The ‘Small House’: An Ethnographic Investigation into Economically Independent Women and Sexual Networks in Zimbabwe

by Mildred Mushinga

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology,

Faculty of Humanities at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

SUPERVISOR: DR FRASER MCNEILL

September 2015
ABSTRACT

This study examines the small house’ concept ‘in Zimbabwe focusing on economically independent women’s motives for engaging in sexual relationships with married men. ‘Small house’ is a colloquial and derogatory term that describes a married man’s quasi-polygamous, informal, long term, secret sexual relationship with another woman. General public and private discourse conceptualises the small house as survival transactional sex and as a key driver of Zimbabwe’s HIV epidemic. Consequently, public health campaigns educate people about the dangers of small housing as part of multiple concurrent partnerships and sexual networks discourses linked to the HIV epidemic. While economic inequalities between genders exist globally, narrow focused frameworks embedded in health and poverty discourses do injustice to the diversity and complexity of sex research. Pinning women’s motivations for engaging in ‘small-houses’ to lack of empowerment, sexual agency and poverty excludes some categories of seemingly ‘low-risk’ women including the educated, economically stable, high socio-economic status women who knowingly and ‘willingly’ engage in these highly stigmatized sexual relationships. Such approaches to the small house phenomenon neglect the intricacies and complex interconnections between sexual intimacy, desires, economic strategising and political manoeuvring. My research investigated this complexity through exploring the meanings these women attach to being small houses and their experiences in these relationships as they are intertwined with broader changing social, economic, political and cultural contexts in which they are located.

Keywords: small-house, women and HIV, Zimbabwe, sexual networks, pleasure, agency, femininities, multiple sexual partnerships
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Human Economy Programme and the Social Science Research Council Next Generation Social Science in Africa Fellowship for supporting my study through the A.W Mellon Foundation scholarship and with funds provided by Carnegie Corporation of New York, respectively. I am thankful for the institutional support provided by the University of Pretoria Human Economy Programme, which has hosted my studies. I especially thank my supervisor Dr. Fraser McNeill who has been patient with me and the numerous proposal drafts, providing the countless brainstorming sessions, insightful feedback and pushing me beyond what I thought were my limits. Thank you for walking this journey with me and seeing me through it! I would also like to acknowledge the engagement and support of the Human Economy co-directors, Professors Keith Hart and John Sharp, the second cohort 2012/2013 post doctoral fellows and my fellow PhD colleagues (2012-2015) for the insightful seminars, the intellectual stimulation, the peer reviews, social support and of course the unforgettable Oxford Square and Oom Gert ‘stress-relief’ moments.

I am deeply indebted to the Harare women who participated in my study and shared their intimate life stories, offered friendship and support and made my fieldwork an enjoyable and unforgettable experience. I am also forever grateful to my friend and mentor, Dr. Tsitsi Masvawure for being a lively and engaged academic critic and for the encouragement and mentorship as an academic. Thanks a lot for that!

To the three incredible scholars who examined this thesis – Mark Hunter, Robert Thornton and Catherine Burns, I am overcome with your encouragements, pushing me beyond my comfort zones and your inspirational critiques. Thank you for reading my work and providing insightful comments that I will move with in the hereafters of this project.

Lastly, but not least I would like to thank my family- my sisters Betty, Caro and Sibo and my brother Charles and nephew Bonny for believing in me as a pacesetter. To my husband, Admire thank you for the love and support, for being my ‘sounding board’ and for believing in me. To Takunda Camille, my daughter, I can never thank you enough just for being mine and of course, your coming at the right time providing the humorous ‘complications’ in my methodology and motivation to push and produce this piece of work!
Dedicated to the memory of my parents, Charles and Alice Mushinga.
Wherever you are, I know you are proud of me…
### ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immuno Deficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART</td>
<td>Anti Retroviral Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARV</td>
<td>Anti retro viral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASO</td>
<td>AIDS Service organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESAP</td>
<td>Economic Structural Adjustment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNU</td>
<td>Government of National Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoZ</td>
<td>Government of Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Global Political Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immuno Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Information education and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDC</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoHCC</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (formerly MoHCW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoHCW</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Child Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSP</td>
<td>Multiple Sexual Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCSP</td>
<td>Multiple Concurrent Sexual Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAC</td>
<td>National AIDS Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASP</td>
<td>National AIDS Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEPFAR</td>
<td>(US) President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI</td>
<td>Population Service International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Message Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>United Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCT</td>
<td>Voluntary Counseling and Testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAHEC</td>
<td>Zimbabwe AIDS Health Experts Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANU-PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZHDR</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Human Development Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZDHS</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIMRA</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Revenue Authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................1
   1.1 Background and outline of research problem. ..........................................................1

2.0 ‘Small houses’ in perspective”: Locating women’s sexual relationships in broader
   African literature. ........................................................................................................4

3.0 Methodological reflections .........................................................................................12

4.0 Theoretical and conceptual considerations ...............................................................18

5.0 Outline of thesis ..........................................................................................................22

Chapter 2: A brief history of HIV and the political and economic setting in Zimbabwe.
.........................................................................................................................................26
   2.1. The economic and political milieu .........................................................................26

2.2. HIV in Zimbabwe .......................................................................................................28
   2.2.1. Zimbabwean government’s policy and programmatic responses to HIV and AIDS.
   ........................................................................................................................................29

   2.2.2 Successes and Challenges ....................................................................................31

   2.2.3 Shaping the prevention response contours: a case of Population Services
   International/Zimbabwe (PSI). .......................................................................................32

   2.2.4 The current state of affairs on HIV .......................................................................37

3.0 A class in transition: the precarious Zimbabwean black middle class. .................38

4.0 Social issues within the health, economic and political crises: Contextualising the
   small house in Zimbabwe. .............................................................................................40

5.0 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................45

Chapter 3: Women and the local sexual marketplace: (Mis) understanding the small
   house concept................................................................................................................47

2.0 Categorizing small houses ........................................................................................47

   2.1 The “temporary small house” ..................................................................................48

   2.2 ‘No money no honey’ small houses .......................................................................53

   2.2 “Que sera sera” small houses .................................................................................59

3.0 Bridging the boundaries: a quest to understanding the small house......................61

   3.1 Breaking through yet staying within: the paradox of small-housing as liberating and
   constraining. ..................................................................................................................64

4.0 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................68

Chapter 4: Low risk women? Pleasure, HIV and sexual networks amongst middle-class
   small houses ..................................................................................................................69

2.0 Exploring other non-monetary motivations and implications for HIV risk ............72

   2.1 Talking about HIV risk: ignorance is bliss ...............................................................74

   2.2 “Forget HIV, it’s been there, is there and shall always be there!” It’s all about
   pleasure! Eroticizing sex in a context of HIV ...............................................................79

   2.3 Love and other affective dimensions of small-housing .............................................84

3.0 More than just untamed desires and motives: Rationalising ‘risky’ sex ...................86

4.0 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................87
Chapter 5: ‘Old’ and ‘new’ femininities at crossroads? Deconstructing the role of the ‘sexual entrepreneurs’. ...............................................................89
  1.1 The new ‘tete’: Understanding the role of the sexual entrepreneur. ...............90
  1.2 The making of a social drama: Daisy the sexual entrepreneur at work...........91
  1.3 The sexual entrepreneur’s dilemma: confronting the malleability of social reality. ........................................................................................................96
  2.0 No chance for redress: Big houses’ perceptions of small houses.........................99
  3.0 New femininities or repackaged old femininities? Interrogating women’s subjectivities, identities and agency. ..........................................................103
  4.0 Conclusion ..............................................................................................108

Chapter 6: ‘Real men and Ben 10s’: A restoration or transformation of masculinity politics in Zimbabwe? .................................................................110
  Push and pull factors. Men’s motivations for small housing..................................111
  ‘Is polygamy making a comeback?’ Pro small housing masculinities and making of a fractured masculinity. .................................................................115
  Weighing social safety vs physical safety............................................................120
  “Small housing is not polygamy. It is cheating!” Perspectives of anti small-housing men. .....................................................................................................121
  Ben 10s: Making virtue out of necessity or masculinity in crisis? ..........................125
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................131

Chapter 7: Concluding remarks: towards a ‘Human Economy’ of small housing? .....133
  Power, politics and resistance: agency within constrained spaces........................137
  Rethinking small houses: Moving beyond HIV discourses to harnessing erotic capital. ........................................................................................................139
  Beyond small houses: indicators for further research .........................................140

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..........................................................................................143
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and outline of research problem.

This thesis explores the concept of a ‘small house’ in Zimbabwe and focuses on economically independent women’s motives for engaging in sexual relationships with married men. A ‘small house’ is a colloquial and derogatory term used in Zimbabwe to describe a married man’s quasi-polygamous, informal, long term, secret sexual relationship with another woman (Chingandu 2009; Shelton 2009; Christensen-Bull 2013). Even the country’s leader, President Mugabe, has characterised the small houses as becoming a national phenomenon, yet, a social and moral crisis cautioning people “not to engage in these relationships as they harm and disturb the institution of the family”\(^1\). The term was popularised in the early 2000s during a phase of an impending economic and political crises and chaos in social relations, which saw an apparent rise in multiple concurrent partnerships, extramarital affairs, premarital and intergenerational sex. However, during this period, small house relationships mirrored more of a quasi-polygamous relationship with poor, low and working class women engaging in such relationships with men for economic security and as secretive ‘second wives’. Though the term seems to refer to a physical structure, which could have been implied given that in such instances, the man would have a bigger legitimate family house and sets another smaller ‘love-nest’ elsewhere where the lover would reside, a ‘small house’ nonetheless, is not a physical structure but a localised term that refers to two things: men’s extra-marital relationships and the women involved in such relationships. For instance, it can be said: this man has a small house or this woman is a small-house. Small-housing (i.e., the act of having or being a small house) generally involves women and men from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Whilst recent research has largely focused on small houses that involve poor women who are economically dependent on married men (Hungwe 2011; Chingandu 2009; Christensen-Bull 2013), my research focused on what I term ‘middle class small houses’ who are economically independent women of high socio-economic status. Such women are usually highly educated, with professional jobs or own businesses, who, knowingly and willingly engage in these seemingly ‘risky’ and highly stigmatised sexual relationships with married men. In generalised public and private discourse, small houses are often referred to loosely as home wreckers and nonconformists.

\(^1\) President Robert Mugabe in an interview on www.nehandaradio.com
In public health discourses, small house relationships are considered to be one of the key drivers of the HIV epidemic in the country (Shelton 2009; ZIMSTAT 2012; NAC 2009). Zimbabwe, currently ranked as having the fifth highest HIV prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2013), has rigorously sought to address the challenge of small housing through campaigns that educate people about the dangers of multiple sexual partnerships (MSPs) and transactional – or ‘survival’ – sex. I argue that such approaches are inadequate to understanding the small house phenomenon because they ignore the complex interconnections between sexual intimacy, desire, economic strategising and political manoeuvring. These approaches also do not take into account the complex nature of individual choices or the fact that small houses facilitate the production of new forms of conduct and social reality and are a reflection of an increasingly unequal society.

Spronk cited in Lyons and Lyons (2011: 376) asserts that, in studying sexuality, one has to be able to “respect the interface between the social context and the personal experience”. This means that “sex research has to understand the ways that societal factors organise sex and sexuality and how these processes shape the experiences of people [and vice-versa]” (ibid). In Zimbabwe, specifically in Harare where I conducted my research, women’s involvement in sexual relationships with married men has, like in many other African countries, mainly been documented as a form survival transactional sex (Chingandu 2010; Matshalaga 1999; Muparamoto and Chingwenya 2009; Muzvidziwa 2002). The transactional sex discourse generally argues that women are motivated by either absolute or relative poverty. However, the evolving small house phenomenon in Zimbabwe involves women from varying economic, social and political backgrounds and hence does not fit neatly into the neoliberal development and public health oriented categories of risk, vulnerability, disempowerment, poverty or lack of alternatives and sexual agency. By focusing on middle class economically stable small houses, this research sought to show that the interplay of sex and economics is not just a straightforward argument about poverty and lack of empowerment or about an excessively permissive sexuality either. I argue that there is need to rethink the notion that economically empowering women is the panacea to reducing their so-called vulnerability and engagement in so-called ‘risky’ sexual conduct.

This research critiques the dominant public health (particularly the HIV prevention) and development frameworks which have mainly focused on poor women and have neglected women’s broader sexual agency by portraying them only from a survival, needs-based perspective. Such frameworks justify the need for some form of interventions to ‘save’ such women from poverty and disease. It is against this wider background that my thesis focuses on unearthing a more nuanced understanding of the motives of economically independent women in Zimbabwe for being small houses. I explore the meanings that these women attach to being small houses and examine their experiences in these relationships as they intertwine with broader changing social, economic, political and cultural contexts in which they are located. Parker in Brummelhuis and Herdt (1995:267) notes that a focus on motivations and meanings relates to “both the subjective and intersubjective meanings and emerges from a focus on the social construction of reality…hence the need to focus on a fuller social, cultural, economic and political dimension of sexual experiences”.

Against this broad background, my key research questions were:

a) How have small houses been explained in terms of neoliberal, health and development models and in what ways can nuanced ethnographic enquiry pose challenges to this?

b) What motivates educated, economically independent single women to engage in these stigmatised and seemingly ‘risky’ sexual relationships with married men?

c) What meanings do women involved in small houses attach to these relationships and what have been their experiences within these relationships (emotional, economic and physical).

d) What strategies (if any) do small houses use to have a safe, satisfying sexual relationship and what, if any, are the women’s perceptions of HIV risk?

e) What are the local understandings of, and perspectives on small houses and how are they perceived in economic, cultural or moral terms?

f) Is being a small house a way for women to challenge patriarchy and its control of female sexual agency?

With these guiding questions, my key findings pointed to the fact that there is no single definition of small houses and that it is a changing, versatile phenomenon. The research also showed the complexities embedded in the cultural and moralising perspectives on small houses and how small houses are not simply a public health or development crisis;
frameworks that I argue miss how deeply intertwined small housing is with other facets of life. The research highlighted how the small house phenomenon could be seen as possibly having fostered the production of new and the fracturing of what used to be dominant femininities. It also showed how the phenomenon can be regarded as a ‘new’ social reality and ways it can serve as a lens to illuminate other aspects of Zimbabwean life and better understand the HIV epidemic. Notions of love, fantasies, desires, pleasure, historical and socio-cultural forces as well as the economic and political context all play in part in defining different modes in which any particular small house relationship is modelled. Hence a high socio-economic status and high education are not necessarily defining characteristics of a woman’s rationality in sexual decision making as there are convolutions around the conception of choice and agency, nor are they a given as protective structural factors against HIV.

2.0 ‘Small houses’ in perspective”: Locating women’s sexual relationships in broader African literature.

There is an extensive literature on men’s motivations for engaging in extramarital relationships\(^3\) and single women’s motivations for engaging in such relationships with married men. However, scholars focusing on women’s motivations have particularly focused on younger women, and have argued that their involvement with men in extra marital sexual relationships is mainly for economic reasons. A few of these scholars have examined non-economic reasons for women's involvement in these relationships and they view these as a form of rebellion against dominant cultural expectations relating to marriage, a form of independence, anger or vengeance against males, a way to have children or a means of securing sexual pleasure\(^4\). The small house phenomenon is a form of extra marital relationship on the part of the man and is common throughout sub-Saharan Africa, albeit known in different local terms. Christensen-Bull (2013) argues that the term ‘small house’, possibly derived from historical practices of polygamy and also associated with patriarchal practices implies that the relationship between the married man and the woman is fixed especially given that the official wife is generally called the ‘big house’. The reference to a ‘house’ denotes the existence of a fixed structure hence a small house presented as a quasi-wife as the relationship sometimes resembles marriage.

\(^3\) Connell 1995, 2000; Morrell, 2001; Hunter 2002; Spiegel 1991; Cleaver 2002; Shelton 2009; Chitando 2007; Smith 2013

\(^4\) Wardlow 2006; Tamale 2011; Masvawure 2010; Karanja 1987; McFadden 2003; Spronk 2011
Haram in Arnfred (2004) examined the idea of a ‘small house’ as used by the Meru in Northern Tanzania to refer to single mothers with ‘visiting husbands’. These women are said to engage in fluid and transient ‘conjugal’ relations as a pursuit of self-fulfilment and economic independence. She highlights that the small house (nyumba nd’ogo in KiSwahili) women have resigned from seeking the elusive modern and romantic ideas of love and intimacy and hence choose men who are married, well settled and generous. These are men who can “link such women into resource networks, better employment opportunities, advance their economic careers, buy them houses, get business tenders or cover for their illegal activities” (ibid: 222). In addition, such relationships are seen as allowing a woman to gain male protection and some degree of female respectability while still maintaining some level of social independence. However, this understanding of small houses has fundamental differences with how small houses exist in Zimbabwe. Whereas the Meru understand small houses as women who have resigned from looking for romantic love, small houses in Zimbabwe are often women searching for love, romance and pleasure. These are relationship ideals they happen to find in affairs with married men (see Chapter 3 on the small house categories and the various reasons women offered for choosing to be in relationships with married men).

Karanja in Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987) explored the concept of ‘outside wives’ in Nigeria. These are defined as single women having long-term sexual relationships with married men. She highlighted that these women were the educated elite and preferred being ‘outside wives’ compared to being the ‘inside wives’ or formally married women. Reasons for choosing to be an ‘outside wife’ ranged from having found a married man as the ‘Mr Available’ vs the abstract single “Mr Right”; having gone through a failed marriage as the ‘inside wife’, or finding a rich married man who could assist them in maintaining upper class lifestyles (ibid: 1987). In as much as the concept of ‘outside wife’ resonates with the Zimbabwean middle class small house, the stated motivations for the Nigerian women seemed to have neglected the intricate and experiential aspect of the sexual relationship. Spronk’s (2006) research on middle class women in Nairobi explained why women engage in multiple concurrent sexual relationships, including relationships with married men, and noted that these can be seen as a form of expressing a liberated, adventurous sexuality. As Spronk asserts, for these women, involvement in such relationships were more about love, confidence and trust and less about disease, risk or vulnerability. These relationships also reflected the complexity of sexuality embedded in multiple meanings, sensations and connections.
McFadden (2003) asserts that women’s sexual agency challenges patriarchy and opens up new possibilities of freedom, creativity and imagination. Karanja (1994) postulated that one explanation for women engaging in sexual relationships with married men could be that, since such relationships (‘small house’ or ‘outside wife’) are normally long term, albeit informal, economically empowered women prefer these informal unions because they often mean less direct control by the man. Spronk (2004) writing on middle class women in Nairobi, also argues that such unions might be the best option that an educated and employed woman might have as she might find it difficult to find a suitable single man. This is especially so given the need to balance a career and start a family. These types of unions offer some independence and diversion from traditional marriage.

At face value, these relationships also appear to offer less vulnerability than traditional marriages. The literature on the motivations of women of high socio-economic status for engaging in sexual relationships with married men can be summarised as presenting these women as driven either by their personal preferences or by other intricate social and economic impetuses. Yet, from my research in Zimbabwe, it was apparent that women’s motivations are driven by a myriad of reasons that include individual preferences as well as socio-cultural, economic, political and other historical factors that are problematic to present as mutually exclusive. Verhejein (2013) argues that the women and AIDS discourse has generalized women’s motivations around issues of vulnerability linked to women’s biology, poverty or need for economic advancement. This is in line with the construction of the developing world especially sub-Saharan African women as perfect neo-liberal subjects and needing some protection from the ravaging poverty and HIV pandemic. Subsequently, this has led to these kinds of sexual relationships being conceptualised under a particular AIDS and development lens and labelled as risky transactional relationships. This, unfortunately, has resulted in confined understandings of transactional sex as being merely a direct trade of sex for money associated with paucity and lack of agency and power. Such explanations are trapped in an economic reductionist model and succumb to the discourse of universal female subordination. Yet, as many studies show, women are not a homogenous category. In this study, there is a peculiar class of economically advantaged or relatively well-off women involved in multiple concurrent sexual relationships with married men and whose motivations might not necessarily fit neatly into these aforesaid categories of vulnerability.

Despite a lot of development and HIV-related literature focusing on so-called poor women’s motivations for engaging in sexual relationships with married men and the growing research
on women of high socio-economic status, there is still uncertainty about how best to include women of high-socio-economic status into development and public health paradigms. Win in Harrison and Whitehead (2007) states that women of high socio-economic status have become the ‘missing’ women in development models as the assimilation and inclusion of gender and sexuality into neoliberal development thinking has only been as a variant of poverty related issues. My interest in economically independent women in Zimbabwe resonates with current studies that have examined the interplay of socio-economic status, education and HIV risk and have shown that in most countries wealthier individuals, particularly women, are at higher risk of HIV infection than women of lower socio-economic status⁵.

In Zimbabwe, small houses lie at the confluence of what are generally considered to be high risk practices for the transmission of HIV. Using the (developmental) HIV discourse lingo, these relationships entail elements of transactional sex, multiple concurrent partnerships (having more than one sexual partner at a given time) and have elements of sexual networks and established spousal relationships. While most of the literature focuses on women’s involvement in such types of relationships as being mainly for survival or as a means of building social and economic networks through risky sexual liaisons⁶, it should be noted that different spaces and contexts provide different push or mitigating factors. There is an increasing recognition that transactional sex and involvement in multiple concurrent partnerships and sexual networks is not ultimately about survival sex, lack of empowerment, HIV risk and transmission. As Smith (2013:163) contends, “the spectrum of transactional sex is wide…as it is also seen in both socially acceptable as well as unacceptable partnerships where men’s economic support is seen as a normal expression of caring, affection and love”.

In light of this, I draw on Thornton (2009) who argues in his work on sexual networks formation in South Africa and Uganda that there is need to acknowledge and understand the differences and dynamism of particular contexts that, at times, drive the need for acquiring social capital at all expense. It is therefore essential to understand and explore the diverse structural positions that women occupy and how these influence their levels of power and agency as well as decision making and choices regarding relationships with married men.


Hunter (2002) highlighted the need to shift the focus away from contemporary sexual exchanges as mainly motivated by subsistence towards an analysis of sexual exchanges and relations as a matter of consumption in what he terms the materiality of everyday sex. However, sex linked to consumption still remains symbolically associated with transactions which involve women engaging in such relationships to receive gifts and other intangibles meant to keep up with certain trendy lifestyles (Masvawure 2010; Hunter 2010; Thornton 2009; Leclerc-Matlala 2008). This does not adequately explain why Zimbabwean women who are economically empowered engage in relationships with married men.

It is apparent that efforts to disentangle economics from sexual relations misses an understanding of Hunter’s ‘materiality of everyday sex’ a phrase capturing how money, love and sex have come together in new ways. A number of academics have engaged in research highlighting how material and emotional practices are often intertwined (Zelizer 2006; Wardlow 2005; Cole and Thomas 2009). Trying to separate material and emotional practices has consequently led to a framing of women’s sexuality based on the focus of strict and mainly Western, Christian sexual mores where sex linked to any strategic materially oriented motives is seen as a taboo. This stance is also laden with connotations of morality versus immorality as seen in the so called ‘Madonna/whore’ discourse (McFadden 2003) where only heterosexual marriage is held up as the moral ideal. Sex outside marriage is seen as sinful and immoral despite the fact that marriage can be interpreted as involving a trade of sexual access in return for financial support. Paradoxically, the marriage market remains an inconspicuously socially and morally approved avenue for upward mobility, appropriating men’s surplus wealth and providing for women’s economic security in diverse contexts. Unfortunately, the Madonna/whore perspective has been the guiding standpoint in Zimbabwe, particularly regarding how small houses have generally been construed in public and private discourse.

Women who are small houses are perceived by some Zimbabweans as exchanging sex for financial gains outside of marriage, a situation that is considered problematic by both men and women who support the partly Christian norms of Zimbabwean sociality. Women in small houses are seen as tarnishing the sacred nature of sex, which is sanctioned only in the context of marriage. Small houses are believed to be a threat to the formal institution of marriage and key vectors of venereal diseases, especially HIV. Moreover, the small house can be a symbolic space for women to act independently of men, and has thus been demonized by those who support Christian and patriarchal norms and values. As Gorton
(2007) asserts, the political has become the personal, as shown in how sexual practices that are outside the ‘norm’ are seen as threatening and potentially destructive to the patriarchal, heterosexual and heteronormative discourses as well as to the nation-state.

Spronk (2011) asserts there is a need to pay attention to historical and social explanations of particular contemporary behaviours and experiences. In trying to understand some of the small-houses I investigated, I drew on Schmidt (1992) who contends that women in pre-colonial Shona society were structurally subordinate and exposed to various forms of control that curtailed their productive and reproductive freedoms. However, she argues that the colonial era brought with it major changes to patriarchal authority yet, most changes in relation to women’s sexuality were conveniently meant to create stability compatible with the smooth functioning of the colonial capitalist system. For instance, monogamous marriage came to be upheld as the morally acceptable long term relationship for kinship and reproduction. Schmidt further states that colonial settlers and senior African men collaborated to restrict and control women through reconstituting and revamping tradition and customary laws. She asserts that “the focus on sexuality is evidence of how sexuality was central to the shaping of the Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) political economy” (ibid 1992:7). Despite this joint force to constrain women’s sexuality, women developed strategies for coping and resisting this control. These included finding their way into towns and cities despite the restrictions on their movements, running away from arranged marriages, engaging in beer brewing and prostitution or domestic service for settler women and attending mission school against their parents’ will (West 2002) whilst Muzvidziwa (2002) focuses on how women entered into mapoto unions with married men in towns and cities (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on mapoto unions). Mission educated women became part of the emerging African elite in the colonial period as they acquired an education and ‘better’ jobs and subsequently a social and economic status in their own right. This form of advancement was carried forward into post-colonial Zimbabwe and took new forms as the social, political and economic terrain transformed (see Chapter 2). In light of this, the burgeoning middle-class women are situated in a very precarious and unstable environment where their socio-economic status has become quite insecure. Hence, in such a context with specific confounding economic, socio-cultural and political factors, single women enter into extramarital relationships for various motives precipitated by the context.

It is in such a context that economically independent small houses can be thought of as women strategically positioning themselves to build social capital and networks revolving
around beneficial reciprocity and exchange. Although it is a global truth that economic inequalities exist between women and men, it is important not to over simplify this by placing people’s lives and experiences into pre-determined categories. This is because such a stance has the risk of overlooking the intricacies of women’s agency, motivations, preferences, desires and practices. Tamale (2011:147) argues that women who engage in such relationships should be seen as “exploiting the resourcefulness of the erotic [which] exemplifies the contradictions, paradoxes and anomalies of our society, as well as the complexities of patriarchal capitalism.” Hakim (2011) uses the term “erotic capital” and notes that it should not be problematic for women to capitalize on their sexuality and sex appeal for any favours. She argues that the erotic should be seen as any other form of capital, which should be used and maintained by any woman who possesses it as long as it continues to provide benefits. In this sense, Hakim justifies women’s involvement in sexual relationships with married men as a means to appropriate men’s surplus or as an avenue for upward social mobility. Just like marriage, it is an equally important path to wealth, social networks and certain middle and upper class lifestyles and should not be seen as relationships driven by vulnerability.

The tendency of posing women’s different ways of expressing and benefitting from their sexuality as problematic can be explained as one of the various arms of control on women’s sexual agency. In addition to the dichotomous Madonna/whore discourse, there is also the social construction of a ‘fluffy’ femininity which is a top ranked type of femininity where the desirable feminine traits like subordination, submissiveness and nurturing are emphasised (Vance 1989; Holland 2004; Connell 1987; Rubin 1984). This has created a contrariety, which is the foundation of complex social gender hierarchy (Collins 1990), in relation to women’s sexualities emphasised through a celebrated sexuality which comfortably accommodates the desires and interests of men and legitimates unequal relations between men (and men) and women (and women). In this perspective women are seen as objects whose reality, identity and history are defined and created only in ways that define their relations with men (hooks 1989). This has, for instance, seen the dominance in literature of men’s wide-ranging motivations to have multiple concurrent sexual partners, the narrow perspectives on women’s sexualities and lived realities hence a limited comprehension of the complexity of women’s motives to engage in such types of relationships, a gap the present study intends to fill.
Given the various motives that can drive women into relationships with married men, it is interesting to investigate Zimbabwean women’s experiences in these kinds of relationships, why they decide to engage in such relationships and how they perceive of and manage them. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, from general neoliberal development and gender and poverty perspectives, women engaging in these types of relationships are said to be pushed by poverty and lack of choices to satisfy basic survival needs. Hence, as pointed out by Verheijen (2013) following the transactional sex paradigm, development and HIV prevention discourses have called for ‘empowerment’ programmes that aim at increasing women’s education, financial and livelihood strategies so as to deter them from engaging in these types of ‘risky’ sexual relationships. At face value the specific group of women I focus on are assumed to know about health risks, particularly HIV infection, and are said to have the choice not to be involved in small house relationships and to seek ‘better’ and ‘safer’ sexual relationships. In reality, however, the highly educated women with whom I conducted my research in Zimbabwe ‘choose’ to be in these so-called 'high risk' relationships. I will show in Chapter 4 that an increasing body of evidence suggests that the link between sexual behaviours, HIV risk and socio-economic status is not as clear-cut and that only considering poverty or wealth as the main driver or deterrent for risky sexual behaviours may be too simplistic. The existing evidence poses a number of challenges to the way that the relationship between sexual behaviour, economic empowerment, HIV risk and gender has, until now, been conceptualised and shows that as more women become educated and economically independent, HIV statistics continue to go up or stabilise at high rates in most southern and eastern African countries. Hence, as Halperin and Einstein (2009) state, there is need to explore other factors beyond poverty which drive women to engage in seemingly risky sexual behaviours. It is against this background that my research investigated the subjective experiences of women in relation to whether they feel that their high socio-economic status, level of education and empowerment correlate to perceptions of less ‘vulnerability’ and control by their partners, more freedom in pursuing careers and lesser risk of HIV infection.


8 See UNAIDS (2013) Global Report on HIV and AIDS reflecting HIV rates in Africa which have remained at higher rates and for those declining are they are still remarkably high as compared to other countries.
3.0 Methodological reflections

My research was conducted in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. I conducted ethnographic field research between March 2013 and February 2014. Ethnography is a type of qualitative research that intends to provide a detailed, in-depth description of a group of people’s everyday life and practice through what Geertz (1973) terms ‘thick description’. Ethnography offers the best way to study people’s private lives (Parker et al 1991; Brummelhuis and Herdt 1995). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3) qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. . .” I chose to conduct the study in Harare mainly because of reasons of familiarity, having lived and worked there since my undergraduate studies and also being an urban setting where the small-house phenomenon is widespread and well established. It was also easy to access participants given that I already knew that a number of my middle-class friends were in small house relationships.

In January 2014, I began making initial contact with people who were willing to participate in the study, starting with my personal networks of friends. Having been away from Zimbabwe for the past five years, I had to physically reconnect with my friends. I appreciated how spending time with people builds the much needed rapport for this kind of study. Besides having stayed connected with friends through emails, occasional phone calls, and Skype, I had to be physically available to reconnect and make people become comfortable and more willing to share their life experiences. To some extent I could tell that I had lost touch with how people were going about their lives and how old friends had changed given the life experiences they had gone through during the five years I was away. Some friends had married, had become mothers, had divorced and I learnt that there are some life experiences which even old friends might not be comfortable to share or that they would censor when sharing. However, researching in a city I had lived and worked in and starting with my own network of old friends made it easy to get a breakthrough into my topic of study, however sensitive. Yet, it also posed difficulties in the sense that the same friends willing to openly share the private lives with me as an old friend took time to appreciate the ‘other’ role I now had, of a researcher who would then write about their stories.

Spronk (2012) favours ‘intensive ethnographic triangulation’ in sex research to enhance quality especially where opportunities for participant observation are limited and where data is based on reports and hence not immune to distortions, lies and partial truth. During fieldwork, I therefore also employed biographical narratives which are personal narratives
that give insights into individuals’ ideas, intentions, behaviours, motivations and justifications (Abrahamson 1992). Biographical narratives can also be viewed as constructs which confront the complexity of the individual. This is reflected through processes of accepting and giving meaning to the social models and ways in which individuals create their own self-images. To obtain these biographical narratives, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews and informal conversations over the course of the research period. As Hammersely and Atkinson (1983:2) describe, “an ethnographer is a covert or overt participant in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues with which one is concerned.” This also highlights the openness of the ethnographic approach to a number of research methods. In addition to the biographies, in-depth interviews, conversations and narratives I also employed mini focus groups as well as ethnographic participation and observation. This involved tagging along when my research participants attended social functions like parties, ‘girls’ nights-out’, beauty therapies and shopping errands.

My fieldwork was centred on twenty women who were involved in small house relationships. These women’s ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty-nine. I recruited women who were economically independent; I defined the latter as women who had the following characteristics: a university or postgraduate degree; worked for a nongovernmental organization, lectured at a university (where salaries are highest compared to other private or governmental agencies) or ran their own businesses (in either the formal or informal sector). I note in Chapter 2 that Zimbabwe's economic and political landscape is highly unstable and has been under immense strain for more than a decade. It is therefore very difficult to come up with a fixed definition or stable ways of measuring or characterising a term such as middle-class.

I used snowballing sampling techniques to identify participants. I chose this approach because it was difficult to identify and openly recruit participants in relationships labelled as small houses due to the stigma attached to these relationships. As aforementioned, my initial research participants were my own friends who had openly disclosed their relationship status as small-houses. These women all worked in non-governmental organizations (henceforth referred to as NGOs) and were aged between twenty-eight and thirty-two. I was aware of the possibilities and limitations of following one network of friends, so I actively diversified my pool and recruited more participants from my friends’ other networks. Consequently, in
addition to my initial network of friends where I had five participants, I recruited six more participants by attending public meetings and workshops convened by NGOs. These were mainly policy dialogues, some gender workshops and public meetings on democracy and governance issues which were mainly attended by the middle class NGO administrators and managers and a few people from the private sector and government ministries. I would actively socialize with people and talk about my research at these meetings and ask for interested people to contact me if they were willing to share their experiences. As this is a topical issue in Zimbabwe, people were quite interested in how I was approaching it and a number of women responded to my request either as interested participants or wanting to connect me to their friend in a small house relationship. However, I noted that these participants were mostly friends or colleagues of my initial group of friends.

