

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TEXT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the texts as presented in the transcripts of six focus groups with 24 Tshivenda-speaking participants. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The following questions (addressed in the form of the themes in the chapter) guided my interpretations, and connected with the objectives outlined in the previous chapter:

- How did Tshivenda-speaking women, who have lost a husband through death, constructed their experiences of grief?
- How did Tshivenda-speaking women construct their experiences of bereavement rituals imposed by their cultural affiliation?
- What subject positions did Tshivenda-speaking women enact when grieving for a deceased husband?
- What contradictions emerged in the constructions of bereaved Tshivenda-speaking women?

Based on the questions above and as a first level of interpretation, I identified themes and sub-themes that are discussed below in the analysis and interpretation of the textual data. This first level of analysis is necessary to identify the systems of meaning (Gee, 2005) that emerged from the conversations with the participants. At the second level of analysis (chapter 7), the discourses prevalent in Tshivenda-speaking participants' perceptions of bereavement rituals are based on this system of meanings and the underlying assumptions that informed these situated meanings.

6.2 CONSTRUCTION OF GRIEF EXPERIENCES

The first question for analysis dealt with the way in which Tshivenda-speaking women, who have lost a husband through death, constructed their experiences of grief. The

way the participants experienced grief varied and depended on how they perceived their loss (Rando, 1993). When asked to talk about their experiences and perceptions of death of their husbands, the participants in the six focus groups discussed issues such as pain, the difficulty of the experience as a whole, loss, separation from the loved one or companion, how they perceived the nature of death, family demands, and the need for social and family support. They also perceived their husbands' death as a transition from one state of life to another, both for the deceased and for themselves in terms of their changing status from wife to widow. A construct that became particularly apparent was the way in which the participants expressed their interdependence and the transition from being a wife to being a widow. Upon inspection, it became apparent that the transition itself was not of primary importance. Rather, the significance lay in how the transition served as a change agent in the participants' perceptions and socially constructed reality of death and bereavement rituals.

What I have learnt is that here in Venda, being a widow is like a sin. I believe that younger widows are experiencing difficulties. When a person has lost a husband, they do not mind that you are like anybody else and you still need a man's company. People think when your husband is dead you are wearing a blanket they will never wear. What people will always see is that this person does not have a husband (Muofhe: G4, TA).

When he was still alive, all family members were happy about me as their daughter-in-law, but that death changed everything. ... As a customary law wife, I had nothing to say. In fact, I was still in grief. I just thought I had to let them take what they wanted (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

... life can be complicated when you are a widow (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

Fulton and Metress (1995), Lalande and Bonnano (2006) and Rando (1993) maintain that there are different factors that influence grief. Such factors include age, relationship, availability of social support and nature or mode of death. The experiences

mentioned in the above quotes testify to this influence. For women in middle adulthood, loss of a husband occurred at a time when they were re-examining the direction and meaning of their own life due to transition in life (Danforth & Glass, 2001).

6.2.1 Reaction to the knowledge of death theme

The level of the pain these participants experienced was constructed in terms of their reaction to the knowledge of their husbands' death. The intensity of the pain seemed to be closely related to whether the death was anticipated or sudden. According to Fulton and Metress (1995) and Stroebe and Stroebe (1987), sudden and unexpected death produced the most severe reaction and resulted in a more difficult adjustment. The nature of the death determined the extent of the participants' traumatic response, how much it preoccupied their mind and whether it became an integral part of the grief experience. As Ndivhuwo (G3, TA) indicated, she "*cannot forget that accident*". Ndivhuwo's husband's death was a shock that was accompanied by disbelief, tears and frustration. This was possibly based on the assumption that the grieving process started before a person's death if that death was known to be imminent (Gunnarsson & Ohlen, 2006). However, when it was sudden it appeared to shock the bereaved and caused more pain that possibly would have been lessened should the death have been anticipated.

With a car accident, the person left home as if he will come home but never came back. That experience is shocking. I cried and thought of so many things. I cannot forget that accident in my life. It was even difficult to understand when people said God does his will (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

I was there when the doctor confirmed that my husband was no more. That was difficult to accept. ...I cried so bitterly. I asked the doctor, the why question, several times. I did not understand how a person could die in front of the doctor (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

The presence of medical practitioners reassured the participants since doctors were associated with healing. This, however, also added to the intensity of their grief experience when the medical practitioner failed to provide the healing they were expecting for their husbands. This suggested that medical practitioners were valued and given authority over life and death, a responsibility to heal the sick, and it was a disappointment when a person died in the doctor's presence. This implied that for some family members there was always an element of hope for recovery when a person is sick and in hospital.

That was a great shock to me. Since the day of the funeral I have not seen the coffin or the grave till today...I was wearing size thirty-six but I went back to thirty-two. That means I was troubled (Muofhe: G4, TA).

Rando (1993) indicated that grief was not only a psychological reaction to loss, but also involved a physical reaction. Although some participants expressed the pain of bereavement in terms of emotional outbursts such as crying and anger (e.g., towards God), other participants experienced the impact of the shock on a physical level (e.g., through weight loss). Thus, death was found not only to have a psychological impact on the participants' lives, but also a physical impact.

The late was sick for a very long time. We could also see that he was going to die. During his last days he could not even speak (Anna: G2, AIC).

When I saw him sick, I just believed that whatever happens will be out of God's will. It is not that easy when you hear that one has lost a husband. It is difficult (Dorothy: G3, AC).

Even though issues of sudden and anticipated death were not relevant to some participants, others anticipated their husband's death. Such anticipation influenced the way they approached and reacted to the event. For Anna (G2, AIC), whose husband was ill for a long time, her anticipation of his death helped her to prepare for and deal

with it. She felt ready for it. A long illness allowed the participants to prepare themselves for the death and they experienced more restrained grief. Even though there were participants who contradicted findings from research by Parkes and Weiss (1983) that anticipated death does not prepare one, there were other participants who supported their earlier studies that claimed that anticipating the death of a loved one reduced the intensity of grief, and Fulton and Metress's (1995) assertion that an unexpected death produced a more severe reaction than an anticipated one.

Dorothy found that although her husband was sick, his death was still difficult to deal with. Dorothy believed that "*whatever happens will be out of God's will,*" and attributed the experience of grief to God's plan. In this instance, her construction of meaning of the grief experience as related to divine intervention possibly influenced the way she dealt with the pain of her husband's death and found acceptance in spite of her other difficulties. Her construction seemed to be informed by her religious-cultural affiliation that promoted the belief that a person's death is God's will (Vold, 2000), and that the person went to heaven (Ter Blanche & Parkes, 1997), and there will be a day for reunion (Pang & Lam, 2002).

6.2.2 Pain associated with multiple losses

The pain experienced by the participants was more than a mere physical pain; it involved intense emotional experiences of discomfort and hurt that were expressed in outbursts of crying and even anger towards God for allowing death to take away a husband, friend, and the father of their children. The participants attributed the intensity of their pain to the meaning that their husbands had in their lives, the nature of the husbands' death, and the various losses they had to deal with when their husbands died. Parkes (2001) argued that intensity of reaction to loss was rooted on the attachment and degree of dependency there was between the deceased and the bereaved.

Hei, death is painful, especially when you are a wife and your husband has died... You know what, when the nurse told me that my husband is no more, I

could not hold myself. I just cried, I just cried. It was so painful (Maria: G1, AIC).

I cried and thought of so many things. I cannot forget that accident in my life. It was even difficult to understand when people say God does his will (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

How would you feel if it was your husband? I think you would also cry unless if he had no meaning in your life (Maria: G1, TA).

This study has found that grief experiences were associated with other losses that accompanied the death of a husband that added to the factors influencing the widows' grief. In their studies, Danforth and Glass (2001) found that widows did not only lose their husband, but also lost "the very purpose and shape of life" (p. 513), that possibly used to be defined according to the position and role the husband used to play in their lives. It was not only the loss of a husband, but several losses attached to his death that intensified their experiences and their perception of grief as painful. Such losses involved a loss of roles and meanings they attached to the existence of a husband, loss of a husband as a valued companion in all aspects of life, loss of position and status, loss of physical attachment, loss of emotional support for everyday family matters, such as raising the children.

Kastenbaum (1998) talked about death as having the ability to both unite and separate people. In this case, the dead united with the ancestors or God and separated from the living. The participants constructed their experiences of grief in terms of loss of a companion and felt lonely because the position that their husband used to occupy and the roles he played in the family were now empty. When family and community members that came to offer different forms of support leave, the participants needed to adjust to an environment in which the husband was missing (Papenbrock & Voss, 1990; Selepe & Edwards, 2008).

Participants varied in how they constructed the level of meaning that their husband had in their lives in relationship to the level of pain they experienced. To some participants, a husband meant the person who provided certain resources needed for survival, while to others he provided a sense of identity that disappeared when he died (Fulton & Metress, 1995).

Such a pain is different and goes very deep (Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

Mm..., but my problem was deeper than that. As I have already indicated earlier, it was deeper than just losing a physical contact (Betty: G5, AC).

Betty spoke of a depth in her relationship and the meaning that she attached to her husband that seemed to be different from the other participants. The depth of the meaning that she attached to her husband particularly intensified the pain that she felt after losing him. Similarly, Mutshekwa (G1, TA) felt that *"such a pain is different and it goes very deep"*, and reported that it was different from any other pain that people could feel when losing any other thing they might be attached to. The participants appeared to agree that losing something recoverable was different from losing a husband who could not be recovered. The participants possibly compared the husband's death with the experience of losing someone else, hence they talked about the depth and the difference of feelings.

With me, ...that's, mm, death is like a loss, losing something, losing something, mm..., something so precious to me, something that I valued so much (Betty: G5, AC).

He was like a friend to me. That means his death meant a loss of a friend, in fact, a very close friend. A friend I trusted so much (Salphina: G6, TA).

Whenever I remember the good times we had when he was still alive, I feel that loss (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

I knew I will miss him. In fact his death was a loss of someone I loved most
(Susan: G6, AIC).

The late was also old. It is just that parting with the father to your children is painful
(Masindi: G2, TA).

The participants constructed their husbands as something of great value that was lost when they died. Having a husband was associated with companionship and somebody with whom family values and activities could be shared. In this regard, the participants' grief experiences showed that they were deeply attached to their husbands. The loss of such a valuable person left them devastated, knowing that they would miss him and the attachment they had with him. They would miss him not only as a companion, but as someone they shared their emotions with. This finding supported Parkes's (2002) argument that grief experiences were rooted in the attachment that people had with each other. It appeared that should they not have had a strong attachment with their husbands, the language used to construct their grief experience would have been different.

According to Fulton and Metress (1995), losing a supportive relationship influenced people to question the reason for continuing with life. Hence, Danforth and Glass (2001) argued that upon the husband's death widows lost the purpose of life. This was true for some of the participants in this study. Salphina (G6, TA) emphasised the meaning that her husband had, while other participants stated that they could not see any reason for living without their husbands. They constructed death as something that was able to cut a strong bond, which represented emotional dependency between the husband and wife. The participants accepted the dependency position to the extent that they did not trust their own capability to survive without their husbands. They positioned the husband on a higher authority level, possibly because of their religious-cultural background that valued the husband's authority. This dependency extended also to the physical needs of the participants.

One thing that is so difficult in life is that even when you go to church flesh is flesh, it needs what is due to flesh, the spirit is spirit and it needs what is due to spirit. ... That there is no more that person you will spend the night with, you see (Dorothy: G3, AC).

Since I am still young I still need a man, but where can I find one who is not married? The one who can be mine. I can only find another one's husband who will only come and go (Selina: G3, AIC).

In resistance of stereotypical discourses that informed widowhood, participants constructed grief experiences in relation to their physical and sexual needs that could no longer be satisfied. The attachment that satisfied their physical needs was gone, intensifying the pain of grief. Their loss brought a need for someone else who could satisfy their physiological needs. Overall, the loss of their loved ones created an imbalance in the family, and created frustration in the lives of the bereaved participants. This supports Chan et al. (2005) and Selepe and Edwards (2008) who maintained that death caused disequilibrium in the family and community.

6.2.3 The family responsibilities theme

Apart from the constructions of death as painful in relation to all the losses they experienced upon the death of a husband, participants also saw death as associated with additional family roles and responsibilities for them. Irrespective of religious affiliation, the participants constructed grief experiences as being associated with difficulties such as added responsibilities, financial and material burdens, and child rearing in the absence of a husband.

So everything is my responsibility. When a child comes from school with a need, I have to make sure that I provide. It is my responsibility (Dorothy: G3, AC).

With the little that I have, I must see to it that I am taking children to school and also meet all their needs. As a result that adds to the pain of loss (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

That is happening to me now. We used to share responsibilities together, but now I have to carry all the responsibilities alone (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

When it comes to the issue of children, these children are difficult. If he were here I would tell him that this child is doing like this and the other child is behaving like that, and together we come with a way to discipline them. As a result, when I am alone it is difficult (Dorothy: G3, AC).

The participants who still had young children at the time of their husbands' deaths constructed the pain and difficulty caused by his death in relation to raising the children alone. Sharing the responsibility of child rearing with a husband appeared easier than having to do this alone. The participants found it difficult to raise children alone, particularly when it came to disciplining the children, meeting all their school and other needs. Raising children without a husband was reported to be much more difficult and added further stress and pain to the experience of grief. It is possible that the religious-cultural heritage that gave men authority over the family made it easier for fathers to discipline the children. When this authority figure died, mothers might find it more difficult to discipline their children. Thus, they experienced more pain as a result of the loss and having to take over those additional responsibilities that used to be their husband's.

In a traditional Tshivenda-speaking family, the husband would not only serve as a father, but also as someone to share responsibilities with (in relation to gender roles). Even though there is still a lack of literature to support this observation, in the researcher's opinion Tshivenda families were interdependent, with wives being expected to take care of the children when husbands were at work, and with wives expecting husbands to provide for them financially. Therefore, the death of a husband

shifted all of these previously shared responsibilities onto the wife, and could leave her destitute at the time of his death. Thus, grieving for their husbands not only involved the pain associated with loss of a physical person and emotional support, but also included having to deal with additional practical responsibilities, and for some widows, without financial resources.

It was a painful experience because the deceased was the only one working and he had just begun building our house. ...the relatives divided it (condolences money) amongst themselves and gave me just enough to buy food. You think that is not painful? (Rose: G1, AC).

With me it was so difficult because I was not working at all. The late was the one who was working (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

They say whatever amount is left should help raise the children. As a result, I always think, if he were around, he would provide this and that. I would not be suffering like this (Selina: G3, AIC).

Samuelsson, Redestad and Segesten (2001) argue that it was a traditional cultural role for men to be the provider for their families. In traditional Tshivenda culture, it was accepted that the husband would be the breadwinner, while the wife took care of the home and children. The family was, therefore, dependent on the husband to bring home money for all their needs. His death implied additional difficulties and challenges for those who now had to go without the much valued financial resources (Sihlongonyane, 2004). This finding also supported Rosenblatt and Nkosi's (2007) finding that upon the husband's death, a Zulu widow expressed grief feelings about poverty and lack of economic resources, rather than about the dead husband per se. The participants who were financially dependent on their husbands reported that the loss of their husband's income increased their stress and added to their experience of grief. The participants experienced this stress because they were never encouraged to be independent while their husbands were still alive.

Hey, you know what, what was most painful was that, there was money from condolences and burial societies left, the relatives divided it amongst themselves and gave me just little to buy food. You think that is not painful? It is very painful. Honestly, death is painful (Rose: G1, AC).

The participants had been financially dependent on their husbands, and this dependency continued even after the husband's death when in-laws and relatives took over the purse strings. As a widow, Rose (G1: AC) was without the financial stability she had as a wife and had now become dependent on others. The extended family used intimidation by "giving her little money," possibly to ensure that she would not walk away with the children and leave no legacy for her deceased husband's family. Having to beg for her family's survival exacerbated the pain of her grief, and their financial dependency kept these participants in a submissive position to their in-laws and relatives. It was possible they hoped that their in-laws would continue to support them financially. It appeared, however, that these experiences would have been different had they been working and were financially independent. Possibly, financial dependency might have contributed to how some women reacted to the knowledge of their husband's death (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

6.2.4 The need for social support theme

Fulton and Metress (1995) argued that the availability of social support was important in the grief process. Social support was known to facilitate emotional expression and the resolution of grief (Fulton & Metress, 1995). This might be in part because mourners were able to share their emotional distress with supportive others. Caring community members offered this kind of support during a time of bereavement. For example, in the Tshivenda speaking community, upon knowing that a person has died, members flocked to the family to offer different kinds of support (Selepe & Edwards, 2008).

