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THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

WIDOW-CLEANSING RITUAL AMONG THE BEMBA AS UNSOLVED PASTORAL ISSUE.

ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN
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Student's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Christ came into the world to serve (Mt.20: 28), as result the Church has a special mission to serve the marginalised. The pastoral agents are sent by the Spirit of the Lord to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind (Lk.4: 18). It is for this reason that I find it necessary to talk about the burning issues pertaining to widow's cleansing-ritual in the Bemba community in Zambia. The Bemba is one of seventy-four diverse ethnic groups, which consists of four groups: Bemba, Lala, Lamba and Aushi. They are mainly found in Copper-Belt, Central, Luapula and Northern Province. These ethnic groups are identical; they share everything in common including language, except for a slight difference in accent. This is due to their common origin.

It is our duty to preserve and promote inner peace but not only at the community level but also in the widows' inner heart.

The organisation of this work over the next pages falls under five chapters. In the first chapter, we will present the statement of the problem and the background to purpose to this paper. The scope, objectives and the definitions of key terms will be presented in this chapter

Chapter two is made up of the literature review. It is a selection of some available printed materials, which may be relevant to this study. Chapter three consists of the research design and methodology. Then Chapter four presents the results and the analysis of the study. In the final

analysis, chapter five will summarise the work and will suggest some recommendations that may be helpful to those pastoral agents involved in the widows' situation.

1.0 Background of the problem

During my pastoral year, from August 1997 to June 1998, in the Central African Republic, Bangui, I was assigned to work with a group of widows. They used to share among themselves their terrible experiences as widows. I have come to realise that among the Bemba community in Zambia, the number of young and old widows is growing rapidly. These widows never hesitate to share their sad situations, which they have or are still undergoing after the death of their beloved husband. Loneliness, rejection, undertaking the new responsibility of two parents, sexual detriment by nature, the absence of God in their suffering are common psalms of lamentation from them.

For some time now, I have been pondering over the situation and what it is all about this involuntary acquired status of widowhood. My personal encounter with those widows, especially those among my people in Zambia has raised in me the interest of study in this field.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The interest to learn more about widowhood has provoked the curiosity in me to know what my people, the Bemba, mean by the term *Widow*. I am left without doubt that widowhood in the Bemba community, is a serious problem that requires proper pastoral attention. The present situation shows that widowhood leads to discrimination, both in the society and the

Church. In the Church, the issue remains an unsolved pastoral issue among the Bemba people of Zambia.

When the Missionaries of Africa brought Catholic faith among the Bemba people in 1889¹, they saw the Bemba's traditional beliefs, customs and practice and condemned them as being pagan. One of the Bemba customs condemned by the Missionaries of Africa was the widowhood-cleansing rite, which marked a rite of passage from a widow or widower to a free person. In its condemnation, the missionaries never gave any alternatives to this custom, which the Bemba regarded as fundamental for their life. The research carried out by Women and Law in the Southern Africa Research Project among the Bemba reports that a widow is regarded as still bound to the deceased in marriage, hence there is a need to free the widow². Sexual intercourse is considered as the most effective way of cleansing a widow ritually. Nevertheless, a number of cases reported involving sexual act is usually between a widow and married man. It is easy to get unmarried inheritance. Is this not committing adultery in the eyes of Christian teaching? Then what makes this practice persistent?

This Church condemnation of the widow-cleansing ritual has caused many psychological and social disturbances among the Christian widows in Zambia. Largely, the dichotomy between Christian demand and the traditional beliefs of the local people in relation to the widow-cleansing ritual causes the crises experienced by the widows. What we are experiencing

¹ Fr Micheal O'Shae, *Missionaries and Miners*, (Ndola: Mission Press, 1979), 29.

² 'Women and Law in Southern Africa', *Inheritance In Zambian Law and Practice, Women and Law in Southern Africa* Research Project, (Lusaka: 1990), 118.

nowadays among the Bemba in Zambia, is a phenomenon of widows undergoing a lot of stresses and economical crises, while the Church is giving no solutions to alleviate the trauma of widowhood. Some of the widows opt to undergo their traditional rituals in order to be accepted by the community, others simply become prostitutes. It is this traumatic situation of widowhood, which has motivated me to see it as an unsolved urgent pastoral issue.

1.3 The objectives of the study

The perception is that the Church in Zambia has a special mission to redress this issue of widow-cleansing ritual. There is a great need of inculturating some of beliefs, which the local people valued, especially those which do not contradict the gospel message. Thus, the objectives of this study are concentrated on the following points:

- To analyse the Bemba custom of widow-cleansing rituals, and then, look at the impact that results from some of those rituals and the conflict that emerges from Christian influence.
- To bring awareness among the pastoral agents (the Church) the psycho-religious dynamics created by some elements of widow-cleansing ritual, such as widow inheritance
- To look how the Church can help widows to cope through this most painful and difficult times and to come out of it as a whole person.
- To point to the fact that the death of a husband causes anger, frustration and all sorts of traumatic experiences, hence the need to discourage any barbaric behaviour, which would oppress the widows more; rather what they need is group of counselling and a supportive and loving environment.

- To urge the Church to come up with a specific pastoral orientation related to this issue of widowhood.

1.4 Significance of the study

These days, widowhood is a common term found in the Bemba common terminology. Norah Mumba states that: "the club of widows is a very fast growing club, much as one would wish this is not the case... Membership is always involuntary. Some are dragged into it kicking and screaming while others wake up one morning and find themselves subscribed without any warning whatever."³

So pastoral agents are increasingly bound to meet more and more widows in their respective ministries. It is essential that they become aware of, and try to understand and counsel those widows struggling with the dynamic traumatic experience of opening a new chapter in their lives. This work too can be useful to me and to other members the Society of African Mission (S.M.A), who strongly advocate for "primary evangelisation" as a way to meet the most abandoned⁴. This can be an essential field for them. For the Church, evangelisation means as Paul VI states, "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new"⁵.

³ Norah Mumba, *A Song in the Night; A personal Account of Widowhood in Zambia*, (Lusaka, Zambia: Multimedia Publications, 1992), 5.

⁴ Dennis Agbenyadzi, *To the Most Abandoned, in Mission Ad Gentes in the Third Millennium*, Bulletin No109, (Roma, Societa Delle Missioni Africane), July 2000.

⁵ Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi N.46*, (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1975).

The fact is that those widows are mothers with full of dignity. John Paul II urges us saying:

What shall we say of the obstacles, which in so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated in social political and economic life? We need only to think of how the gift of motherhood is often penalised rather than rewarded, even though humanity owes its very survival to this gift. Certainly, much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be mother.⁶

This study is a response to this call of the church to evangelise the social, traditional and cultural elements, which seem to compromise the integrity and the dignity of every woman, especially widows.

1.5 Scope and limitation

I have chosen to focus my study on widows because demographic analysis shows that the number of widows greatly outnumber the number of widowers. Men die much younger than their female counterpart. But women have less chance to remarry soon. Widows are more traumatised. Once they are in the state of widowhood, they feel devalued. Alice says that the loss of identity and status are great problems that face almost every widow and the fullness of a woman status is achieved through their husband⁷.

⁶ John Paul II, *Letter to the women of the World*, June 25, 1995 .

⁷ Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, *Widows: The Challenges and the Choices*. (Nairobi: Salamta Press, 1999), 59.

survive even after death. This relationship can only break through the ritual of cleansing in which the ancestors take part. As such, marriage is the central institution, which binds together the whole society

1.6.2 Death

The ultimate goal among the Bemba people is to join the company of the ancestors. For the Bemba, life does not end with death. Life continues even after death⁹. Death simply leads people to be with the ancestors and God, "Lesá". It is a transition from this world to the world of the ancestors. This transition does not happen immediately when one dies. According to the Bemba traditions, some rituals have to be performed to free the deceased from his or her earthly life. Unless these ceremonies are done, then the deceased spirit remains attached to his or her family and the remaining partner.

The widow has to be cleansed. Violation of this tradition simply leads to madness or serious sickness and/or even death. The death of a married person involves a number of elements. These elements or ceremonies have persisted up to now because the people fear the coming calamities from the deceased. Some deaths and sicknesses have been attributed to having no respect for this tradition¹⁰.

⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰ Edourd Labrecque, *Beliefs and Religious Practices of the Bemba and Neighbouring Tribes*. (Chinsali, Zambia: Language Centre, 1982), 83.