I also posted a personal advertisement on a Zimbabwean women’s social group on Facebook. In the advertisement I explained my research interests and invited interested women to contact me privately through my Facebook mail. There were mixed responses to my post, with most women who identified themselves as ‘big houses’ (i.e., officially married women) criticizing my post and stating that they were ‘fed up with small house talk’. However, someone did a Google search of my name and pulled up my research profile from the University of Pretoria Human Economy and the Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division websites and posted it on the same Facebook link. This somehow worked in my favour as an overwhelming number of women who claimed to be small houses contacted me via email and indicated their willingness to participate in my study. However, I had to screen potential participants based on my qualifying criteria of a middle class small house. I also noticed that quite a number of women were quick to ask whether I was going to compensate them and they also wanted to know which NGO I was working for. I found myself having to re-emphasise that my research was for academic purposes and that participation was voluntary, which meant that there would be no compensation for participation. However, it is from this group that I managed to diversify my sample further to include small houses from the private sector as well as businesspersons. From this group I ended up with fourteen qualifying participants. Later in the study at different intervals, I lost communication with five of them as they seemed to have lost interest in the research. These women would continuously give excuses and cancel appointments and ended up not responding to my emails and phone calls.
My daily schedule involved hanging out with any of the women who would be available. I would also actively seek out those I would not have seen in a long time though I ensured that we kept in touch regularly through email, Skype, SMS and phone calls. Since most of them were professional working women, our meetings were normally restricted to after-work hours and weekends. Thus, I found myself with ‘free’ mornings and afternoons whilst my evenings and nights were always busy as I would have to meet with a participant for a drink or dinner. The Whatsapp SMS and Skype communication platforms proved invaluable as they were affordable means to keep in touch with my participants. We would chat at times for hours, with a participant basically narrating some event, talking about their feelings, and their relationships through those platforms. I actually found that some women seemed to express themselves much better and openly through SMS than in face-to-face meetings. I tried to ask four women to keep journals but this did not materialise as they all laughed off the idea and indicated that ‘keeping a diary made them feel like high school kids’.

Initially, I found it difficult to get the women to open up and talk about their personal experiences rather than about their general perceptions about small housing. Even my own friends seemed uncomfortable sharing some of their experiences and they kept probing why I wanted that kind of personal information for even though they were aware of the aims of the research. Women kept referring to a well-known local tabloid called H-metro. Journalists working for the tabloid are known to pay whistle blowers for stories on issues like small housing. Women initially reacted to my questions with sarcastic responses like ‘Are you sure you are not working for the H-metro?’ This was also probably because these women were small housing with high profile public and political figures that they wanted to protect from the media. Building rapport became my main priority until my participants became comfortable to share their stories at their own pace.

One of the most difficult encounters I had during fieldwork was when women started asking me whether I was also small housing. There seemed to be an assumption that my interest in small houses and my non-judgemental approach meant that I was also a small house. I played along to this idea though I never proffered my own relationship as a small house relationship or directly responded to the question of whether I was a small house or not. This raises some ethical questions about whether this was deception or not. There were moments when some participants expected me to also share about my sexual life and probably expected me to confirm that I was a ‘fellow small house’. I took this as a classic conundrum of conducting ethnographic research: as researchers we expect informants to share their lives with us and in
return we must give up some of our own personal experiences. However, in most instances I shared as much as I could about my own relationship without divulging what kind of a relationship it was. This was a tactic I used to avoid having to explicitly state that I was not involved in a small house relationship, a position which could possibly have made me lose some participants. I also did not want to be found deceiving my participants by pretending that I was also in a small house relationship. The responses I gave varied with each participant depending on the dynamics of each ethnographic encounter. I was cognisant of the fact that I had to proceed with caution in sensitive situations whilst conducting ethical research.

Another difficult encounter I had was keeping up with my middle class participants. Most of them were outgoing individuals and would make appointments to meet at expensive cafes and restaurants, which were beyond my budget. Also, keeping track of some of the women proved to be a challenge as they had busy lifestyles and travelled out of town a lot. However, the fact that I resided in Harare during fieldwork gave me the opportunity to build trusting relationships with them and to become part of their friends’ networks as well. I became more than just a researcher. This meant I could join them on shopping trips or to salons where they did their hair and nails. These became hangout spaces where we could sit for hours and chat with minimal interruptions.

To get a full ethnographic experience of the small house phenomenon in Zimbabwe, I also interviewed five women who were ‘big houses’ (i.e., legal/legitimate wives). These women's husbands had small houses at some point in their marriages. I had also hoped to find big house women who would have narratives of having once been small houses so that I could explore how they had eventually become big houses. Not surprisingly, no big house except for one exceptional case wanted to be associated with such a stigmatising past. The only woman who opened up about having been a small house before was very different from the others in that she is now an HIV activist and has opened up about her previous small housing experiences and her HIV positive status. This woman is now divorced and says she says she is back in a small house relationship. Remarkably, it was not difficult to find married women willing to talk about their experiences with small housing husbands and share their opinions on small houses. These married women’s perspectives were also dominant during the social gatherings that I participated in, some of which were organised by my relatives and the others I was invited to attend by friends. These social gatherings were mainly in the form of kitchen parties, baby showers and welcome parties and bridal showers. During these parties, there
would always be a woman acting as a traditional patriarchal aunt to advise the other women about various issues relating to marriage and/or motherhood. Interestingly, these advisors' made the small houses a central point of their presentations especially in relation to how women had to safeguard their marriages against small houses. It was also during these parties that I had an easier access to married women and hence used this opportunity to interview some or engage them in conversations about where I got their general perspectives on the phenomenon of small houses (see Chapter 5 for an in-depth discussion of the advisors roles and big house women experiences with and perspectives on small houses).

I realised that the research would not be complete without male voices, so as to get their perspectives on small houses and small housing even though this was not the main focus of the study. I therefore conducted twelve in-depth interviews with ten men and two mini focus groups (Kruger 1994) one with four and the other one with five men in each group. These focus groups were not planned for; they were spontaneous opportunities that availed themselves during two different occasions. One occasion was after a policy dialogue meeting where I ended up joining a male friend who was sitting with a group of men who were having drinks and casually chatting about the economy. One of the men changed the topic of the discussion when he jokingly called me the ‘small house lady’ and the discussion shifted to small houses. I seized the opportunity and started asking questions and probing on generalised men’s small housing activities. It was interesting to note how men were keen to openly talk about small houses and their personal experiences of small housing. Although participants are unlikely to discuss intimate experiences in groups, the minifocus groups I conducted provided rich insights into men's perceptions, ideas, thoughts and opinions on the issue of small houses.

During my fieldwork, I also used ethnographic observation as a complement to the biographical narratives and interviews. This allowed me to observe behaviours and attitudes that the participant might not otherwise have pointed out. This brings in Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of the dialogical where ethnography is knowledge production through interaction and creates space for sensitivities, shame, doubts and reflections. I also used local visual and text materials in the form of local newspapers, websites and television productions like the television soap entitled ‘The Small House Saga’ which gave me a sense of how small houses are generally portrayed and how they are evolving in the Zimbabwean context. This triangulation of qualitative methods acknowledged that issues around sexuality are personal and complex and often difficult to explore using just one method (Flick 2002).
The choices that are made in any research focus and methodology are bound to have their own limitations. Since this research focused on the experiences of a specific group of women, namely economically independent ones, the results can only be generalised to a limited extent. Furthermore, research on sexual relationships has a practical limitation as data is mainly based on self-reports. Lyons and Lyons (2004) note that in as much as dialogical approaches create space for the sharing of sensitive information, they can also amplify existing hierarchies. I acknowledge that being a small house in Zimbabwe is a sensitive and personal issue and therefore, despite my best efforts at establishing good rapport it is possible that some participants were not comfortable enough to talk honestly and to openly divulge certain aspects of their experiences as small houses.

4.0 Theoretical and conceptual considerations

To comprehend the behaviours and motivations of women involved in small house relationships, I used a post structural feminist perspective. This approach favours women’s experiences as a political strategy that has given voice to women and embraces a plurality of meaning (Gavey in Gergen and Davis 1997). Post-structuralism developed as a reaction to structuralism which has its basic premise in linguistics and focused on closed and centred structures or systems whilst presenting the concept of the subject “as having an essential identity and authentic core” (Alcoff 1988: 415). Post structuralism, associated with French thinkers like Lacan, Derrida, Bourdieu and Foucault sought to disrupt and deconstruct structuralist discourses by arguing that the subject’s identity is not produced by constraining powers of determinism and finds fault with structuralism’s binary oppositions. They argued that individuals are constructed by a social/cultural discourse which is part of some macro forces, nonetheless, with no final, efficient cause nor a predictable, fixed or unified structure (ibid). To this end, post-structuralism understands individuals’ actions as constructed within a social reality. As Jackson (2004: 675) argues, it is mainly concerned with “examining, disrupting and transgressing structures and categories that have damaging effects on people”. It opposes the existence of objective reality and emphasizes how the difference between ideas and reality is constructed through discourse. As Whisnant (2012) aptly argues, post structuralism can therefore be seen as leading to incoherence seen in the multiple systems of discourse and plural meaning but remains self-reflexive.

Post structural feminism draws upon post structuralist principles of complexity, plurality, ambiguity, connection, diversity, recognition and transformation (Baxter 2003). It was developed with particular attention to rejecting a universalised and normalised view of
women as constituting a group by focusing on the varying social constructs that make up each person’s identity. Weedon (1987: 40-41) defines poststructural feminism as a “mode of knowledge production which uses post structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institution to understand existing power relations and to identify areas of change.” Post structural feminists prefer using the concept of subjectivity, which Weedon defines as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relation to the world...a precarious, contradictory process, constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (ibid. p:32).

Hence feminism brings to poststructuralism the “ability to address how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed” (ibid. p:20). In using this theory to analyse small houses, I seek to show that universalism, as it is used in dominant health and development paradigms as well as in moralising Christian perspectives, marginalises non-conformity. This perspective also helped to highlight the complexities involved in small house relationships as they have and are situated in “multiple social positions [have] multiple voices, conscious and unconscious pleasures, tensions, desires and contradictions...” (Orner 1992:78). Post structuralism also resonates with Butler’s theory of performativity, which focuses on conflicting subjectivities and challenges single discourses. This helps destabilise identity categories that normalise and regulate people.

However, this theoretical framework has been criticised for disregarding conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the performing of identity (Nelson 1999). Yet, it is still valuable for instance, in analysing small houses’ performances of identities from how they are prescribed by hegemonic discourses. This also involves looking at how these women’s behaviours are constituted through ‘matrices of power and how this makes it difficult to conceptualise the idea of a ‘self’ outside of power without being structurally deterministic (Butler 1990). Therefore, using a postfeminist concept of subjectivity of the individual gave significance to the women’s notions of self, experiences and how they may give meaning to and construct their own subjectivity, their feelings, motives and agency in shaping as well as resisting the prevailing hierarchical and gendered power relations in heterosexual relationships.

Utilizing a social constructivist perspective in my analysis helped unpack the concept of the small house from an understanding that the construction of knowledge is a political process and hence there is no single truth or authority that can claim the production of ‘pure
knowledge’ (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Spender 1985). This paradigm, like Butler’s theory of performativity and subjectivity, argues that gender and sexuality are contingent social and cultural constructs and are embedded in culture, knowledge and power (Fiaccadori 2006). However, women have ways to negotiate their sexuality and shape the contours of their relationships despite the constraining power of patriarchy (Campbell, Baty, Ghnadour et al in Jewkes and Morrell 2011). Acknowledging women's agency, however restricted, provides room to interrogate the notion of subjectivity and agency from an experiential perspective which explores the how, when and why dominant discourses are displaced as told from the perspective of the subject. Just as the performativity and subjectivity theories argue that identities, sexualities and gendered experiences are socially constructed or prescribed within hegemonic discourses, social constructivism further offers room to problematize essentialism in cultural processes and hence gives room to agency and to how individual actions, performances and experiences can construct new interpretations and social realities.

These perspectives resonate with my research objectives of problematising the approach which has only looked at women’s sexual agency from a health and disease perspective, treating women as a homogenous group hence the approach’s inability to understand and represent the world of lived experiences of women from different classes, geographical locations or cultural backgrounds. In placing agency within social constructivism, small houses’ ‘performances’ can be conceptualised as actions that are conscious and intentional to “resist dominant fixed subject positions and become speaking, knowing subjects whose perspectives and responses can be crucial” in the understanding of any sociocultural or political phenomenon (Fiaccadori 2006:339).

However, as Guba (1990) highlights, the researcher’s interpretive framework is a set of beliefs informing the researcher’s action. However, frameworks come with apparent limitations and for post structural feminism; it is never independent of social and linguistic processes and is in fact constituted by them (Gavey in Gergen and Davis 1997). Theories of performativity and subjectivity have been criticised for denying the subject’s ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determination hence, the construction of fixed subject positions. However, intertwining theoretical perspectives gives room for a broader inquest and understanding of the small house phenomenon giving voice to their experiences, interpretations and their senses of self.
This study focused on economically independent women’s motives for engaging in sexual relationships that are deemed ‘risky’ in the context of a high HIV prevalence. With this background, there emerge a number of concepts that need to be defined and operationalised especially relating to issues around ‘risk’, ‘vulnerability’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘agency’ common terms in public health and development programmes. From a public health perspective, being a small house is considered a ‘risky’ sexual behaviour because it entails having multiple concurrent sexual partners and being part of a sexual network. Risk, in the HIV literature, refers to a behaviour which increases the chances of being infected with HIV. It usually focuses on the number and types of sexual partners, correct and consistent condom use as well as age of sexual debut (Barnett and Whiteside 2006). However, cultural theorists like Douglas (1992) and Tansey and O’riordan (1999) argue that risk cannot be reduced to concerns about safety as has to do with issues relating to power, justice and legitimacy. Risk taking is embedded in one’s culture and hence is a social construction recognizable in processes of value identification and trust building (Douglas 1992). Also, the notion of politicised risk becomes apparent in the small house phenomenon especially looking at who is being blamed and why, processes that reinforces social structures (ibid). In light of this, I envisage risk from a broader perspective which is able to take into consideration the nature of individual free will as well as other extenuating factors that can dispose an individual to risk and at the same time understanding risk from a cultural theory perspective that perceives risk taking as shaped by one’s social context.

Vulnerability is linked to risk and besides biological vulnerability, women have also been shown to face structural vulnerabilities, such as lack of education, poverty and intimate partner violence. These factors increase their risk of contracting HIV as they have limited power and choices to protect themselves in potentially unsafe sexual relationships. Hence, public health and development agencies have venerated education and secure livelihood schemes as empowerment strategies that proffer protective factors to women and increase their likelihood to engage in and be able to negotiate for ‘safe sex’ - seen as any sexual relationship that limits exposure to HIV. Chapter 4 delves deeper into these concepts and how they relate to the middle class small house in Zimbabwe. The chapter shows how these categories of risk and vulnerability are misleading, masks as well as oversimplifies the characteristics of HIV in Zimbabwe.

The somewhat vague concept of ‘empowerment’ will resurface throughout this thesis. Though I use it in my thesis, I acknowledge that the use of this concept erroneously
presupposes a stage of ‘powerlessness’ and ‘vulnerability’ which have been made the defining aspects and characteristics of ‘poor’ women’s sexuality. It is within this context of powerlessness that women are considered vulnerable to engaging in risky sexual behaviours and hence having an education and a means of livelihood are considered ‘empowering’ features that help women increase their power in negotiating and engaging in rational safe sexual relationships.

Agency is another central concept in this thesis and refers to “conscious action aimed at achieving certain outcomes, with the actors concerned considering the efficacy and appropriateness of their behaviour in a given context that comprises the institutional and normative environment within which daily life is enacted” (Niehof 2007:189). Empowerment increases this agency and lack of it entails a form of agency that is overwhelmingly constrained by societal, economic and political structures. These structures are the institutional and normative environment resulting from complex historical, cultural and material interactions (Verheijen 2013). However, dominant HIV prevention efforts conceptualising small houses as risky multiple concurrent sexual relationships assume that human behaviour results primarily from individual agency and hence can be changed by education and economic ‘empowerment’. Yet, as argued in my thesis these structures and agency interact in intricately interdependent ways and not as mutually exclusive dichotomies. I also show how these middle class women use their agency to deal with, respond to and manoeuvre around existing social structures governing the marriage institution and limiting economic conditions. However, like Verheijen (2013) in her study on Malawian women’s agency between HIV and security, I also argue that agency can be negative and show how in some instances women reveal their agency in ways that are contradictory, illogical and not strategically planned.

5.0 Outline of thesis
The thesis comprises a total of seven chapters, all of them concerned with different aspects of the small house phenomenon. The current chapter has laid out the research focus, study rationale and introduced the main arguments of the thesis. This chapter also provided a brief literature review as well as some methodological reflections and a brief description of the theoretical framework informing my analysis. Chapter 2 provides a trajectory of Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political situation and tries to trace the development of the small house phenomenon and how it is played out and experienced in the present-day Zimbabwe. It also gives a chronological account of responses to the HIV epidemic in Zimbabwe and traces
NGOs and public health institutions’ interest and influence in the responses to the small house phenomenon.

Chapter 3 lays the foundation for my discussion of middle class small houses based on my fieldwork data. In this chapter I came up with three clusters or what I termed categories of small houses to organise my field material and observations. In a mainly narrative format, I explore the different clusters of middle class small houses (based on their reported motivations for engaging in these relationships. I also show how women’s sexual behaviours are intertwined with other various economic and socio-cultural facets and how therefore looking only at monetary motivations is instrumentalising to women’s sexual behaviours. In this chapter, I also interrogate the idea that empowerment prevents women from engaging in seemingly risky relationships.

Chapter 4 anchors the argument raised in the previous chapter by analysing the non-material, affective other reasons that women gave for being small houses. This chapter builds the argument against the dominant public health and development discourses that have focused on women’s sexual relationships as constrained and defined by poverty and lack of choices. It explores how women chose to be in these kinds of sexual relationships for different reasons, an act of agency and gives another dimension of the rationale behind engaging in small house relationships, albeit economic empowerment and high knowledge levels about the so-called dangers of such relationships especially given that they are considered a key driver of HIV. I argue that the popular idea that economically empowering women and providing them with educational opportunities is the solution to reducing risky sexual behaviours is faulty.

Chapter 5 offers a theoretical conceptualization of how the small house phenomenon is understood by women through focusing on subjectivities and identities of groups of women including the small houses and the aforementioned advisors whom I termed ‘sexual entrepreneurs’ who have commodified the role of traditional aunts providing marriage advice to big houses. By employing Victor Turner’s concept of social dramas, I show how the small house phenomenon is portrayed as a crisis situation that has presented a breach of social norms and hence the re-emergence of the importance of the traditional aunt position turned commercial aunt, to redress the situation. In analysing the different women’s identities and subjectivities through post-structuralist and post-feminist lenses in this social drama, the chapter also highlights the tensions, structural contradictions, norm-conflicts, indeterminacy and fluidity of social reality.
Chapter 6 turns to an analysis of masculinities and the small house phenomenon. I examine three types of masculinities, namely, men who support small-houses, men who are against small houses and ‘Ben 10’ youths. The first type of men takes their legacy from traditional hegemonic masculinity while men in the second type attempt to carve out a new hegemony anchored in modernity and Christian discourses of monogamy and fidelity. Ben 10’s, in turn, are younger men who are involved in sexual relationships with older women and are used as ‘side flings’ by small housing women. What emerges from this chapter is a picture of how the tropes of tradition and modernity are employed as political weapons in contestations over the fractured hegemonic masculinity and how emerging non-normative masculinities daw on, reproduce as well as resist gendered meanings and expectations. The chapter also shows how masculinities are ambiguous and are bound with the ever changing present.

Chapter 7, the conclusion, will look at issues of power, politics and resistance and discuss the concept of agency within constrained spaces. Agency in this context is shaped by broader social, institutional and the political and economic context in which these small house relationships occur. In framing my conclusion, it is important to highlight that this thesis was carried out under the auspice of the Human Economy programme based at the University of Pretoria where I was in the first cohort of PhD students. According to Hart and Hann (2011:8) the human economy ‘refers to well being, to the satisfaction of all human needs-not just those that can be met through private market transactions…” They further explain that “…the emphasis in speaking of the human economy is on persons, whose preferences and choices are sometimes shaped by calculation, but usually also by the familial, social, political contexts in which human beings are enmeshed or embedded.” (ibid: 9). Nowhere in the bulk of the thesis do I explicitly undertake the notion of a human economy but will briefly attempt to do so in this chapter. In light of this, I propose that the way small houses functions in Zimbabwe to an extent resembles the idea of a human economy approach. Finally, linking small housing, economics and HIV, this thesis argues that in order for HIV interventions to be effective, they must also pay attention to individual ‘risk’ conducts and the particular socio-economic, political and cultural environments in which they occur. As Smith (2013)

---

9 See http://www.up.ac.za/human-economy-programme/

aptly notes in his research on Nigeria, understanding HIV entails having a fuller perspective on the changing dynamics of social relations, which can offer a revealing perspective on the shifting contours of inequality and the problems that new and growing disparities in an increasingly capitalist economy create for and demand from its people.
Chapter 2: A brief history of HIV and the political and economic setting in Zimbabwe.

This chapter gives a brief history of the economic and political crises and HIV in Zimbabwe and the trajectory of government and non-state actors’ responses to these. According to Schoepf (in Mikell 1997), disease epidemics often appear in conjunction with economic and political crises. As I shall explore in this chapter, the brewing of an HIV epidemic in Zimbabwe was intermingled with an economic and political crises that provided an optimum environment for the worsening of the epidemic. On the other hand, the Zimbabwean situation presents a different trend from the general history of how HIV emerged in Africa as Zimbabwe, paradoxically, saw a decline in HIV prevalence during the peak of its political and economic crises (Gregson et al 2006). The political and economic crises that were experienced from the nineties to the late 2000s also produced different forms of economic, political and social chaos. As I shall elaborate later in the chapter, the small house phenomenon can be understood from a perspective of how macro level political economies can affect socio-cultural dynamics at the micro level.

2.1. The economic and political milieu

Raftopolous and Mlambo (2009) assert that major economic advances were made in the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence (gained in 1980). During this period, the government re-integrated the national economy into the world economy; redressed inequalities inherited from the colonial order, adopted a black economic empowerment programme and developed a black middle class. The government also adopted a welfarist approach meant to enfranchise the poor and this saw government subsidising health and education and other social and utility services. In 1990, however, the government changed its welfarist approach and adopted the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). The latter called for trade liberalisation, budgetary adjustments and the removal of subsidies. However, by the late nineties it was clear that economic liberalisation via ESAP was having a negative effect on the country and this saw mounting pressures for democratic reforms by the labour movement and an increase in public unrest in urban centres (ibid 2009). These public unrests were an outcome of the increase in the prices of most basic commodities, the decline of wages in real value, soaring unemployment and an “excess commodification of life in Zimbabwe” (Magure 2014:3). The causes of the Zimbabwean economic crises were complex and multiple and no single explanation will suffice. However, many scholars concur that the late 90s to mid 2000s were characterised by events that worsened the crisis. These events included the government's un-budgeted for gratuity
payments to war veterans, Zimbabwe’s involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, recurrent droughts, the chaotic land acquisition exercise, the government’s repression of the newly formed opposition party (Movement for Democratic Change) and labour movement organised ‘mass stay aways’. The government’s populist rhetoric also aggravated the situation with the President condoning the land acquisition by war veterans and calling for a ‘Fast-Track’ land reform. The latter took place from 2000-2003 and was riddled by violence, corruption, ineptitude and cronyism which destroyed agricultural production (Mamdani 2009).

Economies of affection and patronage became the norm in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors and benefitted a few individuals who were politically connected. The ruling regime’s desperate desire to cling to power ultimately saw the erosion of the rule of law as the government sought to repress all forms of opposition to their destructive populist agendas. In response, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US) poured in funding directed at the emerging critical civil society groupings that were promoting democracy and ‘good governance’. Eventually, the West introduced ‘smart sanctions' targeted at the government and its supporters. Notably, in 1999 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended its lending program in Zimbabwe and, three years later formally announced its non-cooperation with the country. Smart sanctions exacerbated the economic crisis as the country’s foreign currency reserves dried up, foreign direct investments (FDI) shrank and most donors pulled out even in crucial social services like health (Mamdani 2009). The economic and political crises peaked with Zimbabwe recording an unprecedented hyperinflation that saw severe deindustrialisation, cash shortages, a critical erosion of livelihoods evidenced by devaluing of incomes and savings as well as retrenchments, widespread shortage of basic goods, skyrocketing prices and a collapse of the regime’s basic social services provision (Magure 2014; Raftopolous and Mlambo 2009).

This situation stabilised in 2008 with the signing of a Global Political Agreement (GPA) after the highly contested 2008 election results between the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic front (ZANU PF) and the leading opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (IDAZIM 2010). A Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed in 2009 and governed the country for the next five years. The GNU phase saw some of the smart sanctions being reduced and foreign direct investments slowly trickling in (ibid 2010). There has also been a steady increase in donor support in crucial social services. Zimbabwe went to the polls again in 2013 and ZANU PF won ‘resoundingly’, which led to the
dissolution of the GNU. However, although Zimbabwe started recording a steady GDP and single digit inflation rates between 2008-2013, its economic empowerment and indigenisation programmes such as the 2013 Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim-Asset) have caused another phase of capital flight and a resurgence in politics of patronage and a new economy of affection.

The government remains the largest employer in Zimbabwe as other productive sectors of the economy are still trying to recover from the economic crisis (Magure 2014). However, there has been a surge in civil society organisations that are employing a considerable number of Zimbabweans. Prior to the mid-90s, these organisations focused mostly on poverty alleviation through income generating projects, women's empowerment, environmental issues and HIV and AIDS (Raftopolous 2009). However many organisations mutated during the economic and political crises to cover issues of human rights, governance, labour and democracy. There has also been an increase in donor funding for humanitarian projects, economic empowerment, health, education, social services, and gender equality. However, the GNU saw a reduction in funding for democratisation projects. These civil society organisations have helped to resuscitate the once dying Zimbabwean 'middle class'.

2.2. HIV in Zimbabwe

The first case of HIV in Zimbabwe was reported in 1985 (Duri et al 2013). However, by the end of the 1980s, around 10% of the population was thought to be infected with HIV. Between 1995-1997, HIV prevalence\(^\text{11}\) reached 29% and then declined to 20.1% by 2005 (Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey Report 2005/6). Currently, the HIV prevalence stands at 15% [figures accepted by UNAIDS and WHO], a significant decline from 2005 attributed to economic challenges and high AIDS mortality that stimulated sexual behaviour change (Gregson et al 2006; Halperin et al 2011). Zimbabwe has participated in, and is a signatory to a number of international and regional conventions and protocols on HIV and AIDS prevention such as the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), UN Declaration on the Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the SADC Protocol on gender and development amongst others. These conventions and protocols have provided the \textit{modus operandi} for states to come

\(^{11}\) HIV prevalence is the percentage or proportion of the population living with the disease at a given time. HIV incidence refers to the number of new infections in a population at a year of diagnosis (http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health_glance-2011-15-en)
up with their own nationally driven platforms for addressing HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support. Zimbabwe has successfully developed its own home grown responses to the pandemic. These responses have been important in setting the pace for addressing the HIV and AIDS scourge and have in some way contributed to a decline in the country's HIV prevalence (UNAIDS 2011; Gregson et al 2006; Halperin et al 2011). However, given the political and economic crises that Zimbabwe has been experiencing, the once well-paced and well-intended government initiated responses have gone through various phases of accomplishments and absolute failure which manifested in the near total collapse of the health delivery system in 2007/8.

2.2.1. Zimbabwean government’s policy and programmatic responses to HIV and AIDS.

Initial responses to HIV in Zimbabwe were biomedical in nature and focused mainly on treating the diseased body. There was little consideration of the reasons behind sexual risk-taking behaviour or any focus on understanding societal risk factors, which have been shown to be important in HIV prevention. In accordance with the biomedical approach, an advisory board of health experts called the Zimbabwe AIDS Health Experts Committee (ZAHEC) was established in 1996 (ZHDR 2003). However, a Short Term Plan (STP) was developed the following year to implement prevention programs for a year. This was followed by Middle Term Plans, MTP1 (1988-1993) set to ‘facilitate planning, coordination, implementation and monitoring of HIV and AIDS prevention and control activities’ whilst MTP2 (1994-1998) had an additional angle focusing on the need for the reduction in the personal and social impact of the disease and mitigations in the socio-economic impact of HIV and AIDS, (ibid 2003:124). In the same decade the National AIDS Control/Coordination Program (NACP) and a multisectoral National AIDS Council (NAC) were established and these focused mostly on awareness raising strategies.

In 1999, the government developed a National HIV and AIDS policy meant to be the guiding document for all HIV and AIDS interventions in the country. The policy looked at a broad range of issues, such as gender, public concerns, care and support of the sick and affected, information and education as well as priority research issues. It advocated for public debates on issues of confidentiality, pushed for HIV and AIDS to be made a notifiable disease12,  

12 A disease required by law to reported to government authorities for monitoring purposes (www.cdc.gov)
highlighted the importance of protecting the rights of those infected with the virus and sought to protect health professionals from litigation in the event of disclosure of a patient’s HIV status (MoHCW 2005). A key strength of the policy is that it was the first to highlight the need to address inequalities between men and women as a strategy for reducing the vulnerability of women to HIV infection. The Strategic Framework (2000-2004) was the second major policy document to be developed in the country. Its purpose was to guide HIV and AIDS programs in Zimbabwe and give a comprehensive situational analysis of the epidemic in the country (Ministry of Health and Child Welfare 2006). The Strategic Framework identified economic instability and low investments in health and other social services as contributing to increased poverty. The latter is considered a key driver of the HIV epidemic. The Framework also criticized the lack of clear responses to tackling poverty evident in the lack of comprehensive support for the informal sector, which is increasingly the main source of livelihood for many Zimbabweans. The Strategic Framework went beyond viewing HIV and AIDS as purely a medical problem and there was a tacit acknowledgement that women’s vulnerability stems from deeply entrenched socio-cultural factors that condone women’s subordination and dependence on men (Makamure and Gaidzanwa 2004).

In the face of ever soaring numbers of Zimbabweans thought to be living with HIV, the government declared a six-month ‘state of emergency’ in May 2002. However, this was extended into a five-year period spanning from January 2003 to December 2008. UNAIDS (2005) reported that there were approximately 3,000 people dying of AIDS related conditions each week during this period. Additionally, there were over a million Zimbabweans living with the virus and an estimated 800,000 AIDS orphans (ibid). During the emergency period, Zimbabwe decided to override patent protection in order to facilitate procurement and importing of generic Antiretrovirals (ARVs)( ZWRCN 2006). The National AIDS Council (NAC) also drafted a National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (ZNASP) that articulated the direction and national targets for the period 2006 to 2010. The plan emphasized the need for a multisectoral response to the HIV epidemic and adopted the international commitments of ‘universal access’ to prevention, care and treatment services, as well as the need to enhance male involvement in HIV and AIDS programmes (SAfAIDS 2008). The current ZNASP 2011-2015 prioritises interventions that contribute to the reduction in HIV incidence among adults by 50% by 2015, among other targets.
2.2.2 Successes and Challenges

Despite the political and economic challenges that adversely affected service provision in Zimbabwe, particularly in the health sector, the government has scored some successes. One of these is increased access to HIV testing services. Avert (2008) notes that between 2004 and 2005 Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) sites increased from 292 to 430 and that every health district had at least one VCT site. The Ministry of Health also successfully set up Opportunistic infections (OI) clinics in 2007 as well as provider-initiated HIV testing at all public hospitals.

The advent of ARVs in Zimbabwe in 2001 saw the launch of a government-initiated Plan for the Nationwide Provision of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) (ZHDR 2003). Zimbabwe subsequently developed its ART programme and set a national target of providing ARVs to an estimated 171,000 HIV positive people who were in need of treatment. Unfortunately, resource limitations saw this figure being revised down to 60,000. By the end of 2005, only 25,000 were on ARVs (Ministry of Health: AIDS and TB Unit – May 2006). To date, it is estimated that 77% of HIV positive individuals are on anti-retroviral therapy (Zimbabwe AIDS Response Progress Report 2014:12). Impressive as these achievements are, they pose a real threat to HIV prevention efforts, particularly in how people perceive their risk (see Chapter 4). A case in point is South Africa where an increase in the rollout and uptake of ARVs has been reported to have contributed to what Shisana et al (2014:124) argues to be a “an evolving complacency among people at risk noted through behavioural risk compensation [justifiable] in an era of successful ART”. This complacency is anchored in a popular cliché that HIV is no longer a death sentence.

Despite the government’s well-intended policies to address HIV and AIDS, their strategies had a number of fundamental flaws that made it hard for it to meet its targets. Until fairly recently the plans were gender blind and did not take into account the differential impact of the epidemic on women and men. In the public health sector, both the quality and pace of implementation of ART programmes was hampered by lack of qualified health professionals due to massive brain drain caused by the political and economic crises. The chronic lack of foreign currency experienced in the country in 2008/9 hampered the scaling up of ART distribution programmes. In 2009 there was only one company licensed to produce ARVs in Zimbabwe and consequently these remained highly priced and out of the reach of most people. On the other hand, the government free-ARV programme was failing to cope with
demand and experienced regular stock outs of HIV test kits and ART medicines (The Centre Report 2007). Prior to the formation of the GNU in 2009 Zimbabwe received funding from the Global Fund (Rounds 13 One and Five) in 2002 and 2005 but was not funded in Rounds Two, Three, Four, Six and Seven. Zimbabwe’s failure to get this funding was largely due to fears from the Global Fund authorities that funds would be mismanaged (SAfAIDS 2008; UNAIDS 2008). Failure to secure international funding also contributed to the near total collapse of the health system in 2008 in the form of scarce medical drugs and equipment, the closing down of public hospitals except for emergency sections, the mass exodus and prolonged strikes of medical personnel (Chikanda 2011). The health sector was partially resuscitated in 2009 with the assistance from multiple donors and the awarding of the Global Fund Round 8.

2.2.3 Shaping the prevention response contours: a case of Population Services International/Zimbabwe (PSI).

The decline in HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe was partly attributed to change in sexual behaviour among the sexually active population (NAC 2006). A general acknowledgment of prevention as a strategy against HIV and AIDS saw the UNAIDS declaring 2006 as a year of accelerating prevention in high prevalence regions. In line with this declaration the Southern African Development Community (SADC) organised a Think Tank Meeting on HIV prevention that was held in Maseru, Lesotho (ibid). One of the main resolutions from the meeting was a recommendation for every SADC nation state to identify specific in-country drivers of HIV and come up with practical strategies to respond to the pandemic. Zimbabwe, through the NAC, led a consultative Behaviour Change Review process which revealed the key drivers of HIV in the country and subsequently published a National Behaviour Change Strategy (2006-2010). This document, commonly referred to as the ‘BC Strategy’ was meant to be the guiding principle for implementation of HIV prevention initiatives by all organisations and stakeholders countrywide. The review process identified the following four key drivers of HIV: multiple concurrent partnerships (evidenced through the small house phenomenon), inconsistent condom use especially in longer term and marriage relationships, cross-generational sex and low perceptions of personal risk.

13 The Global Fund was formed in 2002 as an international partnership by governments, donors, civil society and international development organisations to support effective programs of prevention, treatment and care in AIDS, TB and malaria programmes (see www.theglobalfund.org).
Despite coming up with novel research outputs and policies, the government was still financially unable to fully implement its strategies and hence relied on a variety of non-state actors. The latter, comprising of community help groups, faith groups, AIDS Service Organisations (ASOs), activists, implementing and donor NGOs and agencies helped form a strong HIV and AIDS response civil society in Zimbabwe. Together, these organisations offered a multi sectoral approach that included behaviour change programmes but also livelihoods projects for women as a way of tackling transactional sex in the form of small housing and the related sexual networks. Most behaviour change projects were premised on condom use promotion and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) messages promoting reduction in multiple sexual partners for both men and women.

