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**THESIS FOR MASTERS DEGREE
IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY.**

THESIS TITLE:

**THE AFRICAN PROCESS OF MOURNING FOR AFRICAN
WOMAN - A CHALLENGE TO PASTORAL CARE.**

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SUMMARY

My focus on this research is on African women and its oppressive elements of rituals they undergo during the death of their husbands.

I am aware that this grieving process is oppressive to women, although it can also be helpful to some, because it helps them to go through the process of mourning. As an African women I am aware that when Africans are confronted by death, both men and women mourn, although in different ways. For example, you find that a widow wears a mourning gown or a suit, whereas a widower wears a simple black band or a small piece of black material on his left sleeve. This is part of the differences I speak about. What disturbs me most with this rituals is that widows has to undergo a longer process than men, and with a package of very strict rules that they must follow. With these oppressive element, widows find themselves isolated, marginalized and rejected by the in-laws as well as the community.

The above problem raises a challenge to Pastoral Care. It is the responsibility of the church to take care of these widows. The question to ask is, Is the church responsible? The answer will be discovered through research and questions posed on widows.

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All glory to God, honour and praise!!

CHAPTER ONE.

INTRODUCTION.

As an African women, I have at several times experienced that women of Africa, particularly Black women are oppressed.

More oppressed than men, especially during their process of mourning. Black women of Africa are experiencing what many feminist call “ *triple oppression*”, i.e, of race, class and gender.

Ruether, one of the feminists argues that :

“The oppression of women is the oldest form of oppression in human history. Most cultures have used the fact that a women is a child bearer as a means to subordinate the woman to the man and to deprive her of the leadership possibilities and of course cultural a self development.” (Ruether :1972: 37)

I agree with what Ruether is saying because women have been oppressed for long time before the Europeans and missionaries even came into Africa. Our great-grand-mothers experienced oppression, the same oppression we are experiencing today. By “ *triple oppression*” I mean, being oppressed by women, then by men and then by culture . A good example, is of a black women who is oppressed simply for being a black person and being a women. The other issue African women get oppressed is by a ritual of initiation. I’m aware that in most

African cultures , both males and females go for an initiation . As Mbiti says that:

“Traditional initiation rites in most African societies are very important because they mark the recognized milestone in a person’s journey in life, and as they on passes from one stage to another , each stage is celebrated with special rituals” (Mbiti :1988:116).

On the other hand Phiri suggests that :

“Initiation rite is the stage that marks the end of childhood and the beginning of womanhood and manhood” (Phiri:1998:130)

I agree with both authors but also analyze the oppressive side of these initiation schools .They teach girls to be submissive, how to become a good wife or how you should satisfy your husband sexually and so on. Less is said about how you should take care of yourself, and how your husband should satisfy you sexually too. In short, I would say that the major thing a woman learn at the initiation school is how to make your husband happy. This for me is one sided and it prepares a women to be oppressed. The worst thing is that, if a women fails this teachings that means you are not fulfilling your role as a woman then he will move out to find himself another wife. Boys are also taught how to be bossy and strong at a very small age. Culture contribute a lot in making boys feeling superior to girls. They are never taught how to love, respect and make their wives happy. The school concentrate on the side of making boys strong and girls submissive.

Men can have as many wives as they want. To some this rite of passage is good, but for me this is an element of oppression to girls. Both girls and boys should be taught to respect each other, respect must not be one sided. The reader needs to be reminded of God's image in human beings. In other words, both girls and boys, males and females, are created in the image of God. Therefore God's image is complete in both males and females (Gen 2:7). This passage offers a new look to gender and stereotypes issues. It suggests that culture makes us to believe that women are to be submissive to men. Here the word of God assures us that we are all created in the image of God, hence our process of life contradicts Christianity, its values and principles on how God created us equally. In short, we are both important and equal partners in creation. The most vital question to ask here is, what does the image of God mean to us Africans? In my own understanding, when speaking about the image of God, we do not speak about the physical, emotional, and sexual appearance, but we are also talking about our spiritual being which is what is important to God, than our own thinking and attitudes. Due to what I have seen and experienced about women in Africa and the manner in which they are treated especially after the loss of their husbands. I believe that they are oppressed, I mean more oppressed than men during the loss of their partner. Let me illustrate this kind of oppression by sharing two stories which will help us understand the issue of triple oppression. The two

stories that I will share in the process, have inspired me in such a way that I became curious and wanted to know, and understand more about oppression faced by women. I asked question, what is exactly happening to black women when they are faced with the death of their husbands? I believe in story telling which is so closely connected to African way of life. Story telling is central to the life of people and religion practiced in many communities of Africa. For example Ellen Kuzwayo once said that :

"Africa is a place of story telling. We need more stories never mind how painful the exercise might be. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone's eyes" (Botman & Petorsen:1996:7). I agree with Ellen's statement because as an African, she understands the role of story telling, and how it help people to share the process of their joy, sorrow and pain.

I will use the above concept of narrative therapy in order to receive stories of women who are mourning with open mind and heart. Therefore, as a narrative researcher, I believe that as people share their stories, a therapeutic moment will be realized which will lead them towards a healing process.

Let me now share the two stories of women in black, who were mourning for their husbands. And going through an unbearable pain because of oppressive traditional ritual.

THE NATAL STORY.

In the early years of my life, I visited one village in Natal,

where I experienced something shocking and traumatic. I was so traumatized that I became curious to research the issue of women in black. The experience thereof reminded me of the oppressiveness of death towards women. There were seven of us in the taxi, on our way to town, along the road a woman wearing a black mourning gown, because she had lost her husband, pointed her finger up in order to stop the taxi for a ride.

This is a custom in the township. When one seeks to stop a taxi for a ride. As she approached the taxi, a sad thing happened, all passengers went out except the driver and I, for I didn't understand the ritual that made them

to climb off from the taxi. I kept quiet and watched as the lady climbed into the taxi and she went straight to the backseat, after getting in, everybody boarded the taxi again. No one sat next to her because of the black clothes she is wearing. This I believe was a traumatizing experience which isolates and rejects the woman who are wearing black. I soon realized that, that was part of the ritual, that people were not allowed to sit next to women wearing black mourning gown. The journey began to challenge my ministry of caring. This is one of the stories that haunted me into searching for answers of caring for women in black.

The second story will also help into motivating and assisting in the understanding of the triple oppression I'm talking about.

PULE'S MOTHER.

I have known Pule from childhood days, later they relocated and we become neighbors. I have never known his father, although he would mention him in some of our conversations. His father left them for Gauteng to seek greener pastures. Ever since he left, nobody knew his whereabouts because he never wrote any letters nor make any means of contacts with his family. It is about 18 years since he left. The sad part of the story is that on his return to his family he was so sick, and within a few months of his return he died.

The in-laws forced Pule's mother to wear black mourning gown. It is amazing that during his absence, they never cared to assist his family in finding him. The rituals were introduced. She was forced to wear black.

I said she was forced because she didn't want to, unfortunately as a women , she was never taken seriously, and her feelings were never considered , her voice was never heard. What a traumatizing and an oppressive element . Pule's mother was never given a chance to express her feelings nor to make an individual's choice. She was never given a chance so as to find out if it is OK for her to wear the black mourning gown, especially for the man who left her for so many years. It is common that women when they are confronted by the death of their husbands, they are treated as if they are no more human beings. The culture also endorse the process of forcing women to wear black. This process is

excepted as normal, because culture expect men to work away from home and be absent for a long time.

Immediately he dies, the family arranges that he is buried at his own house which he left for years. The worst part is that a women will be forced to wear a black mourning gown for him- a person who brought sorrow into her life. It is worse today because some of them come back only to infect the women with the HIV\AIDS virus.

It is also common that the women is even accused of being the one who have killed or bewitched the husband. Suprisingly, when a women dies it's very rare to hear that men becomes accused for the cause of her death. They will not even force him to wear a black mourning band. These are some of the oppressive elements that needs to be dealt with in caring for the women in black.

Several oppressive elements occurs immediately after the death of a partner. It is worse when it is your husband. The poor women is not even given a chance, especially by in-laws or say a word nor have a contribution in sharing how she would want her husband to be buried. She is seating quietly on a mattress at the floor, burning with anger inside herself as the family arranges for her husbands funeral.

I agree with Hancock & Mains when they say:

"For too long widows lived in a suffocating darkness and

*silence. There are no words with which to name their wounds;
nor ear to hear their cries.”* (Hancock & Mains:1987:4)

Now at least in this research work, we will hear their stories and make sure that their voices are heard. Their cry for help is reaching out and touching our own nerves . If we all read this paper with listening ears , then we will begin to hear their voices. Their voices are a challenge to the church, culture and to pastoral care givers.

If we listen to their stories and voices we will begin to recognize them all around us. We will also recognize that they are people created in the image of God. The way women are treated by their in-laws, the community and the church is totally unfair and oppressive.