1.6.3 "*Mukanfwilwa*"¹¹

If the husband dies, the remaining partner is called *Mukanfwilwa*, meaning the one who is married to a deceased spirit. She cannot drink water, eat or bath until the in-laws perform a cleansing ritual. This ritual is mainly for two reasons. She is in delicate state because she is married now to the spirit. Therefore, a ritual for pleading to the ancestors should accompany every activity of the widow.

Secondly, she has lost the dearest companion, so the in-laws have the responsibility to continue taking care of the widow or widower as a way of imploring blessings from the ancestors. The deceased family members are completely in charge of the widow and orphans.

1.6.4 - *Ukuwamia*¹²

When the partner dies, the surviving one remains married to the deceased spirit. Any sexual activity, without going through the cleansing ritual, is taken as adultery. It can simply offend the spirit who may act violently against the *mukanfwilwa*. It is only when the *mukanfwilwa* has finished mourning her partner that she may approach the in-laws for the final cleansing ceremony. Once the *mukanfwilwa* is ready, then, the cleansing ceremony will take place. The cleansing ritual has two forms, depending on the choice of the *mukanfwilwa*:

¹¹ *Mukanfwilwa* is a Bemba word, which literally means that one who is now married to death. In English it simply means widow.

¹² *Ukuwamia* is the process of the Bemba cleansing ritual.

1.6.4.1 *Ukukaka Incinkole*¹³

This ritual is performed for a widow who objects to be inherited. It is mainly applicable to an aged and a sick person. She is given freedom to look for another partner of her own choice or continue living in the state of widowhood if she is too old to remarry. Hence, she is simply blessed. The in-laws spread white flour on the *mukanfwilwa*. One of the in-laws of the opposite sex sits with her on the bed, pronounces some blessings, and begs the ancestors and the spirit of his or her deceased partner to let the person free. Finally, they come out and drink together from the same cup. In addition, she is given money to give to the next partner of her choice.

1.6.4.2 *Ukuntanfya Mfwa*¹⁴.

This form was the most opted cleansing ritual, especially if the widow is young and has the potential to remarry once again. The widow ought to have sexual intercourse for two days with the inheritant, mainly with a distant cousin of the dead husband.

The ceremony differs according to the state of the man who agrees to sleep with her. If the man is single, it may end into marriage depending on the consent of the two. Otherwise, she is free to go out and remarry. With the unmarried man, the ritual is public, as the next paragraph describes it. The married man has to ask permission from his wife and the ceremony is done in

¹³ Cleansing rite done by simple blessing.

¹⁴ Literary, it means to chase the death of the deceased husband by performing widow inheritance.

secret. Once the widow is free from the effects of the death, she is free to go and remarry without any fear. Sometimes this relation with the inheritant can end up into polygamy if he is married¹⁵.

In case they continue to live together in concubine, sexual relationships should be during the day with the door open¹⁶. It is called tolerated polygamy. One person from the in-laws of the opposite sex volunteers to inherit the *Mukanfwilwa*. Therefore, he or she will inherit the widow and orphans and takes all the responsibilities¹⁷.

These rites and ceremonies are the means by which this transition as already mentioned is effected to ensure that the dead has secured a place with the ancestral spirits that help the established order of life to be uninterrupted¹⁸.

1.7 Conclusion

Sex seems to play an important key role in the ceremony of ritual cleansing of the Bemba. It is even said "traditionally a new village was blessed through sexual intercourse performed by the Chief with his wife, since this one was regarded as the custodian and the representative of the ancestors" (Bemba belief). Hence, sex is considered as something very sacred among the Bemba and sex outside marriage simply offends the ancestors. At the time of harvest, unmarried person

¹⁵ The ceremony is performed in the house of the widow. While having sexual intercourse, the door remains open, and it takes place during the day. After that, they put two little pots on the fire filled with water and medicine inside. One of the pots is called *akalubi* (fetish) and the other one *ichikoto* (big woman). The water from *kalubi* pot is poured on the road on which the funeral procession passed. The other pot when water is hot, both man and widow together remove it from the fire and wash themselves. This defines the bond of marriage. If marriage is not envisaged while the woman holds the pot on the fire, the man goes outside the house but he keeps contact through holding the pole of the house.

¹⁶ Edourd Labrecque, 83.

¹⁷ Van Pelt, *Bantu Customs, In Mainland Tanzania*, (Tabora. Tanzania: IMP Book Department, 1977), 219.

¹⁸ Edmund Ilogu, *Igbo Burial, Customs in Traditional Religion, in West Africa*, (Nairobi: Uzina Press Ltd, 1983), 109.

cannot touch the crops; only the father or the mother of the family can take the lead, once they had performed sexual intercourse the previous night. Sex is a symbol of blessing and fertility. The name of the bed in Bemba carries the same name with the altar, which is *Ubusanshi*¹⁹. It is from this background that one should understand why it is so important in the ritual cleansing ceremony of a widow among the Bemba.

However, we see that the coming of Christianity has caused a lot of up-sets in the Bemba community, and indeed everywhere in Zambia. In order to avoid all these, it is good to return back to some of the traditional practices, which will alleviate some of these traumatic experiences.

¹⁹ *Ubusanshi* is the bed to sleep, sex being sacred act that invoke blessings from the ancestors is performed on the bed husband and his wife.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In preparation of this work, I have only come across a handful of volumes and research reports, which address problems related to widowhood. These documents highlight the dilemma faced by widows, Christian widows in particular in this contemporary society that is constantly in the process of changing. As Daisy Nwachuku, says in her article *The Christian Widow in African Culture*, we observe that in developing nations such as those in Africa, the women conditions are compounded by a transitional society, which persistently holds on to traditional norms. These norms fight against the social changes of intruding foreign cultures. When these women lead to a so-called deviation from the norms, their respective community does not welcome such ideas whether they are based on empirical facts, emotions or faith. When they resist or challenge the rituals to preserve their Christian faith for example, they incur social sanctions²⁰.

The problem of widows especially those related to cleansing rituals are still common in many parts of Africa, although we can talk of Africa in development, but a good number of African ethnic groups are still ritualistic and cultural oriented. What we should not forget, as

²⁰ Daisy Nwachuku, *Tradition and In the Will to Arise Women, the Church In Africa*, (New York, Orbis, 1999), 55.

Nwachuku points out, in traditional society, religion and culture are inseparable. The centrality of African human life and day-to-day activities are implanted in the peoples' religious belief.

However, from our reading we might be curious to know how some writers or researchers perceive this issue of widowhood:

- Widowhood and cleansing rituals those African widows undergo
- Kind of traumas experienced by these widows
- Dilemmas faced by Christian widows
- Church teaching versus widow-cleansing rituals

2.1 The perception of a widow and cleansing ritual

The outstanding belief among many African ethnic groups as Edet Rosemary points in her article *Christianity and African Women's Rituals* is that the death of a husband implies that the widow becomes impure since she is now married to a dead spirit²¹.

As earlier mentioned in my first chapter, the death of a partner does not automatically mark the end of marriage. The departed and the survivor must be released from each other, otherwise the widow will remain miserable in her frustrated state. Then the belief is that the deceased husband and the ancestors will be unhappy. So the purpose of this cleansing ritual is to separate the widow from the deceased husband, to reunite the widow with the community,

²¹ Ibid., 31.

meaning to free the woman from her state of widowhood and then to incorporate the deceased husband into the ancestors' kingdom.

Alice observes that African attitude towards death remains the main tool, which can pave the way for understanding of their customary responses. They appease the dead spirit to keep death away from the surviving members of the community. Of course, the approach may differ from one culture to another culture. Most African beliefs state that the deceased husband affects the widow and close contact with the widow can bring disaster upon the community. So to resume back her social and communitarian activities and be considered as part of the community, she has to undergo ritual cleansing. This is to cleanse and purify the widow. That's why among certain ethnic groups such, as the Luo in Kenya, as part of cleansing ritual, a widow has to be inherited. The one who has first sexual contact with her breaks the bonds between the widow and the deceased husband? After this cleansing ritual normal life resumes.

