

February 2021

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### Recommended Citation

Chavasa, Norman (2021). The Kutanda Botso Ritual as a Means of Preventing Femicide Targeting Biological Mothers in Shona Communities of Zimbabwe. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), 473-485.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss1/28>

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## **The *Kutanda Botso* Ritual as a Means of Preventing Femicide Targeting Biological Mothers in Shona Communities of Zimbabwe**

By Norman Chavasa

### **Abstract**

Although femicide perpetrated by adult sons and daughters against their biological mothers is not a new phenomenon in the Shona communities of Zimbabwe, the problem has escalated significantly in recent years. In response, this study focuses on *kutanda botso* (ritual cleansing to appease the aggrieved spirit of the deceased biological mother) a ritual process taken up by adult sons or daughters who disrupt the social norm. They have been taught not to verbally abuse, assault or kill as they will suffer the consequences of an avenging spirit. An analysis shows that *kutanda botso* has a dual role: Firstly, the fear of negative consequences deters the possible perpetrators from such acts of violence. Secondly, it symbolizes the social values of motherhood by extolling and venerating it as an important and admirable position that should be treated with reverence and respect. Mothers deserve to live in nonviolent spaces and social relationships. This research concludes that femicide which targets biological mothers is complex and overwhelming. It requires a solution that involves more than law enforcement agencies and one that appeals to not only human cognition but also tradition.

*Keywords:* Femicide, *Kutanda botso*, Motherhood, Shona people, Zimbabwe, prevention of femicide, biological motherhood

### **Introduction**

Femicide is a violation of the right to life, the right to physical integrity and the right to personal liberty of women committed by private individuals as opposed to the state. It is a global problem which results from social dynamics in the home (Camilo et al., 2015). Corradi, Marcuello-Servós, Boira & Weil (2016: 11) define femicide as violent phenomenon that results from “a violent interaction, whereby a woman or a girl dies, i.e., an extreme and direct form of violence as part of an interpersonal process within a larger social context.” What is more heinous about femicide is that it is motivated by systematic discrimination, inequality and gender stereotype devaluing of women and girls (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2019). This study adopts a definition of femicide by Russell & Harmes (2001:13) as the “intentional killing of females by men and of females by other females ....” While up-to-date global statistics on the scope of femicide is still difficult to establish, existing figures indicate the scale of the problem. For example, the 2017 statistics released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2018) estimated that 87,000 women and girls were intentionally killed. In these statistics, an estimated 50,000 (58%) of femicide were committed by family members. Gender Links (2014) estimated that 66,000 women are killed each year across the globe.

Two major categories of femicide are identified: intimate femicide and non-intimate femicide by family members (UNODC, 2018). This study focuses on non-intimate femicide

because of its close links with violence perpetrated by adult sons and daughters against their biological mothers, which is central to this research.

Gender Links (2014) shows the southern African region as having the highest prevalence rate of femicide followed by South America, the Caribbean, and Central America. Zimbabwe being one of the southern African countries has unprecedented levels of femicide. Musasa Project Report (2013) showed that more than 60 % of femicide results from domestic violence in Zimbabwe. A further report by Manjoo (2012) reveals that 42 of the cases of femicide in Zimbabwe targeted women aged 50 and older. However, as is the case at global scale, there are no accurate figures in Zimbabwe on how many women are violated especially in the home and community. The figures are estimated by government and civil society and sadly, many cases that occur in private places like homes go unreported.

The problem of femicide perpetrated by adult sons or daughters against their biological mothers in Zimbabwe harks back several decades to the pre-colonial era, yet it still remains a topic of heated conversation in post-independent Zimbabwe (Dziva, 2020; Mofla 1924; Musiiwa 2015; Muroro, 2018; Nzenza 2012; Shona Culture Zimbabwe, 2013; Staff Reporter, 2020; Sunday News, 2015; Zimbabwe Independent, 2006; Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation Report, 2020). To put this study in context, some up-to-date flashpoints on different forms of violence perpetrated by adult children against their biological mothers are provided. Judging from search results found via the Google search engine, concerns pertaining to different forms of violence perpetrated by adult children against their biological mothers is still being reported through both electronic and printed media in Zimbabwe.

