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**Gender and Development through
Local Epistemologies: Understanding
Conjugal Violence among Orthodox
Täwahədo Christians in Northern
Ethiopia and Implications for
Changing Attitudes and Norms within
Local Worldviews**

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Abstract

This thesis presents a study of conjugal abuse from the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* community of Aksum in Tigray region. The research was motivated by epistemological concerns emanating from gender theoretical constructs employed widely in international development, including also studies of intimate partner violence (IPV). The first concern emanates from the field's historical reliance on gender theories that have been disproportionately informed by western gender metaphysics. This has combined with tendencies to neglect religious parameters in the study of IPV, assuming typically gender-based explanations that do not heed sufficiently the diverse cosmological contexts in which IPV manifests. Without denying its possible gendered underpinnings, it is suggested that the investigation of IPV should be guided by beliefs and knowledge as embodied by local populations. Consequently, the current study attempted a gender-sensitive analysis of conjugal abuse in the countryside of Aksum that relied on the local cosmological and socio-cultural system to formulate conceptual repertoires for gender and conjugal abuse and to identify how these were accommodated within the local religio-cultural cosmology. Ethnographic investigations were combined with a theology-informed analysis from 'within.' Tigray was selected for study because it has combined a doctrinally non-violent faith with high levels of wife-hitting and tolerance of it. A primary concern was to explore the interlinkages between the folklore Christian tradition and conjugal abuse realities and attitudes to identify whether and how theology-informed and clergy-centred interventions could be relevant for this society. This reflects the argument of this dissertation that interventions should emanate from local belief and knowledge systems and be enacted through resources that are likely to make sense to and have some credibility with the local population. The research revealed complex intertwinements between religious parameters and conjugal abuse, indicating the potential role of apostolic theology and clergy discourses in addressing conjugal abuse under specific conditions.

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Abbreviations

AC	<i>'andämta</i> commentary
ED	<i>Ethiopic Didascalia</i>
EDHS	Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox <i>Täwahädo</i> Church
EWLA	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FN	<i>Fätha Nägäšt</i>
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MQ	<i>Maḥäbärä Qädusan</i>
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
VAW	Violence Against Women
WA	Women's Association
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development

Notes

- 1) All Amharic and Tigrigna terms appearing in text are transcribed according to the transcription rules set out by the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica.¹
- 2) *Fidäl* writing and transcription is given for all key terms when these are first introduced and only the transcribed version when they are repeated. In direct quotations where original language is considered crucial to cite, the transcribed and *fidäl* forms are given in a footnote.
- 3) For names and locations an arbitrary spelling has been selected among the widely used.
- 4) The quotations from personal interviews and informal discussions with the clergy and laity were anonymised and coded. Experts who did not express the desire to remain anonymous are cited in-text; those who expressed desire for anonymity are not named but affiliation is provided. A full list is included at the end of the thesis with their codes. A list of the participatory workshops is also provided with their codes, but locations are anonymised.

¹ Encyclopaedia Aethiopica ,Transcription/Transliteration System, <https://archive.is/bBWaz#selection-39.4-39.28>

Transcription Rules

For Amharic and Tigrigna terms throughout the thesis the following transliteration rules apply:

ሀ *ሐ* *ለ* *ሐ* *ሐ* *መ* *ሠ* *ረ* *ሰ* *ሸ* *ቀ* *ቆ* *ባ* *ቦ* *ተ* *ቸ* *ኀ* *ነ* *ኸ* *አ* *ከ* *ኸ* *ወ* *ዐ* *ዘ* *ዠ* *የ* *ደ* *ጅ*
ገ *ጠ* *ጨ* *ጸ* *ፀ* *ፈ* *ጥ* *ቁ* *ኀ* *ኸ* *ገ*

The vowels were transcribed from 1st to 7th order as follows: *ä*, *u*, *i*, *a*, *e*, *ə*, *o*

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Introduction

Consolidating an epistemology-sensitive gender and development science

Gender in international development

In the 1920s, gender was used as a concept (beyond its grammatical designation in French) by Western psycho-analysts specialising in trans-sexuality to denote the “psychological sex”, or the internal feeling regarding one’s gender.² The western feminist movement in the 1950s subsumed the concept with an almost opposite meaning to denote the socially constructed masculine and feminine identities (as differentiated from the biological male and female physiology) motivated by the political need to counter essentialist and sexist ideas about women and their status in society.³ The concept found its way in the field of development studies through Marxist discourse at a time when development practitioners started to preoccupy themselves with the exclusion of women from economic advancement.⁴ Steadily, attention was transferred from capitalism or colonialism as forces of human oppression to women’s status in society, ideas of femininity and masculinity and their social valuation under ‘patriarchal’ systems.⁵

The incorporation and discourse of gender within development studies evolved in numerous phases, with milestones being the well-known Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) paradigms.⁶ Both these paradigms were criticised for failing to challenge sufficiently structural gender inequalities, as well as for their universalist tendencies in presenting all women as ‘oppressed’ and ‘patriarchy’ as the defining parameter of all women’s social status, ignoring thus the historical and socio-cultural particularities of different women around the world.⁷ It may be observed that such universalising tendencies reflected deeper problematic trends in early feminist theories, which received criticisms for their ethno-centric presuppositions as well

² Friedman (2006, 2).

³ Donovan (2012).

⁴ Boserup (1970), Kabeer (1994, 23, 50).

⁵ Whitehead (2006, [1979]), Kabeer (1994, 65).

⁶ Moser (1993).

⁷ Mohanty, Russo and Lourdes (1991) and Escobar (1995, 177-182), Njiru (1999, 47-48), Arndt (2000).

essentialisms regarding their feminist subject, the ‘woman.’⁸ Such critiques generated gradually more nuanced theorisations and ‘intersectional’ analyses.⁹

The more recent paradigm, known as Gender and Development (GAD), was globally mainstreamed in the field especially following the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995, China).¹⁰ The GAD paradigm has been premised on the assumption that ‘female subordination’ is universally pertinent and has steadily sought to redress unequal gender relations through interventions that aim to ‘empower’ women and other minorities conceptualised as oppressed.¹¹ Because gender inequalities have been understood as intrinsic to institutions and relations, most writers have emphasised the need for ‘transformative’ empowerment.¹² The notion of ‘consciousness-raising’ has been central: women are led to realise their oppression and collective power, usually through relational and experience-based reflection on what theorists perceive to be deeply internalised pernicious beliefs and norms.¹³ Such discourses imply that gender relations are viewed as structurally unequal, that one has reason to suspect established gender norms, and that women’s experiences are key to “(re)-imagining” women under a feminist ideal (pertaining to a feminist standpoint epistemology).¹⁴

Given the heightened reflexivity that incited its mainstreaming, it is enigmatic that the GAD paradigm has not been scrutinised for its assumptions and conceptual bases concomitantly with its application in non-western societies. This would appear especially urgent in view of writings by non-western scholars who have pointed to different cosmological premises for conceptualising and understanding gender relations, subjectivities and human agency cross-culturally,¹⁵ as well as studies that have reported the problematic reception of mainstream concepts such as gender, gender equality and empowerment in non-western societies and especially in communities where faith-based belief systems prevail.¹⁶ The tendency in the GAD scholarship has been to attribute limitations of gender mainstreaming to the (de)politicisation of the gender concept and analytic as

⁸ Gatens (1983), Mohanty (1988), Alcoff (1988), Butler (1990), Oyěwùmí (1997), Delphy (2001), Narayan (2004), Friedman (2006).

⁹ The concept of ‘intersectionality’ traces back to US racial theory. Within gender and development it has been conceived as an analytical tool to account for interlocking social divisions and their simultaneous impact on individual identities and social relations (see Yuval-Davis 2006; Berger and Guidroz 2009).

¹⁰ Baden and Goetz (1998), UN Women (1995).

¹¹ Moser (1993), Kabeer (1994), Sardenberg (2009), Cornwall (2014).

¹² Batliwala (1994; 2010), Kabeer (1994, 92; 1999b; 2011, 5), Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2003), Cornwall (2016).

¹³ Cornwall (2016).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.

¹⁵ Amadiume (1987), Kolawole (1997), Nnaemeka (1998), Oyěwùmí (1997), Oyěwùmí (2005), Steady (2005), Mahmood (2005).

¹⁶ Wendoh and Wallace (2005), Abu-Habib (2007), Mukhopadhyay and Wong (2007), Meer (2007), Vouhé (2007), Para-Mallam et al. (2011), Eves (2012), Mannell (2012), Istratii (2017).

a result of political, organisational or pedagogical reasons.¹⁷ In contrast, the reference point for this dissertation is that gender paradigms have been disproportionately informed by western metaphysics of gender identity and human individuality (albeit evolving), which has interfered with their application abroad. The term metaphysics as employed in this study pertains to ways in which human individuality and gender identity are conceptualised, theorised and explained at their most fundamental levels.¹⁸

Teasing out the metaphysical underpinnings of prevalent gender theorisations

To tease out these metaphysical underpinnings it is necessary to make recourse to feminist theory, a detailed genealogy of which is included in the Appendix.¹⁹ A common thread in the existing feminist theorisations of gender has been the political concern to unite women against perceived social sexism. Such efforts start with early feminist theorisations that tended to speak of ‘essential’ female traits “in an effort to re-validate undervalued female attributes.”²⁰ As Linda Alcoff has observed, feminists in this group pronounced women’s positive attributes and characteristics like nurturance, peaceful demeanour or advanced self-awareness, finding issue not so much with female essence but with masculinity itself and sometimes “male biology.”²¹ The second-wave feminist movement introduced ‘gender’ to draw attention to socially constructed understandings about women under unequal power relations.²² All gender theorists over the years have accepted as their fundamental premise a difference of valuation between gender identities, but gender identity has been predicated on variable parameters: sexed traits (internal identification), sexed ideals (social femininities/masculinities), sex-marked bodies (based on biological ‘sex’), sexuality norms (socially reproduced heteronormative systems), or historical ‘positionality.’²³ For instance, the influential theorist Judith Butler has envisioned gender as an oppressive apparatus whereby human bodies, psyches and identities become discursively pronounced and materialised under the regulated reiteration of normative categories, with primary being the norm of the sex binary.²⁴ In contrast to such post-structuralist theorisations that draw attention to the symbolic and the psychic world, Linda Alcoff has called for a prioritisation of the woman’s lived consciousness and her

¹⁷ Moser and Moser (2005), Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007), Wong and Mukhopadhyay (2007), Bryan and Varat (2008), Smyth (2010), Moser (2014), Istratii (2017, 1).

¹⁸ Metaphysics within philosophy refers to the study of the basic structure of reality. Gender metaphysics broadly refers to fundamental explanations about the construction of gender, which subsumes questions about relationships with sex, human individuality and agency (Istratii 2017, 2).

¹⁹ Appendix 1.1.

²⁰ Alcoff (1988, 408).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Nicholson (1994), Friedman (2006).

²³ See Gatens (1983), Alcoff (1988), Butler (1990; 1993; 2004), Nicholson (1994), Delphy (2001), Friedman (2006), Mikkola (2016).

²⁴ Butler (1990; 1993; 1995).

cultivation of perspective and subjectivity with the historical context of her existence.²⁵ However, the assumption of a patriarchal system and a fundamental gender-based inequality is implicit in all these theorisations.

Such theories have been underpinned by a more important debate about the deeper metaphysics of human individuality and the relationship of gender identity to the biological and social world. As Linda Nicholson showed in her very insightful analysis of gender discourses from the 16th to the 20th century, in the medieval times when Christian theology was prevalent in western societies, individuality and sexual identity tended to be theologically explained.²⁶ This perhaps is why it was easier to locate gender identity internally and to speak of ‘essential’ female or male traits. As the Bible lost its authoritative grip on society, human individuality was opened to scientific explorations. In the 20th century, human personalities were increasingly conceptualised as reflective of social processes, but they did not eschew assumptions that “biology is the site of character formation.”²⁷ Humanist tendencies to consider individuality as essential were reflected in gender theorisations that placed the aetiology of gender in the topography of the sexed body, what Nicholson has partly called “biological foundationalism.”²⁸ As anti-Enlightenment/anti-humanist critiques expanded, such positions started to be questioned. Gradually the earlier “materialist metaphysics”²⁹ of both gender and sex were problematized and reconceived eventually as socially constructed.³⁰ Thenceforth, feminist theory of gender became preoccupied with liberating itself of “biological foundationalism”³¹ and focused on understanding how men and women could be explained as socially constituted in view of anatomical differences, but not limited to those. The rise of post-modernist theorisations consolidated a replacement of a materialist ontology with an “ontology of social things, relations, and non-substantive (and often normative) kinds.”³² In some paradigms the aim has been precisely to subvert notions of “naturalness” which have been portrayed by some influential scholars as exclusivist and oppressive socially imposed norms.³³

Parallels may be seen with how gender has been perceived and deployed within the field of gender and development since the 1980s. While initially some scholars felt compelled to consider how religious traditions spoke about women,³⁴ later approaches were steadily secularised.

²⁵ Alcoff (1988).

²⁶ Nicholson (1994).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Gatens (1983), Butler (1990; 1993), Fausto-Sterling (1993).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Haslanger and Ásta (2017).

³³ Alcoff (2006, 139-144), Istratei (2017, 3).

³⁴ Foster (1983).

Reflecting the tacitly accepted notions of “biological foundationalism”, judgments about gender relations were generally predicated on male and female bodies (how sex-marked bodies shared labour, livelihoods, authority, etc.) while beliefs and internal perceptions, attitudes and dispositions that sex-marked individuals displayed were broadly ignored.³⁵ The influential critique produced by Nigerian anthropologist Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí which traced this “bio-logic” to western epistemologies that have emphasised visual indicators as opposed to holistic ‘world-sense’ is a pertinent reminder of these tendencies.³⁶ In a previous paper the author of this dissertation demonstrated how mainstream theorisations of ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’ have western (liberal) connotations and reflect normative gender ideals emanating from western societies’ experience with sexism.³⁷ This is reflected in “universalist and non-discriminatory”³⁸ definitions of gender equality predicated on ideals of sameness (same opportunities and valuations for all genders).³⁹ It is reflected in assumptions that women reproduce ‘oppressive’ norms that they have deeply internalised, which means that women’s ‘choices’ are not generally attributed to autonomously defined preferences.⁴⁰ It is generally upheld that agency happens only where norms are subverted.⁴¹ More recently, gender equality has been predicated on ideals of gender fluidity, echoing influential feminist theories.⁴²

Concomitant with the gradual secularisation of western sciences and thought systems, in late 20th-century scholarship religious belief and knowledge in local societies were typically dismissed as *loci* of female subordination.⁴³ This trend is not unrelated to western feminist theology and gender and religion(s) tendencies that appraised religious traditions (and especially those of a Christian theology) suspiciously and as universally conducive to female oppression.⁴⁴ It also parallels earlier paradigms within international development that regarded religion either as a hindrance or

³⁵ This is evident from conventional gender theoretical and analytical frameworks conventionally employed in the field. See Overholt et al. (1985), Parker (1993), Moser (1993), Oxaal and Baden (1997), Kabeer (1999a), March, Smyth, and Mukhopadhyay (1999), Reeves and Baden (2000), UNDP (2001), UN (2002), Mukhopadhyay and Wong (2007, 18). While some of these frameworks precede the mainstreaming of the GAD approach, many of their assumptions and methods persisted within the latter paradigm.

³⁶ Oyèwùmí (1997).

³⁷ Istratii (2017).

³⁸ Jabbra (1989, 63).

³⁹ Reeves and Baden (2000, 2) and Cornwall (2016).

⁴⁰ Kabeer (1994; 1999b; 2011, 526).

⁴¹ Kabeer (1999b, 441), Mahmood (2005).

⁴² Cornwall (2016, 76) and Edström (2014). See Appendix 1.2.

⁴³ Whitehead (2006 [1979]), Moser (1993), Baden and Goetz (1997), Kabeer (1999b), Momsen (2004) and Cornwall (2016). In general, if religion was considered, this was usually in “a negative way” (Berkley Center for Religions 2008, 21).

⁴⁴ See Daly (1973), Ruether (1983), Fiorenza (1984), Juschka (2001), Fiorenza (2002), Sharma (2002), Børresen (2009). For critical concerns raised about these trends see e.g. Heine (1986), Young (2002), King and Beattie (2004), Gross (2004), Istratii (forthcoming).

as irrelevant to development practice.⁴⁵ It was rarely recognised that local societies were embedded in distinct belief systems or cosmologies⁴⁶, where religious beliefs could be influencing socialisation and everyday perceptions and behaviour in unique ways that needed to be accounted for in development-related research and practice.⁴⁷

Even in recent years where religious and gender studies in regards to development have multiplied and have become more nuanced,⁴⁸ the main theoretical premises within GAD scholarship have not changed significantly.⁴⁹ The premise that gender identity is hierarchical and that religion is a contributing factor persists, although it is now considered that religion can be instrumentalised for the purposes of development.⁵⁰ This is combined with tendencies to approach religious parameters predominantly at the political, institutional or organisational level, with studies integrating additionally ethnographic, people-centred and theology-informed perspectives being relatively rare.⁵¹ Often, the way in which ‘religion’ is talked about gives the impression that this is appraised as something isolated from wider cosmologies. This approach does not account for the intricate ways in which religious parameters are accommodated in different cosmologies and can interface with gender norms, attitudes and human behaviour.

It is proposed in this thesis that religious parameters may be approached as components of broader cosmological systems that shape local epistemologies. The author has previously conceptualised epistemology as “the criteria and sources for valid knowledge *as related to a specific cosmology*...under the understanding that individuals become conscious agents within specific belief systems where they acquire the tools and standards for reasoning.”⁵² This definition understands that an epistemological system is closely linked to a specific cosmology or worldviews which enable specific modes of reasoning.⁵³ These epistemological systems are expected to determine the criteria that individuals will employ to define and to generate valid knowledge and through what conceptual repertoires they might reason out their realities, not least being their gender subjectivities and gender relations. This does not intend to say that individuals

⁴⁵ Ver Beek (2000), Deneulin and Rakodi (2011), Jones and Petersen (2011).

⁴⁶ Cosmology here is defined as a holistic belief system which is linked to epistemology (valid ways of knowing), ontology (ways of being) and ethics (principles governing social relations). The definition of this dissertation departs from a clearly etymological one (Kyriakakis 2012, 135).

⁴⁷ Exceptions are Foster (1983), Sweetman (1998), Tomalin (2007).

⁴⁸ Examples are Sweetman (1998), Bayes and Tohidi (2001), Greany (2006), Marshall and Taylor (2006), Tomalin (2006), Ghatak (2006), Hopkins and Patel (2006), Para-Mallam (2006), Marshall (2010), Tomalin (2011), Tadros (2011), Bradley (2011), DeTemple (2012), Hoodfar (2012) and Tomalin (2015).

⁴⁹ Tomalin (2007, 1), Istratii (2017).

⁵⁰ Greany (2006, 349), Le Roux et al. (2016).

⁵¹ Examples are Tomalin (2006) and Bradley (2009; 2011). One can cite many other works that incorporate exegetical and anthropological perspectives, but these do not necessarily fall within the gender and development field.

⁵² Istratii (2017, 4).

⁵³ Ladson-Billings (2000, 258).

are attributed a static epistemology or that they cannot be exposed to multiple epistemological systems simultaneously, but rather to underscore that all individuals are ‘epistemologically situated’, which means that they are closely linked to the belief systems they have reason to value the most.

This, then, draws attention to an epistemological plurality which must be considered when studying contemporary gender realities in religious communities, especially indigenous Christian societies located outside the narrow parameters of Western European thinking: in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent and Northern and Eastern Africa. While all societies might typologize individuals by gender identity, it cannot be assumed that people in very diverse contexts are always valued primarily or exclusively by their gender or that this is always hierarchical in the same way, not least because of multiplicities in which human subjectivity can be understood and valued in different belief systems. Ethiopia, the country where the study presented here was conducted, has an ancient civilisation and a pre-Chalcedon Christian faith formally adopted by the rulers of the flourishing Kingdom of Aksum in the fourth century. European influences from the 16th century onwards did not leave the religious tradition unaffected, but Ethiopian responses have shown a wariness to preserve the indigenous religio-cultural heritage.⁵⁴ This ancient Christian faith, which developed intimately with the socio-cultural surroundings and political history of Ethiopia, must be apprehended to have influenced not only how people understand human metaphysics, but also the meaning of normative gender identities and their embodiment.

Influential gender and development concepts and theories and the practitioners who employ them cross-culturally are also epistemologically situated, usually in such a way that results in a prioritisation of western feminist metaphysics in GAD. This author’s seven years’ experience in gender and development practice and training at one of the leading institutions for gender and development practice in the West⁵⁵ has evidenced that gender conceptualisations emanating from non-western cosmologies, especially if these contradict western (secular) gender metaphysics accepted as normative, are not likely to be integrated well in gender theory and training.⁵⁶ This observations need to be appraised concomitantly with the fact that local gender practitioners, despite their different cosmological and socio-cultural backgrounds, have had to be conversant with mainstream theories of gender in order to do their local gender work.⁵⁷ The issue is that conclusions reached through such analytical frameworks cannot adequately reveal the

⁵⁴ Ethiopia was never colonised by European powers, with the exception of a short interlude in 1930’s.

⁵⁵ The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Brighton, UK.

⁵⁶ Istratii (2017, 7).

⁵⁷ This argument has been developed and demonstrated thoroughly in the author’s published work Istratii (2017). See also Ampofo and Arnfred (2009).

epistemological diversity discussed earlier.⁵⁸ In addition, they can raise unnecessary reactions within local communities if these perceive such concepts as an imposition of western values and ideals excoriating their normative systems.⁵⁹

Such occurrences raise important questions about the role of researchers' and practitioners' epistemological location and its potentially pernicious effects if handled without reflexivity in cross-cultural practice. Were GAD theorists and practitioners to focus on reconstructing and analysing gender subjectivities through the conceptual repertoires of local communities, perhaps some reactions could be avoided. Adopting such an approach is likely to reveal considerably more complex relationships that might deem conventional gender mainstreaming approaches inappropriate and irrelevant to some contexts, but it is a viable way to prioritise local belief systems without presuming a priori an aetiology of gender arrangements and a desirable development outcome.

Conducting gender-sensitive research within local knowledge systems

The study proposes that gender analysis could be predicated on a more comprehensive investigation of human individuality within a given cosmological system to avoid superimposing metaphysical assumptions. This should provide the language and theoretical tools to theorise gender identity in reference to the local conceptual repertoire (faith-based or not) and to achieve a better understanding both of gender subjectivities and people's attitudes regarding gender-related matters. This suggestion does not constitute a radical departure from feminist theoretical pronouncements that have suggested enlarging the analytical lens to look at more fundamental systems of valuation from the historical *locus* of the individual consciousness.⁶⁰ It also parallels somehow anthropological approaches that have been proposed in religion and development studies with a gender-sensitive focus. Tamsin Bradley, following the directions provided by Ruth Pearson and Emma Tomalin,⁶¹ has proposed:

A gendered perspective on religion and development simultaneously draws out the aspects of religion that are problematic for women while also pointing to its importance in many of their lives. Specifically, by revealing the patriarchal of many, if not all, religious traditions, a gendered perspective can highlight the ways in which women find themselves disadvantaged and marginalised. Also, observing religion from a gendered perspective allows us to see how women draw on aspects of their tradition to fight the injustices they experience."⁶²

⁵⁸ Bradley (2011, 139-164).

⁵⁹ Abu-Habib (2007), Meer (2007), Para-Mallam et al. (2011) and Eves (2012), Istratii (2017, 7).

⁶⁰ Nicholson (1994), Gatens (1993), Alcoff (1988; 2006), Prokhnovik (2012).

⁶¹ Pearson and Tomalin (2008).

⁶² Bradley (2011, 36).

Importantly, Bradley departs from essentialist conceptualisations of ‘religion’ and proposes that the latter should be approached as a system of values and understandings shaping everyday life.⁶³ She recognises that religious beliefs, faith and faith-based understandings can affect people in multiple ways and that these need to be explored through women’s perspectives anthropologically. However, her remark also evidences that gender continues to be premised on an assumption of a fundamental patriarchal system and as an analytic for capturing primarily disadvantage. In addition, religious effects are still broadly appraised through a binary, as structurally pernicious or personally important to women. The approach that is proposed here shares Bradley’s call for more anthropological approaches, but it proposes avoiding presuppositions that the existence of gender identities must be synonymous to a monolithically non-egalitarian valuation of gendered individuals. It furthermore understands religious parameters as inextricable from broader belief and knowledge systems whose effects need to be described (rather than monolithically evaluated) through a people-centred approach that accounts for their diverse embodiment.

Such an exploratory approach is reinforced by a number of seminal studies from the region of Africa relevant to this research. The aforementioned seminar work by Nigerian anthropologist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí in the Oyo-Yorùbá society may be cited. Oyěwùmí’s study (1997) was a response to earlier conceptualisations of gender, which she believed imposed important epistemological impositions and abstract demarcations on other societies. In her work, Oyěwùmí traced these gender theorisations to western knowledge paradigms in the social sciences in which “[w]estern social categories derive essentially from a perceived dimorphism of the human body.”⁶⁴ This echoed clearly Linda Nicholson’s thesis of a lingering “biological foundationalism” in early gender theorisations.⁶⁵ Oyěwùmí also observed that the introduction of ‘gender’ in second-wave western feminism did not achieve to obliterate this bio-logic within the western cultural mentality.⁶⁶ She argued that if gender was seen as socially constructed, as prominent theories proposed, gender would need to be dissociated from anatomy and be granted diversity across time, space and culture.⁶⁷ As Oyěwùmí noted, “gender constructs are not in themselves biological—they are culturally derived, and their maintenance is a function of cultural systems.”⁶⁸

Oyěwùmí approached her analysis of Oyo-Yorùbá gender relations more comprehensively, by looking closely at the world-sense of the society she investigated. She pursued this by conducting a study of social relations at the level of language, lineage, the institution of marriage and the market. She concluded that “[t]he Yorùbá case...shows that the human body need not be

⁶³ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁴ Oyěwùmí (1997, xii).

⁶⁵ Nicholson (1994).

⁶⁶ Oyěwùmí (1997, 8).

⁶⁷ Oyewumi (2005, 11).

⁶⁸ Oyewumi (1997, 78).

constituted as gendered or be seen as evidence for social classification at all times. In pre-colonial Yorùbá society body-type was not the basis of social hierarchy: males and females were not ranked according to anatomic distinction.⁶⁹ Subsequently, Oyěwù mí argued for a cultural, context-dependent interpretation of social reality. As she noted, scholars of Africa should “do serious work detailing and describing indigenous African cultures from the inside out, not from the outside in.”⁷⁰ This should reveal the kind of classifications that might exist locally, the ideologies that might foster this organisation and how these might influence gender relations.

While her argument has much merit, it is notable that Oyěwù mí did not heed sufficiently the embodied subjectivities of the members of the society she studied. While she provided her readers with some idea as to why Oyo-Yorùbá cultural and social systems did not align with western worldviews, she did not present a full reconstruction of local gender understandings premised on people’s every-day experience. In this, of course, she was constrained by the fact that she was studying people who had lived in pre-colonial times. In this sense, Bibi Bakere-Yusuf was correct to point out that there is a difference between the normative framework, and how this is embodied by living people.⁷¹ A study such as Oyěwù mí’s could achieve more if it engaged with embodied consciousness as much as with linguistic and institutional analysis. However, such limitations do not reverse the usefulness of her gender analytical approach; they only underscore the need for implementing a cosmology-sensitive analysis (Oyěwù mí) from the viewpoint of the historically situated individual (Alcoff).

This limitation appears to have been overcome in another study from the African region, namely Saba Mahmood’s ethnographic account of a women’s mosque movement in Egypt.⁷² Mahmood, like Oyěwù mí, engaged with and attempted to address limitations in mainstreamed gender theorisations, focusing on assumptions about human agency. Mahmood observed that in the prevalent post-structuralist paradigm agency had been theorised in the binary of ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’—the regulatory normative framework that Judith Butler described in her work.⁷³ While she condoned Butler’s decoupling of agency from humanist essentialisms, she suggested that limiting agency to “those operations that resist the dominating and subvertigating modes of power”⁷⁴ obscured many other states of being and activity that could imply ‘agentival capacity’ for reasons that emanated from the specific cultural matrix. She clarified, however, that “[t]he

⁶⁹ Ibid., xii.

⁷⁰ Oyewumi (2007, 21).

⁷¹ Bakere-Yusuf (no date).

⁷² Mahmood (2005).

⁷³ Butler (1990; 1993).

⁷⁴ Mahmood (2005, 14).

kind of agency I am exploring here does not belong to the women themselves, but is a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located.”⁷⁵

Mahmood’s important departure from Oyěwùmí’s approach is that she located the cultivation of norms within the human consciousness that was not isolated from its historical context. Her close interactions with women and observations of their religious experience showed that “the mosque participants did not regard authorised models of behaviour as an external social imposition that constrained the individual. Rather they viewed socially prescribed forms of conduct as the potentialities, the ‘scaffolding’, if you will, through which the self realized.”⁷⁶ She concluded that the “ritual worship for the women I worked with, was both enacted through, and productive of, intentionality, volitional behaviour, and sentiments.”⁷⁷ She found useful, therefore, to employ an Aristotelian “analytical language of ethical formation to describe the process of moral cultivation.”⁷⁸ While Mahmood located the logic of ‘agentival capacity’ in powerful traditions, by centring her analysis on the women’s embodied piety she was able to see that the discursive perpetuation of tradition did not exclude deviations or new imparting of meaning in traditional practices.

Such works suggest as a more appropriate strategy the suspension of generic assumptions regarding gender and its relationship with religious traditions and knowledge systems cross-culturally. Oyěwùmí’s research indicates that the priority should be to explore local cosmologies and systems more holistically, paying attention to *whether* and *why* local beliefs may have different implications for male and female individuals and understanding what this difference is perceived, justified and embodied by local communities. Mahmood’s study, on the other hand, demonstrates that it may be preferable to avoid preconceiving the mechanisms of gender embodiment and their implications and rather focus on understanding modes of agency/behaviour as these emanate from people’s worldviews and values. Evidently, such objectives could not be met without a more comprehensive anthropological study, centring however on the embodied individual consciousness.

Domestic violence in the development context

This discussion of GAD was given as prelude to a discussion of domestic violence approaches in international development. This field has conventionally emphasised cultural, social

⁷⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 152.

constructionist and feminist theorisations and aetiologies,⁷⁹ meaning that it has presented similar tendencies to universalise gender hierarchies and to appraise cultural or institutional parameters (including institutionalized religious traditions) as *loci* of female subordination contributing to women's abuse.⁸⁰ While this scholarship has incorporated more anthropological insights in recent years, the fundamental thesis that violence has gendered motivations has been assumed unquestionably,⁸¹ with the latest paradigms speaking in terms of Violence against Women (VAW), gender-based violence (GBV) or gender violence.⁸² Sally Engle Merry echoes popular understandings when she defines gender violence "as violence whose meaning depends on the gendered identities of the parties"⁸³ and "violence that is comprehensible because of the gender of the interaction."⁸⁴ As a result of a feminist stance on violence, research on domestic violence in the development sector engaged historically primarily with women—preconceived as the victims—while religious parameters and spirituality received very little attention in the analysis of human behaviour, and especially in the perceptions of perpetrators. Some faith-based initiatives for the alleviation of gender-based violence have been taken by what could be called faith-based organisations,⁸⁵ but these approaches have not eschewed assumptions about the gendered nature of violence. The literature capturing such initiatives has tended to focus almost exclusively on faith leaders and their interactions with local communities.⁸⁶

The prioritisation of gender-based aetiologies of violence in development scholarship contrasts with the general field of intimate partner violence (IPV), where there are more conceptual frameworks and a higher integration of religious beliefs and personal faith (see Appendix⁸⁷). Feminist paradigms have been salient here as well, but they have been counterbalanced by family studies placing equal or more emphasis on ontogenetic (related to biological growth), psychological and relational factors, and scholars have been more willing to admit that some violence is situational and mutual.⁸⁸ Increasingly, international IPV scholars have shown that

⁷⁹ Bowman (2003), Merry (2009), Heise (2012).

⁸⁰ A few other writers have noticed the emphasis on 'cultural' explanations and have suggested that such a tendency might denote lingering essentialist beliefs in the West about non-western cultures replicated in the paradigms and knowledge they produce. See Narayan (1977) and Vlopp (2000).

⁸¹ See Centre for Women's Global Leadership (1994), Heise (1998), Green (1999), Sokoloff and Pratt (2005), UN (2005), Terry and Hoare (2007), Merry (2009), Heise (2012), Dauer (2014), UNFPA (2016), WHO (2016) and Le Roux et al. (2016).

⁸² As noted in Jakobsen (2014; 2015).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸⁵ Tearfund (2008; 2013), Herstad (2009), Christian Aid (2014).

⁸⁶ Le Roux et al. (2016).

⁸⁷ Appendix 1.3.

⁸⁸ For an overview, see Lawson (2013, 17). Feminist studies of IPV include: Dobash, Dobash and Daly (1992), Jukes (1993; 1999; 2010), Anderson (1997; 2005), Dutton and Nicholls (2005), Dutton and Goodman (2005), García-Moreno et al. (2005), DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz (2007) and DeKeseredy (2011). Family studies and psychology-informed works include Straus et al. (1980), Dutton (2006), Tolman and

abusiveness cannot be explained on purely sociological grounds, but requires a combination of frameworks that require paying attention to individual parameters.⁸⁹ On the other hand, more ethnographic or history-informed works of domestic violence have pointed to the variability of domestic violence and its explanations cross-culturally, which defies the idea of a monolithic aetiology being universally valid or sufficient.⁹⁰ Psychological studies of IPV that have pointed to linkages between attitudinal and behavioural parameters in the intimate partnership and religious beliefs and spirituality also exist.⁹¹

The prioritisation of gendered explanations of domestic violence means that many studies have not eschewed epistemological limitations demonstrated for the GAD paradigm. Typically, preconceived gender theoretical frameworks have been employed to make sense of data emerging from specific non-western and African societies, as opposed to studying IPV from within local conceptual repertoires and worldviews.⁹² In addition, intervention strategies have not avoided western (liberal) feminist suppositions predicating the alleviation of gender violence to a subversion of the status quo.⁹³ To make these limitations visible and to suggest what could be possible improvements one work has been selected for discussion since it provides one of the most convincing theorisations of violence as gendered in the gender and development field largely due to the author's reflexivity and well-thought methodological innovations.

Hilde Jakobsen, a development practitioner, formulated a recent critique of gender-based explanations of domestic violence in mainstream development, affirming the pervasive 'gender-based violence' speak in development and its historical under-theorisation. She admitted that when development scholars used this terminology, they generally failed to explain in a rigorous theoretical manner how domestic violence was in fact gendered.⁹⁴ With awareness of non-western critiques of gender theory, she provided a qualitative study of domestic violence norms in Tanzania. Using data collected from focus groups in two different provinces, she made a thoughtful attempt to evidence how violence was gendered. In her theoretical premises, Jakobsen proposed the need for a multi-dimensional understanding of gender to depart from tendencies in

Bennett (1990), Holtzworth-Munroe (1997), Gilligan (2004), Mills (2006; 2008) and Askeland and Heir (2014), Motz (2014).

⁸⁹ Dutton (2007) and Lawson (2013).

⁹⁰ Levinson (1989), Robertson (1990), Counts, Brown and Campbell (1992), Kalu (1993) and McClusky (2001), Hynd (2010).

⁹¹ Rye and Pargament (2002), Hall et al. (2009), Lopez, Riggs, Pollard and Hook (2011) and Pollard et al. (2014).

⁹² Green (1999), Sokoloff and Pratt (2005), Merry (2009).

⁹³ See Appendix 1.4 for some representative works that evidence these analytical trends and their progressions.

⁹⁴ Jakobsen (2014, 2).

the international IPV scholarship that defined gender at the individual level paying less attention to its interactional or structural expressions.⁹⁵

Her assumptions throughout the research process were tempered. She provided a long discussion to show how she cautioned both imperialist and relativist theoretical approaches to sociological theory in the African context. She also paid considerable attention to her use and choice of methodology in order to overcome inevitable power imbalances between a white privileged researcher and the local research participants. She made clear that her ‘outsider’ identity excluded any likelihood that she could obtain from focus group participants their genuine or private thoughts about domestic violence. Her interest was rather to explore local “discursive resources for justifying wife-beating,”⁹⁶ that is to say, how wife-beating was justified and discussed *among* the participants. Aware of the inherent power imbalances in such research methods, she opted to pose evocative questions and to exit the focus group process and location until the discussion had ended. She then combined the empirical data with inductive use of gender theory, which guided her on how to ‘read’ the results. The aim was to discover “the respondents’ own logic on wife-beating”⁹⁷ and explore the associations with social norms. Her argument was that post-colonial critique should not exclude the possibility of employing theory created within a western epistemological framework to promote understanding in non-western contexts as long as this was done on the basis of empirical findings. Therefore, she employed in her work concepts such as ‘hegemonic masculinity’, ‘emphasised femininity’, gender performativity and the dual sexuality-gender relationship, all concepts emanating from various feminist theories prominent in the West.

A common theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that participants spoke both of a “good” and a “bad” beating. As the author clarified, the good beating was justified and the bad was undeserved, such as a beating out of drunkenness, a beating that exceeded offence or that caused damage that needed medical attention. Jakobsen found that men believed in male headship and that women were expected to be under the male rule. Thus, she employed the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to describe this relationship and to suggest that the beating aimed to sustain the male headship and that violence was correlated to a threatened masculine identity which could alter the social order. This interpretation was reinforced by that fact that women were expected to appear feminine and not to behave in ways that were considered inappropriate, a norm that women themselves appeared to approve of and to enforce on themselves. This led her to draw from the concept of ‘emphasised femininity’ and to propose that these norms of femininity were directly associated with the female sex. She concluded that gender was indeed related to sex and

⁹⁵ The typology individual, interactional and structural had been explained thoroughly in Anderson (2005). See Appendix 1.5.

⁹⁶ Jakobsen (2015, 71).

⁹⁷ Jakobsen (2014, 10).

that wife-beating was gendered because by doing violence men ‘did’ gender: “Gender norms do support the violence, but violence also enforces the performance of gender, maintains gender hierarchies, and is in itself an enactment of gender.”⁹⁸

Jakobsen heeded non-western critiques about the transposition of gender theory cross-culturally and made an effort to demonstrate why a conceptualisation of domestic violence as gendered was appropriate for the context of her study. She showed that women spoke of their identities as one with their sex and that they based their understanding of labour division on their sex identity. She furthermore showed that the gender beliefs she identified were not limited to the symbolic realm, but had material consequences because they preserved male privilege in the home, in food distribution, in the marriage wealth and in the farm production. Following the call of feminist IPV researchers, she made an attempt to analyse gender at the interactional level informed by mainstreamed gender theorisations, which granted insights into the more “structure-level gender dynamics.”⁹⁹

Nonetheless, Jakobsen does not appear to have heeded the depth of Oyěwùmí’s critique, which was discussed in her thesis. As previously explained, Oyěwùmí was not concerned merely with displacing the biological foundationalism she discerned in the western social sciences, but to underscore that this might not be the way in which local people actually conceptualised, organised and valued themselves. Oyěwùmí’s main concern was to draw attention to the distinct cosmological frameworks in which different peoples were embedded and which defined their conceptual repertoires and societal organisation and to call for rigorous (ethnographic) research to capture these. Jakobsen’s research, as creative as it was, did not incorporate a comprehensive analysis of how people’s pronouncements of conjugal abuse could be located in the local cosmological framework.

Jakobsen’s study demonstrated the existence of norms that expected men and women to do certain things and display certain manners in marriage, but it did not reveal what sustained this normative code. Early in her work she reported being drawn to Tanzania because of the general understanding that this was a non-violent country where social harmony was valued and preserved.¹⁰⁰ Yet, she did not provide a discussion about the local cosmological system and how this ideal of social harmony aligned with the favourable attitudes to wife-beating that she captured. While she mentioned that many of her participants followed the Christian or Muslim faith and she included faith affiliation when she cited participants’ testimonies, she did not explore the implications of this connection. Some testimonies were given by Christian male speakers who

⁹⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jakobsen (2014, 4).

condoned male headship and the use of a “good beating.” This begs asking: How did people’s religious beliefs interface with their attitudes regarding wife-beating? How might their postulated tolerance of wife-hitting relate to the wider social harmony ideal and their religious ideals?

Jakobsen’s analysis was premised primarily on the performative articulations of the focus group participants and on observations about the normative organisation of the family and daily livelihoods. While many of her male research participants might have agreed that hitting one’s wife was tolerable or acceptable, not everyone condoned this and, more importantly, not everyone hit their wives. Statistically speaking, even many of those who condoned it, probably did not hit their wives. This suggests another set of important discrepancies that were not addressed, one at the level of attitudes (among people in the same group) and at the level of the individual (between attitudes and behaviours). How can these be made sense of through a ‘gendered’ violence framework? Why is it that some men did not participate in the performative replication of the social norms since they existed within the same context? Were they not ‘men’ enough? How might gender been embodied and performed by this group who did not condone violence, if violence was all about gender performativity as she theorised? Such questions cannot be addressed sufficiently in a single work, but more insights could be granted through a more comprehensive study of how local people conceived a “good man” and a “good woman” more generally and not only within discourses of domestic violence.

Furthermore, Jakobsen essentially continued the western liberal tradition of conceptualising agency through the dual typology of “coercion” or “complicity.”¹⁰¹ For her theoretical formulation of ‘hegemonic gender beliefs’ she explicitly relied on Antonio Gramsci’s notions of hegemony, consent, coercion and common sense to suggest “how the dominated become complicit in their own domination by sharing the ideas legitimating it.”¹⁰² In other words, the local society was conceptualised as being separated into those who dominate and those who are dominated, with the understanding that the dominated are both coerced and complicit in their own domination. The testimonies cited by Jakobsen suggested that women believed that there were occasions when a beating was permitted and justifiable, but these rationalisations need not be attributed to coercion and domination. Alternatively, these rationalisations might have reflected a combination of Christian, Muslim or other beliefs, psychological reasons, cognitive-affective dispositions and pragmatic responses interacting with restrictive social norms in complex ways as suggested in Mahmood’s study.

Overall, it is clear that the dynamics Jakobsen observed in fostering the approval of a “good beating” were gendered in some dimensions, but the information she provided did not suffice to

¹⁰¹ Jakobsen (2014, 6).

¹⁰² Ibid., 7.

establish that “doing violence was doing gender.” No statement can be made with finality that partner violence itself was “gendered” since this would require understanding how gender identity was conceptualised within the local knowledge system and how exactly this conceptualisation influenced personal attitudes about spousal abuse and behaviour within the intimate relationship, including the responses of the victimised party—not merely at the level of the symbolic or the normative. These observations draw attention to the importance of exploring social norms in conjunction with broader belief systems (which might be faith-based) and individual attitudes of wife-beating to understand the complex mechanisms that could be sustaining the visible norms.

The interface of societal norms and human attitudes and behaviour

The previous analysis has highlighted that divergences can exist: a) between norms, b) between norms and attitudes and c) between norms, attitudes and human behaviour. These disparities mean that other factors must mediate to determine which norms are favoured or prioritised by the individual, why some norms acquire more prominence than other norms and why individuals might display attitudes that might contradict the norms. There is need for a research approach that considers these discrepancies and provides the tools to understand divergent responses to prevalent norms among people sharing the same cultural surroundings.

The work of Gerry Mackie and colleagues made an effort in this direction and merits consideration.¹⁰³ The authors drew from the ecological model of violence (Bronfenbrenner 2), game theory (Thomas Schelling), the Reasoned Action Approach (by Ajzen and Fishbein) and a wider array of theoretical models and constructs to formulate a more comprehensive theory of social norms and human behaviour. The main focus of the authors was to understand how social norms perpetuated and could be changed. The authors defined social norms as “what people in some group believe to be normal in the group, that is, believed to be a typical action, an appropriate action, or both.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, social norms were predicated to the existence of a reference group and social expectations about this group’s approval or disapproval, the latter of which was associated with apprehended sanctions.

This meant that to identify social norms in a given context it would be important to identify who served as the reference group, what was typical practice for this group and what was generally approved at a collective level.¹⁰⁵ The reference group would be the one that held power within a given context, which was imagined as an essential component in the formulation of social norms. The authors furthermore proposed an analytical distinction between social norms and what they

¹⁰³ Mackie et al. (2015).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

called moral norms (or personal attitudes) and legal norms. Social norms were predicated on what the reference group approved, moral norms on the individual's "inner sense" of what was right or wrong (which could contradict social norms), and legal norms which were associated with the state. The authors also made a brief reference to religious norms and distinguished these from other norms because they invoked the divine as source of command. However, they did suggest that religious norms could interweave with or manifest as social, moral or legal norms.¹⁰⁶

In effect, Mackie and colleagues drew attention to the power of social norms and their perpetuation fuelled by self-interest, which was defined in reference to a powerful peer group. It is insightful that they considered individuals to be influenced by both social and moral norms, which were understood to intertwine, but which could also be at odds. This theorisation created room for divergences in the actions of individuals existing in the same context and under the influence of the same accepted behavioural codes. Important is also the authors' emphasis on apprehended sanctions as a motivational force for abiding by the codes of the reference group. These observations taken together could help to explain why some men became abusive when others in the same context did not (different moral values, or following different reference groups), or why men who condoned abuse did not 'do' conjugal violence (fear for sanctions in view of social norms), or why men who condemned violence could become abusive with partners (social expectation that they should do so in some situations). This theoretical framework could also explain why some women might not leave an abusive husband, such as due to moral norms, personal beliefs or non-social concerns contrary to social norms or due to expected social sanctions if the expectation was that they should stay for reasons that found resonance at the collective level. It is also important that the authors understood that social and moral norms could differ, in which case they suggested, the more salient norm would prevail.¹⁰⁷ This would allow for divergences between norms (such as, a social harmony idea co-existing with the acceptance of a "good beating" in the previous discussion) and could explain theoretically why one would be more potent than the other.

However, their theorisation was not without limitations. While it was fine to draw the analytical distinctions that the authors proposed, these should not be reified. The decision by Mackie and colleagues to separate between moral, social and religious norms appears to have been disproportionately informed by western societies' experience with religion, which, generally speaking, was relegated to the private realm and at least for part of its history was treated as *sui generis*.¹⁰⁸ This is evident in the fact that they attributed moral norms to an "inner" sense of right and wrong, suggesting that this sense was self-generating. While they recognised that individuals

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 22 and 35.

¹⁰⁸ Asad (1993).

often enacted moral norms because these agreed with social norms, that social norms could originate in non-social factors,¹⁰⁹ and that moral and social norms would intertwine with religious norms, they did not elaborate on the origins of moral norms and personal attitudes. The model could be refined by embedding social, moral and religious norms within the broader belief system of a given group and trying to understand better how this may lead differently situated individuals to formulate conceptions of morality and values favouring certain norms over other. This approach appears especially pertinent to societies that are embedded in authoritative religious traditions that tend to beget their own normative standards, illustrated most effectively in Mahmood's study.