Moreover, we may wonder, despite of the contemporary social changes and the advent of HIV/AIDS pandemic, people are still adherents and practising some obvious rituals. A Counselling Workshop, held at Kisumu from the 26th July to 1st August 1998 reports that widows accept widow inheritance because customary law limits women's access to productive resources and weakens their control over their men. Widows often found out that when their husbands died all subsequent actions that they undertook like constructing a house or planting, required the presence of men. Decision-making among widows upon death of a spouse and adjustment in duties and responsibilities become very difficult. Loneliness and insecurity is a common experience. Hence they opt for widow inheritance so that the inheritor can build a house

for the widow, remove the seed and procreate. And prior to that the inheritor can prevent sickness and provide some security. Otherwise as Nwachuku says, the widow will avoid to be perceived as taboo to the living men and other males and be subjected to helplessness and the fear of being regarded as a threat to other married relationships and suspected of adulterous living.

2.2 Trauma experienced

Alice in her book *The Widow*²² lists the challenges, which widows face in this time:

- She felt unable to make free choices flowing from her widowhood experience.
- She says that after her husband died, she felt like a half a person upset, fearful, confused, distressed, bewildered, shocked and dazed.
- She felt devalued as a person whom has lost personal identity for she was no longer married.
- She recognises that the loss of identity and status are serious problems, which widows encounter.
- She believes that the fullness of a woman status is achieved through their husband. But what would happen once the husband dies? Life becomes completely disoriented.

However, Alice being American, married to a Luo, she notices how in Africa, traditionally, the dead husband's family cared for the widow. African Customs provided an environment where the widow did not experience isolation and loneliness. But today this is not the case. She

²² Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, 54.

proposes an open discussion of these harsh customs and traditions, so as to empower widows to decide on their response, especially on the issue related to widow cleansing.

Norah Mumba, in her book *Song of the Night* finds it is worthwhile to share her personal account of widowhood as a Bemba. She was 30 years old when her husband died. Norah was caught in dilemma whether she would consider remarrying after her husband died. She says:

It is not easy to accept being alone after years of companionship and love. In a good marriage a pair become one and so the departure of one leaves the survivor truly incapacitated²³.

Mumba's experience is that widowhood gave her the feeling of having had an amputation of a very vital part of her body. She says: *It is such a major piece of surgery that the wound left still gushes blood regularly despite the passage of time. I have the feeling that the wound will stay fresh as long as I am alive²⁴.*

She further analyses the trauma caused by the matrilineal customary system practised among the Bemba. Of course she said in the traditional set up a man is always expected to become the financial backbone of his own family regardless of whether he has a family. His mother looks at him as an investment from the moment is born. Bemba custom treasures children as wealth. From this perspective there is a lot of manpower available to work in the family field and produce more food so as to boost the economic output of the family. In spite of the new social condition, especially created by urbanisation, there is a great expectation of financial

²³ Norah Mumba, 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 4.

returns from his sisters and brothers. Although grown up and married, they still expect the right of inheritance even if a family may be blessed with children.

The matrilineal system may have worked to those societies that evolved in those by gone days before the advent of the present money centred economy. Life was gloriously simple. When man died his estate was only an axe, spear, and a hoe. So widow inheritance was for the purpose of appointing someone to assume his responsibilities of maintaining his wife and children.

Nevertheless, in our present days, the matrilineal system causes anarchy over moral considerations. Now the system is used as cover by opportunistic poor relatives who see the chance to uplift themselves from their poverty upon the death.

2.3 Church's response

Michael C. Kirwen in his book the *African Widows* identifies the psychosocial dilemma that the African Christian widows undergo while trying to deal with both Church teachings and African traditional and customary demands. Nevertheless the church still seems not to understand them. He says that many African Christian women who have lost their husband are confronted with a major dilemma. Widows have to make a decision about their lives: either to go through the cleansing rituals, in accordance with their respective customary requirements of their communities or to abide to Christian rules²⁵. In some communities cleansing rituals involves sexual act or leads marital life with their deceased husband's brothers or to reject their customs and embrace Christian moral teaching. The fact is that despite church opposition a good number

²⁵ Michael Kirwen, *African Widows*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), 9 -15.

of women opt for inheriting union with their brother in law. In most case, these women prefer to live in harmony with their custom than to be perceived by the community as prostitute and be looked down upon by the community. Does the church know the root causes and presupposition of the nature of marriage institutions? African marriage involves both individuals and his or her social alliance. So physical death does not automatically mark the end of marriage. There are all kind of rituals that a widow must undergo to mark the end of marriage with the deceased husband.

The common practice of the church is to reject such African customs as incompatible with the Christian way of life. The church declares the custom as unlawful. They even tabulate a litany of sanctions against any Christians that practices her custom.

One may argue that, in the name of charity the Church takes care of the widows. In the same line with Kirwen, we may wonder how best can the Church help widows in their distress and needs. Church members should bear in mind that African values argue that every woman has the right to social security, sex and procreativity. If this one is still young, she looks forward caring and supporting in her old age by her children²⁶. The consequences resulting from the Church's pastoral approach to widow's custom is that many widows continue practising Christianity and accept to be excluded from the sacraments of the Church

As an answer to this situation Kirwen suggests if it may not be wise to carry out an evaluation from within by the indigenous members of these various African Cultures. This may

²⁶ Ibid., 9-15.

pave the way for formulation of pastoral policies that might help women, widows in particular to overcome the trauma experiences. Then he offers some propositions that possibly be useful tools in our pastoral insertion as pastoral ministers analysing this problem of widows:

- The manner in which distinct African ethnic groups have responded similarly or differently to Church doctrines taught by the missionaries, especially Catholic missionaries.
- If the Christian Churches teachings based on an understanding of local culture, have been clearly taught to the people and if they can be easily assimilated without unreasonable difficulties.
- Where there is apparent acceptance of Christian teachings regarding marriage, is this due to support of an already established pattern that had the backing of traditional wisdom law, and more conversion to the Christian faith, exposure to economic and educational influence or a combination of the factors.

Nevertheless, Mae strongly appreciates the key role taken by the church in extending comfort, emotional support and spiritual guidance. Yet they seem alienated on the whole issue of widowhood, they have failed to understand deeply the root cause of these traditions and its background. The church has failed to empower the widows to come up with a tangible solution to this mystery related to death²⁷.

People are exposed to Christianity refuse all these rituals. But in many areas, traditional practice continues alongside the profession of Christianity. They attend the Church, but in time

²⁷ Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, 59.

of crisis, such as death they return to traditional beliefs, for fear of being haunted by the deceased. Hence they participate in these cleansing rituals in secret.

2.4 Conclusion

When we analyse the above listed thoughts, we may discover that the topics focus mainly on dilemma, trauma and challenges that widows experience, arising from existing conflicts between cultural and traditional cleansing rituals versus faith and contemporary social changes that result from industrialisation and cultural interaction. With a globalise eye, we realise that some traditional and customary practices could be regarded as oppressive to the widow. As Nwachuku notes, some of the traditional ritualistic process and practices have their merits and positive effect, while some others when examined in the light of mental and physical health risks as well as their psychosocial implications might be found to have profound negative effects on the person²⁸. From this background, the obvious solutions as the above-mentioned writers suggest are to abolish all African ritual cleansing. They believe that sexual cleansing ritual is not only immoral from the Church' viewpoint, but it is also dangerous to the life of the widow. So should we reject completely traditional widow cleansing rituals of the local people and embrace the Christian requirements built upon Western world-view?

As Alward Shorter says, Culture is an aspect of what it means to be human. It is human basic right. It comprises the life of a person²⁹. I object those who say that all that is traditional

²⁸ Daisy Nwachuku, 55

²⁹ Alward Shorter, *African Culture, An Overview, Social-Cultural Anthropology*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 24.

should be rejected as Christians. But culture gives a person a sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group. Cultural identity remains vital in our daily interaction with other societies. However we have to acknowledge that every culture is dynamic and is always in the process of changing. But this social change must not become cultural aggression or cultural domination. This could result into an abuse of human rights. Then if an African should be Christian within their social milieu, should we undermine the reasons why African widows undergo the ritual cleansing? In the African understanding, we cannot separate religion from life. From this perspective, some African customary beliefs state that the widow is not free to remarry. If she remarries, then she has failed to live to her commitment made to her deceased husband. So the widow-cleansing ritual fulfils the following:

- It seeks to appease the spirits of the dead and the ancestors
- It decreases the risks of diseases and of calamities caused by the evil Spirits.

