

The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach

by

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PhD (Practical Theology)

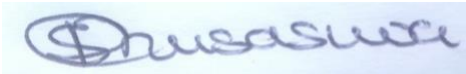
Supervisor: Prof. Dr Yolanda Dreyer

August 2022



Declaration

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the Doctor of Philosophy (Theology) (Practical Theology) at the University of Pretoria is my own original work and has not been previously submitted by me or for a degree at another university.



31/08/2022

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Supervisor Name and Signature

Date



Dedication

To my beloved husband Roy who prayed fervently and unceasingly for the project to be completed. I also dedicate this work to my children and grandchildren and my beloved young late sister Lucy Motsi who founded the Widows and Singles Association in the Anglican Church Harare Diocese and to my late father Peter M'shayi and my mother Lucia Ndoro who believed in the girl child's educational development.

Glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the source of my life.



Acknowledgement

I give honour and glory to my heavenly Father for strengthening me and making it possible to complete this thesis after undergoing a series of operations during the course of the project.

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I would like to acknowledge the financial support I received from University of Pretoria (Postgraduate Doctoral Research Bursary) for the duration of my study. I was able to visit places where my participants lived and observed how rituals were performed.



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While I gratefully acknowledges the assistance and encouragement from the above-mentioned people, I accept full responsibility for any shortcomings in this research paper and would accept any criticisms for its improvement to the glory of God Almighty.



Abstract

The study explores the dynamics of the role of women in the Zezuru death rites of passage. Data was gathered by means of a qualitative phenomenological research design. Narrative interviews were done with six participants and two focus groups were employed at a widow's retreat and a pastors' workshop. The main objective of the study was to examine the role of women in the Zezuru death rites of passage and the extent to which the church can contextualize and utilize those rites of passage to provide effective pastoral care to the bereaved Zezuru widows as they go through their prolonged grief process. The study found that the role of Zezuru women is indispensable in the performance of post-death rituals. They are active at every stage of the death rites of passage. On the other hand, the women, such as the bereaved widows who are closest to the deceased and whose lives are most affected by the death, are marginalized in many respects. While actively performing culturally prescribed roles they nevertheless have little to no decision-making authority in post-death rituals involving their loved ones. The study then explored Christian functional substitutes for some of the cultural practices that could be implemented by the church in its fulfilment of its pastoral role. These functional substitutes would then serve to achieve a better gender balance in post-death rituals while honouring the Zezuru culture and accommodating the sensibilities of Zezuru Christians. The study concludes with an exploration of how, from a pastoral care and counselling perspective, the faith community can facilitate healing, guiding, sustaining, nurturing, liberating and empowering with Zezuru widows. It recommends that functional substitutes over and above the *Nyaradzo* (Comforting service) and *kuvhura dombo* (tombstone unveiling) should be explored in future studies.



Abbreviations

ACB	African Customs and Beliefs
ARV	Antiretroviral
ATRs	African Traditional Religions
EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
ESV	English Standard Version. All Bible quotations given in this study is from this version
FGM	Focus Group Members
KGC	Kurova Guva Ceremony
TB	Tuberculosis.
UDACIZA	Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa
WLSAZ	The Women and Law in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe)
ZCB	Zezeru Customs and Beliefs
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference.
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
ZINATHA	Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association
ZTR	Zezeru Traditional Religion
ZWLA	Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association.



Glossary

<i>chimutsamapfihwa</i>	substitute wife given to a widower to replace wife who has died
<i>chirikadzi</i>	widow
<i>chirongo</i>	earthenware pot, for carrying and storing drinking water
<i>deuka</i>	spill
<i>doro remvura</i>	beer for ceremonial washing of tools used at burial
<i>donhodzo</i>	cooling ritual, meant to let the temper of the spirit 78to be cold before being called to the land of the living.
<i>fuko</i>	garment for the dead
<i>gara nhaka</i>	inherit a widow
<i>gata</i>	consultation to a diviner (n'anga) to learn the cause of death. It is a private ceremony held somewhere very far from the deceased's homestead to determine the cause of death.
<i>hakata</i>	stones and bones used by n'anga to determine cause of death during the divination ritual.
<i>huva</i>	an elevated platform where pots and plates are kept in the hut) in the deceased's hut. It is also known as <i>rukuva</i>
<i>kubata maoko</i>	offering sympathy in bereavement
<i>kudarika uta</i>	ritual to test widow's fidelity, done after 'kurova guva
<i>kudzora munhu</i>	with reference to death it is to control the dying person's posture.
<i>kurova guva</i>	home bringing ceremony.
<i>kurara parufu</i>	the wake.
<i>kupisa guva</i>	to burn the grave (being involved in sexual activities before kurova guva ceremony is performed



<i>kuridza mhere</i>	This has a double meaning. It means to formally inform the next of kin of someone's death through paying a "wailing token" in form of monetary or other payment. But it also means the actual wailing at a funeral by women mourners
<i>kusuma</i>	Represent, report to higher authority. Make preliminary remarks
<i>kwamupfiganebwe</i>	world whose doors are closed by a large stone
<i>mombe yenhevedzo</i>	beast slaughtered to accompany the deceased
<i>mombe yepfungaidzo</i>	meat offered to the spirit
<i>mudzimu</i>	ancestor
<i>mumvuri</i>	shade of dead person who dies grieved; shadow
<i>musha mutema</i>	literally means "the home is black" indicating that people are still in mourning
<i>mweya</i>	soul or spirit
<i>ngozi</i>	revenge afflicted by an aggrieved spirit Shona expression concerning death
<i>nhamo</i>	bereavement
<i>sahwira</i>	ritual friend
<i>tsvimborume</i>	man lost his wife by death (widower)
<i>vari kumhepo</i>	those in the winds or air
<i>vari pasi</i>	the dead; this word is also used to intimately refer to the ancestors illustrating the link with the land
<i>waenda</i>	has gone
<i>wapfuura</i>	has passed on to the next destination ahead of us
<i>washaika</i>	has been taken away but will be found
<i>watisiya</i>	has left us
<i>watorwa</i>	has been taken away, is therefore somewhere



<i>watsakatika</i>	has disappeared, is somewhere
<i>watungamira</i>	has gone ahead of us, has proceeded
<i>wazorora</i>	has rested, is asleep but will reactivate to resume life <i>activities</i>
<i>zumbani</i>	Lippia javanica plant



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivation

This study focuses on the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture in Zimbabwe. In order to provide sufficient background, the geographical, historical and cultural context of the Zezuru people will be described briefly.

Geographically, Zimbabwe is a landlocked country between the Zambezi River in the North, and the Limpopo River in the South. The neighbouring countries are South Africa to the south of the Limpopo River, Zambia to the north of the Zambezi River, Mozambique to the east and Botswana to the east. Zimbabwe is made up of ten provinces (see map below). This study focuses on the Mashonaland Central and Harare provinces where the Zezuru people are located.

Historically, Zimbabwe was a British colony called Rhodesia from 1890 to 1980. After independence, the country was renamed Zimbabwe after the Great Zimbabwe monument in the Masvingo Province. Due to colonialism, trade and population migration, Zimbabwe is a land of mixed races and tribes. According to the census of 2017, Mashonaland Central had a population of 1 441 944 (10.6% of the population), with the Harare province having a population of 1,973,906 (14.5% of the population)¹. It is in these two provinces where the Zezuru, one of the Shona tribes, are concentrated. Other Shona tribes are the Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, Ndau and the Rozvi. All these Shona tribes have slight cultural differences but there are similarities of language and social structure.

¹ Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency: Inter-censual demographic survey, 2017.

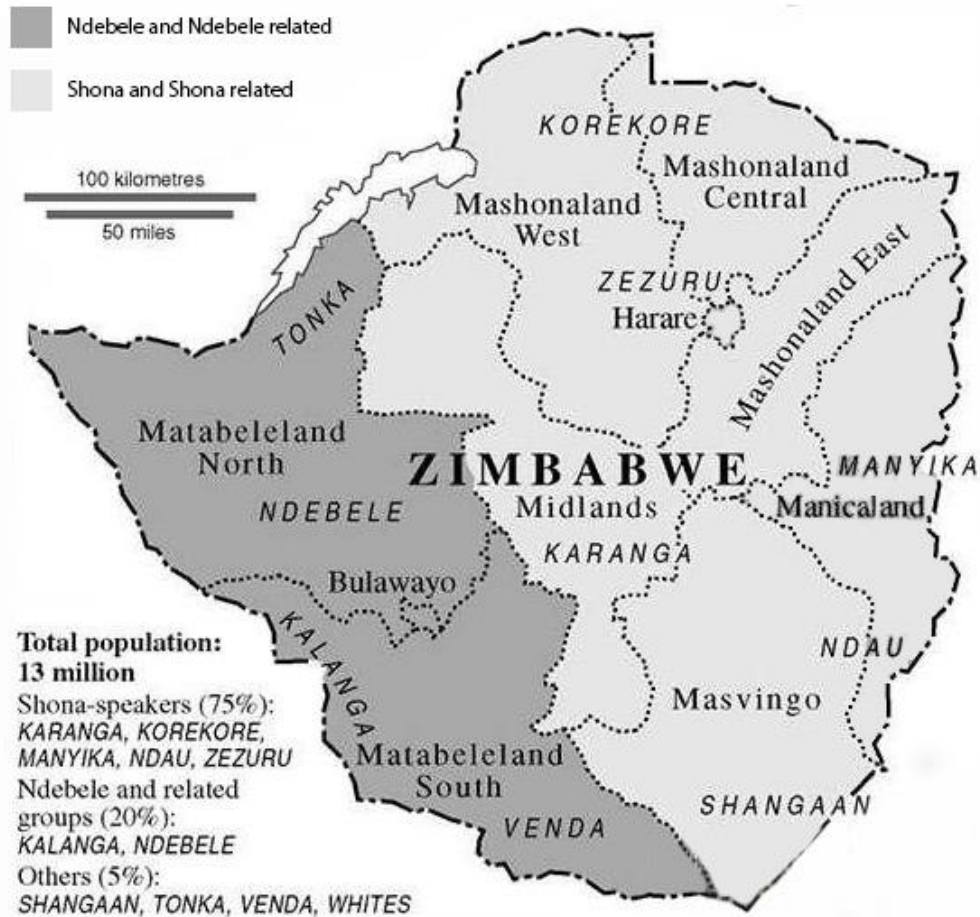


Figure 1.: Zimbabwe map showing Provinces and languages.
 Source: <http://www.mytravellingdays.com/en/culture/Zimbabwe>

The name Zezuru comes from *nzvimbo dzakakwirira dzepauzuru* which means people who live in high places. The Zezuru dialects are:

- Hera spoken in Buhera;
- Njaja spoken in Chivhu;
- Harawa spoken in Seke;
- Shawasha spoken in Chinamhora and Domboshava;

- Nhowe spoken in Murehwa and Marondera.

Historically, the Shona (including the Zezuru) people lived in shelters and ate what they hunted and gathered. This is depicted on the walls of caves in the areas where they dwelled, for example the Domboshava and Chinamhora caves in the Domboshava district. The Zezuru people value extended family relationships highly. In the rural areas today, a typical village consists of several families with the same ancestor. There are mostly not many 'foreigners' (*vauyi*, *vatorwa*) found among them. Each village has a headman (*sabhuku*) who is accountable to the chief (*mambo*) of the area. People do not own land. The land belongs to the *mambo* who allocates land to his people. In the past and to the present day, several homesteads form a village which is called *raini*. The homestead was/is normally built to accommodate the number of wives of the male head of the household. The hut of the male head of the household is called *dare* or *hozi*, that of the boys *gota* and that of the girls *nhanga*.

In terms of religion, the Zezuru people are monotheistic and their religion is complex. They believe in *Mwari* (God) and their lives are controlled by *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits). Only adult persons with children qualify to be *vadzimu* when they die (Zvarevashe 1997:44). When parents die, their progeny call them *vadzimu vangu* (my ancestral spirits). In Zezuru culture the *vadzimu* consist of patrilineal and matrilineal spirits. Communication with God (*Mwari*) goes through the ancestors. The Zezuru religious moral code forbids incest, murder, and eating the meat of their totem animal (*mutupo*). If the moral code is followed strictly, the ancestors will ask the high God (*Mwari*) to reward the people (Zvarevashe 1997:44).

When a person dies, there are different rituals for the different stages of bereavement in Zezuru culture. However, with the influence of colonialism and Christianity, the already complex matter has become even more complex.

Missionaries labelled traditional rites of passage as pagan, evil and uncivilized (Zvobgo1999&Kadenge1998:7). This left the Zezuru people with a conflicted reality. Becoming Christian and abandoning their cultural rites of passage could mean that they would lose their sense of identity. The undesirability of such an option caused some Christian believers of the Zezuru culture to practice their death rites of passage in secret to avoid being condemned by missionaries. Others abandoned missionary churches and founded the African Initiated Churches (AICs) in what Daneel (1987) calls their *quest for belonging*.

As an African Christian believer, I was motivated to investigate the dynamics involving the relationship between the Christian faith and the African Traditional Religion. As a Christian specializing in pastoral care and counselling, I took a particular interest in the how Zezuru death rites of passage contribute to care for the bereaved. At the same time, as a Zezuru woman I was further motivated to investigate the role of women in the death rites of passage. These motivations serve to accentuate the normally subjugated voices: that of African culture long considered inferior by early missionaries, and that of women who have suffered domination under patriarchy and androcentrism.

1.2 Clarification of terms

The following terms from academic fields such as missiology and from Zezuru culture, that will be utilized in the study, are now explained briefly:

- **Ancestor (*mudzimu*)**

An ancestor is a relative from whom one is descended, such as a parent or grandparent. In African cultures, it also indicated someone who has led a morally good life on earth (see Nyamiti 1984:15).

- **Ancestral spirit**

The ancestral spirit is the spirit of the departed person.

- **Contextualization**

Contextualization in this study refers to the understanding of the Christian faith in terms of a particular context. The point of departure is that all theology is contextual (Musasiwa 2007:66; see Kraft 1981:291).

- **Culture**

Culture is that complex entity that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, language, customs, rituals, and other capabilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of society (Taylor 1983:14). Culture is seen as the entire environment that is humanized by a given group. In terms of this study the Zezuru people of Zimbabwe is seen as such a cultural group. Culture is handed down from one generation to another within a given community. Culture, therefore, shapes the attitudes and behaviours of the community members.

- **Death (*rufu*)**

Death is the termination of those biological processes on which life depends. It is the beginning of decay. On a transcendental level, it signifies the passage into another reality, an invisible world (Banana1991:2). Death in the Zezuru culture, in a Zimbabwean society, south of the Zambezi is an event which is associated with numerous rituals.

- **Death rituals**

Death rituals are how people express how they come to grips with that permanent separation of the living and the living-dead. They are expression of human interdependence and of communion between the living and the living-dead (Banana

1999:27). Mbiti (1970:76) points out that they enhance the mutual relationship between the living and the living-dead.

- **Functional substitute**

A functional substitute in this study refers to taking a deeply rooted non-Christian cultural form and giving it new Christian content, meaning and purpose (Kraft 1981:68).

- **Grief**

Grief is a universal mental process set in motion by the loss of a significant person. The process is known as bereavement. It is also a process of self-healing and a way to recovering from the loss. It is a normal response to the loss of any significant person, object, or opportunity (Collins 2007:466).

- **Guva**

Guva refers to the grave. Another term used by the Zezuru people is *imba* (hut) as the place in which the deceased dwell.

- ***Kurova guva* or *kugadzira mudzimu***

Kurova guva is a ritual that is performed after a death. The aim of the ritual is to facilitate the spirit of the deceased to come home after having wandered in the unknown for a year (Nhariwa 1966, Gundani 1998, Mararike 2011).

- ***Nyaradzo***

Nyaradzo is a comforting or a consolation ceremony which is enacted with the aim to console the loved-ones of the deceased. It takes place about six weeks after the burial.

- **Rite**

Rites are a form of religious expression consisting of formal customary practices.

- **Rites of passage**

Rites of passage are a category of rituals that mark the passage of a person through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and the cultural experiences with biological destiny: birth, reproduction, and death. This study focuses on death rites of passage.

- **Traditional beliefs**

Traditional beliefs are handed down by ancestors to subsequent generations.

1.3 Research problem

With the coming of colonialism and Christianity many Zezuru Christians experienced tension between their cultural identity and their Christian faith. Nowhere was this tension more pronounced than in the sphere of post-death rituals which gave Zezuru people their cultural identity. These rituals were labelled as pagan and unacceptable by the missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa (Kamwendo 2016:71). This study aims to investigate the function of Zezuru rites of passage with a specific focus on the involvement of Zezuru Christian women in these death rituals. The investigation will include the extent to which the Zezuru death rituals facilitate the process of women going through the grief healing process such that the church can contextualize and utilize those rites of passage to provide effective pastoral care to the bereaved widows. The study, in particular, utilizes the concept of pastoral care for the bereaved widows to investigate the possibility of bringing the Zezuru culture and the Christian faith into dialogue in what Musasiwa (2002:68) calls 'the quest for identity'. Recovering the agency of the Zezuru women, particularly widows, in the

death rites of passage as well as their identity as Zezuru Christians forms the double thrust of this study. The study seeks to uncover the extent to which the contextualization of the Zezuru rites of passage for pastoral care can also serve make the church more relevant to Zezuru women.

1.4 Aim and objectives

The primary aim of the study is to investigate the role of women in the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture and to explore ways in which the church can utilize aspects of these death rituals to achieve effective pastoral care for the bereaved. In order to gain an understanding of Zezuru death rites of passage, their significance for the bereaved is investigated. The role played by Zezuru women in these post-death rituals is of particular interest and significance. The meanings and practices with regard to Zezuru death rites of passage and their significance for Christian believers will be explored in order to ascertain whether and how pastoral care can include and utilize Zezuru death rites of passage in pastoral care.

The objectives of the study are the following:

- to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics, significance and value of Zezuru death rites of passage for the bereaved;
- to explain how, in the Zezuru cultural context, women understand death, grief and mourning;
- to employ a phenomenological narrative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the functions of death rites of passage among the Zezuru women of Zimbabwe;
- to present the narratives and give a voice to respondents from different areas in Mashonaland Central and Harare;

- to examine functional substitutes for traditional Zezuru death rites of passage that can make the church pastorally relevant to Zezuru women while remaining true to the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

1.5 Methodology

The very nature of this study calls for an application of qualitative methodology. The two characteristics of qualitative methodology identified by Leedy and Ormrod (2015:270) are applicable. Firstly, a qualitative methodology typically focuses on phenomena that are occurring or have previously occurred in natural settings – that is, in the ‘real world. The roles of women in the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture is such a phenomenon occurring in the lived experience of Zezuru people. Secondly, such a methodology involves capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena. The role of women in the Zezuru death rites of passage manifest such complexity over a period stretching for a year beginning with pre-burial rites and proceeding to burial and post-burial rites. This complexity will become evident in the following chapters of this study. These two features justify the choice of a qualitative approach. The theoretical framework that informs the study will now be explained.

1.5.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the following four concepts:

- the concept of ‘the living-dead’ as explained by Mbiti (1969:83, 1970:264) and Nyamiti (1984:15);
- the concept of ‘contextualization’ (Musasiwa 2002:22-23, Musasiwa 2007:66-71; Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:33, West 2001:595-610, Kadenge 1998:254 and Draper 2001:149-168) in the interface between the Zezuru rites of passage and the Christian faith;

- interculturality and inculturation (Raj 2009);
- the nature of pastoral care according to Clebsch and Jaekle (1994:4) and Lartey (2003).

The choice of these theoretical perspectives and proponents is further motivated below.

1.5.1.1 The living-dead

Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1991) popularized the concept of the 'living-dead' in his African theologizing. In African cultures death does not mark the end of a person's existence, but rather ushers the departed into another realm of existence. From this point of view, the departed continue to be active in the lives of the living as an 'ancestor' or 'living-dead' (Mbiti 1970:264 & Nurnberger 2007). Nyamiti (1984:15) explains that those who have departed continue to be conscious of what happens on earth and remain very much attached to their families Nyamiti (1984:15). In the spiritual state, they are even more powerful than they were in their living bodies. They use their enhanced powers to safeguard the interests of their living family members, especially with regard to children and property.

This study explores the significance of this 'living-dead' concept for Zezuru death rites of passage. Various African scholars (see Mbiti 1970:111; Nyamiti 1984:15; Bediako 1990:38; Banana 1991:27; Shoko 2007: 435-456; Mwandayi 2011; Rangata 2017:2) point out that in Africa 'community' is not broken up by death. The living continues to relate to the 'living-dead'. If deceased persons die while upset or angry their spirit would have to be appeased so that they do not use their enhanced powers to take revenge on the living. They should be honoured as the living-dead even more than when they were alive. The ceremonies and rituals are therefore performed also to benefit the living. The rituals signify that the living and the dead are part of the same community (Mbiti 1991:122-123). They offer services to each



another. The spirits offer protection to the living and the living remember their dead by performing the necessary rituals. For instance, the Zezuru summon the family spirit for protection. Mbiti (1991:122-123) in particular explains that by ritualizing death, people dance it away. They drive death away and renew their own life, after death has deprived them of a loved-one. The rituals constitute a celebration of humanity's victory over death. Mbiti (1969:83) further explains that the ancestral spirits (the living-dead) enjoy a state of immortality while they are personally remembered by name by their descendants.

These rites are not performed for thieves, murderers, witches or other trouble makers in the community. They are also not performed for those who took their own life (Mbiti 1991:179). This belief system therefore also functions to keep the behaviour of the living in check. Apart from the ethical implications, this study also investigates the pastoral implications of the Zezuru rites of passage. Firstly, the study will examine the extent to which they help the living cope with loss and bereavement. The extent to which such rituals facilitate closure in the bereavement process will be examined. Secondly, the death rites of passage in Zezuru culture will be brought into discussion with the grief theory of Kubler- Ross (2005), specifically with regard to reaching the state of acceptance following death of a loved one.

1.5.1.2 Contextualization

The idea of contextualization pertains to how the context in its various dimensions and Christian theology relate to each other. All theology is contextual insofar as it is consciously or unconsciously influenced by its context, whether that context is social, ecclesiastical, geographic or historical (Musasiwa 2007:66). This necessitates a theological method that consciously focuses on and utilizes the context as part of the theological process itself (Frostin 1988:2-20). For Bevans (2002:3), the Christian faith cannot be understood outside of the context in which it is lived. Contextualization



then becomes the very essence of Christian theology. Musasiwa (2007:66, 68) concludes that contextualization is, therefore, a *biblical, theological* and *missiological* imperative. This study argues that contextualization is also a *pastoral* imperative.

The dialogical view of contextualization facilitates a process where Zezuru rites of passage can lead to a new understanding of the Christian faith for the Zezuru people. Conversely, the Christian faith should lead to a new interpretation of the Zezuru rites of passage. In Chapter 5 the study employs the idea of 'functional substitutes' (Musasiwa 2007:69) to explore the interdependence of the Christian faith and the Zezuru rites of passage. Functional substitutes affirm the intention behind the Zezuru death rites of passage while replacing the cultural forms that some Christian believers consider to be incompatible with their Christian faith. A biblical example of this is what happened in Athens in Acts 17:16-34. Paul affirmed the religiosity of the Athenians, but at the same time substituted the unknown god the Athenians were worshipping with the true God that he proclaimed. In a similar fashion, the affirmation of the death rites of passage can go hand in hand with functionally substituting cultural practices with Christian practices. Such dialogical contextualization is the point of departure of this study. This will be worked out in Chapter 5.

1.5.1.3 Interculturality

This study focuses on the complex interaction within a groups of people who have been influenced by different cultures and social contexts – a process known as interculturality (see Lartey 2003:70-72). Gender is a factor in the death rites of passages in Zezuru culture. One of the relevant aspects that has to considered when it comes to gender, is patriarchal and matriacal domination. The people who are the main focus of this study are also subject to different religious influences. On the one hand there is African Traditional Religion and on the one hand the Christian faith.

This study concurs with Lartey's (2003:72-73) point of view with regard to interculturality, namely that 'discussion is informed at every point by experiences, thoughts and perspectives from different cultures'. However, while giving adequate attention to the different voices within this cultural interaction, the study will inevitably reflect my own stance as a Zezuru Christian woman.

1.5.1.4 The nature of pastoral care

Pastoral care has always been seen as one of the basic tasks of the people of God. Pastoral care is done on behalf of Jesus Christ, so that the presence of God becomes relevant to the needs of society in general (Herbert 2015:10). In this study, the focus is on making the presence of God felt as Christian Zezuru women go through the process of bereavement. This study employs the model developed by Clebsch and Jaekle (1994). They define pastoral care as 'helping acts done by representative Christians directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled people' (Clebsch & Jaekle 1994:321). To this model of pastoral care to which Lartey (2003: 684-719) adds three more functions of pastoral care, namely nurturing, liberating and empowering.

Representative Christian believers act for Christ on behalf of the whole faith community (Taylor 1983:30). They facilitate people to build their strength through a ministry of presence. They show that the Christian faith at its core is a caring faith as demonstrated by the Advent story, the Easter story and biblical teaching in general. Advent is the story of how God so loved the world that God sent Jesus (John 3:16) to be the good shepherd who cares for the sheep (John 10). The Easter story tells of Jesus who cares so much that he gave his life for God's cause and for God's people. The same God who loves the world has commanded love as the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-40). This love should be expressed in and through pastoral care. The following New Testament passages exhort the need for 'one anothering':

- John 13:34: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.
- Romans 12:10: Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.
- Galatians 6:2: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11: Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.

Representative Christians therefore become agents of pastoral care on behalf of the wider faith community. They mirror the true nature of the Christian faith, namely to care for wounded and hurting people through what Clebsch and Jaekle (1994:321) call 'helping acts directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled people'. This study examines the function of 'helping acts' as they relate specifically to bereavement among the Zezuru women. One aim is to explore the extent to which representative Christians can enhance the pastoral care functions articulated by Clebsch and Jaekle by utilizing functional substitutes.

Death in the family leaves loved-ones troubled, wounded, confused and perplexed. Zezuru women participate in various death rites of passage aimed at both coping with loss and regaining wholeness. This study investigates whether death rites of passage could achieve the seven functions articulated by Clebsch and Jaekle and augmented by Lartey. It argues that representatives of the Christian faith can bring the additional resource of faith to facilitate the process of healing and coming to wholeness after having sustained a severe loss.

1.5.2 Methodological framework

The point of departure of this qualitative study is what practical theologian Emmanuel Larney (2006:89) calls 'pastoral study as liberating intercultural praxis'. It is liberating in the sense that it 'privileges the situated, contextual experience and the analysis of that experience in its multi-layered and multi-factored reality'. Liberation is often necessary in social and cultural contexts where certain individuals or groups are confined by cultural views and practices. Larney (2003:700-701) puts it as follows: "Dominant groups in society may suppress the views and expressions of other groups through coercion, threat and intimidation or else marginalizing or trivializing them."

In this study a liberating framework privileges the contextual experience of Zezuru people in general, and women in Zezuru culture who have to cope with death, in particular. The study explores the value of the death rites of passage in that culture. These experiences were either trivialized or condemned by Christian missionaries who planted churches among the Zezuru people. The approach of the study is intercultural with the aim to reflect 'the complex nature of the interaction between people who have been influenced by different cultures, social contexts and origins' (Larney 2003:70-72). The interaction between Zezuru people of the Christian faith and Zezuru people who maintain pre-colonial and pre-missionary cultural practices will be scrutinised with the aim to come to a fruitful and enriching dialogue and outcome.

Larney (2006:89-90) identifies the following four methodological phases in a practical theological investigation that aims at liberating intercultural praxis:

- **An analysis of the contextual experience**

The analysis of experience emphasizes the situatedness and complexity of the experience that is investigated. In this study, it is the experience of women who participate in cultural death rites of passage.

- **Theological analysis**

Theological resources are brought into the conversation. Questions of faith that arise from the contextual experience are identified and discussed from a theological perspective.

- **A demonstration of the dialectical nature of faith and theology**

The dialectical and indeed dialogical relationship between firstly the faith traditions of the African Traditional Religion and Christianity, and secondly between the faith traditions and the situated experience, will be demonstrated.

- **Reflective practice**

When it comes to reflective practice, the focus of this study is on the practice of Christian pastoral care with those who have experienced bereavement and are going through the process of grief and mourning.

This qualitative study is a phenomenological investigation with a multiple case study design (see Leedy and Ormrod 2010:137). A qualitative methodology is suitable for the investigation of the effect of death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture because it creates space for an appreciation of the values, feelings, opinions and perspectives of participants who are dealing with bereavement (see Mouton & Marias 1989:157). Multiple cases provide a richness of collaborative data. Data is gathered by means of narrative interviews with selected participants and focus group reflections. The aim of a phenomenological study, according to Marino (1990), is to

examine human experiences through the descriptions provided by people involved. In this case the Zezuru women and their lived experiences as they participate in the death rites of passage of their culture is the focus. The goal of the phenomenological study is to describe the *meaning* that the experiences hold for each subject.

The empirical part of the study is conducted in Mashonaland Central and Harare, Zimbabwe. Though the Zezuru people are scattered throughout Zimbabwe, this is the area where they come from originally and are still the most concentrated (see Figure 1). Since I live in Harare the area also presents me with the opportunity to carry out the field research with a greater level of convenience and affordability than the choice of other locations within the country would have been. This geographical area has the further advantage that both Zezuru people who live in a rural area and those who have been influenced by urbanization are accessible. The study is specifically interested in the experience of women in the Zezuru culture. From a religious perspective the study focuses on the interaction between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion as practiced by the Zezuru people.

Limitations of the study can include that people might not be open and forthcoming with regard to certain important rituals they practice. On the one hand, these can be regarded as secret of their traditional customs. On the other hand, they could fear the possible judgmental attitude of Christian believers. These possible limitations will be ameliorated through patient relationship building as well as the use of the multiple data-gathering methods.

In this study information will be collected through using various complementary tools. Existing research on death rites of passage in African cultures will be explored. The focus is on how the Zezuru in the Shona culture relate to the living-dead and the

ritual performances related to the stages of bereavement until closure has been reached.

The empirical part of the study will encompass interviews with six participants who will be asked to relate their narratives as Zezuru women who have been through the stages of bereavement and participated in the death rites of passage of the culture. For this purpose, the interviews will be mainly open-ended and unstructured (see Collin et al 2000:176). The six participants with an age range of between 35 and 80 years all reside in Mashonaland Central and the Harare Province of Zimbabwe. Through a combination of purposive, convenience (see Leedy & Ormrod 2010:212), and key informant sampling (Strydom & Delpont 2011:394), the participants will be selected as follows:

- two from Bindura, the main town of the province Mashonaland Central;
- two from the Goromonzi area which covers the Domboshawa, Chishawasha and Seke districts;
- two from Harare.

In addition to the group of bereaved women, two ministers of religion, one male and one female will be purposively selected for an interview to ascertain their professional standpoint on the matter. A total of eight people will therefore participate in the interview section of the study.

In order to reduce the sensitization effect of my presence as interviewer on the participants, I will first establish a relationship of trust (see Delpont and Roestenburg 2011:181). The aim is that they will feel less inhibited during the narrative interviewing process. The interviews will be done in their home environment in order to afford them maximum comfort. Notes will be taken and the interviews will be

recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews will be transcribed for convenience and the transcripts will be utilized in the phase of processing the data. Participants will be invited to tell their story and describe their experiences and the meaning the rituals have had for them. The six women participants will be encouraged to tell their own story in their own words and describe their experiences with minimal interruption from the interviewer (Daniel 2008:147). The method underscores the approach that the participants are experts of their own culture (White 1987:148). The information gleaned from the empirical part of the investigation is brought into dialogue with the theoretical insights. The aim of the study is to construct functional substitute rituals for Christian believers that serve to fulfil the function of the Zezuru bereavement rituals and their significance in the lives of the women.

1.6 Existing research and the research gap

There is some existing research on death and mourning in African cultures and how different cultures perform death and post-death rituals. Zhuwao (1990) focuses on the aspect of *kurova guva* among the VaShawasha people. Shoko (2007), Betram (1992), Gundani (1998), Sitshebo (2000), and Kamwendo (2008) contribute from a Roman Catholic perspective in response to post-death rituals among the Shona people. Siamonga (2016) wrote extensively on the burial customs and post-death rituals in Zimbabwe. Methodist Zimbabwean scholars have pointed out that their denomination has remained largely silent in the face of cultural death rituals that are often practiced in secret (see Thorpe 1951; Graff 1988; Zvobgo 1990; Banana 1991). Kadenge (1998) in particular reflected on death and mourning rituals among the Zezuru people with an emphasis on the attitude and response of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.



The contribution of this study is three-fold. Firstly, it focuses on the experience of women in the death rites of passage. Other studies mostly took a more general and ecclesial approach. Secondly, this study utilizes the concept of functional substitutes to make indigenous post-death rituals more meaningful and acceptable to the many conservative Christians who otherwise fear that such practices could compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thirdly, the pastoral approach of this study aims to combine Zezuru death rites of passage with the seven functions of pastoral care as articulated by Clebsch and Jaekle (1994:4) and Larney (2003: 684-719) in order to design a model for effective pastoral guidance of Zezuru women who go through the process of grief and mourning. The aim is that the women should benefit from the richness of Christian pastoral guidance and the valuable aspects of cultural rituals, rather than to be torn between the two, and experience anxiety and guilt.

1.7 Relevance of the study

The study aims to contribute to a meaningful merger of the valuable aspects of cultural death and post-death rituals and a Christian pastoral approach to death and bereavement. This contribution could then be utilized by ministers of religion of different denominations to guide their parishioners through the process of bereavement in order to achieve meaningful closure. The study will show how death rites of passage or their functional substitutes can be utilized in this regard. The results of the study with regard to the therapeutic role of the Zezuru death rites of passage can also be utilized in family therapy and pastoral care and counselling. The study aims to achieve dialogical contextualization. Cultural practices and the Christian faith can mutually enrich each other and the recipients of pastoral care can live integrated lives, being both fully Christian and fully African.

Christian churches can benefit from a bridging of the gap between Christian beliefs and cultural practices. The Christian church has historically been seen as a foreign

institution which imposes Western ideas and practices on African people while denigrating their African culture. The findings of this study have the potential to bring Christianity and African culture together in a more constructive way in a pastoral setting. Zezuru Christians can benefit from a greater harmony between both their heritages. They will gain a Christian affirmation that their departed ones are indeed what Mbiti refers to as the living-dead. 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 says:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

1.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in research include the following: protection from harm, informed consent, debriefing participants, the right to privacy, no deception to subjects, appropriate actions and competence of researcher, and the release or publication of findings (see Strydom 2011; William 2006; McBurney 2001; Neuman 2000; Corey et al 1993). Physical or emotional harm should not be done to participants in the process of research (see Strydom 2011:115; Babbie 2007:27). This study protects the confidentiality of participants. Their real names are not used. They chose their own pseudonyms. Informed consent forms were completed by all. They were informed that they could withdraw from participation at any point.

Adequate information on the goal of the study and how much time would be required of them was provided. Review sessions gave participants the opportunity to process after the sessions. Problems generated by the research experience were addressed (McBurney 2001:122). Debriefing took place individually.

1.9 Chapter outline

In Chapter 2 the role of women in the death and post-death rituals in the Zezuru culture are discussed in order to develop an understanding of the Zezuru death rites of passage and their significance for the bereaved.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the death rites of passage among Zezuru Christians. This chapter examines the interplay between the concept of the living-dead as espoused especially by Mbiti (1969) Nyamiti (1984) and other African theologians on the one hand and the concept of contextualization (see Musasiwa 2007; Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989) on the other hand. Contextualization in relation to the Zezuru understanding of the living-dead is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the narrative interviews with the six selected participants. The method of multiple case studies is explained and motivated.

In Chapter 5 the pastoral role of the faith community in the context of the Zezuru death rites of passage is discussed. The pastoral dimension is explored in greater depth by applying the seven functions of pastoral care as articulated by Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) and Lartey (2003) to pastoral care with widows in the Zezuru culture. In Chapter 6 the findings and recommendations of the study are presented.



CHAPTER 2

WOMEN AND DEATH RITUALS IN ZEZURU CULTURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates Zezuru death rites of passage with a specific focus on the role of women. In Zezuru culture there are pre-burial, burial and post-burial rituals. All these rituals are based on the Zezuru understanding of the relationship between the living and those whom Mbiti (1969) calls the 'living-dead'. The chapter first presents an explication of the understanding of death and the relationship between the living and the living-dead in the Zezuru culture. The significance of these rituals will be explained in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Death and the 'living-dead' in the Zezuru culture

Kubler-Ross and Kessler (1998:204) express what could be seen as a typical Western view of death when they describe it as a 'heart-breaking *dividing line*' marking the irrevocable separation between 'time with' a loved one and 'time without' them. In contrast to this, the African view of death, shared also by the Zezuru people, is that of a *continuation* of existence on the part of the departed and their continuing relationship with the living. Banana (1991:27) puts it as follows: 'Death is not death; it is a vehicle from ontology of the visible beings to the ontology of the invisible. Death is part of life; it is a gateway to eternity.' In this view death does not end life. It does not sever the bond between the living and the dead (Dickson 1984:194-195). Banana (1991:27) characterizes the dead in African ontology as 'living-timeless' while Mbiti (1969) calls them the 'living-dead'.