Accounting for religious parameters

The influence of religious parameters on people's attitudes in regards to IPV and possible interfaces with socio-cultural norms and values need to be recognised. Studies from religious contexts have shown that abusive men may have distorted understandings of religious teachings, not unrelated to the family environment they grew up in, which could make it easier for them to justify their abusiveness.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, religious women who experience husband abuse might tend to endure and to forgive it, often as a direct result of how they understand and embody their vernacular religious traditions.¹¹¹ Such studies emphasise, for instance, the pressure that religious women often feel to keep their marriage vows and to avoid divorce, or the influence of ideals of male headship and wifhood in marriage. These trends have been underscored especially in works regarding Catholic, Protestant or Evangelical Christian communities, but also in Muslim societies.¹¹² In Christian societies of an Eastern Orthodox tradition, however, the laity may have had less exposure to biblical exegesis for multiple historical and ecclesiastical reasons.¹¹³ In this case, women's rationalisations may be less attuned to theology and more influenced by socio-cultural standards (couched or not in religious language), such as the urgency to preserve the honour of the family or to meet standards of proper female behaviour.¹¹⁴

In societies where Christianity was preceded by local belief systems, biblical influences might co-exist with other beliefs about the spiritual world, which may shape how people interpret or express local Christian teachings. This was highlighted particularly well in Laura McClusky's work in Belize where she found that Roman Catholic teachings co-existed with indigenous beliefs

¹⁰⁹ Mackie et al. (2015, 5).

¹¹⁰ Johnson (2015, 5), Nason-Clark et al. (2018, chapter 3).

¹¹¹ Shaikh (2007), Merry (2009, 68), Johnson (2015), Nason-Clark et al. (2018, chapter 2).

¹¹² Mclusky (2001), Marsen (2014), Nason-Clark et al. (2018, chapter 2).

¹¹³ Gassin (2015), Istratii (forthcoming).

¹¹⁴ Geanacopoulos (1999), Gassin (2015), Istratii (forthcoming).

with implications for conjugal abuse. For example, fear that the spirit/soul of a departed wife could return to attack a previously abusive husband could have prevented some men from beating their wives in the first place.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the fear of a dead in-law attacking a wife and one's children for vengeance might have encouraged husbands to beat wives to show respect to their in-laws while they were still alive.¹¹⁶ Such acculturation effects might be enforced in Orthodox communities due to the historically accommodating nature of the faith with local belief systems, which were partially subsumed or redefined by religious teachings.¹¹⁷

In parallel, it has been found that through their ordeal some abused spouses may acquire a more justice-oriented understanding of their religious traditions, which might eventually help them to address the harmful situation.¹¹⁸ As some scholars have put it, “[o]ver time, women engaged in spiritual struggles marked by feelings of anger or abandonment may be forced to rework their view of God or religious network as all-powerful, impotent, or uncaring forces, and come to relate to these entities as empowering allies who support women’s efforts to protect themselves from harm in relationships.”¹¹⁹ Sa’diyya Shaikh’s research of “embodied *tasfir*” (exegesis) with Muslim female victims of spousal abuse in a South African community is pertinent.¹²⁰ Shaikh found that the women’s experiences of spousal abuse had not necessarily diminished their belief and trust in Allah and that some reinterpreted Qur’anic teachings in ways that condemned the violence as unethical and could be empowering to them.¹²¹ These interpretations contested more general patriarchal understandings and norms.

Scholarship on religion and IPV has also demonstrated significant insights about the role of the clergy in conjugal abuse. In general, victimised women in religious communities will tend to share their family ordeals with clergy, although they might minimize the seriousness of the situation because of shame, guilt or for other reasons.¹²² However, the clergy’s responses may be inappropriate and could contribute to a perpetuation of the harmful situation.¹²³ This may rise from the clergy’s limited exposure to issues of domestic violence and their inappropriate responses, reflecting their insufficient seminary training, their own attitudes that might lead to the minimisation of the problem, their heightened sense of responsibility to preserve marriage, or their inability to apply religious teachings to either advise the victimised party or counsel the abuser. As Andy Johnson has put it, “it is not uncommon in our experience for a religious leader

¹¹⁵ McClusky (2001, 250).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Gassin (2015, 167).

¹¹⁸ Johnson (2015).

¹¹⁹ Mahoney, Abadi and Pargament (2015, 51).

¹²⁰ Shaikh (2007).

¹²¹ Ibid., 80.

¹²² Hamid and Jayakar (2015, 411), Nason-Clark (2018, 36).

¹²³ Shaikh (2007), Nason-Clark (2018, 39-40).

to be very confident that IPV does not occur at all in his or her religious community because the abuse is so well hidden and because religious leaders often do not have the training to be able to identify signs and symptoms of IPV.”¹²⁴ On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that faith leaders and clergy can be positively influential and that the majority do try to support victimised parties, albeit often acting in ways that may be counterproductive.¹²⁵ Overall, in religious contexts, attention must be heeded to clergy discourses for achieving a more nuanced analysis of conjugal abuse responses.

The current study

This study has investigated local attitudes and realities of conjugal violence in the Orthodox *Tāwahādo* community of Aksum in Northern Ethiopia through the prism of the local religio-cultural framework. In its conceptual and theoretical approaches the study was guided by the aforementioned epistemological considerations. Consequently, a theology-informed investigation into the local religious tradition was combined with a gender-sensitive analysis of conjugal abuse, engaging with theologians in various theological centres in Ethiopia and with clergy and lay women and men in the general population of Aksum. The research aims were: a) to identify local people’s understandings and aetiologies of conjugal abuse, b) to explore their attitudes about conjugal abuse, and c) to examine how these realities and attitudes related to the local religio-cultural matrix, indicating possible linkages with Church theology, clergy discourses and embodied faith. These questions reflect the objective of the study to prioritise local people’s conceptual repertoires and to consolidate a more modest gender and development approach that aims to identify and harness local resources for encouraging necessary attitudinal and normative changes as these emerge locally.

Background of conjugal abuse in Tigray and current *lacunae*

Conjugal violence has been commonplace in Tigray, as has been reported from most regions of Ethiopia.¹²⁶ According to statistical evidence, about one in three women in Ethiopia has experienced some form of spousal abuse in her lifetime.¹²⁷ In 2005 and 2011 across the country significant numbers of men and women were found to ‘justify’ wife-hitting in certain situations.¹²⁸ Other studies have found that the problem of conjugal abuse may be underreported and that

¹²⁴ Johnson (2015, x).

¹²⁵ Nason-Clark et al. (2018).

¹²⁶ Berhane (2005), CSAE (2006; 2012; 2016), FDRE (2008), MoWCYA (2013).

¹²⁷ CSAE (2016, 44).

¹²⁸ CSAE (2006), CSAE (2012).

victimised parties may avoid resorting to formal institutions, opting to mediate the situations through informal parties (family, elders and priests).¹²⁹

While conjugal abuse is pervasive and affects differently most societies, the extent and the attitudes regarding spousal abuse in Tigray arouses curiosity for a number of reasons. These include:

- Discernable religious influences in cultural life and individual expressions of piety.¹³⁰ The indigenous Orthodox *Tāwahədo* Christianity of Ethiopia emerged in the ancient capital, Aksum, with about 95% of the Tigrayan population belonging to this faith.¹³¹ This indigenous Orthodox cosmology has been premised on the apostolic teachings of overcoming human sins and passions through non-violent and loving relationships with others.
- Tigray served as the headquarters of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Civil War (1974-1991) against the dictatorial Derg regime.¹³² In this war Tigrayan women were enabled to fight alongside with men and this outcome has been said to have led to improvements in women's position in Ethiopia overall.¹³³

Tigray thus combines a generally non-violent faith tradition and historical societal changes affecting gender relations with a significant degree of conjugal violence and tolerance about it. Yet, this historic Christian Orthodox matrix of Tigray has yet to be given due credence in studies on domestic violence.

Existing IPV studies from Ethiopia are informative, but they have primarily identified the scope of the phenomenon and the affected groups, risk factors or causes, and have not, for the most part, located experiences of IPV within the socio-cultural realities of the victims.¹³⁴ Only a few studies have employed qualitative approaches, and the majority have focused on women's experiences or testimonies of violence exclusively.¹³⁵ Paralleling the wider GBV field, many of the available studies presuppose feminist explanations, blaming cultural or religious parameters, without

¹²⁹ Gessessew and Mesfin (2004). Semahegn and Mengistie (2015).

¹³⁰ Pankhurst (1955), Levine (1965; 1974), Ullendorff (1960; 1968), Pankhurst (1998), Pankhurst (1992b), Chaillot (2002), Mjaaland (2004) and Isaac (2012).

¹³¹ FDRE (2008, 111).

¹³² Marcus (1975), Young (1997).

¹³³ Hammond (1989), Berhane-Selassie (1991), Adugna (2001), Mjaaland (2004), Berhe (2004), Burgess (2013). See also *Civil Code 1960* and Krzeczunowicz (1967).

¹³⁴ Gessessew and Mesfin (2004), Berhane (2005), Kedir and Admasachew (2010), Allen and Raghallaigh (2012 and 2013), Malaju and Alene (2013), Semahegn and Mengistie (2015) and Erulkar (2015).

¹³⁵ As an exception, Jemberu (2008) included focus groups with men.

usually providing rigorous empirical evidence to demonstrate the connection.¹³⁶ Studies that enable a closer understanding of attitudes and realities of conjugal abuse within the religio-cultural matrix of diverse Ethiopian societies are lacking, which this research has aimed to rectify.

Conceptual approaches

A gender-sensitive approach has been employed to chart the salience of gender parameters in conjugal violence. This has been determined by the recognition of feminist contributions to the field of domestic violence, as well as the emphasis that Ethiopian researchers have placed on gender inequalities as a contributing factor to women's abuse. However, to alleviate the concerns emanating from the fact that gender theories have been epistemologically situated, the gender-sensitive ethnographic process has been premised on a concerted investigation of the local belief system to extrapolate how womanhood/manhood was accommodated within this metaphysical framework and to ascertain whether and how these perceptions became relevant to discourses of conjugal abuse. Attention has been paid to how interlocutors spoke about, explained and described human individuality in their society, whether they conscientiously differentiated people and on what grounds, how they perceived the relations between females and males, what normative understandings and ideals they associated with each and where interlocutors drew their understandings and beliefs from. Prime importance was placed on the experience and articulations of the interlocutors so as to achieve an analysis of local realities emanating from the conceptual repertoire of the research participants.

Under similar epistemological motivations, the study suspended presuming a generic typology or definition of conjugal abuse and explored local conceptualisations, rationalisations and aetiologies working with both men and women. The focus was on intimate partner relationships that had a formal status in the local society (marriage unions regardless of the type of marriage) or that were publicly acknowledged (what local experts have called "irregular unions"¹³⁷).¹³⁸ Furthermore, rather than envisioning males as perpetrators and females as victims a priori, as has been the norm in this field, this study has acknowledged that both genders can become abusive (albeit in different ways and with different consequences) within the context of the relationship dynamics. In view of existing statistical data indicating women in this society as the predominant victimised

¹³⁶ Panos and HBF (2002), Jemberu (2008, 15-17), Kedir and Admasachew (2010), Semahegn and Mengistie (2015, 2); Beyene (2015, 33-34). An especially negative view on Judeo-Christianity that is not theologically informed or ethnographically grounded is expressed in Megerssa (2002).

¹³⁷ IDVE1.

¹³⁸ In general, throughout the thesis the signifier 'conjugal' is used. Unless the discussion refers specifically to formal marriages and their implications or to irregular unions only, the insights emerging from this study of conjugal abuse apply to both types of unions.

parties, however, caution was given to designing the research methodology in view of women's safety.

A cosmology-sensitive and people-centred approach was also followed to approximate the local religious tradition. It was already suggested that religious traditions develop contextually, meaning that they interweave with local belief systems and socio-cultural realities in complex ways. This requires understanding what counts as theology locally and the conditions that have defined the repertoire of theological and exegetical possibilities within a given tradition, preferably through an informed insider's perspective. Thus, canonical texts and other official written materials from the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* Church have been studied and combined with consultations with local scholars. This was juxtaposed to ethnographic investigations of the vernacular religious tradition of the laity and clergy, suspending assumptions about the religious tradition or its interfaces with human subjectivities and gender relations.

Outline of the dissertation

The presentation of this study begins with Chapter 1, which provides an overview of the available scholarship on IPV from Ethiopia and Tigray to tease out some of the socio-cultural, gender and religious underpinnings as they emanate from the existing state of knowledge and to identify more specific research directions. Chapter 2 is a presentation of the methodological approach and innovations of this study to attune better to local cosmologies, with a description of the fieldwork component.

Chapter 3 provides a history-informed analysis of the local religious tradition and its hermeneutics followed by a presentation of Church teachings on marriage, the conjugal relationship and conjugal abuse. This contextualisation helps to evidence a close relationship between Church theology and the socio-cultural surroundings and to locate the clergy in this matrix. This analysis is followed and complemented by Chapter 4 that explores local conceptualisations of the faith (*haymanot*) and the relationship with culture (*bahāḥ*), a demarcation that was readily proposed by research participants. These two chapters highlight the challenge of isolating religious from socio-cultural domains of life in the local society, which serves as a foundational premise for the entire dissertation.

Chapter 5 proceeds to provide an overview of research participants' conceptualisations, rationalisations and attitudes regarding conjugal abuse. It explains the challenges that were faced following such an approach, with primary being the fact that research participants did not appear to have pinned down concrete terms and categories for conjugal abuse. This chapter provides a

first introduction to people's aetiologies and attitudes about the problem, evidencing the importance of gendered and individual parameters in local perceptions.

Chapter 6 provides an analysis of socio-cultural norms related to marriage and the conjugal relationship that were implied in research participants' discourses of conjugal abuse. The chapter undertakes to make evident these socio-cultural norms, expectations and standards, as well as their development in more recent years. These are important to understand prior to proceeding to demonstrate possible interconnections with religious parameters in subsequent chapters, apprehended in the already pronounced overlaps between *haymanot* and *bahäl*.

A closer exploration of religious parameters concomitantly with discourses of conjugal abuse is undertaken in Chapter 7. This chapter discusses the institutional matrix that emerged to be salient in discourses of conjugal abuse and its perpetuation, and especially in rationalisations of battered women's endurance. Central in these discourses were the clergy, who served typically as mediators of conjugal problems and acted as main point of reference for faith matters among the laity. While the clergy and their teachings were believed to have only positive influences on marriage, the overall picture emerged to be more complex.

Chapter 8 complements the presentation of clergy discourses and the possible linkages between religious discourses and conjugal abuse with a closer look at laity spirituality in marriage. The importance of personal faith experience emerged in the ways in which people spoke of *haymanot* as individual morality and spiritual experience, as well as in research participants' recurrent statements that embodying faith and spirituality could deter marriage problems. The chapter explores how women's and men's faith experiences in marriage could be related to conjugal abuse.

Finally, chapter 9 presents individual parameters that were invoked in research participants' aetiologies regarding the motivations of conjugal abusiveness. These aetiologies invoked the human personality (*bahri*), which appeared to be associated both with the social and the spiritual world, not without gendered underpinnings. The chapter provides a description of these discourses to suggest how perceptions about the interface of local metaphysics of human individuality could underpin conjugal abuse attitudes, and how their gendered underpinnings could be related to women's endurance of husband abusiveness.

The Conclusion returns to the main argument of the dissertation, highlighting limitations and challenges encountered in this study. The urgency for a gender and development science that eschews tendencies to theorise according to preconceived frameworks is reiterated. A summary discussion is then provided on the linkages between religious parameters and conjugal abuse realities and attitudes in Aksum. The thesis concludes with suggestions under what conditions

faith-related resources could contribute to manoeuvre the local discursive landscape toward addressing conjugal abuse in the countryside of Aksum.

Chapter 1

Intimate partner violence in Ethiopia and Tigray: Understanding the situation and identifying research directions

The state of IPV scholarship from Ethiopia

Among most often cited studies is a global report by the World Health Organisation published in 2006 which examined the scope of IPV in a number of different countries, including the region of Butajira in Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's region.¹³⁹ Standardised questionnaires were used to identify the extent and type of violence experienced by women to draw comparative conclusions. Compared to all countries included in the sample, Butajira displayed some of the highest levels of abuse, with 70.9 percent of 2261 sampled women having experienced sexual abuse or physical abuse, or both, in their lifetime. The percentage for those who experienced abuse in the last 12 months before the survey took place was 53.7. More than 90 percent was instigated by intimate partners. Furthermore, sexual violence was more prevalent than physical violence (in their lifetime: 58.6 and 48.7 percent respectively, in the last 12 months: 44.4 and 29 percent respectively).

The Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs completed another population study in 2013, conceptualising women's abuse as Violence Against Women (VAW).¹⁴⁰ The main identified objective was to assess the forms, prevalence, causes and consequences of violence against women in all regions of Ethiopia and in settings such as the workplace, the school environment and domestic spheres. A population survey was conducted in schools and workplaces and was combined with service-based data to capture the realities at the household level. Service providers included: police, women children and youth affairs office and health institutions, non-governmental organisations and women's associations. The study found high reports of primarily economic violence, such as in the form of men denying their wives financial support, or refusing to share with them property acquired during married life. Another notable finding was that most service providers associated or directly attributed the abuse to a patriarchal culture that was believed to have traditionally relegated women to a lower status than that of men. The survey did not eschew limitations associated with both population studies (which tend not to

¹³⁹ García-Moreno et al. (2005).

¹⁴⁰ MoWCYA (2013).

reveal particularities and to yield compounded results) and service data (which exaggerate the extent of violence because they are limited to interviews with victims).

The most recent and complete study of IPV that included region-disaggregated statistics was the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Population Survey (EDHS). The survey included questions both about spousal violence and other family relative or stranger violence. Like other studies, it categorised violence under emotional, physical and sexual violence, finding that 35.2 percent of Ethiopian women in the age range 15-49 had previously experienced some form of abuse by their husband or partner. In Tigray, the equivalent percentage was higher at 36.5 percent. More specifically, 27.7 percent of Tigrayan female respondents reported having experienced either physical or sexual violence and 26.7 percent reported having experienced emotional violence.¹⁴¹ Other available studies from Ethiopia or Tigray have pointed primarily to physical and sexual abuse incurred by women by their intimate partners/husbands, although sexual abuse was found to be less often communicated than was physical violence.¹⁴²

The EDHS 2005 and 2011 are also worth citing because they explored, pertinently to this project, attitudes of men and women toward wife hitting.¹⁴³ Ethiopian researchers asked if a male spouse is ‘justified’ (the original wording in Amharic or Tigrigna could not be retrieved) to hit his wife on five different occasions: when she burns the food, when she argues with him, when she goes out without telling him, when she neglects the children, and when she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him. According to the 2011 results, among women aged between 15 and 49, 68.4 percent agreed with at least one occasion, the neglect of children by women and burning the food achieving the highest scores (51.8 and 47.3 percent respectively). In Tigray, the percentage of women agreeing with at least one of the pretexts was 67.1. The percentage of women ‘justifying’ abuse on at least one occasion of the five decreased with the level of education and the level of wealth, although the transition from no education to more than secondary education was more substantive than the transition from lower to higher wealth categories.

According to the responses of men aged between 15 and 49, 44.9 percent agreed that hitting a wife is ‘justified’ at least in one of the five specified occasions. The equivalent percentage from Tigray was 46 percent. Neglecting the children (30.2) and arguing with the husband (25.8) achieved the highest scores. The first pretext was also cited by women, but the second differed for men and women. This could suggest that a woman neglecting her children was generally criticised across Ethiopia, while cooking could be a gendered expectation valued differently by men and women, and that for men abuse following argument could make the use of violence more

¹⁴¹ CSAE (2016, 44).

¹⁴² Semahegn and Mengistie (2015), Allen and Raghallaigh (2013).

¹⁴³ CSAE (2006; 2012).

understandable. As it was the case for women, the likelihood that men agreed with at least one reason for wife-beating fell with education and wealth, and substantively more with education. The more interesting statistic noted by the EDHS 2011 was that divorced, separated and widowed men tended to ‘justify’ wife beating on more occasions than men who were never married or living with a woman.¹⁴⁴ The implication may be that more divorces or singleness after a relationship failure may foster more favourable attitudes to conjugal abuse.

In 2015 a systematic review was published of previous studies on IPV conducted in Ethiopia between the years 2000 and 2014. The authors, Agumasie Semahegn and Bezatu Mengistie reviewed 15 studies, including two DHS reports. The majority had taken place in Amhara, Oromiya and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s regions. Of the 15 studies, one incorporated Tigray along with other eight regions in Ethiopia. From this systematic review it emerged that the percentages of lifetime abuse experienced by sampled women in their lifetime ranged between 20 and 78 percent. Physical abuse was reported in the range of 31-76.5 percent, while sexual abuse slightly lower in the range of 19 and 51.7 percent.

Correlates were analysed and abuse was found to associate with husband “alcohol consumption, khat chewing, family history of violence, occupation, religion, educational status, residence and decision making power.”¹⁴⁵ Women’s literacy levels, occupation and having extra partners were associated with IPV. In addition, women who believed that a wife could do nothing if the husband wanted to find a girlfriend and women with a controlling partner were more likely to be victims of physical abuse. Concurrent with that, women who had a controlling partner were also more likely to have experienced sexual abuse, which was reported more for housewives than for working women. The study also found that approximately four out of 10 women did not report the violence. The authors observed that “[i]n Ethiopia, housewives more likely kept silent...as part of family life, show of love and economic dependency on the husband.”¹⁴⁶ The reason given by the majority was fear for the consequences, whereas fewer justified their silence on the premise that abuse was “normal” or “not serious.”¹⁴⁷ Women who chose to speak out usually reported to their families, local religious elders, leaders and spiritual fathers, with few women seeking help from the police, the courts, health agencies or other legal entity.

The tendency among Ethiopian women to keep spousal abuse a secret was also suggested in a study by Amanuel Gessesew and Mengiste Mesfin which examined the magnitude of rape, associated factors and health-related problems at the Adigrat Zonal Hospital in Tigray. This found that in the period of three years 181 cases of rape were reported to the gynaecological section of

¹⁴⁴ CSAE (2011, 259).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

the hospital.¹⁴⁸ Of these, 22.1 percent were committed by current boyfriends, 5.6 by ex-husband, and 8.3 by ex-boyfriend.¹⁴⁹ Despite previous reports suggesting its existence, no rapes committed by husbands appear to have ever been reported by the women. This could reflect the fact that marital rape has not been criminalised in the country, as will be explained. The authors remarked: “In the context of Ethiopian culture where forced sex is sometimes tolerated due to cultural influences and a majority of women are economically dependent on their husbands, much less proportion of the incidents might be reported to the police and health institutions.”¹⁵⁰ It is also important to retain from this study that 22.1 percent of women reported the violence to have been committed by boyfriends, which would suggest that the women had been sexually active before an official marital relationship had been established. This confirms the existence of intimate non-marital unions, showing that these have not been unaffected by partner abuse.¹⁵¹

Annabel Erulkar’s statistical analysis of a population-based survey conducted between 2009 and 2010 in seven regions of Ethiopia, including Tigray, adds important insights on marital rape and IPV.¹⁵² She investigated the characteristics of early-married girls, namely the relationship between the age of marriage and forced first sexual intercourse with husband, and with intimate violence. In the sample, 17 percent had been married before the age of 15 and 30 percent between 15 and 17. The majority of the girls who married before 18 had never been to school, which led the author to conclude that girls who are not in school and younger than 15 may be particularly at risk of early marriage. Furthermore, having some education meant that it was less likely for the girl not to know her husband at the time of marriage. The author found that “early marriage was associated with having experienced forced first sex with one’s husband, and marginally associated with having been hit or beaten in the last three months.”¹⁵³ About 32 percent of the younger brides had experienced forced sex by their husbands, and seven percent were more likely than older brides to have recently experienced intimate partner violence. Erulkar also found that only 15 percent of the girls married before 15 were reported to have discussed with their husband “the number of children to have, HIV/AIDS, marital fidelity and use of maternal and child health services.”¹⁵⁴

Although not referring to Tigray or Christian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* populations specifically, the study of Abbi Kedir and Lul Admasachew from 2010 is instructive. This interviewed 14 victims/survivors in Addis Ababa who included one housewife, four housemaids and nine sex

¹⁴⁸ Gessessew and Mesfin (2004).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁵¹ See below.

¹⁵² Erulkar (2013).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

workers. The authors assumed a feminist aetiology of IPV and the stance that local culture was blameful for keeping women oppressed and submissive, contributing therefore to their abuse.¹⁵⁵ However, interestingly, “except for a handful of outliers, most of the women did not blame culture. Many did not believe that men could be violent and that they expected women to be subservient as a result of Ethiopian culture.”¹⁵⁶ In other words, while the theoretical framework through which spousal abuse was approached by the researchers was one that considered the gender normative framework blameful, the interlocutors seemed to have a different perception on the matter.

Another qualitative study that examined experiences and rationalisations of marital rape was Girma Tseday’s Master’s thesis at the University of Addis Ababa. Her study set out to investigate how marital rape related to and affected women’s human and reproductive rights by holding intimate interviews with clients of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), an organisation that has been providing free legal aid service for women in difficult situations. The study comprised eight participants and interviews were used to identify the support system for female victims and consequences of the violence. The author employed a radical feminist theoretical framework to conceptualise marital rape as the result of men’s control over women and combined this with standpoint feminist epistemology to justify her decision to centre on women’s experiences and articulations. She found that women generally failed to report the marital abuse “because the culture would not allow it and they fear that it would amount to pushing their husbands to go to other women.”¹⁵⁷ The recurrent theme of her study was the tradition/habit among women to keep quiet about family/couple affairs, and especially regarding the problem of sexual coercion. One woman’s reply illustrated this effectively:

I think forced intercourse is a fate of married woman. I am not the only one, everyone who comes here (to EWLA) has faced this, and our mothers have faced this too. But people do not talk about it. It’s a secret. I did not tell anyone about it.... I am not the only one who faces this problem; women all around the world face it.¹⁵⁸

As highlighted here, women suggested a normalised attitude to keep their ordeals private, but no insight was granted into what fostered this or how it related to wider beliefs, women’s spiritual life and socio-cultural norms.

In 2013 Mary Allen and Ní Raghallaigh conducted a more substantive study of IPV experiences among Tigrayan women, relying on focus groups and intimate discussions with women. According to the testimonies collected, all rural participants perceived physical and sexual violence to be commonplace in their society. The latter was associated with a culture-specific

¹⁵⁵ Kedir and Admasachew (2010, 443).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 447.

¹⁵⁷ Tseday (2011).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no page number.

expectation for wives to cater to their husbands' needs at all times.¹⁵⁹ The authors also observed that their female participants did not refer directly to their experiences of sexual abuse, but to those of their neighbours. On the other hand, when they referred to physical abuse, they spoke of their personal cases. This disparity could suggest that women felt more shame discussing about personal sexual matters or that sexual abuse was more taboo locally for unspecified reasons.

Most of the women linked abusive attitudes to men's perceptions of male superiority, viewing "themselves as being in control of sexual relationships" which made women feel obliged to serve their needs. The specific mentality was associated with "culture" which, according to the female participants "has been there for long, and it is still part of us. We females ourselves believed and accepted that we are under the male."¹⁶⁰ The female participants listed various causes for the different forms of violence that they faced, including poverty, inequality and lack of education for women. Economic interests emerged to be the most crucial factor associated with abusive marriages. According to the authors:

...many of the women believed that poverty was actually the cause of the abuse taking place. Again and again, throughout the focus groups, the participants spoke about women entering relationships or getting married because they thought they would have a better life with a husband or boyfriend, since a man would provide for them and ease the burden on their families of origin. Thus, relationships with men were often viewed as a way out of poverty.¹⁶¹

This seemed to highlight the difficult conditions women with limited education faced, making them particularly dependent on men. Furthermore, "poverty, fear, or social and family pressures or religious beliefs"¹⁶² were some of the justifications that women provided to explain why they remained in an abusive marriage. However, no further analysis was offered of these motivations.

A more recent report by the Overseas Development Institute which sampled both male and female respondents to investigate the contribution of social norms on adolescent girls' development in Ethiopia found that "there was a general view that domestic violence in general has decreased, and moreover that more egalitarian decision-making is increasingly the mark of a 'good husband'",¹⁶³ although its authors observed that "domestic abuse thrives in relationships where the wife has no access to an independent income, and becomes socially isolated due to economic reliance on her partner."¹⁶⁴ This could capture the deterioration of folklore attitudes and norms, with economic scarcity becoming a more conducive parameter to IPV in recent years.

¹⁵⁹ Allen and Raghallaigh (2013, 258).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 267.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 264-265.

¹⁶² Ibid., 269.

¹⁶³ Jones et al. (2014, 33).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

In sum, the majority of studies that were reviewed considered that the traditional socio-cultural matrix historically contributed to the victimisation of women. In their testimonies, women suggested normative cultural expectations, such as regarding marital sex, although they themselves did not explicitly appear to hold ‘culture’ accountable. A closer look at gender-related studies from Tigray and other Christian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* societies of Ethiopia is imperative to obtain a deeper insight into historical and recent gender realities and what could be sustaining gendered norms.

Gender realities and norms in Tigray and Ethiopia

Jenny Hammond’s study of Tigrayan women’s participation in the liberation struggle provides a window into women’s realities prior to and following the liberation war. One woman’s narrative echoes most accounts in the book and is particularly illustrative.¹⁶⁵ According to this testimony, the revolution changed women’s lives substantially. She reported that women had historically accepted their status as inferior, being unable to eat with men as equals, girls being less valued than boys, and women having their sexuality controlled rigidly. She also observed that “[p]hysical abuse was also traditional. If she complained to her parents, she was told it was normal and to go back to her husband.” In this reality, “[r]eligion and the priests had an important influence on women’s oppression. They wanted women to accept it.” She explained that the Church had been perceived as an authoritative institution and people naturally followed its injunctions. The woman also spoke of gender restrictions in the church, observing that “[i]n Axum there was a separate church for women and a separate burial ground. Men could go to the women’s church, but not the other way round.” Her opinion was that women’s oppression had been strengthened by the ‘religion’ and “especially the conviction that a woman was not equal, only half a man.” Most of the testimonies in Hammond’s book spoke of similar realities and confirmed a significant transition to more awareness and equality in the aftermath of the liberation struggle.

While it is not doubted that girls and women were probably suppressed through the norms and practices described by this and other interlocutors, some of the interpretations given to the actions of women and priests could be nuanced. It may be entertained that the priests did not necessarily intend women to accept their inferior position, but could have encouraged them to endure so as to preserve their marriages, which emanates from the importance that the spousal union has had in this Church tradition (Chapter 4). Women’s ululations when a boy was born need not be read as a sign that girls were valued less, but excitement because a boy would become a breadwinner and bring more security to the household (Chapter 6). In fact, Helen Pankhurst found from a study of

¹⁶⁵ Hammond (1989, 39-40).

gender relations in Menz, an indigenous Ethiopian *Tāwahādo* society in Amhara (the region bordering Tigray), that ululations could be equal for girls and boys.¹⁶⁶

Pankhurst's study from Menz provides a more comprehensive and deeply ethnographic account of women's realities. Although she also did not deny women's "oppression", her understanding was that women did "take control" where and when they could, discouraging thus monolithic theories of gender inequality. Edward Ullendorff, writing before the liberation war, hinted to an equally complex landscape when he observed that "women in traditional [Ethiopian] society occupy a subordinate, though by no means oppressed or underprivileged, place."¹⁶⁷ Thera Mjaaland who investigated women's agency in Tigray driven by curiosity to understand the mechanisms that had allowed/enabled women's empowerment to join the liberation war proposed a similar picture.¹⁶⁸ She concluded that many women in the aftermath of the liberation struggle willingly returned to their ordinary roles as mothers and wives in response to broader cultural constraints and under the influence of deeply entrenched gender norms and possibilities.¹⁶⁹

What is less questionable is that many traditional Ethiopian societies, including those in Tigray, have been historically organised on gender-segregated principles. One study that explored the socialisation of boys and girls was Donald Levine's study in Christian Amhara, which took place prior to the liberation war.¹⁷⁰ His study showed that at the time boys and girls assumed their respective roles and responsibilities from an early age according to their capacity, so that a smooth transition could be secured from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Girls spent most of the time with their mothers and boys with their fathers to learn the respective arts and chores. Both girls' and boys' responsibilities increased as they grew up, so that each became equipped to fulfil their roles when they came of marital age. In Amhara this could be at 12 or 13 years old for the girl and late teens or early twenties for boys.

A more recent study confirmed this, suggesting that Ethiopian girls and boys, regardless of ethnicity and religion, grow up with a different set of understandings and expectations.¹⁷¹ In many cultural contexts what is suitable for boys may not be considered suitable for girls. For example, girls may not be allowed to play outside after school, as opposed to boys who may be allowed to return home at dusk. Especially in rural areas, girls and boys may be educated differently because of the different expectations associated with their future, for boys to become financially independent and take a wife, and for girls to marry.¹⁷² Such gendered structures and gender-

¹⁶⁶ Pankhurst (1992b).

¹⁶⁷ Ullendorff (1960, 180).

¹⁶⁸ Mjaaland (2004, 13).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Levine (1965).

¹⁷¹ Poluha (2007).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

specific expectations could be limiting and can indeed hinder women's progress in education, professions and the public life.

However, a society premised on gender norms need not lead to a monolithic hierarchy or outright female marginalisation. As Helen Pankhurst observed in her book, gender arrangements in Ethiopian societies did not appear to be as exclusive as they are in Asian societies, nor did women undertake in the fields some of the most tedious agricultural tasks as is often the case in most parts of Africa. During previous fieldwork in the country between 2012 and 2013 in various rural parts of Tigray the author of this study also found diverse arrangements of labour, with women often dominating in cash crops and marketing activities, although household activities, such as cooking and the coffee ceremony, were associated almost exclusively with women.¹⁷³

The national legal framework on IPV

Although it is difficult to postulate what gender realities and norms might have looked like traditionally, it is accurate to observe that the post-revolutionary Ethiopian state has taken active steps to institute women's rights and to criminalise IPV. A Proclamation attached to the 1960 Civil Code led to the re-articulation of what were previously visibly patriarchal family laws. The wider agreement is that the first Civil Code was founded on profoundly Christian values, exemplified in *Fəṭḥa Nəgəšt* (ፍትሐ ነገሥት), the main Canonical book of the Church.¹⁷⁴ One of the most indicative elements of the Civil Code was found in Chapter 5: Effects of Marriage: Section 2: Personal Effects of Marriage.¹⁷⁵ The first section in article 635 is titled "Head of the Family" under which the following two provisions are specified: 1) "The husband is the head of the family," and 2) "unless otherwise expressly provided by this Code, the wife owes him obedience in all lawful things which he orders." This is followed by article 637 on the "Management of the Family" which states: "The spouses shall co-operate, under the guidance of the husband in the interest of the family, to ensure the moral and material direction of the family, to bring up the children and prepare for their establishment."

This provision on headship was entirely omitted in the Revised Family Law (2000), while the Management of the family was rearticulated under the principles of equality. The provisions under the latter are as follows: 1) "The spouses shall have equal rights in the management of the family" and 2) "The spouses shall in all cases, co-operate, to protect the security and interest of the family to bring up and ensure the good behaviour and education of the children in order to

¹⁷³ Istratii (2015a).

¹⁷⁴ Singer (1970).

¹⁷⁵ *Civil Code Proclamation No. 165/1960.*

make them responsible citizens.”¹⁷⁶ The Constitution of the country (1992) also includes regulations to redress “the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia” through affirmative measures. Article 35 is dedicated to the “Rights of Women” with the third provision stating that the “purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions.”¹⁷⁷

The legal framework, in general, stipulates fundamental human rights that also protect against IPV. Article 35 of the Constitution refers to the state’s obligation to protect women and to eliminate harmful customary practices and that “[l]aws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited.”¹⁷⁸ The Criminal Code (2004) includes in its *Book V* dedicated to the individual and family a section on crimes that are committed through harmful practices. Article 564 reads: “The relevant provision of this Code (Arts. 555–560) shall apply to a person who, by doing violence to a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union, causes grave or common injury to his/her physical or mental health.”¹⁷⁹ One researcher has argued however that including this stipulation under harmful practices “minimised the response of the criminal justice in that harmful practices entail very high sentences and the responses lied (sic) more on educating the public rather than punishment.”¹⁸⁰

There is no explicit reference to sexual offences within the intimate relationship or marriage, although this seems to be implied in Article 625 against “Taking Advantage of the Distress or Dependence of a Woman.”¹⁸¹ According to one analyst, “[t]he reasons attributed to such omission were the resistance from the law making (sic) bodies as a result of cultural considerations and partly as a result of denial of the problem.”¹⁸² A representative from EWLA alluded to such attitudes when she stated: “Most Ethiopians, men and women, accept and justify verbal and psychological abuse.”¹⁸³ Additionally, civil remedies for IPV victims, such as “as right to obtain

¹⁷⁶ *The Revised Family Law 2000*.

¹⁷⁷ *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, article 35.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *The Criminal Code of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 414/2004*.

¹⁸⁰ Moges (2009, 61).

¹⁸¹ The Article reads: “Whoever, apart from the cases specified in the preceding Article, procures from a woman sexual intercourse or any other indecent act by taking advantage of her material or mental distress or of the authority he exercises over her by virtue of his position, function or capacity as protector, teacher, master or employer, or by virtue of any other like relationship, is punishable, upon complaint, with simple imprisonment.” (*The Criminal Code of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 414/2004*).

¹⁸² Moges (2009, 60).

¹⁸³ IDVE1.

protection order, monetary/compensation relief, custody, order, residence order, shelter or medical benefits” do not appear to have been introduced yet in the Ethiopian legal framework.¹⁸⁴

The general opinion among Ethiopian researchers is that the legal framework in Ethiopia reflects a lingering influence of historical attitudes of partial acceptance or toleration of IPV. This acceptance is often evinced through folklore sayings and aphorisms that seem to condone or justify the use of violence against women. Some of the most pertinent sayings are listed by Tayechalem Moges and include the following two: “[W]omen and donkeys love the heavy stick” and “[i]f you (female pronoun) were willing to be pushed around the first time; you shouldn’t be annoyed if you get kicked to the ground later.”¹⁸⁵

This postulated tolerance could reflect in part the effect of pre-Christian customary norms and understandings. According to Norman Singer, customary laws were extant before the introduction of *Fəṭḥa Nägāst* and did not disappear afterwards.¹⁸⁶ After the Civil Code was introduced, creating a universal Code for all the peoples of Ethiopia, customary laws continued to function and might have been absorbed and institutionalised through the very provisions of the new Code.¹⁸⁷ The current legal framework has not entirely departed from the earlier Code, which means that some influences might remain today. It is, of course, not unlikely that within indigenous Christian or Muslim communities of Ethiopia, some spousal abuse could have been perpetuated through misunderstandings of religious teachings or the deployment of religious language for the perpetuation of folklore attitudes.

There is some literature that has directly associated religious beliefs with IPV.¹⁸⁸ However, the positions exposed in some of this scholarship are rarely supported with ethnographic evidence that would allow a people-centred perspective on how religious beliefs have been experienced and their effect on people’s behaviour with intimate partners or their attitudes about marriage, the conjugal relationship or conjugal abuse. Patriarchal Christian or customary perspectives on marriage that underpinned historical marriage laws may have facilitated the perpetuation of the problem, but this should not indict religious beliefs, Church teachings or all the clergy uniformly. These associations only underscore the need to shed more light on how these perceived religious beliefs and values might have interacted with customary or folklore gender norms and ideals to result in what could be pernicious attitudes about the conjugal relationship or directly conjugal abuse.

¹⁸⁴ Fite (2014, 55).

¹⁸⁵ Moges (2009, 40).

¹⁸⁶ Singer (1970).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁸⁸ See some contributions in Panos and HBF (2002) and especially Megerssa (2002).

Religious parameters of conjugal abuse in Tigray and Ethiopia

Available ethnographic studies from Christian societies of Ethiopia and Tigray provide convincing evidence that conjugal abuse was commonplace and culturally tolerated, providing weaker or stronger associations with religious parameters. For example, Alula Pankhurst's 1992 study showed that the phenomenon was pervasive in the resettlement villages and that village committees that were responsible for addressing local grievances and social issues did not generally discourage the practice of wife-beating unless the wife was pregnant at the time of the assault.¹⁸⁹ These villages included both Muslim and Christian populations primarily of Oromo and Amharan background, but the author's account did not make any associations between the tolerance of the problem and religious affiliation. Pankhurst seemed to suggest, however, that the liberation struggle disturbed these attitudes and created niches for women to appraise their situations differently and to articulate demands in new ways. One female interlocutor told the author regarding her husband: "If he thinks he can beat me like a donkey, he is wrong; since the Revolution our rights are respected. We will not wash our husbands' feet."¹⁹⁰

Helen Pankhurst's 1992 account of gender relations in Menz also confirmed the widespread problem and its tolerance. Among the female respondents cited one reported that her husband "was the hitting type", another that "he would hit me and there was forced intercourse", and yet another that "once he came back and was abusive and I decided to go."¹⁹¹ This abusiveness was generally associated with the consumption of alcohol. Most accounts also suggested some female tolerance of abuse, although in all cases women appeared to break their marriages and return home or remarry, often multiple times. The stories that women narrated about the widespread occurrence of divorce suggested various reasons, with primary being early marriage and large age difference between spouses. Anger, not having offspring, falling in love with a third person, poverty, the close association with women's inability to run effectively the home finances and relations with parents-in-law were some of women's justifications. Some of these reasons are reminiscent of the contexts in which men and women 'justified' wife-hitting in the EDHS 2011.

Pankhurst offered some of the most important ethnographic insights regarding the role of the Orthodox *Tāwahādo* Church in the local society. She made a strong affirmation that the Church encouraged the "subordination" of women by placing authority in the hands of men, although she admitted the existence of more egalitarian aspects of life, such as in marriage and divorce procedures.¹⁹² In parallel, she evidenced that the local religious tradition played a particularly influential role in the lives of women, who were often guided by their faith and found "support

¹⁸⁹ Pankhurst (1992a).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁹¹ Pankhurst (1992b, 116-117).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 6.

and explanations of their world in Christian terms.”¹⁹³ This faith system co-existed with culture-specific spirit beliefs that she considered to be almost “in opposition to the dominant Church-based ideology.”¹⁹⁴ Pankhurst suggested that these spirit beliefs served as outlets of frustration and would continue to exist until women found ways to address their material grievances.¹⁹⁵ Her overall work suggested that the Church was influential at the societal level, although little was said about how the laity understood and embodied their religious vernacular tradition, or how women’s embodiment of religious teachings could relate to their experiences of conjugal abuse or their responses to it.

Pankhurst’s account often invoked the Church as a monolithic and influential entity, although she recognised that priests were those who interacted with the people. Her account revealed that priests had a direct relationship with believers and were probably influential in some domains of life. However, she did not find priests to have a central role in non-church marriages, although they usually performed the simple role of scribes.¹⁹⁶ In contrast, the Church was involved “in the *k’urban* marriages [church marriages], and more generally, in both the rule against marriage within seven degrees of kinship and the injunction against polygamy.”¹⁹⁷ She therefore asked why the Church’s role was so minor in marriages, exemplified in the lack of parish registries.¹⁹⁸ As a possible explanation, she contemplated that perhaps “it is not the Church itself that forms the focus of the religion, but rather its priests.”¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, Ethiopians regularly attended Church for christenings and funerals; why not for marriage as well? This led Pankhurst to entertain that:

The only credible explanation is that marriages are too unstable for the Church to wish to get involved, or for the population to wish to sanctify unions. Where the Church has tried to regulate practices, it has had little success. It has attempted to prohibit polygamy, yet the practice is far from abandoned. It has imposed its own form of indissoluble marriage for priests, yet many are those who fail, and there are numerous accounts of trainee priests giving up a future in the Church because their marriage, avowed until death, breaks up well before.²⁰⁰

Pankhurst’s proposed explanation, regardless of its accuracy, evidences that the situation on the ground was not something that the Church could control, not least because both the laity and the clergy had their own mind and did not always meet the Church ideals that pertained to rigid norms regarding virginity/chastity.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 148.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 167.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 104.

More recent evidence enforces the need to differentiate Church discourses from clergy practices, without isolating the two. A report that addressed early marriage in Ethiopia noted that the Church (as formal stance) discourages early marriage and other harmful practices, but that some local priests may have perpetuated them as a result of being influenced by prevalent customary gender norms. The authors of the report found that:

The [C]hurch does not officially encourage early marriage. A large majority of our respondents (86 per cent) did not feel any religious obligation to marry their children off early. However, the beliefs and practices of a large number of rural priests was not different from those of the peasantry, over whom they exert a strong influence.²⁰¹

Thus, while most of the laypeople interviewed did not associate early marriage with Church teachings, some priests tended to be favourable and to perpetuate these practices themselves. The report furthermore suggested that priests' own actions could have strong influences on the broader society, which means that their prioritisation of virginity and practice to marry young girls²⁰² could have strengthened the norm among the laity.

The priests' concern to take a virgin wife raises the need to problematize whether this emphasis of virginity reflects Church injunctions or customary standards which the clergy absorbed through their socialisation in the same surroundings. Theoretically, the Church would expect virginity from both females and males (Chapter 4). On the other hand, socio-cultural norms might have placed emphasis on women's bodily virginity. For example, Donald Levine found that Amharan boys engaged in sexual relationships earlier than the age of marriage, apparently in order to prove their masculinity to their peers.²⁰³ It was found "the unwed girl, by contrast, must remain a virgin at all costs."²⁰⁴ This is both because virginity in a girl was a prerequisite for an honourable marriage according to social and religious standards and because "the Amhara male cherishes the sense of 'conquering' his woman."²⁰⁵ If the girl was found not to be a virgin, the male was entitled to beat her or even return her to her parents, which was a veritable disgrace. This could result in more abusive attitudes toward the girl from her family and others.

More direct associations between religious parameters and folklore attitudes of conjugal abuse were made in Thera Mjaaland's study of women's agency in Tigray in the 1990s.²⁰⁶ The author's interlocutors included Abeba (pseudonym), a woman who narrated her personal experience of conjugal violence. This case illustrates how women's attitudes of endurance could interface with beliefs about the spiritual world. Abeba narrated how she was assaulted one day by her husband for no apparent reason. Throughout her ordeal, which lasted a couple of hours, Abeba remained

²⁰¹ Dagne (1994, 37).

²⁰² Jones et al. (2014, 37).