...staying with other widows who understand what death is and what it involves... is also consoling, you know (Lucy G2, TA).

...The support I got from others who had had the same experience was helpful (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

Other neighbours would come and share their experiences ... The fact that my relatives were supportive was one element that strengthened me. They would come and console me (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

Those people would share their own experiences to an extent that I sometimes felt like my pain was less compared to what others went through. I ended up accepting that my husband is dead and there is nothing one can do to change that (Salphina: G6, TA).

Other women in the church also helped console me even though they still have their husbands (Selina: G3, AIC).

The participants agreed that their grief resulted in a need for social support. It appeared that participants needed social support from the people around them, that is relatives, friends, community members and church members. Such support was considered helpful in assisting participants to come to terms with the impact of losing a husband through death and to reconstruct their lives after their loss. The participants expressed appreciation for the support from other women who shared similar experiences, relatives, and church members, because such support altered their perceptions of loss. Some participants in this study also reported a lack of much needed support from their in-laws, who they found treated them as outsiders (this will be elaborated on later).

... just after the funeral all relatives disappeared and never came back. In situations where they came back, they had other things they were looking for. They never came to enquire about our state of health (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

One thing that is helping me most is that my relatives are supportive. They are always closer to me. Their support consoles me. They also help us with children's school needs and food. All these are helping us accept what happened (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

Relatives played an important role in supporting the participants. They provided support both during and after the mourning period, and the participants specifically expressed their appreciation for this support. Despite resenting the financial dependency on the extended family after their husbands' deaths, the participants agreed that support from their family and relatives were vital to helping them deal with the pain of loss, although they missed such support from their in-laws.

In order to cope with that death, I told myself, I have to focus on my work, my family and myself. I accepted that I am a widow and I have to live on as such. The other thing was that I avoided having a close friend. I learnt to live with single parents, young and old. That helped me to cope with the pain of death (Muofhe: G4, TA).

In their studies, Steeves et al. (2005) found that some participants enjoyed sympathy from church members and other people as it allowed them to express their sadness, while others avoided such sympathy. This might be because they did not want to share their emotions with others, but preferred to cope through directing their energy into their work (Sanders, 1992). Muofhe, for example, avoided previously formed close friendships and rather associated herself with single parents. This appeared to imply that she did not want to associate herself with married people who possibly still had their spouses as she could be perceived as a threat to their families. She might have avoided sharing her experiences with people who might not understand her position as a single parent.

In summary, the participants constructed their grief experiences in many different ways. For some, the focus was on their pain and loss, and the difficulty of having to continue

life without their husbands and to negotiate the change in their positions in society from wives to widows. This caused emotional turbulence that added to their grief. The grief experience included one's development – and adjustment and adaptation – from being a wife to being a widow (Rando, 1993). Others commented on the levels of the shock and pain suffered because of the nature of the death, whether anticipated or sudden. Some saw it as divine intervention and found solace in believing that “*whatever happens will be out of God's will*” (Dorothy: G3, AC).

Some participants indicated that the change of their position in society, from wife to widow caused emotional turbulence that added to their grief. Others commented on the added stress of having to deal with family responsibilities without the help of a valued husband, and the financial dependency on in-laws and relatives. Coping with grief also elicited a need for social support, as well as reliance on existing mechanisms for coping with issues such as work, children, and new friends (particularly those who had already lost their husbands). Adjusting to life after a husband's death required resilience in changing focus away from grief towards a reconstruction of life without a husband. For some people among the Tshivenda speaking community, it appeared that a way to facilitate reconstruction of the new self without a husband involved performing bereavement rituals, while for others performance of bereavement rituals seemed to be oppressive actions facilitated by others.

6.3 CONSTRUCTION OF EXPERIENCES OF BEREAVEMENT RITUALS

The second question of this analysis explored the way in which bereaved Tshivenda-speaking women constructed their perceptions of the bereavement rituals inherent in their religious-cultural affiliation. The participants in this study perceived and constructed bereavement rituals as serving a number of purposes for them. The participants talked about these bereavement rituals as culturally prescribed and as representing family values upheld by the elders (significant others). As such, they felt that they had no option but to perform them and to abide by cultural expectations.

Some of the participants considered the rituals to be therapeutic; and they perceived them as a way to “facilitate healing” (Imber-Black, 1991, p. 222), and as being helpful in restoring their quality of life and allowing them to function in society with a new and reconstructed self. Others perceived the rituals as depressing, and felt they promoted an oppressive inequality between themselves and other family members (particularly in-laws). In these cases, the performance of bereavement rituals seemed to be a practice accommodated in the family that valued performance of such rituals. The participants also perceived the performance of bereavement rituals as a means of respecting the deceased. In the Tshivenda-speaking community, the deceased should be respected through performing the rituals; and failure to do so might provoke the ancestors to bring misfortune to the family.

6.3.1 The theme of cultural prescriptions

In a Tshivenda-speaking community, the elders acted as agents of culture, and were the ones who perpetuated cultural and family values. Cultures have norms, values and attitudes that were considered important and were expressed in what the society conveyed to the younger generations through education and participatory actions (Cook & Oltjenbruns, 1989). This also applied to specific rituals that were designed to assist families in mourning and reconstruction of the self. A newly widowed Tshivenda-speaking woman was expected to accept and comply with the prescriptions of the rituals. Deviating from the bereavement rituals was considered disrespectful to the elders and the culture and could cause conflict (Goldberg, 1981). **Failure to perform the rituals might lead to blame being cast on the widow should anyone else in the family fall ill or die.**

Imagine if I said I do not want to perform those rituals. I think they would believe that truly I killed their son. Do not forget that to those people, they cannot trust me when I say I did not kill him. It is like in our culture, if a husband dies, there is always an element of doubt that the wife is innocent. To avoid that blame, you simply have to do as they tell you (Tshovhewaho, G4, TA).

Some of the participants felt that they had no choice but to perform the rituals. These participants indicated that they performed the bereavement rituals prescribed by their culture irrespective of whether they agreed with the practices or not. Performance of bereavement rituals was perceived as a way of complying with and honouring their Tshivenda culture, irrespective of their personal feelings or religious affiliation. By performing the bereavement rituals as a sign of respect to the cultural prescriptions, they also acknowledged that it was a way of accepting what others demanded because of the power given to them by the culture. It was also perceived as a duty to the husband's family values "*because they were things admired by the in-laws*" and because the widow had no legitimacy to oppose the in-laws, even if their religious beliefs differed from her own.

I had to do some of these things, not because of the belief I had around such rituals, but because the elders were expecting me to do them. ...when a husband is dead, it is difficult to decide what to do and what not to do. That is because as a woman you are married to this family. As a result you have to abide by the rules of the family (Sarah: G2, AC).

Although there were participants who felt performing the rituals was imposed on them, others felt differently. In their construction, performing the bereavement rituals elicited feelings of happiness or obedience at having fulfilled the expected cultural requirements, or guilt for betraying her religion. Some women feared that they would suffer should they not comply, despite feeling uncomfortable with participating in practices that their religious affiliation abhorred. There were also those who did not see a reason for or value in performing some of the bereavement rituals. Nonetheless, cultural prescriptions played a significant part in deciding whether the participants performed the bereavement rituals willingly or under duress, to please other members of the family.

I personally do not see any harm in performing the rituals when your husband has died. That is the same as birth rituals or adolescence rituals.

When we perform those rituals we don't ask questions. Because we know it is part of our culture. I think it is important to perform. Mm..., some people think they are evil. I do not see that. To me it is just honouring the deceased and the culture (Grace: G5, AIC).

...Actually I do not think what these others have done was wrong. It goes with what that particular family believed in. I know that with all that was done, it was meant to help the family recover from the pain of death. Otherwise it would take us long to cope with that death (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

In their constructions of the culturally prescribed rituals, the participants used language that seemed to defend such cultural prescriptions, such as phrases like “*it is our culture*”. It seemed that the participants’ culture was part of their lives to the extent that they could not separate their experiences and perceptions of the bereavement rituals from their culture.

Bereavement rituals are culturally based my child. When your husband is dead, our culture expects us to perform those rituals (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

Whatever has to do with our culture should be followed (Masindi: G2, TA).

Mm... to me it was supposed to be done because it is our cultural rituals. That is what I believe in (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

Culture was given the power to prescribe better ways of behaving. As such, the participants would feel guilty for not complying with the prescriptions. The participants’ constructions of the bereavement rituals put culture in a position of authority. Possibly, this was the reason why Zulu women would feel that in-laws supported them through arranging bereavement rituals for them (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

6.3.2 The theme of perceived functions of the bereavement rituals

The participants in the focus groups agreed that bereavement rituals were culturally prescribed. They also elaborated extensively on the functions of these rituals in assisting them to cope with their pain and loss. In this regard, performing the rituals absolved them from blame from other family members, and from having to deal with additional stressors posed by discontented relatives and in-laws. Furthermore, they indicated that the healing value of the rituals rested upon discovering the origins of the husband's death, putting the deceased to rest, and protecting themselves against further misfortune.

1. Sub-theme: Avoiding blame and conflict

The participants reproduced the construction in the Tshivenda-speaking culture that the experience of grief might be transcended by blaming the death on a person. In many African cultures, death was usually seen as being caused by someone (Mbiti, 1975). Thus, when death struck the family, its members wanted to find out who was responsible for the death. Even though Maritz et al. (2008) maintained that the emotional response to grief included guilt feelings and blame, the participants believed that bereavement rituals should be performed to avoid taking blame for the death of their husband and to prevent conflict with the in-laws. Should a participant allow the conflict to erupt, family members and relatives would disown her, causing further loss and pain. It seemed that the participants performed bereavement rituals for fear of being marginalised by the dominant culture and relegated to the position of an outsider in the family. Such a position would mean that she would also lose her security of cultural and family belonging.

That is because the in-laws will think you are the one who killed their son. Even though they have seen that their son was sick, they could still think I am the one who transmitted the disease to him (Selina: G3, AIC).

It is very difficult, but we just tell ourselves that it is going to pass. We just accept. It is not like I performed such rituals because I believed all things

attached, no. I did that because I wanted to prevent conflict between family members and myself. I wanted everything to pass (Rose: G1, AC).

Relatives are troublesome sometimes, especially when their son has died. They sometimes think you are responsible for his death. Especially when you do not believe in their ideas about burying your husband (Avhasei, G5, AIC).

It is because death is so painful that one would like to know exactly what killed the person. Since these are our cultural practices, I think they should be done. We must respect our culture (Sarah: G2, AC).

It appeared that not all the participants would willingly have performed the bereavement rituals if it were not to satisfy the family, specifically the in-laws, who exerted a great influence on their construction of perceptions of the rituals. The most important role players in the participants' stories were the in-laws who had the power to either accept or reject them (the widows). The participants' construction of the performance of bereavement rituals showed that they wanted to be accepted in the family, hence they performed the rituals. They wanted to avoid feelings of guilt (Ngubane, 2004) associated with being blamed for being the ones who killed their husbands. They were aware that should they deny the performance of bereavement rituals, the in-laws would blame and reject them. This might leave them without the little supportive benefit they would receive upon performance of rituals. Lack of such support may aggravate the pain associated with loss.

It also prevents much of the pain people can cause you, you know. If you want to prevent that pain, you have to do as prescribed. Yes, I think it helps and saves us from a lot of things (Rose: G1, AC).

It was also apparent in their constructions of the pain that encountered upon their husband's death could be exacerbated by other people. The participants talked

about these people as possessing an authority, possibly accorded them by culture, which rendered them capable of causing the women further pain through blame and conflict. Although Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) maintained that self-blame, guilt, blame of others and anger were part and parcel of mourning, the participants in this study were afraid of being blamed by others and were prepared to go to some lengths to avoid it, possibly also to facilitate the healing process.

2. Sub-theme: Healing powers of the rituals

The participants constructed themselves as sick and in need of healing from the pain of death. The bereavement rituals provided healing for the ‘sickness’ of pain that they experienced on the death of their husbands.

I know that with all that was done, it was meant to help the family recover from the pain of death. Otherwise it would take us long to cope with that death (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

Yes, is it not that if my husband is dead I am dirty and I have to be cleansed (Rose: G1, AC).

According to Tshivenda culture, a woman who has lost her husband through death was considered ‘filthy’ and had to be cleansed. Through performing the bereavement rituals, the widow became clean again. The participants wanted to be cleansed from the “*contagion of death*” (Mutshekwa, G1, TA). Cleansing was one of the functions of bereavement rituals mentioned in past studies by Goldberg (1981), who maintained that bereavement rituals helped to purify the mourners who were regarded as polluted by contact with death. This was also supported by recent studies concerning Zulu widows who were considered contaminated by their husbands’ deaths and in need of being cleansed (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007) and Tshivenda-speaking people who should be cleansed upon their family members’ deaths (Selepe & Edwards, 2008). The implication was that, by performing the rituals, the participants accepted that they were filthy and wanted to be cleansed.

That is because when a woman has lost a husband and had children with him, she is filthy and has to be cleansed in the river. It is to clean that filthiness (Masindi: G2, TA).

The need for recovery from the impact of death put Christian participants in situations that contradicted the doctrines of their church. They accepted that they were sick to the extent that they performed the rituals even though these were against the principles and teachings of their religion.

If you want to heal quickly without any other problems just do it. It is true that the church might not allow that, but for the sake of my life and recovery I would just do it (Mercy: G1, AC).

Performing the rituals helped them to “*recover soon*” (Susan, G6, AIC) and restored them to a position of supposed well-being. Despite their different religious backgrounds, their cultural affiliation prescribed that these participants viewed themselves as unable to continue with a proper or normal life without their husbands, whose death left them ‘*dirty*’ and prone to misfortune. As if justifying the therapeutic nature of bereavement rituals, they talked of recovery in a way that allowed them to regain the healthy status they had had before the death of their husbands. It appeared from their constructions that healing was not only meant to heal the pain of death, but also the pain caused by people who marginalised them and subjected them to subordinate positions. Through the performance of the rituals, the participants felt that they could be restored to the status of being part of the family that they had when the husband was still alive.

3. Sub-theme: Putting the deceased to rest

The participants were unanimous in their perception that any form of bereavement rituals (both traditional African and Christian) provided a way of catering for the deceased and his life after death. The participants perceived the rituals as a means of keeping the deceased close to the family. For example, funeral rituals as part of

bereavement rituals were not only meant to express grief, but also to pay tribute to the deceased (Aborampah, 1999).

We have to bring him home because his blood would have been shed on the road. But there are other churches that do not allow this. They say it is a heathen practices (Dora: G1, AIC).

Although Dora (G1, AIC) belonged to the African Independent Church, she maintained dual membership through her belief that performing the bereavement rituals would keep the deceased close to the family, for the benefit of the family. Performing the rituals and allowing the deceased to rest close to home also kept him part of the family even after his death. This suggested that participants believed in life after death and that the deceased continued to fulfil certain roles for family members.

Similarly, Salume (G6, AC) maintained that when people died they went to heaven (Pang & Lam, 2002; Ter Blanche & Parkes, 1997). She also believed that there was life after death, and that this life involved adopting the roles of the ancestors. As a result, she maintained that her husband should be assisted to live well in the life after death. Hence, it was necessary for her to perform bereavement rituals.

In addition to keeping the deceased close to the family, the participants perceived the bereavement rituals as a method of allowing the deceased to rest well in the world of the dead and to allow him to join the ancestral world. This was in accordance with the cultural notion of ancestral honour (Gumede, 1990). As such, should the participants fail to perform the bereavement rituals they believed that the deceased might not rest properly and will haunt the family members (Ngubane, 2004).

Another thing is to allow the diseased to rest peacefully knowing that we performed that ritual (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

When these rituals are performed, we are saying to the deceased, go and join the others who have died before you... They also help us accept death quickly. When you know that your husband has rested well you do not worry. When they are not performed, you do not know if your husband has reached the resting world (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

Although Anna (G2, AIC) accepted that her husband's death was a blessing since he was ill for a long time, she also believed that performance of the bereavement rituals allowed her husband's spirit to join his ancestors. Such constructions indicated that the participants believed that rituals assisted the deceased to join the ancestors (Vold, 2000).

