune God, redeemed by the One Saviour Jesus Christ and sanctified by the Holy Paraclete. This is the genesis of all liberation theology...

1.7.6 Pastoral care as ethical care

I see pastoral care as a mutual and ethical enterprise in which the participants and myself as a researcher are able to give and receive. Ruwona (2003:71) accentuates this view by asserting that pastoral ministry in Zimbabwe demands that the providers and the recipients of the care contribute as equal partners in the pastoral care encounter. For me a commitment to do pastoral care as participatory ethical care immediately challenges me not to care *for* but to care *with* the widows who are in the need of care (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). This commitment moved me to practice care beyond the research relationship through letters and conversations.

1.7.7 Pastoral care as ecological care

For this study I chose the framework of pastoral care as ecological care since we are connected to one another through our ecological positioning (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). If care is also viewed as a social practice, it is not only diverted to the “other” but also to the self and the physical environment as well as the interrelation between the two (Sevenhuijsen 1998:18-19). As we journeyed together in this research, the participants and I became aware of our relationship with God, each other and nature. The participants were able to liken their brokenness to that of nature (see chapter 4).

1.8 EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS RESEARCH

1.8.1 Postmodern epistemology

I chose postmodern ideas as an epistemology of this study because of the stand it takes regarding reality, especially in terms of what constitutes knowledge and how and for whom knowledge is constructed (Richardson 1990:12). Postmodern epistemology holds “the idea that objective knowledge is impossible”; therefore “multiple realities are preferred” (Kotzé 1994:21). It argues that there can be no objective facts, no single truth, that reality is not something that can be constructed irrespective of its knower but that the socio-economic political reality of the knower is decisive for knowledge (Brueggemann 1993:9). Hence, there are no universal criteria for truth; claims to knowledge are always contextual (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:68).

Within a postmodern framework, knowledge acquisition by means of subjective influences is regarded as one of its greatest strengths; the more subjective the information, the closer it is to representing the client's lived experiences. It is within these experiences that alternative stories that promote health and healing develop. According to White (1995:66) a reflexive mode of knowledge acquisition challenges the researcher in terms of his/her own settled certainties in so far as we cannot "know" in advance what is right for the participants. Hence as Heshusius (1994:206) points out, the research process becomes one of collaborative dialogue, "a letting go of boundaries that constitute the self and construct the perception of distance between myself and the participants, involving a participatory mode of consciousness". The knower and the known interact and shape one another.

1.8.2 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism's origin can be traced to various French philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida (Russell & Carey 2004).

Poststructuralist thought (Thomas 2002:97) invited me as a therapist to...

- ❖ Assist the widows (where relevant) to stop measuring their lives according to what certain social norms say life should be about.
- ❖ Question my "objectivity," "expertise" and "practices of interpretation" as the therapist.
- ❖ Question taken-for-granted ideas and assumptions that might be sustained through the language I was using in therapy.
- ❖ Externalise ideas, problems and qualities in therapy conversations. Develop accountability practices to check out the real effects of therapy conversations with the widows.
- ❖ Consider how the stories of the widows' shape their lives and how therapy could enable the rich description of their preferred stories of identity.

1.8.3 Social construction

At the heart of social constructionism is the idea that our possibilities as human beings arise from the culture, society, and tradition within which we live (McLeod 2004:351); we construct-socially, together, through history, what we define as real and true. Gergen (1985:266) stresses, “Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, and otherwise account for the world in which they live.” He also explains “social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of communal interchange” (Gergen 1985:266). Thus realities we take for granted are the realities that our stories have surrounded us with since birth (Freedman & Combs 1996:16).

The ways in which the widows commonly understand the world, the categories and the concepts they use are historically and culturally specific (Burr 1995:5). The specific cultural context of the widowhood and the taken-for-granted ideas that inform this reality in Shona culture is viewed from a social constructionist perspective. Culture is a social construction and anything said about culture is a social construction (Kotzé 1994:110). Social constructionism not only gave me an epistemology to view the reality of this research journey, but also empowered me to constitute realities in relationships and language. In this study I allowed the participants to construct their own preferred realities.

1.8.4 Language

According to Freedman and Combs (2002) language is the medium through which we socially construct reality. The postmodern view of language is that the only worlds that people can know are the worlds we share in language, and language is an interactive process, not a passive receiving of pre-existing truths (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). We negotiated with the participants on the definition of language and agreed to use Shona in our discussions. As a postmodernist/poststructuralist researcher, my aim was to use an accessible and inclusive language that did not leave out the participating widows marginalised, with a sense of inferiority about themselves (Kotzé 2002:28). Although we co-constructed the research participants’

meaning-making of widowhood through language in conversation, it was also important that I paid attention to the background from which their words were spoken.

1.9 PREFERRED WAYS OF PRACTICE IN THIS RESEARCH

1.9.1 Narrative approach

Narrative can be considered to be a postmodern, poststructuralist form of therapy positioned within the social constructionist domain (Gergen 1985; Payne 2000; White 1995, 1997, 2000). It has had a profound influence on my support and care with people. The narrative approach is guided by the notion that we are in this together, which is something that I tried to convey in this research journey. According to (Morgan 2000:2):

Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts of their lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of the problems in their lives.

By making use of narrative as guiding metaphor, I wanted to create space for new knowledge, which would evolve from the story told so that the storyteller and listener are involved in the construction of new meaning and understanding within a particular context. Stories both describe and shape our lives. A narrative approach seeks to empower a person to re-author a liberating or alternative story to the dominant problem-saturated story (White & Epston 1990).

The re-authoring process involves continual invitations to persons to separate their identity from the problem, to reflect a unique outcome and to consider previously undistinguished choices. The therapeutic conversation highlights new and rediscovered understandings and previously unnoticed choice points that are valued by the participating widows and weave them into a new story (Freeman & Lobovits 1993).

1.9.2 Participatory approach

As a postmodernist I value the involvement of participants in care, counselling, facilitation and research. I aimed to participate in a way that would heal and not hurt and I chose to *ethicise* (or act in an *ethicising* manner) (Kotzé 2002:21), that is to do everything in participation with the widows, or rather with every widow participating.

A participatory approach to therapy provides for participatory consciousness which Heshusius (1994:15) describes as a “freeing of ourselves from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity; as a re-ordering of the understanding between the self and the other to a deep kinship of “selfother” between the knower and the known. A participatory consciousness requires a “deeper level of kinship.... an attitude of profound openness and receptivity”. When “one merges, one can come to know even from silence” (Heshusius 1994:16-18); this kind of participatory process is distinct from a western perspective of knowing the other or about the other.

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

In this work I drew on therapists such as Anderson and Goolishian (1992:27-34) who articulate a “not-knowing” stance in which the “client is the expert”. The attitude and actions of the therapist convey a genuine curiosity and the need to know more about what has been said rather than convey pre-conceived opinions and expectations about the person, the problem, or what must be changed. According to this approach a narrative therapist uses a “not-knowing” approach because he/she is searching for the “not-yet-said” through conversational discourse. In this research journey, I allowed each participant’s story to unfold freely as I avoided interpretations and prior assumptions. Therefore, the participants remained the experts on their lives by privileging their experiences.

1.9.4 Deconstruction of knowledge/power practices

Due to my knowledge and professional experience as a narrative pastoral therapist in training, I have the responsibility to deconstruct my power position in order to enable the widows to become the primary authors of this research story. Michel Foucault

(1980) views the relationship between power and knowledge as power is knowledge and knowledge is power. In this study I used accountability, transparency and feedback practices to deconstruct my power.

1.9.4.1 Accountability practice

White (1997:203-204) talks of an accountability that is bottom-up rather than top-down. In this study I am committed to a bottom-up accountability, which helped me to deconstruct my power. For example, I would consult the participating widows during a group session, about how the conversation is going for them, about how they see its direction fitting or not fitting with the overall project and their preferences (White 1995:169), about how it is affecting them emotionally and otherwise etc. I received consent forms from all four co-researchers to use their stories. Throughout the research journey, I sought permission from the participants to ask sensitive questions, being accountable to them at all times and acknowledging their expertise and knowledge regarding their stories.

1.9.4.2 Transparency practice

Transparency practice provided a challenge to the commonly accepted idea, that for therapy to have its desired effects its workings need to be secret; the idea that if persons know what the therapist is up to then it will not work (White 1991:38). We negotiated our meeting times, the process and confidentiality for the shared stories and lived experiences (Reinharz 1992:258) in the group.

The participants had access to the conversation notes and the audiotapes. I have tried to transcribe and translate the participants' words as accurately and ethically as possible. I also verified my transcriptions with the participants and invited them to make appropriate amendments or corrections to details. I created space and opportunities within the conversations to ask questions and make comments. I asked for consent to give the texts to my supervisor and share the comments with them.

1.9.4.3 Feedback practice

As a narrative researcher in training, feedback from the participating widows enabled me to know what sort of “therapeutic interaction is helpful and what is not” (White 1991:37). Hence feedback that arose from this evaluation assisted me to face squarely the moral and ethical implications of my practices as well as avoiding reproducing the “gaze” on participants’ lives (White 1991; Foucault 1973).

1.10 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this work, I was guided by the ideas of qualitative, narrative, participatory action and feminist research. In merging and blending of these different approaches, I was reminded of the words of Denzin and Lincoln (1994:3) who state that qualitative research “does not privilege a single methodology over the other... nor does it have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own.”

1.10.1 Qualitative research

For the purpose of this study I have chosen to use a qualitative approach to research because it is multi-method in its focus, studying things in their natural setting whilst trying to make sense of the meanings that people bring to them. Qualitative research implies:

An emphasis on processes and meaning that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quality, amount, intensity and frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

(Denzin & Lincoln 1994:4)

It is worth noting that a qualitative approach is in contrast with a positivist approach in research in that there is a belief that the latter “describe and accurately measure any dimension of human behaviour” (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:139).

1.10.2 Narrative research

During this project, I used narrative research. In this kind of research people both live their stories in an ongoing experiential text and tell their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:265). According to Nodding (quoted by Schwandt 1996:159) narrative research “is guided by an attitude that values the relationship of the reasoners over any particular outcome, and it is marked by attachment and connection rather than separation and dialogue.” Kotzé (2002:29) says, “narrative allows for open, flexible and responsive interpersonal reasoning”.

1.10.3 Participatory action research

In this work I wanted to ensure authentic participation, which means sharing in the way research was conceptualised, practised and brought to bear on the life-world. My purpose here was to let the participants co-search and co-operate with me in the process of ownership of the research (McTaggart 1997:29). The role of participatory action research is to empower people through the construction of their own knowledge in the process of action and reflection, or conscientisation to use Freire’s term (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001). It is a “collective activity” (McTaggart 1997:6); the interpretation of the experiences is trustworthier if it is negotiated with the participants. It is also more ethical. As Kotzé (2002:27) reminds us: “to be ethical, the participation of the people about or for whom we do research is of primary importance at all levels of our research.” This participatory action research is research done by the people for themselves. It is used to differentiate “the research from other kinds of research where the primary interest is in maintaining control so that research is done on people, making the people objects of research” (McTaggart 1997:29).

As pointed above, in participatory action research ethics play a major role. Kotzé (2002:25) refers to them as “ethicising research” because in research we are constructing realities/knowledges that will shape the kind of world we shall live in. “Therefore, searching for new knowledges in acts of participatory ethicising foregrounds ethicising knowledge” (Kotzé 2002:25). As researcher and subjects, I

hoped that we would co-search “for new knowledges about which all the participants have a say” (Kotzé 2002:25).

1.10.4 Feminist action research

I followed a feminist action research method (Reinharz 1992) because it breaks through power hierarchies since it involves the objects of research as subjects. In other words the subjects become study participants (McTaggart 1997:29). Feminist researchers such as Reinharz (1992), place an important emphasis on “intensive self-reflection and introspection” (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:147). Self-reflection includes what we as researchers have learnt about ourselves during the research process; whether we change or remain unchanged (Reinharz 1992:196).

I constantly engage in self-reflection, “seeking to describe, explain and make understandable the familiar in a contextual, personal and passionate way” (Janesick 1994:217) (see also 1.11.10). Hence, the emphasis in this study was not on my own observations and interpretations, but on the meanings generated by the widows who shared their experiences in the stories they told. I was not “an independent observer but rather an inter-dependant participant within the meaning-generating system” (Botha 1998:82). I was aware that this research ethically belongs to the participants. As Reinharz (1992:181) comments that in feminist action research, “ the people studied make decisions about the study and data analysis. ... the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure, and shared risk...”

1.11 RESEARCH JOURNEY

1.11.1 Step one: Finding the necessary participants

I approached 4 widows at Mary Ward Children’s Home in Amaveni, Kwekwe, Zimbabwe. I invited them for an information session. I gave a brief overview of the project, and presented the information letter (see appendix A). After the widows had time to familiarise themselves with the content of the information letter, I explained the terms of the study. We negotiated the ethically implications of the study, the

method of work for the research, the agenda, use of personal journals and audiotapes and other terms of the study. After a thorough negotiation with the participants, I asked each participant to sign a consent form (Appendix B). Towards the end of the project the participants were also asked to sign a consent form about the release of information (Appendix C).

1.11.2 Step two: Negotiating the journey

Power sharing between the participating widows and myself as the researcher was my commitment. I was aware that the widows would be the co-researchers or co-searchers in this project. Thus I intended to continue negotiating the purpose of the study till the end of the project. At our first group meeting with the participants, we discussed in greater detail the project. I also informed them about my inspiration and my preliminary aims for the research project and also my ideas about how to journey together.

It was important for us as co-creators of this new story to agree on the language and/or terminology, the title of the project and the procedures we will take throughout the journey. It was important for me to keep asking myself who is benefiting from this research project? Are the participants benefiting? These questions helped me to realize that the actual project could be totally different from the project I initially intended.

The group planned the time and venue for the following sessions; there was no time limit to the length of the sessions. We had eight sessions over a period of two months. The average duration of each session was two and a half to three hours. We agreed to tape-record, transcribe and summarize the sessions. I would also read letters/summaries to the group so that everyone could comment, correct, or provide feedback regarding the summary/letter. The participants agreed to use their real names in this research. They argue that, “our new mission is to shine for other widows’ sight. “No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines, for everyone in the house” Mt 5:14-15.

The group decided to start each session with a prayer and to conclude our research journey with a ritual.

1.11.3 Step three: Telling stories

The first participant was invited to share her story. The other participants made notes on events and experiences in the story which “moved” them or to which they “connected”. In this way the other participants and myself became “compassionate witnesses” (Weingarten 2003) or “reflecting team” (Andersen 1991) to the told story. On completion, I asked the other participants to respond to the story. The same procedure was repeated for all the participants.

1.11.4 Step four: Externalising conversations

As a narrative therapist in training, I am interested in engaging in a conversation to situate the problem away from people who consult me. Thus when the participating widows were telling their stories, I listened for the word(s) that were affecting them. For example, a participant might say, “I just get so worried about my children’s future that I can’t sleep at night”. In this case I picked up on the word ‘worry’ and say, “So the Worry is stopping you from sleeping at night?” In this way externalising conversations enabled me to be a part of the process of widows reclaiming their lives from the effects of problems socially created by the society.

1.11.5 Step five: Deconstructing cultural discourse

This research is positioned within Jacques Derrida’s concept of deconstruction, which involves a critical operation in which taken-for-granted ideas; beliefs, notions, practices and truths are questioned or disrupted to make them more visible (Davies 1993; Morgan 2000). To deconstruct is to undo, to take a text apart but not to destroy (Sampson 1989:6; Morgan 2000; Kotzé & Kotzé 1997; Payne 2000).

White (1991:27) defines deconstruction in the following way:

Deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices. These so-called “truths”, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their bias and their prejudices and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating peoples lives.

This research aimed at undoing the influence or power of dominant cultural practices or knowledge that widows live by. During our conversations with the participants, I considered the context in which the problem story existed, the ideas and beliefs that were sustaining the problem and the history of the ideas. I then listened and asked myself:

- ❖ What are the ideas that might explain how the participants are speaking?
- ❖ What are some of the taken-for-granted ways of being and living that are assisting the life of the problem?
- ❖ What are the background assumptions that enable this story to make sense?
- ❖ What unnamed background assumptions make this story work?

1.11.6 Step six: Use of personal journals

In this study, the use of journals was negotiated with participants. They chose to hand their journals to me so that I could incorporate snippets of some of their journals in the project. Dixon (1999:60) considers a journal “a place where selves can be constructed, re-authored, reflected upon, created, within a linguistic space”.

Journal keeping was highly valued in this research because it allowed the participants to have a voice. According to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986:16-64) the use of journals is in keeping with the women’s notion of “gaining a voice.” As such the participants in this study were encouraged to keep journals of their experiences as widows and also to reflect on the group conversations. As co-authors of this document, the participants were consulted in every step to ensure that everything of importance to them was recorded in a way that was acceptable to them. After all, this research is their story.

1.11.7 Step seven: Reflective summary of group discussions

Following each group session with the participants, I used the audiotape recording to summarize and reflect on the session. Each summary was available to all participants for reviewing and editing according to each participant's understanding. By recognizing my own role, I gave the participants a greater voice. Apart from the summaries, every participant received a letter concerning specific issues or unique outcomes that emerged during the telling of stories.

