



**UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE**

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**WIDOWS' EXPERIENCES OF SPOUSAL MOURNING AMONG  
AMAXHOSA: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
STUDY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Grace Akol, Student No: 200483358 declare that apart from the sources used or quoted as listed in the references, this study is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any University.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my family, in particular my husband and my youngest son.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere gratitude goes to Almighty God for giving me the strength and keeping me well throughout the period of this study. My special thanks go to my dear family. To my dear husband, thank you very much for being the man that you are. To my dear children and especially my youngest son, I owe you a lot that you missed out on during this study.

To Mrs. Hlonelwa Ngqangweni, my supervisor, thank you very much for your support, encouragement, patience and for believing in me.

Finally to all my dear friends and colleagues, thank you for your kind assistance during the data collection. To all the widows who participated in this study, thank you for letting me into your most precious and private moments of the most trying stage of your lives.

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted on the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa widows of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study focused on the descriptive presentation of the experiences of the AmaXhosa widows in the Buffalo City municipality of the Province. The study sought to establish the widows' perceptions regarding the mourning rituals and to interpret their experiences within the context of contemporary cultural, religious, gender and socio-political influences. The experiences among the widows interviewed were found to have a similar context but their perceptions about the mourning rituals were different between the widows younger than 40 years and those older than 50 years.

Widows from urban and rural areas of East London, Mdantsane Township and from within a 60 kilometre radius of East London were interviewed. Purposive random sampling was used to identify an equal number of either urban or rural voluntary participants for the study. Structured interviews were held with widows ranging in age from 29 to 91 years. An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the recorded discussions was conducted.

The experiences of the AmaXhosa widows during the conduct of the mourning rituals are described. The key findings of the study indicated that most of the widows felt they had to go through the mourning rituals mainly to show respect for their departed husbands and so that the dignity of the family and clan was maintained. The mourning rituals seemed mostly to have negative implications for the widows such as a lack of family and financial support and being treated as social outcasts; however the rituals also seemed to help the women adjust to their new status as widows. Although the mourning rituals were embedded in the socio-cultural tradition generally followed by the AmaXhosa, religious beliefs also influenced some of the traditions by introducing changes in the way some widows conducted the mourning rituals. For example, some religions advocated for shorter periods of mourning than usual as well as wearing different types of mourning clothes from the usual black or purple dress.

Overall the perceptions of the older widows aged above 50 years revealed that they had no reservations about performing the mourning rituals and quite readily and unquestioningly accepted the customs. The younger widows aged below 40 years on the other hand felt that the mourning

rituals were biased against women and did not serve a useful purpose and even proposed changes to the manner in which the mourning rituals are conducted particularly the shortening of the mourning period from 12 to 6 months or less. However, they seemed to recognize the role played by the mourning ritual in lessening and possibly healing the pain and sorrow caused by their bereavement.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In many places in the world, women have always had an unequal relationship to men and have often been given an inferior status in society (Melange, 1992; Moyo, 2004; Winbush, 2000; Women 2000, 2001). For example, from the history of the Xhosa people women were regarded as jural minors subject to male control throughout their lives among AmaXhosa (Peires, 1981). The study of women as an important and distinct social force and their experiences in society has been reflected but only fairly recently has it begun to take strides (Korieh, 1996). However, there has since been considerable accumulation of reports on studies of widows in particular in society primarily from secondary sources relating mostly negative experiences (Women 2000, 2001).

This introduction gives an overview of the research into experiences of women in society with reference to the mourning ritual of widows following the death of a husband. The chapter briefly describes the background of the mourning ritual and gives an indication of the rationale for undertaking the research and outlines the aims and objectives of the research question. The chapter will then give a limited review of literature on the mourning ritual and how it affects widows. The review gives a description of some of the mourning practices in various parts of the world and then gives a more detailed insight into Asian, African, South African and AmaXhosa mourning rituals. The chapter concludes with a review of all the chapters in the thesis.

#### **1.1 Background and overview of the study**

The subject of death has always been treated with great respect and continues to be so in our modern day culture probably because of the deep emotions of sorrow it arouses (Pearsall, 2001; Kastenbaum, 2004); of grief and the huge adjustments in lifestyle that bereavement can bring (Goosen & Klugman, 1996). Furthermore, the importance attached to the role of the ancestors in the lives of the living among certain African communities gives special respect for death. For example, among the AmaXhosa the ancestors are believed to continue to take a close interest in their

descendants and to brood over the homestead and hence active invocation of assistance from the ancestors is often practised (The Republic of Transkei, 1976).

Funerals and grieving are conducted in different ways in different places; for example, funerals and grieving in America is different compared to Europe and likewise funerals and grieving in Asia is different compared to Africa (McCutchan, 1999). This is probably so because mourning is a culturally patterned expression of how to manage the loss of a loved one (Spalding, 2000; Kastenbaum, 2004) and so each culture determines how it is conducted. The funeral is a ritualized way of saying goodbye and is one of the first of many emotional goodbyes to the significant person (Weizman & Kamm, 1987). There is usually little or no preparation for the death of a loved one; therefore, undertaking the mourning process can serve as a preparation for widowhood and as a support for the bereaved. In a previous study, the AmaXhosa women shared their perceptions of spousal mourning experiences many of them negative perceptions (Akol, 2007). The present study will give an interpretive phenomenological analysis of women's spousal mourning experiences.

In order to fully examine the context of the study, it is necessary to explain what the mourning process is all about. Mourning, which Pearsall (2001, p 931) defines as “the expression of deep sorrow for someone who died” and by Kastenbaum (2004, p.353) as a “culturally patterned expression of the bereaved person's thoughts and feelings” is the process that follows after the loss of a loved one; this will be the main focus of this study. Freud (1917/2009) called it acceptance of the reality of loss. Mainstream understandings of mourning in psychology conceptualise it as the mental and emotional ‘work’ following the loss of a loved one (Weizman & Kamm, 1987). Freud (1917/2009) gave mourning a psychoanalytic meaning in which he noted that it is accompanied by profound painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love and inhibition of all activity. Freud (1917/2009) saw mourning in terms of energy flows, with a process of repeated reality testing to check that the loved one really was gone. This leads to feelings of pain and dejection that may fade but not fully disappear until a replacement love object is sought. According to Freud (1917/2009), respect for reality normally gains the day and over time the reality of the loss is accepted and the loved one's place in the psychic make-up of the mourner is diminished.

Others interpret mourning as the process of absorbing the reality of death, experiencing all the emotions, and being able to let go by expressing emotions in various ways (Weizman & Kamm, 1987). The mourning process is the ongoing psychological experience and the expression of grief. It is the expression of grief, sorrow, anger, emotional suffering, and the full range of feelings experienced by the bereaved (Weizman & Kamm, 1987). Mourning is a word derived from a Gothic verb that means “to be anxious,” and it comes ultimately from an Indo-European base meaning “to remember; to think of” (Weizman & Kamm, 1987, p.40). Mourning involves remembering and thinking of the deceased and this makes the bereaved feel anxious or uncomfortable. It is a continuous and changing process (Weizman & Kamm, 1987).

Rando (2007) suggests that the mourning process can promote three operations, each with its own focus, that enable the individual to ultimately accommodate the loss. Firstly, the undoing of the psychosocial ties that had bound the mourner to the loved one when that person was alive, with the eventual facilitation of new ties appropriate to that person now being physically dead. Secondly, the mourning process helps the mourner to adapt to the loss of a loved one and, thirdly, mourning enables the mourner to learn how to live healthily in the new world without the deceased (Rando 2007).

Mourning rituals or processes vary from continent to continent in accordance with the beliefs of a particular society. For example in Western societies, black has been the traditional colour of mourning as depicted by the black dress. However, this has changed; over time a vast array of clothing the bereaved especially women wear, has developed over the centuries (Taylor, 1983). Wearing black clothing at funerals comes from a very old custom, dating back to pre-Christian times. It is claimed that it was introduced to England by the Romans (McCutchan, 1999). The black clothes were supposed to hide the relatives of the dead person, so that the deceased’s spirit would not haunt them. In Eastern culture on the other hand, the traditional colour of mourning is white (McCutchan, 1999). Africa seemed to have its own mourning attire in the past. For example, in Uganda, widows tied a piece of bark cloth around their waists to indicate their status as widows (Limann, 2003) and among the Basotho, widows wore a cord of plaited grass around their heads (Maloka, 1998). Africa now seems to combine its traditional rituals of mourning with the Western

culture, for example, the wearing of black clothes in some countries on the continent possibly as a result of the influence of colonialism.

The diverse groups of people in different African nations engage in some kind of mourning rites governed by their culture, socio-economic and political environment. The topic of spousal mourning has been chosen because spousal mourning in Africa seems to have negative effects on widows in particular and the widows' experiences of the rituals are not well documented (Korieh, 1996; Shumbamhini, 2006). While the stories of some of these rituals may have been told, there are still many in my view and others' views (Shumbamhini, 2006) that need to be revealed. In contemporary times, the experiences of widows about these age old rituals need to be determined. This research explores widows' experiences among AmaXhosa in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This study is conducted in both urban and rural areas to establish the experiences of widows. In order to do this, the research involves widows of the Xhosa ethnic group of all ages. This study therefore takes an interpretive phenomenological look at the untold stories of spousal mourning in the African context as it is practised among the AmaXhosa as told by widows in the Buffalo City Municipality of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

## **1.2 The AmaXhosa people**

The AmaXhosa are of the Nguni group of people which includes the Zulu. The name Xhosa is used for a diversity of clans that includes the Pondo, Bomvana, Thembu and the Xhosa proper (Peires, 1981; Soga, 1932). The first group of early Nguni immigrants to migrate to South Africa consisted of the Xhosa who were made up of the Gcaleka, Ngqika, Ndlambe and Dushane clans and the Thembu and Pondo. However, a second group of Nguni-speaking people joined these tribes later. These were the tribes that Shaka, the Zulu king, drove out of Zululand. Some returned to Zululand when peace was declared, but those who remained became known as the Mfengu and were assimilated into the Xhosa nation (Peires, 1981; Soga, 1932). The Xhosa are not only the second largest ethnic group of Africans in South Africa but are also the only ones that were never defeated or enslaved by other tribes and fought a hundred year war with the white colonists (Peires, 1979). The AmaXhosa are indigenous to the Eastern Cape Province which includes the former Ciskei and Transkei, having been pushed out of the area west of the Great Fish River between Bushmans River

and the Great Fish River (Peires, 1979). According to the historical description, the area in red was occupied by the Xhosa including all the diverse clans named above (see map below).

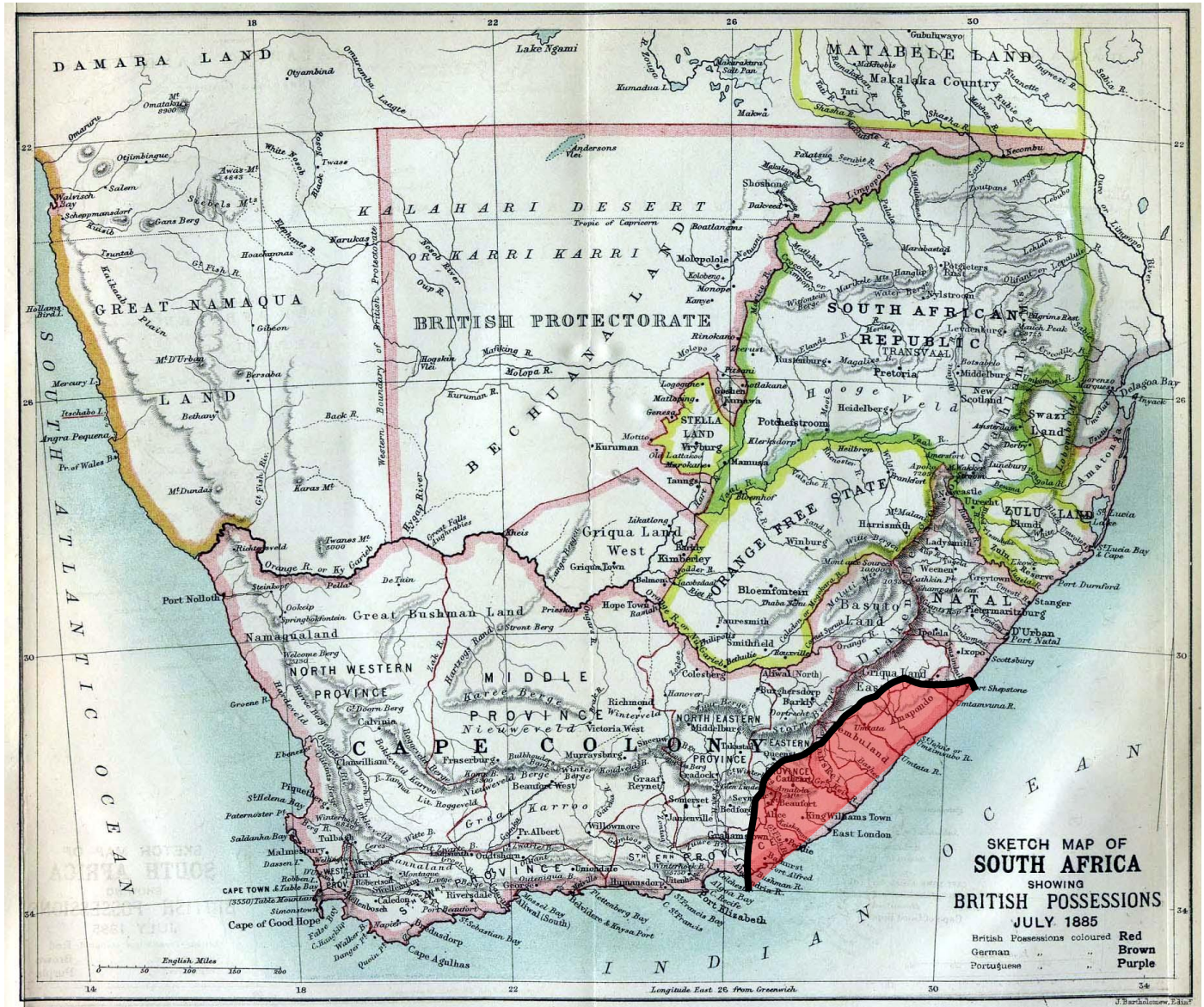


Fig 1 Map of the Cape Colony (1885) showing the approximate land area of the Xhosa shown in red extending from the Bushman's river up to what was known as Transkei (Map courtesy of the Scottish Geographical Magazine. Published by the Scottish Geographical Society and edited by Hugh A. Webster and Arthur Silva White. Volume I, 1885)

### 1.3 Problem Statement and Research Question

The mourning rituals impact women more than they do men the world over. Many practices of the mourning rituals such as sexual widow cleansing (Ayikukwei, Ngare, Sidle, Ayuku, Baliddawa & Greene, 2007; Gluckman, 1936; Gunga, 2009); widow inheritance ( Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Women 2000, 2001); looking down upon the widows (Chan, Chow, Ho, Tsu, Tin, Koo & Koo, 2005); making widows wear black clothes (Feni, 2007; Taylor, 1983); being held hostage on a mattress placed on the floor (Pheko, 2007); being victimized as witches and prostitutes (Shumbamhini, 2006), all continue to be practised. All these authors have voiced a similar theme, the negative effects of the mourning rituals on widows. The first problem statement regarding the impact of the mourning rituals on women is that they remain principally untold stories or are lacking in systematic investigation (Potash, 1986). The utterance of Queen Noluntu Dalindyebo of the AmaXhosa in the local newspaper in which she spoke out against the way some of the mourning rituals impact negatively on women in South Africa (Feni, 2007) exemplified the experiences of widows in South Africa. Her concerns were echoed in another article in the South African press (Pheko, 2007) indicating that these stories still need to be told. It will therefore be fitting to explore these experiences among the AmaXhosa widows through an interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Secondly there is an acknowledgement of a gap that this study proposes to fill relating to the dearth of published information on the experiences of widows in the South African context (Somhlaba & Wait, 2008) which most probably includes to the AmaXhosa people of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study therefore will seek to tell the untold stories of the AmaXhosa widows so that their voices may be heard. This exposé will go a long way in privileging the widows' voices in this matter that seems to affect them deeply. From widows' experiences, an attempt will be made to understand the cultural intent of the mourning practices of AmaXhosa. Particular attention will be paid to any negative aspects of the mourning ritual processes which as revealed elsewhere in this thesis seem to have a greater impact on women more so than men (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Feni, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Pheko, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001).



Thirdly, according to Korieh (1996) the views expressed about women are influenced by two prejudices: male bias and western ethnocentricity. He stressed that the influence of male bias may come both at the point of the primary sources and at the point of the researchers themselves who usually happen to be male. According to him, men's comments on women collected by other African men and compiled by a European man are all that is predominantly read and may not necessarily reflect the true reality. In most writings women do not present their own view point. The point made is that very often data on women and their roles are merely male informants' views, and this male version of reality is accepted as the group's reality (Korieh, 1996). In the case of widowhood rituals in Africa it is unlikely that there is any primary source from an African widow. However, the thesis on Tshivenda widowhood rituals by Radzilani (2010) and the article on Zulu widows by Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007) have begun to present women's views at the point of African women researchers. This will therefore be another study presented by an African woman researcher on widowhood rituals of the AmaXhosa.

### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

That this study addresses the question: What experiences the AmaXhosa widows go through during the performance of the mourning rituals and how the experiences affect them?

In order to answer this question the following had to be examined in-depth through the eyes of a female researcher that is that most studies on women have been characterized by male bias and western ethnocentricity:

- What are the individual experiences of the AmaXhosa widows during the mourning ritual and to what extent have these experiences been told?
- What perceptions do the AmaXhosa widows hold about the mourning rituals?
- What role do the mourning rituals play in the lives of the widows and how does the impact of the mourning rituals on their lives relate to that of men who have also lost their wives?
- What changes have the AmaXhosa mourning rituals undergone?

### **1.3.2 Aims and Objectives of the study**

This study will aim to answer pertinent questions arising out of the implications of the mourning rituals for AmaXhosa widows. The objectives of the study will be as follows:

- To capture and record the narratives of the various experiences of individual AmaXhosa widows following the death of their husbands
- To understand and interpret the views among the AmaXhosa widows with regard to the role played by the mourning rituals in their lives and to explore relational issues between widows and members of the family
- To understand the influences of culture and religion as well as the role of acculturation on the conduct of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals

### **1.4 The Structure of the thesis**

This thesis consists of 7 chapters. The first chapter introduces the context of this study and provides an overview of the mourning rituals with a brief overview of the AmaXhosa and the reason for undertaking this study. The chapter outlines the problem statement of the research question and asks specific research questions in a concise manner and finally it describes the aims and objects of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a discourse on the literature reviewed and provides a background on death and the mourning rituals. A description of various experiences of widows from different parts of the world and Africa is discussed. A brief psychoanalytic discourse on stages of grief and mourning is presented. The chapter considers as the central theme of the study, the diverse African cultural as well as religious discourses on mourning. The chapter gives a comparative review of the context of the mourning rituals in various corners of the African continent with a special perspective on the South African context and raises issues mainly around the negative but also positive connotations associated with these rituals.

Chapter 3 discusses the context of the mourning rituals and some social issues that influence the way the rituals are conducted. The chapter explores the socio-political and economic rights of widows, considers the cultural, religious and gender context of the mourning rituals, looks at possible acculturation of the ritual and looks at the AmaXhosa marriage customs as a reflection of gender power play in this ethnic group. The chapter concludes with a brief exposition of the current views on the AmaXhosa mourning rituals.

Chapter 4 describes the theoretical framework which forms the grounding of the study. The chapter gives a brief overview of epistemology, hermeneutics and phenomenology in relation to the mourning rituals. Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the main method of data analysis and which combines hermeneutics and phenomenology is described.

In chapter 5 the research methods used in the study are discussed including the theoretical concepts relating to the adoption of the methods for this study. The chapter considers the theory of qualitative research which was the main approach used in this study before discussing participant selection, methods of enquiry, data collection and analysis approaches. Ethical considerations, potential risks, significance and benefits of the study are identified in the chapter. The chapter concludes by highlighting the advantages of the structured interviews as opposed to focus discussions, the former suiting the researcher quite well.

Chapter 6 describes the data analysis and interpretation of the experiences of the AmaXhosa widows during the mourning ritual. The chapter presents the results of the structured interviews within the context of a narrative given by the oldest widow interviewed in the study. The results were considered within the context of the expression of grief by the widows, their experiences of the conduct of the mourning rituals, positions taken by widows and factors influencing their perceptions, support and relationships particularly with regard to the husband's family, the gender relationships, cultural and religious prescriptions. The possible acculturation of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals and the cognitive therapeutic and behavioural functions of AmaXhosa mourning rituals were all considered.

Chapter 7 deals with issues for consideration as key matters arising out of the study and makes concluding remarks based on the key issues. The chapter makes remarks on the purpose of the external expression of grief as depicted by the wearing of mourning clothes, the influence of the socio-political landscape on the mourning rituals and the perceived functions of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals. This chapter outlines the limitations of the study followed by the conclusion on the major findings of the study.

## **1.5 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter introduced the context of the mourning ritual and how it negatively affects women worldwide. The statement of the problem depicts a situation in which information relating to the context of the mourning rituals of especially the AmaXhosa of South Africa needs to be captured, recorded and examined in-depth while providing a clear rationale for undertaking the current study. In addition, there is need to tell the mourning rituals through the eyes of female African researchers as opposed to the current situation in which the majority of research has been conducted and reported by males and Europeans (Korieh, 1996). The aims and objectives of the study are outlined.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. MOURNING

#### 2.1 Introduction: Mourning and Grieving

Death is an inevitable consequence for every human being. The death of a close person often leaves behind feelings of deep sadness and loss. A wife whose husband dies has to cope with widowhood, grief and the huge adjustments in lifestyle that bereavement can bring (Goosen & Klugman, 1996). Both widows and widowers are faced with the struggle of loneliness, isolation, an identity shift from we to I, changing relationships, handling rituals and marker events, handling anger, and taking responsibility for oneself (Walter, 1997). Sadock and Sadock, (2003) claim that bereavement, grief and mourning are all terms that apply to the psychological reactions of those who have experienced loss of a loved one. Bereavement is the state of being deprived of someone by death. This is referred to as being in a state of mourning (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

Lopata (1996, as cited in Walter, 2003), indicates that the bereaved spouse is often unprepared for the degree of isolation following the death of a spouse. What happens to a wife when her husband dies depends on the degree of dependence she had on her partner, the degree of disorganisation in her various roles and support systems, and her status as a widow. Neimeyer (1998 as cited in Walter, 2003) claims that the bereaved are faced with the task of transforming their identities in order to redefine their symbolic connection to the deceased while maintaining their relationship with the living, in other words remain connected to the departed spouse without compromising their link with the community. Neimeyer (2006) also points out that grief is a personal process and can only be fully understood in the context of our continued process of constructing and maintaining our most basic sense of self. When events disrupt our sense of self and world, we tend to respond by attempting to interpret them in ways that are consistent with our basic worldview and sense of identity (Neimeyer, 1998, as cited in Walter, 2003).

Grief is the response to loss and when a person suffers a loss one grieves. Grief signifies one's reaction both internally and externally to the impact of the loss (Corr, Nabe & Corr, 2006). Rando

(1993); claims that grief is a broader and a more complex psychological process of withdrawing attachment and working through the pain caused by the bereavement. Grief helps the individual to recognise the loss and to prepare for the process of mourning. Acute grief provides experiences and learning such as the psychological experiences represented by the mourner's feelings of sorrow, depression or guilt; behavioural experiences like anger or preoccupation with the deceased; social experiences such as disorganization or traumatic stress; and, physical reactions to the perception of loss like crying or social withdrawal that result in mourning (Rando, 1993). Grief can manifest itself in numerous ways such as through feelings, physical sensations, cognition, behaviours, social difficulties and spiritual searching (Worden, 1991 as cited in Corr *et al.*, 2006). Grief which seems to consist of acute responses to the loss of a loved one is what sets off the mourning process (Rando, 1995). Pearsall (2001, p. 931) defines mourning as the "experience or expression of deep sorrow for someone who has died". Kastenbaum, (2004, p. 353), on the other hand, looks at mourning as "the culturally patterned expression of the bereaved person's thoughts and feelings". In both definitions, the key context is the expression of some kind of emotion after the death of a loved one.

Mourning across the world happens very differently (Changingminds.org, 2006). Freud (1917/2009) saw mourning in terms of energy flows, with a process of repeated reality testing to check that the loved one really was gone, followed by feelings of withdrawal. This leads to feelings of pain and dejection that may fade but not fully disappear until a replacement love object is sought (Freud, 1917/2009). According to Steiner (1996), Freud seems to have recognised that one consequence of this mechanism of repeated reality testing is that the loss of a loved one is not fully accepted and that therefore mourning cannot proceed to the next stages of adapting to the loss and living healthily without the loved one.

In later psychoanalytic discourse and mourning, different stages of the cycle of grief were described. The Kübler-Ross grief cycle (Kübler-Ross, 1969) describes five (5) active and two (2) passive stages of the grief cycle. The shock stage is the first passive stage characterised by initial paralysis at hearing the bad news. This is followed by the denial stage in which the person tries to avoid the inevitable. Next is the anger stage when frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion takes place. The fourth is the bargaining stage when the person seeks in vain for a way out. The fifth is

the second passive stage that of depression during which there is the final realization of the inevitable. The sixth stage is the testing stage where the person now seeks realistic solutions. The last one is the acceptance stage of finally finding a way forward.

As a culturally patterned expression, mourning therefore defines a way of managing the loss of a loved one and the attendant emotions that follow (Spalding, 2000) as distinct from melancholia, the absence of or reduced evidence of diminution in self-regard (Freud, 1917/2009). Mourning can therefore be considered as the process that defines the order of things that define the social life of people after the loss of a loved one in accordance with the definition of culture (Spalding, 2000).

Even as far back as the Victorian times such patterns were clearly evident. The Victorian mourning fashion was aimed mainly at women possibly because Queen Victoria had much to do with the prescription of rules for the mourning ritual owing to her long and conspicuous grief over the death of her husband Prince Albert whom she mourned for 41 years until her death (Mehaffey, 1993). The Victorian fashion of mourning had a way of isolating a widow in her time of need just as it happened to the Queen. For example in the first year of mourning, the widows were not allowed to exit their homes without full black attire and a weeping veil (Taylor, 1983). Furthermore, widow's activities were restricted only to church services whereas widowers had no restrictions (Hell, 2001).

## **2.2 The Mourning work model**

Whereas Freud talks about mourning in terms of the mourning work model (Freud 1917/2009) and Kubler-Ross (1969) defines the various stages of the grief cycle that constitute the mourning process; Niemeyer (2006) in his review of the findings originating in the Changing Lives of Older Couples (CLOC) study; (Bonanno, Wortman, Lehman, Tweed, Haring & Sonnega, 2002 and Bonanno, Wortman, & Nesse, 2004 as cited by Niemeyer, 2006), discussed some constructivist concepts and findings that may have relevance to a deeper understanding of the various trajectories through bereavement and relevance to the current study.

Niemeyer (2006) suggests a narrative elaboration that illustrates a distinctive meaning-making process as a narrative of widows in the CLOC study reflected. From those interpretations he

suggests that there are pathways through bereavement that widows often go through in coping with their loss. The first one that he called resilient coping refers to the majority of widows (45%), that within a six month period of losing a loved one adapt to a pattern of coping with their loss. Freud considered such adaptation normal mourning work as opposed to a dysfunctional form characterised by detachment, denial, or delay in the grieving process as would be expected in melancholia (Freud, 1917/2009).

Another group of about 11% of the widows he suggests, experience the common grief pathway through bereavement probably along the lines of the grief cycle (Kübler-Ross, 1969). This according to Niemeyer (2006) represents a pattern of struggle of between 6 and 18 months followed by successful adaptation to the loss of a loved one; this could possibly be interpreted as the lengthening of mourning work postulated by Freud (1917/2009).

A third group of about 16% of widows experienced the chronic grief pathway through bereavement. These are widows that fail to adapt or adjust positively to their loss and engage in a continuous search for meaning beyond the 18 month period after the death of a loved one (Niemeyer, 2006). According to Freud (1917/2009), the continuous search for meaning may be related to the failure to adapt to any new object of love as the widow may simply not wish to turn away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of her departed loved one.

The fourth group of about 8% of the widows according to Niemeyer (2006) experience the chronic depression pathway through bereavement. This group not only fails to find a comforting connection but they also fail to pursue a clearly identifiable search for meaning in bereavement, distinguishing them from chronic grievers (Niemeyer, 2006) not unlike the individual perennial mourners defined by Freud (1917/2009) who can become stuck for years or even a lifetime unable to let the lost person go (Volkan, 2009).

Finally, a small group of about 10% of the widows experienced what he called a depressed improved pathway through bereavement. Essentially this group experienced high levels of depression when the spouse was living but the depression remitted and the widows seemed to function well within a six to 18 month period after the loss (Bonanno *et al.*, 2004 as cited by



Niemeyer, 2006) possibly in what Melgar (2009 p 117) writing on mourning and creativity termed “the relief of depressive suffering after a person’s death”.

### **2.3 Widowhood**

Many women experience the death of their partners, as women often live longer than men (Women 2000, 2001). Millions of the world’s widows of all ages endure extreme poverty, ostracism, violence, homelessness, ill health and discrimination in law and custom (Women 2000, 2001). A lack of inheritance and land rights, widow abuse and the practices of degrading and life threatening mourning and burial rites are prime examples of human rights violations that are justified by reliance on culture and tradition (Women 2000, 2001). In most cases it is usually assumed that widows are normally elderly but many widows in developing countries, in areas of conflict or in communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS are young or middle-aged. However, widows of all ages are often evicted from their homes, stigmatized, physically abused and some even killed (Women 2000, 2001).