One prominent non-state actor that was actively involved in HIV prevention in Zimbabwe is the Population Services International (PSI)/Zimbabwe. PSI employs the media and social marketing strategies to tackle the epidemic. PSI has been operating in Zimbabwe, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, since 1996 and its initial focus was on HIV prevention through the social marketing of male condoms (known as the Protector Plus condoms) and female condoms (known as the Care condom). Their services have since expanded to include HIV counselling and testing offered by New Start Centres, STI treatment, voluntary medical male circumcision, TB screening, ART provision, family planning, cervical cancer screening as well as psychosocial support and referrals for people living with HIV through their New Life post-test support centres. Central to PSI’s approach was their use of mass media and interpersonal and behaviour change communications platforms. The latter included their popular behaviour change promotion campaigns dubbed ‘Protector Plus: a friend for life’ which encouraged people to use male condoms and the ‘Don’t be Negative about being Positive’ campaign which encouraged people to get tested for HIV and if HIV sero-positive, to begin a ‘healthy positive life.’

In 2008, PSI/Zimbabwe commissioned a series of studies on multiple concurrent partnerships (MCPs) emanating from what they called a “paucity of data on multiple concurrent partnerships patterns and what drives them in Zimbabwe” (PSI Dashboard 2008). PSI/Zimbabwe was one of the first groups to officially highlight the small house phenomenon.

---

14 A healthy positive life has been construed as entailing leading a ‘normal’ healthy life like any other HIV sero-negative individual.
(PSI 2008) as one of the most common types of concurrent relationships among married men in Zimbabwe. In line with their funder USAID and with the UNAIDS regional office for Eastern and Southern Africa as well as the World Bank’s issued recommendations about communication interventions to address multiple sexual partners, PSI subsequently designed a number of mass media communication campaigns utilizing the radio, print, outdoor and road shows as well as billboards. One of their main ideas was the use of visual portrayals of sexual networks with potential to spread the virus, with the aim to increase risk perception among men and women engaging in concurrent partnerships. Some of their communications had ‘key’ messages like:

“Luxuries come at a cost. They are not worth my self-respect and independence. I chose not to have more than one partner at the same time”.

“He says I’m the only woman who really understands him. Maybe he says this to all his other girlfriends too…Being a small house makes you part of a sexual network. If one person contracts HIV then everyone in this sexual network can also become infected. So think about this before you decide to be a small house.”
Interestingly, Zimbabwe was not the only country in southern Africa recognising multiple sexual partnerships as the key driver of HIV. HIV researchers mainly funded by the UNAIDS and USAID/PEPFAR amongst other agencies had concluded that MSPs were at the root of the generalised epidemic of HIV in southern and eastern Africa, Shelton (2009). Botswana, for example was running the O Icheke (Break the Chain) campaigns whilst South Africa had the popular Scrutinize adverts which were all about discouraging people from engaging in MSPs through visual portrayals of risky sexual networks. As shown in the Scrutinize poster, it resembles the Zimbabwean small houses posters, an indication of the same donor/funder driving the concept of IEC messaging. This, like many other donor-driven projects shows how local conceptualisations about health and development issues amongst many other are usually a reflection of the funders hypotheses about the issue in question and at times might not necessarily reflect or address a real issue on the ground. For instance, the whole MSP as key driver of HIV in eastern and southern Africa discourse has come under attack for having no empirical evidence and also no universally accepted method of measurement. Concurrency has been argued as vaguely and inconsistently defined, concerns that its proponents like Mah and Halperin (2008) and Epstein (2008) have acknowledged but still
defended noting that ‘it would be a tragedy to allow methodological limitations to justify a do-nothing policy.’

Picture 2: South Africa Scrutinize poster depicting a visual sexual network

In the Zimbabwean context, as well-intended the advertisements were, they were flawed in the way they conceptualised women’s motivations for engaging in small house relationships and in the way they presented women as vectors of the virus. Women’s rights groups like Msasa Project condemned these advertisements as ‘sexist’ and ‘irresponsible’. In November 2010, PSI pulled down its small house billboards and also withdrew the newspaper and TV advertisements. Despite this, prevention interventions continue to follow the anti-MSP framework with most programmes now trying to understand and differentiate the different motivations for men and women who engage in concurrent partnerships. The most recent

---

15 For a detailed discussion on the multiple concurrent sexual partnerships debate see proponents Mah and Halperin and Epstein and critics Lurie and Rosenthal’s articles in AIDS and Behaviour journal 2008 and 2009 and Lancet, Volume 374
Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey (DHS) 2010/11 showed that HIV prevalence was higher among employed individuals than among unemployed, at 17% and 15% respectively. No clear pattern emerged among women of different socioeconomic status: the lowest HIV prevalence was found among women in the second and highest wealth quantiles whilst women in the third and fourth wealth quintiles had the highest prevalence. Also, no clear relationship was observed between level of education and HIV prevalence among women (ZIMSTAT and ICF 2012). These findings suggest a maturing and complex epidemic which is changing the risk profiles of the population and suggesting emerging ‘new’ key populations at risk of HIV infection (Shisana et al 2014).

2.2.4 The current state of affairs on HIV

Although Zimbabwe continues to be one of the countries in the world with high HIV infection rates, it is also one of the few countries (including Thailand and Uganda) that have recorded a decline in HIV prevalence (Halperin et al 2011; Gregson et al 2006; UNAIDS 2013). In Zimbabwe, this decline has been attributed to the success of its prevention efforts in social and behaviour change programmes rather than to other factors like high AIDS-related death or massive migration (Halperin et al 2011). Some critics of the Zimbabwean HIV prevalence decline ‘success story’ have even posited possibilities of the reduction in statistical records of prevalence being related to the collapse of the health system and a reduced number of people with access to the services that would record their status.

Domestically, the national response programmes have been made possible through the AIDS levy (3% of payee and corporate tax), which is collected by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) and remitted directly to the NAC. On the other hand, there has been a continuation of massive external support through the Global Fund, UN Agencies, the US Government, DfID and other partners working through community and faith based networks and non-governmental organisations (Zimbabwe HIV and AIDS Progress Report 2014). Also, more recently, HIV prevention emphasis has since shifted from behaviour change messages to a biomedical inclined focus. This is evidenced in the substantial promotion of voluntary medical male circumcision, treatment upscale as shown in the ART coverage figures as well as the adoption of the Option B+ for all HIV positive pregnant women. With a slack in the social and behavioural prevention model reflected in the reduction in communication campaigns, recent reports have been published showing for instance, reduced and inconsistent use of condoms amongst sexually active adults particularly with concurrent
sexual relationships (GoZ Report 2014; Taruberekera et al 2009) as well as a rise in the statistics of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (NAC 2013). This trend reflecting an increase in risky sexual behaviour potentially fuelled by decrease in HIV and AIDS knowledge (with fewer communication campaigns) and uninhibited attitudes about HIV (encouraged by the successes of ARVs) can potentially reverse the gains of the last decade that saw a decline in the HIV prevalence as has been the case with Uganda.

3.0 A class in transition: the precarious Zimbabwean black middle class.

The first section of this chapter looked at the political and economic crises that wrecked Zimbabwe from the late 90s to late 2000s. Concurrently, a social and health crisis was brewing in the form of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and there also was an erosion of a middle class leaving mainly two classes- the very rich and the poor. In Bourdieu’s (1987) terms, a class generally is formed by individuals possessing what he argues to be the same economic, cultural and symbolic capitals and hence have similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices however, without a group identity. Kharas (2010) notes that the middle class can be defined in either relative or absolute terms given that the middle class is generally an ambiguous economic and social designation. Traditionally, the middle class has been designated as the class situated between the upper ruling class, who are the owners of the means of production and the lower or working class, which comprises the proletariat and blue-collar workers. However, this conflates the middle class into a homogenous group (Chavalier 2015) without making distinctions between the upper and lower middle classes. However, as aptly noted by Bottero (2004) in contemporary societies the middle class is increasingly being defined using Bourdieu’s (1984) habitus, capital and field tools which offer a more dynamic understanding of a class as it is lived and experienced through everyday life as noted in people’s lifestyles, values, dispositions, tastes and experiences. Chavalier (2015) writing on the middle class in Durban South Africa distinguishes between the upper middle class who are linked to political power and the lower middle class, termed the ‘Black Diamonds’ who are by and large working professionals. These resonates with the Zimbabwean middle class who can generally be described as being of the lower echelons given that their status is dependant on their professions and salaries as well as conspicuous consumption patterns yet without enough property for security to protect them from the everpresent possibilities of shifting to destitution. This therefore means a lower middle class mainly comprised of professionals defined by their ability to lead a comfortable life, development of particular lifestyles and tastes and consumerism characteristic notably their
desire for upscale lifestyles and a growing disconnect between their consumer desires and incomes (Bourdieu 1987; Kharas 2010).

West (2002) offers a trajectory of the development of a black middle class in Zimbabwe. He asserts that class position is not determined by economic and social factors alone but also by cultural and political experiences. He argues that the emergence of a black African middle class in colonial Zimbabwe was made possible by Christian missionary education and the black African’s aspiration for social mobility in the face of the horrors of colonialism. The black African middle class was defined in terms of their ‘personal and social experiences such as educational attainments, professions, consumption habits, residential patterns, and organizational affiliations (ibid 2002). In most instances, they occupied white-collar professions, which included work as clerks, bookkeepers, teachers, medical workers, lawyers, preachers, and interpreters amongst others. This particular middle class during the colonial period was distinct in that like in the traditional class analysis, it developed a class consciousness and led the struggle for political independence in Zimbabwe which yielded in 1980. They took over most positions in government in post-independent Zimbabwe and to some extent one can argue that this post-independence phase saw the development of an upper black middle class. Many continued to enjoy the comforts of an upper middle class status until the economic crisis eroded away the material foundations of their lifestyles.

From the 90s onwards, standards of living started to go down and levels of education and occupation in government were no longer a given to define one’s middle class status. Civil servants, once ranked as one of the best government paid employees, also began to feel the brunt of declining wages. As the economy continued to crumble, many responded by migrating to countries like South Africa, the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand in search of greener pastures. This resulted in a massive ‘brain drain’ of professionals in the medical and education fields in particular. It can be argued that during this period, Zimbabwe experienced a near-erasure of the middle class as individuals upgraded to the upper class depending on their political patronage or were relegated to other lower ranking social strata. However, those individuals who were working for the few operational humanitarian, governance and democracy NGOs and other non-state agencies could be perceived as the middle class. These individuals earned salaries in foreign currency, namely in United States (US) dollars, even before the official ‘dollarization’ of the economy. Given the

16 With the signing of the GPA, Zimbabwe adopted a multi-currency economy by ditching the Zimbabwean dollar and introducing the US dollar, South African rand and Botswana Pula as official currencies.
hyperinflationary environment, these individuals could take advantage of the exchange rate and purchase basic and luxury goods that were otherwise in short supply in Zimbabwe.

After the signing of the GPA, more NGOs started trickling back into the country as donor confidence slowly grew. Individuals with higher degrees had an opportunity once more to work in these organisations that provided technical support to certain government departments like health and education. A few companies in the private sector were also revived, which allowed some professionals to regain their middle class lifestyles. Since the economy stabilised in 2009, the middle class is slowly re-emerging although there still exists immense uncertainty about the future and maintaining one's desired lifestyle.

4.0 Social issues within the health, economic and political crises: Contextualising the small house in Zimbabwe.

The practice of men having several wives (as in a formal polygamous marriage) or having other extramarital sexual relationships is not new. Small houses, however, represent ‘new’ and changing forms of such practices. Traditionally, men would openly marry more than one wife and this was usually with the knowledge and permission of the first wife and other kin (Rutherford 2001). However, this started to change during the colonial period when men were ‘forced’ to migrate from their rural homes to cities in search of wage employment. Although women were generally restricted from living in towns and cities, some women, particularly single and divorced women, defied this ban and went into towns and cities in search of a livelihood. Most of these women engaged in what came to be known as mapoto unions, which was a convenient way of sharing cooking and sexual arrangements as a result of the changes in domestic relations induced by migrant labour (Muzvidziwa 2002; Rutherford 2001).

Mapoto unions were a form of co-habiting with a married man who had left behind a wife or wives in the rural areas and sought the 'comforts of home' (White 1990), which such relationships provided. Muzvidziwa (2002) argues that women saw a mapoto union as a way of creating social and economic networks. These unions were also a survival strategy given the harsh economic and social climate of the colonial city. However, in most cases, a mapoto union would rarely be formalised through lobola payment even though children were usually borne out of such unions (Bourdillon in Rutherford 2001). Mapoto unions persisted into the
post-colonial period and mainly involved poor working class women. Generally, mapoto unions—though not prostitution—were associated with prostitution as both practices transgresses notions of respectability and ‘proper’ gender relations and involve ‘wayward women’ (Bourdillon 1987). Although it is not clear why the term mapoto unions is no longer in popular usage, it is possible that these types of unions have changed into what is presently known as the ‘small house’. Admittedly, the contexts leading to the formation of small houses are vastly different from those that led to mapoto unions.

What is strikingly similar between mapoto unions and small houses is that both phenomena entail a process of “othering” that is central to the production of such names or identities. Language, as Lacan shows, plays a major role in constituting identity as framed in the hands of the powerful. In this case, the powerful are the general public, the government and NGOs who have picked up on the term ‘small house’, and legitimised it hence fuelling the othering process by having the power to describe and construct what is and what it means to be a small house. According to Jensen (2011), the process of othering is usually centred on the presence and creation of a self and an ‘other’ with hierarchical social differences whereby the other is seen as morally and/or intellectually inferior. Consequently, othering produces subjectivities which are related to inferior social/economic or political positions. It must be noted, nonetheless, that “othering is not a straightforward process of individuals or groups being interpellated to occupy specific subordinate subject positions” (Schwalbe in Jensen 2011: 73). This means that individuals can therefore capitalise on the “inferior or “degrading” identity and in turn use it to challenge the devaluation of the “other” without necessarily disrupting the category.

The expression ‘small house’, which started as street-lingo around the early 2000s, was popularised in the media during the period of the economic crisis that consequently produced social chaos. Youths singing popular music, dubbed as ‘urban grooves’, lamented and humoured the unfolding chaos in social relations, including the apparent rise in extramarital affairs and premarital and intergenerational sex (Mate 2012). It is during this period that a small-house truly resembled a quasi-polygamous union, with a younger poor working class woman being involved with an older, wealthy man who would be able to take care of her and maintain her as a private ‘second-wife’. This would entail the man renting or buying a smaller apartment for the woman (small compared to his main family’s house) and the relationship would entail some form of stability and investment by the man as this would be a probable second family. In most instances, children would be borne out of these relationships
and this was noted as an act of fortifying the relationship by the woman and ensures the man’s economic support and commitment to the relationship. A local TV soap opera entitled ‘The Small-House Saga’ was produced and screened on national television during prime time with each episode running for thirty minutes. It chronicled various issues related to this phenomenon. However, it presented a fairly straightforward account of single women pushed by survival and consumerist needs to engage in such relationships with married men. The latter were portrayed as rich, well-to-do socialites with excess incomes to dispose of. The small house women would be portrayed as being well-taken care of, with men purchasing cars and houses for them. The show also explored the social squabbles that ensued between small houses and big houses and the various outcomes of such relationships, such as HIV infection, pregnancy or the possibility of inheriting a married men’s fortune especially where there will be offspring. Similar issues were explored in the Soul City’s funded ‘Big-house Small-house’ drama and Rumbie Katedza’s ‘Playing Warriors’, a film screened at the 2012 Durban International Film Festival.

As indicated earlier, extramarital affairs are not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. However, the economic crisis transformed the ways in which these relationships unfolded and small houses have come to be understood in the context of evolving consumerism and a changing economy of sexual desires. The economic crisis was a period characterised by survival as well as consumerism politics as women searched for better lifestyles through sexual relationships with men (Ndlovu 2013). This is one example of how sex is overtly linked to the broader market economy and can entail political manoeuvring as women seek better lifestyles (Rubin in Vance 1994). Being a quasi-wife to a married man during this period temporarily provided the woman with the comforts of home and financial support. They also provided, the ‘comforts missing from home’ for the men involved. During the 2000s, the economic and political crises had devastating effects on the family arrangements, especially with migration leaving spouses and families with the burden of maintaining long distance relationships that straddled national borders and continents. Both men and women no longer had access to conjugal rights and hence small housing became an avenue to access such ‘rights’ for men. This even saw some small house relationships bearing offspring, a situation that could complicate the relationship given that a small house relationship is not a formal marriage and transgresses notions of a respectable marriage. Sometimes, though, bearing offspring in a small house relationship could lead to a small house being ‘upgraded’ into an ‘official’ second wife—marked by the payment of lobola—despite the first wife’s
misgivings or without her knowledge. Such occurrences pose challenges and disturbances to how the small house relationship is generally perceived and presents new complications related to social identities and legal recognition. For instance, once a small house bears children or lobola has been paid, the children are legally entitled to maintenance or to a share of the property in the case of their father’s death. If the man married his official wife in either a registered or unregistered customary law union the small house can be considered as an official second wife in a polygamous union and is entitled to a maintenance allowance or in the case of his death, to a share of the man’s inheritance (Chirawu 2012). Therefore, small housing, though originally perceived as a transgressive practice, can sometimes be viewed as an alternative family system (Ndlovu 2013) with legal and in some instances, social recognition. However, if the man married his official wife in a civil marriage, which allows only for monogamous unions, a small house relationship is considered in the dominant Roman-Dutch law as adulterous and hence the woman is not entitled to any estate, although the children are legally acknowledged and are entitled to maintenance and a share of the man’s estate (Chirawu 2012).

As alluded to earlier on, it was in a context of economic adversity that women were often understood as engaging in small house relationships. Hence the development and public health responses were developed from a standpoint that sought to address the devastating impacts of the economic crisis as well as women’s consequent vulnerability to HIV. While this conceptualisation of women’s motivations and vulnerabilities is correct to an extent, it is too simplistic in how it draws a causal relationship between women’s sexual behaviour and poverty. As this thesis will show, the small house phenomenon in Zimbabwe involves middle and upper class women, not just poor working class women. Middle class women in Zimbabwe experienced the same class turmoil that men experienced during the economic and political crises period. Many highly educated women, like their male counterparts, find themselves employed in well-paying but short-term contract jobs. This means that individuals can quickly move from middle class to lower class when their contracts expire and are not renewed. This temporariness of a middle class status in Zimbabwe gives individuals great uncertainty about their futures, hence the probable need to explore different ways to secure the future. I argue that this is the situation facing middle class small houses in contemporary Zimbabwe, albeit not the only motivation to engage in such relationships.

The Zimbabwean economic situation has presented a paradox for women in general. Women have attained a certain level of economic empowerment, especially in relation to education
and job opportunities. These are supposedly protective factors against various forms of vulnerability at a structural level. And yet, the economic and political environment is eroding these gains. In such a context, one can easily conflate all motives of small housing to a survival transactional relationship yet middle class small housing could be seen as a form of ‘consumptive survival’ and ‘personal insurance’ politics. Scenarios can explain this ‘consumptive survival’ politics where, for instance, a woman who earns enough to live a comfortable lifestyle (defined by living in a middle to low density suburb, driving an ex-Japanese car, amongst others) still desires more, in terms of what is generally seen as middle class lifestyle, such as an apartment of her own, brand-name furniture, annual holidays, top of the market gadgets like smart phones and tablets. Middle class people in general also want to distinguish themselves from the poor in terms of where they shop and the kind of recreational areas they hang out at. For instance, in Harare, there are exclusive shopping malls like Sammy Levy’s Village in Borrowdale, with up-market shops, restaurants and bars where the middle and upper class people generally shop. These are high-priced areas where a middle class salary alone might not be sustainable, yet I noticed how my research respondents liked frequenting such areas.

‘Personal insurance’ politics come into play when one considers how these women professionals have a constant fear of what will happen when their work contracts expire since most do not own fixed property and can barely save given their lavish lifestyles. A well-paying but temporary work contract poses tremendous threat to one’s position and entails a possible downgrade, which might mean foregoing the luxuries that one is used to. The likely temporariness of middle class comforts in Zimbabwe has therefore produced the obvious need to insure oneself from such eventualities. Small housing is one such type of insurance. Such situations present a paradox in relation to the acclaimed tenets of women empowerment in which calls for educational initiatives as a strategy for securing women's livelihoods and wellbeing have been made.

Defining women’s relationships as shaped solely by the economic context in which they are situated is however, problematic as it instrumentalises their sexual behaviours and motivations. Economic factors alone cannot sufficiently explain the small house phenomenon in as much as HIV vulnerability can not be explained wholly in terms of the lack of structural interventions in the form of education and livelihoods support (see Chapter 4). I argue in this thesis that a woman’s high education and literacy levels, earning capacity and how she chooses to use her agency in defining her sexual relationships, define the middle class small
house. Hence the emergence of the middle class small house has ultimately transformed how a small house should be conceptualised. At the same time, it has shifted the ‘othering’ dynamics into a complex web of power politics facilitated by how these women’s agency can be understood.

Using a post-feminist lens, a middle class small house can be seen as consciously choosing relationships that she can use to advance herself in otherwise male-dominated economic and political spheres. The small house is also fully aware of the consequences of its actions, which include possible HIV infection, violence from the man’s official wife and a lack of commitment on the man’s part in a case where the woman wants commitment. Moreover, one has to deal with the stigma associated with being a small house, such as being perceived by the ‘moralising majority’ as home wreckers and vectors of HIV. Some women, nonetheless, have managed to turn small housing to their advantage, for instance, whereby one has a man who actually insists on condom use in the relationship based on his own fear of unprotected sex with a small house woman. Though this fear is attached to the stigma surrounding small house women as ‘loose women’ and ‘HIV-carriers’ this works to the advantage of the woman who is also conscious about protecting herself. Some women are able to convince men to use protection mainly as a contraceptive given that some men are conscious not to have offspring with small houses. This agency coupled by her high socioeconomic status are some factors that separates the low income or working class small house and the middle class small house. Although economic factors look like they play a similar part in both patterns of small housing (i.e., working class small houses and middle class small houses) and both are equally faced with the reality of HIV, my thesis argues that the underlying motivations and patterns of risk present themselves in distinctive ways and take complex forms that go beyond the commonly presented susceptibility modes.

5.0 Conclusion

Hirsch (2012) argues that it is consumption that should be analysed as a driver of health vulnerabilities rather than individuals’ economic status. This approach calls for a much broader perspective that examines how the world economy and neoliberalism create health vulnerabilities. In the Zimbabwean context, the concept of middle class as situated in a consumerist economy creates desires, tastes, lifestyles and consumption patterns that are not in sync with one’s earnings, hence leading individuals to explore other means to complement, maintain and secure their lifestyles. These alternatives can potentially expose one to HIV vulnerability. At the same time, consumerist characteristics can be seen as being prompted by
the general capitalist system dominating the world economy. Besides consumption related risks, free market capitalism has also created labour-related mobility or migration, which has resulted in the separation of spouses or the extraction of potential marriage suitors to other spaces (i.e., neighbouring countries or overseas). Yet, as shall be argued in the subsequent chapters small house relationships are not just about consumption or health risks but can also be seen as vital social projects denoting one’s sexual freedom or sexual empowerment.
Chapter 3: Women and the local sexual marketplace: (Mis) understanding the small house concept.

The exchange of money in sexual relationships has typically been seen as immoral in Western Christian ideology (Cole and Thomas 2009; Jolly 2007). This has marred an understanding of African women’s sexualities and downplayed women's agency and the affective aspects of their relationships.

Anthropologists have started calling for a new approach to studying women’s sexualities, which sees engagement in sex as a source of enjoyment and not as a means of gaining acceptance from men or as a means to secure economic or emotional support from men (Spronk 2014; Arnfred 2004; Jolly et al 2013). Keane (in Cole and Thomas 2009:110) argues that “one has to be able to theorize about an autonomous subject, which means that the self must abstract itself from material and social entanglements” and avoid “overburdening sexual acts with an excess of significance” (Rubin in Vance 1989:267). The sexual behaviours of the small houses I interacted with during my fieldwork were not just about economic rationality or constraints but entailed a myriad of other personal and socio-cultural factors. The actions of these small house relationships fit into what Hunter (2010) termed 'the materiality of everyday sex'. He argued that, “…key to understanding the materiality of everyday sex is not love’s absence from relationships but how money and love come together in new ways” (ibid 2010:179). In this chapter I will show that small house relationships exemplify how the economic, social, cultural and personal spheres are not highly differentiated or contradictory but are linked in many ways.

2.0 Categorizing small houses

I went into the field targeting a specific class of women: ‘middle class’ women. I had the idea that since these women are somehow financially independent, they must be involved in small house relationships for non-monetary reasons. However, during fieldwork, I realised that the small house phenomenon is embedded in the everyday complexities of economic, social and political spheres for middle-class women. I also realised that there is no one definition or explanation of what a small house is. It is more than just a quasi-polygamous union as asserted by Chingandu (2007) and Christensen-Bull (2013). Hungwe(2011:66) profers a more encompassing explanation of a small house by highlighting that the small house relationship “goes through phases” and that the woman’s levels of agency, empowerment and “conceptualizations of what it means to be a small house and expectations from the
relationships changes over time”. Women are a diverse group and how they act reflects a combination of their structural positioning and their own unique personal histories and experiences (Kabeer 1994). This is the reality I was confronted with during fieldwork and to try and make sense of the small housing experience, I came up with three categories or labels—‘the temporary small house’, ‘no money no honey small house’ and the ‘que sera sera small house’—in which I grouped the women according to their narratives and experiences. These clusters do not necessarily provide an exhaustive set but in fact I used them to organise my field material and observations hence, the narrative form. Nonetheless, as I will show, this was not a simple and straightforward exercise and women’s experiences straddle these different categories taking different forms as the relationships went through different phases.

2.1 The “temporary small house”

This category comprised of six women who displayed characteristics of being strong, independent, empowered and radical. These women’s motivations for engaging in small house relationships mirrored a post-feminist stance that relationships are about pleasure and fun. The women in this category used the word ‘temporary’ in describing their small house relationships and they also indicated that this was just a passing phase as they wait for ‘Mr. Right, a white wedding and a marriage’. Women in this grouping were single, never married, childless and in their late twenties to early thirties. They met their partners through various platforms including work, though friends and even at church. Their relationships reflect what Giddens (1992) and Hunter (2010) terms romantic love and confluent love as the women choose relationships that they are able to exit at their will. Women entered into these relationships fully aware of their temporary nature and highlighted that they had explicitly agreed with the man that they would move on as soon as they found an eligible bachelor who was willing and ready to marry them. All the women in this group noted that their married partners readily agreed to this arrangement since they were not willing to commit to a small house relationship. In fact, being open about the temporary nature of the relationship allowed the couple to fully enjoy the relationship as both would be aware that they were in it for fun and pleasure. This also helped the couple avoid many of the complications that come with attachment or commitment.

Women in this group explained that they set what they termed the ‘Terms and Conditions’ (T&Cs) of the relationship. They further noted that they were particular about protecting their
personal space and that they simply wanted a partner who would be fun to be with and knew how to ‘please a woman’ (sexually.

“I love good sex hey, a man who knows what to do with my body and not just fumble around. If the sex is bad, I won’t stay. What’s the point in staying?” (Dora)17

Money was not a central concern in these relationships although one woman acknowledged its importance. Dora, a lawyer aged 29 stated:

‘I’m not looking for his money but of course I would love my guy to be able to provide financially. Who wouldn’t like that? Even the guy who will eventually marry me should be able to provide for me, though I know I’ll be having a good job then!’ (Dora)

Sexual pleasure and the idea of ‘having fun’ seemed to be their central motivation for being in these relationships. Small housing was seen as a ‘waiting phase’ and the men involved were called ‘time-pushers’. Women's focus on bodily pleasure, sexual fulfilment, personal freedom and happiness was also exhibited in their carefree attitude about how the general public views small houses. These women displayed a form of agency by re-appropriating the term small house to mean women who are particular about the kind of sex they get, seek sexual satisfaction and are ‘free’ from the patriarchal baggage that comes with formal marriage.

Not all the women in this category had a carefree attitude and some were quick to point out that the public should focus on other social ills in the country, like corruption, prostitution and poverty. I met Ruru, a 26-year-old hotel manager during an outing with a group of friends and during an informal discussion on how people perceive small houses she voiced her concerns:

17 All participants’ names are pseudonyms.
“It really bothers me how people are concerned with what happens in somebody’s bedroom….have they finished deliberating on how to end corruption and poverty” (Ruru)

It is interesting to note that most women in this group were in some way still concerned about being socially accepted as indicated by their desire to find a Mr. Right to settle down with. 'Mr Right' is a term that women used to refer to the man who would marry them in the traditionally accepted manner, that is, by paying lobola and having a so-called 'white wedding'\(^\text{18}\). These two practices are what constitute a 'proper marriage' in Zimbabwe. The issue of a ‘proper marriage’ or lobola came up frequently, and spontaneously, in my conversations with most women in this category. One woman, Dela, noted:

“So, with Mr C we’ve had it going on and off for the past 3 years but he knows that I’m looking for a single guy to get married to who will pay lobola. Everything is Ok between us but honestly I need my own man to pay cows for me!” (Interview with Dela:02/05/2014).

Contradictions in these women’s behaviours regarding their assumed independence and deviation from societal expectations norms and their desire to fit into socially ascribed roles (e.g., being a wife) illustrates how social and cultural factors overtly influence behaviour and choice of sexual partners (Thornton 2007). As Hill-Collins (1990) notes, these women are experiencing a form of self-censorship denoted by how their interpersonal relationships and ways of thinking are invaded by overbearing hegemonic moralistic or cultural ideologies: they desire independence by engaging in small housing but this is only a temporary measure as they ultimately want to be in a dignified and socially acceptable union. These small houses are therefore somehow entrapped in what Hill-Collins (1990:166) terms a “sexuality that simultaneously oppresses and empowers”.

The ‘temporary small-house’ highlights a number of issues about Zimbabwean society and the complexities that shroud so-called independent, educated, empowered middle-class

\(^{18}\) A white wedding refers to a traditional Christian concept of a wedding where the woman wears a white gown during the ceremony as a sign of purity and simplicity. In contemporary terms a white wedding only refers to the wedding ceremony in general with wedding dresses taking various colours and styles just as the original sign of purity/virginity is no longer significant www.bbc.com/369249/white-weddings/
Zimbabwean women. This particular configuration of circumstances openly acknowledges the multiplicity and fluidity of middle-class women’s identities as well as the contradictions between one’s aspirations and actions. These women have tapped into what Giddens and Bourdieu (in Ells 2003) terms a ‘plastic sexuality’ and fun ethic, respectively, which are relationships that have arisen with the ascent of the new middle classes and that are entered into just for the pleasure and intimacy. It can be argued that women’s moments of sexual freedom are a form of resistance to the generalised social and moral fabric that values marriage (Ells 2003). To some extent, one can assert that this group of small-houses is attempting to escape the profoundly hegemonic, social, emotional and sexually oppressive conditions that are mainly found in traditional cemarrriages. Furthermore, these women are also responding to an emergent post-feminist subjective meaning of sexual relationships that has been popularised through the media in ‘chick flick’ books, movies and advertisements (Gill and Scharpff 2011).

For women involved in the temporary small house, these relationships are similar to any other consensual sexual relationship in that both partners understand and acknowledge that the relationship is temporary no matter how interesting, loving or long it lasts. The men involved in these relationships usually state that they have no intentions of divorcing their wives. In turn, the small house women make it clear that they are looking for marriages in which they will be the first wife. The temporariness of these relationships can last anywhere from a few weeks to many years until, in most cases, the woman finds a potential Mr Right or the relationship disintegrates for other reasons. Therefore, being a small house from this group’s narratives is not a once-off experience as it is possible to be a small house at one point, break the relationship and start a new one with a potential Mr. Right, who might, unfortunately, turn out not to be the Mr. Right. A woman in this position can then find themselves back in another temporary small-house relationship. This was the situation for Lulu, a 31-year-old entrepreneur. During an interview with her over a cup of coffee she passionately explained:

“My dear, no one really wakes up one day planning to become a small house. You meet a guy and maybe fall in love and it will just happen that the guy you chose for this waiting period happens to be a married dude! We get into these relationships looking for love, pleasure, [and] some time out from hunting for Mr. Right and specifically targeting to be involved with a married guy.” (Lulu)
Although most of the women in this group claimed that their involvement in small house relationships was not premeditated and was not motivated by financial benefits, they were all involved with well-to-do men who were financially stable. Most of these women had received expensive gifts like smartphones, jewellery, cash and were regularly taken out to expensive restaurants. Still, these women insisted that they never asked for cash directly and the cash they had received was delivered by third parties via Ecocash. This money was denoted as lunch money or money for the woman to spoil herself with at a body spa or hair salon. This made the cash ‘easier’ to receive as it was an unexpected gift and was thus considered to be a romantic gesture rather than an expected transaction.

Such an effort by this group to differentiate themselves from the other women—those who ask for or expect cash and the somewhat explicitly financially dependent women to whom I turn below—could be seen as an effort to retain their personal independence, which they saw as being lost once someone is financially dependent on a man. As one woman pointed out, retaining one’s personal independence meant that it would be easy for the woman to exit the relationship when she felt she wanted to. At the same time, showing some financial independence meant that one would gain some level of respect from the man who realised that the woman was not in the relationship for her economic survival. It can be argued that women in temporary small houses are trying to negotiate for, and retain their power and control in the domains of sexual pleasure and exploration and that they are exercising agency by re-shaping the contours of most heterosexual relationships in Zimbabwe, which are characterised by gendered power imbalances. However, in trying so hard to re-shape such relationships, it is clear that women find it difficult to completely divorce themselves from generalized expectations and exchanges that take place in sexual relationships. For instance, one woman had once received $300 through Ecocash as ‘lunch’ money, an amount that was obviously excessive, but she had pocketed the whole amount with the intention of paying her other important monthly expenses. Hence, although this romantic gesture from the man was more than welcome, she would never directly ask for financial help from her partner. Such favours, exchanges, gifts are part and parcel of everyday intimate relationships (Zelizer 2005) which however, these women are trying, unsuccessfully, to detach themselves from.

19Ecocash is a mobile phone payment method that enables Econet customers to send and receive money, buy prepaid airtime and pay for goods and services. (www.econet.co.zw/ecocash/).
2.2 ‘No money no honey’ small houses.

Some women were quite upfront that their main motivation for entering into small house relationships was monetary. Ten women out of the twenty-five small house women fell into this category, making it the most common category. One of my interviews with Tariro, a 32-year-old manager at an insurance company, encapsulates the general motivations and views on small housing that women in this category held. She explicitly noted, in the presence of her other friend whom I placed in a different small house category, that:

“I’m in this relationship for the money dear. If I say I love this guy I’ll be lying to myself and to you. But he is fun to be with, he respects me, I think he somehow loves me (Laughs) and I honestly love spending time with him as long as we are not going to be having sex. You know actually i think I am developing some real affection for him… (Laughs) But CC is not really my kind of guy, the sex is bad …no atrocious is the word here (Laughs). Believe me…even kissing with him is a mission impossible but at least he is not a mudhara (old man). We have a four-year age difference and I feel comfortable walking around with him. The other good thing about him is that anodusa (he is generous with his money) and when he spoils me he treats me like a real queen, with respect, I love it!. (Tariro: 07/08/2013)

However, it was apparent from the women's narratives that their need for money was not primarily for survival and that they would not engage in cash for sex transactions where a man pays right before or after a sexual encounter as happens with commercial sex workers. Also, women reported that they would not accept to have a man give them any amount of money explicitly pegged for basic needs like rent payment or food. This category’s main ‘terms and conditions’ included having a financially stable man who would be able to provide for and maintain their lavish lifestyles. The latter was evident in the upper middle class apartments they rented, the private schools they were sending their children, their expensive shopping habits and equally expensive cars they were driving. Women in this category frequented expensive pubs, learned to play so-called upper class sports like golf and some met financially well-off men during work meetings and conferences.

