TRADITIONAL TABOOS DEFINED
CONFLICT PREVENTION MYTHS AND REALITIES

Foreword by Dr. C. Nyoni

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TRADITIONAL TABOOS DEFINED:
CONFLICT PREVENTION MYTHS AND REALITIES

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This book is an extract from my Doctoral thesis titled ‘Taboo Systems as a Conflict Restraint in the Political Feud in Zimbabwe. An Exploration of Mazowe and Shamva Districts, Post-independence’ under Prof Everisto Nsenduluka and Prof Sichalwe Kasanda’s supervision at the University of Lusaka.
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Obediah Dodo
This book is dedicated to all those who seek to create a peaceful world through words and love based on their traditions.
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Foreword

Human behaviour is known never to be governed only by rational thinking. African society has often relied on a rich belief system that has saved as a measure to whip people into line. This book by Obediah Dodo explores the taboos and belief system that has saved humanity for ages in restraining and regulating behaviour. It critically examines the usefulness of taboos in the belief system in regulating human behaviour in Zimbabwe. The book further looks at the different taboos that save to restrain regulate and whip into line human behaviour. As clearly outlined in this book, the taboos seemed to have played a variety of roles in society some of which are still being recognized up to this day.

Interestingly, the taboos in this book have been presented in an orderly manner and chronologically before they are defined and explained in their literal form so that they benefit everyone who reads the book. The layout tries to accommodate every reader in terms of diversification in culture, traditions, linguistic dialects and levels of literacy.

This book is a must read for all those wanting to gain an insight into how human behaviour is shaped by the different taboos and belief systems. It brings to the fore the richness and diversity of culture and its respective place in behaviour modification and regulation. It further places the significance of belief systems in maintaining human identity.

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Dr Chamunogwa Nyoni is the Chair in the Department of Social Work, Bindura University of Science Education. He has more than 15 years of proven research, education and training, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation with special emphasis on teacher training primary and tertiary education teaching and election management.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction
Every family has ways and practices that are meant to socialise members so that their behaviour and ways of conducting themselves in public are within the expected norms as per their traditions and culture. To achieve those expected norms and standards, society has some rules that have survived the test of time and have become part of social laws; meant to restrain and or regulate people’s behaviour. Over the years, it has been these social rules that have to some extent, controlled and policed society. Confirming the same notion are Haralambos and Holborn (2000), Emmanuel (2009) and Afe (2013) when they noted that every culture has a long list of guidelines that direct conduct in particular situations. These are taboos and Gelfand (1979) calls them ‘avoidance rules’. Arifalo (2005) also contributes in the debate giving out that during the pre-colonialist era, taboos were the only measure of social restraint and duty and the foundation of the entire social order. Another school of thought observes that all these traditional African systems are fast eroding away through the inculcation of Western ideologies and technologies (Eyong and Foy, 2006).
**Background**

Traditionally, in the Shona culture, it is believed that if one transgresses socially or goes against set societal systems and expectations, there are some varied calamities that are experienced either by the individual or the entire community. Some of these social systems and expectations otherwise called folkways and mores develop into what is then considered taboo for they are ‘forbidden solely to regulate societal behaviour’. The enforcement of these taboos is two-fold; at the individual level where one fears facing misfortunes as a person or coming to the whole family and at community level where the traditional leadership ensures maximum adherence otherwise the entire community gets affected by natural phenomenon like droughts and disease epidemics. In the event that there has been some transgression, some of the ways of remedying the wrongs are through traditional compensation to the aggrieved and appeasement of the spirits. The processes towards achieving these ends usually involve a lot; expensive material resources, human labour and commitment and torrid rituals so much so that people are deterred from infringing the taboos. Members of the community are restrained from hurting others, killing others and annoying the spirits of either the dead or of the forests.

**Taboos**

Taboos are enforced by social cohesion and practice whereby society believes that any violator of the norms will suffer or face some misfortune. The essence behind taboos or avoidance rules, according to Gelfand (1981) and Dodo et al (2012) is that a child in a family must conform and behave like others in order to avoid an unusual occurrence. Any unusual behaviour in any member of the family would mean an outcast. Similarly, people were expected to be afraid of some behaviours and activities that they were involved in because of the repercussions thereto. Thody (1997) however views a taboo as a precautionary belief that hampered open exchange of ideas as it forces adherents to follow its dictates or face punitive measures. Most taboos have their roots in the history or the myth of a community and initiation into a deity service. Taboos are not cast in stone that they are static across generations and time. Instead, they can be changed, wiped off or have others devised and added onto the list depending on the prevailing circumstances and challenges, geographical location, culture and people’s perception towards their resources and heritage. First and foremost, societies make norms which serve as guidelines for expected behaviours in particular societies, times and situations. It is from these norms that laws, folkways, taboos and mores are derived. A folkway is a practice for daily behaviour that individuals adhere to for convenience though no violation of any of it has serious consequences. On the other hand, a more is a practice based on morality and the society strongly believes in it so much so that any violation usually results in condemnation. Unlike the above two norms, a law is a practice that is on paper and enforced by
an authorized organization. It is mandatory that its violation results in a particular sentence (Giddens, 2001, Macionis and Plummer, 2002).

Taboos were traditionally regarded as part of traditional education system. According to Omobola (2013) and Kagan (2012), societies are expected to socialise their youth into their customs, religious philosophy, ethical values and societal views of the entire community through its traditional education. There are also arguments to the effect that traditional education was responsible for the continued existence of some societies prior to the coming of contemporary technical inventions.

Taboos may cover a variety of subjects, such as restrictions on same family marriages, restrictions on consumption of some foods, conditions on dressing and killing a person or killing a sacred animal. Interestingly, most of the scholars around the concept of taboos acknowledge that while taboos have over the years managed to control societies, there is an element of falsehood. These taboos were then grouped by Gelfand into six categories according to the following themes; those that talk about avoidance of danger, good behaviour, living in the correct way, successful pregnancy, healthy living, and those conveying religious teachings while Madu (2002) indicates that when something is said to be taboo, it must not be touched, talked about, or looked at. Meanwhile, Thody (1997) also categorised taboos into five distinct forbidden groups; actions, nourishment, themes, ideas, and signs.

Meanwhile, Bozongwana (1983) goes on to classify the same taboos in a slightly different manner from that of Gelfand. Bozongwana’s approach grouped them according to the people who are affected by them. As such, the classification is according to those that affect men, those that affect children, those that affect women, and those simply classified as general taboos. Tatira (2000) presents a slightly different perspective to the background of taboos. This is evidenced in the argument that taboos were traditionally a mechanism to regulate and control the behaviours of children when they grew up. The emphasis is on children and the argument is that children’s behaviour could only be moulded at an early age. Subsequently, Tatira thematically groups these taboos into 5 categories; those that are meant to guard against bad behaviour, those that warn against danger, and those that conscientise children on issues pertaining to health, those that are meant to prevent cruelty, and others grouped under miscellaneous. All these scholars’ approaches to the question about taboos are different though they seek to relay the same message. This is seen in Pfukwa’s (2001) conception of taboos where he views them in their practical usage. Precisely, Pfukwa groups them according to those that related to wild animals and birds, those that related to land, and those that related to people. Although he had specific categories, he went on to talk.
about other specific taboos for specific events and activities. No wonder why he elaborately talked about taboos related to the Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle.

It must however be realised that in many African societies Zimbabwe included, esteemed taboos are now on the periphery and rapidly phasing out mainly due to socio-economic challenges and the wave of modernisation that has flown across the borders. Their role of protecting the natural surroundings, order, peace and the uprightness of African societal structures has been exposed to extinction (Mawere and Kadenge, 2010).

Roles
A taboo is a system or act of setting apart a person, an object, or a place as sacred to achieve conservation, respect and continuity. Since time immemorial, in the African traditional set-ups, people have always respected and adhered to these taboos. The taboos were meant to regulate the behaviours of the people, help conserve the natural resources and environment and respect the existence of other creatures. There are several ways through which all these traditional taboos are applied in society depending on a variety of factors; level of modernity and civilization, ages of parties involved, attachment to traditional values and belief systems, geographical location and religious beliefs and level of education amongst others.

- Conscientise people on issues pertaining to health. The classification of taboos meant that each had a particular direction in which it managed society. Some of the critical issues hidden behind some of the taboos included the conservation of resources from people’s need to consume in totality.
- Mechanism to regulate and control the behaviours of children when they grew up. Participants gave out that some of the taboos were merely falsehoods which however carried with them vital elements of social regulation and policing instruments for the children so much so that they never dared venturing into some areas reserved for adults like sex, alcohol and smoking.
- Earliest social systems that regulated society. Taboos were regarded as one of the several institutions that controlled the behaviour of people. They also drew parameters and boundaries as to how societies interacted.
- Traditional education system - It was given out that traditionally; Shona people did not have formal education institutions where they could teach their children. Therefore, taboos were one of the several systems that were in use to impart knowledge and good behaviour on the people.
- Have collectively maintained and nurtured peace, harmony and development. The fear of the reported repercussions of the taboo violation in society has over the years helped to maintain and
nurture peace and foster development within the Shona people communities. This has been witnessed in the preservation of wildlife through totemism concepts.

- Helped in the management of common grazing areas and natural resources. The concept of totemism amongst other traditional measures like holly groves, have also helped natural resource conservation.
- Management and administration of local development. Taboos were reported to have played an important role in the administration of local development through instilling fear in people as a way of forcing them to participate.
- Regulation of the ethical use of the environment. Applies as the one above.
- Help people adhere to the expected virtues of humanity. Taboos also ‘forced’ people to adhere to some specified conduct and behaviour in society.
- Discourage people from killing each other. Taboos also instilled fear in people that if they killed each other, avenging spirits would persecute them.
- Set parameters on what ought to be done. To some extent, taboos defined what was right and wrong in society and people had to follow its expectations.

How Taboos Should Work

Though there may be a variety of taboos within the traditional Shona society, they are all meant to achieve the same objective which is societal order. In their application, taboos are expected to have some impact on the intended audience and society experienced differently as follows;

Fear of the spirits of the dead –since most people fear the dead, the taboos should have been applied from that perspective whereby the society should have been presented with a case of an existing effective world of the dead watching on the people. Other cases that have been experienced should have been cited as real life examples. The appearance of the dead to the murderer is so traumatising that the perpetrator and the rest of the family are forced to seek amends. There are also instances when the dead can appear as a ghost to several other members of the perpetrator as a way of influencing the entire family to make amends and compensate. In other instances, the voice of the dead can be heard through either the child or close relative of the murderer stating the demands required to resolve the conflict. Other living examples of the avenging spirits are; spate of unusual deaths in the village and mental stability of a family member following a spate of murders, the mysterious death of an entire family following a series of murders allegedly by one of the family members, and weird ailments in an entire family following theft of field produce.
Fear of natural calamities – traditionally, society could tell that a taboo had been violated through the unusual existence of a natural catastrophe befalling on either the entire society or on a particular individual. These could be in the form of natural droughts, famine, plagues or unusual whirl-winds.

Social isolation – taboos associated with incest, murder and witch-craft are also associated with social isolation so much so that violators end up segregating themselves from the rest of the community. Closely akin to isolation is the aspect about punishment which may be meted out on offenders in society.

Social embarrassment – closely akin to the above point is that violators of some taboos in society end up feeling ashamed of their behaviour so much so that they either decide to leave permanently or to commit suicide. Such taboos could include incest, murder, rape theft and peeping on nude people amongst others.

Falling sick – there is also a belief that violation of some societal taboos may lead to some illnesses like stress, dizziness, lack of eye-sight, stomach cramps, limp numbness and others. Such taboos are associated with the following; theft from one’s field, theft of pocket wallets, and theft of food from huts, theft of livestock, theft of clothing units like shoes and underwear amongst others.

The need for traditional justice - What is interesting with the avenging spirits is that even if a perpetrator of crime is convicted in a court of law and serves a sentence, traditionally, some appeasement still has to be done to attend to the soul of the dead and the remaining family. Therefore, no-matter what one does to suppress the spirits ‘kupinga/kutsipika’, the conflict remains outstanding and may lead to psychological trauma, mental break-down, strange deaths and weird ailments in the entire family till some traditional corrective measures are applied.

Summary

In this chapter, we were taken through the basic aspects around what taboos are, the traditional taboo concept as it is understood by the Shona people in Zimbabwe and probably several other varied communities the world over. Various definitions and debates by various scholars have also been unraveled and most importantly, the following were consulted: Bozongwana, Tatira, Pfukwa, Masaka and Chemhuru, Madu, Thody, Omobola and Gelfand, Giddens, Macionis and Plummer, Arifalo and Eyong and Foy amongst others. Having consulted some of the most prominent writers around the concept, it was then possible and easy to present a coherent background to the concept and how the same taboos are supposed to work in various societies. The chapter managed to prepare readers for a detailed presentation on several other facets on the subject matter.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction
Traditional taboos are a wide phenomenon that is known and followed across most communities in the continent of Africa. Various scholars have presented and appreciated the subject from basically two divergent perspectives: the traditional African and the traditional Eurocentric. Both are genuine and effective as regulators of societal existence. However, in this book and discussion, taboos are looked at from the traditional Shona lenses where it is generally believed that the ancestral spirits and gods somewhere in the atmosphere have an influence. However, this perspective in only sowed in the minds of the minors as they grow, up as a way of instilling good behaviour, education and morality. Most of the adults within the Shona community get to understand that most of the taboos are non-existent and may never have any effect in real life save for a few. Therefore, in this chapter, effort will be put to discuss most of the relevant areas in this taboo debate as the book prepares us for the taboos proper against their definitions and motivations behind.
The Shona People’s Beliefs about Taboos

Since time immemorial, the Shona people have always believed in the Supreme Being (God) and have been worshipping through the ancestral spirits. That religious structure worked effectively so much so that whatever people prayed for was delivered. The Shona people also believed that whenever a person disrespected a taboo, the ancestors sent serious misfortunes and unusual occurrences as a way of punishment. If one killed another person, no matter the reason, the spirit of the dead could return to the perpetrator usually at night and inquire why the murder was committed. The appearance of the dead is so traumatising that the perpetrator and the rest of the family are forced to seek amends. There are also instances when the dead can appear as a ghost to several other members of the perpetrator as a way of influencing the entire family to make amends and compensate. However, Masaka and Chemhuru (2011) think otherwise as seen in their argument that Shona taboos only stir-up fear in people, which has no fundamental significance, “but is a means to an end” - good behaviour.