For example, in 2012, a newspaper report showed that a 31-year-old man (identified as Lazarus) had an argument with his mother over two goats that had been eaten by a hyena in the village one night. According to the newspaper report, the mother blamed Lazarus for failing to fix the goat's pen. In response, Lazarus argued that his mother had no moral right to blame him because he was now the head of the family since the father had passed on. The report further indicated that at the height of the argument Lazarus slapped his mother on her right cheek (Nzenza, 2012).

Subsequently, in September 2013 a 19-year-old girl (identified as Patience Ngoshi) in Unit A, Seke, Chitungwiza stabbed her widowed mother (identified as Felistas Mabhiza) 13 times using a kitchen knife and set her corpse ablaze. The incident occurred following a heated argument with her mother over allegations that the girl had stolen a USD\$100 from the house (Laiton, 2015). Another story involved a 19-year-old man (identified as Ashley Kudakwashe Sibanda) of Southdowns in Gweru who stabbed his mother (identified as Babra Sibanda) to death with a kitchen knife. The incident occurred after the mother had refused to give him car keys to go out with his friends (The Sunday News, 2015; Musiiwa, 2015; Mabutho & Turo, 2015). As recently as January 2020, another case was reported where a Shona man in his mid-40s (identified as Kuture Muzowaka) from Rusape of Manicaland province, killed his 77-year-old mother (identified as Monica Mucheke) after she had served him a meal of *sadza* (porridge), with *nyeve* (a traditional vegetable). He found the relish unpalatable and pounded his biological mother over the head with a granite stone causing her instant death (Dziva, 2020; Staff Reporter, 2020, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation Report, 2020).

The Domestic Violence Act of 2007 and the Gender Commission in 2013 were instituted by the government to address gender-based violence and femicide in Zimbabwe. Civil society organizations are also playing a key role in fighting femicide. Research-based participatory and educational programs and laws prohibiting femicide are also measures that have been put in place

(Gender Link, 2014). However, the role that tradition can play in mitigating non-intimate femicide perpetrated by adult sons and daughters has not been emphasized enough. This study, therefore, seeks to add a voice to the existing measures which prevent non-intimate femicide perpetrated by adult children against their biological mothers.

The study focuses on a social institution called *kutanda botso* (a ritual cleansing to appease the aggrieved spirit of one's deceased biological mother) in Shona language. This institution was selected for systematic review for two reasons: Firstly, it addresses non-intimate femicide in Shona communities. Secondly, *kutanda botso* is a ritual that relies on the fear of negative consequences which can be a powerful controlling instrument for reducing different forms of violence perpetrated by adult children against their biological mothers in Shona communities. *Kutanda botso* specifically deals with cases of violence perpetrated by adult Shona children against their biological mothers in Zimbabwe.

Mofla (1924) shares how *kutanda botso* in Shona communities can be a sword in the fight against femicide targeting biological mothers because it is based on internalism. The fear of *kutanda botso* in Shona social life is not rooted in law enforcement agencies but in internalism in which an individual must weigh the consequences of their actions and then decide whether or not to commit acts of violence against their biological mother. Furthermore, this ritual has deep institutional roots, many of which stem directly from pre-colonial customs that demonstrate the Shona peoples' allegiance to the sacredness of motherhood. It is these merits that warrant the systematic review of *kutanda botso* to assess its efficacy in curbing violence perpetrated by adult children against their biological mothers.

Maroro (2018) singled out some of the acts of violence that might warrant engagement in *kutanda botso*. These acts include, but are not limited to, physical and verbal abuse, rape, assault or murder. For purposes of this study, scolding is used interchangeably with psychological violence which Robinson & Chenoweth (2012) describe as: "the infliction of pain or grief through verbal or non-verbal acts/or behavior. It results in harm to a person's self-esteem and mental well-being as a result of being subjected to behaviors such as verbal abuse, continual rejection, withdrawal of affection, physical or social isolation and harassment or intimidation. This form of violence cannot be isolated from other types of violence such as beating, kicking, slapping or killing due to the interconnectedness of the forms of violence."