The use of letters is closely related to the practice of narrative therapy. Epston (1994:31) describes the use of letters as follows:

Conversation is, by its very nature, ephemeral ... But the words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalizing it.

I used the letters to "extend the conversation" (Epston 1994) beyond our meetings. I stayed as true to the words of the participants as possible, because I had the verbatim accounts available in the audiotape recordings. The letters gave me an opportunity to be transparent with the participants as to how I experienced our time together and therefore I was able to share my confusions, joys, excitement, pain, reflections and questions through this medium. These letters were structured "to tell the alternative story that is emerging along with the [research], it documents history, current developments, and future prospects" (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:112).

I also used the letters to convey to the participants how my life was touched by the stories and what I had learnt from them. This practice is called "taking it back" (White 1997:132).

1.11.8 Step eight: Reporting the research

As a result of ongoing consultation and negotiation with each participant to confirm my interpretation of what she had said, the story was co-constructed in the research

report. My aim in this work was not to speak *for* the participants, but speak *out* for them. The participants' voices are more important in this report since the project ethically belongs to them. Thus each participant had the opportunity to review the draft of the report and comment on its validity.

1.11.9 Step nine: Ethical considerations

According to Kotzé (2002:27) to be ethical, the participation of the people *about* or *for* whom we do the research is of primary importance at all levels. The question, “who benefits”, becomes a central and guiding challenge throughout the project.

In this research, since I was aware of my ability to re-shape the stories that are told in my presence, I kept the following ethical considerations in mind as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1994:422):

When we enter into a research with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived, and retold stories as well as our own. As personal experience researchers, we owe our care, our responsibility, to the research participants and how our research texts shape their lives. We all can find ourselves in the eventually constructed research texts... For researchers these issues of responsibility are always foregrounded as we construct research texts.

1.11.10 Step ten: Reflection on my research journey

Feminist research method calls for particular attention to be paid by the researcher to how the study itself has impacted on the self (Reinharz 1992:196). I became aware that the group discussions were like a “mirrored room that can reflect back only the discourses brought to it” by the participants and myself (Hare-Mustin 1994:19).

Reflection involved capturing ways in which my life was affected by the stories told. I also acknowledged my own influence and authority rather than deny it, by questioning my own views and challenging them as follows: *Who is benefiting from this conversation? Whose knowledges are these? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? How has this research changed me?*

1.12 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

This report consists of five chapters, which, following this chapter, highlight the following:

Chapter Two: The unstoried -The widows break their silence

This chapter provides the narrative accounts of the participants' experiences of their widowhood. The aim of the research is to present richly detailed accounts that enable readers to comprehend with empathy the lived reality of the participants.

Chapter Three: Weaving themes together

Different themes that emerged during the conversations are identified, organised and woven together into a framework that explains how the participants experienced widowhood. This chapter also highlights the literature on widowhood to enable the readers to understand the ways in which academic writers have interpreted widows' experiences.

Chapter Four: Authentic identities - The Hidden Treasures

This chapter portrays the participants' preferred ethical stories and identities and how they have resisted the Shona cultural practices of widowhood, which were dominating their lives.

Chapter Five - Folding back: Reflections on the research journey, the implications and recommendations for practical theology and pastoral therapy.

In this chapter the participants and I reflect on the journey and what the process meant for the participants and myself and how it has changed our lives. The chapter also gives new knowledge and discoveries on the researched topic with regard to practical theology and pastoral therapy.

CHAPTER TWO

STORYING THE UNSTORIED THE WIDOWS BREAK THEIR SILENCE

“Mwana asingachemi anofira numbereko”
or
“A child who does not cry can die unnoticed”

A Shona proverb.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the widows’ voices are heard, voices that were previously silenced. By inviting the voices of the widows into this research group, I wished to write about their experiences and knowledge as well as ideas; by so doing giving them a voice, which could be heard among the many other voices that speak of widowhood. As a feminist researcher throughout the group meetings, I aimed at giving “voices to the voiceless” (Isherwood & McEwan 1998:87). For the voices of the participants to be ‘seen’ in the text they are typed in a *different font*. The different themes that emerged as the stories unfold are presented in chapter three.

As a group we created witnesses to the shared widowhood stories (Weingarten 2003). Witnessing refers to the “context within which voice is produced” (Weingarten 2000:392). A “voice” is not “an individual’s achievement of self-knowledge, but rather a possibility that depends on the willingness of the listeners that make up the person’s community” (Weingarten 2000:392). By witnessing to the stories of widowhood experiences in this group “healing” took place (Weingarten 2003:214).

2.2 THE “UNSTORY”

One of the aims of narrative therapy involves a focus on “story” and the effects of telling particular stories, in particular ways, in particular contexts (White 2001). Story-telling is a way of seeking and co-constructing alternative stories. The unstory, “the story that is not there” (Laird 1991:437) is a concept used when writing about the

storying of women in families (Bons-Storm 1996:57). According to Bons-Storm (1996:57-58):

Some experiences stay "unstoried." They cannot be given a meaning that somehow fits in the fabric of a developing self-narrative. This happens to experiences that are painful and shameful: they are put in a closet, the doors shut. To put those experienced events into words and to tell another person the story would mean not only letting the experiences, but also the pain and shame attached to them, out of the closet. One can only do this if one is absolutely certain that the listener will both understand and acknowledge the pain and shame and nevertheless accept the person who tells the story. If the pain and shame are very deep and confuse the self-narrative too much—and thus the search for an authentic identity – the experienced event drops more or less out of consciousness, and becomes more or less forgotten.

In our society, an experienced event tends to turn into an unstory if that experienced event cannot be put into a self-narrative considered appropriate by the dominant belief system. An unstory usually contains roles for women and men that clash with the proper roles. The socio-cultural narrative presents specific models of what the roles of women and men in all relationships ought to be. If women have "unfitting" experiences, there are no "good" stories about them.

Before this research, the participants could not communicate their feelings so these feelings stayed unstoried till they found somebody (in this case myself) to share with some of their "unwordable experiences" (Bons-Storm 1996:59). By creating space for them to tell their stories, the widows were able to make choices about their preferred ethical ways of living. As we listened to each other's story, we looked at one another as valuable persons in their own right.

2.3 THE WIDOWS TELL THEIR STORIES

In this research I was interested in introducing the participants to the reader in a way that was power-sharing and in keeping with the participatory spirit of the study. I asked the group to say how they would want to introduce themselves and in this way they introduced themselves rather than being introduced by a third person and so their voices became heard from the beginning. It is noteworthy that due to limited space, the stories provided are not the full stories of the participants. After each story there

would be some reflections from the other participants. These reflections only represent part of the conversations, which I had with the participants.

2.3.1 Maria's Story



Fig 1

I am 41 years old and was married in April 1981. My husband's name was Edmond Mudiwa. In 1982 we were blessed with our first child Leonard. We had our second child Tongai in 1985, third child Willard in 1986; unfortunately he passed away in 1988. In 1991 we were blessed with another child Patrick. I lived a good life with my husband and children. Edmond was a caring husband; he provided the family with all basic needs. He never wanted us to starve. He wanted the family to have a balanced diet everyday. He wanted the best for his wife and children. I loved him very much. He always wanted his children to go to good schools. For example, in 1995 we sent our first-born Leonard to a boarding school Dayadaya Mission (one of the best schools in Zimbabwe).

Edmond was a diabetic patient, but was never a burden to me. I had a very close relationship with Edmond this is why I am referring to him with his first name. In our Shona culture we normally refer to our husbands with their totem or surname.

Edmond never complained about my freedom to use the money he gave me. We trusted each other. I could buy anything that I needed without consulting him. My life changed when he passed away in May 2001. He was a blessed guy. As I have already said he loved his family, he left a house for us to live in here in Kwekwe.

However, things were hard for the children and me because Edmond got nothing from his employer, there was not even pension for us to look forward to. After we had buried my husband, I felt very lonely especially when we came back to Kwekwe from the rural area where we buried him. My friends were nowhere to be seen. My extended family behaved as if everything was just the same as when Edmond was alive. Nobody came to ask how I was coping. When I thought of the school fees for the children, I cried. I had many sleepless nights. I was worried. My in-laws had promised at the funeral that they would help with fees but failed to fulfil the promise on time. One day I just told myself, 'Maria if you continue to cry like this, what will become of your children and yourself?' My brother and sisters helped me with some money that I used for buying and selling some vegetables.

To be a widow is hard, even friends from your church isolate you. When I was offered a job at Mary Ward Children's Home, other church members made up a story that I was not fit to work with children because I was suffering from TB. It was very painful for me. The light came when I got a phone call from Sr. Mercy that she wanted me for the job in 2002. I am very happy because I am able to send my children to school. I want to tell those who are going to read this that to be a widow is hard. I went through hard times. I found some of the Shona cultural practices very oppressive to women especially mourning rituals and kudarika uta the jumping over the deceased husband's knobkerrie. This group counselling has done me a lot of good. I find it empowering and transforming. I would like to support other widows out there through sharing my own story.

2.3.2 The participating team's reflections on Maria's story

I asked other participants what moved them in Maria's story that they might wish to discuss together.

Rofina: The whole story touched me. There is so much I can relate to. What stand out for me are feelings of isolation, even from your close friends and church members. Some people especially your neighbours thought you might take their husbands.

Musline: Through your story, I realize that I am not alone in my struggle as a widow. I have often come to a point in my life where I could no longer tolerate the way I was treated when performing those Shona rituals to the extent that I removed the sori (black dress) on my own. I felt like a prisoner in it.

Kate: Your story moved me to tears. I know it is not easy for a woman to cope on her own when there is no source of income, especially if there are small children involved. Maria you have come a long way and you have your family to support you through this. Do not give up on your plans. I am also interested in helping other widows.

2.3.3 Rofina's story



Fig 2

It was on the 5th of April 1996 when my husband Godfrey Muza died. By then I was 35 years old. Relatives and friends gathered for the funeral at our home. Some of the relatives did not want to contribute to the funeral expenses. Fortunately, we had our funeral policy for my husband. After the funeral, my husband's relatives arranged to take my children from me without consulting me. I just overheard it. I imagined how lonely I would feel without my husband and more so without my children. I told myself that I would fight for my children through thick and thin. I stood up and told my in-laws that I will look after my children on my own. I was working at Mary Ward Children's Home. I

loved my children and I knew that if my children were taken away, they would not live a good life.

My children did not want to leave me alone. The elder child gathered some stones threatening those who would lift their hands to take them away from me. My in-laws took one of the children into their car; I pulled the child out of the car. The struggle went on for some time but I never gave up. I cried and wished that my husband was alive. To make ends meet; I borrowed some money from my family and started selling some freezits and vegetables. I also started sewing some school uniforms for selling. This was to supplement my salary. After work I would continue to work very hard in the evening. I managed to send all my three children to school. Nobody from the extended family helped me. Two of the children have already finished the 'O' levels; one is at a Teacher's Training College.

After the death of my husband, my social life changed. The wives of my brothers-in-law isolated me. They thought I wanted to be inherited by their husbands. I never intended to do that. At the performance of the rituals, I was asked to jump over my husband's knobkerrie thirteen times¹. The in-laws wanted to fix me. I could not defend myself at the hands of these men. My father encouraged me not to give up. But I refused to wear the black dress.

I can say that this is my first time to talk about my experiences of widowhood to a group of people. It was very painful for me to start talking about this, but now I feel energised. Yes, it is hard for widows to live in a society like ours where there is already more suffering from HIV and Aids as well as poverty. The extended families no longer care for its orphans or widows. I had to work for every cent I needed day

¹ Among the Shona people at the kurova guva or homing the spirits ceremony a wife of the diseased husband is asked to jump her husband's knobkerrie to show that she has been faithful to her dead husband. If she knows that she was not faithful, she does not jump the knobkerrie but her own family pays to the husband's family in the form of a cow.

and night. This group has become very supportive such that I look forward to coming to the meetings. I am grateful to Sr. Mercy who thought of inviting me to participate in this research journey where I am given space to express myself and air my feelings without being afraid. I see a bright future because of what I have experienced in this group. There is togetherness, which I longed for before I came here. I hope we will continue meeting each other after this research journey. I would like to thank God for the strength and his guidance that I experience in my daily life.

2.3.4 The participating team's reflections on Rofina's story

I asked the other participants what had moved them in Rofina's story, if they had any comments they wished to make.

Kate: What stands out for me is that despite all your difficulties, you were determined to fight for your children. This brought a strong bond between you and your children.

Maria: As you were telling about how you were told to jump over your husband's knobkerrie, I shared your pain but also found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that your in-laws had to make you jump over the knobkerrie thirteen times. I found this very cruel. You were incredibly strong in doing this.

Musline: Rofina, there is so much I can relate to in your story. What stands out for me is feelings of powerlessness that is often experienced by women in our Shona culture and also in some other cultures. I sometimes ask myself why are our mourning rituals oppressive to women? If a woman dies no man is asked to perform this kind of ritual.

2.3.5 Kate's story



Fig 3

*My name is Kate Makudza, born in 1963. I was married to Tedious Makudza in 1983. We lived together for 16 years before the Lord took him in 1999. We loved each other and we were like **bandi nebhurugwa** or **guyo nehuyo** meaning that we were always moving around together except when he was at work. God blessed us with three children, Tendai born in 1984, Tedious born in 1986 and Tabeth in 1991. We had our own house, car and cattle at our rural home in Mutare. We had time to laugh as a family and during the holidays we spent most of the time travelling together as a family. I went for shopping with Tedious and sometimes together with the children. We looked forward to Sundays because we drove as a family to church and after our service would return home and spend the day together.*

*I will never forget the 24th of May 1999 when Tedious was killed in a car accident while going for work. It was a great shock for me. I was not at home that day. When I came back and saw people gathered at my place, I fainted. **Ndakapererwa** (I was helpless). We went to our rural home for the funeral. When I wanted to come back to Kwekwe, my in-laws said I had to stay at the rural home because my husband's grave was there. I didn't argue with them but packed my things and came back to Kwekwe. I thought of my children; how was I going raise them alone?*

My husband was working at National Foods before he died. He was a contract worker; this means that he had no pension to see us through. He was given no benefit nor compensation because he didn't die at the workplace. I told my in-laws that I was going to sell the car so that I will

be able to pay school fees for the children. I was frustrated and pained when I heard that my brother-in-law had sold our cows without consulting me. He never gave us any money. He just told me that he had the right to do whatever he wanted with his brother's property.

Life was tough for the children and me. Sometimes we had nothing to eat. At one time my children had to go to school without shoes. Nobody from my husband's family thought of us. I started selling vegetables and fruits in the streets. I was so happy that my own family was very supportive. I did not give up going to church although at times this brought some memories of my husband. I believed that God would never fail me. I know God cares and loves me. My sisters helped me with food at times. However my life changed when I got a job at Mary Ward Children's Home. My in-laws were against this decision but I went ahead with it.

2.3.6 The participating team's reflections on Kate's story

I asked the other participants what moved them in Kate's story that they would want to discuss with the whole group.

Musline: Kate, your unfailing faith is something that touched me. Your story speaks convincingly of your trust in God. For me I had to question God at times, I often doubted my standing before God, your relationship with God was something very special, you could hold on to it even in the midst of your difficulties.

Rofina: As your story unfolded, I sensed your love for the children. You were determined to work for them despite the opposition that you got from your in-laws. Keep up this spirit of determination.

Maria: Kate, I share your pain and suffering when you had no pension. I find it very inhuman for a company not to offer assistance for

their employees especially in the case of your husband who died on his way to work.

2.3.7 Musline's story



Fig 4

I am Musline Mupindu, 38 years old. Jervas Mupindu was my husband. We got married in 1982. We had four children, Audrey, Caroline, Christine and Amanda, all girls. We lived together for 17 years. The blow came on 12 December 2000 when he died. That year we had planned to celebrate our 18th year of marriage.

*My husband was not only a father to my children but was also a teacher of the Word of God in the Roman Catholic Church. He was once in the parish executive as the secretary and then as the vice-chairperson as well as the **sekuru** (leader) for the guild of Simon Peter. We went together as a family to church and also for shopping. Jervas was a police officer and he could drive us to the rural home in the police vehicle. He loved his children and me. Through his concern for his family we were able to send our children to some of the best schools in the country. For example, our first child went to Loreto High School, one of the best Catholic Schools in Zimbabwe.*

We shared our problems and were able to look for solutions together. I loved Jervas and the children loved him too. I felt very lonely when he died. There were no more visits to places such as Trade Fair in Bulawayo, Echo Park Kwekwe and Agricultural Show in Gweru. After my husband's death I went through a lot of pain and suffering. I can say that from the day my husband died it was as if I was climbing a

slippery mountain. At the funeral my in-laws expected me to buy food for people to eat. They said their son was working for many years so he had lots of money.