In most cases, the spirit of the dead comes to a member of the perpetrator’s family in a trance and outline the circumstances surrounding the murder act as a way of ensuring that everyone is convinced that it is the spirit of X deceased. The spirit then makes relevant demands to the perpetrator failure of which people may start to die mysteriously. The entire family may in other cases, perish except the perpetrator so that he/she pays up. The Shona people also believe that once a person has killed (kubata ropa) another say in a war situation, he/she is supposed to be cleansed to remove all the evil spirits associated with that war. This is done through a special traditional process that involves traditional brew. According to Honwana (1999), this avenging spirit called ‘ngodzi’ in Shona is similar to the ones in Mozambique which are called ‘Mipfhukwa’.

It is also believed by the Shona people that whenever a taboo has been violated, the entire community may be able to tell through the subsequent implications in the community. In some cases, there may be droughts, unusual occurrences of say baboons in a village contrary to the norms and trends and that people may lose their teeth in the event that they ate their totems. In the Shona culture and traditions, there are several taboos that are recognised and whose infringement can be deadly. These and several others have been respected and helping to regulate society.

It is clear that in the Zezuru societies, marriage is not just between two individuals. Rather, it is a union between two families while in certain situations entire villages or clans are involved. The involvement of the entire family and clan was primarily meant to ensure that everyone gets aware of the union and be able to
help monitor any misdemeanors. Besides, it meant to show that families are a collective responsibility which could not be easily shouldered by a single person. In another sense, it simply showed the value in African traditional beliefs in as far as collectivism is concerned.

The African taboo system is also important in the regulation of societal behaviours. This is in stark contrast to Masaka and Chemhuru (2011)’s assertion that Shona taboos only inflame fright in people, which has no significance, “but is a means to an end” which is good behaviour. The two scholars fail to appreciate the role of taboos in African societies and how these taboos may have been originated. However, Honwana (1999) clearly captures the concept and went on to relate it with other experiences in Mozambique where reference is made to the ‘Mipfukuwa’.

While Ndoro (2001) and Maradze (2003), posit that the central role of the African traditional beliefs was washed to the outside edge following the coming of Christianity, Islam and other religions, communities revisit some of the systems and practices whenever they encounter horrific experiences. Even those who would otherwise not believe in African traditional religion; whenever there is a social challenge and especially when there are avenging spirits, they are quick to consult with traditional leaders, traditional spirits and traditional healers for sustainable and long-lasting solutions. What some societies in Chiweshe and Shamva were going through is synonymous with what other scholars like Eneji (2012) says about believing that it is a fallacy to think that traditional African beliefs and norms had been pushed to the periphery as most communities revisited their traditional cultures whenever they faced social challenges.

**African Community Living**

Life in the African concept is cherished and highly valued. Life is celebrated differently in different communities and people sacrifice some of their valuables to sustain it. It is usually defined by happiness, socially and psychologically and not so much by financial resources. Africans usually regard the concept of rural communities as the basis of one’s well-being as most people are brought up and educated in the rural areas, after marriage, they establish retirement homes and finally get buried in the same rural areas. This is based on the pre-colonial settlement lifestyles.

Periodically, Africans and in particular, Zimbabweans visit rural homes where the rest of the extended families are based with a view to rekindle relationships and familiarise with their traditional customs. Besides, they also join members of their rural communities to commemorate significant traditional rituals and cultural proceedings like appeasement of the dead (*kurova makuva*), initiation, title-taking, marriage
ceremonies, memorial ceremonies, spiritual dance ceremonies (*bira*) and enthronement of village bulls (*kudira mombe dzemusha*) amongst several others. Some of these efforts are part of the society’s endeavor to sustain some of the traditional taboos so that they remain relevant.

For traditional Africans, society is more than simply a social assemblage of persons bound together by reasons of natural origin or common interests and ideals. Family in the African understanding refers to a wide array of persons in the extended family including brothers, cousins, sisters, uncles, aunts and grandfathers and great grand-mothers (Gelles and Levine, 1995, Hornby, 2000, Macionis and Plummer, 2002 and Schaefer, 2004). All these relatives are accorded equal respect according to their positions in the family hierarchy and ages. It is from these families that society develops still characterised by oneness, courtesy, honest, respect and trust.

Traditional African lives are clearly defined by several traits chief amongst them being; the belief in ancestors as elucidated by Mbiti (1990) that ancestors were the closest connection between the physically living and the spirit world. Mbiti (1990) posits that the departed symbolically return to their human families from time to time as they still knew and had interest in what is going on in their families. African lives are also defined by initiation rites that graduate young adults into responsible adults. These are varied like the ‘*chinamwari*’ in the south-east of Zimbabwe, the ‘*Sande*’ in Liberia, and the ‘*ng’hula*’ in Tanzania.

Similarly, Gwaravanda (2011) in Matavire (2012) alludes to the theory of ‘*unhuism*’ which is grounded in the critical upholding of traditional values and beliefs. Matavire (2012) goes on to argue that any violation of these ethical values enshrined in ‘*unhuism*’ is a transgression to the whole neighbourhood and is punishable. In Zimbabwe, chiefs are the custodians of all values of ‘*unhu*’ and have moral and social power to effect remedies should there be a transgression. The same chiefs also define what is morally good or bad.

**Culture**

Culture is the sum of a people’s practices that ultimately shape the lives of people. It covers all the creative means through which people adopt to adapt to the prevailing situations (UNDP, 2004, Holenstein, 2005). It can be defined in two distinct fashions; looking at community products and expressions, like buildings, traditional dances, sculptures and another which considers culture as the way people live. Culture can however be appreciated differently; either as defined above or as a system

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entrenched in the people’s lifestyles, that which is gradually passed on to future generations as an ideal practice. It can be good or bad and encompasses customs, religion, and ways of living, morals, mother tongue use, ethnicity and legacy. Culture is established through groups and communities taking up particular ways of livelihood and is passed on through human interaction. According to Leith and Solomon (2001) and Kotzé (2002), culture may be self-ascribed or assigned: an important trait which helps trace the origins of any conflict. Culture also defines the propensity levels of conflicts and violence for a particular community.

In the African context, conflicts that have led to state disintegration, genocide, deep-rooted xenophobia, serious human rights violations, and horrible mutilations of large numbers of people are a typical example of a culture that has characterised the continent (Ross, 1997, Deng, 2005). While culture is supposed to sustain the belief systems and methods of a particular peoples’ way of living, it has in the recent years been defined as a vehicle through which the ills and irregular are passed down to younger generations. According to Leith and Solomon (2001), self-ascribed culture is the way societies describe their own culture and identity, expressing self-importance and self-awareness and protection. It is these traits joining people together like shared language, kinship and other similar habits that then lead to ethnicity. It is therefore not surprising that some of the conflicts and challenges experienced in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular are culture-influenced.

**Important Traditional Institutions**

Essential sanctified institutions with significant religious aspect in the lives of some Africans and in particular, Zimbabweans are varied. However, all of them fall under the authority of traditional leaders who, through their natural power invested in them by traditional cultures and values can mobilise resources and development. Most of the sacred traditional institutions; public shrines, elderly, children, names, places, cemetery, and mountains play a role in the management and administration of local development as noted by Lutz and Linder (2004).

Some of the traditional institutions have been maintained to preserve some particular taboos, especially those to do with societal behaviour regulation. This is achieved through instilling fear in the members of the society. Understanding how traditional institutions regulated society can in this study also help explore how the same institutions could also regulate societal behaviour especially in times of politically motivated violence. The fears of the traditional sacred shrines by the public especially cemeteries and some mountains have helped maintain social order in local communities. The elderly, usually considered
wise are members of the traditional governance councils headed by chiefs and kings and whose mandate is to administer development and planning (ibid). The same constituency is also responsible for conflict resolution systems in their neighbourhood though in some instances with the help of some shrines considered sacred. Children in most African institutions are regarded as special members of communities whose chief responsibilities amongst others are to ensure the growth of family names, bound families together and as peace ambassadors in families.

Public shrines
Public shrines are some of the most significant holy institutions which help appreciably in promoting the sense of community. In traditional African society, these shrines are encircled by all sorts of taboos and prohibitions (Mbiti, 1990). There are some shrines that uphold the identity of a people and these are jealously guarded. To ensure that people do not arbitrarily abuse these, the elders come up with regulations as a way of controlling either entry or usage. There also other shrines that depict the history of either a community or a place. Their maintenance in an orderly manner reflects how that community has maintained its values and resources which eventually become a heritage. Such shrines could include places of prayer and cemeteries.

The elderly
Elders are aged and experienced members of the community who are endowed with social ethics and guide the rest of the community. They are a group of the society that plays a catalytic function in promoting peace and harmony and also teach and counsel on moral values (Kasomo, 2010). Whenever, traditional programmes or rituals are to be conducted, it is the elders who either lead or guide simply because they have both the experience and the knowledge about the processes. They also communicate directly with ‘God’ through respective spirits. In terms of morality and societal order, elders draw parameters on which society follows. It is some of these parameters that eventually led to the concept of taboos as a regulatory mechanism.

Similarly, elders can also play an instigation role in society. Because they are a revered group, elders’ words and positions are taken seriously and considered as part of the societal policy (Ki-Zerbo, 1990). Another valuable feature in the concept of community elders is the issue about respecting all the elderly regardless of any existing relationship as pronounced in the concept of ‘unhu’.
Children
Most children’s lives in the developing world Zimbabwe included are defined by war, poverty, starvation, undernourishment, diseases, abuse, subjugation, neglect and lack of education amongst others. Despite this unfortunate negative tag on their forehead, they are supposed to play an important role in the traditional African society. In the traditional African society, children represent the wellness of a marriage that was understood to be divinely instituted and endorsed (Gecaga, 2007). Therefore, bearing children was a sanctified responsibility that needed to be executed for passing-on life meant partaking in the divine prerogative of conception.

In the traditional African society, having many children was permitted simply to ensure the continuity of the family name and for labour purposes. However, not all of the children would then be adequately provided for leading to various delinquencies: criminality, prostitution, drunkenness and violence. Children were also an economic investment in light of future marriages and the that they served to build relationships with other communities from which marriages would have been created (Gecaga, 2007).

As children grow, they are gradually socialised into specific roles and positions which they are expected culturally to assume like being fathers and mothers and heirs to inheritance. However, most of these traditional processes seem to be losing value and place in the face of globalisation which is influencing rural-urban migration and ‘technologisation’ of the social systems amongst others.

Names
In everyday lives, people take names as symbols of identity only without any other value attached to it. However, in traditional African societies, personal names have meanings, and can influence a person’s character, deter or boost life opportunities (Gecaga, 2007). Names also create a link between name and cultural background, and thus, present some information about a culture. Most African names tell stories, change nonfigurative ideas to stories, celebrate extraordinary events the family would have experienced, or some event that occurred about the period of a child’s delivery and most importantly, enhance and raise cultural superiority and distinctiveness, while at the same time displaying a particular people’s approval of their mores.

Songs
Songs are part of social entertainment and mode of communication that has been in use since time immemorial. Traditionally, songs and dances have been used for various reasons by various communities
but chief amongst them; communication, entertainment, morale booster and as consolation in times of bereavement. In other instances, they may be used to define and distinguish a people and their cultures. Songs are a form of communication with a functional role accompanying birth, marriage, hunting and political actions. Songs are usually used to fight off wicked spirits and to give respects to family spirits. There are also songs and dances that push individuals to murder others and perform other acts of violence in community (Ziegler, 2007). In other terms, song expresses the frame of mind of the people and evokes feelings. As part of social arts, song and dance brings to the fore issues of free speech, artistic authority, and responsibility and accountability for artistic design. Art: song and dance clearly displays massive influence that it has and how that power can be taken advantage of and employed in risky and lethal ways. Politically and during war situations, songs and dances are used to motivate combatants and warriors to fight and defeat the opponent. Dance also uses figurative movements, masks, dressing, body painting and other artifacts to send messages.

Song and dance can variedly relay messages through the content of the songs (lyrics), the attire of the singers or the manner in which either singers or dancers gyrate to the rhythm of the song. Though there are cases when listeners or viewers may misinterpret song messages or dance routines to mean bad, there are also instances when the literal messages will be meant to achieve immoral and bad ends.