This African view of death is amply demonstrated in the Zezuru ontological world. The Zezuru people, as in other African cultures, view death as a means of entering into the higher spirit world. In a discussion with a Roman Catholic priest, he explained that the Zezuru traditional belief centers around what happens when someone dies, namely *chinoora inyama mweya hauori* (what perishes is the flesh but the spirit is immortal). This belief is evident in the death and burial rituals as described in subsequent discussions. Whereas Kubler-Ross and Kessler (1998:204) see death as a dividing line between the living and the dead, the Zezuru people believe that death is not the annihilation of life, but a departure to the spirit world. This is illustrated by the following Zezuru sayings pertaining to death and after-life:

- *vari mumhepo*: those who now exist in the 'air' or spirit world;
- *atisiya*: the person has departed from us, but is expected to come back later;
- *waenda*: the person has gone;
- *apfuura*: the person has passed on;
- *atungamira*: the person has led the way;
- *azorora*: the person rests
- *tamuchengeta*: we have 'kept' (buried) the person.

The Zezuru view of death is, however, paradoxical. Although death is viewed as a gateway to a new life, it is not regarded as acceptable and inevitable. This is why some post-death rituals have the purpose of spiritually diagnosing the cause of death in order for the living to taking remedial action to prevent a further occurrence of death. The following Shona sayings show a negative view of death:

- *nhamo*: death as deep trouble;
- *kufa*: death as cessation of life;
- *kuparara*: death as demise;

- *kuridza mhere*: death announced by wailing;
- *rufu runoparadza*: death is destructive and takes away loved ones.

However, these negative ideas with regard to death among the Zezuru people are far fewer than the positive ones. They are a recognition of the loss of loved-ones in the sharing of this earthly life. This deep sense of loss, as in all cultures, calls for pastoral involvement for support on the path to healing. In Zezuru culture the pastoral approach to supporting the bereaved, will have to include knowledge of the death rituals and their significance to people. The negative view of death in the Zezuru Traditional Religion (ZTR) stems from the idea that death is unnatural, that no one should die. Human beings should live forever. Even the death of a very old person is not seen as simply natural. It is attributed to negative forces such as witchcraft, offended spirits of the person's own family (*mudzimu*) or avenging spirits from outside the family (*ngozi*).

In an interview (July 2020), Tafadzwa from the Domboshava area, 30 kilometers from Harare, expressed the paradoxical Zezuru view of death as follows:

I see death as caused by some external forces of witches, spirits or curses. But one thing that pleases me is that death is a passage to the after-life and it is a continuation of life from the physical to the spiritual realm. It is the *midzimu* (ancestral spirits) who look after me and my family.

In the Zezuru Traditional Religion (ZTR) it is believed that when people die, they transcend into the realm of the ancestors, which is a higher realm than the physical realm on earth. That is why people combine their sorrow over the death of the loved-one with the belief that death is not the end and that the departed continues to live in a different realm.

The following is an examination of how the Zezuru people relate to departed family members. Ancestors (*vadzimu* – plural) are the spirits of the deceased, believed to be ‘living-dead’. They continue to influence the lives of the living descendants in this world. Through rituals, the ancestors communicate with their living descendants (see Smith 1950:38). Nyamiti (1984:15) and Bediako (1990:38) emphasize that in order to qualify as an ancestor, a person would have had to have lived a morally upright and exemplary life. However, Wanamaker (1997:287) disputes the notion of a moral qualification as the condition of ancestorhood. The Zezuru belief that *wafa wanaka* (death renders someone good), supports Wanamaker’s notion. Just as a foolish person is accepted as a family member when alive, a family relationship is never severed by death.

Ancestorhood is not the preserve of men. Although both patrilineal and matrilineal ancestors are influential in the family affairs, the matrilineal ancestors are the most important. It is generally believed that the matrilineal ancestors are more protective of the living. A mother in real life is protective and vigilant (*kusunga mbereko*). She will not leave a child to its own devices. One of the participants put it as follows: ‘If other malicious spirits defeat one’s matrilineal ancestors, then one has no more protection (*midzimu inenge yadimbura mbereko*). When the matrilineal ancestors are angered there is nothing that can stop them from inflicting punishment on the family.’ When one is injured, one would cry, *maiwe!* (o, mother!). The underlying belief is that the mother has either caused the injury or allowed it to happen. Therefore, if one is protected by the matrilineal ancestor, no evil can befall that person unless the matrilineal ancestor opens a door to it (*avhura musuwo*). The female ancestors of the mother’s lineage are interested in the well-being of women and children and have an influence on child bearing (*kubara vana*). Zezuru women do not pray directly to the male line ancestors since they are not of the same agnatic group as their husbands. For example, a father of a family has four *vadzimu*. The high role of

matrilineal ancestors lends weight to the role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe.

Burial rites should have been performed properly in order for someone to become an ancestor. Father Kumbirai (1973:127) puts it as follows: 'The spirit will wander in the forest until that time when the living hands it over (*kusuma*) to the ancestors through *kurova guva* (bringing home) ceremony. The *kusuma kuvadzimu* (prayer through ancestors) is a form of prayer pronounced to inform the ancestors of the forthcoming ceremony. There is an ascending hierarchy of ancestors, beginning with the one who died and was installed most recently. Eventually they reach the status of great grand ancestor (Omorieg 2007:56). The living plead with the ancestors saying, "Do not let your child go on wandering about the forests, take him/her today and live with him/her and let him/her come back to us." Death is an event in Zezuru culture that is associated with numerous rituals. The rituals are done by designated individuals and care is taken to do things *muChivanhu chedu* or *mutsika dzedu* (in the Zezuru traditional way). It is also through the rituals that the ancestors communicate with their living descendants.

Matrilineal and patrilineal ancestors are expected to care for their own descendants. The family members in turn owe respect and loyalty to the ancestors. The living and the living-dead remain one family. One respondent explained it as follows: '*Tinochengetwa nevakatibereka chete-chete unoreverera kumidzimu yako kwete kunevatorwa. Hapana wakapfugamira mutorwa* (We are cared for by those who gave birth to us.)' People are not required to pay their respects to the ancestors of other families or even partake in their feasts. At any *bira* (ancestor celebratory feast) people cannot share in the food dedicated to an ancestor of another family. Mbiti (1976:76) provides the following explain with regard to the various death rites of passage: 'When these acts are directed towards the living-dead, they are a symbol

of fellowship, a recognition that the departed are still members of their human families and tokens of respect and remembrances for the living-dead.’ According to Ela (2001:19), ‘the presence of ancestors is authentically experienced as the participation of the invisible world in the world of the living’. The reverse is also true. The presence of ancestors is authentically experienced as the participation of the living in the world of invisible world. That is what the following ceremonies and rituals are all about. The role of women in these ceremonies and rituals will be seen to be particularly significant.

2.3 The pre-burial rituals

The pre-burial rituals begin with the preparation of the body (*kugadzira chitunha*), the wailing (*kuridza mhere yekuchema*) and the funeral wake (*muwonekedzano weumbowo*). Urbanization has necessitated some modification of the practices. The following is a description of the rural practices which are more typical of Zezuru culture. The aim is to highlight the role of women in the various stages of ritual. The rituals begin immediately after death.

2.3.1 *Kugadzira chitunha* (the preparation of the body)

The *kupeta munhu* is performed in all Zezuru areas by women who make sure the eyes of the deceased are closed properly. Then the body is ritually washed, starting with the head because at birth the person’s head normally comes out first (Banana 1998:38). Then all the orifices, the nose, ears, mouth and private parts, are plugged. The body is anointed with oil, dressed in a clean robe and arranged into a reposed state, with hands folded and joined on the chest. Lastly the legs are fastened together and tied with a strip of white cloth. When all this has been done, the body (*mutumbi*) is laid out (*kurariswa*) on the *chikuva* (altar). The actual preparation of the body by the women goes by the Zezuru term *kupeta munhu*. The women take meticulous care and make sure there is no red linen (*jira dzvuku*) or blanket. No

covering should have even a tinge of red because *chitsvuku chinoshura ngozi* (the colour red can cause the spirit of the departed to become vengeful). One of the participants explained that, in their belief system, covering the body in anything red, would invite *mudzimu* (the ancestral spirit) to come back and spill blood (*kudeura ropa*). After the preparation the *sahwira* (ritual friend) leads the women in the clapping of hands and ululating in the traditional way. Only when this initial ritual has been completed does one of the male elders give permission to the women to wail (*kuridza mhere*). This is when the men assemble to arrange for *nhume* (the messenger) to go and inform the key relatives and friends, that their loved-one has died.

2.3.2 Pre-burial mourning (*kuchema mufi*)

Women also play a central role in the pre-burial mourning rites as they do in the preparation of the body. After the announcement of the funeral, people begin arriving in order to console the bereaved family (*kubata maoko*). The women *sahwiras* (ritual friends) and the *varooras* (daughters-in-law) ensure that fiber bands are tied on the arms of close relatives of the dead. That makes it easier for guest mourners to recognize who the close relatives are so that they shake their hands to express their condolences.

During this mourning ceremony women bring gifts in the form of groceries, such as containers of mealie-meal to be used for making *sadza* (maize meal), vegetables, tomatoes, and bundles of fire-wood. Men would usually contribute thick logs of wood to be used in the outside fire-place. These gifts are used for the celebratory farewell to the deceased (*kuonekana nemufi*). All gifts for *chema* (to bid the deceased farewell) from various mourners are recorded in a notebook. No matter how small the gift, the name of the donor must be announced and recorded. The gifts express the particular relationship they had with the deceased. All gifts are received by



muzukuru (nephew or niece) who will use the following formulae as they repeat the words of the presenters:

- *Chema yangu iyi, ndirikuonekana newe, ndini ...* (Here is my *chema*, it is I ... who is saying farewell).
- *Chema yandakuendesa nayo iyi, misodzi yangu iyi' ndini ...* (With this *chema*, I show my grief, it represents my tears. My name is ...).
- *Ndini ..., usazoti handina kukuchema, ndini ndati chienda.* (It is I, ..., do not say later I never bade you farewell).

The *vakwasha* (sons in law) do not speak for themselves. The *muzukuru* (niece of the deceased) does it for them. One participant gave an example of what happened when her mother died. Her *muzukuru* represented her husband by saying: *Wonaika nhai vatete, mukwasha wenyu Museyamwa abvisa nhongo yake yechema* (See, my aunt, your son-in-law has given you a goat as a condolence gift).

The pre-burial mourning rituals includes the funeral wake (*kurindira mufi*). The Zezuru tradition requires that the body of the deceased spends a night in the home of the deceased. Normally the body is laid in the hut on the *chikuva* (altar). This is a sign of respect. It also gives relatives and friends sufficient time to perform the necessary mourning rituals (Kadenge 1998:86). If it is a husband who has died, the wife has to sit at the feet of the body and the mother of the deceased at the head. One participant explained the meaning of this sitting arrangement as follows:

Mukadzi anogara kumakumbo kuti awonekane nenhengo dzechurume dzaaisitamba nadzo pabonde; uye amai vanogara kunemusoro nokuti pakuzvarwa kwemurume wake musoro ndiwo wakatanga kubuda.



(The wife sits near her husband's private parts, signifying their sexual relationship, whereas the mother sits at the head to signify that she gave birth to him – the head is the first to come out during the delivery).

During the night vigil in Domboshawa the *varoora* (daughters-in-law) perform the *chinemera*. This ritual is designed to lighten the atmosphere somewhat. The women say something funny that comes to mind. The aim is to create a more relaxed atmosphere. They remain jovial in order to make the mourning process more bearable. The *varoora* sing traditional songs and religious hymns. I once observed how the *varoora* constructed dramatic outfits from beer and cigarette cartons. This symbolized the life of the deceased who loved beer and cigarettes.

The women fetch water early in the morning before dawn. The water is heated in order that all the bereaved relatives can take a bath. The body of the deceased is also washed again. The deceased is cleansed for the journey ahead. This is symbolic of the last bath in the old home before entering the new home, the grave. The women dance and ululate as a send-off to the deceased. This is a sign that the deceased should now join the relatives in the new world. The deceased must leave the old home with good memories. In Bindura, the capital of the Mashonaland Central Province, the women do the *kutyora muzura* (ritual courtesy) as a sign of honouring the deceased.

The *kuchema mufi* ceremony goes on until the body of the deceased leaves the house and is taken for burial. In the pre-burial ceremony, the role played by women is again prominent. The women work hard to look after the guests. They care for the bereaved. They lighten the burden of sorrow through their ritual jokes and funny acts. The night vigil is designed to comfort and encourage the bereaved family. This is mainly the responsibility of women. As recognition of this significant role the

varoor will receive some money from the *tetes* (aunts) and *vazukuru* (nephews) as a token of their appreciation for the services rendered to the deceased and the family. They will sing, dance and ululate as they receive the token and give it to the head *muroora* (daughter-in-law) to keep safely. The money is to be shared equally among the daughters-in-law after the burial.

2.3.3 Preparation rituals for the burial

Elaborate preparation rituals take place on the day of the burial. The preparations begin with *mombe yenhevedzo*, the ritual slaughtering of the 'accompanying ox'. Early in the morning a *nhevedzo* ox is identified and slaughtered. In the days before coffins were used, the hide of the ox was used to cover the deceased. The meat was used to feed the people. The concept of *nhevedzo* carries the meaning of 'accompaniment'. The deceased is to be accompanied by another. The ox takes the place of and represents the human person one who would have accompanied the deceased. *Kusuma* (the presentation) of the beast is done first to the living and then to the deceased person. The *sahwira* (ritual friend) or *muzukuru* (nephew) speak the following words:

Hona nhevedzo yako iyi, usazoti havana kundipa nhevedzo, handina ketevedzwa. Ndiwo usaviwo hwavanhu vari kukuchema

(Here is your *nhevedzo*. Do not say we did not give you *nhevedzo*, that you were never accompanied. This beast is also a feast for people who are here to mourn you).

These words are said while they stand at the entrance of the cattle kraal and point to the beast that is to be slaughtered. Some portion of the *nhevedzo* meat is given to older women who roast it in the hut where the body is lying in state. This is an important process known as *pfungaidzo* (fumigation). The purpose is to fumigate the deceased with the aromatic smoke of the meat and surround the corpse with its

fragrance. The process is believed to make the deceased happy because people will be eating meat in the deceased's honour. The deceased will be satisfied that 'in my honour smoke goes up'. Fire and smoke have great significance. It is a sign that 'although my body is dead, my spirit is not dead'.

Singing and dancing continue in the hut where the body lies. Singing songs and performing dances for the deceased show that people are really mourning the person who died. If these dances are not performed, the belief is that the deceased will return with vengeance, saying: *Zvanda kafa makaregerei kunditambira nokundiridzira ngoma, ndakanga ndakaita seiko kuzorega kundiimbira nekutamba* (When I died why did you not dance and drum for me, what prevented you from doing this normal thing for the deceased?). The female relatives who guard the body in the hut spread some leaves of a shrub called *zumbani*. The shrub has a fragrant smell and keeps the flies away. It is also believed to chase away evil spirits.

The digging of the grave involves two rituals. These should be performed properly in order for the living to maintain their good relationship with the living-dead. The first ritual is *kutema rukarwa* (the breaking the ground ritual). This ritual demonstrates how the living care for the deceased. The breaking of the ground is accompanied by words addressed to ancestors: *Varipasi tauya kuzoisa imba yemwana wenyu pamuri apa*. (This is the spot we have chosen to lay to rest one of your children). This ritual can only be performed by a close relative of the deceased. The sex of that relative is of no consequence (Magava 1973:52). Otherwise, it could be performed by someone of the same totem. The rationale for this is as follows: *hapana anopihwa imba yekupedzisira nemutorwa* (no-one can be given their last dwelling hut by a stranger). One of the participants confirmed that when her husband died the *rukarwa* was performed by someone of the same totem (*mutupo*) because there were no living relatives who could do it. In Zezuru culture a married woman is not considered to be

related to the family into which she married. She is regarded as *motorwa* (alien, a foreigner). Even her children are not related to her by blood because the children have *ropa remurume* (the male blood). When she dies her *rukarwa* has to be done by someone from her family of origin.

The second and related ritual is the actual grave digging (*kuchera guva*). Banana (1991:50) explains that grave digging must also be done in ritual fashion. After the demarcation of the gravesite near the homestead, the men go to dig the grave. The women clear the pathway to the grave. The grave of an adult has to be on an anthill because *mukukutu anofanirwa kuvigwa pakukutu* (adults are hard in flesh and spirit, therefore ought to be buried on hard ground) (Interview with father Chimuti of the Catholic Church in Dema, 07-07-2020).

Throughout this, women play a prominent role. As soon as the *rukarwa* is performed, the *varoorwa* (daughter-in-law) prepares the path (*nzira*) which will be used during the procession to the grave. While the men dig the grave, the women cook the food that is to be served after the burial. The *varoorwa* also cook for the grave-diggers. They carry the water which is used for constructing the interior of the grave.

2.4 Burial rituals

The burial rituals are crucial to the Zezuru culture because it is believed that if these are not performed correctly the deceased becomes a wandering spirit that represents a danger to the living. The rituals enable the dead to be reunited with their departed communities. The only people who are thought not to benefit from the elaborate rituals are those believed to have been witches (*varoyi*), murders (*mhondi*) and those who took their own life (*vanozvisungirira*) (see Shoko 2015:34; Dodo 2015:10). Burial rituals include:

- bidding the deceased farewell (*kuoneka mufi*);
- escorting the body out the hut (*kubudisa mufi mumba*);
- bidding the deceased's homestead farewell (*kutenderera musha*);
- journeying to the grave yard (*rwendo rwekumakuva*);
- laying the body in the grave (*kuviga mutumbi*);
- sprinkling soil on the coffin (*kukanda ivhu*);
- the burial ceremony itself (*kuvigwa*);
- the early morning visit to the grave on the day after the burial (*rumuko*);
- the distribution of the deceased's effects – depending on circumstances, this can be done the day after the burial or only after several months.

These rituals will now be explained. The first is the *chema yekuonekana nemufi* (gifts to farewell the deceased). As people prepare for the journey to the graveyard, a ritual of *kuoneka mufi* is done in the hut by close relatives. The purpose of this ritual is to bid farewell to the deceased. In the village of Dema it is called *chema* or mourning ritual. The *muzukuru* or *sahwira* receives the gifts and announces them to the deceased. The nature of the gift reflects the relationship with the deceased. For example, a nephew (*muzukuru*) would say something like: *Chema yangu iyi ndiri kuonekana nemi sekuru* (Here is my farewell gift, dear uncle). An aunt (*tete*) would say: *Chema yemusodzi yangu yandakuchema iyi* (Here is my present to show that I am mourning for you). The ceremony continues until all the close relatives have presented their gifts and recited the appropriate formula. If money is given as *chema*, it will be used to pay *varooro* for their services and a certain amount will be used when the bereaved family go to *gata* after some weeks.

The next ritual is the viewing of the body (*kuona chiso chemufi*). The relatives first view the body in the house. Then the body is taken outside to be viewed by friends and church fellows. The process of body viewing in Dema is led by *muzukuru*, who



uncovers the face of the deceased by removing the cloth. The people see the face of the deceased for the last time. The ritual is accompanied by the formula: *Uyu munhu wenyu uyu, hamuchamuonizve* (Behold your person; you will never see them again). Only adults are allowed to see the face of the deceased person. The children are not allowed to see the body for fear of doing psychological harm to them. This is the most painful moment. Hence this ritual is accompanied by weeping especially by the women (Kadenge 1998:108).

The viewing of the body involves communication with the deceased. At a funeral I observed in Dema, one of the elders addressed the deceased in the presence of close relatives and performed the *kusuma* of what is to take place: *Tiri kukutora, kuenda newe kumadzitateguru ako* (We are now taking you to where your departed relatives are). The people respond by clapping hands and the women ululate, after which the body is taken out of the house. Outside friends, neighbours and church fellows can bid the deceased farewell.

The next stage in the burial ceremony involves taking the coffin around the homestead (*kutenderera musha*) several times before it is transported to the graveyard. The aim of this is to confuse the spirit of the deceased so that it loses its way. This prevents the spirit from returning to the homestead to haunt the living (Interview with Maidei 04-07-20 and Munorwei 12-08-20).

The procession to the grave then commences. The procession I witnessed was punctuated by stops and was accompanied by lamentation and singing. Popular traditional songs were sung because the person who was buried was a spirit medium of the family (*svikiro remhuri*). While women lead the funeral procession to the grave, the *varooro* remains at the homestead to sweep the hut and smear fresh cow-dung on the floor of the hut where the body lay. The dirt from the hut is taken to the grave

and is be buried with the deceased. This is to make sure that the spirit of the deceased goes with the person. It is a way of removing a bad omen. The hut is disinfected with water mixed with *zumbani* (a medicinal herb). This is done for hygienic purposes. It also removes any bad omen from the house, explained a participant.

The actual burial must be done in a particular and prescribed way. The following is what I observed during the funeral ceremony I attended in the Dema village. Half a *rukukwe* (reed mat) was spread in the grave. The coffin was placed on the mat. The mat provides the deceased with a 'proper bed'. Before and during the lowering of coffin into the grave several other procedures must be carefully followed in order to show the maximum respect for the living-dead:

- the deceased's favourite clothes are put into the grave;
- the *muhapa / garadzwa* (water lilies) and *nhokwe* (a type of river grass) are placed in the grave to act as *donhodzo* (that which cools) to cool the spirit of the deceased;
- the body is laid down in the grave facing west, because *munhu ngaataurre kwakaenda vamwe* (a person must face where the others went).

Musarurwa, a lay preacher in the Presbyterian church, explains it as follows: 'It is believed that the west (*kumadokero*) is the direction taken by those who have gone before. *Kunonyurira zuva ndiko kunoperera upenyu* (where the sun sets, is where life sets)' (Interview 10-08-20).

As all these rituals are being performed, the women, especially the *varoora*, intermittently ululate, dance and sing in order to keep the morale of the mourners high. In the funeral ceremony I observed, the *varoora* brought water in *pfuko* (clay

pots) for making dagga to cover the grave. The women knelt with the clay pots on their heads, their faces covered, until someone paid some money as a token. This is called *yekushonongora*. Once the grave was covered, the women thoroughly swept the gravesite. According to Kadenge (1998:126) the sweeping of the gravesite is done for easy identification of foot-prints of witches should they come to exhume the corpse during the night.

Once the grave has been covered, a committal ceremony takes place. This is performed by the closest relatives (Mandaza 1970:56). Elderly men and women gather round the grave and hand over the spirit of the dead to the ancestors. They clap hands in a ceremony called *kurova gusvi* (invocation) as the head of the family says: *Heuno mwana wenyu wamabvisa kwatiri, ikozvino tomupira kwamuri, mugashireyi kunyika yavadzimu, uye mutichengetewo isu* (Here is your child whom you have taken from us; now we hand him/her to you. Welcome him/her in the spirit world and also look after us who are left behind). After the committal the elders return to the homestead.

Before the procession arrives back at the homestead after the funeral, the hut of the deceased is purified. In the Bindura area this is done by the ritual friend (*sahwira*) who sprinkles the inside of the hut with a concoction made up of the following herbs: *hazvieri*, *mutsonzowa*, *musvisvinwa*, *rugumadzambwa*. The use of these four herbs is significant:

- *hazvieri* is used for procuring an abortion;
- *mutsonzowa* is used for exorcising the *ngozi* (avenging spirit);
- *musvisvinwa* is used as a remedy for backache;
- *rugumadzambwa* is used as an antidote against stealing dogs.

It is believed that a dog will never steal meat again if it is given meat mixed with the roots of *rugumadzambwa*. The belief is that what these herbs affect in the natural order, they would also affect in the supernatural realm:

- As *hazvieri* has power to expel the foetus from the uterus, so also it expels from the hut any harmful charms or misfortunes there may be.
- *Mutsonzowa* is a hardwood tree. As hard as this wood is then also the protection against the deceased coming back to hurt the living (as explained by the Catholic priest 17-08-20).
- The *ndove* (cow dung) is smeared on the floor of the hut to purify the dwelling from any misfortune that might have been left by *mushakabvu* (the deceased).

When the funeral procession arrives at the gate of the homestead, the mourners wash their hands with water mixed with *zumbani* leaves (the herb with very strong perfume). This is the purification rite of *kubvisa munyama* (removing the bad luck of death) (Shoko 2007: 435-456; see Mandaza 1970:47). This will deter the spirit of the dead person from haunting the living, particularly the children. It will prevent misfortune (Kadenge 1998:126). Before people enter the hut, the *sahwira* announces: *Imba yacheneswa yabviswa rushambwa rwangarwasiwa nechitunha* (The hut has been cleansed of any misfortune or bad luck associated with the dead body). Then the women provide food for everyone. After they have eaten the mourners are free to depart. This marks the end of the burial ceremony.

2.5 Post-burial rituals

Post-burial rites stretch over the course of one year. They begin with the inspection ceremony the morning after burial and end with the *kurova guva* ceremony after one

year. The various rituals of this phase will now be discussed and the role of women emphasized.

2.5.1 Immediate post-burial rituals

The morning after the burial, family members go to the gravesite to ensure that the *chizhuzhu* branch that was left on the grave is still in place and that there are no footprints around the grave to indicate an overnight visit from witches. When they return to the homestead, they gather to discuss *tsika yekuparadza nhumbi*, the distribution of the deceased's estate as well identify the adult male or female who is to be the *sarapavana*, the person who is to take care of the children if the deceased had dependents. Usually, the distribution of the deceased's estate – major items such as property and cattle – must be done only after some weeks, namely at the *hwahwa wehonye* also called the *hwahwa hwemvura*, the body decomposition ceremony.

Meanwhile the *muzukuru's* function is to act as an intermediary between the cognates of the family group. The *muzukuru* is given the particular responsibility of looking after the property of his uncle (mother's brother) until the day of the inheritance ceremony when the late husband's brother 'inherits' the widow and her children (Gelfand 1982:40). If the deceased is a woman, her niece or young sister will care for the children as a temporary measure until the final ritual is performed (*kurova guva*). The *muzukuru* will act as a parent in the home. After these decisions have been made, some items of clothing of the deceased brought outside to be distributed among the close relatives. The *muzukuru* collects his uncle's belongings, namely items such as ploughs, bicycles and cars and stores them away for distribution later at the bringing home ceremony, the *kurova guva*. At this ceremony the cattle and fields of the deceased are also distributed among the relatives. The

women ensure that items are washed and packed away in a safe place, a locked room where no one can tamper with the deceased's belongings.

A few days after the previous ceremony, there must be *kunobvunzira*. This is a spiritual 'post-mortem' where family members visit a spirit-medium to seek advice on the cause of death. The Zezuru people also call it *gata*. Usually, families consult a spirit medium or diviner who is located quite a distance from their place, in order to avoid biased judgements. The paternal and maternal groups first go to *gata* separately and then together. If the diviner points to either side (maternal or paternal) as responsible for the death, that group will visit various diviners to verify the accuracy of the divination. If the death is found to have been due to witchcraft the results of the inquiry are not released to the public, since that could cause relational and legal complications (Interview Musarurwa 10-08-20).

Bereaved widows wear black clothes and shave their head as a sign of mourning. This is a cultural requirement for a full year. Black clothes symbolize sorrow. Hair is shaved to deny women the beauty associated with hair. Symbolically it is acknowledging that death defaces and the widow is expected to present as an 'unattractive person'. This treatment is highly unfavourable to women. Wherever the widow goes people are reminded of the deceased and remember him. If a widow who adheres to these requirements well, the deceased will enjoy a warm welcome from his ancestors in the spiritual world (Tafadzwa Interview 06-07-20).

2.5.2 Commemoration of body decomposition or tools cleansing ceremony

One to weeks following burial it is time for the rite of passage called *hwahwa hwehonye*, the ritual to commemorate body decomposition (Mandaza 1970:50) or what is now called *hwahwa hwemvura/hwechenura*, the ritual for cleansing the tools (Kadenge 1998:129-130). This ritual has multiple significance as the names suggest.

Firstly, the ritual commemorates the decomposition of the body as it is consumed by larvae (*honye*). This ritual provides the opportunity to reflect on the sadness of parting and the inevitability of a body decomposing in the grave. As such, therefore, the ritual is a somber one. There is no singing or dancing.

The second purpose of this ceremony, according to Gelfand (1959:134), is to provide the opportunity to an elder person within the family to announce the purported cause of the death (*chakadya munhu*). The results of the *gata* are now made known. The third, and more important purpose of this ceremony is the ritual cleansing of the tools that were used during the burial. According to Kadenge (1998:129-130), all tools used in the burial ceremony, including borrowed ones, are kept at the homestead of the deceased until the *hwahwa hwemvura* ceremony. *Mvura* (water) is a symbol of cleansing. At this ceremony the grave diggers and all their tools are ritually cleansed. The beer (*hwahwa*) which is shared at this ceremony is believed to remove the defilement associated with death. After this cleansing the tools can be taken home by their various owners. The ceremony must therefore take place only 7-14 days after the burial so that people are not deprived of their tools for longer than necessary.

Beer is an essential ingredient in the rituals associated with this and other ceremonies. The term 'beer' forms part of the name of the ritual – *hwahwa hwehonye*, meaning 'beer to commemorate body decomposition' or *hwahwa hwemvura*, meaning 'beer for cleansing'. Beer is poured on the ground to quench the thirst of the departed but also to signify sharing and having communion with the living-dead (Banana 1991:29). If the deceased person was murdered, the spirit is told to avenge the death and punish the offenders (*mhondi*) as the beer is poured on the ground. Beer is given as a token of appreciation to the grave diggers. It is also used to cleanse them and their tools from the defilement of death. The beer is

prepared by women. It takes them seven days to do so. On the day of the ceremony The women are present to serve those who are drinking the beer. Women also from a central part of the following ceremony.

2.5.3 Home-bringing ceremony

One year after the burial, or even later depending on circumstances, the family organizes the crucial *kurova guva* (home-bringing) ceremony (Kapito1978). Alternative names are *kugadzira mufi* (to restore the dead) and *kudzosa mufi* (to bring back the dead). Gundani (1994:25) calls *kurova guva* a ritual where the spirit of the deceased is integrated with the living. It is a way of appeasing the dead by bringing them back to the village after they had wandering in the forest for a year. Until this ceremony has been completed, the spirit of the deceased is regarded as 'homeless', neither belonging fully in the world of the living or in the world of the ancestors. Burial places where the ancestors live are sacred places where they can be approached with offerings and consulted in times of crisis. Hence the *kurova guva* ceremony is crucial to ensure the unity between the living and the dead. Vambe (2009:112-119) emphasizes that *kurova guva* is a very distinct Shona cultural rite of passage. The women's popular songs and drumming constitute the medium through which the ritual-myth of bringing back home the spirit of the dead is carried out. Kyker (2009) points out that musical performance is an integral part of the ritual action at *kurova guva*. Song is used to summon the spirit of the deceased and carry it home, transforming the wondering spirit into *mudzimu* (ancestor status).

The literal meaning of *kurova guva* is 'to beat the grave'. In some communities they literally beat the grave in order to awaken the sleeping person and enable them to return home. According to Banana (1991:30), in some parts of Zimbabwe the term 'beating the grave' is not taken literally but merely symbolically. It is the occasion where the departed are invited back into the family of the living. The *kurova guva*

ceremony constitutes the winding up of the burial rites. It is also the symbolic ritual that brings closure to the period of mourning. The ceremony is significant for the deceased as it marks their integration with both the living and the departed ancestors (*vadzimu*). Through this ceremony and its ritual, the spirit of the deceased evolves to become a true ancestor. This is evident in the typical address to the deceased: *Nhasi takudzora, kubva kumasanzu, kusango kwawanga uri takuisa kumusha kunavamwe* (We have taken you back today, we have taken you out of the woods, out of the forest, we have brought you home to others).

Women play a prominent part in the preparation for this ceremony. Banana (1991:67) explains it as follows:

Beer is brewed by elderly women who has passed the child bearing age (*chembere yapedza ura*), with the assistance of little girls who have not reached the stage of puberty. It is believed that females who do not menstruate are undefiled. They are the ones to brew the beer. Menstrual blood is believed to be dangerous to the spirits.

The preparation of the beer is an elaborate process. The first step is to consecrate the finger millet. The elderly woman in charge mixes the finger millet in the clay pot (*mupfuko*) and informs the deceased that they are about to be inducted into the family and the world of the ancestors. The words of consecration are: *Tati hatikuregi uri musango, toda kuti uchiuya kune vamwe* (This is to let you know that we cannot leave you to wander alone in the forest. We want you to join others). Sometimes the consecration is more elaborate, as I observed at Tineyi's village (04-07-20). The aunt knelt before the *huva* (an elevated platform where pots and plates are kept in the deceased's hut. In the presence of many relatives, she consecrated the finger millet with the following words: *Farai nhasi ona zviyo zvataburitsa izvi, zvokuti tikudzorere*



tikuise kuna vamwe vose. Chiedza na Tonderai vevamwe vakatanga, zviyo zivotdzorera nazvo mwana wenyu kwamuri izvi, arege kugara musango ega ega (Farai, here is the finger millet we have drawn from the granary today. Its purpose is to bring you back to others. Chiedza and Tonderai and others, here is the finger millet with which we are giving you back your child. She must not live in the forest alone). As the aunt said the words, she poured some water over the finger millet in the *tswanda* (basket). The women ululated and the men clapped hands praising the deceased with the totem of her husband. The consecrated finger millet was then mixed with what was left after the *hwahwa hwemvura*. The finger millet is then taken to the river and immersed in water (*kunyika mumera*) so that it can germinate. When the finger millet has germinated, it is dried and ground into *chimera* (flour) which the elderly woman uses to brew the sacrificial beer.

The brewed beer must first be consecrated (*kusumwa*). A sample of the beer (*hari yomusumo*) is officially handed over to the master of ceremony to be tasted. In the ceremony I observed, when the beer was pronounced to be adequate, the woman filled a big clay pot (*gate*) with it. Then she also filled two smaller clay pots. These two small pots were sealed and put on the *huva*. The aunt called upon the close relatives to enter the hut of the deceased and gave them the small clay pot of beer as *musumo*. She announced: 'Your beer is ready to be used for the ceremony.' Then she addressed the deceased while facing *huva*²: *Farai takunokubisa musango, tonokuisa kune vamwe* (Farai we have taken you out of the forest and have joined you with others). She knelt and placed the *pfuko* near the *huva* as she said these words. After the *musumo* ceremonial beer had been drunk, the rest of the beer, except the two *pfuko-musoro wemunhu* or *dziva* and *munongedzo*, was shared

² The Zezurus face the *huva* whenever they address *midzimu* (ancestors)

among those present. People began to dance for the spirit. That marked the beginning of the actual *kurova guva* ceremony.

The ceremony itself started on Friday evening and went on until Saturday morning. At Tineyi Rabvu's place I observed that on Friday evening the dedication pot (*hari yesumo*) was taken to the grave and put on the grave. That was a way of informing the ancestors (*kusuma vadzimu*) of their intention to bring the deceased person's spirit into the home and family. The *pfuko* was left on the grave overnight. After the libation at the grave the elders returned to the hut to communicate with the ancestors. One of the elders knelt at the *chikuva* and said: *Imi makaenda kare taurirai madzitateguru vakatungamira kuti tavamba basa rokudzora mwana wenyu mumusha nekumhuri* (Our ancestors inform those who went before you that we have just begun the process of bringing back your child to look after the home and family). Women ululate (*kuridza mhururu*), sang and danced to the rhythm of drums. This went on the whole night with all the relatives present taking part. Should they fail to do so, I was informed, that would be a sign of disrespect to the spirit. One of the elderly women said that if people do not dance the spirit might come back and say *Hauna kunditambira kana kundiimbira wakandiramwa here?* (You did not dance or sing for me; are you now ignoring me?) People therefore dance and drink beer all night long.