It has been claimed that India has the largest recorded number of widows in the world. There are 33 million or 10% of the adult female population, compared to only 3% of men and the number is growing because of HIV/AIDS and civil conflicts (Women 2000, 2001). Women 2000 claims that India may be the only country where widowhood in addition to being a personal status, exists as a ‘social institution’. Ritual and religious symbolism seem to exacerbate widows’ deprivation and stigmatization. Indian society like all patriarchal societies confers social status on a woman through a man; hence, in the absence of a man, she herself becomes a non-entity and suffers a social death. Sati (widow burning) is the ultimate manifestation of this belief. Widow remarriage may be forbidden in the higher castes and remarriage, where permitted may be restricted to a family member. A widow upon remarriage may be required to relinquish custody of her children as well as any property rights she may have. If the widow keeps her children with her, she may fear they will be ill-treated in a second marriage (Women 2000, 2001).

Indian widows are often regarded as evil eyes, the purveyors of ill fortune and unwanted burdens on poor families (Women 2000, 2001). Indian widows are called witches, whores and in most cases

they are disowned by their own relatives and thrown out of their homes in the context of land and inheritance disputes. Similar treatment of widows and abusive words are also used in some of the African countries like Nigeria (Korieh, 1996). A similar kind of treatment does not apply to men. Many Bangladeshi and Muslim widows are deprived of their rightful inheritance by a male relative and forced to work long hours as unpaid domestic servants in a relative's house; others may be brutally forced out into homelessness and thus are statistically uncounted (Women 2000, 2001).

Many factors impede widows from working for cash rewards, for example, the imposition of restrictive and extensive mourning customs such as seclusion or dress codes. In Kabul, Afghanistan, the Taliban prohibition on women working outside the home has created extreme degrees of poverty among 500,000 war widows who are the sole supporters of their families (Women 2000, 2001).

#### **2.4 What informs the negative context of the mourning rituals?**

The probable root cause of the negative experiences of widows within the African and even world-wide context may be contained in the gender roles influenced by culture and tradition. The patriarchal influence in particular may be significant in determining the gender roles in a community. In their paper, Issaka, Nakazibwe, Irvine, Saine and Issaka (2010) argue that customary laws, as sourced from culture, are inherently detrimental and adverse to the promotion of women's rights in Africa. In their view culture contributes to the continued discrimination of women as second-class people in comparison to men. The pervasive exercise of male controlled traditional policies and practices that discriminate against women according to Issaka *et al.* (2010) are reflected in courtship, marriage and dowry payment; early and childhood marriages; widowhood rites; lack of access to property and productive resources, all of which infringe on the women's human rights.

The patriarchal kinship systems, patrilocal marriage where the bride goes to the husband's location, and the patrilineal inheritance in which succession devolves through the male line (Owen, 2007) may be the source of prejudicial treatment against widows. Such practices according to Owen (2007) shore up the concept that women are chattels who cannot inherit and may even be regarded

as part of the husband's estate claimed through widow inheritance. Even where matrilineal kinship systems pertain, inheritance still devolves to the males, through the widow's brother and his sons (Owen, 2007). Patriarchy would therefore seem to play a key role in contributing to the negative experiences of widows worldwide.

#### **2.4.1 Patriarchy**

Patriarchy in which the rule of the male as alluded to already is the basic principle of social organisation of family and society (Ruether, 1996 as cited by Shumbambini, 2006) seems to be a common form of societal organisation in Africa and Asia (Women 2000, 2001). According to Shumbambini (2006) in the culture of the Shona of Zimbabwe, the in-laws do not protect but rather they create an atmosphere of fear in the lives of widows. Closer to home even among the Xhosa, women were considered jural minors (Peires, 1981) to be led by the males.

Patriarchy seems therefore to have governed and controlled the way women are treated in most societies in the world ranging from marriage to control of economic resources and even to the very children they bear (Women 2000, 2001). In the context of the mourning rituals patriarchy seems to display a particularly negative and oppressive side in most African societies (Ayikukwei, *et al.*, 2007; Feni, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Pheko, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001; Taylor, 1983) as well as in Asia where for example sati or widow burning occurs as direct result of the role of patriarchal behaviour (Women 2000, 2001). Patriarchy thus seems to be a key influence in any interpretation of the context of mourning rituals conducted among the AmaXhosa.

#### **2.5 The context of mourning rituals in Africa**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) report as cited in Women 2000 (2001), in Africa some of the traditional mourning and burial rites involve harmful and degrading treatment of widows even to gender-based violence but governments seem slow in recognizing this fact. It is claimed that degrading and painful trials by ordeal are forced on widows and particularly in countries where the concept of so-called crimes of honour exist. It is alleged that widows may be

beaten, murdered or imprisoned on the flimsiest of evidence while male perpetrators remain immune from prosecution (Women 2000, 2001). WHO claims that widows are coerced into participating in these rites through fear of losing status and protection, fear of eviction from the family home, fear of having their children taken from them. Some rites can be life-threatening as well as degrading such as ritual cleansing through sex when a husband dies of HIV/AIDS. In some countries widows are forced to drink the water in which their husband's corpses have been washed. (WHO as cited in Women 2000, 2001).

African widows irrespective of ethnic groups are among the most vulnerable and destitute women on the continent. The customs are used to oppress and exploit widows (Women 2000, 2001). The low status, poverty and violence experienced by widows stem from discrimination in inheritance custom, the patriarchal nature of society, and the domination of oppressive traditional practices and customary codes, which take precedence over constitutional guarantees of equality, modern laws and international women's human rights standards (Women 2000, 2001).

Despite the mainly negative nature of most mourning rituals, their observance among some communities is expected to lead to some positive support for the widow. For example, among the Luo of Kenya acceptance of the widow by the community after the death of a husband depends on her cooperation with regard to the dictates concerning the cultural rites of widowhood and quite clearly the widow's adjustment to her new status depends on the support she receives from the family of her late husband, whose attitude towards widowhood is an important factor (Gunga, 2009). According to Aborampah (1999), the widowhood rituals of the Akan people of Ghana are meant to meet certain basic needs such as protecting the widow from misfortune including economic loss and to preserve the mental stability of the widow, thus serving a therapeutic role. Similarly, among other communities there is an acknowledgment that family and community support for the widow is seen to be an important and integral positive aspect of mourning rituals (Manyedi, Koen & Greeff, 2003).

## 2.6 The context of mourning rituals in West and East Africa

In Nigeria, family law permits certain widowhood practices which discriminate against women, particularly women married according to customary rather than statutory law, clearly a reflection of patriarchal dominance in that society. Some of the negative practices derive from the belief that the beauty of a woman is reflected from her husband. Therefore at his death she is seen as unclean and impure and the customs she must observe in the weeks following her husband's death can undermine health. If she has no male adult children, she may be ejected from her husband's house as both it and his land will have been inherited by his oldest brother. In most cases it has been claimed that the husband's kin do not provide the widow with any economic support particularly if she is reluctant to become an additional wife to one of her husband's brothers (Oniye, n. d.; Women 2000, 2001). This patriarchal influence in society seems to be widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and in other third world countries (Women 2000, 2001). Women need to be freed from these shackles.

Just to underscore the above observations a study was conducted in Imo State, Nigeria, in which interviews and discussions were held with traditional rulers, leaders of women's organizations and widows (Women 2000, 2001). It was found that certain factors have an impact on the health and economic status of widows, such as long periods of incarceration during mourning; an obligatory poor standard of hygiene; deprivation of the husband's property and maltreatment by his relatives.

Amongst other concerns are harmful and degrading communicable diseases and life threatening traditional practices that are part of burial rites. The enforcement of persistent wailing and the practice of demanding that a widow sit in the same room with her husband's body until burial are just too stressful and yet the same kind of treatment does not apply to men (Women 2000, 2001). The culmination of the maltreatment of widows in sub-Saharan Africa is exemplified by the observation that in the United Republic of Tanzania it was found out that about 500 mostly older widows were killed because of accusations of being witches according to A-Help--Age - International Research Study in 1999 (Women 2000, 2001). *Sati*, the widow burning as practised in India or the killing of witches as happened in Tanzania (Women 2000, 2001), reflects the ultimate degradation of widows and must be halted.

### **2.6.1 Widows' experiences of mourning rituals in West Africa**

In his thesis on widowhood among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, Korieh, (1996) stated that there is a conspicuous lack of analytical and comparative studies of widowhood experiences in Africa. According to him whatever scanty information available on widowhood practices is raw or unprocessed. The widowhood rituals among the Igbo, although considered discriminatory or spiteful, were performed according to Korieh (1996) because there was at every stage of the process a sense of community between the dead and the living and ostensibly the rituals were meant to give the widow protection from her deceased husband whom the people believed would still attempt to make contact with his wife (Korieh, 1996).

The rituals involved among others a grave digger periodically striking the roof of the hut in which the women were sleeping. This symbolised the soul of the departed knocking. At each of these knockings the women led by the wife or wives of the dead man, would break out into loud weeping. The wife of an ordinary man is expected to go into traumatic wailing immediately he dies; she is expected to beat her chest, fling her arms about and fall down. The rituals also involved being locked up with the corpse for three hours prior to the husband's burial with the belief that if she killed him, she would die there; the widow could also be forced to sleep in the graveyard for two days after the husband's burial in order to finally convince the relatives that she did not kill her husband (Korieh. 1996).

The period of seclusion of Igbo widows described by Korieh (1996) and reflected strongly by Women 2000 (2001) is probably the most traumatic for widows generally. In most parts of the Igbo society the early parts of this period are usually the most rigorous according to Korieh (1996). During the first 28 days, the widow is not allowed to go to the stream or the market or enter the farmland. Certain rituals must be performed at the expiration of the 28 days before the widow can perform normal activities. In the first few days before the man is buried she must according to Korieh (1996) refrain from washing and sit on the ground. Her food is prepared separately and she is fed by another widow using either a broken or an old plate. These pots and plates are used because they are thrown away after the period of seclusion. They may be handed over to an older widow who assisted the new widow during this period. She is not allowed to touch any part of her

body with her hands but must use a knife or broom stick as at this time she is regarded as unclean. The knife or stick is also purportedly used to protect her from the spirits which may attack her during this period.

Following the burial, Korieh (1996) narrates the case of a widow whose mother in-law took her out to the back of the house to have a bath with very cold water very early in the morning when it was still very cold. As she did this, customs demanded that she cry and call her husband the name she used to call him when he was alive. This lasted for four days. She stayed at home for the next three months mourning him without going out. Such degrading rituals indeed form the core of what Women 2000 (2001) describe as the most hidden and veiled violation of women's human rights, under the guise of customary and possibly religious practices.

Oniye (n. d.) described similar degrading rituals among widows from the Eastern region of Nigeria. He indicated that the underlying assumption concerning the mourning rites practiced in the Eastern region of Nigeria was that the wife has been contaminated by the death of her husband. Thus, in order to be cleansed of this 'dirt' for normal interaction with members of the society, a number of mourning rites or traditions are prescribed such as wailing profusely immediately after the death of her husband and, as indicated also by Korieh (1996), the widow remains with her husband's corpse before burial to keep away flies from the body while waking the household with her wailing which is measured as adequate or otherwise by the junior relations of her dead husband among others.

The rules of the mourning process according to Oniye (n. d.) do not permit the widow to talk to any man, cook her food or do any work. I agree with Oniye that this widows' maltreatment and impoverishment in contemporary Nigeria and possibly elsewhere (Women 2000, 2001) is a function of how empowered educationally and economically the women affected are as well as that of their age and location. The less empowered the women are educationally and economically, the more likely they are to be subjected to these degrading rituals.

Similarly, confinement which according to Oniye (n. d.) is a common feature of the mourning practice for widows in the Western region of Nigeria, is another degrading ritual which has the potential to cause stress and chronic depression (Women 2000, 2001). In describing such

confinement Oniye (n. d.) indicated that two to three weeks was the duration of confinement for employed widows but unemployed widows were expected to be confined for forty-days. During this period, the relatives of the late husband jointly provide caretaker services to the widow; the period reaches a climax with the observance of a night vigil by the widow, her relatives, friends, and those of her late husband. However, according to Oniye (n. d.), if a widow were to die on the night of the vigil, she would be presumed to be responsible for her husband's death.

The widow starts the second phase of her mourning by rising early the next morning and knocking on the doors of her neighbors to thank them for their care and concern. Traditionally, the neighbors are not expected to reply nor show their face in acknowledgement. However, in some other parts of the western region of Nigeria, a husband's death is culturally attributed to the wife. In order to vindicate herself, distasteful and unhygienic as the practice may be, the widow is expected to drink successfully from the water used for bathing the body of her deceased husband (Oniye, n. d.).

The treatment of widows in Northern Nigeria seems to be the least injurious and degrading but still, the widow and her children are often neglected. Meanwhile a mandatory mourning period of 4 lunar months and 10 days is imposed on the widow during which she cannot remarry. However, there are no other rituals that the widow had to undertake or perform (Oniye, n. d.). Although Oniye found that Muslim and Christian widows in Nigeria were more supported compared to widows of other religious affiliations, widows from Northern Nigeria which is predominantly Muslim, were subjected to less bad treatment which may be a reflection of religious influence on the conduct of the mourning rituals since it would appear that Muslim widows in theory are treated better than others as shown by the experiences in India (Women 2000, 2001).

## **2.6.2 Widows' experiences of mourning rituals in East Africa**

In Uganda in the Eastern part of Africa, studies on mourning rituals revealed considerable variation between the various ethnic groups. Although seemingly more compassionate in the treatment of widows; the conduct of the mourning rituals still remains distinctly discriminatory. Description of the mourning rituals between four ethnic groups found them to be quite discriminatory against women but also revealed that the ill-treatment of widows was less severe. The widowhood rituals or



ceremonies which widows are expected to perform as part of the culture or custom of their communities are particularly prevalent in the rural communities believed to be due to the low literacy rate in villages as compared with urban areas where women are more independent and enlightened (Limann, 2003) a finding seemingly observed in other countries as well as expressed by others (Oniye, n. d., Women 2000, 2001).

The study in Uganda was conducted among 4 ethnic groups; the Baganda, Iteso, Bakiga and Lugbara and just as in other African countries, widows underwent degrading practices. It was found that among the Baganda which is the largest ethnic group in Uganda, the widows were expected to wear topless garments as evidence of mourning. Widows tie a piece of bark cloth around their waists to indicate their new status as widows. Widows are prohibited from having a haircut and are expected to sleep on dry banana leaves until the funeral is over (Limann, 2003). Widow inheritance was prevalent in the past but is now viewed as an outdated tradition no longer practised (Limann, 2003).

On the more compassionate side as revealed in another study conducted in Buganda, the widowed spouse was socially elevated to a position of '*Namwandu*' (widow) during the death rituals. The clan then made provisions to cater for the welfare of the widowed and the orphaned through levirate marriage; at the last funeral rites property was distributed, amalgamation of orphans into the extended patrilineal family by a process of adoption by paternal relatives and, installation of the heir and caretakers was done (Nyanzi, Emodu-Walakira, & Serwaniko, 2009), spoiled only by the widow inheritance which involved the remarriage of a man's widow to her brother-in-law.

The widow inheritance practice, in keeping with patrilineal societies, is according to Nyanzi *et al.* (2009) internally consistent with principles whereby the male lineage retains rights to sex, labour and the childbearing capacity of wives even after the original husband has died. It was found that the traditional institution of widowhood in Buganda is rapidly disintegrating or in my opinion possibly undergoing acculturation due to the social stigma attached to widowhood. Widowed individuals no longer embrace the cultural titles '*Namwandu*'. This is because of the shame and ill social connotations associated with widowhood. The economic and financial constraints impact on

the cultural norms of conducting last funeral rites, adoption and care giving by the clan, heirs or care-takers (Nyanzi *et al.*, 2009).

The widows complained that the forced change by the institution of care-takers locally known as ‘*abakuza*’ had deteriorated into being a mere symbol, as people put into the position never looked into the welfare and provision of the widow and her orphans (Nyanzi *et al.*, 2009). Participants claimed that it was only in situations where a widower would be given a female care-taker whom he could marry that this institution ever became practiced. Widows claimed that in their situation it was merely a rite that ended with the ceremony, hence where widowhood used to be a social experience; it is now up to the widow to suffer alone (Nyanzi *et al.*, 2009). While the compassionate nature of widow treatment may be waning, the widows in my view are not subjected to the harsh treatment observed in some of the West African cultural settings described above.

The Iteso are the second largest ethnic group in Uganda and in my view probably have one of the lesser injurious mourning rituals discounting the widow inheritance which is common among many African societies (Ayikukwei, *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Women 2000, 2001). The research conducted among the Iteso found that the mourners, including the widows were not permitted to bathe, eat or shave their hair for a mourning period of three days as evidence of their grieving status. Widows are guarded and confined to the house for fear that they might commit suicide. On the fourth day of mourning they are supposed to cast off evil spirits from the grieving family. Widows and close female relatives must bathe in a river or well with a traditional herb called ‘*emopim*’. On the seventh day after the burial, widows and their children must sit at the doorway with their backs to the house with legs outstretched whilst senior women or older women pass a calabash of blood from a slaughtered animal (cow or fowl) over their bodies; this is to ward off evil spirits (Limann, 2003).

On the last day of the funeral ceremony the Iteso widows are made to sit in the doorway of the matrimonial home and are smeared with a locally made substance. Widows as well as other mourners are free to resume normal activities after the ceremony of removing ashes on the last day of the funeral ceremony. Widows are taken to the bush and given an axe to cut down a tree signifying that they have now assumed the role of the husband and hence may undertake masculine

activities. The last funeral rites require widows to wear their deceased husband's clothes and sit on their stool at the entrance of the matrimonial home whilst feasting and drinking the local brew (Limann, 2003).

Among the Iteso, stepsons or younger brothers of deceased husbands inherit the widows. Young widows who have no grown up children to cater for them are chased away from the home if they refuse to be inherited. At present a widow may choose to remarry a person of her choice; however if her choice does not belong to her deceased husband's clan she must leave the matrimonial home and her new husband must refund the bride price paid for her at the time of her marriage to the deceased. The mourning rituals among the Iteso would seem not to be oppressive since a widow is confined to the house during the period of mourning supposedly for her own protection for fear that she might commit suicide because of the loss of her husband and in addition she is made to cut down a tree signifying that she has forthwith assumed the role of a husband and must therefore take up his responsibilities which is believed to serve as some form of psychological boost to brace a widow for the challenges of a single parent (Limann, 2003) the practices remain discriminatory and even degrading especially some like widow inheritance by the younger brother.

Another ethnic tribe known as the Bakiga who occupy the South western part of Uganda was also studied (Limann, 2003). Widows there are made to perform a ceremony at a place identified by a medicine man. As part of this process the medicine man rubs her 'private parts' with leaves from a plant called *akatooma*, a despicable and degrading form of treatment to say the least. Thereafter she urinates on the plant and the medicine man subjects her to other rituals. As part of the last funeral rites a medicine man again brushes a thorny plant on the forehead of the widow. A concoction of the plant and other herbs is massaged on the parts of the widow's body including her 'private parts'. The herbs are thereafter forced under her feet symbolizing that her deceased husband no longer has any authority over her and she must also throw some of the herbs at the lower part of her bed (Liman, 2003). It is believed that if the widow has a sexual relationship with any man before these rituals, he will die. The widow is supposed to move out of her former bedroom into her children's bedroom. The widow is then either inherited by the adult stepson or a brother in-law as part of the estate of the deceased. It is claimed that this practice has declined in recent years because widows observed that men who inherited them rarely took care of them and widows also realized that in-

laws who wanted desperately to have access to the estate of the deceased, were merely using them (Limann, 2003).

However, among the Bakiga the belief that a man will die if he has sexual intercourse with the widow of the deceased before the cleansing rituals are performed, probably was meant to discourage adultery and raise moral standards. This practice may also protect widows from falling prey to men who may want to take advantage of their vulnerability during their period of bereavement however; the medicine man's violation of the widow's body is in excusable (Limann, 2003). Such acts only serve to add to the litany of the negative experiences of the African widows.

Within another ethnic tribe in Uganda known as the Lugbara, widows must stay in the matrimonial home for four days after the burial and should they go out of the house they can only re-enter walking backwards through the doorway (Liman, 2003). It is believed that failure to adhere to this custom will bring ill health to their children. Family members of the deceased conduct informal investigations in the form of discussions to ascertain the cause of the deceased's death. Widows suspected of having a hand in the death of their husbands are often ostracized by their in-laws.

Widow inheritance among the Lugbara is not considered as wife inheritance resulting in remarriage but is described as rescuing women who have been rendered destitute and works like automatic adoption. Hence a widow is only inherited if she deserves it. She must for instance be well mannered or have had children previously before she may be deemed qualified enough to be inherited; otherwise she may be dismissed with no property except her own. Widows who refuse to bow down to this custom pay dearly for doing so and are denied any part of the deceased estate and have to fend for themselves (Limann, 2003), once again highlighting the influence of patriarchal kinships, patrilocal marriages and patrilineal inheritance on the life of African widows.

In a research conducted in Western Kenya in Maragoli, it was found that in this upland rural area of about two hundred square kilometres in western Kenya, the dynamic relations surrounding widowhood provided a useful opportunity to analyze the construction of feminine and masculine categories as well as the political strategies that emerged from these categories. It was found that widows in this rural part of Kenya were certainly subjected to the limitations imposed on them by

the invocation of strict gender categories perhaps more so at this point in their lives than in any other period (Mutongi, 1999). According to Mutongi (1999), surprisingly, these widows were able to use such categories to their advantage by expressing their grief publicly in ways that focused on their social and economic needs. Maragoli widows reinforced the importance of gender categories but also sought to redress their grievances through these very categories. Mutongi, (1999), claims that these widows consciously presented themselves as poor widows, as idealized stereotypes of suffering females who had become needy and helpless after the death of their husbands.

These widows told their stories in ways calculated to solicit sympathy which usually worked to their advantage since it placed men in the difficult situation of having to defend their ‘ideal’ masculinity. It is claimed that only by helping guarantee the economic livelihood and social status of bereaved widows could men uphold their own self-image, thus the relationship between them was informed by a reciprocity that suggests that the widows were more than passive recipients of male charity. It is claimed that by presenting their grief publicly so as to solicit relief for their sufferings, widows were actively able to turn what men saw as stereotypical feminine behaviour e.g. emotionality, helplessness and weakness, into strengths. By consciously attempting to make men feel more manly, Maragoli widows were able at least partially to exploit existing gender roles to get what they needed (Mutongi, 1999).

It seems that across cultures and religions, the treatment of widows in many developing countries, is harshly discriminatory. In Africa in particular, there is a whole range of negative experiences that widows go through during mourning rituals from outright discriminatory and torturous practices in West Africa to sometimes compassionate but nevertheless still degrading and discriminatory ones in East Africa. In all cases it appears that these negative experiences are heavily influenced by patriarchal kinships and must be exposed at every opportunity.

## **2.7 Widows’ experiences of mourning rituals in Southern Africa**

The experiences of widows in Southern Africa are much the same as what has been already discussed for most of the African and some Asian countries, filled with a bias towards women as the main targets of the rituals and sometimes even accepted quite willingly as the next example

reveals. One of the earliest records of willing participation in otherwise generally negative widowhood rituals relates to the story of a widow from Swaziland who had not washed for 3 years after the death of her husband because she did not want to wash away her sorrow for her husband (Kidd, 1925). This sort of reaction may be a classic example of the perennial mourner (Volkan, 2009); as this widow wished to perpetuate an activity that maintained a connection with her husband seemingly forever. It also depicts clearly what Radzilani (2010) describes as the feminine requirement for intuitive sensitivity and emotional expressiveness.

In most cases however, observations such as those found among the Shona society are the norm. Among the Shona, widows are victimized as witches and prostitutes and accused as the underlying cause of the death of the husband, and are alienated and viewed with suspicion especially by wives of the brothers of the deceased husband because they fear for their own marriages in the advent of polygamy through the levirate marriage (Chimhanda, 2002 as cited in Shumbahini, 2006). Such victimisation of widows is definitely a common feature of widowhood in African and Asian cultures (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Oniye, n. d.; Owen, 2007; Women 2000, 2001).

## **2.8 Perceptions on the mourning rituals in South Africa**

The discriminatory nature of the mourning rituals in Southern Africa does not differ significantly from what has been described in the rest of Africa. Among the Zulu, the widow is the main focus of the mourning rituals (Ramphela, 1997 as cited by Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007) as apparently her observance of mourning is most extensive and is symbolically, practically and spiritually of greatest importance (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). The widow must wear mourning clothing, typically black (blue is worn in certain Christian groups), the clothing of *ukuzila*, for a year following the death of her husband and shave her head so that people can see she is grieving.

Soon after the death of a husband the widow is expected to sit on a mat, because all her furniture is removed; she sits in a designated place quite often in the bedroom where people go to express condolences to her. During the sitting the widow is not expected to go anywhere except to the bathroom. She should not even stand and if she needs something she has to call for it and it will be

brought to her. She is expected to cover her face with a blanket; more urbanised and Christian widows apparently just drape the blanket over their shoulder (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

Other aspects of the Zulu mourning ritual dictate that if a widow is out walking and meets people along the way, the widow has to give way to them and bow or bend her knees and avoid eye contact with them and if she boards a bus she must go to the back to avoid exposing her back to people. Her back is said to emit a bad omen or bad luck; the widow must not go to weddings because apparently if anything bad happens to someone in the community for example, if a child died then she may be blamed for it (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007) .

In a study conducted by Manyedi, Koen and Greeff (2003) concerning the experiences of widowhood and beliefs about the mourning process of the Batswana people, it is claimed that widows seem to blame the community for isolation, discrimination and stigmatization. Hence, these experiences contribute to feelings of bitterness in not being part of the community. On the other hand, the community seems to think that they do not isolate widows in bad faith but that they should understand that it is the Batswana culture which should be respected. The widow's bitterness also seems to follow from the belief that they carry bad luck and are potentially dangerous to other human beings, animals and crops, a belief that seems to be common to many of the African cultures (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). This is a clear indication that widows experience extreme frustration during widowhood and the mourning process because of the treatment they receive from the community. Manyedi *et al.* (2003) also claim that there are groupings of beliefs, those that believe they must comply with customs and rituals and those who see no need to do so.

More recently an article entitled 'It's a bogus African culture' in the Sunday times (Pheko, 2007) also revealed the injustices of the mourning ritual in the South African context. The author reminded readers that "fictions of an undiluted African culture" have been weapons for enforcing women's obedience by accusing them of being too westernised and targeting especially those who increasingly questioning notions of what is called African 'culture'. This article outlined the oppressive cultural mourning rituals and asks for justification of practices that discriminate against women, holding them hostage on the mattress and wearing black. The author refers to the example of her friend's ordeal when she lost her husband and had to undergo cultural mourning rituals. Her

friend was forced to sit on a mattress placed on the floor during the mourning period. Not only did she sit on this mattress with her friend but was constantly watched to make sure she behaved according to cultural expectations. The author argues that it is about time that a full interrogation is carried out regarding these mysterious beliefs and cultural practices that restrict, exclude and discriminate against women (Pheko, 2007).

In a thesis on a discourse analysis of bereavement rituals in a Tshivenda speaking community looking at African Christian and Traditional African perceptions, Radzilani (2010) reported on numerous emotional experiences of Tshivenda widows. Experiences ranged from difficulties and challenges occasioned by lack of financial resources as according to Radzilani (2010), in traditional Tshivenda culture the husband is the breadwinner while the wife takes care of the home and children. This situation is compounded when relatives divide the condolence money among themselves leaving the widow with only a small amount with which to buy food. Tshivenda widows received varied support. While some seem to receive more than adequate support from both their in-laws and relatives, others experience a lack of much needed support from their in-laws. One widow for example reported that just after the funeral all the relatives disappeared and never came back (Radzilani, 2010).

According to Radzilani (2010), among the Tshivenda, the elders act as the agents of culture and a newly widowed Tshivenda woman is expected to accept and comply with the prescriptions of the widowhood rituals whether they agree with the rituals or not. The feeling among some of the widows was that if they did not want to perform the rituals then they would be suspected of killing their husbands so in order to avoid such suspicion they just went along with the rituals. Radzilani (2010) found that while some widows felt coerced to perform widowhood rituals, others felt that performing the bereavement rituals gave them feelings of happiness or obedience at having fulfilled cultural expectations even if it meant betraying their religious beliefs. Some feared that non-compliance would lead to suffering and yet some still did not see any reason or value in performing some of the widowhood rituals while others performed them simply because they were part of their culture. The widowhood rituals included cleansing as all women who lose their husbands through death are considered ‘filthy’; the unhygienic practice of being smeared with chime (half-digested grass from the rumen) and swallowing small stones and most of the widows would according to



Radzilani (2010) gladly have avoided performing the rituals but because of the insistence of the in-laws they, had to perform the rituals to keep the peace in the family.

## **2.9 The mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa**

The early records of mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa during the period of arrival of Europeans on the African continent in the early 1800s were written by travellers like Lichtenstein (1811). These records seem to be merely narrative observations and less conceptual about the rituals. Soga (1932) indicates that the early AmaXhosa mourning rituals included the slaughter of a goat or less frequently an ox immediately after the burial of a family member as an offering and cleansing sacrifice; shaving the head by the members of every bereaved family as a sign of mourning was also performed. The widow secluded herself in her home and did not attend any parties. There was no specific period of mourning but a reasonable time elapsed before she resumed normal life. At the end of her seclusion, the widow would discard her old clothes and her friends would give her new ones including sleeping blankets (Soga, 1932).