²⁰³ Levine (1965, 99-100).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Mjaaland (2004).

quiet and endured. When Mjaaland asked her about her response, the woman explained that she thought that her husband had been possessed by Satan and was not in charge of his own senses. She thought that in this situation it was better to remain very quiet until the violence deescalated. The author explained: “She is also aware that her husband’s beating could have been caused by envy or jealousy, possibly generated by her husband’s acquaintances mocking him about the fact that she is richer than he is. Such ‘bad’ feelings are seen as creating a possibility for evil spirits to enter a body and take hold of the person.”²⁰⁷

Abeba seemed to have acted according to her beliefs and understandings about the effect of evil spiritual forces on human behaviour. This implies that women like her could be acting on the basis of profound beliefs about human behaviour vis-à-vis the spiritual world in such ways that could perpetuate their endurance. It was not made clear, however, if these beliefs emanated from the woman’s faith or reflected non-Christian folklore understandings that the woman couched in the prevalent religious idiom.

Unaddressed questions and research directions

A closer look at IPV studies from Ethiopia has shown the existence of tolerant attitudes of conjugal abuse, with possibly gendered normative underpinnings. These attitudes could be influenced by socio-cultural standards and norms or religious discourses. They could reflect personal beliefs in supernatural activity that may or may not be directly linked to Christian theology. And finally, they may reflect practical or material parameters. The review has established also that it is important to differentiate between the Church and the discourses of the clergy, recognising the potential plurality in clergy’s pronouncements and practices.

The overview also raises questions that provide important directions for this study. It was reported that many conjugal problems emanated from a failure to procreate, that some forms of abuse were associated with early marriage and that attitudes about marriage privacy could keep women quiet about their ordeals. In view of the fact that procreation has been emphasised in Judeo-Christian traditions as a divinely-instituted stipulation, could it be the case that some conjugal disagreement or separation due to childlessness has had religious underpinnings? If the extensiveness of early marriage may be related to a desire to ensure female virginity, which has been identified as a socio-cultural standard,²⁰⁸ what could have been the role of the clergy in its enforcement given the prioritisation of bodily virginity by many in their ranks? In addition, since much intimate abuse has been of a sexual nature,²⁰⁹ and has not been reported on the grounds that the affairs of the

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁰⁸ Mjaaland (2004, 110), Isaac (2012, 174), Kebede et al. (2014).

²⁰⁹ Gessesew and Mesfin (2004).

couple are private or that a husband has the right to expect his wife's sexual services,²¹⁰ could this denote associations with a local understanding of marriage, honour or male headship, as it has been suggested in other Orthodox societies?²¹¹

Furthermore, a number of researchers found that women may stay in abusive relationships because of their children. Do women's understandings of their roles and responsibilities as mothers and wives reflect their personal priorities or might these be motivated or enforced by wider societal expectations, religious discourses and women's personal faith? More importantly, why is it that battered women themselves would not blame 'culture', while the majority of researchers were convinced that spousal abuse has been condoned within local cultures? Could women be implying something else by referring to 'culture' not immediately captured in their pronouncements?

In addition, many abused women were said to report their problems to traditional leaders and priests. This raises another set of questions: What has been conventionally the role of priests in the conjugal relationship and the resolution of marriage problems? Have the clergy generally condemned the abuse or encouraged the victims to endure and not to abandon their homes and families? And how might their own attitudes been formulated in view of official Church discourse and more folklore understandings? In fact, what has been historically the stance of the Church about conjugal violence, provided that this has been articulated as such?

Such questions evidence that relating conjugal abuse attitudes and realities to local religious parameters would require developing a better understanding of: a) Church teachings on gender relations and marriage-related issues, b) the nature of the vernacular religious tradition and the interface with socio-cultural norms, c) local standards and ideals governing marriage and spousal behaviour and their possible gendered underpinnings, d) clergy discourses about marriage and conjugal abuse and the possible interface with the local socio-cultural matrix, and e) the embodiment of religious beliefs and socio-cultural norms by the laity as relating to conjugal abuse attitudes. All these dimensions have been explored in this study and are presented roughly in this order. Prior to proceeding with the analysis, the methodological approach is described in the following chapter.

²¹⁰ Allen and Raghallaigh (2013, 258), Kedir and Admasachew (2010).

²¹¹ Geanacopoulos (1999), Gassin (2015).

Chapter 2

Methodological approach and fieldwork

Researching conjugal abuse sensitive to the local religious context

This research combined a theology-informed investigation into the local religious tradition with a gender-sensitive analysis of conjugal violence in the countryside of Aksum, engaging with Ethiopian theologians and Church scholars, clergy and laity (women and men). It is the argument of this dissertation that any analysis that engages with religious communities must be informed both by the view of ‘insiders’ who have a theology-based familiarity with the tradition and the understandings and experiences of the laity. While in recent years, religion and development scholars have pronounced the importance for interpretative approaches centring on the perceptions and discourses of the believers themselves, the field lacks a more systematic argumentation for integrating theological analysis, especially in regards to Eastern and Oriental Christian traditions.²¹² This may not be unrelated to paradigms in the study of religion that have moved away from textual work to focus on embodied experience.²¹³

The study of Christianities outside of the Western European epistemological framework must incorporate, however, a more comprehensive, history-grounded theological analysis for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is especially urgent in gender studies to prioritise local hermeneutics in order to reverse transpositions of Christian theology on non-western (Christian) traditions, as visible in historical paradigms of gender and theology/religion(s) studies.²¹⁴ It is understood that religious traditions are socially constructed and while they might share certain premises, their exegetical approaches and normative hermeneutics are contextual and need to be discovered. Subsequently, by exploring their theological premises it is possible to obtain insight into their socio-cultural surroundings, and vice versa.²¹⁵ Furthermore, understanding theological discourses grants a better sense into the evolution and malleability of a religious tradition, which are important

²¹² This becomes evident in the field’s assessments provided in Jones and Petersen (2011) and Deneulin and Rakodi (2011, 51-52), as well as the majority of works reviewed in the Introduction. It is not denied, however, that numerous efforts have been made in this direction, especially in the Indian context (e.g. Tomalin 2007; Bradley 2011; Devin and Deneulin 2011) and regarding Muslim societies (e.g. Bayes and Tohidi 2001).

²¹³ Such tendencies, in turn, follow from historical paradigms that tended to approach diverse faiths in a more essentialist-comparative manner. See Appendix 3.1.

²¹⁴ A detailed analysis is provided in Istratii (forthcoming).

²¹⁵ See also the argument made about how societal values influence ecclesiastical discourses in Devin and Deneulin (2011, 63).

considerations if religious parameters are to be harnessed for addressing local problems. Finally, it is important to consider that especially faiths of an Eastern or Oriental tradition, such as the one presented here, are strongly premised on claims of historical immutability and preservation of divine revelations. While lay believers are expected to have diverse understandings and perceptions regarding their religious tradition, their general framework and logic is expected to emanate from basic dogmatic premises, deviation from which would risk being seen as heresy.²¹⁶ Since most Eastern and Oriental Christian traditions have been historically embedded in local folklore traditions, there is need for an approach that neither isolates Church discourses from vernacular faith, nor equates the two.

The gender-sensitive analysis of conjugal abuse realities and attitudes in the local cosmological and sociological context was achieved through an ethnographic approach. This built on works that have attempted in recent years to marry anthropological methods with a gender perspective to refine religion and development research and practice²¹⁷ and existing anthropological studies on conjugal violence that have suspended easy predefinitions or aetiologies of violence.²¹⁸ The study was especially influenced by Laura McClusky's investigation of conjugal abuse among a Mayan community in Belize.²¹⁹ At the time of writing, McClusky had felt that most domestic violence research had been clinical or sociological and had focused primarily on the experience of violence, often approaching the phenomenon in a "peopleless manner." She decided to focus on the emotions, desires, motivations and personal experiences of living women, without being limited to their experiences as victims of domestic violence. Following the contours of McClusky's work, this research took a "people-centred" ethnographic approach to explore local understandings and attitudes of conjugal abuse through the holistic worldview and experience of research participants. However, the project engaged with both men and women to achieve a more inclusive analysis.

The limitations of ethnography and the study's methodological innovations

Despite its strengths, ethnography presents epistemological limitations and begets ethical and safety concerns, especially in regards to domestic violence research.²²⁰ The epistemological concerns identified in the introduction begot the important question of how a suspension of

²¹⁶ At a roundtable about theology and ethnography Don Seeman observed the same about Islamic traditions (Seeman 2010, 12).

²¹⁷ Such as Tomalin (2006) and Bradley (2011).

²¹⁸ Levinson (1989), Counts, Brown and Campbell (1992), McClusky (2001), Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) and Auyero (2015).

²¹⁹ McClusky (2001).

²²⁰ Fontes (1998; 2004), Ellsberg et al. (2001), WHO (2001), Ellsberg and Heise (2002; 2015), Pérez, Castaño and Cases (2007), UN Women (2012), Kelmendi (2013), Downes, Kelly, and Westmarland (2014) and Wiles et al. (2005; 2007).

metaphysical assumptions regarding gender or religion might be achieved by someone espousing a different cosmology or trained in a western epistemological paradigm, who might be inclined to think in certain ways about the domains of life under research.²²¹ While most religion and development scholars are not unaware of these issues, even rigorous anthropological and historical works with a gender perspective have not problematized or made sufficiently visible how the researcher's epistemological location could impact the fieldwork process.²²² Additionally, western anthropology had been for the most part of its history an obscure field and a very subjective process with the anthropologist collecting, collating and 'interpreting' the data away from the eye of the reader.²²³ This recognition raised the need to orchestrate a more transparent and inclusive ethnographic research approach to the extent possible. In response, some strategies were followed:

- Efforts were made to be transparent about the background of this researcher to the research participants and to convey to the readers how this could have affected the research process. This chapter includes a detailed description of how the research was articulated and how the researcher approached the community and cultivated relationships.
- The diary in which the fieldwork experience and its components were recorded daily, included thorough descriptions about the role of the researcher in the ethnographic occurrence, such as the context in which a discussion had occurred, the dynamics of a discussion, the formulation of questions and responses, emotional charge and other elements that could influence how information was stimulated, shared and received. The rationale behind important linguistic choices and modes of asking questions has been explained, while quotations often include the voice of the researcher to evidence the influence on interlocutors' articulations. Due to word limits, these references are not as extensive as it would have been desired.
- Secondly, since translation is so intricately embedded in a distinct local cosmology and socio-cultural reality which gives meanings and connotations to a language, the analysis has tended to employ local terms, which have been explained in reference to their discursive deployment on the ground. Throughout the thesis the author has prioritised the meanings and connotations suggested by research participants, with more comprehensive dictionary references being relegated to footnotes under each term, directing to an Appendix.
- Finally, efforts have been made to be transparent about the ways and methods by which data were analysed and interpreted in view of participants' communication strategies

²²¹ Clifford (1986), Keesing et al. (1987), Narayan (1998), Sillitoe (1998), Spickard and Landres (2002, 84) and Kapoor (2004).

²²² Bradley (2011) and Urban-Mead (2015).

²²³ Keesing et al. (1987) and Spickard and Landres (2002).

defined by both the inherently unequal relationship with the researcher, local politics and individual psychology influencing their pronouncements.

While such strategies do not make the anthropological project a less subjective experience that is ultimately one individual's articulation of one individual's existence in a certain context for a certain time, this more transparent approach was expected to make more visible the arbitrariness and limitations of anthropological investigations.

Such strategies were supplemented with participatory methods for cultural analysis in an effort to provide research participants with more opportunities and platforms to influence the ethnographic process. A dialogical method for data collection and cultural analysis had been previously employed by the researcher for Master's fieldwork among a Muslim community in Senegal to achieve a cosmology-informed gender analysis in that context.²²⁴ Within that experience the participatory methodology helped to delineate together with the participants the contours of their socio-cultural realities, capturing along the way some diversity in local opinions and understandings.²²⁵ Echoing other scholars, it was found that participatory research methods were particularly useful in capturing local standards or general beliefs, norms and practices, providing also insights into local power politics and socio-cultural configurations.²²⁶ These were the primary reasons for employing this method, which is explained in more detail below.

Research timeline and methods

The fieldwork was completed within approximately 13 months of research, which proceeded as follows:

(A) (September – December 2016) London: dedicated to investigations with the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* diaspora to explore their views on gender norms and relations, marriage, the conjugal relationship and conjugal violence.²²⁷ This research stage included: a) attending weekly liturgies, teaching sessions and choir practices in two London churches, b) conducting some life-

²²⁴ Istratii (2015b; 2015c).

²²⁵ Istratii (2018).

²²⁶ Price and Hawkins (2002, 1358), Bergold and Thomas (2012) and Elmusharaf et al. (2017).

²²⁷ This stage in research was not planned, but resulted from having to wait some extra months for a visa to Ethiopia to be issued. Multiple ways were employed to approach and create linkages with the diaspora community in London. Conduits were tried through established Ethiopian and Eritrean community development organisations located in different areas of London, The Anglo-Ethiopian Society and other organisations. The most effective way was to approach churches in London to obtain support from clergy to attend liturgies and mingle with the faithful. The churches that were attended regularly were the Tserha Tsion Church in Hackney and St Gabriel's Church close to Belsize Park. The researcher also participated in church-organised trips to destinations outside of London for celebrations, such as the day of the Cross in Stevenage and St Stephen day in Gloucester.

based interviews with primarily Tigrayan men and women, and c) holding some consultations with some clergy. While this work deviated from the primary concern to investigate attitudes of conjugal violence in the typical village context, it added important insights because most interviewees were raised and socialised in Ethiopia, with some being born and having lived part of their lives in rural areas. The data were evaluated mindful of the fact that members of the diaspora community could have looked back with some sense of nostalgia or judgement about the “backwardness” of the countryside in view of their new socio-cultural *locus* in London.

(B) (December 2016 – January 2017) Addis Ababa: dedicated to researching the local theological tradition and the situation of IPV in the country and preparing for fieldwork. This research stage included: a) reading and analysing the Ge’ez original and Amharic commentary on verses referring to marriage and the spousal relationship with a competent assistant from one of the theological colleges, b) seeking consultations on domestic violence in the country with leading academics at the University of Addis Ababa, representatives at EWLA and one female theologian,²²⁸ c) holding interviews and consultations with theologians and Church scholars,²²⁹ d) examining theses, dissertations and other research materials held on the main campus of the Addis Ababa University (AAU), and e) holding intensive Tigrigna language courses at AAU.

(January 2017) Meqele: about a week was dedicated to holding more consultations with theologians at the established theological college of the regional capital.²³⁰ The aim was to understand better the curriculum of the traditional Church education and priests’ exposure to Church theology and to establish what their expertise could have been historically in terms of marriage theology.

(January – February 2017) Aksum city: about three weeks were dedicated to visiting villages to select a research site, while living with a local family. Selection was informed by research-related questions (e.g. the situation of domestic violence locally and availability of local churches and monasteries) and more practical factors (e.g. distance from the city, accessibility and transportation, availability of electricity and water, terrain and availability of cumulative and sex-disaggregated demographics). Initially, staff members at the *La’alay May Ćaw wäräda* (ላላይ ማይ ጩው ወረዳ) office in Aksum city were consulted and on the basis of the information obtained, five out of 16 communities in the countryside were identified for visits. During these visits, consultations/interviews were held with local village administrators, court workers, police officers,

²²⁸ See List of Experts consulted.

²²⁹ These included the dean and some teachers of the Holy Trinity Theological College, a teacher at the St Paul’s Theological College, a member of the Council of Scholars of the Church, other Church scholars and Ge’ez experts and theology graduates. See List of Experts consulted.

²³⁰ This included the dean and numerous teachers at the Frumentius Theological College (FTC). See List of Experts consulted.

health personnel and some priests to obtain a sense of conjugal problems in the communities. It should be noted here that neither the Women's Affairs Office located in Aksum city, nor the local social courts and police units registered cases under a strict 'conjugal abuse' category. The final selection of a research site was not based on actual statistics but cases reported to the local social courts and the Appeals Court located in Aksum city, as well as informal testimonies by different parties in the local community. At this stage, some monasteries and churches were also visited to speak with priests about conjugal problems in their communities.

(February 2017- July 2017) countryside and city of Aksum: dedicated to immersing in local life. At the end of February the researcher moved permanently to a village community located 17 kilometres away from the city of Aksum. A second community three kilometres on the outskirts of Aksum city was also selected for research. Two village communities were selected to capture more diversity (e.g. in view of their distance from the city and urbanisation) and to address safety concerns in domestic violence research, which proved less pertinent. The names and demographic characteristics of the specific communities are not provided to reduce even further the likelihood of participant disclosure.

However, it can be noted that the first community was one among the largest *ṭabəya* units or villages in the *wäräda* with a population of about 8,000. The second community had a population of over 5,000. Both had a fairly balanced female to male ratio. Local livelihoods consisted primary in farming teff, however, in the second community fewer households owned viable land and more males worked in driving, construction and day work in the city of Aksum, Adwa and the surroundings. The second community additionally displayed a high ratio of non-locals, including many soldiers, while the first village community was comprised primarily of native Aksumites. In addition, the two village communities presented slightly different conditions in terms of conjugal problems. One community emerged to be fairly typical, with primary problems being disputes over child maintenance and divorce settlements—the most ubiquitous problems across the countryside. The other community had reported a murder case resulting from conjugal conflict just the year prior to this research.

Living in one of the two villages permanently evidenced that many things were changing in terms of livelihoods, religious life, gender norms and intimate relationships. Such changes were more discernable in the city of Aksum and it was decided to dedicate approximately 1.5 months of research in the urban context to make better sense of processes and forms of change affecting also the countryside. However, there was no clear divide between 'old' and 'new' mentalities and lifestyles between countryside and the city with change being pervasive in all contexts and taking various forms. Alternating between the different sites was expected to provide a more nuanced picture of how attitudes and behavioural patterns varied and the possible mechanisms contributing to changes in conjugal abuse attitudes and realities.

While stationed in the village, frequent travel was made to the city to buy provisions that were not available in the countryside. Many weekends were spent with different families in the city, further discussing research and observing living patterns and relationship dynamics in these diverse contexts. In addition, frequent visits were made to the Church administrative office located in Aksum, where numerous local theologians and experts were interviewed. At this time, some interviews were also conducted with teachers at the St Yared traditional religious school in Aksum.²³¹ During the final and longer stay in Aksum city, interviews were held with university students, shop owners, drivers, waiters and waitresses, professionals from all walks of life, clergy, monks and visitors of all types. In addition, the researcher attended teaching sessions offered by the Church and the *Mahābārā Qədusan* (ማኅበረ ቅዱሳን; MQ), the All-Saints Association under the Sunday School Department of the Church which has been at the forefront of re-invigorating the traditional faith in recent years, especially among younger and learned generations.

The grounding in one village combined with frequent visits to the second village and the city provided plenty of opportunities to explore both rural and urban contexts and to create relationships with local residents that enabled observations into their intimate lives. In general, information provided by these close informants about the local society and attitudes proved to be especially insightful, but due to the enhanced subjective bias involved, more effort was put into exploring its accuracy from the perspective of less proximate research participants.

(August 2017- September 2017) Addis Ababa: dedicated to working with assistants on transcription and some translations, as well as consulting about the findings with various experts at the theological colleges and others mentioned earlier.

During the fieldwork, participating in and observing local life, holding life-based personal interviews and organising dialogical workshops provided the main methods for this study. Initial immersion in the community life allowed familiarisation with the local language, norms and organisation of livelihoods, and everyday practices, social norms and prevalent beliefs. Some dialogical workshops were organised to tease out general understandings and society-wide expectations regarding men and women, inter-gender relations, marriage and spousal expectations in a more interactive manner with different people in a variety of social configurations. As the research progressed, workshops incorporated more analytical discussions prompted by fieldwork observations.

The personal life-based interviews offered the means for more personal and reflective discussions with men and women that were vital for exploring individual conceptualisations and rationalisations of conjugal abuse in conjunction with individual life experience, situation and

²³¹ These included interviews with both male and female teachers. See List of Experts consulted.

temperament. The general strategy of the researcher was to prompt discussion about the conjugal relationship in general in their society and it was avoided asking directly about personal experiences of conjugal violence. However, most participants shared these nonetheless where and when pertinent, which enabled an insight into more specific cases of conjugal abuse (as defined locally).

After obtaining informed consent, letting participants know that the conversation could touch on the sensitive issue of married life abuse, interlocutors were invited to discuss conjugal life in their society. The researcher often prompted discussion by referring to the high rates of divorce that were ubiquitously affirmed, inviting interlocutors to consider the reasons behind them. In most cases, research participants focused on discussing conjugal problems that were most relevant to their realities and they often shared their own marriage and divorce stories. At this stage, the researcher invited participants to explain how they understood ideal/healthy and harmful/abusive conjugal relationships. This conversation usually raised questions about normative attitudes and standard behaviour in marriage. At this stage, research participants were asked to explain how they conceptualised gender equality and why they thought like this. As a final theme, interlocutors were asked about the role of religious teachings and faith in married life, the stance of the Church on marriage and conjugal violence as they had heard it articulated by local clergy, as well as their understandings and possible experience with pastoral teachings and mediating practices.

The interviews with theologians and scholars of the faith were driven by the aim to ascertain the local theological tradition and to achieve a more contextualised understanding of the local religious tradition as it developed historically within its indigenous context. The interviews with clergy, on the other hand, were expected to add more nuance into local marriage practices and religious life, as well as the clergy's marriage-related discourses and attitudes regarding conjugal violence. The researcher was especially committed to exploring how clergy delivered sermons and if these made reference to married life and relevant problems, what sources they cited (if any) and what religio-cultural norms underpinned these public discourses and pastoral activities.

Table 1: All research groups and sample sizes

Research group	Total size (N)	Females (f)	Males (m)	Interviews (voice-recorded or note-taking)	Informal discussions
London					
Laypeople in London	14	8	6	9	5
Clergy in London	2	-	2	1	1
Ethiopia (excluding Aksum)					
Domestic violence experts in Ethiopia	4	4	-	4	-
Theologians and teachers of the faith in Ethiopia	11	1	10	9	2
Aksum city and countryside					
Laypeople in Aksum	122	76	46	61	61
Clergy and monks in Aksum	23	-	23	12	11
Teachers of the faith in Aksum	12	2	10	9	3
Participatory workshops	56	31	25	-	-
Total	244	122	122	105	83
<p>* Personal interviews followed the formal process of asking for consent prior to the conversation taking place. Most were voice-recorded, but not all according to the preference of the interlocutor.</p> <p>**Informal discussions were more impromptu, opportunistic discussions of considerable length that had a more general (as opposed to personal) tone. Multiple discussions could be had with the same interlocutor. The information was transferred to the fieldwork diary and then collated into a single record of discussions per interlocutor. Permission to use the information (unattributed) was asked usually during or after the conversation.</p>					

Entering the field and ‘doing’ fieldwork

Decisions about how to enter the field, how to recruit participants and how to be in the field were crucial in this study because of epistemological, ethical and safety concerns that needed to be addressed. A primary concern was to justify conducting this study in the specific community since local residents could ask why the researcher chose their society to research conjugal abuse and could expect to see some benefit resulting from it. The intention was to be open about research motivations, but this begot other dilemmas. According to the Code of Ethics of the Association of Social Anthropologists, researchers should be overt when seeking permissions for research from local governments, communities, or ‘gatekeepers.’²³² On the other hand, domestic violence scholars recommend researchers to be as secretive as they can about their research topic

²³² ASA Ethical Guidelines (2011, 2).

for the sake of reducing the likelihood that women with abusive partners will be put at risk.²³³ Researchers of domestic violence have also been advised not to do research with men where women are interviewed.²³⁴ It is believed that interviewing men might lead them to become aggressive with their partners as a result of feeling threatened by the research questions (and the risk of disclosure), or as retaliation to the wife for participating. Implicit in these concerns is the assumption that most violence is enacted by men on women.

While this study has avoided strict typologies, women's safety was prioritised in view of studies from Ethiopia pointing to the extensive abuse of women. In general, the approach taken was to be open about the objectives of the research, but use neutral language to describe what could be a fairly sensitive topic. The researcher let people know that she had been made aware of the widespread divorces and marriage problems in the local society and that she was curious to explore why this was the case in view of the faith that taught peace and non-violence. Most interlocutors resonated with this research objective and most were positively predisposed when they heard about the researcher's Eastern Orthodox background, which the researcher always mentioned in her introductions to be transparent. As the fieldwork proceeded, relations were established with the Church administrators responsible for the countryside located at the ecclesiastical office (*betä kəhənät*; ቤተ ክህነት) in Aksum city. This facilitated building trust with the local clergy and subsequently with the laity. It was a priority to explain the research project and to obtain approval from local administrators, police and court workers, women's associations' representatives, health agents and other parties to reassure the public.

In response to safety concerns, the initial plan was to engage with women in one community and with men in another. However, it was found early in fieldwork that neither research secrecy nor gender-exclusive tactics would be entirely feasible, appropriate, or well-received in the local society. As it was suggested to the researcher in numerous discussions with local gender violence experts in Addis Ababa, representatives from the Women's Affairs Office in Aksum city, local workers in the village communities and women in the resident population, men would likely become suspicious and hostile if they were to be dismissed from the investigations. If the researcher did not work equally with them, taking the time to explicate the research questions and aims to men and women in the general public, people would likely misunderstand and assume that there was a hidden motive behind the research, which could unwittingly create more mistrust and inter-gender tension. Furthermore, conducting research with women without engaging the men in the same community could result in them feeling threatened or frustrated, which could create problems both for their spouses and this study. In the field it was indeed found that conducting

²³³ Ellsberg et al. (2001), WHO (2001) and Ellsberg and Heise (2002, 1600; 2005). Fontes (1998) is among the few publications that draw attention to the need for cross-cultural sensitivity in domestic violence research.

²³⁴ Ellsberg et al. (2001), WHO (2001), Ellsberg and Heise (2002) and Fontes (2004).

research with women necessitated having the support of the men. If dismissed, husbands could simply advise or discourage wives from becoming involved with the researcher. A woman on good terms with her husband would not risk conflict only to talk to a stranger for the sake of social research. Conducting interviews in private with women did not resolve this problem altogether because women would hesitate to initiate contact with the researcher in the first place if their husbands expressed suspicion. Of course, whilst it was possible to let husbands and men know of the research so as to obtain their support, but recruit only from the female population, this solution in reality implied dismissing men and treating them as less important. This was simply unacceptable locally.

As it was mentioned, in introducing the research, caution was given to presenting the topic in broad terms as *a study of marriage and conjugal problems in connection to people's Orthodox Tāwahādo faith* and to avoid references to conjugal violence or women's abuse. Terms such as 'violence' or 'abuse' were never used during public introductions so as not to create unnecessary stress to either victims or perpetrators. Emphasis was also placed on the study's concern with faith, speaking often of the interest in understanding marriage issues vis-à-vis people's faith. These tactics enabled the researcher to be honest and also to neutralise somehow the research topic.

Recruitment approaches

Recruitment was pursued in multiple ways according to the research context, the method of research and the gender of research participants considerate to the aforementioned ethical and safety concerns. Domestic violence researchers have emphasised the need to recruit participants in ways that consider the possible consequences that participation may have for women.²³⁵ For example, it is agreed that women must be interviewed in privacy to ensure that there is no risk to their well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, researchers must ensure that interviewees know the content of the interview and can give consent in an informed manner. Women who are in abusive relationships tend to experience depression, high-levels of stress and other psychological symptoms that must be accounted for if the research is not to exacerbate these. Researchers must therefore take active steps to reduce the risk of re-traumatisation.

In the village community of residence, interviews were held with most women in the researcher's compound to protect their anonymity. It was the primary concern of the researcher to let prospective participants know beforehand the nature of the questions so as to give them time to

²³⁵ Ellsberg et al. (2001), WHO (2001) and Ellsberg and Heise (2002).

assess the risks involved and to decide if and when they wanted to hold the interview.²³⁶ It was a fortunate outcome to rent a room in the compound of a well-connected woman who worked at the local seed house and whose husband had left to work in another city. On non-work days, this woman braided hair and this meant that she had regular visits from female clients from all over the *ṭabāya*. This provided invaluable and ample opportunities to talk to women with diverse social, educational and marital backgrounds and to explore research questions in a comfortable, gender-exclusive context. Many discussions were group discussions focusing primarily on men's and women's societal conditions, marriage and conjugal problems or more private chats with single interlocutors. Many of the landlady's clients agreed to come back on another day to conduct thorough interviews. As opposed to spontaneous chats and group conversations, these private interviews were recorded with the consent of the interlocutors. To further ensure that the identities of the women remained secret, the researcher avoided interviewing men who were husbands of women who had been previously interviewed. Women might not want or not be able to keep their participation secret from their husbands, and the researcher wanted to give no reason for conflict or disagreement between spouses. It was also not advisable since it could cause these women's husbands stress or embarrassment thinking that their wives had divulged personal information to a stranger. It should be noted, however, that there were some exceptions in which both spouses were interviewed (at different times) in circumstances that will be explained below.

In recruiting men, safety concerns in this society were minimal. While all men were invited to hold the interview with the researcher in the latter's compound, the door of which was always left half-open to ensure that the interview proceeded transparently but uninterrupted, it was often the case that many men were interviewed in the mud-road outside of their home gates, at local beer houses or on other occasions in the village. The researcher tried laboriously to isolate the male interviewee to achieve a more intimate conversation, and in most cases this was succeeded. However, there were instances when an interview would be started with a male outside of his home gate and other males would approach out of curiosity. In such cases, the researcher quickly readjusted the questions and broadened the conversation to include everyone. It should be mentioned that while opportunities to build relationships with women were profuse, it was more challenging to find men to talk to in the village, especially during certain periods. Concurrent with findings from the literature review, this community of research emerged to be deeply gender-segregated in terms of livelihoods, which meant that women spent most of their time at home or in home-related activities and men outside of the home in paid daily work or farming. While it was easy to invite women to drink coffee boiled by the researcher the traditional way, it was not possible to do the same with men as effectively both for culture-specific and practical factors. In

²³⁶ As Lisa Aronson Fontes writes in a book addressed to domestic violence victims, women in coercive relationships are the best judges of how their partners might react (Fontes 2015, 192).

general, men seemed unwilling to wait for the entire length of the coffee ceremony and most tended to refuse invitations to drink coffee outside of their own homes. The majority of male interviewees were recruited on non-work days, during important celebrations, during Lent and in evenings after they returned home from work.

This brings attention to another detail that is important to mention. Drinking coffee in this society has been a deeply-ingrained tradition and women have conventionally boiled coffee routinely. The traditional coffee ceremony involves women roasting the coffee beans, grinding them manually in a traditional gourd and boiling the grinded coffee in the traditional jar. The coffee is boiled three times, which means that those who participate in the coffee ceremony are served three times a cup of coffee. Needless to say, the coffee ceremony was found to be an invaluable tool for creating time for personal conversations and it was a priority to master it and to boil coffee for visitors and many other visitors who arrived to the landlady's home or the researcher's compound as a way of expanding networks and building relationships with people. There were days when coffee was boiled two or three times, which means that about six hours of the day were dedicated to drinking coffee and chatting with different individuals. It is hard to recollect a single day that was not spent in the village and did not involve boiling or drinking coffee. The coffee ceremony lasted usually from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending also on the length of the conversations that emerged. In this setting, the researcher always introduced her background and research topic to ensure that women knew that discussions could inform investigations. Due to the centrality of the coffee ceremony, this was incorporated also in the participatory workshops held with women.

Furthermore, fortuitous recruitment of participants happened during regular car rides from the village to the city, especially during market days. Most local women travelled to the city at least once or twice in the week to buy cooking necessities, while many men travelled for daily work in Aksum. These rides were always eventful and due to the limited space in the car (a minibus that most drivers overfilled to maximise profits), the researcher usually entered in conversations with other passengers. These conversations referred generally to marriage in the local society or the vernacular religious tradition, which could be discussed in public. It was in car rides also that the researcher met many of the priests working and living in the community. Having established relations with the Church administrative office, priests were generally welcoming and polite. Some of these conversations resulted in stimulating conversations about the religious practices of the community, pastoral approaches and clergy's own understandings and level of theological knowledge. These car rides also confirmed some of the most problematic aspects of clergy life, exemplified in inebriated priests returning from some religious association/gathering (*maḥbär*; ግጎር). These local religious meetings convened in the name of saints and other religious

occasions were a final recruitment method and a rich context for participation in and observation of local religious practice and life.

In the second village, which was visited frequently (once or twice per week), the researcher followed a different recruitment method. Two public introductions had been made, one by the local administrative officer and one by the most learned member of the clergy at the local church after Sunday liturgy, with local residents apprehending the researcher's coming. The researcher typically walked alone around the village, introducing the research at house level. If house owners were welcoming, the researcher asked to hold an interview. If both spouses were present, the researcher promised to return on another day. This measure was taken to ensure that the conversation remained private to increase disclosure and to reduce the risk of potential stress in both men and women. As another measure, the researcher approached first the homes of women who were known to be divorced or widowed, then married women and men only after acquiring some familiarity with the community.

Prior to that, advice was asked from local gender experts, health workers, secretaries of women's associations or social court staff whether any serious cases of previous or on-going abuse were known so as to be avoided at first instance. The researcher also ensured that she introduced the nature of the research to the woman when she first came to the gate of her house to meet the researcher. This gave the woman time to assess any risks involved and to refuse entrance to the researcher if necessary. When children opened the door, the researcher asked for their mother. In rare cases where men opened the door it was because the wife was not at home, which made it possible to speak to the husband in private. However, there were cases when homes were visited and the women invited the researcher to hold interviews with them in the presence of their husbands. They insisted on this even after the intention to discuss issues related to conjugal abuse in society was made explicit. In two cases the researcher was literally dragged inside the home to talk to both spouses who had apprehended her coming (as a result of earlier public introductions). The counter-offer to talk to each spouse on a different occasion was usually accepted. Therefore, some of the interviews were held with couples, but occurring at different times.

Such decisions were made progressively during fieldwork and in response to situations that arose which were addressed in the most sensible ways in consultation with local experts. For example, it was reasoned that the risk for a woman being seen with the researcher in the village of residence was higher than the risk for a woman in the second village where the researcher was only a regular visitor. Prospective abusive partners in the village of residence could feel more threatened seeing the researcher around their wives. In addition, while in the first village more people associated the research with women's issues in general (perhaps because interviews were started with women and the researcher spent time with the health agent during the first days), in the

second village everyone underscored the religious aspect of the research, since the local priest had made one of the introductions. Therefore, while in the first village it was deemed necessary to ensure the secrecy of the interviews with women, in the second village it was found possible to engage in conversations with women more openly.

The urban context also provided the researcher with ample opportunities for recruiting research participants. In the city, the researcher resided in three different compounds and spent weekend nights in the homes of friends. Upon arrival to the city of Aksum, the researcher lived with a family comprised of husband, wife and one child who made a living by selling oil at the local market. During the last research stages, one month was spent living with a middle-aged couple with four children who were wealthier and displayed more modern lifestyles but still preserved customs encountered in the villages. About six weeks or longer were spent in yet another compound with three families. Two of them were recently married couples who had city jobs and displayed more modern understandings and positions regarding gender relations. The third was a recently divorced mother who happened to be the daughter of a priest and seemed to share much with rural interlocutors. During this period, the researcher attended regularly teaching and praying sessions with members of the *MQ*. These different contexts provided opportunities for ethnographic observations of married life and recruitment of participants from diverse backgrounds in terms of economic and social status, educational level, employment type and relationship to the Church. It should be noted that most of the people of the city had been born or had lived part of their lives in the countryside around Aksum, Adwa and the surroundings and were able to offer comparative comments. In addition, most displayed or continued rural practices and attitudes observed in the village(s), which evidenced again that any analytical dichotomisation such as rural/urban and traditional/modern was inapplicable and misleading.

Clergy were recruited in village and city context, also when visiting local churches and attending liturgies. The community of permanent research alone counted seven local churches, most of which were visited at least once and some regularly to attend liturgies or to talk to priests. Priests were interviewed also during initial visits to rural communities around Aksum to identify a fieldwork site. Finally, clergy were recruited at the Church administrative office in the city centre. After establishing communication with the administrator, the researcher visited the administrative office on Saturdays to interview teachers and to chat with clergy who happened to be present (with many coming to receive their monthly salary). Some interviews were personal and were held with religious scholars, but the majority were group discussions involving priests waiting to be assisted. Seated in the middle of the room and being the centre of attention, the researcher found the opportunity to trigger discussions by referring to her research progress and inviting listeners to react to the research observations.

It should be underscored here that in recruiting participants across contexts the aim was to capture as much diversity and depth of thought as possible. The primary criterion for judging saturation was whether it was felt that the researcher had captured multiple articulations, views and perspectives that resulted in a complex picture of the researched topics within each segment of society and the Church. However, it should be mentioned that more interviews were held with women than with men, although this was compensated by a large number of informal and impromptu discussions with men of different backgrounds in a variety of contexts. Similarly, while it would have been desirable to interview more local clergy to capture more diversity of thought, this was hindered by the fact the clergy could not always be found in the church premises.

Participatory workshops as auxiliary tools for cultural description and analysis

Dialogical workshops were employed as a complementary method to tease out societal norms and standards about gender relations, married life, conjugal problems in the research population and where possible also attitudes about conjugal abuse. They could be perhaps replaced with focus group discussions (FGDs), which they resemble. For FGDs to be successful the process of information-sharing must be democratic so that debates and arguments naturally arise and become instructive.²³⁷ More applied forms of focus groups may often make use of visual materials, charts, mapping exercises or other as entry points to further encourage interactive group discussions.²³⁸ Similar to focus groups, dialogical workshops were designed to be interactive and were organised as group activities and exercises that involved group dialogue, writing, drawing and mapping.²³⁹ The dialogical and unstructured format of the workshop aimed to create a platform for reflective and interactive knowledge generation in a comfortable manner.

While many similarities can be drawn between FGDs and dialogical workshops, the latter may be more conducive to exploratory discussion and more effective in pointing to interconnections between research themes. Focus groups come in many forms and shapes, but they seem to be most effective when they are *focused* on one issue or cultural domain.²⁴⁰ Since this study was interested in the local religio-cultural cosmology and socio-cultural realities more holistically vis-à-vis conjugal violence, it was felt that drawing demarcations was inappropriate. Furthermore, the aim of FGDs has been to maximise the diversity of the data collected by hand-picking participants from a priori determined groups dictated by the interests and the aims of the research.²⁴¹ Sampling

²³⁷ Morgan (1996, 139). The importance of interactivity in focus groups is also ascertained in Kitzinger (1994, especially 105).

²³⁸ Schensul et al. (1999).

²³⁹ These exercises were designed by the researcher, but they were premised on mapping techniques widely used in participatory research methodologies within development (e.g. Slocum et al. 1995).

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 63.

²⁴¹ Morgan (1997).

is therefore very important and representativeness is an issue for many researchers who use this method.²⁴² The dialogical workshops employed here were not premised on strictly determined sampling and while they revealed variability in opinions among participants, they were employed primarily in order to identify *shared* language, concepts, ideas and norms concerning the research themes.

However, as it happens with FGDs, how these dialogical workshops are arranged, in what social groupings participants are invited to share their knowledge, how the discussion is probed, what strategy is followed for moderating group interaction, etc. can influence how these shared ideals are articulated and negotiated in group dialogues. Consequently, insights can be drawn about local factors of negotiation (social status, identity, gender, other) and how these underpin convergence/divergence in local linguistic and conceptual representations. In the context of this study, dialogical workshops were held with diverse groups and in diverse contexts to explore also how internal power dynamics and social context influenced people's articulations and rationalisations of societal norms and rules. Juxtaposing the workshop discussions to the life-based interviews was expected to offer a more nuanced view of informal norms governing the local society and how people privately thought about these norms and responded to them, especially in view of their spiritual life and subjective understandings and desires.

David Morgan and Richard Krueger have argued that FGDs present the bonus that the researcher can directly ask participants about the reasons behind their differing opinions, as opposed to resorting to speculation.²⁴³ This could further attune the researcher to local worldviews and it is something that was maximised in the dialogical workshops by employing them also for more analytical purposes as the research progressed. Workshop participants were not merely sharing descriptive knowledge, but applied their own interpretative lens to make sense of research observations shared by the researcher. The approach was to leverage these interpretations in order to obtain a more insightful picture of the society of research and to present it in its multifarious complexity to readers subsequently. While the same approach was taken with personal interviews, the workshops best revealed overlaps and differentiations between individual and group interpretations, indicating general patterns and idiosyncrasies more clearly.

A final advantage of workshops as compared to FGDs may be noted. In focused group interviews issues of privacy are salient given that participants say things in confidentiality which they know will not be attributed to them. Therefore, participants may say very personal things which they later may regret, or they may refer to experiences that can expose others which might have

²⁴² Schensul et al. (1999, 65-70).

²⁴³ Krueger and Morgan (2015) in Morgan (1996, 139).

repercussions for local relations.²⁴⁴ It is also likely for participants to feel stress more than what they experience in their ordinary lives should the topics be sensitive.²⁴⁵ These are important ethical considerations, but they were less directly pertinent to the workshops since these did not touch on personal experiences but explored generally identified social norms and standards of conduct. Therefore, over-disclosure was less of an issue, although stress effects could be relevant since the themes explored were not typically talked about in the local society. To minimise potential stress, the researcher ensured that participation was voluntary and informed the attendants of what would be discussed a priori and that they could refuse to participate or could leave the workshop activities at any stage.

During this research project, six workshops were held in total: two with women in the respective village communities, two with men in the respective village communities and two with *MQ* male and female members in the city of Aksum. While these were organised progressively, holding workshops with women in the two village communities first and at a later stage with men in the two communities and the *MQ* in the city, participatory workshops were completed before the majority of individual interviews. By ordering them in this way, the aim was to use the workshops as entry point to women's and men's social worlds prior to delving into more personal attitudes during interviews. The workshops held with *MQ* attendants at a final stage of fieldwork displayed the highest degree of analysis and research interpretation.

Workshops were held separately with women and men in view of local gender sensibilities. The aim was to achieve genuine conversation in these workshops. If these were held with mixed gender groups, women were more likely to withhold certain thoughts and observations. This problem was certainly not resolved in women-only workshops, due to deeply ingrained fear for exposing one's privacy to village gossip. Nonetheless, the gender-exclusivity format did provide women with a safe space to share what they would not say out-loud in front of men, even though their pronouncements were perhaps exaggerated and overly strategic. In addition, it was hoped that the discussions with women would culminate in issues of conjugal abuse in the local society (provided participants prompted such talk) and a mixed workshop with men and women would raise serious safety concerns.

The workshops' duration varied, with the shortest being about 1.5 hours and the longest approximating four hours. For all workshops a topic guide was used to ensure that all relevant themes were covered in the different discussions. These generally included:

²⁴⁴ Morgan (1997, 91).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

- norms and ideals in the local society about men and women with a summary reflection on the state of gender relations
- marriage and conjugal expectations in the society, including the influence of the Church and religious beliefs that might underpin it
- married life problems and local aetiologies.

This topic guide was not followed strictly and often topics were sacrificed to create time for issues/debates that arose but contributed unique insights to the study. A coffee ceremony was incorporated where possible to create a more casual ambiance for dialogue. For the first two workshops with women in the two village communities provisions were purchased by the researcher and women were invited to hold the coffee ceremony during the discussions and group mapping. Participants were generally excited and cooperative, enjoyed drinking coffee and eating popcorn (the staple accompaniment for coffee in the culture) and this created a vibrant atmosphere for discussion. Holding the coffee ceremony, which comprises of three rounds of boiling coffee, meant that women were given a reason to stay longer without becoming restless, thus prolonging the workshops. A similar strategy with men was not possible for two primary reasons: men were always unwilling to stay long enough, and it was difficult to make the appropriate arrangements for the coffee ceremony while respecting cultural norms (men did not boil coffee, tended to drink at home, etc.).

The workshops with the women were planned beforehand and were convened with the help of members or the secretaries of the local women's associations. On the other hand, the workshops with the men were more impromptu discussions that were held on Sundays, when men and women gathered in village centres for weekly meetings and trainings. Both times, the local government administrator invited men that were present in the village centre to join the workshop and to support the research. While the local administrator never participated in the conversations, his mediation was found to be necessary given that men in the community were always engaged in some training or work scheme that interfered with any effort to gather them together for a workshop. On one occasion, the office of the local administrator was used and on the second occasion the workshop was held at a local school. While efforts were made to create a comfortable environment for discussion, the workshops with the men were considerably more rushed. In contrast, the workshops in the city were lengthy and elaborate and took place behind the *MQ* bookshop in a room that was used for Friday prayer and teaching sessions.

Table 2: Sample size and characteristics of workshop participants

Group	Total (N)	Average Age	Age Range	Education						Relationship status			Number of children				Occupation types
				Below 5 grades	5-10 grades	10+3 (College Diploma)	First Degree	Second degree	Single	Married	Divorced/Widowed	0	1-2	3-4	5-7		
Women in Village 1	11	38.45	20-58	5	6	0	0	0	0	3	3	4	3	2	4	2	Farmer, student, government worker, secretary of women's association
Women in village 2	12	33.6	28-40	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	10	0	4	7	1	Making traditional baskets, cotton-spinning, selling at the market, farmer, no work
Men in village 1	8	37.6	28-46	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	2	3	3	Farmer, ward, construction worker
Men in Village 2	10	35.6	28-45	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	3	6	1	Farmer, day worker, construction worker, armed forces
Female MQ attendants	8	22.12	21-30	0	1	2	4	1	0	6	2	0	6	2	0	0	Assistant lecturer, university lecturer, teacher, shop assistant, home-stay mom, mid-wife
Male MQ attendants	7	29.87	27-34	0	0	0	4	3	0	4	3	0	6	1	0	0	University lecturer, NGO staff

Learning the local languages and data translation

Sharing a language creates the necessary bridges for comprehending local cosmologies. Thus, considerable time and effort was dedicated to learning the relevant local languages in order to obtain access both to the written theological tradition and for communication in fieldwork.

Prior to fieldwork one year was spent learning intensive Amharic at SOAS and one summer learning Ge'ez with a tutor in Cambridge. Tigrigna, an Afroasiatic language of the Semitic family and the regional language spoken in the research area, had not been available, but learning Amharic and Ge'ez was equally important. Ge'ez is the ancient ecclesiastical language preserved in many original theological texts. The researcher and the tutor found it fruitful to analyse commentaries on Paul's Epistles that referred to marriage. Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia and while regional languages are preferred and prioritised within regions, most Ethiopians who have primary schooling speak this language. In addition, the exegetical tradition of the Church has been in Amharic (Chapter 3), which made it an essential resource for obtaining a more profound grasp of the theology. Subsequently, most teachers and monks interviewed for this project were fluent in Amharic, which was used during interviews. This was also the case with most rural men who had been to school, where Amharic is taught as a separate language. Needless to say, urban populations were generally fluent in Amharic.

However, this did not make Tigrigna less important to learn. As the research showed, most rural women spoke only Tigrigna because they had not been to school. In addition, Tigrigna proved to be the main language of the majority of clergy members in the villages, who generally had not been to secular school but had been trained to become priests at local churches and monasteries where communication was primarily in the regional language.²⁴⁶ The exposure to Ge'ez the summer prior to fieldwork prepared the ground for quicker Tigrigna acquisition in the field. Upon arrival, the researcher joined intensive Tigrigna classes taught by a native speaker professor to another foreign student at Addis Ababa University. The group of three met every day for about two hours for one month. In this phase, training was achieved in the foundations of the language. After one month of classes, the researcher was able to communicate the research clearly and could understand the speech of native Tigrayan acquaintances in Addis Ababa. Achieving a working proficiency in the language was therefore primarily a matter of practice, for which ample opportunities existed in Aksum.

