

**Cultural Encounters**

Dep. of Culture and Identity – CUID

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# Higher Education – Lower Respectability

Analyzing negotiated perceptions of the 'good life' by highly educated, yet unemployed women in Zimbabwe

MASTER'S THESIS

Cecilie Holdt Rude

Supervisor: Lene Bull Christiansen

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I explore what negotiations arise in articulations of the ‘good life’ by Zimbabwean women who have attained higher education, but are struggling to find employment. Within a poststructural approach I have conducted qualitative in-depth interviews. I analyze my interviews within a historical and regional context, and through Judith Butler’s and Lauren Berlant’s ideas on gender norms and cruel optimism. I argue that the modern promise of progression and the neoliberal individualization process in Zimbabwean society place the blame of failure on the individual and keep the women stagnate in their hope of becoming something ‘better’. I show how the dream of financial independence before marriage places the women in high dependency within other relations and how they become marginalized as ‘unrespectable’ in society. I criticize the promise from international development organizations of prosperity and empowerment through education and urge for further focus and research within this issue.

## List of Acronyms

ABC	Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms
AfDB	African Development Bank
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
UN Women	the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women
UNICEF	the United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZimStat	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

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## 1.0 Introduction

*The world is facing a worsening youth employment crisis: young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and almost 73 million youth worldwide are looking for work. The ILO has warned of a “scarred” generation of young workers facing a dangerous mix of high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work in developed countries, as well as persistently high working poverty in the developing world (ILO 2013).*

The world seems to be facing a situation with rising percentages of unemployment despite an increasing amount of well educated people. This problem is stressed in several recent reports from i.a. the International Labor Organization (ILO), The World Bank (WB), and the African Development Bank (AfDB). Not only is youth unemployment high; the higher education one has, the higher the unemployment rate actually seems to be. AfDB announces in a working paper from 2012 that “[i]n most African countries those with the highest education levels tend to take longer to search for a job and have higher unemployment rates than those who are less well educated” (AfDB; Page 2012, 9). This is also seen in a recent book from the World Bank (2013) where it clearly states that; “[t]oday , education no longer seems to guard against poverty and social exclusion” (WB; Vreyer and Roubaud 2013, 163).

However, at the same time as young educated people are struggling to find a job, International Organizations continue to encourage education as a way out of the crisis. Education for women is especially emphasized. Giving a girl an education will seemingly give her a better life; it will improve societies, while simultaneously confronting patriarchal gender relations. UNICEF stresses on their homepage that “[e]qual opportunities in education within the classroom, school and education system as a whole empower girls” (“UNICEF - Basic Education and Gender Equality - UNICEF Priorities” 2013), and in a recent report from 2012, UN Women states the following:

*Education is the most productive investment nations can make with a view to economic recovery and building prosperous, healthy and equitable societies. Education empowers individuals to fully participate in society, claim their rights and achieve their optimal potential. It improves individual livelihoods and employment opportunities for future generations.(UN Women 2012, 32)*

Although UN Women in the same report write that “improved access to tertiary or higher education does not always translate into career opportunities for women” (UN Women 2012, 35) they do not criticize the promise of empowerment within education, but instead emphasize a need to improve quality, increase connections with market demands, and change cultural barriers in order to change the unemployment situation.<sup>1</sup>

International development organization's continued support of education as a primary path towards socio-economic betterment – especially for women – remains highly problematic, with recent reports clearly demonstrating education's failure to *guard against poverty and social exclusion*. As education continues to be exemplified as empowering women and emancipating them from a subordinate position in society, one might ask what beneficial changes occur in this societal position, when that same education seems to have been a waste of time, a lost hope, and an expensive road to unemployment. If the women educate themselves to unemployment, what then happens to the international community's promise of empowerment? There is a great need for qualitative research investigating the position of women whose high education has not resulted in the promised 'better life'. There is a need to understand how these educated yet unemployed women view their current life situation. It is my intention to fill in some of this research gap through a crossroad of development, gender, and education studies.

Despite being a worldwide issue, the problem of unemployment for educated people seems especially high in developing countries. My focus will be on Zimbabwe, as the country represents a unique example of the problem. With an unemployment rate as high as 95 percent, it seems to hold the highest amongst all countries in the world (“The World Factbook” 2013). But it also illustrates a situation where most people seem to be working in the informal sector and in underemployment in terms of underutilized skills, and low or irregular working hours<sup>2</sup>. Despite the seemingly high unemployment rate, Zimbabwe is also the country with the highest literacy rate in Africa, with over 90 percent of its population (“The African Economist” 2013). This situation creates an interesting and yet frustrating dialectic. Unemployment pushes the booming enrollment in higher education,

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<sup>1</sup> See for example also; (UN Women 2009), (“United Nations Girls' Education Initiative” 2013), (“Girleffect.org” 2013)

<sup>2</sup> The numbers from CIA World Factbook are 2009 numbers and are including underemployed people. According to Zimbabwe's own ZimStat, the unemployment rate is only 10.7 %. The difference is due to definitions of employment. Measurements of employment can differ in relation to; hours per week working, formal or informal workplaces, or if one is working with what s/he is qualified for. An issue I will touch upon later in chapter 2.

but the well-educated students find themselves graduating into a distressingly high unemployment rate – with seemingly higher unemployment for those with higher levels of education.

After visiting and living in Zimbabwe several times since 2010, I have personal experience with the unemployment crisis for highly educated women. I have met many women in Zimbabwe, whom I experienced as having the same skills as me, but who were in the frustrating and exhausting situation of years of continued unemployment. Education had not created empowerment for most of these women - instead, many found themselves with little other options than to sit at home and wait for their situation to change. Education's promise of a better life, combined with the women's expectations after attaining an educational title, kept them from looking for a different life. Despite facing the prospect of hopeless futures, they seemed stuck in a belief of education as promising a better life. As one woman said to me;

*I am a frustrated woman. Yes I am. I am. I didn't grow up in a wealthy family. So my mother worked very hard for me to get this education. (...) But I didn't know that, know that one day I would be like this. Yeah. That I would go every day and asking friends and relatives to look for a job on my behalf. It is not at all easy. It is not. So the feeling that I have is that I am disappointed and I have been so frustrated (1. Sashia, 3).*

Meeting these women made me aware of the gap in research and development theories; a situation where education did not lead to empowerment of women and the so-called 'better life'. Instead educated women experienced a new critical situation of negotiating gender and their dream of the 'good life' in Zimbabwean society.

Following this problematic dilemma, I am curious to know how educated yet unemployed women in Zimbabwe navigate the situation of failed promises of education. How does the educated young woman articulate her position, her role, and her goals in life, when the dreams of prosperity after education have not yet been fulfilled? What is a good life for these women, and how does education and employment play a role in attaining this life? How do these women argue for who they are and who they want to be within norms of gender and of respectability? All these queries lead me to ask following research question:

### **Research Question**

***What negotiations arise in articulations of the 'good life' by Zimbabwean women who have attained higher education, but are struggling to find employment?***



I investigate this research question through qualitative in-depth interviews with women in Zimbabwe. I have contextualized these interviews within the history of women, education, and employment in Zimbabwe; global critiques of neoliberalism; and within African feminist ideas of gender.

I use two theoretical approaches in my analysis of the interviews. One is taking point of departure in the promise of 'a better life' and how to analyze articulations of hope and belief in upward mobility. The other is focusing on how gender identity can be acted out within norms of society.

## 1.1 Theory of Science

I intend to position myself and my work in a postmodern/poststructural view. Being postmodern, I do not believe in the modernist progressive development thought as the only way and I am curious to deconstruct normativity and binary oppositions in order to open up for new ways and different reflections on lives and gender. I see modernisms in plural as diverse and connected to context, discourses and history, as well as I see development as a multicultural term with a nonlinear connection to time. I furthermore present my research as poststructural in the sense that I do not view structures and objects as defined or defining unities. Instead I understand statements and objects as continuously transforming in relation to each other. In other words, I see language, or discourses, as continuously creating, breaking and changing structures in society. This understanding is in line with the philosophical ideas of Michel Foucault. One of his main ideas is that the possibilities for objects or statements to make sense are connected to their historical transformation and relation. Thus, a discourse on something is constructed by "the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of these different objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence" (Foucault 1972, 33).

In the sense of my research thesis, I can therefore not talk about 'women in Zimbabwe' as a static defined category. Instead I am interested in expressions, negotiations and articulation of women in Zimbabwe on how they perceive their possibilities in society. Foucault furthermore stresses that meanings can have moments of stability, which over a time-frame regulates ways of actions. He explains this regularity as follows:

*Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic*

*choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation* (Foucault 1972, 38).

I agree with Foucault that discourses are not completely unstable, but that there can be a regularity within discourses that limits possibilities of action. This idea is further elaborated in relation to gender by the queer scholar; Judith Butler, who sees gender as “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler 2007, 45). Hence, women or gender are not defined unities, but there exist certain norms or discourses – *a regulatory frame* – that affect the possibilities for acts. Thereby the normatively accepted acts will be repeated so many times that it will come to be seen as a defining factor for i.e. gender. Butler describes it as “no doer behind the deed” (2007, 34), meaning that every act or articulation is a repetition of prior discourses and that one therefore cannot perform acts beyond these discourses. However, as Foucault stressed, the discourses are constantly affecting each-other, transforming and creating new discourses. Similarly, Butler also sees the possibility of discursive change in acts and articulations.<sup>3</sup> Thus discourses on gender and women are repetitions, yet in transformation. My way of understanding this dialectic between constant change and regularity, is to investigate what is seen as possible, non-possible, respectable and unrespectable for women in Zimbabwe. Thus, women’s articulated negotiations of the ‘good life’ will invite me to see discursive possibilities for being an educated, yet unemployed woman in Zimbabwe within a specific regulatory frame of norms.

As with my field of research, I also see my own production of knowledge as discourses, constructed within a frame of discursive formations. Thus, my findings will not tell any truth about the world, but hopefully be an added discourse, a slightly changed repetition, which can open up for new acts within discourses on gender, development and education in the world.

## **1.2 Positioning Myself as a Researcher**

It is in no way the first time a white European woman writes an analysis of women in Africa and I am aware of the reflection such an analysis must imply. I need to reflect on the influence, which my background has on my choice of methods, theories and questioning. I need to reflect on the relation between my analyzed context and my academic background. And I need to reflect on my position as a researcher in interview situations and in my subsequent analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas on gender acts, I will discuss further in my Analytical Framework, chapter 3.2.

## **My research and I**

By following Butler's epistemological ideas, I am accepting that every act is constructed as a copy of already acted acts in a given time and space. This means in practice, that my acts as a researcher also have an influence on how women's ideas of the 'good life' are presented and articulated.

But my position does not have to be a problem: I see it also as an opportunity. I find it interesting to see how different issues are negotiated against me as the researcher. When an informant explains that a certain act is not possible *here*, it can present an understanding of the possibility for acting that particular act out *elsewhere*. When being a white, European female interviewer, there will be situations where my limitations and possibilities for gender acts are articulated and negotiated by both me and the women who I am interviewing. Being aware of these forms of positioning in my analysis will perhaps further clarify their perceived limits of acts, rather than necessarily harming my research.

## **Contextualizing my research**

A major African critique of Western-based feminist researchers has been that Western feminist ideas have been transferred uncritically to specific contexts of African realities. In order to respect the context of which I am investigating, I need to place my research within these African realities.

According to the Nigerian feminist scholar Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (2005), Western feminist ideas are criticized for being based in a fundamentally biological worldview. Oyewùmí explains that social categorization in many African societies has not been based as much upon sex, as it has been based upon knowledge, seniority or the relation to a metaphysical world. She suggests looking at social categorizations in a local milieu as opposed to looking at gender as a category made in the West and transferred to a different context (Oyewumi 2005, 14–15). Another Nigerian Feminist, Ifi Amadiume, explains that 'motherhood' is almost absent from western feminism whilst it is one of the most powerful concepts for African women (Amadiume 1997, 146). These points by African feminist writers provide opportunities for seeing roles and categories in Africa differently from those provided by Western feminism.

Aware of the need for historical and regional contextualization, I also consider it relevant to look at the contemporary situation of women in Zimbabwe. Ugandan feminist scholar, Joy C. Kwesiga (2002) notes that a number of Western concepts and values that have become a part of the African development process and that "their influence on women's education and other aspects of life is continuous" (Kwesiga 2002, 23). Thus, even with the necessity of a historical contextualization, I

do not wish to ignore the major influence Western ideas have had on African societies. The Zimbabwean feminist, Rudo Gaidzanwa, furthermore points out a need to take into consideration the social, political, and economic context of African women and African feminism (Gaidzanwa 2011, 10). Additionally, the Danish feminist scholar and anthropologist, Signe Arnfred, points out that some African feminism tends to focus on the situation of pre-colonial African societies, and thus does not acknowledge the influence of Western ideas on contemporary societies in Africa. Furthermore, she criticizes some African feminists for making a generalization for ‘all African women’ in the same way that Western feminists have generalized their ideas for ‘all women in the world’. Thus, she stresses the importance of using African feminism in order to see new ways of being, while acknowledging the continued relevancy of Western feminism (Arnfred 2011, 118–119).

Following these reflections on feminism in Africa, I have chosen to place a major focus on the contextualization of my thesis research. Thus, I will not only introduce the current situation in Zimbabwe, but also look at the global trends affecting Zimbabwe and at the specific history of women in Zimbabwe from pre-colonial times to the present. After investigating the context of my research, I am in a greater sense able to understand and analyze my empirical material in relation to the time and space in which it is shaped. This contextualization has furthermore occurred for me as a researcher through my various longer or shorter visits to Zimbabwe, where I have gotten to learn about the society and the people within it. This experience of Zimbabwe through three years of visits has given me a contextualization that no literature could have provided alone.

### 1.3 Structure of Thesis

This thesis will consist of five main parts. Besides this introduction, which outlines my choice of problem, position, method, and design of empirical work, there will be four other chapters;

2. a chapter outlining the context of this research;
3. a chapter introducing the theoretical approaches in my analytic framework;
4. a chapter analyzing my research, and finally;
5. a conclusive chapter of my findings.

I have included **chapter 2**, based on prior reflections on the necessity for contextualization of my research. The chapter provides first an overview of education and employment in Zimbabwe. Here, I have chosen to predominantly use Zimbabwe’s own statistical numbers, as they are the most

extensive in the field and are additionally often referenced by international organizations.<sup>4</sup> I discuss furthermore the effects of wider international neoliberal ideologies on the contemporary Zimbabwean education system by using a broad selection of scholarly work on these subjects from the fields of sociology, anthropology, educational studies and international development.

Second, the contextualization chapter explores the history and current situation of women in Zimbabwe. In order to explore this issue, I have taken use of different scholars within Zimbabwean history, African history, African gender studies and scholars working with gender and sexuality in Africa. Through these, I both explore the historical and the contemporary situation for women in Zimbabwe, and present concepts of respectability and moral sexuality for women in southern Africa.

The analytical framework in **chapter 3** will present the two theoretical approaches that I intend to utilize in my analysis. The first approach is focusing on the promise of progression and the negotiations of 'a better life' within a contemporary neoliberal world. Here, I have used the work *Cruel Optimism* (2011) of professor in English at University of Chicago, Lauren Berlant. Although her philosophical literary theory is connected mainly to the US and Europe, I see its relevancy to an African context, as it centers around the global issue of neoliberalism and the belief in upward mobility. The second approach is focusing on the negotiation of gender, the understanding of norms, and the possibilities for agency in society. I base this analysis on the work of Judith Butler, Professor in Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Butler is famous for her work on gender and her contributions to Queer Studies, but I predominantly reference her analyses of gender acts, performativity, and norms in society. As described in my chapter on the Theory of Science, Western feminist writers are often criticized for their irrelevancy in the African context. In this thesis, however, I use Butler's ideas as an analytical tool to open my interviews. Using Butler's work as a tool rather than a theory, I continue to analyze my interviews within their historical context and in relation to African feminist ideas.

Subsequently I analyze my interviews in **chapter 4** with the analytical tools from Butler and Berlant, and within the context of my research. Having done that, I will end this thesis by

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<sup>4</sup> Their numbers on employment, however, differs hugely from those of CIA World Factbook. On the one hand, I am aware of the difference and do reflect on possible reasons for that. On the other hand, I do see trends in the numbers from Zimbabwe, which can portray the situation of unemployment for educated women in Zimbabwe.

concluding on my findings in **chapter 5** and give suggestions for further reflection and possible action.

## **1.4 Delimitation**

By using Berlant and Butler in my research, I have chosen to delimit an analysis of my research through other relevant theories. Due the interdisciplinary nature of my thesis, it could also have been relevant to analyze my material through theories in i.e. African Studies, African Gender Studies, Educational Studies, or Labor Studies. Nonetheless, I have chosen to use a limited scope of these areas of study in my contextualization of analysis.

In my research, I define educated women as women with at least a diploma or Bachelor's degree from a university. It could have been relevant to compare degrees, levels, and subjects to the negotiated ideas of the 'good life' and to possibility of employment. I have however chosen to delimit my research by using educated women as a joint concept.

Looking at unemployed women, I have chosen to see unemployment as my informants articulate it. This includes, for the most part, situation of underemployment, volunteer work, and to some extent education.

When I focus on women in Zimbabwe, I have chosen to limit my research to women living in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Harare has Zimbabwe's highest rate of unemployment, in addition to the highest concentration of educated women, as I will show in chapter 2.1.

## **1.5 Empirical Research Design**

Designing research on the basis of philosophical readings by i.e. Foucault and Butler, can be a mindful challenge in itself. However, conducting and creating research on the basis of that design is a challenge on a much more practical level: How does one concretely go out and conduct an interview within a poststructural framework? How and where does one find individuals to interview? What questions should one ask? What questions open up for discussions of gender acts and life-dreams? What if interviewees do not respond, do not elaborate, or change the subject? How does one pose questions that are relevant to the context and local understandings of i.e. gender, life,

and education? How does one take into consideration the Western bias, which research concepts might present?

Designing my research has been a long and reflective process. It began in 2010 when I first visited Zimbabwe for 6 months. Here I met many educated women struggling to find jobs, and their stories and frustrations started my initial interest in the problem. After several other visits and an internship at the Danish Embassy in Lusaka, Zambia, a defined problem and design of research began to take shape in my mind. This led to the first project description, which I handed in for the DANIDA Fellowship Centre thesis scholarship. In the end of 2012, when I was accepted for the scholarship, the actual design of my research commenced.

Before planning my research I completed an extensive literary review and developed a broad understanding of the context, as well as took steps to limit the Western bias in my research area. Based on this reading – of Zimbabwean history, African Gender Studies, and statistical reports – I noticed themes which I considered important to pursue further. The combination of these themes with my problem statement provided for the first ideas of methodology and interview themes.

I conducted my interviews over a 1.5 month period in Zimbabwe from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April to the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2013. Since I am interested in articulated negotiations of what ‘a good life’ entails and since I understand my research from a poststructural framework, I chose to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews. Firstly, I wanted to combine personal solo interviews with focus groups and debating events in order to provide space for different articulations and negotiations - but due to upcoming presidential elections in Zimbabwe, I limited this to only personal interviews.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, I initially wanted to explore the negotiations of the ‘good life’ via life-interviews where the informants’ choices and frustrations through life would provide for ways of understanding their portrayal of ‘the good life.’ I later modified this idea when I realized that my interviewees appeared reluctant to share their life stories. Based on this experience, I chose to discuss general issues, related to life choices and their local context as women in Zimbabwe, which then could open up for personal reflections. I found later that the general discussions told me a considerable amount about what my informants saw as ‘general’ knowledge, which gave me an introduction to perceived gendered possibilities in their society.

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<sup>5</sup> Due to upcoming presidential elections, researchers working in Zimbabwe had experienced problems with authorities. This situation affected me in the sense that I chose to keep a low profile by only doing private solo interviews.

### 1.5.1 Design of Interviews

In order to ask questions relevant to my theory of science, to remain aware of my presence in the interview, and to provide space for the discussion of different themes, I sought help and inspiration from a selection of books on qualitative interview methods. For inspiration in relation to my scientific approach, I mainly used a publication on qualitative methods in an interactive perspective (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer 2005). This book gives tools to understand the nature of a qualitative for a poststructural researcher. For more tool-based interview methods, I was inspired by “Social Research Methods” (Bryman 2004) and a book on qualitative interviewing by Emil Kruuse (2007), which is developed by ideas from Steinar Kvale (1996).

Based on my changes in research design, my poststructural scientific approach, my understanding of the field, and my inspiration from various works on interview design, I have created my interviews as open and flexible discussions. In my first interview-design, I created questions in a *past, present, and future* frame. When I later changed my research design from life-interviews to themed discussions - due to my experiences from the first couple of interviews - I made a new frame, based on themes. I found the themes by analyzing the most exciting and relevant concepts for my informants in the first interviews, and by identifying those with the most relevance towards my Research problem. This became an interview form, where I asked questions around 6 themes. The themes lined out the path of the interview, but I tried simultaneously to keep the interview open and loose in order to give space for the interviewees to control some of the direction of our discussion.