For so many years women has been treated as second class objects. They have been unfairly discriminated by class, race and gender. Women were never free in their own country, they are only recognized in terms of men. That’s why when they are married they even carry a man’s surname with them. They are identified in terms of men. Without men next to them they are nothing. This is another element of triple oppression. This I believe, is another way women are oppressed in spite of the black mourning gown. As widows seek to deal with the loss of their husbands, and their loved ones, they become so oppressed, rejected and isolated by their in-laws, family, communities as well as the church at times.

Generally, when African people are confronted by death , both men and women

mourn although in different ways.

For an example, you find that a widow wears a mourning gown or a suit whereas a widower wears a simple black band or a piece of black material on his left sleeve- I'm aware that mourners use different colors, but in this case I will use black as it is common to most Africans, and a black color itself signifies that "*leru le lentsho le wele mo gae*", which literally means that "the black storm has fallen within the family" (idiom expression explaining about death). In this case my topic is more focused on women (widows) and their journey during the whole process of mourning. Later on, depending on the research, I will further develop other elements connected to this topic. My focus on this research is on African women and the oppressive elements of rituals that they undergo after death.

As Africans when confronted by death, in the family, the affected family immediately conducts various traditional rituals to both males and females.

What disturbs me most is that, widows have to undergo a longer process than men with a package of strict rules that needs to be observed. I will share some of this strict rules later, in order to confirm the problem of oppression. I have very strong feelings that this grieving process is oppressive to women, although it can be helpful to some, because it helps them to go through the process of mourning.

Death does not chose as the Tswana idioms will always refer to death as "*ngwetsi ya malapa otlhe*", that is, death is a bride of every family. Therefore the individuals, close friends and relatives who are faced by the situation, are the only ones who understands the pains and dilema that occurred through death.

Kubler Ross also follow this pain of death by saying :

"Death in itself is associated with a bad act , a frightening happening , something that in itself calls for retribution and punishment" (Ross:1974:2)

I agree with Kubler Ross because when a husband dies, the in-laws suspect that the women killed him. Death becomes a punishment instead of being a closer to the chapter of life. Instead of grieving you are now frightened of other people in his family about his death. Guilt becomes a friend to the widow . Hence the widow is expected to wear black clothes so as to face death, and to separate from her ordinary daily living. She is restricted in such a way that she may lose her job. She is not allowed to go to work until after a month.

Life changes , and new rules are introduced that governs your life. For example:

1. A day before funeral, she wears a black mourning, others use blue green and other colors as agreed by the family.
2. From that day onwards, by sunset she is expected to be at home. She is supposed to light a candle before sunset for at

least a period of a year or more until the end of the

mourning process.

After a year, a ritual is prepared whereby she undergoes a process of cleansing, her mourning gown is burned and the deceased clothes are shared among the family members.

3. She is not allowed to shout nor raise her voice when speaking to people for at least the whole year.

4. She is not allowed to visit friends nor neighbors. Actually, she is not allowed to be seen walking around the village

because traditionalists believe that the people of that particular village will be cursed and drought will affect them and they will be forsaken by their ancestors if they participate with

women in black.

5. By 12 noon she needs to pause for a while and stop whatever she is doing, because it is believed that 12 noon is the time for ancestors to visit the community.

6. In Lehurutshe near Mafikeng, I was told through research that a widow is not supposed to cross in between couples as this will bring bad luck to the couple.

7. In some other villages like Mmakau, Polokwane, KwaNdebele, a woman in black is not expected to go to

church. If it happens that she goes to church, she is not allowed to sing nor sit in front of the congregation she needs to stay at the last pew with her back at the wall. Actually she is not allowed to take part during worship, but the only thing

she can do is to sit at the back, and watch the worshippers as they take part in the service. In other words, no one needs to seat next to any person wearing black clothes because people in villages believes that she will bring some curse.

The above laws and rituals explains how women are oppressed by culture and family. The mother in-law is expected to help the widow to observe these rituals. In other words the system uses other women to oppress women. This kind of living raises a challenge to pastoral care. Our churches ought to be places where widows must find peace and love.

Our churches must be seen as a caring places to all human beings, especially the marginalized, children and the abused.

Jesus did his work of healing by restoring what was broken, healing what is fragmented through the healing community which is the church. For an example Jesus healed a women who was subject to bleeding for 12 years (Matt.9:18-26). This women's life was broken, she was

rejected and isolated, but Jesus her life. We need to analyse the church and it's role among the people and society.

I agree with Mwaura in his definition of the church when he says:

"The church must be a caring institution with the following marks- kerygma (preaching the gospel), koinonia (creating a fellowship with the divine), diakonia (the ministry of loving service -and faith)" (Mwaura, cited in Waruta and Kinoti:2000:87) .

As followers of Christ and pastoral care givers, we are called to take care of those broken hearted, especially the widows.

There is another idiom that adds pain to the journey that a widow has to follow. She is not allowed to remarry as traditionalists believes that *'lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi'*, a *'women's grave is at her in-laws'*.

Imagine if you are young and cannot marry any more, what an oppressive life? I'm

aware that some tribes do allow a widow to marry after fulfilling the process of mourning. Others will ask that she marry within the family so that they don't loose children of the deceased. A widow will undergo another ritual that free her to remarry. The main problem is that men do not go

through many of the above steps. You find that after six months they will ask a men to end up a process of mourning so as to allow him to remarry.

These are a few of the triple oppressive elements that has forced me to research for this topic in order to come with a model for pastoral caring for widows.

Let me also analyze the process or rituals that men undergo after the death of a wife. They are allowed to do certain things because they are regarded as bread winners.

1. After (or before) the funeral a simple black band or a small piece of black material is pinned on his left sleeve as a sign of mourning (Surprisingly I have never heard nor read of a black mourning suit for men).
2. He is allowed to go around the village, mix with friends and families while the women are never given that freedom.
3. He is free to go to church, sit wherever he wants, sing, dance, shake hands or pray allowed as if he is entering the Holy gates of Jerusalem.
4. The process of cleansing is nearly the same as the one for women, but not oppressive to men, as it is to women. While being cleansed he will be facing towards sunset because part of his life in marriage has

come to an end. It also releases him to get married again, hence our culture does not question that process for men.

5. He is also given freedom to remarry as traditionalists believes that "*lebitla la monna le fa thoko ga tsela*", literally meaning "*the grave of a man is by the roadside*". In other words men are allowed to travel and be free. That means they can sleep anywhere they want, with any women they want to sleep with without being questioned. If this is the process, I'm worried because this kind of freedom is dangerous, because it will spread HIV/Aids, and women are vulnerable.
6. By sunset he needs to be at home, although this law will only be practiced for a shorter period to men as compared to women. When one compares rituals of widows and widowers. I realize that there are only two places where they are equal. It is in the ritual of entering into the mourning process and that of cleansing.

Let us analyze the ritual of ending the process of mourning for both parties. The timing for men varies between 3 and 6 months, while for women it can last for a year or more. The idea behind this ritual is to light a candle for the clothes of the deceased until the end of mourning period. At the end, the black band he is wearing round his sleeve is burned, and clothes of the deceased are shared among the family members.

The family will rush the process because they are concerned about the loneliness of the man, and not of a woman, because she is recognized as part of the property of the family. Remember the idiom "*lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*", which literally means, "*the grave of a woman is at her in-laws*".

The reader is clear that the process is very oppressive and unfair to women. The difficult part we are faced with is that, it contradicts scripture. It is also against the new constitution of South Africa which recognizes people as equal and important.

As a proudly South African woman, I'm aware that we are living in the world that is dominated by men, yet one in which women are beginning

to reflect theologically on their experiences of being dominated and marginalized by men and other women. The process of life is changing,

feminist theology is challenging domination by men and patriarchal structures, for example, there are women who support one another,

through feminist pastoral care theology, who looked at one another as valuable person with their own right. As McFague says that:

Feminists who have analysed the patriarchal model have brought into sharp relief the pattern that, from at least the time of Augustine, has

been the dominant one in the Christian understanding of relations between God and humanity, as well as people with each other.

(McFague:182:149)

I agree with McFague's statement because it is about time whereby both men and women needs to recognize themselves as equal and that they are both created in the image of God.

As a narrative researcher, I will look at the way culture and Christian religion plays a role and influences us to oppress other people. Therefore my research will be divided into five chapters outlined in the following way:

1. Chapter One - Deals with introduction to the problem and the reasons why I was led to this research.
2. Chapter Two - Deals with methodology - using narrative therapy in order to enter the world of women wearing black mourning gown.
3. Chapter Three - I will concentrate on the definition of death, especially the and Africans concept of death and the process of death.
4. Chapter Four - I will deal with stories of women in narrative therapy - using their stories to share their experiences and working on their healing process.
5. Chapter Five - It is a concluding chapter and way forward as well as issues that will emerge out of the research.

SUMMARY

The reader will now realises how women are oppressed by culture,

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other women and even churches. Some religious institutions have created a theology of submission by using the concept of men as the head, anointed by God in order to lead.

I'm sure that the reader begins to understand why this topic is important to be researched. Pastoral care has to engage oppressive ritual elements in the lives of people, bring liberation and healing, that will free both men and women.