We just go to the diviner to allow the deceased's spirit to join others (Anna: G2, AIC).

We had to perform those rituals because in our culture if you do not perform the necessary rituals you remain with the image (murunzi) of the dead person and that can bring misfortunes (Muofhe: G4, TA).

Similarly, Tshovhewaho (G4, TA) perceived the performance of the bereavement rituals as being "good for my husband's spirit". In this comment, and similar others from the participants, it was obvious that fear played a significant role in influencing the participants to perform bereavement rituals. Performance of bereavement rituals was thus more than just bringing the deceased home or allowing the deceased to join and live well with the ancestors, but it also addressed the participants' fears of what they might experience should they fail to perform those rituals. In this regard, performing the rituals seemed designed to not only cater for the deceased, but also for the participants' own well-being and protection.

4. Sub-theme: Protection against misfortune

According to Kyei (1992), Ngubane (2004) and Pang and Lam (2002) rituals were performed to protect the widow and widower from misfortunes, preserved the mental balance of the widow and widower and kept all bodily organs, genitals in particular, unimpaired. The participants in the present study reproduced the same constructions of the reasons for performing rituals. Failing to perform the rituals implied a disregard for the implications of the participant's relationship with the deceased. In addition, their status as widows placed the participants in need of protection. After the death of her husband, it was believed that a woman could also fall ill or die, or contaminate other members of the family. The participants who had no apprehension about their health before the death of their husbands felt at risk after their deaths. Complying with cultural expectations and performing the bereavement rituals gave them some form of security against such a hazard.

They do that to prevent the death from coming back and take another one. Mmm... to me it was supposed to be done because it is our cultural rituals (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

That is because if that is not done, I will not settle freely. I will fear that what ate my husband will come again and take someone else from the family... That also comforts my heart. My heart will also heal (Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

... we have to find out what killed him. If we do not do it, I think he will think we do not care about his death. That is when he would just torment you. If we know, it calms the heart... We are not only doing it for ourselves, the living, but also for the deceased (Masindi: G2, TA).

My understanding was, it was good for my husband's spirit. I just thought if, as a wife, I did not do those things, my life would not be safe. Even my family, including children, whatever we touch by our hands would not

prosper. That will be showing that his spirit is still lingering and he is angry with you. The best is to perform the rituals (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

The participants expressed fear of dire consequences should they not perform the bereavement rituals. These fears were either for physical reprisals from the family and relatives, which might cause her husband to become a 'wandering ghost', or fear of bewitchment, which could result in their death. Particularly those who adhered to the traditional African belief system perceived the bereavement rituals as a way of preventing misfortunes and protecting themselves from witchcraft.

In Tshivenda there are things called 'mafa' - contagion of death. ... You know what, don't ignore your culture. Aah, witches will play with you (Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

Without the performance of the bereavement rituals, the participants who believed that their husbands were bewitched felt that those who had bewitched the deceased would come and bewitch either them or another family member, who could then also die. Performing the bereavement rituals was a way of preventing misfortunes from befalling the family and protecting themselves from witchcraft. The bereavement rituals seemed to be given the role of a person who would be able to chase away the witches' evil deeds.

Since death is painful, people have to do what is supposed to be done when they feel pain; they have to do what should be done when there is death. And also, if a person does not believe on that, she may not do it, maybe misfortunes will not come to her (Mercy: G1, AC).

The need for protection after the death of a husband was influenced by the fear of possible misfortunes, which could arise due to failure to perform the bereavement rituals, fear of witchcraft, and a sense that the rituals would provide some kind of security for the widow. In compliance with cultural expectations, the participants

believed in the power of the bereavement rituals as a way of weakening the power of the witches and limiting the possibility of misfortune. The participants used words that put the deceased and the witches in the same position of doing harm (bringing misfortunes) to those who fail to perform the rituals. For example, “*witches will play with you*”, and “*he may come back and cause misfortunes to the remaining lives in the family*”.

6.3.3 The theme of agency and control

Despite the perceived functions of the bereavement rituals, the participants furthermore constructed several viewpoints regarding their personal involvement in the rituals. Many felt that it stripped them of any rights to choose whether to partake or not. Some practices were perceived as unhygienic and outdated, while others prevented them from dealing with their own grief by rather focusing on external circumstances.

1. Sub-theme: Unhygienic practices

Unhygienic practices made the bereavement rituals particularly depressing for these participants. Examples of such practices included being smeared with chyme (half-digested grass from the stomach of a ruminant) and swallowing small stones.

...because the elderly would smear me with chyme for the whole day and wash in the evening ... after that we had to swallow some small stones. ...If I had a choice, I would not do those things because I did not know how they prepared those concoctions. For health purposes I do not think I would perform those rituals (Muofhe: G4, TA).

Given the necessity for submissiveness in a royal family, Muofhe (G4, TA) had no choice but to perform the rituals. Other participants stated that the actions were not consistent with the self, for example, Mutshekwa (G1, TA) frowned when she said “*Haa-haa! That (ritual) is silly. But we just tolerate it you know. ...We just tolerate and wash because it is something that must be done... When you are the deceased’s wife? E-e! You have to do it*”.

However, no matter how unhygienic the rituals might be, the participants felt the need to perform the bereavement rituals to fulfil the expectations of their in-laws and of society. They had no power to oppose the practices that were forced onto them by either culture or family. The performance of bereavement rituals seemed to be informed by the socio-political background of the Tshivenda culture that removed the participants' agency and control over their life and actions.

2. Sub-theme: Relinquishing control

Because of their lack of agency on the issue of bereavement rituals, participants had to relinquish control over their actions and performed the actions that others imposed on them. They willingly or unwillingly gave up control over their own lives and their grieving process by following the prescriptions of the culture and the family. The participants felt that they had no control over what happened to them during the rituals and afterwards, but that they had to please others, particularly the in-laws.

I knew that that death would destroy me if I focus on what the in-laws were doing. I relied on what people were telling me as a way of coping with death. Acceptance was medicine to me. I cannot say I have recovered yet. It is just that when I remember how cruel my in-laws behaved towards me, I feel bad (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

In order to cope with that death I told myself, I have to focus on my work, my family and myself. I accepted that I am a widow and I have to live as such (Muofhe: G4, TA).

I found it helpful to accept that my husband is dead (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

I had to assess my coping tolerance pattern. I managed to know what could be the stressors and dealt with them (Betty: G5, AC).

Nonetheless, although some participants accepted the values and control embedded in the bereavement rituals prescribed by their culture, their personal resilience and internal coping mechanisms mediated the effects of this. Even though they might have relinquished control by participating in the rituals, their personal resilience was more useful in assisting them to cope, far more so than external events over which they had little control. Some of the participants viewed themselves as being responsible for how they coped with the death of their husbands.

6.3.4 The theme of detachment

A final theme about the participants' construction of bereavement rituals concerned the way in which they detached themselves from what was happening around them, and from their personal grief experiences. Instead of focusing primarily on themselves to find healing from the wounds caused by death, their actions and thoughts focused on appeasing other people, who would blame them should they fail to conform. The participants accepted the external events and actions imposed on them by cultural or religious prescriptions, and avoided dealing with their inner and personal pain experienced during the grief period.

The participants had to perform the rituals, which were prescribed as a matter of tradition and not necessarily due to their personal need, and they were obliged to accept them. Had they not been under an obligation to either their culture or the family elders, some participants, especially those from an African Christian belief system, would not have performed the rituals. In performance of bereavement rituals, Salume, in particular, accepted that she had no power over the dominant group (in-laws); should she had such power, she possibly would have behaved differently, in a way that was congruent with her religious affiliation.

All those rituals that are performed in Tshivenda, to tell the truth, they were all performed here. I had no powers to refuse them. No, that was because they were things admired by my in-laws (Salume: G6, AC).

.... But we just tolerate it you know. When the funeral is done, they will take a goat and kill it by placing the head in the water until it dies – ‘u ita tshidu’. That goat should not shed blood. They will then use its chyme to cleanse us in the river. We just tolerate and wash because it is something that must be done (Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

You have to do as prescribed... It is not like I performed such rituals because I believe all things attached, no. I did that because I wanted to prevent conflict between family members and myself (Rose: G1, AC).

Most of the things you do because the in-laws want you to do (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

...the in-laws did not even ask for my ideas about my willingness. I was just told what was supposed to be done and then I did everything (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

Although some of the participants felt that the bereavement rituals were inconsistent with their personal needs and did not experience them as meaningful in reconstructing their lives, they participated in these rituals for the sake of complying with family and cultural expectations. In the case of Grace (G5, AIC), there was a particular contradiction between the expectations and prescriptions of her church (AIC) and Tshivenda culture. In order to deal with such contradictions, the participants became detached while performing the rituals: “Yes, it is true. When your in-laws believe in bereavement rituals, whether you like it or not, you will do as they are saying.” Such detachment may have helped Grace to avoid guilty feelings that might be caused by behaving against one’s religion or sense of willingness. However, this sense of detachment silenced the participants’ voices and accommodated only the voices of culture, religion and family values in their performance of the rituals.

6.4 SUBJECT POSITIONS ENACTED WHEN GRIEVING FOR A DECEASED HUSBAND

For many cultures in Africa, a husband is considered a breadwinner and protector of the family (Gunga, 2009; Samuelsson et al., 2001; Winbush, 2000). A similar understanding was relevant within the Tshivenda culture that when women got married, they became dependent on their husbands for resources and security in the family. They acquired a position in the family and a sense of belonging. This disappeared when the husband died. This also implied that the woman's position in the husband's family was entirely dependent on his presence and her relationship with her husband in life. In addition, the husband's or his family's expectations also determined the couple's way of living. The position of wife brought with it familial and cultural expectations that prescribed a woman's behaviour. For example, wives lived under the authority of the husband (Stayt, 1968). When the husband died, the position and status of a wife were lost, and the woman then occupied a new position as a widow. This type of marriage contract appeared to play a role in disempowering and silencing widows' voices against family members' actions. Possibly, that was because they did not have equal ownership of the family's material possessions and so upon his death, the in-laws felt they should share the fortunes, if not claim it entirely.

When he was still alive, all family members were happy about me as their daughter-in-law, but that death changed everything. ... As a customary law wife I had nothing to say. In fact I was still in grief. I just thought I had to let them take what they wanted (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

The transition from being a wife to being a widow appeared to position the participants as 'outsiders,' which was problematic for people who had cultivated an interdependent self that promoted collective cultural voices (Hong, 2004). It was problematic because traditional Vhavenda people believed that a person could not survive well without other people, as expressed in the saying that '*Muthu ndi muthu nga vhanwe vhathu*'- implying that one is who she is because of other people (Moyo, 2004).

I also performed these rituals. In fact with me, the in-laws did not even ask for my ideas about my willingness. I was just told what was supposed to be done and then I did everything (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

A husband's death changed a woman's status as a wife and esteemed person in society (Guzana, 2000; Opoku, 1989). Because of this, the participants associated the loss of a loved one with the loss of certain options of behaviour that were associated with being a married woman. The family and community expected widows to behave differently from wives. Such a change of status and role in society was not usually for the better. Although the participants were accorded a role specially meant for women who have lost their husbands (as widow), they were also deprived of other roles and positions as defined by the dominant group (Guzana, 2000).

For Betty (G5, AC) the change in status from wife to widow meant that her means of transport changed. This was stressful for her as evident in her statement: *"When I get into someone's car I have to sit at the back and not in front. To me that was demotion"*. This change in seating arrangements implied that when she lost her husband she lost her previous position in society. Because she did not belong to the owner of the car and to show that she was a good widow she had to sit at the back. By acting in accordance with these expectations, she legitimised her lesser position in the family group and society.

Another thing was a means of transport. I knew that I have lost it. My husband was a driver and I could not drive by then. I had to become a pedestrian. That was painful. When I get to someone's car, I had to sit at the back and not in front. To me that was a demotion (Betty: G5, AC).

Chan et al. (2005) found that upon the husband's death family members looked down on the widows. Similarly, when the participants in this study became widows, they were positioned as 'lesser beings', and as people who could not make it in life without a husband. Even the participants themselves believed that they needed a man and the

resources that he would provide. Tshivenda culture subjected the participants to a position where they became destitute when their husbands died. The participants acquired a lower status as widows who could not do anything. By accepting and positioning themselves as people who could not do better when the husband died, the participants appeared to justify the lower and weaker position mediated by gender stereotypes and the religious-cultural heritage -- a position defined by the dominant group (Guzane, 2000).

Another problem is that friends can also distance themselves from you. They think because you are now a widow, you are capable of taking away their husbands from them. ... When you are a widow, people see you in a strange way, you know (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

The suggestion that widows might steal other women's husbands further positioned them as people who have lost value for the community. This societal perception might be influenced by the religious-cultural heritage that positioned a woman as needing another man should she lose her husband. This suggested that women were weak and could not conduct life on their own. The participants felt the loss of the position that they had held amongst their friends, as the latter now distanced themselves for fear that the widows might become sexually involved with their husbands. This was a type of social stereotyping that stated that a woman, who was single through divorce or bereavement was on the lookout for a new husband or companion. This stereotype seemed to be perpetuated by other women in the community.

To me the most difficult thing was that your friends would never be your friends anymore. They are afraid that you will take their husbands (Muofhe: G4, TA).

The way the participants constructed their experiences and perceptions of the death of their husbands highlighted the issue of labelling that they were subjected to in society. In their perceptions participants thought that married women regarded widows as

having less value in society as they feared that they would steal their (married women) husbands away from them (married women). Although the participants were subjected to the position of a lesser being, without value in society, they nonetheless possessed an 'authority' that other women feared. This authority supposedly accorded them the power to sexually attract other women's husbands. Hence, they were considered threats to those who are married. Labelling contributed to the marginalisation of widows as single women at a time when their need for support from society was increased.

I can tell that some of the people I was friends with, no longer come to my house. I had a problem before, but now I understand the reason. It is because they still have their husbands and they possibly think I will take their husbands. Jaa, life can be complicated when you are a widow (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

Furthermore, the loss of position as someone's wife subjected the participants to a position of oppressive inequality in relation to other community members and their in-laws. They constructed themselves as being different, and occupied a different, lower societal position (Chan et al., 2005). Other married women occupied higher positions that included respect and value. The participants' in-laws occupied a position that included greater power in decision-making. The participants then were obliged to do as their in-laws told them to do to preserve their tenuous position in the family group.

I had no powers to refuse them, no. That was because these were things admired by my in-laws. Should I refuse to perform those rituals it would not go well with them. As a result, they did all those things to me, during the funeral period (Salume: G6, AC).

Even though some widows were against the cultural prescription that they should observe the mourning period for twelve months before they could remarry, Tshivenda culture dictated that after the twelve months have elapsed, widows might take another man, who is usually a younger or older brother of the deceased. This suggested that

widows did not have agency and control over what happened to them and even to their property. This lack of agency or control intensified the participants' experience of grief. They forfeited even the little agency they had enjoyed when they were still wives, and they became objects about whom decisions were taken by others.

But in Tshivenda, a widow takes the whole year observing taboos. She is not allowed to do anything. I mean having a sexual relationship with another man. She is not allowed to have sex with another man before a year is over (Anna: G2, AIC).

That is the in-laws' responsibility. They will find you a new man. That man should be either a younger brother to the deceased or any other blood relative to the deceased. That widow is not allowed to marry any other stranger. The other thing is that in our culture she does not have the rights to love the man of her own choice; they will find her a relevant person. That is one thing you cannot refuse (Tshinakaho: G2, TA).

The above quotes suggested that the participants were frustrated with the way others imposed their power over them through the socio-cultural events that deprived them of personal control. They were deprived of control over how they behaved and their choices; and they had to allow others to take responsibility for the activities and behaviour related to their bereavement. It appeared that by observing the cultural prescriptions, they were never allowed control over their actions. They always remained the property of the dominant group.

As indicated in Rose's (G1, AC) quote, the family positioned the participants to be dependent for the rest of their lives. Giving her little money ensured that she remained dependent on the family, and thus would not walk out with the children, who represented the legacy of her deceased husband's family.

Hei, you know what, what was most painful was that, there was money from condolences and burial societies left, the relatives divided it amongst themselves and gave me just enough to buy food (Rose: G1, AC).