A more detailed and systematic description of the widowhood rituals following the death of a husband as transcribed from Alberti's Account of the Xhosa in 1807 (cited in The Republic of Transkei, 1976) states that on the death of her husband, a widow would take an ember from the fire and kindle a new fire out in the veld. She remained in 'her lonely place in the veld' for a month, living on herbs and wild vegetables. After this period she discarded her clothes, washed her entire body, put on a grass skirt and returned to her home at sundown. Here she was given an ember with which to start a new fire and she would then drink sweet milk ritually to end her period of impurity. The cow from which the milk was taken was never milked again or slaughtered. The cow was considered impure and was allowed to die a natural death. At the time a widower also did the same, but remained in the veld for only a fortnight. Thereafter, he took some hair from the tail of an ox threaded it into some copper rings and wore this necklace until the ox tail hair perished (Alberti's Account of the Xhosa in 1807 as cited in The Republic of Transkei, 1976).

## 2.10 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an overview of the mourning rituals as practised in different parts of the world. While there are positive expectations from the observance of the mourning rituals, what emerged from the overview seemed to portray the widows the world over as victims of degradation and sometimes downright inhuman treatment during the performance of mourning rituals. In most cases the performance of the rituals for the fulfillment of customary requirements leaves widows impoverished or in some form of difficulty. These rituals undergone by the widows following the death of their husbands seem to be the practice throughout west, east and southern Africa. There are still some knowledge gaps since only a few ethnic groups in South Africa in particular have been studied and even those have not been exhaustively examined. Furthermore, most studies according to Korieh (1996) reflect the rituals from the point of view of the male and European researchers and not from the African female research point of view. In South Africa however, an era has began in which studies conducted by female African researchers (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007; Radzilani, 2010) are taking place.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3. MOURNING RITUALS: CONTEXT AND INFLUENCES**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives a contextual background to the study which will include definition of key concepts and words and a basic introduction to some of the practices that may influence the manner in which widows are victims to the kind of rituals they have to perform following the death of their spouses. The discourses involve the socio-political, socio-economic, cultural and religious influences on the mourning ritual. Some basic definitions explaining some terms and consideration of the mourning process in context will be described. Because of the influences of religion, culture and tradition on the status of women in society in general, the patriarchal context and forms of marriage among the AmaXhosa will be put into perspective

#### **3.2 Defining Ritual**

The central point in this study is the mourning ritual around which terms such as widows' perceptions and so on revolve. In order to grasp the full meaning of the study a proper definition of ritual is therefore necessary. Ritual according to Webster's third new international dictionary (1986) is defined as a 'code or system of rites' or as 'any practice done or repeated regularly in a set precise manner so as to satisfy one's sense of fitness' and often felt to have a 'symbolic significance'. Theories of ritual depend upon the phenomena to which one chooses to assign the ritual label. According to Leach (2004), some see ritual as the communal celebration of social solidarity, and see the creation and enhancement of such solidarity as ritual's main purpose. Ritual according to him may be involved in the communal worship of the sacred. Leach points out that both magic and worship involve actions that are patterned, must be performed in a certain order, involve specific words or objects which may stand for other things (symbols), and which are not strictly dictated by practical needs, all of which are attributed to ritual (Leach, 2004). Magical performance according to him, insofar as it is individual and practical, does not count. Ultimately,

Leach suggests that probably the only thing rituals have in common is that they communicate meanings, or, in some cases even create the very meanings they communicate.

In widowhood, what meaning whether positive or negative do the mourning rituals communicate or create for the widow or for the people that surround her. Radzilani (2010) indicates that during bereavement, when people perform the mourning rituals, their thoughts and feelings are translated and given symbolic meaning first and foremost as an expression of their mourning and their pain and then the belief that the rituals will heal that pain, comfort them and affirm cultural values.

### **3.3 The social and economic rights of widows**

According to Gunga (2009), the culture of the Luo of Kenya like most other African cultures is patrilineal and patrilocal, and hence family life is centered on the lineage as defined through male descendants. Widowhood according to Zahedi (2006 as cited by Gunga, 2009) entails emotional loss and change in lifestyle, identity, social status and role. Consequently, socio-economic and emotional support provided by the family, community and society at large highly impacts on widows and widowers in identifying and utilizing coping mechanisms (Gunga, 2009).

Widowhood rituals or ceremonies are expected to be performed upon the death of the husband as part of the process of ritually separating the widow from the husband but, the practice in Africa is manifested in forms ranging from long periods of confinement, isolation of the widow with the corpse of her deceased spouse, to taking of liquid substances used to clean the corpse of the deceased husband as indicated in the previous chapter. These practices among many others are quite clearly gender discriminatory compared to what men have to perform as widowers and they also infringe on the woman's right to dignity, life and health (Issaka *et al.*, 2010). In many instances men do not have to perform these rituals at all (Gunga, 2009; Radzilani, 2010).

Although the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted a Resolution on "Women's Equal Ownership of, Access to and Control over Land and the Equal Rights to Own Property and to Adequate Housing women's property rights continue to be abused in cultural settings in many parts

of Africa (Issaka *et al.*, 2010). The widowhood rituals perhaps unintentionally seem to contribute to the erosion of these rights.

In most African societies there is no distinction between a woman's personal income and property and that of the husband. Therefore according to Korieh (1996), a widow stands a great chance of losing access to property jointly acquired with her husband. The result is that the widow may have to start a new economic life on the death of the husband. According to Korieh (1996), for most widows at least in Eastern Nigeria, the assumption is that they will invariably be dependent on agriculture and as such, ownership and rights to inherited land will be very important to them. One would expect the widow to inherit her husband's property and estate and sustain herself and her family but this is not the case for most widows in many countries worldwide (Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007, Shumbamhini, 2006).

### **3.4 The Cultural and Religious discourse of mourning**

According to Spalding (2000) culture consists of systems of coherent stable attitudes, values and patterns of social relations which guide and define social life for a people. Cultural theory centres on how to build and sustain shared moral commitment or community and involves analysis of various practices, facilitates the exploration of systems of social behaviour, draws out underlying patterns and attempts to explain underlying similarities and differences between ways of life (Spalding, 2000). Culture is varied because it provides varied solutions to the problem of social organization in terms of the shared moral commitment or community (Spalding, 2000) as expected with mourning rituals; these vary among the different peoples of the world as the discourse later on mourning rituals in other parts of the world and of Africa will reveal.

It goes without saying that many of the ideas handed down to us by the transmitters of culture are eminently sensible and realistic and according to Huxley (1963) if they were not, the human species would now be extinct. But, along with these useful concepts, every culture hands down a stock of unrealistic notions, some of which never ever made sense, while others may once have possessed survival value, but have now, in the changed and changing circumstances of ongoing history, become completely irrelevant. This may be particularly pertinent with many mourning rituals today.

The clear evidence that culture is a construct may be seen in the cultural diversity observed world-wide. The basis on which reality, living things, knowing, cause, competence, innate characteristics, attributes of self, esteemed traits, consequences of behaviour, values, prohibitions and so on are developed in divergent communities is the exact manner of cultural construct (Thomas, 2001). The culture of a community therefore prescribes the manner, behaviour and thinking which makes the community act and interact in a particular way when faced with a situation. Any deviation from this way of acting and interacting is considered abnormal (Hedke, 2002 as cited by Radzilani, 2010).

In the interchange between individuals and culture, grief and the resolution of grief happens in a series of nested cultural narratives involving family, clan, tribe, community, sub-cultural, nation, religious tradition and many others (Klass, 2007) as demonstrated within a religious context (Selepe & Edwards, 2008) and as will become clear in the following discourse on mourning rituals in various parts of the world. At each level of organization these narratives supply the plots for the construction of individual narratives that endow grief with meaning and manageability (Klass, 2007). In a study conducted to gain a better understanding of the beliefs, ceremonies, and rituals surrounding death in European, Asian, Caribbean, Central American, and South American families living in the United States, many commonalties are prevalent across cultures and religions (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006). The stronger their beliefs, the more dedicated the family is in completing the rituals and ceremonies in the way dictated by their religion or culture.

The AmaXhosa people are traditionally said to be ancestor worshippers but they also believe in a creator who cares for them in the greater things in life and who protects them in extreme danger (Mills, 2004; Peires, 1981). The ancestral fathers, as embodied in the Nxele religious reaction during the Xhosa wars with white colonialists (Peires, 1979), watch over the everyday lives of their descendants, their crops and their cattle. Among the AmaXhosa, old people are revered as spirits, and sacrificial offerings may actually be made to them while they are still alive. The ancestral fathers also speak to their families in dreams. However, because not everyone is capable of interpreting these dreams, witchdoctors are called in to act as mediums as exemplified by the central beliefs of the Xhosa cattle killing (Peires, 1987)

Death and burial among the AmaXhosa, which will form most of the discourse in this study, is associated with many complex beliefs and rituals (Alberti's Account of the Xhosa in 1807 as cited in The Republic of Transkei, 1976; Lichtenstein 1811; Peires, 1981; Soga 1932). During the funeral, the men of the clan always lead the funeral procession and the women follow behind. In the case of the death of the head of the family, cattle are sacrificed and a strict procedure followed, as the deceased joins his ancestors and prepares to watch over the interests of the family left behind (Mills, 2004; The Republic of Transkei, 1976). Today, many of the Xhosa-speaking people of South Africa are Christians, as a result of their early contact with European missionaries. However, their religion has become a unique blend of Christianity and traditional African beliefs (Mills, 2004).

### **3.5 Marriage among the AmaXhosa as gendered power play**

In Sub-Saharan Africa, most ethnic groups recognize bride wealth as an imperative for the legitimacy of a marriage (Getz, 1995; Makisi, 1995; Mwamwenda' 1995 as cited by Gunga 2009). Similarly among the AmaXhosa, bride wealth also known as *lobola*, is payable. Marriage among the AmaXhosa is initiated by the parents of the bride or bridegroom and not by the prospective husband or wife (Soga, 1932). The Xhosa tradition makes provision for a certain degree of contact and courtship between boys and girls. However, the proper approach demands that girls remain virgins until they are married. If a girl is not a virgin at the time of marriage, her father will automatically receive less *lobola* for her. Traditionally, the groom-to-be would abduct the bride, with the approval of her family, and then marry her (Soga, 1932)

According to AmaXhosa customary law, *Ukulobola* is the custom whereby a young man pays cattle or their monetary value to his wife's father or guardian on the occasion of his marriage (Koyana, 1980, Soga, 1932). The cattle so paid are called *ikhazi* in isiXhosa. The *lobola* as it is now commonly called forms a fundamental element of Xhosa marriage (Mills, 2004) and involves the transfer of substantial amounts of wealth in cattle or an equivalent from the bridegroom's family to the guardian or father of the bride. The *ikhazi*, according to Koyana, does not constitute a sale of the woman. The woman can always go back to her father or guardian to seek protection in the event of ill treatment by the husband or if the marriage does not work out. The order of events is that a portion of the *ikhazi* is paid before the handing over of the woman and during the handing over

there are in attendance people from both sides. As part of the ceremony, people from the woman's side also offer presents to the husband's family as a symbol of union of the two families and sometimes their presents may equal or even exceed the *ikhazi* (Mills, 2004). A member of the woman's family then declares the health status of the woman and that she will perform her duties; any ailment is declared at this time. The response from the elders of the husband's family consists of remarks of welcome and strong advice to the young man to treat the child of the people tenderly amidst songs and dance and an open expression of joy at the arrival of a new member of the family (Koyana, 1980). The husband's family then gives her a new name (Soga, 1932) which denotes her status as a married woman. Today, marriage only involves the exchange of valuables. The bride's father pays a dowry to his daughter's future in-laws and the bridegroom has to pay the *lobola* for the bride.

The payment of *lobola* in most African cultures seems to symbolize the woman as the property of the man and his family (Rackoczy, 2004 and Van Schalkwyk, 2005 as cited by Radzilani, 2010) as with bridal wealth payment in other African countries (Gunga, 2009). However, among the AmaXhosa, following the death of a husband, a widow is free according to Koyana (1980) to go where she pleases and is not inherited as happens among other African tribes (Gunga, 2009; Limann, 2003; Korieh, 1996). But if the widow remarries, then the guardian becomes liable for the refund of *ikhazi* paid by the late husband. However, it seems it has become common practice not to sue for the return of any cattle if the widow lived for a long time with her late husband with or without children in the marriage (Koyana, 1980) which is a respite compared to how widows are harshly treated in other third world countries (Women 2000, 2001).

### **3.6 The gender context of the mourning ritual**

The gender bias of the mourning ritual towards women has been clearly shown by the various authors (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Feni, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Pheko, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001) although in the earlier times Xhosa men did participate in mourning rituals but to a lesser extent (Alberti's Account of the Xhosa in 1807 as cited in The Republic of Transkei, 1976). The rationale behind the widowhood mourning rituals is difficult to contextualize but Sossou (2002 as cited by Gunga, 2009) postulates that the people, due



to superstitious beliefs, rationalize these practices because widows receive protection from their powerful deceased husbands.

It would seem however, that the treatment of widows is driven more by the gender imbalances created by the patrilineal tradition of most African societies construct women as being of greater need of assistance that is received through performing the rituals (Radzilani, 2010). But probably more profound is that women feel that they have to submit to the prescripts of culture as failure to do so could lead to misfortune, blame and loss of support and acceptance by the in laws (Aborampah, 1999; Gunga, 2009; Sassou, 2002 as cited in Radzilani 2010). On the other hand, it could simply be for economic benefits that the relatives of the deceased hope to gain for example through inheritance or levirate marriage (Korieh, 1996; Limann, 2003). However, among the Xhosa levirate marriage is not a feature of widowhood (Hammond-Tooke, 1974). In terms of traditional Xhosa law, each married woman or widow was in the past allotted a field for cultivation (Murray & O'Sullivan, 2005) as opposed to the situation among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria where widows are denied ownership of any kind (Korieh, 1996).

### **3.7 Acculturation of the mourning rituals**

Acculturation is a term defined by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) as culture change that results from continuous, first hand contact between two distinct cultural groups. Hess, Markson, & Stein (1991) cited in Duffy and Wong (1996) consider acculturation to mean that people in a minority group adopt as their own the norms, values, and behaviour patterns of the dominant society but still are not admitted to more intimate social groups in that society. Both views involve contact between two distinct cultural groups and involve culture construct and the process of acculturation which greatly impacts on the individual and society as a whole. In the context of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals, it is assumed that acculturation must take place within the multicultural society of South Africa; nevertheless it will be interesting to establish who influenced who in terms of the ritual pertaining to the dominant society.

According to Huxley (1963), culture cannot be accepted discriminatingly, much less be modified, except by persons who have seen through it. Persons, who have cut holes in the confining stockade

of verbalized symbols, are able to look at the world and, by reflection, at themselves in a new and relatively unprejudiced way. Such persons are not merely born; they must also be made. This according to Huxley (1963) can happen in the field of formal education where he says that what the would-be hole cutter needs is knowledge. He needs knowledge of the past and present history of cultures in all their variety, knowledge of their nature and limitations, and uses and abuses of language. The context of this assertion will be seen in comparing the views of the AmaXhosa widows of different education levels.

Mourning like any other aspect of culture cannot escape the influence of change as depicted in acculturation. Acculturation could happen in any two African groups or between an African and Western group. The wearing of the black cloth during the mourning period in some African countries, a direct import from western culture, is a case in point and already indicates a behaviour pattern of a minority group adopted by the dominant society. The hiding behind the door instead of the forest among the AmaXhosa is another. The epistemological deconstruction of the mourning ritual among the AmaXhosa will in all probability reveal aspects of acculturation as an expectation of change occurring in a cultural setting. How and when rituals are practised vary depending on the country of origin and level of acculturation into mainstream society (Lobar *et al.*, 2006)

### **3.8 The modern context of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals**

In the context of mourning among the AmaXhosa of South Africa, the rituals seem to relate to what Niemeyer (2006) calls dominant narratives within the new perspectives on grief and bereavement. Dominant narratives apparently represent oppressive ascriptions of identity and quite often are implicitly enforced by local communities and typically draw on powerful cultural discourses that circumscribe the identity options of those whose lives they affect (Foucault, 1970; White & Epston, 1990). Among the AmaXhosa for example, numerous oppressive cultural influences have been described. The requirement for the wife of the deceased to hide herself in the forest during the day, but now altered to hiding behind the door, in order not to mix with other people (Ngubane 2004) is one such example. This ritual, according to Ngubane (2004), was supposed to be a way of showing respect by avoidance. The issue arises as to why such and other restrictions besides being oppressive are directed at or affect women more than they affect men (Pauw, 1975). One of the

Queens of the AmaXhosa people has challenged another such oppressive cultural ascription that of widows wearing black clothes, a comment clearly reflecting women's exasperation with these rituals directed at women only (Feni, 2007). The period of wearing black clothes can range from 6-12 months whereas widowers are not obliged to do the same. Her statement according to Feni (2007) set off some spirited debate within the traditional leadership on the merits and demerits of this particular ritual which is viewed as being unfair to women.

### **3.9 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter the context of the mourning rituals was summarised. The socio-political and economic position of widows, which is often impacted upon by the mourning rituals, was put into perspective. The cultural and religious influence and the gender bias of mourning rituals were examined in relation to how they impact on widowhood. The cultural and religious construct in particular seems to have major influences on the conduct of the mourning rituals. The gender power play as exemplified by the marriage transactions seems to place women at a disadvantage as they are unable to make independent decisions or to negotiate on matters that affect them. This gender power imbalance seems to be carried through into many aspects of women's lives including the practice of the mourning rituals. The chapter concludes with an indication that women are beginning to question this unequal treatment.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to address the theoretical framework which anchors the study presented in this thesis. This study attempts to find meaning in or make sense of the mourning rituals which in terms of analysing qualitative data in psychology is referred to as hermeneutics (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). Hermeneutics together with phenomenology, the interpretation of happenings in an event, form the main theoretical pillars of Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith & Eatough, 2007). IPA involves trying to understand the experiences an individual has in life, how they made sense of them and what meanings those experiences hold for them (Smith & Eatough, 2007). The chapter therefore gives a background to these theoretical underpinnings of the study.

Essentially the study considers the mourning ritual as it is conducted in the African continent within the context of IPA. The topic of widows' experiences was chosen because some cultural practices related to spousal mourning in Africa have as noted in the preceding chapter, have many negative effects on widows (Gunga, 2009; Owen, 2001). For example, in a number of African countries, the potentially dangerous practice of sexual widow cleansing continues to be practised (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009), as well as incarceration during mourning, an obligatory poor standard of hygiene, deprivation of the husband's property, maltreatment by the husband's relatives, the enforcement of persistent wailing and the practice of demanding that a widow sit in the same room with her husband's body until burial (Korieh, 1996; Oniye, n. d.; Owen, 2007, Shumbamhini, 2006), forced marriages, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression (Ntozi, 1997 as cited by Gunga, 2009). These practices repulsive as they seem, are still very much part of the mourning rituals in some African countries (Radzilani, 2010).

While it seems the stories of some of the mourning rituals may have been told, there is much more that still needs to be disclosed and subjected to IPA so as to record any changes taking place in keeping with acculturation.

#### **4.2 The Epistemological Framework of this study**

Epistemology can be defined as the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the origins, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge (Reber, 1985). According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2005), epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief. As the study of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with questions on what the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge are its sources, structure, and limits. Such questions could very well be asked about the sources and structure of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals. As the study of justified belief, epistemology aims to answer questions on how we understand the concept of justification; for example, justification for the AmaXhosa mourning rituals. What makes justified beliefs justified and whether justification is internal or external to one's own mind? Understood more broadly, epistemology is about issues to do with the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2005). Though it will not be pursued in-depth in this study the creation and dissemination of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals would be of great interest.

#### **4.3 Epistemology and the cultural context of the mourning rituals**

In the context of epistemology, the phenomenon of the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa will be examined in terms of the knowledge structure and the concept of justification. What for example makes the AmaXhosa mourning rituals justified beliefs. This question is especially important in the context in which most mourning rituals in Africa are viewed negatively through the observation of most of the authors quoted in this study. The debate on epistemology revolves around analysing the nature of knowledge and how it relates to similar notions such as truth, belief and justification. It also deals with the means of production of knowledge, as well as scepticism about different knowledge claims (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). In fact knowledge requires that something is believed to be true and can be justified as such. To believe something simply means

any cognitive content is held to be true and that such true belief can be justified (Dancy, 1991); cultural beliefs pertaining to the mourning ritual need to be deconstructed within this context.

Do mourning rituals which consist of ‘beliefs’ passed down through generations constitute knowledge? When we conceive of epistemology as including knowledge and justified belief positioned within a particular social and historical context, epistemology becomes social epistemology (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). The mourning ritual considered in this study, will be examined as knowledge and justified belief positioned in a particular social and historical context, in this case the social and historical context of the Xhosa.

#### **4.4 The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Framework**

IPA focuses on the lived experiences of the individual and involves the exploration in detail of these experiences, how the individual participant makes sense of them and what meanings those experiences hold (Smith & Eatough, 2007). This is pertinent in this study as the attempt is to explore and try to understand and make sense of the mourning rituals. The main theoretical touchstones for IPA are phenomenology (Moran, 2000 as cited by Smith & Eatough, 2007) and hermeneutics (Palmer, 1969 as cited by Smith & Eatough, 2007).

Thus IPA according to Smith and Eatough (2007) aims to explore an individual’s personal perception or account of an event or state as opposed to attempting to produce an objective record of the event or state itself. At the same time, although trying to understand the participant’s personal world, IPA considers that one cannot do this directly or completely. Access is dependent on the researcher’s own conceptions embodied in the type of questions asked which are required to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity. According to Smith and Eatough (2007) IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like from the point of view of the person or to take the side of that person.

IPA is also a strongly idiographic method of enquiry. In other words it is concerned with a detailed analysis of the elements of the reflected personal experience and because it is derived from an examination of individual case studies, it is possible to make specific statements about the

individuals (Smith & Eatough, 2007). This contrasts with the nomothetic approach which involves groups and populations and only probability so that specific claims about individuals cannot be made. As far as research questions, sampling and data collection are concerned, IPA employs a qualitative methodology. Therefore most IPA work is conducted using semi-structured interviews as performed in the current study. Structured interviews enable the participant to provide a fuller, richer account than would be possible with a standard quantitative instrument and allow the researcher considerable flexibility in probing interesting areas which emerge. Interviews are usually taped and transcribed verbatim and then subjected to a detailed qualitative analysis in an attempt to elicit key themes in the participant's conversation. In addition, one is able to conduct IPA studies with relatively small sample sizes (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

#### **4.5 Hermeneutics and interpretation of the mourning rituals**

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation theory, and can be either the art of interpretation, or the theory and practice of interpretation and according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005) it covers both the first order art and the second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. As a theory of interpretation, the hermeneutic tradition stretches all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). In the course of the middle Ages and the Renaissance, hermeneutics emerges as a crucial branch of Biblical studies. Later on, it came to include the study of ancient and classic cultures (Bruns, 1992). Hermeneutics also combines issues of identity or empathy, questioning or being critical and understanding of the lived experiences of an individual (Smith, 1996).

In the current context, hermeneutics is not only about symbolic communication, but has become even more fundamental, that of human life and existence (Davidson, 2001). It is in this form, as an interrogation into the deepest conditions for symbolic interaction and culture in general, that hermeneutics has provided the critical horizon for many of the most intriguing discussions of contemporary philosophy, both within an Anglo-American context (Davidson, 2001; McDowell, 1994; Rorty, 1991) and within a more Continental discourse (Apel, 1971; Habermas, 1988; Ricoeur, 1981). As one of the touchstones of IPA, hermeneutics therefore becomes central to the discourse

that will extend to the context of the current study. According to Smith and Eatough (2007) the study does in fact involve what they term double hermeneutic whereby the participant tries to make sense of his/her world and the researcher tries to understand how the participant is making sense of his/her world.

#### **4.6 Phenomenology and the widows' experiences**

Phenomenology is the study of an individual's subjective experience of the world and it is an attempt to describe in detail the content and structure of the subject's consciousness in order to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experience and to explain its essential meaning (Willig, 2001). According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005) phenomenology can be defined as the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience according to them is its intentionality, directed toward something; it is an experience of or about some object. Phenomenology as a discipline is distinct from but related to other key disciplines in philosophy, such as ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics and according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005) has been practised in various guises for centuries, but came into its own in the early 20th century in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and others.

Willig (2001) claims that phenomenology explores both that which appears in an individual's consciousness as well as the manner in which it appears. Phenomenological analysis is always an interpretation of the participant's experience or views by the researcher. However, it will not only contain the exploration of the perspective of participant experience but will also necessarily implicate the researcher's own view (Willig, 2001).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a version of the phenomenological method which accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to the research participants' life world (Willig, 2001). Interpretative phenomenology is an approach to research informed by some of the principles and methods associated with philosophical thought that we call phenomenology. The operative word in phenomenological research according to Giorgi (1986 as cited by Kruger 1998, p.143), is 'describe' followed according to the view of the researcher by interpretive analysis.



The current study will be subjected to IPA whereby themes will be identified from the participants. Phenomenological methods involve three (3) phases: the epoch which requires suspension of presuppositions and assumptions judgements and interpretations in order to fully appreciate everything presented; the phenomenological reduction phase in which the phenomenon is described fully, and finally the imaginative variation phase in which the structural components of the phenomenon are accessed or interpreted (Willig, 2001). In this study a descriptive record of the experiences and perceptions of the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa women of urban and rural origin will be undertaken within the context of social epistemology.

#### **4.7 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter dealt with the theoretical framework underpinning the study of the concept of the mourning ritual. Since the study is about exploring the meaning and sense of the mourning ritual, IPA is the more relevant theoretical framework for consideration. IPA has as its touchstones, hermeneutics and phenomenology both of which are central to interpretative analysis of people's lived experiences.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The statement of the research question intimated that the narrative of experiences of the mourning ritual among the AmaXhosa widows would be explored through an interpretive phenomenological view taking cognisance of the impact and negative connotations attached to the ritual within the past and present context of the experiences of widows in Africa and elsewhere in the world (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Daber, 2003; Feni, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Owen, 2001; Pheko, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Taylor, 1983; Women 2000, 2001).

This chapter describes the research methods of the study with a view to exploring and describing the experiences of the Amaxhosa widows concerning the effects of mourning rituals on them. According to Burr (2003 as cited in Radzilani, 2010), social construction accepts that there are multiple realities constructed in the interaction between people and allows for the investigation of participants' perceptions from their own perspective. This study will explore the perceptions of the AmaXhosa widows about the support or lack thereof received during mourning and the influence of residential environment, religion and possibly level of education on their perceptions as a means to look into their social construction of the mourning ritual.

Another angle of the study is the notion pointed out by Radzilani (2010) that social processes in the interaction between people sustains knowledge. There will be an attempt to identify aspects of the mourning rituals that impact the lives of the AmaXhosa widows negatively or positively and that have been sustained over time. An assessment of the role of the rural and urban socio-economic divide in how the widows construct their experiences will be conducted. The assumed transformative influence of change that seems to penetrate every fabric of society cannot be left out and so an attempt will also be made to assess the acculturation of the mourning ritual.

## 5.2 The qualitative research approach

A qualitative, explorative and descriptive approach was used in this study to examine the widows' experience of widowhood and the mourning process among the AmaXhosa. This study was conducted using qualitative research methods which have been called an interpretative turn in social science epistemology (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). According to Smith and Eatough (2007), IPA employs an in-depth qualitative analysis. The study was therefore conducted with a distinctly qualitative approach through gathering in-depth data and identifying themes from the participants according to IPA guidelines.

Qualitative research is aimed at making sense of human experience within the hermeneutic context as a reflection of enquiry into the way social meaning was expressed in discussions and how these discussions were maintained (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006), qualitative research study allows the researcher to study selected issues in-depth, with openness and detail identifying and attempting to understand the categories of information that emerge from the data and creating themes from them. Qualitative research study involves a variety of different approaches which can be flexible and subjective. Qualitative research allows for a story to be told from the participants' point of view (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). In this case, this allows access to rich descriptive data.

Qualitative methods are generally used for identification, description and explanation, an approach which is ideal for this type of research. Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data from such sources as focus groups, interviews, spoken language and taking of notes or tape recordings (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). In this research, interviews and tape recordings were used. These enabled the participants to provide as much rich descriptive data as possible. The data was then subject to a phenomenological hermeneutic analysis in order to locate the ritual in a particular episteme. In this way it was possible to gain knowledge of the mourning ritual, identify different approaches to human understanding and argue whether or not certain forms of knowledge might be more constructive (Willig, 2001) as far as the mourning ritual among the AmaXhosa was concerned.

This study explored and provided a descriptive analysis of the research findings into perceptions of the mourning ritual by the AmaXhosa women. The study made use of in-depth interviews involving different age groups of widows focusing on the current view of mourning rituals. Terre Blanche and Durrheim, (2006), indicate that interviews are flexible and are useful methods of obtaining information and opinions from participating widows because it permits detailed observations of a few cases and also allows for the building up of understanding of phenomena. Interviews are described as a kind of conversation with a purpose (Kahn & Cannell, 1957). An interview allows a researcher to explore the general topic to help uncover the participant's views and meanings that they attach to their everyday experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Interviews were the most appropriate method for this study.

### **5.3 Selecting the Participants**

In order to gather in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation, a small number of participants is often used. Porter and Wetherell (1987 as cited by Radzilani, 2010) and Taylor (1981 as cited by Radzilani, 2010) assert that a small number of texts or interview transcripts generally generate quite a large pool of information whereas a larger number of transcripts may be more difficult to interpret. In the current study therefore, it was decided to use a maximum of 20 widows in order to generate 20 transcripts for analysis.