As an African I know that story telling plays a vital role in our lives as Africans. I know that stories help us to see ourselves in the eyes of the world. For an example, Africans would use stories to shield people from harm. As Prof M Masango says

"Many boys would listen to the stories to powerful to them"

that would not. And as they listened they would not

"fall prey to evil" (Masango cited in Vertman et al 1999: 492)

I agree with Masango's African concept of story telling, because through the act of story telling one can find healing and motivation.

Even the time for story telling to be dominated by the watching of television and so on.

Muller adds concepts that are interesting and about narrative approach, he says:

"narrative approach is only concerned with stories as if all that is needed is to collect and re-tell interesting stories" (Muller 1991: 48)

I agree with what Muller is saying because Western concept

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Before sharing about methodology, let me define certain words. What do I mean by “narrative?”

Narrative comes from the word narrate, that is, to tell a story in. As an African I know that story telling plays a vital role in our lives as African people. I know that stories helps us to see ourselves in the eyes of the story teller. For an example, Africans would use stories to mould powerful leaders. As Prof M Masango says:

“ Young boys would listen in the evening to powerful stories of brave men at war. And as they listened, they developed leadership skills” .(Masango: cited in Verbum et Ecclesia:2002:712)

I agree with Masango’s African concept of story telling, because for me, out of story telling one can find healing and motivation.

Hence the time for story telling is been consumed by the watching of televisions and so on.

Muller adds concepts that are interesting and about narrative approach, he says:

“ narrative approach is only concerned with stories as if all that is needed is to collect and re-tell interesting stories” (Muller:1991:48)

I agree with what Muller is saying because Western concept

misses certain approach in African concept of story telling .

Africans concept makes sense of their lives through stories telling, it does not matter how painful that story is. Stories are part and parcel of their lives.

People make sense of their lives through stories, especially cultural narratives which are born into our lives as they shape our values, and the personal narratives construct in relations to the cultural narratives. As

Freedman & Combs adds by saying that:

“ In any culture, certain narratives will come to be dominant over other narratives. This dominant narratives will specify the preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving with a particular culture” (Freedman & Combs: 1996:32).

It is also the task of a pastoral Theology to make sense of our pastoral life narratives, and read them against the background of dominant narratives. So it is the stories “ ... contextual stories of people” that the church (undertaking practical theological inquiry) needs to listen to. African people use story and idioms in order to teach the ethical and Christian values within the society. Stories becomes part of life for Africans because they shapes their lives. This leads to people understanding pains and joys that are expressed through story telling.

It does not matter how painful the exercise might be, someone has to listen to those people who are experiencing pain.

Therefore in the telling of their stories, I will lead

the co-researchers (are the people who took part in research as interviews, are being conducted) to set certain questions that will help them to concentrate on the story that will open up to other stories. Co-researchers plays an important part because through their painful stories, they challenge both culture and Christianity and patriachal structures.

Co-researchers will participate in the story through responding to several questions that will help uncover oppressive element that destroy the dignity of women. As they respond to questions they will unfold their painful stories which will help those who have not experience death of their husbands realize the triple oppression that occurs among women in black- especially the problems they face in their daily lives. Let me share few of the questions to illustrate the oppressive rituals.

QUESTIONERS TO GUIDE ME.

1. Would you mind sharing your experience of treatment you received after the death of your partner?

2. What role did your in-laws play during this difficult time?

3. After you underwent the process of mourning, did you consider remarrying? If your answer is yes or no – please share further your reasons.

4. How did you encounter God during these difficult times?

The main aim is to explore how they perceived the role of God during those difficult times. In most cases, as widows experience oppression, the tendency is to regard the absence of God. God at that time is regarded as an oppressive male, who sides with men who are isolating and rejecting women.

As widows begin to unfold their stories one should detect if God is already present in their lives. This will also help me to discover if God plays a crucial role in the discourse, and what special religious activities such as prayer, ritual or the reading of sacred scriptures and singing hymns, enable them to come into contact with God. Finally experiencing God as a friend and redeemer who is on their side.

I strongly believe that as my co-researchers unpack their stories, they will probably have something to contribute to the above questions, although some of the answers might only gradually clarify themselves over a period of their journey.

Throughout the above process it will be good to reflect on my stories and that of my co-researchers. Hart comments are relevant to women in black about God and the church. He says,

“Habitually focused on church going, scripture reading, or personal prayer as the locus of the encounter with God, we

often fail to see that the life situations in which we find ourselves, particularly the crucial ones, are also the locus of the encounter” (Hart:1989:112)

I agree with Hart because South African women are trapped between culture and religion in terms of their triple oppressive elements. Hence women have been disadvantaged by different oppressive forces in culture and religion, and that has weighed them down to the bottom of the patriarchal ladder of sexism, classism and racism.

It is heartbreaking and unbelievable that for years the voice of a women were never heard. That is why we find that many women are more or less uncertain of their own authority in speaking their minds freely. This could be the reason why women more often than men ask for a consent and affirmation at the end of the sentence, for example “ Don’t you think so?” Women are uncertain about many things, not least about themselves. Not trusting themselves as persons with a voice and vocabulary of their own, they say “I have trouble communicating. Even if I have it straight in my head, it is difficult to say it” (Storm:1996:65)

I agree with Storm’s above statement because I’ve been in several meetings whereby, women would not participate fully for fear of repurcious. In many cases you find that men are the one’s who dominates and has a lot to say. Women are there as subordinates. The moment she stands up

and say something, she would not be taken seriously. I still struggle with the issue.

The reason to the above is that in the past, women were never recognized nor given chance to be part of decision making in home, in society and in church. If they responded they were labeled or regarded as sluts, disrespectful and not polite. A nice lady is the one who listen as others make decision on her behalf. That's why even today we still find women who are not trusting themselves as persons with a voice or vocabulary of their own. They just want to be 'nice ladies' or else they would be labeled as bad people. The stigma of rejection and isolation still rule lives of many women.

Women by virtue of their gender experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal rights or access to decision-making in the family, church and in the society. The very same discrimination and isolation women faces, promotes the uneconomical use of women's talents, and it also creates feelings of low self esteem and worthlessness.

Looking at the way women in black are being treated and marginalized, I therefore question the issue of 'ubuntu' (*Human dignity*).

WHAT IS UBUNTU ?

'Ubuntu' is a Zulu expression for expressing humanity. As African people we

believe that our humanity is expressed within a community.

We belong to each other therefore there is no person who does not belong. As Mbiti says that :

“I am because you are, you are because I am” (Mbiti:1986:12)

Belonging is the root and essence of being.

Therefore the whole system of African society and the ordering thereof (law) is based on this concept. “ In African societies

everyone has someone s/he belongs to who should reap the benefits of his /

her life or take on the responsibilities which arise out of that life.” (Setiloane: 1996: 10)

I agree with what Setiloane in the above quotation is saying because in an

African village or township where people have been allowed to settle without

disruption of forced removals, one finds that an air of a large family broods over

the atmosphere. You find that everybody is related to another. This

relationships, by blood, marriage or by mere association are emotionally seated

and cherished dearly. This becomes evident when a need arises, like some

tragedy (death) or some occasion for rejoicing (wedding).

Mbiti adds on by saying that :

“*umuntu ngu muntu nga bantu*”, literally meaning “ a

person is a person because of other person”.(Mbiti:1986:37)In other words, no

one is an island. That is why we find that in Africa every member of society is

closely linked with the community. This creates a chain which binds each person horizontally to the other members of tribe and vertically to both the deceased, ancestors and the coming generations.

Individuals cannot exist alone. They are because they belong.

That's the African concept of Ubuntu, though to my surprise Africans no longer practice what they preach. Instead, Western culture of individualism has been adopted by many Africans and this is evident in the way people of Africa are living e.g. Africans used to share, in a Tswana idiom which says:

“ bana ba motho ba kgaogana tlhogo ya tsie ”, literally

meaning, *“ Africans share no matter how big or small is the item, that must be shared ”*.

This idiom is no longer functioning because nowadays we have the so called streetkids and orphans roaming around the streets and no one to take care of. Africans have adopted the Western idea of *“ Everyone for her/himself but God for us all ”*. These Western concepts are changing African patterns of life. The more educated and civilized we become the more we Africans lose our African roots of ubuntu. This is another topic which could be researched in order to correct the way of living together.

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEPARATION

Analyzing at the way Africans were before and after the Europeans and missionaries came into Africa. One realizes that men and women were living together, uneducated as they were, they were rich in every aspect of life. They owned farms, cattles, sheep and so related to each other through different structures of African life etc. They survived from what they have. The issue of waking up and going to work was out of question they were all together happy as a family and as a clan. Gender was never an issue up until the Europeans and missionaries came into Africa. Actually the African vocabulary has no he or she, we have *Umntu*, a person, referring to both man and women.