The themes in my interviews were:

- Unemployment
- Education
- Gender roles and norms
- Marriage and relationships
- Relatives, friends and society
- Life goals, dreams and disappointments

Most of the conversations started with a discussion of unemployment; why unemployment is there, and what people do to find a job. Following this, the conversations continued to the topics of education, relatives and goals in life. Often this led to discussions of dreams and broken dreams as well as of love and marriage. When discussing marriage, the conversations often led to discussions



on gender roles, relationships and independence. These discussions often led to final reflections on friendships and society.

### **1.5.2 Identifying Interviewees**

Following my research question, I sought female-identified individuals, who were educated with at least a Bachelor's degree<sup>6</sup> and who were unemployed. However, since many individuals in Zimbabwe are in different situations of underemployment, I was open to interviewees within this category as well. That means; people who were working as volunteers, who are overqualified for their job, or who are pursuing further studies because of their unemployment situation. I additionally chose to only include women who are not yet married, in order to look for negotiations of gender within their idea of single life and future marriage life. Finally, I chose interviewees in an age span of ten years - between 24 and 34 years old - in order to provide opportunities for differences within identity negotiations in relation to life plans, time and aging.

Due to afore mentioned political situation in Zimbabwe, I mainly found my interviewees through my contacts in the country. I chose, however, to find interviewees from different areas. One area was the University of Zimbabwe, where I found a few contacts, either studying for a Master's degree or looking for jobs after finishing their Bachelor's. The two other ways in which I found contacts were through a contact in a gender rights organization and through my former colleagues and friends. In the end, this gave me a great variety of informants, with different backgrounds and educations, which have opened up for different discussions within my six interview themes.

I conducted interviews with thirteen informants, but have chosen to only use nine of these interviews. Out of the four dismissed interviews, two were the first interviews and were not recorded, and one interview was conducted in such a noisy environment that it impeded the quality of the transcription. The fourth interview was dismissed because of a negative relation between the interviewee and I. The interviewee was very quiet, her hands were shaking and she could almost not answer any of my questions. She seemed extremely nervous about being with me, despite my various attempts to create a calm and relaxed atmosphere.

In a way, this 'failed' interview led to a positive methodological reflection. The situation made me reflect on how I affect people, as a white European researcher interested in their lives. The

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<sup>6</sup> With one exception being Anna, who has a diploma and is studying her Bachelor's degree.

informant in the ‘failed’ interview even asked me why was I there and why was I interested in her? Her frightened reaction of ‘what do you want from me?’ wrote my whiteness and difference in neon. On the other hand, the experience made me aware of the dangers from the ‘good’ interviews I have conducted. Many of the successful interviews were with women who looked like me in the sense of life, studies, age, and middle-class background. Often, such a peer interview went quite well in my eyes. However, when I reflected upon them afterwards, I realized that we – the interviewee and I - came up with similar expectations of questions and answers. She knew what answers I ‘needed’ and she gave those answers to me. Therefore, even when an interview went ‘well’, I was part of the interview and thus limiting possible answers by being either too different in terms of European whiteness, or too similar in terms of research background and middle-class lifestyle. I will try to take these reflections into account when relevant in the analysis of my interviews.

Below is a table of my interviewees. They will be further introduced during the analysis.

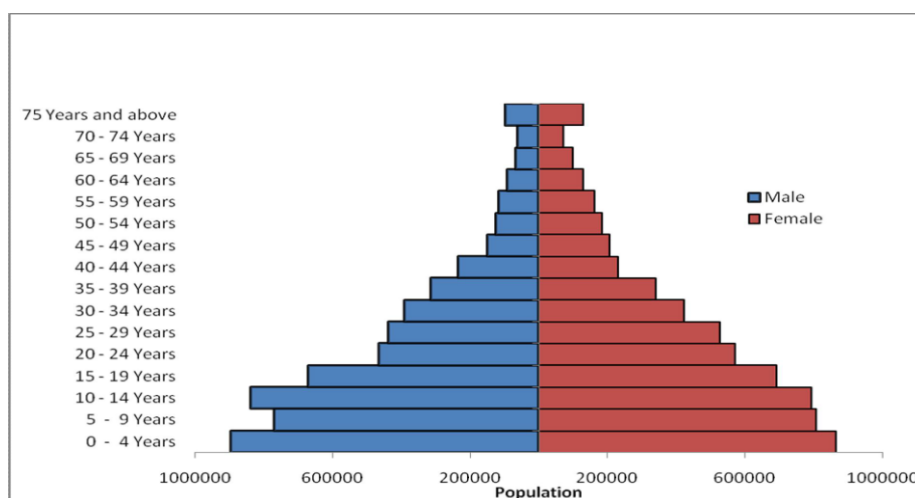
<b>INTERVIEWEES</b>					
<b>#</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Unemployment situation</b>
1	Sashia	Single	32	Development Studies	Unemployed – 3 years →Job searching
2	Karen	Single	34	Procurement	Unemployed – 2 years →Job searching
3	Kristine	Relationship	27	Development Studies and law	Unemployed – 5 years →Job searching
4	Maria	Single	30	Sociology	Unemployed – 1 year →Study Msc. Sociology
5	Sandra	Single	27	Msc. Computer Sciences	Unemployed 2 years →Underemployed
6	Anna	Relationship	24	Diploma in food and beverage management	Unemployed 2 years →Study Bsc. Psychology
7	Vicky	Relationship	24	Psychology	Unemployed 7 months →Volunteering
8	Pia	Relationship	25	Political Sciences	Unemployed few weeks →Underemployed
9	Tina	Single	24	Social Sciences	Unemployed 2 years →Job searching

## 2.0 Contextualization

Before I can analyze my interviews, I need to understand the context of which my informants live. I will therefore, in this chapter, outline the current Zimbabwean situation within education and employment, I will introduce to critiques of the current situation, and I will explore the history and contemporary studies of women in Zimbabwe and southern Africa.

### 2.1 Current Situation: Statistics on Employment, Education, and Gender in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Southern Africa with a size approximately the same as Germany and Japan, but with a population of only 13 million people. Its capital city is Harare. The country, formerly known as Rhodesia, has been independent since 1980, and since independence has been lead by President Robert Mugabe. From its original position as a role-model country in Africa with high literacy rates and steady growth, it has since experienced several major crises such as violent land-reforms, problematic elections, and hyperinflation. Recently, Zimbabwe has experienced a calmer period with a coalition government and a stable economy reliant on U.S. dollars. New elections were held in August 2013, where Robert Mugabe was re-elected as President, although some critics claim that the elections were corrupted. Culturally the country consists mainly of two tribal groups, the Shona people (82 percent of the population) in the north and the Ndebele people (14 percent of the population) in the south (“The World Factbook” 2013). Youth in Zimbabwe represent a huge percentage of the population and are thus highly relevant as a subject for analyses of the situations in the labor market and in the education system.



*Population Pyramid Showing the Percentage Distribution of the Population by Age Group and Sex.*

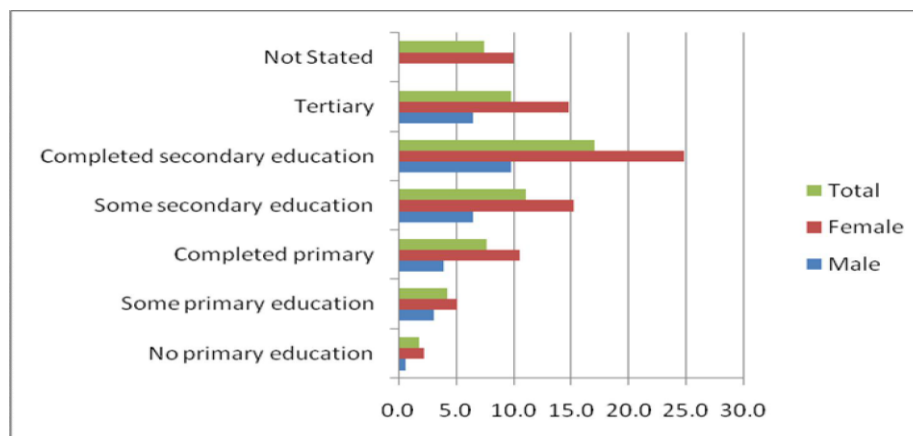
(ZimStat 2012, 7)

Furthermore, Zimbabwean youth have a much higher unemployment rate than the adult population. Fifty-nine percent of the labor force is between the ages of 15 and 34 - defined as 'youth' by the African Union - but as much as four out of five of the unemployed people in the labor force are individuals within this age range (ZimStat 2012, 42).

As stressed in the introduction, the unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is known to be the highest in the world with up to 95 percent of the population identified as unemployed. However, according to ZimStat, unemployment is found to be only 10.7 percent. The differences in these numbers reflect contrasting understandings of employment. The CIA World Factbook stresses that “figures reflect underemployment; true unemployment is unknown and, under current economic conditions, unknowable” (“The World Factbook” 2013). On the contrary, ZimStat defines unemployed persons as “persons aged 15 years and above who, during the reference period were without work and currently available for work” (ZimStat 2012, 196) Thus when ZimStat only see people *available for work* as unemployed, they consequently see informal employment, self-employment, and underemployment counting as employment. In a poor country like Zimbabwe, with almost no social security system, employment becomes a matter of survival. Thus the issue of underemployment that CIA World Factbook stresses is an issue where one might work with any kind of informal job that can put food on the table, despite of i.e. educational background. Where CIA World Factbook measures this situation as a situation of underemployment, ZimStat measures it as employment.

Most of ZimStat’s 10.7 percent national unemployment exist in the cities, where as much as 28 percent of the labor force is unemployed (ZimStat 2012, 39). Looking at women, 14.5 percent of the entire female labor force are unemployed compared to 6.6 percent of the male labor force (ZimStat 2012, 42).

In Zimbabwe, 28.7 percent of the population completes secondary education, while 11.2 percent completes tertiary education. Of the 11.2 percent tertiary graduates, 62 percent are men and 38 percent are women. That means that 8.3 percent of Zimbabwe’s female population finishes a tertiary education. However, with the high youth population in Zimbabwe, this number may continue to rise as time progresses (ZimStat 2012, 57).



*Unemployment Rate by Level of Education and Sex, Zimbabwe, (ZimStat 2012, 71).*

Looking at the above figure, it is clear that the highest unemployment rate is for people who have completed secondary education. The unemployment rate actually decreases with a decrease in education. This is also an issue for the whole of Africa, stressed by WB, AfDB and ILO in the introduction to this thesis. One also sees that the unemployment rate for women is approximately double the male unemployment percentage and that the total unemployment for Zimbabweans with tertiary education is approximately ten percent. More specifically, approximately 15 percent of Zimbabwean women with a tertiary education are unemployed (in contrast to approximately six percent for men) (ZimStat 2012, 71). Knowing that ZimStat's unemployment numbers reflect a situation in which people are unemployed (not underemployed), the high numbers for women and youth are most likely represented by individuals supported by relatives or spouses.

These statistics might not tell us much about the social situation of unemployed women with a tertiary education, but they show that unemployment exists, especially for young educated women and that it is most likely even higher if one starts to count underemployment within its scope.

## **2.2 Unemployment and Education within a Frame of Neoliberalism and Modernity**

As presented in the introduction to this thesis, the situation of unemployment for educated women in Zimbabwe seems to be part of a bigger trend. Recent reports from the World Bank and the African Development Bank, among others, show that unemployment for young and educated people seems to be one of the major problems for developing countries today. This problem might have a relation to what many critics have defined as global neoliberal politics and a belief in a modern idea of upward mobility. Thus in order to understand the current crisis of academic unemployment, I

will present some of the critiques of neoliberalism, modernity, and the accused effects on education systems and human mindsets.

### **2.2.1 Education in a Global, Neoliberal World Order**

Education systems around the world have long been criticized as neocolonial entities, controlled by powerful Western institutions (See for example; Altbach 1971). The criticisms have increased since the forced economic policy changes of the World Bank in the 1980s - known as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and the later Poverty Reductions Strategy Plans (PRSPs).

The following neoliberal ideologies imposed on public educational institutions, systems and policies, opened up for additional critiques within educational studies. One early critic is Stephen Ball, Professor of the Sociology of Education at the University of Oxford, who sees these changes as a threat to access and quality of education. With the market gradually taking over educational institutions, Ball claimed that experimental quality pedagogy would be interchanged with standardized traditional pedagogies, warning that the market would impede the democratic and social role of education (Ball 1998). Another major critic to this development in education is Lant Pritchett, Professor of the Practice of International Development at Harvard University, who claimed that the failure in education was due to expanding quantity of graduates against a labor market unable to absorb these (Pritchett 2001). Other more contemporary critiques of the changing educational systems have followed. The Professor of Education Policy Fazal Rizvi writes in his article from 2006 on the problems warned by Ball and Pritchett:

*The neo-liberal imaginary in education policy appears to have become globally convergent, showing an unmistakable trend towards an acceptance of similar set of policy solutions to educational problems by a wide variety of nation states that otherwise have very different social, historical and economic characteristics. This hegemonic trend represents an almost universal deepening of a shift from social democratic to neo-liberal orientations, manifested most clearly in privatization policies and a heavy reliance on the market to solve various crises facing the state*  
(Rizvi 2006, 200)

Thus, where many have seen Globalization as a greater flow of ideas, technologies and access to different perceptions (Appadurai 1996), Rizvi criticizes globalization for not opening for equal access to this flow of global idea. Instead, it represents a global circulation of a specific neoliberal ideology. This idea, he argues, is mainly controlled by Western governed institutions, who thus bear enormous influence on how educational systems should and can function around the world in order

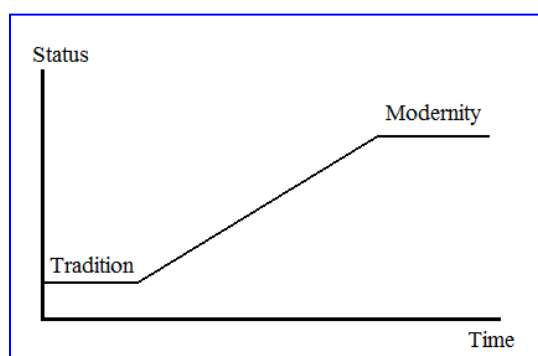
to be acknowledged as valid educational institutions (Rizvi 2006). This critique has been widely acknowledged and expanded by various scholars within education and development. In example of this, the critic from the field of sociology Maria Carparas writes in 2011 how the 'pro-North' idea of neoliberalism has promised a wealth and prosperity that has yet to be fulfilled. Instead;

*[w]hat happened in the span of three decades, i.e., from the 1980s to 2008, was the proliferation of unbridled competition that resulted in a consumerist approach to higher education and to international labour trade. This was aggravated by the continuing overproduction of higher education graduates whose number failed to match the job market that barely had goods to offer (Caparas 2011, 41).*

Neoliberalism has promised poor countries an education system which would lead them to some sort of prosperity, but which instead has resulted in a high quantity of educated people over-education, and credential inflation leading to general lower quality education. All which have now led to skills mismatch, academic unemployment, and migration in many African countries (International Labour Office 2013, 1, 19–21).

### 2.2.2 Modernity and the Promise of Linear Upward Mobility

The promise of development within neoliberal structural adjustment policies is situated in a specific ideology of modernity, derived from evolutionist theory and popularized in the late twentieth century. The ideology was introduced in a time when many colonized countries received their independence and it presented a theory of development, with the ultimate goal of achieving modernity equal to Western states (i.e. Europe and Northern America). The new independent nations now needed help to 'develop' or 'modernize' and the structural adjustment policies were a means



*Diagram of the idea of modernity*

(Ferguson, 2006, 178)

reaching this goal. The professor of Anthropology James Ferguson is known for criticizing this ideology. He explains how the ideology can be placed in a very simple model showing the idea of progressive development from 'tradition' to 'modernity.' This model presents an idea of progression, which promises that over time a state will reach modernity and thus higher status in the world. The ideology of development placed the new nations in a position of not *yet* modern and

gave legitimacy to international neoliberal politics that promised this modern status (Ferguson 2006, 178, 182).

Despite contemporary postmodern deconstructions of the model, Ferguson criticizes these attempts for hiding a contiguous problematic power relation: in deconstructing the definition of modernity as ‘alternative modernities,’ one ignores the economic differences present in the world. In deconstructing the timely development promise of the modernity model, the hope for reaching a modern status or a better position in the world is lost. Thus, the inequalities in the world become ‘de-developmentalized’ as the promise of mobile upward progression is taken away. As Ferguson points out: “In a world where developmentalist patience has little to recommend it, the promise of modernization increasingly appears as a broken promise, and the mapped out pathways leading from the Third World to the First turn out to have been bricked up” (Ferguson 2006, 186–187). Thus, by refuting the modernity ideology of upward progressive development, developing countries are simultaneously accepting their status as static and not *under-developed*, but simply just ‘*under*’. I will return to this problem in my Academic Framework, where I present an idea of how to investigate this issue of hopeless optimism and belief in modernity in my interviews.

### **2.2.3 Neoliberalism and Education in Zimbabwe**

Returning to the situation in Zimbabwe, we know from the earlier introduced statistics, and the Zimbabwean history of great inflation and economic crises, that the country has indeed not yet experienced the promised upward mobility. To add to this, Zimbabwean PhD in Education policy, Munyaradzi Hwami, writes a critique of the higher education system in Zimbabwe. He says that Zimbabwean higher education has been experiencing a crisis that “can be located at the vortex of neoliberal globalization and Mugabeism (authoritarian nationalism)” (Hwami 2012, 112). Not only have neoliberal policies created privatization, expansion, less public funding, and more full-fee paying programs at universities, but the authoritarian nationalism from President Mugabe has furthermore resulted in academic censorship and large migration of professors (Hwami 2012, 113–115). Hwami further stresses the impact of the expansion of universities:

*In 1980, there was only one university, the University of Zimbabwe with a student population of 2,240. Currently there are nine public universities with a total of 55,548 students, as per 2007 statistics. This expansion has been quantitative and the qualitative dimension has been ignored or cannot be attained under current circumstances* (Munyaradzi Hwami in Kapoor 2011, 113).



Compounding these growing numbers of public universities is the expanding number of private education institutions in Zimbabwe. The full-fee and parallel programs, which are a result of this expansion, are often prioritized more than programs for students with public scholarship since there is great need for the funds. As Hwami states; “parallel programmes help bring in much required revenue, but some perceive it as a degree buying venture that has led to the deterioration in the standards of degrees being awarded in Zimbabwe” (Hwami 2012, 112–113). When this degree inflation is viewed together with the high migration of academic staff, resulting in severe low-staffing (University of Zimbabwe for example had 385 out of required 1171 required academic staff in 2009), it shows a serious problematic situation for the quality of higher education. The situation reflects the critiques by Pritchett and Ball, who describe the situation where education becomes more about earning money than about experimental pedagogy and where the education loses its democratic role, when prioritizing the full-fee paying students.

We see, from Hwami, how the neoliberal education system has not yet resulted in its promised prosperity. Instead – and with the addition of the specific local political and economic situation in Zimbabwe – there has been a growing number of highly educated, yet unemployed, disappointed people in Zimbabwe. This ‘marketization’ of the Zimbabwean higher education system has not produced what neoliberalism, through the World Bank and IMF, had promised. Instead, the quality has decreased while the quantity has increased; the professors have left while more full-fee paying students have been accepted for continuously rising fees and lower standards. The result becomes high unemployment for the graduating university students in Zimbabwe.

This situation can be frustrating for anyone experiencing it, but the promise in education of employment and prosperity can have a special meaning for a woman who might see this education as a way to become an independent, ‘modern’ woman and thus break with some of the traditions and norms for gender in Zimbabwe. In order to understand this negotiation of life and gender, I will explore the history of women in Zimbabwe in the next chapter.

### **2.3 History of Women in Zimbabwe**

In order to understand the environment of my research, it is not quite sufficient to explore the gender acts of my informants. I also see the necessity of placing these gender acts in a historical and regional context. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí stresses in her reader on African Gender Studies that, “social categories should be defined and grounded in the local milieu, rather than based on ‘universal’ findings made in the West” (Oyewumi 2005, 15). Placing my analysis within a historical, regional

context might therefore guide me to understand the articulated gender acts differently – and perhaps more thoroughly.

### **2.3.1 Gender Roles in Pre-colonial Zimbabwe**

When exploring Zimbabwean history, it is important to be aware of the lack early historical sources within social areas and that most available written sources are written by white colonial men. The Zimbabwean professor in gender studies and Zimbabwean history Terri Barnes stresses that “Zimbabwean historiography has largely failed to mention African women and issues of gender, (...) women were invincible because historians refused to see them, not because they were not there” (Barnes 1999, xxii). Despite of the lack of gender in early historiography, gender roles have on the contrary been some of the most negotiated issues in colonial and independent Zimbabwe.