Women in the 'no money, no honey' category comprised mainly of divorcees and single mothers in their late 20s to late 30s. These women generally explained that they had been
through many experiences with men, particularly through their failed marriages, and their attitude was that they ‘have been there and done that’, an expression that denoted sarcasm about love and relationships. It also indicated their negative attitudes towards formal marriage. An afternoon spent shopping with Tamu, a 32 year-old pharmacist with an eight year-old son, was an eye-opener into the experiences of some of the women in this category. Tamu explained that she fell pregnant during her final year at college and did not get married. However, the father of the child migrated to Australia in 2007 and is not really supportive as he sends money for his son sporadically. Tamu presented herself as an ambitious woman and highlighted that her mission is to provide the best for her son and also to establish her own chain of pharmacies. She emphasised how busy her life is as she is always on locums (after normal working hours part time jobs) at various pharmacies around town to ensure that she maintains her middle-class lifestyle and keeps her son at Gateway primary, an expensive private school in Harare. She highlighted, however, that she wanted to break this type of ‘hussling’ in five years’ time. Tamu was small housing with a former college classmate. She narrated:

“Well dear I want a good life and no doubt I am working hard for it. I want to build my own house, I want to keep my son in a private school when he goes ku [to] secondary school, I want my own pharmacies and stop this hussling life working for others…hah I’m tired of these locums sha…and there comes this dude, an open cheque and you think I’ll leave it…(Laughs). So, I knew this guy from campus and funny enough he was friends with the father of my child…(Laughs)...We sort of bumped into each other in town and he started showing interest. You know how maZimbo (Zimbabwean) men with money behave…So I was like well, if he thinks he is on top of the game then I might as well play it with him. You know he is monied and has managed to set up a few pharmacies in town. So he could be my golden ticket to setting up my own stuff. He can start by giving me one of his pharmacies… (Laughs)...but I’m serious watch this space dear. Ndichamudya hangu (I’ll use him;[lit: I’ll eat him] until he sees kuti haana kungwara[that he is not the smart one].

In many ways, Tamu’s story resonated with other women's stories in this category. In as much as women in this group presented themselves as financially empowered and independent, most needed money from male partners for the following reasons: to subsidize
rent in upper class suburbs, send their children to private schools, to start or finish off the construction of their houses in middle-class suburbs and to top up and buy posh cars like Sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and Mercedes Benz. Interestingly, this showed how they were striving to maintain their middle class lifestyles, a mission which seemed impossible just on their salaries. It can be argued that these women were getting overwhelmed by the demands of a consumerist middle class status and the need to secure their futures, for instance, by investing in their children’s education and by building their own houses, hence putting an end to the high rentals they were currently paying.

It was important for these women not to appear desperate for financial support, which is why they stated that they would never demand or ask for money from their male partners nor accept what they called ‘charity’ money which is money that will be offered by a man marked for basic essentials like rent or food. The main tactic women used was to attract an economically well off man and then make him believe that they were already living lavish lifestyles and had expensive tastes. This, they explained, would challenge the man to match her standard of living by providing her with gifts or cash befitting her particular tastes and lifestyle. These women thus manipulated most men's desire to be the provider, which is dominant in patriarchal conceptions of masculinity. Chihelele, a 29-year-old single mother and project director at an international NGO, highlighted this by noting:

“So, I’m dating this Minister guy [i.e., a top government official] and we’ve had sex once so far. We met during this other business meeting at my workplace. You know I’m the boss there and the day we met I was dressed to kill! I’ve never asked for money from him so that he thinks I’m not after money but I just told him that I’m off to SA for a few days for my shopping. As a man, I know he’s going to push himself to show kuti murume (he is the man) and give me money either for the ticket or for shopping. I’m not going to ask for it but I know he is going to give me something just to prove he is a man of my standards (Laughs)!”

Women in this group have learnt to use their sexuality as a powerful resource (Tamale 2011) and as ‘erotic capital’, which Hakim (2011) defined as –the ability to use their sexual power over men to appropriate men’s surplus, either through marriage, divorce, dating or other forms of disguised prostitution. However, this situation presents a paradox as it denotes a form of agency where these women are able to capitalise on their sexual appeal and at the
same time makes apparent the “contradictions, paradoxes and anomalies of our society, as well as the complexities of patriarchal capitalism” (Tamale 2011:147). In a way, these women use their appealing sexuality, as well as providing (and receiving) sexual pleasures to men which they disguise as non-economic relationships as they do not want to be confused with or classified as sex workers. Yet as they narrated their stories, it is apparent that their main motivations are monetary, opportunities to get linked into beneficial economic networks and gain other resources from the relationship. One can explain their agency as having successfully managed to manipulate sex, turning it into a gift with the expectation of receiving more in the form of material or monetary gifts from the man who would have been provided with sex. In this sense, sex as a gift becomes a symbol, a catalyst that fosters obligations, friendships, allegiance, and alliances that are not returned immediately yet with much more than was given is expected to be returned, (Caillé in Hart et al 2010). Packaging sex as a gift turns away from direct transactional sex which can lead to labelling the women involved as homo-economicus, and builds into the concept of the materiality of everyday sex where economic motives in sexual relationships are seen as intermingled with social emotional bonds, (Hunter 2011; Haram in Arnfred 2004; Hakim 2011).

The “no money no honey” small houses are women who are seeking some self-fulfilment and who therefore use erotic capital to manipulate their relationships with generous married men. Ultimately, these women desire long term economic security in the form of owning a house or running a personal business. This can potentially cushion them from the insecurities posed by a terminated work contract. In this sense, Zelizer’s (2005) observation that there is a multiplex mingling of intimacy and economic transactions better explains the situation that the ‘no money no honey’ small houses find themselves in. Most of their relationships were long term and not devoid of some budding form of affection though most of the women focused on what they gain or intend to benefit from the relationships. As Carter (2011) points out, sex evolves into part of an economic system and gets intermingled into the local sexual economy20 where its price is not limited to money may include respect, love, time, affection, non-monetary gifts and at times, commitment. Small houses in the 'no money no honey' category inconspicuously expect the man to assist with paying a child's private school tuition, paying for a shopping trip to South Africa or for the construction of her lavish house.

20 Here by local economy I mean a set of economic, historical, social, personal values that defines and characterize sexual relationships in a particular context.
and they consider this as a legitimate response to the dictates of the ‘local sexual economy’, which influences the behaviour of individuals and shapes what people need and want. The local sexual marketplace is defined by Baumeister and Vohs (2004) as a setting in which women are the agents seeking an advantageous deal and men are buyers looking for plenty of sex, some fun, time-out from their marriages as well as companionship without spending too much effort and commitment. The sexual marketplace is created based on the ‘going rate’ in that particular community of middle to upper class individuals.

The two comical quotes, derived from my conversations with two different women, illustrate how women in the ‘no money no honey’ category draw a strong link between their relationships and economics:

―Hah, now I have to sit down and balance my books. It’s about time I reconcile my gross habits with my net income.” (Chihelele)

―If you sleep with Mr X, you’ll have insured your life‖ (Fungi, a 28 year old university lecturer)

These women were referring to their small house relationships with financially well-off men who had not yet started ‘paying off’, but whom they had great expectations from. The women were very calculating in their choices as they had gone for a local business tycoon and a government Minister, respectively, but had deliberately avoided making these relationships explicitly sexual transactional ones. Numerous interviews and interactions with these women revealed that they had the intention of getting as much material rewards as they could out of the relationships, including gifts, cash, business tenders and deals, which they would not have been able to access without these men serving as direct capital or as links to strategic networks. Chihelele and Fungi, who were close friends from high school, were determined women who wanted to build futures for themselves using the erotic connections they had with well-to-do men. In separate follow-up interviews they each noted:

―I am building a house and you know how difficult it is to build from scratch. At least I got a loan from my bank but that was just about it. It was just enough to purchase the piece of land. So, X is building my house for me, but of course he doesn’t know it! He
gives me lots of cash for hairdos and shopping and I’m not stupid hey, I wont do a $500 hairdo for now, the money goes to the construction of my house! $500 can buy me more than 2000 bricks!
(Fungi)

“I need space for my business. This food business I’m into is going so well and I don’t want to continue selling from my car boot. I need a restaurant and I know I’ll do well. I just have to sweet-talk XX and I know he’ll get me the best spot in town. He has the connections and he can pull that one easily”. (Chihelele).

However, the women in the ‘no money no honey’ group easily fall into the common stereotype of studying women's sexualities by instrumentalising their sexual behaviours. Though I classified them in an almost instrumentalising category mainly for the purposes of organizing my data and observations, their stories, like those of women in the ‘temporary small house’ group also had overtones of love, romance and desires despite some of the women’s attempts to draw a line between love or pleasure and doing ‘business’. A conversation with Biggy, a 30 year old single mother and projects officer at a local NGO, revealed how complex these relationships can become despite one having set clear objectives about the nature of the relationship. I had spent a whole afternoon with her explaining to me her background, talking about her failed marriage and defining herself as a ‘strong willed’, character and an ambitious woman who had gone through numerous small house relationships and had avoided falling in love. However, the following day I accompanied her on a shopping trip for her monthly groceries and I felt she finally loosened up when she made the following remark:

“Hah Milly, I’ve done (the) ‘I’m a superwoman and I can do it alone’ stances and what I’ve learnt during those times is that love doesn’t put food on the table! Don’t get me wrong, I don’t mean that I don’t want or need someone to love me. I do! I’m a woman just like any other woman, like you. But I’ve learnt that love is not everything. Now I plan my game and I play it to win. I get into a relationship with a mission, and it’s not about basic survival because I’m not a charity case woman but Im just conscious that I need to improve my life. I need my own house for my kid and myself. I have to stop renting one day. So I have targets, I know my targets and I just have to make sure that I don’t lose focus and the way to go is
don’t fall in love but at times its difficult sha, like to be honest the situation I’m in now, it’s confusing me! I’m losing focus and I can’t stop it, I’m somehow falling in love with this guy! Big time and I mean falling nose dive and I cant stop! He just happens to be a full package, got the money and the charm to make a woman weak in her knees. (Laughs)” (Biggy)

This goes to show the complexity of the act of small housing in that these relationships are not always just about sex and money. As Zelizer (1997) points out, each sex act becomes a value that is transacted in complex networks of exchange with direct and indirect outcomes including economic benefits, affection, and companionship amongst many other things. Thornton (2009:30), in turn, notes that “sex as a social action has properties of motive, intention, unintended consequences and working misunderstandings…” Some of the unintended outcomes of small house relationships in the ‘no money no honey’ category were developing affection for the man and at times deriving sexual pleasure from the relationships that they had originally labelled as being just for money. This shows just how difficult it is to draw the line between ‘business’ and ‘pleasure’ as the world of intimacy is also about people trying to locate themselves into webs of social relations (Zelizer 2005).

2.2“Que sera sera” small houses

I chose to call the third category ‘que sera sera’ a Spanish phrase meaning ‘what will be will be’. Singer Doris Day, in a 1956 song titled ‘que sera sera’, popularized this phrase when she sang about being a little girl asking her mother about the future and, how as an adult she also asked her partner the same question. Later, her own children also asked her the same question and by then she had learnt that the response is always the same: “que sera sera, whatever will be will be, the future is not ours to see..”. This response meant that one should not worry about the future as nobody can tell the future. The que sera sera category comprised of nine women in their twenties who had just started out their careers and were relatively new to the middle class lifestyle. Unlike women in the previous two categories mentioned earlier, these women did not seem to have set their own terms and conditions (T&Cs) but, instead, followed those set by the man in the relationship. Most women noted that the men’s T&Cs were mostly around issues like the times he would be available to see the woman and the time that she could call or should not communicate with him. One woman’s T&Cs included informing her man of her daily plans and whereabouts.
The phrase ‘que sea sera’ rightly fits women in this category as most did not seem to have any firm positions about their relationships and left all for the man to decide. From their narratives, these women's relationships were determined by what the man dictated and they seemed not to have any position as to where the relationship would lead. For instance, I had a conversation with Patie, a 28-year-old bank teller who still lives with her parents in an upmarket suburb. I asked her where she saw her relationship going and her response was:

“Well, I don’t know! It’s all up to X, he’ll decide what he wants. If he wants the relationship to go on, I’m happy, if he wants to marry me, I don’t mind and if he decides to break it, then that’s life…”

(Patie)

Most of the women in this category stated that they were ‘in love’ with their partners and often hinted that they would not mind bearing children in these relationships or have the man pay lobola to their families if he so wished.

What was especially striking about women in this category was the paradox between their sense of powerlessness in the relationship and yet, at the same time, they displayed a high level of sexual agency that the women exhibited. Most of the women seemed attached to their men by some deep level of affection and love which overshadowed even partner violence that some of them experienced in their relationships. As aforementioned, the women in the que sera sera group were in their twenties, had never been married and did not have children. In light of this, one would expect these women to be ‘free floaters’ in the sense that they could move on at any time for ‘better’ relationships yet some stayed in abusive relationships and they appeared to believe that they have no prospects of finding single men on the dating and/or marriage market. Some women seemed to have resigned their fate to these men as accentuated by Farie, a 26 year old accountant, who casually responded to my question about finding an unmarried man to settle with by openly laughing at me and asking me:

“Ah, where do you find single guys these days? The available single guys in Harare are those good-for-nothing boys who loiter at Ximex mall daily. That’s the caliber of single men left out there. Any other good man you might see around and seems like the proper guy you’ve been waiting for is already taken my dear. So I might as well
Most women in this group had the longest running relationships, which ranged from two to seven years, compared to women in the other groups. Their relationships mirrored the common patriarchal marriage relationships where there are agreed values, practices and norms that legitimate unequal power between the parties involved with the women seemingly content with their positions of dependency. For these women, small housing was like any other serious romantic relationship and they demonstrated what Holland (2004) referred to as a “fluffy femininity”, that is, a sense of womanhood characterized by the desirable and rewardable feminine traits of self-accepted subordination, and accommodation of the interests and desires of men. Their ‘whatever will be, will be’ attitude was in the hope that their current relationships would develop into a polygamous marriage were they would be seen as legitimate second wives.

Remarkably, one would expect these women to be financially dependent and trapped in a form of ‘provider love’ (Hunter 2010) mentality yet most of them spoke about how they would not allow their men to provide them with excess gifts or money. Their reasons for this ranged from the need to distinguish themselves from the ‘common’ or ‘loose’ city girls who are dependent on men’s money, to a desire to maintain some form of autonomy as independent middle-class individuals. Therefore, although they still received gifts and money in their relationships, they had self-ascribed moral limits as to what they considered acceptable or normal and what was excessive.

3.0 Bridging the boundaries: a quest to understanding the small house.
I classified small houses into three categories for analytical purposes; in reality, however, women's lived experiences straddled these distinct categories. Women’s relationships transformed regularly and the motivations and meanings attached to a relationship changed over time. Hungwe's (2011) article on small house women in Zimbabwe points out that there cannot be a single definition of a small house given the complexity of women’s lived experiences in these relationships. However, there are fundamental similarities in all small houses, such as the fact that the women are involved in sexual relationships with married men, who are often well-resourced and economically well off. From my fieldwork experiences, I observed that these relationships do not necessarily have to be long term or secretive as suggested by Chingandu (2007), who has written about small houses in
Zimbabwe. In my study, different women had different experiences depending on their motives, how the relationship was progressing and the meanings that they attached to being a small house. Some relationships had lasted for a few weeks due to incompatibility and irreconcilable differences; in one instance, the official wife had found out about the relationship and threatened the small house with violence and witchcraft. Some small house relationships were not secretive as shown by the fact that close relatives from both the woman and man's side were aware and approved of the relationship.

Another strikingly similarity across all three small house categories was that all the women were after some form of personal satisfaction or benefit, be it financial, sexual or affective. Chapter 4 explores this issue in greater detail. As with all relationships (Zelizer 2005), the small houses in my study were transactional in nature with small-houses giving sex, companionship, and affection to their partners in exchange for money, attention, companionship, amongst many other material gifts and non-material support. It is important to note that some small house women were involved with men who were not necessarily wealthy and can therefore be thought of as lower and upper middle class men. For instance, one woman was in a relationship with an entrepreneur motor-mechanic who had just starting running a small workshop garage. They had met through her friend who had referred her to him as she wanted to fix her car and after the initial meeting he would fix her car for no charge. The nature of small house relationships concurred with Baumeister and Vohs’ (2004:344) theory of the sexual marketplace where “each couple negotiates its own price or terms and determines whether what they are involved in is a good or better deal depending on how it compares to the going rate within their community”. Each group of small houses had a different ‘going rate’ and these ‘rates’ were based on the levels of sexual satisfaction, affection felt and amount of money and types of gifts expected and received.

As discussed in Chapter 2, middle class status in Zimbabwe is an unstable status given the economic and political environment. Their lifestyles are constantly threatened by the instability and transiency that defines their middle class status given that the middle class have continued to be defined by their consumption patterns and not accumulation. Hence this is the situation that most women in my study found themselves in. They were leading relatively comfortable lifestyles, living in Harare’s middle class suburbs and sending their children to costly private schools. However, the temporariness of their lifestyles is an ever-present reality in their narratives. Women in the 'no money no honey' group noted that they were careful not to overtly present themselves in their relationships as being concerned about
money even though their principal motivation was to create social relations that would link them into strategic economic networks. Even in the post-crisis era, the economics of patronage still permeate most relationships, and have been worsened by the high levels of corruption in the country. One woman from the ‘temporary small house’ group explained that she needed links to start her business and that this meant establishing a relationship with someone from ZIMRA\(^{21}\) who would help her evade excessive customs duty when she purchases merchandise abroad for her boutique. Dating a well-to-do man who could connect her with influential people, like customs officials, was an important business strategy to help her evade the exorbitant taxes imposed on so-called non-essential luxury goods that she traded.

Regardless of whether a woman is in the ‘temporary’, ‘que sera sera’ or ‘no money no honey’ category, it should be noted that whichever way a woman experiences her sexuality is not entirely bound to their economic class but to other political, social, historical, personal and experiential connections, as Vance (1994) argues. These multiple intersections result in the complexity of women’s lived experiences and makes it impossible to give a single straight explanation of their behaviours. Hunter (2010) argues that money, love and sex are interlinked in complex ways that can involve political maneuvering whether deliberate or incidental. Shrage (1994) and Rubin in Vance (1994:267), on the other hand, lament that ‘sexual acts are usually burdened with an excess of significance’. However, if sex is seen as a social action, which Thornton (2009) argues, has motive, intention, unintended consequences and ‘working misunderstandings’, this renders any sexual act liable to some form of significance or meaning. In this sense, whether the woman is from the temporary small house category and is involved in the relationship for pleasure and fun, or from the ‘no money no honey’ group and outrightly seeks economic benefits or the ‘que sera sera’ groups which is motivated by love and romance, it is clear that across all categories the women’s motive for engaging in any particular type of small housing relationship somehow corresponds to the meaning they attached to this involvement. Arguably, women from the ‘que sera sera’ category who claim to be in love and who present their bodies as a ‘gift of self’ to their lovers are still embroiled in an economy of symbolic exchanges where sex creates and sustains networks of friendships, influence, mutual support, trust and love (Burawoy 2012; Thornton 2009). As Hunter (2010) argues, particular political and economic climates make sex have

\(^{21}\) ZIMRA is the Zimbabwe Revenue Authorities and this was in reference to the Customs duty department.
an immediate materiality. This applies to the Zimbabwean context, which is marked by uncertainties in the labor market for the growing middle class. Such relationships can be seen as a form of social capital where different forms of reciprocity and exchange take place for varying reasons.

In trying to understand the ‘materiality of everyday sex’ and how women experience and express their sexuality in certain political and economic situations, it is difficult to totally ignore the notion of women’s subordination and oppression in their quest for pleasure, happiness and love. The prevailing economic and social orders somehow define the way women (and men) experience their sexuality, which can entail phases of empowerment, agency as well as oppression. Yet, it is also imperative not to always assume that women are on the receiving end of patriarchy (Jewkes and Morrell 2011) even as one acknowledges the presence of modern fraternal patriarchy where women are subordinated to men (Pateman, 1988). This subordination, however, is not a constant in women’s sexual lives, which go through phases of stability and flexibility. Hence a woman motivated by money can potentially end up developing affection for the man in the same way that a small house that is motivated by love can also end up being more interested in the economic benefits of such relationships rather than in their affective benefits.

3.1 Breaking through yet staying within: the paradox of small-housing as liberating and constraining.

In my endeavour to comprehend what small houses are about, another emerging theme in the narratives of all the women across the groups was the notion of marriage, either having no prospects for it, or anticipating that it will happen with the current partner or with some ideal future Mr Right. In light of this, most women were concerned about the social status of their relationships and were floating in its ambiguities in terms of social recognition. Some women emphasized that they were content with their positions as small houses whereas quite a number at times expressed a level of discomfort with the way small houses are perceived by the general public. Many women in my study went out of their way to explain to me that they had met some members of the man’s extended family and that they were acknowledged as a significant other of the man. This was an effort by these women to gain some approval from the man’s extended family, which would validate their position as an important person in the man’s life and not just a secret lover or casual sex partner. Rubin’s (1994) concept of the ‘charmed circle of sex’ notes that there is a classification of sexual behaviours into a
hierachical sexual value system. Small house women were concerned about fitting into the social moral fabric at some point and be seen as engaging in socially acceptable ‘good, normal, married, non-commercial sex’.

Hill-Collins (1990:165) comments on the ‘self-censorship that is inherent when a hierarchy invades interpersonal relationships among individuals and the actual consciousness of individuals themselves’. Among small houses, this self-censorship is connected to the creation of subjective identities marked by how others identify these women as home-wreckers, immoral and a mutated form of sex workers. In turn, some of the women involved in small houses, for instance, those I placed in the temporary and ‘que sera sera’ categories identify themselves along the structures of a celebrated type of femininity where marriage (including polygamous) is upheld. However, this kind of subjectivity where the women would at times feel the socially inscribed identity of being the ‘other’ obtrusive woman in the man’s marriage or the woman who is not socially or culturally acknowledged as the legitimate wife, can be seen as culminating in the loss of power in defining one’s sexuality and/or femininity highlighted by their subordination to normative values of celebrated ‘fluffy femininities’. As aforementioned, most women were keen to be introduced to the man’s relatives and for some, they were willing to bear children in these relationships under the condition that the man would pay lobola first, a move that was meant to legitimize their relationship and offspring. Flo, a 27-year old accountant that I placed in the ‘que sera sera’ category, is an example of women who were willing to have children with men they were small housing with. In countless narratives she mentioned her desire to have children and lobola paid for her. During one lunch date she went beyond just noting that she desired to have kids with the man she was small housing with and went on to explain about her concern with child-bearing in this relationship:

“I don’t mind having his kids. I love him but of course I can’t just get him kids for free. He has to pay something to my parents. Can’t just give him free sex, free time and on top of that, free kids. No! Life is not that easy!” (Flo)

Flo, like many other women who were open to the idea of having kids, acknowledged that having a child in a small house relationship was viewed by the general public as socially unacceptable hence her desire for lobola to be paid as this would legitimise the offspring. In
some instances, the small house is taken as a second wife in a polygamous marriage. Moreover, talking about having children signalled ones preparedness to move the relationship to another level (of commitment, trust, affection) where there is unprotected sex. This had implications for condom use in the relationships with most women seemingly more worried about the repercussions of pregnancy and having children than HIV (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on condom use).

Most of the women I interviewed where in their late 20s to late 30s, and generally considered by Zimbabwean standards to be past the prime marriage age, which is ideally the early twenties. Their chances of marriage were further weakened by the fact that they are well educated and economically well off. In my initial interviews, most women seemed unconcerned about the general perception of being considered as past ‘marriageable’ age or not being the ‘typical marriage material’. In our subsequent interactions, however, I noted an constant conflict in the way they related their experiences and perceptions of being small houses. Initially, they suggested that small housing was a conscious ‘choice’ on their part that it liberated them from the strictures of marriage and was an expression of a ‘free’ sexuality. Yet they also talked about small housing being a ‘waiting phase’ until they found someone to marry them as a first wife or even as a second wife. Most women joked that the lack or absence of suitable unmarried suitors on the marriage marketplace meant that they were ‘stuck’ in sexual relationships with married men.

Another fascinating paradox in the small house relationships was the way monetary and non-monetary gifts were perceived. All small houses across the three categories were concerned about not overtly showing that they expected and sought the gifts they were receiving. They were concerned about not being seen as materialistic and hence risk being associated with women and youths who date older men to meet basic survival needs. Even the women in the ‘no money no honey’ category, who explicitly stated that they were using their erotic capital and maximizing it for material gains, were concerned about not being overtly materialistic. In one interview, I asked Chihelele, who was in the ‘no money no honey’ category whether she was genuinely not concerned with money in her relationship. She tried to evade the question many times before she finally responded as follows:

“(Laughs)...you really want to know the truth..yes, I want his money but I won’t ask or beg for it. He should know from the start that I’m not a prostitute and am not a desperate type of woman. I still
want him to respect me as a woman with dignity and not think I’m some cheap woman that these men are used to and think he can buy me with money” (Chihelele)

Most women across all the categories reported that they adopted the celebrated feminine characteristics of being ‘virtuous’, loving, non-materialistic, innocent, genuine companions and lovers and that they provided the same and even more home comforts than legitimate wives offered. Their celebrated self-reported differences with the man’s wife were mainly around the idea that they bring in a ‘technology of sexiness’, a term that Harvey and Gill (2013:56) used to refer to beauty, desirability, confidence and skills in a variety of sexual behaviours and practices and the performance of confident sexual agency’. As one woman highlighted in an interview,

“The problem with these big houses [the man’s legitimate wife] is that they get the ring, the house and the joint accounts and they relax. They forget how to be sexy and [they] start wearing these baggy Nigerian African attires and doekies [head scarves] to show that they are married. You can even tell that that’s a married woman by the way she walks [Laughs]. They think decency is in the way you dress and walk and then they start being boring sexually. I can still dress decently but sexy, cook for the man when he comes to my apartment, call him Daddy as well and do things [sexually] to him that his wife thinks are only done by prostitutes” (Biggy)

Large sums of money, as much as US$2000, expensive gifts and favours were commonly transacted in small house relationships. However, these transactions did not take place directly after a sexual encounter as typically happens in sex work. These gifts would come as part and parcel of everyday life and there was a remarkable ‘earmarking’ of money and gifts for occasions like birthdays, Valentine’s day and for spontaneous ‘treats’ like hairdos, lunches and spas. The women would also offer gifts for birthdays and other occasions, albeit of lesser value and in many instances they used money received from the same man. As Zelizer (1994: 215) argues, “earmarking currencies is one of the ways in which people make sense of their complicated and sometimes chaotic ties bringing different meanings to their varied exchanges”.
In light of this, small houses were conscious not to directly transact sex for money/gifts, directly ask for it or be noticeably financially dependent on the man. This is mainly because in relationships where the above-mentioned behaviours are present, money/gifts take a different meaning and this, in turn, shapes the meaning of the relationship. In a sense, these women were conforming to the existing moralistic general view that ‘money desacralises love’ (Cole and Thomas 2009). Hence they constantly engaged in a performativity of giving ‘pure’ love, an idea that negates the possibility or reality of money being a legitimate expression of love. Women's narratives of love and pleasure were often marred by their constant need to distinguish affective connections from the social and cultural politics regarding receiving money and other material gifts. This struggle to fit into the moral fabric of society highlights a form of dissonance in that they presented themselves as ‘free-spirited’ beings but simultaneously allowed themselves to be defined and constrained by dominant socio-cultural norms and values.

4.0 Conclusion
Small house relationships defy a single categorization; as they are a hybrid of classical romantic relationships; have characteristics of stable marriages as well as post-modern cosmopolitan open relationships. In some ways they also have the characteristics of ‘mapoto’ unions that were common during the colonial era in that sometimes the small house woman is known and acknowledged by key members of the man's extended family. Although some small houses were motivated by economic need, it was apparent that these relationships are not just about monetary gains and they illustrate how love, sex, desires and money are intertwined in a multi-faceted complex web of contradictory feminine subjectivities. Exercising agency is certainly not straightforward or a given in small house relationships but a cyclical process of gaining power and control and at times ceding power to the morals defining structures that rank and categorize sexual relationships. However, in understanding small house relationships, there is need to transcend the conceptualization of subject-object, power-pleasure, discipline-agency as antithetical and embrace the conflicting yet complementary ways in which these seemingly binary opposites come together in defining women’s sexualities and lived experiences in particular contexts. As shall be explored in the next chapter, these women’s lived experiences at times surpass these boundaries in logic defying ways, showing how they strive not to be curtailed by repressive social structures and health discourses that conceptualise sexual relationships in rigid, health-oriented perspectives.

© University of Pretoria
Chapter 4: Low risk women? Pleasure, HIV and sexual networks amongst middle-class small houses.

Chapter 3 identified and classified women’s small housing experiences using their different motivations for engaging in and the meanings that they attach to the small house relationships. However, in the previous chapter I focused more on exploring the dynamics surrounding small housing and its entanglement with monetary incentives notwithstanding affective and non-monetary motivations that were mentioned frequently by respondents. Hence, this chapter will examine these in greater detail and also reflect on how HIV risk is perceived and managed by women in small house relationships. Central to this chapter is the recognition that, despite various motivations and meanings and how these relationships actually play out, the risk of HIV infection is very high. Paradoxically, having a middle class background defined by higher education levels, a profession and/or stable salary seen as providing an established livelihood has generally been presented as protective against HIV. This chapter therefore interrogates the everyday lived experiences of small house women and shows how these relationships are not immune to HIV risk despite their high levels of knowledge about HIV, stable livelihoods and high levels of education. A form of feminine agency notable in narratives of pleasure seeking in sexual relationships, notions of trust and love and interestingly, apathy to and low perceptions of HIV risk are very present in these middle class women’s small housing relationships.

Poverty and lack of education and economic opportunities for women and youths have long been cited as the main factors that exacerbate the spread of HIV in Africa. These structural factors make women vulnerable and increase their risk of HIV infection, in part by driving them into sexual-economic relationships, which are characterised by unequal power dynamics that often make it hard for women to initiate and practice safe sex. In Zimbabwe, women’s involvement in transactional sex as a means of survival has been well documented (Chingandu 2010; Matshalaga 1999; Muparamoto and Chingwenya 2009; Muzvidziwa 2002). Public health discourses with their focus on epidemiology and disease control models...


have conceptualized small-housing as one of the key drivers of the HIV epidemic in Zimbabwe, which currently has the fifth highest HIV prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2013; UNAIDS 2006; Piot et al 2007). As mentioned in Chapter 2, this has seen the Government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the National AIDS Council, rigorously trying to address the challenge of small houses through behaviour change campaigns and development projects that educate people about the dangers of small housing.

Previous researches have found an association between wealth and HIV infection. Economically well off men in Africa have been shown to use their wealth to access the services of sex workers and to engage in multiple sexual partnerships (MSP)- particularly concurrent and overlapping, thereby placing them at high risk for HIV infection. Conversely, women’s disproportionate vulnerabilities have been linked to their lower socioeconomic status and to existing structurally-based gender inequalities (Hargreaves et al 2008; Jackson 1998; UNAIDS 2001). Researchers have posited that men’s motivations for having multiple concurrent sexual partners include peer pressure and dominant harmful masculinities which encourage such practices, sexual dissatisfaction with primary partners, and a desire for variety where sexual partners and sexual practices are concerned. On the other hand, most research has focused on youths and poor women’s motivations for engaging in sexual relationships. These include poverty, insurance against loss of a main partner and for economic advancement (UNAIDS 2009; Parker et al 2009; Leclerc-Madlala 2004; Shelton 2010). Epstein (2008) notes that these motivations contribute to the impression that sex in Africa is irrational, an idea that has been asserted extensively by non-governmental organisations and has led to the dominant public health and biomedically-based HIV responses.

Shrage (1994) argues that both men and women, regardless of socio-economic status or age, engage in extra-marital relationships and in multiple concurrent sexual relationships. My study focused on economically advantaged or relatively well-off middle-class small house women. My interest in this group resonates with current studies that have examined the interplay of socioeconomic status, level of education and HIV risk. Two of the most


consistent findings from this body of work have been that HIV is a disease of inequality, often associated with social or economic transition rather than a disease of poverty and that wealthier individuals, especially women of high socioeconomic status, are at high risk of HIV infection. This increasing body of evidence shows that the link between sexual behaviours, HIV risk and socioeconomic status is not a straightforward one. This disrupts the development discourses and ‘women empowerment’ approaches that link higher education and secure livelihoods with increased knowledge of HIV, more decision making power and greater sexual agency to diminishing vulnerability to HIV infection. In light of the existing literature and on-going debates around women’s sexual behaviours and their motivations for engaging in seemingly risky sexual relations, I therefore focused my enquiry on middle class women’s intricate sexual experiences within small house relationships. This approach is consistent with most social epidemiology findings that have actually shown an inverse relationship between indicators of socio economic status and most illnesses (Mumah and Jackson-Smith 2013). Taking poverty (seen as lack of education or stable livelihoods/income) as the main driver for risky sexual behaviours is too simplistic as sexual behaviours (and HIV risk) are too multifaceted and defy a single explanation.

As more women become educated, economically independent and empowered, HIV rates continue to soar in most southern and eastern African countries. Consequently, there is a need to explore other factors beyond poverty that drive women to engage in seemingly risky sexual behaviours. Halperin and Einstein (2009) suggest that multiple concurrent sexual partnerships and transactional sex lie at the root of the epidemic. Small housing, whether by low or high socio-economic status individuals is situated at the confluence of what are traditionally considered high risk practices as it has elements of transactional sex, sexual networking and stable marital relationships. Tsala-Dimbuene et al (2014) argue, however, that the focus on MSPs isolates a specific behaviour which does not necessarily help one to understand a person’s risk of contracting HIV. Therefore the question is ‘what actually happens in these small-house relationships that makes this presumably ‘low risk’ group of women suddenly become at high risk of HIV infection.