The concept of *kutanda botso* has been defined from various viewpoints. For example, Gombe (2006) defines *kutanda botso* as a ritual which is done to appease the aggrieved spirit of a parent who has died as a result of her adult children's transgressions. The kind of transgressions may include beating, scolding, killing or despising the parent. Rwafa, Mushore & Vhutuza (2014) contend that *kutanda botso* is a ritual practice in which the spirit of a person that has been killed is appeased. The ceremony involves cleansing the spirit of the aggrieved biological mother so that the spirit of vengeance may be exorcised, and the perpetrator forgiven. Rwafa, Mushore & Vhutuza state that *kutanda botso* seeks to ward off all misfortunes that come about after an adult child has wronged their biological mother. *Kutanda botso* is therefore a mechanism whereby an offending adult child and the aggrieved spirit of their deceased biological mother are able to reconcile through a ceremony in which the offender makes reparations for the wrongs they have committed during the biological mother's lifetime.

Mutapuri & Mazengwa (2013:5) define *kutanda botso* as: "a process undertaken by a wrongdoer to appease the spirit of the deceased person... This is done through a combination of rituals and payment of presents in cash or kind to the relatives of the wronged family." Their definition suggests that *kutanda botso* is a reparative process in which the offender pays

compensation to the wronged relatives of the victim as well as appeases the spirit of the deceased biological mother.

This study clarifies that *kutanda botso* is a ritual process whose primary goal among the Shona people is to rectify what is considered an act of violence committed by an adult child against their biological mother. The purpose of the ritual is to restore a broken relationship between the offending child, their paternal relatives, the aggrieved spirit of the deceased biological mother and her maternal relatives. It is hoped that the administration of the ritual ceremony would serve to curb violence against mothers. This aspect is central to the current study whose primary goal is to search for a mechanism which appeals to individual people's conscience to help complement efforts by law enforcement agencies to mitigate violence against mothers in Shona communities. Mainstream studies on *kutanda botso* have not focused on how this ritual practice can be implemented in the fight against violence perpetrated by adult children against their biological mothers. For example, Mutapuri & Mazengwa (2013) promulgate *kutanda botso* as the cause of a myriad of problems such as mysterious deaths in the family, the inexplicable loss of employment or loss of income. Their study found *kutanda botso* to be one of the mysterious causes of poverty for offenders in Shona communities. Whilst Mutapuri and Mazengwa (2013) look at the consequences faced by the offender, the power of *kutanda botso* to curb violence and reflect upon the social values of motherhood was not the focus of their study.

Other studies have focused on *kutanda botso* as a restorative justice mechanism with the capacity to address effective healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of violence in Zimbabwe. Typically, Rwafa, Mushore & Vhutuza (2014) view the participatory nature of *kutanda botso* in which relatives of the victim, the perpetrator and neighbors come together for the atonement of a wronged deceased biological mother as restorative in nature. Furthermore, they see the re-creation of relationships as restorative in nature (Rwafa, Mushore & Vhutuza, 2014). How *kutanda botso* can be used as a tool in curbing violence against mothers is not covered in the aforementioned studies. A brief overview of Shona cosmology will help to clarify the role of *kutanda botso* in the current study.

### **Overview of Shona Cosmology**

Shona people believe in the existence of spirits and their continual close interaction, social harmony and friendship with humankind. They also assume that these relations may be fragile when individual members or groups in the community commit offences and violate social norms. One of the social norms is '*do not scold, beat or kill your mother as you will suffer the consequences of an avenging spirit*'. If, for any reason a person violates this imperative Shona people believe that such behavior invokes spirits to act against any villain (Gelfand, 1999; Gombe, 2006).