The problem started in Europe in the 18th century. Industries were started, men left their wives and children behind, and left for work in urban areas. When Europeans and missionaries came to Africa, they brought that concept and imposed the same idea to Africans. Men were recruited to work in the mines and industries. Then they were taken to bigger cities to work there. Separating men from their wives, children and livestock, as well as their villagers Creating for the first time the idea of a male as a bread winner, and the economically dependent "housewife" (Watkin & Rueda :1992:8)

This is one of the major reason whereby all around Africa we find men are going out to the cities, looking for jobs and being separated from their wives and children for years. The apartheid era made it worse because

women and children we not even allowed in cities through section ten

(separation development)

This was a period whereby a gospel of separation and individualism was spread.

The Europeans, together with some missionaries promoted and imposed their cultures and beliefs to Africans, instead of preaching the true gospel of Jesus

Christ, which unites people and free slaves. As Paul says that: “ *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female*” (Gal3: 8). For them African culture and structure was regarded as heathenism.

As society and culture changed, men were the one’s who generates income within the family, they finally became bossy and dominant and using their anger on women and children. At the same time women depended on men and they were therefore denied rights to be educated and respected in society, political rights and equal work for women was tyranny. Some villages did not allow women to be educated, only sons were sent to school.

This above concept I believe introduced the issue of women to wear black mourning gown, and came to be oppressive and introduced dependency syndrome which became worse among villagers.

It’s even worse that even in the church women are so marginalized and discriminated upon. A lot of this discrimination is been justified using the bible and Christian theology in order to continue with the concept of subordination.

As Paul says : “ *Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the*

husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church which he is the Savior" (Ep.5:22-23)

This is where the problem of discrimination and abuse

developed it's strength, and gender issues played a bigger role.

In our families, churches, and in the wider community, we are affected by these issues. Women were denied freedom in many ways. As De Waal & Currie says that:

"Human dignity has little value without freedom; for without freedom ... human dignity is little more than an abstraction. Freedom and dignity are inseparably linked. Therefore to deny people their freedom is to deny them their dignity" (De Waal & Currie:2001:223).

I agree with DeWaal & Currie because no person can be fully human unless s/he is given the freedom to express him/herself. Recalling the women in black, they lost their dignity, voice and freedom. One wonders why women are so oppressed or is it because men had no way of expressing their manhood?

The new concept that has developed these days is, when a women losses her husband through death, she then is regarded as cursed. In African language it is said that: "*o na le sefifi*," you are carrying bad luck . You therefore experience isolation and rejection, less people comes to visit you , or even have a cup of tea

because they believe that, "o ne senyama", 'o na le sefifi', 'you have bad luck", because you are wearing black a symbol of bad luck. This kind of life penetrates in the society, church and community. In the olden days, women wearing black were respected, but also expected to carry out their duties without questions.

Hence narrative therapy is important because it helps in the process of healing.

As Payne says that:

Narrative therapy encourages a focus on the untypical – untypical, that is as perceived by the person. It encourages the untypical to be considered in great detail because it is through the untypical that people can escape from the dominant stories that influences their perceptions and therefore their lives (Payne:2000:6)

I agree with Payne because story telling encourages people to share their stories, no matter how painful the story might be. Narrative therapy, like all other therapies begins with the counselor giving the person respectful, interested attention – in a safe place and uninterrupted place. The person is invited to talk his/ her concerns, and the therapist listens. Often, people starting therapy tell stories that are full of frustrations, despair, and sadness, with few or no gleams of hope, it is then the responsibility of the therapist to take the stories seriously, accept them, and restore hope in their lives.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I dealt with the way African people use story and idioms as therapy. This concept helped me to explore the pain of the women in black. The

methodology used is narrative therapy. I also explored the presence of God during the difficult times of mourning. The next chapter will concentrate on definition of death especially the African concept of death and the whole process of mourning.

The women in black came to be oppressed because of death of their spouse. It is important to understand the concept of death in the African community.

1.1 What is death?

It explains death in the following manner:

- 1) physical death- death seems to be necessary for bodies constituted out of physical decay and ultimate dissolution are inescapable.
- 2) spiritual death- here death is a divine penalty as already stated in Rom 6:23 which regards death as the wages of sin (New Bible Dictionary 1993:273)

Before death opens into a process, we need to note that women experience it as a waking crucifixion at times when they should be celebrating their womankind. This is at many occasions witnessed couples taking vows during a wedding ceremony, the vow that troubles me a lot is that women are addressed a lot around the issue of

CHAPTER THREE.

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH.

The oppressive rituals and structures of society has made women in black to ask theological questions about God as well as the concept of death. It also forced them to review death in theological and African terms. Therefore, one needs to ask a theological question about the meaning of death. This issue caused women to experience a painful ritual that humiliates them and men treating them as lesser beings. Then one needs to ask a theological question- about the meaning of death.

3.1 What is death?

Oxford Dictionary defines death as the event which ends life. (Oxford Dictionary:1978:211), whereas the New Bible Dictionary defines death as a biological necessity. It explains death in the following manner:

- 1) physical death- death seems to be necessary for bodies constituted ours are. Physical decay and ultimate dissolution are inescapable.
- 2) spiritual death- here death is a divine penalty as already stated in Rom 6:23 which regards death as the wages of sin (New Bible Dictionary:1993:273)

Before death comes into a picture, we need to note that women experiences it at a wedding ceremonies at times which they should be celebrating their womanhood. I have at many occasions witnessed couples taking vows during a wedding ceremony, the vow that troubles me a lot is that women are addressed a lot around the issue of

“For better for worse, for riches, for poorer.

in sickness and in health,

to love and to cherish

and to honor in the Lord

till death do us part.”

Death is introduced at that time when people should be celebrating. Domination comes to mind as male preachers preach at wedding ceremonies. I often wonder if these vows mean the same to a man as it means to a women. My own assessment is that they are not received the same. For me most men escapes the vow, *“Till death do us apart”*

The above demands a commitment until death. The unfortunate part of this vow is that it was designed mostly for women. For an example, you find that in many cases, after the death of a husband, a women is never allowed to remarry, whereas a man is encouraged to remarry after 6 months or so. Funny enough, never in history of African people a women been encouraged to remarry within such short space of time. If she is encouraged to she then has to take a brother of the deceased. The main idea is to make sure that the children of the deceased remain in the family. Their responses will never be corrected because by so doing I will be violating their humanity. As a narrative researcher I asked my co-researchers (widows) of their understanding about death, (The next chapter will deal with their response and their therapeutic issues.) They came with many answers, just to quote a few answers they said:

The first one responded by saying:

“Death is so cruel, it never crossed my mind that death could divide, people and plant

devious seeds in their minds. To me death should bring people together and help bridge the gap which may exist between them- especially when they bury someone who is part of their life."

The second one said

"People change like chameleons in difficult times and once transformed, they became serpent. They turn their backs on you and became nasty. Forgetting that what comes around goes around."

The third one said:

"Death oppresses. It separates people from their loved ones. I am scared of one day being placed in such an awful situation that will break my heart and turn my life upside down"

Further A single lady responds recalling an experience of her mother in mind during the time of her father's death., she said *"I am afraid, the way my mother was badly treated by in laws, some relatives and neighbors, it made me change my mind, I don't think I want to get married. If what happened to my mother is the way widows are treated. Sorry marriage is not for me."*

Fifth said:

"Death is cruel! It separates lovers. If you want to know more about people who claim to love you, wait until you lose a loved one. Then they often show their true colors and drop the pretence of ever having loved you".

As I was engage with my co-researchers, I noticed that lot of anger was emerging in their

responses. For me, it was like rubbing salt on a wound. I felt that emotionally they were not healed, and they needed someone who will journey with them towards the process of healing and narrative therapy was the way of addressing their anger and grieve.

My co-researcher were full of anger, and it was very difficult not to join them as a women. As a Pastoral Counselor I know that anger is a signal of frustration and oppression, and one worth listening to. Lerner shares an insights about anger that is worth quoting, she says:

“that anger may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met, or simply that something is not right” (Lerner:1985:1)

It is true that anger grips us but we are not able to respond, instead we suppress it, especially in an oppressive situation. I saw in the widow’s eyes deep anger, bitterness and sadness. I agree with Lerner’s insights that, these women were hurting inside and are still angry bitter about their oppressive situation. Their rights have been violated. I am also aware that there are widows who have been cared for, and been given full support by members of the family during their bereavement. The reader needs to note that this thesis focuses on those who are rejected, dehumanised and humiliated and marginalized. Kubler-Ross capture the spirit of anger especially when people deal with humiliation and shame brought by members of the family. She says:

“This grief and shame and guilt are not very far removed from feelings of anger and rage. The process of grief always includes some qualities of anger” (Kubler-Ross 1974:4).

In other words, anger helps me to enter into their story and journey with them, reflecting

on their experience which were not allowed to emerge by in-laws.

With the negative answers shared I also believe that it will be wise to continue researching for an understanding of the meaning of death from different perspectives i.e. theologically as well as African perspectives.

3.2 THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.

Here Kubler -Ross will help us understand what death does when it visits a family. She captures the advancement of science and how people want to deal with the issue of death.

She says:

“The more we are making advancements in science, the more we seem to fear and deny the reality of death”. (Kubler-Ross:1974:7).