Early the next morning (*mambakuedza*) the elders went to the grave to check if the *pfuko* of beer they left there the previous night was not tampered with or developed cracks. The fact that everything was alright was seen as a sign of acceptance by the *mudzimu*. They could proceed with the next ceremony. A woman carrying the *pfuko* of beer led the procession. There was loud singing. Women and men were clapping and singing. They entreated the spirit of ancestors to come and welcome the deceased spirit to join the other *vadzimu*: *Vana vanorwara mudzimu dzoka, vana*

vanochema mudzimu dzoka We-e! iye! iye! (The children are sick; the children are crying. Come back ancestral spirit). An elder in the family addressed the spirit as follows: *Tauya kuzokutora kuti uchirega kugara mumasango, uye uzochengeta mhuri yako yawakasiya* (We have come to bring you back to the homestead, instead of you wandering in the woods, for you to look after the family you left behind). A goat was ritually slaughtered, skinned and roasted. Some of its meat was offered to the spirit while the rest was boiled without salt and shared among those present. At the grave one of the elders poured beer at the position of the head. This was to quench the thirst of the spirit which was tired of wandering (*kupedza nyota*). Snuff (*bute*) was sprinkled on the grave and around the grounds while the elderly men and women knelt clapping saying: *Tauya kuzokutora uyende kune vamwe, madzibaba/madzimail/madzisekuru ne madzimbuya ako, huya nesu kumusha uchengete mhuri yako* (We have come to collect you so that you join your patrilineal and matrilineal family at the homestead and can begin to look after your family). After this ritual, people began singing loudly to awaken the sleeping spirit (Gundani 1994:25). The elders led the procession back home in a jubilant spirit. When they reached the hut, the elder uncovered the little *pfuko* on the *huva*. He clapped his hands, lifted the *pfuko* as he pronounced these words: *Imi mose muripano nevadzimu vedu basa guru tapedza. Chiendai zvenyu panze munodya nekunwa muchifara*. (To everybody present including our ancestors: we have finished the great job. You can go out eat and drink with joy). People did not depart after lunch but continued to drink until Sunday when the last ceremony was performed. This is called *kugara nhaka*, the inheritance ceremony.

The rituals surrounding *kurova guva* are a dramatization of the common bond between the living and the living-dead. *Kurova guva* underscores and asserts the Zezuru people's most cherished value of community. Through the ritual the living and the living-dead are reunited. Bourdillion (1994:45) explains it as follows: 'There

is a latent function in *kurova guva*, which is to help the living to cope with death and overcome conflicts of inheritance.'

While men play a dominant role in this ritual, women are indispensable to the process. Without the role they play this ritual, central to the understanding of Zezuru spirituality, cannot take place. The brewing of beer, cooking and creating the right atmosphere during the ceremony itself through singing, ululating and dancing, is done by women. They can direct the occasion from the background. Makwasha (2004:355-360) describes the central role played by Mbuya Ndoro at the *kurova guva* ceremony of her deceased son Augustine. She was the one to give various instructions, which included rebuking some men who she felt were detracting from the sacredness of the occasion by singing Christian songs.

2.5.4 Inheritance ceremony

This section discusses the after-burial inheritance ceremony that determines who inherits the widow. The Zezurus call this ceremony *kugara nhaka* (literally 'to inherit') or *kugarwa nhaka* (literally 'to be inherited'). This ceremony takes place fairly soon after *kurova guva*, or some weeks or months later depending on the circumstances. In rural communities *kugara nhaka* still takes place, especially in families who hold on to their traditional culture and values. In Mount Darwin at Honyimo's village I was told that the wife of a younger brother cannot be 'inherited' by the elder brother, because he is regarded as a father figure by the family (Maidei 10-08-20).

Before the proceedings of *kugara nhaka* begin, the widow goes through a ritual that tests her faithfulness (*kutendeka*) during the period after the death of her husband. It is meant to ascertain whether she had remained pure, which means that she did not have sex with another man. She has to jump over an *uta* (bow). If she was not sexually active, she would agree to undergo the test. She would refuse if she knows

that she breached the cultural expectation. *Kudarika uta* shows that she remained faithful (*haana kupisa guva*) to her dead husband and family. The women present will ululate, sing and dance. A widower does not have to go through this *kudarika uta* test as it is culturally acceptable that he has sex before *kurova guva*.

The actual *kugara nhaka* ritual is done differently in many parts of Mashonaland Central. In Mount Darwin, the widow gives water to drink or to wash hands in a gourd (*mukombe*) to the one she chooses to marry her. In Bindura, the widow gives *tsvimbo* (knobkierie) to her preferred husband. The men, the brothers of her late husband, sit in a line and she hands over the knobkierie to the man of her choice. *Tsvimbo* symbolizes protection. She is seeking someone to protect her and her children. If the man does not want to inherit her, he refuses the water for washing his hands and does not receive the *tsvimbo*. If the widow does not want the *nhaka* she will give her son (or *tete*) the *tsvimbo*. Hereby the woman indicates that she wishes to either remain in the family as a widow, or that she wishes to move out of the matrimonial home and maybe marry outside of the family.

2.6 Summary

The role of women in the death rites of passage already begins directly after death. Women wash the body and prepare it for burial. Women are the chief mourners at funerals. Women are also the ones to lighten the atmosphere and make the mourning process more bearable through their singing and dancing. They are in effect therefore 'caregivers' where families have been thrown into turmoil because of a death. The women prepare the food, fetch water, clear the pathway to the grave and sweep the hut after the body has been taken away for burial. They also take care of people's health as they prepare medicated water for washing of hands after burial procedures. The women are in charge of brewing beer for the immediate and post burial ceremonies. After burial, the female relatives remain behind to comfort,

console and provide moral support to the bereaved. What these women do, concurs with what Kubler-Ross and Kessler (1998:207) describe as follows: 'In grief, just like in death, there is a transformation for the living. If you do not take the time to grieve, you cannot find a future in which loss is remembered and honoured without pain.'

Yet despite women playing all these active roles, the investigation has shown that cultural oppression and male domination do in many ways characterize death rites of passage in Zezuru culture.



CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUALISING DEATH RITES OF PASSAGE AMONG ZEZURU CHRISTIANS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the interplay between the concept of the 'living-dead', espoused especially by Mbiti (1969), Nyamiti (1984) and other African theologians, on the one hand and the theological concept of 'contextualization' (Musasiwa 2007; see Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989) on the other. Contextualization is dialogical by nature. The chapter focuses on critically hearing and assessing the deeper meaning of the Zezuru death rites of passage as described in the previous chapter. Using the pastoral care model of Clebsch and Jaekle (1994), which was later expanded by Lartey (2003), the chapter focuses on the extent to which the Zezuru rites of passage fulfil the pastoral care functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering the community in general and the widowed women in particular. The exploration is cautious not to romanticize Zezuru rites of passage, but to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses against certain criteria. Subsequent chapters will then show the extent to which the Christian faith, when it becomes incarnated into Zezuru culture, can complement, enhance or counteract the death rites of passage where necessary. The aim is to fulfil the dialogical function of contextualization in this chapter.

3.2 The meaning of contextualization

The most basic yet also profound theological understanding of contextualization is that it is a process whereby the Christian faith incarnates itself into the life and world of those who have embraced it (Bosch 1991:421). This makes the Christian faith in

its various manifestations such as theology, worship, pastoral care, contextual by nature. Understood in this way contextualization becomes a biblical, theological and missiological imperative (see Musasiwa 2007). The Bible, the most significant source of Christian theology, 'is situation-orientated rather than being ... timeless, abstract systematic theology'; it is 'a record of contextualized revelation' (Musasiwa 2007:67). In terms of theology, Kraft (1981:291) observes that 'all theologizing is culture-bound interpretation and communication of God's revelation such that there is therefore no context-free theology'. As a missiological imperative contextualization models the incarnational ministry of Jesus, communicates the gospel in a receptor-oriented way and develops indigenous expressions of the Christian faith (Musasiwa 2007:68).

It has rightly been said that the Christian faith is neither supracultura nor suprahistorical (Bosch 1991:421) since the Christian faith must always be in dialogue with the context. The only matter of contention, therefore, is whether the resulting theology (or whatever manifestation of the Christian faith) should be only 'influenced' or 'decidedly determined' by the context in which the Christian faith is practiced. The view of Bevans (2002:3) is that context should play a dominant, determinative role in the dialogue, arguing that the Christian faith can only be understood in terms of a particular context. Bosch, on the other hand, argues that theology is both 'context-defined and context-transcending' (Bosch 1991:472). By taking 'incarnation' as the theological key to understanding the concept of contextualization it can be reasonably argued that Bosch is right in understanding theology to be both context-defined and context-transcending. The gospels reveal Jesus as being in many ways 'context defined'. He dressed, spoke and behaved like the Hebrew people into whose culture he was incarnated. In that sense he was context defined. However, in his actions and teaching he was context transcending in many ways, since the gospel message transcends cultures. This study leans towards a balance between the context-defined and context-transcending nature of Christian theology. In

agreement with Bediako's (2001) hermeneutic of identity, the study opts for the stance of Africanizing the Christian faith rather than merely Christianizing African traditions (Musasiwa 2007:68). It takes the Zezuru death rites of passage as a legitimate theological category to be analyzed in its own right.

On the other hand, with Bosch (1991), the study endorses the idea that Christian theology should be context transcending. Kraft and Wisely (1979; see Musasiwa 2007) point out that Christianity comes to any culture with a certain degree of intrusiveness and incompatibility with that culture. Otherwise it would cease to be Christian. This is clearly shown in the ministry of Jesus. On numerous occasions Jesus would not conform to the tradition of the elders. The Sabbath controversies are a case in point (see Mark 2:23-3:70). Though the Pharisees opposed Jesus healing on the Sabbath, Jesus went beyond the Sabbath precepts and was guided by the principle of doing what is loving on the Sabbath. Hagner (2009:215) puts it as follows: 'Since the Sabbath was an anticipation of the eschaton, Jesus regarded it as the perfect day for bringing wholeness to those in need.' The New Living Translation of Mark 2:27 shows this clearly: 'Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath"'.

This is a culture- or context-transcending attitude. This study applies Bosch's insights with regard to contextualization to pastoral care with the bereaved within Zezuru culture. The cultural death rites of passage should inform the pastoral care. Using the understanding of pastoral care is as suggested by Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) and expanded by Lartey (2003), death rites of passage are seen in this study as having a healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering function. At the same time, in a context-transcending way the death rites of passage will be interrogated for their shortcomings, especially when it comes to the treatment of women in this culture. The theological point of departure of the

study is that contextual theology is a theology ‘from below’, that is from the ‘underside of history’, with its main interlocutor being the culturally marginalized (Bosch 1991:423; see Frostin 1988). In this study the culturally marginalized Zezuru women are regarded as the main interlocutors – not in the sense of an intellectual exercise but with the typical liberation theology emphasis on *doing* theology. The context-transcending view of theology, therefore, does not allow for an uncritical celebration of Zezuru death rites of passage in all their dimensions. In Bosch’s words, ‘in spite of the undeniably crucial nature and role of the context ... it is not to be taken as the sole and basic authority for theological reflection’ (Bosch 1991:431).

3.3 The healing function of death rites of passage

With regard to the human condition, Lartey (2006: 637) points to the basic human need of *healing*: ‘As human persons, we find ourselves broken and bruised in many ways. From time to time, we find ourselves in need of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual restoration.’ The aim of such healing is ‘to regain what one has lost’ (Lartey 2006: 630). However, for Clebsch and Jaekle (1994:33), healing should go beyond simply regaining what one has lost. Rather, it should be about ‘restoring a person to wholeness and leading them to advance beyond their previous condition ... When mending or restoration takes place under Christian pastoral care, it is hoped that the troubled person will become integrated on a higher spiritual level than they have previously experienced’. The following examines, the healing function of the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture.

The grief process takes its time. Only after adequate time can the necessary adjustments be made and some form of healing be experienced. The process can last as long as two or more years in the case of a major loss such as the death of a spouse, child, parent or grandparent (Nyanjaya 2017:6). The rituals that take place as part of the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture have the aim of facilitating

this healing process. The rituals are a means of providing support to the bereaved from the time death occurs until the *kurova guva* and *nhaka* ceremonies are completed. This chapter focuses on the role played by and for women in these rites and rituals.

Women play an important role in bringing healing to the bereaved, especially through the female ritual friends (*sahwiras*) and daughters-in-law (*varooras*) as they perform their cultural duties. The process of emotional healing is initiated when the last bath is given the deceased. This is an acknowledgement of the last time that human beings, particularly the wife, will have contact with the body. The *varooras* carry the water for the last bath (Kadenge1998:101). The cultural belief is that person is not completely dead but is just passing on to a new destination. The deceased is cleansed for this new journey. *Varooras* perform the right ritual of offering the living-dead water for the last cleansing for the last journey.

Through the *kuridza mhere* (payment of a wailing token) the extended family is informed of the death and called upon to help with the pre-burial, burial and post burial procedures. Close relatives respond to *kuridza mhere* by helping to comfort and encourage the bereaved to eat. They take turns to watch over the deceased's body. In this way they provide some relief for the bereaved widow. A woman who has lost her husband, for example, will be flanked by her sisters or paternal aunts who, in the Zezuru culture, are considered worthy to sit at the feet of the deceased during the entire funeral wake. The widow can rest assured that her people are there to help her. This brings much-needed comfort (Tafadzwa Interview 10.08.20). After the burial the close relatives remain for a period of time to provide further support.

Throughout the funeral wake social support is experienced as people come to give their condolences (*kubata maoko*). They speak words of comfort such as: *Mwari*

vakunyaradzeyi (May God comfort you), *Aenda kunosangana nevakaenda kare* (He has gone to join other ancestors). These words of consolation counteract the sense of hopelessness on the part of the bereaved and give them a sense of hope and purpose. These actions and words assure the bereaved that they are not alone on the journey of grief, and that death is not really the end, but rather a passage to another existence.

Throughout this process the *varoora* and female *sahwiras* tie strings on their wrists and a bands on their head to show that they are in a state of bereavement. In this way outsiders are invited to share in it. Strings or strips of cloth (*kusunga makavi* or *machira*) also identify the widow. Others then know to pay their respects and condolences (*kubata maoko*). Whereas pain tends to isolate, the effect of this sharing of grief is to lighten the psychological burden on the bereaved. The *varoora* also help with cooking and serving food. This lightens the burden on the bereaved widow who does not have to cater to guests. Such support is expression of love and care. As the bereaved observe all that is happening around them, it brings comfort to them to know that there are relatives and friends who take the time to help. They can experience the love that is extended to them.

Apart from practical help, the *varooras* (daughters-in-law) also perform various diversions to lighten the mood. One of these is practical jokes called *kunemera*. It is a ritual designed to lighten the atmosphere at a funeral (Kadenge1998:103). Such joking creates a more relaxed atmosphere and makes the mourning more bearable. As the mourners laugh at the jokes, they experience some emotional relief. That distracts the attention from the pain and helps them to feel better. Another form of diversion is the singing and dancing at the all-night vigil. Apart from providing a diversion from the emotional pain, the singing and dancing are also meant to accompany the deceased's soul into the next world. This brings reassurance to the

bereaved. It causes bereaved persons in the culture great pain if people do not come to offer this kind of support. Nowadays families even go so far as to hire professional singers to keep the singing going throughout the night vigil. If all of this is done according to cultural expectations, people would comment: *Aiwa achemwa, vanhu vabuda* (He or she has been respectfully mourned). The respect and attendance of the mourners fulfil a healing function for the bereaved.

The event of bidding the deceased farewell (*kuwoneka mufi*) aims to provide solace for the bereaved. People queue to enter the room where the body lies. They come with offerings such as money or chicken as a farewell gift to the deceased. Each relative says something to the dead (*mufi*), for example:

Ndini Chivindi, ndinokuwoneka nemukono wangu wemadhora mashanu, ufambe zvakanaka (I am Chivindi. I bid you farewell with five dollars, travel well).

Usazoti handina kukufukidza, herino gumbeze rekuti uende naro sefuko, ndini muzukuru, Gamuchirai (This Gamuchirai. Here is a blanket for you to cover yourself as you enter the next life).

Mbiti (1969:76) interprets these acts for the living-dead as a symbol of fellowship and the recognition that the departed remains a member of the human family. The Zezuru people believe that the deceased do not disappear forever when they die, but become the living-dead ancestors who protect those still alive. Therefore, the dead can still be addressed and they can respond. The following is an example of a speech to a father who has died:

Baba vangu Mushayazvose mufambe zvakanaka, nemiwo madzitateguru ekwa Nyamudziwa (totem) tambirai mwana wenyu Mushayazvose.

(Have a good journey my father, Mushayazvose. And to you Nyamudziwa ancestors, we ask you to welcome your child Mushayazvose).

Tokens and gifts are a sign of respect for and remembrance of the living-dead. These rituals contribute to healing since they facilitate the bereaved to not 'move on' from grief, but rather to 'move with' it.

The rituals regarding the actual burial also assume the presence of the living-dead. They are believed to see everything that happens there. The act of a close relative of demarcating the grave demonstrates that the living still care for and respect the dead. The one who is selected to demarcate the grave, the permanent home of the deceased loved-one, feels a close connection with the departed. The *varooras* (daughters-in-law) prepare the route (*nzira*) to be used when the coffin is carried to the grave. It is along this *nzira* that those who went before, will come to welcome the deceased. Before the coffin is carried to the grave it first circles the hut. The aim is to confuse the spirit of the dead so that it does not return home before the appropriate time, which is the *kurova guva* (bring home ceremony). Through this act the deceased is shown their home for the last time. They bid their home and all those assembled, farewell. This is an act of solidarity with the deceased.

A noticeable feature of the various rituals is that they are meant for both the bereaved and the deceased. The rituals aim to show that the deceased brings honour to the people who are present there. In this way the deceased assures the bereaved that the deceased person has been shown the necessary respect and therefore will be happy in the after-life. COVID-19 measures with regard to funerals disrupted these rituals. Night vigils and the touching of the dead body could not take place. Relatives could no longer perform the death rites of passage. This was a severe psychological blow to the bereaved. Their emotional and psychological needs

could not be met. People could not come to acknowledge the loss and embrace the bereaved, bringing words of comfort. This meant that people were left without the social and cultural support they were used to. Their loved-one had to be buried by strangers from a funeral parlour. In the event that such extraordinary measures disrupt the customary practices, some form of compensatory measures is needed. Chapter 5 will explore the possible role of the faith community in such extraordinary circumstances.

The rites and rituals that have a healing function particularly for bereaved widows have been identified and discussed. However, there are also some Zezuru cultural practices that do not contribute positively to the healing of bereaved women. A case in point is when a young woman of childbearing age is widowed. That widow is not allowed at the burial site because it is believed that it would 'close her womb' and she would not be able to have children later on in life. She is only allowed to watch the proceedings from a distance. One of the participants (Munorwei 04-07-20) described it as follows: *Ndakapfigirwa mumba ndikarambidzwa kuchema kana kukanda ivhu muguva, saka nanhasi ndichiri kurwadziwa* (I was to remain in the house and was ordered not to cry. I was also denied the opportunity to be at the grave or even put the soil in the grave. It still pains me to this day). This is an example of a cultural practice based on superstition that is harmful to the bereaved widow and should be challenged.

3.4 The sustaining function of death rites of passage

After the death of a loved-one restoration to the former condition is impossible for those left behind. It is in such circumstances of irreparable loss that the pastoral function of *sustaining* is called for (see Clebsch and Jaekle 1994; Lartey 2003). For Clebsch and Jaekle (1994:423) sustaining is about 'helping a hurting person to endure and to transcend a circumstance in which restoration to his/her former

condition or recuperation from his/her malady is either impossible or so remote as to seem improbable'. Lartey (2003: 660-661) describes it as follows: 'To be sustained is to find strength and support, from within and without, to cope adequately with what cannot be changed. It has to do with a transformation of a situation by traversing through it, and is more to do with attitude than escape.' Combining the insights of these pastoral theologians, this section will examine the extent to which death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe can fulfil the function of helping the bereaved to endure, transcend and find the strength to cope with their loss. Lartey's insight that sustaining is about attitudinal transformation within a situation rather than escaping from the situation, is of special interest here.

According to Clebsch and Jaekle (1994), one means to achieve sustaining is 'compassionate commiseration' with the bereaved whose loss is irredeemable. The Zezuru death rites of passage do indeed involve 'compassionate commiseration'. In a sense they make the loss somewhat redeemable as they affirm the continuation of life after death and the continuation of an active relationship with the living-dead. Therefore, the compassionate commiserations relate to the loss of physical fellowship after death while on another level the rituals sustain the hope that death is not the end of the bond between people.

In the death rites of passage sustaining begins on a physical and material level after the death of a loved one. The overwhelming demands of death on the bereaved person go beyond the emotional and psychological levels. They include the physical and economic aspects of life. This calls for support from the community. It is therefore a Zezuru cultural practice to provide for the bereaved on a material level as well. People who come to pay their respects to the bereaved, bring a gift of money. This is called *chema*. They make other contributions that reduce the material and financial burden on the bereaved. The contributions of women are particularly

important during and after the funeral. They bring foodstuffs and do the cooking. Their help is tangible and practical. They see to the physical aspect of the struggle of bereavement. The *varooras* and female *sahwiras* therefore fulfil the function of sustaining. They are the ones who mobilize resources that can be used to help the bereaved family members. Money and food are collected by the *varooras* to contribute further to the *chema*.

The sustaining function also goes beyond the physical needs associated with the burial itself. Over the longer term, sustaining takes on emotional and psychological dimensions. The post-burial rituals take a year or more to complete. For each ritual there is community support. This means that grief and mourning become a shared rather than an isolated experience. It is this support of the community and sharing that sustain the bereaved emotionally and psychologically. This is in line with the insight of Clebsch and Jaekle (2003:655) that to be sustained is to find strength and support from within and without, in order to be able to cope adequately with what cannot be changed.

The Zezuru death rites of passage are underpinned by the belief that the deceased person has assumed a higher form of existence. The family therefore feels there is a higher power involved in their reality of loss. This too is a sustaining experience. This makes sustaining transcend mere resignation or 'maintaining a stoic silence or a cynical resolution'. It makes sustaining an act of 'transformation of a situation by traversing through it, and is more to do with attitude than escape' (Lartey 2003:662).

3.5 The guiding function of the death rites of passage

Given the complexities of the Zezuru culture, the bereaved face many questions to which there are no clear answers. The focus of the study is specifically on Zezuru

widows who have to make life-altering choices following the death of the husband. These decisions include:

- Where is he to be buried?
- How is she to provide for herself and her children?
- Should she remarry or remain as a single mother?
- Does she agree to be 'inherited' by one of the husband's brothers who may already have a wife of his own, or who could be an AIDS widower?
- If she decides to marry outside the family, will she be allowed by the former husband's family to inherit the matrimonial property?
- How does she balance cultural requirements and legal rights in many of these decisions?

These complex choices are simultaneously clouded by the grief of loss, which makes decision making even more difficult. In this complicated situation pastoral *guidance* is crucial for these widows. According to Clebsch and Jaekle (1994:429-436), guiding 'consists of assisting perplexed persons to make confident choices between alternative courses of thought and action, when such choices are viewed as affecting the present and future state of the soul'. Guiding can be either 'educative' or 'inductive'. Lartey cautions, however, that the term "guiding" can have a paternalistic and archaic ring to it. In many contexts, the function it refers to is conveyed by current terms such as "problem-solving" or "decision-making" skills' (Lartey 2003:667-671). This criticism does not, however, require that the term 'guiding' be discarded altogether. However, the insight does add an important dimension to the understanding of what the term could and should mean in practice.

This section explores the extent to which death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture can guide widows in the difficult task of decision-making. Do these rites

facilitate women to confidently choose between different ways of thinking and behaving (Taylor 1983:31)? From a holistic perspective on providing care, legal, cultural, spiritual, emotional and psychological factors should all be taken into consideration when decisions are made following the death of a husband. These factors are often conflict with one another. This makes the decision making process even more complex. The pastor who was interviewed (17-02-21), explained it as follows: 'The belief that a dead person is able to see and hear from the spiritual world among the Zezuru Traditional Religion believers brings a sense of guidance. So, when a person dies, they believe that he or she will be able to guide the family from the superior spiritual realm. This is the reason why sometimes the bereaved family, when they face challenges, go to the graveside and invoke the spirit of the dead for guidance and clarity on issues.'

This is not a simple matter for the widow. She could, for example, receive 'guidance' which conflicts with legal and personal considerations. She could be told to agree to marry her late husband's brother. In the case of an HIV-infected widower that could present a risk to her own health. In addition, the proposed husband could already be in a civil marriage. Under Zimbabwean law polygamy is not permitted in the case of someone already in a civil union. In this instance cultural death rites of passage have their limitations when it comes to the provision of clear guidance for the widow. However, some decisions can benefit from Zezuru death rites of passage. From the rituals that have been described, the following can contribute to guidance for the widow.

3.5.1 Guidance regarding to pre-burial and burial rituals

Pre-burial rituals are culturally determined. No difficult decisions have to be made. *Dare* in Zezuru culture is a *place* where decisions are made. At most Zezuru funerals men congregate around a fire (*padare*) while women remain in the hut. From the



dare the bereaved are advised of the correct procedures. These include: where the burial is to take place and which beast should be slaughtered. The pre-burial and burial rituals reveal the patriarchal nature of Zezuru culture. There is very little room for the widow to make decisions. There are some decisions that she is allowed to make, such as how the deceased's body is to be dressed for the burial. The male relatives of the husband, however, make all the important decisions. In this regard the wife is side-lined. However, the widow can indirectly influence the proceedings. She is sometimes consulted privately by the family nephew (*muzukuru*) who then conveys her opinions to the *dare*. If the men who are responsible for making *dare* decisions are wise, they take into consideration the widow's opinions on such crucial decisions such as the location of the burial.

3.5.2 Guidance regarding post-burial rituals

Despite the patriarchal nature of the Zezuru culture, there are some post-burial ceremonies that directly affect the life of the widow and where she does have some scope for making some decisions, albeit sometimes under the tyranny of social expectations. Soon after the burial the extended family gathers to decide on the befitting *sarapavana* (someone assigned to be the father figure for children of the deceased) and the *tsika yekuparadza nhumbi* (distribution of the deceased's estate). The wife's contribution is again indirect. She could exert some influence. However, the husband's family of origin are the ones who overtly make the decisions. The wife can, for example, indicate to the nephew whom she would prefer to be the *sarapavana*. The nephew can relay that to the *dare* accordingly. In the same way the wife can influence the decision of when the husband's estate should be distributed.

The post-burial ritual that follows, is the *kunobvunzira* or *gata* (the visit to the spirit-medium to determine the cause of death). Here the wife would prefer not to influence the decision of where and when to go for the *gata*. If she were to do that, she could

be suspected of having bewitched the husband and that she is now trying to manipulate the evidence. The spirit medium (*n'anga*) who is consulted in order to ascertain the cause of death, plays the guiding role. This person identifies not only the cause of death but also prescribes what has to be done following the outcome of the consultation (Kadenge 1998:144)

At the *Hwahwa hwehonye* or *hwahwa hwemvura* (commemoration of body decomposition and tools cleansing ceremony) all decisions are culturally and spiritually determined. There is no scope or need for particular guidance for the widow. The ritual which commemorates the decomposition of the body as it is eaten by worms (*honye*), creates the opportunity to reflect on the sadness of parting and the inevitability of body decomposition in the grave. The wife is expected to maintain a sombre mood. There is no singing or dancing. The wife should wear black mourning attire for a year after the death of her husband.

One year after the burial, the important post-burial *kurova guva* (home-bringing) ceremony takes place. As in many of the other rituals, guidance for the widow is not necessary since there are no decisions to be made. The ceremony is culturally and spiritually prescribed. This is the ceremony where the spirit of the deceased transitions to becoming a genuine ancestor who will affect the future of the children. The ritual is a dramatization of the common bond between the living and the living-dead. The wife is the backstage facilitator of all those who must play a role in the preparation and execution of the ceremony.

It is at the *kugara nhaka* (inheritance ceremony) that comes after the *kurova guva* ceremony where the wife is most crucially in need of guidance. At this ceremony it is decided who of the husband's family is to 'inherit' the widow. The heart of the ceremony is when the widow by symbolic gesture decides who among the husband's

brothers she chooses to marry. Depending on the area, the widow either gives the chosen husband water to drink or to wash his hands or gives him a *tsvimbo* (knobkierie). If the widow does not want the *nhaka* she will give her son or *tete* (husband's sister) the water or the *tsvimbo*. This signals her decision to either remain as a widow in the family, or to move out of her matrimonial home and remarry outside the family. In this one instance the widow has a distinct choice to make. However, the post-burial ritual still provides some guidance. For example, she cannot choose to be inherited by her husband's older brother because he plays the role of a father figure in the family. When she decides not to be inherited by any of the husband's brothers, culture provides symbolic actions by means of which she can indicate her preferences.

3.5.3 The guiding function of death rites of passage – an evaluation

This section highlighted the many complex and sometimes life-altering choices that a Zezuru widow faces. These choices call for guidance. Pre-burial, burial and post-burial Zezuru death rites of passage provide some guidance to the Zezuru widow. What follows is a critical evaluation of the function of guiding that these rituals fulfil.

Firstly, it is evident that the Zezuru culture is patriarchal. Most decisions are made by men. This severely limits the widow in the making of 'confident choices between alternative courses of thought and action', as the function of 'guiding' is described by Clebsch and Jaekle (1994: 429). In Zezuru culture there are many fixed customs that are followed in the course of at least one year following the death of a person. The widow who already bears the burden of grief is largely relieved from having to make a host of complex decisions. All she has to do is to follow the customs. Whereas this can be a positive aspect of the cultural practices, it also limits her problem-solving or decision-making skills

Since 'guiding' within the Zezuru culture is custom bound, it is rather limited in terms of 'educative' and 'inductive' guidance. While the guidance of the customs simplifies decisions and processes, it lacks the element of empowerment for the widow. The widow's choice with regard to whether she is inherited by one of the late husband's brothers stands out as a rare opportunity for her to make a 'free' life-altering choice. She is, however, always aware of the expectations of the family that she will either choose to marry to one of her late husband's brothers, or to remain widowed for the rest of her life. The choice to remarrying outside of the family has consequences that many Zezuru women are not willing or able to face. They would then be deprived of their home and children in the process.

Though widows in Zezuru culture are overtly disempowered by patriarchy, they do sometimes have some covert influence with regard to decision making. However, they are still dependent on the goodwill of the men who convey and receive her wishes. Men still have the last say.

3.6 The reconciling function of death rites of passage

According to Lartey (2003:678-679), reconciling involves 'bringing together again parties that have become estranged or alienated from each other. These parties may range from individuals through small groups to nations. The quest ... is for harmonious relations between people'. He adds that such reconciling must be done 'in ways that are respectful of their differences' since unity must not be taken to imply uniformity. It is always important to distinguish between unity and uniformity. Lartey (2003:681-682) explains it as follows: 'Harmony does not imply uniformity any more than a harmonious melody can be played using a single note'. This understanding of reconciling is in agreement with that of Clebsch and Jaekle (1994). However, they also include the vertical reconciliation between human beings and God, which for the purposes of this study can be taken to mean also reconciliation between the living

and the living-dead who now occupy the spiritual realm. In other words, reconciliation in the Zezuru culture usually takes the form of the restoration of people's relationships not only with others but also with their ancestors. It entails the task of re-establishing broken relationships among people and between human beings and God (*Musikavanhu*).

3.6.1 The reconciling function of death rites of passage in general

Zezuru culture places great emphasis on relationships within the community. The culture is radically different from the individualism that tends to characterize Western cultures. The death rites of passage in general are a demonstration that death must bring immediate reconciliation between estranged people and communities. When someone dies, even if they were previously seen as bad or evil, immediate reconciliation should take place. This is demonstrated by the common Zezuru saying *wafa wanaka* (one who has died has become good). No ill is spoken of the dead. People should be released from their mistakes. In death, according to the Zezuru people, there is immediate reconciliation. People should live harmoniously with one another and with their living dead.

One of the pronounced ways of achieving or maintaining reconciliation when someone dies, is *kusuma* (informing). It is a way of ensuring that there is peace and reconciliation during a funeral between the living and the ancestors. At crucial stages of the funeral process, the relevant people should be consulted before certain things are done in order to ensure a smooth flow of events. There is also a spiritual level of *kusuma* which involves communicating with the departed to receive the spirit of the dead. A close relative goes to the *chikuva* (family altar) and speaks to the ancestors of the deceased, respectfully clapping and informing them that their child has died. An example of *kusuma* is given by Hodza (1974:49):



*E, wazvionaka iwe Guvamombe
Uzivisewo vose vari mberi kwako
Pamwechete nevane mazita atisingazivi
Kuti musha wapinda mhunza
Mhuri yapera kumokoteka
Kana paine chatadzwa revaiwo
Muudzanewo mese mese
Kuti ndozviri kureva vacheche
Mupote muchidzivirira mhuri mhepo
Zvinoitwawo nevane midzimu yavo
Hevo tateguru*

(varume vachibva vaombera, vakadzi vachibva vapururudza)

Now just see Mr. Guvamombe
Tell those who have gone before you
including those whose names are unknown to us:
Death has visited our homestead.
The family is strugglin.
If we have erred,
tell us and tell those with you
that this is what the peoples are saying:
Protect your extended family
as others are also protected by their ancestors.
Thank you, great ancestor.

(At this stage men clap their hands and women ululate).

This prayer addresses the ancestors. The aim is to please them and make them feel sufficiently honoured that they will concede to preside over the event. It is believed that this *kusuma* enables things to move smoothly. If this fails, this can result in

mishaps among the living (Mbuya Muchadura 12-03-21). Apart from the ancestors, other respected people such as parents, in-laws and other important relatives are consulted at different stages of the process. The aim is to keep them informed of all things at all times. Failure to do so can result in an important person walking away and abandoning the process. That would be disastrous.

Another aspect of reconciliation associated with death rites of passage has to do with the need for continued harmony between the family of a deceased married woman and that of her living husband. If the bride-price (*roora*) for the deceased woman had not been fully paid for, her relatives will demand that this be done before they proceed with the burial procedures. This helps to reconcile the man with his parents-in-law and ensures that there is peace and harmony. It also ensures that the spirit of the deceased will not be upset for not having had a sufficient bride-price paid for her.

All these aspects indicate the strong need for harmony among the living, and between the living and the departed. The death rites of passage bring this need of reconciling to the fore.

3.6.2 The reconciling function of *kurova guva* rite of passage

While the reconciling function pervades all rites of passage within the Zezuru culture, it is the *kurova guva* (bringing home) ceremony that supremely epitomizes this function. The general thrust of the entire ceremony is that of bringing back home the spirit of the departed which had been given a whole year to connect with the ancestors and establish fellowship with them. The *kurova guva* is about the living who now plead with the living-dead to come back home and look after surviving members of the family. The message is clear. Death must not create separation between the living and the living-dead. The preparation for and execution of this

ceremony is undertaken mostly by women. It is the women who must sprout the millet grain needed for brewing the needed beer; grind the millet grain; prepare the beer; cook the food for the many attendees; create the right atmosphere through their singing, ululation and dancing. All this is an indication of the active participation in the healing process by and for women in the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture.

3.7 The nurturing, liberating and empowering functions of death rites of passage

In this section the concepts of nurturing, liberating and empowering are taken together because of their affinities.

3.7.1 The three functions

The question to be considered is whether and to what extent the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture achieve these outcomes for women in general, and widows in particular. With regard to *nurturing*, Clinebell (1979) developed a counselling model that involves encouraging the growth and development of a person's talents and potential. He describes it as 'a human-potential approach to the helping process, facilitating the maximum development of a person's potentialities at each life stage, in ways that contribute to the growth of others as well and to the development of society in which all persons will have an opportunity to use their full potentialities' (Clinebell 1979:17-18). Building on Clinebell's insights on nurturing, Lartey (2003:690-691) identifies the following six interdependent dimensions of growth or nurturing:

- the mind;
- the body;
- relationships with others;

- relationship with the biosphere;
- relationship with the groups and institutions that sustain one's life;
- the spiritual dimension.

Nurturing takes place through *caring* – acceptance, affirmation, grace and love – and through *confrontation* – openness and honesty about those aspects of reality that are being ignored or denied (Lartey 2003:694). This section examines the extent to which the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture contribute to nurturing of women in general and widows in particular, in the sense described by Clinebell (1984) and elaborated on by Lartey (2003). The rites of passage are examined as potentially, at their best, taking place in a 'time of crisis and opportunity' which require people 'to leave past attitudes and limitations behind and to embrace new, potentially threatening, possibilities' (Lartey 2003:694-696).

Closely aligned to nurturing is the concept of *liberating*. A well-nurtured person will also be a liberated one. Liberation is needed on a mental level, where a person is free and able to think for themselves. Liberation is needed on the societal level, where a person is free from 'servile dependence on others in one's social circle or outside it' (Lartey 2003:700). Dominant groups in society are often able to suppress the views and expression of other groups through coercion, threat and intimidation, or by marginalizing or trivializing them. Domination and oppression can be overt or covert (Lartey 2003:701). Dominated people, such as women who are subjected to patriarchy and androcentrism, tend to internalise the messages about them and become 'full of self-hatred and ambivalence about their self-worth' (Lartey 2003:703-704).