To create these opportunities for practice, travel to Tigray took place immediately after. In the city of Aksum most people knew Amharic and this meant that the temptation to use Amharic was

²⁴⁶ Clergy had been traditionally discouraged to join secular school, which also circumvented their ability to learn Amharic. See next chapter.

strong, which impeded progression with language learning. Moving to the village restricted linguistic options because of the lower educational levels and the widespread use of Tigrigna, forcing faster learning. At the village, the daily coffee ceremony provided a context for chatting and practicing. Secondly, the researcher offered to teach Amharic to the 12-year old daughter of a village neighbour, which challenged her to use Tigrigna to convey grammatical rules and meanings. A trilingual (English-Tigrigna-Amharic) dictionary purchased in Addis Ababa was used to study words.²⁴⁷ The researcher and her student came up with equivalent sentences/examples in the respective languages each spoke well (Amharic and English for the researcher, Tigrigna for the student) and this helped mutual improvement. Finally, it should be mentioned that most Tigrayans appreciate the importance of speaking Amharic, primarily for increasing their chance of finding a well-paid job. Children and women in the village both were keen on learning and speaking Amharic and constantly asked the researcher about the equivalent Amharic for many Tigrigna words they used. This not only improved the researcher's understanding of their language, but also helped in refining skills in Amharic.

It was, thus, possible to communicate autonomously by the second month in the village, by which time key terms were pronounced accurately, even as grammar presented flaws. In addition, Tigrigna has absorbed many Italian words and this made comprehension and usage on the part of the researcher easier. For the initial stages, the researcher relied on Aksum University students to translate during workshops with women and some initial interviews with female interlocutors. The assistants themselves were female. They generally did not speak English (although they had some understanding of it), so questions/comments were communicated by the researcher in Amharic and the assistants translated to participants and interlocutors in Tigrigna. The answers in Tigrigna were translated by the assistants back to the researcher in Amharic. This ensured that the researcher had real-time understanding and could respond to the interlocutor's pronouncements *in situ*. No translators were used after about 1.5 months in the field, which meant that the researcher was able to hold intimate discussions with both village men and women at all opportunities. Due to the enhanced linguistic skill more spontaneous conversations that could have not been recorded were held, and were then transferred to the fieldwork diary directly into English.

By the time that workshops were organised with the men in the two villages, the researcher was able to communicate clearly research topics and thoughts in Tigrigna, which deemed the assistant for the most part unnecessary. Nonetheless, a male Aksum University student was hired for both workshops in order to address gender-related constraints that impeded communication between males and females in the local society. While Tigray has displayed signs of change in terms of gender norms, customary attitudes persisted among some of its male population (as will be

²⁴⁷ Kahasy (2008 EC).

discussed), which meant that the researcher faced some challenges to communicate directly and comfortably with them because of her gender. There were instances in which a few men persistently addressed only the assistant, even though the question was asked by the researcher in clear Tigrigna. In addition, the presence of a male assistant/team member proved conducive to men opening up during workshops. It should be noted that such gender-related constraints were rarely an issue since the majority of men were generally happy to engage in conversations with the researcher.

The recorded interviews needed to be transcribed and translated. The majority were in Tigrigna, a smaller number were in Amharic and some employed a combination of both languages since often interlocutors spoke both languages and either the researcher or they alternated languages during the interview to convey better their thoughts. A table that breaks down (roughly) the interviews by language is provided below:

Table 3: Primary language used in interviews with women and men

	Tigrigna	Amharic	Mixed	English	Total
Women	34	6	0	0	40
Men	6	10	2	3	21
*This table includes only the interviews and not the informal discussions (36 with women and 25 with men) since the latter were immediately written down in English.					

These interviews were transcribed and translated with the help of native Tigray and Amhara students in Aksum and Addis Ababa. While transcription was a straightforward but tedious activity (transcription were often done on paper first by an assistant and then transferred onto the computer by the researcher), translating required much attention and care so as to ensure that the interviews were translated in ways that revealed the initial intentions and meanings of the speakers. Since Tigrigna is a malleable language and most words can be used in multiple ways and meanings according to context, this meant that often there was no exact equivalent English term for translating, but multiple possibilities from which one had to select according to the context and the intention of the speaker.

During the final month in Aksum (July-August 2017) the researcher met regularly with a local assistant to translate from Tigrigna into Amharic since the assistant did not write in English. For the rest of the transcripts that were either in Amharic or Tigrigna and could not be translated in the field, transcripts were analysed by the researcher in the original, writing English translations under those sentences that were substantive and pertinent. The transcripts were then shared with assistants in Addis Ababa who checked the researcher's translations and made corrections. During the final write-up year a Tigrigna tutor and expert linguist was hired at SOAS to finalise some

translations. Translating was a reiterative process, with each side offering comments and feedback until the researcher felt confident that the right meaning and intention had been captured. On various occasions, Tigrigna recordings were revisited to clarify the speaker's intention. Overall, the reiterative process of translation was fruitful and insightful and resulted in a more profound analysis of the collected data.

Chapter 3

The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahədo* tradition in its historical context and its teachings on the conjugal relationship through the local exegetical lens

Introduction

The review of the domestic violence literature from Ethiopia evidenced the need to obtain a better understanding of the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* faith of Tigray, its positions on gender-related matters and marriage, its historical interface with socio-cultural realities and the clergy's ability to know and communicate Church teachings to the laity. Various studies implied an overlap between religious beliefs and socio-cultural standards, with the clergy seemingly acting as the bridge between the two, with implications for women's abuse. In addition, many of the studies invoked the patriarchal premises of pernicious cultural norms, as reflected on the earlier family laws of the country, which they associated with the dominant faith and its canonical standards. Such associations beget the need for understanding Church theology, the interface with the surrounding socio-cultural matrix and how the clergy might be located in this matrix.

Following the conceptual premises analysed in the previous chapter, the Church's doctrinal premises and teachings on gender matters, marriage and conjugal abuse were studied relying on authoritative texts²⁴⁸ and consultations with learned Ethiopian theologians and Church-related scholars. This was embedded in a historical understanding of the evolution of the faith in Ethiopian history. For the following presentation, works by Western scholars have been incorporated to nuance or enforce the presentation. The necessity for an insider's view on the dogmatic/theological matters of a tradition does not mean that the work of outsiders should be rejected. These can add valuable perspectives, as long as the epistemological location of the authors is made transparent and their works are not prioritised simply because they happen to be situated in the West.

A historical overview of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahədo* Church

The epic narrative *Kəbrä Nəgəst* (ክብሩ ነገሥት) or “Glory of Kings”, which creates a bridge between Ethiopia and the Holy Land about 1400 years prior the Christianisation of the country, provides the foundation stone from which many Ethiopian people and the Church trace their

²⁴⁸ See table 4 below.

Christian origins.²⁴⁹ Deeply embedded in a Jewish context, the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* is a mixture of Old Testament books, Jewish and Islamic texts and Patristic works that collectively establish an identity for the Ethiopians as the new chosen people of God. As Semere Habtemariam has aptly commented, “[t]he national epic, the Kebra Nagast, Glory of Kings, has played an important role in shaping the identity of Abyssinians and how they view their own past, present, and future history. It is the repository of their national and religious feelings.”²⁵⁰

Whilst the narrative of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* is deeply rooted in a Judaic matrix, the implanting of Christianity in the first millennium AD has come by various routes. One tradition maintains that Christianity was introduced in Ethiopia in 43 AD after the Evangelist Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch along his way and baptised him, who then brought the faith to his country.²⁵¹ The early trajectory of Christianity is unclear, but there is unequivocal evidence of its establishment in the Kingdom of Aksum among the Semitic-speakers of Tigray during the fourth century, after two Syrian-Christian boys from the port city of Tyre, Aedesius and Frumentius, were brought to the court of Emperor Ella Amida following a shipwreck.²⁵² Through their aegis, the imperial family was introduced to Christianity, with Emperor Ezana then proceeding to establish the faith as official ‘state religion.’ Frumentius (*Friminatos*; ቆጭንጥሳ) became the first archbishop of Ethiopia, after being consecrated in Alexandria.²⁵³ Christianity is said to have been consolidated again in the fifth century when monks with a Syrian and Roman background, known as the ‘Nine Saints’, arrived to Ethiopia.²⁵⁴ These monks are associated with the establishment of monastic life in Ethiopia, but also the translation of the Bible in Ge’ez (working primarily from the Septuagint version).²⁵⁵

With Ethiopia’s indigenous Christianity being introduced by the ruling class of Aksum, “it first took roots in the urban, commercial, and political centres, and then moved outwards to the rural areas.”²⁵⁶ How Christianity was disseminated still remains unclear, but the commonly held belief is that it was during the second evangelisation that occurred in Ethiopia.²⁵⁷ Prior to this event, local people “were worshipping the serpent and practicing all sorts of magic and sorcery.”²⁵⁸ Foreign scholars have echoed this understanding, with Donald Levine observing that since the arrival of the monks, Christianity “became a central component of the ethnic identity of the

²⁴⁹ Appendix 3.1.

²⁵⁰ Habtemariam (2017, 61).

²⁵¹ Binns (2017, 2).

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 41-43.

²⁵³ Binns (2017, 43), ICE14.

²⁵⁴ There seems to be no agreement as to the exact date. For instance, ICE4 cited AD 480, while John Binns cited AD 457 (Binns 2017, 2). Other authors cite the sixth century.

²⁵⁵ Isaac (2012, 21).

²⁵⁶ Habtemariam (2017, 123).

²⁵⁷ ICE9.

²⁵⁸ Habtemariam (2017, 132).

Aksumites and their descendants the Tigreans. By the end of the first millennium groups of Amhara were also beginning to embrace Christianity.”²⁵⁹ Through this process, the Semitic element was added to the existing Cushitic indigenous substructure, whose intertwinement has survived in the folklore of Northern Tigrayans as this thesis should evidence.

While it is rarely appreciated by the laity, the close relationship between the Aksumite Kingdom and the Roman Empire in the early centuries, and especially following the latter’s Christianization has been recognised by Ethiopian theologians and scholars.²⁶⁰ Sergew Hable Selassie has observed that “Christianity was certainly known in Ethiopia before the time of Frumentius, being the faith practised by many of the merchants from the Roman Empire settled in the Aksumite region.”²⁶¹ Habtemariam has confirmed this: “These Hellenised elites of Axum had frequent contacts with Roman merchants; and consequently were the first to be introduced to Christianity.”²⁶²

Echoing the patterns of the Christianised Roman polity, the Ethiopian Emperor became the head of the Church, convening councils and arbitrating over important theological issues when these arose.²⁶³ Thus, the Emperors’ lifestyle choices were said to have had an influence on the society,²⁶⁴ but also to have affected the theology of the Church since they arbitrated Church matters.²⁶⁵ Some of these imperial arbitrations could have been conducive to preserve the Hebraic element in this tradition.²⁶⁶ Later, in the 19th century when Ethiopia was imbricated in internal wars among different princes (*Zāmānā Māsafānt*; ዘመነ መሥፍንት), missionary activity generated doubt and division among local literate clergy.²⁶⁷ This resulted in an internal controversy about the anointment of Jesus Christ emerging among Ethiopian monks and scholars after the Jesuits were expelled.²⁶⁸ These theological debates were inevitably shaped by the political struggles among the regional warlords of the time.²⁶⁹

²⁵⁹ Levine (1974, 32).

²⁶⁰ See also Marcus (1994, 6) and Zacharopoulos (2008, 22).

²⁶¹ Selassie (1970a, 3).

²⁶² Habtemariam (2017, 95).

²⁶³ Melaku (2010, 60).

²⁶⁴ Some theologians, in fact, traced the persistence of polygamy and childbirth out of wedlock to the example of Ethiopian rulers that trickled down to society (ICE9, ICE3).

²⁶⁵ ICE3.

²⁶⁶ Two such imperial mediations occurred in the 13th century. One theological controversy was caused by Jesuit missionaries who criticised the practice of male circumcision in Ethiopia. Emperor Geladewos issued in response a Confession of the Faith, which defended circumcision as a cultural practice. Another instance was an internal controversy over the observance of the Sabbath, which was historically upheld in Ethiopia. Emperor Zara Yaqob settled the controversy by deciding in favour of the practice. See Appendix 3.2.

²⁶⁷ Melaku (2010, 134).

²⁶⁸ For a discussion of this that honours the insiders’ historical conscience see Binns (2017, 146-153).

²⁶⁹ Melaku (2010, 145).

The Ethiopian Church and theological tradition had also been shaped by a sequence of military events that were considered liable for a weakening or distortion of the faith. In the 10th century the Jewish leader Judith attacked the Church; in the 16th century the invasions of Muslim leader Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim el Ghazi (or *Grañ*, the left-handed) wrought much devastation.²⁷⁰ These interludes typically saw the destruction of holy books, churches and monasteries and the extermination of clergy.²⁷¹ Within local perceptions these, and especially the Muslim proselytization, are held liable for the enforcement of some non-egalitarian laws and norms among the Ethiopian Orthodox and the introduction of cultural practices such as polygamy.²⁷² Tadesse Tamrat has commented that while many chose to die for their faith, “the large majority of the Christian peasants acquiesced to at least a nominal acceptance of Islam.”²⁷³ Alongside these, the migrations of the Oromo people toward the North, which started also in the 16th century, were cited as further instances of acculturation and were associated with the introduction of illegal marriages and childbearing into the Northern populations.²⁷⁴

Another important element that Ethiopian scholars consider to have defined the development of the Church was its historical connections with the Coptic Church of Alexandria. The consecration of archbishops of the Ethiopian Church from within the ranks of the Coptic Church raised multiple issues over the years. There were periods during which the seat would be empty because of the Copts’ failure to ordain a patriarch.²⁷⁵ On other occasions, Muslim rulers in Cairo interfered with the process of ordination.²⁷⁶ The lack of local languages and cultures by the Coptic Bishops had all sorts of implications since this made them without the remit of local politics within the EOTC.²⁷⁷ Thus, until the EOTC acquired the status of autocephaly with the enthronement of Patriarch Basilios in 1959, it had existed as a decentralised institution with most of its theological activity being led by learned monks (*’əçäge*; አገገ) in leading local monasteries.²⁷⁸ These monks did not eschew local politics, some cooperating with regional leaders, kings or emperors to promote their monastic centre and theological authority.²⁷⁹

In more recent years, the EOTC perspective has been defined in response to rapid urbanisation, the expansion of secular education, technology dissemination and the steady expansion of non-Orthodox Christian denominations, such as the local *Täḥaddäso* (ተሐድሶ)²⁸⁰ group and the global

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 31-34, 101-10).

²⁷¹ ICE4, ICE9 and Melaku (2010, 20, 101-107).

²⁷² ICE4, ICE9.

²⁷³ Tamrat (1970, 28).

²⁷⁴ ICE2, ICE9.

²⁷⁵ Melaku (2010, 28).

²⁷⁶ Melaku (2010, 39) and Binns (2017, 44).

²⁷⁷ ICE19.

²⁷⁸ Habtemariam (2017, 195), Matthew (1971, 60) and ICE3.

²⁷⁹ Appendix 3.3.

²⁸⁰ Appendix 7.1.

Pentecostal movement. It is in light of such changes that the *Maḥəbärä Qədusan*, the ‘Association of All the Saints’ which belongs to the Sunday School Department of the Church, has acquired salience in Ethiopian society and theological circles. The *MQ* was established over 25 years ago, at the end of the Derg regime. Groups were organised to venerate the saints at the local level as a *maḥbär*, later uniting under the association of the *MQ* with the blessings of Abuna Gorgorios, Archbishop of Shewa.²⁸¹

The activities of its highly-literate members, most of them young university students, appear to have been motivated by the objective to strengthen the religious awareness of the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* believers in the country by making central doctrines, theology and Church Fathers’ writings more accessible and comprehensible to the average layperson. Its members may also commit two percent of their salary to contribute regularly to the Church “for strengthening commentaries schools, supporting monasteries, replenishing priests and teachers’ salaries and providing school material and other resources for traditional religious students (*yäqolo tämari; የቆሎ ተማሪ*).”²⁸² In Aksum, the *MQ* met for prayers and teaching sessions every Friday evening and some of its members attended daily teaching sessions in church. Learned members of the *MQ* could also train religious personnel studying to become priests or theologians and to take on other roles in the Church.²⁸³

As some theologians have suggested, the *MQ* has been particularly appealing to the general population because contrary to the other new religious expressions whose aims have been to reform or replace the mainstream religious tradition, it has worked to preserve the Apostolic Faith by revisiting the work of established fathers.²⁸⁴ Nonetheless, while the *MQ* was considered to be Orthodox by both theologians and laypeople in urban centres, it nonetheless has existed at some tension with the hierarchy of the Church or certain members for a variety of reasons.²⁸⁵ What is important to retain is that the *MQ* has been very active in recent years, paying attention also to contemporary issues regarding gender relations and marriage, as will be discussed.

Doctrinal and theological foundations of the Church

The EOTC belongs to the family of Oriental Churches that separated from the rest of the Christian world following the fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.²⁸⁶ It is believed that the monks who introduced asceticism in Ethiopia and translated many Christian books in Ge’ez were

²⁸¹ IDCE1.

²⁸² ICE20.

²⁸³ IDCE1.

²⁸⁴ ICE2.

²⁸⁵ Appendix 3.4.

²⁸⁶ Appendix 3.5.

‘monophysites’ who found refuge in Ethiopia after being exiled by the Council of Chalcedon.²⁸⁷ The EOTC conformed to the decision of the Council of Chalcedon which condemned Eutyches who had formulated the doctrine of a single nature, but regarded Dioscorus, who was condemned by the Council (on rather canonical grounds) as a saint.²⁸⁸ In recent discourses the Church has insisted on the self-identification ‘miaphysite’ to signify that it never spoke of one single nature for Jesus Christ (‘mono’ from ‘μόνο’=only) but of one composite nature (‘mia’ from ‘μία’=one), summarised also in the word ‘*tāwahdo*’ (ተዋሕዶ).²⁸⁹ The EOTC Christological position reads “one united Divine-Human nature, will and energy in the same Christ.”²⁹⁰

The Ethiopian Church had not attended the Council, but espoused the stance of its Mother Church in Alexandria. Following the tradition started by Frumentius who had visited Alexandria to request a Bishop for the country, all patriarchs of the EOTC prior to 1951 were drawn from the Coptic Church.²⁹¹ The integral place of the Alexandrian theologians in this tradition emerged also in conversations with theologians at Meqele’s Frumentius Theological College (*‘Abba Sälama Käšate Bərhanä Mänfäsawi Koleğ*; አባ ሰላማ ከሣቴ ብርሃን መንፈሳዊ ኮሌጅ). Students have used, as part of their standardised training lectures in Patrology compiled by Father Tadros Y. Malaty of the Coptic Church.²⁹² However, this proximity with Coptic Christianity, some of which may be attributed to recent developments, cannot fully explain the EOTC’s theological and liturgical tradition that is eclectic and distinctive. While St Cyril and St Athanasius have been influential in both Churches, the Coptic bishops who served Ethiopia did not generally speak the national and regional languages,²⁹³ which limited the influence they could have on local theological centres.

Prior to Chalcedon, the Aksumite Kingdom had existed in proximity to the Byzantine Empire. This linkage was an earlier conduit for transference of Greek and Syriac influences into Ethiopia. It needs to be considered that Frumentius had come from the (ancient) Syrian city of Tyre and reputedly “translated the Scriptures from Syriac, Hebrew and Greek to Ge’ez” and “changed the order of the Sabaean letters and arranged the writing and reading from left to right.”²⁹⁴ The ‘Nine Saints’ are described by the Church to have had Roman (Hellenised) and Syrian origins and they are believed to have translated many biblical works and introduced monastic life in Ethiopia.²⁹⁵ At the more ecclesiastical and liturgical level, the majority of the 14 Anaphoras of the EOTC for Holy Communion are attributed to Greek and Syrian Fathers, including John Chrysostom, Basil

²⁸⁷ Marcus (1994, 7) and Zacharopoulos (2008, 27).

²⁸⁸ Isaac (2012, 20).

²⁸⁹ Appendix 7.2.

²⁹⁰ Mekarios et al. (1996, 143).

²⁹¹ Binns (2017, 53).

²⁹² ICE8.

²⁹³ Jones and Monroe (1935, 51).

²⁹⁴ Mekarios et al. (1996, 117).

²⁹⁵ Appendix 3.6.

the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Second (Nazianzen), Epiphanius, Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob of Serouh.²⁹⁶ Foreign scholarship has enforced this linkage. Levine has previously observed that “Syriac forms are prominent in the liturgy, devotional music, religious terminology and ancient church architecture of Ethiopic Christianity.”²⁹⁷ Keon-Sang An in a discussion of Ethiopian Church sermons has also pointed to strong Syriac influences exemplified in the use of symbolism as seen in Ephrem’s work.²⁹⁸ Ralph Lee has provided another convincing analysis demonstrating how Syriac imagery shaped Ethiopian traditions.²⁹⁹

Whilst the strong input of Greek and Syriac writers located within the Byzantine Empire has been universally acknowledged, theologians and local scholars also recognise that the Church did not evade Roman Catholic influences.³⁰⁰ The proximity to the Coptic Church, which itself absorbed western theological elements, and the Italian Occupation in the 20th century meant more interactions with Roman Catholicism.³⁰¹ One theologian additionally remarked: “In the 19th century the Coptic Church was influenced by Western forms of Christianity, which then carried into the EOTC. Also, under Haile Selassie, many theologians were sent to be trained abroad, then coming back and bringing with them theological baggage.”³⁰²

Theologians and learned clergy pronounced these variable aspects in the ecclesiastical history of Ethiopia, which has been inextricable from the political history of the country, to convey the message that this is a distinct tradition not without internal ambiguities. As one theologian proposed, it may be necessary to “make a new category for this tradition and then try to understand it through this new lens.”³⁰³

The EOTC’s Judeo-Christian character

Doctrinally, the EOTC recognises both the Old and New Testaments (although the list of Canon books has not been strictly defined³⁰⁴). However, an Old Testament heritage and orientation is perhaps most salient. The Church considers canonical a number of Old Testament books that are considered pseudepigraphical or apocryphal in other Christian Churches, including the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees.³⁰⁵ This is also evident in gender differences in the Sacrament of

²⁹⁶ Mekarios et al. (1996, 84-85) and Lee (2011,77).

²⁹⁷ Levine (1974, 32).

²⁹⁸ Keon-Sang (2015, 157-217).

²⁹⁹ Lee (2011).

³⁰⁰ ICE3.

³⁰¹ ICE3.

³⁰² ICE3.

³⁰³ ICE3.

³⁰⁴ Bruk (2013, 61-63).

³⁰⁵ EOTC (2003a). However, the Church might not have always considered these books canonical. Email communication with Ralph Lee, 5 May 2016.

Baptism, with girls being baptised at 80 days and boys at 40 days. It is also visible in theological understandings concerning the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, the end of which is invariably identified as procreation citing the story of *Genesis*,³⁰⁶ an interpretation that was historically reiterated in Roman Catholic teachings.³⁰⁷ The observation of the Sabbath has been traditionally theologically upheld. It is equally noteworthy that the origins of Christianity in Ethiopia were delineated in *Kəbrä Nügäšt* a book that the Church seems to have accepted without questions.³⁰⁸

The Judeo-Christian character of the EOTC can also be related to the indigenous Hebraic culture in which the Church developed. This might have contributed to monasteries, the traditional centres of religious education, prioritising training in Old Testament interpretation. Indeed, some of the most prominent traditional religious centres in Ethiopia—Aksum, Godjam, Wello and Gondar—are known as centres of the Old Testament.³⁰⁹ Abba Melaku of the Frumentius Theological College in Meqele remarked: “Here in Ethiopia the Old Testament gets more emphasis because it’s the tradition and because there are not many people who go through the training so the teaching of the Fathers is not well known.”³¹⁰ However, he insisted that this had not been necessarily intended and was probably the inevitable effect of the indigenous Christianity having developed in a strongly Hebraic context.

This pronounced Old Testament orientation has combined with an ambiguous integration of New Testament teaching, some of which replaced old understandings. As Edward Ullendorff had noted, the Church recognises that circumcision was necessary in the Old Testament era but was replaced by Baptism in the New Covenant.³¹¹ However, this has not displaced many believers’ conviction that circumcising their male children is their religious duty, as it became evident in fieldwork. Ephraim Isaac has made the pertinent comment that the EOTC has been grounded in the Old Testament and has upheld Pauline teachings somehow superficially. According to his articulation, “Ethiopia, like most Christian nations, accepts, respects, and follows the teachings of St Paul in principle, but *de facto* rejects the traditional doctrine of Pauline thought that biblical law lost its binding force at the coming of Jesus. In this regards, the Church agrees more with the teachings that faith must be combined with good works of the Epistle of James.”³¹²

While it was not possible to ascertain historical Church discourses on the matter, in recent years theologians have openly acknowledged apostolic teachings. In a document that appeared on the EOTC official webpage, Likegubae Abba Abera Bekele wrote:

³⁰⁶ For example see EOTC (2003c).

³⁰⁷ Foster (1983, 174) and Bougatsos (1989).

³⁰⁸ Mekarios et al. (1996, 6).

³⁰⁹ ICE4.

³¹⁰ ICE10.

³¹¹ Mekarios et al. (1996, 36).

³¹² Isaac (2012, 28).

The ancient followers of Judaism taught that salvation could be possible only by doing the deeds ordered by the Law (given to Moses) and as a result strongly opposed the Gospel teachings of St Paul. God has prepared a way in which man can be saved and become righteous by his faith in God because man could not do what the Law orders and because the Law could not save man. As a result, it became that man is saved by God's love and grace and his faith in Jesus Christ.³¹³

Here the author recognised that the laws of Moses were not found sufficient to secure salvation, and that such salvation could only be achieved through faith in Christ, exemplified in Paul's apostolic work. Citing John Chrysostom he further explained:

John Chrysostom, the Golden Mouth, teaches "Faith is the base, and the others are the buildings and walls," telling us that faith comes before doing good deeds. As the base supports the walls and the building, faith is the base for the good deeds. A building cannot stand without its base. Good deeds cannot also exist without faith.³¹⁴

This unattributed quotation could be paraphrasing sections from Homily 9 from John Chrysostom's commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Abba Bekele proceeded to explain that faith that moves mountains is not sufficient to absolve one from the Judgement of God if the faith is not grounded in love for fellow human beings and is not accompanied by deeds to materialise this love (such as giving alms).³¹⁵

Nominally, the EOTC has been premised on a theology of healing, as highlighted in many clergy's reference to Jesus Christ or the faith itself as redeemer or remedy/medicine (*mädhanit; መድኃኒት*).³¹⁶ The EOTC accepts the Orthodox worldview that God created the world all 'very good' and humanity in His likeness. According to its teachings, the disobedience of the first-fashioned couple (Adam and Eve) resulted in the fall from heaven and the corruption of their human nature. It is taught that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world, defined as the "restoration of the world to its direct and unimpeded relation with God."³¹⁷ Following the incarnation, those baptised in the name of Christ are called to establish communion with God by participating in the Sacraments and by following the Church commandments in all realms of life. These prescriptions include: loving one's Lord and keeping all His commandments; loving one's neighbour; loving one's Christian brothers and sisters; loving one's enemies; and doing one's duties to all men and women whether ill-disposed or friendly.³¹⁸ When believers participate in the Sacraments and do works of love it is understood that the Holy Spirit dwells in them.

³¹³ Bekele (no date).

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Appendix 7.3.

³¹⁷ EOTC (2003b).

³¹⁸ Wondmagegnehu and Motovu (1970, 108-109).

In fact, in recent years Ethiopian theologians appear to have pronounced the process of establishing and living in communion with God. Recently, the Association of Theologians in Addis Ababa (which is comprised of graduates from the modern Orthodox theological schools in Ethiopia) organised a seminar under the Amharic title 'Əgziabhern Mämsäl 'Ortodoksawi Təmhərt Dähnät (እግዚአብሔርን መምሰል: ኦርቶዶክሳዊ ትምህርት ደኅነት) which they have translated in English as “*Theosis*: An Orthodox Soteriology.” ‘*Theosis*’ represents the Greek patristic term for ‘deification’ and pertains to the fundamental aim of the Orthodox faith to heal humanity by achieving full unity with the grace of God.³¹⁹

However, it is important to note that within the Eastern Orthodox tradition, from where the concept of *theosis* has been re-introduced, everyone is called to *theosis* whether married or living an ascetic life,³²⁰ whereas in the EOTC there has been a clearer distinction between what one can achieve in worldly life and what one can do as a monk/nun. One teacher of the Holy Trinity Theological College made a pertinent comment: “The monastic example is used as a yardstick... [however] all emphasis is put on the body and on the sinful nature of man. There is little understanding of the notion of divinisation (*theosis*).”³²¹ Father Serapim of Aksum also admitted that laypeople do not generally know that they can become one with God and to achieve sainthood.³²² While healing oneself is asked of all believers, it is questionable to what extent the process of achieving likeness with God has been salient in the perception of the majority, a reality that the ethnographic chapters will evidence.

The EOTC’s variegated Patristic tradition

Within the EOTC, recognised Church Fathers/saints are authoritative sources for biblical exegesis. Ethiopian theologians have explained that the works of the Fathers are studied because they “make plain the interpretation of the Old and New Testament, and there is in them reproof and counsel which are of much profit to the faithful.”³²³ These doctors of the faith are considered to “have received the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ dwells” and are trusted as teachers after the Apostles and the prophets.³²⁴

Regarding the Patristic line followed, the Alexandrian tradition appears to have been preferred because the Antiochian tradition was associated with many heretical authors, notably Nestorius

³¹⁹ Appendix 7.4.

³²⁰ Istratii (2018).

³²¹ ICE3.

³²² ICE14.

³²³ Matthew (1936, 63).

³²⁴ Ibid., 65.

who espoused the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Isidore of Tarsus.³²⁵ A member of the *Liqawānt Guba'e* (ሊቃውንት ጉባኤ), the Church's Council of Scholars, explained: "[T]he EOTC was influenced by the Alexandrian/Antiochian divide. I see most recent Fathers of the Church quote from the Alexandrian Fathers."³²⁶ The Dean of the Frumentius Theological College also confirmed that the Ethiopian Church has followed primarily "the Alexandrian method."³²⁷ This Alexandrian influence is evident in that Cyril's articulation of Christology had a strong impact on the EOTC at the time of Chalcedon. His works have also comprised important learning material in the school of interpretation of the traditional religious educational system.³²⁸ Origen of Alexandria also, while not considered a Doctor of the Faith within the EOTC, and by some is even associated with heretical teachings,³²⁹ may also have influenced the Church's theological tradition.³³⁰ However, the Antiochian Fathers have also held some sway. John Chrysostom, who received an Antiochian training, has been venerated in the EOTC as a great saint and theologian. The Dean of the Frumentius Theological College remarked: "John Chrysostom was from the Antiochian school but his attitude and teaching was Alexandrian."³³¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentaries also appear to have found their way into EOTC's theological tradition,³³² despite him being from Antioch and formulating the theology which Nestorius adopted. The incorporation of such different Patristic influences suggests that this tradition was likely defined by contingencies and conditions not captured in an Alexandrian/Antiochian typology, not least because of the shortfalls of the typology itself.³³³

Many of the works of the known Church Fathers reached Ethiopia primarily through Syrian writers. Some, such as Ibn-al Tayyib (d. 1043) and Išo'dad of Merv (d. 852), who both belonged to the East Syrian 'Church of the East' (typically known as Nestorian Church), and Mose bar Kepha (d. 903), who was West Syrian, were not Orthodox in the Christological definitions adopted by the Council of Chalcedon.³³⁴ These developments are symptomatic of a fertile cultural milieu that saw the "considerable interaction between the East and West Syrian exegetical traditions."³³⁵ Many of their works were translated from either Greek or Syriac, into Arabic and

³²⁵ For an explanation of the two schools see Appendix 3.7.

³²⁶ ICE7.

³²⁷ ICE8.

³²⁸ Cowley (1980, 39).

³²⁹ For example, in Lule Melaku's history of the Church it is written about St George of Gassicha that he wrote books "refuting the heretical teachings of Seballius, Arius, and Nestorius, Photius, Origen, Eutyches, and others" (Melaku 2010, 94).

³³⁰ Appendix 3.8.

³³¹ ICE8.

³³² Cowley (1988, 375 and 378) and Lee (2011, 49-50).

³³³ Steenberg (2005).

³³⁴ These names are all mentioned throughout Roger Cowley's analysis of EOTC exegetical works (Cowley 1988).

³³⁵ Brock (1997, 94) and Faultless (2003, 178).

then into Ge'ez and integrated in the Church's exegetical tradition.³³⁶ Roger Cowley in his comprehensive study of this tradition concluded that the influence of Ibn-al Tayyib in particular was pervasive.³³⁷ Although primarily serving as translators, these writers did not eschew including commentaries or alterations that digressed from the original resources they used.³³⁸

The line of Church Fathers who have influenced the EOTC was probably shaped in terms of the accessibility and reach of works (conditioned on the existence of translations) as long as these resonated with the EOTC doctrines at the early times of its formation and consolidation.³³⁹ Of course, undoubtedly, the invasions of *Grañ* resulted in the destruction of churches and monasteries, with collateral cultural damage, the extent of which will never be ascertained. It is also probable that some works may have never reached Ethiopia. For example, the complete homilies of John Chrysostom (*Yohannäs 'Afäwäraq; የሐንስ አፈወርቅ*) are limited in this tradition and come in the form of two books known as *Därsan (ድርሳን)* and *Tägsaś (ተግሳፅ)*. This excludes excerpts of his commentaries included in numerous works, such as the *Haymanotä 'Abbäw (ሃይማኖት አበው)* of "Faith of the Fathers", or more recent translations from English.³⁴⁰ A teacher at the St Paul Theological College quoted a local expert who had stated previously that the translations of John Chrysostom in the EOTC were only a drop of water in the ocean.³⁴¹ A teacher of the Holy Trinity Theological College in turn observed that "John Chrysostom has been potent in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, but it is doubtful to what extent he has been understood properly."³⁴²

The EOTC's exegetical tradition

The works of the Church Fathers are appreciated and studied, but the main exegetical tradition of the EOTC known as *'andämta (አንድምታ)* commentary (AC) has conventionally been given prioritisation. A member of the *Liqawänt Guba'e* explained that in the traditional religious educational system students are first introduced and master the AC on the Gospels and only then when they are exposed to the Old and New Testament interpretation do they study the Church Fathers. He explained: "We learn the commentary of the Fathers and quote from the Fathers to

³³⁶ Lee (2011, 49-52).

³³⁷ Cowley (1988, 378) and Tilly (1990) cited in Pearse (2009).

³³⁸ Faultless (2003, 180) and Troupeau (1991, 7).

³³⁹ This appears to be the general understanding currently among experts. Personal communication with Ralph Lee, 12 April 2016.

³⁴⁰ For Chrysostomic influences in the tradition see Lee (44-46).

³⁴¹ ICE6.

³⁴² ICE3.

ensure that we are in line with the tradition/creed. In fact, we are not even allowed/encouraged to learn the Fathers before we learn the interpretation of the Gospels.”³⁴³

The AC has been described by one author as “a translation and clarification of the Ge’ez texts of Biblical, certain patristic and liturgical books.”³⁴⁴ The commentators employ multiple exegetical methods, including story-telling, direct quotations, explanation and conditional “if” sentences in order to clarify the original Ge’ez meanings.³⁴⁵ For example, in the Book of Genesis that was studied for this research, the Ge’ez is followed by Amharic headings (direct translation) and then the commentary or explanation (*ḥatāta*; ሐተታ).³⁴⁶ One interpretation may be followed by others, with the introduction of *’andəm*. The Amharic AC on the original Ge’ez texts of the New and Old Testament, Book of the Scholars and Book of the Monks is generally unattributed,³⁴⁷ although it was explained by theologians that some of the Ge’ez commentary on which the Amharic was premised included references to named Church Fathers.³⁴⁸

The origins of the exegetical tradition have not been concretised and current explanations are rather hypothetical.³⁴⁹ According to theologians who were interviewed, the AC has been based on the teachings of the Church Fathers who participated in the early Ecumenical Councils, and some subsequent works of Orthodox theologians, such as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom.³⁵⁰ The commentaries, however, were composed and organised by Ethiopian scholars and clergy over the period of many centuries.³⁵¹ Most scholars interviewed believed that those who formulated the AC did so in prayer and fasting to ensure that their work remained in line with the teachings of the Nicene Council.³⁵² According to one teacher at the St Paul’s Theological College in Addis Ababa, “Our *’andəmta* has no references, no names. We attribute it thus to the Holy Spirit so that no one can then reject the *’andəmta* because of a certain name or Father.”³⁵³

It is perhaps as a result of this attribution to the Holy Spirit that the AC is considered unalterable by scholars regardless of their level of understanding and experience. Mersha Alehegne has observed that “the *’andəmta* commentary has been moulded into its own specific form and feature and it is still in our days being taught in the traditional way.”³⁵⁴ Dawit Berhanu, a teacher in interpretation with over 33 years of studies, told Christine Chaillot that: “For one verse you may

³⁴³ ICE7.

³⁴⁴ Alehegne (2012, 115).

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 114-124.

³⁴⁶ Anonymous (1999 EC).

³⁴⁷ Cowley (1980, 39).

³⁴⁸ ICE7 and Lee (2011, 42-43).

³⁴⁹ Alehegne (2012, 116). See Appendix 3.9.

³⁵⁰ ICE14.

³⁵¹ ICE3 and Lee (2011, 42-43).

³⁵² ICE14.

³⁵³ ICE6.

³⁵⁴ Alehegne (2012, 116).

find more than ten levels of interpretation. But there is a permanent interpretation of the text beyond which no one can pass, because to do so is to deviate and to become a heretic.”³⁵⁵ Cowley’s analysis confirmed that the commentator may say up to 16 times ‘and one’ and that these have been strictly interpreted so that no new ones could be added.³⁵⁶ Neither theologians nor laypeople would be expected to contradict the established hermeneutics. Haile Gabriel Dagne has observed that even at the highest level of Church education where students are exposed to the interpretation of holy books, emphasis is put on memorisation and not on the students’ critical comprehension of the material.³⁵⁷ Habtemariam has, in turn, noted that “Tewahdos are expected and required to know the written and unwritten traditions of their faith and abide by what the Church teaches. Individual and personal interpretations should not supersede what the [C]hurch teaches.”³⁵⁸

A fundamental immutability is true, but theological discourses and approaches have diversified in recent years. According to a teacher at St Paul Theological College, 30 years ago it was difficult for anyone to publish religious materials.³⁵⁹ If the Church’s Council of Scholars thought that the book included heretical content, they rejected it. In contrast, he explained, in recent years there are multiple publishers and people publish all sorts of religious books independently, which has made it more difficult to distinguish Orthodox from non-Orthodox content, the latter of which was associated with the Protestant movement. One theology graduate in Addis Ababa reasoned that Protestant theologians have tended to reference directly from the Gospel to support various interpretations, and this has made Orthodox *Tāwahādo* believers more demanding with their own clergy.³⁶⁰ Therefore, theologians may feel compelled to reference directly from the Gospel to establish legitimacy with the public, circumventing the traditional AC. It needs to be recognised, however, that even works which are considered to align with the stance of the Church do not remain confined to the traditional AC but quote more widely, even outside the local Patristic line.³⁶¹

Despite the nuances, there is no doubt that tradition plays a significant role in the context-specific, historical and decentralised character of the EOTC. This has also defined the decentralised religious education mechanism that was historically in place to train both the laity and clergy in the faith. Understanding Church education is necessary for obtaining a sense of the clergy’s exposure to theology and the societal influences that may have defined their discourses.

³⁵⁵ Chaillot (2002, 93).

³⁵⁶ Cowley (1974, 170).

³⁵⁷ Dagne (1970, 96).

³⁵⁸ Habtemariam (2017, 181).

³⁵⁹ FIELDNOTES, 11 January 2017.

³⁶⁰ FIEDLNOTES, 17 January 2017.

³⁶¹ Appendix 3.10.

The traditional Church education and exposure of clergy to theology

Until Haile Selassie introduced the modern educational system, all education was the exclusive responsibility of the Church. Habtemariam has observed that “Tewahdo children between the ages of four and 10 are required to attend church school”, although historically this was not always practised, contributing to continuing illiteracy rates.³⁶² Theoretically, both girls and boys could attend the Church schools, but it was agreed that girls were traditionally hindered by various conditions, which included gender-specific norms that reserved women for the exclusive role of housewives, in conjunction with limited opportunities for work inside the Church.³⁶³ However, the fact that women were not able to hold a job in church, made it more likely that they would progress into the school of interpretation to become teachers. Therefore, female scholars have existed and work actively in this tradition.³⁶⁴ Two women were interviewed at the St Yared traditional religious school in Aksum, one of whom was a known teacher of New Testament exegesis.³⁶⁵

The general structure of the traditional Church education was roughly described by one teacher in Aksum:

It begins with learning the letters and reading which is called *Nəbab Bet* (ንባብ ቤት) then [proceeds] on to *Zema* (ዜማ), then to *'Aq'w'aq'am* (አዳዳም), which are in the same house. While *Zema* is done only by chanting, *'Aq'w'aq'am* is done by standing and with the help of sistrums (sistra) and drums. Then it progresses to *Tərg'ame Bet* (ትርጓሜ ቤት) or commentary house, in which first, the literal reading (in the Ge'ez original) will be studied, then the meaning will be studied through different interpretations. In this house a person can begin by studying the New or the Old Testament as his choice may be. And also under *Zena 'Abbāw* (ዜና አቡው) one can learn about the fathers/patriarchs like Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and the rest. On the other hand, Church Fathers like, Cyril, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and the like are studied under Scholars of the Church.³⁶⁶

The religious training depended on the role that the candidate wanted to hold in the Church. The key roles were identified as deacon (*diyaqon*; ዲያቆን), priest (*qes*; ቄስ), reader (*'Anagnostis*; አናግኖስጢስ), *däbtära* (ደብተራ), *märigeta* (መሪጌታ) or *mäzämmər* (መዘምር) and church teacher (*mämhər*; መምህር). The *märigeta* could be described as the chief of *däbtära*-cantors³⁶⁷, who are unique to this Church tradition.³⁶⁸ *Däbtäras* are non-ordained specialists in ecclesiastical hymns, dancing and poetry,³⁶⁹ but some traditionally undertook training also in spiritual healing,

³⁶² Habtemariam (2017, 159).

³⁶³ Appendix 3.11.

³⁶⁴ Kalewold (1970, 30).

³⁶⁵ ICE1617.

³⁶⁶ ICE18.

³⁶⁷ Kane (1990a, 196).

³⁶⁸ For the etymology and the historical progression of the meaning of *däbtära*, see Appendix 3.12.

³⁶⁹ Melaku (2010, 21).

becoming involved in non-permissible prayers and the black arts.³⁷⁰ The possible progression of students through the traditional Church education was conveyed in the explanation of one teacher at the St Yared theological school in Aksum, which can be found in the Appendix.³⁷¹ In general, deacons would learn three to five years to acquire knowledge in liturgical prayers, such as *Qəddase* (ቅዳሴ), *Kidan* (ኪዳን), *Wəddase Mariam*, (ወደሴ ማርያም), *Sä'atat* (ሰዓታት) and *Liṭon* (ሊጦን),³⁷² to be ordained as priests. A deacon or priest could also study hymnology, such as *Mə'əraf* (ምዕራፍ), *Ṣomä Dəgg'wa* (ጾመ ድጋ), *Zəmmare* (ዝማሬ), *Mäwasə 'at* (መዋሥእት); poetry (*Qəne*; ቅኔ) and spiritual dancing ('*Aq'w'w'am*; አቋቋም). In general, those who specialised in hymnology (other than *Qəddase* and *Sä'atat* reserved for priests) were traditionally the *däbtära*.³⁷³ Those who desired to learn more could enrol in specialised schools/departments in order to become teachers in their domains, such as in *Qəne*, *Mäṣḥaf Tärğum* (ምጽሐፍ ተርጉም) or *Zema*.

The entire cycle of education would require theoretically between 24 and 30 years,³⁷⁴ with the most demanding being the training required for aspiring teachers of interpretation.³⁷⁵ The curriculum of the highest school of interpretation (*Mäṣḥaf Bet*; ምጽሐፍ ቤት) features the 14 books of the *Qəddase*, the Praises of Mary (*Wəddase Maryam*), *Fətha Nägäşt*, a collection of homilies, anathemas and testimonies by Church Fathers (*Haymanotä 'Abbäw*), works by Cyril of Alexandria (*Qərallos*; ቅርሎስ) and John Chrysostom, and the books of the monks.³⁷⁶ To the list of Church Fathers can be added Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ephrem the Syriac, Severus of Antioch and Mar Isaac of Nineveh.³⁷⁷ Both theologians and clergy posited that the level of training of each member of the clergy depended on their own skills/talents, commitment and practical possibilities. However, it was generally agreed that priests were unlikely to achieve theological training, for reasons associated with the Church educational system.³⁷⁸

A primary challenge is that most students have not been able to commit as many years of education as would be necessary. Traditionally, students have had to rely on the public's almsgiving to secure their daily sustenance.³⁷⁹ However, this societal sponsorship would not be expected to suffice. In addition, students might face health issues, hardship and other scarcities

³⁷⁰ See, for example, Negwo (2015).

³⁷¹ Appendix 3.13.

³⁷² These were mentioned by numerous priests in the field. Lule Melaku mentions *Qəddase* and *Sä'atat* as the faculty of Church hymns reserved for priests and deacons (Melaku 2010, 21).

³⁷³ Melaku (2010, 21).

³⁷⁴ Kalewold (1970, 1-2).

³⁷⁵ ICE10.

³⁷⁶ Kalewold (1970, 31) and Cowley (1980, 39).

³⁷⁷ Kalewold (1970, 31), ICE2, ICE6, ICE7, ICE8, ICE18.

³⁷⁸ ICE2, ICE4.

³⁷⁹ ICE19.

that could interfere with their capacity to learn.³⁸⁰ Existing reports and this research suggest that at least a portion of those who start a religious education must give it up or discontinue it because of the hardships experienced or other interferences. Only those who attain higher levels of training, such as in interpretation of holy books, may receive some allowance for teaching others.³⁸¹

Furthermore, traditionally students have not been able to dedicate their time exclusively to studying because they have been expected to support their families in farming and other livelihood activities.³⁸² Additionally, finding teachers in a specific department at one's hometown may have not always been possible.³⁸³ Many students need to leave their hometowns to go to other learning centres where they can study with no distractions, and this may be associated with more hardships since students are far from home.³⁸⁴ Overall, students have had few means to progress with their training to reach the highest level of religious education provided in the *Mäṣḥaf Bet*.³⁸⁵ For practical matters, students would be prone to complete the minimum necessary training to enter the service and access a salary.

