

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with what Muller is saying because Western concept

misses certain approach in African concept of story telling .

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

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

Freedman & Combs adds by saying that:

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

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

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

Therefore in the telling of their stories, I will lead

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

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

QUESTIONERS TO GUIDE ME.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS UBUNTU ?

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

believe that our humanity is expressed within a community.

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

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

Belonging is the root and essence of being.

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

everyone has someone s/he belongs to who should reap the benefits of his / her life or take on the responsibilities which arise out of that life.” (Setiloane: 1996: 10)

I agree with what Setiloane in the above quotation is saying because in an African village or township where people have been allowed to settle without disruption of forced removals, one finds that an air of a large family broods over the atmosphere. You find that everybody is related to another. This relationships, by blood, marriage or by mere association are emotionally seated and cherished dearly. This becomes evident when a need arises, like some tragedy (death) or some occasion for rejoicing (wedding).

Mbiti adds on by saying that :

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

person is a person because of other person”.(Mbiti:1986:37)In other words, no one is an island. That is why we find that in Africa every member of society is

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

Individuals cannot exist alone. They are because they belong.

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

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

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

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

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEPARATION

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

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

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

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

(separation development)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is where the problem of discrimination and abuse

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Payne says that:

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

1.1 What is death?

Dictionary defines death as the event which ends life (Oxford Dictionary: 1978:211), whereas the New Bible Dictionary defines death as a biological

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

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