*I was glad that the police provided everything for the funeral. I was asked to wear a black dress to show that I was mourning for my husband. What frustrated me was that I had to use my own money to buy the dress. There were so many demands made, which I felt, were very oppressive to me. They treated me like a minor. I was asked to buy the cow for the **kurova guva** ceremony (homing of the spirits). After a year wearing the black dress I removed it on my own because the in-laws wanted me to wear it for another year. They refused to end the mourning ceremony after one year. I was by then working at Mary Ward Children's Home.*

As if this was not enough my first-born Audrey died in 2003. This was too painful for me. I loved my child. She was a source of comfort to me. I could share a lot with her about what I was going through. Many friends and family members were very supportive to me. But my in-laws were not supportive. I didn't know what wrong I had done to them. When I received my benefits from the police, I shared with them. I did not see God in my life. I questioned God's existence. I felt helpless and frustrated. I sought counselling from Sr. Mercy. This was very helpful. When Sr. Mercy invited me to participate in this research journey, I didn't hesitate. I find that space has been created for us widows to air our views and feelings. This is my first time to experience this. I wish more widows in our community could have the chance to tell their widowhood experiences in a way they want.

2.3.8 The participating team's reflections on Musline's story

The other participants in the group responded to Musline's story as follows:

Maria: Musline's whole story touched me. I was wondering how we could stand together as a group and not only support ourselves but to stretch out to other widows whose voices remain unheard. Musline you have travelled a very painful journey but I assure you that I will stand by your side.

Kate: I realize that as women certain cultural practices are in favour of men - men do not wear black clothes, they do not jump over the ritual knobkerrie or even go and stay at the rural home when their wives are buried there. It kept me thinking that one has to resist as you did Musline.

Rofina: After hearing your story Musline, I have come to the point of thinking that we should encourage other widows to talk about their experiences. I find this healing. As women, we have to liberate ourselves. Men put these cultural practices in place; they are the ones benefiting from these practices. Films such as Neria should be accessible to many widows².

2.4 MY REFLECTIONS

As I write this section and reflect upon what was said by the participating team, I agree with the notion that "... it is in the wounds of resistance that people gain power: to tell and even to heal" (Frank 1995:181). Through telling their stories of oppression, empowerment took place. An empathetic bond developed, especially when the

² In this film, Patrick and Neria, through shared hard work and resourcefulness, have built a comfortable home, good life and family in the city. But when their loving and equal partnership suddenly ends with the tragic death of Patrick, Neria's nightmare begins. Patrick's brother Phineas helps himself to their car, bankbook, furniture, and house. He takes advantage of tradition to suit his own needs, making no effort to take care of his brothers' family. Yet Phineas claims that tradition and law are on his side. Neria watches helplessly at first, believing there is no legal or moral recourse for her. But when Phineas takes her children, Neria decides she must fight back. In desperation she seeks justice. Neria learns that law and tradition can both be on her side if she remains strong and intelligently fights for her rights.

women felt that they are being heard. The empowerment, which is experienced by the widows, lies not only in the truth of the story as it is experienced, but also becomes experience through the telling and its reception. Weingarten (1995:21) calls it “radical listening”, a way of listening, which affirms one’s self-worth and assists her/him regain a preferred sense of identity and power. By telling their stories, the widows not only recover their voices, but they become “compassionate witnesses” (Weingarten 2003). The participants have identified some common themes to their stories, which include isolation, resistance, patriarchy, effects of widowhood on children, Shona culture, pastoral care, what helps the widows to survive, widows’ rituals and inheritance. These themes are discussed in chapter three.

2.5 GROUP MEETINGS

The group met for a total of eight sessions spread over a period of two months. We met at Mary Ward Children’s Home because all of us work there. We used different ways of telling the stories, and the participants used these ways as we journeyed together. These included drawing the stories, dramatizing, writing the stories, telling and rewriting them in letters and poetry.

The first meeting involved introduction, looking at the theme of the project, discussion and negotiation of the aim and objectives of the project. As a group we also looked at how we were going to walk together on our journey, which language we were going to use and when we were going to meet. We negotiated the ethical implications of the study, the method of work for the research, use of personal journals and audiotapes. The second meeting began the process of participants telling their stories of widowhood experiences and we listened to Maria’s story (see 1: 11).

The third meeting Rofina storied her widowhood experiences. In the fourth meeting we listened to Kate and the fifth was Musline’s sharing. The sixth meeting was spent on weaving together the themes, which unfolded during telling the widowhood experiences (see chapter 3). The seventh session included a group discussion on how to set up a widows’ association, which would work as a support group for widows in the community. In this meeting the participants also discussed how they were going to celebrate their preferred ethical ways of living. The final session began with reflection

upon the research process and ended with celebrations on the new identities, insights gained through the process of telling stories. The group invited Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Aleta and Blessing Mutero as outsider witnesses (see chapter 4).

2.6 CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE WITH THE PARTICIPANTS

During our sessions I offered each participant an opportunity to story her widowhood experience in a way she felt comfortable with. In the group we were concerned about each other. We developed a “participatory connectedness” (Bishop 1996:23). Each session started with a prayer followed by sharing of our feelings, experiences and challenges. We included our dear ones in our prayers as well as our enemies. The participants suggested bringing in their husbands into the prayer, they would light 4 candles to symbolize their presence in the sharing. I provided some snacks and drinks. We showed practical love by writing each other letters or cards. These forms of love and care counter some of the problem-saturated stories that have ruled the participants’ lives before, such as isolation, stigmatization and lack of support. By listening to the one who was telling her story, the participants then created a community of care. The way we witnessed to the stories of the pain and suffering of each participating widow was central to providing care. This is “frequently the genesis of healing if not curing” (Wright, Watson & Bell 1996:161).

In this study, I saw myself as the facilitator.

- ❖ I put emphasis on the participants’ strengths. I engaged the participants in conversation about the competencies they could employ to make changes in their lives. “The talk is about what clients are engaged in when the problem does not occur rather when it does occur” (Polkinghorne 2004:56).

- ❖ I viewed the participants and myself the therapist as partners. According to Polkinghorne (2004:56) “the point of the client and therapist as partners theme is that therapy is a specialized discursive interpersonal activity rather than a subject knower seeking to comprehend a client as an at-a-distance object”.

I offer the following transcript to illustrate how the participants feel about being in the group:

Kate: I do appreciate the way you care for us in this group.

Mercy: Can you tell me more about this caring?

Kate: Um ... there are quite a lot of good things. Let me say that I feel I am listened to, taken seriously and appreciated. I also have appreciated being physically touched when I was telling my story for the first time (We hold each other's hands to show our solidarity with the person telling her story).

Mercy: What is the difference now?

Kate: Ah well, before we met I was feeling a little bit destroyed, lifeless, you know, but ever since I started these sessions, I can say something just changed in me. I feel very happy to come to these meetings. I am enjoying everything here especially being with you.

Mercy: So what would you say is the change?

Kate: Before these group sessions I used to cry when I thought of my situation. I was miserable and lonely. But now I feel like I am born again, I am a new person although I am still a widow. You people make me laugh, talk and not be afraid of what people say about me. I feel you understand me and accept me as I am. I have never experienced this before.

As a narrative pastoral counsellor in training, I hoped that within the group, the expert/subjugated knowledges (Foucault 1980:81) of all the participants were being

acknowledged. In the space, which we provided as a group, love and caring were being experienced and there was opportunity to speak of the painful events.

During the fifth session Musline said:

*Alone, I could not have been the person I am today. As it is expressed in the Shona proverbs: **chara chimwe hachitswanye inda** – one thumb does not kill a louse, or **maoko anogezana** – hands wash each other. I feel I belong to this group. I am not alone.*

I asked her:

What do you think has helped you in this group to feel that you are not alone?

Musline: Yeah. There is a lot of trust in this group. Each one of you offered to walk with me and to support me whenever I needed help. When we are not in this room this kind of support continues. What we have learnt here in the group sessions we are putting it into practice wherever we are. I am real grateful for all you have done to me as a person.

Hence Mbiti (1998:143) summed up the African communal identity in the principle: “I am because we are and since I am therefore we are”. According to this view, an African worldview does not see life of an individual in isolation from other human beings but sees life in communal terms. It is only through the mutual interdependence between people, as well as between individuals and the community that a full and healthy life can be enjoyed. Desmond Tutu harmonizes with the ethic of Ubuntu (a way of living practiced in South Africa that emphasises the relationships of care between people) by accentuating that a person is a person through other persons (*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*).

Mercy: Musline would you like to tell us the person you are today?

Musline: In this group, I am hearing other widows' stories; I feel with the group. I feel as if a big load has been removed from my shoulders. I can sleep well and do my work without feeling disturbed or dizzy. Alone I tried to do all sorts of things to stop worrying but without success. This group has helped me to become active once again. I am fully active and much alive. I feel part of this caring community. Thank you my dear friends.

As I reflected on Musline's words, Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words came to my mind:

A person is not basically an independent, solitary entity. A person is human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life. To be ... is to participate.

(Krog 1998:143)

The sense of caring with each other was felt through out the research process. I felt the participants' situations as if they were my own. Like the other participants, I also wept as the widows narrated their widowhood experiences. I entered into their experiences. The concept of *umwe* (Shona) or *ubuntu* was highly expressed in our group.

2.7 THE GOLDEN THREAD OF DOING HOPE

Hope is a very important aspect when we care with each other. I agree with Weingarten's (2000:402) words that hope "is something we do with others. Hope is too important - and its effects on the body and soul too significant – not to be left to individuals alone. Hope must be the responsibility of the community".

Often the participants shared the stories of loneliness and hopelessness in a future without their husbands. The presence of this group, proved to be a "container wide enough and deep enough" (Weingarten 2000:402) to hold each other through this loneliness; and in so doing, giving hope. In the telling of stories, I witnessed two

processes even though they were neatly interwoven, the story of pain and suffering and the story of hope and victory.

During one of the sessions some of the participants dramatized and imitated their in-laws. For example Musline enacted her mother-in-law, “Why are you crying, he has gone for good. Do you think your crying is going to change any situation? We want to see what you are going to do without him? We are just the same now, soon you will be as poor as we are”. This brought a lot of humour and laughter in the group.

Each participant appreciated the unwavering solidarity experienced in the group.

I made this more visible to the participants in a letter:

As I was listening to the tape recording of our last meeting, I found a smile growing on my face and in my spirit. To me it feels really good to hear you laughing and clapping hands. The way you dramatized and imitated your in-laws left an impression of marvel and awe in my mind. I was wondering, could the support we experienced in this group be one method of strengthening preferred ethical ways of living? Are there more ways that can help you stay connected to your identities or hold on to the golden thread of hope? I am curious to know whether you have used the same strategies in the past.

Another golden thread of hope occurred when each participant pledged Z\$50 000 for starting a widows’ association group to help other widows who are still marginalised in the community (see chapter 4).

Yet another golden thread of hope happened when the participants assisted a widow with Z\$100 000 without asking her to return the money. I was moved into tears, tears of great joy and hope. Maria said:

When I started this journey with Mercy, I did not expect the process to bring about the solutions we’ve come up with. This brightens our hope, support and togetherness. I am so touched by what this has also done to my family. It did some wonders. I tell you its amazing grace.

Mercy: What has this process done to your family?

Maria: Oh a lot! My children see me differently and they can talk to me openly now because I have also opened up my heart to them. I am able to express my feelings to them. My children appreciate all I do for them and have told me that I am a wonderful mother. I had been talking to my children about my widowhood experiences.

After reflecting on how she succeeded in bringing back her children from her in-laws, Rofina told the group that she has found a new identity. She has chosen a name for it **Kundai** or Defeat. The new identity symbolises the story of hope and victory in her life. In a conversation with her, I asked:

Mercy: What made you choose this name/metaphor of 'Kundai/Defeat'?

Rofina: After seeing the film Neria, I was determined to fight for my children. I did not want my children to be raised by somebody else. Neria was helpless at first when her brother-in-law took her house, car, bankbook and furniture. But when her brother-in-law took her children, Neria decided she must fight back. She succeeded in the end. She won the battle and this happened also to me, I won the battle. I feel empowered by this process of journeying together. The group conversations, sharing and reflections give me inner hope for my future.

I enjoyed and marvelled at the golden thread of doing hope that was woven in all our meetings. In all our conversations, a burning candle at our centrepiece symbolized hope and victory.

2.8 CONCLUSION

During the storying of the widowhood experiences, I created a conducive environment and space that helped each participant feel comfortable. I tried to be available for others since we have all the time in the world to search for, try out, create or bend

language to serve the purposes of knowing and being known (Weingarten 2001:120). The latent voice may speak the unspeakable; know the unknowable, if the voice feels welcomed.

As a reader of these stories I wonder if you could help me to find some answers to many questions I was asking myself before listening to the widows' stories.

- ❖ Why should I think that their stories should be told?
- ❖ What stands in the way of getting them told?
- ❖ What do these stories warn us about?
- ❖ What could or should we, as hearers, learn from them?

One of the things that I learnt from the participants was that it takes a long time and a lot of healing to be able to tell your story. As I work with lots of people's stories (especially children's stories) I realize that I sometimes easily become blind to this important part not treating every telling with the care and respect it deserves.

The next chapter will weave together the themes that were identified by the participants.

CHAPTER THREE
WEAVING THEMES TOGETHER
CO-CONSTRUCTING NEW KNOWLEDGE

May we have joy
As we learn to define ourselves.
Our world, our home, our journey.
May we do so?
Telling our own stories and
Singing our own songs,
Enjoying them for what they are or
for what they may become.
Weaving the new patterns we want
to wear,
We continue to tell our stories of the
genesis of our participation.
We gather the whole household and
begin a new tale.
Nse se nse se o!
Nse se soa wo.

(Oduyoye 1995:217)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Shona culture as in other African cultures, weaving is treasured. Weaving is an art that symbolizes connections and reconnections. In this chapter I weave themes that run through most of the participants' stories. The themes all formed part of conversations that were much more open and free-flowing. It was also my intention to weave many threads from the literature that would bring in colour and meaning to the experiences of widows. In storying the not-yet-said widowhood practices, the participants have been weaving a new tapestry or co-constructing new knowledge that would enable transformation of oppressive practices among the Shona.

Social constructionism maintains that knowledge is created and sustained by social process and that knowledge and social action go together (Burr 1995:3-5). Hence the social construction of knowledge is socially and politically sensitive and according to Hoffman (1990:11) will "create an emancipatory dialogue rather than the oppressive or monolithic one" that has been practiced in our Shona culture. In this journey, it was

our desire to weave new knowledge, new patterns into our Shona culture to make it life-giving to both men and women.

As I write I see an African mat. There can be no higher expression of creativity, of design, of thinking, of weaving patterns than in this mat. I have been weaving the voices of the widows into the new pattern, which highlight their experiences by quoting their voices as Rofina points out:

Our weaving together as a group becomes our testimony to our widowhood experiences.

3.2 SHONA CULTURE

Rossouw (1993:894) defines culture in the following way: “Culture is the interpretative and coping mechanism of society. It is the way in which people understand themselves, their world, and the appropriate interaction with one another and with the world they live in”.

The word culture is very complex.

It has to do with all aspects of life, how we perceive ourselves, how we relate to the past and the future, how we live and die. It is everything, a liberating as well as an oppressing force in the life activities of men and women, be it in the economic and social spheres.

(Hove 1994:7)

According to Kanyoro (quoted by Dube 2004:59):

A particular people (nation, tribe, and ethnic group) has its own culture, its distinct way of living, loving, eating, playing and worshipping. Culture may refer to the musical and visual arts, modern influences on life, an acquired tradition, or to regulations that bind the life of a community... Culture can be a double-edged sword: it can form community identity and it can also be used to set apart or oppress those whom culture defines as other. Participation in culture is so natural and ubiquitous that most people take culture for granted.

It is noteworthy that culture in itself is dynamic. In this study it is clear that there is no pure Shona culture. This agrees with Chimhanda’s (2002:144) words “it is a

misnomer to talk about a pure Shona culture in view of the confluence of cultures and the different ethnic groups of Shona peoples”.

Shona culture has many layers; it can be represented by a big tree, which has many branches. These branches represent the sub groups of Shona peoples, e.g. Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Venda and Kalanga. Even the individual people who belong to the same tribe or sub group are unique.

All the participants agreed that men have used Shona culture as a tool of oppression against women. In the name of the Shona culture men abuse their power and silence the voices of women and children (May 1983; Manyame 1994). According to Musline:

Unlike beauty, oppression does not lie in the eyes of the beholder rather it tugs at the soul of the one who feels it. This is what I have been experiencing since my husband's death. I take this opportunity to liberate myself from these oppressive Shona cultural practices. This group counselling is an eye opener for me. I am enjoying the sharing of our widowhood stories. It has such a tremendous power in healing my soul.

It is correct to say that Shona culture per se does not exist. Unlike in the olden days when people depended on farming and men would leave behind cattle, these days men leave behind pension, bank accounts and other property (Mukonoweshure 1992:70-87). Among the Shona people, traditionally there was no property grabbing like nowadays. The heirs would be responsible for the continued welfare of the widow and her children who were also inherited (Shenje 1992:54-56). The widow will not leave her husband's family because lobola was paid to her family. As such the Shona culture viewed the widow as the property of her husband's family. This notion agrees with Mukonoweshure (1992:81) who asserts that:

A widow just watched whilst her deceased husband's relatives were packing the property and never said a word. In reply to the question why she had not even protested, she answered that she had to be seen as a **muroora**, respectful daughter-in-law. She showed this respect by letting them do as they please. This behaviour follows the Shona custom/belief that the relationship between a married woman or widow and her in-laws is that of respect mixed with fear.