Liberating these people involves the intricate and delicate processes of raising awareness about the sources and causes of oppression and domination in society.

This entails the critical and analytic examining of both personal and structural sources, causes and developments in the establishment of current situations of inequality. In addition to consciousness raising, there is the important task of considering the options available for change. Then choices have to be made, followed by action, reflection and evaluation (Lartey 2003:704-707). The death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture will be examined for their potential to liberate women in general, and widows in particular.

The third concept being examined in this section is *empowerment*, which is closely related to nurturing and liberation. Lartey explains that marginalized groups and persons often endure years of enforced and internalized helplessness, or what psychologist Ernest Seligman calls 'learned helplessness'. This includes a lack of confidence, low self-esteem and a lack of other personal characteristics that are required for effective action in the social realm (Lartey 2003:709-711).

The empowerment of such marginalized or oppressed groups would then involve a processes of revaluing the self and one's personal characteristics. It will also involve finding and using available resources outside oneself. This will enable and motivate persons and groups to think and act in ways that will result in greater freedom and participation in the life of the societies of which they are a part (Lartey 2003:711-713). In this empowerment model the emphasis is on the fact that there is always something good, something of worth and value within human persons as they are. Empowerment is not about overcoming weakness as much as it implies that one builds on some pre-existing strengths (Lartey 2003:598-603). The following section investigates the extent to which the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture fulfils the three functions of nurturing, liberation and empowerment for African women in general, and the widows in particular.

3.7.2 The three functions and pre-burial and burial rituals

The first exploration is about whether the functions of nurturing, liberating and empowering can be fulfilled by the pre-burial and burial rituals in Zezuru culture. With regard to the function of nurturing, the fixed nature of the rituals do not have room for flexibility. They therefore do not really encourage creative thinking outside the cultural patterns. In this sense they do not nurture growth. However the pre-burial and burial rituals do have the potential to nurture relationships with other individuals, as well as with groups and institutions. Caring – acceptance, affirmation, grace and love – is the most observed and most obvious means of nurturing relationships by means of these rituals. It is the women who provide most of the emotional caring support to the bereaved, especially to the widow. They actively participate in the preparation of the body (*kugadzira chitunha*) shortly after the death of the person. During the funeral wake they surround the bereaved widow. She can therefore experience that her burden is shared by caring others. The women's singing and ululation that takes place until the burial itself takes place, has a calming effect on the bereaved. When the women *sahwiras* (ritual friends) and the *varooro* (daughters-in-law) tie fiber bands on the arms of close relatives of the dead they help to identify to guests who the close relatives are. The relatives can then receive the condolences of the guest mourners. In this the relatives can experience a sense of solidarity. Furthermore, the provision and preparation of food is done mainly by women. In the Zezuru culture food has a meaning that goes beyond that of merely bodily sustenance. This is evident in the saying: *Ukama igaswa, hunozadziswa nekudya* (Our relationship is incomplete unless we eat together). The relationships that are nurtured in these pre-burial and burial rituals are often carried into the future. The bereaved widow will not forget those who meant so much to her during her hour of need. She will do the same for those who would have stood with her should they lose a loved-one.

Throughout the pre-burial and burial rituals relationships are not only nurtured through *caring*. They are also nurtured through *confrontation*, which Lartey (2003: 694) describes as ‘openness and honesty about those aspects of reality that are being ignored or denied’. Whenever a widow’s grief exhibits extreme behaviour, such as expressing the wish to die, the women who surround her, particularly the *sahwira* (ritual friend), encourage growth to occur in the new experience of being a widow. They discuss the new reality with her. They support her and encourage her to focus on the children who will be lost without her. The *sahwiras* should be educated to avoid harmful platitudes such as ‘your loved one is in a better place or state and therefore there is no need for desperate thoughts’. In the many ways that women utilise the pre-burial and burial rituals to support the bereaved widow, long-lasting relationships are often established on an individual and a communal level.

Apart from the nurturing that comes from the relationships and sharing, nurturing also takes place in the spiritual dimension. All the Zezuru death rituals have a spiritual dimension. The belief that those who had died live on in the spiritual realm requires certain actions from the women in order that the living-dead can appreciate what they do for them. An example is the *kupeta mufi* (preparing the body of the deceased). The closing of the eyes and mouth, the folding of the hands and the washing and dressing of the body in a typical rural setting have to be done in a prescribed way that guarantees the satisfaction of the living-dead. The dead are cleansed for their journey into the next level of existence. This, together with the women’s singing, dancing and ululating ensures that the deceased will leave the earthly home with good memories. All the other pre-burial and burial rituals too have spiritual significance. In an interview (15-12-20), the participant described a sense of liberation when she knew that she had done her utmost for the living-dead.

With regard to the function of *liberation*, the aspect of mental liberation does not apply when considering the functions and contribution of Zezuru death rituals. Because they are strictly prescribed, the rituals and pre-set customs do not leave any room for the women to think for themselves. In an interview (15-12-20), a male participant expressed the opinion that the wife of the deceased should be able to participate fully in the decision making and funeral arrangements. She should not remain only a distant spectator. Being there and participating in the burial, would facilitate the function of liberation for them. This concurs with what Maidei (23-02-21) was told when her husband died: 'I was told not to go to the grave when my husband was being buried. I looked on from a distance hiding behind a bush, because it is believed that if I see the grave and how he is laid to rest, his spirit would continue to come back into my life.' The belief that a dead person has power to continue to influence and even govern the living, will continue to bind the widow to the perceived wishes of the late husband. The effect is the opposite of liberating. However, Zezuru culture does have some more liberating rituals to release the widow from the spirit of the deceased husband. Munorwei, in Mount Darwin, had her undergarment thrown into the grave by another woman because she was not allowed to be at the grave. This ritual is meant to ensure that the widow is liberated of the spirit of the deceased husband.

In general, the pre-burial and burial rituals continue to exhibit the extent to which servile dependence is expected of women and the structures of patriarchal dominance. Decisions are taken at male only gatherings (*dare*) and conveyed to women for implementation. Women therefore remain marginalized or trivialized, which is a potential threat to their self-worth (see Lartey 2003:703-704). The only recourse women have is to 'whisper' their views and wishes especially to the nephew who can convey them to the *dare*. There the males will still decide whether to incorporate the widows ideas or not. Therefore women should be made aware of

‘the sources and causes of oppression and domination in society’. This involves ‘the critical and analytic examining of both personal and structural sources, causes and developments in the establishment of current situations of inequality’ as well as the consideration of available options for change (Lartey 2003:704-707).

Closely aligned with the function of liberation is the function of *empowering*. Pre-burial and burial rituals tend to reinforce in women the ‘internalized helplessness’ and ‘deficiencies in confidence, self-esteem and other personal characteristics required for effective action in the social realm’ (Lartey 2003:709-711). It is not sufficient for the wellbeing of women that they adhere to assigned roles. They should also be enabled to reevaluate themselves in order to come to a point where they can ‘think and act in ways that will result in greater freedom and participation in the life of the societies of which they are a part’ (Lartey 2003:711-713). They need to be conscientized to that ‘something good, something of worth and value’ that is already within them as women and upon which they can build (Lartey 2003:598-603). The cultural pre-burial and burial rites of passage do not fulfil the function of empowering. They rather reenforce the patriarchal system in which women are trapped and powerless. Chapter 6 discusses the role of the Christian faith as a resource for conscientization and the pastoral function of empowering.

3.7.3 The three functions and post-burial rituals

With regard to the function of nurturing, this is in many ways similar in the post-burial rituals as in the pre-burial and burial rituals. Primarily, it is the interpersonal and group relational aspects of the rituals that are nurturing ‘in ways that contribute to the growth of others as well and to the development of society in which all persons will have an opportunity to use their full potentialities’ (Clinebell 1979:17-18). Here too women function both as agents and recipients of care and acceptance.

Immediately after the burial there is a gathering of both men and women. The aim is to make decisions regarding the welfare of dependent children of the deceased. If the deceased was a mother, one of her sisters is designated as *sarapavana* (replacement mother). A similar procedure would apply if a father died. One of the brothers would then assume the role of *sarapavana* (replacement father) This is a crucial element in the nurturing function of the Zezuru culture. Children should not become destitute because a parent has died. They continue to be nurtured and provided for by members of the extended family and very specifically by the one designated as the *sarapavana*. This ensures some continuity. The children are nurtured physically, emotionally, psychologically and in other ways by the designated substitute. This points to the nurturing role of women within the family.

A few weeks following the burial, the *hwahwa hwemvura* or *hwahwa hwehonye* (body decomposition) ceremony takes place. The essential elements of this ceremony include beer and food, both of which are prepared by women. The beer and food strengthen the relationships among the living and the relationship between the living and the departed. As beer is poured on the ground it is believed to quench the thirst of the departed. It is also about the living sharing and having communion with those who have departed (Banana 1991:29). The women play the role of preparing the food and drink.

This nurturing role by women is even more accentuated in the *kurova guva* (home-bringing) ceremony that happens a year after burial. They prepare the food and drink by means of which to appease the dead when the body is brought back to the village after a year of wandering in the forest. The spirit of the departed would otherwise be unhappy to remain homeless, neither in the world of the living or in the world of the ancestors. This *kurova guva* ceremony marks the integration of the living-dead with

the living on the one hand and the departed ancestors (*vadzimu*) on the other hand. The nurturing role of women during the *kurova guva* ceremony also has a significant spiritual dimension, not only a social one.

What is true of nurturing in the *hwahwa hwehonye* and *kurova guva* ceremonies is also true for the *kugara nhaka* (wife inheritance) ceremony. Women play a central role in preparing the food and drink that nurture relationships. In all of these rituals, women nurture relationships through caring. The aspect of gentle ‘confrontation’ (Lartey 2003: 694) is also there. While death will be seen by the bereaved as a time of crisis the widow’s ritual friend (*sahwira*) will, through caring confrontation, point her to the opportunities that can easily be overlooked in grief. For example, she will point out the husband’s release from pain, and her own release from the onerous nursing duties that took away from her time with the children. Hence the widow is encouraged to ‘leave past attitudes and limitations behind and to embrace new, potentially threatening, possibilities’ (Lartey 2003:694-696).

The liberating and empowering aspects can be considered together, not only because they are closely aligned, but also because they are not prominent in post-burial rituals. Liberation and empowerment for women in general, and widows in particular, are not clearly visible during the *hwahwa hwemvura/hwehonye* and the *kurova guva* ceremonies. In the Zezuru patriarchal society the rigidity of customs means that women are not supposed to think for themselves, but are to remain in ‘servile dependence’, relying on the thoughts and decisions of men (Lartey 2003:700). They have ‘endured years of enforced and internalized helplessness’ with consequent ‘deficiencies in confidence, self-esteem and other personal characteristics required for effective action in the social realm’ (Lartey 2003:709-711).

The liberation and empowerment of women should then clearly come from the outside. It cannot be achieved through the very same structures that enslave and disempower them, which in this case are the prevailing cultural death rites and rituals. Chapter 6 investigates the contribution of the Christian faith and the pastoral functions of liberation and empowerment for 'raising awareness about the sources and causes of oppression and domination in society'. The chapter also considers the 'options available for change' (Lartey 2003:704-707). Paulo Freire's (1970; see Lartey 2003:598-603) educational model of conscientizing the oppressed and marginalized can add value for women as they proceed through the post-burial rituals designed and executed in a patriarchal society.

However, when it comes to the post-burial *kugara nhaka* (inheritance) ceremony some traces of liberation and empowerment can be identified. At the centre of this ceremony is the *kugarwa nhaka* (literally 'to be inherited') whereby the widow is allowed, through use of symbolism, to choose one of her late husband's brothers to inherit her. She can also choose not to be inherited. If this is what she chooses, she symbolically gives water or the knobkierie to the late husband's sister, or to one of her children. This power to choice is liberating and empowering in a sense. She is not forced into marriage against her will. However, this choice does have consequences. The power of choice remains fragile if she is not significantly empowered in other areas as well. A woman would need psychological, emotional and financial strength to overcome the effect of years of subservience in a marriage and to then be able to really live her own life. Without the ability to support herself financially, and without a strong inner resolve, her power of choice can easily become more theoretical than realistic. She can succumb to the expectations of the family and choose a husband among the late husband's brothers for continued survival.

3.8 Summary

This chapter evaluated whether and how Zezuru death rites of passage fulfil the pastoral functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering of widows and those women who support them through the rituals. The rituals before and after the burial were investigated separately.

The overall picture that emerged is that the patriarchal nature of the Zezuru culture has a limiting effect on the agency of the women. The pastoral care functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering are partially fulfilled in the rituals. In other respects they are not fulfilled at all. Men remain the ones who dominate the process. There are some areas of influence from women, even if that does not really amount to agency or liberation. In all the rites of passage the cultural roles assigned to women make them indispensable to the process. In this ways they are able to fulfil the some of the pastoral functions with regard to the bereaved.



CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

As part of investigating the role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture in Zimbabwe, this chapter presents the results of the narrative interviews with six women. The names of the widows have been changed to protect their privacy. They read and signed the consent form to indicate their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix 1). The motivation of the empirical part of the study is listen to the voices of the *Zezuru* widows as they themselves explain their roles in the death rites of passage from the death mourning rites to the after-burial rituals. By means of written testimonies, interview data and workshop reflections, the women tell their stories. This brings to the fore their lived experience (see Daniel 2008:147).

The qualitative phenomenological investigation utilizes a multiple case design. The qualitative methodology is appropriate to the investigation, since it creates space for the perceptions, feelings and opinions of the participants (Mounton & Marias 1989:157). The interviews facilitated the participants to narrate their own stories as they responded to open-ended questions. Due to the Corona Virus pandemic (COVID-19) questions were largely sent to participants by email, WhatsApp and Short Message Service (SMS messages). When the lockdown restrictions were relaxed in May 2021 the participants and six other women who served as a focus group members were invited to a three-day retreat which took place from 23-25 May 2021 at the United Baptist Conference Centre in Harare (Appendix 10). The purpose of the retreat was to enable the participants to complete their narratives, share widowhood experiences and reflect on one another's stories. The women agreed on

the use of Shona and English as the languages of discussion. The theme of the discussions was 'Healed by God' love'. The morning devotions by a female pastor focused on widows in the Bible. This enabled the group to identify the themes that were prevalent among the participants (see Appendix 12). The women appreciated that the widowhood journey is different for every individual. The participants interacted with each individual story. This chapter presents the narrative of each participant and the feedback from the group. Common themes are identified and discussed.

4.2 Participant narratives

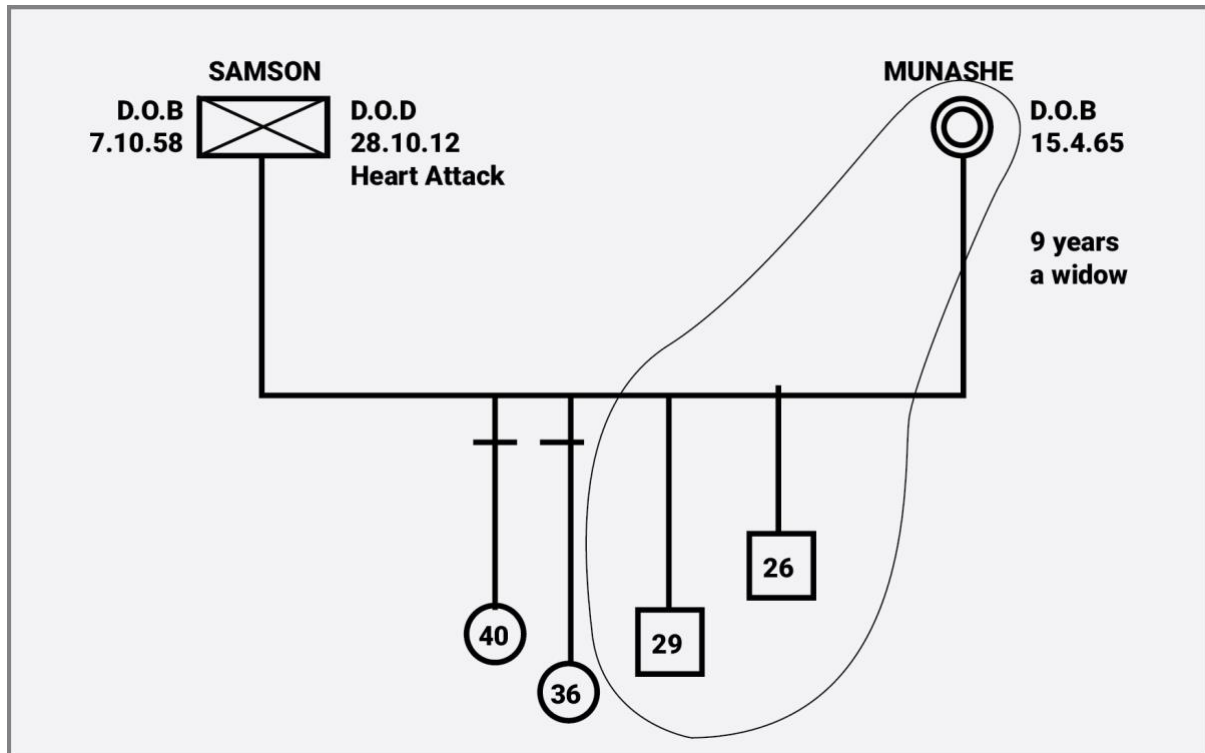
This section presents the participants' narratives, supported by each person's genogram which depicts the immediate family situation. Each narrative is followed by reflections from focus group. The persons in the focus groups who were not primary research participants are identified as focus group member (FGM). Primary research participants are allocated pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and adhere to the privacy requirements of the University of Pretoria.

4.2.1 Participant 1: Munashe

The first participant, Munashe, was born on 15 April 1965. Her genogram which summarizes her family situation, sheds light on her narrative.



4.2.1.1 Genogram and narrative: Munashe



Munashe's husband Samson was born on 7 October 1958 and died on 28 October 2012 of heart attack. They were married for thirty-four years. They had two daughters and two sons, all of whom completed their degree and are now employed. Munashe lives with the two sons in Harare. The one daughter is employed in South Africa and the other purchased her own home in an affluent suburb of Harare. Munashe comments: 'I am so happy that I managed to put my children through university with God's guidance and without any help from the extended family.'

Munashe's husband Samson had heart problems for quite some time. One Friday he had a heart attack and collapsed in the bathroom. Munashe saw that he could not speak. Because of his size and weight, she could not move him. Even with the help of her youngest son they could not move him up to the bedroom. With the help of

neighbours, they took him to hospital where he admitted to the Intensive Care Unit because of his critical condition. Samson died on the third day. It was a Sunday morning. The experience of seeing her husband dead in hospital was devastating to Munashe and her children. She describes it as follows: ‘This was the most painful experience – to see my husband who was always so full of life lying there dead and motionless, without having said goodbye to me and the children.’ They left the hospital and informed the immediate relatives of his death. His relatives asked about his collapse and death. They chose not to believe Munashe’s account of what had happened and accused her of neglecting him. She relates it as follows:

I was accused of having killed him and that I poisoned my husband. They accused me of delaying to check on him in the bathroom and said that I did not take good care of him. Some of the relatives were angry at me. In their minds they concluded that I had killed my husband to inherit his wealth.

The elder brother took charge of the funeral arrangements. Munashe and her adult children were not included. When Samson was alive, he and his brother did not discuss what should be done when one of them died. The death was unexpected and they were unprepared, despite the fact that several members of her husband’s family had died of heart problems. The first hurdle was to decide on a place of burial. Munashe related it as follows: ‘My brother-in-law wanted all burial procedures to take place at their village, but the children and I insisted that he was to be buried in Harare.’ Munashe arranged with her church to have a night vigil for two nights while they waited for her daughter to arrive from South Africa.

Munashe did not perform the pre-burial rituals because everything was done by the funeral parlour. The parlour did the washing and dressing of the body. Munashe



describes it as follows: 'This was a blessing to me because I do not understand the meanings of some of the rituals.' Her church was very supportive and the funeral arrangements went on very smoothly. With regard to the night vigil, the service was held in Munashe's church. There the people could share their memories of Samson. When the body lay in state, Munashe sat at the foot end. This was a ritual she performed without understanding its significance. Samson's mother sat at the head for the whole night. The *varooras* did their dances. They tied white strips of material to some members of the audience in order to identify them as close relatives. This was done for the benefit of those who came to pay their respects.

During the morning of the day of burial, Munashe was told to leave the room because the immediate family wanted to perform their private rituals. At this moment she felt alienated and describes it as follows: *Ndakazoono kuti chokwadi apa handikwane, ndakava mutorwa chaiye* (I became a total stranger among my husband's family members. I did not fit in). As she was sitting near the door, she could hear what was going on inside. It went as follows:

The *Muzukuru*: *Uyu munhu wenyu uyu, hamuchazomuonazve.*
(Behold your person, you will not see him again).

The elder brother: *Tava kuda kukuburitsa, kuenda newe kuimba yako itsva. Usadzokeko kusvika tazouya kuzokutora kana gore rapera Mufakose.*

(We are getting ready to take you to the grave. Do not come back until we come to fetch you after a year according to custom).
Hatikukanganwe iwe Samson, tinokurangirira baba wemusha uno. Tinoramba tichikurangirirai Mufakose, zororai murugare mwana wababa vangu. Varikumatenga tasuma kwamuri mwana wenyu uyo.



(We will not forget you Samson, we remember you father of this homestead. We will always remember you Mufakose, rest in peace my father's son. To those who are in the heavens we are committing your child to you).

The women in the room were ululating and men were clapping their hands in agreement.

This was followed by the viewing of the body. Close relatives were the last to enter the room to pay their respect to the deceased. The *Muzukuru* then announced: *Madzimbuya, madzitete, varoora, vazukuru, tave kuburitsa mudzimu wedu. Munhu wenyu ave kuenda kuimba yake yatinomuradzika* (To your mother-in-law's, aunts, sisters-in-law, grandsons: we are taking us soon to be ancestral spirit out for burial. Your deceased person is going to his resting home – the grave). The *vatukwa* (ritual friends) and *varooras* ululated and swept the driveway near the entrance of the main door. After the sweeping, they ululated again as the body was ushered out. The ululation of the women signifies respect, not rejoicing.

The male friends of Samson carried the bier to the grave. First, they circled the homestead. The coffin was placed on the right side of the grave. Munashe's pastor conducted the committal ceremony. Munashe was not allowed by the in-laws to come close to the grave. She had to look on from a distance. Once the burial ceremony was complete, the crying ceased and relatives announced that Samson's spirit was now satisfied that he had been mourned adequately.

Because he was buried in the city there was no need for the grave to be guarded at night as the custom was in rural villages. The day after the burial Munashe and the relatives went to the grave early in the morning to check that it had not been tampered with. Then followed the *kugova mbatya* (distribution of clothes) ritual. The

elder brother announced that he was going to do it according to *chivanhu chedu* (Zezuru tradition). The brothers took everything that belonged to Samson and shared it among themselves. Munashe and the children were completely disregarded despite the fact that Samson had bequeathed all his belongings to his wife and children in his will.

Nobody was appointed to be *sarapavana* (the male adult guardian who is to take responsibility for deceased's family). They were punishing Munashe for supposedly killing their brother. She was instructed not to ask for any help from family members. She also suffered verbal abuse. One of her sisters-in-law said:

Wanga uchivhaira nemari yemurume wako, hanzvadzi yangu, towona kuti uchavimba neyi zvawazvidyira murume wako wega

(You were comfortable with my brother's money. We will see what happens now, since you killed your husband).

The *nyaradzo* (consolation) service was conducted at Munashe's church. Samson's family members did not attend. They had wanted it done at the rural home. From then on there was no more communication between Munashe and her in-laws. There was no talk of a *kurova guva* ceremony. There was also no *kugarwa nhaka*. No one wanted to inherit the wife of the deceased who was considered to be a murderer and witch. Munashe was not interested in 'being inherited' by anyone. She put it as follows: 'I am content with my widowhood status. One thing I have told myself is: *kufirwa handinyore kugamuchira veduwe*' (it is not easy to accept a state of bereavement). Her aim was to work hard to have her children educated. She felt that God was faithful to their family. Her daughter took over the university fees of the two boys. The second daughter who lives and works in South Africa would send them groceries. Munashe sold her kitchenware to get some money. People in the community and church supported her by buying what she was selling. They

managed to survive. She is thankful to God for the provision. Munashe concluded her narrative with these words:

I am praying that this curse be broken so that it does not affect my four children. As a widow I am self-reliant. I knit and crochet woollen hats and scarves to sell. I make a lot money from selling kitchenware. I am glad I do not need to bother anyone for support.

Munashe verbalized what she called *kuteerera zviru mupfungwa* (obedience to one's own mind). She let go of her worries and allowed God take control of her life. She also shared how her faith and trust in God allowed her to go on a new journey to overcome her grief with the help of God. Her hope is to continue healing on her widowhood journey. Her favourite Scripture is Jeremiah 31:3: I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.

4.2.1.2 Focus group reflection: Munashe

FGM3: When you were saying your painful experiences, I identified with you because I had difficult and challenging moments to accept the death of my husband who succumbed to COVID-19.

Chipo: In your story Munashe I learnt that when you are committed to God and serve God fully, the members and leaders of the faith community and your pastors will support you in times of need.

FGM4: After hearing your story I have come to the conclusion that there is life after death. One has to move on with your life and not expect people to come to your aid.

Nomsa: I am a young widow myself. From your story I have learned that God will not leave me or forsake me. God will be there for me. What an encouragement that is to me!

Munorwei: I realize that as women we should stand for our spiritual rights. We should not be forced to perform rituals that contradict our belief system. You gave an example when it was said: *Tave kuda kuita zvechivanhu chedu saka vechechi mapedza basa renyu* (We are now going to perform our sacred ritual; your church people are done with their part). The way you explained your husband's conversion to one of the relatives, emboldened me not to be ashamed of my faith.

FGM6: When you shared your experience of being called a witch and accused of killing your husband, I experienced that I was not the only one accused of bewitching a husband. I could strengthen myself by saying: 'Just like Munashe, I am not a witch; I did not kill my husband.' I identified with your terrible experience of being labelled what you are not during the grief process and period of mourning.

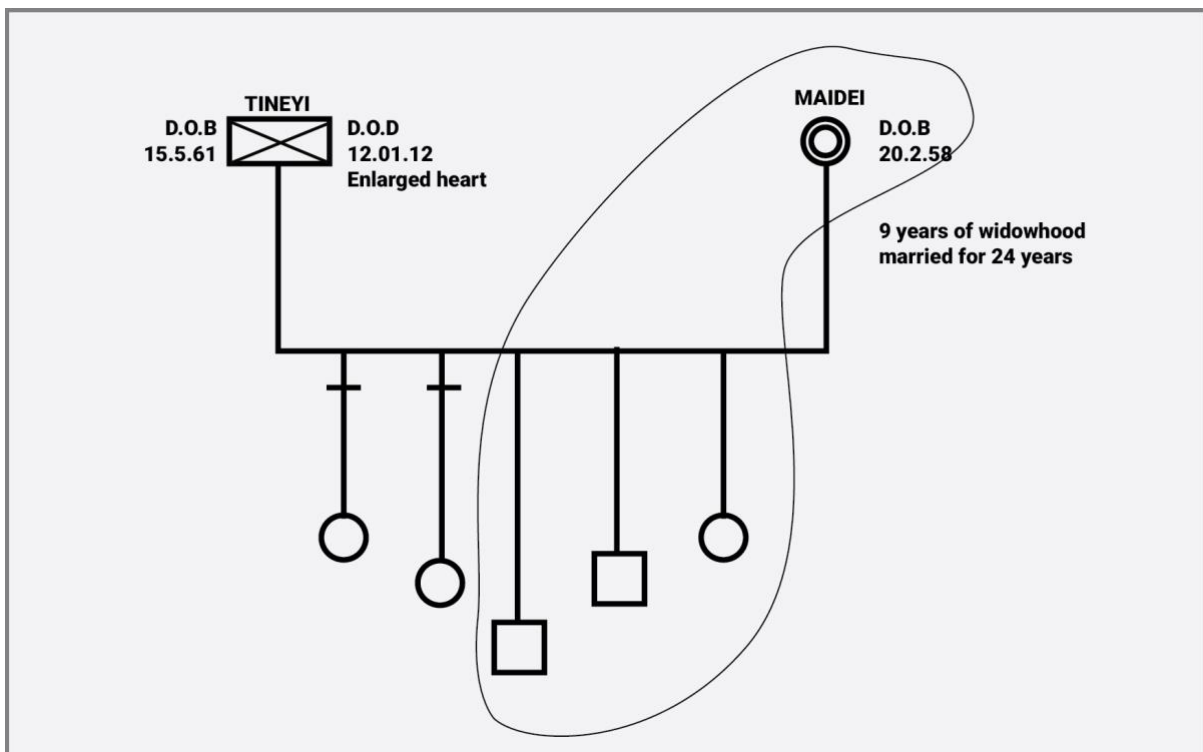
Chipo: I can testify to a similar experience as yours. It felt as though you were telling my story. The impact of sudden death is devastating. It leaves the bereaved widow with many regrets and a sense of unfinished business. I know now that I am not the only one who was traumatized by in-laws. My stress decreased as I heard your story – I was not the only one to go through such a grief process. I now feel relieved of the stress and burdens of widowhood that were haunting me. I feel greatly empowered. I realize now that the stories of some other widows are worse than mine. It has learnt from this to count my blessings, rather than focus on the negatives.

Munashe: Thank you for much for your reflections on my story. Participating in this retreat has given me a sense of peace. I have shared the burdens that weighed heavily on my heart. I am also relieved to know that I am not the only one in this situation. I feel greatly healed. I know that God loves me no matter my situation or what I am going through. Now I can be a facilitator for the healing of other widows.

4.2.2 Participant 2: Maidei

Maidei, the second participant, was born on 20th February 1958. Her genogram and narrative are as follows:

4.2.2.1 Genogram and narrative: Maidei



Maidei's husband Tineyi took ill in 2010. As the problem intensified, he was in and out of the hospital. His heart was enlarged and there was a build-up of fluid around the heart. His immediate relatives and parents did not visit him while he was ill. They accused Maidei of having bewitched her husband. The brothers only visited him in hospital the day before he died. During the period of his illness Maidei felt lonely and rejected. When Tineyi died on 12 January 2012 they had been married for twenty-four years. She had now been a widow for nineteen years.

When her husband died Maidei immediately informed his brothers and mother. They told her to make all the funeral arrangements herself. Ordinarily the family of the deceased should have worked together on these matters. Maidei also informed her husband's employers of his death. They offered financial support for the funeral. In the meantime, her husband's brothers had gone ahead to acquire the burial order and they also made arrangements for a post-mortem. This was very disturbing to Maidei and her children. Hurtful statements were made, but she managed to retain her composure. She relates the story as follows:

While I was looking for funeral money at his work place, his brothers-in-law went behind my back and started the proceedings of acquiring a casket and transporting the body to his village. I was told that the children and I were not welcome at the village. I was to remain in the city. They would come and pick me up for the memorial ceremony (*nyaradzo*).

Maidei tried to convince the brothers-in-law that it was important for the children to be part of the burial proceedings. However, she was completely cut off from all the arrangements. One of the brothers telephoned to demand that she sends clothes to the funeral parlour for the dressing of the body. The coffin had already been bought

without the family consulting or involving the widow and the children. The in-laws arrived at her house with the body. She was informed that they were taking the body *kumusha* (to the home village). She and the children were not permitted to go. They reiterated the accusations that she had killed her husband. She was treated like a *mutorwa* (stranger) in the whole situation. The body was never allowed into the house where they lived for the *kuwoneka musha* (farewell ceremony to the earthly home). It was also not permitted to lie in state at their house. She was pained by this and her spirit was crushed. The children were in deep sorrow. They had lost their provider. She had lost her friend in life. This is how she recounts her story:

Kwakava nekusawirirana nemhuri yangu kuti tisafambise basa remufi tose. Kunyanya kusada kuti tinitora chitunha tese nokuchirarisa mumba vozoenda zvavo kumusha, uye kuti ini semukadzi wemufi tisaende navo asi kuzodanirwa nyaradzo, ndopondozoona pakavigwa mudikani wangu. Zvakandirwadza nekushungurudza.

(There was no unity between my family and my husband's. There were no joint arrangements for the burial. It was painful to be left out of the arrangements and also that my husband could not lie in state at our house even for a few hours before they took him *kumusha* (home). I was particularly pained by the idea of them leaving me and my children out of their plans; we were the bereaved immediate family after all! We had to wait for the *nyaradzo* ceremony to see where he was buried. This was very painful. I felt abused psychologically. Even as I write this story I have great pain in my heart.)

She was not a religious person. However, she did have a spiritual experience as she was making her decisions. She borrowed two cars from friends to transport members of her own family to the home village where the burial would take place. She and her children sat at a distance from the funeral proceedings because they were not supposed to be there. The children tried to persuade her to become involved and give a eulogy, but she refused. After the burial she, her children and relatives drove back to Harare. There were no dates set for *nyaradzo* or *kurova guva* or the *nhaka* ceremonies. The husband's family did not want to involve her since they had declared her a witch. One of the brothers came to remove their furniture, the stove and the fridge. He left them with an empty house. They also took the mini-bus that she used to transport the children to school. She experienced this as emotional and psychological torture. She did not have the space to grieve properly because of the multiple and traumatic problems with which she had to deal.

As she was searching for answers, she found herself calling upon God with whom she did not have a relationship. The neighbours who were Christians gave her things for the house. She appealed for help from the Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association (ZWLA) and eventually her property was recovered. The successful outcome of the legal process was because of the appeal to Section 26(d) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which states: 'In the event of dissolution of a marriage, whether through death or divorce, provision is made for the necessary protection of any children and spouses.' The ZWLA helped her to understand her rights. She could only begin to grieve the loss of her husband when the legal process was complete.

Maidei feels sad that the usual rites of passage could not be conducted for her husband. As a married man with children, he qualified to be an ancestor. However, his mother and brothers denied him this right. Especially because Maidei took his

family to court to achieve justice for her children and herself, there was no mention of their taking part in the *nhaka* and *kudarika tsvimbo* (inheritance and jumping over the knobkierie) ceremonies. Her biggest consolation was the women's fellowship of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (*Ruwadzano*). They came to her assistance when they heard that she had lost everything after the death of her husband. She testifies to having seen the love of God through the actions of these women. This inspired her to become a follower of Christ. Now she is one of them, was baptized and uniformed. Pain and suffering made her realize the need that Jesus walk with her.

4.2.2.2 Focus group reflection: Maidei

The focus group responded to Maidei's narrative as follows:

FGM.1: As you were sharing, I was in tears because your journey is similar to mine. You were isolated, excluded from the planning and made to feel completely powerless.

Patricia: There is much with which I can identify in your story. In my case to the property was taken as punishment for neglecting and killing their relative.

FGM4: While you were sharing, I had a sense of relief from what was churning in my mind. I need not feel the anxiety or isolation anymore because now I know I am not alone in this journey of widowhood.

Chipo: Listening to your story has taught me how important it is that we know what our constitution says about a widow's rights and the inheritance.

Munorwei: When you related your spiritual experience, I appreciated your determination when you realized that you wanted to follow God.

FGM 7: I identified with you as you were narrating your story. It was very similar to mine, especially the part where your husband's relatives went to collect the body from the mortuary without informing you.