2.0 Exploring other non-monetary motivations and implications for HIV risk.

Mumah and Jackson-Smith (2013) argue that women of high socio-economic status are more vulnerable to HIV since they delay marriage and tend to have more sexual partners over time. These women are also said to have extensive sexual experience, which increases their chances of exposure to HIV. Furthermore, women of high socio-economic status tend to engage in sexual activities with men of high socio-economic status and whose sexual behaviours are more likely to have exposed them to HIV. However, some studies challenge the idea that delayed marriage is a risk factor and they show, instead, that marriage is a high risk factor in most sub-Saharan countries (Hirsch et al. 2009; Smith 2007; Wardlow 2007; Wolff et al. 2000). From the small-houses narratives, their relationships provided some form of independence and dissent from traditional marriage and gave them a certain level of control over their lives. I met Dora a 32-year-old accountant and divorcee, who often stated that she felt better-off as a divorcee than she had as a married woman. During a conversation one evening at her residence where she had invited me and two other friends of hers for dinner, she hilariously recounted the number of sexual partners she had. The other women did the same and jokingly checked with each other whether one had had a soccer team, basketball team or chess team (referring to the total number of sexual partners). During this conversation it was clear that Dora and her other friends also in their thirties, had had numerous sexual partners though in serial monogamy relationships. Yet, as explained by Dora, it was during her marriage that she felt more vulnerable to HIV than in her present small housing experiences:

“Hah, after what I’ve gone through for me marriage is a non-starter now. I’ve been there and done that. At least my parents vakadya pfuma yangu (were paid lobola) and so I can tick that box. I can tell you marriage for most people is not easy. Most women stay in horrible marriages just for the status. I did so for 5 horrible years until I decided enough was enough. It’s horrible to recall the experience of having to go and see my doctor with an STI dear! Yandaunzirwa mumba (lit: brought into my home) [by my husband]. Now I’m happier because I get to choose the man I want to date and if it’s not working, if I’m not happy or he starts being ‘funny’ I move out! Hapana chekumirira (nothing holds me back) (Dora)
In light of women’s avowed independence and agency in small house relationships, I wanted to explore how they managed HIV risk given that the nature of these relationships lack sexual exclusivity.

Women’s sexual behaviours were somewhat influenced by the media and in women’s social gatherings particularly notions of how to maintain a passionate and ‘exciting’ modern romantic relationship. These ideas are passed on to the women by the growing number of ‘sexual entrepreneurs’ who are typically hired during women’s social gatherings or parties to talk about how to have and maintain interesting and pleasurable sex (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of sexual entrepreneurs). I noted a certain pattern in most of the women’s narratives especially from the ‘que sera sera’ category. Most women seemed to be particular about condom use and insisted on it in the early phases of their relationships but this vigilance waned off as the relationship progressed. This, like many other women across the categories, was the case for Farai, a 26-year-old researcher working for an international NGO. We had had several interviews and chats where she had explained that she was small housing with a 32-year-old man for the past three years. She considered her relationship as a ‘steady’ relationship and talked passionately about how she was in love with JJ and how he was her perfect guy though at times she would be drawn back by the fact that she knew he was married and that would dampen her spirit as she really wished he was single and would marry her. I had asked her whether they use condoms and she chuckled and responded:

“Oh well, I don’t even remember when exactly we stopped using condoms. It’s one of those things, it just happened in the heat of the moment and that was it. Of course I used a morning after pill and now we are just careful…you know…but hah the condom is an on and off thing. Sometimes we do… (Chuckles)…but most times tinofarisa (we get carried away) and oh well I get the emergency pill. I just don’t want to be on those daily pills” (Farai).

Interestingly, none of the women I interviewed had ever insisted on getting tested for HIV with their partners. Most reported that they had mentioned HIV testing when their partners had first suggested stopping condom use. Yet, none of the women had consistently insisted on condom use and, as happened to Farai, they ‘somehow found themselves having unprotected sex’. This speaks to the spontaneity of sex, which poses a challenge to structurally-based interventions that promote education and economic empowerment. Ruru
openly admitted that having unprotected sex made her feel like her relationship had progressed to a much more committed one. I asked Ruru if she had ever had unprotected sex with the man she was small housing with and how this had happened. She responded:

“Oh well, we never really planned on how and when we were going to start having unprotected sex. It just happened and I really wasn’t bothered that it had happened. Maybe deep down I really wanted it to, just as much as he wanted it. And he was just so happy that we had reached that level of doing it [having unprotected sex] just like that. I also felt happy [Laughs]…fulfilled and being able to fulfil... [Laughs] Am I making any sense? I know it sounds crazy and you’re thinking, really Ruru? But yep, that’s how it happened.”

(Ruru)

A number of women acknowledged that their men put subtle ‘pressure’ on them to have unprotected sex. Women's decisions to have unprotected sex was either an impulsive choice that happened in the ‘heat of the moment’ or a calculated move that was meant to take the relationship to the next level such sex was seen as a gesture of commitment, love and trust.

Following the aforesaid sexual entrepreneurs teachings (however, mainly targeted to married women), my respondents narratives were very anti-condom use and followed, instead a discourse centred around pleasure/sensation, intimacy/connection and spontaneity/interruption (Higgins 2007). It is possible that these women could successfully negotiate for condom use but choose not to as a way of exercising agency in pursuit of pleasure. This is an illustration of how sex is not always mitigated by fear or the reality of diseases but is ‘socially constituted in terms of desire, practices, meanings and people’s experiences’, (Braun 2013:261).

2.1 Talking about HIV risk: ignorance is bliss.

I noted that quite a number of my respondents were not comfortable responding to my questions about HIV risk. It seemed that the issue of the risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases and the likelihood of being in a risky sexual network was more of an after-thought and an issue they did not want to be reminded about as they seemed to
have resigned their HIV status to fate. Some women talked openly about having had miscarriages during their small house relationships; one woman even professed to having aborted a pregnancy that threatened to break down her small house when she informed her partner that she was pregnant. These instances show that women engage in unprotected sex in their small house relationships. Concerns about the dangers of sexual networks and HIV infection were not at the fore of women's narratives and they described having sex as an activity that was entangled in their everyday experiences. That is, sex was either done as an expected performance in a relationship or was done for fun and pleasure.

Even though most women had consciously chosen not to raise the issue of safe sex, many were more worried about falling pregnant, though it still was not a a deterrent to ‘condomless’ sex as they recounted stories of being on contraceptives and using emergency pills which are a non-prescription drug in Zimbabwe. It appears that women prioritized sexual pleasure over any fears related to having unprotected sex. The idea of heightened sexual pleasure by engaging in ‘condomless’ sex was also a constant theme at the kitchen tea parties, bridal shower, baby shower and baby welcome parties that I attended during fieldwork. Legitimate wives boasted that they were able to enjoy ‘direct’ sex, that is, sex without condoms with their husbands (see Chapter 5) a priviledge which small houses also bragged about and scorned at big houses for thinking that they were the only ones entitled to the ‘flesh to flesh’ sex. Considering that some small house women were performing an acquiescent femininity in order to be viewed as ‘acceptable’ by their men, it is possible that besides narratives of seeking pleasure, some of these women’s failure to talk about or insist on condom use was compounded by social and cultural constraints that discourage direct communication about sexual desires and needs (Wolff et al 2000).

On the other hand, as Thornton (2009) and Hunter (2010) shows on women in South Africa, engaging in unprotected sex with one’s partner can be understood as a declaration of “seriousness” or commitment to the relationship. Ruru’s story was a clear example of a woman who felt that unprotected sex had taken their relationship a new/higher level of commitment. She had explained how since the first time they had unprotected sex, her partner had somehow changed, would visit frequently and spent more time with her and she felt that they had some new connection which she had not experienced before. She candidly noted:
“Sha, since the time we had it just like that things just changed. I think our souls just connected in that flesh-to-flesh moment. I had been saying no to unprotected sex for some time and that day somehow I just gave in…and it was magic…the connection. Since then XX haabve pano (doesn’t want to leave my house). I actually have to remind him that he has a wife and has to go home. Believe me, he actually wants to come and live in with me. And I know his daily schedule, from kubasa (work) to kwangu (my place). Daily akutoita kunge akadyiswa (he now acts like I gave him a love charm). (Ruru)

Besides engaging in unprotected sex, it was also clear that most of these women were involved in sexual networks, either in a simple love triangle that involved the official wife, the man and the small house or in bigger networks where the small house women had other sexual partners and the man had multiple small houses. Most women in the ‘temporary small house’ and ‘que sera sera’ categories had multiple concurrent sexual relationships at some point. Their reasons included being in overlapping relationships where they would have entered into a new relationship without officially terminating the one they were already in or as some explained, consciously choosing to have different partners to serve different purposes. I was intrigued by this notion of the women having partners designated for different roles (cash/finances guy; the outgoing/party guy; a booty call; the dependable friend with benefits) and whilst probing this I came across a phenomenon called the “Ben 10”; the name is taken from a popular cartoon series which follows the adventures of a 10 year-old boy with magical powers. Ben 10’s were younger men (usually younger than the women) that the women dated, ostensibly for the purposes of satisfying their sexual pleasure needs. Small house women explained that sometimes they are involved with an older man who can no longer satisfy them sexually or who is not interested in sex but enjoys parading the woman as a trophy in his circles of influence. However, women maintained such relationships with the older men for other reasons such as being linked to some bigger economic or political network or for the material or monetary gifts the men provided. In most instances, there was an understanding between the women and the young men that the relationships were not exclusive. Ben 10's were usually aware that there was a ‘main’ lover and yet were content with this arrangement. This was partly because they enjoyed being taken care of financially by the small houses (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion on Ben 10s). It was clear from the women's accounts that many Ben 10's also had ‘stable’ relationships with younger
girlfriends elsewhere. It is quite possible that a Ben 10's young female lover, in turn, may have another boyfriend or even a sugar daddy, who also has a small house and hence a complex sexual network.

Six out of the twenty women who were my respondents were involved with Ben 10s and five other women had concurrent sexual partners. As aforementioned, some of these partners would involve occasional sex with different men who would provide different services i.e a guy whom one calls on for having fun and going out for social activities and they end up having sex everytime they get together. In other instances women talked of some dependable male friends they would reach out to when in need of help with different personal matters and these were termed ‘friends with benefits’ where sex would be involved time and again. Interestingly, these women also talked of what they referred to as ‘booty-calls’- a dependable man who is called when one desperately needs sex and all other regular options are unavailable. This signified the extent of their sexual networks that they depended on for various forms of favours and the complexity of these was the everchanging concurrent sexual partners, including one-night stands and infrequent but long term partnerships. The risk in these sexual networks was difficult to classify as most women’s narratives highlighted their vigilance in protecting themselves with the one-night stands, and other infrequent-encounters sexual partners but however, had numerous encounters where they would narrate having had spontaneous unprotected sex with Ben 10s or the married man.

An interesting example came to the fore through Tino a 33-year-old business entrepreneur who was small-housing with James and was concurrently in a relationship with John, a Ben 10. I was privileged to chat to John one evening when we had gone out for drinks with the girls and we bumped into John in the same pub. He expressed that he was aware he is Tino’s Ben 10 and is not bothered by the 10 years age difference between them. He noted that he also has a younger girlfriend that his family knows about but in fact he feels that he is in love with Tino. This kind of love-web can potentially be damaging in instances where one of the people in the web/network is infected with HIV and members of the network are having unprotected sex. John and Tino had a few encounters where they had had unprotected sex. However, John stressed that he had not had any unprotected sex with his younger lover given how she was scared about pregnancy (not HIV) and as John recounted, she was not open to the idea of using other contraceptives to protect from pregnancy. However, it is possible that John’s young female lover could be having a sugar daddy and have unprotected sex with him and gets infected with HIV. In a single spontaneous sex moment, she in turn may infect John
or br infected by him, since he has had unprotected sex Tino (who does not know her HIV status) with the potential to pass it on to Tino (if she is negative). Tino will in turn infect James with whom she is small housing with and he passes it on to his wife and/or other small houses he might have and spreads to another network. It is also possible that there can be a smaller ring sexual network where the small housing man is the sugar daddy to the Ben 10s young female lover; yet, there is still a possibility of HIV infection. However, this abstraction remains so given that it was difficult to trace the actual extent and shape of the networks given the secretive nature of all the relationships involved. However, these relationships which can be part of a sexual network(s) are entered into for varying reasons: for the small house women it was mainly because one relationship could no longer fulfil all their desires as Cole and Thomas (2009) found among women in Tamatave, Madagascar.

Thornton (2008) describes sexual networks as types of intricate social structures with their own characteristic form and dynamics. As such, sexual networks are socially embedded and can lead to a better appreciation of the multifaceted social relations, meanings, emotions, roles and actions embedded in sexual relations. He argues that sexual networks are a form of social capital that are a response to unstable social networks. The sexual networks framework has been commended for going beyond individual risk factors, as is the case with the MCPs approach, and focusing on broader social structural and cultural aspects of sex as intertwined with social relations. However, as a model to fully understand HIV risk, the sexual networks approach has the main limitation that it views risk as directly related to the dynamic properties of the particular sexual network that one is part of. Furthermore, it is clear that not all sexual networks lead to the transmission of HIV; this is for example, in the case of an HIV negative que sera sera small house in a relationship with an HIV negative married man who has no other sexual partners besides his legitimate wife and the small house. Such a closed network of HIV negative individuals is considered less vulnerable. The sexual networks framework can also be argued as too deterministic especially when being part of such networks is presented as a way to extend one’s social networks. In as much as this can be the case with some individuals, however, Parker (2009) aptly notes there is need to balance the focus on the political economy of the body around issues of socio-economic and political vulnerabilities, on one hand, and exploitations with a focus on the body and its sexual pleasures. Other scholars argue that the study of sex should focus on pleasure as it is experienced within the complexity of sexualities that are embedded in multiple meanings, sensations and connections (Jolly 2013; Spronk 2009).
2.2 “Forget HIV, it’s been there, is there and shall always be there!” It’s all about pleasure! Eroticizing sex in a context of HIV.

Women in my study had fascinating and complex narratives about their motivations for engaging in small house relationships. In Chapter 3, I highlighted non-economic motives as reflected in the different categories of small houses that I came up with, however, with more emphasis on the ‘no money no honey’ category where the women’s motivations were presented as driven by their economic aspirations. The later category’s motives are directly linked to the evolution of the term small-house in Zimbabwe and how it is understood in generalised public discourses. However, some women, particularly those in the ‘temporary small house’ as well as the ‘no money no honey’ category, were equally concerned about pleasure and bodily sensations as they were about monetary benefits. I met with Biggy, a 30-year-old accountant whom I placed in the ‘temporary small house’ category during an NGOs public meeting. She was introduced to me by a friend who was already my respondent. Biggy was a free-spirited individual and all the times I spent with her she always had a raunchy erotic story to tell. She would jokingly say that her sex life would hit platinum sales in the pornographic category given that she was so open to talk about it and she found it exciting and provocative to be that explicit when talking about her sexual relationship. I had made an appointment with her and that day my plan was to talk about HIV risk and perception issues. However, she took me by surprise when she responded to my oblique questions about HIV issues and risk with some cynicism by saying:

“Hey, my dear forget HIV, it’s been there, is there and shall always be there! We’d rather talk about how sex is enjoyable than this issue of yours of scary diseases and death. Yes HIV is there and it can kill if you don’t take pills…so what? There’s more to sex than this HIV thing of yours!” (Biggy).

This kind of response was sobering for me given that originally I had set out to research on women’s sexuality beyond what I had argued were dominant public health oriented approaches medicalising women’s sexuality and hence omitting the nuances of lived experiences. Biggy’s narratives like many other women drew me to acknowledge that it seemed these women were more concerned about enjoying sex and avoiding pregnancy than worrying about HIV. Biggy, for instance was clear about the fact that she was waiting to find
a single man to marry her and so could not afford to get pregnant in a small house relationship as this would ruin her chances. For most small houses in my study, ‘protection’ meant taking precautions to avoid pregnancy, such as using the morning after emergency pills, and did not necessarily refer to precautions taken to prevent HIV infection. Biggy explained to me that:

“I’m not planning to get married to an already married dude. Won’t settle for second wife status! So, frankly I’m in this relationship for sex and I mean not just plain boring sex but gratifying sex! If it stops being pleasurable I’ll move on…of course we use protection… I don’t want to fall pregnant hey! Not from a married guy. And if we happen to forget to use condoms, it does happen at times…(Laughs).…then there’s the MA [morning-after/emergency pill]… [Laughs]”. (Biggy).

Biggy’s involvement in small housing was also complicated in the sense that she had other ‘fling’ or short-term and concurrent small-housing moments in addition to her main small house relationship. These ‘fling’ moments as she explained, were necessitated by the fact that her ‘main’ partner, although he provided gratifying sex, had a terminally ill wife and would regularly withdraw from the small house affair. Biggy would thus find short-term partners during these periods. She explained that her motivation was to find ‘good and pleasurable sex’ while her main lover took care of his personal problems. At one point Biggy had started dating a single man who seemed to be her perfect match but she dumped him after a short period because of his sexual immaturity. In another conversation she recounted how she had once almost found a Mr. Right - a single, middle-class man with a stable job and who was willing to commit to their relationship and was talking about the possibility of marriage. However, she left him too because he was a sexual amateur.

“Hah! I left the guy though he had everything a woman would fall for. Sex with him was horrible and he was small (had a small penis) for that matter. I just thought to myself, with the way I love sex, I don’t want to embarrass myself later in life as a married woman when I’m caught cheating on him because I just wasn’t ever going to be satisfied by this guy” (Interview with Biggy; 21/08/2013)
Intermingled in Biggy's narratives about seeking sexual pleasure, was the need to create social networks with men in influential positions whom she figured would be able to assist in her political endeavours as she hopes to run for a parliamentary seat in the future. Even though establishing social networks seemed secondary to her preoccupation with sexual pleasure, it is possible that Biggy was, as Thornton (2009) argues in his sexual networks theory, trying to maximize the size and diversity of her social network through a sexual network that would give her access to services that a conventional social network might not have been able to provide. Furthermore, it is also possible that Biggy was using her ‘erotic capital’ to diversify the pool of men who could potentially give her the pleasure she was seeking. These men would then automatically become part of her social network. Biggy's pleasure-seeking endeavours can also be seen as her way of exercising agency as in that she chooses partners who can satisfy her sexually and is not being curtailed by sociocultural expectations, fear of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV or by an acquiescent femininity. One could also see the influence of cosmopolitan cultures and the media in the way Biggy talked about pleasure and her sexual escapades: it was as if she was acting in a series of Sex and the City.

Besides, Biggy, pleasure was significant for the other women in my study even though they were not as explicit about it as Biggy was. The manner in which the issue of sexual pleasure came up in discussions was interesting. In most instances it was introduced by the women themselves in response to my questions about HIV. In most instances, most women were dismissive of the HIV question no matter how subtle I tried to put it across and changed the course of the discussion to other ‘lively issues’ [pleasure and other sexual experiences]. Yet, despite this popular remark to talk about ‘lively issues’ most women were still not able to talk openly and frankly about her experiences of sexual pleasure. In one conversation with Ruru who had also dismissed my question on HIV in a very casual manner she presented her own understanding of sexual pleasure as linked to her orgasm. Her descriptions of pleasure were centred on ‘a man who makes her come (orgasm)’ suggesting that she had previously been in sexual relationships where the men had failed to make her orgasm. Ruru explained that her current partner knew how to fulfil her sexually and that this was one of her reasons for staying in the relationship despite her family’s disapproval after she disclosed that he was married. Another woman, Dora, occasionally enjoyed talking about her wild sexual expeditions and would go into graphic details about her sex life with her main partner and a Ben 10. To her, sexual pleasure was about being ‘wild’ and not withholding one’s self from
exploring and experimenting with sex. In one account, she highlighted that she was now ready to ‘tone’ down her sexual desire because she ended up having unprotected sex with her small house partner, whom she suspected could be HIV positive. She noted that she enjoyed sex with him but always insisted on condom use. However, on that particular day she did not use a condom because:

“…the sex was so wild and this guy was jokingly saying I was emasculating him by keeping on wanting more sex, one session after the other. You see he is a huge framed man and as small bodied as I am he thought I’d be done with one round. So somewhere during the sex sessions he removed the condom and I didn’t even notice! It was just too good.” (Dora)

After the encounter Dora had contacted a friend, who was a pharmacist by profession, to prescribe HIV post exposure prophylaxis (PeP). I probed why she kept having sex with a man she suspected could be HIV positive and she retorted that it was just about the pleasurable sex.

These women’s narratives concur with Jolly’s (2007:2) argument that, “seeking pleasure entails breaking social roles, fears about loss of control, contracting an STI, triggering emotions, anxieties about not being satisfied…” Seeking pleasure entails embracing the possibilities of fun, enjoyment and opportunities and, at the same time pain, humiliation and losses. In the small houses experiences, humiliation would be experienced in cases where a man’s legal wife finds out about the relationship and there had been stories in the local newspapers where the legal wife would find means to embarrass the small house, for instance, by ‘putting up a show’ at the small house’s workplace or at a public place. A plethora of feminist literature has argued that in many cultural settings, sexual pleasure in heterosexual relationships is seen as a prerogative for men and women seldom express their desire for sexual pleasure explicitly (Tamale 2011; McFadden 2003; Allen 2012). Yet, these small house women were able to define what counted as good sex for them and how it should be expressed. This was in stark contrast to how sexual pleasure was discussed at the kitchen tea parties and baby showers I attended, where the majority of the invited guests were legitimate wives. In these gatherings, most of the hired presenters—or sex advisors—focused on highlighting the sexual ‘tactics’ that wives should use to guarantee their husband's
pleasure. They also pitted small houses against legitimate marriages by arguing that the former provided exciting and innovative sex, which is why husbands were leaving their wives in favour of small houses. Vance (1994), however, aptly notes that there are moments when women give up vigilance and control in an attempt to ward off competition from other women. Sex advisors thus taught married women how to revamp their sexual lives with their husbands. In some instances, the gatherings where religiously-based and presenters focused on the biblical principles of a 'virtuous woman' (King James Version, Proverbs 31). In these public presentations, men's sexual needs were given priority while women's sexual pleasure was configured in hetero-normative ways that can lead to the conceptualization of marriages as a site of oppression (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 2012). Yet, Gavey (2012) and Allen (2012) argue that one should be wary of positing pleasure and desire as indicators of sexual empowerment and agency and reifying it over more passive forms. Sinfield (2007) notes that there are individuals who are not interested in seeking pleasure in sexual relationships and that this should be taken as their right to do so. However, the obsession with sexual pleasure in the Zimbabwean context, noted through the rise of sexual entrepreneurs who have become a common feature at women’s gatherings, is seeing a reification of pleasure as unobstructed condomless sex (sex without condoms). While it is important to go beyond always associating sex with disease and pain and focusing on sex and pleasure “an uncritical celebration of pleasure can just be as damaging as a suppression of the possibilities of pleasure” (Jolly et al (eds) (2013:7). A complete appreciation of any sexual act cannot be achieved without taking into account individual subjectivities and the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts in which the act occurs. For instance, Ruru’s decision to engage in unprotected sex was not only premised on sexual enjoyment but on positioning herself as a potential wife who was willing and able to give her self sexually without any reservations. Condom use is often seen as antithetical to sex that is close, loving and monogamous (Higgins 2007). Biggy, for instance, was preoccupied with seeking pleasure and she also used her relationships to explore opportunities to network with the people who would help her pursue her political ambitions. For Dora, pleasure and danger were intertwined and ever-present realities in her life; fortunately, though, she was able to use her high socio-economic status and connections to access the post-exposure prophylaxes.

In a high HIV prevalence environment, it is almost impossible to discuss the issue of sexual pleasure separately from the reality of HIV and the sexual networks that one can be a part of—knowingly or unknowingly. Women in my study shared stories about enjoying
themselves and they temporarily shelved fears about the dangers of sex. However, as Vance (1994) argues, this contradiction represents the realities of women’s sexualities and sexual behaviours, which entail pleasure and happiness, on one hand, and oppression and humiliation, on the other.

2.3 Love and other affective dimensions of small-housing.

Intermingled in the women’s narratives on pleasure and desire for material gifts were narratives of love and desiring affection and commitment from their partners. These were expressed in such terms as ‘I am in love’, ‘I love this guy’ ‘I am falling in love with him’ as well as in narratives relating to enjoying each other’s company and spending time together during weekend-aways, going out to entertainment shows or dining out at restaurants. Women described their men as ‘caring’, ‘respectful’, ‘a real gentleman’, ‘warm’, ‘nice’ ‘for real’ in an attempt to express how they appealed to their emotions and was the main reason they were staying in these small house relationships. For example, Rufaro described herself as being in a committed small house relationship where she described the commitment as equally reflected by both parties. She highlighted that this commitment was evidenced by how she had decided to be faithful to her partner and she also believed that he had no other partner besides her and his legitimate wife. She reported being ‘deeply in love and prepared to be a second wife’ if the man she was involved with was willing or ready to pay lobola. She talked about how she loved spending time with her man, enjoyed sex with him and that they had stopped using condoms and were discussing the possibility of having her use a contraceptive implant. Rufaro was hoping that her partner would decide to pay lobola and formalize the relationship because she was ready to start a family with him.

Rufaro’s circumstances mirrored those of most women in the ‘que sera sera’ category who spoke about their relationships with overtones of sentimentality and affection. Most women in this category were prepared to settle down as official second wives. These women pointed out that they felt that they had met their ‘Mr Right’, who unfortunately happened to be married, and they were not going to give up their quest for happiness despite negative attitudes towards polygamy in the country. Interestingly, these women did not try to legitimise their relationships by drawing on cultural or historical contexts that permit polygamy. Instead, these educated middle class women were consciously choosing to become second wives and were convinced that they had found a perfect partner who just happened to be a married man. They chose to defy modern, Christian, public health and development
perspectives that discourage non-monogamy even though most were exposed to one or more such ideologies either in their workplaces or from family and personal values. Their experiences of love and satisfaction drove these women to transgress the boundaries of what are generally seen as acceptable relationships in the modern Zimbabwean context.

Being highly educated, Christian and generally seen as modern, cosmopolitan women offered an interesting paradox in how these women exercised their agency. They subscribed to what Giddens (1992) calls ‘confluent love’, which is defined by sexual permissiveness, and yet also subscribed to the idea of romantic love, which is defined by monogamy and sexual exclusiveness. Most women talked about ‘being in love’ and desiring marriage, which is based on ‘durable emotional ties’ rather than on short term passionate love (ibid 1992). These women were also able to defy Christian and statutory based concepts of monogamous relationships by choosing to be the ‘other’ woman and deciding to commit to relationships that are generally seen as unfair and exploitative to the women involved. Nonetheless, one can point to the complexity in trying to define relationships around love and commitment as this is impossible to objectively measure and classify the different types of love, how people love and their motivations for entering love or romantic relationship, (Fehr in Clark and Fletcher 2003). Rufaro’s account of love was heavily influenced by her traditional upbringing and her subjective Christian principles. This is why she desired to get married to the man she was small housing with in order to legitimize the relationship. For her, commitment meant practicing sexual exclusivity with her partner and being satisfied with the relationship despite the fact that her partner had a legitimate wife. Other women defined their experiences of being in love as feelings of being satisfied with the relationship beyond sexual pleasure and other fun dimensions of the relationship. Interestingly, the feelings of sexual pleasure, love and affection awakened the reality that one was a small house and not the legitimate wife hence many women's desire for the man to pay lobola and legitimize the relationship. Spronk (2014:35) highlights that “identifying the experience of sex as an important bodily pleasure for most people and as a perceptual knowledge that gives meaning and/or affirms social positions… shows how the body mediates culture and provides meanings that distinguish the self and others”. And yet, as Kulick (2014) argues, sexual experiences should not be seen as being just about social positions but also ideas of fantasies and identification. As such, small housing can be seen as a form of fantasy where these women experience their
dream relationships albeit the glaring reality of the existence a legitimate wife, a situation that in most instances inhibits them from fulfilling their fantasies and turn them into reality.

3.0 More than just untamed desires and motives: Rationalising ‘risky’ sex.

Being in love for most small house women involved progressing from protected sex with one’s partner to using long term hormonal contraceptives, which however, do not offer protection from HIV and other STIs. As Echols (1983) aptly notes, even feminist theorists have failed to agree on what it means for a woman to be ‘in love’ and the interrelated subjective experiences. Nonetheless, it is apparent that love was somehow equated to feelings of strong affection and commitment which culminated in notions of trust which led to terminating condom use. Yet, these women were aware of the dangers of HIV but still engaged in condomless sex and did not insist on HIV testing either. In most instances, women's generalised response to the question of why they knowingly engaged in these seemingly risky relationships was that they are in ‘love’ and would rather ‘talk about other aspects of their relationships’. Unlike their married counterparts whose increased risk to HIV stems from the fact that they are curtailed by traditional and religious obligations to offer conjugal rights to their spouses and to keep their marriages as a ‘reputational requirement’ (Smith 2013), women involved in small houses did not face the same constraints. Instead, these women's idea of romantic love was defined in what I thought were disempowering ways that increased their susceptibility to HIV infection even as they exercised agency in choosing to be in these kinds of relationships.

Most women in the que sera sera category conceptualisations of love and their form of agency was curtailed by cultural ideals of what romantic love entails and how emphasised femininities are supposed to behave in romantic relationships. Such emphasised femininities entail that a woman respects her man and his wishes and strives to please him. In turn, the woman is rewarded by material gifts, affection and ultimately marriage (payment of lobola). The desire or expectation to please one’s partner in cognisance of the legitimate wife who provides unprotected sex, as well as other potential partners who might be willing to do the same, can be a factor which places these women under pressure to trade off unprotected sex. In this context, this form of feminine agency can be critiqued as negative agency that still conforms to the gendered power dynamics and dominance, factors which have been noted as fuelling HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. HIV programming therefore needs to go beyond changing the obvious structural factors that fuel the spread of HIV and also consider the need to change underlying gender identities (Jewkes and Morell 2011).
In as much as I tried to get the women to give me concrete reasons as to understand why they do not insist on condom use in a context of HIV and why they do not go for HIV testing and establish each other’s’ HIV status before stopping condom use, not a single woman responded to these questions convincingly. From their narratives there was a general sense that HIV is not the immediate problem but that getting pregnant was as it could interfere with plans of getting married to a Mr. Right. An unwanted pregnancy had the further complication of having to struggle to legitimize the children born out of what would be considered an ‘adulterous’ relationship. Hence, using my observations from the way they tackled these questions, I argue that it could be to a certain extent, about either an inherent fear concerning their own unknown HIV statuses recognizing that most have already potentially exposed themselves to HIV or a lack of fear of HIV prompted by these women’s easy access to health care as well as access to ARVs. A lack of fear of HIV can be attributed to the current trends where HIV is no longer seen as a death sentence in the wake of the remarkable biomedical interventions reflected in the obvious government-led response shift from socio-behavioural programmes to a focus on management of HIV through PeP and lifelong anti-retrovirals. This position resonates with the South African case as noted in the 2012 HSRC “National HIV prevalence, incidence and behaviour survey” which clearly showed that there is a drop in perceptions of risk and in condom use across all age and status groups – put largely down to the increased uptake of ARVs. At the same time this lack of fear or rather an altered understanding of HIV can also be attributed to the media which has shifted from the ‘scare tactic’ to eroticization of HIV through stories and images of people living with HIV being portrayed as leading healthy lives, a factor that could be contributing to people losing their vigilance against HIV.

4.0 Conclusion

The above sections looked at the motivations and meanings attached to small housing as presented by the women who participated in my study. Small housing relationships could be seen as avenues for the expression of different feelings, identities, emotions, needs and desires that are subjective in nature. As Epstein (2008) and Thornton (2009) argued, sex is a logical or rational act and an opportunity for individuals to define themselves irrespective of all other socio-cultural realities. With the growing focus on sexual permissiveness and subjective understandings of love and commitment and how to pursue pleasure, public health and development specialists are faced with a challenging terrain that cannot be fixed with
straightjacket projects involving ‘women's empowerment’ or that are based on rigid characterisations of so-called high risk groups. Hence, it is important to understand the rationality behind what is generally understood as 'risky sex', especially in contexts with high HIV prevalence and incidence. Central to the notion of risky sex is how it interacts with individual risk factors, interpersonal as well as contextual factors that influence sexual behaviours and consequently affect the meaning of the interaction and determine whether protection is used or not. Such a comprehensive analysis might shed light on other innovative methods of HIV prevention as well resolve the question of causality. My findings also concurred with other studies that show that not all risky behaviour is irrational (Pinkerton and Abramson 1992; Odets 1996; Higgins 2007; O’Laughlin 2013). Rationality in these instances is posed as, for instance, risk eroticisation, no fear of HIV, perceived physical, emotional and psychological benefits like pleasure, intimacy, gaining trust, love and other material benefits which are seen as outweighing the fear of unprotected sex and/or the threat of HIV. Possibly, a fear of the possibility of being already infected or lack of fear of HIV embedded in the known successes of ARV intertwined with desires to express intimacy; trust as well as pleasure seeking endeavours greatly influences these women’s decisions to engage in unprotected sex. Hence, within a framework of subjective values, attitudes, desires and perceptions of individuals one might find answers as to why these well educated and financially well-off women engage in risky unprotected sex. This calls for public health and development specialists’ need to rethink the framework of determinants of diseases(in this case HIV) not just from an analysis of structural factors but a combination of individual behaviours, perceptions as well as the conditions influencing those behaviours and exposures. Hence, also of importance to consider are social relations as well as the social milieu in which small houses are located, issues explored in the following chapter.

28 Straightjacket in this context is used to mean prescriptive, fixed and restricted solutions.
Chapter 5: ‘Old’ and ‘new’ femininities at crossroads? Deconstructing the role of the ‘sexual entrepreneurs’.

The previous chapters focused specifically on trying to understand the small house concept in relation to how personal subjective factors interact with economic factors in particular. This chapter now draws on the broader social milieu in which small houses are located. I examine other women’s perspectives - big house women and sexual entrepreneurs - on small houses. These women offered perspectives that provided an understanding of how Zimbabwean women’s femininities are being (re)shaped via the feud between small house women and big houses, that is, officially married women. I argue that there is a fracturing of dominant femininities and the formation of ‘new’ forms of feminine subject identities as women try to find means to preserve their marriages and prevent their husbands from straying out of the marital space and some take advantage of the emerging economic opportunities presented by the small house phenomenon and its real or assumed threat on the contemporary marriage institution. During fieldwork I had the privilege of attending five women’s social gatherings. These included a bridal shower, a baby shower, a kitchen top-up and two baby welcome parties. These social parties served as a ‘performance stage’, which Turner (1987) argues shows how sociocultural systems are fraught with sociocultural contradictions and norm-conflicts. It was during these gatherings that I came across hired ‘professional’ marriage and sexual advisors that I chose to call sexual entrepreneurs. It was fascinating how they presented the small house phenomenon to party attendees, who were predominantly big houses. Their presentations and be thought of in terms of Turner’s (1987) ‘social drama’ as they labelled small houses as a breach to the ‘norm’ of holy matrimonies and thus a ‘moral crisis’ in need of redress. Using this anthropological analogy, the sexual entrepreneurs take the role of the ‘critics of crisis’ – mobilising strategies for the restoration of normal social relations. In this sense, I argue that we must understand the role of sexual entrepreneurs as a structural one, shedding light on the structural positionality of small houses and legitimate wives.