Death is a mystery and it is a temporal limit of all finite existence. Its meaning depends on the perspective from which it is viewed, that is biological, psychological, sociological, or theological. In Christian theology death is interpreted in relation to God the Creator, Judge, and Redeemer of life. The death and resurrection of Christ are central in interpreting death. The hopeful realism of a biblically rooted theology of death stands in contrast to both death - denial and death-acceptance in modern culture.

Hick explains it further by saying that:

“Death is our way to God, for those who die are thought of as having ‘gone to God’, ‘are among the saints’, ‘are among the angels”. (Hick:1976:207)

Hick's definition is too Western, and does not capture the African side of how African

people view death. This concept will help us to look at the African perspective of death

at a later stage. Let us further explore the issue of death from the Old Testament

3.2.1 The Old Testament

The Old Testament explore the issue of death, especially in relation to the chosen people of God. The book of Psalms are helpful in exploring this issue, e.g.

“Death is a given limit that God has set for all creatures” (Psm.90:10)

As a continual threat to full human life experienced in boundary situations like sickness, loneliness and exile. Since life to us consist in relationship with God, within the covenant community, experiences of alienation from this source are death-like and are feared and lamented. The creation story in Genesis 2-3 view death as the results of a primordial divine curse caused by human sin. In other words, death came into being as the result our sinfulness. The message of hope we have is that, death is

God’s enemy, which will be defeated at the end of history as recorded in Isaiah 26 and in Dan 12.

According to the Old Testament, death is understood in different ways, but the core of the matter is that is that, death is perceived as the will of God, and as a final part of our journey.

3.2.2 The New Testament Perspective

Although the early church affirms that God has acted through Christ to assure final victory over death, tension is evident between seeing death strictly as enemy, and seeing death as resurrection, or as the pattern of God’s way of salvation. For Paul, death is regarded as the wages of sin, (Rom 6:23) and the last enemy (1Cor.15:26), but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom.5:12ff). The good news is that, through his death and

resurrection Jesus has overcome the power which death has held over human life. As Adam brought death into life, so Christ brings new life in the journey of death.

Theologically, we believe that we are all going to die but we will be resurrected from the death, because the resurrection of Christ from death is the basis and paradigm of hope in God's final victory over all evil.

Bernstein says that:

"Life after death is contemplated by theologians of all persuasions. Christians conceive of the road to eternal life as a central focus within the religion, seeing devotion to Jesus as requisite. Within Christianity, however, there are differences among sects, for an example, Protestants feel that God lovingly accompanies a person both to in life and in death. If one has loved God, hope for eternal life in heaven becomes more assured. Catholics also emphasizes God's love. Death is perceived as the will of God. Catholics regards attainment of eternal life as a goal that shapes patterns of behavior and religious standard.

Some religious Jews believe in life after death for the soul, without viewing it as a reward, although other Jews are unsure about events after death and rely upon justice of God's ways"(Bernstein:1977:15).

Africans also have their own side about viewing of death, let's look at how they view death.

3.3 AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE.

Both the Theological and Western view on death did not capture the African side about death. African's have many myths concerning ideas about the origin of death. Some of

them have been recorded whereas some are not. In many myths spreading all over Africa, it is said that God gave people a vessel with a secret in it, and forbade them to open it. Overcome by curiosity or through mistake, someone opened it and death came out and life became painful.

These and many myths emphasize that death came almost by mistake. Even though all myths speak about how death came into being in spite of the above facts. There are no myths in Africa about how death can be overcome or removed from the world. This is the reason Mbiti says that:

“Africans believe that each time a person dies, the death is caused by either sorcery, the spirits, a curse, or natural death. (Mbiti:1986:111)

I agree with Mbiti because I believe that death occurs for a reason. Death is sorrowful, because it is viewed as a separation between this present life and the life to come. That's why death is referred to as returning home, answering a summon, disappearing, fighting a losing battle, sleeping, joining the ancestors. All this proves to us that death is not a complete destruction of life. Life goes on beyond the grave. Hence Mbiti referred to the death as living-death. He says:

“the living-death are bilingual, they speak the language of men(sic) with whom they lived until recently, and they speak the language of the spirits and of God. They are still part of their families, they know and still find interest in the lives of their families. The living-death are the best intermediaries between man and God” (Mbiti:1970:83).

I agree with Mbiti because this proves that life goes on beyond the grave. Therefore people combine their sorrow over the death of someone with the belief that, that is not the end and that the departed continues to live in the hereafter.

That's why African people are so sensitive of what is done when there is death in the family. One of the rituals done is the shaving of hair, the wearing of a black mourning gown for the widow, and a black band around a waist for the widower. The purpose of some of the rituals is to send the departed home peacefully, to serve her/his links with the living and to ensure that normal life continues among the survivors. The main aim is to come to grips with facing death through a process of mourning.

People especially women wail and weep, lamenting the departure of the dead person, recalling the good things the person had done and said during life time, remind themselves that the person continues to live on in the nextworld.

With these perspectives, I find it hard to understand why, after somebody's husband dies, the widow is treated as "*o ne senyama*", literally meaning, "*she is having bad luck*", she is isolated, and marginalized. I wonder what the departed husband says when seeing all the "bad things" done to his dear wife. African people believe that the death are alive as an ancestor, especially those who lived a good life.

With this in mind, I really don't think that he will sleep peacefully, and be able to guard upon us, our children, agriculture and our life stock. I don't think that he will be able to send us rain and blessings as an ancestor. As Setiloane says that:

"if the departed are angry at us, they won't be able to ensure good life to us, the survivors." (Setiloane:1986:19)

As death introduces women into oppression, it will be wise for men to start making wills and write letters which can be left with their lawyers. This will ensure that their partners are not continually abused after their death. Let me share an example,

“In case of my death, please do not harass my wife. She is the mother of my children, and the women I chose and love.

Please let me rest in peace, respect and honor my wish.”

African people have an idiom which says: *“lentswe la mofu le agelwa lerako”* means that the words of the departed must be respected and acted upon.

I believe that if a last wish is made, this ungodly things done to widows could be avoided, and the deceased could rest in peace. Then a women in black can be seen as fully human and be given all the support she needs during her period of great loss.

SUMMARY.

The aim of this chapter is to help us view death from different perspectives i.e African and Western perspectives. This helps us both Christians and Africans to understand death and its impact on us. Idioms and way of dealing with death are used. The OT and NT help us to explore the issue of resurrection and life after death. The next chapter deals with stories of women, using narrative therapy integrating their stories in order to share their experiences of loss.

CHAPTER FOUR.

As an African, I know that stories had been part of African life from the past. I recall with warmth the memories of my grandmother who used to tell us stories every night before we went to sleep. It is out of stories where I was motivated and encouraged to face life situations. I therefore align myself with Elen Kuzwayo who said;

“Africa is a place of story telling. We need more stories never mind how painful the exercise might be. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone’s eyes” (Kuzwayo cited in Bosman and Peterson:1996:7).

As a narrative researcher, I agree with Kuzwayo because as people share their stories, no matter how painful that might be, healing takes place at that moment, when they are allowed to share their painful stories, all they need is someone who would listen and receive their stories. Stories are part of a process of letting out some of the problems that troubles our souls. It is important to use therapy as a way of dealing with our problems. Therefore this section deals with stories of co-researchers. The main focus is to explore their painful stories of oppression, and integrate them in the therapeutic process of healing.

In the light of how widows are treated, we now venture to hear their suppressed anger and feelings. In order to deal with their anger, I will share two stories of widows who experienced oppression, rejection and isolation by their own in-laws. I will use interview materials of two widows who are middle aged, and the third widow will have passed through the process of oppression and isolation. To protect their own integrity and dignity, and in respect of the Human Rights Charter, I will not mention their real names, but will give fictitious names. Therefore it is important to note the following;

1. My co-researchers are quite clear of the process of research. And the outcome of their stories especially how they will be used in this thesis.
2. They know that their stories will be used to educate other people.
3. The following questions were asked in order to journey with my co-researchers, widows who were oppressed by families, culture and rituals.

Then the questionnaires will be as follows:

1. Would you mind sharing your experience of pain and treatment you received after the death of your partner?
2. What role did you in-laws play during this difficult time?
3. After you underwent the process of mourning, did you consider remarrying? If your answer is yes or no, please share further your reasons.
4. How did you encounter God during those difficult times?

STORY OF REGINA

I want to introduce to you Regina, she is 56 years old. A domestic worker who was widowed two years ago (2003). As the progress of interview continues with her, the slogan, or the repeated phrase that came to my mind was, "*Speak now or forever hold thy voice*". Yes, to a certain point, remember I have not experienced this myself.

This concept reminded me of the marriage ceremony African people use. I sensed that she couldn't wait to tell her story. Her voice was so powerful, and I believed she felt so

strong as she shared her story. Therapy begins as she shared her painful story with me. My role as a Pastoral Counselor was to receive her story as she shared it painfully with me. We greeted each other, then I asked my first question:

Pastor: During your mourning period, would you mind sharing your experience after the death of your partner?