Selection of the widows for interview was unlikely to be a simple random process as described by Bailey (1987) due to a number of factors. The simple random sampling approach was unsuitable because the total population, in terms of the number of widows in Buffalo City, was unknown. Furthermore, the study was directed at widows willing to participate in the study and who lived in the local urban or rural area. The whole population of widows was therefore not used to construct the sampling frame. For these reasons, purposive random sampling (Bailey, 1987) was found to be the most suitable method for use in this research. A sample size of 20 widows was expected to provide sufficient representative data for analysis since IPA studies are usually conducted with relatively small sample sizes (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

In order to access the sample of participants, word of mouth was spread through the social development centre in the local township of Mdantsane in Buffalo City. This centre serves people who benefit from government social grants within Buffalo City. AmaXhosa women who had been widowed for at least 2 years were identified and invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. There were 2 exceptions, one widowed for 1 month and another for 6 months respectively who despite the expected emotional wounds still volunteered to participate in the study. There was no pre-screening of the participants for their religious affiliation or age. The only criterion used for selection was that they were AmaXhosa widows fluent in isiXhosa language or in isiXhosa and English and were willing to undertake the structured interview.

In our approach it was envisaged that the newly widowed women (widowed for less than 3 months) would also provide a perspective on their emotions soon after losing a loved one in addition to their perspective on their experiences and adjustment challenges. It has been said that widows begin to focus on changes in their lives from about six months after the death of their husbands and to redefine their life patterns and identities after about 4 years (Scannell-Desch, 2005).

Twenty participants aged 29 to 91 were invited for interviews, ten widows were expected from the urban area of Buffalo City and ten from the rural areas. The widows interviewed came from areas located from 0-70 km from East London and included Duncan village, Mdantsane and East London in an urban setting and Tsholomnqa, Ngxingxolo, Pumlani, Newlands and Mbaca (King Williams Town) villages in rural areas within Buffalo City Municipality.

#### **5.4 Method of inquiry**

IPA is often conducted on a closely defined group (Smith & Eatough, 2007) which in this study is the widows. In IPA studies such a group is derived through purposive sampling and in this case purposive sampling was employed to identify the participants for the study. The location and identification of participants was not conducted in a structured manner but rather using the snowball technique at the social development centre to search purposely for widows as indicated earlier. Participants were also identified through mutual acquaintances between myself and the widow.

Once a willing candidate was identified her contact details were obtained through the social development centre or through the mutual acquaintance. The interviews were organized as follows:

- 8 through the social development centre; 5 spoke only isiXhosa
- 4 through mutual acquaintances
- 2 through the university of Fort Hare, only isiXhosa speaking
- 3 identified participants who indicated their willingness to participate did not come for the interview. two of them withdrew from the interviews at the last minute because they claimed that they were suspected of having killed their husbands. One opted to go to a circumcision ceremony while we were interviewing her colleague instead of waiting for her turn to be interviewed. Two of these widows were from the rural areas and one was from an urban area.

Seven widows dwelt in the urban environment and ages ranged from 29 to 56 (29, 39, 40, 50, 50, 53 and 56)

Seven widows dwelt in rural areas and ages ranged from 34 to 91 (34, 34, 60, 83, 88 and 91; one widow of unknown age was estimated to be 65-70 years old)

Table 1 Summary of the characteristics of the widows interviewed in this study.

<b>Participant Code ID</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years Widowed</b>	<b>Dwelling place</b>	<b>Urban or Rural</b>	<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Mourning clothes worn for*</b>
BCUE-1	53	3	Mdantsane	Urban	Std 10	12 Apostolic Church	3 months
BCUE-2	29	<1 month	Southernwood	Urban	ND EE	12 Apostolic Church	1 month
BCRE-3	34	3	Pumlane	Rural	Undergraduate	Christian	1 week
BCRE-4	34	3	Newlands	Rural	Undergraduate	Christian	1 month
BCUE-5	50	<6 month	Mdantsane	Urban	Professional Nurse	Methodist Church	6 months
BCRE-8	91	27	Ngxingxolo	Rural	Junior	Methodist	6 months

					Certificate	Church	
BCUX-10	38	2.5	Duncan village	Urban	Std 5	Zionist	0
BCUX-11	50	8	Southernwood	Urban	Std 10	Methodist Church	6 months
BCUX-12	56	9	Mdantsane	Urban	Std 10	Christian	12 months
BCUX-13	40	12	Mdantsane	Urban	Std 5	12 Apostolic Church	1 month
BCRX-14	88	13	Mbaca	Rural	Std 6	Traditional	12 months
BCRX-15	83	>10	Mbaca	Rural	Std 5	Anglican Christian	12 months
BCRX-16	65	>10	Mbaca	Rural	Std 5	Anglican Christian	12 months
BCRX-17	60		Mbaca	Rural	0	Anglican Christian	12 months

Acronyms used in the table

BCUE – Buffalo City Urban participant interviewed in English

BCRE – Buffalo City Rural participant interviewed in English

BCUX – Buffalo City Urban participant interviewed in IsiXhosa

BCRX – Buffalo City Rural participant interviewed in IsiXhosa

\* Period of wearing mourning clothes is considered the duration of formal mourning

## 5.5 Data Collection

The data was collected from face to face interviews which because of their flexibility have been found to be the useful method of obtaining information (Walliman, 2005). As the aim of the research was to gain an in-depth knowledge of the experiences of AmaXhosa widows, the personal interaction with participants through the interviews facilitated this process fully. This form of data collection was found to be the most appropriate and necessary because it allowed for the capturing of all the information given by the participants. According to Berg, (1995), interviews involve a more social interaction between equals in order to obtain research relevant information. Interviews are unlike ordinary social interaction because the respondents do not participate with the specific purpose of voicing their feelings, thoughts and observations. Instead, interviewees share their feelings, experiences, and beliefs with the interviewer (Berg, 1995).

IPA is according to Smith and Eatough (2007) concerned with in-depth exploration of an individual's experience and how such an individual makes sense of the lived experience. In the current study a number of questions were put to the widows and were aimed at gaining an insight into the overall experiences of the widows during mourning. Questions were constructed taking cognizance of some of the reasons or problems that could be sources of error, such as addressing the various fears of the respondents and the manner in which they might respond to the questions (Bailey, 1987). There were 22 questions, the first six of which sought to establish the individuals' identity, level of education, religious affiliation and current source of livelihood. The rest of the questions were devoted to looking in-depth into the widowhood experiences from the widows' perspective. The questions were administered as a semi structured interview in order to derive as much information as possible from the respondents. The questions put to the respondents were as follows:

- What is your name? (these names were kept confidential and will not be reproduced in this thesis)
- How old are you?
- Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?



- What religious belief do you hold?
- What is your highest level of education?
- What do you do for a living?
- What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?
- How long did you mourn for?
- How old were you when your husband died?
- What was your experience during the mourning ritual?
  - The putting on and taking off of mourning clothes.
  - The giving away of the deceased's clothes.
- Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?
  - The slaughtering of the first ox.
  - The slaughtering of the second ox.
- What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?
- What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?
- How did/does it affect women?
- How does it affect men?
- Did you receive / are you receiving any support during the mourning period?
- Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?
- What changes would you like to see?
- In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?
- What changes have you noted?

- In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?
- What purpose do they serve?

As indicated by Smith and Eatough (2007) most IPA studies use one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The questions were put to the participants using the interview schedule as envisaged by Bailey (1987) and developed for this study; all responses were tape-recorded during the interview sessions. Data was collected as audio recordings of the responses of the participants to questions asked by the researcher. No personal data form was completed by the participants in order, as stated by Kruger (1998, p. 151), “to afford the participants greater ease in expressing their true feelings”. An audio tape recording is also a more preferred form of interacting with people than completion of questionnaires. The data can be collected more quickly and at lower costs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The audio recordings, which represent a conversation about the experiences of widows, are a record of oral discourse, transcribed verbatim into text for purposes of interpretation. Kvale (1996) describes such transcripts as interpretive constructs useful for a given purpose; in this case it refers to the hermeneutics of the AmaXhosa mourning ritual. For the most part, the interviews of the AmaXhosa widows were conducted individually. An appointment was made telephonically with the widow, agreeing on the date, time and place of the interview. Sometimes more than one widow was present in the same room during the interview but each one of them was interviewed individually in a sequential manner. During such interviews the other widows were privy to the interviews of others. All interviews were recorded individually.

Although the interviews were not conducted as focus group discussions, the presence of some participants while others were being interviewed, may have allowed them to voice their own views within the context of the views of the preceding participants (Patton, 2002 as cited by Radzilani, 2010). During the interview, secondary questions were asked in order to enrich the data or to obtain clarity on some answers. The questions were asked in English and put directly to the respondents who were fluent in and could communicate in English. For respondents who did not have a good command of English or did not speak English at all, a Xhosa translation of the questions was used. The questions would be read to the respondent in Xhosa. The Xhosa record of the conversation was tape recorded. At the end of each interview each widow was asked for any additional information

that she may wish to add regarding her experience of the mourning ritual. At end of each interview, I thanked the widow for her participation in the research.

## **5.6 Method of data Analysis**

The main touchstones of IPA namely phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith & Eatough, 2007) form the basis of data analysis. Smith and Eatough (2007) also indicate that IPA does not prescribe an analysis approach but rather provides flexible guidelines which each individual research can adapt. The methods of analysis used in this study were guided by methods and procedures of analysis as indicated by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006). After detailed close reading (Smith & Eatough, 2007), the phenomenon was broken down into its constituent parts in order to gain an understanding and transform the data into findings (Patton, 2002 as cited by Radzilani, 2010). The mourning ritual as a phenomenon was broken down and subjected to a hermeneutic discourse. In sociology, hermeneutics means the interpretation and understanding of social events by analysing their meanings to the human participants and their culture by emphasizing the importance of the context as well as the form of any given social behaviour (Willis & Jost, 2007). The central principle of hermeneutics is that it is only possible to grasp the meaning of an action or statement by relating it to the whole discourse or world-view from which it originates. In this study the data was analysed through themes identified from each participant and related to the general accepted view among the AmaXhosa.

According to Bogdan and Biklen, (1982), qualitative data analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is or what is not important and deciding what needs to be told or reported to other researchers. The data generated from all the widows interviewed, was captured. The information from widows who did not speak English was captured in isiXhosa because they found it easier to speak and to express themselves in their mother tongue. The interviews were then translated into English by one of the Xhosa speaking researchers at the psychological services centre of the University of Fort Hare. The data was translated and transcribed verbatim from Xhosa into English in order not to lose any valuable information and to produce data texts for analysis.

Those urban widows conversant with expressing their feelings in English were mostly recorded in English but were also given the option of using Xhosa. The data was then analysed thematically for similarities and differences within each participant category and between the urban and rural widows with the aim of working out consistent and recurrent patterns. The themes were identified from each participant in order to establish individual perceptions which hermeneutically, reflected an interpretive phenomenological approach.

This study followed the interpretative phenomenological analysis stages of analysis as described (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Willig, 2001). The first stage of analysis involved reading and re-reading the individual tape-recorded sessions transcribed as text. By reading and re-reading the text the researcher familiarizes herself/himself with the text and becomes aware of any phenomena as they occur in the text (Willig, 2001). In the second stage the researcher identified and labelled themes that characterized each section of the text. The third stage involved structuring the themes into meaningful groups. In the fourth and final stage the researcher produced a summary of the structured themes (Willig, 2001) or narrative account of the interplay between the researcher's interpretative activity and the participants' account of their experiences (Smith & Eatough, 2007). All four stages of analysis were used in the present study.

## **5.7 Ethical Considerations**

The purpose of ethical research planning is primarily to protect the rights and welfare of the participants in the envisaged research (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2006) and to ensure that the study is conducted in an appropriate manner (Babbie & Mouton, 2001 as cited by Radzilani 2010). Informed consent is essential key consideration in social research (Bailey, 1987) when obtaining data; participation must be voluntary and the respect of the privacy of the research participants (Huysamen, 2001) is paramount. All such ethical considerations were taken into account during the conduct of the study.

Since the research was not a participant observation study requiring participant involvement in a research project without their consent or knowledge (Huysamen, 2001), a specific letter was written to notify and inform the participants. The informed consent was obtained by way of a letter

outlining the envisaged research, the role to be played by the participants and included a confidentiality clause. The letter of consent, which also doubled as an information leaflet, outlined the reasons for the study, the content of the study and expected outcome of the study and it explained how the study would benefit the participant and the community at large. The content of the letter was explained to each participant individually and their understanding of the intent of the study and consent to participate in it was obtained. The advantages and disadvantages of the study and possible implication for the individual of the study were all explained to the participants. This allowed the widows to make an informed voluntary decision to participate and not be coerced, forced or deceived into taking part in the study.

The letter of consent was given to each widow and her verbal endorsement of the informed consent to participate in this research was requested. Widows willing to participate in the study were given the letter of consent to sign or to make a cross in the case of those who could not write. All the participants were assured of confidentiality and also assured that no real names would actually be used in this study. Only then with the full knowledge and understanding of the participant would the interview process proceed.

## **5.8 Potential Risks**

Although, participants are informed of anonymity maintained during the research, there is still a possible backlash from the patriarchal society in which these widows live. There is also the risk of arousing certain emotions already overcome especially if the widows have begun to redefine their life patterns and identities after the loss of their husbands (Scannell-Desch, 2005). Another risk is that the widow may provide poor response due to uncertainty of her community response.

## **5.9 Significance and Benefits of the Study**

In the discourse on the research question, points were made regarding the dearth of information and negative effects that mourning rituals seem to have on widows in general but widows in Africa in particular. The significance of this study therefore would be that knowledge about mourning rituals in South Africa with particular reference to the AmaXhosa will not only be increased but may be

enriched as well. Through such an exposé it may be possible to mitigate or at least to bring into the discourse the negative aspects of mourning rituals and their degrading effect on women in Africa.

The researcher's insights will be those of a woman researcher as opposed to the more common male or Eurocentric dominated research as commented by Korieh (1996). Furthermore, the revelation of the widows' views, feelings, experiences and interpretations on spousal mourning rituals means that the voices of AmaXhosa widows will have been heard and the effect of mourning rituals on them known. Radzilani (2010) in her thesis on widowhood among the Tshivenda widows put this in context. She was able to explore through focus group discussions the impact of the bereavement rituals on the psychological wellbeing of Tshivenda widows and to understand and record their behaviour within the Tshivenda socio cultural and religious setting which was found to have a major influence.

This study will similarly add to the body of knowledge on spousal mourning among the AmaXhosa. It is hoped that this particular study will add to the body of knowledge on spousal mourning particularly in Africa viewed through the eyes of a female African researcher since most of the existing information on widowhood has been available through male and Eurocentric eyes (Korieh, 1996). In addition to the women's experiences being heard and their views and concerns addressed, it is hoped according to Shumbamhini (2006) that such an exposé will create a community of concern in which widows will be able to question, address and deconstruct societal practices that silence their voices. The potential benefit could be the introduction into the discourse arena of those mourning rituals that demean and bring hardship to women with the possibility to bring about not only positive change by removing oppressive widowhood practices but also to create an opportunity for the widows to determine their preferred widowhood practices.

## **5.10 Concluding Remarks**

The Qualitative approach used in this study was the method of choice for obtaining rich in-depth information or data in a structured interview format. The structured interview method also suited the researcher who would only have been in a position to participate fully in focus discussions conducted in English since only about half of the participants could express themselves well in

English. The main disadvantage of the structured interview format is its limitation on the amount of data collected as it does not allow wider exploration of the subject due to a restricted list of prepared questions. An attempt was made to overcome this limitation through asking follow up questions.

Seventeen participants were chosen but only 14 (7 rural and 7 mostly urban dwelling widows) were able to participate in the interviews. This was not necessarily bad as the amount of quality information provided by the 14 respondents was probably just as sufficient as what 20 participants would have provided. The method of data collection through audio recording allowed the capturing of all information provided by the participant and together with follow up questioning provided rich data for transcription and analysis. Voluntary consent was essential and it is easy to see why as some of the participants that had agreed to participate initially later withdrew. This was related to one of the risks involving the fear of a possible backlash from the mainly patriarchal Xhosa society. Two potential participating widows feared the interview because the male relatives of their husbands' families suspected them of having killed their husbands.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter analysis and interpretation of the narrative of the experiences of the AmaXhosa widows during the mourning ritual are presented. The discussions take place in the context of what the community expects of a widow in terms of her behavioural patterns and participation in the mourning rituals within their cultural and/or religious setting. The purpose of mourning rituals I suggest is partly to enable the widow to cope with the loss of a loved one and so the cultural and or religious settings are used as coping mechanisms to get the widows through the various stages of the grief cycle as defined by Kübler-Ross (1969).

In the following account, the narratives of the widows interviewed during the study will be presented, analysed and discussed. The transcribed interviews of individual participants are coded in order to protect their identities. Themes based on the questions of the structured interview are identified and the main thrust of the questions revolves around the following

- The experiences that the AmaXhosa widows go through during the mourning ritual. This theme will allow for the reconstruction of the phenomenon, that is the mourning rituals the widows go through.
- What and how did the widows feel about the rituals and the cultural or religious meaning that they themselves attached to them? In other words an interpretation of a narrative on the situated meanings within the conduct of the mourning rituals is undertaken.
- What positions did the AmaXhosa widows take in relation to performing the mourning rituals; and was there any form of contradiction in how the widows viewed the mourning ritual in relation to their socio political status; and what positions do the widows hold or have observed in terms of acculturation of the mourning ritual.



Thematic presentation of the data collected was necessary as the first level of analysis and interpretation in order to identify systems of meaning emerging from the responses to the structured interview (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). At the next level of analysis a discussion of the widows' perceptions of the mourning rituals and the situated meanings is presented. The chapter begins with the presentation of a narrative of the phenomenon of the common customary practice of mourning a dead husband among the AmaXhosa as observed through the eyes of a 91 year old widow. This narrative represents an individual's subjective experience of the phenomenon of the AmaXhosa mourning ritual and is an attempt to describe in detail the content and structure of the widow's consciousness in order to grasp the qualitative diversity of her experience and to explain its essential meaning as envisaged by Willig (2001). Furthermore, the narrative sought to give effect and create a position for a tradition that has been handed down through the generations of the AmaXhosa people.

## **6.2 The phenomenon of the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa**

Phenomenological analysis according to Willig (2001) is always an interpretation of the participant's experience or views. A narrative of the Xhosa mourning rituals was given by the oldest widow (91 years) in the study group and provided knowledge not only in her capacity as the curator of the Ngxingxolo Xhosa Cultural Village (appendix III) but also as a widow. As one of the custodians of the Xhosa traditions, the curator of the Xhosa cultural village gave an insight into the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa as handed down through the generations. Her status as a widow of 27 years also meant that her narrative was in addition, based on personal experience of the mourning ritual. This narrative I feel forms the basis for evaluating the experiences of other widows interviewed in this study.

Death and funeral rituals, according to Romanoff and Terenzio (1998) can give impetus to the social reconstruction of meaning by providing symbolic and communal validation of the changed reality of the bereaved person and will help recast their view of both self and the deceased. Thus this symbolic and communal validation of the changed reality is not only the communal celebration of social solidarity (Leach, 2004) but the rituals according to findings by Radzilani (2010) among the Tshivenda widows will also heal their pain or comfort them as well as affirming their cultural

values. I feel the narratives of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals seem to have similar connotations for the widows.

### **6.2.1 The narrative of the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa**

The narrative (appendix III) captures the essence and richness of the information provided by the 91 year old widow. The narrative describes the sequence of events from the moment her husband is declared dead until the mourning ritual is concluded and the widow is released once again to resume her normal sequence of life. Whether the mourning rituals are the expression of deep sorrow for someone who died (Pearsall, 2001) or just a culturally patterned expression of the bereaved person's thoughts and feelings on the loss of a loved one (Kastenbaum, 2004), is in my view clearly an important and integral symbolic and communal validation of the changed reality of the AmaXhosa widow.

The narrative (appendix III), while attempting to provide a rough systematic insight into the beliefs and practices of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals, also provides a background for examining some of the information recorded from the research participants relating to the practice of the mourning ritual among the AmaXhosa. To believe something simply means any cognitive content held as true and that such true belief can be justified (Dancy, 1991). The mourning rituals, which begin as an immediate reaction to the death of the husband by changing the status of the wife visibly and symbolically (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007), are in my view indeed true beliefs among the AmaXhosa as the rituals are indeed practiced.

The symbolic and communal nature of approaching the changed reality of the widow is clearly exemplified right from the moment the husband passes away. The change in status of the widow begins with the relatives around her taking charge of what happens to her from that moment onwards. Her clothes are turned inside out, any jewellery on her is removed and she is secluded by being made to sit on a mat behind the door (Ngubane, 2004). This outward change of appearance to me is meant to show unambiguously that the widow is mourning and is in pain. Some widows themselves also seem to believe that the mourning rituals will heal them of their pain (Radzilani, 2010), although as revealed later in this study, not all of them felt the same. The following discourse

will reconstruct some of the experiences of the participants in this study as captured in the audio recordings in relation to the major themes of the study identified and outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

### **6.3 The ascription of identity as widows**

Grief signifies the response to loss both internally and externally (Corr, Nabe & Corr, 2006; Rando, 1993). The expression of grief according to Rando (1993) can be psychological, behavioural, cognitive, social, spiritual or physical. The initial expression of grief in my interpretation comes in the form of what could be considered physical as depicted in the narrative (appendix III) when the skirt is turned inside out, covering of the face like a new bride, removal of all jewellery except the wedding ring and sitting silently on a mat behind the door until the funeral, after which the widow changes to mourning clothes and wears them for one year; it could also be considered communal validation (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Such an outward expression of grief seems to vary according to tradition and religion but its primary role is to inform society of the bereavement and identify the bereaved person so that appropriate societal treatment be it positive or negative may take place.

#### **6.3.1 Identity affirmation by individual widows**

Most widows I interviewed in the study did not reflect on the turning of the skirt inside out but rather on the form of symbolic and communal validation of their grief revolving around the wearing of mourning clothes. I found that the symbolic expression of the widows' status was influenced by among others, the culture and traditions of the AmaXhosa as they sought communal validation but was also influenced by the religious affiliation of the widows (Mills, 2004). The examples of the kind of dialogue I captured during the interviews with the widows served to strengthen this observation.

Widow BCUE 1 for example reflected that the mourning ritual was done merely as a tradition, in other words just to fulfil tradition. In the following quote she reveals how the wearing of mourning clothes reveals to everybody her status as a widow.

*In our tradition, we used to wear different clothes from those we were wearing before; a shawl piece, skirt and top and a cape and a toupee, you must be seen by everybody that you are mourning now; you show everybody that you are a widow.*

Widow BCUE 2 concerning religious affiliation reflected that even in their church the mourning dress still played an important role in the mourning ritual as she reveals in the following quote:

*I will put on these clothes (pointing at the white scurf she was wearing). I will mourn for a month according to my church. But others wear black/purple etc and they mourn for 12 months.*

The identity affirmation through wearing the mourning dress was even considered a ‘cultural requirement’ as widow BCRE 4 reflected. In her view one had to be recognized as grief stricken and are mourning as she stated in the following quote:

*While you are in mourning in our Xhosa culture you wear even your attire so that you are recognized that that one has lost a husband. You wear black clothes. Some others now in this new generation wear navy others purple but it was black.*

I found that widows from the rural areas affirmed this identity strongly. For example, participant BCRX 15 strongly stated that there must be something to differentiate a widow from a person who still has a husband. There must be something to indicate loss and ritual helps to inform people so that your loss is self-evident; dress is therefore a silent communicator of the widow’s status to the people of the community.

Whereas the above participating widows simply accepted the wearing of the mourning dress and even desired it as the norm in terms of creating an identity within the mourning process of the AmaXhosa, I suggest that this could be considered as Niemeyer (2006) calls the ‘dominant narratives’ which may represent oppressive ascriptions of identity of the survivor’s sense of self as envisaged by Niemeyer but which nevertheless is often implicitly enforced by local communities. Such ascriptions of identity according to Foucault (1970) and White and Epston (1990) as cited by Niemeyer (2006) are scripts for organizing who one is or who might typically draw on powerful

cultural discourses that define the identity options of those whose lives they affect as in this case the lives of the AmaXhosa widows.

### **6.3.2 Complications to identity affirmation by individual widows**

While the wearing of the mourning dress might represent one form of a universal pattern of response to bereavement as envisaged by Advancement of Health (2004) and by Stroebe, Stroebe, Hansson and Schut (2001) as cited by Niemeyer (2006) in terms of identity ascriptions, I found that complications to this identity affirmation could arise. Among the AmaXhosa for example, not all widows interviewed in the current study affirmed their identity using the mourning dress. Complications arose depending on the circumstances surrounding the death of the husband. In the case of widow BCUX 11 for example; her husband died in a car accident and her husband's family did not involve her in any decisions relating to the mourning of her husband. However, probably in keeping with her desire for communal validation (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998) of her status as a widow or probably as a form of mental representation of the lost husband (Volkan, 2009), she wore purple mourning clothes. But another widow BCUX 12 was officially not allowed to mourn her husband by the in-laws because she was separated (husband abandoned her) from him at the time of his death but according to her she mourned him internally for about 12 months which in my view deprived her of communal validation as envisaged by Romanoff and Terenzio (1998).

### **6.4 A widow's experiences of the mourning rituals**

As the narrative of the Xhosa mourning rituals made by the oldest widow in the study group (appendix III) continues, it suggests that this may be the common practice of mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa widows within the Buffalo City area. The following narrative is intended to reveal their experiences as they went through the rituals. The turning of the clothes inside out from the moment of death as mentioned by two of the widows interviewed, represents not only the beginning of the creation of identity as discussed above but also marks the start of the ritual.

Sitting behind the door which represents seclusion from the community, seems to be an accepted part of the mourning ritual (Ngubane, 2004; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Ngubane (2004) points out

that the widow has to be secluded so that she does not mix with other people. This is interpreted as showing respect by avoidance. Among the AmaXhosa traditionalists according to the narrative, the widow sits behind the door without any change of clothing including a shawl until the funeral is over. She is stripped of all jewellery except her wedding ring, her face is covered and she puts on a shawl like a newlywed Xhosa woman (Xhosa bride) and so forth. Such rituals may symbolise according to Cook and Oltjenbruns (1989) as cited by Radzilani (2010) transition, healing and continuity following the loss of a loved one but in my view are also unhygienic.

Even though such rituals may represent communal validation of the status of the widow I still feel that they represent the oppressive ascription of identity mentioned by Niemeyer (2006). This becomes quite evident as clearly some widows like participant BCRE 3 lamented over practices like seclusion.

*I never saw anyone in that period and what they were doing. You are sitting there alone behind the door.*

This is the cry of someone who feels unhappy with the situation she finds herself in.

#### **6.4.1 The symbolism of the mourning clothes**

The symbolic expression of any aspect of mourning could just be to retain a connection to the deceased (Niemeyer, 2006) or simply for visible expression of the status of being a widow (Radzilani, 2010; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007), both of which remain significant parts of the mourning ritual. Among the AmaXhosa my findings show that such symbolism seems to be inextricably linked to a dress code of one form or another such as wearing capes, toupees, scarf's or dresses of different colours. As the narrative reflects, from the moment the husband dies the first thing that happens is to change the way the widow wears her clothes, turning them inside out. The introduction of the blanket and subsequently the wearing of the mourning clothes all seem to constitute and play a central role in the mourning process. The majority of the widows I interviewed felt that wearing mourning clothes was central to the conduct of the process of mourning. While some of them were quite happy and proud to wear the mourning clothes and one of them even

bought the clothes herself while another extended the period of wearing them from 6 to 12 months, I found that most of the others lamented the impact on their lives did not welcome the practice.

Although not all of the widows spoke about wearing a skirt turned inside out, I found that they shared a common thread of ascription of identity through the wearing of black clothes or other relevant colours as dictated by culture, religion or individual choice where possible. For example widow BCRE 3 in the following quote related how her clothes were changed

*After burying, you are taken to the bushes. They wash you and they burn your clothes that you were using before. Then you are to walk home wearing the new black mourning clothes.*

The adornment with black clothes among the AmaXhosa is equated to being dressed up like a new bride according to the narrative (appendix III). The widow wears these clothes until her family decide that she can take them off usually after one year has past. Just like what happened with ascription of identity, I found that complications often arose as in the case of a husband that was a twin or the widow that had produced twins because then the widow was made to wear mourning clothes for only six instead of 12 months.

Among the older widows I interviewed in this study, participants BCRE 8, BCRX 14, BCRX 15, BCRX 16 wore black mourning clothes and only participant BCRX 17 wore blue clothes but all of them seemed to take much pride in wearing the mourning clothes and participant BCRX 16 even indicated that she even bought the mourning dress herself as her in-laws ignored her strong desire to mourn her husband. I found that the attitude among these older widows contrasted with the younger widows who felt stigmatized by the wearing of black mourning clothes. Stigmatization through the wearing of the black clothes was also observed among the Batswana widows (Manyedi *et al.*, 2003). The commonality of the mourning dress I observed in this study seems to emphasize one of the universal patterns of response to bereavement (Center for the Advancement of Health, 2004 and Stroebe, Stroebe, Hansson & Schut, 2001 as cited by Niemeyer, 2006).

#### 6.4.2 The symbolism of the bush

According to the narrative (appendix III), on the day of the funeral the widow is covered with a large blanket when attending the burial. After the funeral the widow is taken straight to the bushes not to her house, to begin the next stage of the mourning ritual. The widow collects some wood from the bushes and carries it home. After putting her husband in the grave, this place in the bush symbolises her meeting place with her departed husband. A number of the widows I interviewed in this study went through this ritual but may not have grasped the full symbolism of being taken to the bush. One of the widows, participant BCRE 3 states simply “*after burying, you are taken to the bushes*”. The underlying meaning in my view seems lost on her. Could it be that the community in its wisdom recognizes the need for a substitute object as Freud (1917/2009) postulates to which the widow should transfer her emotions? So I suggest that instead of waiting and allowing the widow to develop a substitute object the community attempts to create one for her by designating that spot in the bushes. In my opinion the fact that she is expected to go to the same spot each time she feels she is missing the husband creates a symbolic place where she can release her emotions.