**Challenges Facing Taboos**

Like any other scholar, Kilonzo et al (2009) notes that while taboos have some important role in society, they have been rendered irrelevant by a variety of challenges some of which have been necessitated by society while others are natural changes impacting on society. Some of the challenges that are cited include dense population which Haupt (2000) says impacts on the need to observe some of these taboos negatively. Apparently, as more people gather, there tend to be competition for resources and some blending of cultures and systems. Resultantly, this fusion erodes some of the previously recognised taboos. Nyaundi (2003) and Schaefer (2004) posit that secularisation leads to a reduction in the significance of the ideals institutionalized in religion for the integration and legitimization of daily lives in the contemporary society. Also closely linked to the above is modernisation which transforms peoples’ lives for the better. It is through that process of modernisation that society abandons some of its traditional beliefs and systems that are considered archaic. Communities also abandon some of their traditional taboos through urbanisation. As people move from the rural areas into urban areas, there are some concepts and beliefs which they condemn as backward. This clearly explains why in urban areas, people eat foods without due regard for the ingredients.
Again, Nyaundi (2003) and Schaefer (2004) posit that the advent of foreign religions and the introduction of formal education have seriously impacted on traditional beliefs and systems. All missionary churches damned customary philosophy and practices, as well as belief in taboos and totems. They were regarded as satanic.

It is also posited that government sanctions and political interference have also negatively affected the relevance of taboos as some policies do not promote the involvement of local and public participation either in the crafting of laws or in the implementation of same. All the excluded communities tend to defy what would then be expected of the entire community. There are also instances when political authorities come in and dictate what they feel is appropriate for their programmes at the expense of the generality of the population.

**Reasons for the Erosion of Taboos**

The erosion of some of the taboos in the Shona society has been attributed to a variety of factors and reasons. Given below are some of the most common influences especially in the Mashonaland area in Zimbabwe.

Marriages outside of the traditionally defined boundaries (*kuroorana vematongo*). Marriages outside of these set boundaries meant that some core values and traditions were to be either neutralised or washed away. This is in view of the fact that there are some societies whose beliefs in traditional systems are low if not non-existent at all.

Marriages within the same clan or totemic lineage (*kuroorana vemitupo mimwechete*). There are people who deliberately choose to marry within their clans contrary to the norms and traditions.

Public consumption of alcohol (*kumwa zvinodhaka paruzhinji uye pane vana*). Allowing people to consume alcohol in public exposed vulnerable people and children to abuse and obscenity. This has a danger of exposing the same children to some life realities which are supposed to be kept covertly like the value in taboos.

Indescent dressing especially by women (*kupfeka kwakafumuka kuvakadzi*). Traditionally, in the Shona culture, a woman’s body is sacred and should never be exposed to the public. However, when women
dress in a way which leaves their private parts bare, the relevance of some of the taboos that are supposed to protect them is also weakened.

Uncontrolled use of vulgar and obscene language in public (kutaura mazwi akafumuka paruzhinji). When some people use vulgar language in public, children fail to understand the importance of some of the closely-guarded words and matters in society so much so that they end up abusing the same language.

Neglect or destruction of the extended family concept in times of poverty and need, leading to theft and dishonest (kusachengetana pahuwana mumatambudziko zvinokonzera kuba nehutsotsi). In the Shona culture, one’s child is another’s child. This literally means that no-one exists in isolation of the others. This is aptly captured in the concept of ‘unhu/ubuntu’ where people share in both goodness and difficulties. However, with the advent of globalisation, that is fast eroding and taking with it, traditional systems.

Media depiction of violent movies associating blood with heroism, victory and success (nhepfenyuro dzinoburitsa mabhausikopo ekurwa achiratidza ropa nekuuraya sehugamba nekugona). While most of the traditional Shona beliefs discourage the spilling of blood of another human being, the contemporary media seems to be going contrary. As a result, where it is said if one killed, avenging spirits follow, the media depicts a scenario where the murderer is also able to fight the avenging spirits in a heroic manner.

Trans-border migration for economic reasons (kubuda kwevanhu mune yachitsvaka upfumi). This is closely related to the effect caused by marriages. When people move out of their borders in search of economic survival, they tend to ignore some of their traditions as they try to adapt either as a security cover or to impress their potential employers and friends.

Western biased education system that undermines traditional systems (dzidzo ye chirungu inoita kuti vanhu vavenge chivhu vanhu). Shona tradition protects its artifacts and morals. However, the western education has created some room where the learner has had his/her eyes, ears and brains opened further so much so that they are now challenging some of the wisdom in the taboos. It is important to note though that it may not be entirely blamed on the western education in isolation of technology and globalisation.

The use of English language in most spheres thereby eroding or overshadowing traditional systems some of which may not have proper terms in English language (kushandiswa kwe chirungu pesepese zvinoita kuti mamwe mashoko echivanhu atadze kuiswa kuchirungu ozongokanganwika). There are some common terms in local languages which have not been properly translated into English. This shortcoming
has had an effect on the preservation of such terms and institutions. Children see these institutions and terms from an alien perspective and so never attach the deserved sacredness.

Allowing trials with some of the taboos thereby exposing weaknesses and untruths (*kuyedzwa kwezvimwe zvierwa nevanhu vozoona kureruka kwazvo kana kunyeperwa*). The advent of modernity through the media has exposed some people to instances where they would want to experiment with some customs. These trials and experiments have been influenced by the abuse of alcohol and other immoral substances. Once one person engages in an unethical and immoral activity, the media rushes to publish and other admirers would want to follow suit especially if it has been done by a celebrity.

**Successes of Taboos in the Modern Age**

Some taboos have progressed to regulate maternal health. It has revealed that intake of some prohibited foods during gestation was a way of controlling unusual weight gain of unborn babies, which could cause injury to mothers during labour. That olden antenatal and postnatal system is still being employed by traditional healers and midwives in many parts of the developing world. If the traditional medicine practices and food taboos were set of rules established to regulate the nutritional habits of humans and worked well, why abandon it today?

Traditional drugs are still being used to cure most non-acute ailments that do not need emergency intervention. Besides, traditional taboos also provided preventive health care. On the mental health front, taboos play an important part in the management of neurosis and helps re-trace a patient’s life from its metaphysical past to how it interacts with the present and the future. Most importantly, most communities have been effectively and efficiently policed by some of these traditional taboos. While it may be acknowledged that the modern jurisprudence has regulated societal behaviour, to some extent, ‘the fear of the unknown and unseen’ have also nurtured order, harmony, peace and collectivity.

**Recommendations**

Some of the ways which could be adopted as possible ways of re-establishing, recreating and rebranding some of the taboos so they could remain relevant and effective in the regulation of peoples’ behaviour are given below. This is in view of the important role that traditional taboos do play in most societies. Interestingly, even the most religious communities have acknowledged the importance of some of these taboos especially looking at the traditional origins of the ‘now biblical ten commandments’. Most of the biblical commandments also have their roots in the traditional taboos.
‘Sustained inculcation’ approach of the taboos in the society. This approach is a long term effort which seeks to convince the minds of the society that taboos are really vital so much so that they have to be embraced again. This process is a multi-stakeholder initiative which calls for the efforts from the relevant Ministries of Education and Local Government to embark on a massive propaganda-like programme to win the peoples’ minds.

- It was primarily the responsibility of the families to teach their children the role and relevance of taboos despite the influence of the media.
- Preservation through the school system or through the art industry so that people, especially children develop an interest in them.
- Church institution could also help re-institute such traditions by impressing on the important roles played by the spirits of the long dead relatives. This is common in the African initiated apostolic churches like the Johane Masowe affiliates and the Johane Marange Church.
- ‘De-satanise’ taboos and make them more acceptable in a religious society that Zimbabwe has become.
- Resuscitate the spirit of homeland ‘kumusha/ekhaya’ whereby families meet periodically celebrating their traditional artifacts and ceremonies like appeasement of the dead ‘kurova makuva’, enthronement of village bulls ‘kudira mombe dzemusha’ rain-making ceremonies ‘mukwerera’ and spiritual dance ceremonies ‘mapira’ and initiation, title-taking, marriage ceremonies, and memorial ceremonies.
- The media could also highlight issues to do with taboos in good light so that people see the positive side of them.
- Marriages within the acceptable parameters and circles so that relevant taboos could be preserved.
- Maintenance of the extended family system which does not give room to out-cast and poverty which usually lead to desperation and destitution.
- Use of proper register in all spheres of life. The society should abide by morally and acceptable rules of language use which do not expose children to vulgar language.
- Sanctioning deviants. It is prudent that there be a deliberate policy supported by genuine political will to severely punish all transgressors in this regard. It is only possible with a legislated framework and reinforced by an effective statutory body. It could also be considered that any transgressors of such defined taboos be investigated and possibly displayed to the public so that they are exposed and embarrassed. This is similar to the sanctions that are effected on a person who beat up a mother and is making amends ‘kutanda botso’. The person according to the Shona
traditions is required to dress in old dirty sacks, moves around the village asking for food like a mentally ill person. During the process, women will be splashing dirty water and ashes on him/her before they offer some ‘rapoko’. At the end of the village parade, the ‘rapoko’ is used to brew traditional beer which is then used to appease the spirits from the mother’s side. Besides, the person is also expected to pay some livestock and apologise to the mother otherwise the misfortunes continue to dog his/her life.

- Society simply adopts an approach which seeks to tell the truth ‘kutaura chokwadi’ about the potential implications of engaging in evil deeds rather than trying to lie to a learned community. The elders had to tell their children what they expected in the event that they committed a crime as follows;

  ‘Ukaba unosungwa nemapurisa’ (If you steal, you get arrested by the police).
  ‘Ukabata mukadzi chibharo, unogona kubata utachiwana’ (If you rape a woman, you may contract sexually transmitted diseases).

Summary
In this discussion, taboos were presented in a manner that sought to lay bare the Shona perspective. While other perspectives were also touched, it was meant to give a clear juxtaposition with other cultures. The chapter also presented various Shona beliefs around the taboo concept and how the practice has sustained order and normalcy in society. However, the concept has its challenges which have seen it losing relevance and sustainability over a period of time and in different areas. Finally, the discussion presents some of the recommendations towards the preservation of the taboo system in society.
CHAPTER THREE

TABOOS

Introduction
This chapter simply presents the various types of taboos as they have been categorized in this discussion in comparison to other scholars’ works on the same subject matter. While every effort was made to maintain other classifications as created by various other researchers, relevant adjustments were made in various areas as deduced from the study. In this chapter, taboos are presented against their literal English translation and subsequent explanations. Taboos are presented thematically and subsequently alphabetically.
Morals
These are rules that are meant to force people to adhere to the expected virtues of humanity otherwise referred to as ‘unhu’. These taboos simply ensure that there is order and that social rules of society are followed and respected. In the Shona culture and even African traditions, the concept of morality and general good behaviour is supreme if a people have to be considered mannered and learned. Peace, stability and development are anchored on the behaviour of people; people who value the sanctity of life, value others and their properties and people who are tolerant and democratic.

*Mukadzi akapfeka nguo pfupi, anobata shavi reuroyi.* – If a woman wears a short dress, she becomes a witch. In the olden days, in the Shona culture, women were not allowed to expose their bodies to the public except their husbands. This was enforced through wearing long and descent attire always. To ensure that women strictly adhered to the policy, this taboo frightens them that they at least tried to wear for fear of becoming witches.

*Mukadzi mumwechete akapukuta varume vakasiyana nechikorobho chimwe, anoita jeko.* – If a woman tidies various men with one cloth after sex, she develops fibroids. When a woman tidies various men with the same cloth after sex, it means she is of loose morals. In most of the African cultures, prostitution and infidelity are immoralities which are condemned. Therefore as a way of telling such immoral women that taking more than two men at any given time is bad, there was this threat that they developed fibroids which badly affect their chances of bearing children.

*Mukadzi wemunhu haarohwe, zvinoera- A married woman cannot be beaten by another man, it is sacred.*
This is meant to instill a sense of respect within the villages between men and women. It is feared that if a man beats up another man’s wife, it creates conflicts that have a potential to turn inter-village.

*Mukomana akamanikidza musikana bonde anozvimba guvhu.* – If a man rapes a woman, his navel swells. Rape, like any other crime is immoral and condemned in most African cultures. However, because of some of the traditional and religious beliefs, there are some men who still believe that it is sometimes necessary to force themselves on unwilling women. As this practice exists, some young boys also emulate. Therefore, to discourage them from emulateing the practice, this taboo puts some fear that whoever tries it will have his navel growing big.

*Munhu akagara paguva anoita mamota.* - If a person sat on a grave, risked developing boils. People were generally not allowed to temper with graves as they were considered sacred. It had also been realized that some of the graves were curving in due to heavy weight subjected as people either sat or walked on top. Therefore, this was a measure just to discourage people from sitting on such shrines.
Munhu akapfuura nepamakuva usiku, anoona zvipoko. – Walking through a cemetery at night exposes one to ghosts. Traditionally, especially in the Shona culture, the dead are sacred and so are their burial places. Therefore, this was crafted in order to deter people from arbitrarily walking across such sacred places. This was just meant to preserve the respect of the dead people.

Munhu akasvipa mate aona chitunha chirikunhuwa, anofa achingopfira-pfira. – Spitting after viewing a smelling corpse may cause one to spit uncontrollably for the rest of the life. Since the dead are traditionally respected within the Shona people, it is forbidden to say that a corpse is bad or smelling. Therefore, spitting was discouraged by means of instituting such a taboo.

Munhu akatsika guva anoita man’a. - Stepping on a grave could crack one’s feet. Considering that in the Shona culture, graves are sacred; they therefore had to be protected at all cost. This taboo was therefore crafted to ensure that people did not randomly walk on graves. Other graves close to paths ended up collapsing due to the frequency of people stepping on them.