I chose to call these advisors ‘sexual entrepreneurs’ because of how these women managed to commodify/commercialise a role that is traditionally offered for ‘free’ and earn a living
from it. The term ‘sexual entrepreneur’ has been used by Harvey and Gill (2011) to describe a form of sexual subjectivity that is a hybrid of new femininities entangled with consumer capitalism. In their study of a British television show, *The Sex Inspectors*, they used the term to refer to an emergent new feminine subject who becomes impelled to be concerned with beauty, desirability and sexual performance. However, I use the term to refer to so-called sex experts or advisors who are central in creating this ‘new’ feminine subject in big houses. Lie (1995:311) has used the term ‘sexual entrepreneur’ to refer to “one of the first international enterprises undertaken by Japanese business men (zegen)” who recruited young rural women from impoverished families to work as prostitutes. Lane (2001) and Raymond (2004) also used the term to refer to the sex-industry businessmen who were advancing the proliferation and legitimation of the commodification of sex. I therefore merge the various aforementioned definitions of sexual entrepreneur to define the emerging Zimbabwean women who have successfully managed to commodify ‘sex advice’, a form of entrepreneurship which is as a result of the acceleration and intensification of neoliberalism as well as borne out of the economic and political crises discussed in Chapter 2. Their role is also of interest in that it can be viewed as a form of sexual revolution yet simultaneously facilitating and reinforcing male dominance. By analysing the roles of sexual entrepreneurs and how they subsequently mould the sexual subjectivities of big house women, this chapter questions whether the inevitable interaction of modernism, Christianity and traditional practices is forming new hybrid femininities or just repackaging old femininities. This has implications in terms of how small houses continue to be perceived in the Zimbabwean sociality as well as possible inferences to the need to rethink HIV prevention issues in Zimbabwe.

1.1 The new ‘tete’: Understanding the role of the sexual entrepreneur.

Tamale (2005) describes the emergence of what she terms ‘commercial aunts’ in Kampala, Uganda. These are women who play the role of traditional Ssengas, a role that they have successfully commercialised, commoditized and professionalised. Tamale’s narration of the rise of the ‘commercial aunts’ in Uganda corresponds with that of the Zimbabwean context. However, I use the term ‘sexual entrepreneurs’ as it acknowledges women's innovativeness in an economy with shrinking opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. The term ‘sexual

---

29 This role of sexual entrepreneur sets in as part and parcel of the general rise in the ‘commodification of culture’ globally and in southern Africa in particular. For an in-depth reading on this, see Comaroff, J.L and Comaroff, J (2009) *Ethnicity Inc.*
entrepreneur’ also in some way resonates with how it has been used by Harvey and Gill (2011) to refer to a hybrid of new and old femininities. In both instances, sexual entrepreneurs are forms of female subjectivities necessitated by neoliberal pressures and whose subjectivities somewhat bridge the gap between the traditional and the modern. Sexual entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe can be viewed as playing the traditional role of the Shona *tete* (i.e. patriarchal aunt) who was tasked with the role of tutoring her brothers’ daughters on ‘proper’ womanhood and femininity in preparation for marriage. She also performed the role of marriage counsellor, a role that is commonly played by ritual elders throughout southern Africa. Issues related to ‘proper’ womanhood include providing information on menstruation and on ways to increase erotic pleasure, including tutelage on how to elongate the labia minora in preparation for marriage. *Tetes* also oversee the exchange of gifts and vows (*kupanana mhete*) that constitute the Shona traditional form of engagement between a young woman and her marriage suitor. Customarily, the roles that *tetes* performed were unpaid as they were a cultural expectation. However, the *tete* would be rewarded during the *lobola* ceremony where she literally picks (*kunhonga*) a token amount of money from the *lobola* ceremony plate. The *lobola* ceremony and her ‘picking’ of the token amount of money epitomise her achievement in the guidance of her young charge from courtship to marriage. However, her coaching role did not necessarily end on the day of marriage, as she was expected to counsel the new couple and becomes the point of contact for the niece’s husband to consult regarding any marital problems that they might be having.

The breaking down of strong extended family ties due to migration, economic hardships, family rivalries and deaths, families no longer have easy access to a ‘free’ traditional *tete*. Churches, instead, have become the new breeding grounds for a new type of ‘*tete*’, commonly known as ‘mother advisors’. The latter have taken advantage of the lack of easy access to *tetes* and have commercialised their role by availing themselves as ‘*tetes for hire*’ during women’s social gatherings. These *tetes* have become what I call the sexual entrepreneurs charging between $60 to $150 per party for their services depending on whether they will be a guest of honour with a dedicated time slot to speak for an hour or so or if they will be also be the Master of ceremonies (MC), in addition to their main role as sexual entrepreneur.

1.2 The making of a social drama: Daisy the sexual entrepreneur at work.
It was a warm afternoon in May 2013 when a friend invited me to her cousin’s baby shower party. This was a surprise party that had been organized for my friend’s cousin by friends and relatives. The venue was in a posh garden at a house that is hired out for various functions in
a quiet upper class suburb in Harare. The party was to start at 14:00 hours and we had been informed that the party colours were blue and white which also meant that everyone was expected wear anything with blue and/or white. When we arrived, a number of people were already there and one could easily see that a professional had meticulously decorated the garden with blue and white satin drapes and balloons. Right at the entrance were two huge boxes were dropping their gifts. The crowd had a mix of older and younger women and I figured that most of the older women were relatives of my friend’s cousin whilst the younger crowd (women in their twenties to thirties) was mostly her friends, work colleagues and friends of friends. There was a clear distinction in terms of how people were dressed, with the older women mostly dressed in elegant two-piece suits whilst the younger women were clad in fancy party dresses of various lengths and designs. There was a huge public address (PA) system - an electronic sound amplification and distribution system consisting of a microphone, loud speakers and an amplifier system that was being operated by a man, the only male visible at the premises. Some West African popular party music was playing and most people were seated and a few women in a group were dancing. A few minutes later the ‘party girl’ arrived, heavily pregnant and she seemed genuinely surprised as she sobbed at the sight of people gathered for her.

A catering company had been hired and they had lined up a number of serving dishes with local party cuisine. There was also a variety of soft beverages and a few bottles of wine, whiskey and some creamy liqueur. When people were done with eating, the party’s MC called upon one friend and one relative to give short speeches. Both talked mainly about how they were looking forward to seeing the ‘bundle of joy’ that Tendai was carrying and offering their support to her throughout the journey of motherhood. When they were done with their speeches, the MC introduced the guest of honour, Daisy. Earlier on, Daisy had been giving out business cards that advertised her skills as a Master of Ceremonies (MC), sex/marriage advisor and events manager. Daisy was a 38 year-old mother of two, married to a managing director of a regional company and also an active member of a popular Pentecostal church. She considered herself a businessperson because she also offered services in events management and rented out a PA system. Whenever she is hired to be an MC for a party, her charge is usually inclusive of the PA system unless the person who is hiring insists on using a different PA system. She stated that she usually charged $70 for an hour long presentation and $150 if she has to do the ‘MC-ing’ and use her PA system.
Daisy was extremely anti-small houses. She narrated that she had once been a ‘victim’ of a small-house, which had interfered with her marriage and had caused her to separate from her husband for a couple of months. She described those few months as the ‘toughest months of her life’ as her eldest child kept asking why they were staying at their grandmother’s (Daisy’s mother). She described how foolish she felt then when nobody seemed to understand her decision to move out of her marital home and recalled that relatives and friends kept trivialising the fact that she had moved out of her marital home because of a small house. She stressed that she got back together with her husband through the ‘power of prayer’ and that she had to learn ‘new’ things about marriage to prevent her marriage from deteriorating in the future. Hence, she was now on a mission to advise other women on how not to let their marriage fail. She had turned her advising into a business venture, which earned her between $270-$450 per month. Daisy’s story and her motivation to become a sexual entrepreneur is not at all similar to the other sexual entrepreneurs I observed. I was struck, however, by the way all the tetes described small houses as the nemesis to big houses. They labelled small houses as a breach to holy matrimony and as a moral crisis that needed a strong response from big houses if their marriages were to survive.

During her presentation which lasted for about an hour and a half, Daisy explained why men have small houses, an explanation which strongly resonated with what other sexual entrepreneurs were preaching and inclined to place blame on wives or mothers. She said;

‘Tendai my daughter, I urge you not to neglect your husband whilst focusing on the new role of motherhood…that’s one major mistake most women make in their marriages. They forget that your first baby is always your husband and this one doesn’t grow old, he keeps wanting 100% attention. Do not forget to spruce up yourself and be presentable and sexy as you used to be before marriage…munosiwa mumba maa mega mega amai [he’ll leave you behind in your house…in search of other better looking women]…Don’t push your husband out [of the home] by being a chatterbox… Don’t be boring in the bedroom… Keep cooking nice meals for him…’.

In such instances, the sexual entrepreneurs mainly identified the ‘big house’ as a possible push factor that drives the husband to small houses. In turn, the small house woman was portrayed as one who offers ‘a full attractive package’ that pulls men to her. Central to the so-called small house ‘package’ was their imagined ability to be wild in the bedroom and
provide exciting sex, which big houses were accused of associating with prostitutes and considering unfit for a dignified and married woman. Daisy went on to exhort the new mother to recover quickly and resume sex with her husband, as he had paid lobola. Daisy explained:

“Yes, we know you have to heal after child-birth but it shouldn’t take forever! Remember why you chose to come [here and] be Simba’s wife. It’s not because you had no food or shelter at your parents’ or [because you] just wanted a house to clean. So, when you’re back in action [having sex again], let daddy know you’re back with more fire just as used to be before childbirth and after this teaching, I would even expect more. Don’t just lie there and do the Number 1 position (i.e., missionary)... Do the 1 to 10, even 11 plus, as I’ve demonstrated. Number 1 becomes boring. Remember ana mainini (small houses) out there are doing the number 1 to 100 style”

Prior to giving this advice, Daisy had given a graphic presentation of different sex styles and positions, which she assured the women present would spice up one’s sex life and guarantee that one’s husband would not even think about having a small house. Although advice on sex was a common theme in all the presentations I observed, sexual entrepreneurs also highlighted the importance of communication within the home and advanced the idea that prayer was the cornerstone of strong marriages. It was interesting that the advice that aunts offered drew on traditional, modern and Christian ideologies.

Sexual entrepreneurs presented small houses in a satirical way by referring to them as mainini [lit: small mother], which is a Shona noun that is typically used to refer to an official second wife in a polygamous union. Referring to women small houses as ‘maininis’, did not imply recognition of the husbands’ extramarital relationships; the term was used in a mocking ‘othering’ manner, which reflected sexual entrepreneurs' resentment of the small house. Paradoxically, the use of the term mainini can also be interpreted as a way of acknowledging the meaning of the relationship. For instance, referring to a small house as mainini departs from the more common practice of simply referring to a man's extramarital partner as a ‘girlfriend’ or hure/pfambi [lit: whore or prostitute] in Shona. This use of the term mainini can therefore be read as the epitome of the social crisis. Sexual entrepreneurs make it apparent that there is no room for integration with small houses and that a small house will remain the archenemy of the big house even if the former is to become an official
second wife through *lobola* payments by the man. They claimed that small houses consulted prophets and *n’angas* for herbal medicines, strange concoctions, charms and ‘holy’ water, which they used to lure and entrap men and make it impossible for them to terminate the relationship. In this way, small house women are seen from an ‘othering’ perspective and they are presented as dangerously desperate women who will do anything to displace the official wife and secure their own relationships. In these narratives, big houses are presented as the group that is being infringed upon. Big houses are also reminded that they rank higher than small houses in the hierarchical social order and are therefore urged to be prayerful and fight the physical and spiritual warfare posed by the cunning small houses that are out to displace them. The big house- small house drama becomes a real social drama as the schism between the two parties is irreparable. This is worsened by the conviction among sexual entrepreneurs and big houses that all small houses ultimately want to become big houses, an assertion refuted by the small houses narratives as described in earlier chapters. Sexual entrepreneurs successfully grabbed their audiences’ attention with anecdotal evidence about small houses. In all the cases I observed, they would assert themselves as big houses and state that they were speaking from personal experience. This assertion gave the sexual entrepreneurs a position of authority to talk about the havoc that a small house can wreak on one’s marriage. Most of them were very theatrical in their presentations with some, like Daisy, even going into graphic details when they presented on sex positions and sex moves that are guaranteed to pleasure the man.

An analysis of Daisy’s and other sexual entrepreneurs’ presentations brings to the fore complex contradictions in terms of modernity, traditionalism and Christianity. These sexual entrepreneurs are usually seen by the general public as respectable church women who are merely performing the role of a *tete*. This requires them to interpret the marriage institution from two different perspectives, albeit with the same goal of perpetuating this institution. They are faced with the difficult task of interpreting the rules of marriage and family formation in the face of on-going change as well as in the context of clashing social norms relating to marriage. For instance, this norm-conflict is apparent in that as Christians they believe in monogamous marriages and all extramarital relationships are seen as adulterous. Yet at the same time, the small house relationship though repudiated in Christian and other

---

30 These are mainly orthodox and Pentecostal churches. In the Zimbabwean context there are other Christian churches like the independent African apostolic churches that uphold polygamy as part of their doctrines.
moralist perspectives, it is increasingly becoming culturally recognised as it can be seen as a ‘new’ avenue of obtaining a second wife for those who later formalise their small housing relationships. Also in the Shona tradition if a man decided to get into a polygamous marriage, one of the roles of the tete was to pacify the first wife and instruct her to accept the second wife. Hence, their standpoint of repudiating the small house can be read in a way, as a failure to promote the reproduction of a potentially transforming customary institution of polygamous marriage and therefore, a social crisis in itself. This means a failure to acknowledge small housing as possibly a new form of polygamous marriage that in some way departs from the traditional way of engaging in such marriages but at the same time has its basis in a well-established custom.

1.3 The sexual entrepreneur’s dilemma: confronting the malleability of social reality.

The advice given to big houses to ‘become like small houses in the bedroom’ highlights the dynamics of the relevance of the small house in preserving marriages. ‘Respectable’ women (big houses) are warned to shelve away characteristics of propriety that were probably essential to winning a marriage suitor and as Tamale (2005) writing on the Baganda Ssengas advice to married women puts it, married women are urged ‘turn into a prostitute in the bedroom’ to sexually arouse and satisfy their husbands. Hence in this context, the polarising Madonna-whore discourse is thrown into disarray as the situation calls for the merging of the two in order to save the contemporary marriage institution. Nonetheless, this illustrates the need for traditional and Christian rules and expectations governing marriages to be re-evaluated acknowledging the pervasiveness of change and modernity. Such changes confront the notion of social reality as fluid and transformable calling for situational adjustments (Moore in Turner 1987). In this sense, sexual behaviours generally regarded as raunchy and reserved for ‘prostitutes’ and promiscuous women are prescribed as an anchor for ‘respectable’ and ‘moral’ marital unions. Such a social reality and its structural contradictions are also reflected in how a traditional role has also been transformed by modernity, neoliberalism and capitalism resulting in some women from strong Christian backgrounds commodifying their role as tetes, in response to diminishing economic opportunities. As Tamale (2005) aptly notes, the traditional role of the tetes has also been transformed by modernisation resulting in its shifting from the private to the public domain as the tutoring which was once a private service is now done during public gatherings or social events.

To a certain extent, the role of sexual entrepreneur can be read from a post structural feminist perspective especially in how it exudes recognition of the indeterminacy of social structures,
institutions and social reality that consequently calls for processes of situational adjustments and at times complete change. It somehow frees women from binary dichotomies of the essentialist Madonna/whore and as Ide (nd) argues, enables us to see that there is no essential ‘femaleness’. Yet from another scope, their role can also be seen from a post-feminist stance which in this instance can be viewed as a discourse of sexual freedom, however, with sex being presented as work that requires constant labour and reskilling to achieve satisfaction for parties involved. However, their position can still be seen as predisposed to propagating old sexual stereotypes that perpetuate male domination. The sexual entrepreneurs’ advice is centred on the erotic however, in their cases; the erotic presents itself as an oppressing resource. For instance, sexual pleasure was presented as if it is only an entitlement for the males and the woman’s duty is to ensure that she provides it satisfactory so that her husband does not look for this entitlement elsewhere. Interestingly, this stood in sharp contrast to how sexual pleasure was presented by some small houses, as something that they seek for themselves and not meant to be exclusively for the man. Also, sexual pleasure as central motivation to engage in small housing was far from how the men with small houses ranked it as a push/pull factor (see Chapter 6). From the way I understood the sexual entrepreneurs’ advice, the big houses’ husbands’ choice to engage in a small house relationship was solely burdened on the big houses’ faulty social and sexual behaviours. Hence, it was her duty to make sure she grasps the demands of what Butler (1993) terms perfomativity, albeit in its changing forms, that accommodates the sexual revolution- a pull factor- so as to safeguard her marriage by ensuring her husband not to stray out of their marital space.

However, one can also see a postfeminist standpoint that they engaged by emphasising an empowering aspect of sexuality whereby they presented traditional domestic roles like cooking, washing and taking care of the husband as romantic gestures as well as means to assert oneself as an appropriate wife. Roseline, a 40-year-old sexual entrepreneur though not identifying herself as a postfeminist, conveyed the postfeminist ideas distinctly during a kitchen top-up party I attended one Saturday afternoon. Patty had just been married in a traditional ceremony and had just been formally handed over to her in-laws (kuperekwa) a couple of weeks before the party. Her sisters and cousins had arranged the kitchen top-up party for her where we were expected to give her kitchenware as gifts. Roseline had been invited as Patty’s ‘mother advisor’ from her church youth group. She was the guest of honour at the party and had an hour-slot on the day’s programme. Patty had this to say:
Ndoda kuti ufarire imba yako mwanangu nekuti ndeyako (lit: I want you to love/like your marriage/home my child because it is yours) and strive to make it remain yako wega (yours alone). Bikira murume wako uchiimba (cook for your husband singing) songs of joy and love, iron for him with love and when you prepare a lunch box for him for work, put in a love note. Enjoy doing all these things for your husband and enjoy it specifically because you are the one doing it and nobody else. When he comes back from work greet him with a smile nemutupo wake (with his totem) ita maswera sei Shumba (lit: say how was your afternoon, Lion [of the Lion totem]. Crowd laughs…. Murikuseka henyu aska (women, you’re laughing..) but Patty I assure you, do this and you’ll tell me if he ever strays. Do it with your heart, with love and hazvimborwadze iči, zvinobhadhara iwe! (it’s not taxing, it pays you [at the end])

This meant playing the politics of the ‘game’ in a manner that makes the husband believe that he is the one in power and yet by doing so i.e reverting to being the traditional revered wife (and playing the ‘whore’ in the bedroom) the wife subsequently skews the power scale to her side. This is achieved merely through the fact that the married woman consciously chooses to perform these roles for a calculated purpose that works to her advantage. Roseline’s advice was centred on Patty making sure that her husband does not get involved in extramarital relationships and this should be one of her ultimate marital goals that would definitely gratify her. In this sense, Patty’s actions can then be rationalised as showing agency that works for her. This situation shows sexuality as a site for the production of constraints and opportunities as well as connections and collisions with power and politics (Tamale 2005).

Yet, in talking of marriages and the erotic, the question of sexually transmitted infections or HIV was not raised or rather was generally avoided in all the presentations I observed. On one hand, one can see it as a way of avoiding having to deal with the harsh reality of married women’s powerlessness to protect themselves from HIV given their desires to stay in their marriages (Mumah and Jackson 2013). A lot of research has reported married women’s high vulnerability to HIV linked to their partners’ promiscuous behaviour especially in engaging in multiple concurrent sexual partnerships and HIV prone sexual networks (Wardlow 2007; Smith 2007; Hirsch et al 2009; Hargreaves et al 2008). This vulnerability is also explained by some women’s economic dependence on their husbands as well as Christian and socio-cultural norms that discourage divorce. The sexual entrepreneurs, for instance, invoked the Bible and the principle of marriage promises around the vow ‘for better for worse’ as a declaration that one’s husband’s small housing behaviour was not a justification for divorce.
If anything, divorcing him for small-housing would consequently mean the victory of the small-house woman who then takes the place of big house and relegates one to the position of divorcee, a socially stigmatised label in the Zimbabwean context. Their focus on the esteemed big house behaviours therefore by implication meant that if the big house ensures that her husband does not get a reason to obtain a small house, he would not be engaging in extra marital sex hence there will be no fear of HIV to talk about.

2.0 No chance for redress: Big houses’ perceptions of small houses.

I had the opportunity to speak to four women considered as big houses during the parties as well as on social networks like Facebook and Watsapp focusing on their experiences and perceptions of small houses. All the big houses I spoke to showed a deep-seated resentment of small houses as ‘home-wreckers’, called them ‘smell houses’, mahure literally meaning ‘whores, bitches, prostitutes’ and ‘desperate women willing to play second fiddle’. The resentment was mainly noticeable in the use of language denoted in their choice of words to describe the small house women and the small house relationship. They referred to the relationship as ‘a man’s dumping site’ where a frustrated husband goes to offload his sexual and other social frustrations for a ‘cheap good time’. Most women were very quick to point out that they knew that their husbands would never divorce them and therefore considered the small houses as women varikushandiswa (lit: being used) by their husbands. However, I noted one main difference in perception between the big houses and the sexual entrepreneurs’ interpretation of a man’s motivation to get a small house. Whereas the sexual entrepreneurs seemed to place the blame on the big houses’ behaviours, the big houses themselves had a different interpretation of their husbands’ small housing behaviour. Also, they did not blame their husbands’ for being promiscuous but instead, placed the blame on the small houses cunningness and in most instances inferred that most small houses used sorcery means to lure their husbands.

One example to help understand the big houses’ perspectives is Rumbi, a 39-year-old mother of three and an accounts officer for a local NGO. She is married to Tindo, a physiotherapist at a private hospital. They have been married for twelve years and Rumbi highlights that it has not been a rosy marriage mainly due to Tindo’s numerous phases of infidelity. During an interview one afternoon in August 2013 at her home in the Northern suburbs of Harare, she expressed how she believed that other women were using juju on her husband;
Me: so how did you find out that your hubby was having an affair?

Rumbi: Oh it’s not difficult if you’ve lived with someone for long. Change in habits…he wasn’t eating at home most of the times. He’d come back home late saying he is full, he had a braai somewhere with friends, or with silly excuses that he has a tummy ache blah blah blah…and hey I’m not a kid to be fooled by such excuses. And believe me the giveaway is the sex life. Nomatter how he tries to hide it and perform it’s easy to pick that he is no longer interested in sex. Of course he’ll be getting it from kwamainini (the small house).

Me: How did you deal with the issue?

Rumbi: Most of the times I’ll let him be. You know what, zvemahure (lit: whores, prostitutes-small houses) are temporary. I am married to him and have a family with him. He’ll come back to his senses when he realises that the other woman is just there for fun and to use him. I’ll let him know that I am aware of the relationship in a very subtle way and I know achazonyara ega (he’ll be remorseful). But at one point he had this ‘cheeky bitch’ who actually had the guts to call me and tell me that 'I’m in a relationship with your hubby, I know about you and it’s time you know about me what what’…can you imagine that nonsense?

Me: So what did you do?

Rumbi: I was so angry kuti hure iri randijairira (this small house [lit: bitch] has gone too far). I told my hubby about the call and he begged me saying he was sorry, the relationship was just a silly mistake and this woman anga achiramba kurambwa (was refusing to accept that he was ending the relationship). For the first time I threatened him with divorce because this had gone too far. He can do chihure chake (be promiscuous) out there but for me to get to know about it like that is just not fair. After all, I’m sure this woman aibata bata (used juju) because the conflicts we were having with my husband those days were just unheard of. It’s not like it was his Charms with supernatural powers.
first time cheating on me but this time around it was different. *Mainini ava* (this small house) really wanted to displace me. These small houses can be dangerous my dear…!

**Me:** were you serious about the divorce?

**Rumbi:** Laughs…of course not! *Ndìngasiira imba yangu* small house? (Why would I leave my marriage because of a small house). So that she really celebrates that *mishonga yasekuru Shuga inoshanda* (sekuru Shuga’s juju really works!) haha not in my house, my hubby is covered with divine protection that’s why he quickly decided to end the relationship.

This conversation highlighted a number of pertinent issues regarding the social ‘war’ denoted in the ‘othering’ and hierarchies between small houses and big houses as well as a strong Christian perspective of marriages. Rumbi’s story resonated with other big houses regardless of whether one’s husband had ever had a small house or not. The small house was therefore consistently construed as using *muti* (juju) and other devious means to bring men to them and try to displace big houses, a potential ever-present threat to one’s marriage. This presumed characteristic of small houses made them ‘dangerous’, ‘cunning’ and to the big houses, there was no separation or categories of small houses according to motives as they were all branded as having the same intentions of displacing the official wife. On the other hand the big houses constructed themselves as Christian women, with divine protection and doing all they could to save their marriages. This speaks to a moral Christian code that the big houses defined themselves and used to interpret the small house relationships. Given this moralising attitude exuded by big houses, it is not surprising then that I could not find a big house woman who could open up to having been once a small house and rose to the ranks of big house. Big houses wanted to be seen as respectable women with no tarnishing histories and by no way deserving what could have been happening to their marriages in the case of a husband having a small house.

---

32 A lot of women talked about this sekuru Shuga. Apparently he is a well-known n’anga (witch doctor) living in Norton a suburb just out of Harare. One woman noted how his place is always packed with women queuing to get help offered in the form of charms to secure their marriages. Single women also get charms to find marriage suitors regardless of the suitor’s marital status.
One strong argument that came across from the big houses was that no matter how much one spruces up their sex life or make the marital home a lovely place as advised by the sexual entrepreneurs, once the husband has been ensnared by a small house’s *juju*, it requires more than behaviour change but also prayer and counter spiritual assistance. However, none of my big house interviewees acknowledged consulting the prophets or sekuru Shuga but were quick to point out that they knew about some of their friends who had to take such drastic measures to save their marriages. I later realised that none of my participants were probably going to openly acknowledge consulting these spiritual guides given that the big houses strived to separate themselves from the undignified activities of small houses. In some way, they would not want to be associated with the clandestine prophets or n’angas, a route they labelled as showing desperation, a characteristic bestowed to small houses. However, for them, prayer and spiritual guidance meant going to well-known Pentecostal prophets’ churches like apostle Ubert Angel and Makandiwa’s churches. Interestingly, in these churches, they would also receive some form of ‘charms’ like holy water (the same given by Apostolic prophets) to use in whatever manner they will have been instructed to so as to protect their marriages and prevent their husbands from seeing small houses.

One can therefore conceptualise big houses and small houses as two similar but irreconcilable parties. Both are fighting for the same ‘scarce product’—men—however in different yet similar means. Big houses taunted small houses for over performing the role of wife with sarcastic stories like:

“When a man goes to a small house as he enters the house, she carries him on her back, seats him on the bed and removes his shoes, and if it’s cold, she’ll be warming his slippers in the microwave. Bathes him and carries him back to the bed and serves him some traditional meal where she’ll have added some *juju* concoction to make him look down on his wife and marvel at the small house.”

(Interview with BH1: 17/07/2013)
These kinds of stories reflect the battle between the two parties in trying to please men. Big houses noted how ridiculous it is to try and please a man in such a way and how this was not sustainable. However, as proposed by the sexual entrepreneurs, the crux of the issue was not ‘performance in the sitting room, or kitchen but what then happens in the bedroom’. However, most big houses maintained a position that it was not a maintainable arrangement to be expected to perform satisfactorily in the bedroom after a hard day’s work with the children and home management whereas they considered small houses as ‘having been doing nothing and just waiting for the man to come home’. After all, as one big house retorted, ‘no matter how much you perform at times he won’t even notice because the juju will be working in him’ (Interview with BH2: 5 November 2013). This then justifies a moment when a big house also had to engage in a spiritual warfare to redeem ones’ marriage. At this stage the advice on sprucing up one’s sexual and social acts would have proven not to work and hence trust is turned to the supernatural realm, a sector where some other entrepreneurial individuals are making a living from people’s anxieties about life in general. In Zimbabwe, spiritual entrepreneurship has become booming business, evidenced by sprouting Pentecostal churches with self-acclaimed prophets claiming to have powers to perform all sorts of life changing miracles.

3.0 New femininities or repackaged old femininities? Interrogating women’s subjectivities, identities and agency.

Risking essentialising women’s existence, if at face value one is to look at the sexual entrepreneurs work, the big houses involved and their archenemy -small houses, it is apparent in this context that these three categories of women and their subsequent femininities are more likely to be defined by their relationships to men and to the marriage institution to
which their existence as categories is dependent on. As aptly noted by Jones (2009) traditional anthropologists have, abeit from different theoretical standpoints, argued how bride wealth payment is the fulcrum of the marriage institution and plays the fundamental role of establishing relations and roles between individuals and groups as well as guaranteeing reproduction of the wider social order. In the Zimbabwean context, the ritual of bridewealth payment legitimises married women’s social positions and is used to distinguish the big house from the small house. For instance, sexual entrepreneurs constantly reminded women during the social get-togethers that the big house is the one whose lobola was paid (ndiye ane kwakaendeswa mombe) and the one socially and culturally recognised during family gatherings/functions. They would remind the small house that theirs was a ‘backyard’ ‘clandestine’ relationship and if known to some relatives, these relatives would be relegated to insignificant levels of power and recognition within the extended family system. This obviously presents within a heterosexual discourse, forms of femininities that are more socially valued than others. In this instance, there are the big house, the sexual entrepreneurs and small house types of femininities in which the marrying of traditional values, modernity and Christian practices around what constitutes the revered kind of femininity as well their understanding of the marriage institution makes it even more complicated as this brings together practices often seen as opposing. This brings to the fore Gill and Arthurs’ (2006) question on whether it is possible to talk of a Gramscian ‘hegemonic’ femininity or whether we are now presented with what they term ‘fractured hegemonies’.

In the Zimbabwean context, it can be argued that the traditional and Christian perspectives conspire in producing what Jewkes and Morell (2011) terms the ‘acquiescent femininities’. This kind of femininity value male authority grounded in the culture of the unquestionable position of the male as the one who pays the lobola and is the head of the household. As most sexual entrepreneurs highlighted, it is the kind of femininity required or expected of big houses given that lobola was paid for them and most of them consider themselves Christians. To this extent, one sees how traditional and Christian principles perpetuated in some way by the modern sexual entrepreneurs has played in the reproduction of gendered subjectivities and emphasised the requirement to perform a kind of sexuality which is compliant with these principles. Interestingly, from the way I have categorised them, some small houses particularly from the que sera sera category also displayed this kind of femininity. However, one can argue that this was probably because they acknowledged the dominance of this particular femininity and how it is used to set apart the marriageable and non-marriageable
women. From a post feminist perspective, this would mean these women were using their agency to perform a femininity that they knew could possibly earn one a chance into marriage, which was one of their main objectives for being in such a relationship despite it being frowned upon.

Also, the role of the sexual entrepreneurs can be seen as an act of agency in responding to the needs, pressures and constraints of neoliberalism. However, feminist debates have ensued over this form of agency, or ‘new’ subjectivities with second wave feminists arguing that these are repackaged subordinate femininities yielding to power differences and male domination (Kitzinger 1994). These arguments are tied to Beauvoir’s central argument that women’s roles and behaviours reflect the fact that woman is defined and differentiated with reference to a man (Beauvoir quoted in Hall 2004). Hence, a standpoint that sees the ‘new’ femininity as still compliant with the woman’s position that is subordinated to the male. However, post-feminists see this in a different way. Losing weight to be ‘sexy’, for instance, is defined as a self-satisfying project just as beautifying oneself with facial treatments or going for manicures and pedicures is seen as giving oneself a ‘treat’ (Lazar 2013). Traditional feminine roles like cooking are even being advanced with women seen taking cooking lessons which can be interpreted as a diversification of one’s skills, a self actualisation project rather than a role defined around performing a gendered role. Hence, going beyond one’s comfort zones with sexual practices is seen as helping one to improve her chances of achieving sexual pleasure (Gill and Scharff 2013). Therefore, to some extent the sexual entrepreneurs can be understood as exercising agency in creating new positions and identities that benefit them. Despite reproducing what can be seen as gendered subjectivities in big houses, the sexual entrepreneurs agency and the agency they are instilling in the big houses should be seen in a broader context as ‘agency operating within a context of coercion and inequality and still having room for freedom and choice’ (Madhok 2010 and Duits and Van Zoonen 2006).

Subjectivity can be seen as a site for the production of inhibiting identities as well as internalised subordination. Big houses somehow unquestioningly take on the role of wife in its traditional sense in that it is a subordinated position to the role of the husband and identify themselves as Christian wives whose complex subjectivities inhibit them from holding their husbands responsible as principal players in deciding to engage in small housing relationships. To them, the male honoured with the role of head of the household cannot possibly rationally involve himself in such a relationship and hence they put the blame on the
other woman (the small house). As aforementioned, considering the constraining socio-cultural framework, divorce is not an option, as emphasised by the sexual entrepreneurs given the social stigma that divorce carries for women. This was exemplified in Daisy’s case who highlighted that during the marital separation period she was contemplating divorce but none of her close relatives and friends supported her despite her being open about her fear of contracting HIV. In fact, she narrated how they all stressed that she needed to learn to be subordinate as her excessively assertive behaviour could possibly have pushed her husband to small housing. This corresponds with the Zimbabwean generalised perspectives on divorcees as failures and wayward women influenced by the destructive tendencies of ‘feminism’ which makes women insubordinate to their husbands. Hence, Daisy noting that she had to learn quite a number of ‘new’ things about marriage and being a wife which ‘saved’ her failing marriage. These ‘new’ things obviously included learning how to be subordinate and creating a new form of subjectivity to avoid joining the ranks of divorcees. These apparently are some of the qualities that form the kind of femininity and subjectivity hailing as the dominant femininity in Zimbabwe.

The sexual entrepreneurs as big houses clearly fall into the dominant femininity category yet by looking at their role as ‘modern tetes’ is it possible to talk of a ‘new’ form of subjectivity and femininity? I argue that in essence these sexual entrepreneurs are redefining sexual subjectivities and femininities. On one hand, their role can be argued as fitting in the old celebrated femininity. Through their role and the kind of advice during the social gatherings tenets of the traditional femininity tied to modes of patriarchal domination are evident “noted in social conservatism and hostility to feminism in any of its old or newer forms” (McRobbie in Harvey and Gill 2013:xi). In a structuralist fashion, Harvey and Gill (2013) argue that there are a range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalise the strategies that individuals in their freedom use in dealing with each other- and argues how such structures can constitute subjectivities. This can be the case with these sexual entrepreneurs and the big houses and of course with some small houses where tradition and Christianity becomes forms of governing structures operating increasingly on and through the production and reproduction of subjectivities that make up the celebrated femininity. This resonates with Butler’s notion of performativity bound in a historicised notion of the human subject. According to Butler, “the act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (1990:277). Sexual entrepreneurs hence can be seen as ensuring the continuity of the ‘acquiescent femininity’
sustained primarily through the repetition of a given script. In fact, it can be argued that they are succumbing to pressures that forces individuals to stick to the well-rehearsed interpretations of their gender scripts as diverging from these scripts comes with reprimands (divorce, the othering process and labelling as devious, home breakers) for those who digress (Digeser 1994).