However, the Christian teachings do not compromise with our traditional and customary ritual in many areas. The practice of the widow-cleansing ritual is perceived as follow:

- It violates the Biblical standard of Marriage, which is one man with one woman. If the man is married, then it is interference with the relationship.
- It conflicts with the Christian belief that death means the end of marriage union.
- It denies a widow's right to decide her own future.

Then if we propose an open discussion of these harsh customs and traditions, can this empower the widows to decide on the issue related to the widow- cleansing ritual?

CHAPTER THREE

Research Method and Procedures

3.0 Introduction

Whenever the opportunity occurs to attend to a funeral, especially of a married person, involving widow ritual cleansing, especially among the Bemba, I never miss to observe how the ritual is conducted. This situation raises a lot of questions

- Why should a widow go through all these litany rituals, the tradition never even takes into consideration the pain, suffering endured by the widow, the fact that she has lost her shelter.
- Has she killed the husband?
- Why does the Church not take more active role in protecting widows?

In the light of looking for answers to our preoccupation, this research was carried out. However, through out the researcher formation programme, informal interview has been conducted especially to those who claim to be the custodian of the tradition.

3.1 Research Method

In order to come up with substantial information so as to help us carry out a study, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire is semi-structured. It consisted of questions, which were either, open or closed questions. This comprises only three pages and was filled only

by widows themselves. The questionnaire aimed at getting information about how they feel in the state of widowhood, trauma and challenges and about how society and the church in particular relate to them.

3.2 Samples and the sampling procedure

The researcher intended at coming up with a study group that will provide us with a certain affirmation of the feeling or challenges and problems that face the widows. Our targeting groups were Christian widows, especially Catholics. We aimed at discovering the sort of trauma, dilemma and difficulties, which Christian widows encounter in their respective global communities, specifically, while dealing with both Christian and customary requirements. The questionnaire remained open to the other Christian denomination. Out of 69 that make the 100% collected questionnaires. 15.94% of the sample came from non-Catholic denominations.

Our research aimed at capturing a range of experiences from as many different part of Bemba lands, but due to time limitation we limited ourselves to Ndola City. Ndola, being the capital of Copperbelt Province accommodates at least all the samples of Zambian 's ethnic groups. As Theresa Rasing reports, the inhabitant in this urbanised Copperbelt consists mainly of people from the Northern and Luapula province of Zambia who claim Bemba ethnicity. This could be understood from the fact that Bemba vernacular has become the vehicle of

communication in the Copperbelt³⁰. 17,39% of the returned questionnaires came from Kasama, the metropolitan of the Northern Province, the claimed land of origin by typical Bemba.

3.3 Data collection

Different approaches have been used in collecting the data needed for this study. This was firstly through questionnaire from Ndola and Kasama in Zambia, and secondly through the meetings of widows organised on a monthly basis by Hearts of Gold Counselling Club in Nairobi. The researcher attended regularly the meetings, in which he took an active role. Then an interview was carried out to elderly members of the community and some widows, of which four were recorded.

My helpers however, interviewed some illiterate widows and filled the questionnaire for 12 illiterate widows. In the past widow cleansing ritual, especially those involving sexual acts were important it is still considered important in the rural areas. But in the context of Copperbelt, it is more an ethnic melting pot, whereby people experience gradually acculturation. Many have lost their cultural originality. Also we cannot ignore the impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

Of the 100 questionnaires distributed to be filled, a return rate of 74% was recorded after eliminating 5%, which could not be included for use, because they were completely unreadable we were left with 69, that is 69%.

³⁰ Theresa Rasing, *Passing on the Rites of Passage, Girls' Initiation Rites in the Context of An Urban Roman Catholic Community On the Zambian Copperbelt*, (Leiden: African studies Centre Leiden, 1995), 16.

Given the personal nature of the questionnaire, anonymity was assured and respondents were free to identify themselves or not. Bearing in mind the background of respondents, the questionnaire was composed in such way to be readable and easily understandable. Distribution and collection of the questionnaire took place over the period of 10 months.

The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions. The first three questions sought information about the identity of the person. Questions four to eight investigated the type of experience that widows encounter in their respective Christian communities as well as society at large. Questions nine, ten, eleven and twelve dealt with the situation of customary ritual cleansing form of ritual, and community's attitudes towards the widows. The rest deal with the perception of Church leaders concerning widowhood, what kind of help do they offer, especially to those undergoing the trauma of rejections. In the final analysis we kindly requested them to share with us the sort of trauma that they have faced as widows.

3.3.2 Interviews

Any time an opportunity occurred, the researcher never missed the occasion to conduct interviews with both widows and of the public opinion, especially elderly people of the Bemba tribe who claimed to be custodian of the Bemba culture. From the researcher's experience, during funerals even those who profess Christianity seem to turn in favour of tradition. They say *tradition is always tradition*. This brought the researcher to interview some church leaders about the issue. The interviews were conversational. They lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. Of the 14 interviews, which were conducted, five sessions were recorded.

The questions depended on the competence on the matter of each individual and from one group to another. To the elders, it was mainly to know why they never open themselves to present reality, cultural changes. The public opinion felt very much about the persistence of widow cleansing ritual.

From these interviews the researcher has discovered that the main reason why the tradition of widow cleansing ritual persists up to now, despite the HIV/AIDS pandemic and social changes, is because the majority of Bemba's still strongly expressed a fear of life after death. Death is still a mystery. The Church has observed a silence over the issue of widow cleansing ritual.

3.3.3 Hearts of Gold Counselling club (NGOs)

On a monthly basis, the Heart of Gold Counselling Services organises meetings of widows and widowers. These widows are ever punctual and they form the majority over widowers. In these meetings in which the researcher played an active role, participants share together openly the feelings, trauma and difficulties that they face in their state of widowhood. All members confess to be Christian but from different denominations. They harshly complain how their respective Christian communities and their church leaders show no concern to the plight of widows.

The number of members who are regularly in the group ranges between, 18 to 23. The researcher has continued to attend meeting up to this present time. The researcher was impressed with how friendship and trustworthiness grew among members. The researcher had discovered

this from their sharing and personal talk. They have given us the chance of knowing much more of them from the interaction. The researcher keeps the minutes updated.

3.4 Problems encountered

In this section, I am hereby mentioning some of the problems encountered in the process of carrying out this study. First bearing in mind the very nature and the complexity of the topic, many people wondered what a person aspiring for priesthood has to do with widows. I have also suffered suspicion of taking advantage of widows since they are single.

The Bemba in Zambia has a conception that a priest or any religious person should not take part in traditional customary rituals. When my sister died, in 1995, being a seminarian, I was asked to vacate the place so as to allow my relative to discuss the modality of cleansing ritually my brother in-law. Whenever, I tried to intervene, I was constantly reminded not to mix Christianity with customary ritual.

However, when it comes to sharing or talking about the personal life experiences of widows, it demanded an assurance of trust on my part to become open and share whatever they wished to share. To my own surprise, and perhaps because of my status, the widows were more open than I had expected. From my own observation, they needed a trustful person to share out their trauma.

As regards the interviews, one main problem was to fulfil appointments to meet interviewees, even after prior arrangements were made. Some NGOs kept postponing the rendezvous, maybe due to lack of trust and suspicion of me despite the letter of identification

from Tangaza College. The problem of language comes in when I think of some concepts that turned out hard to translate well from Bemba vernacular to English, e.g. *Akalubi* literary means a toy, but it implies fetish. Even some words in Bemba posed obstacles to translate them in English and carry their own original meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research findings