The narrative (appendix III) goes on to state that the widow is taken to the bush during the day each day for about six days after the funeral and comes home only at night to sleep. The widow takes with her everything she might need for the day, for example food or things to do such as beads for bead-work. On the sixth day a traditional Xhosa beer is made for cleansing the widow when she returns from the bush. On the day when she leaves the bush the widow takes off the skirt that was turned inside out and changes into the mourning clothes (usually black clothes). All this symbolism I would suggest represents the initial stages of the process of affirming the ascription of identity as implicitly enforced by the community and indicated by Niemeyer (2006).

Tradition according to the narrative (appendix III) dictates what the widow must do, how she must work, how she must walk and that she must talk softly, all of which in my view is aimed at reflecting the dignity of her position as a widow. These dictates in my opinion only serve to increase the level of isolation and degree of stigmatization of the widows. Similar observations were made among the Batswana widows (Manyedi *et al.*, 2003). The older widows from the rural areas aged over 60 years such as participants BCRX 14, BCRX 15, BCRX 16 and BCRX 17 were



found in the current study to follow the rituals. Even the widow's hair according to the narrative is cut off by old widows as she is taken away to the bushes where she is then washed with water containing herbs. While in the bush the old widows will dress her in mourning clothes. They will tell her that her status has changed and she is now a different person. She must respect the mourning clothes; she must not be seen or heard shouting; she must respect her in-laws. The widow is also told about the duration of wearing of the black clothes. She is also told about foods she must not eat from the first week of mourning and that she is expected to look like someone in mourning; for example she must not look happy; she must not eat anything with eggs. The old widows will also tell her that she must not be seen eating certain foods. I found that most of these sentiments were expressed by participant BCRX 16 when she said:

*You do not call people loudly, send children or people to help you and you do not go all over. The only places you can visit are neighbours if there is no child to help you. You do not eat outside the house. You respect people until you take off the clothes. When there is no child you can sneak without being seen.*

According to participant BCRX 17, when going to the river one must not talk to people but just fetch water and work inside the house. I found that the older widows seemed quite content with this symbolic and communal validation of their status as widows and this contentment may have had an influence on their apparent resilient coping mechanism as indicated by Niemeyer (2006). None of the widows I noted seemed to express any regret about going through with the rituals.

### **6.4.3 The duration of the mourning period**

Niemeyer (2006) in his review of the CLOC study suggested various paths through bereavement and the time each path lasts could in my view be considered as the duration of the mourning period. In my interpretation, the various categorisations could be described as different modes of coping. Resilient coping could be used to describe widows that mourned for their husbands for a period of 6 months or less and those that failed to find any connection and mourned for more than 18 months could be described as chronically depressed; while widows who mourn for 6-12 months fall in between the two. An example of a chronically depressed widow could be Queen Victoria who among other things established prescriptions for the process of mourning as she mourned her

husband Prince Albert for 41 years until her death (Mehaffey, 1993). Another example could be the Swazi widow who after 3 years had not taken a bath because she did not want to wash away her sorrow (Kidd, 1925). These widows I feel reflect the example of chronically depressed widows as described by Niemeyer (2006) as they seemed to find solace in cultivating a continuing bond with their loved one's memory.

Although in the current study the duration of the mourning period seems to be predetermined by and according to certain conditions rather than as the result of comparable narratives to the CLOC study, I would like to suggest that the variation in the mourning periods of each individual widow could have something to do with the different paths described by Niemeyer (2006). Whereas tradition may dictate that a widow has to spend six days in the bush, I found considerable variation in the practice of this ritual among the widows interviewed in this study.

The duration of wearing the mourning clothes according to the narrative (appendix III) is predetermined as one year. However, participant BCRE 4 indicated that the period could vary up to two years. I also noted according to some widows that this could depend on the 'wishes of the in-laws' but it could also be linked with the chronically depressed category of mourners identified by Niemeyer (2006) in his narratives on the widows' pathways through bereavement. Participant BCRE 4, herself, wore mourning clothes for only a period of one month because she was a Christian. Her Christian background in my view may have helped her cope better putting her in the category of resilient coping as indicated by Niemeyer (2006). All the widows I interviewed who came from the rural areas and aged 60 years and above BCRX 14, BCRX 15, BCRX 16 and BCRX 17 mourned for one year, which falls within the period of normal grief according to Niemeyer (2006).

I found that currently six months seems to be considered the normal period for wearing mourning clothes but according to the oldest widow, BCRE 8, this duration of mourning in the olden days was for widows like her who were married to a twin and in other cases like unnatural causes of death. This happened for example in the case of participant BCUX 11 whose husband died in a car accident and she mourned for only 6 months. However, among some of the widows I interviewed exemptions could be made for example widow BCUE 1 who was employed so she wore mourning

clothes for only three months and widow BCUE 2 for religious reasons mourned for only one month so she wore just a white scarf for one month in accordance with her church's prescripts. The family however, according to her did what is called *amaqhosha* (where they put on the black buttons) so she also had to put on a black button. Despite the circumstances that seem to dictate the duration of the mourning period I could easily form an association between the various paths outlined by Niemeyer (2006) and the experiences that emerged from the widows' narratives in this study.

#### **6.4.4 Transformation through removal of the mourning clothes**

Removing mourning clothes at the end of the mourning period may in my opinion be quite a transformation for the widow. Manyedi *et al.* (2003) indicated that the Batswana widows expressed their discomfort at wearing black attire as did some of the participants in this study because they were stigmatized. This presupposes that the widow may be quite happy to experience feelings of rebirth at the end of mourning as a deliverance from the stigma of wearing the mourning dress as suggested by Melgar (2009) writing on Freud's Mourning and Melancholia.

After one year as the narrative (appendix III) in this study relates, the relatives inform the widow that it is time to change her black clothes. The old widows take her again to the bush, remove the black clothes and burn them; they wash her and put new clothes on her like for a new bride, not unlike the rebirth Melgar (2009) talks about. The widow according to the narrative does not wear just any pretty clothes; they have to be strictly like clothes worn by newlywed bride as this time she has to look like *umtshakazi* (bride). They put a shawl and towel on her and she wears these *makoti's* (bride) clothes for three months before reverting to normal clothing. Most of the older participants I interviewed like BCRX 14, BCRX 15, BCRX 16 and BCRX 17 had similar experiences during their mourning period but in addition, they indicated that one had to slaughter a sheep for this ceremony. The removal of the black clothes therefore was a simple ceremony where only a sheep was slaughtered as participant BCRX 16 related in the following quote:

*When taking off the clothes, they slaughter a sheep, buy new clothes, call people of the community and prayers are performed by the community people. These clothes are taken off by old people who also do not have husbands. When taking clothes they also warn you on how to behave. They tell you to behave the same way you were while you were still mourning.*

While some widows felt proud to wear the mourning clothes, the level of stigma associated with the wearing of especially black mourning clothes aroused incredibly strong negative feelings among some of the widows. I found that some of them could not wait to take off the mourning clothes as their experience in public was filled with a lot of stigmatization. For example, participant BCRE 3 who by the way only had to wear mourning clothes for 1 week since her late husband was a twin and she did not have to go through all the mourning rituals as long as the other twin was still alive, had strong feelings about wearing mourning clothes. This widow had the following to say:

*Taking off the mourning clothes was a relief to me. Going to a taxi was a shame because everybody was saying .... ooooooh you are so young how is it like?  
... . The mourning clothes are a symbol that you are a widow. They do not even greet you....  
Taking them off was like it is okay I am over this stage now. I am glad because it was like stigma to me. I was the only one with pain. I was the only one who lost a husband here so if it is time to take them off I am glad.*

The degree of relief felt by the widow I found was almost palpable as she ‘discarded’ probably not only a very significant symbol of her grief expression but also the one representation of the communal validation of her status as a widow. I interpreted the wearing of the mourning clothes which they found to be a major stigma, as an oppressive ascription of identity as suggested by Niemeyer (2006).

#### **6.4.5 The ceremonial slaughtering of an ox**

The family does not perform any special ceremonies during the time of putting on the mourning clothes. The first ceremony performed according to the narrative (appendix III) was usually done just before removing the black clothes and an ox not a bull was slaughtered to symbolize that the husband was gone. This I suggest relates to what Radzilani (2010) terms assisting the diseased to the afterlife where they are believed to be living in a different state (Ngubane, 2004). The narrative

also indicates the deceased is accompanied spiritually. The widow, working together with her sons if she has any and the in-laws provided the first ox slaughtered.

The mimosa tree (*Umnga*), according to the narrative is used as plates when consuming ox meat. A piece of the meat of the slaughtered ox from the right front leg is grilled lightly and eaten in the house only by widows and no one else. The *umshwamo* (piece of meat from an ox only eaten by widows) is reserved for the mourner and not mixed with any other meat. Women who still have their husbands do not eat that particular piece of meat and even if offered they would refuse to eat it because they know that according to tradition they must not eat that meat while their husbands are still alive. The rest of the meat of the ox must be eaten and finished the same day. The bones must also be burned with nothing left over. The strict nature of the restriction of the *umshwamo* could be indicative of cleansing or purification rituals as performed by other groups like the Tshivenda, Zulu and Shangaan (Radzilani, 2010; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007; Selepe & Edwards, 2008) because widows are seen as contaminated by the death of their husband (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

The slaughter of the first ox according to the narrative (appendix III) was meant to be carried out before removing the black clothes. However, these days some widows take off their mourning clothes even before the ceremony is performed. I noted from the interviews that some widows claimed not to have the means to fulfil the ceremony while others no longer practised the ritual strictly in accordance with the way it was done in the olden times. Widow BCUE-1 for example, claimed to be “*still organizing the money to do the first ox slaughter*” although she had been widowed for 3 years and had removed her mourning clothes after only 3 months. Manyedi *et al.* (2003) observed that Batswana widows experience a stressful life because of the rituals prescribed by society. Indeed I found this to be similar among the AmaXhosa widows going by the laments of the widows interviewed in this study. According to the oldest widow BCRE 8, it was only after slaughtering the first ox could restriction of the widows’ movements, like not attending weddings, be lifted; widows could then be allowed to go to certain places but not to all places.

Sometimes the symbolism of slaughtering the ox seemed uncertain in view of what happened in some families. In the case of widow BCUX 11 for example, the family of the in-laws never involved her in the slaughtering of the ox. They slaughtered the ox and invited all family members

from all over and just warned her on how to behave. This in my view gives the slaughtering of the ox no particular significance in the whole process of the conduct of the mourning rituals.

According to the narrative (appendix III), another ox was supposed to be slaughtered, this time to bring the husband back home spiritually. This second ceremony according to the narrative was meant to invite or make contact with the husband's spirit which by now was thought to be a part of the ancestors so that he may continue to look after his family (Mills, 2004). This was evident from the reflections of widow BCRE 8 as shown in the following quote:

*The slaughtering of the second ox is to say now as a mourner you are ready to wait for your husband to come back home spiritually as you are a believer of traditional activities as you believe now he is included on the ancestry (ancestors of the family).*

The ox had to be slaughtered in a particular way and had to be cooked in the same way as the first slaughtered ox. The ox was slaughtered a day before and cooked the following day. Unlike the first ox, all the people of the same clan would eat the *Intsonyama – ukweshwama* (the meat taken from the right front leg of the ox) and which had *Intlala* (a piece of meat with some fat on it). The second ox is eaten on leaves from *Umnguma* and *Umthathi* trees (leaves are used as plates). As with the first ox a piece from the right front leg is grilled lightly and then eaten by the people of the clan into which the widow was married and then the rest of the people from the village come the following day and eat the rest of the ox with the family. This manner of observing the mourning ritual as with the identity ascription (Niemeyer, 2006) is in my opinion more externalized and clearly seems to be more about communal validation than the internal grieving of the widow, a finding also made by Manyedi *et al.* (2003) among the Batswana widows.

#### **6.4.6 The distribution of the dead husband's clothes**

I found the giving away of the late husband's clothes to be a common ritual among almost all the widows in the study but the manner in which the clothes were given/taken away varied from one participant to the other. However, nearly all the participants retained or were expected to retain some of the deceased husband's clothes. The significance of this ritual in my view may be double edged. It may in the first place be an attempt to remove all direct reminders of their husband in an

effort to come to terms with the loss and yet at the same time retaining as Niemeyer (2006) puts it, a strand of continuity in their sense of connection to their spouse. Among the AmaXhosa, the clothes worn by the husband when he died were burnt at sunset according to the narrative (appendix III). The rest of the clothes were shared amongst the family and the husband's brothers on a day when the widow decides to give away the clothes. This sharing of the husband's clothes according to participants BCRX 14, BCRX 15 takes place three months after the funeral but it could be longer in some families as was the case with participant BCRX 16 who only called the family to share the husband's clothes after she took off the black clothes one year later. If however, as the narrative relates there was something for example, a shirt that the widow wished to keep as a reminder of their love, she could keep that item but she needed to slaughter a goat as she did so. I wondered whether the wish to keep an item had any link with Freud's attachment theory which in this instance would tend to prolong the grieving process that is a reluctance to let go of the lost object.

In some cases according to the narrative (appendix, III), the widow was compelled to keep until she died the things with spiritual or family significance for the family such as *Izidanga*, (beads with red and white diamonds that the husband used to use during ceremonies) and she has to inform everyone in the family that she was doing so. This, as Pellman (1992) reflects may be just one example of some of the adjustments in roles that widows must make after the death of their spouses. If her husband was the first born and he was responsible for slaughtering at family ceremonies and they had a son, then their son would take over his role of slaughtering but the widow would still be responsible for taking care of the *Izidanga*. If the widow did anything wrong or made a mistake and she wanted to apologise, she would take the *Izidanga* and in the privacy of the bedroom she would say "*my husband I apologise I have done something wrong*". The furniture such as his chair or the bed could be kept by the widow or given to their son or to a brother in-law.

I noted that the giving away of clothes and other items that belonged to the deceased husband or those shared with the widow remained an important feature in the practice of the mourning ritual among the AmaXhosa but some variations were evident. For example, most respondents in the study made no mention of *Izidanga* and also some of the practices reported by the widows although varying slightly on the concept of disposal of the deceased husband's clothing followed more or less universal patterns of response to bereavement as noted by others (Center for the Advancement

of Health, 2004 and Stroebe, Stroebe, Hansson, & Schut, 2001 as cited by Niemeyer, 2006) as a way of negotiating through the landscape of loss and grief among the AmaXhosa. For example, widow BCUE 2 whose practice of the ritual had a christian influence was asked to take all his clothes to his relatives but was also advised to keep whatever she liked for herself. She was also made to understand that when the ritual of the mourning clothes was done her parents were expected to bring a new bed for her as she was not supposed to sleep in the same bed that she shared with her husband when he was still alive. Similar practices were expressed by another widow participant BCUE 1 who related her experience as follows:

*To remove the (mourning) clothes you must cook, make Umqomboti (traditional beer), you must organize new clothes, new beddings take all those used by the husband especially linen, you must buy new linen and new blanket for yourself so that may be you can forget about him... . The bed remains because I have no money to buy a new one; you are supposed to remove even the bed. ... . o give away the clothes, you cook and call all the family and then you first make a choice to take all the clothes of the deceased husband which you want and then the family takes theirs and the old ones are burned.*

Under some circumstances or possibly as a result of strained family relationships I found that this part of the ritual was conducted without ceremony. As in the case of participant BCUX 11 whose husband died in a car accident; was not involved in all the mourning rituals. The husbands clothes were simply taken and distributed to other family members by the in-laws one month after his death and similarly, participant BCUX 12 who was separated from her husband at the time of his death, did not know what happened to his clothes but later she saw his brothers wearing some of them. In the case of widow BCUX 13, the husband's family did not come for the clothes she simply gave them to those clan members she could find. Sometimes the giving away of the husband's clothes can be a difficult experience for the widow as participant BCRE 3 felt because at times she needed something to hold on to. This she expressed in the following quote:

*At least if these clothes were still here it means that there is still hope.... I gave them the clothes and they did not expect that he was having some new clothes. My husband was a taxi driver. They did not expect him to have decent clothes. They usually saw him on T-shirts so I gave them all the new ones. I asked them for only two T-shirts. I told them that I like these ones.... It was that when I wore them it gave me hope. So here is something I can hold on to and they took the rest of the stuff. Whenever I am missing my husband I wear those T-shirts.*



The clothes as far as this particular participant was concerned seemed in my opinion to have become a symbol or representation of her husband to which she could transfer her affection or attachment. When family support is totally lacking the giving away of clothes becomes a non-ritualistic and almost an act of dispossession as happened to participant BCRE 4 who related her experience in the following quote:

*The giving off his clothes, according to our rituals it is supposed to take place after a year that your husband has been buried. But for me if you want to know about my case it did not go that way. Immediately after the funeral of my husband his bigger brother came and took everything of his brother and it was like there was a normal thing.... There was nothing formalized like calling all other relatives to share it among each other. It was never like that he just took them.*

In some instances I noted that the desire to keep some of the deceased spouse's clothes was so strong that some widows acted contrary to the norm in order to retain any clothing of their husband. For example, participant BCRE 4 had to steal two pieces of clothing and hide them before the brother arrived to fetch them as she knew he was not going to leave any for her. Since he did not know all her late husband's clothes he would not know if any were missing. I ask the question whether this strong desire among a number of the participants in this study to retain an item belonging to the deceased husband in this case mostly some of the deceased's clothing, is a form of coping mechanism or whether it is grief work contrary to that envisaged by Freud (1917/2009) in which the painful process of severing the attachment to the non-existent object should take place (Bonano & Kaltman, 1999). I found in this case though that most widows seemed to want to retain that attachment through holding onto some of the late husband's clothes.

Other ceremonies for which their significance is unclear to me were performed; participant BCUE 1 for example described another ceremony involving the washing of the dishes which was performed only by the family and a few friends and neighbours. In this ceremony, the widow has to make *Umkhomboti* (a local beer) and invite the family to join her for dinner.

## 6.5 Positions and perceptions taken by widows

### 6.5.1 Influences on the widows' perceptions

In most African cultures, the husband is considered the breadwinner as well as the family protector (Gunga, 2009). Among the Xhosa people in the old days, women were considered jural minors subject to male control throughout their lives (Peires, 1981). Although this image of women seems to have changed and continues to evolve towards equality between men and women, women still receive unequal treatment even today. For example, more recently the President of the Congress of traditional leaders of South Africa revealed their true patriarchal nature when he lashed out against women who want to occupy traditional leadership positions (Feni, 2011). Meanwhile government has been making every effort to create gender equity in South Africa leading to the establishment in 1996 of a commission on gender equality to govern and guide the process (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Even Koyana (1980) considered the early patriarchal dominance reduced when it came to treatment of widows; a Xhosa widow was according to him said to be free to go wherever she pleased. Such a view though seemed to contrast with most of the experiences of some of the widows I interviewed in this study and with experiences of widows in other patriarchal African societies which control the future of the widows (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Pheko, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Taylor, 1983; Women 2000, 2001) and even currently with the utterances of traditional leaders in South Africa (Feni, 2011). I found that the widows in this study felt quite restricted in what they did or said similar to the observations made in other African societies. As envisaged by Gunga (2009), men however are still considered breadwinners and protectors. The struggles experienced by some of the widows in this study bear this out as the lament by participant BCRE 3 demonstrates in the following quote:

*Now with this new life I have to beg. I have to ask others. I had to move to a new place to stay. I was struggling. It is not a good life because you always know that you have this person and you are relying on him. He is not there.*

*... . There was a time I had a class in Sociology lecture and it was ending late at 08H00 p.m. I was staying at Fanta. I had to catch a taxi. I had to walk in the dark and sometimes I used to cry. I had to make this work. I had to be strong because I want to study. I wanted to prove to them (in laws) that without his presence I can still do it.*

As regards their perception of the mourning rituals in general I found that some widows regard them as unnecessary. Participant BCRE 3 for example, felt the same but fell short of expressing any negative perceptions about the mourning ritual as she related in the following quote:

*When slaughtering (the ox) you wear clothes inside out. You do not have to do that. Mourning rituals do not serve any purpose. It is just a belief. They do not do any good thing.*

### **6.5.2 Emotions expressed and their influences on the widows' perceptions**

A number of widows I interviewed in this study demonstrated emotional feelings. The expression of emotion often took the nature of momentary failure to continue with the interview or voice breaking and faltering to outright crying and shedding of tears as they recalled their experiences. The emotional feelings were expressed by widows BCRE 3, BCRE 4, BCUE 5, BCUX 10 and BCUX 12. Participant BCRE 3 in particular recalled expressing serious emotional turmoil to the extent of wishing to take her own life as she narrated in the following quote:

*... . On the second day after he died, he died on a Monday, then on Tuesday I thought of taking my own life. But, I thought no I have my own life to take care of and live. Let me not think of committing suicide. Even now I am stronger than then but it takes experience. It is difficult as time goes I begin now to understand. I am telling myself that this is real life. It is happening there is no husband now. I have to be what I would like to be. It is kind of a hard thing. It is the end of the storm. I used to stay with him but never stayed outside. I was working before but if I did not have money he would come and fetch me.*

I sense through this lament that not only did the husband play a key role as provider and protector but he was also a companion to lean on in difficult times and situations. Manyedi *et al.* (2003) described similar experiences among the Batswana widows who also experienced not only the loss of financial security and protection but also the loss of a father figure and the children's disciplinarian among other roles.

### **6.5.3 Negative perceptions of the mourning rituals**

The position taken by some other widows in relation to the mourning rituals I found depended on the individual and most of them felt that the rituals were unnecessary. Participants BCUX 11,

BCUX 12 and BCUX 13 for example, indicated that the rituals did not serve any purpose except, as one of them lamented, only to bring trauma to the mourning widow. She gave the example that when going to church the widow was expected to stay at the back of the church. There is also complete lack of respect for the mourning dress as widow BCUX 13 added “*many people would wear black clothes while doing bad things*”. Other widows like participant BCRE 3 did not have the desire to perform the full rituals. This particular widow was not expected to perform the full ritual as she was married to a twin but would have to undergo the ritual when the other twin dies. She however would not do so as she expressed in the following quote:

*It depends to the person and the family.... They said I am not going to perform the rest of the rituals like slaughtering of the (ox) because my husband is a twin. However, when the other twin dies I am supposed to go back and perform all the other rituals but I will not perform those rituals because I am a Christian and I am over that now.*

Similar positions were taken by the Tshivenda widows (Radzilani, 2010) and according to Radzilani such views positioned the widows as outsiders by merely going through the motions of the rituals without actually engaging with them.

Participant BCUX 13 reflected on the stigma associated with the wearing of the mourning clothes as others above have stated and would like to see some change that would culminate in removal of black clothes which according to her bring about restriction of movement and social interaction.. She felt that the ritual was like added punishment added to the loss of a husband. Others like widow BCUE 5, a nurse, took a simple position adhering to the cultural norm although like other participants she was unhappy about the wearing of the mourning dress. She had the following to say about her experience and feelings:

*It is a culture therefore it has to be done. The orders have to be obeyed. Everyone can see and identify that I am a widow which I don't like.... Because of my profession I have to wear uniform to work which provides me with relief. I feel constrained because everyone can see I am in mourning and expect me to behave in a certain way; I cannot freely participate socially and talk loudly and cannot attend certain functions.*

#### **6.5.4 Positive perceptions of the mourning rituals**

Most widows older than 50, I noted took a positive view of performing the mourning rituals. Participant BCUX 10 thought mourning was good because it showed love and respect for the husband as the head of the family and it was not good to not mourn at all; and as far as complaints and abuse of women is concerned, she asked why women in the past mourned without complaint. This participant in my opinion seemed to belong to the group that valued societal validation of their status as widows.

According to the oldest widow BCRE 8 however, some women reject mourning clothes as a rejection of an abusive partner. Others who reject mourning clothes she noted have ulterior motives to commit adultery and others still because they may have been responsible for the death of their husband. Family members of the deceased husband have been found by other researchers to often raise suspicions of widows killing their husbands (Manyedi *et al.*, 2003; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

#### **6.6 The social relationships of the AmaXhosa widows**

Although quite frequently the relationships between widows and their in-laws may be supportive as far as performing the ritual is concerned, Zulu widows experience high levels of poverty according to Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007). However, as already indicated the widows are often suspected of having killed their husbands and instead of support they may be deprived of crucial economic resources as also reflected by Manyedi *et al.* (2003) and Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007). I have also observed in the current study some of the acrimonious relationships between the widows and their in-laws when it comes to distributing the clothing of the late husband.

One of the apparent key requirements I found among the AmaXhosa is the maintenance of respect and dignity by the widow after her husband dies, an observation also made among the Zulu (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007); Tshivenda (Radzilani, 2010) and among the Batswana (Manyedi *et al.*, 2003). The oldest widow in the study, participant BCRE 8, indicated that as a sign of respect for the in-laws she was not supposed to call some things the way they are normally called for example water was no longer called *amanzi* as it is called by unmarried woman; she would instead as a sign

of respect for the in-laws and also depending on the clan she belongs to call water *imvotho*. The changed relationships I suggest extend beyond the in-laws and affect how the widow relates to the community at large. For example, the widow is expected to sit at the back of the church or taxi and not to go out but rather to send someone else to do her errands all in order to avoid mingling with community members because she is supposed to be the carrier of bad luck. Such bad luck according to the Luo of Kenya can only be removed through sexual cleansing by an outsider (Gunga, 2009). This kind of treatment of widows in my view only serves to strengthen the resolve of some widows to resist performing the rituals as observed among the younger participants in the current study.

### **6.6.1 The social support of the AmaXhosa widows**

In their study among the Batswana, Manyedi *et al.* (2003) reflected on the high levels of stress among the widows due to all the customs the community expects them to follow and to the lack of support they receive from their in-laws compared to what they receive from their own relatives and from other members of the community. In the current study I found that some participants like widow BCUX 11 seemed to have had the most difficult time with very controlling in-laws. Decisions regarding the mourning of her husband for example were taken by them without involving her due to friction between her and the in-laws. She was not allowed to go out; she was not allowed to wash her clothes while people were looking; she was not allowed to talk when in mourning regardless of whether or not she liked the decisions taken on her behalf by the in-laws. This widow never received any support from her in-laws as she states in the following quote:

*Not at all: After the death of my husband they did not want to be witnesses at court so that I can get my husband's belongings which I was entitled to. However, I received support from my family and they were sad about what was going on with my in-laws.*

In some cases I noted that suspicion of killing a husband was always hanging over the widows as Manyedi *et al.* (2003) and Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007) also found in their research. Participant BCUX 13 stated as a matter of fact that her in-laws never supported her and instead they believed that she killed her husband; based on similar accusations, widow BCUE 1 had the following experience and lacked support as she related in the following quote:

*Yes (in the past) they were getting support from their families nowadays things have changed and it is not because we are working it is just because of family politics. They think that it is you who killed the husband; in other families they know if the husband was sick for a long time they are accusing you of being responsible for it. This suspicion is common in many families but in my case they knew that he was sick, he was diabetic and then he also had a gall bladder problem.... He was sick for a long time*

Some widows were simply abandoned or cut off altogether by the in-laws as happened with widow BCRE 4 who related that she stopped being family to her in-laws soon after their son (her husband) was buried. The in-laws of participant BCRE 3 suspected that she was responsible for the death of her husband regardless of her feelings about him. Despite all this however, she did receive a little support from some family members as she indicated in the quote below:

*Even if you are not the one who killed your husband, they still suspect you for having killed him that, somehow you had an input on it. Even if you do not know what happened to him. My husband was only sick for one week with a flu. I do not understand why they thought I was the one who killed my husband. I wondered how I would kill the person I need the most and love.... After the funeral on a Sunday, they slaughtered a goat. They said they are washing their hands. After that I never saw anyone. I was alone at home they sent my sister to come stay with me because I used to stay alone with my husband. It was difficult. I did not have food and electricity. I had to go to them and ask for food. My sister in-law and my mother supported me. They bought me clothes.*

The sense of loneliness and stigmatisation was overbearing for some widows due to the lack of family support as Manyedi *et al.* (2003) also noted. For some widows this state of loneliness became a form of training for the life ahead as participant BCRX 15 reflected in the next quote:

*Now that your husband is late you are all on your own even the family members do not assist. They just come when you have something. Now you have to understand you are on your own. During mourning, it helps you to get used to the idea that you are all on your own. It teaches you the new situation you find yourself in so that by the time you take off the mourning clothes you are used to being alone without a husband to support you.*

My observation was that the social environment of widows in the current study was not nearly as comparable to the bad treatment that widows are subjected to in many other African countries (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001). However, it was still full of considerable stress and indignity especially with regard to being accused of causing the death of the husband.