Regina: I felt so lonely and isolated. People were afraid to talk to me, they were also afraid even to shake hands with me. I don't know who told them to react this way, but that is the situation I faced after the death of my husband. I remember attending a mother's day service at our church. There were refreshments prepared for the occasion. We formed a queue in order to get food. I joined the line and all of a sudden everybody in the queue left and joined another queue. I realized that people were afraid to come into contact with me and this made me angry and rejected by the community, especially members of my church.

What a traumatising situation, especially in the church. After all the treatment I got from people is that I felt rejected, isolated and emotionally abused. That's all I can say.

Pastor: Well I sensed some anger in your tone, will you mind if we explore it?

Regina: Well I suppressed it because my community expected me to behave like a good woman. (silence) if you react, they label you. People are so cruel you know, it's like you are no longer a human being. You know, do you understand?

Pastor: Yes, to a certain point, remember I have not experienced this myself.

Regina: That is true, but life is like hell.

Pastor: Well, let's explore the issue of marriage now. After you underwent the process of

mourning, did you consider marrying again.

Regina: (Pulled a deep breath), then she said, “I didn’t want to remarry, but my in-laws insisted that Gab’s children needed a father figure, and that lobola has been paid. Senzo, Gab’s brother was given me as a new husband (go tsosa motes), meaning he continues to revive his brother’s family. So he did return with me to Gauteng, but the arranged marriage didn’t work out. I felt I’d betray my husband, but these were his people and I believed that it’s a way of life he would understand my position. Maybe I didn’t know that to be a woman means that you are treated like property. Senzo was unemployed, and myself as a domestic worker, I didn’t earn much, I decided to move on with my life. I accommodated him into our home but I struggled to love him.

Pastor; I kept quite, but listening attentively.

Regina; (she continues). The hardest thing for me was testing HIV positive last year. Surprisingly I was not sure which of that two passed this disease to me. I was angry with the death of my husband, and that’s not an easy emotion to endure. Knowing Senzo probably has it too, is a big concern, but I haven’t told him because it would cause further problems.

Pastor: I sensed that Regina had a lot to say, and she needed an opportunity like this to talk. Then I asked, how are your in-laws treating you now?

Regina: Ooooo.. I really don’t know how to put this in words. My in-laws are very cruel. I’m telling you! (She paused) Gabriel has been sick for some time, though I never expected TB (Tuberculosis) would take his life. Even his family knew that their son was sick. But the moment he died, they told me straight in my face, that: “*o mmolaile, ko a*

ileng teng o tla mo latela”, this is a Tswana word literally meaning that “ you killed our son, and wherever he went you will follow him”

Gab's funeral was very painful, but the drama was still to follow. When we returned from his rural home, where he was buried. I was shocked to see that the sofas and electric appliances were emptied from the house where we lived in Soweto. I knew it was no robbery, Gab's family had apparently arranged for the goods to be collected. I was angry, because I wondered what these people expected their son's children would survive. (She paused). This is what they did to me. I couldn't call the police because I was too grief stricken. by losing my husband...that I loved so much.

Pastor: As Regina related her story, I could sense the anger within her. She bottled her sorrow for too long, because she even told me that it is the first time she is sharing her journey of mourning with someone . The way it was, all she wanted at that moment was to talk and nothing else. That's why I've even given her a listening ear and less talk from my side. Therapeutically I did not want to interrupt her story because I also learned that it has been interrupted by many characters in her life.

Regina: After a year we returned to Gab's home for the memorial ceremony for which a beast was slaughtered, and I officially removed my black mourning clothes (she signed then continues),in that ritual, the diseased knobkerrie(traditional stick) and other tools are laid down on the ground, I was told to step over them so as to see if i haven't slept with any man . Ooo.. what a disgusting public declaration, I obeyed because I needed to complete this ritual.

Besides all they have done, I continued to relate to my in-laws, because my children had

to visit them during school holidays, although I never stay over for longer than few days. I may be an outcast, but I really did try to be a good wife (she nodded her head with tears in her eyes)

Pastor: How did you encounter God in ordinary life situation, especially during those dark days?

Regina: I have trusted God since my childhood. Therefore, in short, I would say God's strength kept me going. Yes there were times I felt empty and lonely, but I trusted God. I prayed without ceasing. I believed that I could not survive without God.

Pastor: Regina's story share some of triple oppression of African women by the in-laws, society and culture. What a humiliating and disgusting element of abuse and oppression. The above story proves a point that the voice of a women has been silenced for too long, and are not audible enough. I have seen many cases where a marriage is arranged without the widow's concern, as it was done to Regina. You are given a husband without any discussing with you, because the family of the deceased son want their grand children to remain within their clan name. It is very sad because you learn to love the man as you continue life with him. The other oppressive element is that, if you refuse to be married within the family, they will take the children away from you as their mother, the furniture, even the house and you will be left alone.

For me this part of widow inheritance and replacement of marriage needs serious attention by the church. A widow is inherited by the heir of the deceased husband as part of his estate, like any other property. In this case a women is not expected to decide. There are cases where a widow is denied a chance to inherit any property that her

husband has worked left, even if they have worked together with the late husband.

Sometimes you even find that it was a women who was working, and the husband was unemployed. According to Christian teachings, the understanding is that the marriage contract is absolutely dissolved by the death of one of the partners

Unfortunately, you find that this is not possible to some families, and that's why we find ourselves in forced or arranged marriages. Mugambi has this to say;

"ties with the Africans did not and could not entirely sever their ties with their kin"(Mugambi:1988:101)

I agree with Mugambi's statement because as Africans it's not easy to cut the relationships we have especially with the in-laws. For an example, if they arrange a forced marriage for you, it is not easy to deny it. This is a challenge that a church needs to take into consideration and challenge this oppressive system.

THE STORY OF KEDIBONE

Let us now analyse the second person who will be called Kedibone. Kedibone is a qualified teacher, and a mother of two boys, aged seven and nine. When I meet her, she was bereaved for three months, her process of widowhood had just began. The issue of grieve was still fresh in her memory. We meet at her home. The reader needs to remember that at an early stage of mourning, a widow is not allowed to travel or visit other people. That is the reason that caused me to visit her at her own home. As we talked, it appears that she looked fine and relaxed.

Pastor: I'm aware that it is only three months since you lost your husband. Will you mind sharing with me the journey of you bereavement as well as the treatment you received

after the death of your husband from you family, friends and in-laws. Once more I will not edit her words- I need to respect the way she explained herself. These people are oppressed and I don't want to violate their vocabulary.

Kedibone:(before she could even respond, she looked me straight in the eyes) My husband, Thuso suffered from a heart attack while coming from work to home. On his way he died. After I received the bad news about his death, I didn't want to talk to anyone. The neighbors started gathering around, offering help I didn't ask for. It was January, I felt cold and my teeth were gnashing. I supposed it was a shock. After a while I felt terrible stomach cramps, then I felt as though my bone marrow was drying up. I thought of the good years we spend together. After all, Thuso's death devastated me (she took a deep breath, then tears rolled down her cheeks), it was a time that I desperately needed sensitive, loving and caring people around me. Unfortunately no one seemed to know how to help me deal with my grief, well after all, I received a lot of support from family, friends and church people. But after the funeral everybody disappeared. No one came back for a visit. They treated me differently, life changed, although ...(she pulled a deep breath), to be fair, you have to ask yourself: Is it me? Am I overreacting because of my bereavement or what?

Pastor: I realized that she was getting confused. Not completing sentences. She needs good care.

Kedibone Sometimes you want to be alone- but it seems every one was fussing around me. I remember one of the family members said: "she is going to be sick. Lt's take her to the doctor! And we better insist that she eats - she will waste away, we cannot afford

another death.

People needs to know that we all take death in a different ways. Everybody said I was Strong, perhaps because I am not the person who cry once experiencing death. But for Thuso I was weeping inside, even while I went through motions as daily chores. Yet no one asked me " How do you feel?"

Pastor: Well, it is difficult if people don't know what your needs are. Now would you now tell me how your in-laws are treating you?

Kedibone: Coming from the Christian family, where African traditions are not followed zealously, there was no pressure for me from my in-laws. I didn't even have to wear black. But at the same time I was told to behave because I'm still mourning. There were rituals performed on me, and I changed my daily ordinary life style. For an example I was told not to shout nor raise my voice. I was told to make sure that I'm home before sunset. They were extremely helpful. I did not experience a lot of oppression. My in-laws said to me I now know my status and that I should respect myself. One could sense that they wanted me to observe the rituals because I'm an African.

Pastor: After you underwent the process, did you consider remarrying? If yes, or no please share further your reasons.

Kedibone: I'm not sure of what my in-laws would say, since I've stated a new journey of widowhood. Marriage again hasn't crossed my mind yet. But I feared the impact of my husbands death on the children, and how I would cope as a single parent. And there are financial burdens to bear. I'm expected to work and take care of the children, you know. I think I won't marry, she said. I'd keep comparing Thuso with any other man I meet.