The possibility of the spirits' involvement in human affairs is further intensified by the belief that "death to the Shona is a transition, not extinction...in which the spirit reaches a higher and purer form of existence" (Benyera, 2015: 6761). Shumba, Nyevera & Jongwe (1983) contend that death in Shona understanding is equated with falling asleep in which case oneness, collaboration, co-existence and close interaction between surviving household members and the spirit world are not disrupted by physical death. It also assumes that when a person dies, their spirit continues to interact with surviving members of the family and that harmonious interaction with spirits is instrumental to happiness and prosperity among surviving members (Gelfand 1982, cited

in Benyera, 2015). Social interactions between surviving household members and the spirits of the deceased relatives is the focus of this study because of its direct linkages with *kutanda botso*. Similarly, Shona people believe that if a person is murdered or dies in grief after having been wronged, their spirit becomes angry and restless and returns to settle the case as an *ngozi* (the spirit of a murdered or aggrieved person that comes back to haunt the wrongdoer until the matter is settled). Within this framework, children honor their parents even after death because they believe that a deceased parent has greater influence on the lives of surviving children. For this reason, a child's ill treatment of their parents during their lifetime may risk punishment because if the parent dies their angered spirit can come back to haunt the life of the surviving child. By the same token, children believe that the ill treatment of a parent, may cause the spirit of the aggrieved parent to take its revenge on the offending child should the matter not have been settled prior to the parent's death. As such, Shona children are socialized into believing that ill-treating a mother can result in *ngozi* which can only be meted out through *kutanda botso* (Shumba, Nyevera & Jongwe 1983).

### **The Setting and Methodology**

The study is based on the Shona people. Shona constitutes the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe. A significant number of Shona people live in rural areas. Shona is an umbrella term used to represent a group of dialects (Chishona), which include Zezuru, Manyika, Ndau, Kore-Kore, and Karanga vernaculars (Gombe, 2006; Kabweza, 2002; Magwa, 2004). However, numerical size was not the impetus behind choosing Shona people for this study, but the perpetual practice of *kutanda botso* which extols the social values of motherhood as it shall be discussed in detail below. *Kutanda botso* is widely accepted and practiced in rural areas of Zimbabwe.

To systematically review, *kutanda botso*, the study adopted a qualitative methodology based on its propensity to make sense of respondents' experiences. One set of data was collected via primary sources derived from the internet, newspapers and secondary sources, for example literature relating to *kutanda botso* in contemporary Shona society. In addition, the writer being a native Shona is not writing from abstraction, but rather an authority by experience.

To complement the literature review, another set of data was collected via informal conversations with 10 adults of which six were female and four were male. The ages of the respondents ranged between 40 and 65 years. The first conversation that triggered this study occurred during an informal workplace discussion on *kutanda botso*, which the writer followed up later for more details and research. The informal discussions focused on two primary questions: the first sought to understand whether respondents had ever heard of or witnessed the ritual of *kutanda botso* in their lifetime. The second sought to understand their knowledge of the stages involved in *kutanda botso* and what it seeks to achieve.

All conversations with respondents were conducted in their specific vernacular. After each conversation, the researcher took pains to document discussions whilst they were still fresh in his memory as he was reluctant to use a voice recorder. To a large extent, these conversations enriched the writer's knowledge of *kutanda botso* because after discussions the writer realized that he had only witnessed one of the six stages of *kutanda botso*. In the mid-1970s, whilst still a teenager he had witnessed the offender in sacks and filthy clothes begging for grain. The narratives of some of the respondents helped to fill the gaps as to what happened after the begging spree. Literature sources such as Gombe (2006); Kabweza (2002) and Tsodzo (1980) and others also helped to explain the role played by the traditional healer in the *kutanda botso* ritual.

Mentioned already, each of the respondents acknowledged having grown up in rural areas where they had witnessed the *kutanda botso* ritual being performed. Four reported that they had witnessed *kutanda botso* in the late 1970s when they were teenagers in the Masvingo district. One reported that she had witnessed it in 1982 in the Mhondoro district, Mashonaland west province when she was a teenager. Two respondents reported that they had witnessed *kutanda botso* in 2016 in one of the villages in the Musana district of the Mashonaland central province.