### 6.6.2 Lack of financial support for the AmaXhosa widows

Internal family and in-laws support and external community support is suggested for widows (Bankoff, 1983 and Lopata, 1988 as cited by Manyedi *et al.*, 2003). I observed varying levels of such support in the current study. For example widow BCUX 10 received support from both her in-laws and from her maiden family; most of the other widows' experiences in this study however, were those of conflict with the in-laws. In particular, family financial support was lacking for most of them as widow BCUE 1 recalled in the next quote:

*I had kids and I was supposed to support those kids buy clothes, 2 of them are men, they are in grade 11, I had to support them paying Admin fees there was no one that was supporting me, I had to buy groceries the salary was too small and you could not do everything with it... I have a lot of debts with standard bank, African bank....They have handed me over to the attorneys because I can't pay because I am alone supporting the family and no one listens to me.*

### 6.6.3 Taking financial advantage of the AmaXhosa widows

In some cases rather than providing support I found that some family members took advantage of the widows and treated them unfairly. One widow related a tale involving being cheated by in-laws. Participant BCRE 3 told a story of her brother-in-law whose widow was cheated out of money that purportedly was to be used for the purchase of the ox for ceremonial slaughter as she relates in the quote below:

*The slaughtering of the bull (ox) is not necessary because it is you the widow who is supposed to buy the bull (ox). Where will you find the money if you are not working? ... Like the story of my older brother in-law when he passed away, the widow got the money to buy a bull for slaughtering but the family witch doctor said that they must start from other things. So the money was taken and they promised to pay her back but I did not see them pay her back. The money was diverted to other things. I do not see the reason for that....*

Some widows I interviewed experienced more than just lack of support. The in-laws of widow BCRE 4 who had received financial support while her husband was alive continued to expect the same kind of support but they in fact expected the widow to provide for them. She described what in reality happened to her in this regard:



*... Actually what was happening, my husband was supporting my married sister-in-law and his big brother, the one who came to fetch the clothes. We were buying groceries for them each month and we were renting for my big brother a house in the municipality. What happened after the funeral by the month end before me taking off those clothes, they came as usual wanting groceries from me and money for rent.... They asked me did your husband not give or leave you money. I told them even if he did I am not going to give you that because it is what we are supposed to live on. I cannot give it to you. ... .*

While the in-laws of participant BCRE 4 expected assistance from the widow, they on the other hand were not prepared to assist her with resolving matters of the estate left by her husband as she reflects below:

*Like my husband left two cars and when you go to the estates, you have to bring a family member from your husband's side and a family member from my family with the same surname or elders because they want to make sure that I do not get everything that belongs to my husband. .... Right after that you want assistance from me but they did not want me to get that money. They always make sure that you are experiencing difficulties not knowing what satisfies them...*

Despite all this, widow BCRE 4 whose only income was derived from her late husband's estate did fulfil certain expectations of her in-laws possibly out of allegiance to her late husband or probably because of the pressure brought to bear on her by the in-laws as she described in the following statement:

*I did those.... but as far as what they want I had to buy a goat and another one and brandy and there are so many of them. But after I did that I felt stupid. Why did I do this because whenever I have a problem they cannot assist me? But maybe I like them I do not know but I do like them when we talk serious things because they are the family I have. They are my church family.*

In addition to trying to meet the expectations of the late husband's family, the financial strain of having to ensure that the mourning rituals for her husband were done properly was in my opinion quite stressful. This was clearly put into perspective by participant BCUE 1 in the following quote:

*They (mourning rituals) cost a lot of money especially when you are alone but we have to do those things in accordance with our culture.*

The experience of widow BCUX 12 was a complex one as she was separated from her husband but was apparently not divorced by the time he died. The in-laws refused to allow her to bury her

husband and told her that they would bury their son and yet they expected her to pay the costs even though her husband had during their separation, sold their house and taken the money with him. She eventually attended the funeral but with some restrictions from her in-laws such as not being allowed to pour soil over the coffin.

Furthermore, she felt hurt because some of the things that happened to her children which I presume were behavioural problems due to lack of a father figure, reinforcing the role of the husband as family provider and protector. Participant BCRX 16 even had to buy her own black mourning dress as well as new clothes to change into later.

Although it may seem that the participants in this study were not so deprived of their economic resources, I feel nevertheless that the majority of widows did not receive much financial support particularly from their in-laws. In fact some of them were treated in a manner that seemed exploitative and abusive in particular with demands both financial and otherwise were made in spite of the condition of mourning.

## **6.7 The gendered nature of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals**

I found the nature of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals quite gender biased. According to the narrative (appendix III), when a wife dies, a Xhosa man has to mourn the death of the wife. Traditionally, he puts on a black *duk* (black crochet hat) and must also wear a black arm band for about a year unless he like the woman, has a twin. However, it seems that this is no longer adhered to and these days men just put on a black button which you cannot even see. The button does not however, distinguish whether the man has lost his wife or other family member such as a sister or brother. The husband can remarry after a year if he is young. The widow cannot remarry. If she is very young according to the narrative, the families on both sides have to sit down and discuss the matter. If her family wants her back because she is young, the in-laws have to decide what is to be done with her and her children. If however, she bears other children after her husband's death, the children take his (the dead husband's) surname and are considered his children. If the young widow decides to stay at her late husband's home she can stay and date someone but discreetly; she needs to respect all the in-laws in whatever she does during dating (appendix III).

I record below some of the experiences of the widows interviewed in the current study and their views regarding the way men practice the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa. Most widows under the age of 50 years that I interviewed in the current study felt discriminated against because they have never observed a man wearing mourning clothes as the narrative implies they should. Even their behaviour after the loss of a wife is not respectful. This gender bias of the mourning ritual against women was emphasised by participant BCUE 1 who reflected on the discriminatory nature of the practice in the next quote:

*Because it is only women who wear these clothes, it affects them a lot because if a man becomes a widower, he can bury the wife today and tomorrow you can see him with another woman. But you as a woman you can't do that you have to wait you can't even sit with a man next to you. It does not affect them.*

While some men might make an effort according to participant BCUX 10 to wear a black button and may even shave their hair, others seem simply to do whatever they please. Participant BCRE 3 puts into proper perspective how they feel with regard to the manner men mourn:

*With men they do whatever they want to do. They do not even change their clothes. May be they shave their hair. They continue to live their lives normally. There is no stigma. He is the only one who knows he has lost a wife. May affect them psychologically but society treats them differently.*

Because the way the mourning ritual is practised is so biased against women, widow BCRE 4 declared herself a feminist because as far as she was concerned, there was no need for the mourning rituals as long as they remained one sided. From her observation, when a woman dies, a man does not mourn. She questions for example why a man is expected to have someone to comfort him immediately and someone to stand in for his wife. This according to her means that men do not mourn at all and can marry immediately; therefore she has no need for biased rituals. Furthermore, participant BCUX 11 added that men are unaffected by the mourning ritual because they are busy looking for another woman. This in my opinion reveals a very strong bias against women.

Participants above 55 years, BCRX 15 and BCRX 16, made similar observations such as men being free to do what they want; to talk on the street, go to taverns, and as far as they are concerned are exempt from mourning. They may mourn for about 4 months only but in a way quite different from

women. These participants seemed more accommodating of the gender biased mourning practices and according to them it was all part of culture. Males are different from women and that is the way it is and women will never be treated like men. Similarly, participant BCUX 12 also over 55 years of age observed that men do not wear mourning clothes and hardly stay a year without a partner as she reveals in the following quote:

*Sometimes others after three months you hear that they are married/cohabiting. I understand them because they cannot stay for long even in the Bible they can't stay without a woman. We women we are made stronger than men to live without men.*

Participant BCUX 12 even had some sympathetic words to say about the behaviour of men, who following the death of their wives soon take on another partner:

*So they can be understood for marrying immediately after they have lost their wives. It does not mean that they don't think about their wives they think of being victims of girlfriends so they prefer to get married to have someone who will take care of them.*

Widow BCRE 4, aged 34 years, considered the whole ritual irrelevant because when she was in mourning clothes, it attracted more and more men as though she was a job opportunity or something like that, “Applications just kept coming like all men now loved her”. This to her was not right but again was just another reflection of the injustice of society towards women. So not only in my view were the mourning clothes a source of stigma but they also identified the widow to wealth seekers who were looking to access substantial legacies.

I noted that there was an obvious difference in opinion between participants aged above and below 50 years. Those below 50 years old came out strongly against the gendered bias of the mourning ritual while those aged over 50 years were more sympathetic and accommodating. However, the apparent bias of the mourning rituals against women seems to be typical of a patrilineal and patriarchal society as shown by studies elsewhere (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Feni, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Pheko, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001). In some societies it is ascribed as giving protection to the widow from their powerful deceased husbands (Gunga, 2009). While among the Tshivenda, there is a perception that the need for greater assistance is given to the widows through the performance of the mourning rituals (Radzilani, 2010). But probably more telling is the sheer pressure upon the widows to perform the rituals;

failure to do so may bring misfortunes, blame and loss of support and acceptance by the in-laws (Aborampah, 1999; Gunga, 2009).

## 6.8 Cultural and religious prescriptions

Different cultures have different mourning rituals which are a reflection usually of their underlying belief systems (Chang, 2002 as cited by Radzilani, 2010). In the narrative (appendix III) it was noted that the AmaXhosa practice different rituals since some are Christians and others are traditionalists. Among the Tshivenda where the people are either traditional Africans or African Christians, culture demands that widows perform the mourning rituals which may conflict with their Christian practices (Radzilani, 2010). However, Selepe and Edwards (2008) noted that the African Independent Churches tend to integrate Christian rituals with traditional African rituals which suggests that the followers respect both religions. Indeed most AmaXhosa widows I interviewed in the study professed to be Christian but quite a number of them also practised traditional mourning rituals.

Observations of this dualism were evident among the AmaXhosa widows I interviewed in this study. Widow BCUE 2 for example did not wear the usual black dress and mourn for 12 months instead she put on a white scarf and mourned for a month according to her church's prescripts. Similarly, widow BCRE 4 whose husband was also a Christian but his family was not, wore a white scarf and a white *iqhira* (head cloth) for one month only in accordance with the way her church observed the mourning rituals. In the case of participant BCUX 10 who belonged to the Zionist church, she appeared to have successfully integrated the Christian and traditional rituals as she related in her experience:

*After the birth of my child in June I stayed for 3 months, and then I was taken to my church for cleansing (washing away the dark cloud that had resulted from his death). In my church we do traditional activities.*

This integration of traditional and Christian mourning rituals was apparently successful as Selepe and Edwards (2008) also observed in their studies on the Zion Apostolic Church in Venda. I found in the current study that some widows belonging to the 12 Apostles churches like the participant BCUX 13 adhered strictly to the church beliefs and she only mourned for one month. Although she

felt that people should mourn spiritually or else wear black clothes according to tradition, she did not support the wearing of mourning clothes and as a Christian she felt that there was no need for it. In some cases I noted an apparent conflict between tradition and religion which seemed to leave some widows confused about society's expectations. For example, participant BCRE 3, a young 34 year old widow from a rural area found that her status thrust her into an unfamiliar role of becoming a senior lady in the church as her narrative below indicates:

*May be because I am young sometimes I feel like I do not know where I belong especially in church. It is like they wanted me to be a mother. I do not even have a child but in church they treat me like a mother. I am leading them, the old ladies. I am still in that position leading them. It is confusing me because I used to wear my long skirts when my husband was alive. Now I like to put on trousers. I have to change. I used to wear iqhira (head scarf) but now I do not wear it. I have to change slowly.*

Widow BCRE 3, who was married to a twin was not expected to perform the full mourning rituals immediately but would have to undergo them when her husband's twin dies creating in her mind a conflict between traditional culture and religion. However, because she is a Christian, she probably will not perform these rituals. Nevertheless, she still thought that mourning was helpful even for Christians. Although according to her Jesus is there for support, at the back of their mind they still felt the pain and needed the rituals.

I noted that other cultural influences on the AmaXhosa mourning ritual involved variations due to factors such as being married to twins, sudden death through accident or being pregnant at the time of bereavement. For example, participant BCRE 8 mourned for only six months instead of one year because she was married to a twin. The expectation for widows of twins is that the full mourning ritual will only be performed when the surviving twin passes away. Participant BCRE 3 did not perform any rituals because she was also married to a twin.

Participant BCUX 10 did not perform the mourning rituals because she was pregnant when her husband passed away and she related her experience in the following words:

*I did not wear black clothes or mourn for my husband's death because I was pregnant. In some families when you are pregnant you do not mourn by wearing black clothes. Some people wear other colours according to their religious affiliations for example blue colours and so on.*

Participant BCUX 11 mourned for six months because her husband died in a car accident. The unnatural manner in which her husband died led to the shortening of the mourning period. Radzilani (2010) indicates that sudden death which takes people by surprise possibly deprives the culture of an opportunity of performing certain rituals which in this case resulted in the shortening of the mourning period.

## **6.9 Acculturation of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals**

According to Huxley (1963), culture cannot be discriminatingly accepted, much less be modified, except by persons who have lived through it. The AmaXhosa, having lived through their mourning rituals, seem in my view to be in a period of change. According to the narrative (appendix III), the mourning rituals have always been a reflection of the emotional need to demonstrate both the widow's mourning and change in her status. The way the mourning rituals are held today it would seem is not the same as in the past and this does not sit well with the old people. In the olden days women would cry for their loss. These days according to the narrative, mourners move up and down preparing for the funerals; they do not even put on a *duk* and they wear unusual hair styles all of which I suggest is evidence of the change taking place in the AmaXhosa mourning rituals. An observation echoed by most participants aged over 50 years and affirmed by participant BCRX 14 is as follows:

*The youth of today do not care whether they mourn or not. When you lost your husband in our generation you find it difficult to even talk such as when people greet you.*

Most of the widows aged under 50 years that I interviewed expressed either a desire to see change in some of the rituals or have as in the case of the narrative, actually observed changes that have already taken place. The most tangible changes I have noted seem to be in the area of the duration of the mourning period and the colour of the mourning dress which was commonly black but now widows wear white in some churches, blue or purple; the duration mourning, was expected to be at least one year, but now ranges anywhere from one to six months. Participant BCUX 10 made the following observation with regard to this:

*There are some changes because people used to wear only black clothes regardless of their religious affiliation. These days they do according to their churches wearing different colors or not wearing clothes at all. Other people are complaining that it is abuse for women though women in the past were mourning without complaining.... By the time of our mothers they were wearing those clothes for about a year now we wear those clothes for about 6 months even 3 months because we are working. By that time our mothers were not working they were sitting at home because they were housewives; we are getting 6 months because we are working.*

While some like participant BCUE 1 for example, indeed desired change in the way the mourning rituals were conducted in particular, attribution of identity; she had doubt about change actually taking place and she expressed her doubts in the following manner:

*But I don't know if it (change) will happen; if this wearing of mourning clothes can be taken away then it can be better because now everybody can see you are a widow. Yes I feel there should be change and another change is if I can pass away the husband gets support from the government like a grant but if it is a husband that passes away I can't get anything.*

The religious influence in my view also acted as a vehicle for acculturation of the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa. Participant BCUE 2 observed that their mourning period of one month was dictated by their church and was according to her reasonable, unlike those who wear black mourning clothes for one year. Participant BCUX 11 concurred but wished for the period to be reduced to one month. It was not all simply about change in the conduct of rituals but participant BCUE 2 also thought that it depended on your belief system; as far as she was concerned these rituals were unnecessary unless somebody really believed it (the mourning ritual) would help them. Another supporter of change, participant BCRE 3 felt that a change was necessary in this modern day and age but at the same time dependent on age and family. Because of her young age she was allowed to wear blue mourning clothes while a friend of hers from another church wore white clothes. Similarly another friend of hers wore the clothing for only six months. But when her mother in-law also became a widow, her rituals were terminated because they could not have both the daughter in-law and mother in-law in mourning clothes at the same time.

In contrast to all the above, the oldest participant BCRE 8 felt that the rituals are fading and action needs to be taken to revive and revitalise them. She wants for example the 12 month duration of mourning to be kept compulsory for all with reasons given. She insists that the right duration of



mourning is a year whether you are working or not. She was unhappy that nurses do not even want to cut their hair to show that they are mourning. The acculturation she has observed is that after a week a woman complains about wearing mourning clothes and prefers to change clothes at work and so do not mourn for enough time. Others get into relationships immediately after the husband's death. Widow BCUX 11 seems to agree with her as she has also noted that some women do not respect their mourning rituals as they talk loudly and others even get involved with other men (have relationships) while still in mourning. According to widow BCUX 12, some women even become pregnant during the mourning period. I noted that while the older widows seemed resilient and remained steadfast to their customary mourning rituals, the young widows rebelled and desired rapid change in what they considered to be oppressive or unfair rituals.

Acculturation that results from the interaction between two cultures (Redfield *et al.*, 1936) in this case the white man's (European) culture and the African culture may in my opinion be responsible for the changes occurring in the conduct of the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa. The 56 year old participant BCUX 12 clearly felt the acculturation of the mourning rituals and stated that the children of today have changed everything since they no longer want *lobola* paid for them anymore. According to her, they live like white people as they have been taught in their schools. She gave the example of her daughter who defended her boyfriend; he was supposed to pay *lobola* but has no money even though he is working in London as a professional nurse. She lamented further that even the fathers of today drink with their children and do not mourn so according to her, the mourning ritual is outdated for the current generation.

The changes seen through the eyes of participant BCUX 12 are numerous as she observes the centrality of the church in this change. Some women wear whatever outfit is recommended by their churches and some churches do not even allow or encourage the wearing of the mourning dress because according to them it is associated with darkness. In the olden days, their mothers did not talk to people if they were wearing mourning clothes as participant BCRX 16 confirmed. They used to be accompanied by people who would talk on their behalf; participant BCRX 15 added that the youth of today do not have time for mourning and do not respect the status of widowhood. In her days if you were outside the house and people passed by you ran inside and did not talk to them. But that is no longer the case. Participant BCUX 12 feels that with all the bad things people do now

while wearing mourning clothes, it would be better if people mourned spiritually because these clothes do not stop them from doing bad things. Since men do not mourn why should women have to mourn.

According to participant BCUX 12, clothes are meaningless to the current generation compared to our mothers who used to remain at home and the people of the community would help them. Some have even changed black clothes to look like any ordinary clothes in order to show that the late husband was rich. Some simply do not wear mourning clothes because it hurts them to wear these clothes and it makes them cry every day. I have noted that the sentiments expressed by this 56 year old widow were also reflected by most of the participants that were over 60 years old, BCRX 14, BCRX 15, BCRX 16 and were a stark reminder that the rituals may not only be undergoing change but may in effect be the first stages of their eventual disappearance especially in view of the position held by a number of the participants aged below 50 years, that the rituals serve no useful purpose.

One positive change widow BCRE 8 would like to see is the inclusion of a will for distribution of the husband's assets. Apparently if a husband has belongings everything is distributed among his brothers; and for most widows the removal of the most obvious asset, the clothes of the late husband is a clear demonstration of such intent. If a will was in place it would give direction as to who must take charge of his belongings. It is worse in the rural areas where the family even confiscates the husband's livestock when there was no will to show the distribution of the property. She concluded with a despairing remark that it would be even better if your husband owned nothing that the in-laws could take. This clearly reflects the frustration most widows experience when it comes to property and economic resources and is in line with what happens in many societies in Africa and beyond (Ayikukwei *et al.*, 2007; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Shumbamhini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001).

#### **6.10 The role played by the mourning rituals in the lives of AmaXhosa widows**

Rituals are assumed to affirm the cultural values of people through their utterances and actions within a given context (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998 as cited by Radzilani, 2010; Taylor, 1980 as

cited by Radzilani, 2010). The functions of mourning rituals are quite varied; for example, according to Radzilani (2010) they serve as a public display of grief among the Tshivenda people and provide an avenue for approval and validation by the community (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998) which is very important to the Venda people (Radzilani, 2010). Niemeyer (2006) suggests that the mourning rituals serve the purpose of giving identity as a widow to the woman that has lost her husband or assists in her change of status to that of a widow (Radzilani, 2010). Other functions include assisting the deceased on his way to the afterlife, providing healing or therapy and purifying the mourners (Radzilani, 2010). The mourning rituals performed by the AmaXhosa seem to play similar roles.

One fundamental and common finding I noted among the majority of the participants in this study aged over 50 years was their belief that the mourning rituals were beneficial because they allowed them to pay respect to their late husband and respect to the family and to show that you as his widow actually care, an observation also made among the Tshivenda widows (Radzilani, 2010). In order to express this respect those widows over 60 years, BCRX 14, BCRX 15, BCRX 16, would wear black clothes for twelve months, stay at home and not visit different places, not talk to people randomly and not eat in public and use small children to do their errands. However, some of the younger widows I interviewed aged under 40 years did not exactly welcome the public display of their grief through wearing mourning clothes as the stigma associated with the mourning dress particularly the black dress, seemed psychologically overwhelming to them. Manyedi *et al.* (2003) also found similar behaviour among the many Batswana widows they studied. This issue was reflected by participant BCUE 2 aged 29 years:

*Wearing those clothes you are being identified. You are being cast from other people. Someone should know from inside that you are in mourning not the whole world should know. It puts one at a risk.*

Because the widows were easily identifiable publically through the special dresses they had to wear, they became targets of unscrupulous elements in society. The risk widows were exposed to as a result of the public display of grief when they put on the black mourning dress was explained well by participant BCUE 1

*This wearing of clothes, we are not comfortable about it because every man when they see a woman wearing those mourning clothes, they assume that she has got a lot of money because if you are a widow they think you have a lot of money so they will want something to do with you so that they can get access to this money you are keeping....*

But the essence of a public display of grief was not lost on all young widows I interviewed and widow BCRE 3 aged 34 years whose husband was a twin and was not expected to perform the mourning rituals still went ahead and wore black clothes which she put on for one week in order that other women would respect her and so that no one in their society would say she never mourned her husband. Indeed the widow herself felt good about doing it and the experience I suggest probably provided some form of healing for her especially since she said that she loved her husband dearly. At the end of the day mourning according to widow BCRE 4 is something that comes from the heart. You mourn your husband from within. She did not see any point in displaying her feelings. Indeed widow BCUX 10, who by virtue of being pregnant did not wear mourning clothes, put it very clearly “*Though I did not wear the black clothes I was mourning his death by my actions (in my heart)*”. The mourning internally in my opinion was probably more significant for some of the widows as it may have provided the widows with the intimate moments to consider their loss and their new status and allow healing to begin.

Some mourning rituals did indeed provide beneficial results for the widows such as for example, giving away the deceased husband’s clothing while others found it difficult to part with them; some widows actually found it a relief to give them away as participant BCUE 2 aged 34 years indicated below. This process in my view seemed to accelerate the healing process in this particular widow:

*I just packed the clothes I had no feeling about it but now if those clothes were here it would have hurt me. So to me it is fine that the clothes are not here it has helped me to forget. I have kept his suite for my son and a gown for myself.*

As indicated earlier, others however, have developed an emotional attachment and found it difficult to part with the clothes of their loved ones; participant BCRE 3 aged 34 years lamented that it was a difficult thing to do since the clothes acted as an extension of him which she could hold onto and if she missed her husband she simply would put on one of the T shirts she had retained. Clearly the severing of the attachment to the non-existent object (Bonano & Kaltman, 1999) was in my opinion not taking place.

Another interesting aspect to the mourning ritual was the request to extend her mourning period by participant BCRE 8. This was the oldest widow who related the narrative on the AmaXhosa mourning rituals and she did this in order as she stated to demonstrate her love for her husband. A number of other widows expressed similar sentiments of love for their husbands but none of them extended or wished to extend their mourning period to demonstrate their feelings. It would seem to me that the older generation of widows took mourning for their husbands more seriously than contemporary widows. Some widows like participant BCUX 10 stated that some of them lose weight while others gain weight and according to her, there is a belief that the one who gains weight has accepted the loss and her mourning was beneficial but the converse was also true.

## **6.11 Concluding Remarks**

The findings presented here probably reflect the first formal research conducted on the AmaXhosa mourning rituals. The results of this study although having much in common with research done among other ethnic groups in South Africa, represent the first record of the widows' experiences and perceptions of the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa. The following summary presents the key findings of the study.

1. The way the AmaXhosa mourning rituals were performed was influenced by the age of the widows, the social circumstances and relationships of the widows and by the circumstances surrounding the death of the husband.
2. Some widows especially the older ones sought communal validation through the wearing of the mourning dress while the younger widows were not particularly concerned about such validation but rather went through the rituals because it was a tradition.
3. The colour of the mourning dress was important to the AmaXhosa. Traditionally black was worn but now other colours are being used and influenced by social change and religious beliefs.
4. The gendered nature of the AmaXhosa mourning rituals revealed that the practice was biased as only widows were most affected by it.

5. One of the main reasons for performing the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa was to maintain respect for the dead husband and the dignity of the family and community.
6. Some widows received social and financial support from their in-laws while others did not and this depended on how good or bad their family relationships were and on the family perception of how the husband died.
7. The older widows found societal validation to be more important to them while the younger widows felt that emotional and spiritual wellbeing were more important.
8. The younger generation of widows is driving and making happen the acculturation of the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa. The most tangible changes were mainly around the shortening of the duration of the mourning period and the use of different colours of the mourning dress other than black or wearing no special dress at all.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **7. CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The Xhosa mourning rituals like most traditional practices indeed form a knowledge structure that constitutes a belief system as contemplated by the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2005) for a substantial population of the AmaXhosa people. The narrative provided by the oldest widow served to put a system and structure to the performance of the rituals including timelines for most stages of the rituals. But whether the AmaXhosa mourning rituals constituted true belief and that such true belief could be justified (Dancy, 1991) was another matter. Quite a number of the participant widows interviewed in the study contested some of the practices and questioned their authenticity, for example, the gender bias which singles out women as the most affected by mourning compared to men. There was a kind of disinterest in the mourning rituals particularly among the widows under 40 years of age. Their common view was that the rituals did not serve any useful purpose. Even some of the older widows performed the rituals simply because it was a custom that had to be followed but did not say what justified the performance of the rituals. However, there were some issues related to the male domination of the Xhosa society that were revealed by the widows' responses, in particular the comparison between the way the community views the treatment of a man who has lost his spouse and how it views the widow. Although seeming outwardly negative there were also apparently some aspects of the mourning ritual related to their psychological feelings of giving respect to their departed beloved husband that seemed beneficial to the widows, making their performance justified.

#### **7.2 The purpose of external expression of grief**

Society according to Kastenbaum (2004) has expectations that a grieved person should go through the mourning process. Societal validation in this instance therefore becomes the driving factor. So it is possible that a bereaved person instead of experiencing and feeling real grief might only be engaged in the cultural expressions of mourning by simply following the rituals as

society expects them to do. This was quite apparent in this study as mourning among the AmaXhosa seemed to be externalized among a number of participants. Similar findings in which society appears to be satisfied with what the widow does as expected culturally, rather than what she feels internally, were made among the Batswana (Manyedi, *et al.*, 2003)

The external expression of grief through dress and modification of behavioural patterns was viewed within the AmaXhosa society as a respectful way of showing that you are widowed. As Radzilani (2010) similarly pointed out, the public display of grief among the Tshivenda people provided an avenue for approval and validation by the community. Similar sentiments were expressed in other studies (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Most participants in the study revealed that respect was the main reason they performed the mourning ritual. It seems therefore that as with the Tshivenda people, approval and validation by the community was very important among the AmaXhosa but probably more significantly some of the widows revealed that it was respect for the departed husband that motivated them to go through the mourning ritual.

While the public display of grief seemed to be appreciated by especially the older generation of widows aged above 50 years, the younger widows did not share in this appreciation. The younger widows seemed to place more emphasis on the emotional and spiritual mourning for their husbands than to the outward expression or display of grief as expected by the Xhosa society. Their view was that mourning is something you feel in your 'heart' the depth of which related to how much you loved your husband, not something to be displayed. Their actions, for example, the reluctance to wear the mourning dress or to wear it only for a shorter period than expected by society and of behaving publically in a manner according to the older widows that did not conform to the ideal of a 'widow in mourning', showed according to these older widows complete disrespect for the widowhood ritual and to the husband and to society. So while societal validation seemed more important for the older generation of widows, the emotional and spiritual wellbeing was what the younger widows wanted to feel during the process of mourning.



### **7.3 Viewing the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa through social change**

The changing socio-political landscape seems to be leaving its imprint on the public expression of grief through the mourning rituals. In the past and even now the widow is treated and possibly even feared as someone to be left alone for various reasons, such as the bearer of bad luck (Selepe & Edwards, 2008) and was therefore isolated and not allowed to mix freely with the public. Even some of the participants in this study experienced such treatment; this apparent fear of widows however, seems to be decreasing. This it would seem is due not to a change in the manner in which society perceives widows but most likely due to the specific circumstances surrounding the widow. This was reflected in this study by widows who revealed that because they were easily identifiable through the mourning dress men often sought actively to befriend them professing love for them. Men do this because of the expectation that widows will inherit a lot of money and this in effect exposes widows to the risk of being conned out of economic resources. Family members particularly the in-laws had similar expectation for financial support as some of the participants in this study revealed.

The apparent dilution generally of the mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa according to the widows aged over 50 years is of great concern. The younger generation has ceased to follow the rituals as they used to perform them in the olden days because culture is dynamic and not static. Some do so because they feel as mentioned already that the rituals have no value while others feel the rituals are oppressive to women and even question why men should exempt and others still because of the job environment.

According to the widows under 40 years of age, women in the past did not have jobs and so they could follow the mourning rituals to the letter but in these modern times the pressure of going back to work as soon as possible after the husband's funeral means that they have to cut short the mourning period and modify other rituals like not wearing mourning clothes since in some work environments wearing of uniform is compulsory.

The older widows are not pleased with all these changes and feel that restoration of the ritual to the original form is essential but do not discuss the implications for not doing so. The dominant

narrative of mourning envisaged by Niemeyer (2006) which in this case is represented by the views of the older widows among the AmaXhosa is now being modified by the younger widows. The younger generation is asking questions about the validity of the AmaXhosa mourning ritual. This is like cutting holes in the confining stockade of the traditional cultural practices which represent the verbalized symbols of tradition postulated by Huxley (1963). The young generation of women now look at the world in a new and relatively unprejudiced way and so the likelihood of restoration of the mourning rituals to the original practice as hoped by the older widows is unlikely to happen.

#### **7.4 The functions of the mourning rituals among the AmaXhosa**

According to Radzilani (2010), mourning rituals have functions like assisting the deceased journey to the afterlife, assisting change of status to that of a widow, providing healing or therapy and purifying the mourners. To a great extent similar sentiments were felt among the Ama Xhosa with regard to the observation of the mourning rituals especially among the older generation participants. Even some of the younger widows, who felt that the mourning rituals did not serve any purpose, seemed to derive some comfort from participating in some of the rituals.