As in the example above, traditional culture has become internalized in such a way that it oppresses women. Kate said, “*as a woman, I am expected to do what I am told by my brother-in-laws. I can not make decision on my own*”. This resonates with Foucault’s (1977) ideas on docile bodies and normalizing judgment. I recalled the following comment from my aunt, “it seems to me that our Shona custom is gender biased, why is it that our society is male dominated, women are always told what to and what not to do?” I do agree with her that men do benefit from the rules and regulations they enforce on women but women are the docile bodies.

Rofina said:

It is high time that we co-create a way of living that is not oppressive. This is a new era in which we are living. From now on I will make my own decisions. Why should I have to consult somebody who is far away, a person who does not care for the children, who does not even come to see them.

3.3 PATRIARCHY

“Patriarchal societies are those in which the rule of the father is the basic principle of social organization of the family and society as a whole” (Ruether 1996:173). As I reflected on the narratives of the widows the following questions kept nagging at me. Is patriarchy still the prevailing feature in the Shona culture? Whose interest is it serving? Does patriarchy have a silencing effect? In Shona culture, patriarchy positions men in relations of power that are taken for granted to such an extent that abuse of widows is entertained under the guise of care and protection Mukonoweshure (1992:79). According to the participants, patriarchy has created unsafe and unhealthy situations for the widows.

As a woman I am regarded as a minor; my in-laws think I cannot make decisions for my children and myself without consulting them. Just imagine if a woman dies the widower has many more resources than we, widows are experiencing.

(Kate 2005)

This resonates with what Poling (1991:105) says; men have more resources for survival than women and children.

My in-laws told me that whatever they were doing, it was in order to protect me and the children from the spirits of the dead. Even though my husband is dead, I am still married to the clan. This puts me in a tight corner.

(Maria 2005)

Mbiti (1991:59) states that in Ghana there is a proverb, which says that African women are flowers in the garden; the men are the fences. According to the participants in the Shona culture, *the in-laws do not protect widows as they say; rather they create an atmosphere of fear in the lives of the widows.* Dixon (1999:76) was right to say “Any impulse to act in her own interests leaves a woman in the clutches of fear, anxiety, guilt and shame.... The goodness code becomes a prison.... Which forces us to stay within its narrow walls”.

As widows we need to challenge the practice in our Shona culture that men are made to make decisions for us, decisions that affect our lives negatively.

(Maria, Rofina, Kate & Musline 2005)

Oduyoye (1995:214) asserts that:

We need a new belief or practice that goes beyond scientific or biological origins. We need a belief that focuses on human interconnectedness as part of becoming human. Today our way of thinking must mirror our new vision of the earth as a home for a single human role, interconnected and of equal value. We must recognize that social structures are socially created by human beings and, therefore, may be scrambled, reorganized or discarded if they are dysfunctional.

Feminist theologians agitate for the transformation of patriarchal Christianity that would enable “everybody to become an agent in his or own right, with full personhood and autonomy” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:112).

3.4 WIDOWS' RITUALS

There are certain rituals that have to be observed by the widow in her status. These emphasise the widow's subordination to her in-laws. They disempower and dispossess the widow with regards to issues of her own matrimonial property (White, Kamanga, Kachika, Chiweza & Chidyaonga 2002; Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1992; Chimhanda 2002). According to Nwachuku (1992:61) the African cultural concept of widowhood is retrogressive in that it generates and encourages abuse of human dignity through widow stereotyping and stigmatization, and also through perpetuating further psychological violence to a person who is already grief stricken at the loss of a dead spouse.

*As Shona women we are concerned about oppression of widows in the practices of ritual cleansing, Levirate marriages and the restrictions imposed on the widows before **kurova guva** (homing of the spirits) ceremony. Normally **kurova guva** is performed a year after death. Before that as a widow I am considered still married and have to be strictly faithful to the marriage. I will be wearing a black dress sori. It was very painful for me because this homing of the spirits ceremony took place only after two years.*

(Musline 2005)

According to Chimhanda (2002:153-154):

It appears that the Shona patriarch empathizes more with the widower than the widow. The Shona usually perform the homing of the spirits ceremony of a deceased wife within a year after death, whereas that of a deceased husband can be prolonged indefinitely. The agnates of the deceased, in accusing the adulterer of **kupisa guva** (burning the grave), claim heavy damages. Moreover in the ritual of **kudarika uta** (the widow being asked to jump over the deceased husband's knobkerrie), it is the widow only who is asked in front of the public to pass the test of faithfulness or else face public embarrassment or wrath.

One of the participants said that the widow ritual of cleansing demands that

From the time the husband's body is lying in state until after burial, as a wife I cannot take a bath. After the funeral I can then bath.

Another one said:

From my experiences I have learnt that the ritual reinforces despair; it breaks up the family into warring factions, renders the widow helpless, creates health hazards, disturbs the children's psychological growth, and leaves the family insecure.

Chimhanda (2002:154) also points out that such practices can cause serious physical discomfort for a person already emotionally stressed in mourning. Hence we see the widowhood rituals are totally opposed to Christian principles of life and love.

3.5 ISOLATION

In this study the participants pointed out that widowhood rituals isolate widows from the community.

This black dress that a widow wears for the duration of mourning is problematic to widows because as long as she is wearing this clothing, she is isolated.

According to Chimhanda (2002:144):

In Shona society widows are victimized as witches and prostitutes, and, as underlying the death of the husband. In addition to this widows suffer alienation and suspicion especially from wives of the brothers of the deceased husband who fear for their own marriages in the advent of polygamy through the Levirate marriage.

The participants highlighted that the social marginalisation of widows frequently took one or more of the following forms:

- ❖ *Rumours and accusations: widows are often accused of being "responsible" for the deaths of their husband, regarded as sexually threatening, and generally considered as inauspicious.*

- ❖ *Enforced dress and behaviour codes: many widows are under strong pressure to observe restrictive codes of dress, appearance and behaviour.*
- ❖ *Social ostracism: a widow is often excluded from the religious and social life of the community, due to her perceived inauspiciousness.*

The participants indicated some attrition in friendship.

A person who was very close to me a year before the death of my husband was no longer a friend when I became a widow. I just felt maybe she was afraid I might take her husband or that I might ask her family to support me financially.

I thought I had friends that were close but when I was widowed and they were not, they drift away.

Lopata (quoted in Martin Matthews 1991:47) said, “particularly in these circumstances, widowed persons lose not only a spouse but also their entrée into a couple compassionate society to which virtually all their friends belong”.

3.6 INHERITANCE

Among the Shona people, the custom of wife inheritance is becoming less frequent but some families still practice it.

A widow may agree to be inherited or she can choose her son as custodian of her late husband's estate by offering him the water to wash his hands, at the inheritance ceremony. This is also an indication of the widow's desire to remain at the homestead for the sake of her children. Usually nobody dares challenge her openly. There may be some subtle mischievous acts to frustrate her, such as giving bad advice or turning her children against her, but no one challenges the woman openly.

In some cases if the woman 'behaves' and causes no trouble, she may eventually win the support of her in-laws. But with the economic situation

deteriorating, most relatives are beginning to fight for the deceased's property and most men will insist on inheriting the wife so that they can control her and her late husband's property.

(Manyame 1994:52)

The participants pointed out that although there are customary laws that protect them, one might not use them for fear of being isolated by the in-laws.

It is sometimes hard for a widow like me to make use of the law that protects me. There is fear of witchcraft and fear of being ostracized by my husband's family especially when I have children. When the children are sick or have problems, I need the help of the in-laws. In such situations they may refuse to help me. This is why sometimes it is hard to resist their demands especially where there are young children.

According to May (1983:90-91) too often, however, women will not access the laws for the following reasons:

- ❖ They are afraid of angering the husband's family, particularly if it has taken over the children, as this might mean loss of contact with the children. The children may suffer in the hands of the husband's family.
- ❖ They also do not want to draw attention to their widowhood if they wish to remain in town.

Generally, customary rules on inheritance reflect the female-male roles prescribed by tradition and custom which are based on the notion of male leadership and dominance and the corresponding subservient role of women (May 1983; Manyame 1994).

White, Kamanga, Kachika, Chiweza and Chidyaonga (2002:29) had this to say:

Property dispossession against widows is a form of violence against women, which threatens the enjoyment of women's rights. The dispossession of the widow itself is a long and complex process emanating from interplay of the construction of gender roles and images, the plurality of legal norms, poverty and cultural factors. The solution to this problem

may lie in such laws, institutions, cultural factors, gender equality and justice.

In this study, no participants accepted inheritance by the brothers' in-law. According to Mukonoweshure (1992:73) this may indicate that people are gradually changing their way of thinking about inheritance. However, some of them, Rofina and Kate, have experienced property grabbing by their husbands' families. For both of them some of the cattle, which were left behind by their husbands, were sold by their brothers' in-law without their knowledge. The in-laws claimed that the cattle belonged to their relative and they had the right to do whatever they wanted with the money. This was very painful to Kate and Rofina since they have worked together to earn these cattle.

3.7 IMPACT OF WIDOWHOOD ON CHILDREN

Many widows are extremely anxious about the needs of their children, especially the need for education. Many children of widows end up working (e.g. grazing cattle, collecting wood, or doing wage labour in nearby towns or in the rural areas) in order to supplement the family income. The need to work at an early age affects the immediate well being of these children (especially in the case of occupations where children are overworked, exploited or exposed to health hazards), as well as their future opportunities. On the death of the father, the children usually have to assume greater responsibilities. Sometimes the mother brings them into the labour force to try and compensate for the loss of their father's labour (Chen 1998:423 - 424).

In this study the participants indicated that:

- ❖ *I had no one to help me with housework and other things that needed to be done. I asked my children to help me with selling of vegetables and working in the house after school.*
- ❖ *My children were affected by their father's death. Their performance in school dropped. When I saw that it was getting*

worse and worse, I sat down and talked with them. This was very helpful. They are now doing better in school. One is already working where the father was employed.

- ❖ *After the death of my husband, my children used to cry and were never used to eating vegetables with no meat. My children were used to a good life and had pocket money at school; I could not afford this.*
- ❖ *I could not afford to pay boarding fees. My children had to go to ordinary schools around. This was hard on them.*

However, some of the most meaningful, caring pastoral experiences for the participants, came from their children. I witnessed moving accounts of how the widows were at times, sustained, guided, healed and reconciled by the concern and caring practices of their children. For example, when Musline was struggling with the loss of her daughter:

Caroline my second born would wash my clothes, comfort me, hold my hands in hers and walk me to work. All my three children care about me. At times we sit together and have long conversations about their father and Audrey, my daughter.

3.8 RESISTANCE

The participants portrayed that resistance to the cultural practices of widowhood has helped them to survive. Some of the remarks made by the participants on this issue were:

- ❖ *I refused to stay in the rural areas and came here to Kwekwe to work for my children. If I had stayed in the rural areas, what could I have done to provide for them? I have lived with my husband and children here in Kwekwe ever since we got married. Some of the in-laws called me all sorts of names but I never gave in to them. I just said no to their demands.*

- ❖ *When I told my in-laws that I could not wear the black dress anymore because I was now working, they thought I was not serious. But I meant it. I just felt imprisoned by such practices and I stopped wearing it.*
- ❖ *When my in-laws wanted to take my children from me after the death of my husband, I said, 'No'. I told them I am capable and old enough to take care of my own children.*

I reflected in a letter to Maria concerning this issue of resistance:

Maria you said one does not need to be clever to survive, but one has to know God. I wonder if you experience God as an ally against oppressive cultural practices. You also said, "I pray before I take action of resistance". I am curious to know how prayer helps you to "take action of resistance".

In her response to this letter, Maria said that she draws strength from her relationship with God. She told the group of an incident when she was reading her Bible, kneeling beside her bed, reading Isaiah 43:1-5. She talked about the peace she experienced and the comfort she felt in being in union with God. She sees God as a friend to whom she cried out for help in her darkest moments, and someone who fights for her when she is being oppressed.

3.9 RESPONSES OF IN-LAWS AND EFFECTS OF THIS ON WIDOWS

According to the participants, the responses of the in-laws vary from one family to another and from one individual to another. For instance, Rofina was actual helped by one of her brother in-laws to resist from the demands of the other family members of her husband's family. The brother in-law encouraged her not to give in. This did not make things better for her but they further accused her of being in love with this brother in-law who was on her side. As a result Rofina felt isolated.

However, Musline asserts that when she refused to wear the black dress for the period stipulated by her in-laws, they stopped communicating with her. They told her that they had nothing in common with her. Musline like Rofina also said she felt isolated and lonely.

3.10 WHAT HELPS THE WIDOWS TO SURVIVE

Some television programmes show widows pretty much like they do old women being forgetful and impatient (Shuchter 1986; Walter 2003; Moessner 2000). They also show them needing help all the time (Harvey 1978). Even though the widow is “stepping into a New World,” we recognize it also to be true that the widowed person stepping into that unfamiliar world is essentially a “new person”, (Moessner 2000:251).

The following shows how the widows survived:

- ❖ *Street vendor – I would work every day to make sure that my children had something to eat. I sold vegetables, clothes and freezits.*
- ❖ *My children were very supportive. After school or during the holidays they went to the bus terminus to sell fruits and eggs.*
- ❖ *I am grateful that my husband left me a house. I rent out two rooms and I am able to have the other rooms with my children. We would use the money we get from the lodgers to pay our rates.*
- ❖ *After the death of my husband, I also started to help others. The more I helped others, the more I forgot about my own problems. I had to accept that he was gone, not coming back. I didn't spend my time wishing him back. I learnt how to tie my own shoelaces and get going. I looked for a job at Mary Ward Children's Home and started working with orphaned children who even had no parents. Working with these children reduced a lot of stress in me.*
- ❖ *At times I remained passive to the verbal attacks made by my sisters-in-law. I took this strategy to avoid antagonizing the in-laws. I wanted to remain a member of my husband's family and to safeguard my in-laws' involvement in my children's major*

ceremonies such as marriage and other rituals, as the in-laws participation in such ceremonies is crucial.

- ❖ Family support was of paramount importance to me. We did some sewing together with my sister to make ends meet. My brothers and sisters assisted me with money to buy food. I stay with my sister and my mother visits me and I am able to share with them my worries and fears. I think it is very helpful to keep in touch with one's own family.*
- ❖ The Mary Ward Sisters have been a great source of strength and support for all of us and for other poor women in the surrounding communities. The four of us are employed at the Mary Ward Children's Home.*
- ❖ My friends or **sahwiras** were always there when I needed them. They gave me a house to live with my children and I pay reasonable rent, which is affordable. When my daughter died they were there to help me.*
- ❖ My friend is always right there when I needed her to listen, a shoulder to cry on. I can talk to her confidentially and know it won't go any further.*
- ❖ I received counselling from Sr. Mercy that strengthened me and helped me to look at my life in a positive way.*
- ❖ I must say being part of this group has enhanced my widowhood social position and built up my confidence as an individual.*
- ❖ Some good cultural practices helped me to survive. For instance, my husband was the eldest male child in the family; I was then taken as the **amai** or mother in the family. This gave me a lot of respect in my husband's family in such a way that I was consulted when they were making decisions. Nobody dared to take my property when my husband died.*

The above responses show that in spite of the painful experiences widows go through after the loss of their partners; widows have also moments of strengths. According to Moessner (2000:251) some widows cope very well in their new roles as breadwinners of the family, they discover new skills, which they have never thought of when their partners were alive. Manyame (1994) and May (1983) say that many widows among the Shona people survive on selling vegetables and fruits.

3.11 GOD

The four participants all attend church and belong to the guild of St. Anne of the Roman Catholic Church. Faith and God are personal beliefs that sustained the widows in times of difficulty. They see God as caring for the widows.

- ❖ *For me I am convinced that God loves me. As Jesus raised an only son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17), I am also convinced that He will not abandon me. Jesus challenges the Pharisees to emulate widows when he points to the widow's mite as an example in alms giving (Lk 21:1-4; Mk 12:41-44). This shows that Jesus is concerned about me.*
- ❖ *The thought of God as caring helped me to keep going. I would pray with my children every night before going to bed. My favourite Bible reading is the passage in Isaiah chapter 43 verses one to five (Is 43:1-5). God is a God of the poor and a God who will never forget me.*
- ❖ *God has sustained me. God gave me lots of gifts. I know that God cares for me. I have been broken like nature around me but as God mends nature he also mend me. I am even more important than this nature because it has been created to make my life more beautiful.*

My own understanding of God is influenced by participatory approach to theology and post-modern theology that allow me the space to determine for myself the plan for my own life, working alongside God who is involved as a co-creator. In this study, I accepted the other person's view of God or the "Other" in our conversations. Thus I

tried to create a space in our conversations for the participants to share their relation with God as they were experiencing him/her. The participants and myself belong to the same church, the Roman Catholic Church and would be easy for me to fall into the trap of the certainty of knowing what God is like for them. There is sometimes the “entrapment of knowing” (Griffith 1995:126) that comes from “knowing what God is like for you because I know your religious denomination”. Griffith (1995:128) found in her research that denominational beliefs were a poor predictor of the person’s experience of God.