The inclusion criterion for participation in this research was that each respondent had to be of the Shona origin since the practice is predominantly exercised amongst the ethnic group under study. These informal conversations were conducted over a period of eight months partly because the researcher relied on referrals. At some point the writer spent two months establishing the whereabouts of one respondent that he considered to be an information rich source.

To protect the dignity and confidentiality of the respondents, the researcher devised a coding system which represents the gender and age of the respondent. For example, F1, 40years refers to the first female respondent aged 40 years or M2, 60 as the second male respondent aged 60 years, F9, 50 years and M10, 65 years and so on.

The first conversation on *kutanda botso* was convenient. To arrive at 10 respondents, the researcher used snowball sampling to identify the second to the tenth respondent who provided further referrals. Seven of the respondents declared never having been an offender in a *kutanda botso* ritual. Three of the respondents reported that they had never witnessed one in their lifetime and their knowledge of *kutanda botso* was based on hearsay. A point of saturation had been reached at 10 respondents.

Although the writer wished to converse with offenders who had engaged in *kutanda botso* during their lifetime, it proved difficult as most of the people referred to by the respondents had either passed on by the time of our interaction or migrated to some unknown distant places. The researcher was able to cope with the unavailability of offenders because *kutanda botso* is a phenomenon that occurs occasionally. Information from respondents was valid because the majority (seven) reported that they had witnessed a *kutanda botso* ritual in their lifetime. The three respondents who had not witnessed the ritual personally shared stories that resembled those of the respondents who had witnessed *kutanda botso* at different places and times.

### **Findings on the *Kutanda Botso* Ritual Ceremony**

The *kutanda botso* ritual takes place only if the wronged biological mother has passed on without the conflict between her and her adult child having been resolved. This ritual ceremony takes place in the circumstances of misfortune, trouble and suffering such as: mysterious deaths in the family of the offender, chronic sickness, and unspeakable accidents. Tradition has it that these misfortunes are caused by the aggrieved spirit of the deceased biological mother of the offending surviving child. It is commonly believed that if these misfortunes persist, the offender may consult a traditional healer to probe the causes of these mishaps. Upon consultation, the traditional healer advises the offender to pay reparations through *kutanda botso*.

The second stage is a family gathering to discuss findings of the traditional healer. A family will include relatives of the offended, deceased mother as well as her father, the paternal and maternal aunts, and all the biological relatives of the offender. The traditional healer advises the relatives and the offender of their responsibilities to make amends. The senior family members of the offender will inform the village head about plans to conduct *kutanda botso*. The village head will in turn summon a meeting to conscientize all household members and surrounding villages



about this big event. The third stage will involve the village head informing the chief (at district level) who in turn will convene a meeting and instruct their subjects to assist the offender with small grains which the offender will use to brew traditional beer for the ritual (Muroro, 2018; Rwafa, Mushore & Vhutuza, 2014).

When the appointed time for the offender to subject themselves to the public humiliation process draws closer, a family meeting is held to discuss proceedings. One task is to identify friends of the offender who will clothe him/her in the appropriate attire for the ceremony. Friends of the offender are adults who live in the same village. Friends will also need to be assigned to brewing beer for the ceremony. This beer will be brewed in the forest. Once the process commences, friends are obliged to remain for the duration of the ceremony. (F3, 50 years; F4, 47 years; M10, 65 years).

The fourth stage involves the offender being chased out into the forest to take his abode until the day when the ceremony is finalized. Tradition demands that friends dress the offender in a sack and filthy rags. The offender has to go from house to house in the surrounding villages to beg for grain. The offender is subjected to scolding and spite from everyone they meet. The villagers are expected to hurl sand, charcoal, and residue from cooking pots, or anything that is filthy at the offender. Onlookers may insult and accuse the offender by using vulgar language. The offender is not allowed to retaliate. This behavior is meant to be a type of cleansing for the committed transgression (M 7, 59 years; F6, 49 years; Tsodzo, 1980).