Murume akarara nemukadzi mukuru kwaari anooma ropa. – If a man indulges with an older woman, he loses weight. With the advent of globalization, the love and marriage culture has over the years transformed into a westernized concept that takes no consideration of age differences between partners. Resultantly, there has been a new trend whereby young men date very old women and vice-versa. In the Shona culture, this is taboo and to discourage the practice, young men are told that once they sleep with older women, they lose blood and subsequently lose weight.

Mwana akapinda mumba nepahwindo anoita mbavha. – If a child enters a house through the window, he becomes a thief. In most societies in Africa, thieves are a class of people who are hated and rated lowly on the scale of success. There is no normal parent who dreams of her/his child to become a thief in life neither is there a child who also wants to become an outcast in society. Therefore to discourage children from entering the house through the window, this taboo frightens most children so much so that they are deterred.

Mwana akasadaira achidevedzwa nevakuru, anovhara nzeve. – If a child does not respond to an adult’s call, he becomes deaf. Children in society are expected to be respectful and humble to any elder that they meet. To ensure that this level of discipline is attained, children had to be threatened that they became deaf if they were not respectful and humble to every elder that they met. It also meant that if they chose to ignore or disrespect any orders that they got from the elders, they too became deaf, which they are not ready to be and so comply. This was only a measure of instilling discipline in society.
*Mwana mudiki haatarise vakuru mumaziso* - Children do not look directly into the eyes of elders. It is believed that children who look directly into the eyes of the elders are arrogant and disrespectful. Therefore, this was a measure of discouraging children from looking directly into the eyes of their elders.

*Ukadarika munhu akagara pasi, haabereki,* - walking across a seated person may lead to barrenness. This measure was designed to ensure that generally people respected others. It also ensured that children grew up disciplined in society.

*Ukadongorera munhu achigeza, unoita shohwera.* - If one peeps through a person who is bathing, he/she develops pimples on eyelids’. The taboo simply realises that there are some uncultured people who behave in unexpected ways; socially and culturally and therefore sets guidelines for the control of such practices. In real life, peeping on naked people has no such consequences as evidenced in a variety of nude shows and practices the world-over except that it is prone to exposing people to sexual abuse, rape and demeans the other party.

*Ukadya chikanganwa hama chehuku, unokanganwa hama dzako.* – Eating a gizzard could make one forget all the relatives. This was an old measure meant to instill discipline and morals in children especially with regards to food morals. It sought to deter children from demanding certain parts of meat as it was being served on the table.

*Ukadya uchitaura unomera muswe.* – If a person talks on the table, he/she develops a tail. When people have their food, they pay attention to both the taste and the value in the food itself so much so that they concentrate quietly. However, some people choose to talk on the table and risk spitting out some granules or saying out foul words likely to take away others’ appetite. To minimize on such eventualities, the threat that if one talks on the table develops a tail helped a lot.

*Ukagara wakarara unopindwa nemhepo.* – If you lay on the floor, you allow air through your anus. As people while up their night time away after supper, there are some who prefer to lay on the floor. However, the danger is that they risk either easily puffing or tripping others down. In other cases, they eat up large sitting spaces so much so that others remain with no sitting spaces. Therefore, the threat that if one lay on the floor exposed oneself to air penetrating through the anus which subsequently caused some diseases discouraged people from lying on the floor.

*Ukamira pavakuru unovapedza ropa.* – If one remained standing amongst elders, the elders could lose blood. This was a deterring measure meant to ensure that young children did not stand while the elders were seated. Some of the taboos were designed in a threatening manner so that they had enforcement capacity.
Ukanhonga nyama neruboshwe, haugute. – If you eat meat with your left hand, you do not fill up. In the Shona culture, people eat sadza using the right hand. The left hand is only expected to hold meat which is supposed to be picked from the plate using the right. People eating are discouraged from picking meat from the plates using the left hand as it is considered disrespectful.

Ukarara pasi unonhuwa chakubvubvu. – If you sleep on the floor, you smell bad. At night, people while up their time around a fire talking stories or doing some communal tasks. There are some who prefer to lie on the floor. This is not encouraged as some people end up either puffing or taking up more space than expected hence the threat that one develops a bad smell.

Ukarara vamwe vakatandara unovhumuka. – If you fall asleep while others are awake and whiling up time, you experience nightmares. In the rural areas of Zimbabwe and many other African nations, people sit around a fire at night discussing various issues and sometimes, elders pass on their knowledge to the young ones through story-telling. During these forums, it is expected that most of the family members will be present waiting for the bed time. To while up time, besides story-telling, people could be shelling maize or groundnuts amongst other household tasks. These are some of the best moments in the rural areas. Therefore, for one to fall asleep is unexpected. The danger with falling asleep while others are awake is that unconsciously, one can puff to the embarrassment of the elders present. Therefore, this taboo was crafted to discourage people from sleeping in public.

Ukarova amai unotanda botso - If you beat your mother, you face misfortunes- this taboo is meant to protect vulnerable mothers from their children’s violent behaviours. It is believed that since mothers raise children at home more than fathers, they tend to be in more conflicts with their children than the fathers. Therefore, because of the frequency of conflicts, they are prone to face more risks hence the need for protection.

Ukaseka chirema, unozvara chirema. - If you laugh at a lame person, you bear a lame child too. In essence, it is immoral to look at other people and demean and embarrass them for whatever their postures. Traditionally, it is believed that God is responsible for whatever form people may be in and therefore, judging may be improper. Laughing at a lame person naturally demeans. Therefore, this taboo was devised to control people from demeaning others with the threats that they too could have children with similar disabilities.

Ukasina pamberi pevanhu unoita mburwa. – If a person frowns in public, he develops pimples. In order to instill discipline and morality in the young ones, there were some deterrent measures that were designed in communities. As people grow up, they adopt various mannerisms and characteristics which they associate with success, pride, class and integrity amongst others. These include gait, smile, speech
and its style, facial expressions and how one greets others or responds to others’ greetings amongst others. However, during the process, some people get deformed as they try to change their original ways of conducting themselves. This taboo was put in place precisely to attend to that social challenge whereby some people frowned at those that they considered of a lower class in society especially with the advent of civilization and urbanization.

_Ukatsika paguva unoja._ - If you step on a grave, you die, This taboo was devised to regulate people’s conduct towards the welfare of the dead and all shrines to do with the dead. This alone shows how the Shona people value the dead and how they treat life as a sacred virtue. This also ensures that people fear death and as much as possible try to keep away from violence.

_Ukatsvairwa, hauroorwi._ – If rubbish is swept on a girl, she does not marry. This taboo was meant to discourage laziness in girls; especially those who remained seated as cleaning took place. However, it also carried an element of respecting others as one cleaned the place around.

**Health**

There are also some taboos that were devised to ensure that people’s health was maintained and regulated. It was important within the Shona culture that health aspects be upheld for one’s health determined one’s peace, development and joy.

_Mhuka yakafa yega haidyiwe, inorwarisa._ – If a wild animal dies of some natural cause, it is not eaten by human beings, it causes diseases. There are some people who think they can find a dead animal and take it to their homes as relish. It is dangerous to people’s health and that it also promotes laziness. To discourage people from just eating an animal whose cause of death is not clear, this taboo was crafted.

_Mukadzi akatsvaira mumba manheru, anodaidza varoyi._ – A woman who sweeps at night invites witches. This is a discouragement to women who would want to sweep at night with poor vision as to where they dispose the rubbish. The discouragement is reinforced by an element of threat that witches come after such an act.

_Mukadzi anenhumbu akashandisa bhavha rimwe nemurume wake, anosvodza._ - A pregnant woman should not use the same bathing bucket as the husband, or she suffers hemorrhage. It was noted that most bathing buckets used by some men were dirty that if they were also used by women, it would become a health hazard especially to the unborn baby. Therefore, to ensure that the babies’ health was guaranteed,
this measure was devised and to some extent forced women to keep the same buckets and dishes scrubbed and clean.

*Mukadzi anenhumbu haadye akakotama, mwana waanozvara anozoita munhikwi.* - A pregnant woman should not eat, bending, her baby would develop severe hiccups. As a precaution to the unborn baby to prevent choking, there was a taboo meant to deter pregnant women from eating food bending.

*Mukadzi anenhumbu haadye nzungu, mwana waanozvara aoita maronda pamuromo.* - A pregnant woman should not eat ground-nuts, there would be swelling around the baby’s mouth. This was a measure crafted to deter some pregnant women who developed craves for groundnuts during their pregnancy ignoring the health implications thereto. Besides, excessive groundnuts lead to running stomach which is bad for most pregnant women.

*Mukadzi anenhumbu, haone chitunha, anozozvara mwana akafa* - A pregnant woman does not view a dead body, otherwise she delivers a dead foetus. Most women in the Shona society are afraid of dead people. Therefore, for a pregnant woman to see a dead body is traditionally considered a serious risk especially for the unborn baby as the mother may be either shocked or experience some depression which is not good for the baby.

*Mukatambidzana munyu mumaoko, munozovengana.* - Do not pass on salt directly into the others’ hands, you create hatred. This was also designed to ensure that people do not contaminate salt as they passed it to the person next especially during meal times. This followed a realization that there were some people who, during their meals and with their hands full of meal residue like *sadza* and gravy, would want to touch salt containers thereby contaminating with dirty.

*Mukomana akadya mbambaira dzakarara, haazvarise.* – A boy who eats sweet potatoes from the previous day may become infertile. It is believed that food from the previous day that is not pre-heated may be unhealthy and poisonous. Therefore, boys who in the majority of cases are in the habit of eating food without the consent of the elders are discouraged from doing so by way of such taboos.

*Mukomana akakotota mupoto, anoita mazamu.* – If a boy licks the remains in a pot, he develops breasts like a woman. Boys are generally believed to be notorious at home to an extent that they go behind their elders licking the remains in pots. This practice is a health hazard. Therefore, to stop it, this measure was developed as a scare to all the potential mischievous boys.

*Mukomana akananzva mugoti, anoita mazamu.* – A boy who licks a cooking spoon grows breasts like a woman. In most homes, boys are believed to be notorious that they lick both pots and cooking spoons
after meals. This practice is a health hazard and could not be accepted hence the threat about the growth of breasts on any involved boys.

*Munhu akaitira tsvina musango remichero, tsvina yacho inotevera.* – Excreting feces in a wild fruits bush, the feces will follow back home. This was only designed to discourage people from using bushes that have edible fruits as waste excreting areas. The threat that feces could follow a person was a deterrent enough to keep the forests clean and unpolluted that people could then go and harvest the fruits freely.

*Munhu akakuchukudza munyu, anopenga.* – If a person shakes salt, he risks suffering from mental illness. Salt is considered an important and central ingredient in a home. Therefore, it should never be abused or wasted hence the taboo threatening abusers with madness.

*Munhu akasvipa tsvina yembwa, anoputsika.* – If a person spits upon seeing dog waste risks falling down. This was designed as deterrence to people who spit each time they see dog waste. This was in view of the fact that with the number of dogs in the neighbourhood, there would be excretion all over which is bad for the people’s health.

*Munhu akatsika tsvina yembwa, anoita munyama.* – Stepping on dog waste invites misfortunes. This was a measure put in place in society to ensure that whenever people walked, they took care of their paths and ensured that they avoided any form of waste. In the end, the same people got into their homes without removing that dirty. This ultimately became a health hazard to the entire families especially infants who crawled on the floors.

*Murume akarara nemukadzi ari kumwedzi anofa.* – There are some men who would want to have sex with their wives for the simple reason that they are their wives regardless of the fact that they are experiencing periodic menstrual cycle. Therefore, this was only put as a measure to deter such men from making such unhealthy conjugal demands.

*Musikana akadya sadza munya, anoita tsvina pakuzvara.* – If a girl eats stale *sadza*, she will first excrete feces before delivery of a baby. There are some girls who are so lazy that they do not want to prepare fresh food and would rather take stale food. This is therefore a system put in place by the elders to discourage such girls from eating stale food and in the process teach them to be hard-working.

*Mwana akapedza kudya sadza rese anokura.* – If a child eats all the food provided, he/she grows fast. There are some children who naturally do not like to take their food. If they are not closely monitored, they may lose weight and experience retarded growth. The taboo therefore simply tries to encourage young ones to eat up all their food so that they grow in a health condition.
Sadza riripamoto rikapupuma rorasikira, rinozvimbira. – If you are cooking sadza and it boils over, it causes constipation. When some people cook sadza, they forget to closely pay attention so much so that it boils until it spills over. This in some cases, puts out the fire, is untidy on the stove or reduces the quantities expected. Therefore, to ensure that maximum attention is paid to the pot on the stove, this taboo was crafted and people fear to get constipation after eating over boiled sadza.

Ukachera mvura nechirongo chitema, tsime rinopwa. – Drawing water from a well using a jug from the hearth, the well dries up. As a way of ensuring that public wells are protected from abuse and contamination through the use of either dirty or contaminated utensils, society devised measures meant to frighten away potential deviants. If people were told that using contaminated utensils to draw water could dry up the wells that they relied on for their lives, then they were likely to stop and only use clean utensils.

Ukadya nyama mbishi unoita mudumbu. – Eating raw meat causes running stomach. Some people decide to prepare their meals late so much so that they end up losing patience and have to eat raw food. There has been this taboo that if one eats raw meat, he develops a running stomach. While there is some element of truth with regards to the running stomach, there is an issue about heath especially if some of the meat has not been inspected by health officials. In some rural areas, some cattle have foot and mouth and anthrax diseases which are transmittable through eating the meat unless in some cases if it is well boiled.