Theologians confirmed the problem, with most associating this with shortfalls in the Church educational system,³⁸⁶ or the student's disposition and ability to perform well in this system.³⁸⁷ It was also noted by a number of interlocutors in the field that this weak level of training in interpretation might have been fostered by a loose enforcement of canonical regulations about ordination.³⁸⁸ Traditionally priests were qualified to be ordained as long as they knew the liturgical material and "as a result the clergy in Ethiopia have usually achieved only a basic level of education."³⁸⁹ While ideally a priest should know interpretation of the New Testament prior to being ordained, this qualification was not always met.³⁹⁰ A member of the Council of Scholars confirmed that this is a violation of canonical rules and provided some explanations:

The destructions and weakening of the Church resulting from Ahmed *Grañ*'s invasions is one event only. Other reasons are associated with the history of the Church. For example, for most part bishops were Copts coming from Egypt. These bishops did not know the local languages and often did not understand the clergy. The practice was for clergy to come, generally on foot, from all parts of Ethiopia to Axum in order to be ordained. Imagine someone walking from Shewa, here in Addis Ababa, to Axum. How could anyone refuse

³⁸⁰ Kalewold (1970, 19).

³⁸¹ ICE19 and Kalewold (1970, 30).

³⁸² Melaku (2010, 74).

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ ICE19.

³⁸⁵ ICE10.

³⁸⁶ ICE20.

³⁸⁷ IC4.

³⁸⁸ ICE7, ICE19, IC89.

³⁸⁹ Binns (2017, 172).

³⁹⁰ ICE19.

him? Who would check his background and credentials? How to send him back after walking so long?³⁹¹

Mass ordinations were described for the 16th century in Portuguese documentation.³⁹² Loose canonical enforcement was also acknowledged by local clergy during fieldwork, with one church teacher asserting: “There used to be no ordination of clergy. It’s a convention nowadays (to ordain clergy).”³⁹³

Once priests were ordained, continuing their training became more difficult due to their multiple duties as pastors, husbands and fathers. In the EOTC deacons must marry before becoming priests, which means that priests have to cater to the needs of both their brethren and their families. They might simply not have the time and capacity to continue their studies under such conditions.³⁹⁴ Responsibilities at home, such as the need to plough one’s farms, and the need to provide pastoral support curtail the ability of the priest to study.³⁹⁵

In recent years, fewer students have gone to the traditional religious schools, resulting in a gradual decline of the traditional Church education. Haile Gabriel Dagne has observed: “One of the main reasons for this change is that the graduates of the church schools have lost their traditional elite status in the social order, which today, particularly in the modern sector, is being occupied by those who have a modern Western type of education.”³⁹⁶ In other words, more students choose to pursue what they consider to be better alternatives, such as attending the modern secular school. One church teacher in Aksum reported similar trends:

The problem is that nowadays those who go to worldly/secular modern school earn relatively good money after graduation and lead a better life. But those who go to the traditional religious school the church doesn’t pay enough. For this reason, people prefer to go to the modern secular schools and the number of students in the religious schools has greatly declined.³⁹⁷

Interesting is also the fact that initially secular education was condemned by the clergy as sinful, although it was reported that the Church Council had not issued an official decision on the matter.³⁹⁸ Some interlocutors thought that the clergy’s antagonism toward secular education had contributed to preserving their low literacy levels.³⁹⁹ This issue is significant because it evidences that it has not been unusual for clergy to act at their own discretion, shaping to some extent the religious tradition itself.

³⁹¹ ICE7.

³⁹² Jones and Monroe (1935, 75-76). See Appendix 3.14.

³⁹³ IC89.

³⁹⁴ ICE10.

³⁹⁵ IDC8, IDC10.

³⁹⁶ Dagne (1970, 91).

³⁹⁷ ICE19.

³⁹⁸ Appendix 3.15.

³⁹⁹ ICE7, ICE22.

Regardless of the origins and factors inhibiting the acquisition of advanced training among religious students, this was believed to have had repercussions for the laity. One learned member of the clergy in Aksum explained that “because most teachers and those who serve in the Church do not enter or finish the *Māṣḥaf Bet* they are not able to teach or improve the understanding of the people.”⁴⁰⁰ A church teacher in Aksum explained that many priests did not have training in interpretation and could not teach the rest of the society with their example.⁴⁰¹ Another interlocutor reasoned that it could happen that the member who had profound knowledge had no capacity to speak in public and to preach.⁴⁰²

In addition, some interlocutors believed that without exegetical knowledge clergy tended toward acculturated understandings of religious teachings, which contributed to perpetuate local norms and folklore understandings. One English-speaking church teacher serving at the Church of Mary of Zion in Aksum distinguished ‘faith’ from ‘tradition’ and argued that many members of the clergy who lacked or had limited training would be challenged to differentiate between the two.⁴⁰³ Alongside these problems of acculturation, some spoke of shortfalls among the clergy to embody the teachings of the faith, a problem which they considered had exacerbated in the modern era. A teacher of the St Paul Theological College opined that many priests were materialistic or corrupt and could even justify their behaviour feeling no scruples.⁴⁰⁴

This overview of the traditional religious education and its challenges begins to evidence a complex landscape that demands both differentiating formal Church teachings from clergy discourses and considering the effect of clergy discourses on the vernacular religious tradition, and vice versa. The analysis also evidences that the Church is currently in transitional times and that these changing conditions might have implications for the influence of the clergy in the local societies.

Teachings on man-woman relations, marriage and the conjugal relationship

In order to capture the multiplicity of theological influences and historical forces that fermented and shaped the tradition of this Church a wide range of old and new materials were studied relevant to these themes, including canonical and liturgical books, sections of the AC, official materials published by the Church, independent theologians and more recent writings by the *MQ*,

⁴⁰⁰ ICE13.

⁴⁰¹ IDC10.

⁴⁰² FIELDNOTES, 13 June 2017.

⁴⁰³ ICE13.

⁴⁰⁴ ICE6.

as well as books available in the Ethiopian market for public consumption.⁴⁰⁵ These were supplemented by consultations with modern and traditional Church scholars and theologians.

Table 4: Types of Church-related materials examined (not exhaustive)

<p><i>Canonical/liturgical books and relevant <i>Andämta Commentary (AC)</i></i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fätha Nägästä (FN)</i>, translated by Paulos Tzadua and edited by Peter L. Strauss, English, 1968 • <i>Ethiopic Didascalia (ED)</i>, translated by Harden John Mason, English, 1920 • <i>The Bible, the Old and New Testament Books</i>, Amharic, 2000 (EC) • <i>The Book of the Old Testament, Genesis and Exodus: Commentary and Interpretation</i>, Amharic, 1999 (EC) • <i>The Book of Baptism, Holy Matrimony and Unction</i>, Amharic, 2008 (EC) • <i>The Book of St Paul, Reading and Interpretation</i>, Ge'ez and Amharic, 2007 (EC)
<p><i>Theological works</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Order and Canon Law of Marriage of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church</i>, by Abba L. Mandelfro, English, 1976 • <i>Notes on the Teachings of the Abyssinian Church: As Set forth by the Doctors of the Same</i>, translated by A. F. Matthew, English, 1936 • <i>The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations</i>, by Mekarios et al., English, 1996
<p><i>EOTC official web materials/pages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Doctrine of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church”, English • “The Sacrament of Matrimony”, English • “Christian Doctrine and Living: Introduction to Christianity” by Abba Bekele, English • “Divine Plan and Gender Equality,” by Deacon Gebre Egziabher (Jr.), English, 2015 • The Coptic Church, “Sacrament of Matrimony” (link provided on the EOTC website), English
<p><i>Relevant books found in the Ethiopian market</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Spiritual and Social Life of Christian Women</i>, by K.K. Merahi, English, 1998 • <i>The Order of Marriage and Social Ethics</i>, by K.K. Merahi, English, 1990 • <i>Married Life and its Living</i> by Qomos Samuel, Amharic, 2008 (EC) • <i>On Women and Donkey: Gender and Christian Perspective</i>, by Heregewoin Cherinet, English, 2015 (Amharic, 2005 EC) • <i>The Commentaries on Married Life: As Taught by Saint John Chrysostom</i>, by Mämhär Shimelis Mergiya, Amharic, date not specified (probably 2004 EC)
<p><i>John Chrysostom’s commentaries</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chrysostom’s commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, original Greek • Chrysostomic contributions to AC section on the Epistle to the Hebrews, translated by Roger Cowley, English, 1988 • The traditional compilations of Chrysostom’s commentaries by Ethiopian scholars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Därsan</i>, Amharic, 1987 (EC) ○ <i>Tägsas</i>, Amharic, 1987 (EC)

⁴⁰⁵ For more detailed explanations can be found in Appendix 3.16. A full bibliography is given at the end of this dissertation.

A canonical text that was prioritised was the *Fätha Nägästä* (*FN*), which is believed to have had historical centrality in this tradition. This book was reportedly compiled by Egyptian writer Abu-l Fada'il Ibn al-Asal at the time of Cyril III of Alexandria (1235-1243) and elucidates religious issues (ecclesiastical, liturgical, monastic, lived faith) and themes that would be expected to preoccupy a Christian Church and society.⁴⁰⁶ The English translation produced by Abba Paulos Tzadua and Peter Strauss claims that *FN* draws from apostolic texts, the canon of the early ecumenical councils, writings of Early Church Fathers, laws established by Byzantine emperors and Syro-Roman and Judaic texts and laws.⁴⁰⁷ There are different theories that explain how the document reached Ethiopia and in what form.⁴⁰⁸ Tzadua and Strauss explained that throughout the history of Ethiopia the Church largely observed its provisions, mentioning that the book had been kept in monasteries and important churches where “[i]t was conserved and available for consultation.”⁴⁰⁹

Despite its pervasive use by the Church, however, it is important to consider that its existence did not displace other customary rules and norms that had existed in the country.⁴¹⁰ During fieldwork, scholars and theologians referred to *FN* as the main Canon of the Church, although it was observed that the Church was increasingly becoming attuned to secular legislation (such as concerning the age of marriage). One recent graduate from the Holy Trinity Theological College in Addis Ababa remarked the following: “*FN* has been the primary book the Church has worked with. Priests and preachers have conventionally used it widely. Now, we ignore the secular section and we look at the religious section. But because we know it was compiled by an Egyptian, we also criticise things in the religious section.”⁴¹¹ As it will be seen, the EOTC differs from the Coptic Church on marriage-related issues, which are located in the secular section of *FN*.

Man-woman relations

Both the study of official texts and consultations with theologians indicated unanimously that the EOTC has accepted and taught equality between men and women. Abba Melaku at the Frumentius Theological College in Meqele made the following statement: “Our faith teaches that men and women are equal and are one body. You can’t find anywhere in the Holy Bible or in any

⁴⁰⁶ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, xv).

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., xix.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ This seemed to be suggested in Norman Singer’s analysis of the introduction of Ethiopia’s first Civil Code (1930) and the interaction with *FN* and customary laws. As the author demonstrated, those who drafted the Civil Code were overly concerned to show the continuities with the Canon book; however, in certain instances the drafting Commission was at opposition with *FN* and at times favoured local custom. See Singer [1970, 74 (footnote 2), 83, 90].

⁴¹¹ FIELDNOTES, 13 December 2016.

religious place a teaching that says women are less than men. The teachings are [that] they are equal.”⁴¹² Citing the story of *Genesis*, he added:

It [*Genesis*] also says: God created man in His image. This means both man and woman are created in the image of God. And because they are created in the image of God they are one and have one image. They have the image of God. They are no different, there is no higher or lower. When it said “He created man in his image” it used one word “Man” for both to be called by it. Hence the teaching of our faith, first, God created both in His image.⁴¹³

Abba Melaku understood the generic ‘man’ as being synonymous to male and female. The AC commentary on *Genesis* studied for this project uses the plural third person pronoun.⁴¹⁴ The biblical verses on the fashioning of man and woman are explained in the AC section as follows: “Man and woman He created them. (Explanation) At this time Eve had not yet been created, it was later that (he) said that he (Adam) knew her. Another one says thus, that she is in Adam’s nature/make.”⁴¹⁵ In addition, it is said that man and woman were given equal authority to govern over the created world.⁴¹⁶

Father Serapim of Aksum also confirmed this theology of equality, stating: “The woman is not created above the man or the man above the woman; they both are created equally and are both the image and likeness of God.”⁴¹⁷ He suggested that this fundamental equality extended to marriage in the context of which he envisioned the spouses as being one: “Equality in the teachings of the Church means oneness of the two. The Church teaches that there is no way that the one is better than the other; they are one and equal.”⁴¹⁸ In general, theologians recognised that males and females presented some distinctive biological and psychological characteristics, but they did not in any way think that this had any impact on the fact that man and woman were spiritual equals.⁴¹⁹

The fundamental spiritual equality of men and women in this Church tradition is an important point to retain in view of works by Ethiopians postulating the non-egalitarian nature of the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁴²⁰ Still, it must be acknowledged that the Church has preserved certain practices where gender differences do emerge, such as the aforementioned baptismal differences. Such gender asymmetries were described by some theologians as the Old Testament heritage of the tradition that has been preserved as authentic and not as demeaning attitudes toward

⁴¹² ICE10.

⁴¹³ ICE10.

⁴¹⁴ Anonymous (1999 EC, 19-20).

⁴¹⁵ Anonymous 1999 EC, 19). See also the slightly different translation given by Cowley (1988, 217).

⁴¹⁶ Cowley (1988, 219).

⁴¹⁷ ICE13.

⁴¹⁸ ICE13.

⁴¹⁹ ICE10.

⁴²⁰ See some of the contributions in Panos and HBF (2002), such as Mergassa (2002).

women.⁴²¹ Despite this justification, practices of the Church that display gendered patterns have increasingly attracted attention in Ethiopia, to which Church associates have attempted to respond in view of contemporary societal conditions.

A recent *MQ* post composed by Deacon Gebre Egziabher Jr addressed some of these concerns, helping to understand what could be formal Church positions on such matters. He started his essay with the basic premise that God created Humanity as female and male; the two were of the Human who was made in likeness to God, therefore of the same nature and equal to each other.⁴²² However, the Deacon explained, Adam was created prior to Eve and Eve came from Adam. Therefore, male infants were baptised at 40 days, while female infants were baptised at 80 days. He underscored that this was not meant to suggest some inequality between the genders since in His incarnation God honoured the woman, having His Son being born through the Virgin Mary. Moreover, Deacon Gebre explained, the different authorities for wives and husbands in marriage, as will be discussed, reflected not inherent inequalities, but God's Providence as a means to secure harmony and balance in the relationship.

Deacon Gebre Egziabher addressed also the tradition of discouraging women from entering the Church during menstruation. Invoking theology, he explained that both men and women were not allowed inside the Church when there was any type of blood flow on the premise that the blood of Christ (Eucharist) should be the only blood offered. Still, while the rule is not gender-specific, the *FN* seems to have placed special emphasis on keeping women out of the Church. At one instance priests are threatened with deposition should they allow women in their menses to enter the church.⁴²³ Following this pattern, funeral practices that were witnessed in Aksum seemed to prohibit women to enter the place inside the church compound where a male was buried.⁴²⁴

Female theology graduate Heregewoin Cherinet, who made an unprecedented attempt to raise awareness about “folklore attitudes” in a recent theological book about women, has also confirmed that the rule regarding blood flow applies to all. However, she pointedly asked why the prohibition had been pronounced for women, while the injunction about the men was almost forgotten.⁴²⁵ She also traced these practices to the Old Testament and affirmed that all these prohibitions had been undone in the New Testament, citing John Chrysostom: “The Church teaches as that the great Church Father John Chrysostom strongly opposed the people who were prepared to stone a woman who had entered the [c]hurch during menstruation.”⁴²⁶ Still, as she

⁴²¹ Appendix 3.17.

⁴²² Egziabher (2015).

⁴²³ Appendix 3.18.

⁴²⁴ Appendix 3.19.

⁴²⁵ Cherinet (2015, 272-273).

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.* 273.

proposed, folklore practices prevailed and displayed a degree of immutability at the level of society.

Marriage and divorce

The EOTC's official dogma states: "Marriage is pure and undefiled, and not unclean, for God created Adam and Eve that they might multiply people. Hence flesh is not impure, for He did not repudiate the body."⁴²⁷ A *MQ* blog post cited the *Creed of the Apostles* to enforce that: "Marriage and propagation of children are pure and undefiled, 'because God created Adam and Eve to multiply."⁴²⁸ The *FN* quoted primarily verses from Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians to explain that marriage is in accordance to God's plan, that every man must take one woman for his life and stay united with her and that in marriage one becomes the owner of the other. In the *Order and Canon of Marriage* (1976) it was explained that marriage "was instituted from the very beginning along with other commands which God first gave to Adam."⁴²⁹

The *FN* echoed Paul in stating that it is good for men if they can avoid marriage and devote themselves to God, but if they cannot, they should take a wife as their own.⁴³⁰ Ephraim Isaac has expressed the opinion that historically the Church avoided prioritising monastic over married life.⁴³¹ In addition, he noted that monasticism may be a virginal life but it is not preserved only for virgins: "Many men and women become monks and nuns after having fully participated in normal physical life, and the extreme mysticism and wholesale renunciation of the physical associated with Egyptian and Syrian monasticism are alien to Ethiopian thinking."⁴³² Even as asceticism was admired and life in chastity considered superior, the EOTC appears to have viewed marriage, and specifically the monogamous couple, as the basic unit of society.⁴³³

Marriage is recognised as one of the Seven Sacraments in the EOTC and must be sanctified in church to be holy, accompanied by the Holy Communion.⁴³⁴ However, traditionally to perform the Holy Matrimony, a number of stringent preconditions needed to be met.⁴³⁵ The prohibition of pre-marital sexual relations has been especially pronounced in this tradition and applies equally to men and women.⁴³⁶ According to Church Canon, the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony or *täklil*

⁴²⁷ 'Doctrine of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church.'

⁴²⁸ ZeEyessus (2009).

⁴²⁹ Maldefro (1976, 1).

⁴³⁰ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 130).

⁴³¹ Isaac (2012, 171).

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid., 172.

⁴³⁴ 'Doctrine of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church.'

⁴³⁵ Appendix 3.20.

⁴³⁶ Kebede, Hilden and Middelthun (2014, 669).

(ተክሊል), which literally means “crowning”,⁴³⁷ is performed only for virginal couples.⁴³⁸ The Sacrament is comprised of three mysteries: the crowns (’*aklil*; ክክሊል) and rings (*qäläbät*; ቀለበት), the anointment (*meron*; ሜሮን) and the Holy Communion (*Qʷərban*; ቅርባን). Scholars in Aksum explained that it is the Holy Communion which unites the two spiritually, which is the crucial objective of the Sacrament, echoing the Canon Book of the Church.⁴³⁹ Father Serapim in Aksum was outspoken about the fact that “the *täklil* is verification, honour and prize of those who kept their virginity.”⁴⁴⁰ He described the Matrimony as a “reward” (*šəlləmat*; ሸልማት)⁴⁴¹ for those who keep the laws of the Church.

In addition to the precondition of physical chastity, Holy Matrimony has been considered indissoluble. These two preconditions may comprise part of the reason why the Church has tolerated non-church marriages historically.⁴⁴² Ephraim Isaac, in turn, has written that the EOTC “expects the few who are married in the Church to uphold an indissoluble union; yet because of this strictness, it gives freedom to, and even encourages, its members to have secular or civil marriage, which it blesses.”⁴⁴³ Canonically speaking, priests are not allowed to perform marriages outside of the Church and they may be stripped of their profession if they are found to be doing so.

Nominally, non-virgins and those who marry a second time are also able to marry in the Church. However, these marriages have a strictly penitential character and are only allowed as Providence of God to avoid fornication, with *FN* including this stipulation under “Widows.”⁴⁴⁴ This more penitential marriage can be performed also for those who start premarital relations and later decide to marry by Church procedures. According to this process, the couple must first undergo confession in communication with their spiritual father and must be taught the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* laws on marriage. After confessing their sins, the couple may need to commit to fasting for a designated amount of time, alms-giving or other works. Then, on another day, they will go into the church to take Holy Communion together which will seal their marriage. The prayers said in this case differ and there should be no crowning. According to *FN*, this is the prayer of absolution known as *Fəthät Zäwäld* (ፍትሐት ዘወልድ).⁴⁴⁵

While a penitential marriage should conclude with the couple taking the Holy Eucharist together, in practice priests may have hesitated to grant these couples Holy Communion, which may not be unrelated to the historical emphasis placed on bodily virginity as affirmed earlier. In the *Order of*

⁴³⁷ From the verb *kälälä* (ክላላ). See Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 142).

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ ICE13.

⁴⁴¹ Kane (1990a, 605).

⁴⁴² Buxton (1970, 71), Bauer (1977, 172), Pankhurst (1992b, 119) and Isaac (2012, 58).

⁴⁴³ Isaac (2012, 172).

⁴⁴⁴ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 85).

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 143.

Marriage and Social Ethics Merahi described a church marriage which he had attended and had not involved communion. The author noted that “[n]ormally the decree of the [C]hurch does not allow Christian marriages to be celebrated without [H]oly [C]ommunion,”⁴⁴⁶ but obviously this standard was not followed by all priests. Merahi’s commentary also seemed to suggest that couples had some room for choice. While the practices of local parish priests should not be taken as a spring board for appraising the official discourses of the Church, historical reasons offer ground to think that the Church might have contributed to these practices.⁴⁴⁷

Regarding the age of marriage, *FN* traditionally specified as majority age for males 20 or 25 and for females 12 and 15 (depending on wealth class).⁴⁴⁸ In most recent publications, the Church stipulates: “[A] virgin (girl) from 15 years and above; a virgin (boy) from 18 and above.”⁴⁴⁹ The aims of marriage have been defined as: (1) Preservation and growth of mankind; (2) Mutual help between husband and wife; and (3) that marriage might help to keep man and woman from the temptation of carnal lusts.⁴⁵⁰ In *FN* the purposes of marriage are identified with “the procreation of offspring, in order to preserve the lineage” and secondly “satisfaction of the desire for carnal union wherefrom come offspring.”⁴⁵¹ According to popular writer Merahi, “[w]hen we think of the basic aim of marriage, we come across the first word of God which was given to our forefathers: ‘be fertile and multiply.’”⁴⁵²

The official EOTC webpage dedicated to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony directs readers to the respective webpage of the Coptic Church, which, notably, lists the three aims in a different order as: 1) Cooperation between man and woman; 2) Procreation; 3) Protection against adultery and fornication. A note is included that “Christianity does not make reproduction the main aim of marriage, but the second aim after cooperation between the married couple.”⁴⁵³ This echoes the same understanding exposed by John Chrysostom in his Pauline commentaries, who explicitly shifted from speaking of procreation to emphasising the apostolic teaching of marriage as serving the achievement of mutual holiness.⁴⁵⁴ Pertinently, a theologian at one of the modern theological colleges explained that the EOTC had been embedded historically in an Old Testament cosmology and that Paul’s teachings regarding marriage had not been integrated in the tradition substantively.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁴⁶ Merahi (1990, 46-47).

⁴⁴⁷ Appendix 3.21.

⁴⁴⁸ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 140).

⁴⁴⁹ Anonymous (2008 EC, 75).

⁴⁵⁰ EOTC (2003c).

⁴⁵¹ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 130).

⁴⁵² Merahi (1990, 21).

⁴⁵³ The Coptic Church, ‘Sacrament of Matrimony.’

⁴⁵⁴ Chrysostom, *De Virginitate*, Paragraph 19.

⁴⁵⁵ ICE11.

The official doctrine of the EOTC condemns divorce, except for cases of adultery or perhaps impotence. Offenders of adultery are barred from the Eucharist. Levirate marriage or concubines are not tolerated and the rule applies equally both to the laity and the Emperor.⁴⁵⁶ *FN* did not make a clear differentiation between marriage annulment and divorce, but included all provisions under the section “The marriage which may be dissolved.”⁴⁵⁷ There was written that marriage could be annulled in the following three cases: 1) if husband and wife choose a religious life (to be in a monastery); 2) if one of the partners refuses to the other partner the marital union (with one reason being absence from home); or, 3) if the third end of marriage for mutual help is not fulfilled (because of adultery which brings many pains into the family, and spousal abuse).⁴⁵⁸ These dissolutions could be initiated by both men and women.

In the *Notes on the Teachings of the Abyssinian Church* (1936) it was also stated that divorce was unacceptable, citing Paul: “‘It was said, He who divorces his wife, let him give her a writing of her divorce; but I say unto you, everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of sexual misconduct, makes her an adulteress and he who married her who is divorced commits adultery.’”⁴⁵⁹ Whereas previously a man could issue a writ and easily divorce his wife, in the New Testament this was prohibited. The *FN* also includes the response that Christ gave when asked about the annulment of the laws of Moses that had permitted divorce, stating that this was done in response to “human hardness” but it was not intended by God.⁴⁶⁰

In *ED* adultery was condemned, importantly, not merely as physical act but as intention in the mind.⁴⁶¹ The author underscored that committing such adultery was equivalent to a curse. Merahi in his book went as far as to argue that “inability to live in agreement with the law of God which says, ‘One man to one woman’ results in two types of punishment.”⁴⁶² Those who committed adultery would be punished with “general diseases” such as AIDS, a perception that is not unusual for Christian communities.⁴⁶³ However, in reality, polygamy and divorces in the Christian societies of Ethiopia have been frequent. Ephraim Isaac has made the pertinent comment that the EOTC “forbids polygamy, but it does not look down on divorce.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁶ ‘Doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church’ (11).

⁴⁵⁷ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 148).

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁵⁹ Mathew (1936, 57).

⁴⁶⁰ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 143).

⁴⁶¹ Mason (1920, 4-5).

⁴⁶² Merahi (1990, 4).

⁴⁶³ Eves (2012).

⁴⁶⁴ Isaac (2012, 174).

The conjugal relationship

In the *ED* it was emphasised that husbands must be patient and loving with their wives: “Bear patiently with one another ye sons of God. And let the husband also bear patiently with his wife, and not be haughty or false; but let him be merciful and upright, and cherish her alone in love and humility.”⁴⁶⁵ In *FN* Paul is cited to establish that husbands “owe” love to their wives, and that wives owe “obedience” to their husbands.⁴⁶⁶ *FN* also cited the admonition of Peter in *Didascalia*: “O men, servants of God, every man among you shall bear the weight of his woman. He must not be haughty, not deceitful, but shall be merciful and upright, one who hastens to do that which pleases his wife.”⁴⁶⁷ In the *Order and Canon of Marriage* male headship was predicated on the husband’s responsibility for the wife’s welfare.⁴⁶⁸ In response to a suggestion that the teaching of male headship might have been used locally as pretext to dismiss or oppress women, Father Serapim of Aksum explained:

Yes that is a misunderstanding. On the contrary, this teaching proves their oneness and equality because the head will not manage without the body and the body will not manage without the head. But the two exist together in oneness. In a like manner so are the husband and the wife. That is what S Paul thought. Since God created Eve from Adam’s body she is his body, which means they are one body. This is a mystery to be known through the eyes of faith it is not one to be verified through a laboratory test. Christ also taught the equality and oneness of the two in the Gospel of St Matthew.⁴⁶⁹

Abba Melaku provided a similar reply but he also invoked the context in which the apostles taught, giving the following explanation:

It is said the man is the head of the woman, but one should ask what the reason is for it, why it is said so. One should notice the type of culture in the East at the time. This was written for Corinthians. And Paul was the one who wrote it. What was the attitude of the Greeks toward women at the time? Many women got married and the pagan religion at the time did not give a lot of room for women. So Paul thought man and woman are equal, but in administering their house the man is the head. For example, the prime minister of a certain country is its leader, but that does not mean to say he is smarter and cleverer than all the scientists and the doctors in that country. Accordingly, leading does not mean being better. [...] In a particular office there might be employees who are better than the head. So this order of administration is from the divine not from human intellect. For example, a head of a family is the one who leads, guides and takes responsibility, this is what headship means.⁴⁷⁰

Abba Melaku reasoned that this organisation may have been in part a response to a society that was already organized in a patriarchal way, a *status quo* that could not be simply reversed. However, while the ancient Greek or Jewish societies had historically denied women equal status to men, the Orthodox notion of male headship attempted to rectify this. It must be emphasised that

⁴⁶⁵ Mason (1920, 4-5).

⁴⁶⁶ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 80).

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Maldefro (1976, 6-7).

⁴⁶⁹ ICE13.

⁴⁷⁰ ICE10.

while gender roles are encouraged for the preservation of harmony in the family, this ideal does not emerge anywhere to have been given the place of doctrine in the EOTC.

Although sexuality issues did not appear to have been addressed yet, sexual relations are considered acceptable within the conjugal relationship. Ephraim Isaac characterised the attitude of the Church toward sex as “liberal and natural” and postulated that the EOTC “faces little or no special difficulties in coming to grips with the progressive sex ethics. Individual families may have rigid views of sex of their own choice, but the Church itself regards sex as a normal condition and a natural basis of life.”⁴⁷¹ Still, sexuality should also be contained even within marriage to accommodate a religious lifestyle. Merahi has mentioned in his work that the couple is expected not to have intercourse during the following four occasions: 1) In time of pregnancy, 2) On the Baptizing Day, 3) During Main Fasting Days, Main Holidays and Sabbath, 4) During Menstrual Time. Considering Ethiopia’s regular fasts and religious holidays, the abstinence from sexual intercourse required of the married couple cannot be considered an easily achievable task. While the Church has not articulated formal teachings regarding birth control, the *FN* cites a prohibition on “shedding the seed outside the uterus of the woman” and “avoiding the natural fruit”⁴⁷² while Deacon Gebre Egziabher in his *MQ* post spoke of the sinfulness of abortion.⁴⁷³

Considerably less has been written about domestic violence within the Church, with most relevant information being recent. Cherinet referred in her book to a seminal effort made by Ethiopian Church Scholars to create a manual against gender violence based on the Gospel. This was published in 2009 with the title *Developmental Bible (Yäləmat Wängel; የልማት ወንጌል)* and took a clear stance to condemn any violence or maltreatment of women as un-Orthodox, calling everyone to “follow God’s will...to protect women from suffering.”⁴⁷⁴ Deacon Gebre Egziabher in the *MQ* post that was analysed earlier referred also to conjugal abuse. He seemed to attribute this violence to changes in the gender realm. Like most clergy and theologians, he conceived the family to be the building block of human society: “The biblical position is clear, each have their own role and order, and if this divine order is not followed for the home or for that matter even the larger family, meaning nation, then disaster occurs and peace lost.”⁴⁷⁵

Deacon Gebre Egziabher furthermore drew examples of abusive relationships from the Old Testament times, which were associated with both men and women. The Deacon’s examples of abuse included a wife’s pressure on her husband to commit adultery (Sarah and Abraham), a husband’s neglect for his wife (King Solomon) and crime that is motivated by sexual lust (King

⁴⁷¹ Isaac (2012, 172).

⁴⁷² Appendix 3.22.

⁴⁷³ Egziabher (2015).

⁴⁷⁴ Cherinet (2015, 66).

⁴⁷⁵ Egziabher (2015).

David).⁴⁷⁶ He saw these acts as the outcome of the fall from heaven and proposed that only by following God's commandments could these be overcome. However, while he pointed to the need for all believers to depart from the vices of the flesh, including lust and concupiscence, he concluded his essay by citing Timothy's advice to women to overcome their love for adornment and be modest and profess Godliness in good works, implying somewhat that part of the solution lay in the hands of women.

Finally, it is noteworthy that in *FN* cites as one of the reasons to end a marriage is where a spouse suffers damage by the other. This is on the premise that the third end of marriage, mutual help, was not fulfilled. It is said: "[If there is] damage to the life of one of the couple by the other, and their quarrel results in bitter violence involving enmity [the marriage is dissolved]."⁴⁷⁷ The translator's footnote to this passage explains that enmity was used for the original term "rebellion" and referred to hostility between the families of the spouses.⁴⁷⁸ In the same section it is also mentioned that adultery was prohibited "lest the killing of one of the partners or indeed of the seducer be occasioned by jealousy, or lest the killing of the one who devises the marriage of one of the adulterers happen."⁴⁷⁹ The way in which these teachings were articulated underscores again the Church's central tenet that marriage should be a peaceful affair.

Examining the influence of John Chrysostom's teachings on marriage in this tradition

On the basis of John Chrysostom being a seminal figure in the marital tradition,⁴⁸⁰ an inquiry was undertaken to establish whether his prolific commentaries on marriage and the conjugal relationship have had substantive effect on the domains of gender relations and marriage in the EOTC.

Text-based investigations suggested that his commentaries on marriage were, on the whole, weakly known and incorporated.⁴⁸¹ Two books dedicated to John Chrysostom's commentaries, *Darsan* and *Tägsaş* which were used by the EOTC do not appear to include substantive material on marriage and married life.⁴⁸² A teacher of the Holy Trinity Theological College observed that "John Chrysostom is very influential in the EOTC, although his work on marriage may be less known. Although he is quoted frequently, the quotes are often taken out of context, and the meaning is not comprehended."⁴⁸³ A teacher at the St Paul Theological College proposed that

⁴⁷⁶ Appendix 3.23.

⁴⁷⁷ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 149).

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Appendix 3.24.

⁴⁸¹ Appendix 3.25.

⁴⁸² Appendix 3.26.

⁴⁸³ ICE3.

historically emphasis was put on John Chrysostom's works about asceticism rather than marriage "primarily because most people associated him with the life of the monk."⁴⁸⁴ He reasoned that traditionally the most learned scholars of the faith had been monks and naturally they must have had more interest in translating Chrysostom's commentaries referring to ascetic life. However, a renewal of interest in Chrysostom's works in recent years is visible with the *MQ* having published some of his complete (non-marriage related) commentaries relying on existing English translations.⁴⁸⁵

Chrysostom's commentaries on the *Epistle to the Hebrews* did make some references to marriage and the conjugal relationship and these appear to have been part of the Ethiopian tradition.⁴⁸⁶ Roger Cowley has translated the original Epistle to the Hebrews from Ge'ez to English and the AC commentary that accompanied it.⁴⁸⁷ His translation evidenced that the AC section on this epistle was informed by Chrysostom's commentaries. He also juxtaposed the commentaries to the Greek original and found them to align,⁴⁸⁸ which would not be surprising if John Chrysostom's full homily had been translated into Ge'ez from Greek.⁴⁸⁹ Chrysostom's full homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews could not be located in any Ethiopian language during this study, thus key messages in his homily were examined in Greek.⁴⁹⁰ A full analysis of this epistle, its background objectives, Chrysostom's motivations for commenting on it, as well as its context may be found in the Appendix.⁴⁹¹

Although the comments on married life that Chrysostom provided on this specific epistle do not reveal the breadth of his teachings on marriage,⁴⁹² they do make clear that in his thinking marriage was crucial to the life of the Christian and needed to serve as a *locus* for moral and spiritual edification if it were to serve Orthodox purposes.⁴⁹³ As it was suggested, central in his later works on marriage was the understanding that the end of marriage was soteriological, which departed from the Old Testament emphasis on the end being procreation. Equally important is that Chrysostom emphasised the need for spiritual cleanliness and readiness, seeing bodily virginity as inadequate, as evidenced in his story of the Ten Virgins.⁴⁹⁴ This stands in contrast to the Ethiopian Church's emphasis on physical chastity and on procreation regarding marriage.

⁴⁸⁴ ICE6.

⁴⁸⁵ Appendix 3.27.

⁴⁸⁶ Cowley (1988, 295-343).

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 344.

⁴⁸⁹ Lee (2011, 32).

⁴⁹⁰ Appendix 3.28.

⁴⁹¹ Appendix 3.29.

⁴⁹² For a detailed presentation of Chrysostom's commentaries on man-woman relations and marriages see Istratii (forthcoming).

⁴⁹³ Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 152

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 145-146.

Conclusion

Studying the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahədo* faith from the prism of learned Church scholars and theologians evidences a theological tradition premised on teachings of spiritual equality and healing that influenced and was influenced by the Semitic-Cushitic cultural underlayer and political realities in which it developed. This seems to have resulted in the preservation of Church elements oriented to Judaic times that affirm the folklore culture. The analysis has indicated internal variations, with the Church upholding some tenets very rigidly (such as the precondition of bodily virginity in marriage) and enforcing other tenets quite loosely (such as the prohibition of divorce) which could reflect a society where bodily virginity, with an emphasis on the female, was historically pronounced and where divorces were frequent. While gendered practices were not theologically explained in pernicious ways, the limited exegetical training of the clergy in conjunction with a gender-biased society could become problematic if the demarcation between Church teachings and folklore traditions has not been clear in the perception of the laity, as suggested in works such as Cherinet's.

The following chapter will evidence precisely these intertwinements in the discourses of the laity in Aksum. It will provide more concrete insights into how the socio-cultural location of the religious tradition could be associated with pernicious social norms and even situations of conjugal abuse.

Chapter 4

Vernacular understandings of faith and the interface with socio-cultural norms

Introduction

As apprehended in the theology-informed analysis of the previous chapter, the investigations in Aksum showed that *haymanot* (ሃይማኖት) was discussed concomitantly with *bahəl/bahli* (ባህል/ባህሊ). The term *haymanot* could be translated as either ‘faith’ or ‘religion’,⁴⁹⁵ while the term *bahəl* could be rendered as ‘culture’ or ‘tradition.’⁴⁹⁶ However, the rendering of the words in English is less important than the ‘translation’ of the conceptual framework that underpinned and related these terms to each other within local perceptions.⁴⁹⁷ A typical position that rural interlocutors expressed in conversations with the researcher was that their *bahəl* was also their *haymanot*. Another position was more critical and pronounced; *haymanot* as having become somehow acculturated or being practised at times as thoughtless tradition. These attitudes were visible in the discourses of both members of the laity and the clergy.

How people perceived the subtle relationship between *bahəl* and *haymanot* seemed to have implications also for how they understood, rationalised and responded to social norms and practices that related to local gender asymmetries and even abusive conjugal situations. Moreover, such discourses revealed various dimensions through which faith could become influential in personal and conjugal life, providing crucial analytical guidance for this study. This chapter presents the range of understandings and attitudes regarding faith and culture that was identified locally along a tentative spectrum. This organisation helps to convey the embedding of the religious tradition in its cultural surroundings and to demonstrate the implications of such discourses for the preservation of the status quo.

⁴⁹⁵ Appendix 7.5.

⁴⁹⁶ Appendix 7.6.

⁴⁹⁷ In general, throughout the thesis the pairs faith/religion and culture/tradition are used interchangeably, although phrasings such as ‘religious tradition’ and ‘personal faith’ are preferred. While in English faith might pertain to more personal belief and religion to a system of beliefs, it was not possible to adopt such a rule of thumb for translating *haymanot* since *haymanot* could capture all these analytical levels, and it was not clear how it was meant by interlocutors each time.

Understanding the *haymanot/bahäl* relationship in the countryside

The ethnographic experience in Aksum evidenced that the religious vernacular idiom was pervasive and underpinned socio-cultural norms and practices, with all local residents typically speaking about their culture (*bahäl*) in terms of their faith (*haymanot*). This perceived proximity between socio-cultural norms and faith prompted a deliberate attempt to investigate directly how local people understood their correct/proper Orthodox faith (*täkakkäl* 'Orthodoks *haymanot*; ትኩል ኦርቶዶክስ ሃይማኖት) as a further lead into understanding the tradition that was embodied vernacularly.

These explorations evidenced that the faith could be described as cultural heritage and moral norms, as conscientious practice and as spiritual experience. In most discourses these conceptualisations interweaved into each other, but different individuals prioritised them differently, resulting in variable attitudes regarding established socio-cultural norms. While no generalisations can be made, these attitudes can be located along a broad spectrum with the left hand-side representing a viewpoint that considered social norms to align perfectly with the faith and that was resistant to any changes, and the right hand-side equating a perspective that advocated for a redefinition of the vernacular religious tradition, albeit in diverse ways. The following section provides a closer look into this spectrum, evidencing the difficulty of pinning down neat categories. In this analysis, discourses of rural laity and clergy are juxtaposed to discourses of more learned clergy, *MQ* attendants and urban residents since no single point on the continuum could be equated to any one group. Still, discernable trends suggested that it mattered whether one was positioned in the countryside or the city, whether one had a close relationship with the Church and whether one had a theology-based background to supplement one's exposure to the teachings of the rural clergy.

Position that pronounced faith as cultural heritage and moral norms

On the leftmost edge of the spectrum belonged interlocutors who pronounced faith as their distinct heritage and identity. This religious heritage was usually talked about in conjunction with societal moral norms. Discourses in this conceptual range made few distinctions (if at all) between *haymanot* and *bahäl*, with the latter being perceived generally in positive terms.

This position emerged in the discourses of rural interlocutors who spoke about their *täkakkäl* 'Orthodoks *haymanot* as being indigenous to Ethiopia, the only faith that they had inherited and that was unquestionably theirs. These interlocutors could also affirm that *haymanot* had been historically strong in Aksum and that it continued to be so in current times. One man at the villages observed: "Religion (*haymanot*) among the people has been here for a long time. It is

known; we have a known church here. We believe it (have faith in it) without any doubt.”⁴⁹⁸ He then spoke of the ancient history of the faith: “There is no other faith (*haymanot*) we accept other than what we’ve been raised in. We call Mary our Mother. We do not know any other (faith).” It is important to observe that St Mary was often cited in these discourses not only because in this tradition she is given the most prominent place as the Mother of God and intercessor, but also because she was considered the protectress of Aksum. One male interlocutor remarked: “Aksum, starting from the ancient times, has been a Christian region. And *'Ortodoks haymanot* had a stronger and deeper root in Aksum. Blessed Virgin Mary is here too.”⁴⁹⁹ Such statements begin to suggest that faith was not conceived outside of people’s regional/local heritage and history.

Simultaneously, faith was associated with personal conscience and moral conduct. The man who referred to St Mary being present “here” also added: “For example, if I want to steal someone else’s money, my morals punish me because of my faith (*haymanot*). Because religion doesn’t support lying, stealing... and the likes. Religion has the highest value in Tigray, especially in Aksum. So religion is given the highest place.”⁵⁰⁰ He located thus the faith in his personal values dictating that he should not steal or lie and “punishing” him if he acted against the laws of God. A participant during a workshop with men at one of the villages similarly remarked: “The Christian people here understand what killing or stealing is. This is because, starting from our childhood, priests have been teaching us what is good and what is not.”⁵⁰¹ He expanded:

Starting from our childhood we have been learning the spiritual ways, we were baptized and accepted Christianity, so we know what the laws in the Bible are. And, the national law punishes people starting from the age of 18 and above. But in the Bible people start fasting starting from the age of seven. So our morals are bounded by the faith (*haymanot*), so that’s why.

According to this man’s narrative, in the local society it was common practice for people to be raised within a Christian ethos. After being baptised, children would be typically introduced to “the laws in the Bible” and to fasting as early as seven years old. Like other interlocutors, he made a direct linkage between becoming baptised (a Church Sacrament), fasting (a Church practice) and moral conduct (personal values and standards of behaviour). This testimony highlighted a general belief that early initiation to Church life combined with practising important religious norms resulted in the cultivation of personal morals or what participants called ‘conscience’ [*həllina* (ገሊፍ)].⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁸ IM13.

⁴⁹⁹ PWM1P2.

⁵⁰⁰ PWM1P2.

⁵⁰¹ PWM1P.

⁵⁰² Appendix 7.7.

It was also not unusual for local people to make more explicit statements that their ancient faith was also their culture (*bahəl*). This was best exemplified in some discourses regarding the typical religious gathering (*maḥbär*). At one such occasion, a woman characteristically asserted that the *maḥbär* reflected both “our culture and our religion”,⁵⁰³ an attitude that was discernably shared by many rural residents. In various instances, interlocutors identified *bahəl* with “good” traditions, such as one man who referred to the practice of elders to support the reconciliation of young couples or a “culture of helping each other and sharing the work.”⁵⁰⁴ Another man associated cultural values that prioritised peacefulness and non-violence with their faith.⁵⁰⁵ These more positive discourses regarding *bahəl* seemed to emanate from interlocutors’ perception that *bahəl* overlapped with *haymanot*, or was heavily influenced by it.

Interlocutors in this conceptual range relied primarily on what they had learned or heard from clergy to explain their faith, which justifies why a research participant stated that “people know what the priests have told them.”⁵⁰⁶ When asked about their understandings of the *’Ortodoks haymanot*, individuals who understood their faith as their unquestioned tradition cited what they had heard the priests teaching them, which was generally equated to the “word of God.” Typically interlocutors in this conceptual category recognised that they needed to keep the commandments of God, but were unlikely to speak of a spiritual way of experiencing the faith. Most participants in this group answered in the lines of a rural woman who explained that according to the faith one must attend church regularly, pray, participate in the mysteries, and concerning marriage, a married couple must stay together until the end.⁵⁰⁷ This reflected the prevalent discursive repertoire of the local clergy, which will be analysed elsewhere, and contrasted to the discourses of those on the right hand-side of the spectrum who emphasised a return to the faith as spiritual experience.

In general, interlocutors on this side of the spectrum were convinced that the religious tradition continued to be strong in Aksum. However, many spoke of a deteriorated faith which they attributed to a less rigid religious lifestyle, as highlighted in one woman’s comment: “Faith in Aksum does not change because there is arduous conviction. It is people’s laziness. Faith cannot create bad things.”⁵⁰⁸ The problem seemed to be located in people’s problematic religious embodiment and not the vernacular religion itself. Some interlocutors opined that the religious lifestyle had become weaker as a result of the expansion of what was described as a more

⁵⁰³ FIELDNOTES, 20 March 2018.

⁵⁰⁴ IM16.

⁵⁰⁵ IM9.

⁵⁰⁶ FIELDNOTES, 8 October 2016.

⁵⁰⁷ FIELDNOTES, 19 June 2017.

⁵⁰⁸ IW30.

individualistic and ‘worldly’ (*‘alämawi*; ግለግዢ)⁵⁰⁹ lifestyle, which interlocutors associated primarily with ‘modern times’ (*zämänawi gize*; ዘመናዊ ጊዜ),⁵¹⁰ urbanisation and the advent and expansion of technologies (phone, radio, TV) and secular education.⁵¹¹ These were not considered necessarily evil, but were described as ‘temptation’ (*fätäna*; ፈተና)⁵¹² that could distance people from a traditional faith-based logic and lifestyle.