Yet, on the other hand, it will be an injustice to view the women’s subjectivities as only bound within the patriarchal webs with no form of agency. In light of this, as aforementioned, the sexual entrepreneurs can be seen as instrumental in the reclassification of performativity, redefining and creating new sexual subjectivities and breaking boundaries yet at the same time recreating them. To explain how there is a possibility of ‘new’ subjectivities and femininities forming, I will use Radner’s concept of ‘technology of sexiness’ noted by Harvey and Gill (2013) which highlights that in contemporary situations customarily revered traits like virginity, virtue and innocence are no longer the anchor of celebrated female sexuality. In fact, an admired modern female sexuality requires one to be skilled in performing an assertive sexual agency as well as a variety of sexual behaviours and practices. This has become the ‘new’ twist of the sexual entrepreneurs advice where, for instance, they recognize an assumed characteristic of the small house sexuality as a cornerstone to preserving one’s marriage. Big houses are therefore faced with the necessity of remaking a new sexual subjectivity that may entail transformation of the body, self and sexual comfort zones to enhance beauty, desirability and sexual performance (Gill 2009). This new subjectivity can also be read from a postfeminist lens in which an activity formerly presented as being about pleasing one’s husband becomes repackaged as all about pleasing oneself. The big houses are exhorted to go to the gym and lose the bellies, to wear ‘sexy’ clothes and ditch the traditional African attire33, take up cooking lessons and change their menus from the traditional sadza (thick mealie-meal porridge) and a stew as well as adopting adventure in the bedrooms. In this instance, small-houses’ subordinated femininities generally castigated as an embodiment of moral decadence are incorporated into the dominant femininity. This makes it apparent how the subject is a site of contradiction, perpetually in the process of construction. These women’s subjectivities in general, are seen as fluid and overlapping and this disrupts the binaries seen in the categories of ‘big house’ and ‘small house’ showing how they can

33 These are elaborate African prints in the form of dresses or 2-piece costumes and headgear, a style borrowed from West Africa.
partially overlap but remaining distinct. As Hall (2004) argues, the fact that the subject is a process lies the possibility of agency and modifications.

This brings me to put forward an assertion that small houses, big houses and sexual entrepreneurs form a kind of fractured hegemony of femininities with clashing and yet attuned characteristics working for and against each other. The hostility that sexual entrepreneurs and big houses project to small houses is in so far as they intend to safeguard their marriages, choosing to prescribe to particular positions of traditional beliefs and Christianity. At the same time, small houses are used as the example of a revered modern, post-feminist subject with a confident sexual agency, the kind of ‘new’ subjectivity that is now openly admired and marketed to big houses by sexual entrepreneurs. Digeser (1994) poses a question that rightly fits this situation by asking whether such subjectivity could be offering multiple meanings, emancipated self-understandings and continual contestations over the identities of women. This question remains problematic to answer and depends on whether one believes in the post-feminism discourse or subscribes to the critiques by second wave feminists who dismisses post feminism as a false consciousness. Taking the critiques angle, creation of these new femininities can be seen as merely a harmless agitation that actually neatly fits into the neoliberal abyss where human beings are seen as being advanced by individual entrepreneurial freedoms with market exchange seen as capable of guiding all human action (Harvey 2005). This argument is premised on how the market economy has infiltrated all aspects of human sexuality, for example, in how women are pressured to join gyms for sexy bodies, buy beauty products to cover or rectify skin ‘problems’, buy sexy lingerie and pay for professional advisors to help them safeguard their marriages. As Budgeon (2013) asserts, this poses the risk of a kind of feminism that is continually trapped in discourses of choice, freedom and empowerment that are compliant with neoliberalism and post-feminism without critically engaging with them.

4.0 Conclusion

Sexual entrepreneurs have successfully managed to present small houses as a crisis situation, a threat to the marriage institution. They refuse to acknowledge the small house phenomenon as a possible avenue that polygamy could be infiltrating back (see next Chapter) into the contemporary marriage institution given a context where the colonial monogamous marriages have been imposed and made the normative model of marriage. However, their role also helps to bring to the fore the incongruities and norm-conflicts that are pertinent in the Zimbabwean context. The question of subjectivities also becomes central in how big houses
and the sexual entrepreneurs form their sense of self both through history and language. *Tetes* as traditional patriarchal aunts and individuals endorsed with the responsibility to (re)produce the dominant form of femininity that ensures and perpetuates social reproduction through the marriage institution have successfully used their position to influence the classification of conflicting femininities. These are seen in the way being and remaining married carries a sense of pride, dignity and victory, whereas being a small house is subsequently labelled as shameful and immoral. Sexual entrepreneurs as the ‘new’ custodians of the marriage institution tactfully perpetuate a traditional and subordinate femininity and are hostile towards the small houses and at the same time endorse portions of small house characteristics as an essential modern femininity. Hence, they have managed to create a fissured dominant femininity which they are propagating through their access to public channels including both secular and Christian platforms.

However, a disturbing dominant trait cutting across all these subjectivities and femininities—as also highlighted in South African 2012 National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey—is an abject reduction in perception of risk of HIV especially in a context where these women’s sexuality hinges upon sexual interaction with a ‘shared’ male subject. Interestingly, the need to safeguard one’s position as a married woman and stick throughout the husband’s infidelities and potential vulnerability to HIV seemed to cut across women of all classes, an attribute that can be explained from socio-cultural perspectives rather than an economic one. Nonetheless, it is clear that these women’s experiences of their sexualities interlinked with their subjectivities are not regulated by the reality of HIV. Rather, stronger forces like the traditional marriage institution, Christianity and neoliberalism seems to be directing the course that femininities and subjectivities are produced and reproduced. Yet, this is not without resistance, innovations and negotiations showing elements of agency, choice and empowerment. Hence, it is also possible to talk of ‘contextual subjectivities’ where these women have created and allowed the creation of various subjectivities to choose from and perform at different points in time to achieve specific outcomes.

© University of Pretoria
Chapter 6: ‘Real men and Ben 10s’: A restoration or transformation of masculinity politics in Zimbabwe?

The previous chapters have focused on women and various aspects of their involvement in and attitudes towards small housing. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork, I also interacted with men to get their perspectives (and experiences) with/on small houses. Though men were not the main focus of my study and hence I did not get rich ethnographic data, I however managed to have ten in-depth interviews with eight men and two mini focus group discussions. I recognised that men’s perspectives were important in this study so as to get a balanced appreciation of the small housing phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Of interest in looking at men’s perspectives was also the interplay of masculinities around the small house phenomenon. Masculinities are interesting to look at as they help to understand how inequalities develop and how power is yielded (Morrell 1998). The first part of this chapter will examine tensions between two types of masculinities: those that are pro small housing and those that are anti small housing. I will show how these tensions play out in how structuralist metaphors of ‘modernity’ and ‘traditionalism’ are employed by the men as political weapons in contestations over hegemonic masculinity in the Zimbabwean context. I argue that this presents a fragmented hegemonic masculinity, with the fractures necessitated by processes of development and men’s varying interpretations of Christianity, urbanisation and modernity which have reshaped masculinities and sexual practices (Hunter 2002; Morrell 1998). The final part of the chapter introduces the Ben 10 masculinity which I argue to be a form of masculinity in crisis. On one hand, Ben 10s can be seen as a protest or oppositional masculinity that is transforming how Zimbabwean masculinities have been envisaged. Yet on the other hand, given the economic crisis that Zimbabwe has been experiencing, one can note on a masculinity in crisis where the idea of the provider male which has largely been disrupted by the economic recessions have dealt these young men a number of blows hence their newly found comfort in relationships with older women who are financially stable. In conclusion I argue that in the Zimbabwean context, like elsewhere, the power relationships existing between various forms of masculinities, with some holding on to the old ways and some carving out new forms of doing masculinities is battle for transformation and restoration of what it means to be a ‘real’ man.
Push and pull factors. Men’s motivations for small housing.

Men’s motivations for engaging in extramarital sexual relationships have been well documented (Hirsch et al 2009; Longfield et al 2004; Phinney 2008; Smith 2007). Studies suggest that men are motivated by their purchasing power, their innate predisposition to desire sex with a variety of sexual partners, importance of sexual reputation, virility, potency as well as some other facilitating economic structures, cultural scripts and norms (see Smith 2007; Benefo 2008; Hirsch 2007; Joseph and Black 2012; Chiroro et al 2002). Although some men in my study had similar reasons for engaging in extramarital relationships, they also highlighted other ‘push factors’ that drove them out of the marital home. During my first focus group discussion with men, though none of them openly acknowledged to be ‘small housing’, they stated that small houses provided some peace and quiet far from the wife and kids and visiting relatives; stress-free moments in a space where one is treated well and not bombarded by financial issues; and a space where one rekindles the affective dimensions of a relationship and forgets about being a husband or family man’ (viewed in terms of performing those social gendered roles of husband and father).

During my interviews with men who had small houses and those who were anti small housing, I noticed how they used the terms ‘modern’ and ‘tradition/traditional’ as binaries to describe their attitudes (and practices) towards small housing. Men who were pro small housing often employed the term ‘tradition’ in some instances to justify their involvement with small houses as an age old social norm that they claimed to be common in the Zimbabwean society. On the other hand, men who were anti small housing referred to themselves as ‘modern men’ guided by Christian principles of monogamy and fidelity. However, fused in their framing of the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ men, I argue that just as femininities are transforming with contemporary dynamics, so are masculinities, ultimately producing new forms of masculinities that do not neatly fit into the traditional/modern structuralist dichotomies. This resonates with Ratele (2013) writing on South African masculinities, who argues that what are labelled as traditional and modern masculinities are not necessarily on opposing ends, but are bound in the ever shifting present where they are continuously being remade and reconfigured. Morrell (1998) highlights Connell’s (1995) distinctions of different masculinities as dominant, complicit, submissive or oppositional/protest which are nonetheless, fluid. The Zimbabwean masculinities in relation to small housing are meddled with various social, cultural, economic and personal factors which makes them almost impossible to be set in any clear cut categories/distinctions. There
exists numerous currents of transformation which I will discuss later in the chapter to elucidate the Ben 10 phenomenon, that I argue to be a form of masculinity in crisis but coming out as a ‘new’ configuration of masculinities.

One of my male interlocutors was Tawanda, a 38-year-old director of a local NGO who is married to a lecturer and they have a three year-old toddler. I had two in-depth interviews with Tawanda concerning his small house relationship. During one of our interviews he gave the following reasons for small housing:

“Well for me small housing is a way to preserve my marriage to my wife. At least going to my small house gives me time of peace and tranquillity from the noise at home. My wife does not stop talking and add to that the energetic toddler. And imagine you’ve had a hard day at work and all you need is some quiet relaxing time and you go home to that noise. You’ll go crazy. I have noticed that even during those moments where I try to spend some quality time with my wife, we will end up fighting as she finds a way to bring in issues about the child, money, relatives wanting to stay with us…so it’s better for me to limit my time at home and that’s why I prefer spending time with my girlfriend [small house]” (Interview with Tawanda)

Tawanda’s reasons for small housing were echoed by three other men I interviewed who were in small house relationships. They pointed out that a small house relationship was, contrary to popular belief, not just about sex or a way to prove sexual prowess and/or virility. The men stressed that such reasons or motivations ‘were outdated’ and that men like them were not necessarily looking for sex but were also looking for good company and someone to relax with and have intellectually stimulating discussions with. They claimed that this was the key difference between them and those men who engaged in one-night stands or bought the services of sex workers. It was also interesting to note how men interchanged the words ‘girlfriend’ and ‘small house’ and yet when I probed whether it was the same they were quick to point to the contrary. Daniel, a 40-year-old accounts manager at a local insurance company summarised men’s perspectives on the differences between small house and girlfriend during a late afternoon meeting in a pub where we were having drinks and chatting about various socio-economic and political issues. I had asked whether a small house and a girlfriend are similar and his response was:
“No!....Small house and girlfriend are not necessarily one and the same thing. A girlfriend is that young girl you get just to play with, just for short term fun but a small house is...well you can say a kind of a girlfriend, yes, but, someone you’re more serious and stable with. By serious, I mean someone you can even introduce to your relatives, friends etc whereas a girlfriend, hah, I’d never introduce her to anyone except crazy friends at a party and even the way you introduce her, they’d know right away that hah, this is just one of those things..” (Interview with Daniel).

In most cases, girlfriends were presented as young, immature women who were mainly for fun and the relationships were shorter and labelled as ‘not serious’. Interestingly, despite the so-called ‘push factors’ from the marital home, all the men I talked to were quick to point out that they were not willing to divorce their wives. In fact, all of the men stated that they had come to accept their marital problems as ‘normal’ and part and parcel of the marriage institution. They felt they had to live with these challenges and hence opted for small housing as a tactic (not) to deal with their marital problems and simultaneously ‘preserve’ their matrimonies. Hence small housing seemed to be an evasion strategy that helped to sustain the marriage in the face of an imminent breakdown. The desire to maintain their marriages was apparent in how men stressed that being open about one’s marital status and the fact that one was not contemplating divorce was key to establishing a small house relationship. This prevented the relationship from being misconstrued as potentially leading to marriage.

Tawanda narrated;

“I never lie to the woman I want to date about my marital status. That’s the first thing I always tell someone I intend to date, that I am married and have a beautiful daughter, my princess ...(Laughs) It helps avoid possible future complications. I will tell her that yes, I am having problems at home but it’s not like I am going to divorce my wife. I don’t want to build somebody’s false hope for marriage with me. And yah, I know these relationships can become complicated especially when real feelings start to develop and you start feeling the attachment, but if it gets to that level that’s when I strategically start withdrawing from the relationship and move on. It’s not like I’m a serial heartbreaker or Casanova of some sort. I enjoy the attachment and the love too but hey, it’s just that I don’t want more drama in my life, the drama at home is enough” (Interview with Tawanda: 13 March, 2013).
The men to whom I spoke about these issues openly stated that they enjoyed small housing relationships with ‘independent women’, whom they described as usually not ‘clingy’ or nagging for money for lunch, hairdos or manicures as compared to younger girlfriends or other lower class small houses, women they labelled as ‘shallow women’ desperate for marriage and explicitly after money. Men whose small housing motivations were similar to Tawanda explained that a demanding family environment, the need for good company to relax and enjoy some time with and their desire to keep their marriages intact had pushed them into small housing.

A number of issues come to the fore with these pro small housing men. Firstly, it was interesting to note how these men expressed that their decisions to engage in small housing was contrary to popular belief, not about sex. During a conversation with Daniel, he highlighted that if it was just about sex then men would just be hooking up with sex workers. This was in contrast to the message preached by the sexual entrepreneurs (discussed in Chapter 5) whose teachings seemed to centre on sexual performance as one of the key push factors from big houses and a pull factor to small houses who were described as providing exotic and uninhibited sexual experiences for these men. Secondly, these men expressed that they were looking for some ‘time out’ from their wives and families and were particular about wanting some form of connection with a small house they would settle for hence not settling for a sex worker or short-term girlfriend experience. This resonates with what Bernstein (2007) albeit writing on sex workers, notes as men’s search for ‘bounded authenticity’. She explains that this authenticity is notable in men searching for an interpersonal connection seen as genuine desire, pleasure and emotional ties with sex workers. The men I interviewed reflected this need for ‘bounded authenticity’ in the way they talked about small houses as providing that ‘peace’, ‘interesting discussions’, ‘affection/desire’, ‘romance’ and ‘pleasure’ that were now missing from their marital homes. Nevertheless, as Tawanda candidly pointed out, most of the men were conscious about not crossing certain lines especially relating to the relationship transforming into a ‘serious’ one where either party would start contemplating marriage. Though there are stories of men who have ended up having children and marrying their small houses, the men I interacted with were all resolute about making sure that their relationships would not get to that level as they noted that children and marriage would complicate the relationship and it would degenerate into the marriages they were looking for a break from.
These men presented a form of masculinity that, in one way mirrors the older form of the dominant masculinity that defines some Zimbabwean men and, at the same time is divorced from it in some fundamental ways. Traits of the dominant masculinity are seen in these men’s justifications of small housing as a need for variety: not necessarily just sexual variety but diversity in terms of the spaces where ‘different’ forms of femininities are performed. The marital home environment is presented as a space where the affective dimension is wearing out due to everyday pressures presented by the marital institution and by how their wives are more concerned by its social (and economic) reward structure and hence end up excelling as wives and mothers than lovers (Hirsch 2007). This was one issue that the sexual entrepreneurs tried to tackle by exhorting big houses to have all the qualities of various femininities which they identified on one hand as the dignified and caring mother and wife and on the other hand, called for these women becoming like ‘prostitutes in their bedrooms.’

Marriage is seen as a fundamental practice, a significant life stage and a realisation of adulthood, maturity and marker of success in a society where the marriage institution is an enduring and important one (Hirsch 2007). Divorce, though rife in modern Zimbabwe, is still shunned as it signifies failure on both the woman and man’s part (Dube 2013). Being a married man commands dignity, respect and pride in different social spaces, hence the explicit obligation to make sure that the marriage (or whatever is left of it) is maintained and presented as operative in the face of kin and friends.

‘Is polygamy making a comeback?’ Pro small housing masculinities and making of a fractured masculinity.

Though the small housing men did not really come out as the dominant form of masculinity, to some extent, small housing can be read as an altered way of reviving traditional hegemonic masculinities that celebrated polygamy. This idea was discussed extensively by a local newspaper columnist, Prudence Muganiwah, in an article titled “Is polygamy making a comeback”, which received overwhelming responses in subsequent issues of the paper (The Sunday Mail, 17-23 November 2013). In the discussions that ensued, some people were in support of small housing and argued that the practice was ‘nothing out of the ordinary as it is part and parcel of the Zimbabwean culture’. This sentiment was also raised by some of the men I interviewed. In response to Muganiwah’s column, one reader noted that:

‘polygamy never went anywhere…men were just forced from the colonial days to sign themselves into the western style of
monogamous marriages at the Native Commissioner’s office, which at that time served the colonial masters as they were able to regulate the black African men’s sexuality. However, they continued polygamy through the urban *mapoto* unions whilst keeping the official wife in the rural home.” (Response by Sarah: The Sunday Mail, 17-23 November, 2013:ppL9)

This reader was justifying the existence of this form of a once hegemonic masculinity as grounded in tradition or some cultural norms and values. She argued that there have been failed attempts to eradicate this practice and that this was an indication of how the practice has stood the test of time and metamorphosised into an alternate form (small housing) with a strong traditional background. Moletsane (2014:14) however, characterises these types of arguments as a form of cultural nostalgia and argues that the notion of ‘going back to our roots [is] an aspect of troubled and contested knowledge [that is] often invoked to address challenging phenomenon in contemporary society’. She further argues that it is a sentiment of loss and longing for a positively evaluated past world hence the idea of a ‘restorative nostalgia' which invokes the need to ‘reclaim our culture’ in an attempt to recapture that which was lost (ibid). In the precolonial period, polygamy was a central defining characteristic of the marriage institution amongst the Shona people of Zimbabwe (Dube 2013). It gave a man the prospects to balance missing ‘entitlements’ amongst the spouses, such as wanting to have (more) sons as a way of enlarging one’s clan to enjoying diverse culinary styles offered by wives. It therefore defined the dominant masculinity symbolising wealth (shown by the ability to pay *lobola* for multiple women), virility (shown by the number of children sired with the spouses) and ability to manage numerous wives. Consequently small housing can be argued to be a desire to go back to the past, a way of reclaiming one’s culture and reasserting a once ‘lost’ form of masculinity. It was quite apparent that the practice brings to the fore ‘new’ and changing forms of masculinities. I will now turn to these.

Firstly, I was quite intrigued by how these men were quite open about desiring what they called ‘independent women’ who would not be entirely financially dependent on them, despite most of the men being economically well-off. This trait departs from the masculine ideal of the provider male that defines the old dominant masculinity. Besides the provider perspective, this small housing masculinity admires women who are almost equals, another
departure from the generalised belief of men desiring women of lower standing than them. Secondly, all the men I interviewed talked about how careful they were to preserve their marriages with their official wives and they were keen on justifying their small housing relationships as a ‘better’ way to have extramarital sex compared to having sex with ‘ladies of the night from the Avenues’. Thirdly, they stressed that most of their small house relationships were not just about sex but more esteemed qualities like ‘good’ company and a space to relax, even though they were particular about avoiding commitment, a trait that is generally seen in men who prefer sex workers (Joseph and Black 2012).

To a certain extent, I see these men as trying to distinguish themselves as performing a type of masculinity that is different from the assumed ‘other’ (the traditional masculinity). Though similar to the traditional masculinity in desiring and actually having more than one sexual partner, their masculinity is different in that they are no longer looking for women who are entirely economically dependent on them and who cannot engage with them as equals. This means they actively seek for women who are in a matching social and economic class, educated and financially well off like them. In light of this, one can argue that perhaps this departure from the traditional provider masculinity is a reflection of a ‘masculinity in crisis’ trying to tactfully evade the burdens of a potentially costly relationship given the middle-class women they desire both for their marriages and as small houses. The concept of masculinity in crisis, is usually defined in relation to poor men within the context of the economic challenges faced in neoliberal societies. However, it can also be used for these well off men. For instance, Hunter (2002) and Morrell (1998) note on men in Durban, South Africa, and how their masculinities were rooted in changing material practices which put to the fore processes through which meanings and practices are produced and contested. Such processes of colonialism, urbanisation, migration and neoliberalism have continued to shape and reshape masculinities and sexual practices in Southern Africa. In this sense, the economic challenges and pressures facing Zimbabweans in general can be argued to have forced these men to take on an alternative form of masculinity that justify their preference for

34 However, this does not dismiss the fact that there are many other men in small housing relationships with women of lower status and financially dependent.

35 The ‘Avenues’ is a residential and commercial area in Harare close to the city centre characterised by broad roads with jacaranda trees where ladies of the night (commercial sex workers) stand behind the trees and flash passing cars, hoping they will be interested and stop for their services.
women of the same high socio-economic status which they present as economically independent and hence do not put pressure on them to practice the provider masculinity.

Ratele (2014) argues that media portrayals of men as consumers who fit a certain status and class aspirations puts a heavy burden on them to fit into these categories, which are defined by costly consumer items like cars, electronic gadgets and clothing labels, the schools one sends their children to and the kind of places they hang out. Hence, subscribing to the provider masculinity will certainly strain one’s financial standing in such a consumerist economy. Therefore, these men are comfortable with providing lavish gifts like expensive jewellery, perfumes or electronic gadgets, however, once in a while (as a mark of the expected gift exchange in any kind of relationship as well as a show of their financial status) as opposed to being in a relationship with a lower class small house where they might be expected to pay for the woman’s monthly accommodation rentals and cover her household’s expenditures. Hence, a complicit form of masculinity is seen to be emerging where men are reconfiguring themselves in a manner that allows them to navigate the present world and its demands.

During one mini focus group discussion during a lunch break with four professionals, financially well off men in their late forties, they informed me that there was a new term for small houses: ‘similar houses’. This term denotes how the small house relationship is more like the legitimate ‘big house’ especially in terms of stability, and level of commitment. Yet, paradoxically, men wanted a sense of stability and at the same time hailed the flexibility of these relationships. Owen, a 47-year-old businessman explained:

“Well you know these relationships can be comical…I have my small house, we have been on and off for a number of years now. She knows I’m not going to divorce my wife and I think she, at times, gets frustrated when she starts falling in love with me. Then she’ll break up with me telling me she found a single guy with whom she wants to be serious with and when the relationship is not going well she finds a way of getting back with me. She knows I’m not going anywhere…I’ll always be here…waiting for her. I know I love her but marriage is not possible…Barika hariite [polygamy is not on] It just complicates your life for nothing and once you marry a small house, she’s no longer a small house…she becomes a big house[legitimate wife] and in no time you’ll be running away from her… (Laughs)
I found this idea of wanting to portray a different kind of masculinity from the polygamous one perplexing as once again, the endeavour proved to entangle itself in a web of paradoxes. On one hand the men talked of not wanting commitment and on the other they referred to small houses as ‘similar houses’ running parallel to official marriages and signalling a sense of stability and commitment to the relationships. However, in trying to make sense of this situation I concluded that most of these men would have desired to formalise their small house relationships, especially those who had been dating for long. However, they were bound by their monogamous civil law marriages, which made small housing an adulterous act and where filing for a divorce is usually a protracted process and socially frowned upon. Men therefore would appear to be in a quandary: their modern marriages and their social positions as Christians and respected community members would not allow them to enter into either the despised polygamous marriages or consider divorce. These men therefore imagined themselves as ‘strong’ men who can enter into long term sexual relationships where they avoid to commit via marriage. Small housing therefore presented an opportunity to experience an utopian relationship they yearned for with their wives and at the same time they took action to prevent their small housing relationships to become marriages, an institution they were seeking temporary breaks from.

One can see a form of ‘fractured masculinity’ where these men are part of a masculinity hegemony in which however, they are carving their own way of being men that borrows but divorces from the traditional way of doing things. This resonates with Hunter’s (2002) observation of men in Durban as he notes that the men have conformed to Christianity and and colonialism and its shunning of polygamous marriages and have consequently taken on a new form of justifying having numerous sexual companions by conflating polygamy and multiple sexual partners. As such, the Zimbabwean men I interviewed subscribe to the present day marriages that are characterised by monogamy, nuclear household organisation and women’s increasing education and participation in the formal and informal workforce. Although this form of union presents great opportunities for the socially sanctioned contemporary family type, it fails to satiate men’s desires when it comes to the emerging ideals of marital companionship. Men complained about wives who become submerged in the ‘consuming maternal career’, in addition to their professional careers. They therefore missed the affective aspects of marital relationships. This affective dimension is what most of these men are searching for in small houses, a form of bounded authenticity which they argue, lacks from relationships or encounters with sex workers. It is this desire for affection,
pleasure and emotional ties which seem to make these men vulnerable as it is not seen as a sexual commodity which can be bought but a ‘natural’ process which develops and subsequently sees both the men and the women involved losing their vigilance in protecting themselves against STIs and HIV (see Chapter 4 on the affectionate dimensions of small housing).

**Weighing social safety vs physical safety.**

As aforementioned, pro small housing men also created a form of complicit masculinity to the traditional polygamous hegemonic masculinity by articulating small housing as a ‘better’ way of having an extramarital relationship compared to men who pay for sex with sex workers. These men wanted to portray their brand of masculinity as ‘smarter’ than the ‘careless’ forms of masculinities that engage in ‘one-night-stands’ and picks up ‘prostitutes’ from the streets. To them, ‘picking’ up a sex worker was an outdated habit and was reserved for ‘low class men with no sense of self respect and dignity.’ Hence according to these men, small housing has become a dignified means of having sex outside marriage in the sense that ‘one does not have to look for a dingy hotel for short –time sex or have sex in the back of a car, shameful acts with high chances of being caught and ending up on the front page of the local newspapers’. This distinction between what they called ‘dignified’ relationships with small houses versus ‘shameful’ short term one night stands or a ‘pick up’ in the Avenues can be seen as an attempt to separate different types of masculinities and a process of yielding power through subordinating the other masculinities. This process of gaining power by diminishing the other mirrors the battle of femininities between big houses, small houses and ‘commercial aunts’ discussed in Chapter 5, a process embroiled in changing cultural and material practices. As Hunter (2002) aptly notes, such battles demonstrates the various processes through which meanings and practices are established and challenged. One example of such processes is an understanding of the concept of safety. In this context small houses are seen as ‘socially safe’ however, underplaying the importance of ‘physical safety’ (Hirsch 2007).

Social safety in this context is perceived through the man having less risk of being caught stopping in a ‘hot spot’ to pick up a sex worker as small housing mainly entails the couple having the security and comfort of the woman’s apartment as their love nest. It is also tied in with the need to protect one’s social status given that most of these small housing men are affluent and respected members in their communities. The concept of ‘physical safety’ is muddled in the misconception that these middle class small house women are ‘safer’ than sex
workers in relation to fears of contracting STIs or HIV. Hence, small house women are hailed as rational beings who would not put themselves at risk by ‘sleeping around’ with numerous men. These small houses are also assumed to have better knowledge about the dangers of unprotected sex and that they protect themselves accordingly. Interestingly, most men subscribed to a prevalent belief that when they have unprotected sex with a small house, this demonstrates a level of intimacy and some kind of privilege that is entitled only to them.

The tendency of shunning sex workers - as they are labelled as physically unsafe in terms of fears of contracting STIs and HIV - in favour of middle class women who are willing to be small houses is a widely held belief in Harare. There have been reports in the local press of some sex workers ditching street work and “dressing up formally like professionals” to lure wealthy men looking for independent middle class small houses (The Sunday Mail, 6-13 November 2013). Local newspapers carried stories about sex workers now frequenting posh hotel bars and would sit and drink expensive liquor pretending to stressed out by work in the hope of enticing wealthy men to be small house to. These women are aware that they have to act like independent middle class women and not be fully dependant on these wealthy men, so many continue to engage in sex work so as to broaden their income base. Hence, a man looking for a middle class ‘independent’ woman is likely to easily fall for this kind of performance believing he is engaging in a socially safe yet potentially physically risky relationship. Despite the potential risk involved in engaging with these sex workers pretending to be middle class professional women, physical safety is still underplayed with the other middle class small houses who are believed to be ‘safe’. Yet, this stands in sharp contrast to the lived experiences of some of those middle class women who have reported having other ‘side flings’ or concurrent sexual relationships with other men. The men I interviewed, just as the women in previous chapters, reported that at some point they had had spontaneous unprotected sex with their small houses and had continued without knowledge of their HIV statuses. In many cases, these men just like the small houses I interviewed, were more concerned about pregnancy issues.

“Small housing is not polygamy. It is cheating!” Perspectives of anti small-housing men.

Though small housing was somehow presented by the pro small housing men as a revived and ‘new’ norm, a behaviour symbolic of the traditional dominant masculinity that revered polygamy, some men who despised the practice expressed strong sentiments and argued that it was erroneous to associate it with or label it as a form of the Zimbabwean cultural tradition.
of polygamy. My first encounter with such a sentiment was when I took my daughter for a scheduled visit with her paediatrician. I had spent about an hour and a half in a fully packed waiting room with wailing babies and mothers too concerned with their babies to engage in any time-passing conversations. I had not planned to interview 54-year old Dr Chinoda, my baby’s paediatrician. When I finally got my turn to see the doctor, I went in and was greeted by a warm smile with no sign of exhaustion considering the number of patients he had been seeing in the one and half hours I had been waiting. He looked at my daughter’s baby clinic card and obviously noticed that under the ‘Mother’s Occupation’ item line it was listed as ‘Student’. He asked me what I was studying and I eagerly explained my field and area of interest and he snickered at the idea of studying small houses, which he believed did not deserve to be given such significance. He took my daughter and did a quick health check and passed her back to me whilst scribbling on the health card. He told me that everything was fine with the baby and surprisingly went back to the small houses issue. He said:

“You know…I know you are a PhD student and maybe trying to analyze and theorize sexual behaviours but I want you to keep this in mind….from a Christian perspective, small housing is a spirit of harlotry, Satan’s seed to destroy marriages. My daughter, I can tell you that in the 56 years I have lived and known God, such behaviours we are now seeing is harlotry in its extremes and signify the end of times in the last empire. We are living in Sodom and Gomorrah my dear…we are nearing the end of the world.’
(Conversation with Dr Chinoda)

A local Pentecostal church pastor I interviewed, Pastor Jack reiterated this argument that small housing was the devil’s plan to destroy the sanctity of marriage and he retorted that ‘small housing is not polygamy, it is cheating’. These two men’s viewpoints resonate with the idea of ‘new masculinity’ that are propagated by most Pentecostal churches as a way to discourage multiple concurrent partnerships and curb HIV (Chitando 2007). Such masculinity involves men who despise violence, men who can openly express their romantic and affective dispositions to their wives and are able to maintain marital fidelity (ibid).

Two more men that I interviewed did not necessarily identify themselves as Christians but they were also against the idea of small housing and called it ‘cowardice behaviour’ from
men who cannot handle problems or challenges in their marital homes. Tonderai, a 36-year-old secondary school teacher remarked:

“You cant call yourself a real man when you run away from the heat at home to seek solace in the arms of another woman who will lick your wounds and pat your back like a wounded dog. That’s being a coward! There’s nothing manly in that! If there are issues at home, a man has to be strong and deal with whatever that needs to be dealt with. Most of these men you see small housing imbwende (cowards) scared of their wives and they cannot even talk to them like men. So they run away to small houses where they are treated like kings and reassured of their manhood.”(Interview with Tonderai)

In a response to Muganiwah’s column, which I mentioned earlier on small houses, a reader identified as Levi argued:

“Society, the media included, are trying to bestow some kind of decency on social vices that take away from society leaving it morally bankrupt…you hear women proudly saying I am not a sex worker I’m somebody’s small house. Honestly, what is the difference? And please let us not dignify small housing and call it polygamy. Even if one argues that it is polygamy, then I dare say the re-emergence of this form of polygamy is sad indeed. It should not be seen as anything else but cheating, an insult to our culture!”(The Sunday Mail. 24-30 November 2013)

What is common amongst these men who were anti small housing is how they used Christianity as well as ‘culture’ as their basis for critiquing small housing. Both perspectives attack any form of restorative nostalgia that small housing men might use to justify their actions. Christianity was used focusing on its monogamous angle and its understanding of how ‘real’ men were characterised by their sexual modesty rather than sexual potency and hence are able to commit and maintain exclusive sexual rights to one wife. Therefore any other form of masculinity that revered polygamy or sex with multiple partners is considered, a weaker masculinity, the devil’s work set on a destructive path (to destroy marriages, people’s health and Christians in general). In this sense, the Christian men are seen as presenting themselves and their beliefs as ‘counter-cultural’ (Chitando 2007). Traditional
norms and values are viewed as a potential vice and deterrent to maintaining an esteemed masculinity with its basis in a Christian lifestyle. Real men are able to challenge established however out-dated traditions and carve out ‘new’ ways of being men- those that embody Christian principles and are seen as a mark of being modern.

Other men called small housing an insult to the Zimbabwean ‘culture’, highlighting that it distorted how the traditional process of engaging in polygamous marriages was conducted. During a mini focus group discussion with four men in their late forties they concurred that polygamy in the traditional way entailed a man first consulting his first wife and elders and these would help him in choosing the subsequent wives. However, they pointed out that the present day small housing involves hiding the relationship from the legitimate wife and from other important social circles and hence it is labelled as ‘cheating’ in a modern marriage framework. This concurred with how the sexual entrepreneurs discussed in Chapter 5 labelled small housing and critiqued any female relatives who would acknowledge a small house officially introduced to them highlighting that as long as one is a woman, karma would see one’s husband also getting a small housing and the small house being accepted by his family. Hence, on one hand this distinctive viewpoint of the Christian religion with its tenets of monogamy and good deeds and on the other, a particular understanding of the ‘original’ traditional values, presented certain “opportunity structures” (Chitando 2007) claimed by these men as a form of the dominant masculinity in modern day Zimbabwe. As such, small housing men were seen as a minority, ‘a few men stuck in the past’ and still engaging in archaic masculinity behaviours and hence the subjugated masculinity. Interestingly, most of the men who were small housing actually presented themselves as modern men, Christians, who shunned traditional customary practices and were more attuned to Christian and modern ways of life.