Ukadya uchiridza mukanwa haugute. – If you make noise when chewing, you will not fill up. Eating time is one of the most important times in most families in the Shona culture so much so that they all gather around sharing the same meal. During the meal time, it is usually the elders who discuss important family issues while the rest of the young ones are quiet. As people eat, there are some who chew in a manner that they make some queer sound which to some may be irritating. To discourage people from chewing in this irritating manner, there was this threat that one risked not to fill up.

Ukadya uchitaura haugute. - If one took food talking, he/she does not fill up. Literally, it was feared that if one had food while talking, there may be instances of spitting on other people’s food. Besides, talking and eating exposes one to getting gagged by food and die.

Ukadya zvinotapira unoora mazino. – Eating sweet foods causes teeth to go bad. There are some people especially children who enjoy taking plenty of sweet foods regardless of the nutrient levels and other health hazards. To avoid facing some of the health challenges associated with sweet foods, people were told that taking sweet foods caused teeth to rot.
Ukafura madziwa uchidya, unobuda mututu. – If you blow your nose on the table, you nose bleed. Like it has been mentioned in other sections and taboos in this book that eating time is considered very important that people never messy it with anything. Traditionally, in the Shona culture just like in most others, people take their time to prepare food before they dedicate it to their gods for blessings. Therefore, for any person to blow his/her nose while others are still eating is undoing. It blows away others’ appetite for the food. It is therefore discouraged by the use of the threat that whoever blows his/her nose on the table bleeds profusely.

Ukananzva maoko uchidya unopera garutso. – Licking fingers on the table takes away all the appetite. In the Shona culture, eating time is one of the best family moments whereby people meet sharing food and discussing important ideas. What must however be realized is that in the olden days, sharing food meant eating from the same plates. Therefore, if one licked fingers and yet expected to continue taking food from the same plate where others were eating posed a hygiene challenge. This taboo simply discouraged people from licking fingers on the table as it was both a health challenge and it eroded others’ appetite.

Ukanhuwidza chikafu, chinoshisha. – Smelling food turns it bad. There are some people who have a habit of smelling food before they eat. This is sometimes irritating to either the cook or other consumers. This is discouraged by this traditional threat that the food gets rotten.

Ukanon’ona mumhuno panevanhu, unobuda mututu. – If you pick your nose in public, you nose-bleed. There are some people who are not moved by the presence of large crowds and even few individuals that they engage in some nasty activities regardless of how they irritate others. Some people may even pick their teeth, blow noses, spit or pick their noses in public. Because it is irritating, this taboo threatening with nose-bleeding was crafted.

Ukarara usina kusuka mugoti, unodedza chamupupuri. – If a cooking stick is not cleaned after cooking, there will be a heavy whirl-wind. There some people who after cooking sadza simply put away the cooking stick hoping to clean it later. What the traditional communities realized was that because the stick is wooden, sadza tended to stick and posed a health hazard. To ensure that people cleaned their sticks, the threat that a heavy whirl-wind could come was put in place.

Ukatsvairira marara panze usiku, unodaidza varoyi. – Sweeping rubbish out of the house at night invites witches. To ensure that rubbish and other waste is managed well, the elderly devised some means through which cleanliness could be maintained. It was believed that disposing rubbish out at night could mean dumping it anyhow thus littering the entire homestead. Therefore, the taboo only sought to frighten people from littering their homesteads.
If you urinate into a water well, it dries up. For health reasons, people are discouraged from polluting water wells. Therefore, this was set as a means of regulating people’s behaviours in society with regards to public water wells.

-it is taboo to excrete on the road lest one develops boils on the buttocks. This measure was devised to deter people from spoiling public places especially roads where passers-by could step on that dirty and spread diseases. Besides, roads are not secluded places for such acts.

leave your shoes on the door mat or you lure ants into the house. As a way of maintaining health and cleanliness in the homes, mothers came up with restraining measure which forces people to take off their dusty shoes before they entered shining homes.

If parents have sex when their baby has measles, the baby dies. This measure was put in place as deterrence to those irresponsible parents who neglected their sick children in preference for sex. Besides, the same parents did not take enough measures to ensure hygiene after sex.

Religious

Taboos that are classified under the religious category are those that seek to sustain a particular community’s traditional values and customs. Realizing that each and every community is guided and protected by a list of principles, values and mores, there is then the need to have such taboos which instill fear in the people so that they do not transgress from the expected norms and practices that are tantamount to either dilute or out rightly wash away a people’s beliefs.

A woman who aborts ends up experiencing stillbirths. Realizing that there were some women who were aborting unnecessarily, there was some need to stop it without the use of any laws or physical enforcement mechanism. Therefore, the crafting of this taboo helped to instill fear in women that they would not conceive later in life. While there is an element of discipline, the taboo pays attention on the sanctity of life.

Seeing a wild-dog on a homestead at night invites the mysterious death of a family member. It was generally believed that wild-dogs never got into villages under normal circumstances. Therefore, if a person saw one, it meant that
he/she would have walked late at night or would have been involved in some immoral activity late at night.

*Munhu akapfeka ngu o tsvuku nguva yekunaya, anorohwa nemheni.* – Wearing coloured apparel during the rainy season attracts lightning. Shona traditional leaders have over the years valued their cultural systems so much so that they have never wanted to compromise by allowing alien artifacts. This taboo was crafted to stop people from wearing unwanted apparel in particular areas and functions in society.

*Munhu akarima nechisi, haakohwe, zvirimwa zvinodyiwa nemhashu.* – When a farmer works in a crop field on a Sabbath, the crops will be invaded by locusts. In a bid to preserve the Sabbath day sacred, traditional elders came up with various threats for any transgressors including that if one worked in a field, the crops risked being invaded by locusts. While this threat may not have been true, it to some extent helped recognize the Sabbath in society.

*Munhu akashora michero mugomo, anoita chadzimira akarasika.* – If a person talks bad about wild fruits in a grove, he/she gets lost. Traditionally, elders used to value their resources that they guarded them jealously. In order to achieve that, they devised means of ensuring that people who harvested their natural resources and in particular fruits did not talk bad about either them or the local ancestors. It was expected that anyone who wanted to eat the fruits, followed some socially accepted etiquette.

*Munhu akatorwa nenjuzu haachemwe, anodzoka akafa.* – When a person is drowned by a mermaid and relatives cry, the victim dies. There is a strong belief in the Shona culture that if a person drowns in water, he/she would have been taken by a mermaid for several reasons, chief amongst them for training as a witch doctor. Therefore, if the relatives cry, it is believed that the victim will be found dead. This is just a measure put in place to comfort the families of the victims.

*Munhu akatsika pamharadzano, anozvimba makumbo.* – Stepping on a cross-road, a person may swell feet. In the Shona culture, when people traditionally cleanse away evil spirits or misfortunes, they usually dispose the waste at path junctions where most people walk through and in the process inherit the misfortunes. Therefore, to discourage people from unnecessarily walking at the expense of productive work, this taboo was crafted.

*Ukaputsa hari, unoita munyama.* – If one breaks a clay pot, you face misfortunes. Traditionally, clay pots have been a symbol of wealth and strongly showed the status of women in society. Therefore, to protect these pots owned by mothers and wives, there had to be some social regulatory system deterring people from breaking them.
Ukataura vanhu vakafa usiku unovaona. – Discussing the dead at night, you see their visions. The Shona culture just like several other African ones respects the dead. It is actually taboo to talk about the dead let alone walk through a grave yard or point at a grave. This is a measure put in place to maintain the sanctity of the dead. To dissuade people from talking about the dead, this threat that one sees them in their visions was crafted.

Vanhu vakaroorana munaMbudzi, vanoita munyama. – If people marry in November, they invite misfortunes for it is a holy month. Just like the Sabbath, the month of November is considered sacred in the Shona culture that people are not allowed to conduct any activities related to culture and family rituals. Whilst there may not be any misfortunes, society has come to believe that if one disobeys, there will be bad luck befalling transgressors.

Vasikana vasati vazvara havadiwe panovigwa munhu, chibereko chavo chinozovhara. – Girls who are yet to bear children cannot attend grave burial, they may never conceive. It is a question of principles within the Shona culture which says girls should be away from the burial place. However, there is a lot to with the need for manual labour especially in the areas to do with food preparation, utensil cleaning and other menial assignment back home while others are burying the dead.

Safety

There were also some mores that were crafted to protect communities from dangers of natural formation while others sought to prevent man-made calamities. This followed a realization that there were some activities by individuals and sometimes groups that were tolerated in society but with deadly eventualities. While some were noted to be pure accidental, they still had options to avoid them. Therefore, the traditional communities’ elders in their wisdom decided to craft some taboos and mores meant to prevent and at all cost deter people from engaging in other risky actions.

Kufamba nemoto pachivanze usiku, zvinodaidza nyoka. – Walking around the courtyard at night carrying a fire, attracted dangerous snakes. This was also one of the safety measures instituted in the villages to deter people from risking burning homesteads at night accidentally through uncontrolled or blown away fires.

Kumhanya pachivanze kunodaidza mazizi. – Running playfully around the homestead yard invites owls. Children have a tendency to play around the homestead yard in various ways including running around. Sometimes, running disturbs the daily chores like sweeping and even when there are elders seated around.
In some cases, children fall as they run around and suffer severe injuries. Therefore, to stop children from doing so, this taboo frightens them as most of the children are afraid of owls at night. Owls are associated with witchcraft.

*Kurara wakafuka musoro, unovhumuka.* – If a person sleeps covering the head, he experiences some nightmares. It is not unusual that some people sleep covering their heads in blankets especially during cold seasons. While this is a way of avoiding cold, from a safety perspective, it is dangerous as one may suffocate in the event of an emergency like fire breaking out, smoke covering the room or if an intruder sneaks into the room. Therefore when the taboo says if one covers his head he experiences nightmares, it is only a way of persuading people to desist from the habit of covering their heads.

*Mukadzi anemimba haafanire kugara pamukova, mwana anozorambira pamukova pakuzvara.* – Pregnant women should not sit on door-ways; they risked failing to deliver their babes safely. This was crafted in traditional societies to specifically ensure that pregnant women did not block door-ways as they were considered slow to respond in the event of a fire or some emergency.

*Mukadzi haasunungukire mumba munemasimbi.* – An expecting woman does not deliver in a room with metal implements. The Shona people have a practice whereby they remove all iron tools and weapons from the house of an expectant mother since it is believed that metal tools attract lightening which can affect the pregnant mother. This taboo illustrates the level of protection that a mother and her child receive in traditional Shona societies.

*Mukadzi vane nhumbu haadye nungu, anozotadza kuzvara.* – A pregnant woman is forbidden to consume porcupine as that is thought to cause a delay in labour. Like I mentioned in the section for conservation taboos, there are some endangered wild animals that are but delicious. In the case of a porcupine, its defence system is dangerous for a woman to try to catch it. Therefore, the taboo was crafted to protect pregnant women who craved for porcupine meat from being injured.

*Munhu akafamba nen hendeshure, amai vake vanofa.* – If a person walks backwards, the mother dies. Since it is dangerous to walk without clearly seeing where one is going, society felt that crafting an inhibiting taboo was the best way of attending to the bad habit. It was basically meant to discourage people from walking backwards.

*Munhu akaitira tsvina pamadota, anotsemuka kumashure* – If a person relieves himself or herself on ashes, he/she cracks on the uterus. This was a safety measure meant to keep people away from fires especially ashes assumed to be out of fire.
**Munhu akatora uswa hwakapfirira denga remba achivesa moto, imba yake inoputsika.** – Lighting a fire using thatch from a hut, that person’s marriage breaks. Some people have a tendency of pulling thatch from their huts when they start fires. Over time, it is realized that the front part of that hut begins to leak as the roof will be thin. There are generally two risks; to light the roof of the hut and to thin down the roof the same hut.

**Munhu haabude panze nemwenje, anodziya vadzimu.** – No person is allowed to take a fire outdoors; that chased away guiding ancestors. This taboo was designed to discourage people from taking fire out as that was considered dangerous in the event that winds blew that fire on properties.

**Ukagara paduri, unouraya mukadzi.** – If a man sits on a pounding jug, he risks killing his wife. This was designed for both safety and health reasons at home. It was believed that if a man sat on a pounding heath or anything not designed for that purpose, there were chances that he could fall in the presence of children and worse still, get injured. From a health perspective, sitting on an artifact used to produce edibles was seen as unhealthy and untidy.

**Ukagara pagonhi nguva zhinji, unoita muroyi.** – If a person sat on the door-way, he/she could later become a witch. This was meant to discourage people from sitting on the door-way as that could be a disturbance in the event of either a fire or some emergency. The threat was that one would then become a witch and naturally few people wanted to either be associated or become witches.

**Ukagara pamukova unoita mamota.** - If you sit on the doorway, you develop boils on the buttocks. Sitting on the doorway naturally blocks the way for the rest of the family members. However, some may try to force their way or even attempt to walk over the seated person thus getting exposed to the danger of falling down. Therefore, this taboo was only meant to avoid blocking the way and tripping others down.

**Ukaisa mwana pamapfudzi, anoita mbavha.** – Carrying a baby on the shoulders converts him into a thief. As a safety measure, this was coined so that people desist from dangerously carrying children on the shoulders. Some people have a tendency of carrying children on their shoulders without even holding them exposing them to serious danger of falling especially if the adult stumbles.

**Ukananzva banganga unoora mazino.** - If one licks a knife, teeth will rot. There are very few individuals who are ready to live with bad-looking teeth especially if they are rotten. They inhibit smiling in public. The practice of licking a knife is a very dangerous one that traditional societal elders decided to craft taboos that discourage people from licking knives for they risked getting cut.