Most pre-colonial history sources of social categories in Zimbabwe explain women’s roles in relation to men. This binary opposition is important to acknowledge and as Oyewùmí stresses, it is a very Western narrative to understand society from a ‘bio-logic’ sense (Oyewumi 2005, 9, 17). For example, we see in the Zimbabwean historian David Beach’s historical book on “The Shona and Their Neighbors” (1994) that women mainly are portrayed as wives to men. The book explains that some marriages were polygamous (normally with two wives), but that monogamous relationships were common as well. Furthermore he explains the value of women in terms of *Lobola* (bride-wealth), where a woman often was married away to a village with a different ‘totem’ and her lineage therefore received some compensation for the loss of her labor (Beach 1994, 51). However, the professor of African history Elizabeth Schmidt illustrates in her Zimbabwean historical research a more reflective picture on social categories and gender roles. Here, power amongst women is elaborated beyond the simple role of a wife. Schmidt explains that many women held great power in households and lineages – especially older women - as well as a some women held high status via religion, politics or profession (Schmidt 1992, 14–15). However, Schmidt also explains that women’s status in pre-colonial Zimbabwe was lower than men’s, and that status generally relied on marriage, children and age. As she explains; “a woman without a husband or children was ‘held openly in derision’” (Schmidt 1992, 15). Furthermore, she notes that; “[j]ust as it was the duty of children to respect and obey their fathers, and junior men their elders, it was the duty of wives to respect and obey their husbands” (Schmidt 1992, 19). Yet despite this official subordinate role of the woman, Schmidt stresses that in reality, women had much more influence and exercised much more control and authority than official structures prescribed. This observation may be related to what Beach describes as the concept of ‘self’ within the Shona people. He explains that the Shona

saw a distinction between an internal and an external self. Where the external self was seen as the physical world and the forces, spirits, and talents within this world, the internal self was a circle of humanity passed down from ancestors' spirits to the individual. For Beach, this means that some actions could be affected by external forces over which one had no control. Therefore, “[p]eople made a fairly clear distinction between theory and practice” meaning that “they believed that there was an ideal state of society in which things ought to run according to their world view, but that in practice things often had to be different” (Beach 1994, 144, 156). Similar observations have been made in other parts of historical and contemporary Africa. Cultural sociologist Signe Arnfred writes in her research on sexualities in Africa how sexual relationships in Mozambique before and beyond marriage are seen as normal for both sexes as long as one keeps a form of ‘discretion’. The sexual act is not wrong in itself; it is rather the articulation of the act which is seen as immoral. Furthermore, Arnfred stresses the existence of indicators of marriage in pre-colonial southern Africa that “dealt with control of fertility more than with control of sexuality” (Arnfred 2004, 16). For example, adolescents in some Zulu tribes were encouraged to experiment with sex by having so-called “non-penetrative thigh-sex” (Arnfred 2004, 16). Again, as long as the relationship did not become visible by i.e. resulting in pregnancy, the sexual act was accepted and even expected (Arnfred 2004, 74). If we are following these observations from southern Africa and of the Shona people in Zimbabwe, women might have had a much freer sexuality than they were articulated to possess. Furthermore, historians might not have seen the differences between fertility and sexuality and thus may have analyzed the control over women to be much greater than in reality. Thus, status and social categories were more than wives and husbands. These observations are also visible in later history when colonization pushed for certain negotiations of power and gender roles.

### **2.3.2 Colonialism and the Negotiation of Roles**

When settlers came to live in Zimbabwe in the late 1800s, many political negotiations of power, capital and control appeared. These significantly affected the gender roles. With settler-farmers and capitalism, there was a higher demand for wage-labor on the farms. Thus, when men began to leave the household for wage-labor, the women had to take over more of the previously male tasks. This could, to some, seem to give women a higher status, but, as Schmidt explains, women's status was actually devaluated due to two major factors: 1). men's wage came to surpass the production of food, and 2) the role women held within religion, politics and education was devalued. These changes resulted in great complaints from the local Zimbabweans, showing that gender roles and

duties before colonialism had been much more balanced in terms of workload and status (Schmidt 1992, 71, 74–78, 80).

The change of status for women was also visible in the social areas of society. As Barnes explains, women were given minority status by the settlers and thus officially placed under the control of men. However, women did not at first accept these subordinate social rules and the settler state therefore had to employ more active methods in ‘civilizing’ the Zimbabwean women (Barnes 1999, 23–24). The church had a major role in this ‘civilization’ process. Firstly, the high religious status of many women was changed when the state banned local religions in the favor of Christianity. Secondly, Barnes describes how female sexuality became judged and controlled to a greater extent: “Gradually, women's sexual activity outside the control of their male relatives became defined as immoral, and women so categorized became the objects of social condemnation” (Barnes 1999, 24). Education was also a settler institution that degrades powerful roles from the women. According to Schmidt, the important role of educating children was now taken over by mission schools (Schmidt 1992, 86–92). In these schools, girls were told to be ‘good housewives’, studying subjects like cookery, laundry etc. (Barnes 1999, 34). In addition to these social changes, structures also affected their status in other ways. Although most women in Zimbabwe were not Christian married, they were not allowed to work any place, rent an apartment in the city, or have access to hospital or schools for their children, without a Christian marriage certificate (Barnes 1999, 28). Following these difficult times for women, many turned to so-called ‘Mapoto’ relationships, where women lived unofficially as a wife in the exchange of accommodation and food. Single women and women in such relationships quickly became condemned by settler society and the Zimbabwean elite as ‘prostitutes’ – in the sense that they were out of male control. These sexual morals and judgments became, as I will argue later, a condemnation that have affected women all up to present time (Hungwe 2006, 42).

### **2.3.3 Nationalism, Independence and New Social Morals**

With increasing educational institutions in Rhodesia came a rising African intellectual class in the late 1900s. This group of intellectuals was educated through settler schools and was respected by traditional Zimbabwean institutions. These connections provided them with great influence over education, gender, and sexuality in what was to become the independent Zimbabwean state.

### **Influential African literature on the 'good African woman'**

A small number of African intellectuals wrote novels in Shona and Ndebele for the mission schools. These novels were meant to have an educational purpose, and thus the Rhodesian government held a number of interests in influencing their content. Lene Bull Christiansen, assistant professor in intercultural studies, writes about this issue in her research on gender and nationalism in Zimbabwe. She explains that the novels were supposed to maintain the racial division and to keep the Africans in the rural areas, as well as preaching sexual morals. The African writers found themselves torn between their local beliefs and the social opportunities of writing for the mission institutions; resulting in novels containing a mixture of Rhodesian state and local Zimbabwean morals, which "solidified a neo-patriarchal view on women's roles in society and on the marriage institution" (Christiansen 2009, 91, 95). The picture of the 'good African woman' showed an obedient, faithful and silent wife and mother. Decent and well-behaved, she was presented as loving and caring for her husband regardless of the circumstances - loving her culture and Christianity (Christiansen 2009, 96–99). The 'new moral codes' were thus not solely imposed by Rhodesian state – rather, many of the writers, schooled by mission schools, supported a change of African morals in order to promote social development. The interesting issue here is the emphasis on female sexual morals as put in question. Male sexual morals have been naturalized to a degree where they are 'beyond question' as Christiansen points out in a recent article (Christiansen 2013, 522). The female moral values thus became interpreted as an image of an ideal indigenous woman, which meant that if women breached the values, they would be seen as 'non-indigenous' (Christiansen 2009, 95, 99–100) and (2013, 513).

### **Independence war and female soldiers**

In the struggle for independence, these colonial female gender norms were challenged and changed. Later, however, women's role in society yet again became a matter of national interests. This is illustrated by the Zimbabwean feminist writer, Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi in her research on gender during independence war. Under the Zimbabwean liberation war, women fought side by side with their male comrades and "both Zimbabweans and outsiders perceived women as having played a major role in winning the war" (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, xix). Women started to be acknowledged as soldiers and fighters, and thus regained some of the respect previously directed towards men. The freedom fight also affected the former strict sexual morals and gender relations. As Nhongo-Simbanegavi writes; "Young men and women abused their situation and challenged the

traditional authority of the elders by cohabiting, without approval from their parents, with the guerrillas in their mountain hide-outs” (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, 9–10).

However, this emancipating status of women was only a short phase. The official appraisal of female fighters was criticized as being instrumentalized only to gain support from civilian Zimbabwean women and from the socialist regimes, which funded the liberation army (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, xx–xxi, 1–2). Furthermore, Nhongo-Simbanegavi explains that “[t]he actual role of women during the war makes it abundantly clear that ZANU<sup>7</sup> had hardly laid any foundation for a significant transformation of gender relations during the struggle. Gender reforms were never on the movement’s practical agenda” (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, xxi). Additionally, despite the sexual freedom under the war, many women met a wall of judgment afterwards. The guerilla women became viewed as ‘problematic women from the bush’, and often war-time relationships were dismissed by the men, who remarried a new more ‘decent’ woman after the war (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, 9–10, 146). Following this ‘myth’ of female liberation, many female war veterans became disappointed with the lack of recognition and compensation as well as with the lack of actual ensuing female liberation.

### **Sexual morality and family planning in the new independent Zimbabwe**

The new independent Zimbabwe held a biased agenda on gender in the early years of independence. On the one hand there was focus on the ZANU and ZANLA manifesto on women and thus a ministry for women’s affairs was established. Several acts and laws were introduced to improve the situation for women as well. On the other hand, the new ministry was criticized for having greater interests in strengthening the party than in strengthening Zimbabwe’s women. Furthermore, a nationalist agenda was emerging with the new independence. Reacting to the previous strict Rhodesian family planning strategies to reduce African families, the independent government now praised and promoted a ‘traditional’ patriarchal family structure. However, since Christian patriarchal ideas had been mixed so thoroughly with portraits of the African family, the so-called ‘traditional’ family structure was not solely ‘traditional’. Thereby ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ were used as a ‘Trojan Horse’ in the new époque of nationalism (Christiansen 2009, 108 and (2013, 513) Additionally, if an individual opposed these gender norms, they would not only have been seen as

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<sup>7</sup> ZANU was the political party ruled by Robert Mugabe prior to independence. The party had split from ZAPU, but merged later again with ZAPU and became the current ZANU PF. The ZANLA forces were the military division under ZANU.

'non-indigenous', but would also be judged as unpatriotic and in opposition to the new independent Zimbabwe.

### **2.3.4 Contemporary Gender Acts in an era of Women's Movement and HIV/AIDS**

As a result of the negotiated gender norms under and after the liberation war, a major feminist movement emerged in the 1990s. These Zimbabwean feminists were disappointed with the lack of concrete action against gender-based discrimination, and with a women's ministry that seemed to be more interested in promoting ZANU PF's power than in improving the situation of Zimbabwean women (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, 139). Additionally, a number of discriminating acts from officials passed without reactions from the ministry or the Women's League, reinforcing the feminist critique of the ministry. For example, single women walking alone in Harare were still seen as prostitutes and 'swept away' at night to be replaced in rural areas. Individuals who left ZANU PF's Women's League thus started what became a huge women's movement in Zimbabwe. Despite strong opposition from the government, the women's movement kept growing and became a highly influential movement in the Zimbabwean political arena, creating great changes for women (e.g. the Domestic Violence Law). This great expansion was also due to intense funding from international development organizations and in addition to the consequences of the great HIV/AIDS pandemic (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000, 136, 141).

#### **HIV/AIDS, 'small houses' and the challenge of marriage**

Gender relations were again challenged following the HIV/AIDS pandemic in southern Africa. Whereas South Africa had focused on securing treatment for all following the pandemic, Zimbabwe instead reinforced the former gender norms by preaching a so-called ABC prevention strategy (Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms). Responsibility was again placed on moral sexual behavior (Christiansen 2013, 512). The correct sexual morals were again mainly directed towards women by putting guilt on the so-called 'small house'<sup>8</sup>. Christiansen writes how 'small houses' have been condemned as the main reason behind the spread of HIV/AIDS. The sexual moral for women was seen as limited to the 'honored wife' of a husband, and the only one who could destroy that was the 'small house', because she could transmit the HIV virus to the husband and his wife. Christiansen stresses that "poverty is the only morally comprehensible reason to revert to a 'small house' relationship, while a young woman's aspirations, laziness or vanity is not, and sexual pleasure is not

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<sup>8</sup> The 'small house' is the lover of a husband or perhaps what was previously described as 'mapoto' relationships or a modern version of the 'traditional' polygamous marriage. (See; Christiansen 2013, 515)

even an issue worth considering” (Christiansen 2013, 522). Following these condemnations of the ‘small house’, it is clear that the image of the respectable African woman is still perceived as a married faithful and obedient woman.

This picture has however been somewhat challenged, following the issue of HIV/AIDS. As Christiansen’s analyze from Zimbabwean newspaper columns; “marriage is not safe anymore.” Instead it is to a greater degree being “described as the root cause of many women’s vulnerability to the disease” (Christiansen 2009, 125). More and more Zimbabwean feminists have challenged the role of the ‘ideal African woman’ as the all-accepting obedient wife. They criticize social expectations that force women to stay obedient and not question the behavior of their husbands, which in cases of infidelity, can lead to contracting HIV, sickness, and possibly death (Christiansen 2009, 114). However, this critique is only seen coming from married women. As Christiansen points out, being ‘respectably married’ is still so important in the nationalist narrative that if a non-married woman criticize the marriage institution, she will be condemned as a cultural outsider and anti-Zimbabwean (Christiansen 2013, 525).

### **2.3.5 The Independent African Woman and the Notion of Respectability**

In the above outlined history of women in Zimbabwe from the start of colonialism to the present day, there is a clear thematic issue of mobility, female sexual morality, and respectability. From the moment settlers and missionaries came to Zimbabwe, through the processes of capitalism, urbanization, freedom fights, independence, nationalism, women’s movements and HIV/AIDS, there has been a constant negotiation of these issues. The questions of mobility, morality and respectability can thus be seen as a marking dilemma for Zimbabwean women through history and today. If one challenges the normative ideas of gender, then one can easily be placed in a category of ‘inrespectability’. This dilemma is interesting to investigate further in the processes of understanding the context of perceived possible gender acts for women in Zimbabwe today.

Mobility and prostitution have held a discursive connection throughout history. The feminist Zimbabwean historians Everjoyce Win and Terri Barnes note that the concept ‘prostitute’ through colonial history has been attached to all single or independent town-women, regardless of whether they were selling sexual services or not: “Men often simply refer to independent women as ‘prostitutes’ because they earn incomes and keep their own money without a supervision of a man” (Barnes and Win 1992, 117). This analysis is also noted by Zimbabwean professor in sociology and human resources, Chipo Hungwe. She writes that ‘prostitute’ came to be a term for all



'unrespectable' women in Zimbabwe: "'Respectable' women were those who remained in the rural areas and submitted to the guidance and control of elders, or who returned intermittently to the rural areas; 'unrespectable' women were those who 'ran away' to the relative freedom of urban areas" (Hungwe 2006, 38). Hungwe further outlines how mobility came to be a major signifier for unrespectable women in Zimbabwe: "Inrespectability affects women who move freely by being ie. cross-border traders, women whose mobility is free of male control, and women who simply behave 'in ways that men disapprove of'" (Hungwe 2006, 41–42).

Similar observations have also been seen in other parts of southern Africa. Jane L. Parpart, professor in gender and development studies, discusses the dilemma of being an independent woman in Zambia in her text "'wicked women' and 'respectable ladies'" (2001). She describes how a respectable lady in 1930ies' Zambia had to be a responsible wife and mother, who lived in harmony with the neighbors, kept her house clean and respected her husband's will. A 'wicked' women, however, was an uncontrollable urban woman who lived alone, changed partners often, argued against elders and neglected husbands, children and homes (Parpart 2001, 280–282). Consequently, it was both the 'modern' women and the actual sex-worker who were seen as 'wicked'.

The anthropologists Liv Haram and Rachel Spronk discuss this same dilemma in their research on gender and sexuality in contemporary Africa. Through their ethnographic work in Tanzania and Kenya respectively, they show that independence and mobility continue to have negative connotations for women. Haram stresses in her research of Tanzanian town-women in the late 1990's that "the identity of 'town women' is constructed by means of a dual process of 'othering' engaging two sets of binary oppositions: married woman/prostitute and town/country" (Haram 2004, 213). The Tanzanian town-women refuse to be married in order to avoid situating themselves in a subordinate position to men, but also risk being viewed as prostitutes if they engage in too 'loose' or 'open' relationships. As Haram notes, women must balance the respect of having a husband and the independence and autonomy being without him (Haram 2004, 213–226). In order to cope with this issue, women engage in longer relationships, which are open enough to break them if needed. Another method is the so-called practice of 'polyandrous motherhood' where one has children with different partners. As Haram notes, "Since the respectability of a single woman very much hinges on her performance as a mother, once she is deprived of motherhood, she is further marginalized as a loose woman" (Haram 2004, 225). Thus, according to Haram, an independent

young single woman in Africa still carries negative connotations. Women find, however, different ways of navigating this dilemma in order to maintain respectability within a modern life. Spronk has found similar results, but her focus on middle class urban women in Kenya shows a different approach to this dilemma and a different interpretation of the 'modern' lifestyle. Spronk's informants feel ambivalence about being 'modern' or being 'traditional'. They see their modern lifestyle as binary to being rural, uneducated, unsophisticated and 'tribal', but they also feel that they are betraying their culture by living a 'modern' or even 'westernized' life (Spronk 2012, 84). Spronk writes that "young professionals fear not being part of dominant Kenyan culture, while sometimes they do not want to be part of it" (Spronk 2012, 79). However, despite the anxiety in balancing life between culture and modernity, their middle class status gives them room and possibility for exploring new ways of living and gaining respect in contemporary Africa (Spronk 2012, 94). Although there are differences between the situations in these African countries, I do see the research relate to the situation of my informants in Zimbabwe. As my informants are educated, yet unemployed, they are neither young professionals as in Spronk's research, nor un-educated women as in Haram's research. However, their negotiations of respectability might actually be fluctuating in-between these two situations, making the research of respectability from both Spronk and Haram quite interesting to compare in my analysis later in this thesis.

Following this historical chapter, it is clear that the concept of 'respectability' has an important role to play for women and female identity in southern Africa. History holds a significant place in society and the colonial past has created an anxiety for women of being too 'modern', thus losing respectability and connection with 'true' African culture. Having investigated the historical and contemporary situation of women in Zimbabwe, I will analyze my interviews in relation to this historical contextualization. At the same time, I intend to combine the historical contextualization with a particular framework tool for my analysis. I will introduce this analytical framework in the following chapter.

### 3.0 Analytical Framework

When dreams and hopes for a better life clash with norms and possibilities in society it might cause a person to reconsider and struggle with the meaning of life. When women in Zimbabwe expected and hoped to get employed after getting a degree, their unemployment forces them to reassess their fantasy. As one of my informants explained it to me:

*To be honest I did not come to do my masters because I really wanted to empower myself. Initially it was really because I just wanted to get out. (...) My mom didn't really understand it. My mom was like "you are supposed to get a job." You know "look for a job" and I was like "But mom I can't get a job. There is nothing for me to do", you know. So initially it was not easy, to be honest (4. Maria, 3).*

The informant's dreams of getting a job were shattered, thus preventing the achievement of her post-education plans; the society does not understand her job situation, and her degree is not appreciated. Situations as those above could be described as 'situations of negotiation' – negotiation between an individual's hopes for the future, and society's expectations. In my research, I am interested in these negotiations of the 'good life' and thus the negotiation of female possibilities for acts in Zimbabwean society.

As mentioned, I have decided to place my analysis in a framework consisting of two theoretical approaches; the first approach sees the promise of progression within education as a 'cruel optimism', the other investigates the negotiation of gender within a performative bubble of norms and possibilities for agency.

#### 3.1 First Approach – the Cruel Optimistic Belief in Education

Why do individuals still believe in the upward mobility of the educational institution, when they clearly see the high failures from it? Why does Maria, in the quote above, keep pursuing higher education, when she clearly find the promise of jobs less real than fantastmatic?

Lauren Berlant has recently written a philosophical reflection on exactly this dilemma. She explains:

*[T]he current recession congeals decades of class bifurcation, downward mobility, and environmental, political, and social brittleness that have increased progressively since the Reagan era. The intensification of these processes, which reshapes conventions of racial, gendered, sexual, economic, and nation-based subordination, has also increased*

*the probability that structural contingency will create manifest crisis situations in ordinary existence for more kinds of people* (Berlant 2011, 11)

According to Berlant, individuals choose to stay in these crisis-like situations, because of “*cruel optimism*”. When one is fantasizing about a ‘better life’, one gets attached to an object that seemingly leads this better situation. The object thereby becomes the way to attain the ‘better life’. However, this optimistic desire becomes *cruel* the moment when the attachment to this very object hinders attainment of the desired goal. Thereby, “[a] relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant 2011, 1). When Berlant criticizes the recession of contemporary society for congealing decades of crises, in especially Europe and the USA, she actually criticizes the subjunctive, or the promise of modernity. As she says; “[t]he fantasies that are fraying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality” (Berlant 2011, 3). ‘The better life’ has somehow become a frozen fantasy of ambiguity. Individuals within neoliberal society believe so much in the dream and in the ways to get there, that they do not question the present and alternative possibilities. As she states: “*Cruel Optimism* gives a name to a personal and collective kind of relation and sets its elaboration in a historical moment that is as transnational as the circulation of capital, state liberalism, and the heterofamilial, upward mobile good-life fantasy have become” (Berlant 2011, 11, her highlight).