4.0 Introduction

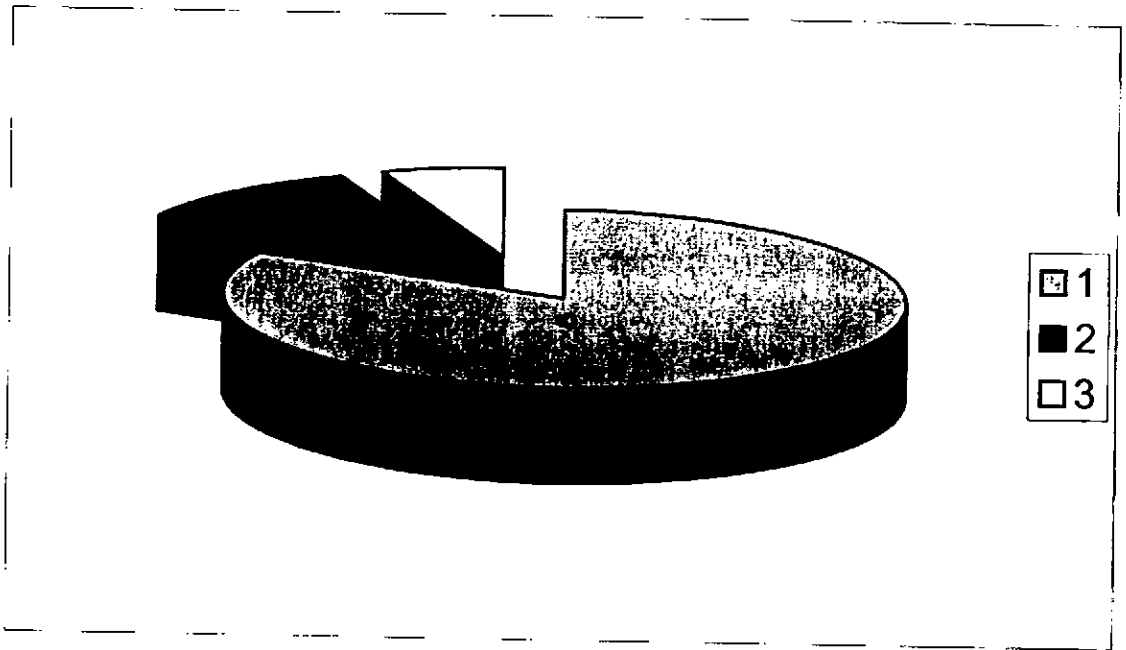
This section will analyse and explain the data collected in a logically organised manner. I will attempt to verify the hypothesis framed on the basis of the objectives presented in chapter one. I have used tables and figures in view of providing a visual summary of data collected during our study. Although the tables and figures may be self-explanatory, I felt the need to refer to them in the text.

I would like to bring to the attention of our readers that the data used here are based mainly on the answers to the questionnaires addressed to the widows. In this work, I will have a look into the background information common to the respondents. Then an analysis of questions peculiar to each questionnaire will follow up. In order to respect confidentiality, real names have been changed

From table 2 above, the highest frequency of the participatory respondent falls in the age group of 40 to 49 years with the frequency of 40.56 % of the total, followed by the range of 30 to 39 years with a frequency of 26.56 %. The oldest widow is 66 and the youngest is 29 years old. The average of the given ages comes to 35 to 62. Thus the population sample approves to be middle age.

Table 3: Catholic respondents of the samples

	Number	% of sample
(1) Yes	57	82.61
(2) No	8	11.60
(3) ?	4	5.79
Total	69	100



Our focus of our studies was mainly on Catholics. So out of the total number of respondents, the vast majority turned out to be Catholics, 82.61% were Catholics.

4.2 Particular question

4.2.1-Answers to fixed questions

Table 4:Those who underwent professional counselling.

	Number	% of sample
Yes	12	17.39
No	53	76.81
No indication	4	5.79
Total	69	100

As we can read in table 4 not many widows have courage and possibility to go and seek for counselling sessions. Either because the tradition imposes on them some norms such as total seclusion or they are ignorant about it or they lack means. The table shows only 17.39% underwent counselling. The rest expressed ignorance about the issue.

Table5: Health report

	Number	% of Sample
Good	36	52.17
Fairly good	24	34.78
Bad	9	13.04
Total	69	100

Table 5 give us an idea bout the health situation of our respondents because now days every widow is a HIV/AIDS suspect.

Table 6.1 Experience of widows in their respective Christian communities

	Number	% of the Sample
Very supportive	6	8.69
Supportive	11	15.94
Indifferent	23	33.33
Negative	29	42.03
Total	69	100%

Table 6.2: Experience of widows in their respective secular communities

	Number	% of sample
Very supportive	7	10.14
Supportive	7	10.14
Indifferent	5	7.25
Negative	50	72.46
Total	69	100

Table6: 3 Experience of widows with their family members

	Number	% of sample
Very supportive	5	7.25
Supportive	15	21.74
Indifferent	26	37.68
Negative	23	33.33
	69	100

Table 6.4: Experience of widows with their in-laws

	Number	% Of sample
Very supportive	2	2.90
Supportive	4	5.79
Indifferent	7	10.14
Negative	56	81.16
Total	69	100

Table 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and table 6.4 above are based upon different reactions that widows experience in their respective communities: in the secular context, with their respective families, the in-laws and then in their respective Christian communities including the reaching of Church leaders. This mainly depends upon a number of factors; such as upon the death of her husband the widow becomes impure. She is now married to a dead person. Despite Christian teaching this traditional cultural concept on death still prevails in the mind of people.

As already mentioned in Chapter two, widowhood is perceived as a taboo to the living husbands and also is threat to the relationships of other couples. Widows are suspected of adulterous living. The way of determining this has been ranked from very supportive, to

negative, with the middle point that implies that the respondent is neutral or indifferent. My aim here is to identify how the Christian communities perceive the state of widowhood.

One of the widows, Mrs Kalondo, experienced a total rejection from her friends and churchgoers. She said: “my friends and I used to visit each other frequently, we helped each other. Since then I have faced strong rejection. They don’t want to associate with me”. She hates to be called a widow, because she felt un-useful in her community.

Mrs Kasonde reports that after the death of her husband, friends, relatives and neighbours who used to be so close to her have now neglected her. They no longer come to visit her. She does not matter in the society.

Mrs Mulenga says that she is undergoing a lot of pains by the way, in which her in-laws treat her. They have left her with nothing; all the goods acquired together with her husband were grabbed. To make matters worse they are now planning to grab the house. She also reports that since she became widow she no longer plays an active role in the community.

However, a good number of widows confess and express a general sense of gratitude of the support received during funeral periods. The small Christian communities participate actively. They contribute some money and maize flour for them. They also acknowledge the constant spiritual and moral encouragement given to them by members of those Small Christian communities. The common complaint is Christian widows undergo torture; are forced to go through rituals without their consent, so Christian community should remain supportive.

Hearts of Gold Counselling Club members report that they find it difficult to socialise with the community. They are always asking to which group do they belong? Why should the custom say that widows shouldn't be friendly to anybody? A member reports befriending one of her late husband's male friends and her in laws responded by threatening to grab properties and take the child away. Female friends especially married women suspect widows to be after the husbands.

Table 7: Widows' experience of priests' attitude to them

	Number	% of the sample
Very supportive	6	8.69
Supportive	19	27.53
Indifferent	21	30.43
Negative	12	17.39
Not indicated	11	15.94
Total	69	100

From table 7, all possible kinds of responses can be expected from priests. Some are caring, sympathetic, but others are hostile and might even have a discriminatory tendency resulting in keeping distance from them.

Some widows pointed out that some public members consider them as a threat to the priests. Other women approached Margaret a widow, (a member of lay Franciscan group) and strongly advised her to keep her distance from the priest. The public may substantiate the point but a priest ought to overcome this in order to minister well and be helpful to them. Does the fact of being widows incapacitate them from seeing a priest? Some priests do not want to associate themselves with the whole customary ritual cleansing, which is seen as pagan in the eyes of the Church. So the general sense shows that priests pay less attention to the widows.

Table 8: Property Grabbing

	Number	% Of sample
Yes	15	21.74
No	49	71.01
Not indicated	5	7.24
Total	69	100

In the above table, we present the number and percentage of the respondents who are victims of property grabbing. Property grabbing is still a problem in the mind of some individuals. Cases reported are mainly experienced in the rural areas. Mumba argues that in the traditional mind, a man is always expected to be the financial backbone of man's

own family regardless of whether the man has his family³¹(C.f. Appendix IV). The man's relatives in the matrilineal society look at him as an investment from the moment he is born. This kind of thought is ever present in the mind of few. However, property-grabbing cases are less and less reported. Only 21.71% of the respondents have reported victims. 71.01% of them say that all were left to them and 7.24% did not indicate. The law has been passed, even the Zambian Police, Copperbelt Division Headquarters made a warning to all property grabbers. This warning letter targeted those who have been practising these unchristian and inhuman acts to stop. It says property grabbing after the death of a spouse is an offence punishable by the law.³²

4.2.2 Answers to open questions

Table 9: Widows who have experienced widow-cleansing ritual

	Number	% of the Sample
Yes	43	62.32
No	21	30.43
Not indicated	5	7.24
Total	69	100

³¹ Norah Mumba, 4

Table 9 gives us an idea how many widows favour widow-cleansing ritual as culturally practised by the Bemba. However, a strong sense of rebellion against the tradition is felt especially among those who think from a Christian perspective. 62.32% of our respondents underwent widow-cleansing ritual. 7.24% did not indicate and the rest never did it. The reason remains unspecified whether it is out of widows' rejection based on their faith or the in-laws have denied them access.