Part of the function of the mourning rituals seemed to be to take the widow to the point of acceptance of her loss. According to Radzilani (2010), following the loss of their spouse most widows and the community describe their state of being as ‘not normal’. The performance of the mourning rituals even by those reluctant to do so was a way of returning them to ‘normal’ status. Both the cultural and religious construction of the mourning rituals had major influences on the conduct of the rituals but with the same aim of returning the widow to ‘normality’. The gender power imbalance also encouraged the widows to perform the mourning rituals in order to return to their ‘normal’ status.

Somhlaba and Wait (2008) have shown that a higher level of social support for the bereaved is associated with lower levels of anxiety. So one could say that the reverse would indeed be true; that lower levels of social support could be associated with higher levels of anxiety. In this study, quite a number of the participants received little or no social support and these participants described much hardship and indeed were crying out for help.

## **7.5 Limitations of the Study**

Although the qualitative nature of the study meant that the main concern was to understand the phenomena within a certain socio-cultural context (Schurink, 1998 as cited by Radzilani, 2010), a limitation may have arisen as the study did not meet the positivist quantitative and verifiable approach to research. This limitation may not necessarily influence this study as quantitative data collection was not critical to the outcome of the study which was conducted as an IPA.

Another limitation of the study could relate to what Carpenter (1999 as cited by Radzilani, 2010) states that information and thoughts shared by participants in interviews often depends on whether they position the researcher as one of themselves or as an insider or outsider. As a researcher and non-widow the participants could position me as an outsider and fail to share their most intimate feelings about widowhood. Furthermore, according to Taylor (2001) the researcher must understand the local language used by the participants so that he or she can understand the local idioms. The secondary interpretation runs the risk of losing some meanings and may create some gaps; the researcher was of a different ethnic group to the AmaXhosa and relied on translation of 50% of the interviews by a colleague within the University.

The other limitations could revolve around whether or not the interview environment was threatening to the participants especially the non-English speakers. Even among those that spoke English discomfort might be expected during their attempts to express their feelings about the mourning rituals. The converse to this is that the interviews recorded in Xhosa could have lost some of their meaning during the process of translating and transcribing into text data.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion therefore, mourning rituals of the AmaXhosa although seeming to play some role in lessening and possibly even healing the pain and sorrow of the bereaved widows especially among those who believe in the healing value of the mourning rituals, most of the participants in this study found the rituals to be socially and financially stressful. There were more negative perceptions than

positive ones about the performance of the ritual. Significantly, the gender bias towards women was emphasised and furthermore most of the widows felt stigmatized. The rituals formed a kind of roadmap through which the widow regained some form of normality in the society in which she lived. Social support, which was often the key for the successful completion of the rituals, was not always available and quite often lack of social support helped create the negative feelings held by the participants younger than 40 years about participating in the mourning rituals. While some participants did not believe in the rituals although they performed them, their views must also be respected even if they do not see and appreciate the value of the mourning rituals. Whereas the older generation of widows yearned for the return to the original way of practising the rituals, this research has clearly revealed that change in the way the rituals are conducted is taking place. This change may be inevitable as younger people begin to see through the rituals and question the validity of some aspects of the practices especially those they see and deem as unfair and discriminating against women.

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**APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT**



UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE, EAST LONDON  
CAMPUS

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a student doing a Bachelor of Social Science, Masters Degree at the University Of Fort Hare. I am currently engaged in research on widows experiences of spousal mourning among the AmaXhosa of the Eastern Cape Province. The research will seek to deconstruct the experiences of widows in an urban and rural setting.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about this research and to seek your consent to participate in this research. I give a firm promise that:

You will be given full information on the research to be undertaken  
Any information gathered will be treated with utmost secrecy and confidentiality.  
Names of participants will NOT be recorded or divulged.  
The findings of the research will be used purely for academic purposes.  
You will only become a participant once you give voluntary consent to take part in the study.

**Do you give voluntary consent to take part in this study** Yes.....  
No.....

Signed.....

**GRACE AKOL (B Soc Sc, Masters Psy - STUDENT NO. 200483358)**



## APPENDIX II TEXT OF PARTICIPANTS' INTERVIEWS

### PARTICIPANT NO: 1 – Urban – BCUE-1

*What is your name?*

My name \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 53 years old

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in Mdatnsane

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am in 12 Apostles church here in Mdantsane

*What is your highest level of education?*

Grade 12

*What do you do for a living?*

I am just working in a Cash loan

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

In our tradition, we used to wear different clothes from those we were wearing before a sh.....piece, Skirt and top and a cape and a toupee you must be seen by everybody that you are mourning now; you show everybody that you are a widow

*How long did you mourn for?*

I am supposed to take 6 months but since I am working they said I must wear them for 3 months so I wore them for 3 months

*What was your colour of the clothes you wore was it black or some other colour*

It was Navy blue

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 50 years

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving away of the deceased clothes.*
- *(And the putting on and the taking off of the mourning clothes can you explain what happens during that time when you are putting them off? How soon after your husband dies)*

I had kids and I was supposed to support those kids buy clothes, 2 of them are men, they are in grade 11, I had to support them paying Admin fees there was no one that was supporting me, I had to buy groceries the salary was too small and you could not do everything with it, I have a lot of debts with standard bank, African bank. They have handed me over to the attorneys because I can't pay because I am alone supporting the family and no one listens to me.

To remove the clothes you must cook, make Umkhomboti, you must organize new clothes, new beddings take all those used by the husband especially linen, you must buy new linen and new blanket for yourself so that may be you can forget about him; the bed remains because I have no money to buy a new one, you are supposed to remove even the bed

You cook and call all the family and then you first make a choice to take all the clothes of the deceased husband which you want and then the family takes theirs and the old ones are burned.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

Yes I took 4 months to wear the mourning clothes and followed all the rituals. I am still to do the first slaughtering of the bull. So I am still organizing the money to do the first one. Then after 3 years I am supposed to do the second one.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

The taking off and removing of the clothes the putting off of the clothes, the slaughtering of the first bull and then the second bull. Another thing that follows is that you have to wash the dishes. You make Umkhomboti and the family joins you and you have dinner. This is the last ritual which involves only the family and a few friends and your neighbours.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

They cost a lot of money especially when you are alone but we have to do those things in accordance with our culture. This wearing of clothes, we are not comfortable about it because every man when they see a woman wearing those mourning clothes, they assume that she have got a lot of money because if you are a widow they think you have a lot of money so they will want something to do with you so that they can get access to this money you are keeping. In other words men are after widows because they think they are rich. The money is supposed to be coming from insurance especially if the man was working but me I did not even get a cent from the place where my husband was working.

*How did/does it affect women?*

Because it is only women who wear these clothes, it affects them a lot because if a man becomes a widower, he can bury the wife today and tomorrow you can see him with another woman. But you as a woman you can't do that you have to wait you can't even sit with a man next to you.

*How does it affect men?*

It does not affect them. It is only women because if a man becomes a widower, he can bury the wife today and then tomorrow you can see him with another woman.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I did not get any support as I said earlier. No support even for the children who are going to school.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

Yes I think it is necessary.

*What changes would you like to see?*

But I don't know if it will happen; if this wearing of mourning clothes can be taken away then it can be better because now everybody can see you are a widow. Yes I feel there should be change and another change is if I can pass away the husband gets support from the government like a grant but if it is a husband that passes away I can't get anything, I am not getting any grant and I have got 2 kids and it would be better now ..... but I am struggling to take him back I am collecting money now so that when he comes back, we have to do dinner buy some beers, his new clothes like shirt trouser, shoes and he is going to wear those clothes for..... I have to change even the uniform for school so we are struggling a lot

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes there are some changes from the past.

*What changes have you noted?*

By the time of our mothers they were wearing those clothes for about a year now we wear those clothes for about 6 months even 4 months because we are working. By that time our mothers were not working they were sitting at home because they were housewives; we are getting 6 months because we are working.

Yes they were getting support from their families nowadays things have changed and it is not because we are working it is just because of family politics. They think that it is you who killed the husband; in other families they know if the husband was sick for a long time they are accusing you of being responsible for it

This suspicion is common in many families but in my case they knew that he was sick, he was diabetic and then he also had a gall bladder problem.... He was sick for a long time

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

No it does not serve any purpose.

*What purpose do they serve?*

No it costs a lot of money to the widow especially when you are alone but we have to do those things in accordance with our culture. This wearing of clothes, we are not comfortable about it because every man when they see a woman wearing those mourning clothes, they assume that she have got a lot of money because if you are a widow they think you have a lot of money so they will want something to do with you so that they can get access to this money you are keeping. In other words men are after widows because they think they are rich. The money is supposed to be coming from insurance especially if the man was working but me I did not even get a cent from the place where my husband was working.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 2 – Urban - BCUE-2**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 29 years old.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in the urban areas - Southernwood

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am a Christian of 12 Apostles Church in Christ.

*What is your highest level of education?*

I have a National Diploma in Electrical Engineering.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am self employed.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I will tell you about my church. I will put on this clothes (pointing at the white scurf she was wearing). I will mourn for a month according to my church. But others wear black/purple etc and they mourn for 12 months.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I will mourn for 1 month. He was buried on the 12/06/2010. I will take off these clothes on the 12/07/2010 the same day he died. I put on these clothes (white Scurf) the day he died.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 29 years when my husband died.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

I do not know. I know that I have to do this. Although it casts you from the others. You are not free to go to Town as you. At least I know I have to do this for my husband. My in-laws because we do not go to the same church but they understood our rituals. My husband used to go to the same church with me (12 Apostles Church). They go to another church. If they were other people they would never have allowed me but they understood. I did get their support.

I have not taken off the clothes yet.

When we went to his home I was asked to take his clothes. I took all his clothes but some other people advised me that if there is something I like I could keep it for myself or something I would like to keep for myself I could keep. Otherwise it helped me because during that time although my husband has passed but it has not registered yet. I just packed the clothes I had no feeling about it but now if those clothes were here it would have hurt me. So to me it is fine that the clothes are not here it has helped me to forget. I have kept his suite for my son and a gown for myself.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

I am not sure about the slaughtering.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

They did what is called amaqhoshu (a button) and then they put on the black buttons. I will be putting on the black buttons. Some people say that when that ritual is done my parents have to bring a new bed. I am not supposed to sleep on the same bed that I was sleeping with my husband when he was still alive. I am not sure if they asked my parents that as I will only know when that comes.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Ours is reasonable unlike those who wear black mourning clothes for 1 year.

*How did/does it affect women?*

It does not affect women it looks like ordinary clothes.

*How does it affect men?*

I am not sure how it affects men. I am usually in doors.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I get support from my family but not much there (from the in-laws). My son is now with his grandmother. When he comes back I will be a bit better and a bit stronger.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

In our church's mourning rituals I do not think anything can be changed but with other traditional mourning rituals, I think again it depends on what you believe. After the day my husband was buried I was supposed to go to the river to wash all my husbands' clothes or just some of the clothes. You are also supposed to wash yourself. This is to remove bad luck. I did not do that because I had pneumonia. It is not necessary unless somebody really believes it will help.

*What changes would you like to see?*

It is fine in our church. There is no need for any change. At least you need to do something.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

I do not remember any changes.

*What changes have you noted?*

I do not remember any changes.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

No.

*What purpose do they serve?*

Wearing those clothes you are being identified. You are being cast from other people. Some one should know from inside that you are in mourning not the whole world should know. It puts one at a risk.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 3 – Rural – BCRE-3**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 34 years old

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in the rural areas in Pomlane out of East London.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am a Christian. I fellowship at the Christian church at Pumlane.

*What is your highest level of education?*

I am doing a Degree course in Social Work.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am studying.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

For me it was short. I never saw anyone in that period and what they are doing. You are sitting there alone behind the door. You are to wear some black clothes. After burying, you are taken to the bushes. They wash you and they burn your clothes that you were using before. Then you are to walk home wearing the new black mourning clothes. It was kind of unfair. It was a new thing to me. I was asking them why you are doing this to me. It was kind of disgusting. They said even them they went through the same rituals.

*How long did you mourn for?*

My husband was a twin. In xhosa they said if your husband is a twin then you do not have to mourn. I wore the black clothes for one week but in my case they said they were doing that for me in order for the other women to respect me. No one anymore will say you never mourned your husband. They told me that they are doing this for my sake so that I may be safe from our society. It was a good thing I felt I loved my husband. I told my pastor I had to do this afterwards I will just pack up my things and go.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 31 years old.



*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

Even if you are not the one who killed your husband, they still suspect you for having killed him that, somehow you had an input on it. Even if you do not know what happened to him. My husband was only sick for one week with a flue. I do not understand why they thought I was the one who killed my husband. I wondered how I would kill the person I need the most and love.

After the funeral on a Sunday, they slaughtered a goat. They said they are washing their hands. After that I never saw anyone. I was alone at home they sent my sister to come stay with me because I used to stay alone with my husband alone. It was difficult...( the participant was emotional as she narrated her experience). I did not have food and electricity. I had to go to them and ask for food. My sister in-law and my mother supported me. They bought me clothes.

Taking off the clothes was a relief to me. Going to a taxi was a shame because everybody was saying ooooooh you are so young how is it like? The mourning clothes are a symbol that you are a widow. They do not even greet you. Taking them off was like it is o.k. I am over this stage now. I am glad because it was like stigma to me. I was the only one with pain. I was the only one who lost a husband here so if it is time to take them off I am glad.

The giving away of his clothes was another difficult thing. Sometimes you need something to hold on to. At least if these clothes were still here it means that there is still hope. I gave them the clothes and they did not expect that he was having some new clothes. My husband was a taxi driver. They did not expect him to have decent clothes. They usually saw him on T-shirts so I gave them all the new ones. I asked them for only two T-shirts. I told them that I like this ones. It was that when I wore them it gave me hope. So here is something I can hold on to and they took the rest of the stuff. Whenever I am missing my husband I wear those T-shirts.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

No because he was a twin so they did not do all the rituals. The other twin brother is still alive.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

They told me to shave my hair but I think my sister in-law said no. even my old clothes; they said I should not give them away. They told me that I will wear my clothes. If you are not working you stay at home but if you are working you go to work.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

It depends to the person sometimes they are not necessary. It depends to the person and the family. They said she is not going to perform the rest of the rituals e.g. slaughtering of the bulls because her husband is a twin. However, when the other twin dies I am supposed to go back and perform all the other rituals but I will not perform those rituals because I am a Christian and I am over that now.

*How did/does it affect women?*

May be because I am young sometimes I feel like I do not know where I belong especially in church. It is like they wanted me to be a mother. I do not even have a child but in church they treat me like a mother. I am leading them, the old ladies. I am still in that position leading them. It is confusing me because I used to wear my long skirts when my husband was alive. Now I like to put on trousers. I have to change. I used to wear iqhira (a head cloth) but now I do not wear it. I have to change slowly. It is difficult as time goes I begin now to understand. I am telling myself that this is real life. It is happening there is no husband now. I have to be what I would like to be. It is kind of a hard thing. It is the end of the storm. I used to stay with him but never stayed outside. I was working before but if I did not have money he would come and fetch me.

Now with this new life I have to beg. I have to ask others. I had to move to a new place to stay. I was struggling. It is not a good life because you always know that you have this person and you are relying on him. He is not there. There was a time I had a class in Sociology lecture and it was ending late at 08H00 p.m. I was staying at Fanta. I had to catch a taxi. I had to walk in the dark and sometimes I used to cry. I had to make this work. I had to be strong because I want to study. I wanted to prove to them that without his presence I can still do it. On the second day after he died, he died on a Monday, then on Tuesday I thought of taking my own life. But, I thought no I have my own life to take care of and live. Let me not think of committing suicide. Even now I am stronger than then but it takes experience.

*How does it affect men?*

With men they do whatever they want to do. They do not even change their clothes. May be they shave their hair. They continue to live their lives normally. There is no stigma. He is the only one who knows he has lost a wife. May affect them psychologically but society treats them differently.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I applied for a loan. I got a bursary from Social Development and I got help from my mother. My mother supports me all these years although she is still paying fees for the others. I am making sure that I pass so that I continue to get the bursary.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

A change is necessary because you have to move on from the past. I am studying doing social work and I have to deal with other people who may have the same problems like I have. I also think that mourning helps especially as Christians we have that thing that Jesus is there. We will be fine and yet at the back of your head you are the one who is feeling the pain. If you do not mourn your husband somehow some where it may affect you because every time you hear or come across some people (they) will say you do not even do the mourning ritual. Unless you are a real Christian then you know you will pass that one. For others it is a good thing but me no. if any thing they can change is to support a person because you can not kill someone you love.

*What changes would you like to see?*

The slaughtering of the bull is not necessary because it is you the widow who is supposed to buy the bull. Where will you find the money if you are not working? Like the story of my older brother in-law when he passed away, the widow got the money to buy a bull for slaughtering but the family witch doctor said that they must start from other things. So the money was taken and they promised to pay her back but I did not see them pay her back. The money was diverted to other things. I do not see the reason for that. When slaughtering you wear clothes inside out. You do not have to do that.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

It depends on your family. It is like for me they said I am young so I have to wear blue. The others wear black clothes. My friend from another church wore white clothes. It depends on age and the family.

*What changes have you noted?*

Like another friend of mine she wore for only six months then when her mother in-law also became a widow. Her rituals were then terminated because they could not have both the daughter in-law and her mother in-law in mourning clothes. It brings bad memories.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

No.

*What purpose do they serve?*

Mourning rituals do not serve any purpose. It is just a belief. They do not do any good thing.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 4 – Rural – BCRE-4**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 34 years old.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in New Lands. It is a rural area right outside of Mdantsane.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am a Christian.

*What is your highest level of education?*

I am doing 3<sup>rd</sup> level – bachelors of Sociology.

*What do you do for a living?*

I do not do anything for a living. I am just maintained by the money I got from the passing of my husband and that is why I am able to go to school.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

While you are in mourning in our xhosa culture you wear even your attire you are recognized that, that one has lost a husband. You wear black clothes. Some others now in this new generation wear navy others purple but it was black. The mourning period is determined by your in-laws. You can not say that you want to get rid of this now it has been too long. They are the ones (in-laws) who determine that it is enough now you have to change to those normal clothes. You can not determine yourself and it is them who do the service because you can not just undress. There is a ceremony of some kind then you do it and you wear your normal clothes that is the xhosa mourning.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I am not mourning because I and my husband adopted a Christian religion. So in our religion you mourn only for 1 month. He has got his own family. There was a difficulty when he passed away because he was the only one who was in church. So you had to convince them that according to our own religion this is what is supposed to be and they want to you to put on those black clothes and that other stuff. But my church leaders managed to tell them that I can not do otherwise because my husband was also a leader in church. I have to be an example. I must do according to the church rules so I mourned for that 1 month and I was not wearing black clothes. According to my church religion you wear a white scurf and a white *iqhira* (head cloth) for 1 month. My husband was buried

on the 28/01/2010 then on the same day 28/02/2010, you wear your normal clothes. It is exactly 1 month. Otherwise other than that, if you are to do xhosa way it would be six months, 1 year, 2years up to them (in-laws) as long as they feel that you have to wear this. Some they feel that you are responsible for the death of their son so they are punishing you in a way. So fortunately for me I did not go through that.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 31 when my husband died.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

You do not get anything from the in-laws. May be some other families are fortunate enough but what mostly happens is that in-laws most of the time they always...*(the participant became emotional at this point and could not continue talking for a moment)* you stop becoming a family immediately after the passing of their son. They just cut you off. They do not know you. There is no connection any more. You can not expect to get something from them. It is out.

*( What about the children?)*

We are not that family that we used to be. Thought we do not have a problem with them but we can assist them if we could but even I as I have this maintenance that I have from my husband so I can not share it with. I have a child to raise. If I was working may be I could but I can not assist them.

As I have indicated it was more of a religious thing to me. It was a matter of conforming to my church. I was doing what was expected of me. So it was something that I had to do so I had to wear those clothes. For me I felt that I have to because he is no longer there. Its some kind of respect I do not know. I had to show some respect to him. Wherever you go people know that you that something happened to her but it does not matter because something did happen.

The giving off his clothes, according to our rituals it is supposed to take place after a year that your husband has been buried. But for me if you want to know about my case it did not go that way. Immediately after the funeral of my husband his bigger brother came and took everything of his brother and it was like there was a normal thing. There was nothing formalized like calling all other relatives to share it among each other. It was never like that he just took them.

*(Were you not informed of when he was going to come?)*

He informed me that he will be coming to fetch his clothes. It was in a form of an order if I may say so because he said I will be there to fetch his clothes.

*(Were you not allowed to keep some? Like whatever you loved like may be a shirt, jacket etc?)*

I am not allowed but I did steal some because I knew that he was not going to give me anything. So I did steal two of his things and hid them because he does not know all his clothes. It was my chance before he came to steal and hid them and he took everything and went.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

No we did not do that (the slaughtering of the bull) because it was more of a Christian mourning.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

I do not know anything. I did not even notice anything even with my mother (grandmother) other than what I have told you.

*(Does your mother (grandmother) belong to the same church with you?)*

No she did the black widow thing.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

I do not know whether I am a feminist of what because as far as I am concerned, I do not see a need for that because when it comes to a woman passing away, a man does not mourn. He immediately marries so I do not see any need for that. It is irrelevant so long as I am concerned because when you are in that mourning thing you ..... *(the widow cries at this point)* it attracts more men, more men and more men. It is like you are a job or something. Applications come in like .....all men now love you. They are so in love with you. It is not right so long as I am concern. Otherwise may be other people will say it is alright.

*(While we are still at that love issue, it is an opportunity to get something e.g the money they assume the widow has got?)*

There is no love at ll. There is no love I do not see it may be some day I will meet or see it I do not know but all the men I have seen they are fakes.

*How did/does it affect women?*

This thing of mourning is some what biased. A man is expected to have some one comforting him immediately like a woman doing everything that his wife was doing. They do not mourn at all this is why I say I do not see why we have to do it. They are not doing it and yet at the end of the day

mourning is something that is inside you. You mourn your husband from inside you. There is no point of showing it to everybody that I am in this period of having lost my husband. There is no point of showing that.

*How does it affect men?*

They do not mourn at all. A man is expected to have someone comforting him immediately like a woman doing everything that his wife was doing.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

No. they just want, want and want. For instance there is this circumcision ritual, when boys get to manhood, they will just ask for support from you knowing that you are not working but they want something from you. It is like that with our customs. They expect you to go and work and do everything there. I did those, I have no problem with that but as far as what they want I had to buy a goat and another one and there are so many and brandy. But after I did that I felt stupid. Why did I do this because whenever I have a problem they can not assist me? But may be I like them I do not know but I do like them when we talk serious things because they are the family I have. They are my church family.

*(During the actual mourning time did you get support from them?)*

No. You do not get anything from them. I actually what was happening, my husband was supporting my sister-in-law. She is married and he was supporting his big brother, the one who came to fetch the clothes. We were buying groceries for them each month and we were renting for my big brother in the municipality. What happened after the funeral by the month end before me taking off those clothes, they came as usual wanting groceries from me and money for rent. I told them where are my supposed to get money from because our source of income was my husband who is gone and I am not working. Where do you suppose I will get the money from? They asked me did your husband not give/leave you money. I told them even if he did I am not going to give you that because it is what we are supposed to leave on. I can not give it to you. They did not have any information if there were any funds or insurances at the time. They will give you all difficult answers when you.... (The participant became emotional for a while) Like my husband left two cars and when you go to the estates, you have to bring a family member from your husband's side and a family member from my family with the same surname or elders because they want to make sure that I do not get everything that belongs to my husband. But fortunately for me the lawyers just want someone with the same surname he does not have to come from the same family. So I just got



somebody with the same name and he signed for me from the court and everything came to me. Right after that you want assistance from me but they did not want me to get that money. They always make it sure that you are experiencing difficulties not knowing what satisfies them. I am not interested. But I will continue doing what is right to them.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

Yes. It is very necessary even the one that is in my church I know that when we are in church there is no democracy. There is only kingdom where the king says do this. Even there that is why I am saying I am not sure whether I am a feminist or what. But I do not think it is necessary that there is this mourning because when you are mourning, you mourn on your own you can do dirty stuff even when you are on black clothes. So there is no significance of wearing them. This is why I say it is point less to wear those clothes.

*What changes would you like to see?*

If it continues let men mourn their wives as well or I do not see mourning as necessary because what is mourning is what you feel you mourn on your own. There is no need to show everybody that you are mourning.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes. I can see there is a slight change because I think it is because of the effect of the law and the effect that people are greedy. But otherwise the mourning is still very severe in the rural areas. In-laws are interested in monies of their sons. They make sure that you do feel the pain some of them. It is very little change because I remember the other mother she is still wearing them it is almost a year and half and you go looking for a job wearing this things. In other areas it is slightly changing. But in rural area it is still very, very severe. I do not know how to put it.

*What changes have you noted?*

In the rural areas it is still the same. In the urban areas, they allow you to take off those things while you are at work. When you come home you wear again but in the rural areas you wear them all the time. You wash them at night and you hang them and then in the morning you wear them. So it is still the same there in the rural areas. May be it will change as time goes on I do not know.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

In this modern time they should try to do away with it.

*What purpose do they serve?*

They should try to do away with it.

*(What else do you feel should be high lighted in this research because the purpose of the research is for the widows voices to be heard?)*

What I can say, I do not know if that is possible or not as you are writing research if they could make a change because what is happening is that for instance my husband was working in a contract, he was not permanently employed if I may say that. There is no money that you get from the government unlike someone who was employed by the Government. The Government gives you some money each month that you are used to. But when you were like someone like my husband who was working in contract there is no money that is kept for you when you retire or whatever. When something happens to you it is given to you or your family. If the Government could provide some kind of intervention If I may say so because what happens, to widows, they become as much as you are mourning you feel very hurt about your husband, you will still feel very responsible to this children and you end up having to go to because there is no other way you end up giving yourself to men although you are not psychologically there but you have to do this because there are the only source of in come that you can give to your children at the time. So it is something like that. If they could give some kind of intervention for widows like they do in social grants and all that stuff. If they could have that kind of intervention may be there would be a change. We would not feel we have to go there. Let us say if I did not have policies may be I would have been a prostitute who knows I do not know because my child has to be fed, he has to be clothed etc.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 5 – Urban – BCUE-5**

*What is your name?*

\*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

This year I am 50 years old

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live at Mdantsane, N17. Mostly lives in urban areas but has a home in rural areas

*What religious belief do you hold?*

Methodist church at Mdantsane

*What is your highest level of education?*

Passed matric then studied to become a professional nurse

*What do you do for a living?*

Currently unemployed (since bereavement); previously worked as nurse for nursing service agency from Cape Town

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

What I know I used to hear it from my mother because she was brought up in rural areas. You wear mourning clothes/dresses

*How long did you mourn for?*

My family told me that I will take 6 months of mourning

*How old were you when your husband died?*

50 yrs old when husband passed

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes*

In-laws came to stay with me for 2 weeks; in my culture in the week following the funeral they do mqombothi. Gives you time to talk/interact with people. The day my husband died I was asked questions I didn't like; the in-laws thought I and my husband had divorced because there were problems within the marriage. The in-laws wanted things that belonged to my husband.

I am still wearing mourning clothes. My husband's clothes have not been given off; his family washed his clothes.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull*

Slaughtering of first and second bull has not yet happened

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

I am unaware of any other mourning rituals to be performed other than what has already been mentioned.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Feelings of mourning ritual: it is a culture therefore it has to be done. The orders have to be obeyed. Everyone can see/identify that she is a widow which I didn't like... (*the widow became emotional and cried*). Because of my profession I have to wear uniform to work which provides me with relief. I feel constrained because everyone can see she is in mourning and expect her to behave in a certain way; you cannot freely participate socially and talk loudly and cannot attend certain functions.

*How did/does it affect women?*

Affect on women: they cannot be free. People are always watching her. I do not like the way women are treated; it was okay to have those kinds of perceptions in the old days but in this generation it's not fair.

*How does it affect men?*

Affect on men: they are free to do as they please.

*Did you get/are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I receive much support from my husband's family – the family he grew up with that looked after him & educated him, not my husband's biological family.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

I feel that there should be a change in the mourning ritual that is currently followed that has been passed down from long ago. It depends on the women involved; they may have loved their husband very much and be willing / prefer to conduct the mourning rituals as opposed to someone who is doing it by force i.e. because it is something that just has to be done.

*What changes would you like to see?*

The changes I would like to see are in the attire that widows ought to wear. Wearing these mourning clothes makes it is easy for you to be identified as a widow thus preventing you from mourning internally. Women who have gone through the ritual themselves approach me and it makes the grieving process more difficult.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes it has undergone some changes.

*What changes have you noted?*

In the olden days the mourning process would last up to 1 year. The duration also varies amongst families – some families may only mourn for 3 months. Families no longer mourn for 12 months/1 year but they do not mourn for less than 6 months especially in the rural areas.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

No.

*What purpose do they serve?*

I don't think the mourning process serves any purpose.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time.

*(At this point the participant asked that the recorder be turned off and she narrated emotionally about the way her in-laws were treating her as a suspect in her husband's death)*

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 6 – Urban – BCUE-6**

This participant refused to be interviewed. She claims that she was suspected of having killed her late husband. The participant lives in Mdantsane Township.

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 7 – Rural – BCRE-7**

This participant refused to be interviewed. She claims that she was suspected of having killed her late husband. The participant lives in Tsholomnqa, a rural area.

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 8 – Rural – BCRE-8**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 91 years.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I mostly live in the rural areas – Ngxingolo village

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am a Christian. I pray in the Methodist Church.

*What is your highest level of education?*

J.C – Junior Certificate.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am a pensioner.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

To be patient hold on and have a secret e.g. be fulfilled with everything.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I mourned for six months because he is a twin.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 63. He died in 1983.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

Keep on with the in-laws, respect the in-laws. There are things that you don't call them the way they are called e.g. water, you don't call Amanzi as it is called by unmarried woman. A married woman as a sign of respect of the in-laws and also depending on the clan – call it **Imvotho**. As a widow you decide on the time to take off the mourning clothes, if the family wants to take off the mourning clothes before then end of the year (in 6 months), you can tell them that you want to continue with the mourning until the end because you loved him (your husband). I did that. It also depends on people you are married to.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- The slaughtering of the first bull.