The fifth stage entails handing over the collected grains for beer brewing to relatives of the offended, deceased biological mother. The maternal relatives will present the grains to the aggrieved spirit in acknowledgement of the offender's acceptance of their transgression. This stage is appended by the process of beer brewing and cleansing of the offender by a traditional healer who is conversant with dealing with such matters (Gombe, 2006; Kabweza, 2002; Tsodzo, 1980). Traditional beer brewing among the Shona takes seven days. Beer for *kutanda botso* is brewed in the forest by friends of the offender. The brewing utensils are cleansed after the ceremony (Gombe 2006).

The sixth stage is the actual day of the ceremony in which the offender and paternal relatives are barred from partaking of the beer and the beast that is slaughtered for the invited neighbors. If relatives and the offender are to partake of any food on the day of the ceremony, tradition allows them to have water and some stiff porridge with plain vegetables, but not the meat and beer that is dedicated to the ritual ceremony. At the height of the ceremony, a traditional healer will preside over the cleansing of the deviant (M 7, 59 years; F6, 49 years).

The final stage will result in the offender being reintegrated as a member of their household. The traditional healer will offer up prayers to the aggrieved spirit of the deceased mother, asking her to forgive the offender. This stage will also see friends of the offender washing them with pure water and soap and disrobing them of the sacks and filthy rags. These will be replaced by clean clothes to signify that the misfortune associated with offending their biological mother has become a thing of the past (F1 40 years; M6 55 years; M10 65 years; Gombe, 2006; Tsodzo, 1980).

### **Evaluative Discussion of *Kutanda Botso* Ritual**

This section assesses *kutanda botso* as an embodiment of the social values of motherhood among the Shona and a means of preventing violence targeting biological mothers.

### *Kutanda Botso as a Symbol of the Social Values of Motherhood*

Motherhood is reflected in the stereotypical sentiments in the *kutanda botso* ritual. This is reflected in a newspaper report that “*Kutanda botso* happens when someone wrongs or assaults his/her biological mother. Assaulting one’s biological mother can only be atoned for by the offender by undergoing public humiliation and taking responsibility for his/her own actions” (Zimbabwe Independent, 2006).

That more stereotypical attention is given to offences committed against the motherhood is reflected in the comments by a culture expert Mr Phathisa Nyathi when he says:

A woman is a giver of life, she bears the burden of procreation and carries the baby from the time it is an embryo—smaller than an atom until it is big enough to see the world. She goes through excruciating pain of labour and eventually gives birth and when she delivers, they say “amhlophe” in Ndebele and “*apona*” in Shona literally meaning she has survived, for birth is tough and a threat to the mother’s life. But when that which stayed in the womb for nine months and threatened the life of the mother at birth has the guts and courage of taking away life from its life giver then it’s sad, it becomes an abomination, and can spell bad omen (The Sunday News, 2015).

First it is important to note that the foregoing sentiments reflect that motherhood is central to *kutanda botso*. As such, adult children who commit offences against motherhood are held accountable through *kutanda botso*—a ritual that reflects the important position of women in the survival of societies.

Second, *kutanda botso* reflects the social values of motherhood. This is reflected in social commentator and Pan-Africanist Professor Sheunesu Mpeperekwi’s comments:

A mother carries a child in her stomach for nine months during which period they share a lot and are connected by an umbilical cord. What the mother eats the baby also eats, they share antibodies, you name it. There is an intimate biological linkage that is unbreakable, yet a father just donates sperm only. This is why culture holds the mother more important than the father (The Sunday News, 2015).

It is clear that whenever *kutanda botso* is being discussed it invokes social values of motherhood among the Shona people. In a Facebook post of 28 August 2013 on *Shona culture* comments relating to *kutanda botso*, revealed that:

Mothers are a symbol of our existence and serve as our guiding angels or our bridge and advocate to the spiritual realm for our own good tidings and blessings. A mother in the Shona Culture is the Key that unlocks our doom or success in life depending on how we treat them. It is unheard of for a child to chide and worse still beat up our own mothers. Such practice has a huge price attached to it and leads to a curse that will stretch for generations and generations should the perpetrator not make good of his iniquity (Shona Culture Zimbabwe, 2013).