**Ukananzva banganga unotanangira mazino.** – If a person licks a knife, other teeth grow on top of the existing ones. The risk involved with licking sharp objects is enormous. Besides looking at it from a
health perspective, it is just dangerous considering that in the event of any mishap, a person may be harmed.

*Ukaona chamupupuri tiza, chinokutakura kunjuzu.* - Avoid whirl-winds, or it blows you to a river with mermaids. Traditionally within the Shona culture, there has only been one term for strong winds commonly called whirlwinds. Some of these winds are too strong to be ignored and prevented easily that they sometimes destroy an entire village. Therefore, urging people to run away from such strong winds was just a safety measure against death and destruction. People also generally feared mermaids and did not want to be taken to the mermaid-infested rivers.

*Ukapinda mumunda kuchinaya unorohwa nemheni.* – getting into the field when it is raining exposes one to lightning. Some farmers feel that time may be running out for their cropping schedules so much so that they get into the field when it is raining. Little do they realize that if they weed when its wet, the weeds don’t wilt or dry but rather re-strengthen. This taboo was then coined to keep such farmers away from the fields.

*Ukarasa madota usiku, unodevedza mazizi.* – If you dispose hot ashes at night, you invite owls. There are some people who start fires at night. However, before a fire is started, the previous day’s ashes have to be cleared. In some of these ashes there may be some hot ones such that if they are disposed of at night, chances that they re-ignite and burn properties and vegetation are high. This is just to deter people from disposing ashes at night risking to burn several other properties and valuables.

*Ukasona hembe wakaipfeka, unosonera nhamo.* – If a person mends a dress while wearing it is tantamount to sewing poverty on the same dress. There are some people who choose to mend their dresses while they are wearing them. During the process, they ignore the risk of injuring themselves. Therefore, the threat of sewing poverty on the dress is simply a safety deterrent.

*Ukasvetuka huni iri mumoto, haurorwe/roori.* – A person does not marry if he jumps a log in the fire. It is very dangerous for a person to walk across a fire or simply jump across. There are risks that the person may stumble on a log and splash fire around or may fall onto the fire. Therefore, this taboo was only meant to frighten people away from the habit of jumping over fires.

*Usadye wakarara, unomera muswe.* - If you eat food lying on the floor, you develop a tail. Some children enjoy taking food lying on the ground or floor. Therefore, some parents threaten them that they risk developing tails. This is in view of the fact that eating food lying down seriously exposes one to possible choking, which may result in death.
Usafamba negotsi, unenge uchiziwendesa kuguva rako - Do not walk backwards; you will be directing yourself to your grave. It is generally dangerous for a person to walk backwards without clear vision of where one will be stepping and going. To avoid those dangers, there was this threat that attempting to walk backwards led one to his/her grave. Naturally within the Shona culture, no one would want to know about his/her death.

Usagara mumugwagwa, uniota mamota kumagaro. - Do not sit on the road; you develop boils on the back. Some people have a habit of casually sitting on the roads ignoring the dangers involved in the event that high speed motor vehicles approach. To discourage people from this habit, this taboo effectively does so.

Usagara pamapfihwa, hauzoroora mukadzi. - Do not sit on the heath, you may not marry. Sitting on either the hearth on logs in the same fire exposes one to the danger of getting burnt. Therefore, the taboo was only meant to protect people from the dangers of fire.

Usagare pachikuva unouraya mai vako. - Do not sit on the hut clay-pot shelve, you may kill your mother. Most rural huts have an in-built place where mothers place their clay pots, which are sacred within the Shona culture. It is a tradition that if any member of the family breaks these clay pots, they have to be replaced before the death of the mother as non-replacement is believed to invite misfortunes. Therefore, people are discouraged from sitting on this place simply to reduce the chances of breaking the mother’s pots.

Usagare padanda unouraya mukadzi. - Do not sit on a log, otherwise you will kill your wife. Some people may sit on logs especially if there are no enough seats. However, some of the logs may be burning on account of having been pulled from the hearth. So to avoid exposing people and other burnable property to the fire on that log, the taboo was crafted.

**Discipline**

Societies are defined by how they present themselves to the outside world. Most importantly, their integrity is built upon their values and beliefs in comparison to other known societies. In short, this is about discipline of the local inhabitants in relation to how they see other people, how they manage their resources, how they nurture their heritage and how they uphold their societal hierarchy.

There are some types of taboos that seek to nurture and instill self-control in the local people. This is against the backdrop that discipline is defined differently in various areas. However, the basic traits of general discipline include: ideal usage of resources and body parts, social practices and recognition of
social order, recognition of religious and cultural practices, uncalled for behaviours and indulgence amongst others. Most societies wanted to maintain their integrity by strictly adhering to the most ideal practices so much so that they coined taboos that made it an abomination if anyone transgressed what societies expected from reasonable people. Most scholars; Pfukwa, Masaka and Chemhuru and Tatira amongst others acknowledge the existence of such taboos in most societies.

Kushandisa ruboshwe, kushora.- The use of a left hand is considered a disdain for the person. Culturally, it is believed that all normally functioning people should make use of the right hand for all important work including taking food, holding heavy loads and greeting others. The use of the left though scientifically possible is considered a disdain for the person. This is just a way of encouraging people to use their right hands for important tasks.

Mukadzi anenhumbu akaba, mwana waanozvara anozoba. - A pregnant woman should not steal, her baby becomes a thief. There are some women who steal even when they are pregnant. The Shona people also believe in the concept of one taking after another. In light of this belief, society crafted this taboo as a way of ensuring that the unborn children do not take after their dishonest mothers. Indeed, because the mothers do not want their children to become thieves as well, they then stop stealing.

Mukadzi anenhumbu akasakudza murume wake, anotadza kurasa ropa pakuzvara. - A pregnant woman should not be rude to her husband; she will not bleed during her pregnancy. It is believed that during pregnancy, bleeding is health for the unborn. Therefore, to instill discipline in women, this taboo was crafted sorely to put fear in those women who disrespected their husbands. It must be realized that most traditional societies were patrimonial in nature.

Mukomana nemusikana vakarara musango, vanoita mapundu. – Lovers develop blisters if they make love in the bush. For most young people, developing blisters is an embarrassment. Besides, it affects beauty. Therefore, to discourage young lovers from turning bushes into love nests and to discourage them from making love before they are formally married, this threat of developing blisters helps.

Munhu akapfeka nguo akapindurira, amai vake vanofa. – Wearing clothes inside out may cause the death of the mother. Traditional societies believed that mothers were at the centre of every person’s lives so much so that to instill fear, the mother had to be placed at the centre of the tragedy. The fear in this whole debate was meant to ensure that people wear clothes properly for the sake of the minors.

Munhu akarara nehanzvadzi yake, vanobereka chirema. – Incestuous relationships produce disabled offspring. Since time immemorial, it has been an abomination for related people to indulge in sex. Therefore, to keep people away from such an act, this taboo was crafted.
Munhu akashora hohwa musango, anoita chadzimira. – If a person talks bad about mushroom in the wilderness, he/she gets lost. This was just meant to teach people to appreciate what whatever they receive or get especially from the natural environment. This comes against the backdrop that traditionally, the Shona people believe that there are spirits that are responsible for the natural environment.

Murume akadongorera mupoto anoita mahobi. – If a man peeps into a pot, he develops a big forehead. There have been some men who overstep their roles at home so much so that they even take charge of the kitchen activities. Therefore, this taboo was crafted to deter such men from extending their influence into the kitchen.

Murume akadya zvabikwa nemukadzi anopomba anofa. - If a husband of an adulterous woman knowingly eats her meal, he dies. There were times when society did not tolerate promiscuity especially involving married people. Therefore, to ensure that men did not accommodate infidelity in their homes, there was this fear that once a man ate food prepared by such unfaithful woman, he died. It only served as a restraining mechanism in marriages.

Murume akaonerera mukadzi achigeza, anoita shohwera. – If a man peeps through a bathing woman, he develops blisters on his eyes. This was designed to instill fear in some men who had a habit of peeping on naked women as a way of satisfying their sexual gratification.

Murume anoda kunoraura hove haarare nemukadzi, haazobate. – It is sacred to have sex before going fishing. This is one of the most general taboos respected the world over in various circles from sports to family programs. It is not recommended for men to indulge in sex before they go out either fishing or hunting as it is believed that it causes serious misfortunes. This was only crafted after it was realized that most men who went out fishing woke up late as a result of fatigue due to indulgence. As a result, they made small catches.

Murume haabvumirwe kurara nemukadzi mumunda, haazokohwe. - It is forbidden for a man to have sexual intercourse on a farmland, he makes no harvest. As a way of instilling discipline in communities especially where people have a propensity to indulge in irregular sexual escapades, society devised means to keep lovers away from public places. One of the areas which were specifically identified where some lovers had a tendency of leaving used condoms was the maize field. In most high density suburbs where residents grow maize, people have a tendency of turning the fields either into toilets or sex havens. During the process, they mess the fields. Therefore, this was a mechanism meant to stop uncontrolled bush sex.
Musikana akaitiswa pamuviri nababa vake, haazvare kusvika adura. – If a girl is covertly impregnated by her father, she does not deliver until she discloses the man responsible. It was believed that there were some men who impregnated their daughters and threatened them with death if they disclosed the incestuous acts. Therefore, putting this threatening taboo forced such girl victims to disclose their ordeals or that they risked failing to deliver till probably they died.

Musikana akaona baba vake vachigeza, anoita munyama. – If a girl sees her father bathing naked, she faces serious misfortunes. Culturally it is unacceptable for children to see their parents either bathing or naked. Therefore, to keep children especially girls away from seeing their fathers naked, the threat of possible misfortunes was developed.

Musikana akarohwa nemutsvairo, haroorwe. – If a girl is beaten with a grass broom, she may not be married. Realizing that there are some girls and women who are just lazy that they do not want to do any household chores; elders end up beating them to start working. The weapon usually used is the broom. Therefore, to ensure that such lazy women are not always seated, this taboo frightens and forces them to work.

Musikana akaroorwa baba vake vasingadi, imba haimire. - If a girl is married without the father’s blessings, marital problems such as infertility, perfidy, split and death occurs. It is every woman’s wish to have a successful marriage. It is also every father’s wish to culturally marry off his daughters procedurally. To discourage girls from eloping, this taboo threatens that marriages due to elopement or without the father’s consent usually fail.

Muuto haarare nemukadzi arisi musango, anozotadza kunzvenga mbumburu. - A combatant is not supposed to engage in sexual contact with a woman otherwise he will be killed by an enemy. This is one of the regulations put in place during the liberation struggle in Rhodesia by the liberation fighters as a way of instilling discipline on the combatants. The measure was also meant to frighten the armed fighters from abusing defenceless citizens in their operating zones.

Mwana haatore achitangira vakuru. - A child cannot take something that is being shared without waiting for elders to take their share first. It is a serious abomination in the Shona culture for a minor to disregard the presence of elders. Elders are expected to take the first priority in any activity, be it taking food, taking seats, talking or walking along a path. This was designed to ensure that when children grow up, they respect their social and cultural hierarchy.
Mwana haagare vakuru vakamira. - A minor should not be seated when elders are standing. This was crafted simply to instill discipline in minors that elders should be respected and afforded the first priority in almost every activity in society.

Renekedza vanhu vakuru, unoita munyama. - Respect elders or you face misfortunes. The Shona people have traditionally maintained social etiquette highly so much so that in every community, everyone respects the social structure and respects every elder. Also, the fact that in the same community, people do not like to face misfortunes makes them comply with the rules and expectations.

Ukaba kana kutora chisiri chako, unoita munyama. - If you steal, you face misfortunes. As a way of discouraging people from stealing in society, this taboo was crafted. In the Shona culture, people generally do not like bad luck/misfortune and would do anything possible to cleanse it away.

Ukagara badza mumunda, unodaidza makudo. – Sitting on a hoe in the field invites baboons. The essence of getting into the field is to work on the land and not to sit and relax. As a way of discouraging laziness in the fields, people were told that sitting on farming implements was a way of luring baboons to destroy the crops.

Ukamanikidza mwana kurara, anofa. - If one forces a child to go to bed, he dies in his sleep. This was a measure meant to train some elders on the need to either persuade or allow natural sleep for children. It was feared that some elders forced children to sleep so that they got intimate with their partners. In some cases, after forcing children to sleep, they would sneak out for their love partners risking the safety of the minors whilst they were out.

Ukanhonga mari unoita mamota. - Do not pick money from the ground which is not yours, you develop boils. In an effort to create an orderly society free from dishonesty and treachery, the traditional elderly came up with such sayings which were meant to frighten people from taking what was not theirs.

Ukanyepera kuchema, unoshura rufu. –Faking a cry invites death in the family. The Shona people treat death as a sacred occurrence in life which should never be a daily occurrence. Therefore, faking a funeral cry in a home is discouraged as people are told that it is a wish for unexpected deaths.

Ukarevera mumwe nhema, unotsva kudenga. - If you lie against someone, you will be burnt in hell. It is believed that the spirit of the person whom you will have lied against will liaise with the ancestral spirits in the realm of the dead and ensure that you are recorded in the appropriate registers as a candidate for hell. This taboo was devised to ensure that people do not lie and especially lie against other innocent people.
Ukaridza muridzo usiku, unoshevedza nyoka/zvidhoma. – If a person whistles at night, he invites snakes or ghosts. Culturally, it is believed that night time is resting time. Therefore, if a person whistled, that would disturb peace and serenity in the neighbourhood.