However some of the participants had come through their crises of faith. Musline said she had questioned God in this way.

Why are you doing this to me? You have taken my husband and daughter and now my television has been stolen. Am I the worst sinner on this earth? Why, God? Why are you treating me like this? God where are you?

The stories of women who have been suffering often include the questions such as Why God? Where is/was God? Or Why me? A response to this question does not primarily ask for a theological answer, but makes an appeal for space and understanding of the questioner’s relationship with God, experience of pain and disillusionment (Louw 2003:193). I agree with Ackermann’s (1996:142) question: “How dare theologians interpret what is so unspeakable.” However, narrative theology agrees that we need to ask “how” can we care and listen to each other, not answer (Louw 2003:199). There is need for us to search for a healing that is respectful, inclusive and communal. As pastoral therapists it is important for us to ask how can we ethically and collaboratively search for meaningful narratives about God’s active presence in our lived realities. Together with the people asking the questions we need to search for narratives that can heal and sustain life, and contribute to hope and wholeness.

The following is an excerpt from the conversation I had with Musline:

Musline: I didn’t know what God was trying to do with me because he had taken my husband and child.

Mercy: *That's a fair question to ask God isn't it?*

Musline: *I asked in this way because I had failed to understand what God was trying to do to me.*

Mercy: *Musline have you had any answers from God?*

Musline: *At times yes. When I needed school fees for my daughter, I got the money after a week's prayer and fasting. Another instance I cannot forget is when I needed a job. I prayed for this and I got the job here at Mary Ward.*

Mercy: *Do you think God understands the pain you have gone through?*

Musline: *Yes he does.*

Mercy: *In what ways do you think God understands your pain?*

Musline: *There are many ways: through my friends who gave me a house in which I am living with my children, when my daughter was very ill many people helped with money for her medicine and I am participating in this group.*

3.12 PASTORAL CARE

According to Sevenhuijsen (1998:131) care is the “repairing of citizens so that they can once more take part in their normal social participation”. In this study pastoral care is concerned with walking alongside widows on their journey to become the “whole” people that God created them to be.

As a part of their religious duty, the ancient Hebrews were called on to provide for the most vulnerable, which included the poor, the orphaned, and the widowed (Deuteronomy 27:19; Exodus 22:21-24). One of the church's first benevolent works was to provide care for widows (Acts 6:1-7). The widows and their children need the help of the church. The New Testament injunction of 1 Timothy 5:9-14, if followed by the church in its pastoral ministry, provides a molested widow with a refuge and an emotional support in defense of her faith and her action.

As far as I know the church in Zimbabwe has not addressed the effects of widowhood rituals. According to Edet (1992:35), the Christian proclamation of human liberation and equality of men and women is indeed good news for women, but this teaching is more theoretical than practical. She argues that if it were practical, Christianity could have emancipated women from adverse rituals (Edet 1992:35). The church's concern about the welfare of women can stop harmful traditional rituals and replace them with the church's rites instead of allowing them to operate on parallel levels.

For example, Kate said:

When I was told to sit at the back of the church because only those families with a husband, wife and children had to sit in the front row, I was horrified and I left the church and went home. To me it showed that the church condemned widows and their children.

As a concerned Shona woman, I wish to remind the churches that widows are part of the People of God and the Body of Christ. They are also called to freedom and salvation. The People of God are at the same time the mystery of the presence of the risen Christ.

Here are some specific suggestions for the church's ministry with widows in the light of what the participants said.

- ❖ *The therapy sessions within the church's counselling ministry must provide the widow with an opportunity to re-evaluate herself as a real person and not as someone with a social stigma or taboo. In this sense, group therapy sessions such as what we are doing now provide a viable personal support and a solidarity base for resisting those areas in which the deliverance of widows from bondage is still most predominantly unchallenged. These sessions help the churches to provide full solidarity with the widow during the period of her transition into her new situation.*

- ❖ *A widow needs to be counselled on property ownership and new occupational adjustments, so that she can assume her new*

responsibility as the family's sole breadwinner. It is also necessary to support the widow financially.

- ❖ *In addition to providing assistance in the immediate aftermath of death, the church can also provide opportunities for a widow's continued engagement in life and the faith community. In order for this to occur, the church has to challenge sexist and ageist attitudes and stereotypes about widowed women.*

- ❖ *Given that widowhood often has a negative impact on a woman's economic status, the church might undertake legislative advocacy for widowed women as part of its commitment to social justice. Remembering that commitment to care for the widows has been a part of the church's ministry since its beginning, can provide the contemporary church with motivation and a mandate, as it seeks to develop a contemporary model of ministry for, with, and by widowed women.*

Why has the above not happened? Perhaps because men are in charge of both church and state and as such are the beneficiaries of the oppressive cultural practices. I think it is high time for the Church to address issues of gender although this could be faced with a lot of resistance. For example, in the Catholic Church in which the ordained ministry makes all the decisions. Mary Ward, the foundress of the religious affiliation in which I belong experienced a lot of resistance. She was even imprisoned as a heretic for advocating apostolate for women religious vis-à-vis the enclosed cloister.

3.13 CONCLUSION

In sum, this chapter has explored the societal views, ideas and cultural practices regarding widowhood and has also examined how these practices have affected the widows. Furthermore, the chapter presents the strengths of the widows and show how the widows have resisted dominant cultural practices constituting their widowhood.

During unstorying their widowhood experiences, the participants identified common themes. Weaving these themes in this chapter has been a spiritual experience for me. I felt honoured to have witnessed the strengths of the participants. I also felt privileged and graced that the participants could feel free to share honestly their thoughts about their personal life and even about their relationship with God. The space that I created for the participants helped them to tell their stories as they experienced them. Justice for people is when they can tell their story from their perspective and in the way that they want (Griffith 1995:124).

As expressed in the African mat, I see that the widows in this study are not only gifted but are women of vision. In the various themes they have identified, they were able to weave and mend. As Rofina pointed out:

We were able to sort through the strands and decide which ones to hold on to, which ones to tie and knot and which ones to let go.

The following chapter will present the narrative and participatory practices that enabled the widows to explore their ethical ways of being.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HIDDEN TREASURE - AUTHENTIC IDENTITY

*There is within me,
a hidden treasure,
a beautiful pearl,
a grain of mustard seed,
ready to grow into a big tree.
See it starts to grow.
Look, look, look.
It brings new life.
It brings joy, laughter and hope,
New life, new life, new identity.
The hidden treasure has brought
new abundant life.
Come let's celebrate together.
Together come let's celebrate,
New identity.*

(Maria 2005)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the process and use of narrative and participatory practices (1.9.2) with a group of widows as a means of helping them to explore alternative, preferred ways of living. The group setting allowed the widows to connect with each other. It provided the opportunity to challenge the effects of Shona cultural practices such as widowhood rituals and patriarchy.

It is the aim of this chapter to highlight that within the social construction discourse, “knowledge is therefore seen not as something that a person has, but as something that people do together” (Burr 1995:8). If the knowledge of what widows should be and do is a result of a social process and not an objective description of external realities, the opportunity remains for these women to socially construct new realities by negotiating meaning through language. There is no ultimate, universal, external image that widows must live up to. What a liberating thought! Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) confirm this by saying, “Our view is that communication and discourse define social organization and that reality is a product of changing dialogue”.

The use of narrative practices such as externalising conversations; deconstruction, re-authoring conversations, letter writing and the voices of the participants are included in this chapter.

4.2 NARRATIVE THERAPY

According to Polkinghorne (2004:53) “narrative therapy is based on the understanding that the language form in which people understand their lives is the storied or narrative form”. Narrative therapy relates to the storied nature of being human (White 1995:11-40), of how human beings deal with experience by constructing stories and listening to stories of others. Stories guide people in their way of thinking, acting, and making sense of experiences of events and relationships. It maintains that the meaning people ascribe to their lives, relationships and experiences are shaped by knowledges and stories that communities of persons negotiate, construct and engage with.

Narrative therapy assists people to resolve problems by enabling them to separate their lives and relationship from the knowledge and stories that they judge to be impoverishing. It also assists people to challenge the ways of life that they find subjugating, and encourages people to re-author their own lives according to alternative and preferred stories of identity, and according to preferred ways of life (White 1995:121-122). Narrative therapy takes an ethical and political position and draws on ideas of power, position, subjectivity, ethics and resistance. Foucault (1982:216) says:

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind", which is simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures.

During this research process pastoral care and counselling was done according to the narrative and participatory approaches. It was necessary for me to try to understand the experience of widows and how they have survived. I approached these widows as a Christian, and co-consulted with them in the context of their lives. White (1997:198)

refers to this as the “ethic of collaboration”, the building of stories of hope “in partnership” with others. I was able to hear the hopes in the widows’ stories, which could be lifted out as “unique outcomes” (White 1991:26). Freedman and Combs (1996:67) describe, “unique outcomes” as “experiences that would not be predicted by the plot of the problem–saturated narrative” and which are exceptions to the problem. In this study, I was looking for fragments of hope that we could weave together to bring meaning to widows’ lives.

4.3 EXTERNALISING CONVERSATIONS

According to Freedman and Combs (2004:142) “externalisation is a practice supported by the belief that a problem is something operating on, impacting, or pervading a person’s life, something separate and different from the person”. It is noteworthy that one of the primary focuses of narrative therapy is to “separate the person's identity from the problem for which they seek assistance” (Morgan 2000:17). Externalising locates problems not within individuals, but as products of culture and history. It is a concept that was first introduced to the field of family therapy in the early 1980s by Michael White. Problems are understood to have been socially constructed and created over time. With respect to the participants' stories, I asked questions in which I changed the adjectives that the participants were using to describe themselves. For example, when Rofina said:

I am a depressed person.

I asked her: What does the Depression tell you about yourself?

I also asked the participants questions in a way that invited them to personify problems. For instance, when Kate said:

I feel angry at times.

I asked her: When is Anger most likely to visit you?

In this study such questions created space between the participants and the problems they were experiencing. This enabled them to begin to revise their relationship with the problems.

Freedman and Combs (1996:283) mention the fact that therapists have expressed concern that by externalising the problem, people may be reluctant to assume responsibility. They argue that this is not the case. When people are separated from their problems, they are in a position to make decisions about what to do in relation to them. Furthermore, they suggest that “much of narrative therapy has to do with bringing forth descriptions of people's preferred ways of relating to particular problems and documenting the preferred identities they construct once separated from the problem-saturated self-descriptions” (Freedman & Combs 1996:283).

Externalising conversations begins to disempower the effects of labelling and diagnosing which are “impoverishing peoples’ lives” (White 1991:29). Externalising conversations create the possibility of the development of an alternative story. White (1991:29) speaks about alternative stories that provide the opportunity of separating the person from the so-called dominant or totalising story that so often characterises our lives.

Below is an example of part of an externalising conversation, which I had with one of the participants.

Mercy: What does Frustration tell you about yourself?

Kate: It says I can't do anything about my widowhood situation and tries to stop me from trying.

Mercy: How does it stop you from trying?

Kate: It says, “You won't be able to raise the children on your own. If you insist you will regret in future because when your children want to get married your in-laws will refuse to come for the ritual”.

Mercy: How does it say that? Does it have a special sort of voice or way of speaking?

Kate: Oh ... it's sort of a man's voice very strong.

Mercy: A man's voice?

Kate: It laughs at me in a nasty way.

Mercy: Does it always laugh at you in a nasty way?

Kate: Always. It never says anything nice about me. It says, "Kate, you are a failure. You can't raise these children on your own".

Mercy: When does it say these things? Is it all the time or only some of the time?

Kate: Not all the time but some of the time especially when I want to make decisions for my children.

Mercy: What does it say about making decisions?

Kate: You are stupid. You can't make decision for the children because your in-laws won't like it.

Mercy: So it criticizes you? Is that right?

Kate: Yes, it criticizes me; in most of the things I do even here at work.

Mercy: How does Frustration work? Do you know it's coming? Does it give you any warnings?

Kate: Sometimes I know it's there because it makes my headache.

Mercy: So it targets your head first? Is that right?

Kate: Yes, from there it goes to my stomach.

Mercy: Then what happens?

Kate: Well then it got me because when it goes to my stomach, I feel very sick.

Mercy: So its tactic is to get hold of your head and it works on your stomach.

Kate: Yes.

Mercy: How long would it take to do this? Does it work quickly or slowly?

Kate: It works very fast.

4.4 DECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL PRACTICES

Deconstruction (see also 1.11) is a guiding concept in postmodern literature, research and narrative therapy. In narrative therapy, it is a process whereby people unpack and reassemble their beliefs and practices, leaving them free to choose a story of their own authoring, rather than what has been prescribed by history, culture and dominant groups (White 1991:21- 40).

Feminist therapists deconstruct the taken-for-granted cultural practices, which are oppressive to women. These assumptions are deconstructed or dismantled so as to empower women's self-narratives and to reveal the oppressive practices that privilege males. In this study, this was done by questioning the discourses that support the stories of the widows. For instance, one of the participants enacted the patriarchy discourse in the Shona culture and the whole group interviewed her. We were the journalists taking down some notes. She played Patriarchy Discourse as an externalised 'character' as in the following example:

- ❖ What do you want to achieve in widows' lives?
- ❖ What are some of the ideas and beliefs that are around in our culture that support your work?
- ❖ What do you try to talk widows into about themselves?
- ❖ Who are your friends and allies?
- ❖ What are your favourite tricks or tactics?

We also explored the practices that undermine the operations of patriarchy discourse on the lives of widows:

- ❖ What can widows do to resist you and your friends getting into their lives?
- ❖ What type of things might motivate widows to get free from being paralysed by you?
- ❖ What sort of places are the hardest for you to endure?
- ❖ What sorts of ideas might widows have that really get up your nose?
- ❖ What is it like to talk about yourself in this way?
- ❖ Is it a worry to know that widows are starting to resist you?

These conversations were very helpful to the participants; the tricks of the dominant discourse became visible to the widows in the group. According to Russell and Carey (2004:122) interviewing a dominant discourse in this way can be effective in breaking the silence and secrecy that surrounds it.

The participants also deconstructed the societal views associated with widowhood by creating new possibilities for living a life in different ways by disentangling themselves from social expectations of their in-laws. One participant said:

*This research has helped me to embrace my status of widowhood. I had a lot of problems in accepting that I am a widow. I am very proud that I belong to **Chiedza widows' association** (which the participants formed during this study). I now know also the liberating power of embracing the fact that I am a widow and of celebrating who I am. I am no longer worried nor view my widowhood status as a problem to be solved but as a status to be lived with.*

4.5 RE-AUTHORING CONVERSATIONS

Re-authoring conversations take place between a therapist and the person who has come to see her/him and involves the identification and co-creation of alternative stories of identity.

According to Epston (1998:24-25):

A re-authoring therapy intends to assist persons to resolve problems by: (1) enabling them to separate their lives and relationships from knowledges/stories that are impoverishing; (2) assisting them to challenge practices of self and relationship that are subjugating; and (3) encouraging persons to re-author their lives according to alternative knowledges/stories and practices of self and relationship that have preferred outcomes.

This practice of re-authoring is based on the assumption that no one story can possibly explain the totality of a person's experience; there will always be inconsistencies and contradictions (Russell & Carey 2004:21). Our identities are not single-storied; we are

multi-storied. As I was listening to the participants' narratives, I took notice of the events that contradicted the dominant story. These are known as unique outcomes (Morgan 2000:52), which are sometimes referred to as "sparkling moments" (Freedman & Combs 1996:89; Russell & Carey 2004:23). In other words, I listened for the times when the problem had less or no influence.

I used the unique outcome as a point of entry for the development of the participants' alternative stories. For example, in my letter to Maria, I asked her:

Maria, I have heard you describe how hard it was for you to make ends meet after your husband's death. You said, 'I used to cry but I told myself: how could I manage if I continue to cry like this? I started selling tomatoes and I managed to pay fees'. I was wondering how you came to this plan and where you got the money to start the business. Also, what does this tell your children and relatives about you as a person?

Maria's response:

Mercy you asked me how I came to this plan. My mother was widowed when we were very young. She worked very hard in the fields and she would sell her products to the market. She was able to send us to school. After my husband's death, I told my brother and sisters that I would like to start a project of selling vegetables and fruits. They gave me the money. My relatives and children are proud of me and they say that I am not a kind of a person who goes round begging but a person who is determined to work for herself. They say I am a woman with a vision.

During our conversations, after identifying the unique outcome, I was able to link it to other events in an alternative story-line. For example, when Rofina said:

I had to fight for my children; I didn't want my in-laws to take them away from me. You should have seen me that day, I was a different Rofina. I forgot all my worries and misery.

I asked her:

Have you ever done anything like that before? Were there any preparations that you made? If yes, have you ever made similar preparations? Has there been other times when your care and love for your children has enabled you to slip away from worry and misery? Have there been other times either recently or in the distant past when you have demonstrated a similar sense of strength of will or determination? What do you think it tells your children about you that you care for them?