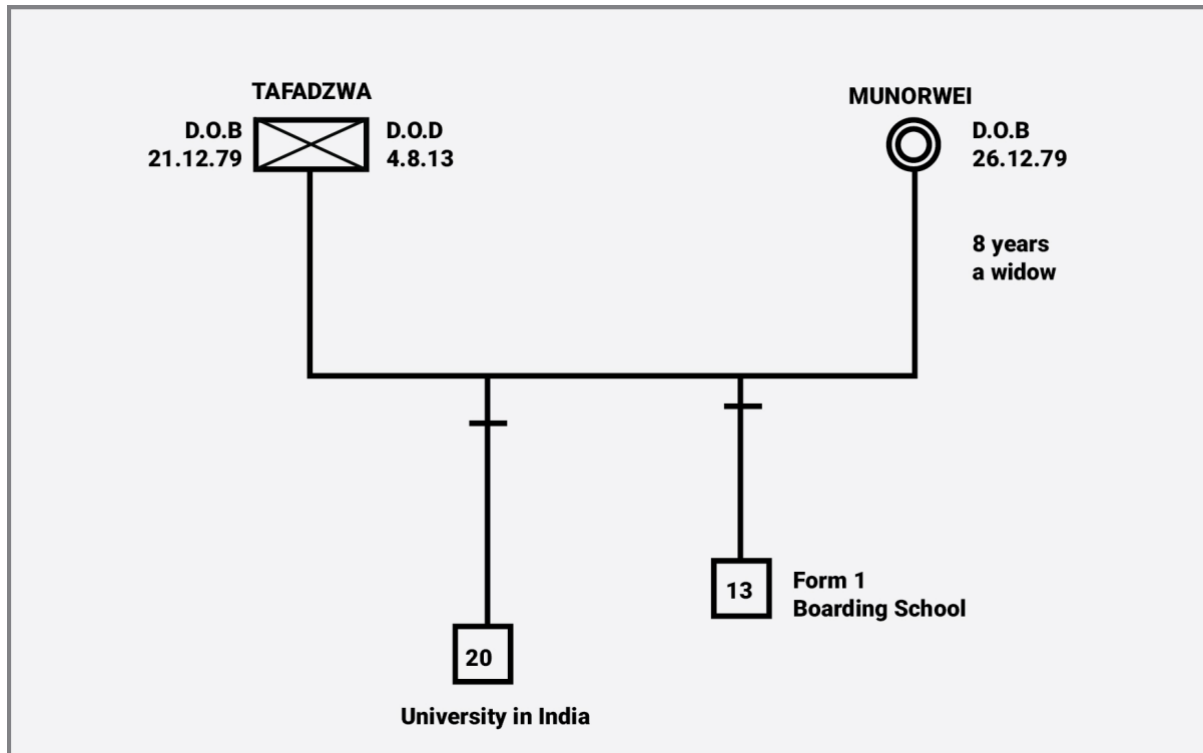
Maidei: As a new Christian I rely completely on God. God revealed Godself to me through the love the Christian women showed me when I had lost everything when one of my in-laws came and ransacked the house while I was still at the funeral. My story is similar to Neria's. That helped me to know that I am not the only one in this situation. I am healed and know that God loves me regardless of my situation or what I am going through.

The retreat gave me a feeling of relief from the prevailing situations in my life. I know now that all is well with my soul. I no longer need to experience anxiety or feel violated because now I have a network of women who understand me. From the theme of the retreat, 'Healed by God's Love', I learnt that only God can truly heal me. I was mentally, emotionally and psychologically afraid, but after three days of sharing our various journeys, I feel relieved in my heart. The women were able to share openly their pain, trauma and the abuse they suffered. They reminded one another that even in the greatest of difficulties, God is able. The last lesson I learnt is that the journey of the bereaved spouse is not an easy one.

4.2.3 Participant 3: Munorwei

Munorwei, the third participant, was born on 26 December 1979.

4.2.3.1 Genogram and narrative: Munorwei



Munorwei has been a widow for eight years. Her late husband, Tafadzwa, was born on 21 December 1979 in Mt. Darwin, a city in Mashonaland Central, and died on 4 August 2013 in Harare. They had two sons. The older son is a student at a university in India and the younger son is at boarding school in Zimbabwe.

Tafadzwa had been ill for five years. One Sunday morning he woke up and asked his wife to call the pastor from the Zengeza Baptist Church where they were members. He did not feel well and wanted the pastor to pray with him. After the prayer time, he asked her to take boys to church because he wanted time alone with her. When it was only the two of them Tafadzwa expressed his feelings to Munorwei as follows: *Minamoto yako iri kundikanganisa, uri kunditadzisa kufa, nguva yangu yakwana.* (You are holding me back with your prayers. They are hindering my death. My time

is up). Her response was: *Hapana kwaunoenda, ini nevana tichiri kukuda. Usadaro kani Tafadzwa.* (You are not going anywhere. The children and I need you. Do not speak like this Tafadzwa). He began to gasp for air and Munorwei called for help from the neighbours. They took him to the Chitungwiza Private hospital, but on arrival he was pronounced dead. As soon as she arrived back at home, she began to inform her husband's relatives of his death. Her mother-in-law arrived at her house and was shouting to the ancestors:

*Mufakose watora mwana wako, unomuchengeta zvakanaka,
mwana arege kugara nekuzungaira namasango, Mwari iwe
nhasi mbereko yadimbuka, waitireiko zvakadai kwandiri*
(Mufakose, you have taken your child, look after him well, do not let him wonder about in the forest. God why have you treated me like this, in this day I have lost a child).

When all the relatives had arrived Munorwei was told to leave the room. The explanation was that she was not culturally related to her deceased husband. After death his spirit and body belonged to his people. She felt very sad because suddenly she treated like a stranger (*mutorwa*). The brothers only consulted her when they were beginning to make arrangements for the burial. They asked if she and her husband had discussed his wishes. They promised to respect his wishes and were happy to hear that he wished to be buried *kumusha* (at his village home) in Mount Darwin. The funeral arrangements went well and without conflict. Munorweyi praised God for this because it was in keeping with her husband's peaceful nature.

Usually upon the death of man and when his body is taken *kumusha*, the widow is expected to pack the deceased husband's clothes and belonging for distribution to

his family at *home*. However, Munorwei did not do so. She wanted it to be done at the *Nyaradzo* ceremony. She wanted to do as he had instructed her:

Kana ndazofa torai mbatya dzose itsva dzakanaka mupe vana vangu nokuti vakomana vachadzikwana”

(When I die, all the good and new clothes are to be kept for my sons. When they grow up, they will fit them).

All the property, for example the trucks and houses were bequeathed to the boys. One of her husband’s brothers did not accept her explanation. He worried that leaving items of the dead person tied in bundles would cause the *ngozi* (avenging spirit) to arise.

Munorwei planned the *Nyaradzo* with the people of her church. This was to take place one month of burial. They had a night vigil in Mt Darwin at the village. The pastor led the prayers and ministered to them through the word. After the service the pastor and church friends left so that the family could do their *kugova nhumbi* (distribution of clothes) ritual. They distributed only a few items as instructed by her husband. Her husband’s brothers agreed that the cars, trucks and house should go to the deceased’s sons. The next ritual was *nhaka* (the inheritance ceremony). She told her husband’s family that she did not subscribe to the *nhaka*. She did request that a male figure should be a mentor to the children and someone she could turn to for advice on life issues:

Ini handitenderane nazvo. Chandinoda ndechekuti pawanike anopota achiona vana. Uyezve murume wangu akati ndisaroorwe kusvikira vana vakura. Hapana anoda kupinza vana vemumwe murume chikoro (I do not accept being inherited as someone’s wife. My husband wished me not to get married again

until the children are grown up, because no man is really willing to educate someone's children).

While everybody was seated at the *nhaka* ceremony Munorwei stood up, received a gourd with water and gave it to her older son. She said to him: 'Choose one of your father's brothers, one who will be your guardian.' Her son went and gave the water to the older brother who used to visit them when their father was alive. The younger brother who did not pay much attention to her husband during his illness, did not like this. He said that he was supposed to be the one chosen to be the guardian. Then he stormed out and refused to partake in the rest of the proceedings.

The *nhaka* ritual was done soon after *nyaradzo* because Munorwei refused to have a home-coming *kurova guva* ceremony. The family respected her husband's wishes that they, as Christian believers, did not want the ritual done. Unlike the other widows, Munorwei's in-laws did respect her faith. She also still has good relations with them. She still cares and provides for her husband's mother. She still sees herself and is treated as one of the daughters, even though her husband is dead.

4.2.3.2 Focus group reflection: Munorwei

Patricia: As you were explaining about the importance of prayer and how God works in your life, I just felt I needed to learn more about prayer. I was touched by the way your husband knew you as a prayer warrior when he said to you: 'You are holding me up, your prayers are hindering my death. My time is up.' Your husband could sense your connectedness with God. I was encouraged by your prayer life and am also going to improve in my walk with God in prayer.

Munashe: Munorwei, you are one of the few women who is respected by the in-laws. They consulted you about where Tafadzwa wanted to be buried, and were



willing to follow your guidance. We are going to follow what you discussed with your husband. That was awesome, I felt happy.

FGM6: I found comfort in your firmness resolve to execute your husband's wishes: 'Just take my body home for burial. My clothes will be distributed later when you have chosen the best things to keep for the boys.' You were not intimidated when one of the brothers was angry with you. You are truly a source of empowerment for others before they themselves also have to face such a situation.

FGM1: Munorwei, you amazed me by refusing *kugarwa nhaka* (to be inherited as a wife). I remember you saying, 'I am not going to be inherited by anyone, but I do want a male figure in the life of my boys. I promised my husband that I would look after the boys until they finish school.' That took a lot of courage, and I admire you for it.

Patricia: You were wise in the way in which you handled the *kudarika* (cultural test of faithfulness following death of husband) ritual. The wisdom came from God. The way you prepared your boys was unique. You showed maturity with your different way of respecting culture without conforming to it. I will be able to help young widows knowledgeably.

FGM2: Your encouragement to us at this retreat has helped me to come out of my misery and self-pity. There is life after death. You have moved on with your life. The story of Anna who was widowed after seven years of marriage should be a good promise for you. God does not leave us or forsake us in our bereavement. This has helped me now to move on with my life.

Munorwei: Response to the focus group reflection

I am grateful to God who helped me to change the way a Zezuru woman behaves at a gathering of *nyaradzo*. I chose to reverse the oppressive ritual which just suits men's desires when I gave my son the gourd with water to choose one of the uncles to be their guardian for their psychological and social welfare.

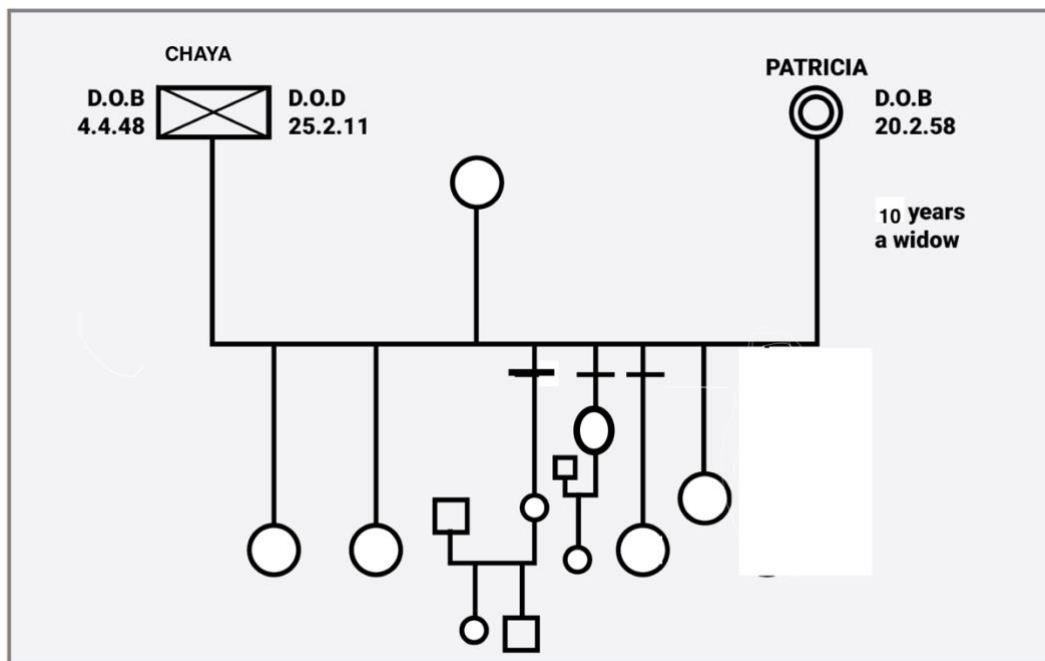
The stories presented by other widows at this retreat made me aware of the need of creating an association of widows to empower each other. Those facing problems with their in-laws could then receive guidance from those who have been through it. Gogo Chawapiwa's illustrations taught me that I should not compare the journey of my widowhood with other widows, because people's understanding of the word of God and cultural beliefs differ. She also emphasized the need for time to grieve and to be aware of our rights and to fight for them. Just hearing Gogo's story, I learnt that I should trust God on my life journey, know what I want to be and choose people of good caliber with whom to fellowship. Coming here and meeting other widows at this retreat has made me feel that I am not alone. Here are people who speak about the same pain that I have. They are able to listen without being judgmental. From now on, I realize I must set boundaries in my life in order to avoid people taking advantage of me. The film, *Neria*, showed so many situations that resonated with our experience. The film should be seen by women before they lose their husband. It will prepare them for the ordeals and experiences that could come their way when they are widowed – forewarned is forearmed.



4.2.4 Participant 4: Patricia

Patricia, the fourth participant, was born on 20 February 1958.

4.2.4.1 Genogram and narrative: Patricia



Patricia married a divorced man with two daughters. She and her husband, Chaya, were married in 1980. They had four daughters together. He died in February 2011. Her husband's home area is in Mt Darwin in Chesa, an agricultural community. Chaya developed a severe type of cancer called Kaposi Sarcoma which causes lumps in the digestive tract and lungs. He suffered from this condition for five years. During the last year of his illness, he underwent five surgeries at the St. Annes Hospital in Harare. Patricia sums up the painful experience that followed his death: *Ndakave nenguva yakaoma mushure mekufa kwemurume wangu. Hama dzake vaiti ndini ndakamuuraya kuti ndigotora zvinhu zvataive takashanda tose.*

(I had a difficult time after the death of my husband. His relatives, especially his siblings, were saying I killed him just so I could inherit what we had worked for together).

Particularly the sisters-in-law (*vanatete*) accused her of bewitching their brother so she could inherit the house, cattle and farm in Chesa.

On the day of Chaya's death Patricia had to identify the body before it could be transferred to the mortuary. When the coffin was brought into the house briefly, she was told by his family to sit at the head end, whereas her husband's mother sat at the feet end. Usually, the mother would be seated at the head and the wife at the feet. This anomaly (*chipini*) that was imposed on her was designed to bring the deceased husband's anger upon her. Patricia could not make the decision as to where her husband was to be buried. The family arranged for the burial order without consulting her. Patricia felt as though she had lost her identity: 'I lost my identity; I had known myself to be a good wife. Now my sisters-in-law stamped a new identity on me – that of "widow". I felt isolated, rejected, hopeless and lonely'. Patricia and her daughters had to follow the husband's family to Mount Darwin where he was to be buried. The body lay in state at the village home. Early the next morning Patricia was obligated to wash the corpse even though this had already been done at the funeral parlour. According to the relatives, this was the last rite she had to perform before the burial. She was doing this while the grave was being dug.

As the grave was being prepared Patricia was not allowed to leave her position at the head end of the coffin, except for going to the bathroom. She could not wash or change her clothes until after the burial. When the grave was ready, the usual pre-burial rituals took place. This included the viewing of the body. The men carried the body and Patricia and the other women followed. At the gravesite Patricia had to sit some distance away. She gave them her *rukukwe* (reed sleeping mat) to be put on



the floor of the grave. As Patricia observed everything from a distance, the sisters and other women were singing as the men finished the covering of the grave.

During the graveyard speeches Patricia's sister represented her and said the following:

Tanga takagara zvakana nemurume wangu. Akandichengeta zvakana, tikaera vana vedu tose. Murume wangu akanga anerudo uye aive chipanga mazano. Mangonzwa zvataurwa na sahwira vangu panhetembo yake. Famba murugare murume wangu uzorore kusvika tasangana.

(We lived happily together. He cared for me and we raised our children. He was full of love. He was a good counsellor to me and the community as you have heard what my ritual friend had to say. Go in peace my husband. Rest until we meet again)

The women had to search for *mahapa* (water lily) and *nhokwe* (a specific weed) to cool the body in the grave. This is called *donhodzo* (that which cools). *Donhodzo* is meant to cool temper of the spirit of the dead when it comes to visit the living. While they were placing the *donhodzo* branches the other female relatives knelt next to the grave to view the deceased. After the burial, Patricia's hut was purified with water mixed with herbs by her female friends. She was also given a bath with herbs to cleanse herself and to separate herself from the spirit of her dead husband. Her hair was shaved and she was given a black dress to wear for a whole year until *kurovaguva* (home coming) ritual. After a few days her sisters-in-law took her to a *n'anga* (diviner) who was to reveal the cause of Chaya's death, the process of *gata*. The diviner pronounced that Chaya's death was caused by angry spirits on his mother's side. This verdict did not please the sisters-in-law who had hoped for a confirmation

that Patricia had bewitched Chaya. They sisters never announced the diviner's verdict.

Patricia had to return to Chesa to prepare the *hwahwa hwehonye* (body decomposition) ceremony. Her preference was the Christian based *nyaradzo* ceremony but she was given no choice in the matter. Chaya's family were heavily steeped in the Zezuru Traditional Religion. The ceremony was supposed to be followed by a ritual in which the *sarapavana* (the guardian) was announced. However, this did not, happen. Patricia sees this as punishment on the grounds of the family's suspicion that she bewitched her husband.

After a year the *kurova guva* (home bringing) ceremony took place. Again, Patricia would have preferred the Christian tombstone unveiling ceremony as a functional substitute for the *kurova guva* ceremony. However, she was not given a choice. She had to arrange the traditional *kurova guva* ceremony, which included the brewing of the beer that was necessary for the Zezuru ceremony. The following day the *nhaka* (inheritance) ceremony took place. It included Patricia jumping over the *tsvimbo* (*knobkierie*) three times. If she did not fall, that would be a sign that she had kept herself pure after the death of her husband. She had not defiled the honour of the grave of her husband (*haana kupisa guva*). After this Patricia was instructed to present water to the man she had chosen to 'inherit' her. She refused, because she did not intend to remarry. She wanted to care for her children. This did not please Chaya's brothers.

4.2.4.2 Focus group reflection: Patricia

The focus group remarked on the compliance with what she did what she was told, even though it went against the grain. They commented as follows:



Munorweyi: As you brought up the issue of *nhaka* I was so pleased to find that I am not the only one who does not support the custom. I too wanted to rather focus on looking after the children.

FGM2: I could identify with the words with which you introduced your story:
Hakuna mazwi anobva kumunhu anogona kunyaradza munhu kunze kwaMwari
(No one can find the words to comfort a bereaved person, except God).
Truly, no words can match what God says to us in times of sorrow.

Munashe: It seems, Patricia, that when your husband passed on you have been doing the rituals even though they caused you pain. You are a very compliant person.

Chipo: Patricia your *sahwira* was very creative and it shows how much of your family history she has. Treasure the words; they are full of richness. Your husband is remembered for his love towards people and his good character.

FGM3: It was very cruel for your sisters-in-law to tell you to remove your things from one of the rooms for their worker to live in your house.

Nomsa: The feeling of isolation, loneliness, hopelessness and rejection is part of all of our journey, all of us who have lost a spouse. It gave me comfort to know I am not alone.

FGM1: I think our culture should stop accusing widows of being witches. Awareness of diseases that kill is needed among the Zezuru people. I was told the same when my husband died. When you were narrating your story, I was reliving it.

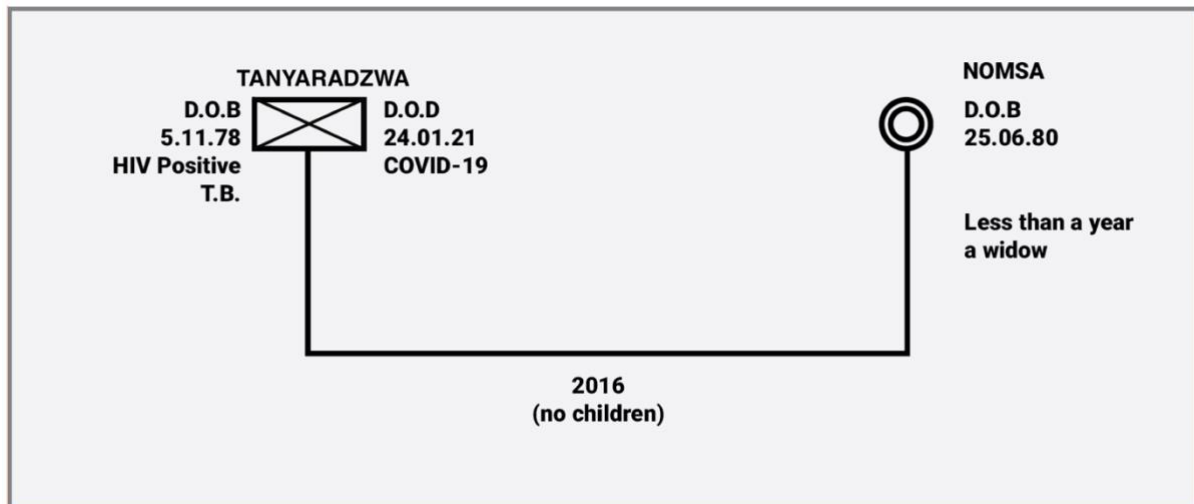
Patricia: I feel rather relieved. I was liberated from the things that troubled my mind. Just being around people who went on a similar journey to mine has calmed my thoughts. I know now that I am not alone. Some of my thoughts centered on how I was treated by my sisters-in-law and other relatives of my husband. Now I know that I am not the only one who did not get the opportunity to mourn and to grieve in peace. At the *hwahwa hwehonye* ceremony, I had hoped to be assigned a *sarapavana* but the family did not do so. They said: ‘We are punishing you for killing your husband.’ This was painful, because of course it was a false accusation. He died of cancer. However, I am proud to have passed the test of ‘jumping over’ the knobkierie without falling down. I also managed to stick to my promise to my children that I did not want to be the inherited wife of one of Chaya’s brothers. So, I had to spill the water to the ground rather than hand it over to the chosen one who would then become my husband. I was determined to look after my children and myself.

4.2.5 Participant 5: Nomsa

Nomsa, the fifth respondent, was born on 25 June 1980.

4.2.5.1 Genogram and narrative: Nomsa

Nomsa and her husband, Tanyaradzwa, were married for only five years. He died on 24 January 2021.



Tanyaradzwa was born on 5 November 1978. He and Nomsa did not have children. He was HIV positive which had already compromised his body. Then he contracted the Corona Virus. Nomsa always wondered why her husband did not want children. He did not disclose his HIV status when they got married. He kept it a secret until he got COVID. The blood test revealed his status. She was shocked, especially when she found that she also tested HIV positive. This is when she understood the reason why he did not want to have children. She explains it as follows:

When the extended family heard that we both had COVID-19 they left us to self-isolate in our home. I had to nurse my husband alone. It was the most trying time in my life because I was not well myself. Tanyaradzwa did not want to be left alone in the room. He told me that he was afraid to die and leave me alone with nothing to inherit except debt. When my husband was dying, he called *sekuru* – an uncle who had died a long time ago. I assumed he was connecting with his dead *sekuru*. Thereafter he never spoke again. He began having convulsions and gasped for



breath. Then he died. It was frightening to me because I had not experienced death first hand before and I was alone with him. I was in a state of shock. I could not even call my neighbours to come and help because it was a COVID-19 death. I just covered the body and went out to make phone calls to inform his relatives of his death. I did not know what to do with the body.

She informed the COVID-19 response team, who had to prepare the body for burial within twenty-four hours.

This was my most painful moment because I was not at liberty to bid farewell with all the necessary rituals. For example, I could not give him the last bath, or anoint him with oil; I could not dress him in his best clothes for his journey. This was so painful that it broke my heart. The body was also not allowed to lie in state. We could not have a night vigil. The body had to be buried that same day.

With all this happening around her, her emotions were in confusion. As the cultural custom required, she was not allowed to see the body in order to avoid bareness should she want to remarry in the future. She could not wash herself until after the husband was buried. On the fourth day early in the morning she was taken to Manyame River with the purpose to throw her underclothes into the flowing river while chanting words to disconnect herself from the sexual spirit of her deceased husband. She did not understand this ritual and is still searching for its meaning. She told her pastor about it, searching for an interpretation of the spiritual implications of what she had done unwittingly.

Following the hurried funeral arrangements, no *nyaradzo* had taken place. Gatherings were prohibited as part of the COVID-19 protocols. The parents promised to notify her when they scheduled the event. She is still battling with several issues including the fact that her husband died without children. They did not own property. They lived in rented accommodation. The family had not taken his clothes for distribution because they were afraid of contracting COVID-19. She does not know what they are planning to do about this and many other matters. ‘So many unfinished issues surround me’, she concluded.

4.2.5.2 Focus group reflection: Nomsa

Nomsa was the youngest widow at the retreat. She was chosen as a participant because the study aimed to ascertain how cultural rituals and usual rites of passage would be affected in COVID-19 conditions. The participants responded as follows:

Chipo: Nomsa, I felt for you as you were narrating your story. My husband died of COVID-19. While we were in self-isolation death visited us, just as in your case.

Patricia: The ordeal the cultural rituals put us through were terrible. I too was not allowed to wash myself until after the burial. I also had to do things I did not understand.

Chipo: The COVID-19 lockdowns have severely affected the performance of *nyaradzo*.

FGM1: How embarrassing it must have been to throw the undergarment into the river with everybody watching. I think this ritual should be stopped. It is meaningless. I wonder how you feel now after hearing what others have shared in their stories.



FGM7: I could identify with you when you said you were shocked to discover that your husband was HIV positive while you only knew that he was on TB treatment. This happened to me too. Men can be very secretive. Now I am on ARVs just like you.

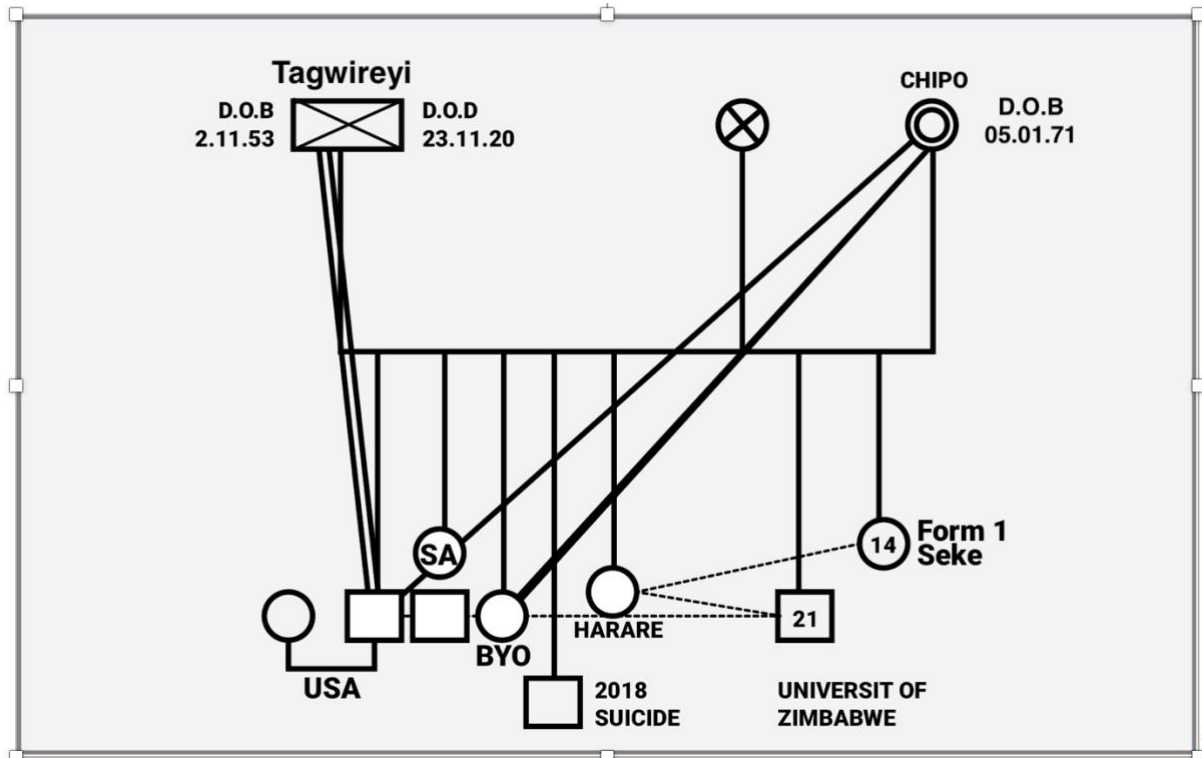
Nomsa: When I came to the retreat, I was utterly confused and had many questions. My heart was heavy. However, when I heard the various narratives, I began to feel more at ease. I was among people who understand my situation. During the grief process I had to do what I was told without knowing or understanding why. Sharing it with you, helped me to feel free and encouraged again. At this retreat I was surrounded by loving, caring women. This gave me a sense of belonging. I feel that here I have a good support system. From the discussion it become clear to me that widows do not get sufficient time to grieve, often because of the traumatic things done to them by the relatives of the husband. As for me, COVID-19 created a good space for me to be alone and reflect.

4.2.6 Participant 6: Chipso

Chipso, the sixth participant was born on 5 January 1971. She married Tagwireyi.



4.2.6.1 Genogram and narrative: Chipo



Tagwireyi had been a widower for five years when Chipo married him. He had five children from his first marriage. One of his sons took his own life in 2018. Chipo and Tagwireyi had two children together. The son is at university and the daughter is in high school.

In October 2020, Chipo and her husband tested positive for COVID-19. They went into self-isolation. Tagwireyi became very sick. During this time, he asked his elder brother to get a lawyer to transfer their house into the name of his oldest son who resides in the United States. Chipo did not know of this request. Tagwireyi also had his bank accounts transferred in his son's name. He thought that he did not have long to live and made sure that after his death nothing would be left to Chipo. She



only discovered this when her brother-in-law showed her the will. She tells her story as follows:

Most of my husband's family did not expect him to die so suddenly. They were shocked. They kept saying: 'He was strong; what did you give him?' My family grieved with me. The children of his late wife also grieved with me, with the exception of his third daughter who lives in South Africa. She demanded that I should be removed from my father's house because I had killed her father. She did that so that she could inherit the house. She did not attribute his death to COVID-19. She blamed me. She did not send a message of condolence, nor did she thank me for having cared for him.

After Tagwireyi's death Chipso had to get the people responsible for attending to COVID-19 deaths to come and remove the body. The family could not come because the Ministry of Health protocols had to be observed. The usual pre-burial death rites of passage were not performed. There was no viewing of the body. Her husband was buried by the health personnel while she and her son looked on from a distance. She did not experience any challenges from her in-laws because of the 'new normal' burial procedures of people who died of COVID-19.

She was surprised that her husband had appointed his elder son in the United States America in his will to perform all the post-burial rituals. Eight months later the *nyaradzo* had still not been performed. She was told by one of his brothers to await instructions from the US. The son who lives in the United States of America did not attend the burial because it had to take place within twenty-four hours of the death as per COVID-19 regulations. The travel restrictions due to COVID-19 were also a hindrance. At the time of the retreat there was still no death certificate. She was told

that the son in the US would to process it. She did not want to go against her husband's wishes, so she was hesitant to just go ahead and obtain the death certificate. In fact, Chipo was breaking the law, which required deaths to be registered at the nearest Death Registry office within 30 days of the death (Zimbabwe Births and Deaths Registration Act Chapter 5:02 Sect 20[1]). Moreover, the estate could not be attended to unless the death was registered.

These people are actually denying me access to the money in the bank, and to my husband's pension including the National Social Security Authority (NSSA) funds he left behind. Maybe they fear that I would take the property and put it in my name. I am experiencing the evils of customary marriage. A woman is not protected.

Chipo is still waiting for the other death rites of passage such as *kurova guva* and *nhaka* to be discussed by the family, since Tagwireyi was an elderly man who would qualify to be an ancestor. Chipo describes her culture as one that does not protect widows, but rather contributes to fear in the life of a widow (see Mberi 1991:59). She explains her experience as follows:

I experience much stress these days because I do not know how I will provide for my two children. My husband locked his funds in the bank and had no plan in place for how I should support our children. I did not expect this. I do not know what to do. As a Zezuru woman, I know grieving and mourning are prescribed by different rituals: *kupeta*, *kuviga*, *nyaradzo*, *kurova guva* and *nhaka*. COVID-19 robbed us of these processes that are meant to help us in our bereavement. The behaviour of my husband in

his last days are a puzzle to me. His decisions at the end are devastating to me. It leaves me with a sense of helplessness, regret and unfinished business. How could he give his oldest son all the power – someone who does not even live in Zimbabwe? I hope I will get an answer some day.

4.2.6.2 Focus group reflection: Chipo

Munashe: It is very sad to hear that your husband managed to transfer every property into his son who is overseas. He did not think about you, or the children he had with you.

Patricia: Are you aware of the document written by Women and Law in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe). This document states: ‘The death report must be made within thirty days.’ The surviving spouse should keep the death certificate. I think you can approach organizations that offer legal aid for assistance. I feel sorry for you Chipo because you did not know that you are the rightful person to get the death certificate, you are actually committing a crime by not registering the death of your husband (Women Rights Handbook 2016:34-35).

FGM4: Chipo, you say that you do not want to go against your husband’s wishes and get the death certificate yourself. Please do not feel that. He is dead and his decisions before he died show a lack of care and consideration for you. Take Patricia’s words seriously please and act because it is your right to get the death certificate.

Maidei: The daughter in South Africa is disrespectful, accusing you of killing your husband. I have great empathy for you. As widows we should know what our

constitutional rights to legal aid are. We need help when we are in a situation such as yours.

Munorweyi: It is very encouraging to me that you have shared in earnest your feelings and what you went through. I have found that there are women in the legal system who can help us with the matters of a deceased estate.

FGM2: Your story has confirmed again that our culture does not protect women, especially those who are in mourning and need to grieve. As Zezuru women we should free ourselves from some of the cultural prohibitions.

FGM6: The story was touching. It is similar to my story. I too had no time to grieve but had to battle with the issues at hand.

Chipo: My three days at the retreat have been very good for me because I had friends who listened to my story with understanding. They encouraged me to be strong. I learnt about the group of female lawyers who can help me with legal matters and to get the death certificate. The women at the retreat had so much information on my rights which were being violated by my husband's brother and children by his first wife. Many questions I had were answered. I am less confused now. I know that am not alone on this journey of grief. The different stories I heard here were an encouraging to me. The COVID-19 death of my husband left me lonely and hopeless but now I feel encouraged by the new friends I made at the retreat. Just knowing that I have friends with whom I can share, has helped me very much. I learnt that there is no such thing as 'getting over grief', but I have learnt to live with it, accommodate it and make it part of me.

4.3 Reflection on themes

From the participants' narratives and the focus group discussions with regard to death, mourning, grief and death rites of passage some themes were identified. The main themes that emerged from the narratives and discussions were:

- the cultural oppression of women;
- traumatization by in-laws due to cultural superstitions;
- mourning rituals for grief and healing.

These three themes will now be discussed in greater depth.

4.3.1 Cultural oppression of women

The description of death rites of passage in this study has revealed the extent to which women are groomed to be to be obedient, submissive to men, and not to assert themselves. Mapuranga (2011:20) explains that, from a young age girl are instructed on what is expected of them as women who submit to the dictates of a patriarchal culture. They are taught to take instructions from men without questioning, as expected by culture. From the narratives and from the descriptions given in the chapter, specifically two women attested to how they were told what to do with regard to the cultural death rites of passage and sometimes also with regard to practical matters in which they were not to think for themselves and assume agency over their own lives.

Cultural prohibitions against widows when it comes to death rites of passage illustrate the measure of the cultural oppression of these women. Munashe's narrative, for example, reveals that she was not allowed in the house during some rituals that preceded the burial. She could not even be at the grave to see her husband's body being lowered into the earth. Maidei was excluded from the planning

of her husband's funeral. Patricia was compelled to perform cultural rites that were contrary to her Christian faith and she was powerless to refuse. The case of Chipso illustrates how many women are disempowered because of their lack of knowledge of the law and of their legal rights. Many women are not given the necessary information. There is a lack of awareness of and education on what to do in the event of a husband's death. For example, women do not know Article 21 (Right to Inheritance) of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights which states: 'A widow shall have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of the property of her husband. A widow shall have the right to continue to live in the matrimonial house. In case of remarriage, she shall retain this right if the house belongs to her or she has inherited it.' The Women and Law in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe) (WLSAZ) aim to make women aware that Section 26(d) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe on inheritance states that, 'in the event of dissolution of a marriage, whether through death or divorce, provision is made for the necessary protection of any children and spouses' (WLSAZ ND:33-34).

At the women's retreat where the widows had the opportunity to share their narratives and process them in focus group discussions, they also viewed and discussed the film *Neria*. They could identify with the plight of the widow Neria, who was traumatized by her husband's brother Phineas. He simply took their matrimonial property and left her and her children destitute. Through the mediation of friends, Neria received help from the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association and recovered all of the confiscated property. Neria is also an empowering example of a woman who refused to be 'inherited' by the husband's brother, as cultural dictates. This story illustrates how women who have been widowed are culturally oppressed by means of death rites of passage, but it also shows how women can be empowered when they become aware of their rights. This story affirmed the actions of Munashe and Munorwei who also refused to adhere to the demands of culture.

4.3.2 Traumatization by in-laws and cultural beliefs

In most of the narratives of the six participants, the death of the husband was not accepted by his family as being due to natural causes, even where the medical evidence to that effect was clear. The cause of death was believed by some family members to be bewitchment. The wife is accused of having bewitched the husband and causing his death in order to inherit the property. Traumatizing accusations such as 'you killed your husband' were levelled against the widows. Munashe and Maidei, for example, were victims of such accusations. The widows are not protected from this kind of abuse.