A rural male interlocutor made the following comment: “[T]here is no spiritual action⁵¹³. Some people say ‘whatever comes, comes.’ Now (it is all about today); for eating, for drinking, for dancing, nobody knows what tomorrow will bring, so ‘let me be as I wish’ they say. All in all, they say ‘whatever comes, comes.’”⁵¹⁴ The man’s combined use of “spiritual” with “action” evidences that he referred here to people living by religious standards and norms. Referring to the Holy Eucharist (*Qʷərban*) which should normally be incorporated in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony in this tradition, another man observed the following: “Do you know what they think? Do you know what they say? Let me tell you: ‘I am a boy, I am still young. When I become old I will go to take *Qʷərban*’ they say. But, the time at which God will come cannot be known (so one should always be prepared).”⁵¹⁵ This man thought that more and more people were abstaining from Church Sacraments because they had a mind for earthly things. A man in his late 40s who would soon be ordained a priest also opined that “before, the faith was extensive. Even though people had a more simplistic understanding of the teachings of the faith, they were strong about coming to church and praying. Now, they are tempted by the new ways and the desire for money.”⁵¹⁶ Both these interlocutors found fault in what they perceived to be a diminished sense of piety which they equated to a less rigid embodiment of religious norms. While one referred to spiritual “action”, it must be underscored that none described faith as personal spiritual experience and both prioritised following religious norms.

Since traditionally the faith had been envisioned in association with a Christian conscience described by some as personal ‘law’ [Tigr.: *həgi* (አገ); Amh.: *həgg* (ህግ)]⁵¹⁷ that dictated moral conduct, the deterioration of the faith was associated with a parallel deterioration of moral values in the younger generations. It was repeatedly affirmed by educators, parents and clergy in the field that in the past children had not dared to speak in front of adults. In the traditional society, the young were always expected to respect and to serve those senior to them who were

⁵⁰⁹ Appendix 7.8.

⁵¹⁰ Appendix 7.9.

⁵¹¹ FIELDNOTES, 22 April 2017; 16 June 2017; IM26.

⁵¹² Appendix 7.10.

⁵¹³ Original: *mānfäsawi tǣgbar* (መንፈሳዊ ተግባር).

⁵¹⁴ IM13.

⁵¹⁵ IM17.

⁵¹⁶ IDC4.

⁵¹⁷ Appendix 7.11.

conventionally identified with wisdom.⁵¹⁸ It was posited that with the advent of the secular school, children had changed and had steadily become more outspoken, while manifesting a diminishing capacity to listen and to obey. This was paralleled by many to a reduction in Church education, as in the following comment by an elderly man:

Before, in the time of our mothers and fathers, the religion was strong, now it is not. We were told that children who do bad things are rude. They would tell us that God will be angry and punish us and we were afraid (to misbehave). In the modern times, there is no what you call ‘fear of God.’ The children of the parents of modern times are destroyed/spoiled. If they (parents) advise them (children), they do not listen. They do not do like this. “You are lame” they say (to their parents).⁵¹⁹

Contrary to this situation, the speaker declared, in recent times children openly insulted their parents. This deterioration was generally attributed to parents and in part to clergy, who were considered responsible for children’s training. One male interlocutor commented:

Ay! Now the faith has been weakened. It is the reflection of modernity. Before, the spiritual fathers found their children on Sundays at church. If they did not find them, they would ask: “Why did you not come?” Now there is no such thing. Before, the priests if their spiritual children fought, they reconciled them and made them seek repentance and communion. But now, since priests themselves have sunk into modernity, they have abandoned these practices.⁵²⁰

This statement highlights that modernity was believed to affect both the laity and the clergy. In the past, all education had been provided through the religious schools whose prerogative was to instil in children moral values and ethical behaviour and to encourage the cultivation of a faith-based *həllina*. With the diminution of clergy’s time spent with children this socialisation was considered jeopardised. Some thought that this was not unrelated to the fact that more and more priests were choosing to attend secular school and to pursue modern theological education, as in the following comment: “At this time now, there are no more priests because they go to the science (secular) school.”⁵²¹ Another male interlocutor reasoned that learned clergy had more incentives to stay in the city due to a large salary gap in the two contexts. He cited as typical salary for a rural priest around 300 birr per month (about £8) and for an urban learned *mārigeta* reaching as high as 5,000 birr (about £139),⁵²² figures that could be considered generally accurate.

In conclusion, it is important to observe that while people who took such positions spoke of the deterioration of the religious lifestyle because of a diminished piety, the effects of modernity, or clergy’s reduced teaching, they still did not speak of the need to redefine the faith or to abandon

⁵¹⁸ For an interesting analysis of hierarchical relationships in Christian Ethiopia see Malara and Boylston (2016, especially 51).

⁵¹⁹ IM12.

⁵²⁰ IM26.

⁵²¹ IM21.

⁵²² IM26.

vernacular norms and practices. They considered that the faith had been strong in the “old times” and within the established traditions and norms, suggesting that the remedy to this deterioration was probably a return to a traditional religious lifestyle more so than its redefinition.

Position that pronounced faith as conscientious practice

Further down the spectrum could be located pronouncements that emphasised the conscientious character that the faith should have. These interlocutors were more likely to view some aspects of the vernacular religious tradition as *bahəl*, giving *bahəl* more negative undertones. Nonetheless, interlocutors in this conceptual range did not relinquish their religious tradition either.

In this conceptual range belonged rural interlocutors who believed that some of their countrymen and countrywomen lived the faith as ‘habit’ or ‘custom’ [Tigr.: *ləmdi* (ልምዲ); Amh: *ləmd* (ልምድ)]⁵²³ and that they replicated conventions unconsciously. One rural male interlocutor commented: “Sometimes [priests] teach after the liturgy. But, most of the times, people go (to their homes) to eat. People live by habit/convention⁵²⁴.”⁵²⁵ A female rural resident in turn commented: “There is no [religious conscience]. They just do it without knowing/understanding⁵²⁶. They just kiss the church walls and they return [home].”⁵²⁷ Yet another male rural resident opined: “It [faith] is not done properly, we just do it blindly. So, I always feel bad. There exists what we call religion but there is no religious education.”⁵²⁸ Similar opinions were expressed by urban interlocutors who considered themselves Orthodox and who frequently attended church, such as a woman who affirmed that the faith has not been lived at the level of *həllina*, but as *ləmdi*. She stated: “They all go to church wearing their scarf (*näṭāla*; ነጠላ), they bow and pray and do the right movements. They repeat without understanding the Ge’ez prayers they hear. Then they go back home and think and do bad things.”⁵²⁹

These and other testimonies amounted to a perception that many people followed the prescriptions of priests not because they espoused a conscientious understanding regarding the meaning or objective of these prescriptions, but due to thoughtless bodily reiteration under the imposition of custom. It is important to differentiate these concerns from a critique of impiety or worldliness due to modernity, which was associated with the previous position. Here the problem was rather one of acculturation, whereby thoughtless reiteration that was rigidly upheld had

⁵²³ Appendix 7.12.

⁵²⁴ Original: *ləmänor bäləmd näw yäminorut* (ለሙኖር በልምድ ነው የሚኖሩት)

⁵²⁵ IM19.

⁵²⁶ Original: *zäyməfəlaṭ* (ዘይምፍለጥ).

⁵²⁷ IW34.

⁵²⁸ IM16.

⁵²⁹ FIELDNOTES, 30 June 2017.

replaced spiritual or religious motivations. This was highlighted in the comment of a church teacher at one of the villages, who explained that for the people in his surroundings “faith is culture”,⁵³⁰ even though elements of this culture were “new things”⁵³¹ passed on from one generation to the next through habitual or thoughtless practice.⁵³²

In this position could fit also many urban residents, although the population in the city of Aksum displayed probably the highest plurality in attitudes. Many had grown up in villages around Aksum city and thus made similar critical points that the vernacular tradition in the countryside had been practised unconsciously. One young man opined that people came to church and recited by memory or by reading mechanically, without having a substantive understanding of meaning or the purpose behind the recitation, asserting: “We are there for the presence only.”⁵³³ He also explained that life in the villages had been conventionally based on a repetitive pattern and a time-consuming routine that left no room for spiritual matters.⁵³⁴ He thought that in their conventional experience of the religious tradition people “only follow the pattern.”⁵³⁵ Another interlocutor asserted that people unconsciously bowed when they heard the priests’ teachings and prayers, but in effect they internalised little of what they heard and continued habitual practices after they returned home.⁵³⁶ Once, a female interlocutor imitated people’s gesture of doing their cross and bowing in church to illustrate the thoughtless bodily recitation which she attributed to the majority.⁵³⁷

Some of the interlocutors holding such positions associated the lack of conscientious faithfulness to the clergy’s failure to provide the proper interpretation of the prayers and teachings in the Church, as highlighted in this comment: “Nobody tells us what the meaning/interpretation is.”⁵³⁸ Others emphasised the fact that priests were often not available when the faithful sought spiritual advice.⁵³⁹ As it was observed during fieldwork, many churches were rarely open during weekdays because priests worked in the field, attended ceremonies to bless, travelled to the city for meetings or to receive their salary, or visited the homes of spiritual children for celebrations and to resolve problems when they were called.

Over and over again, research participants postulated that the faith had not been experienced at the level of human conscience (*həllina*) because people lacked a more profound understanding of

⁵³⁰ Original: *haymanot bahal’eyu* (ሃይማኖት ባህል እዩ).

⁵³¹ Original: *haddiṣ nägär* (ከዲሻ ነገር).

⁵³² IDC10.

⁵³³ IDM5.

⁵³⁴ IDM5.

⁵³⁵ IDM5.

⁵³⁶ FIELDNOTES, 27 June 2017.

⁵³⁷ FIELDNOTES, 25 June 2017.

⁵³⁸ IM13.

⁵³⁹ IM16.

the message and objective of the faith. However, interlocutors who made such comments were still known to participate in Church life or the vernacular religious practices, as opposed to others who had given up religious life, had espoused more secular lifestyles or had moved to another religious camp. In other words, their critique was not of the vernacular religious tradition holistically or absolutely, but of the limited understanding with which people practised this tradition conventionally. It seemed to be suggested that a more accurate teaching about matters of the faith could redress this problem of thoughtless reiteration.

Positions that emphasised faith as spiritual experience

Interlocutors who spoke of acculturation could exist at different points along the continuum with those closer to the centre unlikely to speak of fundamental changes in the vernacular religious experience, contrary to those closer to the right hand-side of the spectrum that emphasised a return to a more spiritual embodiment. Still, even these interlocutors abstained from making critical statements about the vernacular religious tradition, recognising that the general public valued this tradition profoundly and would not receive well departures from what they perceived as their cultural heritage and identity.

MQ attendants in the city of Aksum could fit in this category since they tended to pronounce the problem of acculturation cautiously.⁵⁴⁰ Those who were interviewed for this study tried to avoid judgements about the vernacular religion and found reasons in historical or ecclesiastical rationales to justify the weak understanding of the faith on the ground.⁵⁴¹ Some *MQ* attendants expressed the desire to rediscover the faith both for personal benefit and by disseminating the proper information to others.⁵⁴² This reflected the deeper familiarity of *MQ* attendants with Church texts and teachings than the general public, as evidenced in the participatory workshops held with them. Participation in the prayer sessions of the *MQ* evidenced also that some attendants had gone through the traditional Church educational system and that most of the attenders were generally highly educated in secular vocations.⁵⁴³

Indicatively, a male *MQ* attendant who was also a school teacher at one of the villages of study reasoned that believers had been impeded to a large extent in their comprehension of Church teachings due to the archaic Ge'ez liturgical language which was infrequently translated by

⁵⁴⁰ FIELDNOTES, 22 July 2017.

⁵⁴¹ IDW40, IM24, IM27, IM29, IDM9.

⁵⁴² FIELDNOTES, 26 April 2017, 11 June 2017, 22 July 2017.

⁵⁴³ This emerged from the background data gathered from the *MQ* workshop participants. See table 2 in Chapter 2.

clergy.⁵⁴⁴ However, he also spoke of priests' lack of exegetical knowledge and weak spirituality, as conveyed in the following exchange:

R: Is religious education not given in church?

M: No. Not as often as it should. In our Church, the largest part is allocated to prayer. The prayer is in Ge'ez which makes it difficult for most Orthodox Christian followers to understand.

R: Do the priests know the meaning of the prayer?

M: Yes, they do, but they don't translate it.

R: Why?

M: The absence of the translation is a big problem. Daniel Kibret always says "People who say love one another don't know how to love." The way people understand is different from one another and applying that and translating is the biggest problem.

R: What is the reason for this?

M: The religion exists but the big issue here is the contextual meanings found in the Bible which priests haven't understood. Hence, they have been influenced [by culture] and translated these through cultural ways.⁵⁴⁵

This interlocutor believed that most clergy knew the translation but they failed to articulate it to the people. He cited a statement made by Daniel Kibret, a prominent EOTC deacon and prolific speaker, to suggest that many members of the clergy could speak the religious teachings, but they might not embody them in their own lives. Since they do not embody them, it is more difficult to comprehend them and to teach them cogently to others. Additionally, this interlocutor was aware of the fact that in this tradition biblical verses needed to be studied in view of the context in which they had been spoken, which priests lacking theological training might be unable to do. Not understanding these teachings through the proper hermeneutical framework made the clergy more susceptible to an acculturated exegesis.

Other urban residents not associated with the *MQ* but who tried to re-inscribe their faith and to embody it in ways that felt more impactful to them could also fit in this category. A young man cited earlier confided that he preferred to pray alone at home but he was very secretive about it.⁵⁴⁶ As he attested, he was an Orthodox, but remarked that if he dared to speak of a more personal relationship with God to anyone in his surroundings, he risked being associated with the Protestant movement: "[A]ny deviation begets suspicion in this society. In our society, any revolution is unacceptable, in every aspect: private, religious, cultural, political, or economic."⁵⁴⁷ The same opposition to change was affirmed by multiple other interlocutors, including a young female store owner in the city of Aksum.⁵⁴⁸ She explained that she was often criticised by female acquaintances if she failed to attend church as consistently as expected due to her busy work

⁵⁴⁴ IM29.

⁵⁴⁵ IM29.

⁵⁴⁶ IDM5.

⁵⁴⁷ IDM5.

⁵⁴⁸ FIELDNOTES, 24-25 March 2017.

schedule (this being a woman who closed her store every weekend to be in church). She was also of the opinion that most people had lived their faith according to *bahāl* and had become change-resistant about the most minor aspects of religious life. She also explained that if one tried to question the superficiality of certain practices and to speak of a more conscientious faith, others were likely to become judgemental and antagonistic and call this person a *Pente* (ጸገጤ). Yet another interlocutor stated that if a person was a little different and refused to abide by traditional conventions, people criticised them and outcast them or accused them even of sorcery, especially if they were female or better-off.⁵⁴⁹

The case of a married young woman in Aksum city may also be cited.⁵⁵⁰ This interlocutor also considered that the Church in her country had presented traditionally many problematic aspects, including some clergy's own failure to embody the faith's teachings in their own living. However, she appreciated the more profound value of the faith and tried to experience it in a way that could bring more fulfilment in her life. She did not appear to be typically religious, in the sense that she did not attend Church liturgy every Sunday and she wore modern clothes (including trousers) which one rarely saw in women with an active Church life. However, she expressed a very strong faith and was thankful to God for the blessings that she had received in her life. She was convinced that a relationship with God could be cultivated at all times and she had developed a habit of frequently praying internally. She shared that every night she said a number of silent prayers before sleeping and she felt that these were having a positive effect on her marriage.

It is important to underscore that while all these interlocutors expressed concerns with the way the religious tradition had been conventionally perpetuated, they still appreciated it or partially embodied it. Both the rural and the urban interlocutors who were cited here considered their faith indigenous and uniquely Ethiopian and did not want to see it harmed, but rather strengthened in ways that would make it more impactful at a personal level. In addition, many of the vernacular religious traditions, such as regarding church attendance and behaviour, or the typical religious gatherings, were generally upheld even by more critical interlocutors. There was however more sophisticated awareness about them, which could reflect both the higher level of schooling of the urban residents and their exposure to more refined Church teachings by relatively well-trained clergy in the cities.

⁵⁴⁹ FIELDNOTES, 30 June 2017.

⁵⁵⁰ FIELDNOTES, 1 July 2017.

Observed patterns in the countryside and implications for the continuation of social norms

The analysis above aimed to give a sense of the diverse ways in which research participants with different backgrounds juxtaposed social norms and culture to their religious tradition. Interlocutors were found everywhere along this spectrum and no neat categorisations can be proposed. The fact that someone considered the faith to be part of the local cultural heritage or identified it with a set of moral rules does not mean that they could not be experiencing the faith also conscientiously or more spiritually. The spectrum was proposed as a more fluid alternative to a rigid typology precisely to accommodate better the nuanced attitudes that were observed during fieldwork.

How rural residents thought about their religious tradition had to do with who they were, their level of exposure to urban lifestyles and discourses of learned clergy and their personal spiritual state; however, it is evident from the cited cases that more rural residents were found on the left side of the spectrum where culture was less likely to be criticised. This is not unrelated to the fact that historically the large majority of rural residents relied on rural clergy to learn about their faith, who might have displayed various shortfalls as observed by numerous interlocutors. It was observed that rural residents who were likely to identify *haymanot* with *bahäl* were less likely to preoccupy with the clergy's limited training, while those who found faults with the vernacular religious tradition could also pronounce the clergy's deficiencies. One learned rural *märigeta* remarked: "The priests are the ones who often teach but, because they haven't learned much besides what they use for liturgical services they do not teach in depth, whatever the subject matter may be."⁵⁵¹ Another member of the clergy with a prominent position in the Church affirmed: "Most priests study only the liturgical services."⁵⁵²

The fieldwork observations support these affirmations. Most interviewed priests had not reached the *Maşhaf Bet* and had no formal training in the interpretation of the Gospels, although this was a possibility.⁵⁵³ Everyone reported having studied well the liturgical aspects of the *Qeddase*, primarily *Wəddase Mariam*, *Sä'atat*, *Kidan* and *Liṭon* with different levels of exposure to St Yared's *Dəgg'wa*, *Zema* and *'Aq'wam*.⁵⁵⁴ A few admitted that they had studied some of the *'andəmta* commentary on the four Gospels.⁵⁵⁵ In addition, a few spoke of a memorisation of Ge'ez prayers, but not all specified having obtained training in the language.⁵⁵⁶ Most affirmed having undergone training for some years as deacons before marrying and becoming ordained as

⁵⁵¹ IC6.

⁵⁵² IC5.

⁵⁵³ IC4.

⁵⁵⁴ IC2, IDC4, IC7, IC11.

⁵⁵⁵ IC2, IC3.

⁵⁵⁶ IC4, IC7.

priests. Exceptions included cases where a learned *mārigeta* or a church teacher (*māmhar*) was also an ordained priest, which was not infrequent. One *mārigeta* cited six years' training, including in the School of Interpretation,⁵⁵⁷ while a church teacher cited 15 years of study.⁵⁵⁸

While rural residents could recognise that clergy in the city of Aksum tended to have higher theological training than rural priests, few thought that the teachings of the rural clergy did not suffice. Also, they seemed unaware of *MQ* activities and teaching sessions in the city, with exceptions including a school teacher at the village who resided in the city.⁵⁵⁹ The lack of *MQ*-inspired pronouncements of faith as spiritual experience and the rural clergy's own limited invocations of the spiritual aims of the faith⁵⁶⁰ resulted in a situation where few rural residents spoke about faith. In fact, some rural residents opined that faith in the countryside was more tangible than in the city of Aksum where the effects of modernity were more discernable, as highlighted in the following comment: "Still the faith is strong here and people are simpler in their thinking. In the city, they are all business-oriented and care only to make money and maximise their profits."⁵⁶¹ 'Simpler' captured a more popular belief that people in the countryside were less calculative and showed faith in God. Such statements highlight again that for rural interlocutors modernity was associated with a deterioration of the faith, and was a more salient threat than was the problem of acculturation.

These rural attitudes are important to understand because they had implications for people's adherence to or departure from established practices, including social norms that could be fostering gender asymmetries or other pernicious situations related to conjugal abuse. For instance, two rural men with different educational backgrounds affirmed that it was culture to segregate labour in rigidly gender-based ways and were adamant of the fact that their faith did not teach such a division.⁵⁶² A male resident remarked: "It is not by religion. It is our habit. Based on lasting tradition woman works her own work and man works his own work. They work their due work. Until now this old habit has not changed."⁵⁶³ A primary school teacher, also resident of a village, observed that "the Church has always preached equality. Inequality as seen in current gender-segregated lifestyles and distribution of authority in the family is the result of cultural practice."⁵⁶⁴ At the same time, a man at the village affirmed that "religion defines man to care for

⁵⁵⁷ IC6.

⁵⁵⁸ IDC6.

⁵⁵⁹ IM29.

⁵⁶⁰ IC1, IDC8, IC10.

⁵⁶¹ IDM8.

⁵⁶² IM13, IM29.

⁵⁶³ IM13.

⁵⁶⁴ IM29.

outside work and the wife in the house.”⁵⁶⁵ In this case, religion (*haymanot*) was invoked rather to grant legitimacy to the conventional practice.

Such discourses start to evidence how the dual understanding about *bahäl* (one as equivalent to *haymanot*, another as almost at odds with it) enabled people to nominally de-legitimise social norms and practices, while essentially preserving the vernacular ways. Despite the distinctions made between *haymanot* and *bahäl* by some rural interlocutors, these were not sufficiently potent to displace more prevalent discourses that considered the religious tradition and social norms to overlap. To demonstrate this, the following section provides a closer look at discourses surrounding alcohol consumption at the regular religious gatherings. While some interlocutors affirmed that this practice comprised part of their vernacular religion, others expressed more critical opinions that these had become socio-cultural events not necessarily serving spiritual purposes.⁵⁶⁶ Even clergy considered alcohol consumption on these occasions to have become a thoughtless habit, which they nonetheless seemed unable to abandon.⁵⁶⁷ In the end, the religious gatherings were perpetuated under their conventional format by both laity and clergy.

The religious gatherings and alcohol consumption between *bahäl* and *haymanot*

Religious gatherings convened for the veneration of the saints or big religious celebrations emerged to be a central component of the vernacular life in the countryside. In general, two types were identified in the local society, what interlocutors called *zəkər* (ገዢ) [or *šwä' mahbär* (ሰው ማህበር)] and the typical *mahbär*. What differentiated the two were the principles under which they operated. The *zəkər* was described as being open to unspecified number of people according to the host's capacity and the rule of reciprocity (*lafanti*; ለፍገታ) which meant that one invited those who had invited him/her.⁵⁶⁸ The *zəkər* gatherings also seemed to be segregated by gender, with women and men being seated in separate rooms. If the house had only one main room, men or women were seated in the yard on tree stems. In contrast, the typical *mahbär* was for a select group of people of a specific number (12 or 21) and was held by rotation each month. For example, *mahbär* gatherings held on *Mikael* day were for men only (12 persons), although in the countryside women were also invited to the same house but they stayed in a separate room, apparently treating the occasion as a *zəkər*. On the other hand, *mahbär* gatherings held on *Maryam* day were both for men and women (21 people). Many of the religious occasions were

⁵⁶⁵ IM28.

⁵⁶⁶ IM16, IDC10.

⁵⁶⁷ FIELDNOTES, 14 May 2017, 9 July 2017.

⁵⁶⁸ IM28.

celebrated both monthly and annually, with the most prevalent celebrations being dedicated to patron saints of surrounding churches. The researcher counted at least 17 such occasions per each month, with the most popular provided in the Appendix.⁵⁶⁹

Typically, the family who hosted the gathering prepared enough traditional beer [Tigr.: *səwa* (ሰዋ); Amh.: *ṭäla* (ጠላ)] and bread (*'ambaša*; አምባሻ) for the guests and if they were wealthier they served also roasted legumes (*tärä*; ጥረ). On the day of the religious gathering, when a new guest arrived, she or he was first seated with the other guests of her/his gender. Then, the male host or an older son proceeded to fill a cup for the guest with home-made *səwa*, while the woman of the house brought a tray with bread to offer a large chunk to the newcomer. The bread was offered always only once, while the beer was offered multiple times; it seemed to be a norm or expectation for the host to appear overly generous and to apply pressure on guests to drink more. The *səwa* was held in traditional large clay containers and transported with a smaller plastic container into individual cups. Wealthier households used their own traditional cups, but the majority used old tomato cans which could be quickly and easily washed. The religious gatherings started late in the evening and continued into the next day.

Participation in about 15-20 *maḥbär* and *zəkər* gatherings during the fieldwork period confirmed that the pattern almost never changed. Women who were observed first took some *səwa* with their finger and made the sign of the cross on their (and their children's) forehead before taking a sip. While sipping their *səwa*, they chatted a bit with their neighbours and soon they departed to return home where chores and older children awaited them. Men seemed to engage in deeper conversations and stayed for lengthier periods of time. In most gatherings, people spent their time discussing what seemed to be mundane matters, such as money issues, livelihoods, meetings and trainings at the local administrative office or other events that had happened during the day.⁵⁷⁰ A single occasion on which men and women had been stranded in the same room provided the researcher with the opportunity to overhear also the men's discussions.⁵⁷¹ This was on a *Mikael* day during which men typically met as a *maḥbär*, with women joining in a separate room as *zəkər*. Due to pouring rain and lack of space, this being a poor household comprised of a single room and a small yard outside, women and men sat together as a unique occasion. No one seemed to mind the arrangement and readily justified it due to the rain. Initially, men and women did not directly interact, but eventually the discussion extended to engage both genders when people started to entertain prospects of finding gold in the area, in view of one of the female attendants' recent finding of what people thought to be a tiny portion of the precious mineral.

⁵⁶⁹ Appendix 4.1.

⁵⁷⁰ FIELDNOTES, 20 March 2017, 26 May 2017.

⁵⁷¹ FIELDNOTES, 19 June 2017.

The numerous gatherings that were observed started to evidence for the researcher the more practical function that these had in the local society. When asked, various interlocutors readily said that they participated in these gatherings to obtain the blessing of the saint or because they made a promise to a specific saint to join^{572, 573}. However, other reasons could be more salient in the everyday social scene, as highlighted in this man's comment: "The *maḥbār* is also a socialisation event. They (attendants) counsel each other and give advice. They also know their place in society. People see who is getting richer and they know their place in society."⁵⁷⁴ On a different occasion a female interlocutor affirmed that the *maḥbār* provided a context for eating and drinking together and for "playful conversation"^{575, 576}. As Helen Pankhurst found to be the case in Menz, the religious gatherings in Aksum appeared to "provide an event to which women can look forward, and occasion to think about, to dress up for, and one which is socially approved."⁵⁷⁷ As opposed to the all-male drinking places, these were also occasions on which women could drink legitimately. Thus, it is not surprising that the socialisation aspect of the religious gatherings was especially pronounced in the discourses of women,⁵⁷⁸ such as in occasions when women teased each other playfully of drunkenness after returning from these gatherings or when they let go in other ways.⁵⁷⁹

Since it was the custom to offer traditional beer as part of hosting them, drinking was a common practice among both the laity and the clergy. Numerous interlocutors affirmed that alcohol consumption often resulted in problematic behaviour among some men, disinhibiting them and leading them to become aggressive with other males or their wives and children at home, as highlighted in the following comment:

There are a lot of religious gatherings here and they drink there. The man comes home drunk after spending the evening there, then his wife will tell him: "Drunkard, where were you? Drunkard!" If she insults him, he will take a stick and strike the woman's head. This is the origin of divorce. In short, drinking alcohol is the beginning of hitting. In this country there was no other drink than milk and they never got drunk. The drink of this country is *ṭāla*. It is made of *qolo* (ቆሎ), *gäbs* (ገብስ) and *gäšo* (ገሽ). It is really strong. It is not the same with manufactured beer. And when you drink it, it comes up to the head. Then, the brain does not work. Then, there is hitting. To divorce becomes an obligation. In conclusion, it is culture (*bahäl*). Today, for example, it is the 21st of the month, it is the celebration of Mary, the holy feast; there are many religious gatherings [today]. And there is in these a lot of *ṭāla* consumption. When I drink beer my brain will soon start spinning. And then there is no

⁵⁷² Original: *mäbša'a* (ሙብጻኣ).

⁵⁷³ IM28.

⁵⁷⁴ IM28.

⁵⁷⁵ Original: *čäwata* (ጭዋታ).

⁵⁷⁶ FIELDNOTES, 1 June 2017.

⁵⁷⁷ Pankhurst (1992b, 154).

⁵⁷⁸ FIELDNOTES, 20 March 2017, 19 June 2017.

⁵⁷⁹ FIELDNOTES, 14 March 2017.

sleep, one vomits. So, for the woman to live with such a person is bad. He is very bad, he does not listen.⁵⁸⁰

Like this interlocutor who described this pattern as “culture”, other rural residents tended to distinguish between the stipulations of the faith regarding drinking on these occasions and people’s own practices, as highlighted in the comment of a rural male resident: “[O]ur religion forbids fighting. ‘Drink if thirsty’ says the [bible/the religion] and then go home when you are full (you had enough).”⁵⁸¹ In other words, faith and drinking were not considered incompatible, but people took issue with drinking excessively which could result in un-Christian conduct. Another man opined: “If the person has faith, he will not drink like this.”⁵⁸² Yet another observed: “*Tāwahādo* religion teaches one not to be violent but to love by mutual concern, to discuss and to advise each other. As I told you, although one knows the Church’s teaching, some get intoxicated soon. After they go home, they become indiscriminately violent against children and the spouse.”⁵⁸³

In these pronouncements the religious gatherings, which were generally understood as people’s vernacular religious tradition and expression of their faith, were differentiated from the pernicious practice of drinking excessively. The latter was described as a norm or culture (*bahāl*) with clearly negative undertones, and it was the individual who was held liable for excessive drinking. The broader culture which incorporated holding the religious gatherings or the convention of serving alcohol in their midst, however, was never questioned, as illustrated in the following incident from one of the villages. On the occasion, two religious gatherings took place on the same day, one of which was hosted at the house across from the researcher’s compound.⁵⁸⁴ When the last guests had left sometime around midnight, a fight broke out, creating a pandemonium of male voices. Apparently, a police officer came and mediated the situation. Conversations with neighbours on the following day evidenced that such behaviour was considered bad, but this recognition did not trigger any open criticisms or problematisation about the conventional format of the religious gatherings and liability was attributed only to those individuals involved.⁵⁸⁵

Along with drinking, other interlocutors emphasised as problematic the departure of the conventional religious gatherings from their more spiritual character. The general idea seemed to be that these should include “[r]eading books and the life of the saint.”⁵⁸⁶ However, testimonies existed that suggested otherwise, as the remark of one man: “In this country, what is called *ṣwā*’

⁵⁸⁰ IM25.

⁵⁸¹ IM28.

⁵⁸² IM14.

⁵⁸³ IM28.

⁵⁸⁴ IM28.

⁵⁸⁵ IM28.

⁵⁸⁶ IM28.

maḥbär exist. In this community people meet in order to eat and to drink. So, they are not used to talking and learning about spiritual matters.”⁵⁸⁷ One priest who was also church teacher opined in turn that these gatherings had become acculturated, adding new elements overtime.⁵⁸⁸ Another local church teacher made visible efforts to experience the religious gatherings more conscientiously by teaching carefully about the faith, as highlighted when he was invited to an exclusive *maḥbär* and when he hosted his own *zəkər* at the village.⁵⁸⁹ While the church teacher still followed the customary norm of serving *səwa*, he did so in a stronger ambiance of quietness that was rarely encountered in the *zəkər* gatherings of the laity (and many other clergy).⁵⁹⁰ Conversations with him evidenced that he probably belonged on the right hand-side of the spectrum along with the *MQ* attendants who spoke of the need to experience the faith more spiritually.⁵⁹¹ Still, it is important that he did not abstain from the vernacular norms, which he knew would be unacceptable in the local society.

Despite the existence of more critical pronouncements, the practices of the majority seemed to have more authoritativeness in the local society. As opposed to the aforementioned church teacher, other clergy generally consumed *səwa* and appeared unable or unwilling to depart from the practice, as illustrated in a conversation the researcher had with a local priest during a car ride from the city of Aksum to the village.⁵⁹² It became noticeable that the priest was slightly inebriated, which the researcher proceeded to confirm by asking the priest directly. The priest smiled affirmatively and explained that he had been to a *maḥbär* in the city where he had been served *səwa*. He tried to justify his light-headedness by referring to his small frame which made him easily influenced by alcohol. He explained with a tone of assumed helplessness that everyone kept offering him to drink and that this had become a habit (*ləmdi*) that was hard to give up. On another occasion the researcher joined a group of 10-12 priests after one Sunday liturgy for a religious gathering held in the back of a local church.⁵⁹³ Like other gatherings, this included eating traditional bread and drinking *səwa*. This setting offered a good opportunity to explore what the priests thought about the drinking component in these spiritual events. A solemn discussion followed during which some of the attendants reiterated that drinking *səwa* had become a habit (*ləmdi*) for them that was hard to give up. However, some expressed uncertainty as to why it would be theologically inappropriate for them to drink in their priestly role, and this no church teacher present seemed able to address.

⁵⁸⁷ IM16.

⁵⁸⁸ IDC10.

⁵⁸⁹ FIELDNOTES, 5 April 2017, 7 April 2017.

⁵⁹⁰ FIEDLNOTES, 7 April 2017.

⁵⁹¹ IDC8.

⁵⁹² FIEDLNOTES, 14 May 2017.

⁵⁹³ FIELDNOTES, 9 July 2017.

Since all priests consumed *səwa*, laity who relied exclusively on rural priests to learn about the faith and viewed them as examples of the faith would not be expected to think that the practice, if not excessive, was at odds with their religious tradition. On the other hand, the fact that the norm had become a personal habit that was difficult to abandon, made it unlikely that clergy would openly oppose the practice. Even if some decided to do so, in view of the fact that other priests could become visibly inebriated, clergy had little credibility to teach the laity to abstain from it.

Conclusion

The analysis of discourses regarding faith (*haymanot*) from the context of Aksum has demonstrated ethnographically the intertwinement of the religious tradition with its cultural surroundings which was suggested in the previous chapter, while adding important insights about the role of religious parameters in the continuation of norms and even some forms of conjugal abuse in the rural setting. The analysis has made evident that *haymanot* could be associated differently with socio-cultural norms within local perceptions and that this depended in part on interlocutors' level of exposure to Church theology and clergy discourses. In addition, *haymanot* could be spoken and experienced at different analytical levels, pertaining to institutional, normative or personal expressions. A study of the role of religious parameters in conjugal abuse attitudes and realities would need to explore all these dimensions, without becoming oblivious to the possible intertwinements at each level with socio-cultural norms. With this multi-dimensional framework as a reference point, it is possible to proceed into a closer analysis of local discourses and attitudes about conjugal abuse in the Aksumite society, which are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Local conceptualisations, rationalisations and attitudes regarding conjugal abuse in the countryside of Aksum

Introduction

As it was explained in the introduction, for the investigation of conjugal abuse no presuppositions were made, other than that it emerged within the conjugal union, which generally incorporated in this study also ‘irregular unions.’ The aim of this approach was to explore to what extent conjugal abuse was pinned down as a problem and how prepared local people were to speak about it, however without assuming an artificial ‘outsider’ typology.

Studying conjugal abuse contextually turned out to be a challenging matter for a host of linguistic, communicational, structural and other socio-cultural reasons. Choosing a proper lexicon for enquiring about conjugal abuse was hindered not only by the unfamiliarity of the researcher with local terminology, but also by what emerged to be a fluid discursive repertoire emanating from the fact that local people did not appear to have pinned down yet a concrete typology or an encompassing conceptualisation of conjugal abuse. As would be expected in any other context, interlocutors’ definitions were quite subjective and emanated from their life experiences. In addition, most did not isolate the discussion of conjugal abuse from more general realities and problems that affected the conjugal relationship, or spoke directly of conjugal problems without clarifying if they considered these within their definition of abuse. Furthermore, the query was challenged by communicational parameters, not least due to the sensitivity of the topic within interlocutors’ socio-cultural environment and the researcher’s foreignness which could deem interlocutors particularly cautious in their responses.

In view of these challenges, the compilation of conceptualisations, rationalisations and attitudes regarding conjugal abuse provided in this chapter is an imperfect attempt to present the research participants’ intricate discourses without succumbing to the usual tendency to categorise what seemed to be quite fluid in people’s cosmological framework, although some data grouping was necessary to convey better the content of the investigations. The aim is to pull together the different threads in research participants’ discourses and to summarise the conceptual range, without giving the impression that these were either prevalent or established understandings.

Accessing the conceptual repertoire: Challenges and strategies

The objectives of the study raised the practical question how to explore perceptions of conjugal abuse in the local society without employing an existing term that would already assume too much or be too specific and could direct or bias people's focus and articulations. It also needed to be considered how to introduce the topic in ways that did not cause stress or discomfort to interlocutors in view of the possibility that anyone might be experiencing some form of abuse or be abusive with their intimate partners. The *desideratum* for a neutral, gradual and non-judgemental approach at all stages of research (along with the researcher being from 'without') reinforced the need for discreet and culturally sensitive investigative techniques.

As it was suggested in the discussion of methodology, a decision was made to explore conjugal abuse within a wider context of problems related to marriage and conjugal cohabitation in the local society.⁵⁹⁴ From this basis proceeded the exploration of more personal conceptualisations of conjugal abuse. This gradual interviewing approach was found to be effective in motivating interlocutors to speak about both positive and negative aspects of married life, which usually resulted in them independently referring to various forms of what could be classified as abusive behaviour or situations in marriage. In turn, this provided opportunities for the researcher to identify local terminology and to use this in further questioning.

Rural interlocutors did not generally use an abstract and comprehensive concept for abuse, but multiple terms for hitting/striking, hurting, the beating stick, arguing, fighting, misbehaving, etc., each of these in a specified situation or context. One popular term that seemed to be more encompassing and not limited to physical or verbal/emotional abuse was the Tigrigna verb 'hurt' or 'offend' (*bädälä*; በደለ).⁵⁹⁵ The discussions with different interlocutors in fieldwork also suggested that the term *bätəri* (በትሪ),⁵⁹⁶ for the beating stick, was used symbolically by female interlocutors to represent physical abuse. Male interlocutors did not generally use this term, but tended to denote a physical beating by referring to the heavier stick or staff (*dula*; ዱላ).⁵⁹⁷ If the researcher referred to either *bätəri* or *dula*, interlocutors understood immediately that the question concerned physical abuse. However, asking the question this narrowly, limited the attention to physical abuse only, while the aim of the study was to explore how interlocutors conceptualised abuse more generally.

In most cases when research participants identified some problematic behaviour in marriage, it needed to be established if they identified any of these with abuse and more generally how they conceptualised conjugal abuse, necessitating a more encompassing term. For the purpose of

⁵⁹⁴ Original: *nay ḥadar šägämat* (ናይ ኣዳር ጸገማት).

⁵⁹⁵ Appendix 7.13.

⁵⁹⁶ Appendix 7.14.

⁵⁹⁷ Appendix 7.15.

asking, initially the dictionary term for ‘abuse’ (Tigr: *təqə’at* (ጥቕሳት); Amh.: *təqat* ጥቃት) was tested.⁵⁹⁸ Consultations with a Tigrayan linguist suggested that *təqə’at* had existed in the local vocabulary but that the meaning of ‘abuse’ was reintroduced from Amharic causing a slight alteration to the conventional meaning.⁵⁹⁹ While it made sense to enquire how people understood conjugal abuse⁶⁰⁰ there was some degree of uncertainty as to how interlocutors comprehended this term due to its versatility. The majority gave direct answers and seemed to understand it as any form of harmful situation that was salient in their minds. Some were more perplexed, however, and there were a few times when people did not seem to understand the question at all.

As a strategy, multiple ways of asking the same question were employed with each interlocutor to ensure that the comprehension of the question was not limited by the usage of a single terminology. Asking people how they understood conjugal abuse or inviting them to explain how they defined an unhealthy/healthy relationship or harmful/beneficial married life seemed to produce results. Another format was to ask how people defined harmful situations or harmful behavioural patterns in marriage. A table of the different formats of the question asked in Amharic and Tigrigna is provided in the Appendix.⁶⁰¹

Linguistic factors emanating from the versatility of the Tigrigna language, amplified the challenge of this conceptual fluidity. Some of the terms that interlocutors used were specific and referred to easily identifiable actions, situations or human behaviour; other terminological choices were more versatile or ambiguous. Particularly prevalent was the verb ‘disturb’ or ‘upset’ (*räbbäšä*; ጸበሽ).⁶⁰² This was deployed ubiquitously, at times with a humorous connotation to suggest that someone was naughty or annoying, or more solemnly to suggest that one was troublesome or even aggressive. Interlocutors used it when they spoke about drunken men picking fights with other men, a husband’s difficult behaviour with a wife, youngsters’ harassment of tourists, a child’s disobedience or naughtiness, or other situations. A similarly versatile term was *sədənät* (ሰድነት) which pertains to misbehaviour or vulgarity.⁶⁰³ Again, interlocutors could use it across numerous contexts, including within the context of the conjugal relationship. The versatility of this and other terms meant that it was not always possible to pin down with certitude an equivalent English translation and that it was not made immediately evident if interlocutors considered the situations they referred to as abusive.

⁵⁹⁸ Appendix 7.16.

⁵⁹⁹ The Tigrayan tutor that the author worked with explained that in its more conventional usage *təqə’at* has meant to ‘be on the offensive’, such as in the advance of soccer players in the field or in the army.

⁶⁰⁰ Original: *nay hadar təqə’at* (ናይ ኣዳር ጥቕሳት).

⁶⁰¹ Appendix 5.1

⁶⁰² Appendix 7.17.

⁶⁰³ Appendix 7.18.

It must be underscored that rural residents did not generally speak in abstract or theoretical ways, but exposed their perceptions and rationalisations contextually by reference to real-life situations. They often spoke of problematic behaviour, situations or contexts in the generic third person or through the stories of unnamed friends. Sometimes they used the first person to speak hypothetically, such as in the expression “if I, for example...” Some direct declarations of conjugal abuse were made by battered women with whom the researcher interacted. However, in the local close society where people seemed to guard all private information carefully, even these open declarations might be questioned for their unusual veracity. Regardless of the causes, people’s cautious strategies to communicate their views presented the study with important challenges. The contextual examples interlocutors used needed to be somehow organised to extrapolate more conceptual implications.

The most formidable limitation to the investigation of local understandings of abuse was, however, the fact that forms of abuse that have been reported in the IPV reports from Ethiopia were almost never articulated. Very few referred to sexual abuse, although the problem of sexual coercion was implied in the answers of some. Consequently, a conscious effort was made to initiate more discussion about sex and sexuality in married life in ways that were locally appropriate and confidential. In such conversations, female interlocutors did not appear to feel inhibited to speak about their sexual life. Gradually, numerous women and men affirmed what could be sex-related problems in the form of marital expectations and spousal duties, as it was also reported in the other studies from Ethiopia.⁶⁰⁴

These conceptual and communicational reasons deemed researching conjugal abuse in the countryside of Aksum a particularly challenging and intricate task. As a response to these challenges, an attempt has been made to explain as transparently as possible terminological choices made during the investigations and at the stage of data analysis. While abuse (*təqə ‘at*) is cited on the occasions where it was used by the researcher or the interlocutors, it should be retained that this term did not necessarily emanate from local discourses. Hence, preference has been given to speaking about harmful or abusive behavioural patterns and situations when translating interlocutors’ discourses, although ‘conjugal abuse’ has been used in this dissertation as an umbrella term.

Data on conjugal abuse

Data on conjugal abuse was sought at the Women’s Affairs office in Aksum city and the social courts both in the city and the countryside. These conversations pointed the lack of a systematised

⁶⁰⁴ Gessessew and Mesfin (2004, 143), Tseday (2011) and Allen and Raghallaigh (2013, 258).

recording system for conjugal abuse specifically. Staff at the Women’s Affairs were able to point only to a survey that had been compiled for the last six months of 2016 for the *La’alay May Čäw wäräda* looking at women’s issues and institutions they resorted to. No reference was made to conjugal abuse, but it was found that when women faced “abuses”, they did not generally know the state laws, and when they did, they did not know how to take advantage of them.⁶⁰⁵

The lack of a concrete conceptualisation of conjugal abuse in the local society was reflected also in the court system in Aksum, which did not register cases under such a category. This was true both for the village courts, which have inherent power to adjudicate family matters, and the Appeals Court in Aksum city that was responsible for the countryside and resolved cases appealed at the local social courts. In general, when physical abuse within the conjugal relationship was reported, this was under the category of physical assault and was treated under the criminal code.

Examination of records on conjugal matters brought to the Appeals Court in Aksum evidenced that virtually all the cases that local staff had registered regarding the conjugal relationship referred to child custody, child maintenance and property division issues at the time of divorce, which emerged to be extensive in the local society. A list of marriage-related cases for the year 2015-2016 showed that there had been 45 appealed cases of this nature. The table below indicates the type and number of cases that originated in each of the 16 rural administrative units.

Table 5: All appealed cases to the Appeals Court of the *La’alay May Čäw wäräda*, 2015-2016

No	Name of village or <i>tabäya</i> (ጥብያ)	Number of maintenance cases	Number of property division cases	Number of child custody cases
1	<i>Dura</i> (ዱራ)	0	0	0
2	<i>Däbräqal</i> (ደብረቃል)	3	1	0
3	<i>Mahäbärä Sälam</i> (ማህበረ ሰላም)	2	3	0
4	<i>Adi Šəhafi</i> (አዲ ፅሓፊ)	5	1	0
5	<i>May Wäyāni</i> (ማይ ወይኒ)	1	2	0
6	<i>Miha</i> (ሚሐ)	0	0	0
7	<i>Hašibo</i> (አሻቦ)	1	1	0
8	<i>Läsaləso</i> (ለሳልሶ)	2	3	1
9	<i>Wäläl</i> (ወለል)	1	2	0
10	<i>Däbrä Bərhan</i> (ደብረ ብርኃን)	1	2	0
11	<i>‘Ədaga ‘Arbi</i> (ዕዳጋ ዓርቢ)	0	0	0
12	<i>Kätäma Dego</i> (ከተማ ደግ)	2	4	0
13	<i>‘Awulä ‘o</i> (አዉሊዎ)	2	0	0
14	<i>Säglamen</i> (ሰግላሜን)	0	0	0
15	<i>Natka Bla ‘ə</i> (ናትካ ብላዕ)	0	0	0
16	<i>Mädägo</i> (መደጎ)	4	1	0
Total		24	20	1

⁶⁰⁵ Laelay Maychew Wereda Women's Affairs (2008 EC).

A staff at the Appeals Court headquarters in Aksum mentioned also that in the same year five criminal cases had been appealed, which included three rape cases by strangers, one case of conjugal murder and one case of infant abuse. The criminal cases in that year had included no physical assault. This led the Appeals Court worker to observe that conjugal abuse, including physical assault, most likely existed but was not generally reported or addressed through the court system. It could also be that these cases were sorted by the village courts through social pressure and never made it to appeal. In the Appeals Court worker's articulation, "[i]t is possible to conclude that most cases of conjugal violence are unreported, being silenced by the community or its culture."⁶⁰⁶

The reports of the local social court officers seemed to confirm this. In one of the village communities where research was conducted, for the six months between 30 July 2016 and 30 January 2017, the court worker reported that 153 new cases had been registered and 15 were crimes.⁶⁰⁷ The officer also reported that there were in the community about 85 women who had been abandoned by men, many non-local soldiers, and that many had had children whom they could not provide for. Consequently, about 55 cases were child maintenance disputes. In the other village community, for the six-month period 22 August 2016–7 February 2017, the court worker reported 600 cases of which 50 were crimes.⁶⁰⁸ Of the full number of cases 30 were cases of child maintenance. Again, no specific statistics were kept about conjugal violence, which seemed to reinforce the general view that conjugal abuse of less than a criminal nature was either unreported or reported as a different conjugal problem at the time of divorce. It is also notable that while court workers registered cases in notebooks, the reports provided above were compiled *in situ* for the purposes of the study.