The participants' quotes suggested that if there were alternatives to their reduced status as widows, they would prefer to be positioned differently, and for their status not to be reduced. However, they considered their positioning to be beyond their control, and reflect what other people preferred. Possibly, that was the reason there were contradictions between their selves and their behaviour. The section that follows highlights the contradictions that were apparent in the women's constructions.

6.5 CONTRADICTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF BEREAVED WOMEN

The transcripts suggested that participants, because of their belief systems from different religious backgrounds, had different understandings of death and what it meant to them. Therefore, in their constructions of grief, contradictions arose between the constructions of reality of the traditional African and African Christian participants. However, there were also similarities in the ways the two religious groups perceived and talked about the performance of bereavement rituals. Similar contradictions and similarities were apparent in Rosenblatt and Nkosi's (2007) study where some Christian women performed the rituals willingly, while others from the churches that strongly prohibited rituals would not perform the rituals.

Traditionally, while others (usually men and elders) arranged the funeral, the widow was expected to stay at home as a sign of grief and mourning (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Contradictions emerged in the opinions of Grace (G5, AIC) and Mutshekwa (G5, TA). Grace felt distressed when she was not involved in her husband's funeral arrangements, while Mutshekwa understood it was culturally acceptable for a woman to stay home while others arranged the funeral. Grace and some of the participants in her religious group (African Indigenous Churches) constructed themselves as stronger than the way culture constructed them (as being weaker), whereas Mutshekwa accepted the

weaker position that her culture prescribed for her. Thus, culture positioned women, not because they were mourning, but because of their gender. The gender-related roles prescribed by culture denied the participants the opportunity to perform certain roles because they were meant for men (e.g., arranging the funeral). According to Martin and Doka (2000) gender played a role in influencing the way people grieved though it did not determine the grief patterns.

You were fortunate. I could not choose because I had no money. In fact, they did not involve me in any arrangement. I stayed in the house from the day we heard that my husband was dead until the funeral (Grace: G5, AIC).

Yes, in our culture, widows are not allowed to be seen out of the house before their husbands' burial. It is believed that they are mourning their husband. ... In fact, my husband had younger brothers. Those people would report the progress everyday. Why should I worry (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

One would want to choose a coffin for her husband (Sarah: G2, AC).

Whether I choose it or not, it remains a coffin (Masindi: G2, TA).

In addition to gender, the participants' religious affiliation might be the other cause for the contradictory constructions. While Betty (G5, AC) claimed that "*losing a body was not that stressful or painful*", and "*that was because I had deeper understanding of death*," Mutshekwa (G5, TA), who had a different religious affiliation, contradicted the viewpoint with her statement that "*people will never be used to death.*" The way the two participants in the same group contradicted each other highlighted the role that religion played in the participants' perceptions of death. This was probably because different religions regulated the interactions between people within that religious group (Pang & Lam, 2002), which in turn informed the way people construct reality. It was possible that Betty's understanding of her husband's death was informed by her expectations of other

people (in-laws or church members), while Mutshekwa, who expected her in-laws to cause her pain, could not consider death to be understandable. While some of the participants were emotional about the role that their in-laws expected from them as widows, Betty used a number of cognitive statements in her construction. She took a position that gave her a sense of responsibility and control over what was going on in her life as a bereaved woman.

Mm... to me, in order to deal with them I had to know their roles to my husband. Whatever they were doing I had to take it as a way of grieving on their side. I understood they were experiencing their own loss. A mother was experiencing a loss of a son, a sister has lost a brother and a cousin has lost a cousin (Betty: G5, AC).

While Mutshekwa (G5, TA) perceived the rituals as “*cultural based*,” Avhasei (G5, AIC) stated that the performance of the rituals “*depends on families*.” She indicated that the performance of these rituals depended on whether the family believed in them or not. Grace (G5, AIC) said “*Personally I do not see any harm in performing the rituals when your husband has died*.” She justified the performance of the bereavement rituals as something that should be done. Her perception positioned the death of a husband as something that demanded the performance of bereavement rituals. Although there were participants who were not willing to perform the rituals, there were others who were willing to do so and understood their (rituals) cultural significance.

The nature of the support that the participants received from different sources was also differently constructed. The nature of support included both emotional and financial support, especially from relatives. Even though they missed material support, Zulu widows in Rosenblatt and Nkosi’s (2007) study appreciated the ritual support they received from the in-laws and therefore regarded those rituals as important to them. Tshovhewaho’s perceptions of family support were, however, not the same. It seemed that although her relatives accepted her in the family group and took care of her and her children financially because she performed the rituals, they did not provide emotional

support. Although she was more financially stable as a result, she nonetheless would have appreciated emotional support from the relatives.

... just after the funeral, all relatives disappeared and never came back. In situations that they came, they had other things they were looking for. They never came to enquire about our state of health. They do not care about that. Although I still have a child who is still going to school at the university, I can take him to school with no difficulty. There is enough money. Also the relatives contribute towards his schooling. (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

Some of the participants would have desperately welcomed such support, but did not receive the kind of support shown to Tshovhewaho (G4, TA). The grief experience of these participants seemed to be mediated by the physical, emotional or financial assistance they received.

Contradictions also emerged in the way that the participants used language to construct the bereavement rituals. Bereavement rituals were constructed differently even between participants from the same religious affiliation. This might be due to the meanings they attached to their cultural practices compared to their religious beliefs, as well as their interaction with other people in the context of bereavement.

Mm..., in other words what I can say is that bereavement rituals are part of our culture. Why do we have to see them as evil. To me, because I performed them, I think they are helpful (Salphina: G6, AC).

I refused to perform the rituals because I relied on prayers (Salume: G6, AC).

It is not like I performed such rituals because I believe all things attached, no. I did that because I wanted to prevent conflict between family members and myself (Rose: G1, AC).

Some participants perceived the rituals as forming part of the cultural prescriptions that they should abide by, whilst others conformed to them purely because of family expectations. That implied that culture and family (in-laws) were constructed as being powerful in determining the widows' participation in and construction of bereavement rituals. Avhasei (G5, AIC), for example, accepted that bereavement rituals were part of her culture, although she still maintained that she was forced to perform the rituals by her in-laws. This took away some of the decision-making rights she felt that she should have had. Had she had the power to choose and decide, she would not have performed such rituals even though they were part of her culture. A contradiction emerged in the way that she talked about bereavement rituals in terms of representing "our culture," and talking about them as something that other people expected her to do.

In fact, I participated in everything they wanted me to do. To me those rituals are part of our culture. In fact, when it is your husband who is dead, your choices are limited. Most of the things you do because the in-laws want you to (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

Muofhe (G4, TA) also contradicted herself in stating that her performance of bereavement rituals was an indication that she loved her husband, whilst at the same time stating that she "had to tolerate it." Having 'tolerance' implied that she performed the rituals under protest and not because she actually believed in them as an expression of love for her husband. The data suggested that even among the traditional African participants, bereavement rituals were performed not only for the value attached to them, but also to appease others.

We loved our husband, so we had to do everything that was supposed to be done in a royal family...I had to tolerate it (Muofhe: G4, TA).

A contradiction emerged in the constructions of Muofhe and Tshovhewaho (G4, TA), who were both from the same religious affiliation. Whereas Muofhe talked of "tolerating" the rituals, Tshovhewaho talked about the rituals as having "value" for her. Participants

from the same religion might have different perceptions of bereavement rituals, because of their family background or because of the people they interact with. Such contradictions implied that, not only do religious affiliations dictated the way that participants constructed the performance of bereavement rituals, but external influences might also play a role.

6.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The participants constructed the death of their husbands as an event that was painful and accompanied by multiple losses, including loss of position that the participants previously occupied. They were accorded a new, lower status that the participants constructed as uncomfortable. Irrespective of the participants' religious affiliation, the transition from being a wife to being a widow was constructed as legitimising the performance of bereavement rituals in order to be accepted in the community and the family. Oppressive inequality was constructed in terms of the distribution of power relations where the participants were silenced by their lack of power (including financial power). The in-laws became more powerful and dictated the participants' actions and interactions in relation to performing the bereavement rituals.

The following chapter reports on the discourse analysis of the participants' perceptions of bereavement rituals.

CHAPTER 7 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the discourses that I have identified from the group conversations. These discourses informed the way in which the participants constructed their realities about bereavement rituals in a Tshivenda-speaking community. In order to identify the discourses for analysis, I used the six building tasks suggested in Gee (1999), namely, semiotic building, world building, activity building, socio-culturally-situated identity and relationship building, political building and connection building; as well as Parker's (1990) criteria for doing discourse analysis. The building tasks implied that language was used to construct reality in the interaction between people (Terre Blanche et al., 2006), who related to each other and events taking place in a particular context. For example, the participants used language in a particular way to construct their perceptions of bereavement rituals within their cultural and religious context. The discourses in the participants' constructions ranged from an abnormality discourse, power and patriarchal discourse, gender discourse and religious-cultural discourse to other minor discourses that were found within broader discourses. Such minor discourses include fear discourse, religious discourse, blame discourse and witchcraft discourse. I considered these as discourses because they emerged from the way in which the participants told their stories using the social languages relevant to their situation as bereaved women and as members of a particular religious-cultural and ethnic group.

7.2 CONTEXT OF THE DISCOURSE – THE PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

7.2.1 Semiotic building

Gee's (1999) reference to semiotic building as "using cues and clues to assemble situated meanings about what semiotic (communicative) systems, systems of knowledge, and ways of knowing" (p. 87) was relevant in the participants'

conversations. The participants' construction of their perceptions was mainly conveyed by the way they used language. That is because language in discourse analysis does not reflect, but constructs social reality (Coyle, 2007). It is constructed of linguistic building blocks like words, categories, idioms, repertoires and so on (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). Words such as pain, loss, devastation, disorientation and alone were used to describe the intensity of their experience. They even spoke of contagion with death. These words were symbols of speech that referred to other ideas such as death, defeat, damage, harm, injury, hurt, termination, failure, and ruin. Participants could have, but did not, use these words. Reasons for this could be because they did not think of them at the time, or because they did not interpret their experiences in these terms, or perhaps because these ideas were implied by the words they used.

...death is painful especially when you are a wife. ... You know what, when the nurse told me that my husband is no more, I could not hold myself. I was so disorientated. I just cried, I just cried. It was so painful (Maria: G1, AIC).

As others have said, death is painful. It is a loss of the person you love most. It is a loss one can never recover. It is not like losing money or something else. Those are easy to replace, but not a husband. If you do not know that person or is not your relative, mm, his death will not mean much to you. You will just feel pity for that family. But if it is your husband who has died, it is more painful than when your parent or in-laws have died. Such a pain is different and goes very deep (Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

My husband's death was a devastating one. It was in the morning when we woke up that he started complaining about pains in his stomach. When we took him to the hospital, in less than an hour he was testified dead. I was there when the doctor confirmed that my husband was no more. That was difficult to accept (Tshovhewaho, G4, TA).

Take it from me, a husband's death is different from that of a child. The pain of a husband's death is worse. I know that. When a child dies, you will know that you have other children, but when a husband dies it is over. There is no other husband. In fact if a child dies, you can get another child from the same man. There is no death as painful as the one of a husband. Death of a husband is so painful (Muofhe: G4, TA).

I felt that death is painful. Yes, especially when the person who has died is your husband. Yes, death is painful because it leaves you lonely. I found that the death of my husband was the most painful thing in my life that I don't think I will ever feel anything more painful than that (Salume: G6, AC).

In their stories, the symbols of speech that they chose represented a sense of comparison of their husbands' death to something else that they possibly have experienced or as a way to convince the audience (those in the group) about the level of pain they experienced after the death. Maria and Salume made use of the word "especially" and Mutshekwa and Muofhe used language that compared the husband's death to other losses – of either money or a child. It appeared they did not have any other way to make one understand the feelings they went through when they lost their husbands except through comparison of such death to other losses or deaths that someone who has not lost a husband could have experienced in her life. Muofhe repeatedly talked about the pain associated with her husband's death, possibly symbolising a wish for the audience to understand how painful it was to lose a husband.

While they were telling their story, those listening (including me as the interviewer) said "mm" and "ah" at intervals. These 'noises' were symbols of speech that were used in language to sympathise and to agree with the speaker's pain. The participants understood each other because they used the same words or social language to explain their experiences. They shared knowledge and ways of knowing because the ones listening and the one talking were all widows (except me).

Ah, witches will play with you (Mutshekwa: G1, AIC).

Eah, life can be complicated when you are a widow (Tshidaho: G4, AIC)

Mm, you know what, the best way to cope with that is to accept that your husband has died and that it is a custom that when a husband has died, the wife should stay in the house until the day of the funeral (Maria: G1, AIC).

In several instances, participants used symbols of speech that communicated to the audience that they carefully selected the words they used to construct meaning of their bereavement reality. The participants made use of the symbols like “*mm*” before they started a sentence. This may symbolise that they had a lot of words to choose from, but selected what would best construct their reality in the context of the research.

Mm, in our culture ... (Dorah: G1, AIC).

Mm, death is like a loss, losing something, losing something, mm..., something so precious to me, something that I valued so much (Betty: G5, AC).

Mm, to me death is like a bridge (Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

The participants shared knowledge about the death of a husband and they used language that symbolised that knowledge and their ways of knowing. They talked of the death of their husbands as legitimising the performance of bereavement rituals. They spoke of rituals as something that they understood to be part of their culture, and also as activities that others wanted them to perform. This was revealed in the way listeners would respond in their conversation as group members (for example, by saying “*yes, it is true*”). By doing this, the participant showed that she knew what the other group members knew. It was a sign of agreement with what was said and a way of symbolising the sharing of knowledge and experience of grief.

7.2.2 World building

The social construction of reality as world building implied “using the cues and clues to assemble situated meanings about what [was] here and now (taken as) reality, what [was] here and now (taken as) present and absent, concrete and abstract, real and unreal, probable, possible, and impossible” (Gee, 1999, p. 86). This concerned the way in which participants constructed their reality about bereavement rituals.

In their stories, the participants constructed the reality of bereavement rituals in a way that conveyed to the other focus group members that they had no power of influence, and were compelled to perform the rituals to appease others. The religious-cultural background that valued the rituals and gave authority to the in-laws over the bereaved women might inform such constructions.

I also performed these rituals. In fact, with me, the in-laws did not even ask for my ideas about my willingness. I was just told what was supposed to be done and then I did everything (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

They considered themselves in need of the rituals to overcome the grief they were experiencing and to heal the wounds caused by death. They also used words that defended the rituals as being part of their cultural prescriptions and what their in-laws wanted. The participants talked about the performance of bereavement rituals as if they were in bondage of some sort.

After all, these rituals are temporary. You do them once and then you live your life freely (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

Mm... I just told myself it will end and I will be free again (Maria: G1, AIC).

I know that with all that was done, it was meant to help the family recover from the pain of death. Otherwise it would take us long to cope with that death (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

The participants constructed a world concerning bereavement rituals that constituted different categories (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). These categories included *people* (family members, their husband, children, elders, etc.), *places* (burial place and the house), the *times* (when he was alive, now that he is dead, waiting period before the burial), *objects* (coffin, rituals, washing or not, the basket on the head, etc.), the *institutions* (marriage, family, church, religion, culture), and *God and ancestors* (God and ancestors took away the deceased, bridge to the afterlife). Below each element of the constructed world mentioned above is discussed separately.

7.2.2.1 The people

As participants talked about the pain and the loss that they experienced, they talked about other people and their roles in contributing towards the intense pain they felt. They talked about the role that the husband played when he was still alive as a father and a breadwinner and the one who disciplined the children. After the death of their spouses, participants had to take over these roles. Participants also had to perform the rituals that were regarded as important in their culture and by other people, such as their in-laws. The construction of the performance of bereavement rituals was related to the respect that should be given to the elders. The role of the elders was constructed as ensuring that the participants abided by the rules of their culture, notwithstanding the participants' reluctance.

7.2.2.2 The places

The participants talked about the house as a place where they should stay with a blanket covering the whole body. This legitimised their position as widows who respected the culture even when they felt oppressed and deprived of freedom of movement. The participants also talked of going to the river for cleansing. A river appeared to be a symbol of cleanness, implying that the participants were dirty and needed to be washed to return to the normal state that they occupied before the death of their husband.