Table 10: Type of cleansing ritual experienced

	Number	% of the Sample
Ubupyani (sexual inheritance)	4	5.79
Incikole (simple blessing)	39	56.52
Refused to undergo the ritual	21	30.43
Not indicated	5	7.24
Total	69	100

In Chapter one we talked about two different forms of widow cleansing ritual practised in the Bemba community, depending on the choice of the widow. The first is *Incikole* (simple

³² Zambia Police Copperbelt Division, *To all Church leaders*, (Copperbelt Province, Ndola), April 17, 1998.

blessing). This ritual initially was performed to those women, who may not remarry later due to their age or sickness. The rest mainly opted for the second form.

Table 10 shows a strong social cultural change as only 5.79% opted for inheritance. It is only reported among the questionnaires from Kasama. Even those inherited respondents report that after sometimes the inheritance went back to their first wives. 56.52% chose to be cleansed through simple blessing ritual, which initially was applied to the sick or the aged women. We refer you to in table 5, which gives us a general sense of the good health of most of respondents.

Table 11: Widows’ attitude to the practice of inheritance

	Number	% of the Sample
Support sexual inheritance	2	2.90
Indifferent	2	2.90
Negative	65	94.20
Total	69	100%

In Table 11, 94.20% of the respondents manifest a negative attitude toward widow inheritance. 2.90% remain indifferent and the rest. And only 2.90% support widow inheritance. This could be out of the social cultural set up. The widow finds difficult to fulfil man’s duty and fear of beirtg accused of taking out married men.

Table 12: Reason why widow inheritance is not supported

	Number	% of the Sample
Unchristian and bad custom	28	40.58
HIV/Aids	21	30.43
He can not support children	7	10.14
?	2	2.90
There is no love	11	15.94
Total	69	100%

Moreover, table 12 gives us some of the reasons why widow inheritance should not be encouraged. 40.58% of the respondents say it is unchristian. 30% say that the system is the most efficacious way to spread HIV/AIDS. Because he or she can never know what disease the husband died of or the inheritant could be already infected. 10.14% express their resentment that the inheritant cannot support the widow and her children taking into consideration the present social economical factors. As Mumba noted, initially the Bemba customs provided an environment where the widows were taken care of and inheritance was for the purpose of appointing some one to assume the responsibilities of maintaining the wife and children. The more children that family had the more manpower it possessed to work in the family field. S

they produced more food and boosted the economy out put of the family.³³ But the new social and economical set up does not give room to have many children and wives. 2.90% of the widows said nothing, we suppose, they are those who do not favour the violation of the traditional practices. 15.94% understand that every marriage should be out of love from both parties. Some of the inheritants are just interested in sexual intercourse and dump the widow later.

Table 13: Attitude that widows expect from Church ministers

	Number	% of the Sample
Help financially	31	44.92
Counselling and Spiritual prayers.	27	39.13
Help to educate children	9	13.04
No suggestion	2	2.90
Total	69	100

³³ Norah Mumba, 6.

Table 14: Suggestion of widows to the Church over inheritance

	Number	% of the Sample
Discourage and educate the public	36	52.17
Christianise widow cleansing ritual	21	30.43
Form club of widows	9	13.04
No suggestion	3	4.347
Total	69	100

In trying to get the help that widows expect from priests Table 13 shows that 44.92% of our respondent need financial assistance from the priest. Widows complain that by the time the husband dies, she is left with a huge hospital bill and other debts. So widows are forced to sell the properties of the house. 39.13% of them need spiritual and moral support, especially if priest can organise some counselling sessions for them on how to cope with temptations, challenges and difficulties that they encounter. 13.04% call for help to pay school fees. The death of the father of the house implies losing a breadwinner. Many children are reported dropping out of school.

Table 14 looked at some of the expectations of widows from the church leaders in particular. 52.17% reproached the church for having kept silence for so long over the matter of widow cleansing ritual and, widow inheritance in particular. So the Church should take up a

active role of educating the public and discourage its members from practising this barbaric behaviour. 30.43 called for the Christianisation of the Bemba cleansing ritual by replacing with a spiritual blessing from the Priest rooted in the Lord's power. None of the widows give concrete suggestions as to how they could be done in practise. 13.04% of them suggested that forming widows' club in their respective parishes would help them to be empowered and the club could help educate widows about their right in the society.

4.3 Some psycho-dynamics encountered by widows

In addition to the instances in the earlier pages two more cases are cited. Agnes lost her husband in 1998. Her in-laws accused her of carelessness, because their son died without their knowledge. The in-laws mistreated her. She was kept hungry until the members of her Christian community had to intervene. So far the in-laws have refused to cleanse her so as to set her free. In the community she is now taken as a woman married to the deceased spirit. She is not free to remarry or be a friend to any man. She has become a threat to the community.

Faustina too shares her experience. She said her in-laws also refused to cleanse her. Because the case ended up in court, where the judge urged her in-laws to perform the cleansing on the spot. Life became very tough at the time the husband died. She had to learn how to fulfil the role of both parents. She almost contemplated suicide. Her heart was broken because she felt she had nobody to love her again. The death of her husband was a loss of the part of her body that will never be recovered.

From the foregoing pages we have realised what widows face. These include the following: rejection, isolation and alienation, difficulties in the area of self-esteem, depression, social function, interpersonal relationship, fear, helplessness and no hope to remarry again. It is very likely that from this situation, the widows may develop some sexual disfunctions in their lives or future relationships. For a woman with such trauma, a phobic reaction could also where irrational fears of the woman are translated into the dread of her deceased husband's objects such as the rings and clothes. The woman may also fear of being alone or entering places such as a bedroom.

Moreover, what we are experiencing nowadays is a phenomenon of widows and with it all kinds of neurotic behaviours among the widows, especially among the Christians widows. The fact is that the Church strongly condemns the Bemba widow-cleansing ritual not only as immoral, but also as an infringement on the right of the widow, many Christian widows opt not to do it, but later on they comply to the demands of the society for fear that bad calamities may come their way. The other reason is that unless the widow is traditionally cleansed, she cannot be remarried because she is still the 'Death Carrier'. This has resulted into; hopelessness and other similar neurotic behaviours like guilt, fears and anxieties.

The Church, despite condemning the Bemba widow-cleansing ritual custom, does not offer any alternatives. Widows feel dejected³⁴ although at first they may pretend to be fine on Christian ground, but later in life they comply with the rules of the society, otherwise they may face the fact of rejection. Many Christians do practice this custom in the night and then repent to

³⁴ Ibid.,54, 60-61.

the priest as simply having committed adultery. As Alice puts it, "for some widows, such traditions seem to allay fears of being haunted by the deceased, and neutralises anxiety... when life has become unfamiliar."³⁵ Without cleansing, even the freedom, which the Church preaches for the widows, cannot be achieved because nobody is ready to marry the uncleaned widows. Failure to follow these traditional values or customs brings with it all sorts of neurosis; being guilty of offending the ancestors, fear of bad calamities sooner or later in life, depression or emotional upsets. That is, the stigma attached to widowhood in the traditional society still lingers in the minds of many, notwithstanding the Church's condemnation. The Church's stand has simply created a multitude of perpetual widows who, in most cases, may turn their lives intolerable. In rural areas, many widows agree to be cleansed and thus either remarry later or simply be inherited because the freedom to remarry comes only after the ritual of cleansing has been performed³⁷.

A widow thus affected by these traumas may show some signs of anxiety that could be reflected in such things as digestive disorders and lack of appetite. We do not intend to say that all widows are victims. But all depends on different circumstances. In the African context, lack of knowledge on the above psychological problems have reinforced the belief of the Bemba, who accuse the widows of showing these symptoms as a result of their misconduct and violation of

³⁵ Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61, 79.

³⁷ 'Women and Law In Southern Africa'(WLSA), 212-216.

the tradition. They believe that: it is because she has had sexual intercourse without going through the prescribed cleansing ritual that the spirit of her deceased husband is hunting her.