Ukarota munhu akafa achikudeedza, ukadaira unofa. - If the spirit of a dead calls you in your sleep and respond, you die. The taboo was devised to ensure that people respect their sleep and that once they go to bed, they do not disturb others by making noise. Responding to calls by the dead meant that one will be responding to a call of death. Whereas in real life, no-one dies for talking after sleeping times, the taboo has managed to control the Shona people’s sleeping habits. It must be realised that the threat of reprimand contained in taboos makes the would-be offenders reconsider their decision because of the sternness of the punishment that goes with violating taboos.

Ukasvetuka mumwe, unokura musoro. - If you jump over someone, he/she grows a big head. Because no one would want to see another developing a bid head, people generally tend to respect the social norm that forbids jumping over other individuals. It simply instills some form of respect for the others in society.

Ukavaka bonde musango haubereke. - If you have sex in the bush, you become barren. Having sex in the bush was also taboo in the Shona culture. It was believed that the ancestors roaming in the forests were going to see it and get angry thereby wishing misfortunes and sexually transmitted diseases. However, traditionally, the explanation was that if the bush is close to the villages, there were chances of getting caught while others feared that having sex in the bush exposed people to insects, dirty and some other dangerous creatures. However, during the liberation struggle the explanations behind this taboo was that people involved in intercourse could be caught in the act by the combatants or that the act could then involve the combatants and ultimately compromise the agenda of the war. Besides, the taboo also helped secure village girls from the wrath of the sex-starved combatants.

Usabe, zvaunenge waba zvinonamira mumusoro wakazyitakura. - Do not steal; the stolen goods will get stuck on your head. It is embarrassing in society to see a person with some baggage stuck on either the head or shoulders. Immediately, people easily conclude that he/she is a thief. This is what the taboo simply urges people not to be involved in or associated with.

Usatarisa chitunha mumaziso, chinokutevera. - Do not look into the face of a deceased person. This was only a way of discouraging people from wanting to look critically on the dead as that gave the living an opportunity to establish the cause of the death and probably influence family conflicts. In most cases, what people deduced as some of the causes of the death were all wrong as that was not scientifically supported.
Death

Murder is among extraordinary or serious taboos in the African cultures. The taboos argue that if you kill, avenging spirits will persecute you for you will have angered the highest ancestral spirits. The other explanation is that if one kills, the entire family suffers serious misfortunes that no-one prospers. Closely akin to the murder taboos is suicide. It is believed that this is also one of the most extraordinary taboos whose sanctions involve the denial of proper burial rites and animal sacrifices by the family of the deceased to the ancestors. The explanation behind these taboos is that a long time ago, people lived in the wilderness. Therefore, their survival depended on their large numbers and so could not afford to have people either killing others or themselves.

Ukaponda unotevedzera zvaiita munhu wawakaponda. - If you kill a person, you adopt mannerisms/behaviour of the deceased. In the Shona culture, while people respect their dead, no one wants to continue seeing the images or shadows of them. Therefore, if one was to be told that if they committed an offence or killed another, they would continue to either see their shadows or begin to behave like the murdered individual.

Ukauraya unoita ngozi. - If you kill, avenging spirits will torment you. This is one of the most prominent of the taboos. It is believed that avenging spirits are invincible forces that have power to devastate any society in various ways from inducing poverty, casting illnesses, misfortunes, barrenness, unexplained deaths in the family up to inter-family hatred amongst others. Therefore, because no one would want to face avenging spirits, people desist from committing murder.

Generosity

The African communities and in particular the Shona are guided by the spirit of unhu/Ubuntu in whatever they do. These people are traditionally inclined to communalism whereby they would want to share or help each other through the concept of reciprocation. They believe that one’s problem is everyone’s challenge just as much as they believe that every child in the community is everyone’s responsibility. It is therefore in this spirit that the concept or belief in sharing whatever is available is driven. The taboos in this category were simply meant to inculcate the spirit of sharing and giving.
**Gandanga haridye derere rinozotsvedza.** - A combatant does not eat okra; he/she will become sleepery and get exposed to an enemy. This taboo was coined during the liberation struggle of the 1970s by the combatants who did not want to be served with any relish other than meat. Therefore, it was crafted in a manner that instilled fear in the civilians that they had to ‘voluntarily’ slaughter their livestock for fear that the combatants, who were said to be fighting for the liberation of Zimbabwe, would be captured and killed. Actually, this was an exploitative tact and form of extortion by the combatants.

**Ukavesa huni nekumashure, unozvara mwana achibuda nekumakumbo.** – If a person lights a fire starting with the lower part of firewood, he/she risked delivering a baby coming out legs first. Traditionally, it was believed that it is easy to light a fire using the upper part of the firewood since it is thinner and tender than the lower and hardened part. Therefore, it was faster and emitted less smoke as the fire developed. Effectively, it meant visitors could also get served faster.

**Conservation**

Environmental taboos are intended for the regulation of the ethical use of the environment. Such taboos were devised by traditional authorities as a way of conserving the fast deteriorating natural resources. Jimoh et al (2012) suggest that incorporating cultural norms and taboos into preservation programs may present incentives to communities to protect natural wealth. Jimoh et al (2012) goes on to cite Lingard et al. (2003), Schachenmann (2006), Tengo et al.(2007), Jones et al. (2008) and Rabearivony et al. (2008) who reported the importance of taboos and cultural laws in the continued existence of forest biodiversity in Madagascar. Colding and Folke (2001) acknowledge that social taboos exist in most cultures as typically clear examples of unofficial institutions, where norms, rather than legislative laws and regulations, determine human conduct toward natural environment. "Resource and habitat taboos" (RHTs), according to Colding and Folke (2001) have roles similar to those of recognised institutions for nature conservation in modern society but have not been adequately acknowledged in this capacity. It is also argued that social taboos offer a variety of advantages chief amongst them being that they are non-costly and compliance is voluntary.

According to UNEP (2003), there are indications that sacred forests are losing value because pressure on the land to supply the requirements of the inhabitants is growing and that traditional beliefs and customs are breaking down. Therefore, coming up with such taboos helps keep away people from further depleting the resources. It will however be realised that some of these taboos are similar in various societies though leadership in these respective areas may not have consulted each other when they crafted them.
Joining in the debate about the role of African traditional taboos in natural resource conservation is Mawere (2012). However, his approach is from the aspect of ‘unhu/ubuntu’ philosophy whereby he argues that traditionally communities have been able to protect and preserve their resource simply through good behaviour and ability to adhere to local rules and regulations. Mawere (2012) cites Norumedzo communal area which is rich in edible stinkbugs (encosternum deleorguei Spinola) ‘harurwa’ and loquats ‘mazhanje’ in the local grove ‘jiri’ that was widely believed to be sacred. According to the local taboo, it was believed that any abuse of any of the two natural resources; stinkbugs and loquats, would invite the wrath of the ancestors through other terrible misfortunes. This argument is similar to the one that Eneji et al (2012) allude to relating to the sacred groves that are found in Ghana and other West African countries and seen as realistic systems of local strategies for the administration and preservation of natural surroundings in the countryside communities. However, Shastri et al (2002) argue that there are several other means through which traditional biodiversity conservation could be effected other than traditional customs and cites the following: religious traditions that talk of monastery forests and deitified plants, royal customs that relate to royal hunting preserves in the case of pangolins in Zimbabwe and sacred animals like lions referred to as ‘mhondoro’ in Shona language.

_Hunza ikaroverwa padota, inochinja kuita nyoka_ – if an eel is put on ashes, it changes to a snake. There are people who fish large quantities for the purpose of either commercial resale of preservation for future consumption. However, during the process, it threatens the availability of the same species in future. Therefore, this is a measure meant to protect eels from uncontrolled fishing especially by fishermen who would want to preserve for future consumption.

_Kuuraya haka, unoita munyama._ - Killing a pangolin (Manis temminckii), causes bad luck. As a way of ensuring that some of these delicious but defenceless wild animals were preserved, there was need for such deterring taboos. This was the same way in which the infamous wild bird called ‘Dodo’ got extinct. Most local traditional leaders especially the Chiefs fined heavily if one killed or ate a pangolin as it was considered a special delicacy for the kings and chiefs. Any other ordinary person who killed a pangolin experienced bad luck.

_Kuuraya mhuka irikubereka, unorohwa nemheni_ - Killing a wild animal that is giving birth, you get struck by lightning. Normally when an animal is giving birth, it has no strength to run or fight off predators. It is therefore against this background that this taboo was crafted to safeguard and protect such animals. It also follows a realization that failure to protect them threatens their extinction as they will be reproducing.
Kuuraya mhuka irikuyamwisa, zvinodevedza munyama. - Killing a lactating animal, invites bad luck. Traditional societies believed that as they harvested natural resources for consumption, they also had the future in mind. They believed that if an animal was either giving birth or lactating, it had to be spared as a way of ensuring continuity. Failure to respect that policy was believed to attract bad luck in a person’s life.

Kuuraya mhuka isingadyiwe, zvinoitisa rushambwa. - Killing a non-edible wild animal causes misfortunes. In the same spirit of conservation and continuity, traditional communities also discouraged people from killing animals that they did not need for their immediate survival. There were some animals that were not edible by people and whose defence systems were weak that they were easily killed; it was such taboos that then had to protect them from arbitrary killings.

Kuuraya mhuka kuti munhu atengese, zvinoidza rushambwa. - Killing a wild animal for profit-making purposes, invites bad luck. Traditionally, while people were also capitalist in nature, they discouraged the killing of wild animals for commercial purposes. They believed that edible wild animals were a gift from their God for consistent survival as they could hunt and slaughter as and when they needed for domestic consumption and other large scale communal rituals. It was believed that selling meat or trophy from such wild animals attracted serious misfortunes to the entire family.

Kuuraya mhuka usati wapedza yekare, zvinounza munyama. - Killing a wild animal before finishing an earlier hunt causes misfortunes. There used to be hunters who enjoyed killing animals regardless of whatever meat stocks that they had in their homes. This practice ended up threatening the numbers of the animals in the wilderness. Therefore, this more was crafted to deter such a destructive habit of arbitrarily killing wild animals before there was a definite need for more relish in the home.

Munhu akadya mutupo, anobva mazino. – If a person eats an animal associated with his/her totem, he/she loses teeth. This was also devised as a regulatory facility in areas where particular animals were being hunted for consumption. This taboo has over the years helped to protect wild animals from extinction as particular areas are defined by the existence of specific animals, which apparently are not consumed locally on account of being local people’s totems.

Munhu akadzika mugomo nemichero, anoshaya nzira. – If a person takes home wild fruits from a hill, it is believed that he/she gets lost in that wilderness. This was coined to help conserve wild fruits from depletion through commercial harvesting. Local people believed that all natural resources were provided by God for local consumption by that community. Therefore, any attempt at taking some away or commercializing was believed to be unacceptable and bound to bring darkness in the way of that person and eventually get lost.
Munhu akatemha michero yaasingadye, anoita munyama. – If a person harvests fruits that he/she does not eat, encounters misfortunes. Following a realization that other people simply harvested wild fruits which they did not need, this taboo was devised to scare away such culprits from their habit which deprived other wild animals and birds from their food.

Munhu asiri mambo akadya haka, anofa. – If a person who is not a king ate a pangolin, he risked facing death. Traditionally, pangolins are extinct animals and to conserve them, this deterrent taboo was developed. It was thought that since kings were few in a defined community, their rate of consuming out such defenceless but delicious wild animals would be low thus preserving them.

Murimi akauraya gudo mumunda, anodzoka awanda. – If a farmer kills a baboon in the maize field, more baboons will invade. It is a laborious task to guard maize fields from baboons throughout the day. In some cases, some farmers resort to attacking and killing some of the baboons as a way of permanently resolving the issue of problem animals. However, this strategy has a serious bearing on the future existence of the baboons. Therefore, this taboo threatens that if a farmer kills a baboon in the field, more will definitely invade and devour the entire field. This was crafted to frighten farmers who wanted to kill the baboons so that they only chased them away. This is one of the several means through which wild animals were preserved in the olden days.

Murume akagarira ngoma, mukadzi wake vanofa. – If a man sits on a drum, his wife dies. A drum is sometimes mistaken for a seat especially when chairs are inadequate at home and yet it is not strong enough to be sat on. Therefore, this taboo is meant to deter men from sitting on a drum to avoid breaking it.

Mushonjiwa (Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia) hauitwe huni nekuti unotsvairiswa paguva. – The tree may not be used as firewood for it is used to clear at gravesites. This tree has various medicinal and religious values in the Shona culture. Therefore as a way of protecting the tree from depletion, this more was crafted knowing very well that people were afraid of graves and would therefore avoid felling it down.

Shato ikaurayiwa, mvura hainaye. – If a python is killed by people, there will not be rains that cropping season. In Zimbabwe, pythons are sacred and rare snakes whose defence mechanism is weak. Therefore, the taboo is meant to protect them from human attacks.

Sipo dzinonhuwirira hadzidiwe parukova. – Perfumed detergents are not welcome to the rivers. Long ago very few people could afford or access perfumed detergents in the rural areas. However, for those who
did, they usually bathed along the streams and the local fear was that the smell could impact badly on the survival of the entire water life. Simply, it was crafted to preserve aqua-life.

_Ukarima munda wakachinjika, haukohwe._ – If you till land along the slope, you make no harvest. Sometimes it is easy to till land in a particular direction regardless of the direction of water flows. Some farmers would then choose to till the easiest way and ignore some of the guidelines by agriculture experts on soil erosion and conservation. This taboo was therefore crafted to discourage farmers from promoting soil erosion.

_Zongororo rikaiswa mumuti, mvura hainaye._ – If a millipede is suspended from a tree, there will not be good rains that season. Traditionally, millipedes are associated with bad omens in society. Therefore, people had a habit of killing them. This was a means of protecting them from extinction.