7.2.2.3 The times

Bereavement rituals were also constructed in terms of times that were relevant. They talked about the way they were expected to do things, against their will, things that they would not do if their husbands were still alive. They also talked about the waiting period before the burial. That period was accompanied by staying in the house and receiving social support from other widows.

7.2.2.4 The objects

The objects that were relevant included the coffin and the basket on the head. They spoke about being denied the opportunity of choosing a coffin because they were mourning and because they were expected to stay in the house. They also talked about carrying a basket on their heads when performing cleansing rituals. They further talked about a blanket they were covered with during the seclusion period and the specific clothing they had to wear for a period of twelve months. Those were further signs that symbolised widowhood and mourning the death of their husbands.

7.2.2.5 The institutions – marriage, family, church, religion, culture

The participants talked about the families they had married into and their church as being responsible for providing the social support that they needed due to their widowhood status. Their need for social support legitimised their position of being emotionally broken and in need of repair. The family institution was put into practice when the widow was obliged to perform the necessary rituals to appease her relatives.

For a traditional African person, a family is usually regarded as the most important institution (Ritchie, 2001). It was in the family institution where they were united with the husband, occupied certain roles and status as husband and/or wife. It was in the family, culture and community where the participants could not do as they liked because there were certain norms, defined by the in-laws (as agents of culture), to guide participants' behaviour. The culture was constructed as the institution that

defined how people should behave before and after the death of a husband, and failure to behave accordingly would bring misfortune to the family. Participants talked about bereavement rituals as part of the culture that needed to be honoured.

Some participants constructed the bereavement rituals as activities they performed despite their holding different religious beliefs, while some participants believed they should be performed to avoid blame. Participants performed the rituals even when they knew such an activity was against their religion (Christianity).

I think the church and culture should operate together because when I have lost a husband, the church has not lost a husband. The church should allow me to do all that will heal my heart. (Dorah: G1, AIC).

Performance of bereavement rituals was not only because of oppression from the in-laws, but also because of an understanding of the nature and role of bereavement rituals in their lives. This implies that some participants took ownership of their actions knowing that they belong to and respected their culture.

7.2.2.6 God and the ancestors

The participants talked about God as the Supreme Being who took away the deceased to the afterlife. That was the life with God or with the ancestors. The participants' language placed God and ancestors in the role of guiding their performance of the rituals. They talked about praying and performing the rituals in ways that would appease the Supernatural Being.

7.2.3 Activity building

Gee (1999) referred to activity building as “using cues and clues to assemble situated meanings about what activity or activities are going on, composed of what specific actions” (p. 86). The implication was that discourses were action-oriented (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). The activity building that took place in the participants' stories was to talk about how painful their husbands' deaths were to them. It is possible that when they

talked about pain, they were appealing for sympathy from others in the group. That is because discourse is the primary medium for social action that in speaking we blame, justify, invite, compliment and so on (Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

Hei, I agree with all that others have said. ...what worried me most was that which was expected of me. Those things which they wanted me to do. Mm... you know what is supposed to be done when your husband has died in our Tshivenda culture? I think they also know [she was pointing at others]... Jo! As if you do not know. The relatives will expect you to stay in the house with those who have already lost their husbands. You will stay with those old ladies the whole week (Mercy: G1, AC).

I also performed these rituals. In fact with me, the in-laws did not even ask for my ideas about my willingness. I was just told what was supposed to be done and then I did everything (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

In their stories, they told me about the activities and actions that they were involved in through the use of action statements. They talked about their performance of the bereavement rituals that included divination, carrying the basket on the head, cleansing, sitting in the house, crying, feeling pain, choosing a coffin and worrying that the husband might not be buried properly. Their involvement in activities around the performance of bereavement rituals legitimised their position as widows who were expected to perform these rituals.

Furthermore, to show that they were not willing, but expected to do it (perform rituals) they used language that distanced themselves from the rituals. They referred to the rituals as 'those things'.

What worried me most was that which was expected of me. Those things which they wanted me to do (Mercy: G1, AC).

As they talked about performing bereavement rituals, they spoke in collective language using terms such as “we” and “us”, “they” and “others” to refer to those responsible for their actions and behaviour. The latter implicated them as women who did not take ownership of their statements and had no control over the events taking place around them, as well as who performed the rituals because others wanted them to do so.

I had to carry a shallow willow basket on my head. They smeared me with the chyme of the goat so that I could be taken out of the house. They took me to the river for cleansing by the old ladies. When we came back from the river we rested at a certain point. We rested while the shallow willow basket was still on my head (Masindi: G2, TA).

The participants in group five, however, accepted much more responsibility for their thoughts and perceptions about death and the bereavement rituals than those in other groups. These participants had more agency and control over events, although they did perform the rituals. They did not blame others (e.g., their in-laws) for their actions. Rather, they chose to perform or not perform the rituals.

My in-laws were trying to keep me in the house while they were preparing my husband’s funeral. I refused because I knew that staying in the house would mean they would have to choose the casket and tombstone for me. I told them, they could do all other things but allow me and my children to choose the tombstone and the casket (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

I just told myself he is dead. Even if I do not accept this death, I won’t change it. Acceptance is difficult but if you manage to accept, the burden, pain will lessen (Grace: G5, AIC).

Yes, in our culture, widows are not allowed to be seen out of the house before their husbands’ burial. It is believed that they are mourning her husband ...why should I worry? (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

For these participants, performance of bereavement rituals was their choice. They accepted and understood the cultural activities and expectations. They performed the rituals because this was consistent with their needs, not because other people wanted them to do it. They possibly knew how they would benefit from such rituals. Avhasei “*refused*” to perform the rituals. This may imply that she was able to draw a line between the requirements and expectations of external environmental (other people’s needs) and her personal needs and how to satisfy them. She resisted other people’s influences over her life and actions.

7.2.4 Socio-culturally situated identity and relationship building

In this section the ways in which participants constructed their identities as bereaved people – as widows – and the relationships they built as a result of losing a husband are described. Socio-culturally situated identity and relationship building refers to “using cues and clues to assemble situated meanings about what identities and relationships are relevant to the interaction, with their concomitant attitudes, values, ways of feeling, ways of knowing and believing, as well as ways of acting and interacting” (Gee, 1999, p. 86). Burr (2003) maintained that “our identity arises out of interactions with other people and is based on language” (p. 51). It was through their interaction and communication with others that the participants constructed their identity. For example, the interaction they had with their husband, in-laws, relatives and community members contributed towards their construction of their identities as widows.

Burr (2003) argued that our identity is constructed out of the discourses that are culturally available to us, while Tesser (1995) contended that identity or the self is shaped by what happens and what is expected within the cultural and social context in which an individual lives. Romanoff (2001) maintained that narratives are the vehicle through which healing occurs and when telling their stories individuals work through the loss until the storyteller recognises a changed identity.

By using language in different ways, the participants socially constructed their widow identities in a way that legitimised the one speaking of grief and her sense of

bereavement. It gave meaning to their loss by valuing it and positioned the participants as victims, the broken ones, the ones who needed sympathy from others, and the ones who needed healing by others.

Other women in the church also helped to console me even though they still have their husbands (Selina: G3, AIC).

In their stories, participants told me about people, places, times, objects, institutions and God. All these helped to position them further as widows, the sad ones who needed support and who experienced very intense emotions.

That is our culture, my grandchild. I know that you who are educated do not see any value in performing these rituals, but it is important to perform them (Phophi: G6, TA).

I do not know (laughing) if you will understand what it means? All those rituals that are performed in Tshivenda, to tell the truth, they were all performed here (Salume: G6, AC).

As they told their stories, they took on the role of the bereaved woman who should be pitied, and as someone who knew something that the facilitator did not know (the bereaved versus the reader or the not-bereaved). The participants placed some of the audience in the role of sympathisers (who understood the meaning) and they put me (the interviewer or reader of their story) in the role of the ignorant, the not-knowing or the young.

The participants, as bereaved widows, also elicited sympathy by explaining their feelings of guilt because their husbands died, and they were blamed of being responsible for the death. There appeared to be a relationship between husband and wife that was expressed through the feeling of guilt.

I suspected they were blaming me. They thought I had killed him. It was tough (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

All the time they were telling their stories, they used the relevant social languages that fitted the situation of being a bereaved woman who had to perform all the rituals. They used language that would elicit the sympathy they perceived as their right as bereaved women.

If I had a choice, I would not do those things because I did not know how they prepared those concoctions. For health purposes I do not think I would perform those rituals (Muofhe: G4, TA).

The participants even regarded those telling their stories from a different perspective (e.g., religion) as not knowing how it felt to be a bereaved woman and as being ignorant (not-knowing) about the social and cultural knowledge of the Tshivenda-speaking people.

They also defined their social networks based on their status as the bereaved widows (identity) who had been dependent on their husbands for many things; who could not drive a car; and who had to accept others making decisions for them. They had no legitimacy in the family institution after their husbands died. The definition of social networks has to do with the construction of the husband-wife relationship.

Yes, in our culture, widows are not allowed to be seen out of the house before her husband's burial. It is believed that she is mourning her husband.... I did not worry about anything. I knew there were people who will do the arrangements, like my children. In fact my husband had younger brothers (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

When a husband is dead, it is difficult to decide what to do and what not to do. That is because as a woman, you are married to this family. As a result, you have to abide by the rules of the family (Sarah: G2, AC).

The participants also identified themselves as not knowing and positioned the in-laws as the ones knowing and feeling more intense grief than they themselves did during their interactions. They also defended their culture by telling the group members that it (including its rituals) was no different from other cultures, and that people should value their culture and because in a sense they were who they were because of their culture.

Everything they talked about was placed in a particular context. Their discourse was situated within a specific sequential environment and occasion (death), institutional setting (family), and argumentative framework (Wiggins & Potter, 2005; Woofitt, 2005). Had it not been for the death of their husbands, they would not have identified themselves as widows or as being in need of sympathy.

The use of “I” in their statements to refer to themselves is another way participants built different socially situated identities in their language. According to Gee (1999) speaking in the first person, “I” is just another way in which participants constructed identity in and through language. In this study participants used “I” to refer to what they talked about themselves. In several cases they used “I” in their cognitive statements as they talked about thinking and knowing (*I know... or I think...*). They also used the “I” in ability and constraint statements to refer to having to do things (*having to perform the rituals and inability to oppose the in-laws or culture*). In all these categories, they talked about themselves in relation to something (death or rituals) and others (husband and in-laws). This implied that in their talk, the value of significant others was of importance in the participants’ actions and interactions.

Their use of cognitive statements appeared to communicate the previous interaction that took place in their world. Mutshekwa (G5, TA) made it clear that other people “*will do the arrangements*”. That idea showed that she had a previous interaction with those

people and now she was confident that they will arrange her husband's funeral. Another example was Phophi (G5, TA), who said "*I know that you who are educated do not see any value in performing these rituals*". It appeared in response to her previous interaction with educated people who were ignorant of the performance of bereavement rituals and who possibly did not understand the value of bereavement rituals. It may also be the way that she has constructed educated people.

7.2.5 Political building

Gee (1999) referred to political building as "using cues and clues to construct the natural and relevance of various social goods, such as status and power, and anything else taken as social good here and now" (p. 86). The participants told the audience about their lack of status and power as widows when they could not choose the coffin, or when they were forced to do things they did not want to do. The issue of lack of status and power reflected the position in which others put them and in which they put themselves. Their position implicated them as vulnerable (Burr, 1995). The more the audience agreed with the participants' social construction through the use of social language, the more they positioned themselves as the poor bereaved widows.

One would want to choose a coffin for her husband (Sarah: G2, AC).

When a husband is dead, it is difficult to decide what to do and what not to do. That is because as a woman you are married to this family. As a result you have to abide by the rules of the family ...I had to do some of these things, not because of the belief I had around such rituals, but because the elders weere expecting me to do them. Even when you do not believe in other things you would just do them to avoid disagreement (Sarah: G2, AC).

The participants also granted others (family, in-laws, church members, etc.) power by positioning them where they could or had to decide on their behalf. They submitted to their demands using language that put the elders on a higher and superior level to the participants (they had knowledge of the bereavement experience because they had also

lost their husbands), giving them power over how they should or should not feel about their loss. The participants seemingly considered the in-laws' bereavement (because they had lost a son while the participants had only lost their husband) as being on a higher level or as being deeper than their own sorrow.

Yes, in our culture, widows are not allowed to be seen out of the house before her husband's burial. It is believed that she is mourning her husband.... I did not worry about anything. I knew there were people who would do the arrangements, like my children. In fact my husband had younger brothers (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

The participants used language to tell the audience about their sad and disenfranchised future, and how the family would tell them who to marry. This further implied lack of power to decide even those things that concerned their intimacy. The choice of the word “*allowed*” appeared to imply that even if they wanted to exercise their rights, those people in authoritative positions would deny them such rights.

They will find you a new man. That man would either be a younger brother to the deceased or any other blood relative to the deceased. That widow is not allowed to marry any other stranger. The other thing is that in our culture she does not have the rights to love the man of her own choice; the old ladies will find her a relevant person (Tshinakaho: G2, TA).

But in Tshivenda, a widow takes the whole year observing taboos. She is not allowed to do anything. I mean having sexual relationships with another man. She is not allowed to have sex with another man before a year is over (Anna: G2, AIC).

Although there were participants who talked about themselves as powerless and others as powerful and having authority over what they were supposed to do, there were some participants who accepted and presented themselves as having power and

responsibility over their situation, actions and interactions. While some participants, like Sarah (G2, AC) could not refuse the authority from her in-laws in relation to the performance of bereavement rituals, others like Avhasei (G5, AIC) refused to perform the bereavement rituals. Participants like Avhasei took positions as women who have responsibility in preparing their husbands' funeral and practiced their rights as individuals after their husbands' deaths.

I refused because I knew that staying in the house would mean they would have to choose the casket and tombstone for me. I told them, they could do all other things but allow me and my children to choose the tombstone and the casket (Avhasei: G5, AIC).

I refused to perform the rituals because I relied on prayers (Salume: G6, AC).

Some participants' position to perform the rituals appeared to be influenced by their religious affiliation. It was evident in the language Salume used. She "*relied on prayers.*" In some cases, the rituals were performed because they had therapeutic value (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991). Possibly, Salume relied on prayers as they would provide some form of therapeutic intervention. According to Chong (2006), prayer is a way of communicating with God who watches over people and consoles them when things are difficult and painful.

7.2.6 Connection building

Connection building was "using cues and clues to make assumptions about how the past and future of an interaction, verbally and non-verbally, are connected to the present moment and to each other" (Gee, 1999, p. 86). The participants used language in a way that showed how they built connections across the sentences of their stories. The most used connection words were "*because*" and "*as a result*". These two words were used to connect the past and the present within the context of bereavement and the performance of bereavement rituals. These connections might imply that history had an influence on how people understood and constructed meaning out of what they

experienced in the present. This supported the social constructionist notion that all forms of knowledge and understanding were culturally and historically specific and relative (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2006).

It was so painful because of the meaning he had for me (Maria: G1, AIC).

But, mm, in our culture when a person is buried in the graveyard we see him as if he is too far from us. As a result we have to bring him home. This is also done if somebody has died in a car accident. We have to bring him home because his blood would have been shed on the road (Dorah: G1, AIC).

I saw it painful because the deceased was the only one working (Rose: G1, AC).

When a husband is dead, it is difficult to decide what to do and what not to do. That is because as a woman you are married to this family. As a result, you have to abide by the rules of the family (Sarah: G2, AC).

You know what, death is more painful to me as the wife to the deceased than to anyone else. That is because the in-laws will think you are the one who killed their son (Selina: G3, AIC).

It was evident in their talk that the participants used language that connected them to their husband's death and the previous life they lived together. This was possibly because of women's identities being embedded in connectedness, affiliation and attachment (Ross, 2002). They talked of their connection and attachment to their husbands as validating their experiences of their husband's death. This implied that for these participants, the performance of bereavement rituals was not only meant to satisfy the dominant group, but it was also meant to help the women practice their right and freedom of action as a result of the life lived and the connection with their husbands. This also implied that if there was no connection between the past and the present, the

participants' experiences would be different. Possibly, they would not talk of themselves as widows, who needed to perform bereavement rituals.

My husband's death has affected me so much ...that was because I loved him and he loved me (Mercy: G1, AC).