White (2003) developed re-authoring conversation “map” that acts as a guide to re-authoring conversations. The re-authoring conversation “map” divides the questions that we ask as therapists into two categories, *landscape of action* and *landscape of identity* of the preferred story (Russell & Carey 2004:25). Landscape of action questions involve inquiries into events and actions. For example, *where were you when this happened? What happened before and after that? Have you done this before or was this the first time?* The process of re-authoring conversations assisted the participants to link these events into an alternative story. Landscape of identity questions relate to the implications that the alternative story has in terms of the person's identity (Russell & Carey 2004:25). They invite people to reflect differently on their own identities and that of others. For example, *what did it take you in order to do that? What does it say about you as a person?* I weaved these questions back and forth, in and out, assisting the participants in creating a new and different story (see letter below). This concurs with what White (1995:31) says:

In re-authoring work we invite persons to traffic in both of these landscape [action and identity] – by reflecting on what alternative events in the landscape of action might mean, and by determining which events in the landscape of action most reflect the preferred accounts of characteristics, of motive, of belief and so on – so that alternative landscapes of action and of identity are brought forth.

Landscape of action and identity questions were very helpful in the development of the participants’ new stories as can be seen in the letter below.

Dear Musline

I want to thank you for sharing more aspects of your story with Rofina, Kate, Maria and myself. I appreciated your trust and openness.

Hi Musy, when I listened to your story on the audiotape for the third time, I could cry, smile and laugh at the same time. I am curious to know the impact on your life when you read your own words in this formatted text.

*You said, "I can sum up my widowhood experiences in this name **Ndoona** - now I can see"*

"My eyes are open".

"I can see my talents".

"I can see that I am a good mother".

"I can see that I love my children".

"I can see that God loves me".

"I can see that I am strong".

"I can see that I am what I am because of my friends and my family".

"I can see my family loves me".

"I can see that I am a helpful person".

"I am not affected by what people say".

You said, " I can liken my life to climbing a slippery mountain. I had to fall many times. But I feel I am nearly reaching the top".

Musline, can I ask you some questions about what you said above? What do you think made it possible for you to see? What helped you to start to see? Did you take any steps leading up to this action? What do you think was guiding you in taking these steps? Did you face any challenges? If you did how did you overcome them to be able to see what you now see about yourself?

I am interested when you said;" I am what I am because of my friends and family", does this mean that there are people in your life who support you or who have witnessed you climb higher up the slippery mountain? Who are they? What do they

say about what you have achieved as a person? I am curious. Musline, do you have somewhere from where you draw strength? Were there people in your life who influenced you? I am interested to know what they say about the distance you have covered in your journey up the 'slippery mountain'.

You said, "After the death of my husband in 2000, Pain and Frustration had claimed 90% of my life". You only held 10% of your own territory. You said, "I reclaimed 50% when my daughter Audrey received counselling". I am wondering if Audrey was here now what would she say about you as her mother? You said when Audrey died in 2003; "Pain and Frustration claimed 95% of my life. I questioned God: Why me, what have I done? After the death of my husband, Audrey was my hope; she was doing extremely well at school. Why Lord?" I am wondering what God would say to your questions. You said after one session of counselling, "I reclaimed 20%. After a week I went for a second session and I reclaimed 25% and when I started this journey with this group I reclaimed 35% of myself from Pain and Frustration". This means that you have reclaimed 85% of your life. You said by the end of this therapy, "I want to take hold of 100% of my life, that is, to reclaim it back from Pain and Frustration. As I talk now I feel something is happening in me". Musline, I am just curious to know if it's okay with you what is happening in you, and if okay, why?

*'Ndoona, now I can see', I am wondering what in our own culture or society can help us discover our identities? What in our own culture or society can attempt to prevent us from discovering them? Can you think of a way you can celebrate this identity? Is that something you would like to do? What steps would you take to build on this new identity? You said, "My in-laws thought I was going to be a 'street lady', but because of my friends, I got a house and a job". You went on to say that during your daughter's illness friends and your own family were very supportive. You said, "Alone, I could not have been where I am today. As it is expressed in the Shona proverb, '**Chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda** – one thumb does not kill a louse' or '**munhu mumwe haakombi churu** - one person can not surround an anthill'". What very beautiful metaphors! Where did you learn all this? I would like to learn from you.*

If these questions arouse your interest, I would be happy to hear your responses.

I am looking forward to seeing you at our next meeting

Cheers

Mercy

I found the use of landscape of action and of meaning questions very useful in this research. They led to an exploration of the widows' values, commitments, beliefs, desires, intentions and strengths. These were articulated and brought into the foreground of an emerging alternative story while the dominant problematic story was placed at the background. The questions have brought forward a rich description of the widows' abilities to act in relation to the problem's influence (Morgan 2000:68).

4.6 METAPHORS

In the Shona culture metaphors help in emphasising a point in a much easier way that's understood by the community as seen in the usage of local animals as reference items. For example; *ane ruoko rwegudo* or *he/she has a hand of a baboon* meaning he/she hits others always. In this research the participants spontaneously used metaphors since it is part of our Shona culture.

According to Janesick (1994:209) metaphor in general creeps up on you and surprises. In this study, metaphors were ways of picturing, thinking, presenting, talking and painting reality. I agree with Eisner (1991:227) that metaphoric precision is the central vehicle for revealing the qualitative aspects of life. Metaphors can hold multiple, disparate meanings as well as describe what cannot be expressed economically in words.

The participants were very creative and imaginative and during our conversations different metaphors developed (see also 4.9). For example, after listening to Kate's story, I reflected in a letter:

Kate, I am wondering how you came to choose your metaphors. You moved from attempts to be made into a "dustbin" to being "green leaves" and a "light". Were

there people who supported you in doing this? Who were they? What would they say when hearing about this move?

Kate's response:

I chose these metaphors because they summarize my widowhood experiences in few words. I also took three different metaphors to show that there is growth in me. Yes there are people who supported me these include my sisters and my children. My elder sisters say that I am a brave woman, a heroine. My children say that I am life giving and a light for them to see where they are going.

The participants said that metaphors symbolize what is going on in their lives and they bring meaning and life. According to Musline metaphors “give me courage and strengthen me in my life journey as a widow. They bring a lot of healing to me”.

Some of the metaphors that were identified by the participants were the following Shona proverbs: '**Munhu mumwe haakombi churu** - one person does not surround an anthill'; '**Kandiro kanoenda kunobva kamwe** - give and you will be given also' (see also 2.6). These metaphors strengthened the bond between the participants and helped them stay connected to each other till the end of our journey.

During one of our conversations, Musline drew a picture of a ladder. She said:

As you can see from this ladder, it starts from 1 on the bottom to 10 on the top. When I started this journey together with you, I was at 3 but now I feel I am at 8. I want to assure you that I am not going to remain at 8 but because of who I am now, I aim to be at 9 in a few weeks. By the end of the year I will be at 10. This picture

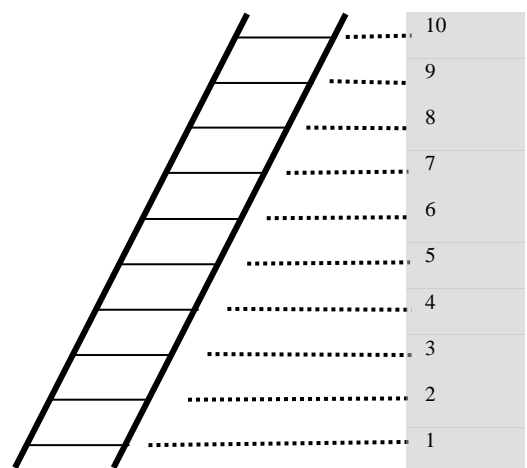


Fig 5

symbolizes hope for me; keeping it will remind me of this journey together.

According to Morgan (2000:98) pictures of this nature can act as a support and motivation to encourage people to reach their new destinations, which they aspire to.

During our last session, five burning candles were put in the middle of our centerpiece for prayer (see 4.9). As a group we agreed that these burning candles symbolized our lives as light to other widows who are still marginalised.

4.7 LETTER WRITING

Letters as therapeutic tools are used in narrative therapy as a powerful way of capturing lived experiences through written word (White & Epston 1990; Epston 1994). The participants gave me permission to write reflective letters after each group session.

In a storied therapy, the letters are used primarily for the purpose of rendering lived experience into a narrative or 'story': one that makes sense according to the criteria of coherence and lifelikeness. In a storied therapy, the letters are a version of that co-constructed reality called therapy and become the shared property of all the parties to it.

(White & Epston 1990:125)

The advantage of a letter in narrative therapy is that a client can hold a letter in hand, reading and rereading it days, months and years after the session. Epston (1994:31) wrote that he had clients telling him that they regularly reread letters that he had sent them years ago to remind themselves what they endured, how far they had advanced their lives and the extent to which they considered themselves to have changed. The participants could not wait to read the reflective letters that I delivered a few days before the group meetings! They said that these letters we were writing to each other were a source of comfort and brought a lot of healing. Rofina said:

These letters I am receiving reminds me of my husband's letters which he used to write to me. They are very powerful in bringing healing to the whole of my body. Thank you everybody for writing me letters. If you allow me to keep them,

this will give me more time to reflect on what is written about me. I will cherish not only the letters but the writers as well.

What distinguishes a narrative letter is that it is literary rather than diagnostic. The letter engages the reader not so much by developing an argument to a logical conclusion as by inquiring what might happen next. It is structured to tell the alternative story that is emerging during the therapeutic conversation. The letter documents history, current developments and future prospects (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:112).

As a therapist who privileged the participants' voices in the sessions, I found that by writing a letter after each meeting I was able to:

- ❖ say many of the things I had wanted to say during the meetings, but never manage to do so;
- ❖ collect my thoughts and reflect on them;
- ❖ bring alternative stories of the participants to attention;
- ❖ use letters as a transparent form of my own journaling that all the participants and myself could share;
- ❖ help to develop a sense of group-solidarity, sisterhood and community.

I also had great joy to receive letters from the participants. It was a source of encouragement and affirmation of my work with the participants. Initially I had difficulties in transcribing the research conversations and committing the lives of the participants in print but when the participants appreciated the written work in their letters to me, I felt relieved and happy.

4.8 THICKENING THE ALTERNATIVE STORY

“As a new and preferred story begins to emerge, the therapist is interested in finding ways to assist the person consulting them to ‘hold onto or stay connected to it’” (Morgan 2000:74). It was the aim of the group to hold onto the new stories that have

emerged during our conversations. In this study outsider witnesses and re-membering conversations were used to thicken the alternative stories of the participants.

4.8.1 Outsider witnesses

When persons begin to discover how new outcomes and new alternative-narratives enhanced and take root in their self-narrative it is important to thicken the plot even further introducing the alternative narrative to a wider compassionate or understanding audience that will validate the new narrative. In a sense the audience becomes a "participating audience" by being trusted by the person and in a direct or indirect way inviting them into her/his re-authoring journey.

Myerhoff (1986:25-40) refers to these outside individuals or groups as "outsider witness groups". These groups can be family members, friends other therapists or any group selected by the person. Outsider witness groups side with the person against abusive narratives that seek to ruin self-narratives and so support the person (White 1995:26,33; 1997). White (1995:33) says that recruiting some of the audience to the preferred developments is "powerfully authenticating".

Weingarten (2000) refers to a team participating in the above-mentioned manner as "compassionate team", emphasising the team's compassion and support. White (1995:178) says that "outsider-witnesses" contribute to the affirmation and authentication of people's claim about their identities and narratives and their appropriation.

It gives "greater public and factual" character to these claims, serving to amplify them and to authorize them. The outsider-witness also contributes to a context for reflexive self-consciousness - in which people become more conscious of themselves as they see themselves, and more conscious of their participation in the production of their productions of their lives. The achievement of this reflexive self-consciousness is not insignificant - it establishes a knowing that "knowing is a component of their conduct", making it possible for people to "assume responsibility for inventing themselves and yet maintain their sense of authenticity and integrity", for people to become aware of options for intervening in the shaping of their lives.

(White1995:178)

The participants invited Sr. Elizabeth Gotore, Sr. Aleta Dube and Blessing Mutero as outside-witnesses to the new identities of the participants (see 4.9). Rofina said:

*Inviting other people to witness our new stories is a way of showing how committed we are and that we need other people's support in our preferred ways of living. This agrees with the Shona proverb; **mbudzi kuzvarira pavanhu kuti nditandirwe imbwa** or when a goat chooses to give birth where there are people, it is asking for support from the people. We need the support of Sr. Elizabeth Gotore, Sr. Aleta Dube and Blessing Mutero in holding onto our new life.*

4.8.2 Re-membering conversations

The term re-membering refers to calling attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life (Myerhoff 1982:111). White (1997) introduced the term 're-membering' into narrative therapy by developing the idea that peoples' identities are shaped by what can be referred to as a "club of life". This metaphor introduced the idea that for all of us there are members in our club of life who have had particular roles to play in how we have come to experience ourselves.

According to Russell and Carey (2004:48-49) re-membering practices are based on the poststructuralist understanding that our identities are forged through our relationships with other people. Our lives have membership, which influences our experiences of ourselves. How others see us, how we experience ourselves with others, how we participate with others, all influence who we are becoming as people. This resonates with the Ubuntu concept as described by Mbiti (1998:143) "I am because we are and since I am therefore we are" (see also 2.6; 5.7.2). Archbishop Desmond Tutu has described this concisely, "people become people through other people", and in South Africa the Zulu people say "*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*".

According to Russell and Carey (2004:49):

This is a view of life that sees our identities as being made up of many 'voices' (multi-voiced) and is quite different from other highly individualized accounts of identity that focus only on a single-voiced self. It is also distinct from contemporary structuralist understandings of identity that construct a 'self' at the center of one's being, comprised of various properties and essences of the person's nature.

It is noteworthy that the poststructuralist perspective that underpins re-membering conversations does not assume an individual self but rather an interconnected web of relationships. For example, I asked Rofina in a letter:

If your son were here now and I asked him to tell me just one thing he appreciated about what you have done in dealing with this problem, what do you think he would say?

Rofina's response:

My son would say that I am a courageous woman who knows what is good for her and her children. My son is very proud of me.

In a letter to Kate, I asked:

Who in your past would be the least surprised to hear you speaking in this way about what is important to you?

In her response, Kate said:

My husband would be the least surprised to hear me speaking in this way. He always said I am very special and I am a gifted woman. This is why he used to consult me whenever he wanted to make a decision.

In another conversation with Maria, I asked:

What do you think your relationship with your sister meant to her? What difference do you think you may have made to how she thought about herself and her life?

Maria's response:

We have a strong bond between my sister and myself; we share our joys, sorrows and secrets. We stand together in times of hardships. My

sister is always aware that I am a person who stands by her and she can trust me with anything.

4.8.3 Expanding the conversation

During our seventh session, the participants formed an association for widows, which they called *Chiedza (light) Widows' Association*. This will link the widows together around certain preferred themes, stories and values as well as stand together against certain problems and contribute to their activities and events.

According to Morgan (2000:116):

Many narrative therapists try to find other ways to assist people to access the special knowledges and understanding held by others. Establishing and consulting leagues, committees, teams, groups and networks constitute one way this can be done. These leagues are groups of people interested in sharing their inside knowledges with others. They bring together and circulate the voices of people who are involved in a similar struggle. In this way, it is their voice on these matters that are privileged, rather than voices of therapists.

The following is an excerpt from the letter I wrote after the session:

I was moved when each of you contributed some money for starting a widows' organization. How did you manage to raise Z\$200 000? It is very inspiring indeed. Imagine, a friend of mine (the one I told you about in the last meeting) who is interested in your work donated Z\$300 000 towards your organization. I must say that I like the name very much. You said Musline is the chairperson, Rofina the secretary, Maria the treasurer, Kate the coordinator and myself your consultant. You mentioned that the main focus of this organization is "the poor widow". You stressed that this organization is strictly for widows. Other people can contribute to the organization through donations. The aims of the organisation include:

- ❖ To assist widows who need financial support to start a project.*
- ❖ To share our widowhood experiences.*
- ❖ To counsel each other.*
- ❖ To empower each other.*

❖ *To celebrate our lives as a group.*

You said you are going to draft some contract forms (see Appendix D) for those who would like to borrow some money from your organization. They would return the money before the end of the month. You pointed out that those who would like to become members of the organisation would contribute a joining fee. You said your future plans are to run a sewing project since some of you are very gifted in this skill. You said that even though we are celebrating the end of our journey together, we would meet in future to reflect together our preferred ethical ways of living.

*I want to thank you that I am trusted to be a consultant to **Chiedza Widows Association** and want to commit myself to its cause. I can only imagine how this is going to be a light in the lives of other widows struggling with the effects of widowhood. Once more thank you for allowing me to walk awhile with you. May God bless your openness on this journey. I feel sad that we are at the end of the journey together but I am very happy that you said we would meet as a group in future. I am looking forward to our celebrations on the 15 January 2005.*

The participants were very happy that I accepted to be their consultant. They are determined to work with other widows who are still marginalised. As I formulated the aims of this study, I never thought that the participants would end the research process by forming Chiedza Widows Association. I am really touched by their commitment to their new ways of living.