**Peace**

It must be realized that most taboos were designed to counter a particular practice in particular areas. This explains why some taboos were not recognized in other areas and why some taboos were more prevalent in certain areas and not in others. For example, taboos seeking to conserve animals were more prevalent in animal infested areas. Similarly, there were some areas whose inhabitants had a jingoistic mentality. Therefore, to regulate their appetite for conflicts and violence, such taboos focusing on peace and harmony were crafted.

There were however some areas where you could hardly find a taboo about peace simply because the inhabitants were peaceful. Factors that also instigated conflicts differed from area to area and the level of intensity also varied substantially. Conflicts could be caused by issues as minor as the need for a bigger piece of meat in a family, the desire to sip beer first ahead of other drinkers to ownership of land.

_Mukadzi haadye mazondo, anozyimbirwa._ – A woman is not allowed to eat cattle hooves, she gets constipated. There is a strong belief within the Shona culture that cattle hooves have some medicinal properties good for sexual activities so much so that there are some men who eat them often to boost their sexual prowess. It is against this background that some men claim that women cannot take the hooves for fear that they too become sexually powerful at the detriment of their husbands. In marriages, that is likely to spark conflicts over sexual strengths by respective parties. The other argument is that always when a beast has been slaughtered, there are just four hooves, which are not enough to satisfy the needs of all the
consumers. Therefore, this taboo was meant to ensure that some potential consumers are eliminated from the limited sticky bones thus resolving a conflict over a scarce resource.

*Mukadzi wemunhu haarohwe, zvinoera.* - A married woman cannot be beaten by another man, it’s sacred. There is no provocation that is worse than beating another man’s wife. Conflicts out of such provocation are either long term or fatal. To avoid such conflicts in society, this mores was designed to scare away potential transgressors from beating up married women.

*Mukauraya munoita ngozi.* - If you kill, avenging spirits will torment you. While this mores was designed to stop people killing each other, it also sought to promote peace in communities. It argued that if one killed another, the spirits of the dead were likely to rise up and fight back against the murderer. It is this living-spirit fight that is referred to as ‘ngozi’ or the avenging spirits.

*Munhu akarohwa nebenzi, anoita munyama.* – If one is assaulted by a psychiatric patient, he/she experiences bad luck. There are some people who look down upon the mentally challenged so much so that they sometimes harass them. In retaliation, the mentally challenged may wage a violent fight and during the process destroy property. Therefore, this taboo was crafted to maintain peace in various communities.

*Musadeure ropa munotora mweya yakaipa kana kupenga.* - Don’t kill or you face misfortunes like mental illness. Traditionally, mental illness has been attributed to evil spirits and avenging spirits. Every member of any community would therefore want to maintain integrity and dignity by keeping away from such evil-related challenges. It is also believed that such spirits affect the entire clan except for the real murderer so that he/she feels the pain and agony and push for compensation. Therefore, the taboo has been effective in instilling fear in people who may be planning to kill others.

*Ukaba kana kutora chisiri chako unoita mhemherera.* - If one steals or robs, he/she goes mad. Every person in society would want to be independent and lead a uniquely better life except for those who emulate some role models. With this taboo, it is believed that if one stole another person’s property, he/she begins to behave like the victim. This is worse in situations where the victim has some queer or unusual character and the thief begins to behave in a queer or unusual manner.

*Ukaita utsinye unoita munyama.* - Cruelty invites misfortunes. As people worry and complain about a person’s cruelty and heartlessness, bad luck begins to pile on the perpetrator and ancestral spirits protecting the victims begin to wage a spirited fight against the perpetrator thus adding more misery.

*Ukanhonga mari unoita mamota.* - Do not pick money from the ground which is not yours, you develop boils. It is believed that everything has an owner somewhere or whoever would have dropped it will claim...
ownership at some later stage. This is considered as theft. It is also believed that there are some individuals who make use of traditional ‘juju’ to generate wealth and some of the conditionalities include placing some valuables immersed in ‘juju’ in public places so that whoever takes, gets bad luck. Therefore, to discourage people from taking or picking money, a move likely to spark conflicts in society, this taboo was crafted.

_Ukarevera mumwe nhema, unotsva kudenga._ - If you lie against another, you go to hell. (See also under discipline)

_Ukatarisa munhu akafa mumaziso, anokutevera._ - If you look into the eyes of a dead person, you continue seeing him/her thereafter. (See also under discipline)

_Ukatuka nechemumoyo unoita buka._ – Insulting others quietly causes nose-bleeding. There are individuals who insult others in their hearts. Normally this is a sign of deep anger and hatred over something one may not have control or power over. It simply means that the person insulting harbours deep vengeance that if given an opportunity, retaliates violently. Therefore, this discourages harbouring anger and hostility.

_Ukauraya munhu asina mhaka, unomuona kuhope._ - If you kill an innocent person, you see him/her in visions and dreams. Sleep is supposed to be every person’s resting opportunity preparing for the next day’s assignments. However when a person in his sleep begins to see visions of the dead, that sleep ceases to be well and a resting opportunity: instead, it becomes a nightmare. This is what happens, according to this Shona taboo if an innocent person is murdered.

_Ukauraya, unoripa nemwanasikana wako._ - If you kill, you compensate by surrendering your virgin daughter to the victim’s family. Killing another person is unacceptable in every culture. However, some people are not deterred from committing such heinous offences. To deal with such people, traditional societies came up with a system of compensation whereby the murderer is required to surrender his/her virgin daughter to the family of the victim. The daughter is then given to any male member of the victim’s family as a wife regardless of whether there is love or not. The new couple is expected to bear children and the first boy child is then named after the deceased (that is if the deceased was a male). This way compensation is said to have been accepted by the spirit of the dead. This process of compensation was simply designed to frighten people from wanting to kill others as no-one would want to surrender own daughter to strangers as a wife. This situation creates conflicts in the family that is required to surrender a virgin girl. On the other hand however, it is a means of resolving a conflict between the families of the murderer and the victim.
Usabe mumunda memuvakidzani, unozvimba dumbu. - Do not steal from a neighbour’s field, you grow a bulging stomach. It is embarrassing for a person to develop a swollen womb as it is normally associated with infidelity and theft. There are some people who use ‘juju’ to protect their property such that if it is stolen, the thief immediately feels the effects like bulging stomach, swollen legs, feeling dizzy and even death. However, not every person in society believes in ‘juju’. The threat was then applied wholesome in the Shona communities to discourage theft.

Usatore chinhu usina kupihwa, unoita jambwa. - Do not take someone’s property without consent, you face misfortunes. This taboo is similar to one used in theft of property. However, in this case, it focuses on taking someone’s property without the owner’s consent and eventually experiencing bad luck. It simply sought to discourage dishonest conduct in society.

Food

Food taboos can help utilizing a resource more efficiently while at the same time helping to protect a resource. Food taboos are often meant to protect the human individual from diseases and allergies (Douglas, 1996, Meyer-Rochow, 2009) and to preserve and conserve food reserves. Masaka and Chemhuru (2011) give out that there are several taboos that are respected in the Shona culture with regards to food.

Murume akadya nguruve anopera simba. – If a man eats pork, he becomes powerless. It is believed that pork carries a host of sickness-causing parasites, which are linked to high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, rheumatism, arthritis, boils, asthma and eczema. However, in most communities, it was believed that besides the diseases argument, men who drink beer wasted a lot of money on roasted pork. Therefore, to a great extent, it sought to save resources in families.

Ukagara paduri, vakadzi vose vaunoroora vanofa. - If you sit on the mortar in which grain is pounded, all the wives that you marry would die. This taboo discouraged people from sitting on a mortar which is used to pound food; as such, this was considered unhealthy. Given a strong belief in the Shona culture that if one kills a wife, avenging spirits persecute, and no-one would therefore want to sit on the mortar lest he threatens his wife.
**Household Resource Management**

While all other types of taboos could be talked about, the discussion may not be complete without mentioning the need to manage household resources in most homes in the Shona communities. The Shona communities are traditionally known to be communal in nature and live as extended families that also produce their main food through farming. Most of the families preserve their food for future consumption and train their children to be responsible people in life.

There are however times when people realize that their resources are either depleting or are being abused by other members of the same communities. Such situations then call for strategic management of all the available resources: human, material and livestock. In order to achieve that, the elders devised some threats and deterring systems that helped preserve the resources in whatever manner appropriate. It was some of these threats and deterring systems that eventually developed into the present day taboos.

*Kurara wakagonya unorota uchitadza kutiza.* – If a person sleeps with folded legs, he/she experiences nightmares whereby he will be failing to out-run the coming danger. It is quiet usual that people have their legs slightly folded when they sleep especially during the winter season when it is cold. In the poor rural areas, some families may not have enough blankets and so do not encourage people to sleep in that posture for fear that it takes up more space than planned. In some cases, it is feared that having legs folded pushes one’s knees up and may end up butting the person next. Therefore to ensure that unnecessary sleeping space is not wasted and for the safety of the person sleeping next, this taboo was coined to regulate people’s habits.

*Mukadzi akadya nzungu mbishi, anovhurika kuzasi.* – If a woman takes raw ground-nuts, her vagina loosens. This taboo was devised to discourage women from consuming raw nuts before they ground them to peanut butter, which is consumed by the entire family. In most communities, women take pride in having a tight vagina than a big hole which no-longer has any friction and grip during indulgence.

*Mukadzi ane nhumbu haamwe mukaka, mwana wake anozoita musikanzwa.* – A pregnant woman is not allowed to drink milk as it is feared that her children may develop bad habits after birth. It is quiet usual that pregnant women develop a craving for a particular food. In rural areas, some of the most common foods available include milk which apparently is a basic and staple food for the entire family as it can be used during tea time and as a relish with sadza. Realizing that pregnant women could drink all the milk and starve the rest of the family, this taboo was crafted to discourage them from taking milk.
Mukadzi anepamuviri haadye mazai, mwana haazomere vhudzi – a pregnant woman is not allowed to eat eggs otherwise the new baby will not grow hair. This taboo was coined following a realization that most pregnant women have an enhanced appetite for various foods, eggs included. Therefore, this taboo is supposed to control their consumption rate.

Musikana akadonhedza chirongo chaakatsiga, haazvare. – If a girl drops a water pot, it is said that she becomes barren. While this was a means of encouraging hard-working and commitment, it also served to ensure that girls did not unnecessarily break household pots.

Mwana haamwe mukaka wembudzi, anozoita dofo kuchikoro. – A child is forbidden to take goat milk as it is feared that he becomes unintelligent. In the rural areas, livestock is herded by young children who experiment with anything that comes their way. This includes illegally milking cows and goats. However, with cows, they usually face various challenges to do with their strength. This then leaves them exposed to goats which are easy and less dangerous. If uncontrolled, this practice can starve kids which contribute to the household’s wealth including food reserves.

Mwana mudiki haadye mazai, anoita buka. – Children should not eat eggs otherwise they lose their teeth. This taboo was meant to scare children away from demanding eggs as relish as a way of conserving chicken at home since it served as a symbol of wealth.

Ukabudisa mombe mudanga ichidududza, inotyoka musana. – If you drive cattle out of the pen backwards, they do not reproduce. Some young herd-boys are so irresponsible that they drive cattle out of the pens hurriedly so much so that in some cases some will have to squeeze on the gate while others move out backwards. This is dangerous for the livestock. To stop such a practice, this taboo was coined putting fear in the herd-boys that the cattle would not reproduce: threatening the availability of free milk on their part.

Summary
This book managed to classify taboos into eleven distinct categories: Morals, Health, Religious, and Safety, Discipline, Death, Generosity, Conservation, Peace, and Food and Household Resource Management though not in any order. This does not however mean that these are the only categories available. It must be noted that various other scholars and researchers have also categorized taboos differently. The factors that were looked at in this book may have been different from those considered by other writers. In all the taboos’ definitions and explanations, it was clear that traditionally, taboos’ effect lay in the following factors; deception, age, fear, hope, illiteracy, immaturity and the need for peace in
society and never any truths. Taboos, according to the explanations, were simply society’s means of regulating people’s behaviour without any real and tangible effect in the event of any transgression.
Chakubvubvu – This is a bad smell which develops when a person has been lying on the floor for too long.

Bonde – This refers to a bed. Traditionally there were no modern-type beds; there were reed-knit mats which were spread on the floor before blankets were spread over.

Buka – Nose-bleeding or a person who easily gets shocked after experiencing an unusual occurrence.

Chipoko – This is a ghost or appearance of the dead to their killers either physically or in visions.

Chirongo – Clay pot used to store water or traditional beer.

Chitunha - Corpse

Derere – A traditional vegetable which is sleepery.

Gandanga – This term was popularized during the Zimbabwe’s liberation war period referring to guerilla fighters.

Jambwa – Misfortune or bad luck

Kumwedzi – Periodic menstrual pain experienced by adult females usually monthly.

Kuponda – Murder or killing another

Mamota - Boils

Man’a – Physical cracks on human feet usually caused by either cold weather or failing to bath.

Mbumburu - Bullets

Mhemberera – An uncontrollable mannerism of behaving like another person.

Mhondoro – The most senior ancestral spirit in a clan.

Munyama – Misfortune or bad luck

Muuto - Soldier

Ngozi – This is a spirit avenging the murder of another innocent person.

Shohwera – It is a blister on the eye that is believed to develop after a person has peeped through naked people of the opposite sex.

Shura – It is an unusual occurrence which signifies bad events later on in life.

Tsvina – Dirty or feces
References


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