Thirdly, *kutanda botso* allows all members of society, both young and old, to demonstrate their allegiance to the sacredness of motherhood. *Kutanda botso* invokes the expression of the Shona peoples' religious beliefs about motherhood. It also reflects how mothers should be valued by their children.

It may be logical to argue that modern ideas of gender equality and non-discrimination are veiled in the *kutanda botso* ritual, which seeks to extol and venerate the female as an important figure in society. However, the purpose of *kutanda botso* is to emancipate women from their self-perceived and socially constructed identities that frame them to be inferior to their male counterparts and therefore weaker vessels.

#### *Kutanda Botso as a Means of Preventing Violence*

In Shona communities, *kutanda botso* was created to deter biological children from committing acts of violence against their biological mothers. This historical ritual was instituted in the pre-colonial era. Shona people assigned a purpose to *kutanda botso*. Today this ritual is performed in a different context. Through the practice of *kutanda botso*, many Shona people have been deterred from committing verbal and physical acts of violence against their maternal family members. Respondents with whom the researcher interacted demonstrated fear of negative consequences as captured in their responses below:

- *Amai havarobwi unoita ngozi yausingazofi wakapedza* (biological mother should not be beaten up or killed as you will get yourself in a fix that you will never get out of throughout your lifetime) - F4, 47 years in Mondoro district;
- *Ukaona uchirova kana kuuraya mai wazvipinza pama one awusingazogoni kubuda zvachose* (if you find yourself beating or killing your biological mother –it's a sign that you have gotten yourself into a fix that you will never get out of in your entire life) –F2, 42 years in Musana district;
- *Mai chero vakakutuka kana kukurova havadzorerwi nekuti ukavarova wazvisikira moto muziso* (Even if your mother beats you up don't dare ever try to fight back because doing so is like someone playing with the fire that one will not be able to put out)-M7, 59 years in Masvingo district.

The foregoing sentiments by respondents confirm studies by Mafohla (1926); Kabweza (2002); Mawere (2010) and Nzenza (2013) that fear of *ngozi* is a powerful controlling instrument in the reduction of violence and murder and the mistreatment or abuse of another person especially one's biological mother. The Shona people's fear of negative consequences points to their understanding that murder plunges the perpetrator and the entire family into jeopardy, which cannot be avoided even if reparations are made (Nyathi, 2015). This fear is not individualistic but tied to bloodline bonds. In a newspaper article, Nyathi (2015) states that:

This is a bond with far reaching implications. When one member of the group is guilty the whole group is guilty. It is for this reason that members of a group take keen interest in the affairs of one member of the group; that individual can invite serious consequences upon all of them.

In the above excerpt, Nyathi acknowledges that there is mutual policing amongst members of the family that is based on the fear of the *ngozi*. Thus, the fear of the *ngozi* commands an attitude of respect towards one's biological mother. Mawere (2010) observes that fear of *ngozi* is internal

in orientation. Internalism is taken to mean behavior that is heavily influenced by one's conscience. Because of the internal dimension of *ngozi*, the abstention from violence does not depend on law enforcement agencies, such as the Zimbabwe Republic Police, rather, it is a matter of conscience. This fear of *ngozi*, as asserted by Mawere (2010), has for several centuries led Shona people to embrace respect for other people, to be tolerant and to co-exist, which is social cohesion by another name.

## **Conclusion**

The contention of this study is that *kutanda botso* has great potential to prevent violence as well to restore peace—even in extreme cases where a mother is the victim of violence. The preventive power of *kutanda botso* lies in its potential to instill fear of negative consequences in would-be offenders. Respect for the surviving biological mother is gained immediately (albeit in small numbers initially) by would-be offenders within the family circle of the first offender and then from witnesses as they process, reflect, devise new ways of managing relationship problems with surviving mothers. It is also possible that by witnessing a *kutanda botso* ceremony, other villages may be encouraged to do the same, thereby helping to prevent further femicide.

**Acknowledgements**

“The support of the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in the Republic of South Africa towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the CoE in Human Development.”

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