4.9 RITUAL AND CELEBRATION

Rituals and ceremonies were first introduced in narrative work by White and Epston (1990); celebrations, awards and prize-giving signal a shift of therapy's focus from problematic relationships to the positive steps taken. The celebration took place at Mary Ward Children's Home in our meeting room. Kate and Rofina prepared the centrepiece for praying, singing and dancing. They arranged it in such a way that we were able to reflect and meditate in the way we felt comfortable with. Maria and Musline prepared the prayer and some music to play.

Five candles were lit at the center that symbolized our hope for the future of *Chiedza Widows' Association*.



Fig 6

I provided cakes, buns and cool drinks to help create a celebratory atmosphere.

Before our celebrations we had some reflections on the process of the journey (see chapter 5).

The participants and myself created the following song and prayer, which we said together. Our desire is to be available for other women who need our support. I found these widows very creative. Hence this was a moment of strength for them (Moessner 2000:251).

GOD WIDEN OUR TENTS

*May the people of various countries,
various cultures, tribes, and families
find room in our world and our lives.*

*All: Help us to widen our tents, God,
so that all are welcome among us.*

*May special people,
may the differently abled,
may minorities of any kind
of race, class, or gender —
find room in our world and our hearts.*

*All: Help us to widen our tents, God,
so that all are welcome among us.*

*May the aging
and the very young,
may subcultural groups of every kind,
may special interest caucuses
find room in our world and our prayer.*

*All: Help us to widen our tents, God,
so that all are welcome among us.*



Fig 7

*May people of various religions and rites,
whose name for God
and claim to God
are different from our own,
find room in our world and our love.*

*All: Help us to widen our tents, God,
so that all are welcome among us.*

*God of all people
God of all cultures
May we broaden our vision and widen our tents
so that plurality and diversity
determine who we are:
people called and committed to a
world united in justice
peace, now and forever
Amen.*

Each participant had prepared a metaphor as a symbol for the growth she experienced on our journey together. The following are part of the metaphors.

Maria: Shinga (perseverance) she said:



Fig 8

This name explains how I have walked my journey of widowhood. I never gave up even though it was hard at times. A burning African clay pot symbolizes how I was at the beginning of this journey. Now at the end of our journey together, I am a finished product with water to quench thirsty for those widows in need. I am like a well-decorated African clay pot. It is beautiful.

Rofina: Kundai (conquer/defeat) she said:



Fig 9

I fought to have my children with me when my husband died. All my children are living with me and I am very happy. At the beginning of this journey, I felt that I was like a fruitless tree, but now after having talked about my widowhood experiences, I am like a fruitful tree. I would like to bring some fruits to our last meeting so that I can celebrate my new ways of living with each one of you here. I want to bear fruits for others.



Musline: Ndoona (now I can see) she said:

Fig 10

Before I came to these sessions, I could not see my potentials and abilities. A closed eye symbolizes this. At the end of this journey together with you, my friends, I can see that God loves me and that I am a gifted mother. An open eye symbolizes this. I want to be an eye opener to other widows.



Kate: Tarisai (see) she said:

Fig 11

Before telling you my widowhood experiences, my life was like brown leaves. In other words hard like a stone. But now green leaves can symbolize my life. It has become life giving to others. See my daughter Tabeth is now in Form One. I want to be life-giving to other widows in need.

For the celebrations we had invited Sr. Elizabeth Gotore, Sr. Aleta Dube and Blessing Mutero (see 4.8.1) to witness, testify and most importantly, celebrate the changes that had already taken place.

Sr. Elizabeth had this to say: “I see the quality of strength, confidence and self worth in each one of you which I have never experienced before. It’s powerful and you are pioneers in giving hope for other widows in our country. You have become educators and motivators. This will help you and others to accept the situation of widowhood. I will support you with my prayers”.

Sr. Aleta said: “This celebration is the most amazing thing; this way of doing therapy must be very powerful and transforming. It is really practical and tangible. I can see the growth of each one of you. What a brilliant way of doing things!”

Blessing (laughing): “Hei, I feel honoured to be invited: firstly as a photographer and now to witness and testify the growth, which has taken place in you. Thank you so much. I am a privileged man. What a blessing! Ladies! I offer to do your accounts without charge. Please think about it”.

We also had the pleasure to read Dirk’s letter (Dirk is my supervisor).

15 January 2005: 6.53 a.m.

May I thank Mercy, Kate, Musline, Rofina and Maria that I could be part of this journey through the letters that gave me a peep into what has happened during your conversations. You made me aware of the struggles of widows and injustices you had and still have to face as widows. I promise to act on this awareness and speak out and support widows, and take all opportunities that may come my way to do so. I will also do the same with regard to women who become “widows” due to divorce and who have to suffer because of their men’s doings with them.

With love

Dirk.

4.10 CONCLUSION

Reflecting on our conversations, I feel that our therapeutic relationship in itself was spiritual. I marvelled at the participants’ courage in being able to turn their situations around. The participants and I have created, with time, a connectedness that Heshusius (1994) calls “participatory consciousness”. This reflects a way of “being”

in the world, which is characterized by "allocentric" knowing. Allocentric knowing requires an attitude of profound openness and receptivity towards the other, a temporarily letting go of all preoccupations with the self and a move into a state of complete attention. Turning to the other does not result in loss of the self, but leads to a heightened feeling of aliveness and awareness (Heshusius 1994:16-17). This was achieved because of the ritual space I created for the participants to tell their stories in the way they wanted. The participants would draw pictures, write letters to each other sang or dramatize as they told their stories. We cried and laughed together, ate and drank as sisters. An intimacy, a sisterhood developed through sharing what we truly cared about and found meaningful (Weingarten 2000:391). In the comfort of this "sisterhood", the participants were able to express their feelings freely without fear of being misjudged to such an extent that they would shout, scream or use "taboo" words to express their feelings of anger and frustration.

In the next chapter I adopt a reflective position by looking back on the research journey as a whole and also reflecting on some of the possible implications and suggestions for practical theology and pastoral therapy.

Before proceeding to the next chapter I have this question, which kept coming into my reflection, I wonder if you as a reader can help me answer it:

How do these new stories of the widows invite us to rejoice in life in Zimbabwe, despite the suffering and hurt?

CHAPTER FIVE

FOLDING BACK

A story told aloud to progeny or peers, is of course, more than a text. It is an event. When it is done properly, presentationally, its effect on the listener is profound, and the latter is more than a mere passive receiver or validator. The listener is changed.

Myerhoff (1982:116)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reflects on the challenges of the study, the research curiosity, the methodology used and the effects of the research on me as a researcher. New questions are posed and I reflect on some of the possible implications and suggestions for practical theology and pastoral therapy.

This research argues that we live our lives through stories. These lives are constructed through the self and society. Narrative therapy takes up the “story” metaphor to question those “taken-for-granted” realities and practices that shape – and sometimes restrict – our lives (Nelson 2000:13). As a therapist in training I found myself immersed in the cultural stories and as did the participants of this study.

As pointed out above our stories are constructed through the self and society. This study suggests that these stories could also be deconstructed. The process of deconstruction implies the exploration of neglected and unstoried versions of our life stories (White & Epston 1990). By cultivating these neglected and unstoried events (Freedman & Combs 1996), new and preferred ways of being are constantly developed. In the process, preferred outcomes become a possibility. Through developing conversations it showed that there are multiple voices and multiple stories. As a result of prevailing dominant discourses in our society, of societal stories dominating the self-story, the widows in the group were confined to thin descriptions about themselves and their stories.

5.2. THE CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

A major challenge in this study was the joining of voices, so that the voices of the widows might have power equal to the academic voices of the literature. I created a ritual space in the group because this was the first time for all the participants to share their stories in public. This was very effective because it enabled me to listen to participants' stories and not to let their voices be marginalised by my voice as a researcher.

Musline's comment about the ritual space:

Coming to share in a group like this where you are given space to talk without being accused or misunderstood was very helpful to me. I can talk, cry or laugh freely here.

By researching with the participants, I was challenged to present this research report in an accessible and inclusive language that does not leave the participants marginalised, with a sense of inferiority about themselves (Kotzé 2002:28). Thus I had to let go of my technical theoretical language and use everyday language that invite everybody's participation.

Another challenge was that in my previous research, I was accustomed to having control over the process and study results. However, using a participatory action research approach, my control over the whole process was less, particularly as the study progressed. I found Anderson and Goolishian's (1992) "not-knowing" approach very helpful. I allowed the stories of the widows to unfold freely and I avoided interpretations and prior assumptions. The widows remained the experts on their lives by privileging their explanation of the problems.

5.3 RESEARCH CURIOSITY

I stated in chapter 1 that the stories of the widows whom I assisted previously, have made me become very curious about how widows

- ❖ “unstory” their widowhood experiences (Laird 1991: 437);
- ❖ resist the dominant cultural practices constituting their widowhood;
- ❖ story their “not-yet-said” widowhood practices (Anderson & Goolishian 1992).

Although the above curiosities have been talked about in chapters 2, 3 and 4, I feel it is necessary to discuss them. In this chapter, I will therefore give a brief overview of the destinations to which each of these three curiosities have taken me.

5.3.1 How widows “unstory” their widowhood experiences

Looking at chapter two, it is evident that widows are willing and able to talk about their widowhood experiences. They do not talk about them because they lack the opportunity and forum to do so. What I have learnt in the storying of widowhood experiences is that the group setting provided multi-opportunities to allow the women to become visible and to talk themselves into existence (Davies 1993:21). The way the widows told their stories was very powerful to me. I was profoundly affected – sometimes overwhelmed by the sadness of the stories I heard. I could not hold back my tears. We cried together as sisters and together we hold each other’s hands. This was very powerful in bringing to the participants. I would like to recommend that the main purpose of revisiting stories of widows’ experiences should be to bring healing. Thus it is my commitment to challenge narrative therapists and pastoral carers to give a voice to widows and let them exercise their voice.

5.3.2 How widows resist dominant cultural practices constituting their widowhood

As one begins to listen to the subjugated voices one will be very surprised at how society's view of women has not only just enslaved women, but also it has enslaved society. Real freedom is when the oppressed and oppressor are both emancipated.

The ritual space, which I created for them to tell their stories in the way they wanted enabled them to resist the Shona practice that women cannot talk publicly about the oppressive widowhood experiences. Of interest to note in this journey is the fact that

the widows resisted wearing the black dress and inheritance by their husband's relative (see chapter 3).

I was also upset by the idea that our church sometimes excluded widows in the "family structures". In the church, which the widows and myself attend, a family should have a father, mother and children. As I am a member of our parish council in our church, I would like to take this challenge to our parish priest. There is need to redefine in an inclusive way what we mean when we talk of a family structure.

5.3.3 How widows story their "not-yet-said" widowhood practices

As I have pointed out in chapter 3.10 widows have also moments of strength, which are often not told in most literature. What I have observed in this journey with the widows is that letter writing, the use of metaphorical language, praying, drawing, drama and singing are useful tools in storying the "not-yet-said" widowhood practices.

Metaphors are very useful in aiding the process of externalising conversations, thus freeing the voice to talk about otherwise difficult or painful issues (Morgan 2000:21) (see chapter 4). Letter writing (see 1.11.7, 4.7 and 5.5) can be useful because one can write about painful things, that may more easily be absorbed in private (Epston 1994:31). With regards to singing and dancing, I follow along the ideas of Mbiti (1998:146-147) and argue that in a Zimbabwean context people can express themselves through drama, drawing, praying, singing and dancing. It is therefore the aim of this study to recommend the use of these mediums when people are telling their experiences. I feel privileged to have been a witness to the widows' narratives and experiencing their creativity throughout the journey. I am grateful that I could play a role in their lives.

5.4 PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS

5.4.1 Narrative and participatory therapies

When I asked them to reflect on the process of our journey we had taken together, they commented in different ways.

Musline: I have enjoyed our meetings very much. During these sessions I was always aware of the caring atmosphere; I felt heard and understood, something I so often longed for in my life. In the telling of my story so many issues surfaced again. I became aware how difficult it has been for my in-laws to try and understand my arguments and beliefs from the standpoint of my perceptions. Mercy, you have helped me a lot previously, and already our contact meant a great deal to me. Our sessions brought much healing – I am a new person, far more positive than I was ever before. Our conversations helped me to think consciously about my life. Things made more sense as I heard myself talking and paying attention to that which I really want. I am able to embrace life more fully now. Our meetings made me aware again of God's faithfulness. I want to bring up my children in line with what the Bible teaches: I pray that I will be able to see life through their eyes. I pray a lot for my children and I know God is walking this road with me. I pray that my children will see the change in me.

Kate: If I look back now, I am so grateful for what you did for all of us; I can never say thank you enough. These times we have had together helped me to gain greater insight concerning myself, helped me to see things in a new perspective and I am sure the knowledge I gained will help me in the future.

It is a requirement of participatory action research that the research should provide the participants with “some kind of improvement or change” (McTaggart 1997:27). Throughout this whole participatory research process I was constantly concerned about ensuring that participants would benefit from taking part in these sessions. At this point I needed to ask the group and myself whether the narrative and participatory pastoral approaches to care has been a mutually empowering experience for the women who were prepared to challenge the cultural practice of widowhood

experiences.

It sure is a blessing to know that there are people who care. We have truly learnt a lot - not only about oppression, but it is wonderful to know that I am not the only one suffering. You have really been an asset to us and we appreciate what you have done for each one of us.

(Rofina 2005)

The participatory and narrative approaches to therapy have been empowering and life-giving. I like the way I was given space to tell my story the way I wanted. I am proud that this report is ours. Each one of us had a lot to say about the whole process. I can call Mercy our facilitator. I am grateful to having participated and that my own voice is visible in the report.

(Maria 2005)

According to Angus and McLeod (2004:370) narration is in itself a basic therapeutic process. When each participant was telling her story, the other participants listened without interruption. This gave the one telling her story time to reflect on her story and to consider whether there were any parts of the story she wanted to reconstruct or update (see Chapter 2).

5.4.2 Group work

When reflecting on the research journey, all the participants voiced their appreciation of the group-process and the unwavering solidarity we experienced in our sessions.

Rofina: I enjoyed being in this group and through sharing in others' stories my own story 'fell into perspective'. There was a lot of learning and healing, which I experienced.

Kate: I felt I was being nurtured and cared for in this group. The group therapy helped me to keep going; to know that other women have also suffered; that I am not alone and the group 's support made me realize for the first time that I had the strength and guts to move forward. Knowing that somebody thinks I am strong is very inspiring (One of the group members had commented that she sees Kate as a very strong person, to have overcome all these hardships).

Musline: I think the writing about my own story has been of most benefit to me. I feel I have been empowered and energized to go forth and make disciples for the Lord.

Maria: The meetings helped me realize that I was not alone. This group has given me a new direction. All the support I have been able to participate in, helping others, giving hope and support has really helped with my own healing.

It was of utmost importance for me to recognise from the outset the participants as the experts and authorities of their own experiences. I tried by all means to maintain the originality and authenticity of what they said because this was one way in which the “balance of power” was maintained.

5.5 LETTERS

The reflective letters I wrote after each group meeting gave me the opportunity to facilitate the process of co-authoring alternative stories, using the medium of written language to continue and enrich the conversations (Epston 1994:33). It gave me the opportunity to reflect on what happened during the sessions. Using externalising language, I created possibilities for the participants to intervene and make changes, rewrite their stories with them so that the issues they discussed had less influence on them. It also gave the opportunity to internalise their own preferred stories (Epston 1994:32). In sum, I found the use of letter writing not only useful in expressing painful experiences but also in healing.

5.6 DECONSTRUCTION OF MY POWER

During the research journey, I was mindful of Foucault's words (1980:96-98) that “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere”. Hence the unequal power relationship between the participants and myself was restructured to validate the perspective of the participants. The premise was to remove the hierarchical relationship between researcher and participants. Changing research terminology from one of hierarchy to one of equality was one of the first steps we took.

We referred to widows as "participants" as a preferred term instead of "subject" or the "researched". I was aware that addressing the imbalance in power relations between researcher and participants was more than simply changing the language. It also entailed involving the participants at all levels of the process. Reinharz's (1992:179) enlightening comments were of particular help to me in this regard as she states:

In participatory or collaborative research the people studied make decisions about the study, format and data analysis. This model is designed to create social and individual change by altering the role relations of people involved in the project... [I]n participatory feminist research, the distinction between the researcher(s) and those on whom the research is done disappears. To achieve an egalitarian relationship, the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure, and shared risks. Differences in social status and background give way as shared decision-making and self-disclosure develop.

It is noteworthy that my power due to my professional experiences and knowledge was constantly countered by this participatory approach to therapy and research. The participants themselves refer to the report as theirs. They are the ones who suggested inserting their photos and their metaphors in the report. Although I had difficulties in sending the report to my supervisor through the e-mail, the photos have made a very powerful impact to the report as a whole. The participants become visible to the reader. In this report, I have learnt that allowing the participants to participate fully in the projects brings a lot of colour into the research project.