### **3.1.1 Standing Still in Crises while Waiting for Promises to be Fulfilled**

In their efforts to reach a tired fantasy of the good life, individuals attach themselves to certain clusters of promises. These promises become the object that can fulfill their dreams: “When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us. This cluster of promises could seem embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea – whatever” (Berlant 2011, 23). Thus the cluster of promises could be seen as an educational system’s promise of employment and prosperity.

However, here the individual is forever stuck waiting and hoping, “dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure” (2011, 199). Due to their trust in the fantasy and its promises, individuals are at an impasse, where life crises are seen as ordinary obstacles on the way to a better life. Instead of moving forward, individuals experience several crises and traumas, yet optimism casts these traumas as ‘ordinary crises’ or bumps on the way to a life they might never reach. Berlant explains how someone could see the ordinary life as; “an impasse shaped by crisis in which

people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (Berlant 2011, 8). Instead of helping them to flourish, this impasse is severely detrimental. According to Berlant; “[p]eople are destroyed in it, or discouraged but maintaining, or happily managing things, or playful and enthralled. Add to this the fading of security and upward mobility as national capitalist alibris for exploitation in the present” (Berlant 2011, 200). Thereby the optimism and trust people have in objects, such as the education system, can actually just be a feeling that makes life bearable, as people experiences trauma, crises and bumps in their lives.

The question that I could ask now, and which Berlant is asking herself as well, is what might happen, when people realize that the fantasy is more cruel than optimistic? Berlant suggests that “if the cruelty of attachment *is* experienced by someone/some group, even in a subtle fashion, the fear is that the loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything” (Berlant 2011, 24) Thereby, even if the fantasy and the object to get there, are not working; even if the object is actually working against one’s flourishing, it might be even more unbearable not to have any promises at all. One might not be ready to give up a worn-out fantasy despite clear awareness of its inabilities. Instead one might stay at this impasse, waiting for a new hope to arrive. People might continue to believe in the fantasy until they see something else or rather something better emerge. This very belief might be the main reason they can live a bearable life at all. As Berlant argues; “[a]s more people from social locations are seen watching their dreams become foreclosed on material and fantasmatic ways, the grimace produces another level of face to create a space of delay while the subject and world adjust to how profoundly fantasmatic the good-life dreams were, after all” (Berlant 2011, 196). Thus, I can use Berlant’s ideas here to see new negotiated understandings of what the ‘good life’ can be now, when education did not keep its promises of employment, prosperity and this so-called ‘better life’.

### **3.2 Second Approach; Negotiation of Identity in a Bubble of Norms**

Negotiations of what the ‘better life’ is and how to get there are in many ways also negotiations of who to be in one’s society. One’s understanding of the ‘better life’ might be negotiated against one’s perceived possibility of agency as a person in society, and in particular, in my case, as a woman in a Zimbabwean context.

### 3.2.1 Judith Butler and Gender Identity

Judith Butler offers useful ideas concerning how to understand and work with gender. She says; “the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined” (Butler 2007, 23). By this quote, she explains that a person only can be culturally accepted as ‘a person’ when accepting and conforming under gendered norms.

African feminist Oyěwùmí, would undoubtedly criticize this statement. Her main critique of Western gender studies is exactly that, of not being a person without being a gender. On the contrary, people from various ethnic backgrounds in Africa do not perceive gender in this way. She gives examples of women-women marriages and explains how the Yorùbá tribe in Nigeria controls social relations via social realities as opposed to biological facts, such as sex. (Oyewumi 2005, 10, 13) Thus, according to Oyěwùmí, gender is not the main norm affecting a definition of a person. In an African context, one can also be a person outside being a gender. Professor in philosophy and English Sara Salih rephrases this idea of a person defined by gender. She writes: “gender is a 'corporeal style', an act (or a sequence of acts), a 'strategy' which has cultural survival at its end, since those who do not 'do' their gender correctly are punished by society” (Salih 2002, 66). In this version of the idea, where gender is described as a style of acts, society sets certain norms of acting ones gender, which limits possibilities of people. Since norms in the Zimbabwean society – at least since colonization – has been highly negotiated in terms of gender, sexual morality and the institution of marriage, as I have illustrated in chapter 2, it seems like people do have to act in certain gendered ways in order to be accepted in society. Thus, as I stressed in the introduction, Oyěwùmí’s feminist ideas might open up for a reflection on context, but her research is not necessarily relevant to a contemporary Zimbabwean one. Subsequently, I do see the relevancy of Butler’s point in the sense that ‘wrong’ gendered acts can risk being punished by society in a Zimbabwean context.

Butler understands the subject to be in ‘a process’, and therefore never finished negotiating its identity. The ‘acts’ that define the identity are continuously changed, copied and reconstructed. Butler stresses that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 2007, 45). Salih explains this with other words. She argues that

“gender is an act or a sequence of acts that is always and inevitably occurring, since it is impossible to exist as a social agent outside the terms of gender” (Salih 2002, 47). These two citations note, first of all, that there is no ‘natural being’. It is the repeated acts in a given society, and the copies of those acts, that give the impression that something is natural. Second, we see that one cannot even exist outside the acts. Since gender is a sequence of acts; one might not be anything but the acts that define her. As Salih notes, “Butler repeatedly refutes the idea of a pre-linguistic inner core or essence by claiming that gender acts are not performed by the subject, but they performatively constitute a subject that is the effect of discourse rather than the cause of it” (Salih 2002, 65).

This statement is especially interesting, as it argues that the negotiations of norms and gender, which my research works to investigate, are not negotiations between a subject’s inner essence and the outside world. Instead, these negotiations are between different acts that together create the subject. As Butler directly puts it (with inspiration from Nietzsche) there is simply no ‘doer’ behind the ‘deed’, or more specifically; “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 2007, 34). Thereby, what can perhaps be analyzed from these conversations with the Zimbabwean women is how negotiations of life are effects of certain discourses that performatively constitute identities, dreams and experienced norms. I will return to this idea later in this chapter, when I discuss the concrete method I intend to use in my research.

### **3.2.2 Agency and the Bubble of Norms**

When gender-acts ‘performatively’ constitute a subject, it seems like there is no agency in Butler’s ideas. However, Salih addresses this confusion with the following argument; “Butler argues that sex and gender are discursively constructed and that the subject is left with the question of how to acknowledge and ‘do’ the construction it is already in” (Salih 2002, 48). With this, Salih notes that the subject can have some agency, but that this agency does not come before the acts, but rather inside them. Thus the subject is not free to define its identity by itself, but there is a certain space for movement. Other readers of Butler’s performativity-concept have, according to Salih, sometimes seen performativity as almost theatrical: the subject has a closet of gender-identity-clothes to choose between and that it is possible to wear – or perform - a new one of these identities every day. That is, however, not exactly what Butler argues. As Salih points out;

*since you are living within the law or within a given culture, there is no sense in which your choice is entirely ‘free’, and it is very likely that you ‘choose’ your metaphorical*

*clothes to suit the expectations or perhaps the demands of your peers or your work colleagues, even if you don't realize that you are doing so.*

(Salih 2002, 50)

Thus, Salih explains that the metaphorical clothes you wear are performatively constructed by the cultural norms of society. So your 'freedom' is limited to *how* clothing is worn, or to the small changes you can do to it. As I understand this idea of performativity, there is no closet with identity suits; instead, there is a certain area of possible movements. I understand performativity as some sort of 'normativity bubble'. Inside this bubble are the certain possible identities, or norms of gender, in a particular space and time. The bubble, and thus gender identity possibilities, can expand when the borders of the bubble are pushed. But once individuals exceed the boundaries of the bubble, leaving the normative gender identity, they are not seen as 'normal persons' anymore. Butler's concept of "performativity" casts identity as performatively constructed by the gender norms possible within the bubble. But the bubble is flexible, and acts can be subversive and change the size and form of the bubble, if the acts are closely related to the normative acts within the bubble. Since gender is a sequence of repetitive acts, one can repeat, or copy, gender acts, but with a slight change, in order to push the borders of the 'normativity-bubble'. Thereby as Salih quotes Butler; "[c]onstruction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency...[t]he task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat, or, indeed to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (Butler in Salih 2002, 67).

### **3.3 Method – Central Concepts to Utilize**

With a point of departure in the two theoretical approaches to my analysis, I frame a method with which to analyze my empirical work. I will look at my informant's articulation of the 'good life', and their perceived attachment to education as a promise of progression. Subsequently, I can see situations where this fantasy is fraying, and where the women negotiate new ways of reaching some kind of 'better life'. In relation to this, I look at how the women negotiate their respectability and space for agency in society.

Using Judith Butler's ideas, I have chosen to look at the negotiations of gender in my research as repetitions or effects of prior gender acts. Bringing this together with the concept of 'respectability', there is a possibility of analyzing perceived respectable and unrespectable gender acts. The interesting task is to look for acts that show the slight change or specific repetition that performs on



the border of the bubble. At the same time I can use Berlant to look into when these women see some aim or goal as necessary for their development into a better position in life. Berlant describes an analytical approach to use in this context. She says that “it is an incitement to inhabit and to track the affective attachment to what we call the ‘good life’, which is for many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it” (Berlant 2011, 27). Thereby these women might negotiate normative understandings of what the ‘good life’ is against their own failures, struggles and dreams in their lives.

Since the border, or limit, of possible gender acts is a construction, I can deconstruct their perceptions of gender, respectability and the ‘good life’ by acknowledging their articulations as performatively constructed acts. This will give me the possibility of understanding which norms that might influence fantasies of gender and the ‘good life’ in Zimbabwe, but it also gives me the possibility of understanding their processes and their possibilities for change.

### 3.3.1 Design of Analysis

After having reflected on the operationalization of my two theoretical approaches, I will now design my analysis accordingly. I am inspired by the afore mentioned quote by Berlant as it entails central concepts from both Berlant and Butler and summarizes a concrete method of analysis relevant to my research question. This quote does so by encouraging the researcher to look at 1) articulations of the wanted ‘good life’, 2) what possibilities there exist within norms of the ‘good life’, and 3) what affective attachments are necessary for reaching this ‘better life’.

Concretely I thus intend to split my analysis into three themes:

1. **THE GOOD LIFE FANTASY.** First of all I want to look at what my informants call “the good life” and thus understand their fantasy of prosperity and upward mobility. This can be explained as an analysis of *what they want to have*; what they are striving towards, and what they are dreaming about.
2. **THE BUBBLE OF NORMS.** Second of all, I want to look at understandings of possibilities or lack thereof. With help from Butler, these possibilities can also be explained as my informant’s articulation of the normativity bubble around them. In other words, the expressed perceptions of *what they have to have*; what they believe society demands from them, and what norms they think are given or unchangeable.
3. **THE OBJECTS OF DESIRE.** Lastly, I want to look at the affective attachments to what my informants see as the ‘good life’. This can therefore be explained as the objects of desire

or what Berlant also calls ‘the cluster of promises’. Thus, this is the articulated perceptions of *how they can/cannot achieve it*; how education can/cannot lead them to the ‘good life’ and how they thus express their belief in the educational system as an object of desire.

In between, and across, my analysis of these three themes, I will analyze the informants’ negotiations of gender acts and agency as subjects. In order to do so, I intend to analyze one interview in-depthly within each theme. I can thus analyze these interviews as whole pieces and become aware of connections between statements and the informants’ continuous identity negotiation with themselves, with perceived norms, and with me as a researcher. Furthermore, as a poststructural researcher, this method is quite relevant, since I see patterns of discourses in the individual qualitative focus, which might not have been seen if the interviews were broken up. The interviews I have chosen for each theme were chosen based on their quality, on the amount of material on that particular theme, and on their relation to the other interviews. Nonetheless, since all the interviews touch all three themes, I intend to start my three analytical chapters with a thematically analysis using relevant passages from across the nine interviews. These can thus add to and open the theme for the in-depth analysis following. By this I combine a horizontal thematic analysis with an in-depth vertical analysis.

## 4.0 Analysis

This analysis will be a window into experiences of a small group of women within a huge and complex context. I will step out of the broad and theoretical reflection, which I have just introduced, and step into the lives articulated by 9 women in Zimbabwe – and in particular within the lives of 3 of these. As I wrote in the introduction to this thesis, I am curious to explore how educated yet unemployed women in Zimbabwe negotiate the situation of failed promises of education. I want to look into what a ‘good life’ is for these women, and how education and employment plays a role in attaining this ‘good life.’ I intend thus to analyze the articulations of these 9 educated, yet unemployed women within the broader regional, political and historical context of which they live.

### 4.1 The ‘Good Life’ Fantasy

Although the fantasy of attaining a ‘better life’ through education is a present theme in all three analytical chapters, this chapter will focus on my informants’ articulations of what they strive for - what life they articulate as the ‘good life’. The idea of the ‘good life’ amongst the interviewed Zimbabwean women is affected by different discourses in their context (as outlined in chapter 2). On the one hand, the belief in education as a progression to a ‘better life’ and the Zimbabwean women’s movement have had a strong voice in affecting perceptions of the ‘good life’. On the other hand, historical, cultural and normative ideas on how to be a ‘good’ African woman in Zimbabwe and what to strive for as a woman, do affect dreams and hopes for my informants’ fantasies of the ‘good life’.

The fantasy of the ‘good life’ is expressed in very similar ways by all my informants. There are, however, differences in their negotiations of this fantasy when they experience the probability of not reaching their initial dream. All my informants express a dream of getting a ‘good job’. That is articulated as a job, which is relevant to their degree and paying well so that they will be financially independent. This independence is furthermore crucial to attain in order to be respected by society and to be prepared for marriage. 24 year old Vicky, who has been unemployed for 7 months and now is volunteering, expresses this dream in the following quote:

*So I wanted it to be like when I finished a degree I would want to get a job, you know. I would be financially independent so that in my marriage I would manage to help out my husband. (...)So ahh it would be very difficult for me to be like, I would just stay as a housewife of which I attained a*

*degree! I wouldn't want to end up doing those kind of things like vendoring or what other ladies are doing. (7. Vicky, 7)*

The dream of financial independence is apparent for all the women, but whereas the women from middle class families can sustain their lives, waiting for a 'good job' to appear, the women from poorer families are in a less fortunate situation. In the above quote, Vicky articulates a dislike about being a housewife or doing *vendoring*. She is from a middle class family and her parents are paying for her living, making it possible for Vicky to be picky about jobs. She received an education in order to get a 'good job' and she can afford to wait for the right job to come along. 27 year old Kristine, on the contrary, studied development studies and law and has now been unemployed for 5 years. Although she is supported by her family, her long unemployment period makes her desperate to the point that she just wants any job: "Everything, I am just looking for anything to get money" (3. Kristine, 3). Karen is a bit older at 34 and has a sister in London, who is supporting her. She has had some years on the job market before she became unemployed and speaks with a certain pride about her degree. She says, "there is just no way I could be happy getting a receptionist job. (...) for me I won't put much effort looking for a job where I will be overqualified for, I won't (2. Karen, 8). Thus, their articulations of financial independence become a question of getting a 'good job' and becoming 'better' than 'lower class' women. However, it is not all who can afford to wait for this opportunity and their unemployment situation affects the women differently in terms of socio-economic status. This issue I will discuss further in the analysis of the bubble of norms (chapter 4.2).

Financial independence is a necessity in order to enter into marriage for all my informants. Marriage has a vital place in their 'good life' fantasies, but there is no way that any of my informants will consider getting married before they have found a job and have become financially independent. Vicky expresses a strong desire for marriage, but her unemployment is standing in the way: "I just feel like ahh no I just need to be married. I just feel like it. Yeah I just feel like now I want to get married, but the problem is that I haven't yet found something to do" (7. Vicky, 9). 24 year old Anna, who has a diploma in food and beverage management and now studies for a Bachelor's in psychology, further stresses that she wants to focus on herself first, by being "able to take care of MY self. Myself. Before I could get married" (6. Anna, 7). For Vicky and Anna, their need for independence manifests itself in different wishes. First, there is a general dream of a life with no financial problems. Second, there is a need for a 'good marriage' where one does not need

to rely on any help from a husband. As 34 year old Karen stressed to me, she will “absolutely not” get married because she does not want “someone who is going to be pulling me down because they are working and I am not. Just because I am relying on them to give me money, relying on them to give me basic things” (2. Karen, 10). Thus, marriage is desirable for my informants, but only after they have become financially independent and thus not vulnerable to abuse from their husbands. This ambivalence about marriage as something desired yet feared is quite central to the negotiation of the ‘good life’. I see it as similar to the ambivalence which women experienced in the crossroad between a modern life and a cultural respectability, as outlined in the history chapter (chapter 2.3). As stressed by Hungwe and others, a modern independent woman might easily be seen as a ‘prostitute’<sup>9</sup> and unrespectable. But a dependent position of a wife with no job is unthinkable for these women. In order to find a balance between respectability and independence, these women want their own income. Thus, unlike Haram’s Tanzanian informants who balanced the issue by negotiating the marriage institution, my informants seem to balance the dilemma by negotiating the positions within marriage.

Within the dream of being financially independent is thus a dream of a ‘good marriage’. 25 year old Pia, with a Bachelor’s in political science, explains this dream to me in a way where it sounds like something ‘every’ modern women should think. It is articulated as a general perception:

**C:** *Ok, so what does it mean to be independent?*

**P:** *To be independent it means that financially you can support yourself, yaah I think it has to do with mostly for ladies with your financial status, you have to be someone who is financially stable, so it means that you won’t need to beg from someone. Yaah I think if you are financially stable I think your husband can even understand you, he can support you in other ways instead of asking for a single cent from your husband or begging, yaah so you need to be financially stable. When we say women we are independent we will be talking about financial stability (8. Pia, 14).*

The history of capitalism in Zimbabwe, as presented in chapter 2.3, could have had an effect of this articulated general perception. In the beginning of capitalism in Zimbabwe, men became waged labor while women began to do more of the former male tasks at home. However, even though women did the former male tasks, they did not inherit the status of these jobs. Now the male-earned capital could surpass the production of food and since women mostly had access to capital through men, it was one of the ways in which men kept their higher status in society. When Pia stresses the

<sup>9</sup> When I choose to quote this it is because it refers to many more meanings than ‘a sexual worker’. This I stressed through Hungwe and others in my historical chapter (chapter 2.3).

importance of not begging for money, I see it as a form of reaction on a historical dependence to men's produced capital. She even seems to talk for all women by explaining it in a 'we' form; women need to regain access to finances in order to not be dependent on their husbands. Pia also articulates 'understanding from the husband' as a benefit from financial independence. This is similar to many statements from the other informants, who articulate a need to be on the same financial level as their husbands. For example, Anna answers me on the question of why she needs to be financially independent:

*A: You know, just to have this balance. This gender balance. So that when I get married, I don't feel overpowered by my husband. That he is educated more than me or that maybe he is the provider in the family more than me. You have to be at the same level, I think (6. Anna, 7).*

Although my informants express gender balance and understanding from their husbands as a quality of a 'good marriage', they do not all articulate a need for equality. They do not talk of gender equality, but gender balance. In a 'good marriage' there is a need for a financial balance and understanding from the husband but at the same time a 'good woman' is articulated to be subordinate to their husband. I see a dilemma between a modern independence and the cultural respectability, which I will explore further in the chapter concerning 'the bubble of norms' (chapter 4.2). Nonetheless, a 'good life' consists of a 'good job', financial independence and a 'good marriage' for most of my informants. I will in the next part, analyze what these wishes means for another one of my informants, 30 year old Maria.

#### 4.1.2 In-depth Analysis of the 'Good Life' Fantasy – meet Maria

Maria is an interesting example of the negotiation of a 'good life' fantasy. She is thirty years old and currently studying for her Master's in sociology after a year of unsuccessful job hunting. I met her at her university, and we bonded quickly around being Master's students, conducting research, and writing reports.

Maria's ideas of the 'good life' stand out from the rest for two reasons. First, she grew up in a middle class family who supported her during education and unemployment. Her

**Maria is 30 years old and single.**

She holds a **Bachelor's degree in sociology** and is currently **studying for her Master's degree**, which she started after having been **unemployed for 1 year**.

She is from a **middle income family; her late father was employed**; her mother is a housewife. She has three sisters who work as an auto electrician, teacher, and financial consultant, and one brother who is a teacher.