4.4 Public view

I thought that it would be worthy to say something in general about the public view. However I would like to tell my readers that no questionnaire was carried out for this section. The information mentioned here comes from casual interaction, informal interviews and personal experience of the researcher.

The greatest problem the public acknowledged that the widow's face is that of the trauma and all sorts of discrimination that the same public paint them. They say that initially one of the reasons why the in-law had to perform a ritual to the deceased wife before she drinks or eats anything is that the in-law had the full responsibility on the widow. But this turns very often into punishment depending on the relationship with the in-laws. The public condemn the practice of property grabbing. The widow inheritance should be banished; it is a channel of spreading HIV/AIDS. Sometime the widow is inherited out of cultural pressure because of her uncleanness as wife of the deceased; she has no voice within the community. In spite of the fact that people claim to be Christians when it comes to widow cleansing ritual they act differently. They simply exclaim, "tradition is tradition, no-one is above tradition". Without being aware, widow's bad treatment has become a vicious circle system for a few individuals, not only because of bad record of the widow and the in-laws, or circumstances in which one's partner died, but it is simply a matter of vengeance or retaliation. Many say that the meaning behind widow cleansing ritual has been distorted. They also acknowledge the social economical and cultural change

Since we can't remain people without culture hence many opt for *incikole* simple blessing. Others object to every thing, but call upon the Church to look for means of how to empower women so as to get rid of this pagan tradition.

4.5 Conclusion

This section has given us an overall view from the data collected on the field from the widows themselves. It has given us an overall situation of widows, especially their attitudes towards the Bemba custom of widow cleansing ritual. A good number of our respondents have articulated openly the kind of trauma experienced resulting from some of those rituals. They have also mentioned some challenges, which they face by the fact of being Christians versus the Bemba traditional customary requirements.

Decision- making among some of the widows upon the death of the spouse and adjustment in duties and responsibilities is still difficult. Loneliness and insecurity are realities. Up to today the tradition proves that the Bemba community still perceives widowhood status as a taboo to the living husbands and other males and subjected to helplessness. They still regard them as a threat to other couples and they are suspected of adulterous living. So far no concrete pastoral solution has been proposed so as to help these widows to overcome some of the psychological and spiritual dynamics created by the very fact of being a widow.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

5.0 Introduction

Our final analysis is a recapitulation of the study as it has been presented in the previous chapters. The insight gained will lead us to come up with some suggestions as well as some recommendations to be undertaken by the pastoral agents in order to be able to minister more fruitfully to widows and their needs.

5.1 Summary

In chapter one we set certain objectives. In line with those objectives, the results of the study came to light through some helpful books presented in the second chapter, the literature review, the analysis of the researcher, data collected on the field which were presented in chapters 3 and 4. The summary that follows flows from what we have discussed so far.

Today the Bemba's tradition and customs face some challenges from foreign, social, economical and political influence. The interaction with other ethnical groups, especially those of Christian influence, also from this perspective we may say that the Bemba society is more accommodating to widows as compared to the old society. It may be debatable. However the cries of widows shows more often that they still face discrimination directly or indirectly in various ways.

A high percentage of the widows interviewed strongly articulate the trauma that they face in their state of widowhood. They fail to cope with this unprepared situation. The death of a husband leaves them alienated. The widow happens now to fulfil the role of both parents out of her own wish.

The rising laments of widows suggest to us that both as a church as well as a society, we have failed to give adequate support, to the widows who are deprived by nature from their marital status. Sometime the impression they read from the rest of us is that they too would die together with their husband.

Some of the challenges expressed

- How to handle their sexual feelings. While living with their husbands she got accustomed to express it through conjugal act as their marital right.
- Loneliness, they feel rejected.
- The relationship is almost broken with the community, God and themselves. People fear to associate with them for various reasons mentioned earlier on.
- They lose their self-esteem. They are women with no status in their community. Nobody will love them again.
- Financial support especially the late husband was the only breadwinner of the house.
- They are women born within a culture. So the dilemma is there either to undergo their traditional widow cleansing ritual or completely reject it in the

name of Christianity. The question still stands how to cope with the consequences resulting from either choice.

- - In the rural area we still record some few cases of widow inheritance. Is there any need of practising widow inheritance in any form bearing in mind the impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic?

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the studies done so far, we find it necessary to come up with some recommendations to both the church and the public. Our main focus here is not to exclude the Bemba widow cleansing ritual, but how the Church's pastoral agents can journey constructively with widows so as to rebuild up their lost image, identity and dignity. As St. James says in his letter, "The religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1: 27).

Church's pastoral agents have the mission to restore the distorted image of widows, and reintegrate them back in their respective communities as human being created in God's image with their full right and dignity. They have to be empowered. This is to come through all available means, from the pulpit, seminar or public awareness. Widows should be given the opportunity to fully participate in the life and workshops of the parish. These could be some practical ways of removing the stigma.

From the researcher's experience with the Hearts of Gold Counselling Club, members say that they had no one to talk to confidentially. They feared to become the laughing stock of

the community. We find that pastors are proper people who can have time to listen to the marginalised widows. From this experience, the researcher would like to propose some guidelines to other pastoral agents on how to journey with widows in their state of widowhood. This has been experimented on the club above mentioned. From the evaluation carried out the majority of the participants felt contented with the programme (Cf. Appendix V). Our main objective is to enlighten the widows in their grieving process up so as to reach the final level of acceptance.

5.2.1 Club of widows

We will suggest that priests in their respective parishes should encourage the formation of clubs of widows at parish level. This will serve as counselling through which widows, who face similar challenges may share, encourage and support one other. This is a healing process that consists in freeing widows' conscience. They spent most their time crying in the privacy of their bedroom and feel like God has forgotten them. This also could be a way to free the conscience from societal condemnation as they try to live again. With this group, they should be able to touch on issues that affect their life such as mourning, legal matters, single parenting, relating with God, the community and especially with their in-laws, and prior to that their sexual feelings. Thus the following phases are basically the main outstanding elements of the trauma that widows face in their state of widowhood.

1- Self-esteem (loss of image)

Once the husband dies there is a strong question, which arises in the mind 'Who am I'. There is a loss of identity. Alice says that she felt like half a person, devalued because she was no longer

married. There's a strong belief that the fullness of a woman's status is completed through her husband. This total disorientation of a widow's life calls for special care. We strongly believe that the human person cannot be a half person.

2-Relationship:

A person is a relational being to him or herself, to others and to God. Some widows experience resentment and deny God. They ask how can a good God take away their breadwinner? They find little support within their church and often they can experience rejection from their respective communities. Sometime they feel guilt of their husbands' death just from the way the society treats them. Hence this situation affects their personality and sense of appreciation of self, others and God.

3-Single Parenting

From the widows' experience, it is not easy to accept being alone after years of love and suddenly the pair becomes single. The main problem that arises is how to handle the father's role especially if the husband was the only breadwinner of the house?

4- Sexual Emotions

Many widows find it difficult to control their sexual feelings. They say that during the period of mourning, sexual feelings are not present. But once the body regains its normal function, it is the most terrible moment. Hence guidance is needed.

5- Legal matter

This is especially against property grabbing. The widows express ignorance about the husband's property. There is need for a lawyer to come and orient them on what steps to take as to legalise some of the properties.

6- Health

Health problems seem to be a major problem to many widows. Most of them do not know what diseases killed their husband. They are all suspect of being HIV/AIDS carriers in the eyes of their respective communities. Hence there is need to encourage them to go for medical test. If the results are either positive or negative it will help them to behave and handle their health in accordance with their state.

However, these 6 points mentioned above that correspond to 6 steps may not work mechanically that once we follow their order the person will automatically be rehabilitated. It may work to some extent depending on the situation of the widow. Supposing the health is the outstanding problem that needs to be first to pay attention to then we better attend to that. The order does not matter much. But every session needs the presence of an expert to facilitate the discussion. The lecture form is to be highly discouraged. I encourage group discussion, which allows widows to talk out their problems. Based on the experience of the research work, after going through these six sessions many widows expressed satisfaction. They felt empowered to fight for their rights and dignity and against the oppression of the traditional customary set up.