Another suspicion that is projected onto widows is that they may have had relations with other men during the year leading up to the *kurova guva* ceremony. Two of the participants had to pass the test of *kudarika uta* or *tsvimbo*, a practice of jumping over a knobkierie to prove that they had remained 'pure' for the whole year. They did not engage in sexual intercourse with another man. Even 'innocent' women can fail in the physical act of jumping. The discrimination against women further lies therein that this test is administered only to women and not to male widowers. Widows are also forbidden to participate in anything that is of interest to them during and after the burial of their husbands. Male widowers are not restricted in this way. They are free to pursue their interests and live their lives. In Mashonaland Central in Mount Darwin, women are forced to shave their hair. It is assumed that hair is part of a woman's beauty. A widow should not look beautiful. A widow should live a simple life and should always looking sorrowful and shabby. Patricia had to go through this ordeal. She described it as: *Ndakasvuurwa vhudzi rese nambuya vangu kuti murume wangu afare ari muguva nezvandiri* (I was shaved by my grandmother to please my deceased husband as he lay in his grave).

The widow's black dress is prescribed with head gear to match. The dress is called *sori* in Zezuru. It has to be worn for a year. The woman can only remove that dress at the *kurova guva* ceremony. This dress identifies women as widows in public. They are often subject to discrimination and stigmatization. The *sori* dress is also a constant reminder of their loss. Widowers, on the other hand, do not dress in full black. They are just obligated to wear a little black patch on the sleeve of the shirt, and also only if they want to. Magesa (1997:147) explains that the aim of the black garb is to indicate that the woman is in mourning and to announce to the public that she is in the transitional social state of bereavement. Cultural injunctions forbid widows from expressing their grief in other ways that they choose for themselves.

4.3.3 Mourning rituals for grief and healing

Grief is an individual subjective emotional response to loss. Mourning is the process of coping with grief over time. Mourning is an external response to loss. In Zezuru culture it is made visible through death rites of passage. These continue for a year or more. Section 3.3 of this study explored the contribution of death rites of passage healing, in other words to 'restoring a person to wholeness' (Clebsch & Jaekle 1994:33).

For the Zezuru widows in the study two factors disrupted the mourning rites. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the flow of mourning rituals that would usually fulfil different emotional and psychological needs. Many of these rituals could not take place because of hasty burials within the mandated twenty-four hours. Under normal circumstances other women play a crucial role in the grief and healing process through the rites of passage. Female ritual friends (*sahwiras*) and daughters-in-law (*varooras*) perform certain duties in these rituals. The fact that these rites could not take place, deprived women of this much needed female support and solidarity in the process of their grief. The second disrupting factor for

widows is the oppressive cultural practices of men and the husband's relatives. These practices exacerbate the emotional pain of women who are already in great pain because of the loss they have suffered and the uncertainty they have with regard to the way forward.

This section now explores the role of a widows' retreat as a dimension of healing aimed to counteract the disruptive factors. The widow's retreat described in this chapter was initially meant primarily for gathering data on widows' experiences as they go through the various death rites of passage. In the process the retreat itself became a healing death rite of passage. It became an avenue for widows to freely express themselves without the male oppression that characterizes almost all the other Zezuru cultural death rites of passage. As the retreat demonstrated, self-expression before sympathetic and non-judgemental listeners has therapeutic value. This is the experience that the six participants articulated as follows:

Munashe: Participating in this retreat has given me a sense of peace. I could empty the burdens that were heavy in my heart. I am also relieved to know that I am not the only one in this situation. I feel healed and know that God loves me no matter my situation or what I am going through. Now I can be a facilitator for other widows.

Maidei: The retreat gave me a sense of relief and a reprieve from the situations that I was struggling with in my life. Now all is well with my soul. The anxiety has left me. I do not feel so violated anymore because now I have a network of women who understand.

Munorwei: The stories of the other widows at this retreat made me aware of the need to establish an association of widows to empower one another. Those who

face problems with in-laws should receive guidance from those who have been through it and have a better idea of how to deal with things.

Patricia: I feel relieved of my troubles and the things that were pressing on my mind. To be around people who have had similar experiences and a similar journey as mine, has calmed my thoughts. I am not alone. Now I know that I am not the only one who did not get the opportunity to mourn and to grieve in peace.

Nomsa: When I came to the retreat, I was confused and had many questions to which there were no answers. After having heard the stories of others, I felt more at ease. I found myself among people who understand. During the time of grief, I was told what to do, but I did not understand why. Sharing these experiences with others has set me free and greatly encouraged me. At this retreat I was among loving, caring women. This has given me a sense of belonging. I now have a good support system.

Chipo: The three days at the retreat have been very good for me because I had friends who listened to my story without judging me. They understood me and encouraged me to be strong. I learnt about the group of women lawyers who can help me with legal matters.

From the above testimonies the therapeutic value of the retreat a healing rite of passage is evident. Such retreats can help to overcome the disruption of COVID-19 hurried burials and the pain of cultural oppression. In this way women can be empowered to assume agency over their own lives and future.

4.4 Summary

This chapter presented the results of the telling of six personal narratives and focus group discussions. The six participants, were (pseudonyms): Munashe, Maidei, Munorwei, Patricia, Nomsa and Chipo. Genograms depicted their immediate family structure. In the semi-structured interviews, the participants were invited to narrate their own story before the focus group. They responded to the open-ended questions. The setting was a widows' retreat.

From the narrative interviews and focus group reflection's significant themes were identified. These included: the cultural oppression of women during the Zezuru death rites of passage, the traumatization of widows by in-laws due to cultural beliefs, and mourning rituals for grief and healing. The retreat itself became an alternative post-burial healing process for widows.

Chapter 5 focuses on the pastoral role of the church with regard to widows in the context of the Zezuru culture with its particular death rites of passage.



CHAPTER 5

A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO DEATH RITES OF PASSAGE IN ZEZURU CULTURE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the pastoral role of the church in response to the Zezuru culture's death rites of passage. The chapter first investigates the possibility of a connection between the Zezuru belief in life after death and the theology of 1 Corinthians 15. Secondly, it explores possibilities of overcoming the stigma among Zezuru people that the Christian faith is a 'foreign religion' by incorporating compatible Zezuru death rituals into its liturgy. Thirdly, the chapter examines functional substitutes for those aspects of Zezuru death rites of passage that some Christian believers find to be incompatible with their faith. Lastly, a pastoral approach to providing solace for widows in Zezuru culture will be developed.

The theoretical framework of this study is multi-dimensional and the approach is that of 'contextualization'. The Christian faith enters into dialogue with the Zezuru cultural death rites of passage and the idea of 'the living-dead' in a way that evokes an 'intercultural pastoral' response. The point of departure of this chapter is that the Christian faith is 'translatable', not only in linguistic terms, but also more broadly in cultural terms (see Bediako 1992). There is no such thing as 'cultureless Christianity' that is practiced in a vacuum. Just as the Christian faith was initially practiced in the context of the Jewish culture and later accommodated in the Hellenistic, Roman and Western cultures (Bediako 1992), so can it find an enculturated home also in African cultures in general and Zezuru culture specifically. On the other hand, that same Christian faith also transforms certain aspects of the culture in which it is practiced.

This will then also be the case where the Christian faith is practiced in Zezuru culture (see Musasiwa 2007).

5.2 The Zezuru understanding of life after death and 1 Cor 15:12-49

If the church were to play a meaningful pastoral role in the lives of widows in the context of the Zezuru culture and its death rites of passage, areas of convergence between the teachings of the Christian faith and the understandings of Zezuru culture should be found, especially with regard to views of death and the after-life. The most significant convergence can be seen in the mutual belief that death does not completely annihilate the existence of a person. In Zezuru culture, this belief is expressed in the idea of the living-dead or the concept of ancestrology. Ancestors are understood as people who have made their way into the spirit world and are deserving of being venerated by their descendants. As a spirit, they have enhanced functions, such as protecting the interests of their family or clan. The following three functions are attributed to the ancestors (Beyer and Mphahlele 2009):

- mediation between God and human beings;
- protecting the living;
- providing guidance to the living.

The Zezuru conception of life after death is compatible with the Christian hope of the resurrection of the dead for 'those who belong to Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:23). The Christian hope of a life after death is explained in Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15, and particularly in verses 20-49. The key statement that summarizes this passage is verse 22: 'For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.' From this Paul draws four implications that are relevant to the church's pastoral role with regard to widows in the context of the Zezuru death rites of passage.

The first implication is that Christ's resurrection is 'the *first fruits* of those who have fallen asleep; (1 Corinthians 15:20). The Lexham Bible Dictionary explains first fruits in the Old Testament sense as 'the first and best part of the harvest of crops or processed produce, animals, and firstborn sons. These 'first fruits are to be offered to God and then given to the Levitical priesthood. Typifying this concept of first fruits is the instruction given to the priesthood in Numbers 18:12-13: 'All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the grain, the first fruits of what they give to the LORD, I give to you. The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours.' Paul uses this idea in its metaphorical sense to indicate firstly that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is *the first*, or the initial portion of the harvest. The implication of 'first' is that it represents others to come, in this particular case 'those who have fallen asleep', that is, those who have died. In Christ, therefore, 'shall all be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15:22). 'First fruits' also represent *the best*, for God is worthy of only the best. The implication is that all who are in Christ are to be raised in perfection just as Jesus, the first fruits, was raised in perfection.

Secondly, death is depicted as a *defeated enemy*, 'for he (Christ) must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). This statement describes death as enemy that robs people of their loved ones. The very fact that the Zezuru culture provides for death rites of passage is an acknowledgement of this experience of loss and devastation. However, in Christ the loss is not only mitigated, but ultimately completely reversed by the coming resurrection. Death is a defeated enemy.

The third implication is that in Christ the resurrected person is *perfected and imperishable*. The resurrected body of Jesus was freed from all the limitations of mortal flesh. This is in a sense parallel to the Zezuru belief that the living-dead

ancestors are endowed with more power and authority than they had before death. They are therefore believed to be better able to carry out their three main functions of mediating, protecting and guiding. Christianity does not accord such functions to ancestors. The understanding is rather that they 'remain asleep' in Christ until such time as they are perfected and resurrected. The functions of mediating, protecting and guiding are instead carried out by Christ, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep in him, and by the Spirit.

Fourthly, this leads Paul to the conclusion that 'death is swallowed up in *victory*' (1 Corinthians 15:54) which comes from 'God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:57). Again, there is a convergence with the Zezuru belief that life overcomes death as the ancestors continue to live in their enhanced spiritual state following their bodily demise. They become what Mbiti (1969) calls the 'living-dead'.

The 1 Corinthians 15 passage is typical of other New Testament teachings on life after death. The comparison with the Bible passages that seek to comfort the living after the departure of their loved ones is made in this study. Another typical passage is when Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: 'But we do not want you to be uninformed brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.' The use of the word 'sleep' echoes the idea of the 'living-dead' espoused by the African theologians. It evokes the hope of victory over death within the Christian faith just as the idea of the 'living dead' does in Zezuru religious thought.

The areas of convergence do not make the two perspectives of life and death synonymous by any means. Significant differences remain. However, these differences need not detract from the pastoral role that can be played with regard to



widowhood and the death rites of passage in Zezuru culture. The most significant difference lies in the fact that ancestors in the Zezuru culture are regarded as part of the elders, but with enhanced power to bless, protect or punish families. The Christian faith does not ascribe such a role to the 'living-dead', described by Paul as 'those who sleep in Jesus' (1 Thessalonian 4:14). Those roles now belong to the risen Christ. The second difference is that ancestors in the Zezuru culture act as intermediaries between God and their families. In the Christian faith, 'there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and people, the person, Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5). Those roles ascribed to ancestors are believed to now be adequately carried out by Jesus Christ, whom Nyamiti (1984) in the title of one of his books identifies as *Christ as our ancestor*. However, the idea of 'ancestral Christology' is criticized by some. One of the critics is Mokhoathi (2018:3) who, despite his critical stance on several counts, nevertheless agrees that 'both the African and Christian perspectives see death as a transitional phase and not the cessation of life'. It can therefore be concluded that the differences between the Christian faith and the Zezuru beliefs do not necessarily have to devalue the pastoral role that can be played with regard to Zezuru death rites of passage and widowhood.

The differences noted above in fact enhance pastoral care with Zezuru widows in that the functions that are ascribed by culture to death rites of passage are subsumed by the resurrected Christ. The functions of the Zezuru rites of passage – the mediation, protection and guidance – need not change. What does have to change is the form that the ceremonies take. 'Functional substitutes' are therefore suggested for some of the cultural rites. These are discussed in the following section.

5.3 A pastoral evaluation of Zezuru cultural rites of passage

The study has named and explained the large variety of Zezuru death rites of passage. These include *gata* (spiritual post-mortem ritual), *hwahwa hwehonye* (body decomposition ceremony), *kurova guva* (bringing home the spirit of the dead ceremony) *kugova nhumbi* (distribution the deceased assets ceremony) and *kugara nhaka* (inheritance ceremony). Collectively they fulfil a variety of functions in the lives of the Zezuru people, widows in particular. These rites of passage bring comfort in that they illustrate how the deceased has assumed a new, better and higher mode of living, rather than having perished altogether. They also give public expression to grief, which is conducive to emotional healing after a great loss. They make provision for corporate mourning which is in line with the Shona *hunhu (ubuntu)* culture of 'I am because we are'. Shona women greatly value relationships and the strength that is derived from fellowship with others. Private mourning only would lead to a deep loneliness with the accompanying psychological problems that arise from unexpressed grief. The death rites of passage provide for the need of social connection and a sense of belonging. The pastoral role of the church with regard to Zezuru widows would be inadequate, if not counter-productive, if it does not incorporate the positive traits of these cultural rituals and rites into new forms that do not clash with the premises of the Christian faith. The rich benefits of the Zezuru death rites of passage can be utilized, rather than discarded.

It is, however, neither possible nor desirable for the church to simply perpetuate all the Zezuru death rites of passage in their current form. Some of the rites of passage are perceived by the predominantly Christian Zezuru widows to be incompatible with their Christian convictions. The main area of incompatibility is the belief underlying several of these rites of passage that the departed are not only alive but are still active in human affairs. They can be appeased or angered into taking vengeful



actions against the living ones. So, for example, at the center of the *kurova guva* ceremony is 'bringing the spirit of the departed home'.

Some Christian believers find that their Christian faith is incompatible with the idea of actively interacting with the dead (Appendix 9). The passage in 1 Corinthians 15 gives the assurance of the coming resurrection of the dead, but says nothing about their ability to interact with the living in the interim. Those believers point out that the Bible refers only once to a ritual where the spirit of the dead is brought back to consciousness, namely the story in 1 Samuel 28:3-25 where the desperate king Saul, disguised as a commoner, persuaded the spirit medium at Endor to call up the spirit of the prophet Samuel who was long since dead and buried. According to the story, the real spirit of Samuel did appear. It was dressed like Samuel and spoke through the medium as Samuel would have spoken. When the medium described what she saw, 'Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground' (1 Samuel 28:14). However, Saul was not praised but rather condemned by Samuel for this action. Samuel said to Saul: 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?' (1 Samuel 28:15). This made clear that even if the spirit of the dead can be invoked and can manifest themselves, this is not the norm, and the dead do not find it desirable to be called up to return and interact with the living. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 provides another perspective:

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing ...
Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished;
never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the
sun.

In light of these Scriptures, many Christian widows believe that death rituals which involve invoking or interacting with the spirit of the dead are unchristian and



undesirable. The participant, Patricia, related that she was most uncomfortable with the *kurova guva* ceremony for her husband. She would have preferred it to have been substituted by the Christian-based tombstone unveiling ceremony. Her view was supported by other Christian widows. Pastors often voice the same objection to death rites of passage that involve invoking or interacting with the spirits of the dead. Three ministers of religion put it as follows:

Minister 1

For Christians it is demonic to invoke or interact with the spirit of the dead person. In African Traditional Religion it is an achievement to be an ancestral spirit, as such the dead denoting the concept, 'our dead ones are with us but in a better state (spirit) and they guide, protect and fight for us'. This is not true because the Bible clearly says: 'A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; and their blood shall be upon them' (Leviticus 20:27). This practice is not about worshipping God but is rather about evil spirits. Nowhere in the Bible do we see God commanding God's people to do this. In fact, God expressly forbids it (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

Minister 2

There is no need to invoke or interact with the spirit of the dead because there is no relationship between the living and the dead. The dead person has no life, is powerless, and has no sense of belonging. When the son of David and Bathsheba died, he said: 'My child will not come back to me but I will one day follow my child' (2 Samuel 12:23). The dead do not see or know anything, so there is no need to interact with them. This is affirmed by the text from Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 which reads: 'For the living know that they

die, but the dead know nothing, and have no reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.’

Minister 3

From a biblical point of view, it is not right to communicate with the spirit of the dead. In the Bible people do not interact with the dead. Once people do that they enter into the realm of demons or occult spirits. In the Mosaic Covenant it was forbidden to speak to the dead. Examples are Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Leviticus 20:27 and Exodus 20:4. Consulting the dead is one of the weapons Satan can use to attack our Christian faith. My first example is the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:15-23. David acknowledged the death of his child and he knew he could not bring the child back to life. He said: ‘I shall go to him, but he will not come to me.’ The second example is the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). When they died, they went to separate places. The rich man went to hell and Lazarus to heaven. The rich man pleaded with God to send someone to earth to warn his relatives. In the story it is clear that he himself could not return to the living to warn them, because of the great chasm between them: ‘And besides all this between us a great chasm is fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us’ (Luke 16:26). There is no relationship between the dead and the living. When a person dies that is the end of their association with the living.

The three ministers came to a conclusion that people should not fear the dead and that God prohibits people to communicate or consult with the dead. This view of the three ministers is held by many conservative Christian believers.

5.4 Functional substitutes for some Zezuru rites of passage

A functional substitute is understood in this study a Christian ritual that can replace a deeply rooted cultural ritual that some Christians may find objectionable or incompatible with their Christian convictions. This concept was first popularized by Kraft (1981:68) who emphasized the necessity of taking some non-Christian cultural forms and giving them new Christian content, meaning and purpose. There are three categories of Zezuru death rites of passage. The point of departure of this study is that only the third category warrants functional substitutes for pastoral reasons.

The first category of death rites of passage as described in Chapter 2 are sufficiently compatibility with Christian convictions that they can be adopted by the church as they are. The only refinement that can be brought about is to omit talking directly to the dead in the course of the performance of the ritual. These rituals include the pre-burial mourning (*kuchema mufi*), the burial rituals and *kugova nhumbi* (the distribution of the clothes and assets of the deceased).

The second category consists of those rituals in which widows who are Christian believers would not want to participate at all. They have no pastoral function and do not necessitate functional substitutes. These include the following:

- ***Gata* – the divinatory practice to find out the cause of death**

The narratives of the participants showed that *gata* was practiced even when the cause of death was scientifically uncontented. The spirit mediums often blamed the death on the widow who was then despised her in-laws. Question 1 to the three pastors read: 'As a minister what is your attitude towards congregants visiting the

n'anga (diviner) after the death of their loved ones?' This question relates to the *gata* ritual. One pastor articulated the sentiments of all three as follows:

My attitude is negative because I believe that traditional healers should not be consulted by Christian believers on matters of life and death. I believe that we should only submit our concerns to God through Jesus Christ. I do however understand that the bereaved often visit *n'angas* after the death of their loved ones due to various factors that at times are beyond their control, such as family pressure when foul play is suspected.

This response reveals that the *gata* is often a coerced affair which arises out of suspicion of foul play. As Chapter 4, such suspicions are often directed at the innocent widow. This indicates a pastoral need to liberate widows from this kind of ritual with its detrimental emotional, mental and spiritual effect.

- ***Kudarika uta/tsvimbo* – test of the widow's sexual faithfulness**

This is a demeaning practice that requires even elderly women to jump over a knobkierie to test whether they have had sex with a man since the death of their husband. It happens at the time of *kurova guva* or *kugara nhaka* ceremony. This was experienced by two of the respondents in the study. For a pastoral perspective, widows should be completely liberated from this practice. It is based on superstition and discrimination. It is not required of male widowers and therefore represents unconscionable double standards.

- ***Kagarwa nhaka* – the widow 'inherited' by a relative of the deceased**

The psychological pressure on a widow to nominate a husband among the family of the deceased is great. If she refuses to do so, the consequence is often that she is forced out of the matrimonial home. This custom should be discarded, not only on Christian religious grounds, but also on humanitarian grounds. In this practice women are treated as chattel and their human rights and agency are violated. Widows should have a choice as to what they want to do with their lives. They should be able to care for their children without being 'inherited' by a man.

Functional substitutes for the third category of the Zezuru death rites of passage will now be explored, with a particular focus on substitutes for *hwahwa hwehonye* (the body decomposition ceremony) and *kurova guva* (bringing home the spirit of the dead ceremony). Chapter 2 explained both of these rituals. This chapter argues that for these rituals functional substitutes are needed because they play a significant role in the widow's journey of grief. Therefore, they are of pastoral concern. On the other hand, these ceremonies are considered by some, including Christian Zezuru widows, to be wholly incompatible with their Christian convictions.

The aim of developing functional substitutes is to retain the positive elements of those Zezuru death rites of passage, while discarding what is regarded as 'the undesirable elements. This would not be unique to Zezuru culture and Christianity. The history of the Judeo-Christian faith is replete with examples of pre-existing 'pagan' covenant formats that became foundational to, for example, the theology of covenant which is so central to the Old Testament. In the post-New Testament era, many a pagan festival was taken over and transformed into Christian traditions. The pagan origins of Easter celebrations are well attested to in the literature. Easter and Christmas are therefore examples of functional substitutes.

Zezeru rites of passage can similarly be replaced by functional substitutes. The aim is that the intended functions are retained, but the form and meaning of the rites are changed to be more acceptable to Christian believers. Christian believers are then enabled to live an integrated Christian life in which they can be fully African and fully Christian. The emotional, spiritual and psychological purposes of the traditional these rites can be enhanced rather than suppressed in this way. The church can become and remain relevant to the people it serves.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 attests to such an approach of identification with the people to whom the church ministers:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

It is from this Pauline point of departure of becoming 'all things to all people' that functional substitutes can be utilized to facilitate dialogue between the Christian faith and the Zezeru rites of passage. Furthermore, functional substitutes are a way of resolving the tension between those who uncritically embrace the Zezeru Traditional Religion and those Christians whose hermeneutics of suspicion would otherwise find no redemptive features in Zezeru death rites of passage, especially when it comes to the dignity and wellbeing of women.

With this motivation for the need of functional substitutes, what follows provides a description of the pastoral functions of the *nyaradzo* (consolation) ceremony as a substitute for *Hwahwa hwehonye* (decomposition) ceremony. This ritual takes place a few weeks following the burial of the husband. It is a time when the grief is still intense. From a psychological perspective the intense pain often causes people to resort to denial (see Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005). Denial is a necessary psychological mechanism to shield the grieving person from the unbearable impact or traumatic effect of the loss. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:10) put it as follows: 'Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle'. Yet the grief journey must proceed in order to reach the ultimate goal of 'acceptance' where the widow reconciles herself with the reality of the loss and finds a way to go on with her life. That is also the main function of the *hwahwa hwehonye* ritual. It aims to facilitate the widow to accept the reality of death and the decomposition of the earthly body. It is a ritual that brings the family together and signals to the widow that the initial mourning period is over and she can begin to function in real life again. Those who surrounded her during the process of mourning after the death of her husband disperse after this ceremony. This indicates to her that life now must go on.

While many Christian believers accept the benefits of such a ceremony of releasing the widow from the loss, there are elements of the ritual that they consider to be incompatible with their faith. The main objection is against the pouring of the beer, which is central to the ritual. The *hwahwa* or *beer* is poured to quench the thirst of the departed and to have communion with him. If the husband died as a result of murder, as discerned in the *gata* ritual, then his spirit is urged to avenge his death by punishing the murder (*mhondi*). If the wife was wrongly identified by the *gata* as the *mondi* that would mean the addition of injury to her grief. This is part of why *nyaradzo* (the consolation ceremony) can serve as a more constructive functional



substitute for *hwahwa hwehonye*. The *nyaradzo* practice fulfils the positive functions intended by *hwahwa hwehonye*. However, it contributes much more to the consolation of the widow and the bereaved family members. At a typical *nyaradzo* function the reality of victory over death is emphasized through preaching and songs. The 1 Corinthians 15 passage is a popular text for the *nyaradzo* sermon. These spiritual truths assure the widow that while death is real, it is a defeated enemy.

Another strong feature of the *nyaradzo* ceremony is the testimonies to the life of the deceased. These testimonies also contribute to bringing closure to the widow. She and all present recall their memories of the deceased and honour those memories. The testimonies emphasize that, though the person is gone, his legacy continues. At this occasion the widow is often reminded of the story of Abel and the text is quoted: 'Though he died, yet he still speaks' (Hebrews 11:4). During the retreat those widows who had gone through the *nyaradzo* ceremony, attested to the healing effect of the experience. They could find solace in the knowledge and assurance that he lives on, not as a spirit, but in his lasting legacy that they carry with and in them. This inspired some of the participants to maintain that legacy by creating an ongoing memorial to his work. One of the participants referred to the example of the widow of a famous Christian leader and Bible teacher who established a Memorial Library at the theological college that he had co-founded.

The second Zezuru death ritual for which a functional substitute is desirable is *kurova guva* (the bringing back home ceremony), which takes place approximately one year after the death. Many Zezuru Christians have established the unveiling of the tombstone memorial service as the functional substitute for *kurova guva*. The objection to the traditional Zezuru cultural rite of *kurova guva* regards its central meaning, namely bringing the wandering spirit of the departed back home where the living-dead will be the protector of the family. This idea that the family is now to be

protected by the living-dead is seen by some Christians as contrary to biblical teaching. They see no evidence in the Bible that the spirit of the departed continues to interact with the living. They hold to the sufficiency of the risen Christ to fully protect and care for the living believers. Typical of this view is the statement one of the pastors in the focus group: 'The idea of victory in the resurrection should be differentiated from ancestrology as conceived in the Zezuru culture ... Traditional beliefs provide partial answers to questions about death and the hereafter. Only Christ provides full answers to such questions of ultimate importance.'

Despite the criticism, however, there are also some functions of *kurova guva* that are beneficial to the grief process and cannot be ignored by pastoral caregivers who work in a Zezuru context. First among these is the human need to remember the departed and what they meant to the living. This is sometimes institutionally memorialized. An example is where Jesus institutes the sacrament of holy communion in remembrance of what he sacrificed for people. The significance of this can be seen in the fact that all the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:14-20) and Paul reports on it in 1 Corinthians 11:22-24. Both the Luke and the 1 Corinthians version articulate the intended purpose of the ritual as being 'in remembrance of me'.

Zimbabwe has several national statues intended to remember those who shaped the history of the country, including David Livingstone, Joshua Nkomo and Mbuya Nehanda. The need to remember can be adequately expressed in the Christian memorial service as a functional substitute. This service generally takes place one year after the burial, which is a similar timeframe to that of the *kurova guva* ritual. If a family can afford it, a tombstone is erected and unveiled by the family pastor on the day of the memorial service. The service includes singing, dancing, testimonies and preaching of the word of God. The messages often focus on a biblical precedent of a



memorial stones. An example is where King Josiah destroyed the idols and symbols of Baal worship. He even removed the bones of the false prophets from their tombs and burnt them (2 Kings 23:17-18):

Then he said, 'What is that monument that I see?' And the men of the city told him, 'It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel.' And he said, 'Let him be; let no man move his bones.' So, they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria.

The tomb of the man of God was a memorial monument to him in order that his good deeds should not be forgotten by future generations. Because of his exemplary life of faith his life was memorialized by the monument (tombstone). His grave was not desecrated and his good memory was preserved. In the same way the godly deceased in Zezuru culture today deserve to be remembered by future generations and their honour preserved. This kind of Christian service is intended not only to remember the dead, but also to bring the hope of the Christian message to the widow and other mourners in their time of distress.

Both of the functional substitutes that have been discussed can be applied to any bereavement situation within the Zezuru culture. However, they hold special pastoral significance for widows, given their challenging situation within the culture. These rituals represent the social and spiritual accompaniment of widows on their journey of grief, so that they can experience that they are not alone, judged, blamed or ostracized. The actual funeral is only the beginning of the long healing process. The psychological denial occasioned by the shock of loss is partially attended to by the *nyaradzo* ritual, whereas the memorial service after twelve months period (according

to the Zezuru cultural belief) can facilitate the completion of the grief process. Such a healing journey would be difficult if the widow were to travel down this road without the spiritual and social support brought about by these functional substitutes.

5.5 Traditional rituals and Christian liturgy: The Catholic example

This section explores the Catholic Church's example of the incorporation of traditional rituals into Christian liturgy (see Hermann 1997; Chidavaenzi 1992; Kamwendo 2016; Catholic Bishop's Conference *Kuchenura Munhu* Liturgy 1982; the Catholic Liturgy *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* 2001). Kamwendo's work employs the theoretical framework of inculturation to examine the Catholic Church's response to post-death rituals in Musami. The Jesuit mission in the Musami area of Mashonaland East has a history that goes back to about 1923. At the mission a primary school, a secondary school and a hospital as well as a place of worship were established. Kamwendo describes how the Jesuit missionaries initially insisted on undiluted Christian practices. Any Shona traditional religious practices such as post-burial rituals were rejected outright and labelled as 'heathen'. The result was that the Shona converts suffered from what Kamwendo described as 'split personality syndrome' – a tension between their Christianity and their Africanness expressed through their Shona traditional religion (Kamwendo 2016: ix). So often this meant that the converts practiced their Christian faith in public, and their death rituals in secret to avoid punishment from the Jesuit missionaries.

This tension was only resolved after the tragic gunning down of seven missionaries in 1977 by unknown assassins at the height of the Zimbabwean liberation war. Six years later, in 1983 (the third year of Zimbabwean independence), a milestone memorial service was held at the Musami Mission to honour the memory of the missionaries. At the insistence of the Shona people of Musami, the event was patterned after the *kurova guva* Shona post-burial ritual. The ceremony included

most of the rites that the Jesuits previously forbade and condemned as heathen. The event was extraordinary and unprecedented in several respects. Firstly, the *kurova guva* ritual was done for White missionaries, whereas the ritual itself is peculiar to a non-proselytizing African traditional religion. Secondly, the ritual was done for people whose vow of chastity meant that they were destined to die single, whereas the Zezuru culture prescribes such a ceremony for mature, married adults with children. Thirdly, the event was done for people who had not died a natural death but a violent one. On all three counts the ceremony violated the cultural norms for *kurova guva*. This leads to the conclusion that the ritual was performed as a way of protest by African Christians against the former prohibition of post-death rituals by the Jesuit missionaries. It also exceeded the cultural boundaries in some ways.

This event, coupled with the teachings that emanated from the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965 greatly influenced Catholic thought and practice with regard to Zezuru post-death rituals. For the first time the concept of enculturation was taken seriously in the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. According to Kamwendo (2016:53), related concepts such as accommodation, indigenization, enculturation, incarnation and Africanization are all different aspects of contextualization. He accepts Pope John Paul the Second's (1926:51) two-way definition of enculturation as 'the incarnation of the gospel in native culture and also the introduction of the culture into the life of the church'. The process of enculturation led the Catholic Church in Africa to incorporate traditional burial and post-burial rituals into their liturgy.

The *kurova guva* type of memorial service at Musami mission was the height of enculturation. It included features such as the preparation of libation beer by Catholic sisters and the slaughtering of the *mbudzi yeshungu* goat in the early morning on Sunday 6 February 1983, the day set aside for the actual memorial service. The slaughtering of the *mbudzi yeshungu* goat is a cultural rite to appease the angry

spirit of someone who died while still aggrieved and who would then have a desire for revenge. It is almost inconceivable that such post-death rituals would be performed at a mission station, and for missionaries who had previously condemned such rituals as unacceptable paganism. However, this shows the extent to which enculturation had taken place in Catholic thought and practice.

The Musami memorial was not an isolated event. In 1982, the year before the Musami memorial service, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference published the *Kuchenura Munhu* (another name for *kurova guva*) liturgy as a way of integrating *kurova guva*, the most important Shona post-death ritual, into the Catholic liturgy. Renowned church historian, Paul Gundani (1994), hails this liturgy as 'a much bigger doctrinal and liturgical success than most other adaptations. Just as the Musami *kurova guva* memorial service, this radical Catholic liturgy was initiated by the Black diocesan clergy who formed the National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC) from 1972. Ten years into their work they achieved this remarkable and still controversial doctrinal and ecclesiastical feat with the adoption of *kuchenura munhu* as an official Catholic rite.

A Catholic rationale for the inclusion of the *kurova guva* in Catholic liturgy is given on page 11. The *kurova guva* rite, it says, is compatible with the Catholic faith and helps to preserve African culture. The two are like soil and manure, the Shona *kurova guva* being the soil and the Catholic faith being the manure. The Catholic faith only adds one element to the existing post-burial ritual, and that is the goal of committing the dead to God and requesting Jesus and the ancestors of the deceased to accompany the spirit of the deceased to God the Father. On page 12 the only significant difference between the Shona *kurova guva* and the Catholic faith is explained. According to Shona cosmology, when someone dies their spirit hovers around the forests until the spirit is brought back home through *kurova guva*. The spirit is

restless until brought back home and will be upset and angry if the living neglects this important homecoming ritual. In contrast, according to the Catholic faith the spirit of the departed immediately goes to one of three places: heaven, purgatory or hell. The spirit that is not immediately accepted into heaven, requires the help of the living in its journey to heaven. In both cases, however, the spirit of the departed remains unhappy and unsettled until the living come to their aid.

Having explained the compatibility between the two traditions, the liturgy then provides for prayers and petitions for each of the four stages of *kurova guva*. The four stages are the following:

- **Stage 1: *Kuburitsa zviyo***

This first stage is about committing the beer-brewing *rapoko* to the spirit of the deceased.

- **Stage 2: *Mbudzi yeshungu***

In the second stage a goat is sacrificed in order to achieve reconciliation between the living and the dead.

- **Stage 3: *Kuratidza chipfuvo chenhevedzo***

In the third stage a cow slaughtered to accompany the spirit of the deceased.

- **Stage 4: *Kupira doro nenyama***

The fourth stage is the process of committing the beer and pieces of meat to the spirit of the deceased and those who went before.

After the four stages have been completed the climax is *kutora mudzimu nokuupinza mumusha*, bringing the spirit of the deceased home.

An analysis of the prayers and petitions for each of the above stages of *kuchenura munhu* reveals the following eight characteristics that harmonize the Shona traditional religion and the Catholic faith:

- The prayers and petitions sometimes identify God as the Chief Ancestral Spirit (*Mudzimu mukuru*). An example is found on page 22: *Saka tinoti chiudza vamwa vako vaotisvitsirewo kuna vari kumhepo nokuMudzimu Mukuru, Nyadenga* (So we say: tell your fellow ancestral spirits to commit these things to other superior ancestral spirits who will in turn take the same message to God, the chief Ancestral spirit.
- The petitions recognize the hierarchy in the spiritual realm whereby lower order spirits commit petitions to higher order spirits, then to the saints until the petitions eventually reach Jesus Christ and God the Father.
- The petitions often request the one for whom the *kurova kuva* ceremony is being performed to intercede on behalf of his family on earth.

Iwewo, N.... kana waveko, kuna Mwari, Mutangakugara, usakanwe kuti wakasiya mhuri, nehama dzako pasi, ugare uchidzinamatira kuti dzitevere gwara raKristu nokuchengeta mitemo yaBaba, Musikavanhu. Haudi kuti mhnuri yako ikunyadzise nezvainosara ichiita pano pasi. Haungafare nezviito zvavo vakaipa. Saka gara uchivareverera kuna Kristu, kuti vagosvikawo kumifaro isingaperi.

(You, N..., when you reach God the First Existence, do not forget the family and relatives that you left behind on this earth. Continually intercede for them that they may follow the ways of Christ and obey the laws of God our Creator. You would not want your family to put you to shame through bad works on this earth.



You would not be happy with their bad behaviour. So, keep interceding for them before Christ, so that they too may enter into eternal joy.)