She lives with her family and is supported by her sister, but is paying her own school fees by a project-employment at her university.

sister, who lives in London, seems to be a role model and support system for Maria, and she expresses boredom and restlessness as main frustrations from her unemployment. Secondly, her enrollment in sociology and status as a Master's student seem to have affected her articulated 'good life' ideology as well. She has read gender studies and expresses very feminist opinions. Her academic background also plays a role in her meeting with me; a foreign feminist researcher. She might have felt challenged by my background and felt the need to reflect certain feminist ideas regarding gender roles.

### **Job and occupation**

Early in the interview, Maria outlines a pathway to what she defines as a 'good life'. Like the rest of my informants, she wants to be able to be financially independent (4. Maria, 5). But as the following two quotes illustrate, the 'good life' dream changes the moment Maria is unemployed.

*C: I talked with [my friend] and I asked him, so do you know anyone who is in this situation, that they maybe, they can't find a job or they have been looking for jobs and then they pursued further studies. And I guess that's what your situation is?*

*M: It is something like that, because if you look at when I was undergrad, I was thinking obviously that maybe after 6 months or so you will probably get a job. But nothing like that happened. I tried so much and wrote so many applications and everything, but nothing really came up. Yes there was a time when I wasn't even invited for an interview over a year and I was like, you know what I don't think this is even worth it. Because now it meant that I was at home the whole time, I was not doing anything, I had a degree. So there was only one other thing to do that was to come for Master's. I was coming for Master's, not because I was thinking that maybe after Master's I would get a job. No it was simply for giving me occupation. You know that you can't just be sitting at home. That's maybe the actual reason for why I went for Master's. Because I could not find a job. Because supposedly I really found a good job I wouldn't have come for Master's. So, yeah...*

(...)

*C: How did you decide to go to pursue your Master's? What kind of feeling did you go through to decide this?*

*M: Ehm I think the first thing I think I was feeling... I took a year break from undergrad. And I didn't like it. I didn't like the feeling of being at home the whole day. I think that is really really tough not to do something. Not to be occupied. And then also I asked myself. You need at least something to do. You cannot do this. (?) Even if I do this I will be like "get a job", you know. Why not doing anything, it is not even worth it. And you also got your expenses. According to the standards of somebody who is not working you know you are unemployed then you have got transport cost and so... It is a lot of money so, all these things are going into your head and then you also have to cater for the family who are like "you know what, we paid for you to do your first degree and now you want to go again and do another degree. To do what?" They would want me to go and get a job. Look for a job. You do not have to continue your studies, no. Then I try to explain to people, "no let me go and do this" then they ask you why and you really don't have an answer. "Let me do this because I really want to get out of the house." you know, it's not the best answer*

*but, yeah something like that. To be honest I did not come to do my Master's because I really wanted to empower myself. Initially it was really because I just wanted to get out.*

(4. Maria, 1,3)

In these two quotes one sees the negotiations of the 'good life' that Maria has gone through. She went for her Bachelor's in sociology to be able to get a 'good job'. She was sure that within 6 months or so you will probably get a job, but when that did not become a reality, she changed her goal. Now life was not necessarily about getting a good job - she just wanted to do *something*. Whereas her Bachelor's degree was an object of desire to get the 'good job', her disappointment makes her pronounce her Master's degree as an end. Thus, Maria might not trust the Master's education as a promise of a job. Instead, she expresses the Master's degree as solving her unemployment problem in the present. However, Maria also explains how her family does not understand her reasoning behind returning to University. Instead of furthering her education, which ends with her still not receiving a job, her family want her to just look for that job now. As she quotes her family, "*you know what, we paid for you to do your first degree and now you want to go again and do another degree. To do what?*" Her family clearly sees education as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. And they don't see the point in further education if it does not lead to employment.

I see this conflict as a dilemma for Maria between cultural demands and an idea of modernity. On the one hand, she needs to fulfill the cultural demand from her family of a collective responsibility, whereby she is expected to take care of her relatives. On the other hand, she needs to follow her own ideas of modernity and respectability as a modern, independent woman. Whereas her family perhaps saw her Bachelor's degree as an investment in Maria so that she later could support them back, Maria now articulates her Master's degree as a way of getting out of the house and being occupied. In Maria's articulated need of being occupied, I see first of all a wish for modern progression in the sense of moving somewhere. She cannot just be sitting at home and wait. In Berlant's optic, Maria might be very aware of the uncertainty of the education-fantasy, but it is better to be 'dogpaddling' somewhere, than to not do anything at all. This also refers to Ferguson's critique of modernity and neoliberalism: If Maria gives up her trust in upward mobility, her education will have been a waste of time and she will not further herself. If there is no progression, she will be 'de-developmentalized' and the economic inequalities in her world will be static walls, with no possibilities for change. This problem I will discuss further in the third analytical chapter (chapter 4.3). Furthermore, I see a modern middle class woman who does not want to be seen as



only a housewife. As Vicky said in the beginning of this chapter, being a housewife is not acceptable when you have a degree. Spronk also outlined in her research from Kenya how middle class women saw themselves as binary opposites to being un-educated and un-sophisticated. Since my informants view a housewife as someone who is un-educated, sitting at home and doing nothing, it might place Maria unwillingly in the same category. Studying for a Master's degree at university, on the other hand, replaces Maria in the sophisticated modern middle class category that she seems to be striving to uphold.

### **Power and freedom in marriage**

Like most of my other informants, Maria too articulates that financial independence is a necessity for a 'good marriage'. But whereas most of the other informants express financial independence as a way to obtain balance in marriage, Maria has a more aggressive approach. Her articulated independence almost serves as a shield against marriage or as a tool to obtain power over the husband instead of obtaining balance or equality. Several times Maria expresses the 'good life' as a situation where she has power; power over herself, her life, and most of all, power over men. Maria expresses a clear concern with men. This concern is stressed to the degree that Maria does not trust men, she does not want to get married, and she needs to be powerful towards men. In her interview, she explains how some unemployed women are forced to either find a teaching job or to get married (4. Maria, 2). According to Maria, those two choices seem to be the last possible choices a woman should make. One has to find a 'good job' (and thus not a low-paid teaching job in the rural areas) and to stay independent (and not get married). I see her fear of staying home and doing nothing shining through her vocalizations. To keep respectability as a middle class modern woman, she needs to have a good career, and not be dependent on a husband. This idea of a 'good life' is also articulated in the quote below:

*M: Ehm I am looking for a good career, I am looking for a good career, a stable income. One that I don't need to worry about. I then after that, you know, when I am all good and settled, then maybe I can look for a husband to marry. Not because I want him for his money, no I probably marry him because he is fun, because I know that I can look after myself -and him, you know without a problem. So I probably just marry someone that I can easily control.*  
(4. Maria, 9)

This quote states that the 'good life' fantasy for Maria is about a good career and a stable income. What is striking is how Maria is not talking about *balance* in marriage, like many other of my informants do. Maria seems almost uninterested in marriage; as if she questions 'what meaning

does marriage have if I am independent anyway?’ She does not want to compromise her modern independence. In a way, her articulation is emphasizing the negotiation that all my informants are articulating: the negotiation between being a modern independent educated woman and being a good traditional Zimbabwean wife. Despite their dream of independence and career, most of my informants talk of being a subordinate wife, similar to the picture of an ideal woman, which I outlined in the historical chapter. A good Zimbabwean wife was (in the 1990s) portrayed by Christiansen (2009) to be an obedient, faithful, silent wife and mother. In addition, she should be descent and well-behaved, loving and caring for her husband no matter what, and she should love her culture and Christianity. Maria is breaking from this cultural ideal by claiming 100 percent independence and even more: She does not want gender balance, or even gender equality, in marriage. If she is supposed to get married, she wants ‘power’ over men. Using Butler, I see her need of control and independence as a negotiation of gender and respectability. On the one hand, this can be seen as a negotiation of respectability against me as researcher: Maria presents what she imagines ‘correct’ feminist opinions should be as a way of proving her academic knowledge towards me. On the other hand, this articulation expresses an extreme form of feminism that exceeds a classic western feminist ideal of gender equality, in the sense that she demands the man’s space in society. When Maria claims the power in marriage, she is leaving the bubble of possible female gender acts to a degree, where she exceeds being a woman and almost demands to be like a man. I see this action as being similar to what happened in early colonial history, where women took over many of the former male tasks. The question is whether she will attain the respectability and power that men have by performing these ‘male acts’, or if she will lose respectability as a woman - and as a person- by exceeding her bubble of gendered norms? This problem is further discussed in the dialogue as follows:

*M: [R]ight now my career is more important, than culture, than anything, than marriage, than anything. Because I think if you have that basic, you say, yeah if your career and such things are in order, I think everybody knows that (?) position opposed to being married and you are not financial stable, you don’t have a good career. I think there is bound to be problems in that marriage. So I think it is definitely more important to empower yourself educate yourself. You really need to do what you need to be doing in a proper way, before you get married or focus on culture.*

*C: What kind of problems would be in that marriage?*

*M: I hear that people who don’t have money in their marriage, they fight every day. Because the rent has to be paid, the children have to get clothes, somebody has to travel and go somewhere, but there is no money, the roof is leaking, you know. You will keep asking maybe the husband the whole time, maybe who are also unemployed, “we need to fix the ceiling, ehm the guiser needs to be fixed.” And you know when every day you will keep asking him to do something you cannot afford, so maybe in the end of the day people just get fed up. I think you should worry about other things in*

*your marriage but not to fight about money. I think there is a need to have enough, adequate money that you can be happy with, you know, so you can do particular things without worrying.*

**C:** *So when you... If you are financially independent, you think that there would be less discussions about money?*

**M:** *I think there would be less discussions about money, number one. Number two: I will not be detached to a marriage that I do not like. If I do not like it, I am not worried. I can just take my bag. Hey, I do not even have to carry my bag. I can just carry my money... And say; "you know what; I am leaving. Good luck. I will go and start a life elsewhere, you know, have my own life." But then if you are not financially independent, you can stay in a loveless marriage, in a horrible marriage, because you are attracted to the economic value of the marriage, which is wrong. I want a situation whereby if I don't like what is going on, I can just, you know, get my bag pack, yeah that's it.*

**C:** *Do you think that men would see that as a threat...?*

**M:** *It is! It is... I think it is a threat. I think they find it very... ehm it doesn't happen here a lot where you find men look for women who are a lot educated than them. But then he can also be educated then he can live with that. So that's general what happens. It is very rare... Or even in marriage, maybe they start of at the same level and maybe the woman gets more financially empowered than the man, then it is bound to make trouble in that marriage, because then the man feel inferior and feel undermined.. There will be no peace within that marriage. That is not a life.*

**C:** *But you just said before that if you are not financially independent, there will be problems, because you will be discussing about finances, but now when you are financially independent, you will be actually having discussions about... power.*

**M:** *You cannot demarcate. I mean you cannot separate the two. Power and money go hand in hand. If you have the power... you are better off if you have money, you have power and you are in a good marriage... everything... Okay power and money can decide if you will have a good marriage, right, but also it can cause that marriage to be bad if the power and money are in the woman's hand and not in the mans. So it is just... It is a power game really. It's about who has got the money. Because if the man has got the money and the woman's doesn't, the marriage will still be good, because the woman knows that if I leave this man I am in trouble, I am in big trouble*

(4. Maria, 8–9)

As this dialogue shows, 'power' is a central part of a successful life for Maria. As my other informants also stress, there can be problems in a marriage if the woman is not financially independent, because this woman needs to beg for money all the time. She can be stuck in a *loveless marriage*. The dependency of a man's income can thereby lead her to stay in miserable conditions – and thus a bad life – without having the freedom to move on or break free. But if the woman is financially independent, there can also be problems in the marriage because the man will feel threatened by the woman's power. It is a *power game*, as Maria says. She is aware that she is inviting a war rather than compromise. If the woman wants to be the one with power, there is bound to be problems. She is clearly articulating that men do not want women with an education; they do not want women who have more power than them. Thus to date, Maria has yet to find a man, who respects her need for power, and perhaps that is also why marriage is not necessarily a part of her

‘good life’ fantasy. She might not see it as a possibility to find this type of man, because men’s gendered acts are seen as *beyond question*, as stressed with Christiansen earlier (chapter 2.3).

If Maria cannot *easily control* her husband, she wants to be able to at least leave him and say, "You know what? I am leaving. Good luck. I will go and start a life elsewhere, you know, have my own life." (4. Maria, 8). Unlike many of my other informants, the ‘good life’ for Maria could easily be a life alone, As long as she has the freedom to do what she wants, when she wants it. She claims the need for freedom is important for women in order to break free from a patriarchal system. It is therefore not only a ‘better life’ for her, but a ‘better life’ for all women in society. As she says,

*“You will find that now, women are becoming more emancipated, our society is very patriarchal in nature, soo there is so much... you know, women are really put down in our society. But now you actually see that if you look at the divorce-rate now, there is actually... It is a way for women of saying they will not go for particular things within a marriage”* (4. Maria, 7).

When Maria articulates ‘patriarchy’ and ‘emancipation’, she is again talking to me as a foreign researcher in gender. In her explanations of these issues in her society, she articulates a belief that other societies might be better. These articulations thus show a perception that I perhaps represent a society, where women are not *put down*. Hence, I see these expressions partly as an embarrassment of these articulated issues of women disempowerment in her society, which she does not see as modern, and partly as a way to secure respectability from me of her modern and academic status.

Maria also combines the concepts of power and freedom in our dialogue. She wants the freedom to make decisions over her own life, and she wants power to break free if she wants to. Maria is thereby negotiating mobility. Whereas mobile and free women for years have been judged as unrespectable ‘prostitutes’, as stressed by i.a. Hungwe and Win, Maria here tries to negotiate this norm. She plays with freedom in possible gender acts up to the point where she even flirts with the idea of being a so-called ‘small house’. Her consideration of being a lover to a married man is despite its bad reputation from a history of strict sexual morals and the HIV/AIDS pandemic

*[I]t is good for one thing. Then you know he is elsewhere and you are still free to do every other thing that you want to when he is not with you most of the time, yeah. So it could be that fine, if you, yeah I guess with somebody like me, that could work. Because I don’t like somebody following after me where-ever I am. I don’t like that. I like my freedom. So maybe that could work.*  
(4. Maria, 15).

When Maria flirts with different ways of being a wife and being a woman in order to secure the dream of a ‘good life’, she negotiates gender norms in society and contemplates how she would like

her gender identity to be. If she cannot get the freedom she dreams about, she might accept being a second wife or a 'small house' in order to reach her dreams. She is in a situation similar to the Kenyan middle class women in Spronk's research: she puts her cultural respectability at stake when she flirts with these gender acts at the border of the 'bubble', but her strong articulation of modern women as free and powerful is an attempt to strengthen her respectability in a middle class society and perhaps amongst foreign women like me. Being aware of these perceived norms of respectability, I will now explore the articulations of norms in the next analytical chapter.

## 4.2 The Bubble of Norms

Using the ideas from Butler, the bubble of norms is the perceived area of possible performed acts. The informants in my research articulate many negotiations between what they think they are expected to do and what they think they cannot do. Having received an education, often being the first one in their families, they feel society expects them to be successful. Furthermore, they clearly articulate an expectation from society of marriage and of being a certain type of wife. Although these norms are clearly stated by the women, they simultaneously try to negotiate the perception of the norms; they try to find a balance between their dreams and their perceived barriers. In the end it all comes down to a perception of what acts can be seen as respectable, and what acts cannot and thus breach the bubble of norms.

As I addressed in the previous chapter, the dream of financial independence seems to be a tool for my informants to handle the normative demand of getting married. Although many of my informants express a wish for getting married, they all articulate several issues about marriage that can be dealt with or balanced by being a financially independent woman. The most mentioned normative issues in marriage are the issues of respect and subordination, and the issue of extramarital relationships. Although financial independence is a way for the women to gain respect and understanding from their husband, they also express a norm of being a submissive wife. Pia explains to me that "you have to submit to your husband but then if you are not economically stable then you can't say anything against what your husband wants. You act according to his rules, so I think as ladies we need to be independent" (8. Pia, 13). Pia is, however, also a good example of the dilemma most of my informants are fighting with. If you are too independent, you will challenge your husband, as Maria also pointed out in the previous chapter (8. Pia, 15). Anna furthermore explains to me that the challenge appears because many "men in this culture they are just in charge

to be, to just execute their powers of masculinity in the house. That they want to post that ‘I am the man here in the house. I am the man’” (6. Anna, 8).

In the women’s perceived bubble of norms, there are thus certain male gender acts that cannot be challenged or changed. Instead, the women only deal with how to perform and balance their own gendered acts against a perceived static male gender. This introvert perception can be compared to the focus of female sexual morality throughout Zimbabwean history. As I outlined in the contextualization to this thesis, it was mostly the female sexual morality that constantly became judged and controlled through time—being through colonialism, nationalism, or the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Male sexual morality has instead been *beyond question*, as stressed by Christiansen. For many of my informants, respecting and submitting to your husband becomes *beyond question*. Instead, their perceived possibility for change lies in ways of being a modern independent woman while sustaining the submissive role. 24 year old Tina, who has a Bachelor’s degree in social sciences, gives a good picture of this perception on gender in the following quote: “I think that’s a kind of conflict that women have to deal with how they can that get that balance that ok I can get this degree, I can get my Master’s and I can also get married and have my children and work” (9. Tina, 9). It is clearly a conflict that women need to deal with – alone.

I see the same perception in terms of extramarital relationships and cheating. As I showed in the contextualization chapter, single women were blamed for the spread of HIV/AIDS because they had relationships with married men. Men were again seen as *beyond question*; this same perception I also see from my interviews, especially from the older women. 34 year old Karen tells me a story about an exboyfriend who cheated on her. When I ask her if it was a one-time experience, she answers, “No they always cheat, they always cheat” (2. Karen, 13). She explains to me how she has not opened her heart to any man again and how she is even considering if she can bear ever being married:

*[I]f I have to think about marriage I will have to think about things like that like “am I going to be able to put up with a man who will be constantly cheating me and be able to tolerate it and accept it?” because if I can’t accept a boyfriend who has that kind of a behavior how am I going to put up with a husband who does that, so that’s another reason why marriage is not really a priority (...) I don’t think I will be able to accept and live with that. But a lot of people say hey men cheat, they all cheat, just deal with it. They all cheat. Even for me I should understand now that they will cheat on you. I think sometimes it is often about yourself, what you can tolerate and what you can put up with. It’s an individual decision (2. Karen, 15–16).*

Again the introvert reaction is present. Dealing with unfaithfulness is an *individual decision*. Karen is thus negotiating what gender balance she can live with. 30 year old Maria, whom I introduced in

the previous in-depth analysis, has an opposite perception. She agrees that all men cheat, but her way of dealing with it is to express indifference. She says:

*[T]here is not much I can do about it. If he wants to cheat whether with my friends or with people that I don't know, he would still do it. I am not with him 24/7 and I would probably just buy him a box of condoms or something, and if he cheats I would encourage him to use them. But no... no way, no I am not bothered. No (4. Maria, 14).*

These women in their thirties have experienced being heartbroken by men who cheated on them and they have become cynical about it. It seems like the older you get, the more you give up on men or marriage. When male behavior is *beyond question*, it becomes a question of accepting it or living without it. But, how independent and modern can they choose to be? Can they choose to *not* marry, as Karen is considering? If the women decide not to get married, then will they perhaps be perceived as unrespectable, similar to the mobile free 'prostitutes', not in control of men, as presented by i.a. Haram, Hungwe and Win earlier. It seems like this is a risk, the older women in my research are willing to take. This issue I will explore further in the in-depth analysis later in this chapter.

The concept about respectability also comes into play when these women have to defend their unemployment status. Their degrees were not only supposed to result in financial independence, but also earn them respect from society. 24 year old Anna explains how proud her family is that she is the first one to ever attain a degree in the family, but also how her mom does not understand her situation. "Sometimes she shouts at me that I am lazy, I don't want to work, I don't want to do this. But she doesn't know the core reason why I sit, or act the way I do"(6. Anna, 6). The local community had apparently also expected more from Anna. When she returns home after trying her luck in South Africa, with no more finances than any of the local friends, they laugh at her situation.

*So when someone has got a degree or a diploma education and at the same time they don't have anything, they just feel that maybe you are just a laughing stock to the world or in the society. (...) It belittles me in a way.. My goals, sometimes they are just crushed. And people laugh at me... That I am not working (6. Anna, 6).*

It is simply not 'good enough' to attain a diploma or a degree. In the beginning, people might be proud of you, but when they see that there is no 'good job' or that you have not "acquired buying a car, a house and whatever, whatever" (6. Anna, 6), the respectability disappears. Kristine also expresses this experience of being an educated yet unemployed woman in Zimbabwe. She says;

[A]t first when we were the first to graduate in the family and people give you a high profile and say “aah this one this this one”, and when they see that this education is not yielding any results anymore they will just treat like as any other person or just like aah, or even saying aah, because they can’t see the visible results of the education, it will just be on paper, it’s not yielding anything. Yaah (...) at first they will feel pity for you but then they would become tired and say aah this one (3. Kristine, 9).