5.2.2 Widow inheritance

The next hot issue that poses a great concern today, Christian widows in particular widow inheritance. This continues to be a source of a great personal conflict from Christian widows in particular. Should be it promoted or not? We have seen that in the Bemba community widow-inheritance was something obvious and mandatory especially the rite of cleansing went with it. With the coming of Christianity, this has become a problem and it has caused a lot of anxieties. The Church strongly opposes this custom as evil and as an infringement on the rights of the widow. The Catholic Church will not condone the practice of widow cleansing ritual which involves sexual intercourse in any form. It is possible that widow inheritance may have worked for our ancestors, who developed in those by gone days before the advent of the present money centred economy when life was gloriously simple. When a man died his estate was only an axe, a spear, a hoe. So widow inheritance was for the purpose of appointing someone to assume the responsibilities of maintaining his wife and children. In our present days, the practice causes anarchy over moral considerations. Now widow inheritance is used as an opportunity and the best channel to uplift the in-laws from their poverty upon the death. Hence we strongly concur with the stand of the Church in this matter.

What does the Church say about marriage with regard to widowhood? The Church's concept of marriage is different from the Bemba understanding. For the Church it is a bond

between two individuals³⁸, which cannot be terminated by anything, but death. This is implied in the act of consent to be faithful until death³⁹. The Church marriage bond does not endure beyond the grave. It is a bond between two individuals who have freely consented to marry each other in love.⁴⁰ Only death can dissolve the marriage bond.⁴¹

This is contrary to the Bemba understanding where marriage is communitarian and its termination is effected only by divorce with rituals. Since Christian marriage is between two individuals and is a personal choice, the death of one partner frees the other from such a bond.⁴² Furthermore, in so far as the dead ones have no bad influence on the living, the remaining partner can decide for her/his remaining life. It is encouraged that the widow remains unmarried if she can do so. Or else she is free to remarry the unmarried man of her choice.

The Christian community should take care of widows with material assistance. Besides condemning the Bemba custom of widow-inheritance, the Church has to make some pastoral plan that cares for widows. So far nothing has been said about it. Even Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter, *Familiaris Consortio*, says nothing about widowhood apart from saying that it is a painful experience.⁴³ He has said much about single parents, divorced ones, etc.,

³⁸ *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation*. (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983) Nos. 1055, 1057.

³⁹ "Marriage", In: *The Rites of the Catholic Church* Vol. 1. (New York: Pueblo Publishing co., 1990), N0 60.

⁴⁰ Michael C. Kirwen, *The Missionary and the Diviner*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴³ John Paul II, *The Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*. (Limuru: Kolbe Press, 1998), No. 77, 95.

CONCLUSION

We must agree that, humankind is destined to death. So a married woman is a potential candidate to widow's club if the husband dies earlier. The survey of this study suggests that widow's situation and its impact call for a quick solution and attention from both the public and the Church. Then what can we do about it? Are we incapable to do something so as to save the situation?

We can argue that there is a danger of alienating someone from her own culture. The women in the Scriptures, especially in the Acts 6 and the letters of Saint Paul are new Christians born into the Church. They are just converts. However, Paul and others condemn the cultural evil attitude of treating widows. We even read in the first letter to Timothy 5: 3-8 that they believe that it is their duty to tabulate on regulations for widow so as to protect them from those suppressive customs. They defend them not to become again submissive to the hierarchy of the Church.

So in our case we have the right to protect the widows and denounce, as the Church teaches, the elements of the practice of the Bemba's cleansing ritual, especially the barbaric behavior and widow inheritance. Then we have the duty to empower the widows to assist themselves to refuse to submit to those practices that would endanger their life as the person.

The fact is that there are no people without culture. Hence as pastoral agents, we should not inculturate the Gospel in the Bemba culture. This means that the Gospel has to renew the life of the Bemba people and their culture. So the Gospel of Christ must combat, remove, purify and

the Bemba people and their culture. So the Gospel of Christ must combat, remove, purify and elevate the morality of the people⁴⁶. And this remains the primary duty of each every servant of the Gospel of Christ.

⁴⁶ Austin Flannery (Ed.), *The Church in the Modern world No.58, In The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Document Vol.1*, (Bandra: St. Pauls, 1999), 846.

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APPENDIX II



APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE ON WIDOW INHERITENCE

Name (Optional)..... Age.....

Are you widowed? Yes / no. With children? Yes / No.

If yes, how many are they? Girls...../ Boys.....

How is your health? (Optional).....

Do your children go to School? Yes / No.

If no why.....
.....
.....

After your husband died did you undergo some Counselling? Yes / No,

If yes, from whom? The Pastor / priest / counselor

If yes did you find it helpful? Yes / No.

If yes How? If no, why?.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Did you get any support from your Church? Yes / No.

If yes how. If no, why?
.....
.....

What is your experience as a widow?

- In your Church

- In the community.....

With relatives.....

- With parents.....

- With your in – laws.....

Did your in-laws treat you fairly? Yes / No.

If no why
.....
.....

Do you desire to get remarried? Yes / No.
If Yes why? If No, why?

.....

As Widow, what help do you expect from Your Parish priest or you pastor?

.....

Would you please share your trauma with us?

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Does your Church favour widow inheritance? Yes / No

Is there any thing that you would like to reproach the Church on this matter.

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APPENDIX IV

Telegram: DIVPOL, NDOLA

REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

In reply please quote:
ZPCB/101/1/61COMF
No.



ZAMBIA POLICE

COPPERBELT DIVISION HEADQUARTERS

P.O. BOX 70401
BUTEKO AVENUE
NDOLA

17th April, 1998

All Church Leaders
Copperbelt Region

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The Zambia Police Services wishes to ask you to help it disseminate information on the role of the police in the fight against property grabbing. Sent to you is a warning letter to all property grabbers. Announce to all the church members what the police are doing.

The knowledge is in a few hands, therefore we have thought that through churches many people would learn about the existence of the Victim Support Unit in the Zambia Police Service. Let the message reach everybody.

Thanking you in advance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mbeve'.

Mbeve Cosmas

COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISIONAL COORDINATOR

A WARNING FROM ZAMBIA POLICE SERVICE VICTIM SUPPORT
UNIT ADDRESSED TO ALL CHURCHES ON THE COPPERBELT

THE ZAMBIA POLICE SERVICE has observed with dismay at the increasing number of property grabbing cases. In this light, the Police Service wishes to strongly warn those who have been practicing these unchristian and inhuman acts. Property grabbing after the death of a spouse is an offence punishable by law. Be informed that the police will not sit and watch you commit this crime.

Rush to the nearest Police Station whenever you suspect household property is about to be grabbed or has been grabbed. Your Police Service will ensure that property about to be grabbed is protected while the property already grabbed shall be recovered and the grabbers arrested and prosecuted.

One shocking thing is that, people who come to church and call themselves christians, are in the fore-front to grab property. Sister-in-Laws and brothers-in-Law you are possible widows and widowers. Stop these unchristian acts. Do not expect any mercy from the Police once discovered that you are a property grabber. Do not come to the police and say you did not know because the warning is loud and clear. Disseminate it. Evaluate your acts by reading Exodus 22:22-24.

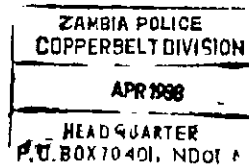
VICTIM SUPPORT UNIT - Committed to ensuring all Zambian Citizens fully enjoy their human rights. Stop property grabbing. Help the Zambia Police Service to fight property grabbing by reporting these cases to the Police. I challenge you christians, lets fight property grabbing together.

Becoming rich after the death of your brother or your son at the expense of his children and his wife is a crime and the police will not leave you.

THE WAR IS HERE LETS FIGHT.

MBEWE
MBEWE COSMAS

COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISIONAL (PROVINCIAL) COORDINATOR
COPPERBELT



APPENDIX

HEARTS OF GOLD COUNSELLING CLUB

EVALUATION

- For how long have you been a widow/ widower?
- For how long have you been attending our meetings?
- How many meetings have you attended so far?
- Would you please list your trauma that have been troubling you as widow or widower?
- By attending our meetings are some of your trauma tackled?
- List those, which you feel, have been tackled and explain how have they been dealt with? And list the un-tackled ones?
- Please share with us your expectations before joining the club? Are they fulfilled or achieved?
- Please criticise constructively and give your impressions about
 - The way meetings are conducted.
 - The speakers
 - Participation and contribution of members
 - Organization of the club.

Can you suggest some area of improvement?