During the stay at the villages (February-July 2017), at least five female victims of physical violence, who self-reported their abuse, were interviewed in the context of this study (some multiple times). In addition, at least two crimes of a conjugal nature were reported to have occurred in the year prior to fieldwork or during this research. One was the murder of a wife by her husband and another was an attempted murder by a couple who together tried to kill the ex-husband of the woman.⁶⁰⁹ These cases had apparently gone to court and the perpetrators had been on trial or waited to hear a sentence. The conjugal murder in the one-year period that was provided by the Appeals Court worker referred to one of these two crimes. The second crime had

⁶⁰⁶ Hand-written report handed to the researcher which included the table above.

⁶⁰⁷ See Appendix 5.2.

⁶⁰⁸ See Appendix 5.3.

⁶⁰⁹ FIELDNOTES, 4 March 2017, 5 June 2017.

been reported as having occurred more recently, falling outside of the time period for which data were provided.

At one occasion, the researcher also encountered an elderly woman who had come to the police station at the village administrative centre where the researcher resided to report her husband for assault.⁶¹⁰ The woman had walked for about two hours to seek help. She had previously been at the police and the local hospital following another instance of abuse by her husband, at which time the man had been in custody for 24 hours. A nurse working at the local hospital corroborated that the woman had visited the hospital.⁶¹¹ The researcher took the woman to the police officer to file a report. As the woman took her seat to tell her story, the researcher asked the police officer what could be done. His brief comment prior to the researcher leaving the scene was that there were many women who reported such cases but very few times it was proven that there was conjugal abuse.⁶¹² This seemed to confirm that women's reports were written down but most under different problems of a conjugal nature.

Participants' discourses of harmful conjugal behavioural patterns and situations

As it was explained, most interlocutors introduced the topic of abuse by discussing marriage problems in more general terms. In their responses, not all marital problems were identified as *tagə'at*, while some of the situations were spoken more explicitly in conjunction with it. Due to space limits, an overview of marriage-related problems in the local society raised by research participants is relegated to the Appendix.⁶¹³ It may be observed here that the situations or behavioural patterns that participants did discuss as explicitly abusive were not disconnected from the wider problems and stresses affecting the conjugal relationship. The reasons for marriage problems and extensive divorces that were reported match generally those identified in the literature review and include poverty and material stresses, failure to procreate, family interference, spousal incompatibilities, changes in gender dynamics and pernicious husband behaviour, such as drinking, committing adultery and long absence from home.⁶¹⁴ As will be seen, these were also associated with more abusive situations.

⁶¹⁰ FIELDNOTES, 28 March 2017.

⁶¹¹ FIELDNOTES, 29-31 March 2017.

⁶¹² FIELDNOTES, 28 March 2017.

⁶¹³ Appendix 5.4.

⁶¹⁴ Giel and Luijk (1968), Pankhurst (1992a), Pankhurst (1992b) and Tilson and Larsen (2000).

Situational or interactional abuse

Much of the abuse that interlocutors discussed was perceived to emanate from the dynamics of the conjugal relationship and to manifest incrementally. ‘Argument’ or ‘quarrel’ [Amh.: ርዕዓረጃጃጃ (ጭቅጭቅ)],⁶¹⁵ ‘disagreement’ or ‘lack of understanding’ [Tigr.: zäyməsməma ‘; (ዘይምስምማዕ)]; Amh.: ‘alāmāsmamat (አለመስማማት)],⁶¹⁶ and ‘hurt’ of ‘offend’ (Tigr.: bädälä) were frequently cited under what could be grouped as situational or interactional abuse. For instance, one female interlocutor answered that “abuse means problems”⁶¹⁷ and one male respondent affirmed: “Abuse for me is when there is no peace, no love and lots of argument in a marriage.”⁶¹⁸

All research participants described similar situations in which arguments emerged and led incrementally to different degrees of abuse, as indicated in the table:

Table 6: Conceptualisations of abuse expressed by the laity in Aksum

<p><i>This (abuse) means...eh, simply quarrelling, conflict, when he drinks, or fast quarrelling. People are different in their behaviour. When a man comes from his work, when he is pleasant she becomes happy. Even [regarding] cooking the food. He can say [to his wife]: “You will do this in a few minutes, now take a seat. Take some water.” She then becomes happy. This is a good relationship, healthy. But bad relationship is when the man comes from the work, when she says something and she quarrels by simple manner, for no reason, and he gets a temper. He may even beat her.</i></p> <p>–Male, married, 30s</p>
<p><i>They are arguing inside their marriage. Because there is no agreement within their married life they always argue. If there is hitting, they may divorce and things improve. The reason for this is that the wife when her husband returns drunk interrogates him: “Why did you drink until now? Why did you waste money?” She talks to him like this. So he replies to her by asking: “Why do you speak to me like this?” Then he may even hit her. This is violence against the wife. For this reason, he begins arguments with her.</i></p> <p>–Female, married, 30s</p>
<p><i>When the husband returns from wherever he’s been, the wife asks him where he was because she wants to make sure he didn’t come empty-handed and he is the provider of the house. And when he comes empty-handed, they might argue and he might get angry and hit her. This is called abuse.</i></p> <p>–Female, separated, 40s</p>
<p><i>Abuse is not allowed, but due to poverty, abuse can emerge. Additionally, if there is incompatibility of characters, that is to say, if she says something argumentative/confrontational, [abuse] is also possible. Some people drink a lot and can hit; for this reason this results in abuse.</i></p> <p>–Female, widowed, 30 years old</p>
<p><i>The reason is because they (men) get drunk. Another reason is that they have a character/personality that is argumentative. There are some people who have everything but they still create problems. This is a problem of personality; could be behavioural incompatibility between wife and husband.</i></p> <p>–Female, unspecified</p>
<p><i>[T]here are some men who argue with their woman when they come home. In this time, there</i></p>

⁶¹⁵ Appendix 7.19.

⁶¹⁶ Appendix 7.20.

⁶¹⁷ IW13.

⁶¹⁸ IM19.

<p><i>may be even physical or psychological assault.</i> –Male, married, 30s</p>
<p><i>Abuse means if it is serious it results in physical injury. If he makes it difficult for me to run the house (if he does not provide as a breadwinner), it is abuse. Argument is abuse.</i> –Female interlocutor, married, 30s</p>
<p><i>The kind of abuse that exists in this society is mainly money shortage that interferes with women’s cooking/running the house. For example, around here the young men spend the day in downtown city drinking řála (traditional beer), beer and other alcohol and at night when they return drunk they tell to their wives: “Why didn’t you cook food? Why did you not serve me food?” It leads to argument; there is also hitting. So, this is abuse. So, when she tells him: “Give me money” (for groceries), he says: “What money do I have?” This is abuse.</i> –Female, married, 30 years old</p>

These responses are representative of the majority of the research sample and the range of situations cited by either male or female interlocutors. Firstly, they reflect their understanding that most abusive situations consisted in or followed from conjugal arguments and conflicts. Secondly, they evidence a general pattern in people’s discourses whereby conjugal abuse was conceptualized as harmful situations or behaviour that could reach different degrees of harmfulness and could result even in physical assault, usually by the husband against his wife.

The catalysts were identified recurrently with men’s failure to act as breadwinners, men’s drinking habit and spending money on alcohol, and being argumentative and critical with their wives when they returned home inebriated. Poverty and economic distress were some of the parameters that were said to exacerbate these bad dynamics and conjugal behaviour.⁶¹⁹ One male interlocutor spoke of the difficult village life because of families having too many children while lacking the financial capacity to sustain them all.⁶²⁰ Another male interlocutor explained that he was a farmer and had no regular salary, which meant that during phases of the production cycle he had to return home without food or money. He reported that this often resulted in arguments with his wife, who did not understand his challenges.⁶²¹ This was illustrated in another man’s description: “After the working day, he receives his monthly salary and then he goes and drinks and to women. Then the wife asks for money for food, but he has spent it. Where can he get it from? And then that leads to argument.”⁶²² Such testimonies direct to the gender-segregated organisation of marriage, which operated under specific spousal expectations and duties.

As some of the testimonies suggested, some abuse was traced to the woman’s failure to *respond* appropriately to their husbands in emotionally charged situations. If the wife chose to avoid confrontation and remained silent, conflict could be avoided. However, if the wife retorted with antagonism or criticized her husband, it was generally believed that she was acting insensibly. A

⁶¹⁹ IW5, IW8, IW24, IM13.

⁶²⁰ IM21.

⁶²¹ IM18.

⁶²² IM23.

male interlocutor made the pertinent comment that while both spouses needed to show patience, the wife had more responsibility since she was the one who reacted usually to a drunken or angry husband and whose wellbeing was most threatened.⁶²³ A female interlocutor in turn opined:

Violence/abuse in a marriage is the husband and wife's equal responsibility. Meaning, the husband works outside the whole day and when he comes back and says something to his wife and if she doesn't respond to him with kind and good words, he gets angry and hits her. This is violence; because a husband should be handled well; because one day the husband might come home drunk and she should let it go. My husband doesn't argue but he leaves without any argument. If it's like this, then it's called good leadership. And equality means you (the woman) should not hurt your husband and your husband should not hurt you.⁶²⁴

Like many other interlocutors, this woman considered that a wife needed to be especially cautious in her dealings with her husband. It could be that one day her husband returned drunk and if she replied with anger or hostility, he might not have the inhibition to stop himself from hurting her. Her opinion seemed to be that it was the responsibility of the wife to avoid these situations, which she could do by speaking in a soft voice to her husband and answering in good will to his more negative comments and unstable emotional states.

Some interlocutors thought that the extensive marital conflict they described was fostered by a lack of deeper understanding, emotional attachment or healthy communication between the partners. A female village resident asserted that in many marriages husbands and wives tended to argue because they did not think carefully before they spoke and did not try to understand their partner's point of view.⁶²⁵ Some related this directly to lack of love or emotional intimacy, such as this man who said: "In the marriage there are problems not explained, because as I told you, there is no love. If there is love, you can understand (each other)."⁶²⁶ A female interlocutor also commented: "Lack of communication, [not] helping each other, [not] helping each other. [It is] not financial. It is selfishness."⁶²⁷ Others emphasised behavioural or personality incompatibilities between the spouses, like this man: "Even if husband and wife love each other, bad behaviour always make them to separate/divorce. The problem is variation in behaviour."⁶²⁸ A female interlocutor in turn affirmed:

The problems are because of personality deficiencies⁶²⁹ and the bad mentality of the husband. For the man, if you are a little angry with your wife you go to another wife. The wife because of a little anger she divorces him. It is just frustration because of small things.

⁶²³ IM9.

⁶²⁴ IW7.

⁶²⁵ IW6.

⁶²⁶ IM21.

⁶²⁷ IW2.

⁶²⁸ IM9.

⁶²⁹ Original: *nay bahrayat godälotat* (ናይ ባህርያት ጎደሎታት).

People do not have toleration/endurance, but this is essential (in marriage). If you can have that, it is possible to live together.⁶³⁰

This reply highlighted most effectively that individual behavioural deficiencies and a lack of commitment for overcoming marriage problems were believed by many to foster disagreement, conflict and eventually separation.

This leads to the most pervasive aetiology that interlocutors gave for the abuse, which was the individual's problematic 'personality' or 'character' [Tigr.: *bahri* (ባህሪ); Amh.: *bahrəy* (ባህሪዬ)].⁶³¹ Interlocutors spoke of different degrees of problematic *bahri*. Some spoke of 'intense' men or women [Tigr.: *hayal* (ሓያል); Amh.: *hayläñña* (ኃይለኛ)].⁶³² At one of the villages, a wife described her husband as *hayläñña* because he was a bit difficult or loud and demanding, without manifesting however physically aggressive behaviour.⁶³³ At the other village, an elderly woman was married to a very meek man and she was also described as *hayläñña*. Some neighbours voluntarily asserted that she overly preoccupied with securing food and resources for her family's livelihood which put much pressure on her husband to work.⁶³⁴ When the researcher visited her home to invite her husband to an interview, she intervened to say that he had no time because he needed to work. The husband had expressed willingness to hold the interview, but upon seeing his wife's adamant refusal, he remained quiet and agreed to speak to the researcher on a different day. Although subsequent attempts were made to honour this agreement, the man's wife obstructed any further conversations with him.

Very problematic men, usually entirely neglectful of their wives or men with perceived serious vices tended to be described as naturally 'bad' [Tigr.: *kəfu*' (ክፉእ); Amh.: *mätfo* (መጥፎ)].⁶³⁵ Women who were adulterous with their husbands could also be described as *kəfu*'. So were women who failed to govern the household properly and complained constantly about money or husband shortfalls, therefore fomenting disharmony in married life. Men who were abusive in variable ways with their wives were often said to have a "problem of the head" or "empty-headedness/foolishness" [Tigr.: *bado hangol* (ባዶ ሓንገል); Amh.: *bado çəngəllat* (ባዶ ጭንቅላት)].⁶³⁶ Some interlocutors, as above, associated them with the old 'mentality/way of thinking' or 'attitude' [Tigr.: *'atähasasba* (አተሓሳስባ); Amh.: *'astäsasäb* (አስተሳሰብ)].⁶³⁷ This was believed to have sustained some men's demeaning behaviour with women and consequently their abusiveness with wives.

⁶³⁰ IW30.

⁶³¹ Appendix 7.21.

⁶³² Appendix 7.22.

⁶³³ FIELDNOTES, 21-23 March 2017.

⁶³⁴ FIELDNOTES, 19 May 2017.

⁶³⁵ Appendix 7.23.

⁶³⁶ Appendix 7.24.

⁶³⁷ Appendix 7.25.

Gender-related asymmetries

Argument was a pervasive context of abuse in interlocutors' discourses, but some chose to speak of women's maltreatment or suppression. After providing a multifarious definition, an interlocutor remarked: "Early marriage is also abuse."⁶³⁸ Another female interlocutor explained: "Abuse means that she was not educated and as a result she would be disrespected, she would not be able to work (a paid job), these are the reasons. It is called suppression"⁶³⁹ .⁶⁴⁰

Numerous male and female interlocutors identified abuse as a situation in which the wife worked and the husband did not, or in which the wife was overworked. This emerged to be a pattern in women's accounts, such as this one: "My abuse is that I work until exhaustion. It is about work, we have no other problems."⁶⁴¹ A male respondent also brought up this, saying: "Abuse means to watch her getting tired; watch her work hard. The woman is exhausted. A woman does not have the ability that a man has."⁶⁴² An interlocutor who was not native to Tigray but had been married to a Tigrayan woman for many years was critical of the fact that local women worked both in the home and supported husbands in the farm: "Here [...] the male waits until his wife finishes her job and when she finishes, together they go out to the field. Then, when they return, the woman has to work in the house and the husband sits."⁶⁴³ Citing Church teachings, he explained that the union of marriage was indissoluble and that within the conjugal relationship husband and wife must love and support each other, sharing their 'tiredness.'

In addition to general gender asymmetries and an unfair division of labour in married life, some interlocutors referred to other wrongdoings with gender-specific implications. One female interlocutor said: "After having six children together, he left me for another woman. This certainly is abuse."⁶⁴⁴ This echoed a general trend that was identified in participants' discourses of marriage-related problems, with many husbands abandoning their wives often suddenly in their marriages and failing to support them sufficiently with child maintenance in the aftermath. One interlocutor observed how helpless the female could become if she was abandoned and how this could then result in other forms of harm:

If a woman faces a disaster (e.g. if the husband leaves), she could get hurt easily because she has kids so she might face problems, because she can't work on her own and provide.

⁶³⁸ IW14.

⁶³⁹ Original: *šäqti zbahal* (ዕቕጢ ገባሃል)

⁶⁴⁰ IW4.

⁶⁴¹ IW10.

⁶⁴² IM16.

⁶⁴³ IM16.

⁶⁴⁴ IW10.

Even if she worked, she could provide for today but not for the future. Her child might get sick and if she doesn't have money to pay the hospital that is also abuse.⁶⁴⁵

This comment should be understood in view of the local gender-segregated organisation of life where only the husband earned a living. Such a rigid division meant that women had no consistent financial resources or a paid job to fall back on when the breadwinner decided to leave, although the majority relied on craft-making or petty trading to support themselves and their children.

Most gendered forms of violence were associated with the 'bad' mentality that was mentioned earlier. Some interlocutors associated these mentalities with the past, which they believed persisted among some men, as highlighted in one female interlocutor's comment: "It is a problem of thinking/mentality. Some men are aware of the problem of abuse but they continue to abuse their wives. The (men) do it deliberately (they want to humiliate/to undermine the wives)."⁶⁴⁶ This explains why many attributed gender asymmetries to men being 'selfish' [Tigr.: *səsu* ' (ሰሱዕ)].⁶⁴⁷ Others used the Amharic phrasing 'of their stomach' [*yä hodaččäw* (የሆዳቸው)]⁶⁴⁸ which was employed to refer to those who only thought of their own desires and interests ignoring their spouse's needs.

Physical violence

As the earlier statements suggested, hitting and beating was also included in people's discussions of abuse. Usually interlocutors spoke of physical assault together with issues of poverty and conjugal argument to denote that they understood this abuse to result from the interaction of the spouses, frustration and other stresses of marriage. A female interlocutor commented: "Abuse means to argue, to hit in marriage."⁶⁴⁹ Another woman said: "Abuse means economic shortage and physical abuse."⁶⁵⁰ The prevalent form that interlocutors spoke about was 'hitting' or 'striking' [Tigr.: *mwuqa* ' (ምዕቃዕ); Amh.: *mämṭat* (መምታት)].⁶⁵¹ Both female and male interlocutors also referred to the beating stick, as in the following comment by a male interlocutor: "Women make food and coffee. Men work outside. He doesn't help. She asks him for money and he does not provide. Conflict, misunderstanding and quarrelling follow; and even *dula* (hitting) follows."⁶⁵²

The common perception was that physical abuse of wives by husbands had been widespread in the past, but had now become rare as a result of government legislation and domestic violence

⁶⁴⁵ IW7.

⁶⁴⁶ IW18.

⁶⁴⁷ Appendix 7.26.

⁶⁴⁸ Appendix 7.27.

⁶⁴⁹ IW10.

⁶⁵⁰ IW18.

⁶⁵¹ Appendix 7.28.

⁶⁵² IM22.

awareness programmes which had been reportedly implemented by the government throughout the countryside. A female interlocutor remarked: “It has changed. Nowadays, it has changed, there is no hitting. Wife and husband do not hit. It has changed, they do not hit. Nowadays, they are equal, everyone.”⁶⁵³ An elderly woman also affirmed: “Nowadays, it is not allowed. Before, it existed. There was beating and she still would not leave the house. Nowadays, however, there isn’t. It is not allowed. Today, it is good times.”⁶⁵⁴ A male interlocutor in turn, affirmed: “Before, those who hit were people who had not been to school. Both spouses are getting schooling now. People in old times who had this problem were without education. In our times, there is equality. So, the previous mentality has been disappearing. Now, if there is hitting, they divorce.”⁶⁵⁵ The rather transitional nature of the situation seemed to be highlighted in a comment by a female interlocutor who said: “There isn’t (physical abuse). But also, there is. They endure it. But mostly, there isn’t due to the current government.”⁶⁵⁶

While the aforementioned forms of abuse were primarily associated with men, a few interlocutors referred also to women’s share of abuse, such as this woman who remarked: “Men are not the only ones who abuse others. There are some women in the society who are a problem. They live without working, so inside their families there is never peace.”⁶⁵⁷ This referred to women failing in their gender-specific works, just as some men failed in their breadwinning responsibilities. Another female interlocutor affirmed: “Abuse means hitting or physical violence. This exists in some couples. The problem could be with the man, or with the woman.”⁶⁵⁸ Numerous research participants opined that in the past women used to stifle their response and to remain silent when confronted with their husbands’ misbehaviour. However, in current times women were more likely to answer back with confidence and might not try to hide their hostility in an argument with their husband. One interlocutor took a step further and correlated this to an increase in conflict: “Before the woman stayed quiet. But in our times we have equality. The woman rejects her husband’s thinking and her defiance strengthens/triggers more disagreement.”⁶⁵⁹ An elderly woman provided a more extensive criticism:

But the young woman feels empowered and says “do not hit us. The government guarantees our right.” And the men become angry. Nowadays, the men are the ones who are insulted. The wife insults the husband and the husband is humiliated and cold. Now the bad behaviour lies with the women. Wherever they go people tell them “what kind of thick-skinned/hard-hearted women are you?” Nowadays it is us the women who do not obey. We say it is our night and we spend the night outside. Nowadays some men are shamed (of

⁶⁵³ IW33.

⁶⁵⁴ IW39.

⁶⁵⁵ IM25.

⁶⁵⁶ IW39.

⁶⁵⁷ IW15.

⁶⁵⁸ IW23.

⁶⁵⁹ IM9.

how the women treat them). When she gets in, nobody will hit her. She brings a husband by her own decision, no one can say anything because the laws protects her rights. The bad behaviour rests with us the women. You see a lot of bad things from women; they do not respect themselves and they just do their hair, they go wherever they want to go. But the husband today is the one who is the victim. There aren't even five women to respect themselves. In this vicinity, you'd be surprised if you found five women to be humble. But, now they even hit the men.⁶⁶⁰

Such accounts were rare with this one being spoken by an elderly woman who had reasons to view modernity with suspicion. Still, it is illustrative of the changing times which appeared to have disturbed traditional conjugal dynamics, providing another aetiology that local people could use to explain conjugal abuse.

Serious conjugal crimes

As opposed to all other harmful conjugal situations and behaviour, conjugal crimes were generally considered tragic and accidental. At first instance, interlocutors attempted to rationalise such crimes by referring to the specific circumstances in which these had occurred. An elderly man in the community where a husband had murdered his wife was familiar with the case and explained that the spouses had earlier conflicted about whether she should attend a religious gathering. The husband had reportedly opposed her going but she went nonetheless. When she returned, he was said to have struck her fatally. The old man reasoned that this was an accident and that the husband of the woman “did not think that she would die.”⁶⁶¹ At further questioning he added: “No, he was not drunk. It was in the morning. But, there had been an offense. It was family grudge⁶⁶². The family of the husband and the family of the wife had grudge.” In other words, it was proposed that the husband had not wanted his wife to attend a religious gathering on the side of her family, with whom he was at odds for some unarticulated reason. Their fight and her defiance had angered him, resulting in his extreme response.

This interlocutor's rationalisation reflected the answers of other interlocutors when they tried to explain such incidents. However, the perplexity remained and interlocutors eventually turned to spiritual parameters to make some sense of what was understood to have been senseless behaviour. People conclusively stated that the assault must have been catalysed by satanic inducement. One elderly man had known the wife who had attempted to murder her former husband with the help of her new partner, and said that he really could not explain what had happened.⁶⁶³ He said that she and her ex-husband had born nine children, five of whom were well-educated and two were

⁶⁶⁰ IW39.

⁶⁶¹ IM19.

⁶⁶² Original: *qim* (قيم).

⁶⁶³ IDM21.

working as government workers. He was truly perplexed as to why this happened to this better-off family, affirming that this was the work of Satan.

In general, conjugal violence of a serious degree tended to be seen as unintended and the result of accidents occurring in the midst of argument or a bad moment. This differed from the way in which equally appalling non-conjugal crimes were rationalised in the same society. During fieldwork, a soldier was murdered brutally, with body parts being amputated, for no reason that people could think of. According to them, he had been a friendly foreigner and had no grudges with locals. Conversations with residents at the nearest village a few days after the crime made clear that people understood such extent of violence to be inhumane, irrational and catalysed by satanic influence as well. However, these crimes were seen as “crimes with purpose”⁶⁶⁴ which interlocutors insisted were only a recent phenomenon in the city of Aksum and the surroundings and were taking new and extensive dimensions. Such a murderous intention was generally not attributed to fatal assaults that occurred in the conjugal relationship.

Sexual abuse: A hardly ever discussed issue

The discourses that were presented evidence that research participants did not generally speak of sexual forms of abuse, which have been reported extensively for Ethiopia and Tigray.⁶⁶⁵ No interlocutor admitted having experienced rape or sexual coercion in her marriage, with one female interlocutor naming sexual coercion/rape as abuse: “Abuse means problem, conflict, maladies and other such things; these are all called abuse. If the husband imposes on the woman to sleep with him without her consent, this is also abuse. But my husband did not give me such kind of difficulty because he does not go to another woman.”⁶⁶⁶ She seemed to suggest that if men became involved with women other than their wives, this could facilitate/result in sexual abuse. This could be because a wife who knew that her husband went to other women was more likely to be afraid that the husband would give her STDs and would refuse to lie with them. The previous woman’s reference to “maladies” would seem to condone this view.

The scantiness of similar references to sexual abuse reflects probably the fact that a wife sleeping with her husband when he requested it was a normalised expectation in the local society.⁶⁶⁷ One key informant who worked at the local seed house reported one day to the researcher that an old

⁶⁶⁴ Original: *bä 'alama wänžäl* (በዓለማ ወንጀል).

⁶⁶⁵ Gessesew and Mesfin (2004), Erulkar (2013), Allen and Raghallaigh (2013), Semahegn and Mengistie (2015) and CSAE (2016, 44).

⁶⁶⁶ IW15.

⁶⁶⁷ FIELDNOTES, 14 February 2017.

couple had visited the administrative centre to resolve a marital issue.⁶⁶⁸ They were in a stalemate because the husband wanted to continue having sexual relationships with his wife, who refused. She was looking for the women's association representative for advice. The informant explained that the husband's request or the wife's denial did not breach any existing laws since there was no legislation to govern these matters. She added that in this case the issue would be resolved according to the customary understandings and practices of the elders in the community. When the representative of the women's association was later interviewed,⁶⁶⁹ who confirmed the incident, she was asked again whether it was expected in the local society for a wife to sleep with her husband at his will. She nodded and added that in the case of the old couple the man was right to say that it was his wife's problem and that there wasn't much that the wife could do in this case.

Hence, a local health worker confirmed that sexual matters/problems in the couple existed and could be extensive. She called it "sex whenever the man wants it."⁶⁷⁰ Women's pregnancy, postpartum or sickness, as well as during important fasts and religious celebrations, seemed to be understood as exceptional situations. Fieldwork observations evidenced that this problem was probably extensive and preoccupied also the clergy, who traditionally mediated spousal conflict. This was highlighted in a conversation that the researcher had with a priest while travelling from the city of Aksum to the village of residence. Seated in a crowded bus, the priest and the researcher started to discuss together the Church's understandings and teachings on marriage and conjugal life. Soon the interlocutor sought advice on an issue that he said had preoccupied his mind for quite some time. He described the case of a man who had been married to his wife for many years but she had unexpectedly refused her husband sexual intercourse. The priest seemed perplexed as to why the wife would suddenly change her behaviour and wondered what one should do in view of religious teachings. He accepted suggestions that perhaps she was feeling unwell or was disinterested due to health-related reasons, tiredness or age, but insisted that this was a woman who refused persistently, exclaiming with apparent incredulity: "How can a wife refuse her husband?" since, as he reasoned, they had been married in the church where they had vowed to be "one body" and to separate nothing between them.⁶⁷¹

One male interlocutor in the countryside also referred indirectly to this expectation when he discussed conflict among couples. He reasoned that many of the traditional marriages had been early and arranged, which meant that there had been a considerable age difference between spouses and this could foster also incompatibility in the bedroom:

⁶⁶⁸ FIELDNOTES, 14 June 2017.

⁶⁶⁹ IW42.

⁶⁷⁰ FIELDNOTES, 12 February 2017.

⁶⁷¹ FIELDNOTES, 14 May 2017.

The woman may be young, the man may be aged. Then, even [during] sexual intercourse [the woman] cannot express her feelings. But, you understand [why] there is problem. If the man is aged, or if the woman is aged, he needs but she doesn't want. Or when the man is aged, and she is young, she needs to enjoy. This one also is a case of conflict.⁶⁷²

This testimony drew attention to age difference as an important mediating factor, suggesting also that this could have been an extensive problem in the past when early marriages were more prevalent. He explained that young brides could have negative or unpleasant sexual experiences since their young age made them more timid and hesitant to speak their mind and to express their discomfort or unwillingness in the bedroom. Such testimonies are reminiscent of Annabel Erulkar's previously cited statistical analysis of a population survey in seven regions of Ethiopia (2009-2010) which had found that forced sex was highly associated with early marriage and was likely mediated by lack of communication between spouses.⁶⁷³

It is then not surprising that such norms were reported also by a woman in the UK encountered at one of the Ethiopian churches in London. She reported that she knew many other women who faced different forms of abuse in their married life, including undesirable or constant sex. Her comment was as follows:

Lots of the times I discuss with people about why they divorced. They tell me: "When my husband comes home late, he asks me for (sex) but I am tired." You know, this woman, let's say, she has two kids, she cleans the house, she is doing shopping, she has no one to help her, how she can enjoy life in the bed? No, no, it must be equal. You need someone to help you. If he comes late and then he asks something...you need a break, [you need] help.⁶⁷⁴

Her testimony again highlighted a deeply accepted norm that wives should always yield to their husbands' sexual requests. While this norm should not be a proxy for marital rape, undoubtedly it was for these women a form of psycho-somatic abuse that caused anxiety, discomfort and fatigue, subverting their overall wellbeing.

Clearly then sexual matters were an issue in this community and could potentially result in cases of sexual coercion. Still, interlocutors hardly ever referred to these when they discussed particularly harmful situations or behaviour in married life. The different discussions, including the interaction with the priest, suggested that local perceptions of conjugal responsibilities could be interfering to deter people from thinking of the issue as a form of abuse since it seemed to be considered the exclusive problem of the woman. It is also not impossible that women felt ashamed or did not speak in order not to breach local standards of conjugal privacy, underlining how important it was to obtain a deeper insight into conjugal relationship norms and spousal expectations.

⁶⁷² IM21.

⁶⁷³ Erulkar (2013).

⁶⁷⁴ IW2.

Local attitudes regarding harmful conjugal situations and behaviour

As part of the personal interviews research participants were asked if the harmful contexts and behavioural patterns they mentioned were condoned within the local society or considered right by them and others in their society. Oftentimes the specific situations identified in the EDHS questionnaire were given as examples to research participants in order to prompt their specific reactions.⁶⁷⁵

Virtually all interlocutors condemned the abuse and considered it wrong. Interlocutors affirmed over and over again that neither *bahəl* nor *haymanot* permitted this, echoing a previous study that had found that Ethiopian women did not tend to blame culture for their abuse.⁶⁷⁶ One male interlocutor opined: “Religion teaches good: to kill, to argue is not allowed. The woman is like a sister, like a mother. She must be loved and respected. Of all, the woman deserves the most (respect).”⁶⁷⁷ A younger male interlocutor said about conjugal abuse: “This is a very inappropriate act. Within religion, it means abusing oneself because the married couple is considered to be one (one body/flesh).”⁶⁷⁸ A woman remarked: “It (culture) doesn’t allow physical violence, because if you hate the other person, you just give him an answer and you let him/her go with respect, but you don’t physically hit [them].”⁶⁷⁹ Another female interlocutor opined: “It (abuse) is not right. The reason is [that] they should decide to divorce by agreement/consent.”⁶⁸⁰ Yet another said: “There is (abuse): fighting, arguments are created, if there is hitting and they become angry they may even kill their wives. So in order not to reach this stage, they divorce.”⁶⁸¹ These testimonies echoed the canonical stipulation in *FN* that spouses should divorce when there is enmity in the couple,⁶⁸² which could suggest a religious influence underpinning socio-cultural standards.

In view of the aforementioned EDHS results it was apprehended that more people would justify wife-hitting. While the relatively small sample of this study would not be able to reveal the average attitudes of the population, the consistency in the finding is interesting due to having engaged with a diverse and heterogeneous population across multiple lines of difference. The methodological discussion already touched on the mediation of the researcher’s identity in the research process, and this could have been an issue here as well. During interviews some

⁶⁷⁵ The exact articulation of the EDHS question in English was: “In your opinion, is a husband *justified* in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations...” It was not possible to identify how it was addressed in Tigrigna or Amharic, but a *verbatim* translation was used in interviews.

⁶⁷⁶ Kedir and Admasachew (2010, 443).

⁶⁷⁷ IM9.

⁶⁷⁸ IM29.

⁶⁷⁹ IW7.

⁶⁸⁰ IW9.

⁶⁸¹ IW27.

⁶⁸² Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 149).

interlocutors were visibly concerned with presenting their culture (*bahāl*) in a favourable light to their foreign interlocutor. On the other hand, psychological factors could have led some interlocutors to change their answers so as to be more likable or more ‘correct’ according to what they thought the researcher expected to hear.

However, it may also be that research participants considered the source of the problem to be different. Many interlocutors explained that those who were likely to become physically abusive were convinced at some level that this was still allowed. One woman observed: “It is not allowed/permitted. But, there are some who permit themselves to hit.”⁶⁸³ Another female interlocutor commented: “It is not allowed (by culture). By the faith it is also not allowed. But, it is their mentality/thinking. It is not the result of the education they received at home/how they were raised at home.”⁶⁸⁴ This seemed to vary from those opinions that identified a pernicious mentality regarding women with the older and uneducated generations.⁶⁸⁵ In other words, participants did not make explicit linkages with *bahāl* but rather held the individual responsible. In parallel, everyone affirmed a widespread norm for abused women to endure the abusive situation and in these discourses people were more likely to cite culture as a contributor factor, as highlighted in a man’s comment: “[Women] let it go (forgive the abuse) because of the cultural influence, and not because of religion (*haymanot*).”⁶⁸⁶ Regardless of what the deeper meanings of these pronouncements were, they resulted overall in a situation where abusiveness in the conjugal relationship was attributed to the individual in ways that did not encourage societal mobilisation to redress the problem.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a look into how research participants understood what could be described as harmful, abusive or offensive conjugal situations and behavioural patterns, how they explained these and how they generally felt about them. The point of departure for this discussion was that there was not a single ready terminology or concrete conceptualisation or typology in the local society about conjugal abuse but rather situations and behavioural patterns that were associated with broader marriage or relationship problems. The fact that most of these forms of abuse emerged from conjugal dynamics meant that abuse could be mutual, multi-dimensional and incremental, possibly resulting in great harm for the woman. While most of these forms were identified in the reviewed literature, the popular typology of physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence may need to be avoided since this obscures the overlapping nature of the abuse

⁶⁸³ IW17.

⁶⁸⁴ IW13.

⁶⁸⁵ IM11, IM25.

⁶⁸⁶ IDM23.

as described by research participants. In large part, conjugal abuse was related to spousal expectations, which could have gendered underpinnings but which tended to be differentiated from religious teachings. To unpack this matrix the following chapter will first discuss in more detail socio-cultural norms that were found to underpin married life and their interfaces with modern times, prior to looking at their religious parameters.

Chapter 6

Marriage and gender norms, changing trends and conjugal abuse

Introduction

In their descriptions of abusive situations and behavioural patterns research participants invoked normative expectations or ideals that seemed to underpin marriage and the conjugal relationship in the local society, such as the expectation for a husband to act as a breadwinner and for a wife to respond to her husband's sexual needs. Various interlocutors spoke of the persistence of an 'old' mentality that fostered harmful attitudes among some men toward their wives, with some explicitly referring to a culture (*bahāl*) that enforced such attitudes. It is also notable that sexual coerciveness was not considered generally abusive and was treated almost as a woman's problem to solve. In parallel, people did not consider culture accountable for the abuse, but attributed the problem to the individual. Such discourses suggested the prevalence of local marriage norms and the extent to which these have been accepted and normalised in the local society, despite various connections to conjugal abuse. On the other hand, some interlocutors affirmed changes in gender relations that were believed to have disturbed conjugal dynamics, with some identifying gender asymmetries as abusive. This chapter undertakes to provide a deeper look into these normative underpinnings and their developments in recent years as they were described in research participants' discourses. The aim is to provide more contextualisation to the presentation of conjugal abuse realities and rationalisations that were presented in chapter 5.

Terminological considerations

Marriage and gender norms were explored in the context of life-based interviews. In Tigrigna, the word for 'marriage' is *mārə'a* [መርዓ; Amh.: *gabəçä*; ግብጽ],⁶⁸⁷ and this locally referred both to marriage in general and the actual wedding. This general terminology was initially selected because it did not place emphasis on any particular form of marriage (e.g. church marriage). Gradually, it was enhanced in response to research participants' own lexicon. For example, interlocutors often used the term *särg* (ሰርግ)⁶⁸⁸ which, as Helen Pankhurst found to be the case in Menz, was used to describe "the form of wedding."⁶⁸⁹ On the other hand, married life and the

⁶⁸⁷ Appendix 7.29.

⁶⁸⁸ Appendix 7.30.

⁶⁸⁹ Pankhurst (1992b, 103).

everyday co-existence of the spouses was generally summarised with the adjective ‘conjugal’ [nay *hadar* (ናይ ሐዳር); Amh.: *yä tadar*; የጎዳር].⁶⁹⁰

Initially, conjugal life and less formal unions were differentiated by the researcher and priority was given to the investigation of the former. However, more and more couples in the countryside were found to be living together in a semi-formal arrangement, which was assumed to be equivalent to the ‘irregular unions’ that domestic violence experts in Addis Ababa had described to the researcher.⁶⁹¹ It was observed that in these unions couples generally followed the same pattern of married life, bore children together and often thought of each other as husband or wife. As it was seen in the previous chapter, these unions were also associated with extensive cases of abandonment and were not immune to problems and potential forms of abuse encountered in marital relationships. Incorporating these less formal unions in the study was not only relevant, but also important due to the implications that the existence of these alternative unions could have for marriage itself.

Local depictions of marriage dynamics in past and present times

As the previous chapter suggested, marriage and the conjugal relationship were affected by changes that research participants associated with modernity. To understand better these articulations and what motivated them, it is necessary to look closely at local perceptions of marriage in conjunction with conventional and more recent practices in this realm and the domain of gender relations more generally. Such an analysis proceeds from research participants’ own discourses that generally demarcated ‘past’ from ‘modern times.’

The local narratives agreed that conventionally marriage that followed the formal norms was arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, with the couple usually meeting each other at the time of the wedding, as highlighted evocatively by a male interlocutor who said: “My father went and asked my wife’s father ‘please give me your child/daughter.’ After that, my father brought to me my wife.”⁶⁹² In the past, most women were not literate or they completed only a few grades before entering married life. Female interlocutors in their 50s and 60s who were interviewed affirmed having married as early as 11 or 12 years old, while 16-17 was the most commonly cited age for the more recent generations.⁶⁹³ One elderly woman provided the following description: “I was a child. It is not like today. In those times, we were good. We did not even raise our heads to look at people in the eyes when we walked in the street. It is today (that change has happened).

⁶⁹⁰ Appendix 7.31.

⁶⁹¹ IDVE1.

⁶⁹² IM13.

⁶⁹³ FIELDNOTES, 15 March 2017; 17-20, 25, 26, 29-30, April 2017.

We did not know school. We got married by abduction.”⁶⁹⁴ These testimonies not only evidence that customary forms of marriage involving young girls had been commonplace, but also suggest that such customs could be reminisced with some nostalgia.

While in present times research participants all acknowledged that the government considered 18 as the legal age of marriage, they still seemed to consider valid the social convention of girls marrying earlier than that. A close intertwining of people’s religious beliefs and these practices was highlighted in one woman’s comment: “Marriage means that God has created us and ordered us to multiply. We girls from age 15 and above can marry, according to our marriage ceremony. Then, wife and husband have opportunity to give birth to children.”⁶⁹⁵ In fact, on the first day of research at one of the villages the researcher was made aware of a wedding ceremony (*särg*) taking place in the vicinity. Upon being asked, a local woman affirmed that the girl’s age was 15 whereas the man was either 27 or 28 years old.⁶⁹⁶ The researcher responded that such an early marriage was not allowed by law and asked curiously why the police, located about 10 minutes from where the marriage was taking place, were not reacting accordingly. The woman shrugged her shoulders and said she did not know; however, she affirmed that while this was not accepted by law, it had been accepted by the Church and the people traditionally. It is also notable that the marriage was attended by a number of priests. When the researcher raised the issue with the local police officer on a different day, he echoed explanations given by other interlocutors, such as that the girl lacked a birth certificate and her age could not be established with certitude.⁶⁹⁷

Regarding the types of marriages that were performed traditionally, these included marriage by crowning in church (*täklil*) and the cultural (*bahälawi*) wedding ceremony described often as *qal kidan* (ቃል ኪዳን)⁶⁹⁸. *Qal kidan* signified the traditional way of marrying at home by taking vows in witness of elders, family members and the ‘spiritual father’ [Tigr.: ’*abbat näfsi* (አባት ነፍሲ); Amh.: *näfs ’abbat* (ነፍስ አባት)].⁶⁹⁹ Even when couples married customarily they tended to go by the church to take the blessing of a priest, as observed by a member of the clergy: “The spiritual father brought the couple to the church when the couple expressed their desire to marry. In the church they received the blessing and then they returned to the home to do the marriage by the traditional/cultural ring ceremony.”⁷⁰⁰ A second marriage was generally not performed by clergy and was almost always a cultural wedding, although some exceptions were reported. It was also

⁶⁹⁴ IW39.

⁶⁹⁵ PWW1P1.

⁶⁹⁶ FIELDNOTES, 12 February 2017.

⁶⁹⁷ FIELDNOTES, 17-20 April 2017.

⁶⁹⁸ Appendix 7.32.

⁶⁹⁹ Appendix 7.33.

⁷⁰⁰ IC3.

becoming a norm for couples to go by the town hall to sign marriage contracts as additional formality or guarantee.⁷⁰¹

Similar to what the literature review had suggested, male and female interlocutors in the village affirmed that the church marriage had been feasible primarily for those associated with the Church alone. An 80-year-old male interlocutor affirmed that “[t]hose who marry by crowning are those who studied in the religious school or are deacons.”⁷⁰² Another stated: “Religious marriage can occur in two ways: If one is a virgin or a deacon they can marry by crowning.”⁷⁰³ While the Holy Matrimony was theoretically open to anyone who had preserved their physical virginity, people’s stories evidenced that in practice few laypeople attended church to marry. Most of these trends were highlighted in the marriage history of workshop participants and individual interlocutors who provided this information, a list of whom can be viewed in the Appendix.⁷⁰⁴

The case of one female workshop participant is illustrative and can be mentioned. Like numerous others, she and her partner had not started pre-marital relations, but due to the general norm that had associated church marriage with members of the clergy, they had not considered going into the church to marry.⁷⁰⁵ The case of another workshop participant who reported marrying for a second time by some form of *Q^wərban* is a little more curious.⁷⁰⁶ A closer look into the woman’s life revealed that her second marriage was to a deacon. Since her partner was associated with the Church, he would be expected to marry by the formal Sacrament, but because she could not have the *täklil* having married before, one must assume that they had a penitential marriage ceremony which concluded with the Holy Communion.

In their discourses interlocutors affirmed that marriage had been traditionally embedded in a patriarchal order, with the husband being considered and acting as the head or governor of the rest. So large had the gap been between male and female authority that some reported wives being expected to wash their husbands’ feet and to eat last.⁷⁰⁷ These descriptions are reminiscent of accounts cited by some of Jenny Hammond’s research participants from Tigray and also Helen’s Pankhurst’s study from Menz.⁷⁰⁸ One male interlocutor remarked: “Because the husband used to be the master of the house, he made all the decisions. He could beat her, assault her and so on.”⁷⁰⁹ Like many others, he thought that the traditional marriage order had fostered a ‘bad’ mentality

⁷⁰¹ IM14.

⁷⁰² IM12.

⁷⁰³ PWW1.

⁷⁰⁴ Appendix 6.1.

⁷⁰⁵ PWW2P11.

⁷⁰⁶ PWW1P2.

⁷⁰⁷ IM12, IM23.

⁷⁰⁸ Hammond (1989, 39-40), Pankhurst (1992b, 122).

⁷⁰⁹ IM20.

among some men that their wives were there exclusively to serve their needs, contributing to wife-assault.

Other interlocutors opined that while a patriarchal family organisation had been the local norm, relationships between spouses had not been always or inherently unequal. An educated urban interlocutor opined: “Most of the decisions are made by men. But this does not mean that women are not appreciated. Women are not ignored, they share, they develop ideas, but most of the time the final word is the men’s.”⁷¹⁰ He observed that women had traditionally played a central role in the household and community life, which made it somehow difficult and counterproductive for husbands to ignore or to derogate them. A Tigrayan female interlocutor in London, perhaps not unaffected by home-sickness, in turn opined: “Back at home the father is the head. I want to tell you, back home, they have responsibility for the family, they work hard.”⁷¹¹

Within traditional norms, men have been expected to act as breadwinners by working outside and women to administer the household and to rear children, while supporting occasionally their husbands in the farm. In the past, women were said to work all day long, preparing bread, collecting firewood, finding water and doing other chores often until late at night. In the older times, when no water collection system existed (the current *bumba*; ቡምባ), girls often exerted themselves in collecting rainwater from the ground.⁷¹² There were also no grinding machines that have now become available at the village level, which meant that women had to labour each day to grind grains in preparation of the staple bread. While it was not denied that men also worked hard, who typically spent the day in the farm under difficult weather conditions, women’s daily household work was described by all as having been especially exhausting.

Changes in this rigidly gender-segregated division of labour were mentioned and were attributed to a variety of factors, such as influences from the urban centres, government awareness campaigns about gender equality and modern education. In recent years, the government was reported to have implemented a very intensive gender awareness strategy against pernicious practices, especially early marriage. Women’s associations were established in all villages and have been working to inform women on their rights. The liberation struggle and specifically the Tigray People’s Liberation Party’s (TPLF henceforth) educational trainings on gender equality were also considered to have changed effectively many men’s mind-sets. A male interlocutor in his 80s made a pertinent remark when he discussed his feelings toward his second wife: “I have no negative attitude towards women because our party (TPLF) taught us well during the (liberation) struggle. I told you earlier that when I was with my second wife in Axum, I used to

⁷¹⁰ IM24.

⁷¹¹ IW2.

⁷¹² FIELDNOTES, 3 July 2017.

give her all the money I got as retirement pension.”⁷¹³ Regardless of the reasons that motivated changes in local mentalities (which will be explored elsewhere), during the fieldwork many men were seen participating in the raising of children and even in some household works in the village and city life. Some husbands were seen fetching water from the local *bumba*, although usually by donkeys and never carrying the water jug on their backs as women typically did.

