

GENDER DYNAMICS OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON IN THE HARARE
METROPOLITAN PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

by

WONDER MUCHABAIWA

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

SOCIOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF. ME RABE

2018

Student number 55500595

I declare that GENDER DYNAMICS OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON IN THE HARARE METROPOLITAN PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE is my own work and that all sources that I have cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



.....
SIGNATURE

07/09/18

.....
DATE

ABSTRACT

The *small house* phenomenon amongst the Shona people in contemporary Zimbabwe forms part of the relationship and household arrangements amongst certain heterosexual couples. In cases where partners engage in *small house* relationships, it has specific implications for existing marriage and family dynamics. The study sought to address the question: What are the perceptions on gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon as an emerging family structure in contemporary Zimbabwean society? The relative newness as well as the secretive nature and complexity of the *small house* relationship, render the nuances of gender dynamics in such contexts worth exploring to add value to the Sociology of Families and gender dynamics. The research was conducted in Harare metropolitan province and adopted social exchange theory and African feminism to illuminate the gender dynamics in *small house* households. It utilised a qualitative research paradigm and employed in-depth interviews to collect data from 30 participants who were purposively sampled. Findings of the study reveal that although the *small house* relationship may at times be informed by the ideals of traditional Shona polygynous marital practices, it differs in several respects with polygyny as it attempts to adapt to the socio-economic demands of the 21st century. The study uncovers that the social exchanges in *small house* relationships are not only gendered, but also based on inequalities relating to class, age and lineage. The *small house* relationship at times perpetuates gender inequalities between the partners involved. The study exposed how certain *small house* relationships were inundated with a myriad of problems including gender-based violence, financial constraints and increased susceptibility to HIV and AIDS and other STIs. Problems experienced in *small house* households are often exacerbated by the secretive nature of the relationship. Furthermore, a form of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, which are manifestations of the deeply entrenched patriarchal hegemony in the Shona culture, results in asymmetrical intimate relations. It was also revealed that *small house* households may inadvertently violate children's rights, including opportunities to access and secure education and social security. Reportedly, disengaged fatherhood in the context of the *small house* can affect children's welfare and socialisation negatively.

Key terms: polygyny, *small house*, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, patriarchy, absent fatherhood, lone parenthood, social exchange theory, African feminism