- The slaughtering of the second bull.

Yes you participate but not at all activities that you are not allowed while you are still a mourner e.g. you can not attend wedding ceremonies.

The slaughtering of the first oxen is to say you can go to here and there not all places.

The slaughtering of the second oxen is to say now as a mourner you are ready to wait for your husband to come back home spiritually as you are a believer of traditional activities as you believe new is included on the ancestry (ancestors of the family). It must be an ox not a bull.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

It involves being seen that you are a mourner. There are signs/symbols that indicate you are a mourner.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

As a mourner you feel ashamed to do wrong things as you know that people are looking and they can remind you by clothing. Mourning is the way to show people that you are mourning and that person is your husband.

*How did/does it affect women?*

Women, some don't want to take long wearing those clothes because of what is taking place e.g. abuse. Some say that they don't want to mourn someone who abused her. Others are committing adultery. Others because they are responsible for the death of their husband. Some women who commit adultery don't care when their husband die. Mourning affects you every time you see children growing without their father.

*How does it affect men?*

Men can be very affected when their wives die especially if they were really affectionate.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

No, there is no support – you must work on your own. You don't even get support from the government.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

It is necessary – to be guided as it is fading – needs to be improved.

*What changes would you like to see?*

Keep all to the time as well as reasons for the time. The right time of mourning is the a year whether you are working or not e.g. nurses don't even want to cut their hair to show that they are mourning.

The mourning time is a year need to be compulsory for all.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes.

*What changes have you noted?*

The way they make things. On the day of the funeral, after a week a woman complains that they don't want to wear the mourning clothes. Some even take with them clothes to change while they are at work. They don't mourn for enough time and others get in relationships immediately after the husband death.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

No.

*What purpose do they serve?*

Some women leave their homes with the children and suffer with them at their maternal homes. Husbands also take little time to mourn for their wives.

Additional Information:

Yes. About the Will. If a husband had belongings all what he has is taken away by his family (brothers). If the Will was in place it would give direction who must take charge of his belongings. It is worse in the rural areas where they even confiscate your husbands' livestock because there was no Will to control who is taking what or not. It is much easier when your husband did not have anything that the in-laws would want to take.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time.

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 9 – Rural - BCRE-9**

**Ngxingolo village** - This participant disappeared while we were still in another interview.

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**TRANSLATED FROM XHOSA VERSION TO ENGLISH**

**PARTICIPANT: 10 – Urban – BCUX-10**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 38 years old.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in Duncan village in the township.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am a Zionist.

*What is your highest level of education?*

It is Standard 5 or Grade 7 now.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am a cleaner.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I do not have enough knowledge. I have little knowledge. You wear black clothes or black buttons sewed with black cloth. You stay about 6 to 8 months. Then you take off the black clothes.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I did not wear black clothes or mourn for my husband death because I was pregnant. In some families when you are pregnant you do not mourn by wearing black clothes. Some people wear other colours according to their religious affiliations e.g. blue colours etc.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

My husband died in 2008 February. I was 36 years at that time.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

I received support from my husband family and my own family (where I come from).

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

After his death, a cow (ox) was slaughtered to accompany him. They still have to slaughter another cow (ox) in memory of him. Though I did not wear the black clothes I was mourning his death by my actions (in my heart).

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

After the birth of my child in June I stayed for 3 months, then I was taken to my church for cleansing (washing away the dark cloud that had resulted from his death) (*At this point the participant started crying before continuing with the interview*). In my church we do traditional activities.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

I think mourning is good because it shows love and respect to the husband and it is not good not to mourn at all.

*How did/does it affect women?*

Some loose while others gain weight. There is a belief that the one who gained weight she has accepted the mourning and it liked her.

*How does it affect men?*

I am not sure. They only put the black button and cut off their hair as women do.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I got support from church and neighbours and from both of my families.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

Nothing it is good the way it is done I do not know from other people.

*What changes would you like to see?*

Nothing.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes.

*What changes have you noted?*

There are some changes because people used to wear only black clothes regardless of their religious affiliation. These days they do according to their churches wearing different colours or not wearing clothes at all. Other people are complaining that it is abuse for women though women in the past were mourning without complaining.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

Women need to show respect to their husband.

*What purpose do they serve?*

There is the belief that man or husband is the head of the household and his wife follows. In such an instance woman has to mourn their husband's death as the head of the family in his memory.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 11 – Urban – BCUX-11**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 50 years old.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in urban areas - Southernwood

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am a Methodist church of South Africa.

*What is your highest level of education?*

Grade 12 or Standard 10.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am a Telephone operator (PABX)

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

When somebody died of an accident you do not mourn for a full year. You mourn for a period of only for 6 months.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I mourned for 6 months because he died of a car accident.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 42 years old.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

Oh, it was not easy at all. Most difficult time of my life decisions taken without involving me. I never received my righteous benefits. You know the friction of the in-laws (between me and them). They had never involved me in the slaughtering of the cow (ox) for the respect of the older people in the family.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*



I was not that involved in other issues but after one month of his death his clothes were given to other family members. I was wearing purple clothes to mourn his death. After six months I took off the clothes.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

They slaughtered and invited all family members all over and I was warned in terms of how to behave.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

It is not a good time. Everything is under control of the in-laws. You do not go out. You do not wash your clothes while people are seeing you.

*How did/does it affect women?*

It is not a good experience. You do not talk when in mourning no matter how you do not like the decisions taken on your behalf.

*How does it affect men?*

They are not affected at all because as they are in mourning, they are busy looking for another woman.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

Not at all: After the death of my husband they did not want to be witnesses at court so that I can get my husbands belongings which I was entitled to. However, I received support from my family and they were sad about what was going on with my in-laws.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

Yes.

*What changes would you like to see?*

Yes at least it must be one month because this six months or 12 months period is too long while some of the things need your attention while you are not allowed to talk.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes.

*What changes have you noted?*

Some women do not respect their mourning such as that they talk loudly and others even get involved with other men (relationships) while are in mourning.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

Not at all: When you go to church, you are to stay at the back but these days they are cheating.

*What purpose do they serve?*

No purpose. It only brings trauma to the mourner (the widow)

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 12 – Urban – BCUX-12**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 56 years old.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I mostly live in the urban areas - Mdantsane

*What religious belief do you hold?*

My religious belief is the

*What is your highest level of education?*

My level of education is Grade 12.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am a teacher assistant at the Khayathu Special School.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I understand too much of it but I would like to express myself in isiXhosa. What can I say People from the olden age support those who lost their husband used to support, used to mourn together with the family but I never got/received that support because we were separated with my husband. He left to Johannesburg though we had four children. Before I got married I had a child who then helped to support the children financially. We always had quarrel because she believed that I was wasting money for step siblings. However, my husband came back from Johannesburg, sold the house while we were staying in and left with the money to his places (other women). He then came back again when he heard that one of his children was admitted in Hospital because she was sick. My husband died in Hospital seat when he was informed that the child who was sick is HIV/AIDS positive. He then was buried and my in-laws never allowed me to bury my husband because they

will bury their son so I will have to pay the costs. Then the church members took an action but they had to get my consent to get lawyers/court intervention to stop the funeral so that I can bury my husband. I was against that because at my home we had never fought for a dead person. We went to the funeral with my children and I wanted to see him and we were given the access to see their father. My husband's family did not allow me to put the soil.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I did not wear the black clothes because the family never came to support us. I mourned by heart for about a year without ..... we never did any of the mourning rituals; I was always trying with my children. *(This participant was too emotional as she narrated her experiences).*

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 45 when he died (2001). Now I am 56 years old.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes*

I do not know what happened to my husband's clothes because he was staying with a girlfriend in Johannesburg, but I see some of his clothes with his brothers.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

I was not involved in the slaughtering of the bulls.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

I did not participate in all the mourning ritual activities.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

It is hurting me now because some of the things that took place to my children because I think if he was around things could be different.

*How did it affect women?*

I feel like a victim of some of the things that took place in my family as there is no father figure.

*How does it affect men?*

Men do not wear mourning clothes; they hardly stay a year without a partner. Sometimes others after three months you hear that they are married/cohabiting. I understand them because they can not stay for long even in a Bible they can't stay without a woman. We women we are made strongly than men to live without men. So they can be understood for marrying immediately after they have lost their wives. It does not mean that they don't think about their wives they think of being victims of girlfriends so they prefer to get married to have someone who will take care of them.

*Did you get/are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I did not have any support even now no one supports me but God will provide.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

Yes but our children don't care.

*What changes would like to see?*

I don't know what to say. Children have changed everything e.g. they don't want to be lobolad (dowry). They are living like white people. I think it is their way. They had been taught in their schools. We adults we are just bucking when we talk to them. Even now I was battling with my daughter who was protecting her boy friend who was supposed to pay lobola and she was saying that her boy friend does not have money though this man is working in London as a professional Nurse. He has got everything but now she said ..... worked hard and is a bread winner at home. I cried when she was saying this and I reported to the church. Things have changed and the fathers of today drink with their children and I don't see them mourning so this ritual is out dated for this generation.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes.

*What changes have you noted?*

People are changing; others are wearing whatever outfit that is recommended by their churches. Other churches do not allow or do not encourage that because is associated with darkness. Some women even got pregnant while they are mourning. In the olden day, our mothers used not to talk to people when wearing mourning clothes. They used to be accompanied by people who will talk on their behalf. With all the bad things people do now while wearing mourning clothes, it will be better if people mourn by heart because these clothes do not stop them on doing bad things. And also man do not mourn why do women have to mourn. Clothes are meaningless in this generation compared to our mothers they use not to move around instead people use to help them. They even change black clothes like any clothes to show that they were having rich late husband. Others may not wear it because is hurting to them wearing these clothes and cry everyday.

In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?

No.

*What purpose do they serve?*

They do not serve any purpose because even the clothes are meaningless in this generation compared to our mothers they use not to move around instead people use to help them. They even change black clothes like any other clothes to show that they were having a rich late husband.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 13 – Urban – BCUX-13**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I am 40 years old

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in Mdantsane. I usually live in the urban area.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

My religion is 12 Apostolic (TLCC).

*What is your highest level of education?*

My level of education is standard five (5).

*What do you do for a living?*

I am unemployed I survive through a grant of the two (2) children.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I have no knowledge of mourning rituals as from my church does not do mourning rituals

*How long did you mourn for?*

In my church we mourn for about one month.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was 28 years when he died.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*

- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

People from Xhosa community take 6 or 12 months. Clothes depends others are navy others are black. No one from the family came for the distribution of his clothes so I just gave the clothes to people who have the same clan.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

We were not involved in slaughtering. When he died there was no communication. I was a stand alone. Nothing was ever done for him.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

I put a white scarf on the shoulders, you work as usual or used to. Mourning is in the heart of the mourner and continues as you work.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Mourning is stressing and it always reminds you of the loss.

*How did/does it affect women?*

Mourning is stressing and it always reminds you of the loss and children also misbehave.

*How does it affect men?*

Men do not mourn immediately after death of the wife, and they get married.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

My in-laws never supported me instead they believed that I killed my husband.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

For me I feel mourning will depend on your heart as many people would wear black clothes while doing bad things.

*What changes would you like to see?*



For me I feel like people must just mourn by heart or else the black clothes though I do not support it. For me as a Christian there is no need.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes.

*What changes have you noted?*

There is a difference from the past to now. People have lesser months such as three or two months not a year of mourning. I would like to see people changing black clothes because with these clothes you can not even visit the neighbours even when you have a problem and now they are like a punishment to the one who has lost the husband.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

No.

*What purpose do they serve?*

Mourning rituals is not serving any purpose.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interview and for your time.

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 14 – Rural – BCRX-14**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I do not know my age but I was born in 1922 (88).

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in urban/rural areas?*

I live in the rural areas in Mbaca in King Williams Town.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am Rhabe.

*What is your highest level of education?*

It is standard six.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am unemployed, survive through Government grant and plough the garden

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

When you are mourning you wear full black clothing and do not go around you stay at home. My husband died in 1997.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I mourned the death of my husband for a year.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I do not know my age.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

I was helped by special old ladies of the family especially those who have lost their husbands. They will warn you about everything about being single (widowed women). When taking the clothes after twelve months, the family slaughter a sheep and the whole community comes and you are given new clothes to indicate that you are over with mourning. During this time you prepare, baked bread and cook, must have tea. These new clothes indicate that it is over.

Sharing of clothes of the husband, you call the brothers of the husband after three months of the funeral. You put all his clothes in front and they share the clothes among themselves. This is done after taking mourning clothes.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

There is no other mourning ritual when taking off the clothes other than the slaughtering of a sheep. There is no slaughtering of a cow.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

Mourning rituals are good because you give respect to your late husband and respect to the family to show that you care. You wear the black clothes for twelve months. You stay at home. You do not go around places and also not talking to people.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Mourning rituals is good because you give respect to your late husband and the family.

*How did/does it affect women?*

It does not affect women because it is good to mourn when women loose their husbands.

*How does it affect men?*

Yes men mourn sometimes they take a year or less.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

I received nothing.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

It is good to mourn when women loose their husbands.

*What changes would you like to see?*

No change.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

Yes. The youth of today do not care whether they mourn or not. When you lost your husband in your generation you find it difficult to even talk such as when people greet you.

*What changes have you noted?*

Some mourners these days would go out from their homes eating while as a mourner you do not eat in public space. These days you find them eating apples on the street in town. As a mourner you must be respectful.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

Yes.

*What purpose do they serve?*

It is good that people must mourn the death of their husband.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interview and for your time.

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT NO: 15 – Rural – BCRX-15**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

I was born in 1927 but I do not know how many years.

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in Mbaca a rural area in King Williams Town.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am an Anglican. I pray at St. John's.

*What is your highest level of education?*

My level of education is Standard 5.

*What do you do for a living?*

I am on old age grant and gardening.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I mourned the death of my husband in 1996. After the funeral, the following day my clothing was changed and I mourned for about a year. The widowed woman of the family assists in the process of mourning. They tell you that as a mourning person you have to respect the process. You do not talk badly, greet people softly and remain in your household not to be found all over the place. So they say you must be a lady when wearing these clothes as a sign of respect to your husband.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I mourned the death of my husband for a year.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I am not sure of my age then.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes*

After three months in my case the younger and older brothers of my husband shared the clothes amongst themselves in my home. In some families they can wait for more than three months, it depends. When taking off these mourning clothes there is no ritual performed.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

There is no other mourning ritual when taking off the clothes other than the slaughtering of a sheep. There is no slaughtering of a cow.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

A sheep is slaughtered and the community and family come. After taking off the clothing, a prayer is performed and then people eat (dinner). There is no specific church involved.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Yes it is good. There must be something to differentiate you from a person who has a husband. There must be something to indicate that you have lost your husband. It helps because some people get to know about husband death, you need not to explain yourself all the time. The period of mourning also helps those who did not here about the death.

*How did / does it affect women?*

It does not affect women because it is good to mourn when women loose their husbands.

*How does it affect men?*

Yes it affects men but they do not fit exactly to what women do in terms of mourning. They put buttons that indicate that they have lost their wife and also cut their clothes. Men are free, they

talk on the street, go to the taverns, and they are not expected to mourn the way women do. This is part of culture. Males are different from women it is the way it is. We will never be treated like men.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

No I received nothing.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

No there is no need. Men and women are different. It is part of beliefs, norms that women must be the ones who mourn as they are expected culturally. There is no need for change in mourning rituals.

*What changes would you like to see?*

No there is no need for change.

*In your view has the mourning undergone any change from the past?*

Yes. This youth of today do not have time for mourning. They do not care of the situation they are in. In our generation when you were outside the house you run to the room you do not talk to them as you are scared.

Now that your husband is late you are all on your own even the family members do not assist. They just come when you have something. Now you have to understand you are on your own.

During mourning, it helps you to get used to the idea that you are all on your own. It teaches you the new situation you find yourself in so that by the time you take off the mourning clothes you are used to being alone without a husband to support you.

*What changes have you noted?*

Some mourners these days would go out from their homes eating while as a mourner you do not eat in public space. These days you find them eating apples on the street in town. As a mourner you must be respectful.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

Yes it is good that women must mourn the death of their husband.

*What purpose do they serve?*

It is good that women must mourn their husbands when they die.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interview and for your time.

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 16 – Rural – BCRX-16**

*What is your name?*

My name is \*\*\*\*\*

*How old are you?*

\*\*\*\*\* (Approximated to between 65 and 70)

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban/rural areas?*

I live in Mbaca in rural areas in King Williams Town.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am an Anglican. I pray in St. John's Church.

*What is your highest level of education?*

My level of education is standard five (5).

*What do you do for a living?*

I plough and working in a pre-school temporally.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I do have enough information about mourning rituals although I also mourned my husband death. I wore the black clothes for about a year. The mourning clothes are a sign of respect to the late husband. I bought the black clothes myself not the family because there is a need to mourn.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I mourned my husband for a year.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was not that old when he died.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

You do not call people loudly, send children or people to help you and you do not go all over. The only places you can visit are neighbors if there is no child to help you. You do not eat outside the house. You respect people until you take off the clothes. When there is no child you can sneak without being seen.

When taking off the clothes, they slaughter a sheep, buy new clothes, call people of the community and prayers are performed by the community people. These clothes are taken off by old people who also do not have husbands. When taking clothes they also warn you on how to behave. They tell you to behave the same way you were while you were still mourning.

The clothes of the husband, I called the in-laws and I put the clothes in front of them to share among themselves because it was after a year when I took off the black clothes. I waited for about a week after that so I called them to share the clothes.

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

There is no other mourning ritual when taking off the clothes other than the slaughtering of a sheep. There is no slaughtering of a cow.

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

They only slaughter a sheep and the community and family come. After taking off the clothing, a prayer is performed and then people eat dinner.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Yes it is good because there is a need to mourn your husband. There must be something to differentiate you from a person who has a husband. There must be something to indicate that you have lost your husband. It helps because some people get to know about husband death, you need not to explain yourself all the time. The period of mourning also helps those who did not hear about the death.

*How did / does it affect women?*

It does not affect women because it is good to mourn when women loose their husbands.

*How does it affect men?*

Yes they mourn but completely different from women because they continue the way they want. They go out for drinks immediately. Men mourn with black button and cut their hair. There is nothing much to respect for them. They mourn for about +-4 months only. They are different from women.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

The family did not assist me in anyway in terms of the costs such as the buying of the black clothes and the clothes needed when taking off the mourning clothes.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

No.

*What changes would you like to see?*

There should not be any changes because there is a need for a woman to mourn her husband not to go around as if nothing has happened. People will be astonished when you do not mourn as a woman though for men is different because of the norms.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

When comparing this time and older generation. Now it is different as young women lose their husbands at younger age and things are changing. There is still mourning but completely different from olden days.

*What changes have you noted?*

When mourning people need to wear black clothes. The youth of today do not respect mourning. They are up and down. They do not respect what they have been asked to do during the mourning. They do as they please.

*In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?*

Yes it does serve a purpose.

*What purpose do they serve?*

There is a need for women to mourn not to go around as if nothing has happened. People will be astonished when you do not mourn as a woman though for man is different because of the norms.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interview and for your time.

**End of the interview.**

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**PARTICIPANT: 17 – Rural – BCRX-17**

*What is your name?*

My name is\*\*\*\*\*.

*How old are you?*

I am 60 years old

*Where do you live? Do you mostly live in the urban / rural areas?*

I live in Mbaca in the rural areas in King Williams Town.

*What religious belief do you hold?*

I am an Anglican. I pray in St. John's Church.

*What is your highest level of education?*

I have never been to school.

*What do you do for a living?*

I depend on hand outs.

*What is your understanding of the mourning rituals?*

I do not know much but I mourned my husband's death wearing blue clothes. I was warned of the things that I should not do such as not communicating with people on the street. When going to the river not to talk just fetch water and then do everything inside the house. The mourning clothes were bought by the in-laws.

*How long did you mourn for?*

I mourned for a year.

*How old were you when your husband died?*

I was not that old.

*What was your experience during the mourning ritual?*

- *The putting on and taking off the mourning clothes.*
- *The giving off of the deceased clothes.*

A sheep was slaughtered when taking off the mourning clothes by the in-laws

*Did you participate in all the mourning ritual activities?*

- *The slaughtering of the first bull.*
- *The slaughtering of the second bull.*

A sheep is slaughtered and the community and family come. After taking off the clothing, a prayer is performed and then people eat (dinner).

*What do all the mourning ritual activities involve?*

They slaughter a sheep and the community and family come together. After taking off the clothing, a prayer is performed and then people eat.

*What are your feelings about the mourning ritual?*

Yes it is a good thing because there is a need to mourn your husband. There must be something to differentiate you from a person who has a husband. There must be something to indicate that you have lost your husband. It helps because some people get to know about husband death, you need not to explain yourself all the time. The period of mourning also helps those who did not hear about the death.

*How did / does it affect women?*

It does not affect women because it is good to mourn when women lose their husbands.

*How does it affect men?*

I have never heard of men mourning.

*Did you get / are you getting any support during the mourning period?*

Yes. The in-laws sometimes visit me and bring something's to help me.

*Do you feel that a change in the mourning ritual is necessary?*

I am not sure if it is necessary or not to mourn.

*What changes would you like to see?*

It is important for the women to mourn their husbands' death.

*In your view has the mourning ritual undergone any change from the past?*

No.

What changes have you noted?

Comparing the old and the current time, I have not noticed any change so I would not comment on that.

In these modern times do you feel that mourning rituals serve any purpose?

Yes.

What purpose do they serve?

Women must mourn their husbands' death.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research interviews and for your time.

**End of the interview.**

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### **APPENDIX III: TEXT NARRATIVE OF THE XHOSA MOURNING RITUALS**

#### **MAMA TOFU INTERVIEW - SATURDAY 11/12/2010 AT 10H00**

*Mama Tofu can you tell me how you started Khaya La Bantu Xhosa Cultural Village?*

The way I started this Mr. Michael Corbett, it was in 1999 when Mr. Corbett met Zinzi (my daughter) who is a school teacher was working on a tar road selling beads when she met Mr. Corbett. Mr. Corbett was looking for someone to assist him. When he came here (my home) he saw me sawing. He asked me to assist him. Same year (1999) that is when I started Khaya LaBantu Xhosa Cultural Village. I was trained by a Tour Guide to speak with people about Xhosa Life only.

In 2005, the Eastern Cape Tourism Board informed Mr. Corbett that they will take me (Mama Tofu) to the village to work there to serve tourist. There are three different groups that work with me to help tourists from Qholava, Tshintu and Imoti since 2006 without Mr. Corbett.

Yesterday I lead the circumcision ceremony who was initiated and took to the Bhoma (house of initiate).

I have a new one (widow) I know who has lost her husband (2009). I told her to come here because there are people who would like to talk to her about her experience. However, I also experienced that. My husband died in 1983 as a Xhosa woman and Xhosa experience I have knowledge of that experience.

*Mama Tofu, can you take me through all the procedures of the Amaxhosa mourning ritual from the beginning up to the end of the mourning.*

It started from the minute your husband is dead. The family changes your dressing. They turn your clothes inside out from then. Your sitting is changed you now sit behind the door. You remove all the jewellery. You cover your face, take the shawl and put it like a newly wed or bride (Xhosa woman). As we practice different rituals like others are Christians and others are traditional. The shawl is any colour. I am a traditionalist. The family takes the skirt and turns it inside out. You are sitting behind the door without saying anything while they have taken everything except the ring. You sit until the funeral without changing anything including the shawl.



On the day of the funeral you have the big blanket over you and go to the grave yard. After the funeral you are taken to bushes not to the house first as a start of mourning ritual. You are to collect some woods from the bushes and carry them home. That symbolizes that now that after putting the husband in the graveyard that is where you will visit the bushes whenever you miss the husband.

After the funeral you are taken to the bush during the day for about six days and come home only at night to sleep. You take everything e.g. food with you that you will need also things such as beads if you are beading. After the sixth day of being in the bush a traditional xhosa beer is made for cleaning and they are going to take you back from the bushes. On this particular day you take off the skirt that has been turned inside out so as you can put on mourning clothes after those six days (the black clothes). The black clothes are put like a new bride. You wear these clothes until your family decides to take off the clothes when the year has gone by wearing black clothes unless your husband was a twin or you have twins you take six months with mourning rituals.

What you must do, how you work or walk as a mourning woman etc to show that you are a widow, your hair is cut off and you are taken away to the bushes by old ladies. You are washed with a herb and the old ladies tell you that you must talk softly. They dress you in the bushes. They tell you that you must respect the mourning clothes, you must not be seen shouting, respect your in-laws. They warn you about everything as you have become somebody else. Only old ladies take a widow to the bushes but mostly those who are also widows who have experience of mourning ritual. They also tell you about the ceremony time (the wearing of black clothes).

They also tell you about things that you must not eat from the 1<sup>st</sup> week of mourning and you must look like a mourner. You must not be seen happy. You must not eat anything with eggs. They also tell you about certain times that you must not be seen eating certain things.

After one year, the family people come again and say they have come to change you. All the black clothes that you have been wearing will be burnt. They (old ladies) take you again to the bush wash you and put new clothes like for the new bride. It is not like you wear any pretty clothes. It is strictly clothes worn by newly bride. This time you look like *umtshakazi*. They put a shawl and towel. During this time you change three times. After three months of wearing makotis (bride) clothes, the old ladies come and tell you that you can wear anything.

During that time there aren't any ceremonies that are performed by the family. The ceremony performed is before changing the black clothes an ox is slaughtered. This is done to say he is gone. This also means that they are accompanying him as there is a belief that spiritually he is not dead only the flesh.

The meat is eaten in the house by only widows no one else. The right arm of the ox is taken and a piece of it is half braai and the widow is *shawming*. The *umshawmo*\*\* is for the mourners and is not mixed with any other meat only widows eat that right arm meat. Women who still have their husband do not eat that meat and even if you offer they will say no because they know that they must not eat it while their husbands are still alive. The meat of the ox must be eaten and finished in one day. The bones must be burned nothing to be left. This is before removing the black clothes. However, these days some people take off their clothes because they claim they don't have means to fulfil that. This is the accompanying \*\*\*slaughtered. The widow decides when to slaughter with her sons at anytime. It is slaughtered by a widow, her sons and in-laws.

The second ceremony an ox is slaughtered to bring him back home spiritually. It has a certain way to be slaughtered and cooked in a certain way like the first cow slaughtered. This is slaughtered a day before and it is cooked the following day and is for all the people from the same clan not the widow. The people of the same clan will eat *Intsonyama - ukweshwama* and is taken from right and it must have *Intlala*.

The first ox is put on the mimosa tree *Umnga*. The second cow is put on *Umnguma* and *Umthathi* as plates. When the cow is slaughtered cow is eaten by people who come from the same clan first by braaing a certain piece before the other people from the village can come on the following day and eat with the family.

All the husbands' clothes he has been wearing when he died are burnt during sunset. Then for the other clothes are shared amongst the family including his brothers. As a widow you decide on a day to do that. If however there is something e.g. a shirt you need from his clothes you can take but you need to slaughter a goat and say you are taking because you love and you will keep them. The only thing that you don't do anything with them that you keep until you die are the clothing that he has been using during ceremonies like e.g. beads (*Izidanga*) which have red and white diamonds. If you have no son, everyone in the family must know that you will keep them. If your husband was the

first one who was responsible for slaughtering of family ceremonies. If you have a son, he is the one who will take over his roles of slaughtering though you will be taking care of *Izidanga*. If for instance you do anything wrong or mistake and you want to apologise, you take these beads or *Izidanga* and you go to your bedroom. You say my husband I apologise I have done something wrong.

The furniture like his chairs you keep them or give to your son or give to the brother in-law. You can keep the bed and use it or else give to his sons or brothers in-law.

*Why are the mourning rituals being held in the manner that they are stipulated?*

The heart needs to know that you are mourning and changing.

*Are there any changes from the time you were a young woman up until now? Explain.*

Not the same things of today do not suit old people like me. The olden days women were crying for the loss. These days, mourners are up and down preparing for the funerals, don't put a duk, have funny hair.

*What about the men are they also practicing the same mourning rituals as the women? Explain.*

When a woman has died, a Xhosa man has to mourn the death of the wife. He puts a black duk and a black crochet hat. Traditionally, he must have a black *duk*. He must also have a black bend for about a year unless he has a twin like a woman. But these days they just put on a black button which you can't even tell whether is the wife or family member but you just see that someone either a sister or brother etc has died. The husband can get a wife after a year if he is young. The wife can not get another husband. If she is very young, the families have to sit down and talk about the matter. If her family wants her back because she is young the in-laws will have to decide with regard to her and her children. If she gets other children after her husband death, the children will take his surname as his children. If the daughter decides to stay she can stay and dates someone but need to respect all the in-laws with whatever she is doing.

*Mama Tofu somebody who will read about this entire in-depth interview between you and me might want to know how old you are to be able to know all these mourning rituals. Could you tell me how old you are?*

I am 91 years, born in Mooiplaas in a village across the river. I was born in 1920. In 1922 my uncle took me to another village called Newlands – Nxezhuni. It is where I learned everything – to be a girl, middle age girl and when I lost or missed my virginity when I was in private school. I met a boy and had sex with a boy who made me pregnant in 1939 and I could not do anything. We did not get married. I had to look for a job. I had no mother no father. I only had my sister. I had to work for my child. In 1950, I got married and he took me with my child and he looked after me from 1952 until his death in 1983. I never had any man after him though there were so many opportunities to do that. My husband was much prettier than me.

Mama Tofu thank you very much for this in-depth interview and for your time.

**End of the interview**

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