I stayed in the house from the day we heard that my husband had died until the funeral (Grace: G5, AIC).

Yes, if my husband is dead, I am dirty and I have to be cleansed (Rose: G1, AC).

To me there was no problem in doing all that. My understanding was it was good for my husband's spirit.... The best is to perform the rituals (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

The behaviour that was represented in their language showed a connection between the deceased and the living in the past, the present and the anticipated future. Even though the deceased was buried in the graveyard (as in Christian burial rituals), the widows performed rituals that were intended to bring him home to be part of the family. Bringing him home represented a belief that life was communal and was possible only in a network of mutual interdependence (Ngubane, 2004). It continued the interaction between the living and the dead.

They also built a connection between the one who knew and the one who did not know what it meant to grieve. They talked about themselves as the ones knowing while the interviewer was the one who did not know, possibly because of age and because she had not yet lost a husband.

I just do not know if these young people still perform the rituals (Mutshekwa: G5, TA).

I had to do all those things. That is our culture, my grandchild (Phophi: G6, TA).

The participants linked their culture with others by indicating that theirs was no different from other cultures deserving of respect. This way of talking called for a recognition of their own culture, just as others might recognise other cultures and possibly admire them.

7.3 DISCOURSES

Certain discourses emerged from the way in which the participants told their stories using the social languages relevant to their situation as bereaved women and as members of a particular religious-cultural group. According to Van Schalkwyk (2005), these discourses were “inherited from our mothers and their mothers before them” (p. 4). They were not new but passed down from previous generations. When analysing these discourses, a consideration was made of the possible alternative discourses that could be constructed in the place of the chosen ones. This supported Coyle’s (2007) argument that “discourse analysis can be used to indicate that alternative discourses could be constructed in their place” (p. 104).

7.3.1 Discourse of being not ‘normal’

In the way the participants told their stories about the bereavement rituals, they used language or words to describe their experiences as *not ‘normal’* (pain, loss, lack of status, crying, etc.), as somehow *ill* (death contagion, need for cleansing, need for protection against evil spirits, etc.) and *suffering* (need for healing, the pain never goes away, guilt over the death of a spouse, etc.). The audience also responded with language that confirmed and legitimised the state of being not ‘normal’.

I know that with all that was done, it was meant to help the family recover from the pain of death. Otherwise it would take us long to cope with that death (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

Yes, if my husband is dead, I am dirty and I have to be cleansed (Rose: G1, AC).

It is possible that this way of describing the bereaved women derived from the family, such as the in-laws, or from cultural institutions that considered performing the bereavement rituals to be essential for women because it decreased the pain (made them *normal* again), cleansed them (made them *healthy* again), drove away the evil spirits (avoided further *abnormality*), absolved them from blame and guilt (gave them *therapy*), and healed them from their great pain.

All the practices included in the rituals were aimed at curing the ‘abnormality’ to the extent that the institutions of culture and family might even choose a new husband for the widow so that she could be ‘normal’ again. Even though the participants might not agree with all of these practices, in telling their stories, they constructed a reality in which they believed – that they needed the rituals to overcome the grief they were experiencing. They even constructed their reality in such a way that they considered it honourable to be ‘abnormal’ and in need of healing, thus making it easier to accept the inevitability of having to perform the rituals.

A contrast to this abnormality discourse would be that their story would involve acceptance of death of their husband without having to perform the rituals, of God’s better judgement and peace (in the case of Christian participants), recognising social support for what it was and not trying to explain elaborately why they needed the rituals for any kind of appeasement. They might still have used words such as loss and pain to describe their experience of death, but without the implicated meanings of damage, harm, injury, hurt, failure, and ruin. They might have performed the rituals because they perceived them as enriching and part of a social support system that would be needed at times of trauma and distress. But they might also have been telling a story of their refusal to comply with expectations that could have resulted in them being considered even more ‘abnormal’ in society. They might have moved away to another community to find solace because they were too ‘abnormal’ (abandoning culture for religious values).

Moving away from one's community would mean accepting the identity and position of the outcast, the rebel against one's culture, family, and elders.

7.3.2 Power/patriarchal discourse

Burr (2003) argued that discourses were not only embedded in power relations, but also had political effects. From a social constructionist perspective, the issue of power relations supported power inequalities between the participants in this study and their in-laws. Burr viewed power as the person's capacity to have some effect on their world. In their stories, the participants mostly positioned their in-laws with power and authority, prescribing how they should behave and perceive bereavement. The participants had very little capacity to affect their own worlds. They were positioned as passive followers who acted as directed by those in power (in-laws). This was in line with Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine's (2008) and Coyle's (2007) argument that when an individual is constructed through discourse, he or she is offered a particular subject position within that discourse. The discourse brings with it a set of images, metaphors and obligations concerning the kind of response that could be made. In his or her response, the participant either accepts or denies such a position. By accepting such a position, participants in this study fulfilled the obligations of the position they were subjected to.

But we had to go to the diviner to find out what was behind that accident. That was because they said that should be done. People just believe that there is something or somebody who caused that death or accident (Ndivhuwo: G3, TA).

It is because the elders are always behind all these ...I had to do some of these things, not because of the belief I had around such rituals but because the elders were expecting me to do them (Sarah: G2, AC).

The participants constructed the people involved in the bereavement rituals (their children, elders, in-laws, church members, sangoma, etc.) as the dominant group with power to influence events. They positioned themselves as the subordinate ones who

could not make their own decisions, who had no choice or influence, who were in bondage, and who were dominated by cultural beliefs, family values, expectations. This was all meant to avoid conflict. They gave power to other people by positioning themselves as the unfortunate widows, the ones who could not think for themselves and who had no influence over events that concerned them deeply. This positioning of the participants, most likely derived from a culture and religion that granted privileges to members of the dominant group (husband, in-laws, elders, sangoma, priest, etc.) and to God as the Omnipotent One. Mostly, the participants could not recognise their own oppression or the powers of the dominant group, possibly because they were used to the social stereotypes surrounding the bereavement rituals. Not even their religious affiliation could help them challenge the dominant discourses.

The participants may have opposed this power discourse had they positioned themselves in more symmetric and equal relationships. That might mean that they would not speak about and put other people in a dominant position, but that their story would be about the equality amongst all parties. The participants as the bereaved widows, the in-laws who were grieving for their son, the family and so on, all being equal partners in making decisions about the burial of the participants' husband and his estate. The parents-in-law would acknowledge the widow as a person in her own right even though she was no longer married to their son. The participants' position in society would not be dependent on being married to someone else's son, but would be because they were human beings. The participants would have used an entirely different set of words to describe their experience of the bereavement rituals in their culture. Possibly, they would have used language that put people in an interdependent culture in equal positions.

7.3.3 Gender discourse

A gender discourse appeared to construct women as vulnerable and emotional when compared to men. Vulnerability and emotionality called for sympathy from others. According to this discourse, participants would accept their positions as being in need of

other people's care. It appeared as if on their own, they could not make it or improve their status and position as related to their feelings in a way that fitted the self.

...death is painful, especially when you are a wife (Maria: G1, AIC).

...the deceased was the only one working (Rose: G1, AC).

When we were together, it was easy to finance his schooling. As I am saying I know there are things I know I cannot do for that boy when his father is no longer there (Susan: G6, AIC).

If he were here, I would tell him that this child is doing like this and the other child is behaving like that, and together we would come with a way to discipline them. As a result, when I am alone it is difficult (Dorothy: G3, AC).

I believed in prayer. But since I came here through marriage, all family members and relatives believe that there should be throwing of bones, killing the goat and also helping the dead to rest (u luvhedza) I do not know (laughing) if you will understand what that means? All those rituals that are performed in Tshivenda, to tell the truth, they were all performed here. I had no power to refuse them. No, that was because they were things admired by my in-laws. Had I refused to perform those rituals, it would have caused conflict (Salume: G6, AC).

Related to their positioning of others as dominant, the participants positioned themselves as subordinate, not only because of their lack of socio-political power and influence, but because they were women, wives, widows and mothers. In their stories they told the audience about what their husbands meant to them. They talked about their dependence, as opposed to co-dependence or interdependence, on him because he was the strong one, the one who disciplined the children, and the one who earned money so that the participants and their children could survive. The participants were

the submissive parties who only had status in life because they were married. They did not have any influence over their own movements and life in general. Their stories included events and situations in which they were silenced because women were not allowed to have their own mind. As widows, they were silenced because they appeared to know even less about what they wanted and needed, only the elders seemed to know them.

Culture, religion and family (institutions) positioned the participants as people who had to take on a particular role in society, a role that was subordinate to the dominant or privileged group, that is, the males (husband) and the family (in-laws). The participants had been placed by their religious-cultural heritage as members of a marginalised and oppressed group by the fact of their sex (female), a characteristic that is beyond their control. The participants lived up to this positioning by crying, avoiding conflict, being submissive, considering others' feelings more than their own, taking the blame or avoiding the blame, and subjecting their own views to that of others, all gendered stereotypes and attributes of women in their culture.

As widows (another element beyond the participants' control), they were positioned as members of an even more marginalised and oppressed group. They had to perform rituals simply to maintain peace and harmony (more stereotypical feminine attributes) and because they did not know their own mind (Winbush, 2000). This was apparent when one listened to the language and symbols the participants used to reflect on their subordination to dominant others (husband, family, culture, religion). It was also illustrated in the way they constructed a reality regarding the rituals that impressed upon the audience that they had no power of influence. They were bound by discourses that produced 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as objects to be understood and positions to be lived out in ways that are oppressive, particularly for the bereaved widow.

I do not have much to say, but what I would like to add is that when you are married to a particular family, it is difficult to tell them that you do not want to do certain things. Imagine if I said I do not want to perform those rituals. I

think they would believe that truly I killed their son. Do not forget that to those people, they cannot trust me when I say I did not kill him. It is like in our culture, if a husband dies, there is always an element of doubt even when the wife is innocent. To avoid that blame, you simply have to do as they tell you. After all, these rituals are temporary. You do them once and then you live your life freely (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

I could not choose because I had no money. In fact, they did not involve me in any arrangement. I stayed in the house from the day we heard that my husband had died until the funeral. That taught me that truly money talks. I think if I had money they would have allowed me to participate in funeral arrangements. Knowing that I had no money, I had to understand (Grace: G5, AIC).

The participants could not refuse to perform the rituals and could not even talk about them during the mourning period because that would mean being insubordinate to the dominant, patriarchal, familial or cultural powers. This was because when a husband died a woman was expected to be quiet and not talk to anyone or question anything (Guzana, 2000). Participants would be accused of witchcraft or sorcery, or be blamed for the ill-health or misfortune that might befall themselves or the family at a later stage. This would make the participants members of an even more marginalised and oppressed group (the witches, the insubordinates) with even less power of influence in society. Possibly, the participants felt that they could not allow this to happen. As women they became blameworthy (society would not blame men in the same way), and they had an obligation to comply with orders because they did not know enough to behave differently.

Even though they were positioned in a powerless role because of their gender, somehow they were positioned by other married women as 'objects' that were sexually attractive to their husbands. This suggested that participants did have some power to

attract men. This positioning might have come from the religious-cultural background that described women as attractive for the purpose of satisfying men's sexual urges.

I can tell that some of the people I was friends with, no longer come to my house. I had a problem before, but now I understand the reason. It is because they still have their husbands and they possibly think I will take their husbands. Jaa, life can be complicated when you are a widow (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

The gender discourse that women abided with when talking about their husband's death made it difficult for them to realise the positive implications of their husband's death. That is because in cultural contexts where women have been socialized into dependent social roles, some kinds of losses might act as a means to remove social constraints for growth and independence. For women in these social contexts, loss might in some ways be liberating from dependence to independence (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001). This was a liberation from dependence on the husband as the dominant one to independence and self-reliance.

However, some participants in this study resisted cultural and societal labels of a widow as passive with no voice about what happens in her life after the husband's death. While Selepe and Edwards (2008) stated that Tshivenda widows had to observe a 12 months mourning period before they remarried, some participants in this study argued that even after the death of a husband a young widow still had sexual interests and needed a man to satisfy such needs. This showed that even though they came from Tshivenda culture with its dominant gender stereotypes, this study gave them the space to voice their feelings. Although they could talk in defence of their feelings and resisted cultural prescriptions associated with their loss, participants also talked about how the pain they experienced was associated with what they 'gained' in the form of responsibilities in relation to loss of a husband.

7.3.4 Religious-cultural discourse

In a sense, everything the participants were saying was intricately connected to the social relationships and structures of the wider culture that could explain how the psychological phenomenon of their grief, bereavement and experience of the rituals came about. There was a socio-political and ideological basis for the way they constructed their reality of the bereavement rituals.

The collectivist culture and faith community of which the participants were members, further provided them with a social language that made them interpret their experiences in one way and not another. Participants told stories that connected intimately with the historical features of their cultural embeddedness and the people, ideas, things and institutions that the participants valued in their culture, also encouraging each other to talk about the importance of their valuing the bereavement rituals in order that they did not disappear. Thus their stories could not be value-free and, though only part of the multiple realities that could be constructed regarding bereavement rituals, their stories were richly coloured with the values of their culture and the faith community to which they belonged.

7.3.5 Minor discourses or discourses found within other discourses

In relating their stories, the participants also used language to describe other aspects of their experience of bereavement rituals. The participants described, for example, their fear of the unknown (fear discourse), of the afterlife, divination and putting the dead to rest (religious discourse), of blame (blame discourse), of the Sangoma (witchcraft discourse), and so on, thus legitimising practicing the rituals and positioning themselves and others in specific relationship patterns.

7.3.5.1 Fear discourse

This discourse was related to the activities connected to the performance of bereavement rituals. The participants performed the rituals not because they were part of their culture and a symbol of respecting that culture, but because of fear of the unknown that they might suffer at a later stage, the so-called misfortunes (Kyei,

1992) from which rituals protected people. Such fear might come from a culture that threatens those who do not comply with expected rituals and from the elders who would blame participants for the death of their son. Frantz, Farrell and Trolley (2001) maintained that the death of a loved one forced many grieving people to experience emotions associated with sadness, guilt, anger, or fear that followed the loss.

The traditional healer can come and do all other things, including 'u fara mudi' (protecting the homestead by the traditional healer). So to prevent misfortunes and witches from getting to the family (Lucy: G2, TA).

If one family member gets sick, I will suspect that maybe it is the reason is that there were things that we did not do (Masindi: G2, TA).

To me there was no problem in doing all that. My understanding was it was good for my husband's spirit. I just thought if, as a wife, I did not do those things my life would not be safe. Even my family, including children and whatever we touched by our hands would not prosper. To me those rituals are of value because if, like she said, you believe in these rituals when they are not performed you will never be happy. Always, you will see your husband. That will be showing that his spirit is still lingering and he is angry with you. The best is to perform the rituals (Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

I had to do all those things. That is our culture, my grandchild. I know that you who are educated do not see any value in performing these rituals, but it is important to perform them. That is because when you do not, for example, wash, as a wife, you invite misfortunes in your life. The dead one will not rest in a good manner knowing that we did not perform those rituals. If they are not performed, my grandchild, you will not forget about your husband. You will always think about him. Nothing will prosper in

your life. Now, if you do not want to encounter misfortunes, it will be better if you do what is prescribed by your culture (Phophi: G6, TA).

Had they not known about the misfortunes associated with failure to perform the rituals, they would possibly have used a different language to construct the performance of bereavement rituals that would not be informed by a fear discourse. They would have talked about bereavement rituals in a way that represented self-confidence when performing bereavement rituals.

7.3.5.2 Religious discourse

When they talked about the functions of the bereavement rituals, participants used language that justified the need to know the cause of the death through divination. They put the Sangoma in a position of somebody who knew the cause or who should be blamed, and positioned themselves as people in need of knowledge concerning the death of their husbands.

Mm... like going to sangoma for divining. They will always tell you he was bewitched by so-and-so. After knowing that, what will you do? Nothing, you cannot go and kill that person. You just accept that the person has died. God has taken him. He went where there are others. We will also follow (Mutshekwa: G1).

Imagine a person got sick for a week and then he dies. Do you think we should just accept that it is death. No, we have to find out what killed him. If we do not do it, I think he will think we do not care about his death. That is when he would just torment you (Masindi: G2).