Spending money on an education was seen by these women and their families as an investment and a way of achieving a ‘better life’. When this lifestyle is not obtained, the women look back and feel they wasted time and money on an education that did not lead them anywhere, and subsequently feel more worthless than their un-educated friends and family. Vicky stresses this feeling by pointing out that her six siblings are doing better than her. “But all of them they didn’t attain a degree. They ended up with o-level. They are just doing these ordinary jobs. But they are earning a living!” (7. Vicky, 6). The education system had promised them and society something better than the *ordinary jobs*, and when they cannot even find any job, they become *a laughing stock in society*. As Karen says to me; “it’s really really frustrating to a point where I probably can get into tears” (2. Karen, 7). I see this as the flipside of a neoliberal education system and a modern belief in progression. Whereas international organizations are promising empowerment, prosperity and development if women are educated, these women are conversely laughed at to a degree where they feel less worth than their surroundings. Furthermore, as stressed in the last chapter, their degree makes them feel that they should be better than the un-educated, unsophisticated women around them. This feeling of superiority makes most of them stuck in a waiting position, because it would be too big a defeat to take one of those *ordinary jobs*. The desperate belief in progression to something ‘better’ makes them ironically stay in a dependent situation where they have to beg for support from friends and families. They thus try to uphold the status of a middle class woman despite actually being in a lower economic situation than the working class woman. Regardless, they still believe that they are better off.

#### **4.2.1 In-depth Analysis of the Bubble of Norms – meet Sandra**

One woman I interviewed who is dealing with this precise issue is Sandra. I met Sandra in her small home outside the capital of Zimbabwe, Harare. She has a busy life and we had cancelled a few appointments before we were finally able to meet. Being in Sandra’s home created a cozy and safe atmosphere, and we quickly started to talk. What makes Sandra an interesting example of performativity and the perceived bubble of norms are several negotiations between what she thinks



she *should* do and what she thinks she *can* do. She is negotiating the form and size of the normativity bubble in her presentations of certain goals and problems in her life.

Sandra is 27 years old and single. She is not unemployed but she is an example of underemployment from an underutilization of skills. Despite having a Master's degree in computer science, she is working full time as a salesperson in an insurance company, selling insurances over the phone. Sandra is from a lower-middle income family with many siblings, but she lives currently with her female friend in a shared apartment. Not being in a relationship is related to many perceptions and articulations of norms by Sandra. This status further

relates to her relationship with men, and to her job situation. These three areas of negotiations seem vital for her because they are areas where she thinks she is doing something not just different from the norm, but also wrong. This analysis will thus dwell on these three themed negotiations.

**SANDRA** is 27 year old and single. She holds a **Master's degree in Computer Science**, but is **working full time as a salesperson** in an insurance company; a position having nothing to do with her degree but rather one she got after having done a small data-capturing job in the same company.

She grew up in a **low-middle income family** with three sisters and two brothers. Her parents are now retired and her siblings are working and studying.

Sandra is earning a decent wage but feels less respected for her degree and is bored at her job.

### **To have 'any' job or to have 'a 'good' job**

In the chapter on the 'good life' fantasy, I described how all the informants dreamed of being financially independent. This dream is also expressed by Sandra in our conversation. However, as with the other informants, it is not every kind of job that is seen as a 'good job'. Sandra is a clear example of this dilemma between academic pride and a need for financial independence. With a Master's degree in computer science, she expresses frustration over her job in marketing. As she says,

*The nature of the job is boring because I have never had passion for marketing. So every time I, Every morning when I open my eyes and just say to myself oh my God I have to go to back that place again but then I don't have a choice but to go there because it pays the bill, but it frustrates me so much. So so much, but then there is nothing that I can do. I have to keep going back there.*  
(5. Sandra, 5)

Sandra is clearly very frustrated by how bored she is of her marketing job. But, as I will show through the next dialogue, what seems to be most challenging for Sandra is the perception that most of her relatives, friends and colleagues do not understand her frustrations. Sandra is somehow stuck between a judgment of her type of job and a judgment of her dissatisfaction with her job.

*C: Do you feel, like the identity you had when you were studying a Master's degree or in IT, do you feel that when you have a job which is under what you actually had, that that affects how people see you or..?*

*S: It does, it does because people always judge, they always judge I think, and sometimes the job that you do... it, I don't know. I have noticed like at work, people treat each other like according to the level of the job, like the level of your job, like obviously of you are doing those lower jobs maybe they won't take much notice of you, I mean no one is going to be interested in you. But then if you doing those, if you are a manager and obviously they pretend to be more interested in you. I have noticed that every time somebody finds out that I have got a degree they always ask me, "aaah, ok, so you have a degree." So I find out that the next day they will start talking to me differently to the way they used to I mean the day before because they have heard that I have got a degree, so yaah I think that's how it affects how people see you then, it does affect. It actually does. It makes you to gain more respect when you have a degree than when you don't have a degree.*

*C: How does aaah your friends and your relatives react in your situation?*

*S: I think they are now used to it. I think the fact that I am managing to, to take care of myself and to take care of others, they have now forgotten that aah the job I am doing is not really what I studied for, they are now comfortable. I think for them it's ok because I am managing but then they don't know like what I am have to go through every day, they don't.*

*C: You don't... do you tell them about it or explain to them?*

*S: Sometimes it's hard to explain but, sometimes it's hard to explain but you know, with people sometimes you might explain but they won't really understand, it's only somebody who is in the same situation as you are who can really understand what you are saying sometimes. They will just say that aah, ok you hang in there at least the job is there, at least you are managing you can afford to stay on your own so just, it's ok, it's ok, that situation is affecting everybody so well, yaah.*

*C: So they are happy with your situation or?*

*S: Not happy but maybe indifferent*

*C: What about your friends?*

*(28:53)*

*S: My friends, my friends some of them are unemployed so they actually think I am better off because I am actually employed. At least I am doing something and then those that are working you will find that, ok, jobs are not paying very much here in Zimbabwe so aaah, even if somebody who is really in the, ok in some companies you might find that ok some companies where they are even some kind of programmers, blab bla bla but then they are earning something like 200 dollars and aaah, ok in my marketing job I am maybe earning more than that, more than they are, they don't really feel that I have got a reason to complain, because I have got a job that is paying more than their job, but then they don't understand that they have got respect, you know, like where they are working. They might not be getting that much but at least they are respected, they are seen as people, whilst I am just one of those marketing people. But I have got a degree, so it really hurts me I think yaah because I feel I could be, I could be.... more... I could, I could, ok not that I need people to respect me but sometimes we need that in life, you want to feel important I think, so this job it makes me feel like I am a loser sometimes because it's not an important job, it's just one of those jobs yaah.*

*C: But people think that you are doing better than them, some of your friends?*

*S: That's what they think yaah, but then some you can see, you can see the way they look at you, they feel pity for you and, and some think I am just not applying; I am not putting enough effort, some were even saying that aah no I don't think you are serious but then they don't know like how much effort I put, they don't, they say that, "you are not serious, up to now you are still working for that company, up to now." But they don't know how much effort I am putting. I even pray about it*

*but aaah what can I do, I can only keep hoping and applying maybe. I am hoping that maybe it will change some day but it's not easy especially aaah if I meet those friends because I do have some friends who managed to get jobs like aaah in big companies and they are being paid well, some have even managed to get houses. They now have got their own houses, their own, not renting, buying. They have bought their own houses, they have bought their own cars and ah they just look at you, you can just see the pity in their eyes. Ahh, it just makes me feel so small.*  
(5. Sandra, 7–8)

Sandra articulates a misunderstanding from society. Either she feels judged as *just one of those marketing people* by her co-workers and her former classmates who *make her feel so small*, or she feels judged by her family and friends, who think that she should appreciate having a well-paying job despite of its irrelevance to her degree.

She articulates a need for respect for her academic degree in computer science, but the respectability which her education was supposed to give her has not happened. I see a negotiation of respectability and education here. Whereas education has been seen as a part of what defines a middle or even upper class person, as what the Kenyan informants in Spronk's research expressed, it here seems to lose its respectability. The way Sandra phrases that she *could be more* shows her expectations of education and her fraying hope of receiving respectability as an *important* person. She knows that it is not possible to gain that respect within her current job situation, but if she does not receive any respect for her degree, then the degree loses its value, and if the degree loses its value, she will lose the promise of getting 'a better job' and thus perhaps a middle class life. Like my other informants, she expected her education to open up something 'better', but whereas many of my informants are waiting for the better job because they do not want to be seen doing these *ordinary jobs*, Sandra is economically forced to accept such a job. She thus feels like she has given up on a 'better life' and that people judge her for that. In Sandra's articulation of the bubble of possible acts, she can only choose between being a pitied un-educated marketing person who at least has a job, or a failed Master of computer science, who at least has a degree; neither of which will give her the middle class position and respectability that she had hoped for.

### **Single status in a married world**

Like the other informants, marriage is another norm that Sandra articulates. When I ask Sandra if she ever had thought of being married, she quickly responds with, "Yaa its every girl's dream I think most girls, most normal girls in Zimbabwe" (5. Sandra, 9). Marriage is for every *normal* girl in Zimbabwe and being single creates many perceived problems for Sandra. Sandra explains to me how it is almost impossible to rent an apartment as a single woman – simply because it is not seen

as possible for a woman to live alone. “They just think that every girl aah probably the rentals are being paid for by the guy or by the boyfriend or some older man, elderly man, they don’t believe that a lady can go to work and be able to pay for her own rentals” (5. Sandra, 10). The bubble of norms seems not be able to entail an identity of a woman without a man. Instead, it shows the perception of single women being what Hungwe described as ‘prostitutes’. Because women are not perceived as financially independent, a single woman ‘must’ be dependent on a man’s income. This experienced perception creates pressure on Sandra to get married in order to be taken seriously by society. It does not matter that she has her degree and a job. Similar to the Tanzanian women in Haram’s research, she needs a husband to be seen as a respectable woman.

Another pressure, which Sandra articulates, is in relation to her friends. The dialogue below starts with me asking if her friends are pressuring her to get married, but it ends up being more about how she experiences being single amongst her friends and how she feels the pressure of a marriage-norm:

**C:** *What about friends?*

**S:** *Ahh, friends they do, obviously some people won’t say it but you will feel, you will feel it because aah I think 90% of the people I went to school with its either they are married, they are getting married or they have got kids. So you will find that you will keep asking yourself, ok so what’s wrong with me, why can’t I also get married like they are. So well, and always they will tell you no take your time, you know take your time because there is not really much, it’s not really all that like what you think it is so you can just take your time and get somebody. But then yaah, maybe I will just be putting pressure on myself that ok I also want to be married, I also want to start having my family. But then my friends they don’t put pressure on me, they don’t. The ones that they do I don’t stop talking to them, the ones that do I stop talking to them. There was this girl that I know, that I went to college with. She is one of my friends. She got married when we were in our final year, actually she got pregnant and then she had to get married because of the pregnancy. She always say so you see I am now married so you should also be serious you know, and then she would start asking your boyfriend....., “so when is he going to marry you?” and all that because she is married she wants everybody to be married so I have stopped talking to her, ok not really talking to her but I have stopped looking for her but I do talk to her hie hie but I don’t put effort to look for her and all that. Because I didn’t like the way she was going on and on about me not being married because she is married, I thought that no, I didn’t like it so I stopped talking to her after she got married.*

**C:** *Do you think it affects your friendship if your friends are getting married or they get employed in a nicer job or something, do you think that affects your friendship with your friends or with your former classmates?*

**(45:29)**

**S:** *Aaah I have been fortunate in that, aah my friends, well it does affect especially the husbands now if the person gets married aah probably the husband would want that person to be friends with someone who is married because they think that maybe the one who is single won’t really be giving much advice, they will, obviously they will start, ok I have got a friend of mine whose husband used to ask, would say that ok, why are you playing with this girls what sort of advice can*

*she give you, I mean she is not married and you are so stop like being friend with her because she is not married. So you will find out that yaah, she would call you. She would see me but not as much as we would because the husband didn't approve of it. So maybe that's the, that's one reason why I think, that I think affect the friendship when the other person are married. But then well, the other friend well, one, she was a friend that got married aah well nothing. Obviously it does change a bit because somebody will now be having a family and kids and all that. But their attitude towards me didn't change. It still remains the same yaah. But one of my friend's husbands told her that she should stop having friends who are not married. So I think she is the only.*

**C:** *Why is it not good to have a friend who is single?*

**S:** *Because aah ok they believe that aaah obviously if they are going to, because I have got a boyfriend breaking up and, ok, if you are single I mean, you can go out and have fun, there are things that you do when you are single and things that you do when you are married are different. With us here. I don't know how you guys do it. Like when you get married you are expected to aah go out with your husband you do what he says and all that, so I think maybe the guy told her to stop being friends with me because I would still be sort of like independent and she is no longer as independent as I am. So probably I would influence her to do things that I do that maybe a married person shouldn't be seen doing that is one of the reasons why, and then the other reason was that "why she is not married? Why she is not married? The reason why she is not married is because she wants to have fun, she wants to have boyfriends and all that, she doesn't want to get married, she is naughty that's why she is not married. So you should stop being friends with her." why he thought that, I don't know.*

(5. Sandra, 11–12)

Sandra articulates here a feeling of an untold pressure. She feels the pressure because everyone around her is getting married. The pressure might even come from within her where she asks herself what is wrong with her, why is she not yet married? This sentiment that women should be married is an unspoken norm for Sandra; she *feels* the pressure. She believes there is something wrong with her life even though her friends and family do not openly pressure her to get married. Still, to Sandra being single is taboo. Sandra clearly expresses a feeling of not being 'correct' in the norm. This feeling is confirmed and extended when her friends stops seeing her because she is single. The husband of a friend is even warning against being with Sandra because *she is naughty*. Thus Sandra perceives the taboo about being single to be so strong that she feels judged as naughty and not to be taken serious. Even though Sandra might not be directly pressured to be married, she does feel the norms around her placing her in a character that she does not identify with. She cannot be seen as a financially independent woman. She cannot be seen as both single and serious. She even cannot be with her married friends because single girls apparently will give married girls bad advice. I see this pressure of marriage as a picture of the situation, described through Christiansen in the historical chapter. I stressed how the nationalism in Independent Zimbabwe placed a pressure on women as the central role of the mother in the traditionally Zimbabwean family, which in real was an ideological mixture of Christian morals and Zimbabwean cultural traditions. If women did not

follow this norm, they were not only seen as non-indigenous, they were also seen as non-patriotic. Whereas the women in Haram's research from Tanzania challenged the marriage institution by living in loose relationships, and the women in Spronk's research had a more loose connection to cultural demands of marriage, it seems like my informants feel much more pressured to be married. First of all, it is seen through Christiansen, Hungwe and Win that single women, who are sexually explorative and have loose relationships are seen as unrespectable 'prostitutes'. Second of all, if they criticize the marriage institution, they criticize the whole nationalist narrative in Zimbabwe, and subsequently become positioned as an un-Zimbabwean. Thus, only if Sandra gets married she will receive the respectability she believes she is entitled to. Only then she will be acknowledged as a serious and successful correct Zimbabwean woman.

### **Men and gender roles**

With these perceived norms, it is not surprising that Sandra is looking for someone to marry. And this someone has to have certain qualities. Maria, in the last chapter, was extraordinary in the sense that she wanted power over her man. She wanted *someone she could easily control*. But this does not seem to be the norm in society, at least not according to Sandra's perceived norms of a proper man. Actually, Sandra wants someone quite opposite. She wants someone 'higher' than her. Someone she can look up to. She explains this feeling in the following dialogue, where we talk about how to find a good husband.

*[O]bviously if a guy comes up to me obviously the first thing that I will look at is ok how far has he gone with his studies? What is he doing? aah what can I get out of this person? Like, how is this guy going to change my life? If he is not then I just say no, I just say no, so I think it makes it difficult for us to get partners because we want more than what we have. Obviously we would want someone who is better off, like me personally I would want somebody who is better off than I am. Like even education wise, I would want somebody who is more educated than I am, maybe who has got a better job than I have.*

**C:** Why

**S:** Because I, I think that's the only way I would respect them, I think.

**C:** Ok, so education and job are the only things...

**S:** What else, what else?

**C:** There is nothing else that gives respect?

**S:** Aaah, no, I want someone that I will be able to gain something from him, if he is more educated obviously he will be inspiring me to do like he has done, like to be more educated. If he is aah, if he has got a better job or he is maybe more higher. Have climbed the corporate ladder obviously he will be giving me advice because obviously in life you would want to do better than you are doing so that's why I feel that I should get somebody who is better than I am because I need somebody who would inspire me to do better than I am doing now, so if I get somebody who hasn't really made it in life and all. Of what gain would that be, would that person be to me.

**C:** Couldn't you be an inspiration to him?

*S: Aaah, I don't want to be an inspiration to a man; I want the man to inspire me*

*C: Why?*

*S: Aaah that just what I decided I want, that's what I want, that's what I want especially if I am going to have to submit to that person and be a wife to him that respects him, aaah I think, I feel that they should be able to have those qualities because how can I submit to somebody who looks up to me? Umm, no, I wouldn't like that.*

*C: So he has to be higher than you?*

*S: He has to be higher than me, he has to be higher than me, he has to.*

(5. Sandra, 15–16)

As with most of my informants, Sandra's choice of an ideal husband is based upon two articulated norms that she believes she has to live up to: to respect one's husband and to submit to him. Sandra explains how she would like a man who has a higher education, who is better off than her, who has ambitions, and who can inspire her. He needs to be *higher than her*. I see these qualities as symbolizing her perceived agency within the normativity bubble. She does not question the norm of respecting and submitting to one's husband, as Maria strongly did in the last chapter, but rather looks for a way to act out her identity as an educated, financially independent woman within this bubble of norms. Thus the only possibility for her, as she articulates it here, is to find someone who is *better off than her*, because, as she says, *how can I submit to somebody who looks up to me?*

When Sandra articulates submission and respect as normative features of being a wife, she is also in a negotiation of what actions these terms consist of. Sandra articulates specific assignments related to being a submissive wife and negotiates in these articulations how she wants to deal with them. One of the issues we talk about derives from the single life she is living and how this would change when she gets married:

*C: Do you think single women act more independently and more naughty than married women*

*S: Obviously, they do I mean they have got, they don't have to answer to anyone. So you can do whatever you like whenever you like, but then if you are married you can't just say that today I want to go out, or today I want to go out to a movie, tomorrow I want to go out with this person. You can't do that.*

*C: Why not?*

(49:53)

*S: You can't because you have to be at home and be with the kids and your husband and you can't.*

*C: So when you get married you can't be going out any more?*

*S: Like the modern woman now, ok people do go out but then you have to get your husband's approval obviously if you know that your husband doesn't like it when you go out so much obviously you won't be wanting to go out all the time you go out and come back you having a fight and all that so things change when you get married because you will have to consider somebody*

*else. Unlike when you are single you just do like you want, like what you please. You don't have like to ask somebody about what they think about it. So it's different when you are married you have to consider somebody's feelings you have to, they have to be okay with it. But then when you are not you can just do things at your own time, whenever you feel like.*

(5. Sandra, 12)

It is an articulated norm for Sandra in this passage that a woman should change her life the moment she gets married. A single woman lives an independent life and makes her own decisions, but when that woman gets married she then has to consider her husband's feelings. I see these feelings expressed as obvious and even normative. The picture of the married woman sitting at home, waiting for her husband to come home, is quite similar to the picture presented through Christiansen in the historical chapter of this paper. Perhaps this image is also the reason why most of my informants want an education, career, and financial independence before they get married. They know that the moment they are married, they will have to sit at home and be a good obedient wife. Again there are certain gender acts, which are seen as *beyond question*, and the women negotiate their possibilities within this bubble of norms. Being educated and having a job is therefore a way to negotiate freedom; to get out of the house, within this bubble of norms.