5.7 REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The participants discovered that doing research is a process that involves an on-going series of decisions and choices. I found that feminist research is unique because it is feminist beliefs and concerns that acted as the guiding framework to the process. In retrospect, I can state that methodologically, feminist research differs from traditional research for three reasons. Firstly, it actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between researcher and participant(s); secondly, it is politically motivated and has a major role in changing social inequality; and thirdly, it begins with the standpoints and experiences of participants (Harding quoted in Muchimba 2004:83).

It is noteworthy that there is a difference between research and a transformational project such as this study with the widows. This project is more than a research in that as a researcher I cannot withdraw the moment the research aspect is completed for the purpose of my dissertation. As a researcher, I have an ethical responsibility to remain connected, as the participants desired me continue to be their consultant.

5.7.1 Reflecting on the qualitative research process

I have always enjoyed listening to people's stories and reading descriptive writing, and the art of creative writing is something that has always captivated me. Through qualitative research I have had the privilege of listening to the stories people tell and of writing about these sacred encounters. In this study, I preferred to capture the lived experience of participants in order to understand their meaning perspectives (Janesick 1994:218). However, I discovered that qualitative research is not just about listening to stories and giving a factual account of these. This field of research is fraught with ethical dilemmas. It involves the lives of real people. For example, how could it not be complicated? Who is going to judge what serves the interests of the participants best? When I started with the project, I was extremely anxious and unsure of myself.

As the process unfolded, I realized that no research can be neutral or value-free, and that qualitative research is in essence an ethically complex undertaking (Janesick 1994: 209-218; Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2). No matter how amiable and sympathetic my interaction with the participants, I was still very much involved in the weaving of

their life stories. I became aware that in qualitative research, the interplay of the self and the other could, if I did not guard against it, become exploitative. Using qualitative research in this study challenged me to question my own relationship with widows in the community in which I live. It challenges me to take a strong stance in protecting other human beings especially the widows. My mother has just been widowed on the 4th of March 2005. Hence at the death of my father, I made it a point that widowhood rituals such as wearing a black dress and mourning ritual could not marginalise her. The question that I posed to my father's relatives was who benefit from such practices? Whatever they did as a family, they saw to it that my mother also benefited.

5.7.2 Reflecting on participatory action research

I am indebted to feminists' participatory action research for the methodology in this research. The particular feminist research approach that I was guided by illustrated clearly its commitment to the emancipation of the widows. Positioning myself as a feminist researcher, I approached the sessions with the understanding that there would be no hierarchical relationships between the widows and myself. Hence I employed a genuinely collaborative approach throughout all stages of the research process (Reason 1994:324-339) (1.11.2). We worked together as equal partners from the onset of the research till the end of the project. It is my belief that good research is research conducted *with* people rather than *on* people (Heron & Reason 2001:179). Through out the research, I was guided by the question *Who benefits?* I cannot hesitate to say that by forming a widows' association, which is already helping other marginalised women, not only did the participants benefit from the project but also the entire society.

Through this study, I have learnt that doing participatory research means taking a journey. The whole process is about movement to movement, from the way things are to the way things could be. It is about transformation on both personal and social levels.

At the heart of this transformation is a research process, which involves investigating the circumstances of places; reflecting on the needs,

resources, and constraints of the present reality; examining the possible paths to be taken, and consciously moving in new directions.

(Smith, Williams & Johnson 1997:8)

It was important to me as researcher to work in a way which would encourage both inclusive and power sharing with the participants, and which would provide benefit to the women involved in the project, (McTaggart 1996:248). I had chosen to meet with a group of four widows rather than with the women individually because of the African cultural view of identity expressed in Ubuntu – “I am because we are and since I am therefore we are” (Mbiti 1998:145) (see also 2.6; 4.8.2). It was important for me in this study to work with a group of widows rather than an individual widow because as human beings we depend on each other. In the African culture, which I grew up, a person is not basically an independent, solitary entity (see 2.6). This is illustrated in fig12 below.

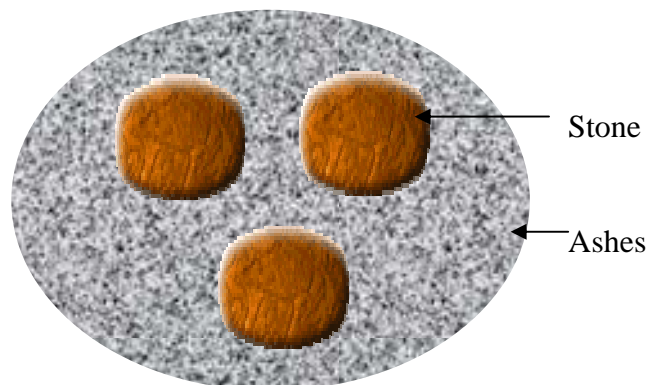


Fig 12

Among the Shona, the three stones represent wholeness in that for them to hold a pot (as they are used in cooking) they have to be a set of three. Neither two nor one stone can hold a pot. One cannot cook with one stone. This emphasises the idea of *unhu* in Shona or *Ubuntu* in Zulu or Ndebele. Furthermore the fact that the stones are rooted on ashes brings more significance to the widows' stories. The ashes here represent an unpleasant condition the widows were and somehow are still immersed in. Despite all this the stones 'go ahead in providing support for the pot', and hence ensure that the cooking process is completed. Likewise the widows and I have also taken this stance of doing things to accomplish our goals. We are taking a stance in the community; it is our aim to empower other widows who are still marginalised in our society.

During the process I did not consider myself as an expert on the subject of widowhood. I reminded myself that I needed to do a lot of deconstructive listening (Freedman & Combs 1996:46) for it is in such listening that one learns a lot about oneself and others. As I was co-directing the research process, the participants jointly "owned" it. Such democratisation of the research project empowered the participants because they had become co-researchers (Reinharz 1992): a development that made the widows to see themselves as agents of social change. By listening to each other's stories, a desire to change the situation in which they were before undertaking this study developed.

5.8 THE INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS ON MYSELF

The process of being reflexive has been invaluable. I have practiced this by reflecting on my own story and trying to step outside my unconscious ideology. I have tried to maintain a sincere intention to be informed and changed by each counselling session and each research journey (Hare-Mustin 1994:33). Reflexivity is something I'm taking with me to every future counselling session, and research work. It is a precious gift I have received in this research.

I was moved by the stories of the participant and they changed me. Initially, I noticed that I was afraid to speak out for widows whenever people oppressed them; but since I participated in the stories of the widows, I am concerned about their welfare as people. Hence I became an empowered witness to the widows' stories (Weingarten 2003:26-34). After our fifth meeting, I talked without fear to a group of Roman Catholic priests about the experiences of the widows I am working with. This experience has helped me to address oppressive practices in society without fear of what people say or how they would react.

The tape recordings of the sessions were of great assistance. During the sessions the recorder took over the part of the "co-searcher" (Dixon 1999:45) and I became part of the group. Afterwards, while I listened to the recordings, I claimed back the role of

“co-searcher”. I was able to externalise the issues that were discussed and to recognise the cultural voices that also contaminated me. I have learnt to question practices in Shona culture that oppress or marginalise others. Previously I would never question the taken-for-granted practices or beliefs.

Reinharz (1992:194) observes: "Although changing the researcher is not a common intention in feminist research, it is a common consequence". As we got to know each other and shared laughter and tears, closeness developed within the group. I could share my personal ideas and feelings without hesitation, unlike before the journey. I found that writing my thoughts and feelings in the research journal also helped me to acknowledge our progress.

5.9 WHAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM THE JOURNEY

From this research journey, I have also learnt that:

- ❖ Research for the sake of research is insufficient. Research which is aimed to create a just and ethical society does not exist to make good reading or simply seek to present information and data but to be used in transforming the lives of people. The question, *Who benefits?* should be the guiding tool. I can humbly say that in this research, the participants were able to transform their lives and the lives of other people when they formed a widows’ association.
- ❖ The participatory way of doing things; and in particular this research brings out more reliable results, compared to the autocratic way of research. This again is empowering as seen in the widows’ association that my co-participants have set up. The major lesson here is that you can tap previously untapped “goodies” by the use of the participatory method. Another observation in connection to this is seen in the children at Mary Ward Children’s Home where I am working. Since I started implementing the participatory approach, the result is that the children now have a better focus than before. In my Doctoral research in the coming years I am going to work with the children at the Home using this participatory approach in doing research.

- ❖ Outsiders can be caring and supportive as well when sharing the stories of the widows with them. When I talked to some of my friends about the formation of the widows' association which is geared to assist other marginalised widows, they donated US\$ 60 towards the association.

5.10 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL PRAXIS

When I was formulating my commitment to this study, I entertained the question whether I would be able to contribute to the field of practical theology and pastoral praxis in co-researching a small part of the community. As I was committed not to introduce topics for discussion at the group meetings, I never posed any direct questions in this regard. Would therapists acknowledge the worth of witnessing the stories of the people who come to see them? How could latent voices be welcomed?

The research participants shared with me aspects of their beliefs and of their particular church memberships. They spoke openly about the faith that sustained them through difficult times in the past and they mentioned many times that their faith kept them going through all the hardships. I was not only the researcher in the group but also the pastoral carer, offering counselling in the narrative and participatory pastoral approaches, which I used in the group. A community of care and concern was created where there was mutual caring (see 2.6). In the following section I reflect on Church and community.

5.10.1 Church and community

Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:90) say that critical reflection on the church leads directly to a discussion of how one can change and transform it to become a prophetic voice of transformation. When I reflected on the critical dilemma faced by the widows with regard to pension, I asked myself what could pastoral therapists do?

My journey with the four widows also forced me to ask: how can our church become a loving community? Poling (1991:146-152) describes the nature of a loving community as inclusive and just. An inclusive community values personal experience and diversity as “otherness and difference” (Poling 1991:148). If our church is a

loving community, no one becomes marginalised through stigmatisation and isolation. Inclusive love also challenges us, as we have to move beyond our boundaries of comfort. We have to create space for the marginalised members of our community to voice their suffering and find healing and protection. It is also a challenge to me and you, the reader, to become aware of and to address issues of oppression and segregation.

I recommend that the church in Zimbabwe needs to change the discourse about family so that it does not isolate widows and children who are orphaned. There is need for inclusive discourse in our church. In this way the church will be responding to the needs of our times. In this time and age many women are widowed and many children have lost either parent or both due to HIV and AIDS.

5.10.2 A challenge for practical theology

The idea of praxis as central to practical theology needs reclaiming and reformulating from a feminist perspective to include the voices of women and/or marginalised people. Constructing new inclusive models of preaching, including the lived experiences of widows could serve to widen the scope of practical theology. It is noteworthy that practical theology research methodologies should not reproduce the very issues it studies not merely do research on people, but with them and for their benefit. I hope that this study will not be read as the final answer to the curiosities that inspired it, but will rather serve to inspire us to return to the drawing board again and again to continue the praxis of healing God's people.

5.11 WHAT'S NEXT?

With the research process completed and transcriptions of the stories edited and approved by the participants, we are willing to continue with our work to help each other.

According to Maguire (1987:79) feminism is

- ❖ a belief that women universally face some form of oppression or exploitation;

- ❖ a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms and
- ❖ a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to bring to an end all forms of oppression.

I agree with the assertion that feminism involves a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression. Therefore for me the writing of this dissertation does not mark the end of the process. I see it as a small contribution in the ongoing or non-stop battle concerning widows' oppression, as one of them commented:

To end all forms of widows' oppression is our goal, especially in the church where we have the influence to do so. We want to plant this vision in all our church members until it becomes their vision too.

The participants were well aware that while the expressed goals of feminist research are to empower and take the standpoint of the marginalised; and restructure power imbalances in human relationships, attaining these goals could be frustrating.

5.12 CONCLUSION

The research process could have come to an end but as I have already stated above, the writing of this dissertation does not mark the end of the struggle against the oppression of widows in our society. The commitment that the participants have displayed in order to work for the cause of the marginalised and exploited in our society has been of great encouragement to all of us. Within the hearts of the participants a passion for justice and equity has been born. This research has transformed and empowered the widows to form an organisation, which has already started to offer support to other widows in the community. I have been touched by the way the participants are fund raising for the association.

I would like to conclude by quoting the voices of the widows:

As Shona women, we want to be the salt of widows, to bring flavour

and healing to others. We want to shine where there is darkness, to plant seeds of love where there are none, to spread threads of strength in adversity and to weave many threads into the colourful tapestries that are us.

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APPENDIX A

STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATING WIDOWS

I would like to thank you for your interest in this project about storying widowhood in Shona culture. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. Should you decide to participate I would be most thankful. Should you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind.

The aims of the project

This project is being undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master degree in Practical Theology (with specialization in pastoral therapy). The aims of the project are:

- a) To explore the influence of societal views, ideas and practices regarding widowhood and examine how these practices have affected them.
- b) To co-construct with participants preferred stories, questioning cultural views, ideas and practices that affected them and to engage in re-authoring their widowhood.
- c) To co-construct with participants new knowledges regarding widowhood and enable transformation of oppressive practices.

Participants needed for the study

Four widows will be included in the group discussions, telling their stories, how they experience being widows.

What will be required of participants?

If you agree to take part in the project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during the group sessions to be used in the research report.

Should you decide to take part in this project, you will be expected to attend four weekly group sessions of about two hours each. After each session, you will receive a summary of the session. You will be asked to make comments, corrections and/or provide feedback regarding the summary.

Although the sessions will be in either Shona or English this report will be used in English. Therefore, all the summaries as well as other correspondence will be in English. At your request these can be translated into Shona.

No financial reward or any form of payment will be made for participation in the study.

Free participation

You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any consequences to you.

Confidentiality

The information obtained during the group discussions will be discussed with my supervisor and will be used in the project. With your prior consent, the group sessions will be audio taped, however, should you wish that I rather make notes, I would be happy to do that. I will provide you with a summary of the group sessions. Your comments, corrections and/or feedback will be included in the final report.

You are assured that the information collected during the project will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed after conclusion of the project. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the audiotapes and notes taken during group sessions.

Results of the study

Results of this project may be published. At your request, details (names and places) will be distorted to ensure your anonymity. You will have the choice to use your own

name or a pseudonym of your own choice. A copy of the report will be made available to each participant.

Questions concerning the project

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, either now or in future, please feel free to contact me:

MERCY SHUMBAMHINI (SR)

TEL: 055 23281/23288

CELL: 011 740 158/ 091 942 300

Email: cjmercy@catholic.org or mchnhome@zimlink.co.zw

Or my supervisor: Professor Dirk Kotzé at the Institute for Therapeutic Development

TEL: 0027 12 460 6704/346 2092

CELL: 002783 324 8729

Email: itd@itd.ac.za

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, University of South Africa and the Institute for Therapeutic Development
P.O. Box 35214 Menlo Park

0102

Pretoria

South Africa

APPENDIX B

STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION BY WIDOWS.

I have read the Information Sheet concerning the project and I understand its scope and objectives. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.
3. I understand that my personal information (including tape recordings) will be kept confidential and destroyed at the conclusion of the project, but that any raw data the project depends on will be retained for three years.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
5. I am aware that Mercy's supervisor, Dirk Kotzé will have access to all relevant material

I am willing to participate in this research project.

.....

(signature of applicant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Name of participant in capital letters)

.....

(signature of witness)

APPENDIX C

STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE

CONSENT FORM FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION BY PARTICIPATING WIDOWS

1. I have the summary of each session to completion.
2. I had the opportunity to make changes to the summary, including suggestions, corrections and comments pertaining to my participation.
3. I agree for my suggestions, corrections or comments to be included in the research project.
4. I have read the final summary of the discussions and agree that this is an accurate and satisfactory account of the counselling process, and I therefore give permission for this summary to be used in the research project.
5. I understand that the information obtained during the discussions may be included in an article format for publication. I further understand that should I decide that I do not wish the information to be published, I am able to withdraw my permission at any stage of participation in the project.

I hereby give my permission for information concerning myself, to be used in the written report of the project and in the publication. I understand that my confidentiality will be preserved throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in the publication. I also understand that any information that may lead to my identification will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

I prefer the following name (either name or pseudonym) be used in the research report or any other publication resulting from the project. Name to be used

.....

.....

(signature of applicant)

.....

(date)

.....

(name of participant in capital letters)

.....

(signature of witness)

APPENDIX D

STORYING WIDOWHOOD IN SHONA CULTURE

CHIEDZA WIDOWS ASSOCIATION CONTRACT FORM

I agree that I will return the

amount of Z\$after a month. If I fail to return the said amount, legal
action can be taken against me.

.....
(Applicant’s first name in capital letters)

.....
(Surname in capital letters)

.....
(I.D. number)

.....
(Signature)

Address:

Tel:

.....

.....

Date:

.....
(Witness’s first name in capital letters)

.....
(Surname in capital letters)

.....
(I.D. number)

.....
(Signature)

Address:

Tel:.....

.....

.....

Date:

We have agreed to give Mrs./Ms.the amount

of Z\$which she will return after a month.

.....

(Chairperson's signature)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Treasurer's signature)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Secretary's signature)

.....

(Date)