They also justified the need to help the dead to rest through the performance of bereavement rituals. Their talk implied that they performed the rituals to please the ancestors (Aiken, 2001). The participants positioned themselves as people responsible for the happiness of the ancestors through their practices.

That will be showing that his spirit is still lingering and he is angry with you
(Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

If you do not perform the necessary rituals you remain with the image
(Murunzi) of the dead person and that can bring misfortunes (Muofhe: G4,
TA).

7.3.5.3 Blame discourse

In their stories concerning the reasons for performing the bereavement rituals, fear of blame was emphasised. Participants spoke about blame as coming from other people (in-laws and some community members). These people appeared to be representing the culture that valued the performance of bereavement rituals.

To avoid that blame, you simply have to do as they tell you
(Tshovhewaho: G4, TA).

Most of the things you do because the in-laws want you to (Avhasei: G5,
AIC).

That is because the in-laws will think you are the one who killed their son
(Selina: G3, AIC).

When he was still alive, all family members were happy about me as their
in-law, but that death changed everything. I suspected they were blaming
me. They thought I had killed him. It was tough (Tshidaho: G4, AIC).

In their talk, they demonstrated how others were responsible for their behaviour. The participants would do what other people said to avoid blame. They presented the pain of death as '*outside the self*' and coming from an external source, in this instance, the in-laws, and not so much as their own sense of loss that justified the

performance of bereavement rituals. The participants' activities were meant to avoid the blame that the in-laws would place on them.

The participants talked about being judged without a hearing and having their freedom of choice further restricted. They constructed the activities they performed as being done to avoid judgement by others. In most cases, the participants used language that indicated that they did not take ownership of their statements, by using the collective terminology of “we” and “us” or “they” and “others” as being responsible for their actions and behaviour.

The participants would not have been coerced into doing things they did not agree with, if the Tshivenda culture was not so adamant about blaming those who did not comply with prescription. Had death not occurred in the family, the participants would have used different communication styles or would have used a different vocabulary to refer to the role of the in-laws. The family also used blame to keep the widows submissive after the death of their husbands.

7.3.5.4 Witchcraft discourse

Fear of witchcraft came out in the participants' stories as contributing towards their reasons for performing the bereavement rituals. In their stories about fear of witchcraft, they talked about witchcraft and the positions and roles of the sangomas as 'divining'. At one level, the Sangoma was equated to a witch, but at another level the participants saw the same as being good at dealing with bereavement. At yet another level, if the participants did not want to comply with the cultural practices, a Sangoma was seen as bad or threatening. In the final analysis, however, the Sangoma and the possibility of witchcraft took away the participant's control over her own self and over events taking place around her loss of agency.

You know what, don't ignore your culture. Ah, witches will play with you
(Mutshekwa: G1, TA).

The traditional healer can come and do all other things, including protecting the homestead. “u fara mudi” so to prevent misfortunes and witches from getting to the family (Lucy: G2, TA).

The human subject that the participants talked about was either a witch or a Sangoma with a different or similar role in the lives of the participants. This role was either to bewitch the participant as a punishment for failing to perform the rituals, or it was a therapeutic role in dealing with bereavement. The participants were inviting the reader to understand the positions that sangomas occupied in the Tshivenda-speaking bereaved people. On one hand people were supposed to respect the Sangomas for the good healing job they performed and, on the other hand, they blamed them for the witchcraft that they were afraid of.

The fear of witchcraft that participants talked about in their stories might derive from the cultural and historical knowledge that tells people that death could be best explained as having non-physical causes like witchcraft (Opoku, 1989). In this instance, death was considered to be caused by witchcraft. The participants' talk implied that should there be different cultural knowledge about death other than that put forward by Opoku (1989), who suggested that witchcraft was responsible for death, they would have used different language. Possibly, the participants might have used such language when talking about reasons of performing the bereavement rituals. They would not have performed the rituals out of fear, which subjected them to subordinate positions.

7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

What was apparent in this chapter was the way the participants used language to construct their realities (cultural, religious, familial, and so on), build their different tasks (semiotic, world, activities, socially situated identities and relationship, political and connection building), and how selected discourses informed their constructions. In terms of semiotic building, there was connection and representation between the

language the participants used to construct their realities (Coyle, 2007), and the world they built from that language in terms of bereavement experiences and performance of bereavement rituals. The participants used language that represented their pain and loss thus justifying the performance of bereavement rituals. Personal and distant (e.g., they, others) words were used in the construction of bereavement and bereavement rituals.

The chapter presented the different social languages that the participants used when telling their stories. The participants used language and speech that symbolised them as people hurt, injured, not normal and in need of healing. Such symbols again appeared to justify their performance of bereavement rituals. The world that they constructed through different social languages involved the realities concerning their needs. Such needs involved bereavement rituals, and how different people, places, times, objects, the institutions, and God and ancestors played certain roles in their construction of bereavement rituals.

The activities that were prevalent in their construction of bereavement rituals involved the way they talked about the rituals: going to the sangoma for divination, cleansing, sitting in the house before burial, crying, carrying a basket on the head, choosing a coffin, and being worried that the husband might not be buried properly. In these activities, the language used represented most of them as being widows without the power to decide their own actions and behaviour, particularly since they performed those rituals to appease other people who were in authority. They used language that positioned them as the ones without power, and others as having more power and status. There were participants who were able to either refuse the authority of others or participate in rituals because they understood the role they (rituals) played in their lives. They could take responsibility for their activities contrary to their less powerful counterparts.

The way in which participants constructed their socially-situated identities and relationships involved their identities as widows and the relationship they had with their

husbands and their in-laws, when the husband was still alive and after his death. They represented their identities through the use of “I” statements, and their relationship with others through the use of cognitive statements. They put others in the role of sympathisers after their husbands’ death.

In their construction power to choose or not to choose the coffin positioned them either as powerful (for some) or powerless (for others). For those who granted others power to choose the coffin on their behalf, they positioned themselves as powerless, whereas those who chose their husbands’ coffins placed themselves in powerful positions. The participants furthermore built connections between beliefs and their rationale for the performance of bereavement rituals. Consequently, while the participants from a traditional African background would perform the rituals because the rituals had a cultural base, the Christian participants would pray to God for healing and recovery.

The analysis of discourses showed that participants performed bereavement rituals because they were powerless and had a lower status to other people. They performed the rituals because they were widows or married to a particular family, they appeared abnormal and they supposedly wanted to return to their normal state by performing the rituals. They were also afraid of witchcraft and of being blamed for the death of their husbands.

The following chapter reflects on the process undertaken in the study.

CHAPTER 8

REFLECTIONS ON PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

8.1 REFLECTION UPON THE PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY

In chapter 7, I outlined the discourses that were identified and analysed from the spoken language of the bereaved participants from the Tshivenda-speaking community. It was apparent in the conversations that the religious-cultural discourses prevailed in the talk about the bereavement rituals. The discourses that were identified as informing the way the participants experienced grief were discussed as they had particular roles in the way participants constructed their realities in connection with death and bereavement rituals. Since language reflected and constructed the situation or context in which it was used, the way language was used to construct their perceptions was also context-dependent (in this case, the death of a husband).

This chapter reflects on the processes undertaken in this study. It also contains a summary of the discourses identified in the participants' talk. The conclusions based on the findings of the study are also highlighted, including my recommendations. At the end I address the limitations of the study.

8.2 REFLEXIVITY

In this section I address methodological and personal reflexivity. I further expand on the methodology part in the section dealing with the study's limitations (see section 8.5).

8.2.1 Methodological reflexivity

The nature of the objectives and research questions of the study called for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's point of view that would be difficult to obtain through the adoption of positivist approach that focuses on pre-conceived variables (Willig, 2001). In order to obtain a deeper understanding concerning the participants' constructions of bereavement rituals a qualitative approach

appeared most appropriate and relevant for this study. It allowed me to explore participants' construction of their experiences of grief, bereavement rituals and subject positions they enacted when grieving for a deceased husband. The adoption of a qualitative approach allowed me an opportunity to listen to the language participants used to give meaning to their perceptions of the phenomenon (Storey, 2007), and how knowledge and social action go together to construct reality.

To ensure that my study was credible and trustworthy, I stayed in the field until the data were saturated. During interviews, I asked different questions that were in line with the objectives of the study, and all interviews were tape-recorded. This made it possible for me to relate what the participants said to the objectives of the study. The empathetic way that I asked questions during focus group interviews influenced the answers given. I asked questions in a way that encouraged participants to give answers that added to my knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Such a way of asking questions put the participants in authority and expert positions and accorded me the position of someone who did not know and was in need of such knowledge.

During the interviews, I constantly checked that what I heard the women saying was really what they meant to say. Tellis (1997) called this double-checking the data. I would briefly repeat or rephrase to the participants what they said after their conversations. This helped me to obtain a full sense of the participants' expressions. I continued to reflect upon the objectives of the study during the study process. As suggested by Babbie and Mouton (2001), I ensured that the findings are the product of the focus of the study. After the interviews, I transcribed the verbal stories from the tape into a written text for the purpose of discourse analysis. During transcription, I tried to produce a detailed transcript because, according to Wooffitt (2001), discourse analysts must always produce as detailed a transcription as possible.

However, it appeared that the method of data collection (focus groups) might have influenced the selection of words used by the participants. Having to discuss their religious cultural views and experiences in a group might have caused them to position

themselves in culturally acceptable ways (such as being in need of healing) to avoid being criticised by other group members. They might also have reproduced taken-for-granted religious-cultural assumptions and beliefs about bereavement rituals (that they will provide healing to the bereaved, and that failure to perform them will result in misfortune). The participants might have adopted the traditional values embedded in the Tshivenda culture and that were also reflected in the religious-cultural values.

The themes that guided the interpretation of the transcripts were in line with the objectives of the study. I had to reflect on the questions that I asked the participants during the interviews and the responses that they gave to generate the themes and sub-themes during the interpretation phase. When analysing the discourses, I also reflected on the objectives of the study to avoid analysing irrelevant information that did not contribute to the objectives of the study.

Given the purpose of the study, to analyse the discourses pertaining to the way Tshivenda speaking women construct performance of bereavement rituals, discourse analysis appeared the best method to analyse participants' construction of reality concerning bereavement rituals. It allowed me to identify a coherent set of meanings, objects, stories and statements that participants used to produce a particular version of events pertaining to bereavement rituals (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). As they talked about their events, I was able to identify the discourses that I will reflect on in section 8.3. By adopting discourse analysis, I was able to listen to and identify the relationship between the language participants used and the construction of bereavement rituals and to describe as best as possible the socially constructed realities that emerge in the day-to-day lives of participants.

8.2.2 Personal reflexivity

When working within the social constructionist framework, issues concerning the gender, age, and ethnicity of both the researcher and the participants are important factors in how the research and information gathering were approached. In this section I

reflect on my personal constructions of the topic and how this might have constructed the study.

My experience of losing my father and remaining with my mother in our Tshivenda-speaking family, and observing her performing the bereavement rituals, provoked and sharpened my interest to do this study and choice of research approach. This experience sensitised me to understand the meanings participants attached to their experiences and the language they used to describe such experience. I was able to understand and interpret their experiences concerning staying in the house until the day of the funeral, covering the body with a blanket, cleansing, the inability of the widow to arrange funeral and choose the husband's coffin. Since I was interested in gaining more in-depth understanding of what my mother might have felt during her time, I probed and asked 'why' questions so that the participants could give more information. When observing their non-verbal expressions as they talked, I assumed their emotions and transferred them to what my mother might have felt. Although I felt angry and blamed other people for making my mother go through what I felt was possibly a difficult time, I had to hide my emotions so that I could gain quality data for the success of this study. Hiding my feelings was especially difficult to do during the transcription of the focus groups. When transcribing the data, I would stop in the process and engage my mind in searching for the meaning of what the participants were talking about in relation to what my mother experienced because I was still young (18 years) and it was difficult to understand what my mother was going through. This is because experiences are life histories of people and consist of values, emotions and memories that are embedded in stories (Papa, 2008). Listening to the participants' stories brought back some painful memories for me. I had to guard against constructing discourses from the participants' data that reflected how I had constructed my mother's experience, i.e. as negative and difficult.

During the execution of this study, there were certain roles that I had to accept because of their influence on the study. I accepted the position of being a child or grandchild and of being 'ignorant' because of my age. This helped me gather more information than I

would have obtained had I behaved like a person who already knew about death and bereavement rituals. It was culturally expected that the younger generation, in the presence of older people, should be identified either as their child or grandchild or as a person who has little comparative life experience such as death and bereavement rituals. What made it further possible to achieve the outcomes of this study was the fact that I shared the ethnicity and the language of the participants. As a Tshivenda-speaking interviewer, it was possible for me to gain access to participants who also spoke the Tshivenda language. My knowledge and general worldview which I brought to the data, helped during the analysis and interpretation stages (Taylor, 2001). Being familiar with the participants' language and references, I was able to understand the idioms and metaphors within their stories.

Although I was younger than all the participants, age did not prevent them from expressing their perceptions and experiences regarding the phenomena under exploration. In their discourses, the participants acknowledged my age and related to me either as a child or grandchild, or the younger generation. With this background, some of the participants expressed themselves in a way that informed me about cultural expectations, in the assumption that I did not know about these things, either because I was too young or because I was only formally educated about them.

8.3 THE BUILDING TASKS AND DISCOURSES IDENTIFIED DURING ANALYSIS

Certain discourses emerged from the way that participants told their stories using the social languages relevant to their situation as bereaved women and as members of particular religious-cultural groups. These were the discourses that informed the participants' talk. Before analysing these discourses, Gee's (1999) building blocks or tasks for analysing discourses were followed. These gave the context in which discourses were analysed.

- **Semiotic building**

This building task involved the way that the participants used language to construct their reality concerning bereavement experiences and the performance of bereavement rituals. They used language that described them as ill and in need of healing through performing rituals. Their language appeared to call for sympathy from others. It was evident in their talk that they carefully selected the words that they used to tell their stories. This building block addressed the study's objective of identifying the participants' constructions of bereavement and bereavement rituals. It answered the research question concerning their experiences of grief following the death of a husband.

- **World building**

In their stories, participants constructed a world that concerned the reality of bereavement rituals as something they needed given their grief and their need for healing. This building block addressed the objective of identifying the role and meaning that the rituals play and have in the participants' lives. Through their talk, they defended these rituals as fulfilling a personal need and thus acceptable as being culturally prescribed and part of their culture. In their construction of bereavement rituals, the participants talked about people, places, times, the objects and institutions that played particular roles in their stories.

- **Activity building**

This building block addressed the objective of understanding the process of grieving and the performance of bereavement rituals that the participants could not take responsibility for. In the participants' stories of their activities, there were certain "subjects" who were given power and responsibility for their actions. These subjects included in-laws, ancestors, witches and sangomas. Each of these subjects had a role to play in the participants' actions. The participants went to the sangoma for divination, cleansed, sat in the house before burial, cried, carried a basket on the head, chose a coffin, and were worried that the husband might not be buried properly. In addressing this building task, they used language that represented most

of them as being widows without the power to decide their own actions and behaviour, particularly since they performed those rituals to appease other people who were in authority. Some participants either refused the authority of others or participated in rituals because they understood the role they (rituals) played in their lives. They could take responsibility for their activities contrary to their less powerful counterparts.

- **Socio-culturally situated identities and relationships**

When participants answered the question concerning their experiences, they used language that identified them in a certain way in relation to others and that identity had particular meaning to the participants. The language they used put them in certain positions different from others' status. In their talk, participants used language that positioned them as the victims, the broken ones, the ones who needed sympathy from others and the ones who needed healing through interaction with others. They talked about other people, institutions, times, places and objects that all positioned them as widows who needed support and who experienced intense emotions. Although they used language that positioned them as being in need of sympathy, they addressed the interviewer as someone who was ignorant of the experiences they described and who should learn from them.

- **Political building**

This task concerned the way participants lost and gained certain status and positions because of the power that others were granted by the religious cultural context of death. The language they used to address the meaning they attached to others in the context of performance of bereavement rituals gave others the power to make decisions for the participants, who in turn either accepted the position of being without power and, therefore, the position of being someone who should follow others' instructions, or rejected others' power and instruction and acted as they wished. For example, in their construction concerning the choice of a coffin, some (powerful) were able to choose the coffin and others (powerless) could not choose.