Sandra is in her late twenties and seems to have some of the same cynical feelings about men as Maria and Karen have. She articulates relationships to be in favor of men, and when I ask her about the norm of cheating, she says: "Aaah, 80% of the men [cheat]. I don't know if you have heard of this small house thing like here, it's now so common, it's now so common, ahh it's no longer surprising" (5. Sandra, 16). This perception of men as unfaithful becomes related to Sandra's personal experience with her ex-boyfriend. Throughout our interview, Sandra keeps on explaining how good this ex-boyfriend was to her, but after a two year relationship, she finds out that he is married to another woman. Throughout their two year long relationship, she did not know anything about his wife and kids, who lived in another town. Despite his qualities as a 'good man' she cannot accept that he is married to another woman. She says, "I actually have to let go and move on, it's hard, very hard, it's very hard" (5. Sandra, 19). Thus, Sandra negotiates between being an unregistered 'small house' or breaking up with her married boyfriend in order to look for a real husband. Again, as Hungwe and others are showing, being single or in loose relationships such as being the 'small house' to a married man has been perceived as unrespectable in Zimbabwean society. Throughout history, women in the so-called 'mapoto relationship' were judged as 'prostitutes' and unrespectable because they did not follow Christian or traditional rules on marriages and because they were free of male control. Being a 'small house' has some of the same



meanings as the 'mapoto relationships'. But whereas 'mapoto relationships' meant all unregistered relationships, 'small houses' normally only referred to the women and their position as in an unregistered relationship with a married man. Christiansen argues furthermore how the 'small house' women also have been branded as unrespectable during the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Like Hungwe shows, you can quite quickly be placed in a category as unrespectable or as a 'prostitute' if you are an unmarried woman in Zimbabwe, whether being alone, a 'small house', or in a 'mapoto relationship'. Adding this issue to the previous argument of marriage being a part of a Zimbabwean nationalist narrative, Sandra thus has to act in a bubble of norms, where marriage is the only relationship institution that gives respectability. Therefore, relationships become seen as emotional investments to attain marriage status. As Sandra says:

*But then he let me love him, he let me fall in love with him and I was in the relationship, so deep, so deep that up to now I am still trying to break up with him and it's so hard*  
 (...)  
*I invested so much in this relationship but then only to find out that all my efforts were for nothing usually I think when you going into a relationship with a married man you are getting into it for financial gains, nothing else, it's to have fun and financial gain, if I had known, I wouldn't even have stayed with him for long because he didn't really do much for me (5. Sandra, 16).*

When Sandra is stressing to me that she was not going into this relationship for financial gains, because her boyfriend was not *really doing much* for her, I see an articulation of a norm about love and a 'good relationship'. The strong focus from all the informants on being financially independent before marriage could show a perception of modern relationships, based on love. It is important for Sandra to show that their relationship was based on love, not on her financial gains. It could be important for Sandra to explain this fact to me because I represent a western norm about modern love relationships, where finances normally are perceived as something dealt with outside kinships. Stressing this point to me, she thus secures respectability from a representative for this ideal modern form of relationships. In addition, it might be important for Sandra to distance herself from a relationship with a married man because it places her in a position as a financially dependent woman in Zimbabwean society – even possibly an unrespectable, 'naughty' one. This situation would damage her struggle to gain respect for her degree and her status as an independent modern woman (who can be taken seriously). I see these perceptions as in-between a cultural perception of relationships and a modern one. The ambivalence lies in her detest against being with a man for his finances, because a modern relationship is based on 'love', but she still wants her man to be *better off* than her, showing certain ideals on how financial gains are naturally a part of a relationship. She

articulates an important difference in how these finances appear within a relationship. She should not be dependent on them and they should not define her reason to be with a man. But within the relationship the woman should still experience financial gains – perhaps as a part of proving their love to each other: When the woman needs to respect and submit to the man, he returns the respect in terms of financial or material appreciation. Thus the modern relationship is perceived by Sandra to be based on love, but can still entail the culturally expected financial appreciation.

Nonetheless, her relationship was a failed promise of marriage. In the negotiation between staying in her ‘mapoto relationship’, with a man she loves, and looking for the ‘normative correct marriage’, she chooses the latter, because if she does not choose marriage, she will still be seen as a single, naughty ‘prostitute’, she will lose her friends, and she will lose her respect as a woman. Unlike the Kenyan town-women in Spronk’s research, it does not seem possible for Sandra to gain respect only from her degree or her job. Perhaps this has something to do with the failed promise of a ‘better life’ from her education. Had she been respected for her degree, had she attained that ‘good job’ instead of her *ordinary job* or had she been from a middle class family, she might have experienced a different bubble of norms. Perhaps, if the promise of progression within her Master’s degree had not failed, she would have been more like the middle class informant Maria, or the modern independent Kenyan women who chose their sexual partners out of ‘fun’, not as an emotional investment to a married status. Sandra is thus not yet modern or independent enough to opt out of the marriage institution. I will look further into perceptions of the failed promises of modern progression, in the next analytical chapter.

### **4.3 The Objects of Desire**

There are probably several ways where one can achieve the fantasy of ‘a good life’. One could perhaps get the ‘good job’ through an uncle or a friend. One could be financially supported by family or a boyfriend. One could even get married to someone wealthy enough to take care of both. Nonetheless, my informants have chosen education as their object of desire – their way to obtain the ‘good life’. The main reason for this choice, I am arguing, stems from the strong emphasize that international development organizations gives on the importance and possibilities of education. Now, when the pathway has not delivered what it promised, certain new negotiations of this path appear. Tina explains this concept in the following quote: “I have my education, I have my Master’s degree but I am jobless, so you scratch your head, and say ‘but you said it would be ok for us if we

get educated then we get our jobs” (9. Tina, 1). The failed promise of a better life is clear in this quote. I feel it almost as if Tina is talking to me. Me, as this white European researcher, representing an international society that keeps on promising that “*education empowers individuals to fully participate in society, claim their rights and achieve their optimal potential. It improves individual livelihoods and employment opportunities for future generations*” (UN Women 2012, 32). “We” as an international society *said it would be okay* for them, and now the women feel it was a waste of their time. Vicky is 24 and has only been unemployed for seven months, but she has almost already lost her hope.

*ahh it is so embarrassing. It is like you wasted your time, you know, attaining a degree. It would like it was something useless. So it is very embarrassing. So sometimes you think like why did I proceed, you know. So doing a degree is not even helping me in any way. Some of the people they would even confront like the people who stay in my hood. They would be like; so why did you like go to school and attain higher education? It is not helping you in any way here. You wasted your time, you know. It is very difficult.*(7. Vicky, 6).

The informants not only believed in a fantasmatic object of desire, but they also invested in it. Now that they are unemployed, they feel they have failed and have made a fool of themselves in their community and in their family. They are a *laughing stock*, as I wrote earlier. Like Maria's parents in the first analysis on the ‘good life’ fantasy (chapter 4.1), Anna is also questioning the results of her education. She says, “I just feel like sometimes I am wasting my time reading and then what. Even if I finish, then what?” (6. Anna, 5) Vicky also explains how her parents question the investment potential of education by asking her “so why did we send you to school? You still want us to take care of you? You still want some money from us? Maybe it had been better if you had found something else to do that doesn't need any qualification” (7. Vicky, 3).

Education appears to be a lost cause. It is a waste of time; an expensive investment with no output. But my informants cannot really accept this failure. They still hold on to the ‘cruel’ optimism of education. Anna still pursues her studies in psychology, despite her articulated mistrust in the project. Kristine still keeps a tiny, albeit fraying hope, despite her five years of unemployment. “I still would be looking for employment because I just can't hang the certificate for no reason” (3. Kristine, 7). The negotiation of the meaning and worth of education in these women's lives is a key to understanding their situation as educated yet unemployed in Zimbabwe. In Berlant's optic, the women's trust in education might keep them from flourishing in other ways, but if they give up the promise of upward mobility, they have to accept being a failure. If they stop believing in education as something good, they are agreeing with the people who are laughing at them, and they will in

some way accept being seen as lower than even the un-educated people in Zimbabwe. In this situation, they will have to let go of their dream of being the middle class sophisticated modern women, like the Kenyan women in Spronk's research, and accept being lower than the working class. The failure in giving up the hope and promise within education is thus so massive that it becomes impossible. Despite expressing education as a waste of time, Anna is therefore stressing the following:

*For me it is very important to finish my education because in this world that we are coming to. In this world that we are in, I mean, it is very vital for someone to have an education, because you will have an understandings of things that you really want to do, an added advantage of.. you know. Of what you really want to do in life or establishing or something, You have a knowledge in doing that, because if you don't have a knowledge you are not able to sustain that vision, because you end up doing things that are, you know, that contrast with what you want to do (6. Anna, 13).*

The confusion Anna expresses within this quote of why education is relevant is so obvious that it only stresses the situation of hope and hopelessness that these women are in She cannot really express what education can do for her anymore. But, they have to believe in education in order to believe in themselves, as something 'better'; as the modern woman, who is progressing in her life. Tina stresses this modern belief in education through the following quote as well:

*What I want to be doing now, I want to be concentrating on getting there. My focus for now in the year is to get a place to volunteer or to work and to start my Master's in October and do it for like 2 years and then from there I will see for a way out, what else I can do, yaah (9. Tina, 6).*

They have to believe in progression because that is what the modern neoliberal society is demanding from them as modern women. As I also showed in the in-depth analysis on the 'good life' fantasy, Maria wanted to be occupied, to progress, not to just sit at home. Progression is the key to reaching 'the better life' and progression is the meaning of education. When there are no jobs, "you end up with no option rather than to sit", says Anna (6. Anna, 2). And as Karen also stresses to me, her years in unemployment is a gap in her progression: "I have changed my CV so that it won't have like so many gaps. (...) people also want to see that you are doing something with your life" (2. Karen, 9). Thus education becomes a way to fill in the gap of their progression. Although they are aware of its waste of time, they have to belief in the promise of progression. This is, first of all, because the society is following a modern neoliberal ideology which expects people to be constantly progressing. If you are not doing that, there must be something wrong with you. Second, they are aware of being in an impasse. But 'dogpaddling' somewhere is better than sitting at home and going nowhere. As pointed out in chapter 2.2, Ferguson stressed that if you stop

believing in modern progression; inequality in the world becomes static. Instead of developing towards a modern status, one is just lower. This hopelessness is thus impossible to accept.

When education cannot fulfill its promises, the dream becomes negotiated as a goal rather than a way to the goal. Having a degree, studying for a Master's or appreciating education becomes articulated as the goal. I see this articulation as a negotiation of a failed fantasy. 24 year old Tina is a good example of this negotiation of education in the following quote:

*I think you can only go so far with passion for what you want to study or what you want to do. So I think that a person should pursue a certain degree or a certain qualification because they are passionate about what they want to do (...) So I hope that when I complete my Master's I will get a job, but even if I don't I welcome any other opportunities that may present itself that are related to what I want to do in my career (9. Tina, 8).*

Despite their frustrations, education does not always become a disappointment. Instead, many express, like Tina above, that they now want to pursue further education to deal with their unemployment situation. Karen says, for example, "I have been trying to get a job for this long so let me try to do my Master's" (2. Karen, 1). Again, I see hopelessness as forcing the women to hold on to the promise that remains within receiving an education. If they lose their hope in education, they lose everything they have worked for. This dilemma of hope and hopelessness, I will explore further in the in-depth analysis of Sashia below.

#### 4.3.1 In-depth Analysis of the Objects of Desire – meet Sashia

If there is one of my informants that is in desperate need of a better life, it must be Sashia; she is also the most hopeless of them all. She thus represents an interesting example of an educated yet unemployed woman in relation to the promise of education as the object of desire. I met Sashia in a quiet restaurant where I offered her lunch. This was the first time in weeks she had a meal for lunch, because Sashia was used to only eating two meals a day. This information and the quiet atmosphere at the restaurant opened up for a conversation about being highly educated and still struggling to survive.

Sashia is from a low-income family in a village in the middle of Zimbabwe. Her father left her mother before she started school, leaving her mother to

**SASHIA** is 34 years old and single. In 2006, she finished a Bachelor's in **Development Studies**. At first she worked for a few years, but she's currently been **unemployed for three years**.

She grew up in a **low-income family** with a single mother and two younger brothers. Her late mother worked as a trader at the marketplace in their village.

Sashia is living on the little money that her brother sends her every month, which barely pays for food and accommodation.

raise Sashia and her two younger siblings. Sashia's mother worked at the marketplace in their village and put most of her income towards giving her children an education. Sashia studied development studies, her brother studied medicine, and her youngest brother is still in high school. Being the first born in a poor family placed a pressure on Sashia to get a job and support the family. She succeeded for a few years after she graduated, even working within her field of studies. Unfortunately, three years ago she lost her job and thus her income. Since then it has been her brother supporting her. Sashia rents a small room on the outskirts of Harare and she subsists on the \$150 US dollars that her brother sends her every month. When rent and general expenses are paid for, she is left with \$50 US dollars to survive. She has thus very limited means for printing CV's, using internet cafés, or taking transport into town. Sashia now finds herself in a vicious cycle where being unemployed means living on a small budget which lead to her barely being able to afford applying for new jobs (See; 1. Sashia, 3–4).

Sashia's situation is a point of departure for various negotiations of expectations, hopes, and promises in life. She continuously negotiates whether education is a waste of time or whether it is good for something – and what that something then can be. It seems like she is not quite ready to give up the optimism, although she is aware of its 'cruelty'. Consequently, this analysis will be touching upon the various feelings Sashia has with her object of desire being the promise of education.

### **Education leads to employment**

As with my other informants, the first and most significant promise of education is that it can lead to employment – and to a better employment than if one had not received an education. The frustration appears when this promise of education fails. In Sashia's words:

*But the frustration comes when you are at the border and you are facing all sorts of challenges to get your things here. It will be yourself. You went to school up to university and there will be someone who didn't even go to school at that same border, doing that same business. And there will be someone that went up to form 4 [equivalent to 10 years of school]. So if you look at these people I think there should be this social stratification or demarcation depending on to what level you go up to. So you get frustrated knowing that you went to school and you tried to shape your career, but you can't do that. You are now doing something that should be done by someone that has not even been going to school. It is frustrating. So frustrating. And demotivating.*  
(1. Sashia, 2)

Sashia is frustrated because she is in great need of money and the cross-border trading job was not a desired option. It is a picture of the failure of education. Only having a job as a trader is a waste of

one's education. As I see it, the frustration comes with the fear of losing the hope and fantasy of a 'better life'. When Sashia accepted to do cross-border trading, it was her last option, giving up her fantasy of a 'better life'. She was doing the same job as her mother did, and she has wasted her time and the hard-earned money of her mothers. When Sashia says that *there should be this social stratification or demarcation depending on to what level you go up to*, I see her last thin fantasy and attachment to education as her object of desire. Education *should* give her a better position than all these other women at the border. It *should* give her a well-paid job. She is expressing a dilemma between an awareness of her own impoverished situation of three long years of unemployment and her still fraying belief in education. For the interview, Sashia even brought newspaper clippings of jobs she has applied for but has not heard from. Showing these job-ads to me, she says, "All of these I can do. If you read what they are requiring, you can just see that they should have at least short-listed me, because I have applied for all these vacancies and I didn't even get short-listed for a single one" (1. Sashia, 3). She reveals her disappointment to me, which I take as an act of desperation – maybe I can help her find a job? She tells me how she faithfully has bought newspapers two times a week but how she later gave up. "But 2012, mid-2012, I was like 'Why am I struggling myself, using two dollars every week, but I don't even get called for the interview?'" (1. Sashia, 3). This expressed frustration, desperation, and disappointment for Sashia shows her continuous fluctuation between hope and hopelessness.

### **Education leads to prosperity and a better life**

Within Sashia's negotiation of education, she is continuously changing her mindset between hopelessness and something I see as academic pride. The following dialogue, which is a continuation from the last quote, shows this dilemma in her articulation of her frustrated situation:

*And there was a time when I asked myself; "If ever I am going to have kids, will I ever be hard on them that they should be serious with their education." Why?*

**C: yeah why should they...**

**Sas:** *Why should they? When someone who is not educated is doing the same as someone who is educated. There is no difference. When we are at home, we will be talking to housewives, those who didn't go to school, those who just got married because when you are living there, you will be maybe three, four families at the same house so maybe the other is married and maybe the husband has gone to work and it is myself and those two women who are living there. They didn't go to school. I went to school, but we are all at home. Together. You can't discuss like serious issues, like academic issues, because you are not at the same academic level. You are not. So if you talk to them about something, they will think that maybe you are crazy because it won't make sense for them. It won't make sense that you went to university. There is my landlord. She has a relative who came*

*from the village who want to go to enrol for development studies in Gweru. So what she said is that she told her husband that “You want your brother to go and study development studies in Gweru? That’s the programme [Sashia] did and look at her. She is at home. She is not getting any employment. Why do you want to let your child go to university to do that same programme? When he will just come back and sit at home.” You see what kind of mentality people end up having. They end up having that kind of mentality where people think it is not worth it sending their children to university to do a certain programme because when they come back they won’t be employed. So... it is a bit difficult. Even to convince someone to go and do such a programme. It is difficult, but it is not like it is not worth it to go to school. It is. It is important to learn things, right? To broaden your scope of thinking. And it can help you even to do other things that someone who is not educated can’t do.*

(1. Sashia, 2)

Sashia is clearly arguing with herself in this dialogue: is it worth having an education or not? She speaks with pride in her education, her knowledge. Her intelligence is wasted when she sits at home and talks with un-educated housewives, because they *can’t discuss serious issues*. But she also doubts whether she needs her kids to do well in school, knowing it will not take them anywhere anyway. She continues to stagger between hopelessness and belief in her education. When her neighbor warns against receiving the same education as Sashia, she describes it as a sad mentality because *it is important to learn things, right?* She is thus in the same dilemma as many of my other informants. When the promise of a ‘better life’ through education fails, the only value of education is now knowledge. But what can knowledge give you, if you sit and talk with un-educated housewives? What can your degree give you, if you work with people who, like Sandra in the last chapter on norms, do not appreciate your degree?

If Sashia does not stay optimistic about the value of her education, she will have wasted many years in her life and she will regress to the same level as the housewives, whom she does not feel connected to. She feels wiser than them, although her life is not better than theirs. I see this as a fear of losing hope and a fear of losing status. What is she, if education was a waste of time? Her degree is perhaps her only connection to the category, described by Spronk, as a modern sophisticated middle class woman.

The fear of losing her identity and pride is helping her maintain a tiny belief in education as a promise of prosperity and a ‘better life’. This is also present in the next dialogue:

**C:** *So how much does your education define your identity as a person? How important is your education for you?*

**Sas:** *Education is important for me because it helps you do particular things at particular times. You find that if I had not gone to school, I would know that this is it. There is nothing I can do. But because I went to school and I have my certificates I know one day, I will get a job. Yeah. When the time comes I will get a job. A very good one, yeah and that is going to change my life. Because*



*education can actually change one's life because if you are educated you are able to get a job. It is all about getting a job. Earning a living. With education you can do that, yeah.*

(1. Sashia, 5)

Sashia articulates an optimism in education based on an argument of “if not”. If she did not have an education, her life would not be progressing. She would know that her life would be stagnant; *this is it*. Thus, Sashia is expressing the same attachment to progression as many of my other informants. Her attachment to her education as an object of desire makes her believe that her life will be ‘better’ someday. Despite sitting at home with \$50 US dollars per month to live for, her optimism makes her accept her situation. *Because education can actually change one's life*.

As described in the contextualization chapter earlier in this thesis (chapter 2), the higher the education one has in Zimbabwe – and in many developing countries – the higher the unemployment and underemployment is. These statistics tell a different story than the one Sashia is explaining in the interview. She and many of my informants still seem to have an optimism that education leads to employment. Thus her optimism is cruel because her belief in education might, on the contrary, keep her from flourishing. If she had used her time differently she might, according to the statistics, be better off – at least financially – than she is now. Sashia's awareness of her own job situation and her feeling that education is not worth it, tend to clash with her persistent belief in education as something good. When Sashia cannot find a ‘good job’, she has to emphasize other good things about education in order to sustain the belief in the fantasy. This emphasize is similar to what I showed in the in-depth chapter on the ‘good life’ fantasy with Maria. Maria first explained her education as a mean to an end, but since she did not find a job, she started to see education as good in and of itself. Like Maria, Sashia also articulates new features in education that she emphasizes as very important: “just getting an education is important” (1. Sashia, 16). Thus, the less Sashia believes in the chance of getting a job, the more she highlights the importance of knowledge and mindsets. Because the main point of her education is not being accomplishing, she must emphasize other promises that can legitimize the education as something important, worthwhile, and as a legitimate object of desire.

### **Education leads to independence and status**

This legitimisation of education as a good investment becomes visible in other articulations by Sashia. It seems like education not only is supposed to lead to a good job, but also to create a better social life. Like many other informants have pointed out, education gives women a higher status in

forms of independence and respect. Sashia explains in the following dialogue how education is more important than marriage for reaching a 'good life'.