- The petitions request the one for whom the *kurova kuva* ceremony is performed to return and care for the living. For example: *N..., hwahwa uhwu ndokwokuti udzokere mumusha mako unochengeta mhuri yako* (N..., this beer that we commit to you is our way of asking you to come back to your own home to care for your family).
- The petitions rehabilitate and sanctify the living-dead. All the stages include the sprinkling of holy water for this purpose. In this way it becomes true *kuchenura munhu* (the rehabilitation and sanctification of a person).
- The liturgy demonstrates the intermingling of Shona cultural practices and Christian practices. For example, upon completion of Stage 2 people are given beer and are encouraged to sing Christian and traditional songs and dance to the accompaniment of drums and other instruments intermingled with prayers and Scripture reading (p 21).
- The prayers and petitions try to match cultural and biblical practices. For example, the *kusuma mbudzi yeshungu* (slaughtering of the goat of appeasement) is taken to be reminiscent of where God is appeased through the blood of Jesus Christ (p 22).
- The prayers culminate in the ceremony of bringing the deceased's spirit home. It is accompanied by the following petition:

Zvino ngatichiturirai kumadzitateguru edu, ivo vagoturirawo kuna Kritu, iye Kritu agozviturirawo kuna Baba kuti tave kutora munhu wedu nhasi tiende kumusha. Ona, iwe N..., nemi vaN..., navaN..., chiudzanai makadaro mose, zvichingoenda kusvika



kunai ye, Musikavanhu, Mudzimu Mukuru, kuti mwana wenhu, N... uyu, nhasi tava kumutora, tichinomupinza mumusha make. Uyezve, tinoti mukumbire Kristu kuti, kana N... asati asvika kumuzinda wedenga chimuperekedzai asvikeko. (Now we inform our ancestors who will in turn inform Christ, and Christ will inform the Father that we are now taking our person home. You N...., and you N..., and also N... please inform each other according to your ranks right up to the Creator, the Chief Ancestral Spirit, that we are now taking our son N... to reintegrate him into his home. And also, please petition Christ that if N... has not yet entered the heavenly home, may Christ now accompany him there.)

The purpose of this *kuchenura munhu* is about more than finding compatibility between the Catholic faith and Shona culture in order that believers may feel at home in both worlds. It is also about comforting widows in the knowledge that the spirit of the deceased will come home to care for them and the children. The husband becomes the living-dead who is both with them and at the same time also in heaven, or making his way from purgatory to heaven, accompanied by Christ.

However, the Catholic *kuchenura munhu* liturgy has not been accepted without controversy, also among Catholics themselves. Nineteen years after the publication of this liturgy the Catholic Church also published *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* - a Catholic Church burial liturgy for Shona Catholics which also contains several post-burial liturgies such as that of the memorial services and the unveiling of the tombstone. These post-burial liturgies are more conservative in that they do not endorse the Shona *kurova guva* post-burial rituals as the *Kuchenura munhu* rite does. In an interview, a prominent Catholic priest and General Secretary of the



Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference, Father Chiromba, explained that the majority of Shona Catholics are uncomfortable with *Kuchenura munhu* liturgy and would rather stick to more traditional Catholic liturgy. Although *Kuchenura munhu* has not been banned by the Catholic Church it has died a natural death. With very few exceptions, Catholic priests and laity now use the liturgies contained in the *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* book.

At the same time, however, *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* also ensured ongoing enculturation with regard to burial and post-burial rites among the Shona (including Zezuru) Catholic believers of Zimbabwe. During the actual burial rite, prayers and petitions are addressed to God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), to the departed saints, and to the departed relatives of the deceased. Only rarely do they address the actual spirit of the person who is being buried. The prayers and petitions addressed to God are mainly to ask God to receive the spirit of the deceased, to forgive their sins and to judge mercifully. The following is an example from the 'final commendation and farewell prayer' (p 27):

Mwari, Nyadenga, muridzi wapasi, Baba vane tsitsi, onai taungana pano isu vana venyu, kuzoperededza mwana wenyu nokumusvits kwamuri. Ndimi makamudaidza. Ndimi makamubvisa matiri. Kusave nokumwe kwaangandogara kusina imi. Chimugamuchirai achigara nemi varidzi vake. Muregrereiwo zvose zvaakakutadzirai, muchimupinza mumusha wenyu worufaro. Munzwireiwo tsitsi, musamutonge muine hashu, musamurangewo... Kudaro, Baba, chipinzai mwana wenyu mumusha wenyu worufaro, achigara nokufara nasasande vose namadzitateguru ake ose, namadzisekuru ake ose, namadzimbuya ake nehava dzake dzose.



(God of heaven and earth, the Father of mercy; we gather here as your children, to accompany this your child and commit him to you. You are the one who has called him and have taken him from us. Let him not dwell anywhere else save where you are not. Receive him to live with you, his owner. Forgive him all his sins, and cause him to enter into your happy dwellings. Have mercy on him and do not judge him harshly or condemn him... Therefore, Father, take this your child into your dwelling of joy, that he may live happily with all the saints, all his forefathers, all his uncles and grandparents, all his grandmothers and all other relatives.)

The petitions addressed to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and other saints are for them to accompany the spirit of the departed to God. The following is an example (p 28):

M *Maria Musande, hoyoi mwana wenyu N....* (Mary, here is your son)

V *Endai naye kuna Mwari.* (Please accompany him to God)

M *Imi vangere navasande vose, hama yenyu iyi.*

(All you angels and saints, here is your relative)

V *Endai naye kuna Mwari* (Please accompany him to God)

M *Imi vechizvarwa chokwababa vake makatisiya, muri muna Mwari, mwana wenyu uyu.*

(All you ancestors from his father's side of the family who are in God, here is you son)

V *Endai naye kuna Mwari* (Please accompany him to God)

M *Imi vechizvarwa chokwamai vake makatisiya, muri muna Mwari, mwana wenyu uyu.*



(All you ancestors from his mother's side of the family who are in God, here is you son)

V *Endai naye kuna Mwari* (Please accompany him to God)

Conspicuously absent from these typical prayers are petitions directed to the spirit of the person who is being buried. There are only two examples of this in the entire burial rite. The first is on page 30 when the priest sprinkles holy water on the coffin and also when he is perfuming the coffin with incense.

When sprinkling holy water:

M *Ndinokumwaya mvura inoyera, kuti ucheneswe naMwari, muzita raBaba nero Mwanakomana neraMweya Mutsvene*

(I hereby sprinkle on you this holy water so that by it you may be cleansed by God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit)

V Amen

When perfuming the coffin with incense:

M *Ndinokupfungaidzira kuti iwe unatswe nokuchengetwa naMwari. Kunhuhwira uku ngakudzeinge vavengi vose nemweya yakaipa, muzita raBaba nero Mwanakomana neraMweya Mutsvene*

(I hereby perfume you with incense so that by it you may be cleansed and kept by God. May the incense drive away all enemies and evil spirits in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit)



V Amen

The second and only occasion that addresses the dead person in association with the living relatives is found from the concluding prayer found on page 36:

Iwe N.... kumbirira mhuri ako iyi, yawasiya pano pasi kuna Mwari, kuti isawane chainoona. Gara uchiinamatira kuti idzivirirwe kunjodzi dzose dzapasi nokuzvinhu zvose zvinokuvadza mweya momuviri. Musi wokufa kwavo uvatambire nokuvaperekedza kudenga kuna Mwari, kumufaro usingaperi.

(To you N.... intercede before God for this your family which you have left on this earth, that no harm may befall them. Keep praying for their protection from all the dangers of this earth and from all things that can harm them in spirit or body. When they die receive them and accompany them to the God of heaven where there is everlasting joy).

It is noticeable that this petition does not request the spirit of the deceased to return personally to care for the family. It rather requests the deceased to intercede with God to do so. This is a clear indication that conservative Catholics do not accord the living-dead the role of caring for the living.

The burial mass is followed by various memorial masses – for one person, for more than one person, and for a priest. It ends with the ‘rite for blessing a tombstone’ (pp 49-51). These post-burial masses also do not invoke the living dead to care for the living, nor do they invite the spirit of the departed to return home as *Kuchenura munhu* does. They can in fact be taken as functional substitutes for the *hwahwa hwehonye* and the *kurova guva* rituals. The Christian content is much more

predominant than the cultural elements. In the *Kuchenura munhu* rite it was the reverse. Here there is no attempt to bring the spirit of the departed back home. The living-dead are rather committed to a life in heaven with the saints and angels. Christianity comes to any culture with a certain degree of incompatibility, otherwise it would cease to be Christian. Although the Catholic *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* liturgy occasionally addresses the dead it does not attempt to give them 'a greater share in all that is done under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 9:6).

In both Catholic burial and post-burial liturgies it is apparent that enculturation in its double sense is at work. Firstly, the gospel is incarnated in native culture. The liturgies commit the spirits of the departed to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At several points they also communicate the gospel of Jesus and the resurrection of all believers. These elements did not previously exist in the burial and post-burial rituals of the Zezuru people. Secondly, enculturation meant the introduction of the culture into the life and liturgies of the Church. In Zezuru burial and post-burial rituals the departed are the living-dead and are sometimes addressed directly. They are petitioned to intercede for their living relatives, to welcome them in the spirit world when they die and to accompany them to the God of heaven. The only significant difference in the liturgies is that in the case of *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* the living-dead are not the ones with the power to protect the living, as they are conceived to do in the Zezuru culture and in *Kuchenura Munhu*. In both cases however, enculturation has done much to ensure that Christian believers do not suffer from a split in their allegiance with their culture and their Christian faith.

In conclusion it can be stated that the Catholic Church has gone further than most to incorporate traditional burial and after-burial rituals into Christian liturgy. The imperative for enculturation has motivated the church to integrate the Zezuru worldview into Christian liturgy. This has made it possible for Zezuru members to feel

at home in the church without losing the essence of their Africanness. It has also made it possible for widows, who are the primary concern of this study, to find healing, strength and comfort following the loss of their husband.

5.6 New possibilities for Zezuru Christian widows

This study has examined the extent to which both the Zezuru and the Catholic death rites of passage fulfil the seven pastoral care functions identified by Emmanuel Lartey (2003:684-719), namely: healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering. The study has shown that Zezuru death rites of passage are male dominated. They show traces of underlying patriarchal values and gender discrimination. In these rites of passage widows are at best marginalized, or at worst oppressed. This hinders the fulfilment of the basic pastoral care functions in Zezuru culture. The Catholic Church's rites of passage do not yield pastoral care benefits outside the Catholic Church. Apart from denominational constraints, the research participants in this study also found the cultural rituals and rites to often go against their Christian convictions.

In order to investigate this matter and address these concerns, I arranged a widows' retreat of two and a half days with the theme: 'Healed by his love' (Appendices 10-13). The retreat took place 23-25 May 2021 at the United Baptist Conference Centre in Harare at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. The retreat achieved two main purposes. Firstly, it provided the opportunity to gather empirical data for the study from the widows who were willing to participate in the study. Because of travel constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was impossible to conduct field work in Mashonaland East and Central. The retreat therefore provided the opportunity to collect comprehensive data from the participants who were present there.

Secondly, the retreat modelled a new post-death ritual for Zezuru Christian widows where the constraints identified by the participants in their narratives would not apply. The retreat gave the widows the opportunity to be in their own space where they could fulfil a death rite of passage in the presence of women and without compromising their Christian convictions with regard to the living-dead. The participants could support one another, learn from one another and encourage one another. They could also interact with other women who acted were not widows themselves.

5.6.1 The retreat format

In order to achieve the intended purposes, the retreat had to be formatted in a way that would include the following components.

- **Devotions**

The devotions were led by Reverend Noleen Chinyerere, a Methodist female pastor with a specific calling to minister to widows. She grew up with a widowed mother. She was therefore able to identify with the wounded widows at the retreat and could bring words of encouragement, hope, power, healing, liberation, reconciliation, sustenance, guidance, empowerment, trust, dependence on God, love and loyalty.

The devotions were based on the experiences of widows in the Bible. The women often had to overcome great obstacles. They included Anna, the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38), the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-25), and Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:1-22). Anna was a prophetess whose husband had died after seven years of marriage and then lived as a widow until she was 84. She overcame the adversity of widowhood through her faith in God. She served in the temple, with fasting and praying. She was eventually rewarded with the joy of seeing the newly born Jesus when his parents came to present him to at the temple. From her story the widows learnt to derive

strength from prayer, to live a life that is pleasing to God and to find peace in their widowhood. After the retreat, Munashe, Munorwei and Maidei related how this story inspired them to become involved in the ministry of intercession of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe.

The second story was that of the widow at Nain whose son was raised from the dead by Jesus. Her already painful widowhood had been exacerbated by the death of her only son. She experienced desperation. Two significant details from the story were emphasized in the devotion. Firstly, Luke 7:13 says: 'When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.' Jesus is projected in the story as caring for those who feel desperate and marginalized as the participants did. Secondly, verse 16 says that through Jesus' action of raising the dead son onlookers recognized that 'God has come to help his people'. The raising of the son symbolized the resurrection of hope, both for the widow at Nain and for the widows who attended the 'Healed by his love retreat'. In a text message afterwards, Munorwei shared about the resurrection of hope in her own life and how John 11:25 had become true for her as a result of this devotion: 'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and life. Those who believe in me even they die, yet they will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me (Jesus) will never die"'. For Munorwei and the other widows the loss of a loved did not signify a permanent loss.

The last devotional story came from Ruth (1:1-22). Tragedy had struck a whole family in which the father (Elimelech) and two sons (Mahlon and Chilion) died and left Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, as widows in the foreign land of Moab. A widow had no clear title to land and no resources with which to make a living. That is similar to what happens to Zezuru widows today, since land in most cases belongs to men. The widows at the retreat agreed that life was very hard for Naomi, Ruth and Orpah after the death of their husbands. Naomi expressed the

bitterness of with her situation: 'Call me no longer Naomi; call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt with me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me.'

Patricia identified with Naomi's bitterness during the discussion time. Naomi could not cope in Moab and went back to her people in Bethlehem. She was accompanied by her loyal daughter-in-law, Ruth. The lesson which was clear to the participants was that God honoured Naomi and Ruth's faithfulness. In the discussions Munorwei shared how reliance on God was one of the key things she learnt from the story. The result of such reliance on God is the healing from bitterness that that God brought about in the lives of the two widows. The story brought more weight to the conference theme: 'Healed by his love'.

The retreat devotions therefore contributed significantly to the goals of pastoral care: healing, empowerment, liberation, guidance and nurturing. Testimonies from the widows indicate how the devotions enabled them to move forward with their lives.

- **Widows' testimonies**

The retreat created a positive mutual support system for the women. They could share their narratives in a safe space. This was followed by discussions. The interview questions for the telling of the narratives were:

- Who am I?
- What happened to me when my husband died?
- How do I feel today at this retreat.

The actual stories and the discussions were presented in Chapter Four of this study.

- **The film *Neria* (1993)**

On the Saturday afternoon of the retreat the women were shown the Zimbabwean film, *Neria*. In this true-to-life film the main character and Patrick were happily married and had two children, Mavis (daughter) and Shingi (son). The film depicts Neria's struggles following the tragic death of Patrick in a road traffic accident. Patrick's older brother Phineas took advantage of his death by taking the deceased's possessions and using them for his own selfish benefit, thereby making Neria and her two children destitute. At one stage Phineas took the children to the family's rural home without Neria's knowledge. He tried to influence the children against their mother. He and his wife moved into Neria's house. Neria's mother-in-law accused her of being a witch who responsible for Patrick's death. This blatantly unfair and untrue accusation based on superstition and/or greed, was typical of what the majority of the participants also experienced.

Neria's experiences mirror those of many widows and their orphaned children in Zimbabwe. The pain of their loss is often exacerbated by both untrue accusations of having killed their husbands in order to inherit property and being deprived of their rightful property. Some even lose their children to the husband's family who take custody. The value of this film was that it gave the women someone with whom they could identify. More importantly, however, is the way in which Neria became empowered and was able to defeat the forces of patriarchy, oppression and sexism. Female friends gave Neria psycho-social support and created a safe space for her. They encouraged her to rise above her fears and fight for her rights. She engaged a lawyer and eventually reclaimed her dignity and property through both the community court and the high court. The widowed participants felt emboldened to emulate Neria and recover what they had lost. The Neria story also educated the women with regard to the available legal services and the network of friends.

- **Control group contributions**

Apart from the devotional speaker I also invited other widows who were not in my primary research team. The purpose was that they would interact with the primary participants, share their own experiences of widowhood and encourage the women. Chapter four reflects these contributions. Of particular importance, is the contribution of the guest speaker, Gogo Chawapiwa. She had been a widow for 44 years. Her husband died when she was 38 years of age. She described him as a man of integrity and a wonderful and caring husband. Her story illustrated that widowhood was a difficult process. Her husband died in a landmine accident. She and her son were also injured.

Before he died her husband requested that she transfer all the money from his account to hers. On the last day of his life, he wanted to share Holy Communion with her. She relates it as follows:

In the last moment of his life, he asked me to kiss him twice and said: 'Thank you very much for your greatness. Goodbye.' Then he died. I was in disbelief and denial that he had really gone. I felt as though the world had disintegrated on me. I cried until I could cry no more. I wished God had taken me instead of him. My in-laws many things soon after the burial of my husband. The questions they asked were: 'Where is the bank book?' 'How come you were not as affected by the accident?'

She described how in-laws ransacked the house looking for the bank book and other family property. She resisted those cultural requirements that were contrary to her convictions. Firstly, she refused to visit a diviner to enquire as to the cause of her

husband's death. The cause of death was clear. Secondly, she resisted the cultural requirement of *kufukidza tsoka dzemurume*, which means that she had to have sex with a relative of her husband in order that her husband's spirit would rest. Thirdly, she refused the *kugarwa nhaka* (wife inheritance). For that she was hated, but she stood her ground.

Gogo Chawapiwa shared with the group how she survived widowhood and what lessons she learnt. Firstly, her faith in God became her pillar of strength. The story of Lazarus in John 11:1-46, were of great comfort to her during the period of grieving. Verses 25 and 26 were especially poignant: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet they will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' She prayed to God to heal her heart and not to have sexual feelings for other men. She emphasised the importance of maintaining good relationships with in-laws, as much as possible. For example, she has a good relationship with her mother-in-law with whom she lived for 20 years after the death of her husband. It is important for the children to have relationships with their relatives. She also stressed the importance of support groups such as the retreat. This gives women the help they need on their journey to healing. Such groups and networks provide recognition, sustainability and empowerment. She spoke about the value of working hard for her children rather than forever being dependent on others. Although she was employed as a teacher, she augmented her income with cross-border trading. She made and sold clothes and had a money lending business. She emphasized the need to set boundaries. A woman should not be forced, coerced, manipulated and convinced to do what they do not want to do or do not understand. Her refusal to accept certain cultural rituals was an illustration of this point.

5.6.2 Pastoral care, culture and healing

The narratives, discussions and reflections at the widows' retreat with the theme 'Healed by his love' had specific benefits for the participants. These outcomes in and the beneficial elements in Zezuru cultural post-burial rituals can be brought into conversation with the seven purposes of pastoral care in order to develop an effective approach to pastoral care with Christian widows in this specific cultural context.

- **Healing**

What has emerged in this study is that Zezuru widows often find themselves broken and bruised by not only the experience of the loss of their husband, but also and especially by experiences with families-in-law and their clash with cultural beliefs and practices that are detrimental to women. These women are in need of emotional, psychological and spiritual restoration and healing (Lartey 2006:637). The Zezuru death rites of passage have some capacity for healing, but in other respects can exacerbate the women's suffering. In the Christian retreat, 'Healed by his love' the women could share their experiences in a safe space where their voice could be heard, and their humanity and dignity respected. There was also the deep healing effect of telling their story and encouraging and being encouraged by others. The devotions, the Neria film and the narrative of Gogo Chawapiwa contributed to the healing effect. The devotions strengthened their relationship of faith. The film and the narrative of a real person who had survived and succeeded in life as a widow, gave them the opportunity to identify with others' stories and experiences. This helped them to break out of the sense of utter isolation and loneliness. The determination and success of the role models, both in fiction and reality, inspired a similar resolve and determination in them. Faith, a sense of belonging and community, as well as a vision for the future, contributed positively to the healing process.

- **Sustaining**

To be sustained is to find strength and support from within and without. It enables a person to cope adequately with what cannot be changed (Lartey 2003: 660-661). Death is an undesirable situation that cannot be changed. It triggers a grief process. It requires a long process of healing, a long journey towards acceptance and peace. It therefore requires a great measure of endurance. It requires the strength and support that come from sustaining. The processes at the 'Healed by his love' retreat was aimed at providing support and empowering and sustaining women. 'Sustaining' suggests an ongoing process rather than a once-off event. The widows requested that the retreat should be held annually.

- **Guiding**

Clebsch and Jaekle's (1994:429-436) description of guiding is pertinent to this study, namely that it is about 'assisting perplexed persons to make confident choices between alternative courses of thought and action, when such choices are viewed as affecting the present and future state of the soul'. This requires problem-solving and decision-making skills (Lartey 2003: 667). The 'Healed by his love' retreat helped widows to confront the many complex and life-altering choices they face after having lost their husband. Many of the difficulties and questions arise from the very nature of Zezuru culture. The *Neria* film helped the widows to resolve the problem of how to assert their right to property in the face of deprivation often caused by the extended family following the death of their spouse. Discussion groups and plenary presentations helped them answer the many other questions of their situation. For instance, they had to deal with the cultural pressure of 'being inherited' by a male relative of the husband, who in most cases already had a wife. The guidance came

from a combination of devotions, the film, the sharing of stories and the teaching of a female role model.

- **Reconciling**

In a quest for harmonious relationships, reconciling must include 'bringing together again parties that have become estranged or alienated from each other' (Lartey 2003:678-679). Death within the Zezuru culture tends to trigger conflict. Some arise from accusations of witchcraft. Other arise from greed: accusing the wife of killing her husband would provide the family with the opportunity to acquire the deceased's property and assets. Another terrain of conflicts involves *kugarwa nhaka* (wife inheritance). Being passed on to another man while she is in the grief process can cause great bitterness in widows. While the 'Healed by his love' retreat did not resolve many of these conflicts, it explored avenues of reconciliation. For example, the emphasis in the devotional talks about the need for forgiving wrong-doers helped to lower the level of bitterness. Gogo Chawapiwa also taught and illustrated from her own experience the need to have harmonious relationships with in-laws and the need for children to extended family members on both sides of the family. However, she also emphasized the need for clear boundaries. Forgiveness and sustaining good relationships do not mean that a woman should give up her agency or betray the convictions of her faith.

- **Nurturing**

Following the death of their spouse, the widows needed encouragement to grow and develop their talents and potential. A process of nurturing is required for this to become possible. Lartey (2003:690-691) identifies on six dimensions of growth or nurturing, namely: nurturing of the mind, body, of relationships with others, of the relationship with the biosphere, of relationships with groups and institutions, and

nurturing of the spiritual dimension of one's life. The retreat provided nurturing through both 'caring' and 'confrontation' (Lartey 2003:694). The caring and confrontation occurred through empathetic devotions which nurtured the spiritual aspect and in relating their experiences in an understanding environment the emotional and relational aspect of being human were nurtured. The confrontational aspect encouraged self-insight and provided the stimulus to grow out of self-pity and resolve to work hard for themselves, their independence and their families. The Neria film opened the eyes of the widows to the reality that culture is not set in stone, and oppressive cultures can be confronted through legal means.

- **Liberating and empowering**

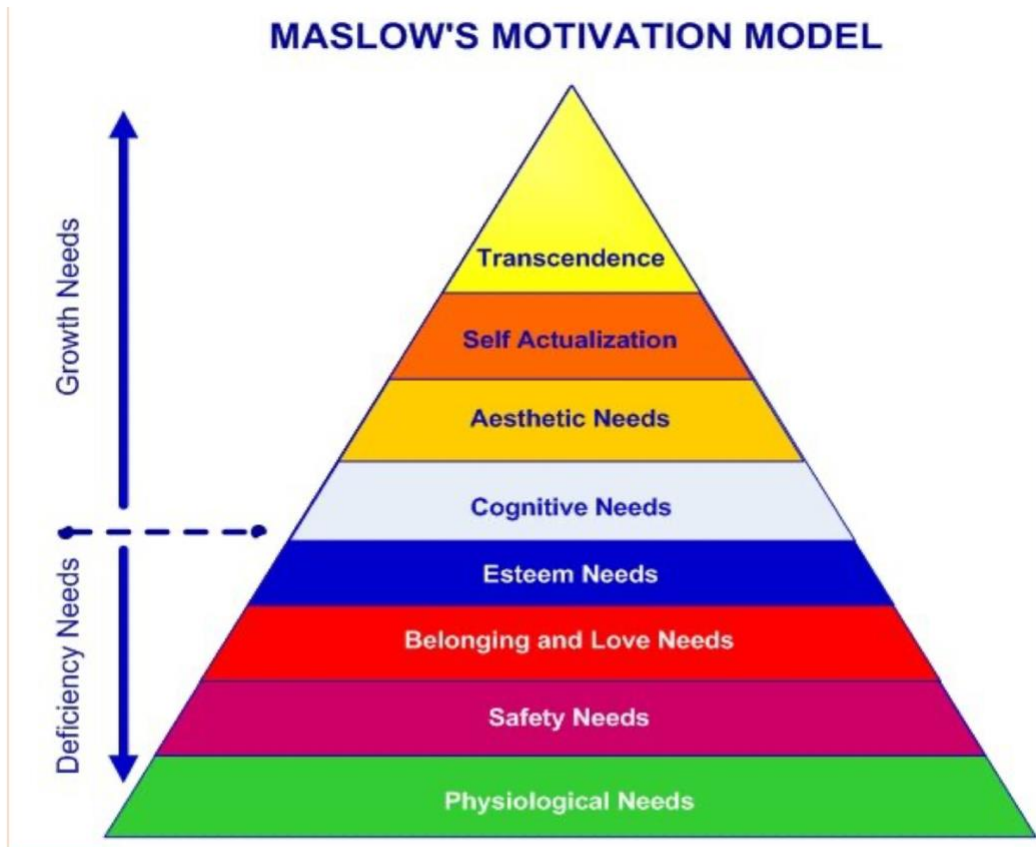
Liberation is needed both on a mental and a social level. On the mental level widows are often inhibited by patriarchal structures to think for themselves. On a social level there is often the problem among women of 'servile dependence on others in one's social circle or outside it' (Lartey 2003:700). Prolonged subjection to patriarchy and androcentrism often reduces a woman's sense of self-worth. They then need to be liberated from such domination and oppression. The 'Healed by his love' retreat worked towards liberation by raising awareness about the sources of oppression and domination in society. This enabled the women to critically examine both personal and structural sources of inequality and to find a means of confronting them. They were also challenged to consider the options available for change. These include, for instance, legal options and the formation of support groups and networks. In this way reflection paved the way for action towards liberation.

Closely linked with liberation, is empowerment. Lartey (2003:709-711) explains that marginalized groups and persons who endure years of enforced and internalized helplessness struggle to break free. They first have to find the strength to be

empowered. The retreat aimed to empower Zezuru widows *within* themselves and also to find and utilize the available resources *outside* of themselves. Empowered persons with access to resources can think and act in ways that will result in greater freedom and participation in the life of the societies of which they form a part (Lartey 2003:711-713).

5.7 Meeting the widows' needs

Becoming a widow within the Zezuru culture is often a difficult and disorienting experience. The particular difficulties they face were a recurring theme in this study. These difficulties create needs that can best be analyzed by employing the Maslow hierarchy of needs depicted in the diagram below.



Source: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

The model indicates how human needs range from the biological and physiological to the spiritual and transcendent. Maslow (1970) classifies the first four needs as basic or deficiency needs. If these needs are not met individuals feel the deficiency or feel under threat physically, emotionally or psychologically and are therefore driven to meet those needs. It is difficult to be motivated to meet higher needs if the lower order need have not been met, for example, is a person is hungry (physiological need), is feeling unsafe (safety need), is feeling rejected (love/belonging need) or does not feel worthy (esteem need). Maslow classifies the last four needs as 'growth' or 'being' needs. These needs promote growth and development rather than just filling a gap or deficiency. The growth and development



needs are never fully satisfied. If basic needs have been met, these needs continue to motivate behaviour. Cognitive needs (the need for knowledge and understanding), aesthetic needs (the appreciation and search for beauty and form) and self-actualization needs (self-fulfillment through realizing personal potential) continue to characterize a person's growth. The same would apply to transcendence needs. These are about spiritual needs and moral values that would include helping others to achieve self-actualization.

The study has shown that for widows in Zezuru culture the needs identified by Maslow are all threatened to varying degrees and at various times. On a biological and physiological level some Zezuru widows face deprivation and destitution. They are suddenly, because of the death of their husband, deprived by his family of essentials such as food and housing. Such deprivation is accompanied by the threat to their safety. With the departure of the husband whose traditional role included protecting the family, the widow and her children are now without protection. Various threats to their bodies, wellbeing and future now ensue. The study also showed the extent to which many Zezuru widows are castigated by extended family members who suspect them of having killed husbands to gain some advantage such as inheriting property. The love and belonging need are thereby threatened. Esteem needs are also threatened because of the stigmatization of widowhood. Esteem is not only threatened by stigmatization and the accusations that they cause the husband's death. Esteem is mainly threatened by the lesser value attributed to women in Zezuru culture and the entitlement of men to be and take what they want when were and how they want it. That leaves women 'worth less' in culture and society, always dependent, not self-sufficient, not a person in their own right. The low self-esteem from which widows often suffer also affects their ability to achieve self-actualization, the higher order need in Maslow's hierarchy. If they are not deliberately empowered, they will probably not realize their potential for self-advancement, self-



support and independence. The consequences of not having these needs met, exacerbates the burden of painful grief and mourning, a process which can include elements such as shock, denial, anger, and depression before eventually reaching the stage of acceptance (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005). Only then can the women begin to build up a new and meaningful life without the deceased.

5.8 Summary

This chapter developed a Christian theological and pastoral perspective on Zezuru death rites of passage within the four-dimensional theoretical framework constructed in Chapter Two. The four dimensions consist of: the living-dead, contextualization, inter-culturality and the nature of pastoral care. The similarities between the Zezuru belief in life after death and the teachings of the New Testament based mainly on 1 Corinthians 15 were identified. This opened up the possibility of Christian churches to incorporate some Zezuru post-death rituals into their liturgies. The example of the most radical and most controversial form of enculturation was presented, namely the Catholic Church's adoption of the *Kuchenura Munhu* liturgy in 1982. It aimed to incorporate all the features of the Zezuru *Kurova Guva* ritual, integrated with elements of Catholic teaching on what happens to a person after death. Concerns about syncretism led to the quiet demise of the *Kuchenura Munhu* liturgy within the Catholic Church. A more Christian based liturgy *Maitiro echiKristo okuviga munhu* was adopted.

In Protestant circles, the perceived incompatibility between aspects of the Zezuru post-burial rites and the Christian faith led to the development of functional substitutes in the form of *Nyaradzos* (consolation services) and tombstone unveiling memorial services. Such functional substitutes have served a double purpose for Zezuru widows. These have enabled them to remain faithful to both their Christian faith and their culture by retaining the positive functions of Zezuru death rites of

passage while discarding those elements perceived to be incompatible with their faith. Secondly, they have opened avenues for the church to play a significant pastoral role, especially during the initial critical stages of widowhood.

However, the functional substitutes exhibit the similar problem of male domination. This reduces the effectivity of the pastoral role of the church when it comes to the care of widows. The aim of the 'Healed by his love' retreat was not to be a substitute for existing post-death functional substitutes, but to be an effective means of providing pastoral care and counselling. The retreat showed the potential for meeting needs on all the levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. An evaluation of the retreat also showed that to a very significant extent it achieved the seven pastoral care functions, namely healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study has focused on the role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe and approached the challenges of widowhood in this particular culture from a pastoral perspective. I was prompted to undertake this study because of the stories I heard from and about widows in my community, and especially from those who came to me for counselling. Most of them came from the areas that were selected for this investigation. The stories invariably included the performance of death rites of passage. They articulated mixed emotions about the rituals prescribed by culture. On the one hand, some felt obligated to participate in these cultural rituals, while on the other hand most of those who were Christians were unable to reconcile some of the cultural rituals and their meanings with their Christian beliefs and convictions. For them as women of a particular culture, in the matter of cultural prescriptions versus their own preferences and the right to exercise those preferences, the issue was rather complicated. These issues with which women grapple, prompted this study on the experiences and role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe from a pastoral perspective in order to develop a pastoral approach that could address their concerns and provide effective guidance for practice.

The geographical areas identified for the investigation were Mashonaland Central and Harare because that is where most Zezuru people live. Participants were from the city and villages in the area. The people in these areas still adhere to traditional Zezuru practices with regard to death, burial and after-burial rituals. Zezuru culture is closely tied in with a complex religious outlook. People believe in *Mwari* (God), but

their lives are mostly controlled by patrilineal and matrilineal spirits of the living-dead who continue to form a part of and have a significant influence on the closely knit Zezuru extended families. The departure (death) of any adult member of the community is therefore followed by a series of rituals which aim to ensure that everything is done correctly so that the community can remain intact.

In the exploration of these post-death rituals and their meaning and effect, the study focused specifically on the experiences and role of women. The study found that women play an indispensable role in the performance of the rituals. Women are active at every stage of the death rites of passage. On the other hand, women such as the bereaved widows who were closest to the deceased and whose lives are most affected by the death, are marginalized in many respects. They have little to no decision-making authority. They are relegated to the role of onlooker rather than participant in the funeral ceremony of their loved-one. Elements of cultural oppression of women and male domination were noted at every stage of the death rites of passage. The practical consequences of this had a detrimental effect on the the future lives of the women and their children. The study then explored Christian functional substitutes for some of the cultural practices that could be implemented by the church in the fulfilment of its pastoral role. These functional substitutes would then serve to achieve a better gender balance in post-death rituals while still fully honouring Zezuru culture and accommodating the sensibilities of Zezuru Christians.

6.2 Findings

The participation of women in the death rituals in the Zezuru culture was explored in the study in order to evaluate from a pastoral perspective, whether the rituals and the role that women play in these rituals can be regarded as conducive to widows' journey of grief and mourning. To this end, the participation of women in the pre-burial, burial and post-burial rituals was explored and evaluated. The study found

that the role of women in the death rites of passage is an active one. Women are clearly indispensable when it comes to the carrying out of the rituals. These rituals have an essential function in the remembrance of the living-dead and their continued participation in the life of the living, as seen by this particular culture. It is women who wash the body and prepare it for burial. They are the chief mourners at funerals. They also perform various functions of care. This includes providing comic relief to lighten the atmosphere and make the mourning process more bearable. They further contribute to the proceedings by singing and dancing, preparing food for the mourners, and caring for people's health by preparing medicated water for washing of hands after burial procedures. After the burial, the female relatives are the ones who remain to comfort, console and to give moral support to the bereaved. In short, the women play a vital role in the pre-burial rituals, the burial rituals, as well as the post-burial rituals. Yet, despite their active and vital role, women are subject to the cultural oppression and male domination that characterize the death rites of passage. Women have to adhere to prescribed ways in which things are done without having the decision-making power to which the men are entitled.

Since the focus of the study is on a particular culture in a particular environment, the concept of contextualization was relevant to this Christian theological study. The study explored the two approaches to the nature of Christian theology, namely the 'context defined' and the 'context transcending' approach in order to assess the deeper meanings of the Zezuru death rites of passage and bring these into discussion with the tenets of the Christian faith. With regard to the pastoral aspect of the study, the pastoral care model developed by Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) and expanded by Ghanaian practical theologian, Emmanuel Lartey (2003), was utilised to ascertain to what extent Zezuru rites of passage fulfil the functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering the community in general and the widows in particular.

Through the theoretical exploration of the concept of contextualization and the lens of the pastoral care model, the study indicated the strengths and weaknesses of the Zezuru death rites of passage in the grief process of the bereaved. The results that emerged are that the patriarchal nature of the Zezuru culture has a limiting effect on women as agents and recipients of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering. Men are the dominant cultural role-players. However, there are some ways in which women can – if allowed by the men involved – exert a measure of influence on decision-making with regard to their own choices and their own lives. The main result of this exploration is, however, that women are culturally marginalized and barred from being the main interlocutors when it comes to their own lives and that of their family.

The empirical investigation took the form of narrative focus group reflections with six participant widows. The widows responded to the interview questions, which guided the narration of their own stories at a three-day retreat. Apart from these six main participants in the investigation, other widows with the relevant experience and facilitators with a deep knowledge of the challenges of widowhood in this particular culture, were invited to contribute their insights. The thematic reflections arising from the narratives and discussions included: the cultural oppression of women, the often-traumatizing attitudes and actions of the in-laws, and the role of mourning rituals in the grief process. The retreat provided a safe environment for the widows to share their narratives and articulate their emotions. A consequence of this retreat and sharing their experience was that the widows saw the value of a support group and decided to form such a group for ongoing support. They also wanted to extend the benefit of such a group to others and make a difference in the lives of other widows. They would therefore also invite widows they know from their churches and communities to join their support group.