Besides , I'm terrified of becoming a widow again. Due to that I no longer consider it .
Widowhood isn't easy, but you have to swallow it, bitter as it is.

Pastor: During this difficult times, How did you encounter God, especially in ordinary life- situation, especially after the death of your husband?

Kedibone: I was angry ay God. I even asked God, why do you do this to me? As a Christian I found in God comfort. Slowly but surely the Holy Spirit began to be the best comforter I ever needed. Slowly I began to learn to look beyond my immediate situation to God's ultimate purpose for my life, and doing so I'm beginning to heal.

Pastor: My research lead me to understand the struggles of support that is needed by widows at this time. With Kedibone's story I noted attentively as she was talking. People came around, yet most of them did not know what to say to her. As she said that. This I believe is the great challenge to all pastoral care givers, and to the church at large. It is time for the church to establish a support group for widows experiencing pain and oppression . As Hinga says

"I argue that women should take up the personal challenge themselves, and become as it were, pastors unto themselves, as well as pastors of the church itself, by pointing out where the church errs and fails in its mission of liberation to the downtrodden, and the creation of a just and fair society. Women can be pastors unto themselves by supporting one another , unequivocally when tragedy strikes, and above all by being of good counsel with one another in order to help other resist abuse and violence, when it threatens them or help each other heal when actually hit with violence and oppression" (Hinga, cited in Waruta & Kinoti: 2000;139)

I agree with Hinga's statement that women needs to be empowered so as to uplift each other in times of needs. But it is also difficult at the time of death. The struggle women experience is painful.

THE STORY OF SBONGILE

The third co-researcher, Sbongile is aged 35, married to Sizwe, four years ago. Songile is "a house wife", and Sizwe was self employed as ataxi owner. They were blessed with one daughter aged nine.

During the interviews, we followed the same pattern. Greeted each other, and shared some jokes, then I asked;

Pastor: I'm sure you are aware that I'm during a research about the struggles of widows after death? Then would you mind sharing you experience of treatment you received especially after the death of your husband, especially your community, friends, family, in-laws, and the church.

Songile: I would say I mourned inside. I didn't wear black mourning gown because the moment Sizwe died, I was immediately thrown away from our home. My in-laws took my one and only child away from me. I was left alone. Actually everybody treated me differently. Some of the people I knew did not even care to greet me, they were even afraid to shake hands with me.. Mind you I wasn't even wearing black, but for the simple fact that I'm a widow, people treated me differently. I went to church after three weeks of my husband's funeral, as the Sunday school teacher, two ladies came to me and told me that I must stop teaching immediately. This made me feel oppressed, marginalized and rejected. To this day I don't know who send the two ladies to me but I got the message

loud and clear.

Pastor: it is a painful experience neh, Let's talk about it if you don't mind. And what role did your in-laws play during this difficult time?

Sbongile: Gone are those days when my in-laws used to sing, "*umakoti ungowethu*" (The daughter in-law is ours). They chased away, accusing me of killing their loved son. My in-laws told me straight in the eyes that, what brought me in their lives is no more, therefore I should go. I was never given a chance to grieve the death of my husband. They hate me! That I know.

Believe me when I say to this day I don't know where my husband is buried. They took my one and only daughter away from me.

Pastor: My goodness, it must have been bad. Now tell me, would you be allowed to remarry, especially your in-laws?

Sbongile: At this pointing time, I don't care what my in-laws would say about remarrying or what. The experience left me emotionally scared, and I don't think that I will ever marry. I'm scared.

Pastor: as I was attentively listening, to the widow's stories, I learned the following. It was difficult for the to put a painful story into words. Some were even scared to share because of the stigma they were stigmatized and discriminated against. Their rights has been violated. The past part of their lives have fountains of tears, a lot of abuse, discomfort and hatred.

It is the oppression of, and devalued humanity of women that has evoked the outcry and challenges by feminism. This challenge is legitimate especially if one takes into

considering what it means to be human and belong to the body of Christ. Oduyoye comes closer to the pain of a woman when she says: *“Feminism has become shorthand for the proclamation that the women’s experience should become integral part of what goes into the definition of being human beings. It highlights the women’s world and her view as she struggles side by side with the man to realize her full potential as a human. Feminism, then emphasizes the wholeness of the community as made up of female and male beings. It seeks to express what is not so obvious, that is that male human being is a partner with female human being, and that both expressions of humanity are needed, to shape a balanced community within which each will experience a fullness of being”* (Oduyoye;1986;34)

I have also learned that widows are struggling i.e, struggling for liberation, dignity and for peace of mind. Besides the good constitution of South Africa, women are still oppressed. Therefore for the sake of the widows safety and security, I would advise men to start making wills and write letters which can be left with their lawyers. Let me give an example:

“In case of my death, please do not harass my wife. She is the mother of my children, and the women I love. I chose her and love her. Please let me rest in peace and honour my wish.”

I believe that if a wish like this is left behind, then this ungodly madness of mistreating the widows will be avoided and the deceased will also rest in peace.

Summary FIVE

This chapter has helped women in black to share their painful experiences during their moment of loss, and how to cope with it. I agree with Bernstein when she says that:

“Loss cannot be ignored, for it won’t go away. Each loss must be faced, grappled with, and managed, then we can survive. Celebrate existence and deal effectively with each new experience (Bernstein:1977:2). The next chapter will help us find a new model and a way forward of further dealing with this issues of rejection, isolation and triple oppression experienced by widows.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND WAY FORWARD.

The memories of painful stories challenged my life as a single young women. Young people are also facing the issue of HIV/AIDS, pandemic that is sweeping couples and young adults. With this in mind, one cannot but think of the words of Setiloane when he says: "*I belong , therefore I am*" (Setiloane:1986:10)

I wonder if these words have the same meaning and impact to both men and women. I'm more concerned with the above quotation because after listening to the widows stories, I have learned that this quotation does not apply to women as being part of belonging. For women it means oppression and isolation. I started my research work being emotionally and spiritually hurt. Looking at the unfair treatment given to widow's. As I am comparing my feelings with the past period, I would simply say, I'm not yet healed, but I believe that I'm in the process of healing because therapeutically healing comes through dialogue and by confronting the issue at hand. Meeting the women in black brought hope to me in spite of their struggles.

I have learned that I have bottled anger for years, but thanks to God that I'm now able to produce a piece of writing on the very same topic: "African way of mourning, a challenge to pastoral care". This is a challenge to me and to many women who are struggling.

As I come into contact with different people from different cultures, I've started to realize that "*ga gona ntlo e e sa neleng*", literally meaning that there is no single human being who does not have problems. Every human beings has a story to share, and what is important is not how you tell it, but how you live it out with other people.

As Africans, I'm aware that we are caught up between two cultures, that of Christianity

and African customs. I will therefore define the two in order to discover an answer to the problems experienced by widows. I did not understand why women in black, are treated so badly, and inhuman. Yes some of us would blame culture for that, therefore if this is the case I have a problem with culture. The reader needs to explore with me the issue behind this kind of treatment. Those who hide around the issue of culture also needs to examine how they are cheating themselves.

My research has led me to share some insight about culture. Several of the women in black suffered because of culture. Then one can ask, what is culture.

THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE.

I'm aware that every living creature has culture. Therefore, with this concept in mind, I believe that no human being can claim to be without culture. Mugambi share an interesting point about culture when he says:

Culture means literally speaking, cultivation. It is the state of being cultivated. Culture is what we are, what we have, what we believe and what we long for. Culture is for the people what agriculture is for the land. Culture influences the way we choose to live. For an example, the food we eat, music we listen, the way we dress etc. Culture is what we consider to be our hope and despair, joy and suffering. Source of love and hatred, what gives us satisfaction or anxiety”(Mugambi:1997:14)

I agree with Mugambi wholeheartedly, because I know that different people have different cultures that suit their needs and context. Then if this is the case that means that culture is not static. Culture is good but not everything in culture is good, especially when we are within the same culture, a certain group of people turn to dominate, oppress dehumanize and marginalize others. A good example of about the stories of widows

shared in chapter four. I quote Regina's

After a year we returned to Gabriel's rural home, for a memorial service. At that ritual the diseased knobkerrie (traditional stick) and tools were laid down on the ground in other for the widow to step on them as to see if she hasn't sleep with any man.

Here a widow's sexual life is denounced in public, whereas a widower's sexual experience is honoured. We find that his process of mourning is shortened so that he may be able to marry so as to satisfy his sexual needs. This kind of culture humiliates women and uplifts men.

What kind of a ritual is this? Oooo..it's so disgusting and humiliating . it does not help or aim at uplifting on of the partners. I'm struggling with this question in mind, why oppressive rituals done to women only and not to men also. As women are mourning for the loss of their husbands, they also have to undergo a ritual that some of the dehumanizes and oppresses them women in black are having it tough, in the community, family and in the church. It's even worse that even when those bad rituals are performed on them they cannot even talk for themselves.