The pro and anti small housing masculinities showed the contestations over hegemony as well the tensions and fragmentations inherent in masculinities. It also put to the fore how masculinities are relational and contingent and undergoing construction (Ratele 2013). The Christian men who were against small housing did not refer at all to the other sect of Christians, for instance, the African Independent Churches (mapostori) who believe in and practice polygamy following the same Bible specifically the Old Testament teachings. Hence Christian masculinities, for instance, are fragmented in a way depending on one’s denomination and their interpretation of the Bible. For those who acknowledge polygamy as a legitimate means to have multiple spouses and concurrent sexual partners, the present day
small housing was seen as a skewed attempt to resuscitate polygamy in what they argued to be an insulting manner to the dignity of the traditional practice. However, this meant they were not in a position to acknowledge a ‘remaking’ of a new form of masculine practice, a possible move to establish their dominance. For instance, Tonderai’s labelling of small housing behaviour as cowardice signifies a subjugation of this masculinity tendency with characteristics of frailty, timidity hence a weaker form of masculinity. This notion of subjugation highlights the view of how a hegemonic masculinity as a societal euphemism for male dominance is established through subordination of the ‘other’ (subdued masculinities and femininities). One can also see the struggles for hegemony that masculinities undergo as the small housing type of masculinity tries to assert a gender identity rooted in a cultural script seen as a source of credibility with a grounded history. Concurrently, the anti-small housing masculinity turns this assertion to be a sign of ‘lack of manliness’, a dependency on a past that no longer exists and a sign of a lack of valour to forge a new beginning and construct a ‘new’ culture. However, the anti-small housing men’s interpretation of small housing men can also be understood in light of some literature that has presented men who engage in extramarital sex or those who buy sex from sex workers as men who feel insecure about their masculinity and hence engage in compensatory behaviours in order to reaffirm their masculine status (Joseph and Black 2013).

**Ben 10s: Making virtue out of necessity or masculinity in crisis?**

As I have already highlighted in earlier chapters, I came across a Ben 10 phenomenon, a term used to describe a younger man in a relationship with an older woman. During my fieldwork, these were young men usually between the ages of 21 and 26 who were seen as ‘side flings’ [or deliberate short-term sexual relationship not meant to serious] by women in small housing relationships with other men of their age or older. Nonetheless, the term is not restricted to young men dating only small housing women. It can also be used to any young man dating a conspicuously older woman generally referred to as a ‘sugar mummy’. Though the small house terminology seems to be specific to Zimbabwe, the Ben 10 lingo is also used in South Africa as shown on their local films screend on Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) Multichoice termed “Lokshin Bioskop”\(^{36}\) and in Lesotho\(^{37}\), also referring to young men in

---

\(^{36}\) Local short films on the South African DSTV Multichoice network channels MzanW-163 and 164 about everyday township life and experiences.

\(^{37}\) [http://sundayexpress.co.ls/?p=12146](http://sundayexpress.co.ls/?p=12146)
sexual relationships with older financially well-off single or married women. My interest in these Ben 10s was mainly to find out how they perceive their masculinity as well as understand how they managed their sexual relationships and identities in general.

I met Munya in August 2013, then a 22-year-old student at Harare Polytechnic College and during this time he was dating Biggy one of my research participants (see Chapter 2 for details on Biggy). She introduced me to Munya during a friend’s birthday party and it was a brief encounter as he was apparently just ‘passing by’ on his way to another party. He was with a bunch of his friends who all looked like young lads (between 20 to 23 years) dressed in the locally dubbed ‘bling-bling’ style which is more like ‘hip-hop style’ baggy T-shirts and caps, hanging ‘oversized’ jewellery and dropped jeans. Munya was driving Biggy’s car and he spoke with this imitated black American hip-hop accent. We briefly chatted that night and it was apparent that he was sort of ‘showing off’ his girlfriend to his friends before they drove off for a ‘boys night out’ and promised to come back and pick up Biggy after the party. We met again about a week later and we talked about his relationship with Biggy. Munya was adamant to prove that he was in love with Biggy and told me that he was ready to propose marriage to her though his parents and siblings did not approve of the relationship. However, he did not seem to be aware that Biggy was dating another man as a small house. At some point I asked him whether he was not bothered about the age difference and also what his friends thought about his relationship with Biggy. He pointed out that he had ended his relationship with his younger girlfriend. He stressed that he made this decision, as he now wanted to concentrate on building his relationship with Biggy, an idea he noted as illustrating how serious he was about the relationship and was not bothered by the age difference. He indicated that his friends envied him and wished they could also get older financially independent girlfriends as ‘younger girlfriends were stressful, immature and expected the man to provide financially mainly when they decide to dine out or do some recreational activities like watching movies at the cinema’. However, Munya was keen to point out that for him being in a relationship with Biggy was not about her money as ‘people might think’ and he noted that he came from an affluent family. Referencing to ‘what people might think’ shows how Munya was quite aware of the general public’s negative perceptions about Ben 10s. He highlighted that he was not comfortable with being called a Ben 10 and that he viewed his relationship as being not different from any other dating relationship such that focusing on the age difference and assuming that there were always distinct economic
statuses between the partners led to the portrayal of this kind of relationship with negative connotations.

During the same period, I met Ricky a 24-year-old jobless young man through a male friend who was helping me connect with small housing men. Ricky was dating a 33-year-old woman whom he was aware that she was small housing with an older man, a politician. Ricky highlighted that he knew that he is a ‘Ben 10’ and playing second fiddle and light-heartedly retorted that ‘ndiyo yacho, itori bho yakadaro’(it is Ok as it is). Ricky did not appear bothered by the negativity surrounding being a Ben 10 and in some way venerated his position as the ‘new norm’ for young men and that ‘many young men he knew wished they could be Ben 10s’. He pointed out that he had his other ‘proper’ girlfriend, Revai, a 20-year-old college student. Ricky explained how he hangs out with Chido, the small house, at her own convenience and noted that he was comfortable with that arrangement as it did not put any pressure on him and also gave him space and time to be with his younger girlfriend who did not suspect that he was cheating on her. He pointed out that he was in between jobs as his work contract had just expired but he was confident that he would be back on the job in a few months’ time. Ricky, like Munya, also stated that he was not dating this older woman necessarily for money but was quick to note that he enjoyed the luxuries that came with the relationship. Such luxuries he explained, involved at times getting to drive her car ‘which always had a full tank’, that she paid all the bills for any outings, gifts he would receive now and then as well as the ‘wild sex’ they used to have stating how sexually experienced and open to try new things she was.

He however pointed out that he was not quite sure why she was dating him as ‘he did not seem to be his type’ [in that he was younger and struggled financially] but nonetheless he pointed out that he was not bothered to find out. He however stressed that he had wanted to know if she was married, as he did not want to be involved with a married woman. “Vakadzi vevanhu vanouraya sista. Unoitwa central locking ukapinda mu H-metro!” (Married women are dangerous. You can die in such a relationship if you get a woman who has central locking system and you will end up on the headlines of the H-metro press). This statement also

38 Central locking system, a term derived from the automatic system of locking a car’s doors simultaneously when the driver’s door is locked is commonly used in Zimbabwe to refer to a certain belief that a husband or wife can use muti/juju on their spouse to avoid cheating. This is believed to include making one’s husband fail to have an erection with any other woman or an extreme of ‘locking’ the cheating partners where after coitus their sexual organs will remained joined, potentially leading to death.
reflected how people are generally tolerant of men who cheat on their wives but if it is a married woman cheating it is seen as a taboo and some men go an extra mile to make sure they ‘protect’ their wives using *juju* like the ‘central locking system’. Ricky also reported that he was staying with his older brother and his family and so was not worried about having to pay rent though he worried about not having enough to spend with friends and on himself for luxuries. He made effort to present his relationship with the older woman as a relationship he was in just for fun and not a sexual transactional relationship as these kinds of relationships are generally presented. He reiterated this point by saying,

“I’ve never received cash from her for anything except for occasions where she would give me money and ask me to go and pay her bills for her and if there is change, I would bring back her change and usually she refuses to take it back. She has never offered me cash and I don’t think I would be comfortable to accept it but of course she likes buying me gifts and I like it that way!”

The two cases I have presented to a larger extent represent the other Ben 10s I briefly interacted with during my fieldwork. However, interestingly I did not come across any Ben 10 who explicitly acknowledged being in this kind of relationship for money. Most of them ardently stressed that they were aware of the negative perceptions that people had about Ben 10s. However, despite the young men being keen on stressing that they did not want to be viewed as people in such relationships for money, one can still rope in the argument of whether being a Ben 10 is an example of a masculinity in crisis. The notion of masculinity in crisis emanates from the concept of the provider male which has however been disrupted and reconfigured by globalisation and recessions that have incapacitated men from performing a number of their traditional expected roles (McDowell 2012). Hence masculinity in crisis is connected to the socio-economic changes and men’s loss of economic authority in specific economic, political and other socio-cultural arrangements in which local masculinities are articulated. Listening to the stories of the young men I interviewed, one can be quick to classify them as men experiencing a crisis especially looking at the fact that all of them were either unemployed, working class or college students. Though they adamantly repudiated the possible idea of being in such relationships for money, they all acknowledged that they were Ben 10s in the sense of being younger and less financially stable than their girlfriends, but
rejected the perception that they were more like ‘kept or trophy boys’ for the women, a position taken probably to defend whatever is left of their masculine identity.

From general local perspectives, being a Ben 10 is a sign of emasculation, allowing oneself to be under a ‘petticoat government’ and ceding all power to the woman. However, other perspectives can appreciate these young men as having seemingly out of choice and desire decided to go against the cultural grain of being the provider male and be part of a ‘new’ masculine gender identity. On one hand, this ‘new’ identity can be seen as a transformation of masculinity politics in the Zimbabwean context where men generally tend to court and marry younger women and rarely women of the same age or older ones (Ndlovu 2013). Also, men mostly date and wed women who are of a lower economic status to them(ibid). On the other hand, this new identity could be seen as a way of ‘making virtue out of necessity’ by exaggerating their comfort with a deplored identity in a society that undervalues young men. Young men in this sense, proudly present themselves as content with the ‘lower’ status they have in Ben 10 relationships and with their loss of power reflected in how the mature financially independent woman controls the relationship. Yet as argued before it could be a form of crisis in the sense that these young men do not necessarily have a choice given that they are also constrained by consumerist aspirations like dressing up in fashionable clothes, driving fancy cars as well as dining out in classy restaurants, desires that they cannot fulfill own their own but through being in Ben 10 relationships.

However, Moghadas et al (2012) argue that the concept of masculinity in crisis is a political social construction which can be understood as a form of moral panic. They assert that men still have multiple masculinities that they can choose from. Padilla (2007) makes the same case from his study of Dominican male sex workers who have what he terms the patriarchal gender privildge (p,61) and besides their ‘liminal’ and stigmatising sexual behaviours as sex workers, they are still access the normative masculinity through a provider role with younger female girlfriends. In light of this argument, Ben 10s for instance, at times choose to be in these sexual relationships with older women, relationships potentially discrediting of their masculine status and in other instances concurrently maintain a younger woman with whom they perform the provider-male form of masculinity, a likely means to compensate for their emasculated ‘manhood’ with the older woman. This was apparent during my fieldwork when

---

39 ‘Petticoat government’ is a derogatory way of referring to a man who is controlled by a woman. It literary refers to a petticoat as an undergarment and how the man is seen as ‘under’ the woman/wife.
I spoke to some Ben 10s like Ricky highlighting that they also had other relationships with younger women whom in most instances they regarded as the ‘true love’ and potential marriage suitor, scenarios that bring to the fore the issue of sexual networks discussed in earlier chapters. It also shows, just like the small house femininities, the multiple sexualities, identities and subjectivities that the young men had and could choose from. Just like some small houses who could choose to be temporary small houses with the hope of becoming houses at some point or small housing men who are fathers and husbands with families and at times engage with small houses- individuals in these categories draw on, reproduce and resist contradictory sexualities, gendered meanings and expectations. This ties in with Hall’s (1996:6) argument that ‘identities are the points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.” In this context, the role of language that defines and describes a Ben 10 or a small house is critical in the construction and negotiation of realities and selves in different interpersonal relationships and cultural contexts. It also shows how people do not have stable identities, that is, how individual identities can be performative as well as flexible. This highlights how these Ben 10 masculinities can also be perceived as transformative on one hand and restorative on the other hand, a way of dealing with changes and different realities.

However, the restorative dimension seems straightforward to comprehend as it relates to their relationships with younger women and how these young men perform a kind of masculinity that resonates with the hegemonic masculinity, especially as dominant provider males. Also, dating two women concurrently, in this case, the older woman and possibly a younger woman also reflects a form of masculinity in resonance with the traditional hegemonic one which venerates multiple concurrent sexual relationships for men. Dating an older woman can be valued in the young man’s circle of friends as an accomplishment, a mark of manhood and prowess in that the young man is considered as having been successful in wooing and ‘courting’ an older prosperous woman. This is shown in the case of Munya who pointed out how his friends admired him as a Ben 10 and wished they could also be in that kind of relationship. Traditional values of the dominant masculinity are in the case of Ben 10s, intertwined in an alternate way with being modern, in producing a form of ‘in-between’ masculinity status that these young men adore and seem comfortable with though negatively perceived in this particular cultural context.

The transformative dimension of the Ben 10 masculine identity is seen in how this identity though constructed around negativity is in itself a production of a novel cultural meaning and
how these young men are negotiating a different understanding of the practice. In a sense, the Ben 10 phenomenon is a social reality that is not just a semantic construction noticeable in the way it is perceived as undesirable, but a reality seeking a new meaning. This new meaning is forging its way in how dating older women is the new ‘cool’ relationship as perceived amongst youths as it comes with a status of sexual prowess and the level of ease that these young men project about being in these relationships. Also, some young men professed being in love with the older women and were willing to formalise their relationships and make their parents acknowledge the older woman as a marriage suitor though they noted how the small house women were openly not interested in this idea and that their (Ben 10s) parents were strongly against their relationships. In most instances, they highlighted that their parents became protective when they heard that their son was a Ben 10, assuming that it was an unequal and exploitative relationship with their son as the subordinated partner. Hence, most young men used ‘sexual silence’ to their parents as a ‘strategy to avoid disclosure and therefore, remain normal men’ (Padilla 2007:61). With sexual silence as a strategy mostly to their parents, one can appreciate how the Ben 10s are trying to challenge and move beyond the discursive understanding of Ben 10 relationships and negotiate broader ways of representing what it is and means to be a Ben 10.

Conclusion
This chapter has shown how Zimbabwean masculinities have not been spared from the effects of changing material practices brought about by waves of modernity, colonialism, Christianity and neoliberalism and hence the fragmented and conflicting masculinities that exist and seek dominance and recognition. Pro small housing masculinity shows the opportunities for internal contestations within a traditional hegemonic masculinity as well as how meanings and practices around polygamy and safety have continued to be redefined. This resonates with Ratele’s (2013) argument that traditional masculinity is not necessarily predestined, hence there are opportunities for masculinities changeability which is evident in how men engage with the ‘traditional’ aspect of manliness and how they have also allowed it to be fluid and equivocal. Aspects of traditional norms and values permeate the ‘new’ masculinities that are budding seen in the form of modern, Christian as well as the youthful Ben 10 masculinities. Hence the ‘newness’ is embroiled with the past, which stands as a marker of an indestructible characteristic of Zimbabwean manhood. Yet interesting changes presented in the form of valorising monogamy and marital fidelity, romantic love as well as a change in how to have numerous sexual partners are increasingly becoming central defining
characteristics of the so-called modern Zimbabwean man. Nonetheless, the pursuit and preservation of companionate marriages and despising of divorce remain a challenge in an HIV rife context as it propagates engaging in multiple concurrent sexual partnerships and the creation of sexual networks in search for affection, security, love amongst other things. Nonetheless, this framework has provided a stage for the continuous (re)production and reconfiguration of masculinities presented in the contexts of the dominant ways of being a man branded as the ‘real’ men and guiltlessly enjoying the rewards of being a Ben 10.
Chapter 7: Concluding remarks: towards a ‘Human Economy’ of small housing?

Introduction

When I started out on my PhD project – which now seems an age ago – I was one of the first cohort of Human Economy PhD students. As my background was largely in development, I struggled to fully comprehend the essence of what a ‘Human Economy’ approach may be. Having now come to the end of this process, I want to try and tie some main strands of my research and arguments together in this concluding chapter with my attempt at thinking through what a Human Economy of small housing may look like. This may well be a rather risky way of concluding my thesis, but I hope that it allows me to frame the story thus far through a somewhat different lens, opening up new avenues to consider my ethnographic engagements.

Thus far, this thesis has been silent on the aspects of a human economy approach and how it may look when applied to small houses. Although not explicitly stated as ‘a human economy approach’ in the preceding chapters, the small house phenomenon as presented thus far, expressed through the narratives of the women, reflects some of the dynamics of this approach especially as discussed in Chapter 3. Hunter’s (2002) influential concept of the ‘materiality of everyday sex’ showed that money and material gifts have infiltrated everyday life including in intimate relationships. It is difficult to separate economic transactions and intimate sexual life (see also Zelizer 2005). In reality there exists a multiplex mingling of economic transactions and sexuality. ‘Emotional authenticity’ (ibid.) is intricately and explicitly incorporated into the economic contract and this makes it apparent that commodification and intimacy do not necessarily constitute ‘hostile worlds’.

Yet, development (and public health) discourses have always been constructing ‘ideal type’ neoliberal subjects via donor aid pushing particular research priorities that fit well into neoliberal discourse. The small house is one such example of a rigidly constructed subject whose motivations for engaging in such a relationship have been construed as entirely economic. This has consequently led to a portrayal of these women as fundamentally homo economicus thus instrumentalising their sexual behaviours. Such economic determinism separates the worlds of economics and sexual behavior in ways that obfuscate the lived realities of the actors under scrutiny. Subsequently, such a portrayal fits the recommended
panacea for these women i.e given that they are portrayed as having been pushed by poverty and lack of education, hence the resolution to ‘empower’ them with livelihood (economic) strategies and to educate them. Even though the small house phenomenon became prevalent during a period of economic and political crises in Zimbabwe, and irrefutably such relationships were to some extent a product of poverty, the idea that women depend on men for survival is not the only, or best, way to read the small house phenomenon.

The contemporary configurations of small housing, as my thesis has demonstrated, present a complex situation that challenges the rigid idealization of a neoliberal and development discourse constructing ‘charity case’ women in need of (outside donor funded) redemption. Small houses have become a metaphorical symbolic critique of the constrictive environment associated with the ‘charity case’ woman in ways that force us to seriously reconsider how we posit women’s (and men’s) sexual behaviours vis-à-vis the socio-economic and political climate in which they are situated. A human economy approach draws us to understand these relationships from a broader perspective, one that perceives these women as undeniably living in a particularly defining economic context and whose preferences and choices are sometimes shaped by calculations, which are neither predetermined nor predictable. It also brings into significance other defining socio-cultural, political and familial contexts as well as the personal and emotional experiences, which include their subjectivities and agency in defining, making and remaking the contexts in which they are located.

I set out in this thesis to investigate middle class women’s motivations for engaging in and the meanings that they attach to their small house relationships in present day Zimbabwe. Asking some fundamental questions like: how have small houses been explained in terms of neoliberal, health and development models and in what ways can nuanced ethnographic enquiry pose challenges to this; what strategies do small houses use to have a safe, satisfying sexual relationship and what are the women’s perceptions of HIV risk as well as exploring the local understandings and perspectives on small houses helped develop a comprehensive approach to understanding the small house phenomenon. In this regard, my thesis sought to go beyond the ways in which the small house phenomenon has been conceptualised in the Zimbabwean context. I have argued that current approaches are inadequate to understanding the small house phenomenon because they ignore the complex interconnections between sexual intimacies, desires and economic strategising inherent in such relationships. These approaches also do not take into account the complex nature of individual choices and subsequently because of their rigid conceptualisations of sexual behaviours they overlook.
other various ways of looking at and understanding the small house phenomenon. However, given all the above, it is imperative to highlight that the value of this thesis is more on its empirical contribution to contemporary social phenomenon than in critiquing popular development and public health conceptualizations. At the same time, it should not be seen as mere cataloguing of the sexual and intimate practices of small house women but rather should be read as an exploration of the various significances that the latter attach to sex, love and intimacy and the subsequent interpretations given to social and sexual relationships.

Consecutively, it has also put to the fore other previously neglected observations like how small houses facilitate the production of new forms of conduct and social reality and are a reflection of an increasingly unequal society. It is this kind of society which has continuously produced a ‘liminal’ sexuality, perceived in a local context but echoing other forces at play.

For instance, the rise of the middle class small house shows the instability that surrounded the Zimbabwean economy up till this day given the precariousness that defines the middle class status, with the unstable job markets on which their status is dependent. Zimbabwe experienced what Sachikonye (2012) calls the ‘lost decade’ where the economy collapsed due to a number of factors including bad governance by an authoritarian leader and his ruling party, poor economic strategies and sanctions leading to an estrangement by the key world economic players. At this point there existed a chaotic economic, social and political system with traits of neoliberalism and at the same time socialist rhetoric, a scenario that made daily life in Zimbabwe conflicting and disjointed. It could certainly not be said that Zimbabwe created perfect neoliberal conditions. Under these circumstances, the attempts by donors to create ideal neoliberal subjects though misguided attempts at ‘empowerment’ did not work.

Connected to this, the ways in which researchers constructed women as in need of economic salvation was flawed.

It is apparent that these middle class women have in some way devised means to confront their economic challenges and dilemmas through willfully creating relationships of patronage with men in order to ‘safeguard’ their class statuses – a status they achieved independently of these men. Subsequently they have also created a new social reality in how their sexual relationships display an intersection of love, pleasure, and intimacy with the economy to form a mutually constitutive relationship between the two. Hence, a human economy approach to small housing would consider these women’s subjective understandings and their lived experiences and practices of love and intimacies, and their struggle to maintain intimacy within the shifting and constraining terrains of socio-economic processes.
A key point I make in this thesis is that intimacy, love and money are entangled in a complicated set of constantly changing connections. There is a need to explore the various nuanced meanings that women (and men) create and attach to their relationships than simply focus on the fact that material exchanges occur in intimate social relationships. Many studies on small houses in Zimbabwe have mainly focused on the incontestable fact that material exchanges occur in these relationships following research themes seeking to understand what drives them to expose themselves to the risk of HIV infection. Such research was also conceived in a period where the prevailing focus was on identifying women and youth’s vulnerabilities to HIV mainly for and by health related NGOs to feed into specific interventions related to HIV programmes. Previous studies on small houses highlighted the fact that they were central to sexual networks in which multiple concurrent partners played a key role in assisting HIV transmission between partners. They helped to construct HIV as a disease of poverty which thrived not only on economic inequalities but also in gendered differentiations of status income and decision making power.

This thesis went beyond this by looking at middle class women who are not necessarily poor but nonetheless still engage in sexual relationships that are socially stigmatised and have been labelled as risky in a context of the HIV pandemic. In exploring these relationships by focusing on women of high socio-economic status, my thesis concurred with Kim et al (2008) and Piot et al (2008) who have argued that it is not necessarily poverty that propagates risky behaviours which may lead to HIV infection but rather social and economic inequalities associated with historical transitions as well as internalized cultural scripts which can be elusive push factors into potentially risky sexual relationships.

One of my key findings in this regard was that the women with whom I conducted research seemed hardly concerned with the prospect of contracting HIV through their sexual encounters. Financially well off and educated as they were, the realities of HIV neither restrained them from engaging in such sexual behaviours nor made them cautious and want to find out about their partners’ HIV statuses. This is certainly not a reflection of neoliberal development discourse in which the ‘poor’, uneducated subject with no agency or protective structural factors make poor sexual health choices. Perhaps, as offered by Shisana et al (2014) the ARV revolution across Southern Africa has created a certain level of ‘risk disinhibition’ with regards to HIV contraction. HIV is no longer a death sentence hence not worth stressing about. Women (and men) now focus on other tenets of their sexuality like pleasure and intimacy.
Power, politics and resistance: agency within constrained spaces.

Some of the main themes that cut across the thesis were the concepts of power, politics and agency shaped by broader social, institutional, political and economic contexts. For instance, some health focused NGOs and the government perpetuated a conceptualization of small houses defined in a context of evolving consumerism and the changing economy of sexual desires, catalysed by an economic crisis and high HIV prevalence. This understanding of small houses saw these authorities legitimating the term and the practice as a problematic social reality. Despite the term having been originated by ‘ghetto urban groovers’ (urban youths singing a new hip-hop like genre), who were merely singing about social issues in the early 2000s, the powerful NGOs and the government appropriated the colloquial term under the technical jargon of multiple concurrent sexual partnerships and sexual networks. This proliferated a generalized negative perspective on small houses as ‘whores’ and home wreckers and perpetuated their stigmatization as ‘HIV carriers’ and ‘spreading agents’. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, most research on small houses in Zimbabwe looked at women’s economic vulnerability as a push factor to engaging in such relationships. Hence, most women in these relationships were categorized as poor, working class and economically dependent on men with the men involved being generally considered as older and financially well off. This display of power especially on labeling and categorizing of women involved in such relationships did not only end at the higher political levels. It also permeated the social sphere where established hierarchies deemed small houses as being outside the social ‘charmed circle’ of what is considered as ‘moral’, ‘good’ and ‘respected’ sexual relationships and sexual contact. The same development can also be seen with the most recent ‘Ben 10’ phenomenon- a label designated for young men dating older women and generally taken as being motivated by the prevailing economic constraints and again, branded a problematic social issue. This policing of heterosexual sexualities mainly by creating hierarchies that have celebrated conducts of performing and experiencing sexualities and chastised ones shows how power and politics permeate even the most private and intimate individual experiences.

Yet, in such contexts of economic inequalities and policing of sexuality at both national and community levels there are intriguing ways in which both women and men displayed different forms of agency in these various contexts. Firstly, there have been kinds of re-appropriation of the term small house to mean the modern admired femininity and sexual subject who is educated, financially stable and sexually astute. The media through TV soap operas and dramas have played a part in this development with the ‘social police’ in the form
of sexual entrepreneurs (as custodians of the sexual and gender hierarchies and also adherents of revered femininity) also seen using small houses as an example of an esteemed modern sexual subject. In light of this, the small house can be perceived as exercising agency by re-shaping the contours of heterosexual hierarchies in Zimbabwe and therefore opening up spaces for a new comprehension of sexualities that is not only understood from a perspective of social and economic inequalities and deterministic behaviours.

Secondly, these women’s agency can also be seen through what Bernstein (2007) calls the ideology of sexual fluidity – where these women can be understood as both ‘buyers’ and ‘sellers’ of sex and other intimate desires. Using the transactional sex discourse, men are usually perceived as the ‘consumers’ or receivers of sex and women as the ones ‘selling’ or providing sex in exchange for material benefits. Yet, with the evolving small house phenomenon, the women can be seen as both conspicuously ‘selling sex’ entangled in the ‘materiality of everyday sex’ and simultaneously ‘buying’ it in their relationships with younger and financially unstable Ben 10s. Though such relationships of women as ‘consumers’ of sex are not new and resemble the ‘sugar-mummy’ relationships revealed in youths and HIV research, they are different in how they bring out the ideology of sexual fluidity of women both as potential purchasers and suppliers of sex, a notion which departs from the commonly presented perspective of women as mainly providing sex and sexual desires/comforts for men’s consumption.

At this point, I will attempt to make a link of this transformation in women’s sexuality and expressions of intimacy to regional and global tendencies of ‘liberated’ sexualities. This also involves the Ben 10s sexuality and performance of masculinity. Such sexualities can be linked to new global patterns of consumerism. With ‘unlimited’ access to information as well as the ability to consume other cultures through constant watching of American television on satellite stations, the small houses’ sexual fluidity and the Ben 10s choice to be in relationships with older women suggests how experiences of intimacy (and love) are changing to reflect the inevitable intersection of sets of global cultural transactions. Ben 10s are resisting the ascription of identity by hegemonic public masculinities and carving out ‘novel’ types of romantic relationships with older women dubbed ‘cougars’ in the West, beneficial sexual partnerships and an alternative to a dominant sexual culture and sexuality.

Lastly, the agency displayed by sexual entrepreneurs, discussed in Chapter 5 reflects some women’s efforts to appropriate and subvert power and sketches the significance of the
economic dimensions of the small house. Sexual entrepreneurs, as I outlined earlier in the thesis, are women exercising agency in constructing a ‘new’ economic and social position as a response and/or decision conditioned by their experiences. Sexual entrepreneurship also exemplifies as argued by Parikh (2004:15) with reference to youth’s romantic relationships in Uganda, ‘public resonance of seeming private acts’ and she further states that ‘there is nothing more public than privacy’. This argument highlights, for instance, how sexual entrepreneurs have commodified and commercialised the concept of pleasure in what Rasmussen (2010) terms ‘progressive secular domains’, whereas it used to be a concern for the private/personal spheres. Such can be interpreted as women leading in being part of the growing ‘sexualisation of culture- a shift to more permissive sexual acts and the emergence of new forms of sexual experiences amongst others’, Attwood’s (2006:78). Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that I chose to focus on women’s agency as a different approach from the dominant development and public health frameworks that have dwelt on vulnerabilities and constraints. However, this approach as also put forward by Parikh (2004) does not deny the existence of persistent female subordination in Africa.

**Rethinking small houses: Moving beyond HIV discourses to harnessing erotic capital.**

One of the main appeals for me to undertake this area of study was my background in Development Studies as well as having been a development practitioner particularly in the areas of women, youths, livelihoods and HIV/AIDS. I had worked for a number of Zimbabwean local and international NGOs as well as an HIV/AIDS research institute in South Africa. I hoped, possibly optimistically, that my research would help bridge a gap and bring forth an apparent need for policy rethinking around women and HIV and ultimately HIV programming especially given the new drive towards evidence -informed policy making. Hence, one of my main arguments that in order for HIV interventions to be effective, they must also pay attention to individual ‘risk’ behaviours and the particular socio-economic environments in which they occur. As Smith (2013) notes in his research on Nigeria, understanding HIV entails having a fuller perspective on the changing dynamics of social, economic and political relations, which can offer a revealing perspective on the shifting contours of inequality and the problems that new and growing disparities in an increasingly capitalist economy create for and demand from its people. In principle, HIV prevention programmes should be comprehensive in that they should be informed by in-depth research on people’s sexual behaviours and the different nuances of political and socio-economic dynamics in the contexts in which they occur. This is imperative in a context of high HIV
prevalence rates where private intimacy and sexuality is deemed as potentially threatening to
the health of the nation. There is also need to rethink the notion that economically
empowering women is the panacea to reducing their so-called vulnerability and engagement
in ‘risky’ sexual conduct. Nonetheless, I am not dismissing education and secure livelihoods
as important aims for the ‘women’s empowerment’ strategy but arguing for a case where
there are not taken as the only strategies that matter.

However, the way I presented my findings and possible recommendations still does not do
justice to the notion of women’s sexualities and their lived experiences as they are still
defined within the realms of public health and development frameworks. HIV, like poverty, is
a reality and has to be addressed in a systematic way, but defining women’s sexualities under
the auspices of such constraints perpetuates discourses that view (women’s) sexualities as
problematic and necessitating different forms of ‘remedies’. Yet, it is possible to view the
small houses sexualities from optimistic perspectives that for instance, celebrate women’s use
of their erotic capital. Rather than focusing on HIV prevention messages and various levels of
risks and vulnerabilities, a focus on educating women on how to harness their erotic capital as
well as opening up avenues for a free expression of different sexualities would perhaps
subsequently help develop a system where sexuality is expressed and enjoyed in its totality
compared to the piecemeal approach that focuses on its negative and painful realities. A focus
on the benefits of the erotic capital and celebrating different expressions of sexuality rather
than regulating and suppressing them would ultimately see the legalization of prostitution as
well as gay and lesbian sexualities in Zimbabwe. Just like small houses, stigmatising and
suppressing them as ‘liminal’ sexualities has not yielded any benefits on the health and
development fronts and possibly, could be driving the health crisis that is at the front.

**Beyond small houses: indicators for further research**
Ethnography allows one to immerse themself in a particular community and opens up various
interesting subject matters that are potentially exciting and illuminating if pursued. However,
one major weakness it has is how the quest for depth jeopardizes on breadth. Limited by the
constraints of having to collect data mainly for the purposes of this thesis, there were various
other interesting subjects that came to the fore during my fieldwork that I could not pursue in
detail as well as other matters, which I have tackled in my thesis and acknowledge that there
is room for further investigation. Firstly, I found the conception of small house masculinities
stimulating and even though I tackled it in a chapter in my thesis, there are other various
strands, which can be further explored. I confined my discussion to men with small houses
who however, did not have children mainly because my networks led me to such a category. Yet, it would be interesting to research small housing men who have produced kids with their small houses and explore the different dimensions that the relationships can take as well as implications on new configurations of families in a modern context. The same can be said of Ben 10s relationships noting on the room to further research this growing form of youth masculinity as a possible new pattern of preferred youths’ romantic relationships that is not necessarily bound by materialism.

Secondly, a subtle thread that ran through my thesis was the prospect of a concept of ‘transformation of culture and sexuality’ that can be further developed from both a theoretical perspective or through in-depth research to unearth the manifestation of such a concept in the Zimbabwean context. Also the notion of the ‘new’ middle class in Zimbabwe can be interesting given the dearth of information on this class in the post-independence period after the economic and political boom phases. Recent research on the South African new middle classes has shown how the concept of the ‘new’ middle class in Africa is intriguing and provides room for interrogating various historical, cultural, economic and political settings and how these are producing a ‘new’ African middle class subject.

In conclusion, small house women’s sexual relationships with married men embody a variety of signifiers for personal, socio-cultural, economic and political elements. They confront us with the reality that for instance, money is not the impersonal, value-free object of exchange but as Parry and Bloch (1989) argue, is infused with cultural meaning, symbolic interpretation and moral evaluations. Also as argued by Hunter (2010), particular political and economic climates make sexual relationships have an immediate materiality. This therefore, at times, makes it a daunting task to disentangle other illuminating aspects of such relationships from the everyday material exchanges that occur. Yet as explored in this thesis, small house relationships do embody enlightening attributes of the Zimbabwean sociality and other economic, political and historical features. They have for long been considered as belonging to the private personal sphere and relegated to the health and development peripheries yet, such relationships are entangled with forces such as culture, tradition, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation and gender supremacy. In trying to sketch out what a human economy approach to small houses may look like, I have provided avenues for reading women’s sexual agency that opens up emerging possibilities of freedom, creativity

40 See the Development Southern Africa Vol 324 for a special issue on the new South African middle class.
and imagination in a context with a multitude of constraints and opportunities for the women in my study, subsequent researchers and policy makers alike.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

   *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 37:p517-529.


77. Gillepsie, S; Kadiyala, S and Greener, R (2007) Is poverty or wealth driving HIV transmission. *AIDS, 21*(7) s5-s16


103. IDAZIM (2010) The public attitudes to the GPA and the political transition in Zimbabwe. OSISA. Harare (www.osisa.org)


118. Kirby, S and McKenna, K (1989) Experience, Research, social Change: Methods from the margins. Toronto ON, Garamond Press


151. Mishra, V; Assche, S.B;Greener, R; Vaessen, M;Hong, R et al (2007) HIV infection does not disproportionately affect the poorer in sub-Saharan Africa. *AIDS*, 21(Suppl 7): s17-28


154. MoHCW (nd) *National Treatment Guidelines for HIV and AIDS.* Government of Zimbabwe Publications


188. PSI (2010) *Case study: Concurrent sexual partnerships in Zimbabwe*. Global Social Marketing Department [online] [www.psi.org](http://www.psi.org) [Accessed 20 August 2014]