- **Connection building**

The way the participants talked about the past, present and future indicated how they built connections. Connections between their bereavement experiences and the activities they had to perform (bereavement rituals), between the death of the husband and the treatment they got from the other people, between the husband's life and their bereavement experiences, were evident in their talk. They built connections between beliefs and their rationale for the performance of bereavement rituals. It is evident that the participants from a traditional African background performed the rituals because the rituals had a cultural base and the Christian participants would pray to God for healing and recovery. Such connections were prevalent in their use of connection words in their stories.

Based on the objectives of the current study and the answers given by the participants, I identified the following discourses:

- **Abnormality discourse:** in their talk concerning their experiences of grief, participants used language that implied they were not normal, that they were somehow ill and suffering and in need of healing from the abnormality.
- **Power/patriarchal discourse:** in their stories concerning performance of bereavement rituals, some participants talked about other people as dominant in terms of power, and they positioned themselves as being subordinate and unable to make their own decisions. Their actions were decided by others. Although power was granted to the in-laws and sangomas, there were participants who constructed themselves in a position of power and rejected the oppression from others.
- **Gender discourse:** as they talked about their experiences in the context of bereavement and bereavement rituals, participants did not only position themselves as subordinate because of socio-political power and influence, but also because they were women, wives, widows and mothers. Gender discourse was identified because participants identified themselves as expected to perform bereavement rituals that are not expected for a man in the same situation.

The participants appeared vulnerable due to their gender that called for other people to take care of them. Their gender justified oppression and submissiveness to the dominant group. Being a wife and widow bound the participants by discourses that produced masculinity and femininity.

- **Religious-cultural discourse:** what the participants were saying concerning their experiences of grief and bereavement rituals, functions and meanings of bereavement rituals, the process and other situated meanings attached to their reality were connected to the social relationships and structures of the wider culture, which could explain how psychological phenomena of their experiences came about. Their collectivist culture and the faith community of which they are members also provided them with social languages that they used in their stories.
- **Minor discourses:** in their stories, participants used social languages that described several other aspects of their experiences of bereavement rituals. They talked about fear of the unknown, putting the deceased to rest, blame, and the role of the Sangoma, thus legitimising their performance of the rituals and positioning themselves and others in specific relationship patterns.

8.4 CONCLUSIONS

In the conclusion, particular attention is given to the way the study answered the research question that informed the interpretation of the results.

8.4.1. Construction of grief experiences

When asked to talk about their experiences of grief, the participants' constructed grief in terms of how they reacted to the knowledge of their husband's death. Irrespective of religious affiliation, the participants who anticipated their husband's death did not have as complicated and intense feelings as for those whose husbands died unexpectedly. It was evident that for African Christian participants, the death of a husband was experienced in a religious context (it was God's will). With traditional African participants, language that gave God responsibility for their husband's death was never understood.

In this study I found that for both traditional African and African Christian women, losing a husband through death is a difficult and painful experience accompanied by multiple losses. This concurs with research by Davies (2004). It appeared that such losses involved not only losing a husband, but also losing status, companionship, love, financial support, physical attachment and emotional support that the husband would have provided. The pain participants experienced when grieving the death of a husband was aggravated by the additional responsibilities that the participants used to share with the husband and which they now have to carry alone. These responsibilities included raising and disciplining children. The participants from both religious affiliations were also deprived of pleasure associated with sexual needs.

This study also found that the death of a husband was difficult to cope with, especially when there are certain responsibilities that as a widow one has to execute alone. Coping is even harder when a wife was financially dependent on her husband. Hence women from a traditional African background tended to blame God for taking away their husbands. Looking at the way the participants constructed their grief experiences, it seemed that they regarded themselves as ill and in need of healing through the performance of rituals (traditional African) and prayers (African Christian).

8.4.2. Constructions of bereavement rituals

Although bereavement rituals were considered therapeutic in nature, the participants experienced them as something that others wanted to see performed, irrespective of religious affiliation. Their constructions symbolised that most of the participants, particularly from traditional African background, had no power to refuse participation in these rituals because they were culturally prescribed and represented family values; and failure to perform them could bring misfortune. They performed the rituals out of fear of punishment by ancestors, in-laws and witches, and wanted to protect their in-group position in the family and cultural institutions.

Possibly, because of the socio-political context in which the interviews took place, as well as their religious-cultural assumptions, beliefs and values, traditional African

participants constructed bereavement rituals in a way that positioned them as being in need of healing. That was because the interviews took place in groups, which might have influenced their selection of words to avoid being criticised by other group members. It might also be the result of the religious-cultural assumptions and beliefs that the bereavement rituals provided healings to the bereaved and failure to perform them would cause misfortune. Given the values embedded in the Tshivenda culture, it was possible that the participants had no other values apart from the religious-cultural ones.

For African Christian and African traditional women, mourning the death of a spouse, the construction of their realities concerning the bereavement rituals was intermingled with their submissiveness to the dominant patriarchal and oppressive norms that prevailed in the Tshivenda culture. Thus, the participants were expected to submit to their husbands when they were still alive and to the in-laws after their deaths. Only a few participants from an African Christian background were able to either stand firm against the cultural prescriptions or perform the rituals because they understood the value of the rituals in their lives.

8.4.3. Subject positions the participants enacted when grieving the husband's death

The participants in this study constructed the death of the husband as an event that was painful and accompanied by multiple losses. Such losses included loss of the position that the participants used to occupy when the husband was still alive. Upon his death, they occupied a different position which the participants, from both religious backgrounds, constructed as uncomfortable. The transition from wife to widow was seen to legitimise the performance of bereavement rituals in order to be accepted in the community and the family, irrespective of religious affiliation or personal inclination. Most of the participants had to live according to the positions they occupied.

Oppressive inequality was constructed in terms of the distribution of power relations where the participants were silenced by their lack of power. The in-laws became more

powerful and ordered the participants' actions and interactions in relation to the performance of bereavement rituals. As a result, the participants remained with little capacity to have some effect in their world. Most of them, particularly from a traditional African background seemed to accept the position of the oppressed who could not oppose the social stereotype that surrounded bereavement rituals.

Through their talk, the participants enacted certain positions that they were subjected to by themselves and also by others. They used language that legitimised those positions as a result of the grief they experienced after they lost their husbands. Such positions included being an unfortunate widow, and a hurt, lesser being without value, and a subordinate who had no say in what was happening around her. In this position, the participants were silenced because of their gender and their religious-cultural background. They were dominated by cultural beliefs that took power away from the woman and gave it to her husband, and took power from the widow and gave it to the in-laws.

The participants may have opposed some of these discourses had they been able to position themselves in more symmetrical and equal relationships. That might mean that they would not speak about and allow other people to be in a dominant position, but that their stories would be about the equality of all parties. The participants would be viewed as the bereaved widows, the in-laws who were grieving for their son, the family and so on. All would be equal partners in making decisions about the burial of the participant's husband and his estate. The in-laws would acknowledge the widow as a person in her own right even though she was no longer married to their son. The participants would have used an entirely different set of words to describe their experience of bereavement rituals in their culture. Possibly, they would have used language that positioned people as equal. Rosenblatt and Nkosi's (2007) research with Zulu widows seems to imply that financial independence was a factor in the positions their participants could take. If the widows had been financially independent when their husbands were still alive they might have been able to take a different position and could have exercised their rights without fear upon their husbands' death.

Nevertheless, some participants used language that represented them as dominant and responsible for their actions, and resisting the power from both their in-laws and culture. These participants accepted their gender stereotype, but enacted their freedom of action and interaction. They performed the rituals because either they believed in their (rituals) role in their lives or they did not perform the rituals because they were in a position to resist other people's oppression.

8.4.4. Contradictions in the participants' constructions

In the African Christian women's constructions there was a particular contradiction with what the church (AIC) expected and prescribed, and what the Tshivenda culture expected and prescribed. In order to deal with these contradictions, the participants had to become detached while performing these rituals. This sense of detachment, however, silenced their voices and allowed only the voices of culture, religion and family values to dominate in their performance of the bereavement rituals.

In their constructions, the participants perceived bereavement rituals as something that would heal their hearts (wounds). This implied that they regarded the rituals as therapeutic, whilst on the other hand such rituals were regarded as "that" which the in-laws expected the participants to perform. That shows that some participants were not sure of where they stood in terms of the performance of bereavement rituals. There were contradictions in their constructions of their reality.

The participants' voices appeared to be saying something in contradiction with what they felt about the issues concerning bereavement rituals. They talked in a way that justified their performance of bereavement rituals, whilst at the same time they felt confined to the process by others (those in authority). On the one hand, they talked of bereavement rituals as cultural activities that should be observed, and on the other hand, they talked of bereavement rituals as something they are forced to do as a sign of respect for their in-laws and to gain a sense of belonging in the family.

Such inconsistency between their constructions of reality and their feelings calls for consideration from those who provide professional help to widows, who in some cases feel differently from what they say as a result of outside influences (in-laws and culture). Such inconsistency might be because of the fear of being marginalised. Their constructions also show that when the interviewed participants were confronted with the death of a husband, they did things they were not comfortable with as a result of fear. They would justify their actions not because they enjoyed those actions, but because they wanted to avoid conflict and to ensure peace and stability in the family.

8.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I am aware of the considerable limitations of my study. The nature of the group setting for data collection might have been threatening to the participants and they may have withheld some of the stories for fear of judgement by others. It became apparent in the group interviews that some of the participants were not free to speak about their perceptions, possibly because they felt this could pose a threat to their positions as widows in the community. As a result, they were dominated by others' conversations and their contributions were minimal. To counteract this as far as possible I ensured that I collected data until saturation point (Greeff, 2005; Maritz et al., 2008).

Secondly, since most of the respondents were not fluent in English, a dominant language in the academic world, interviews were conducted in their first language (Tshivenda) which was also important as it facilitated the development of a sound rapport between the interviewer and the participants (Kagee, 2004). Consequently, the transcribed interview data were translated from Tshivenda to English before the discourses could be analysed. Translation process might have led to omissions or inappropriate substitutions of the original rich material provided by the participants. In order to address that, I translated the English material back to Tshivenda because I had an advantage of speaking the same language and culture with the participants.

Thirdly, some disadvantages could also be noted for the procedure used in the present study. There was the question of the effort that the procedure involved. Setting up and interviewing six groups took a long time and delayed the start of the analysis phase because I had to spend so much time doing transcriptions from the audiotapes to obtain the texts for analysis. The transcripts left me with a great deal of material that needed much time to be read and analysed (Wilkinson, 2008). Discourse analysis can be extremely time-consuming and labour-intensive (Levett, 1989; Taylor, 2001). Sufficient time was required, not only for transcribing the interviews, but also for the wide preliminary reading demanded by the procedure. No matter how much time was demanded for the discourse analysis itself, additional time had to be allocated to meet all the requirements for the procedures.

Fourthly, the nature of this study means that the collected data and their interpretation could not justify generalisation to the whole community of Tshivenda-speaking women who have lost their husbands. That is because qualitative research by nature lacks generalisability of the findings (Kagee, 2004). Also the sample of this study (snowball sampling) was too small to represent the whole population (Struwig & Stead, 2001), but enough to produce a large pool of information for discourse analysis (Taylor, 2001). Although generalisation is not applicable in qualitative studies, I ensured some transferability of the findings by including in this thesis a chapter detailing the first level of interpretation (Chapter 6) and the transcriptions and translation of the focus group interviews (Appendix B). I collected and reported detailed descriptions of the data and engaged myself in a first level of interpretation of the findings before identifying discourses.

These limitations do not detract from the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Rather, it shows the complexity of the phenomena under investigation. The different themes identified as inherent in these participants' discourses are open to discussion. The analysis or evaluation of discourse is multifaceted, dynamic and subjective to some extent, and it does not cater for the collective group of individuals such as family members who might not be seen to be directly affected by the issue. However, in view

of the above, the anticipated contribution of these research findings to the scientific body of knowledge is that, since there is very little literature on the subject of bereavement rituals in traditional African communities, like Tshivenda, the findings will add to the available literature concerning women in the context of bereavement rituals.

8.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of what has been discussed, as well as the complex and subjective nature of the effect of death and bereavement rituals on the participants, it is recommended that further research should be done in the field of bereavement rituals. Such research can focus on discourses informing the reconstruction of the self after losing a husband in a traditional African family.

Since this study utilised focus group interviews, another study focusing on the bereavement of women can be conducted using in-depth individual interviews, which might bring new information to light that did not arise in the focus group interviews. Instead of thinking about and voicing their views within the context of the views of others, as it is the case in focus groups (Patton, 2002), individual interviews allow participants independence in terms of what they say.

Furthermore, the discourses identified from this study should be considered to help sensitise and inform people about the impact of bereavement rituals on the psychological well-being of bereaved women. It is also important for people to understand the positions women are subjected to by themselves, by others and by their religious-cultural heritage. People should not judge women by the way they behave, but understand them within the setting, for example, of losing a husband within a given socio-cultural and religious context.

Some of the participants in this study identified themselves as powerless and not responsible for their actions concerning rituals. It is, therefore, important that women who appear vulnerable after they lose husbands re-construct their positions and their

notions of issues like responsibility, power and womanhood that can assist them before and after the death of a husband. This can be done through empowering bereaved women, who still think they have no choice regarding their actions so that they understand the positions that they could accept or deny during the presence of their husbands and after their death. Bereaved women can also be empowered on issues pertaining to equality and dignity of each human person as advocated in the South African Constitution, especially when oppression of women is justified according to cultural practices and religious ideologies. When empowered they will or not perform the rituals not because they are forced to, but because they understand the role of the rituals in their lives.

Given the nature of the experiences that women go through when grieving the death of a husband, it is recommended that professionals who are consulted also consider the religious-cultural sphere that might be contributing towards the difficulties and pain that women in this situation experience. The findings from this project show that not only the participants should be assisted, but also the in-laws who were found to subject the participants to submissive and oppressive positions without power. This study could help professionals to understand the participants' experiences and how women's voices concerning their lives could be heard, and also the role of the rituals for those who believe in the significance of such rituals in their lives.

In addition to the above recommendations, there is still valuable and rich information in the transcripts of this study that can be used for studies with a different focus than this one. While this study focused on the discourses that inform the participants' talk about bereavement rituals, another focus could be on the way women reconstructed their life after losing a husband.

South Africa is a multi-cultural country and different cultures may have different ways of acting and interacting in the context of widowhood. Since this study only focused on the Tshivenda-speaking women, I also recommend that further studies around bereavement rituals in other cultures be conducted. Tshivenda might not be the only

culture dominated by patriarchal discourses and that positions women as weaker than men. Thus, a culture in which women, as weaker and powerless beings, are expected to observe all bereavement rituals that their counterparts (men) may not observe due to gender imbalances within the particular society (Fulton & Metress, 1995) poses further questions for research, especially when performance of rituals is not always dependent on one's will and choice.

8.7 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is imperative to conclude that the participants' perceptions and constructions of bereavement rituals are informed by the religious cultural discourse. For some African Christian and African traditional participants, mourning the death of a spouse and the construction of their realities concerning the bereavement rituals were intermingled with their submissiveness to the dominant patriarchal and oppressive norms that prevailed in this culture. Other participants managed to resist such norms.

The findings of this study will shed light on the pain that some Tshivenda-speaking widows experienced after the loss of a husband, especially widows who were, among other things, financially dependent on their husbands. People will possibly understand the way this pain leads to a need for healing through performance of bereavement rituals, within the context of the positions the participants enacted as they grieved the death of their husbands. It was evident in this study that widows occupied different positions during their mourning period. They either subjected themselves or were subjected by others to a powerless position. They accepted or rejected and resisted such positions and practiced their human rights even within the context of the death of the husband. It was also evident that, although there were widows who perceived bereavement rituals positively, others perceived the rituals negatively. Based on the findings of the study I can conclude that some widows performed the rituals because they were willing to do so and understood the significance of the rituals in their lives,

while others performed the rituals not because they were willing, but wanted to please and submit to their in-laws and culture.

It is therefore important to understand that bereavement rituals have immense therapeutic value to some bereaved Tshivenda speaking widows. People have to appreciate its value in the healing of the individual and the community after the death, especially for those who believe in the significance of the rituals in people's lives. It is also important to accommodate and respect those who do not believe in the bereavement rituals, as they do not perceive the role and value of the rituals in their lives.