As women in chapter four were sharing their stories I was reminded of the story of the adulterous women. The woman who was pardoned by Jesus, after she was threatened (dear reader be reminded that the man who was caught up with her was excluded and be freed), she was threatened with stoning forced by man , she remained silenced through out the whole drama, while the man acted and spoke around her in John8:1-11. Voices of women were never heard and taken into consideration. Paul's text like 1Cor.14:34-35 is also used by many clergy to keep the women silence and condemn them. Due to that most women chose to keep quite, suffered in silence and fearing that if the talk, they will

loose respect, embarrass themselves and their families. As Nolan capture the whole thoughts by highlighting the issue of disobedience by saying:

it is the so called sin of not being submissive to every established authority and every level, no matter what it might demand of us. Once someone is in power, no matter how illegitimate that can be, once something is declared law, no matter how unjust and evil it may be, we are made to feel guilty about disobeying. Therefore we become conditioned to feel that we are holier, more spiritual and closer to God when we are submissive”(Nolan:1989:101)

I agree with Nolan because in many cases when a women speaks her mind, she is labeled as disrespectful and a rebellious person. This is a point of power struggle between men and women.

In most cases you find that if a women talks, they are perceived by men as disturbing the balance of power within the relationship of marriage, hence there are so many case of violence in marriage. The previous past law was also treating women as infants. Whenever a women want to buy furnisher, a signature of her husband was needed. If she does not have a husband, her brother's signature would also be preferred or else she would not buy nor rent anything in her name.

This kind of culture indeed contradicts the issue of *Imago Dei* (the image of God), that has been given to both men and women, especially to the partners in the ruling, and living equally and in harmony and sharing responsibilities. If culture oppresses and dehumanizes the image of either men or women, then I'm having problems with that particular culture and it must be changed. The process of change can be done through education, support groups for widows and challenge the church to come out with a

therapeutic model.

Let us now analyze the second issue raised by my co-researchers. The issue of Christianity was also raised and its oppressive elements.

THE CONCEPT OF OPPRESSION WITHIN CHRISTIANITY.

The Bible is thought by many an anti-feminist document. On the same note the Bible has been used as a resource for arguing against a woman's desire to be anything but a dutiful housewife and a mother. This is many people's peak of the obvious prejudice which the Bible has against women. With the above comment in mind, one can understand why women are treated as inferior by men. For example Eve's creation from the rib of Adam provides the biblical stigma of fundamental inferiority and secondary status. The Bible itself is full of stories of oppressed and abused women. Since then, there has been resistance to change by most men and some women. Missionaries came into Africa using the Bible as their manuscript, they managed to destroy certain cultural practices that were helpful to Africans. As Mugambi once said: *"Africans were therefore expected to abandon their culture and religious heritage, adopt norms of others in order to be accepted as Christians (Mugambi:1997:54)*

I agree with Mugambi because this is evident that even the theology that is taught in our schools, seminaries, and churches is Western. As an African I know and understand that Christianity is hard to digest in the African context. What has been happening is that African Christians have been living on two levels i.e.

1. the traditional African level
2. and the Western cultural level, hence we are talking about African Renaissance.

Any tradition or cultural practices that denies both man's and women's full life, as intended by Christ should be rejected. A cultural practice that promotes and protects both the humanity of man and women must be embraced. Therefore this require a revisit of our doctrine from a human gender perspective. Paul also reminds us that "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ*"(Gal.3:28).

As God's people we need to be liberated from all cultural and religious structures that marginalizes, oppresses and isolates the abused and the vulnerable. I believe that it is our responsibility as both Christians and Africans to take the challenge of proclaiming the gospel of liberation to the captives. Especially to the women and children. Liberation theology must be introduced. Then,

WHAT IS LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

Liberation Theology, simply means a theology that liberates people. All we need in therapy is the theology that will free and liberate us.

Guitierrez is also helpful in correcting the situation we find ourselves in. He say's that *liberation is an embracing process that leaves no human life untouched, because when all is said and done, it expresses the saving action of God's history*(Guitereiz:1984:2)

I Agree with Guitierrez because liberation theology leaves no stories untold, and no stones unturned. Therefore there won't be any women who won't be able to keep quite because of cultural hindrances. Ruether, a feminist theologian states two problems that we needs to be liberated from

1. Androcentricity- the male orientation of life
2. Misogyny- literally meaning being nasty to women. (TEE College

Notes:Course:342:1992:109)

I also felt challenged when reading from the word of God, fro the story of Exodus that There would have been so salvation from slavery for the Hebrews if they had not stood up and marched across the sea ofthe Reeds at low tide. This is precisely what the women in black are trying to do. I therefore challenge all African churches to stand up and proclaim the gospel of liberation to the broken-hearted. Clinebel also has this to say: *Ministers are the only professional persons with training in counseling who have automatic entrée to the world of the most sorrowing people. It gives an unparallel opportunity and responsibility to be effective guides and companions of the beareved as they walk through the valley of death”*

I agree with Clinebel because the word of God also challenges us to take care of the widows. It is therefore our responsibility as Christians and Africans to see to the following:

1. A CHURCH BECOMES A HEALING AGENT.

Our churches needs to be transformed and become healing agents in order to restore human dignity to a state of wholeness. A good hospital is there to treat the sick, in the same way the church must extend it's arm of care, acceptance, and love to all that needs to be emotionally , spiritually and physically healed. We need to become a church that comes out of our isolated suspicious corners, and boldly say in the name of Jesus, let's talk, let us find each other. Let us build a bridge here, heal a wound there, repair a damage over here, find a way forward there instead of sitting around and do nothing When the church responds to the widows, caring for them and learning from their pain, a

model of therapy can evolve, whereby widows as well as widowers will be both treated as fully human.

The church can only be a healing agent if it is a sanctuary, a place where people feel safe. People need a place where they can come and share their pain, knowing that they will not be judged, but rather received and loved.

2. HUMAN DIGNITY MUST BE RESTORED

Anything that undermines and oppresses human dignity must be abolished. Human dignity must be affirmed to both males and females. It is so interesting to note that in Africa, when we greet each other we say; *siyakubona mfowethu* (I see you my dear brother/sister) then the other person will respond by saying; *ngiyakubona mfowethu* (I see myself in you sister/brother) (Masango: unpublished class notes)

This above affirms human being in the most beautiful way. This concept of greeting affirms humanity and further introduces another concept of living *ubuntu*,

Mbiti is helpful because he leads us deeper into respecting human dignity that God has Given as a gift to humanity. He says; *I am because you are*(Mbiti:1986:61)

The above concept lives and flow in our daily lives, therefore when taken seriously, it can assist us in correcting the evils of oppression, rejection and isolation. Finally, the research needed to analyze the image of God in human beings.

2. WE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD.

The bible teaches us that “*God created human beings in God’s image, in the image of God both males and females we created*” (Gen1:27)

In each one of us, there is the image of God (*Imago Dei*) This passage offers a new look

at gender issues and stereotypes. Then the vital question for me here is that, what do we really mean when we talk about the image of God? The image of God simply means we do not speak about the physical and emotional appearances, but we speak about the spiritual being which is what is important to God than our own thinking and attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Acknowledging the fact that both males and females are created in the image of God, there should be no subjection of dominion of men in both cultural and Christian practices. The church as the body of believers, representing God on earth, has a big task to incorporate most of the practices so that those rituals that are bad and humiliating (especially to the women in black) must be avoided and all that are good must be maintained.

Hancock and Mains have these remarks;

It is ironic that the church, which should be represent compassion, and the power of Jesus Christ in the lives of the wounded, broken hearted people, had sadly failed to listen and respond. There is a little doubt in my mind that the long time male dominance of the church has left it crippled in ministering to women who had been hurt by men. But we are beginning to listen, and beginning to hear. The voices are coming through. And by encouraging, comforting, and journeying with the abused, the isolated and the marginalized as friends, we can help to press on"(Hancock & Mains:1987:50)

As a matter of facts, African people have come a long way with the issue of oppression and discrimination. This is the time to look back as Africans and ask ourselves the question: how can we learn from our past? So that we don't recreate the mistakes we did in the past.

Before God we need to confess that we have done wrong, and that by believing I the myths that the women in black are full of curse and bad luck, we therefore ask forgiveness.

It is therefore the responsibility of the church to see to it that Both African culture and Christianity work hand in hand with the existing structures that seeks to unify the two divided groups with the purpose of producing one culture as Mugambi says that:

“Culture is not static, it can be changed” (Mugambi:1997:14) I agree with Mugambi because we need to change all the structures of culture that oppresses and isolates and that are harmful to our neighbors and to ourselves. By so doing Africa will be blessed!!!

SUMMARY

The reader now realizes that the women in black must also be treated with love and care. They are fellow human beings who are loved by God. Our churches should represent compassion and the power of Jesus Christ in the lives of the wounded, broken hearted people. As Christians it is our responsibility to love and care for the marginalized and the abuse.

In this way we will be able to heal men who abuse women and also learn to include women in black. The main focus is on inclusion of women, a challenge given to us by God through scripture that says that *“There is no Greek, nor Jew” before the eyes of God we are all equal.*

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