One of the aims of such a support group would be to learn about and better understand the 'Widows' Charter' (Appendix 18). This document is important for several reasons related to this study. Firstly, the preamble stipulates the concerns that led to the compilation of the charter. These concerns include the following:

- In many countries widows suffer because of the low status attributed to them in society, discrimination, violence, and a lack of basic legal rights.
- In many communities widows are stereotyped as evil, the ones who bring bad luck. These social attitudes obstruct them from fully participating in civil society.
- Widows are often barred from inheriting property and other assets that they shared with their husband in the marriage. They are often evicted from their home, deprived of all assets and left destitute.
- Widows sometimes become the victim of degrading and even life threatening traditional funeral and burial practices.
- The way in which widows are treated has severe negative implications for all of society. The poverty of widows deprives their children of their right to safety, shelter, food and education.

Secondly, the charter makes a number of important assertions regarding widows. The first three articles are particularly relevant to this study:

- **Article 1**

Article 1 asserts that as human beings widows are equal to all women and men, irrespective of their age or marital status. There shall be no discrimination against widows in either word or deed, in family or private life, and in the community and

public life. The State is guilty of breaching the law if it implicitly condones discrimination and the abuse of the widows by others, including family members.

- **Article 2**

Article 2 states that widows shall have the right to inherit from their husband's estate, whether the deceased spouse left a will or not. Widows may not be 'inherited' as the wife or concubine of the husband's brother. They may not be forced into a *levirate* relationship. They may not be forced to have sex with a relative of the husband in order to become pregnant and continue the dead husband's line and name. Anyone who deprives a widow of her property or takes custody of her children without a court order, shall be guilty of a crime.

- **Article 3**

Article 3 asserts that anyone who arranges for a widow or coerces her to participate in harmful traditional practices in the context of funeral and burial rites shall be guilty of a crime. Anyone who forcibly deprives the widow of custody of her children shall be guilty of a serious offence.

The matters raised in the Widow's Charter are educative, liberating and empowering. It is important for women to have knowledge of this and understand their legal rights. Support groups can make it one of their tasks to educate widows in this regard. Women who have been through the experience of widowhood can in turn educate others, so that all women have the knowledge and are fully prepared should they some day have to face the situation of becoming a widow in that culture and country.

The study evaluated the role of Zezuru post-death rites of passage in the grief process and their efficacy in tending to the needs of bereaved widows. The study found that some of their needs are indeed met by these rites of passage which

represent a way of accompanying the widows on their journey of grief and mourning. The rituals ensure that they are never alone, but have the necessary support. At every stage of the post-death rites of passage the community comes together in support of the widows and their families. This includes meeting *material needs* such as food, water and firewood for preparing meals for the bereaved. Various *psychological needs* are also met, such as the need for human connection in the process of going through the journey of grief. However, some shortcomings in the post-death rites of passage were also identified. A significant obstacle to the women's journey through the grief process and thereafter, is the cultural oppression and male domination embedded in the death rites of passage. The study also found that some Zezuru Christians resist cultural post-death rites of passage that they regard to be incompatible with their Christian faith.

These shortcomings, problems and obstacles that were identified in the study evoke the question whether the Christian faith community can play a positive pastoral role in this regard. The study found that functional substitutes of cultural rites and practices with a clear Christian content, can play a significant role in meeting the needs of Christian Zezuru widows. These functional substitutes for cultural practices also serve to alleviate the problem of cultural oppression and male domination.

Two functional substitutes were identified. The first is a substitute for the *Nyaradzo* (comforting) ceremony. As the name indicates the aim of the ceremony is to bring comfort to the bereaved. The functional substitute is a church ceremony which aims to bring comfort through songs, testimonies about the departed, and the preaching of the word of God. The Nyaradzo ceremony for Francis Nyathi (Appendix 15) is an example. In the service the deceased is honoured and given recognition for his contribution to the lives of others. God is petitioned to provide the bereaved with the 'peace that surpasses all understanding'. They hymn 'What a friend we have in

Jesus' affirms that Jesus takes all human grief upon him. The sermon has the aim to 'cure troubled hearts' (see sermon by Rev. Dr. Roy Musasiwa). This functional substitute for the *Nyaradzo* ceremony aims to facilitate healing for the bereaved in the present and give hope for the future.

The other functional substitute is a remembrance service and the unveiling of the tombstone approximately one year after the death of the husband. This is a substitute for the *kurova guva* ritual which is objectionable to Christians who find it to be incompatible with their faith. The tombstone unveiling ceremony is a substitute for the cultural *Nyaradzo* ceremony. It not only honours the departed through remembrance but also anticipates everlasting union in the life to come. Although these functional substitutes play an important role in the lives of Christian widows in the Zezuru culture, they do not have the power to provide for the those needs of the grief process that continue even after one year of the grief process has elapsed. Provision for the emotional and psychological needs of widows and ongoing pastoral support would still be needed. The contribution of the functional substitutes for cultural rites of passage is positive, but their effect is limited.

The widows' retreat and subsequent support groups provide a means of continued pastoral support and guidance which goes beyond what either the Zezuru death rites of passage or the functional substitutes can accomplish. This continued pastoral support is necessary because the grief process is a lengthy journey toward eventual acceptance and healing. The retreat called 'Healed by his love' was initially organized for the purpose of gathering empirical data for this study. From this engagement for the purpose of research it became clear that there were also particular benefits for the widows in their various phases of the grief process. They experienced the benefit of pastoral support as they shared their various positive and negative experiences in the context of their culture and faith communities. The

retreat showed that there was a need for ongoing support for the women. This could be provided by pastoral care and counselling in the faith community and also through support groups through social media networks and annual retreats. The Anglican Church in Zimbabwe already has a Widows and Single Mothers Association (WISMA). Pastoral care and counselling, retreats and support groups can provide ongoing support for the women and address their needs on a spiritual, emotional and practical level. They can provide skills training to help widows to meet their physiological and self-actualization needs. In these ways widows can experience connectedness and a sense of belonging as they relate to sympathetic and understanding others. The knowledge that they are not alone, but that others have similar experiences forges a sense of connectedness. This supports widows on their difficult journey to finding a new social status and building a new life on their own. Combatting the unjust stigmatization of widows which has such a detrimental effect on their sense of self-worth, should be a concerted effort of faith communities, culture and society.

The specific interest of this study in the field of practical theology and particularly the sub-discipline of pastoral care and counselling, is the pastoral role of the church in response to the Zezuru culture's death rites of passage. The study explored and identified connections between the Zezuru belief in life after death and the view of the apostle Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians 15. It explores possibilities to overcome the stigma among Zezuru people that the Christian faith is a 'foreign religion' by incorporating aspects of the Zezuru death rituals into Christian liturgies. Functional substitutes for those aspects of Zezuru death rites of passage that some Christian believers find to be incompatible with their faith were introduced. By employing such functional substitutes, the church can become more relevant to its Zezuru members. People of the Zezuru culture can then preserve an integrated identity that is both fully Zezuru and fully Christian. In this way the Zezuru people can feel culturally at

home in the Christian faith and faith community. For the women it means that they can feel culturally at home in the Christian faith community and also experience the pastoral support and guidance of the church to oppose and transcend cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices that are harmful to them and their holistic wellbeing.

A pastoral approach with the focus on providing solace and empowerment for widows in the Zezuru culture is proposed in the study. The 'Healed by his love' retreat functioned not only as an opportunity to gather data with regard to widowhood in Zezuru culture and the experiences of Christian widows, but also provided an empowering pastoral opportunity for the women to share their experiences and evaluate what both culture and their faith could contribute to their healing and wholeness. Such a retreat for widows as a pastoral care opportunity is not a replacement for the post-death functional substitutes. Along with the functional substitutes that fulfil a ritual function which has specific pastoral care benefits, the retreat and other opportunities of sharing and giving and receiving support, have a different set of pastoral care and counselling benefits.

The Christian functional substitutes for Zezuru rites of passage, the benefits of a widows' retreat and of support groups for pastoral care and educational purposes, were explored and evaluated. The results show that to a very significant extent the seven pastoral care functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering can be achieved by these means. The study showed that these functions can be fulfilled as follows:

- **Healing**

Healing is about the emotional, psychological and spiritual restoration following grief and pain that result from having sustained the devastating loss of a spouse. Such healing can be facilitated when widows have the opportunity to share their

experiences with others who were willing to listen, who can understand and respond. The retreat fulfilled the function of a post-burial ritual for the widows. It gave them the opportunity to share and reflect on their grief together with others, but without the limitations imposed on the cultural rites of passage. From a cultural and religious perspective, healing can also be facilitated through the *Nyaradzo* ceremony which provides solace in the knowledge and assurance that the deceased lives on in his legacy and in the spiritual realm where he awaits the resurrection of the dead.

- **Sustaining**

Sustaining is about an ongoing process of healing and maintaining equilibrium in life. This is not a once-off event. The widows decided that a retreat should be held at least annually for the purpose of sustaining.

- **Guiding**

Guiding emerged as a clear outcome of Christian functional substitutes for cultural rites of passage. The pastoral guidance experienced in the group setting where the widows could share their experiences and receive feedback and encouragement, also served the purpose of guiding. With this guidance, the women could make confident life changing choices between alternative courses of thought and action. The screening of the film *Neria* fulfilled the role of educational and practical guidance. Through the film they received information and saw an example of how their legal rights could be protected and what the legal procedures entailed. Discussion groups and plenary presentations helped them to find answers to the many other questions that arose following the death of their spouses.

- **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is necessary to end the various conflicts that are often triggered by the death of a spouse. In the particular culture accusations of witchcraft and greed have

a detrimental effect on persons in the grief process. Other conflicts arise when widows put under pressure to fulfil cultural demands such as being 'inherited' by another man in the husbands' family. The retreat and the sharing that it facilitated could not serve to resolve these conflicts. However various avenues of reconciliation could be explored and encouraged. This lowered the level of bitterness without the widows having to give up their human rights or religious convictions. This is an issue that future pastoral retreats and future academic research can explore.

- **Nurturing**

The pastoral function of nurturing is concerned with the encouragement provided for people to grow and develop their talents and potential. Nurturing focuses holistically on the mind, body, relationships with others, relationships with groups and institutions, as well as nurturing the spiritual dimension of people's lives. The retreat provided such a nurturing opportunity and opened avenues for this to continue in the form of future retreats and support groups. Nurturing takes place by means of both 'caring' which encourages and 'confrontation' which stimulates further insight and growth.

- **Liberation**

Liberation from oppressive patriarchal structures is needed for widows on both a psychological and a social level. The 'Healed by his love' retreat worked towards such liberation by raising awareness about the sources of oppression and domination in society and culture. Ways were explored how women can become agents of their own liberation from servile dependence on men. They were challenged to consider the options for change that are available to them. This includes legal options and the formation of support groups and networks.

- **Empowering**

The pastoral function of empowering is linked with the function of liberation since marginalized persons tend to struggle with internalized helplessness which is the psychological consequence of years of oppression and subjugation. The 'Healed by his love' retreat facilitated the women to find the strength to embark of the road to liberation both *within* themselves and also through available resources *outside* of themselves. The empowering should also be ongoing and can be facilitated further through future retreats. Empowered and empowering widows can increasingly think and act in ways that will result in greater personal freedom and in full and autonomous participation in the life of their society.

6.3 Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, some recommendations can be made. Other functional substitutes over and above the *Nyaradzo* (comforting service) and *kuvhura dombo* (tombstone unveiling) should be explored. *Nyaradzo* and *kuvhura dombo* cover only two of the many post-death rituals that were identified in Chapter 2 of this study. One of the cultural post-death rituals that was seen to disempower and oppress women is *kugara nhaka* (literally 'to inherit') or *kugarwa nhaka* (literally 'to be inherited'). This ritual place undue pressure on a recently widowed person in the midst of the grief process to get remarried to a family member of the late husband. This amounts to social pressure. It is not the woman's own choice. With regard to this cultural practice a substitute should be found in a similar way to how functional substitutes were developed for the *kurova guva* and *hwahwa hwehonye* rituals.

Faith communities can establish support groups for widows. They can also have regular retreats modelled on the 'Healed by his love' retreat that was organized for the purposes of this study. Such retreats can serve to strengthen the positive elements of the Zezuru death rites of passage and provide a corrective on some



negative elements of these rites. This can contribute to fulfilling the pastoral functions identified in the study, namely healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering

Comparative research be carried out among other Shona and Ndebele tribes. Commonalities and differences that are identified can contribute to a deeper understanding of the death rites of passage of these cultures and the experiences of those persons who are also Christian believers.



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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research consent form for individual participants

Topic: The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach.

My name is Sylvia Chirevesayi Musasiwa, a PHD (Theology) Practical Theology student of the University of Pretoria (Student number: U:13398271).

I am doing research on the above topic and am requesting you to kindly participate in this study.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the churches' response to "the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture".

In terms of procedures of the study, the participants will be interviewed to seek their understanding of the death rites of passage. No risk is anticipated in this study apart from the time taken on the interview(s) and the possibility of arousing grief memories from the past. Debriefing counselling will be available to participants after the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary, with participants having the right to withdraw from the study anytime without negative consequences. Confidentiality is assured, with the information disclosed being used only for research purposes without names of participants being disclosed to anyone. Participants have the freedom to disclose personal information to the extent they feel comfortable.

Should you have any questions, please contact me on the following numbers: 0242-304565 (home)/+263 772367597(mobile)

As a sign of informed consent, kindly sign two of these consent letters: one for the researcher and one for yourself to keep your records.

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

Participant's signature..... Date.....

Participant's age.....



Appendix 2: Interview questions for participants

Questions for the 8 selected participants (the questions will be asked in Zezuru and the nearest English equivalence is given in brackets)

1. *Chii chinotanga kuitwa kana munhu afa?* (Explain the very first procedure to be done when someone dies)
2. *Ko kupeta kana munhu afa kunorevei?* (Explain the *kupeta* process soon after the death of a person)
3. *Ndiyani anotumwa kunosuma hama dzemufi uye anoenda neyi?* (Who is sent to announce to close relatives the death of the deceased and what token must they give to those relatives?)
4. *Hama dzemufi dzakakoshera chii parufu?* (What significance is given to the relatives of the deceased?)
5. *Ndiyani anotema Rukawo?* (Who does the groundbreaking for the tomb of the deceased?)
6. *Tsanangudzai zviniotika pakubuditsa mutumbi mumba.* (Explain the procedure of taking the body of the deceased out of the house for burial)
7. *Ndedzipi tsika dzinoitwa pakuviga munhu?* (What cultural procedures are followed during the actual burial of a person?)
8. *Ko Seiko vanhu vachigeza maoko kana vabva kunoviga munhu uye mvura inoshandiswa inoiswei?* (What is the cultural significance of washing hands after doing the burial? What happens to the water once hand washing has been done?)
9. *Ko sei vanhu vachifumoenda kuguva sure kwekuviga munhu uye vanenge vachinoitei ikoko?* (Why do people go to the grave the following morning after burial and what happens there?)
10. *Sei vanhu vachienda kugata? Kunoendwa nani uye vachinozvifambisa sei ikoko* (Why do people go to *Gata* [occasion of consulting a medium on cause of death]? Who goes there? Describe what happens there)
11. *Chii chinozoitika kana vanhu vadzoka kugata? Anotaurira mhuri chikonzero cherufu ndiani ?* (What happens when people come back from *gata*. Who announces to the family the cause of the death?)
12. *Doro rehonye rinozoitwa kwapera mazuva mangani uye zvii zvinoitwa padoro rehonye?* (When does the first beer-accompanied after-death ceremony take place? What actually happens during this ceremony?)



13. *Kana gore rapera panozoitwa doro rekuchenura kana kuti kurova guva. Titsanangurireiwo kuti chii chinonzi doro rekuchenura. (After a year of burial there is another ceremony called “doro rekuchenura” or “kurova guva”. Tell us the significance of this ceremony).*
14. *Rinobikwa nani? Sei richibikwa naiyeye (Who brews beer for this ceremony and why this person or people?)*
15. *Mutambo unoitwa usiku unorevei uye zvii zvinenge zvichiitika. (Why does this ceremony happen at night and what actually happens during such a ceremony?)*
16. *Kana mweya wemufi wadzoswa, panozoitwa nyaya dzekugara nhaka. Zvinofambiswa sei zvekutsvaga munhu anozogara nhaka? The next important ceremony an inheritance one. What procedure is followed to identify the rightful person to take over the property and spouse of the deceased).*
17. *Ndezvipi zvinozoitwa kurangarira mufi mushure mekurova guva? (How do people continue to remember the living-dead following all these ceremonies?)*



Appendix 3: Affidavit - Travel to for field research

I, **Sylvia Chirevesayi Musasiwa** (ID 47-006007K-80), residing at 14 Takeley Drive, Sentosa, Mabelreign, Harare, do hereby make oath and swear that:

I am a PhD student with the University of Pretoria (Student No. U13398271). As part of the requirement for this degree I am to undertake field research in the area of Pastoral Care and Counseling. The topic of my study is “The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Approach”

My research will require me to travel to various areas in Harare and Mashonaland Provinces during the period June to December 2020

My research assistant for this project is Masiwa Panashe Hopewell Ngoro (63-2304833L-80) whom I will be sending on various errands in connection with this research project.

I appeal for police clearance to enable this movement

I make this solemn declaration in my right mind and consciously believing the same to be true.

Signed

Signed before me at Harare this day of 2020

Signed

COMMISSIONER OF OATHS



Appendix 4: Letter to EFZ

10 April, 2020

The General Secretary
Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
Harare, Zimbabwe

Re: Request for Permission to undertake research among EFZ member bodies In Harare and Mashonaland Central Provinces

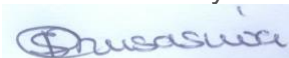
I am a PhD student with the University of Pretoria. As part of the requirement for this degree I am to undertake some field research in the area of Pastoral Care and Counseling. The topic of my study is “The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Approach”. I have chosen to focus my field research on Harare and Mashonaland provinces of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). This letter serves to request for your permission and blessing to undertake field research among your member churches in these provinces.

In terms of procedures of the study, the participants will be interviewed to seek their understanding of the death rites of passage. No risk is anticipated in this study apart from the time taken on the interview(s) and the possibility of arousing grief memories from the past. Debriefing counselling will be available to participants after the study.

Participation in this study will be voluntary, with participants having the right to withdraw from the study anytime without negative consequences. Confidentiality will be assured, with the information disclosed being used only for research purposes without names of participants being disclosed to anyone. Participants will have the freedom to disclose personal information to the extent they feel comfortable.

It is my hope that benefits from my research will extent to the wider church in terms of understanding ways some cultural practices can be contextualised for the purpose of making the church more relevant to the communities we serve.

Yours Sincerely in Christ



Mrs. Sylvia C. Musasiwa
Student No. U13398271



Appendix 5: Approval letter from EFZ

20 April, 2020

Mrs. S. C. Musasiwa
14 Takeley Drive
Sentosa, Mabelreign
Harare

Re: Permission to undertake research among member bodies of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe

The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe is a body corporate with over 900 member bodies comprising Denominations, Church Bodies, Ministries and Para-Church Organizations. The Fellowship represents over 4.5 million individual members in all the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe.

We are in receipt of your letter dated 10 April in which you requested for our permission and blessing to undertake field research among our member churches in Harare and Mashonaland Central Provinces. We are happy to grant you this permission and to facilitate contact with our faith communities in the provinces on the following understanding, inter alia:

1. Your research shall be focused on “The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Approach”.
2. No risk is anticipated in this study apart from the time taken on the interview(s) and the possibility of arousing grief memories from the past.
3. Participation in this study will be voluntary with participants having the freedom to disclose personal information to the extent they feel comfortable.

It is our hope that the results of your research will not only benefit you in terms of acquiring a higher qualification, but also the wider church in terms of understanding ways some cultural practices can be contextualized for the purpose of making the church more relevant to the communities we serve.

Yours Sincerely in Christ

B. Makwara
EFZ GENERAL SECRETARY

Appendix 6: Interview questions for ministers of religion

Topic: The role of women in the death rite of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach.

1. As a minister what is your attitude toward congregants visiting the n'anga after the death of their loved ones?
2. What values, if any, do the burial and after burial rites have within the Zezuru culture?
3. In which way does culture influence one's understanding of death rites of passage?
4. Are there any points of divergence between culture and church on death rites of passage?
5. How do death rites of passage affect the work and ministry of the pastor?
6. To what extent can you make use of the death rites of passage without compromising the Gospel of Christ?
7. How do you think the church should incorporate traditional rituals into its liturgy?
8. Explain the Zezuru concept of death and life after death in the light of 1Corinthians 15:20-34
9. From your observation what is the role played by women, men, children in post death rituals?
10. How have you been conducting services at:
 - *Nyaradzo* ceremony
 - *Kurova guva* ceremony
11. In your understanding, do traditional beliefs provide fully true answers to people's questions about death and after death?
12. Why do people approach spirits of the dead?



Appendix 7: Research workshop with ministers of different denominations

Date for the workshop: 30 September 2021

Venue: Domboshawa Theological College

Researcher: University of Pretoria Student; Sylvia Chirevesayi Musasiwa

Topic: The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach.

My name is Sylvia Chirevesayi Musasiwa, a PHD (Theology) Practical Theology student of the University of Pretoria (Student number: U:13398271). I am doing research on the above topic and am requesting you to kindly participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the churches' response to "the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture" (emphasis on '*Nyaradzo* and *Kurova guva*').

In terms of procedures of the study, the participants will be interviewed to seek their understanding of the death rites of passage. No risk is anticipated in this study apart from the time taken on the interview(s) and the possibility of arousing grief memories from the past. Debriefing counselling will be available to participants after the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary, with participants having the right to withdraw from the study anytime without negative consequences. Confidentiality is assured, with the information disclosed being used only for research purposes without names of participants being disclosed to anyone. Participants have the freedom to disclose personal information to the extent they feel comfortable.

Should you have any questions, please contact me on the following numbers: 0242-304565 (home)/+263 772367597(mobile)

As a sign of informed consent, kindly sign two of these consent letters: one for the researcher and one for yourself to keep your records.

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

Minister's signature..... Date.....

Minister's age.....

Appendix 8 Programme: Research workshop with ministers of religion of different denominations

Topic: The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach.

Programme

1. Welcome and registration (people having tea)
2. Introductions: S Musasiwa
3. Prayer: Rev Chirovamavi
4. Session 1 (2 groups)

What are functional substitutes and why are they important in the death rites of passage (Nyaradzo)

5. Session 2 (2 groups)

Kurova guva discussions

6. Session 3 (2 groups)

The witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28: 3-25)

7. Vote of thanks: S.C. Musasiwa.



Appendix 9: Responses of workshop for with ministers of religion of different denominations

Date for the workshop: 30 September 2021

Venue: Domboshawa Theological College

Researcher: University of Pretoria Student; Sylvia *Chirevesayi* Musasiwa

Topic: The role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach.

Session 1

1. *Hwahwa hwehonye/hwemvura* (AR. Practice)
2. *Nyaradzo* as a Christian substitute
3. *Nyaradzo* practice described
4. Functions of *hwahwa hwehonye* fulfilled by *Nyaradzo*
5. What are the areas of incompatibility
6. Note: What is the place of widows and other women in both practices
7. Summary

Session 2

1. Describe tombstone memorial practice
2. Functions of the *kurova guva* fulfilled by tombstone memorial practice
Note: some key happenings
 - Memorization
 - Fellowship with the spirit world/the departed
 - Continuity of here and after
3. Areas of incompatibility
 - Bringing back home the spirit of the departed

- Analysis of the story of the witch of Endor calling back the spirit of Samuel (1Samuel 28: 3-25)

Note: What is the place of widows and other women in both practices.

4. Incorporating traditional rituals into Christian liturgy (how do you do it in your churches)
5. Summary

Session 3

Areas of incompatibility

- Bringing back home the spirit of the departed
- Analysis of the story of the witch of Endor calling back the spirit of Samuel (1Samuel 28: 3-25)

Sample responses from pastors

Ministers' response 30-09-21

Minister 1

From the biblical point of view, it is not right to interact with the dead. In the whole scripture there is nowhere people interact with the dead. Once people do it they are entering into the realm of the demonic or occultic spirits. In the Mosaic covenant, it was forbidden to speak to the dead. For example, in Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Leviticus 20:27 and Exodus 20:4. Consulting the dead is one of the weapons Satan can use to attack our Christian faith. My first example is the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:15-23. He said that his child was dead and could not bring him back. David concludes by this statement from verse 22b, "I shall go to him but he will not return to me".

The second example is the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) when the rich man pleaded with Father Abraham to send someone to go and warn his relatives. In the story it is quite clear that the dead cannot come back to the living

because of the great chasms fixed between them (v26). “And besides all this between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us”. When I look from the indigenous point of view, people believe that when a person dies, he/she comes back to look over the affairs of the living which Christians object because God the creator has that responsibility. What I am saying is:

- There is no relationship with the dead
- When a person dies, that is the end of his/her association with the living.
- The spirit of the dead when it speaks it's a demon.

I believe there is no way in which the dead can communicate the need of the living to God nor can they reach the living. The story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 presents a story from which people can draw some truths about life after death. In ATR, one can ask for forgiveness from the spirit of the dead but from the examples I gave, the bible is encouraging people to do so before they die because when they are gone there is no connectivity.

The three ministers shared the same sentiments of: no need to fear the dead and that God prohibits people to communicate with the dead.

Minister 2

My objection to invoking the spirits of the dead is that it makes the living prone to deception.

It is possible with the dead but it is not encouraged. Many have been duped by evil malignant spirits masquerading as benevolent spirits.

The problem with the Christian faith is that it has lots of affinities with ATR regarding belief in the afterlife. Hence it is difficult for some Christians to draw a line in terms of how far they relate to the spirit world.



Appendix 10: ‘Healed by his love’ retreat program.

Friday 23 to Sunday 25 May 2021

Friday

1. Welcome and Registration
2. Introduction and S. Musasiwa to explain details on the confidentiality form.
3. Getting to know each other’s story
 - Who am I
 - What happened to me
 - How I feel today
4. Word from Rev. Chinyerere (Female)
 - Biblical examples of woman who were widowed.
5. First prayer for healing.

Saturday

1. Review of yesterdays session
6. S. Musasiwa: Questionnaire2,3 (Individual story writing)
7. Guest: Gogo Chawatipa
 - Film Neria
 - Group discussion
 - Her story “Gogo Chawatipa”
8. Team building activities
9. Word of encouragement (Rev Chinyerere)
 - Me time (Reflection)

Sunday

1. Devotion and communion (Rev Chinyerere)
2. Testimonies
3. Evaluation and way forward
4. Departure



Appendix 11: Healed by his love retreat confidentiality form

As a member of this retreat team, I understand that I may have access to confidential information about study sites and participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.
- I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.
- I understand that all information about these studies or participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of this information, unless specifically authorized to do so by approved protocol or by the local principal investigator acting in response to applicable law or court order, or public health or clinical need.
- I agree to notify Mrs. Musasiwa immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

Signature

Date

Printed name

Signature of Workshop leader

Date

Printed name



Appendix 12: Retreat questions

Day 1a

1. What were the family reactions to the death of your husband?
2. Describe your mother-in-law's reactions or any other member of the family.
3. How about your children's loss?
4. Who consoled you and what were they saying to you?

Day 1b

5. How about the ladies at church, how did/do they treat you?
6. What should be done when death comes?
7. What typical issues do you draw from the story of Neria in the film?
8. What practical activities help the bereaved families to grieve with hope?

Day 1c

9. What role should the community play in helping the bereaved to process grief?
10. What spiritual and emotional costs did you encounter as a woman?
11. How long should one grieve?
12. In your grief moments do you think you received the three best gifts

Day 2a

What you went through

2. Family reactions to the death of your husband.
3. Your mother-in-law's reaction
4. Your children (what had they lost)
5. Who consoled you (friends)? What were they saying to you?
6. How about ladies at church, how did/do they treat you

Day 2b

1. What should be done when death comes?
2. What typical issues do we draw from the story of Neria?
3. What practical activities help the bereaved females to grieve with hope?
4. How has the extended family helped the bereaved deal with grief?
5. What role should the community play in helping the bereaved to process grief?

NOTE: What is your story? Write it?



Day 2c

1. What emotional and spiritual costs did you encounter as a bereaved woman?
2. How long should one grieve?
3. What advice would you want if you are still angry with the death of your beloved husband?
4. In your grief moments, do you think you received the three best gifts:
 - Listened to
 - Presence of people
 - Prayer
5. With a friend describe your own grief journey.

Day 2d

1. How have you adjusted to the death of your loved one?
2. What are some of the challenges you have faced due to the death of your husband?
3. How can you express your feelings in grief without hurting other people?
4. How should you mourn as a Christian? Is there a Christian way of mourning?

Scripture texts for your individual study

1. Jeremiah 29:11
2. Psalm 116:7-15
3. 2 Corinthians 5:1-6
4. 1 Corinthians 15: 53-57
5. Mathew 5:4
6. Revelation 21: 3-4

Appendix 13: Healed by his love retreat evaluation form

1. What were your thoughts before you came for the retreat when you had been invited to attend the workshop?
2. How do you feel now after our writing of “own grief stories”?
3. What do you think was left out by the facilitator?
4. Write down any suggestions you feel should be part of such retreats for widows?
5. Now that you have experienced the journey of healing for yourself. What do you expect this support group to do?



Appendix 14: letter to Eunice and her response.

28 February 2022, 22:49

Dear Eunice

May I please, with your permission put a summary of Francis' memorial service programme in my thesis. I would like to give an illustration of a Baptist Nyaradzo.

God Bless you

Mama Sylvia

Eunice's Response

28 February 2022, 23:04

Hie Amai

Sure, no problem. Please go ahead.

Eunice

Appendix 15: A Nyaradzo service at Calvary Baptist Church in Harare

For Francis Nyathi: 04.12.21

Opening remarks:

- We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of our dear brother Francis Nyathi who succumbed to death due to Covid-19 in Botswana.
- The service is meant to give honour and recognition of the deceased to his bereaved family members and friends.
- Our prayer today is to ask God to return peace that passes all understanding to the bereaved hearts.

Hymnal: What a friend we have in Jesus

Tributes: Navigators International Representative

Nyathi Family: brother, sister, daughter and wife.

Sahwira (sent an audio from the United Kingdom)

SDAC Office Representative.

Word: entitled "Cure for troubled hearts" (Rev. Dr. R. Musasiwa)

Vote of thanks: Sister.

Benediction: Pastor Tichaona Dzinotywei

Departure to Warren Hills Cemetery: Wife and daughters laid a wreath of flowers

(Note: it was the wife and daughters first time to see where he was laid because all had covid-19 when he died. The church buried him during their absence.

Words of encouragement said at intervals of speeches.

The Master of Ceremony had this to say at intervals of speakers.

Quotation 1: After Tribute 1 (Phebion spoke about his work in Navigators)

'Only a moment you stayed, but what an imprint your footprints have left' Dorothy Ferguson.



Quotation 2: After tribute 2 (Older daughter Lisedi) “In the end its not the years in your life that count, its life in your years”. Abraham Lincoln.

Quotation 3: After tribute 3 (younger daughter, Naledi) Revelation 21:3-5 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people and he dwell with them; they will be his people and God himself will be with them and their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new!.

Quotation 4: After tribute 4 (Field worker for Navigators International) John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”.

Quotation 5: after tribute 5 (Elder brother) Lamentations 3: 21-23

Quotation 6: After tribute 6 (SADC Representative who worked with him)
Romans 8:38-39

Quotation 7: After tribute 7 (His wife’s uncle, his sahwira) Psalm 139: 7-10

Quotation 8: After tribute 8 (His wife’s sister, Maiguru) By Robert Burns, An honest man here lies at rest. The friend of a man, the friend of truth, the friend of age and guide of youth. Few hearts like his, with virtue, few heads with knowledge so informed. If there is another world, he lives in bliss, if there is none, he made the best of this.

Appendix 16: Tombstone unveiling: Methodist in Zimbabwe

The minister was a dominant figure on the program. He did not allow *varoor*a to do their performances. He actually announced that he was in charge.

Venue: Homestead

1. He gave the word at the homestead.
2. Led the procession to the grave:
 - at the grave he removed the white cloth that covered the tombstone
 - blessed the stone and comforted the bereaved
 - asked one of the *vazukur*us to read the words on the tombstone.
3. Speeches by family members and church representation.
4. Vote of thanks from the elder of the bereaved family.
5. Closing prayer and benedictions from the pastor.

NOTE: The minister started the hymns sang at intervals.

6. What didn't happen?
 - *varoor*a did not play their role of untying and removing the cloth from the grave
 - *varoor*a did not ululate as the minister removed the cloth because they were forbidden
 - what happened at this tombstone unveiling showed how the minister's attitude was influenced by the missionary's' ideology – condemning cultural values
 - he was rigid.



Appendix 17: Anglican unveiling of the tombstone – Saturday 31 March 2020

Program Theme: Come let's celebrate a life worth living

10:00am	Leave home for St. Mary's Cemetery (for those able)
10:30am	Prayers led by Canon 1 laying of wreath of flowers
1:00pm	Service at the homestead led by Canon 2
2:00pm	lunch and tribute by relatives <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mother of the deceased• Brother of the deceased• Sisters of the deceased• Nephew and niece of the deceased• Daughter and son of the deceased• Church representative• <i>Sahwira</i>
3:00pm	Prayer and benediction.

Scripture Readings

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Key verse was verse 16

Appendix 18: The widows' charter (extracts)

Preamble

Noting that all women are equal before the law and that the human rights of women are inalienable, universal and non transferable,

Noting that in many countries widows suffer from low status, discrimination, violence and lack of legal rights

Noting that in many communities widows are stereotyped as evil, bringing bad luck, and that social attitudes to widowhood obstruct them from fully participating in civil society

Noting that in spite of international and domestic laws guaranteeing equality in inheritance, land ownership, and criminalising violence to women widows are often banned from inheriting, evicted from their homes, deprived of all their property, and left in destitution

Noting that widows are often victims of degrading and life threatening traditional practices in the context of funeral and burial practices

Noting that there is no special reference to discrimination and abuse of widows in the Beijing Platform for Action

Noting that widows are key social and economic players in development

Reaffirming the important role that widows do and may play in the resolution and prevention of conflicts

Expressing concern that the impact of this treatment of widows has severe and negative implications for the whole of society. In particular because the poverty of widows deprives their children of their human rights to shelter, food, education and the rights of the child

Recognising the urgent need to mainstream a widows' perspective in all policy developments and decisions

Reaffirming the need to implement fully all international human rights and humanitarian law that protects the rights of women and girls, irrespective of their age or marital status, during and after conflict as well as in times of peace requires all governments to use all measures possible to eliminate this discrimination, and to work with widows' groups to assess their numbers and their situation so as to develop policies and laws to alleviate their isolation and poverty, and acknowledge their valuable social capital.

Article 1

Widows shall enjoy equality with all women and men, irrespective of their age or marital status.

Any treatment of a widow which differs from the treatment, legally, socially, economically, of a widower shall be deemed to be discriminatory and therefore illegal.

Widows shall not be discriminated against, in word or deed. either in family and private life, or in community and public life.

The State is guilty, by omission, of breach of the law, if it implicitly condones discrimination and abuse of the widow by non state actors, such as family members.

Article 2

- a) Widows shall have the right to inherit from their husband's estate, whether or not the deceased spouse left a will.
- b) Widows may not be disinherited
- c) Widows may not be "inherited" as wives or concubines to their husband's brother, nor forcibly placed in a "*levirate*" relationship, nor forcibly made pregnant by a relative in order to continue producing children in her dead husband's name.
- d) A widow has the right to remarry
- e) A widow must be free to marry someone of her own choice
- f) Polygamy and temporary marriage is forbidden.
- g) "Honour Killings" are murder
- h) Daughters shall inherit equally with sons
- i) "Property Grabbing" and "chasing off" are criminal offences, punishable as the most serious category of crime
- j) Anyone who attempts or manages to deprive a widow of any of her property, take custody of her children, without an order of a judge or magistrate shall be guilty of the most serious category of crime
- k) Anyone, whether a relative or a stranger, who seeks or manages to gain control of the dead husband's bank account, insurance policy, accident compensation claims, without the order of the Court is guilty of the most serious category of crime



l) Free Legal Aid shall be given to widows in all inheritance, property and personal status disputes

Article 3

- a) Anyone who arranges or coerces a widow to participate in harmful traditional practices in the context of funeral and burial rites shall be guilty of the most serious category of crime (for example: ritual cleansing through sex; scarification; isolation; restrictions on diet and dress endangering mental and physical health)
- b) Anyone who has sexual relations with a widow in the context of funeral and burial rites shall be guilty of Rape, and subject to the maximum penalty.
- c) Anyone who forcibly deprives the widow of custody of her children shall be guilty of a serious offence
- d) Anyone who physically, mentally or sexually abuses a widow is guilty of the most serious category of crime
- e) Anyone who verbally abuses a widow by calling her insulting names shall be guilty of an offence.