<i>Sas: (...)maybe I don't trust them. Not at all.</i>
<i>C: You don't trust any men at all? Is that because of the former one or is it just...?</i>
<i>Sas: Because of the former one and the experiences I had when I was working for "The Girl Child Network". Many women would come like seeking assistance because they were having problems with their men. I got to meet many people, many women who had problems with them, so I haven't met someone who can prove me that there can be some different men who can treat women well.</i>
<i>C: Why do you think there was so many who had problems with men?</i>
<i>Sas: I think it is lack of economic independence. So men are taking advantage of women who are not economically independent because that they know that they won't go anywhere. They will be stuck with them. Even if they torture them, even if they threw any bad things at them. They keep on saying "we are staying here for our children" and they won't be having anywhere to go even to earn a living. They depend so much on men. So man can have an advantage to abuse them, to maltreat them.</i>
<i>C: So marriage is not really your way out of your situation either?</i>
<i>Sas: It is not. It is not because I don't... If I thought it was, I would have been married because of my situation. Yeah I would have been married, looking for someone to take care of me, so that my brother would have one more to help him take care of the other brother. But I don't think it is the solution. Maybe I will be doing to myself more harm than not, by getting married, when I don't have like a stable job. I want to do that when I have my money so that no-one will take advantage of me.</i>
<i>C: Do you think that that is a general Female opinion, or is it because you have an education or you are more empowered that you have those ideas?</i>
<i>Sas: I am more empowered.</i>
<i>C: In what way?</i>
<i>Sas: In the sense that I know, I know that one needs to be economically independent for her to be happy in life. And I know that if one is economically independent, no-one can take advantage of her. Because, if someone maltreats me, I will be in a position to say: "This is not well treatment. This is abuse and this is not good. This is harmful" I can be able to articulate my rights because I know them and because I know what is good for me.</i>
(1. Sashia, 7–8)

Sashia articulates mistrust in men, like many of the other informants in this research. It is the economic dependency that makes men capable of mistreating their wives. The way of avoiding this mistreatment is explained by Sashia to be either economic independence or knowledge. Even though Sashia is not economically independent, she still has achieved knowledge from her education, which puts her *in a position to say*: "This is not well treatment. This is abuse and this is not good." It seems to me here that Sashia again emphasizes the good things education has done for her in order to keep the fantasy alive and legitimate. If she did not take her education, she would perhaps have ended up in an abusive relationship, unable to articulate her own rights. Thus again education is articulated as more than the way to employment. It is also the way to empowerment of

women in terms of knowledge and awareness of rights. As I showed in the contextualization chapter, and the research done by Spronk, education and thus knowledge have through history been seen as a defining factor for being middle class. This is also what is preached by international development organizations, with promises of empowerment and prosperity. The question I now have to ask is whether being educated and knowledgeable can keep its place as a middle class factor, or if we will see a growing educated class that in reality are even lower than the working class, because they will not have any jobs at all?

### **Education leads to nothing**

There is one very interesting articulation that Sashia expresses as a midpoint between her hopelessness and her belief in education. It is an articulation of 'impasse' or passivity: Sashia is waiting. She describes a waiting position, hoping that the promises of education will be fulfilled someday. In the following quote Sashia expresses how people are stuck in Zimbabwe. They receive an education, but it does not lead them anywhere and they do not know how to deal with this situation:

*So people are stuck. Those who are in the same boat with me. They are stuck. They don't know what they shall do other than this cross border trades. Some are doing this, some are selling second hand clothes. Some are even selling those cards... ehm airtime – only to get 8% profit per card. And you will spend the whole day standing because you can't sit down when you are selling those things. And Cecilie, you went to university, thinking that you will get employed. And in the end of the day you are standing and selling these cards to get 8% profit. It is so frustrating.*  
(1. Sashia, 2)

People in the same boat as Sashia receive an education and graduate to nothing. They are stuck. This situation of being stuck is similar to Berlant's 'impasse'. People are moving to get somewhere better but they find themselves stuck in the same pool they came from. They are 'dogpaddling' around in the hope that it will be a progressive upward mobility, only to realize that they have not gotten anywhere. The belief that education will lead you somewhere even keeps Sashia from getting anywhere, when her academic pride meets with her situation of unemployment and poverty. This is also visible in the following quote, where I ask Sashia if she blames anyone or anything for her situation.

*Sas: I don't blame anyone. I don't blame anyone... I just told myself that maybe one day things will be well but when is that one day coming?*  
*C: So you are still hoping every day?*  
*Sas: Yeah I hope. But I no longer have that eager[ness] to look for jobs, go to organisations, asking for a job, doing this and that. Yeah.*

After this dialogue, we talk about her survival, and how her brother supports her living. She responds with a defeatist articulation saying, “Ah sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, crying. Because, it is not sustainable Cecilie, it is not “ (1. Sashia, 4). It looks like a neoliberal belief in education as one’s own responsibility and possibility: Everyone can reach the ‘good life’ as long as one does well. When Sashia has failed in this mission, she only blames herself to the degree that she feels defeated. She has given up looking for a job because she does not *have the eager[ness] to look for jobs*, but she is well aware of the lack of sustainability in this decision. She wakes up in the night and cries because she cannot take care of herself and she feels she has failed in reaching the ‘good life’. She seems to be aware of her impasse, but if she changes direction or does something else she will also have given up her education – and the promises within in it. It is a reaction similar to Ferguson’s critique of modernity. If you do not believe in the modern promise of development, you will no longer be underdeveloped – you will just be ‘under’. Perhaps, she will even be seen as ‘under’ the working class women, because she does not even have an *ordinary job*.

As I have shown, the problems experienced when being highly educated, yet unemployed women in Zimbabwe are many and complex. Not only does this situation affect the financial conditions of my informants, but they also affect the women in terms of respectability from men, relatives, and society. The women are in a frustrating negotiation of who they think they should have become because of their education, and what they are capable of doing. These negotiations show a greater problem of devaluation of education and the consequences this has on society, women and on the modern idea of progression. These issues I will discuss and conclude on in the next chapter.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have illustrated a rising dilemma with higher education in the world. International development organizations promote education as a progressive tool to reach a 'better life' but at the same time the unemployment rates are increasing for educated people. In Zimbabwe, the rising unemployment does not only create frustration amongst the graduates, I have shown how the unemployment especially affects how women negotiate their possible acts in society. I will in this chapter first conclude on my analysis and subsequently discuss what I find the most important issues from my findings.

### **The promise of education**

Education entails a clear promise of progression to something better in my analysis. For my informants this 'better' is articulated as financial independence. Financial independence is the dream for my informants because of mainly two reasons. First it will entail a good relevant job that gives them respect in society; they are taken serious and are perceived as important. The 'good job' is supposed to secure their position as modern independent middle class women and it is supposed to show a progression from their initial situation to a 'better situation'.

Second, the financial independence is also articulated to give women a certain freedom in terms of marriage and cultural expectations. The women can, with 'a good job' and middle class status, be respected for their career rather than because of their husband. This will thus create freedom in terms of being single, mobile, and not seen as 'prostitute', but rather as a modern independent career woman. Within marriage the financial independence is articulated to create more space for movement. Firstly, it will create a gender balance when the male dependency is removed. It will, for some of the informants, even give the woman certain power within marriage. But for most of my informants, male gender acts are described as *beyond question*, making it much more important for the informants to have a gender balance, by securing their own freedom and independence in marriage. Having an education and a job is thus articulated to give women space for movement beyond the domestic areas as well as it will give them freedom to choose a husband based on love as the binding factor. However, the informants also articulate a norm of submission and respect for the husband: Although they do not want to depend on their husband's finances, they do expect the husband to be financially better off than they are so that they can respect him as the 'man in the house'. This respect and submission is connected to a nationalist narrative about marriage as a

traditional cultural institution and of women as the mothers of the nation. Thus, denying marriage is not a possibility as it will be seen as denying the nation and thus as being un-Zimbabwean.

### **The reality of education**

In reality my informants have not experienced what international institutions, neoliberalism and modernity had promised them. Education has not given empowerment or prosperity, instead the informants are unemployed, underemployed or forced to volunteer or go for further education. Their degrees do not give them the respectability they had expected. Instead their situation as unemployed makes them a *laughing stock* in society and their education loses its respectability when it is not utilized. As a reaction to this problem, some of the informants choose to stay passive and hope for the 'better job' to show up, others feel the pressure for progression from the neoliberal modern ideology and add to their education with volunteer work and further studies. These informants are, however, fortunate to have a good socio-economic background and receive support from relatives and friends. Some of the informants have less access to support, either because their relatives have lost the trust in their education or because they simply cannot afford to support it. These informants try instead to look for an *ordinary job*, despite the subsequent devaluation of their degree and their respectability as modern middle class women to be merely working class. The unemployment also affects the informants' marriage situation: Because of their need to be financially independent, they postpone marriage till after they have reached this status. However, this postponement of marriage places them in a situation of dependency on other relations as well as their single status can situate them as naughty 'prostitutes' in society, they lose contact with their married friends and they are judged as unrespectable women.

As I have shown, it is clearly problematic to promise prosperity and female empowerment through education, when this promise to a large extent is failing. Instead, women in Zimbabwe experience several problems with securing respectability, financial independence and a 'good life'. I see four important issues with this failed promise of a 'good life' through education that are vital for the informants' negotiation of acts in Zimbabwean society.

### **Progression**

There is a serious issue with the promise of progression and the reality of stagnation for my informants. When international development organizations and institutions promise empowerment

and prosperity for educated people it entails certain ideologies within neoliberalism and modernity, which affect people immensely. As explained in chapter 2.2, the Structural Adjustment Policies have placed a pressure for greater privatization and marketization of the education system in Zimbabwe, which in return has resulted in over-education and skills mismatch. The individualization focus within neoliberal ideology has furthermore promised for individual progression through education, but when people fail to reach a 'better life', they also place the blame on themselves. My informants keep on saying that they wasted their time; they should have studied harder or chosen something else to study. Thus there is a huge pressure from international development and gender organizations of taking an education, but when people follow this advice, and find themselves unemployed, it is partly experienced as their own fault. The individualization within neoliberalism makes their failure individual to a degree where they become laughed at and made a fool of. When unemployment is not acknowledged as a societal problem of structure and planning, but an individual choice of education, it is up to the individual Zimbabwean woman to guess how she can get an education that gives her the best possibilities for employment. The neoliberal educational system does not only promise progression, it also leaves it up to the individual to get the right education for the future job market and subsequently blames that same individual for her failure.

Furthermore, the failed promise of progression within the education system places my informants in a dilemma. They are in the situation, described by Ferguson, where they have to believe in progression in order to keep a hope for anything better than what they have. If the modern idea of upward mobility is 'de-developmentalized' these women will no-longer be developing from a lower class to a better situation. They will instead just be 'lower'. Inequalities in the world will subsequently be divided by walls instead of being stages in a developmental process. Giving up the trust in education will thus mean a lost hope for a 'better life'. Because the women cannot give up their hope, they are in an impasse, where their fraying fantasy of the 'good life' is keeping them from doing anything else. Within Berlant's optic, there is a problem of a cruel optimism in these women's lives that keeps them from getting that 'good life' they are dreaming about. Not only are the employment failures of educated women individualized, they are also stuck in their belief in progression to a degree where they stagnate instead of progressing in any way.

### **Gender and empowerment**

International gender organizations place a high focus on the positive outcome of education for empowerment. However, I argue that when education does not result in employment and financial

independence for women, they can end up in a problematic situation of high dependency, inrespectability and embarrassment. My informants clearly want to be financially independent before they get married, but when they do not reach this goal, they end up being stuck as unemployed single women. This situation creates certain issues. First, my informants articulate a risk of being stuck in an abusive marriage, with limited freedom if they get married despite of their unemployment. If they do not have a job and finances to argue their mobility from, they risk being stuck as housewives with limited freedom and thus lose their status as modern independent women. Consequently the informants are postponing their marriages unlimited till after they have reached the fraying dream of being financially independent. This, however, places them in another problematic situation: Since their education is seen as a waste of time by their relatives and friends when it has not resulted in employment, it becomes difficult to uphold a status as modern middle class women. When they do not have a career that can give them respectability despite of their single status, they are now to a higher extent judged for their single status. Because they are not financially independent, they will be seen as naughty unserious 'prostitutes'. This situates the women in a dilemma, where marriage will place them as dependent 'housewives' in risk of abuse and where their single status can marginalize them from friends and relatives as unrespectable naughty women who are perceived to have sexual relations for financial gains. Being educated yet unemployed can thus marginalize women in Zimbabwe to a degree that is far from the promise of empowerment.

### **Independence**

Independence has a highly valued position in the articulation of the 'good life' by my informants. This is both in terms of employment and in terms of marriage. I see the individualization within neoliberal ideology affecting the Zimbabwean society and the informant's idea of a modern woman to a degree where individual independence becomes the picture of a 'good life'. The informants do not want to be dependent on anyone; they want to be free modern individuals. This is problematic because it places a pressure on a collective dependency system, which has been a vital part of Zimbabwean cultural history. Whereas marriages earlier have secured networks and connections between lineages, as I have shown in the historical chapter of this thesis (chapter 2.3), they are now changing to become individual matters. The individualization process in society is thus affecting the relations between people to an extent where dependency becomes articulated as a negative relation by my informants. I see the desire for independence as possibly harmful for a Zimbabwean cultural system based on collective dependency. When traditional collective relations get pressured and



dissolved by a modern neoliberal idea of individual independence, it can create great changes in the cultural relations between people. When the social security in Zimbabwe mainly is build upon these collective responsibilities, the desire for independence can thus have a negative effect when the women experience unemployment in life. The desire for independence becomes a cruel optimism similar to the fantasy of upward mobility. When my informants are waiting and striving to become financially independent before being married, they are simultaneously continuing a dependency on other relations. Their education has been supported by friends and relatives and they are expected to get a job and pay back from this investment. When the informants are so focused on becoming independent before getting married, they are ironically creating a greater pressure on their other relations. The desire for independence, following a neoliberal individualization process, can thus become a desire which ironically dissolves cultural collective relations in society and at the same time place immense pressure on these fraying relations, when the women are stuck in unemployment.

### **Devaluation of Education**

The fourth issue I see as vital for educated yet unemployed women in Zimbabwe is the devaluation of education and knowledge. Whereas Spronk in her research on women in Kenya described education as connotating to a middle class status, I see in my research how education loses its credibility when being 'wasted'. When my informants cannot find employment or are forced to become underemployed, their education loses its value. I show how the women, despite of their education, cannot uphold a respectability of them as modern middle class women, when their degrees are not being utilized in relevant 'good jobs'. On the contrary the informants articulate being laughed at, pitied and humiliated. It is clear through my analysis that knowledge and education are not enough to secure respectability as a modern middle class woman in Zimbabwean society. Over-education and academic unemployment can instead create devaluation of knowledge and education. When the promise of prosperity and empowerment through education is dissolved and when knowledge loses its value, the whole education system can be in crisis. If education cannot secure 'a better life', if it cannot empower women and if knowledge no-longer is a valued skill, then the hope for something 'better' might be dissolved as well. The problem that might arise now is the opposite of what international gender organizations have promised. As the informant Maria stressed to me in my interview with her, education is the institution that enforces equity between the genders. She says; "when I go through school, I am reading the same things as a guy goes through and then I think at the end of the day we have to have equal opportunities for the both

of us” (4. Maria, 5). If education is devalued, the institution that ensures equal access to society is devalued as well. The devaluation can create a situation whereby education no longer is as important as other qualities and experiences. On the contrary, the process of over-education can generate a risk of disempowerment, rather than empowerment. It is a situation where women no longer receives respectability for their education and knowledge, but conversely are judged as failed unrespectable women, lower than even the working class.

To conclude, educated women in Zimbabwe are in a situation where their dreams of the ‘good life’ and their expectations from education are negotiated against their experienced reality of unemployment. Instead of prosperity and empowerment, they experience humiliation, stagnation and judgment as failed unrespectable women. Their dream of the ‘good life’ force them to wait for something ‘better’ as they cannot give up their belief in the promise from education and their pride as educated modern women. However, the question is how long education can keep being a value, when over-education and academic unemployment expands. The fraying fantasy of education as a way to a ‘better life’ is thus challenged to a degree where educated women can risk losing respectability and status as they stagnate in unemployment.

## 6.0 Further Reflections

This Master's Thesis is touching upon a research area within gender, educational and development studies, which is immensely neglected. The inconsistency between promises of empowerment and the realities of high academic unemployment is crying out for a change of focus. My research and my conclusions are highly relevant and needed in this gap of research, since my research is deconstructing the normative positive picture of education. The women, who experience the situation of being highly educated, yet unemployed, show instead a negative picture of disempowerment, dependency, humiliation and stagnation.

Being a Master's thesis, my research is naturally limited in terms of time and area of empirical work. My informants are interviewed in the capital of Zimbabwe, and are found through my personal and professional contacts. I would therefore urge for further research within this field. It would be relevant to explore how the unemployment situation affects women in different academic fields, how it affects highly educated men in Zimbabwe and if the issues can be experienced in other parts of Zimbabwe.

Within my small scope of research, the conclusions, however, give a clear message of a large research-gap and a neglected inconsistency between promises and realities of education for women. I encourage international development and gender organizations to acknowledge these results of my research and I recommend further analyses of the actual effect of higher education on gender with the rising unemployment rates – this not only being in Zimbabwe, but in all countries with similar situations of academic unemployment.

International development organizations and national governments are using immense resources on education and on encouraging people to receive an education, but are simultaneously encouraging privatization and individualization in education systems, resulting in over-education and skills mismatch. I encourage these institutions to take greater responsibility for the promises of education, to acknowledge the institutional and structural problems within education instead of blaming the individuals for their unemployment, and to strengthen a structure for the situation post education.

Finally, my research shows a need for international organizations on gender to acknowledge that education not necessarily empowers women. There is a risk that inflation of education can create a contradictory situation for women in many parts of the world, where education rather disempowers than empowers women. I therefore urge for further reflections and studies on the cultural and socio-economic complexities for educated women within gender studies and gender organizations.

## Danish Summary / Dansk Referat

I dette kandidatspeciale undersøger jeg, hvordan højtuddannede arbejdsløse kvinder i Zimbabwe forhandler ideen om 'det gode liv'. Jeg kritiserer, hvordan internationale køns- og udviklingsorganisationer lover forbedring og empowerment for kvinder gennem uddannelse, mens der samtidigt ses en stigende arbejdsløshed for højtuddannede i verden – især i udviklingslande. Jeg udtrykker en mangel på kvalitativ forskning omkring, hvordan denne situation af akademisk arbejdsløshed påvirker kvinders situation i udviklingslande og forsøger med dette speciale at udfylde noget af den manglende forskning. Jeg undersøger denne problematik poststrukturalistisk igennem kvalitative dybdegående interviews med 9 kvinder i Zimbabwe, der på flere forskellige måder er uddannede og arbejdsløse. Disse interviews har jeg desuden placeret indenfor en historisk, køns-teoretisk og regional social kontekst. Dette gøres via en gennemgang af den arbejdsmæssige og uddannelsesmæssige situation i Zimbabwe samt en kritisk refleksion over neoliberalistiske og modernistiske tendenser indenfor uddannelsessektoren i Zimbabwe. Derudover foretager jeg en historisk gennemgang af kvinder og køn i Zimbabwe, samt reflekterer over køns- og seksualitets forskning i det sydlige Afrika. Udover at placere mine interviews kontekstuel, bruger jeg Judith Butler og Lauren Berlant som analytiske tilgange til min analyse af interviewene. Via disse to teoretikere undersøger jeg mine informanternes artikulation af 'det gode liv', af normer i samfundet, samt af det brudte løfte om et bedre liv gennem uddannelse.

Gennem min analyse finder jeg flere problematikker for højtuddannede arbejdsløse kvinder. Jeg argumenterer for, hvordan en neoliberal individualiseringsproces og en moderne progressionstanke dels placerer skylden for arbejdsløshed på den enkelte og dels presser mine informanter til stadigvæk at tro på forbedring i en sådan grad, at de stagnerer i deres transitsituation. De bliver latterliggjort af deres lokalsamfund for at have fejlet, men de kan ikke opgive troen på deres uddannelse og venter derfor i flere år på, at deres situation skal ændre sig. Jeg viser, hvordan kvindernes tro på uafhængighed er en hæmsko for dem, når de ikke vil gifte sig, før de er økonomisk selvstændige, og samtidig derved bibeholder en allerede presset afhængighed af andre relationer. Derudover argumenterer jeg for, hvordan deres uddannelse mister sin værdi som følge af deres situation, og at de i stedet bliver set som useriøse kvinder uden indkomst eller ægtemand til at opretholde deres respektabilitet. Jeg afslutter med at pointere vigtigheden af ikke kun at se uddannelse som et gode for kvinder i udviklingslande, men at man i stedet må anerkende problemstillingen for højtuddannede arbejdsløse og følgelig må forske yderligere indenfor dette felt.

## List of References

### INTERVIEWS

1. **Sashia**. "Interview with Sashia" - Appendix on attached DVD.
2. **Karen**. "Interview with Karen" - Appendix on attached DVD.
3. **Kristine**. "Interview with Kristine" - Appendix on attached DVD.
4. **Maria**. "Interview with Maria" - Appendix on attached DVD.
5. **Sandra**. "Interview with Sandra" - Appendix on attached DVD.
6. **Anna**. "Interview with Anna" - Appendix on attached DVD.
7. **Vicky**. "Interview with Vicky" - Appendix on attached DVD.
8. **Pia**. "Interview with Pia" - Appendix on attached DVD.
9. **Tina**. "Interview with Tina" - Appendix on attached DVD.

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