During the workshops, participants were asked to outline the typical day of a woman/wife and a man/husband. The details are showed in tables 7 and 8. As it was expected, these attributed household activities and child care to women and breadwinning activities to men. Men’s daily occupations in the village communities included paid day work (such as in construction), farming, or supervising other workers. In addition, women assisted men in the farm or supported the building of houses. This could refer to their own homes or other people’s houses and reflected a property construction business for rental that was fast-growing in the local communities.

Table 7: What men and women do on a typical day according to male workshop participants⁷¹⁴

What men do on a typical day	What women do on a typical day
<p>1. The men/husbands on a daily basis do different things. Because their work depends on their wealth. If he owns animals, he will look after them systematically; if he does not own animals, he will look after his farm.</p> <p>2. The youth if they don’t own farmland, they will do day’s work. Day’s work is construction work. This work involves: building, finishing, cutting metal.</p> <p>3. He does works that will get him money, runs up and down to ensure a sustainable life.</p>	<p>1 In the morning she wakes up and she cleans the house</p> <p>2 She boils coffee</p> <p>3 She prepares breakfast</p> <p>4 She brings water</p> <p>5 She prepares lunch</p> <p>6 She washes clothes</p> <p>7 She cooks dinner</p> <p>8 She plans what she has to do in the morning</p> <p>9 She looks after the cattle/animals</p> <p>10 She does the weeding</p> <p>11 She does finishing work</p>

⁷¹³ IM12.

⁷¹⁴ PWM1.

Table 8: What men and women do on a typical day according to female workshop participants⁷¹⁵

What men do in a typical day	What women do in a typical day
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If he is a farmer he farms 2. He works in construction 3. He builds buildings 4. He does the finishing work/adding cement 5. He harvests 6. He checks if the worker is doing his work 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She raises the children 2. She tailors 3. She prepares food 4. She weaves cotton 5. She fetches water 6. She collects wood 7. She harvests 8. She does the weeding 9. She does the cutting of grasses 10. She farms 11. She builds houses (works in construction) 12. She does the finishing work

Both the tables and the discussions that followed these exercises made evident a general perception that women were busier than men throughout the day, as illustrated in a male participant’s comment: “Of course, more work is to the woman. Because they work in the farmland, and then at home there is cooking, treating the children, washing the clothes of the children and the husband. Absolutely, work has more impact on the woman.”⁷¹⁶ It was considered, however, that part of this asymmetry was to some degree inevitable due to women giving birth to and rearing children, which made them most appropriate for these tasks.

Similar trends were identified for the city of Aksum, with the difference that there change has been occurring at a faster pace with more visible effects. A table with the results from the same exercise with female *MQ* attendants in the city of Aksum is included in the Appendix.⁷¹⁷ According to the workshop participants, women continued to have the primary responsibility of raising children, administering the house and fulfilling social responsibilities. However, in the city men were said to be even more involved in children’s care. In the articulation of a female participant: “He might take care of the child once he gets home. That by itself is work, but he may not do other chores.”⁷¹⁸ Nonetheless, certain customary norms and understandings persisted in the urban population as well. Similar to the countryside, men in the city of Aksum seemed to preserve their role of breadwinners and to provide financially.

Moreover, participants felt that the husband remained the ultimate authority in terms of deciding important matters. A female *MQ* attendant stated: “The society thinks men are superior to women. It has been improving little by little currently, but it still exists. This problem exists here in

⁷¹⁵ PWW2.

⁷¹⁶ IM21.

⁷¹⁷ Appendix 6.2.

⁷¹⁸ PWFMQP3.

Aksum.”⁷¹⁹ A male *MQ* attendant also affirmed: “Here in Ethiopia the culture is somehow different from another country and more credit and more honour is usually given to the male.”⁷²⁰ This may explain why some female workshop participants felt that they did not have full freedom of movement and considered it necessary to have their husband’s approval in everything they did. One woman commented: “If a woman wants to go somewhere, but if the husband doesn’t want her to go, she will not go. But if the woman wants to hold the man back, she can’t. It’s a double standard.”⁷²¹ This again was confirmed by a male participant who spoke of women’s difficulty “in any movement.”⁷²²

These postulations about both changing and continuing gender norms in marriage motivated a closer investigation into how rural residents understood equality between men and women and if they thought that this was currently achieved in their society and family life. In their responses interlocutors typically indicated that in legislation men and women had equal employment opportunities, citing divorce laws stipulating an egalitarian share of spousal assets. Interlocutors also referred frequently to more egalitarian practices, highlighted by a middle-aged man: “I think there is equality in eating together, drinking together. There is more equality in employment.”⁷²³ Simultaneously, these improvements were contrasted to a persistent mentality that still valued women as lesser, as highlighted in a woman’s comment:

There is the equality that the government established. But in this society, there is no equality. They believe a woman can’t work equal as a man. It can be called equality only if the woman and the man work together. Because the society is not educated there is no practice of equality here.⁷²⁴

This woman invoked literacy levels to explain why non-egalitarian mentalities persisted. Another woman echoed this: “There is equality but the woman isn’t seen as equal to the man. The man is always above the woman. There is equality now by government legislation. Now the woman can go out, before, she could not go out.”⁷²⁵ Yet another observed that some men still treated women’s opinions as inferior and did not allow them to speak confidently: “Some are equal but some don’t have equality. The one who don’t have equality, the man suppresses the wife’s opinion. When she says, “let’s do this and that” he says “no” to her opinion and gives his thought. So there is no equality.”⁷²⁶

⁷¹⁹ PWFMQP2.

⁷²⁰ PWMMQP1.

⁷²¹ PWFMQP3.

⁷²² PWMMQP1.

⁷²³ IM23.

⁷²⁴ IW13.

⁷²⁵ IW19.

⁷²⁶ IW18.

In defining an egalitarian situation, female interlocutors typically spoke of a fairer division of labour, as in the earlier response. One woman explained that she was a stay-home mom, while her husband worked hard outside in his respective work and provided for the family. Because they both worked their respective shares and contributed equally in their own gender-specific ways, she opined that there was equality in her marriage.⁷²⁷ Another woman pertained to a similar definition when she said that there is no equality in the couple because the woman is expected to do all works related to the home, while the man leaves and goes out and has freedom and money.⁷²⁸

Among male interlocutors as well, equality was envisioned as a situation whereby men and women cooperated in most works and worked equally hard, not letting the other partner to do unfair amounts of work; however, this in view of physical possibilities as explained in the following comment:

Equality means [that] regardless of whether a person is a man or a woman, they work equally. That's what equality means. Together and by supporting each other they do their work. But there is capacity or strength difference between a man and a woman. The woman gives birth which makes her weak. This prevents her from working equally with a man. Other than that, they are equal.⁷²⁹

It was more generally recognised that men and women displayed biological and physical particularities (muscular strength, giving birth, etc.) that differentiated their capacity for work. Male interlocutors tended to affirm that when their wives were pregnant or in their post-natal condition, or sick, they could cook on their own or bring food from outside; alternatively, they had a female neighbour do the cooking for the family. Thus, a more egalitarian division of labour implied the necessity for mutual consideration and understanding on behalf of both spouses. One male interlocutor thought that equality in married life existed when there was mutual consideration between the spouses.⁷³⁰ Another affirmed: "Equality means mutual honour, mutual consideration, mutual understanding."⁷³¹ Yet another man commented: "Equality means we share the same thinking"⁷³².⁷³³ It was generally agreed that these standards had not yet been achieved at the societal level.

⁷²⁷ IDW11.

⁷²⁸ IDW20.

⁷²⁹ IM13.

⁷³⁰ IM26.

⁷³¹ IM16.

⁷³² Original: *ḥasab* (حساب).

⁷³³ IM14.

Marriage and spousal ideals and expectations

In research participants' discourses much conjugal conflict and abuse was associated with wives or husbands failing in their duties and thus disturbing the marriage peace. On the other hand, early marriage was understood by some as abuse, and this could not be unrelated to the expectation of female virginity, as suggested in the literature review. This section explores some of the normative ideals that became salient in the discourses of research participants.

People's discourses evidenced that spouses were expected to meet certain criteria and that these were largely predicated on their gender. One male interlocutor explained: "The men were expected to be high-income, to have a strong personality to be selected for marriage. Women had to be virgins and to have good quality of personality."⁷³⁴ The expectation of virginity appeared to have not been enforced for men. One female interlocutor said: "I don't know whether he was or he was not a virgin, that is to say, you cannot know with men."⁷³⁵ In many cases, the husband had been a soldier, which meant that he had moved and lived in different places where he would be expected to have found a woman to live with. The personal stories suggested that the bride and groom would not discuss these matters at the time of marriage or subsequently (since most married by the cultural ceremony), although clearly the man was privileged to ascertain the woman's chastity. In most cases, the girl was considerably younger than her husband which would make her unlikely to entertain asking about these matters, especially if a man was expected to have been sexually active.

Regarding spousal behaviour, female interlocutors insisted that women needed to be 'modest' (*thut*; ትሁት).⁷³⁶ They explained that a wife must be a good cook and have ready food for her husband and know how to take care of her children. In particular, she must know how to boil coffee, make sauce (*wät*; ወት) the traditional 'əngära (አንጅራ) and bread (*dabo*; ዳቦ) and the local beer (*səwa*).⁷³⁷ An elderly woman said: "A good wife must always look after her husband, she must always give him beer at the right time, to feed him at the right time, to make coffee before he goes to work, etc...."⁷³⁸ Furthermore, a wife must have a calm and pleasant comportment with her husband and his family and must avoid criticising him or picking fights with him.⁷³⁹ She must preferably smile and not anger her husband and her face must be calm and smiling.⁷⁴⁰ Female interlocutors emphasised many times and with urgency that wives ought to be quiet and careful

⁷³⁴ IM24.

⁷³⁵ IW12.

⁷³⁶ Appendix 7.34.

⁷³⁷ FIELDNOTES, 14 February 2017.

⁷³⁸ IW39.

⁷³⁹ FIELDNOTES, 21-23 March 2017.

⁷⁴⁰ FIELDNOTES, 14 February 2017.

because “Tigrayan men do not like arguments.”⁷⁴¹ The women agreed also that a wife must take good care of herself to ensure that she is attractive to her husband and that she must preserve good sexual relations with her husband and avoid refusing him when he needs her.⁷⁴² On the other hand, interlocutors explained that a man was expected to provide as a breadwinner and should ideally be hard-working and have a stable income. It would be a bonus if he was sturdy and strong. However, a few young female interlocutors seemed to place more emphasis on men’s education and good manners.⁷⁴³

Men were less outspoken about their spousal priorities, but their priorities seemed to reflect their broader mentalities. One rural resident said: “The principal thing is physical beauty. If not, it is the character, her own condition, her mentality. To manage married life her character must have some necessary traits. A good woman is like this.”⁷⁴⁴ A woman being schooled was not voluntarily identified as a prerequisite, but many male interlocutors stated that education was good. One man commented: “It is good for all. She had brains, he has brains. It is good for all.”⁷⁴⁵ Still, this did not mean that men wanted their wives to abandon their traditional gender roles or that they would tolerate wives who were confident and outspoken. According to a female interlocutor, men would not likely accept advice from their wives and might condescendingly respond “what do you know?” if she attempted to speak confidently.⁷⁴⁶ This was also highlighted in a conversation with a male rural resident who expressed impatience with his wife, whom he perceived to be of low intelligence.⁷⁴⁷ An interlocutor in the city of Aksum in turn affirmed that most men in Ethiopia might not accept to have women advise them or talk to them openly.⁷⁴⁸ He explained that they are used to the woman being quiet and modest and that they detest argumentation. It is notable that when men were asked about the importance of virginity, they hesitated to give a firm reply, but nor did they say explicitly that virginity did not matter.

Illustrative is also the case of a young man from one of the villages who ran his own local beer house and travelled frequently to the city of Aksum for business.⁷⁴⁹ While he expressed more modern ideas about women and relationships, he insisted that he wanted to choose a wife from the countryside because he thought that women in the city, while more educated, tended to be weaker and not as hard-working. He said that rural women have been used to the hard life and could work without complaint whether in rain or under the scorching sun. They would know every job in the

⁷⁴¹ FIELDNOTES, 14 February 2017.

⁷⁴² FIELDNOTES, 14 February 2017.

⁷⁴³ FIELDNOTES, 2 June 2017.

⁷⁴⁴ IM25.

⁷⁴⁵ IM23.

⁷⁴⁶ FIELDNOTES, 15 March 2017.

⁷⁴⁷ IDM14.

⁷⁴⁸ IDM25.

⁷⁴⁹ FIELDNOTES, 6 June 2017.

home and fulfil their duties without much ado. In contrast, he believed that women in the city would leave their work half-way if the rain poured down or if the sun became too strong. He clearly wanted a strong wife who could take care of the home and would not depend on him; yet he preferred that they lived in the city.

Interwoven with these spousal ideals, was the expectation that a marriage had to be peaceful.⁷⁵⁰ A ‘good’ or ‘healthy’ conjugal relationship was invariably defined as a relationship premised on ‘agreement’ [Tigr.: *səməmə* ‘(ሰምምዕ); Amh.: *səməməñät*; ሰምምነት)⁷⁵¹ and ‘peace’ (*sälam*; ሰላም)⁷⁵². For the majority, as will be discussed elsewhere, peace was considered concomitantly with faith, as highlighted in this man’s remark: “Good marriage means peace. First [living] in faith; then, [living] in peace. Then problems will not come.”⁷⁵³ While numerous interlocutors also referred to love, emotional concerns were significantly less salient in people’s discourses. For instance, a male interlocutor remarked that “[p]eaceful married life needs good health. We must be able to work and to find money” and only after he was asked if love was necessary, he answered in the affirmative.⁷⁵⁴ Virtually all interlocutors referred to the need for material security, good health and peace as essentials for a good relationship, placing emotional intimacy usually in a secondary position or not mentioning it at all.

This pattern was observed by some Aksumites as well and was attributed in part to the climate of formality that governed the (traditionally) arranged marriages. According to one young interlocutor in the city, “[I]f you look at the older people, they were doing everything by formal ways, they felt shame. They felt shame. They were more formal and respectful.”⁷⁵⁵ A couple of urban residents thought that this de-emphasis on love manifested rather a more profound problem of intimacy in the local society, which they believed was cultivated in kinship relations and close family contexts from an early age.⁷⁵⁶ This begins to draw attention to what emerged to be a more pragmatic basis for strong familial relationships in the local society, affecting possibly also the conjugal relationship.

Kinship expectations and the role of the family in marriage

The family emerged to be a prominent factor of married-life problems and an implicit parameter in discourses of conjugal abuse in the local society. Some of the narratives suggested that family

⁷⁵⁰ FIELDNOTES, 20 June 2017, 1, 5 July 2017, IM13, IM23.

⁷⁵¹ Appednix 7.35.

⁷⁵² Appendix 7.36.

⁷⁵³ IM23.

⁷⁵⁴ IM13.

⁷⁵⁵ IM24.

⁷⁵⁶ IDM5.

relations could influence even manifestations of serious conjugal violence, as exemplified in one of the reported conjugal murders that were traced to a family grudge. These stories motivated a closer exploration of the role of the family in marriage and the reasons that would foster such strong filial loyalty and premises for family interference.

Such investigations evidenced that in the countryside the family was a central unit of survival. Family members were related to each other by blood ties, but they also seemed to be tied together throughout their lives through a system of kinship norms and expectations. Children learned from an early age to support the household livelihood according to their gender. In adulthood they were expected to support their aging parents. Families often lost children to diseases and other causes and women seemed concerned to have at least a few. Having a male child in particular was especially important since the boy remained in the family and became a breadwinner, contrary to the girl who became wife to someone else and did not typically earn a living.

The socio-cultural importance of acquiring male offspring was highlighted in some of the narratives of divorce that research participants shared with the researcher. Indicative is the case of a male interlocutor whose second wife faced fertility problems and asked him for a divorce. The interlocutor shared the following thoughts on the matter:

In this society if one man has a child, when he dies, the child is named after him. Now, for example, the woman I was married to before she had one girl child with her first husband, and she wanted another child with me, but she could not have that. In this condition people told her “why don’t you try with another man?” Since they advised her like this, she went (to try with someone else).⁷⁵⁷

This story, which was not a unique case, suggested that the emphasis was not on having children *per se* as the woman already had a daughter. Her desire to have a child seemed to emanate from feeling pressured to have more children, and perhaps a male child specifically. The woman’s former husband elaborated further:

She told them. She said “I have no children.” If you are disturbed and you are sad/anxious it is evident. Because they were her family she asked them for advice. “Your youth is passing. Why don’t you try with another man?”, they told her; “You will die without giving birth”, and so she did like this. In our society if a man does not bear children, it is an insult (OR he is insulted). If the family of the man cannot bear a child, who is she? They insult. Certainly, there are some people who say that the child is given by God and [who] save/keep their marriage. But, either by family or her age the wife is reminded: “You haven’t born children.” It is tradition (*bahā*).⁷⁵⁸

This passage evidences that acquiring children almost gave women their ontological status. A woman without children was nobody (“who is she?”) and would be questioned by others, while a

⁷⁵⁷ IM12.

⁷⁵⁸ IM12.

childless man could be treated with contempt. This importance for offspring in the local society and parents' dependence on children in old age could result in deep bonds between the two.

This should be appraised in conjunction with the local standard that older people needed to be listened to and honoured by those who were younger. Hence, research participants explained that traditionally they needed to have the consent and blessing of their parents prior to marrying, an injunction that clergy consistently emphasised. It was observed also that the wedding ceremony of *qal kidan* granted a central role to the parents of the couple. In addition, the families of both husband and wife remained directly involved in the married life of the spouses. In the countryside, it was observed that newly married couples typically lived in the husband's parental home until the newlyweds could move into their own house.

Some interlocutors believed that the involvement of the families in marriage contributed positively to the conjugal relationship because the elderly and more experienced parents could advise the couple and deter some marital conflict or separations. In addition, the proximity to the family was believed to function as pressure on the husband to behave better with his wife due to the fear of not appearing shameful to his own parents and relatives.⁷⁵⁹ However, other comments suggested that traditional kinship expectations could influence the marriage negatively. One male interlocutor in Meqele upon asking his recently married friend what he thought of married life, received the following response:

He told me that in Ethiopia if you marry a woman you have to marry her mother, her father, her aunt, her brother, her sister. You have to understand and to control and to make and to solve everyone's problems. They bring different problems. They want to make interruptions in your marriage, to interfere.⁷⁶⁰

Since the husband held the exclusive role of the breadwinner, he was expected naturally to support his wife, and if necessary, also his wife's relatives. The man's narrative underscored the tight connections that children and parents preserved throughout the life-course, and these seemed to extend conveniently to sons-in-law (and presumably daughters-in-law).

In sum, families would be expected to be influential in the conjugal relationship due to deep bonds of loyalty and duty between parents and children. These bonds seemed to surpass the marital bond due to their longevity and deeply entrenched character, providing ideal grounds for conjugal disagreement when family-related issues arose. This was best highlighted in the case of one woman who had been married to a "good" husband, whom she still reportedly loved but had to divorce due to their families' bad relations.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁹ IDM11.

⁷⁶⁰ IM24.

⁷⁶¹ PWW2P1.

Irregular unions and changing relationship norms

The court cases that were reported in the previous chapter evidenced a trend whereby irregular unions were affected significantly by wife abandonment and a failure of the man to provide for children's maintenance. One soldier in such a relationship with a local woman cited men's foreignness and lack of kinship bonds as conducive to their easy abandonment of women.⁷⁶² His female partner, who had previously been in a similar union with another non-local man which had resulted in childbirth, cited cultural differences in an attempt to rationalise why her first partner had not acted in the manner that would be expected locally (taking charge of her and her child).⁷⁶³ Regardless of the reasons, it was agreed that a formal marriage curtailed the woman's possibilities to make demands or to expect the man's support.

Couples living in irregular unions were encountered extensively in the city of Aksum, but also in other cities of Ethiopia. They were visible in the village of study that hosted non-local men but not in the village that presented a more homogeneous local population. They could be thus associated with extensive migration of men and a pluralisation of ethnicities that was reported for Aksum and the nearby countryside. It is also possible that some of these unions have expanded as relationship norms have seen changes in both the city and the countryside of Aksum, highlighted in comments such as the following: "The conditions of marriage have changed. He and she, if they do not see/know each other before, [they] do not marry. Now, they have started to live together without marriage."⁷⁶⁴ Under this arrangement, while courting the parties normally keep their relationship a secret until they decide that they are compatible and they want to marry. One male interlocutor said about his own marriage: "Two years we were together in secret. After two years we decided to marry and shared [it] with our families."⁷⁶⁵ In many cases, the decision to marry could be accelerated by an unexpected pregnancy, although it was reported by a court worker that many couples chose to perform secret (illegal) abortions which he estimated could reach high numbers.⁷⁶⁶ While these were more secretive types of intimate relationships, it is not unlikely that they fuelled more openness also in the domain of irregular unions.

Young people's choices to postpone marriage and their preference for more modern forms of intimacy could be appraised in reference to the historical epidemic of divorces in the local society and what emerged to be widespread suspicion about the quality of men and women as intimate

⁷⁶² IDM11.

⁷⁶³ FIELDNOTES, 4 April 2016.

⁷⁶⁴ IM26.

⁷⁶⁵ IM21.

⁷⁶⁶ IDM5.

partners. The remark that people lacked ‘candour’ (*gəłʒənüt*; ግልጽነት)⁷⁶⁷ was on everyone’s mouth in the villages. Inter-gender suspicion was highlighted in a discussion that the researcher had with a recently married man in Meqele.⁷⁶⁸ He explained that men in his society would hesitate to express their love to a woman because of being uncertain about her quality.⁷⁶⁹ He added that many men’s default reaction is to think that the woman is “a player” and to wait until they get a better sense of her personality before they reveal their feelings. Women designated as “players” were understood to act flirtatiously with multiple men in an effort to appear desired by many, which would increase their “value” in the eyes of men and could secure for them a good prospective husband. The way this interlocutor approached his wife-to-be is illustrative. He said that they had a common friend through whom he first found out more about her. After he found about her life story, he approved and wanted to pursue her. He waited, however, four years before he asked her to get married.

Rumours about female histrionics seemed to acquire new dimensions when they combined with local folklore beliefs about dark magic and trickery. Those who were distanced from their rural communities were more outspoken about these folklore beliefs. Some Tigrayan male interlocutors in London, for instance, seemed to believe that back home women’s concern with securing a husband made them more susceptible to “rushing” to cultural sorcerers in order to secure a husband with the help of magic.⁷⁷⁰ An interlocutor working in Addis Ababa but originally from a rural area of Tigray also spoke of magic and love potions being used by women and their harmful consequences. He referred to a woman who had purportedly done magic on the brother of one of his good friends, claiming that this subsequently caused the man to behave “like a crazy person.”⁷⁷¹ While rural interlocutors rarely referred to women doing black magic on men, beliefs about the activity of cultural sorcerers and spirit possessions, which will be analysed elsewhere, existed and were probably pervasive.

The fieldwork granted multiple exposures to this mentality regarding women. In one of the villages, two neighbours were considered to be “bad women” because they were believed to try with their wardrobe choices and alluring coffee ceremonies and meat-*wät* ‘feasts’ to attract better-off and educated men as husbands.⁷⁷² The ladies were 28 and 29 years old and held governmental professions in the village. On one occasion the researcher was invited to participate in a coffee ceremony held by them and found in their room a group of high-profile men.⁷⁷³ In a brief

⁷⁶⁷ Appendix 7.37.

⁷⁶⁸ IDM4.

⁷⁶⁹ IDM4.

⁷⁷⁰ FIELDNOTES (L), 4 November 2016.

⁷⁷¹ FIELDNOTES, 26 December 2016.

⁷⁷² FIELDNOTES, 29 May 2017.

⁷⁷³ FIELDNOTES, 29 May 2017.

conversation earlier that day, the two women were asked why they had not been married yet and whether it had been their choice to wait. One of them nodded and said that Tigrayan men were not considerate with their wives/women and that good men were hard to find.

Perhaps these popular stories and realities made men more suspicious of women, which could interfere with building trustful intimate relationships or concluding a marriage. In Aksum, a local university female student at the time in a romantic relationship expressed frustration because her partner did not want to believe that she truly loved him. The girl remarked tearfully that Ethiopian men are suspicious of all women because they know that the women inside the culture grow up to be calculative and exploitative.⁷⁷⁴ As she put it, they think that women cannot truly love them because they are self-interested. She complained that her own boyfriend “does not understand my love.”⁷⁷⁵ This could be related also to the aforementioned affirmations of limited emotional connection in intimate relationships.

Persisting and changing marriage norms and implications for conjugal abuse

Conjugal disagreement and conflict because one spouse failed to fulfil the expectations of the marital contract were described as prominent contexts of abuse. The analysis in this chapter has evidenced that marriage in the local society was traditionally a gendered affair, with the male being considered the formal breadwinner and provider and the wife being charged with the household chores and the needs of the family, roles that generally persisted at the time of fieldwork. A husband’s failure to provide financially for his wife deemed the wife unable to fulfil her own gender-specific expectations. This would not sit well with expectations for a perfectly hard-working woman who fulfilled all the duties and kept a peaceful home. Due to their husband’s shortfalls as breadwinners, women could not be proper wives by accomplishing the tasks associated with wifhood. This would only exacerbate their frustration with their husbands’ deficiencies. Husbands, in turn, despite their own failures to provide would still expect their wives to deliver, reflecting deeply entrenched traditional standards.

This gender-based arrangement of marriage combined with expectations for a meek and non-confrontational comportment on behalf of wives and an understanding that men were the authoritative gender due to their breadwinning capacity. This helps to explain in part why many interlocutors considered wives almost exclusively responsible for avoiding confrontational responses and why some interlocutors were put off by women becoming more confident and outspoken with their husbands. Along with these observations, people placed primary importance

⁷⁷⁴ FIELDNOTES, 8 February 2017.

⁷⁷⁵ FIELDNOTES, 8 February 2017.

on a peaceful conjugal cohabitation, which could justify why discourses of conjugal abuse focused overwhelmingly on spousal argument, discord and dissimilarity. On the other hand, the kinship norms which were said to underpin the marital relationship add perspective to discourses that family interference often led to conjugal conflict and even abuse. The expectation that a husband should provide for his parents (and possibly also siblings and his wife's family) offers one reason for tensions in the conjugal relationship. This may need to be appraised in conjunction with the widely postulated issues of poverty, money shortage and other scarcities that interlocutors affirmed as salient catalysts for conjugal argument.

The current changing landscape that has challenged to some extent these more traditional norms did not seem to resolve the associated problems, but rather created new challenges. In present times, interlocutors spoke of the need for a more symmetrical division of labour and articulated more comprehensive conceptualisations of gender equality. This helps to explain why some research participants associated more conflict or disagreement in the couple with women becoming more confident or confrontational. Such discourses would not have occurred a few decades ago, and it would be expected that men who still preserved 'old' mentalities would be less receptive to women's rising demands.

Still, these postulated changes did not appear to have displaced convictions that marriage should be arranged according to gender-based arrangements, as evidenced in the workshops held with both rural and urban residents. While younger girls expressed preferences for more educated men with more urbanised views on gender roles, they also expected men to continue to be breadwinners and be able to provide for them materially. Similarly, while younger men suggested that they would like a wife with the education and sophistication of the women of the city, many still looked for meek, non-confrontational and hard-working women to marry. In this new scheme of things, traditional normative standards seemed to become harder to fulfil and this could foster frustration conducive to conjugal abuse.

Conclusion

This chapter has teased out some of the norms and standard understandings governing marriage in the local society associated with the abusive situations described in the previous chapter. It has evidenced some of the gendered underpinnings of the conjugal abuse realities and aetiologies discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, it has identified spousal expectations that could help to make some sense of the EDHS 2011 results, which had found high percentages of women 'justifying' wife-hitting in occasions where women failed in tasks such as cooking or taking care of their children. Confirming the earlier spectrum that demonstrated variable degrees of overlaps between

haymanot and *bahāl* in local perceptions, people's discourses about marriage norms evidenced different degrees of overlap between the religious traditions and socio-cultural norms. In order to explore the more specific interface of religious parameters with the norms identified here and abusive situations *per se*, it is necessary first to obtain a sense of the clergy's teachings regarding the conjugal relationship, their attitudes about conjugal abuse and their role in the married life. Chapter 7 is dedicated to such a presentation.

Chapter 7

The role of the Church in marriage, clergy discourses on marriage and implications for conjugal abuse

Introduction

In was previously explained that research participants were of the general perception that while the physical assault of husbands against wives had been pervasive in the past, this had changed over the past decades primarily due to government interventions, education and a stronger institutional presence. In parallel, research participants affirmed that it was normalised for women to endure abusive situations. In rationalising this, many complained that the local institutions for addressing conjugal abuse did not work effectively and that socio-cultural standards enforced this attitude. In this array, the faith/clergy were identified as more resourceful and were generally spoken in terms that suggested a positive role for religious teachings, the clergy and faith in people's married life. A closer look at the discourses and practices of clergy suggested, however, a more complex situation, while some narratives by previously battered women suggested that priestly advice could become one parameter that enforced their inaction in such situations.⁷⁷⁶

This chapter aims to describe the role of the Church in marriage and to relate clergy discourses to conjugal abuse in the local society. It incorporates a thorough analysis of practices, teachings and pastoral approaches of clergy, specifically deacons, ordained priests and church teachers, in relation to marriage. The objective is to draw associations with the marriage norms and the Church teachings about the same presented in previous chapters to develop a more complete picture of how religious parameters could be related to either socio-cultural norms contributing to conjugal abuse or directly to conjugal abuse realities.

Institutional reasons invoked in explaining women's responses to conjugal abuse

During fieldwork at one of the villages, the researcher interviewed two women who had been married at different times to the same verbally and physically abusive man.⁷⁷⁷ The researcher

⁷⁷⁶ IW38.

⁷⁷⁷ IW38.

encountered the first woman in her modest rural home spinning cotton. She was in her late 40s, welcoming and eager to talk to the researcher whom she invited to sit in her yard. She narrated then that she lived alone but that she had been married before and had one child. During her married life she had been abused consistently by her husband, whom she divorced after five years. Following their divorce, the man went on to wed her closest neighbour, literally the next-door woman. He then proceeded to physically abuse his second wife, which she could overhear over the wall that separated their homes. She described that she had previously tried to intervene on behalf of her husband's second wife by calling the police. As the first woman narrated this story, the second wife of her ex-husband entered the yard. Without any inhibition, the first woman shared with her visitor the topic of the discussion and asked her to join the conversation and to contribute her testimony. The second woman agreed and subsequently an interview was held with both. This woman also reported that her husband had been violent for about 20 years of marriage. Eventually they also divorced, after which he presumably went to a third wife, this time in the city of Aksum.

Both women asserted that the man had been verbally and physically abusive and both seemed to agree that he had a bad personality (*bahri*). The first wife affirmed that she divorced him because she could not tolerate any longer the physical abuse. The second wife explained that she had oscillated for many years between her options. She mentioned that she had asked a local priest and he had thought it was better for her not to break her marriage. The neighbours, including the first wife of the man, encouraged her to divorce. Her narratives suggested that her husband eventually left her to marry another wife. The second woman was said to have hesitated to report her abuse to the local police unit. This was implied when the first wife narrated how she had personally called the police to stop a beating, which the other woman confirmed by nodding. According to the story, when the police came, the assaulted woman pretended that everything was fine and kept quiet. The women provided a rationale for this inactivity when they explained that while there were laws against violence in the local society, these were not generally enforced by police or court workers, who often knew their husbands as a result of occasionally drinking together.

For reasons that were discussed in various instances throughout this dissertation, the two women might have told their stories selectively, might have exaggerated parts of it or might have left other parts untold. Nonetheless, their story illustrates the widely reported norm among victimised wives to endure violence silently, often for years on end. A local priest during fieldwork put it very evocatively: "Many women keep the domestic abuses and problems within them in the way they carried their children inside them when they were pregnant. They will carry these problems

inside them too and will not share with anybody else.”⁷⁷⁸ As this case-study suggested, women hesitated to take action unless they had the support/approval of the people in their surroundings.⁷⁷⁹ In addition, women did not tend to pursue solutions through formal conduits, echoing results from existing studies from Ethiopia.⁷⁸⁰ One woman remarked: “We are like our parents. We do not know anything. We do not go to the social court. We stay quiet. We only tell our spiritual fathers.”⁷⁸¹ A local member of the clergy in turn affirmed: “Yes, she doesn’t go to the police station or the local court, she goes to the priest first. For example, in the previous years, such problems existed but they [the women] did not do anything about it; until now.”⁷⁸² Other narratives suggested that women went to local priests. In the aforementioned case-study, the priest was reported to have encouraged the woman to avoid breaking her marriage; however, most other narratives demonstrated that priests sided with the women and helped them to exit their pernicious situations, as will be discussed.

To provide a deeper understanding of how important the Church, represented by the clergy, was in marriage, the following section includes a more thorough discussion of the perceived inefficiencies of other local institutions as they emanated from research participants’ discourses regarding women’s endurance. This is followed by their pronouncements regarding the role of the faith/clergy in the resolution of marital problems.

The legal framework

The legal framework did not generally emerge in conversations with rural residents, which could partially relate to the aforementioned *wärüda* report finding that rural women did not have good knowledge of laws. However, many urban interlocutors affirmed that the existing laws for addressing domestic violence were insufficient. One woman in Aksum mentioned on a memorable occasion a husband who had been shown on national TV a few years ago for chopping his wife’s legs.⁷⁸³ The woman recollected that his sentence must have been between 10 and 15 years. She juxtaposed this to a crime that had happened some years ago at a local wedding where a man had killed another man. There the perpetrator had been sentenced to lifetime imprisonment. Like other interlocutors, she considered that the disparity in these two sentences implied a societal and state tolerance for conjugal violence in contrast to all other violence. She echoed scholarly

⁷⁷⁸ IC10.

⁷⁷⁹ IW13.

⁷⁸⁰ For example, Gessesew and Mesfin (2004) and Semahegn and Mengistie (2015).

⁷⁸¹ IW37.

⁷⁸² IC89.

⁷⁸³ FIELDNOTES, 4 March 2017.

critiques about Ethiopia's relatively weak legislative framework on spousal abuse,⁷⁸⁴ as well as opinions that were expressed by the EWLA staff representative in Addis Ababa, who identified the problematic pattern that when cases of domestic violence occur, victims must provide evidence that may be hard to acquire for multiple reasons.⁷⁸⁵ Even if the evidence is acquired, a concrete codified law about evidence assessment has been lacking.⁷⁸⁶ Such opinions, although confined primarily to the urban population, help to put into perspective the statement of the police officer who was cited in an earlier chapter affirming that only rarely were reports of spousal abuse proven to be true.⁷⁸⁷

Local police and social courts

As in the earlier story of wife battery, numerous female interlocutors associated the continuation of wife battery with the ineffectiveness of the local police and social courts. It was believed that police workers (who tended to be male), were unlikely to take action against a violent husband because they accepted in-kind bribes by these men.⁷⁸⁸ In the earlier story, one of the two women explained: "He (the husband) will take him (the police officer) out for drinks and pay for all the drinks. This action is greater than my request for justice."⁷⁸⁹ The other woman added: "Before, a woman could go there (to the police station) and could tell everything. But nowadays, corruption prevails."⁷⁹⁰ Others mentioned that mechanisms to counter police corruption have been put in place, and spoke primarily of the problem of lacking data about concrete forms of conjugal abuse and a codification system of the evidence at the level of local police units and social courts.⁷⁹¹

Perhaps a more important limitation that emerged from the testimonies of female victims of physical assault is that the local police or courts did not provide pragmatic solutions to their problems. In their narratives, women never expressed an interest in seeing their husbands incarcerated and most seemed to be seeking ways to end the violence. According to police procedures, in cases of spousal abuse that did not involve hospitalisation or death the typical remedy following the formal path was for perpetrators to either pay a fee or spend 24 hours in the

⁷⁸⁴ Moges (2009) and Fite (2014).

⁷⁸⁵ IDVE1.

⁷⁸⁶ IDVE1.

⁷⁸⁷ FIELDNOTES, 28 March 2017.

⁷⁸⁸ FIELDNOTES, 30 June 2017, 3, 18, 24 July 2017.

⁷⁸⁹ IW38.

⁷⁹⁰ IW38.

⁷⁹¹ The two permanent officers at the Women's Affairs office in the city of Aksum mentioned as alleviation mechanisms the possibility of transferring a corrupt/ineffective officer to another place (which did not actually solve the problem), reducing the officer's responsibilities, or even deposing him and not allowing him to work as part of the police force (IDW41, FIELDNOTES, 24 July 2017). A local police officer also affirmed that officers who are caught with such behaviour are typically harshly disciplined and expelled from their work positions (IDW41, FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017).

local prison. If a husband were to be incarcerated for assaulting his wife, he would be released soon without any concrete interventions being taken to change his behaviour. A female police officer in the city of Aksum imparted that in most cases nothing happened, and man and woman returned home and stayed together.⁷⁹²

In the case that the woman left her house to report the assault to the police, a man had the alternative to go to the police station with his children (whom the woman would have left home) to report his act willingly and ask for reconciliation.⁷⁹³ In this way he would avoid being taken into custody and reconciliation mechanisms involving the elders would be followed instead.⁷⁹⁴ For this stage, the police officer would typically summon three elders from each spouse's side to mediate, while the proceedings of the session would be written down.⁷⁹⁵ Reconciliation could comprise of different phases whereby the husband is made to promise that he will change and is given some time to evidence this.⁷⁹⁶ If he persists in his abusive behaviour, the elders take concrete steps to finalise the divorce and to ensure the equal distribution of property.⁷⁹⁷ Depending on the nature of the case, this could necessitate paying a fee to the local court or travelling to the appeals court in the city of Aksum, a cumbersome step for couples who face economic scarcity. However, women did not generally seem interested in dealing with these legal procedures, as highlighted in one comment: "We do not go by the law. Nowadays, if you go to the social court and get caught in legislation, you do not find solutions."⁷⁹⁸

Other interlocutors, including some police officers, suggested more practical or structural factors that impeded the effectiveness of the state-led institutions. One such factor was the long distance that people needed to cover in order to reach the closest police station in their *tabəya*.⁷⁹⁹ Another was that police officers could be absent from the offices because they were addressing other problems in their community,⁸⁰⁰ highlighting reported challenges related to low human force on the ground exacerbated by unsatisfying salary levels. A final parameter was police officers' own attitudes and understandings of conjugal abuse. One officer who was interviewed during fieldwork was genuinely convinced that women did not want to see their husbands incarcerated or prosecuted and that they decided to endure for the sake of their children.⁸⁰¹ While this was found

⁷⁹² IDW19.

⁷⁹³ FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁹⁴ FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁹⁵ FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁹⁶ FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁹⁷ FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁹⁸ IW37.

⁷⁹⁹ IDM24.

⁸⁰⁰ FIELDNOTES, 18 July 2017.

⁸⁰¹ IDM24.

to be accurate to some extent, as will be discussed, such an attitude could discourage officers from taking punitive measures with perpetrators to enable a context for reconciliation.

Local Women's Associations

Similar issues emerged regarding the local women's associations (WAs), which operated at the *ṭabāya* level to increase awareness about women's issues and to communicate rural women's problems to the Women's Affairs Office at the *wäräda* level. Female interlocutors, the only clients of these associations, expressed different levels of dissatisfaction with the associations. In one of the villages there was discernable antagonism between a segment in the female population and the secretary of the association.⁸⁰² One woman posited that the current secretary had lied about having lost her first husband in order to induce sympathy and to obtain her current position.⁸⁰³ Generally, the WA secretaries in the countryside of Aksum worked voluntarily; however, they received small stipends to cover transportation costs when they were requested to attend regular meetings or trainings in the city of Aksum, and this was considered to offer an incentive for women to take on the post to earn some extra money or visit the city for other purposes. Complaints by men about WAs consisted in a single observation that these associations failed to engage with men about issues regarding women and the family, which should concern both spouses.⁸⁰⁴

In the other village, the secretary had just been replaced, with a new secretary, who was also the wife of a local priest. The researcher knew the woman and had heard her express dedication for her new post. She described the kind of support they were prepared to grant to women who sought their help: "If they come, we go together with them. We ask their husbands why they act the way they do, and we ask them not to repeat it. We are like this."⁸⁰⁵ However, it emerged that if the female clients did not wish to file a report, a WA secretary had limited room to act. The secretary referred to the case of a woman who had recently confided to her that she had an abusive husband. In hearing this, the secretary had advised the woman to report to the police, but time went by and she had yet to act on this. The WA secretary explained that she could not possibly take the initiative to report the woman's husband without permission, explaining: "We cannot go by ourselves/our own initiative (to the social courts or police). This is not allowed."⁸⁰⁶ Such an initiative would betray their friendship and would be considered unacceptable behaviour in the local society. Regardless of whether or not WA secretaries were individually dedicated to the post

⁸⁰² FIELDNOTES, 28 February 2017.

⁸⁰³ FIELDNOTES, 23 May 2017.

⁸⁰⁴ IM29.

⁸⁰⁵ IW42.

⁸⁰⁶ IW42.

or not, the effectiveness of the association was clearly a function of many things, including informal norms that governed local standards of confidentiality.

The mediation of family, elders and neighbours

In addition to the more formal institutions, interlocutors spoke about the role of parents who could be involved to help in the resolution of conjugal problems. When a couple faced problems, it seemed to be a norm for the faulted partner to ask parents and elders to intervene. A female interlocutor said: “If there is argument, we tell our fathers/parents. They ask him why he is angry. I tell them why we fight.”⁸⁰⁷ The different testimonies collected suggested mixed impressions about the effectiveness of such intervention mechanisms, as highlighted in one woman’s comment: “If I advise him, he does not listen. His own family also advises him a lot. But, he does not listen. His father and mother have even arrived to tell him that he is not their child. But, he does not listen. He is a very difficult person.”⁸⁰⁸ The possible mediation of the family could simply be unsuccessful; on the other hand, it could be that women felt too ashamed to share their ordeals even with relatives, as suggested in another woman’s comment: “She says there is nothing. She keeps quiet. She tells that all is good. If she starts to experience abuse, she does not tell her father and her mother.”⁸⁰⁹

Other interlocutors referred to the mediation of elders for the resolution of conjugal abuse. A narrative by a battered woman suggested that elders could act proactively, if the life of the woman was in danger:

[W]hen he got worse, I pressed charges against him. The appointment with the court was the 24th of January. But he came late at night, drunk. Then the elders feared that he might kill me so they stayed the night with me. In the morning, they told him: “You disrupted the neighbours, you will divorce her.” Then they got us divorced. He went back to the city.⁸¹⁰

In line with the traditional procedure, elders intervened to reconcile the parties, but since the husband of the woman did not listen and continued to drink and to act unpredictably, they assertively put an end to the relationship. As in the case of the police procedure, the elders were usually invoked in narratives of divorce resolution, rather than in the constructive resolution of marriage-related problems.

It was affirmed by multiple interlocutors that neighbours would also generally intervene to stop assaults when these were known. A research participant who was interviewed in London narrated that when she was young her father had repeatedly helped their female neighbour when she

⁸⁰⁷ IW37.

⁸⁰⁸ IW15.

⁸⁰⁹ IW31.

⁸¹⁰ IW13.

sought refuge in their home from her abusive husband.⁸¹¹ At the village, one woman observed: “[I]n this society when there is physical violence the neighbours interfere to help.”⁸¹² Another woman reported: “Some people have problems in their marriage. They hit each other and by screaming they bother their neighbours and we go to their house to help them (to become peaceful).”⁸¹³

These reports contrast other reports that suggested a general hesitation on behalf of onlookers to interfere in the private affairs of a couple. Someone said that when people heard about conjugal abuse in a home, they told each other to leave the couple alone.⁸¹⁴ In a discussion of marriage-related problems, a man affirmed: “However, neither you nor I can solve the problem. They have to resolve it alone.”⁸¹⁵ There were also accounts, such as the following: “There was a woman (who died) who was physically violated. But people say her husband used to hit her. But there are no bruises on her body and we don’t know how she died.”⁸¹⁶ This testimony suggests that people could have an idea of who was being assaulted in their close surroundings and that they probably watched out for marks that would justify their intervention. However, in the case that no evidence could be assured, such interventions were not expected to happen.

It must also be considered that even in situations where onlookers intervened to deter an assault, they were limited in what they could do due to local codes of conduct. This was highlighted in a story told by an elderly man, who had served as a TPLF soldier:

There was a young woman who used to bake *’ang’ara* for me. [...] She is very kind; when it rains she invites people who pass by her house to enter and wait until the rain stops. She believes that house is of God and people should be given service into it. One day, as usual, she allowed passers-by to wait in her house until the rain stopped. The rain however did not stop, it became very late night and they slept there. After they left in the following day early in the morning, her husband complained that the people had taken a robe with them and that she was responsible for that because she made them enter into the house and sleep there. He insulted her and was about to hit her. I advised him to be calm and to consider the consequences of his action by telling him that it was not her fault and she is kind to him and others. But he got angry at me and said “it is none of your business.”⁸¹⁷

This story not only affirms the existence of spousal assault, but also demonstrates that people, and specifically males, could interfere to deter other males from assaulting their wives. However, it shows that even such interventions had limited effect if the recipient party chose not to be cooperative. Additionally, it may be noted that the speaker was an elder addressing a presumably middle-aged man. Despite his seniority, which should typically grant him more authority and

⁸¹¹ FIELDNOTES, 17 September 2016.

⁸¹² IW23.

⁸¹³ IW18.

⁸¹⁴ FIELDNOTES, 3 July 2017.

⁸¹⁵ IM14.

⁸¹⁶ IW8.

⁸¹⁷ IM12.

respect by those younger to him, the husband he addressed spoke back with clear disrespect. Interfering further, when the man was clearly inimical, would not only break local codes of conduct, but could also get this man in trouble and lead even to physical fight. One can understand, then, than despite the possibility of interference, people showing willingness to stop an assault and the postulated influence of the elders in the local society, there were some boundaries that outsiders could simply not overstep.

The salience of the clergy in marriage

While the formal and informal institutional parameters described above were usually spoken in terms of their limitations to reverse conjugal abuse, the clergy were almost invariably spoken in terms of their strengths and benefits in the resolution of married life problems. This was established unquestionably in the context of the participatory workshops. One exercise invited participants to identify the institutions that were most prevalent in their society and which they resorted to when they faced problems in their marriage. Table 9 describes the results from four different workshops held with rural residents. Notably, most workshop participants were young and middle-aged individuals with the highest average age being 38.45 years old.

Table 9: Most influential institutions laypeople resorted to when facing conjugal problems

Male workshop participants at D, 30 April 2017	1 <i>Haymanot</i> /priests 2 Social court 3 Health unit/doctor or social court 4 Elders 6 Secular school/teachers
Female workshop participants at D, 26 February 2017	1 If there is a problem, the solution would be the court 2 By the advice of the spiritual father 3 By speaking out and communicating the problem in the <i>'adər</i>
Male workshop participants at L, 23 April 2017	1 <i>Haymanot</i> /priests 2 Elders 3 Secular school 4 Health unit 5 Police 6 Social court
Female workshop participants at L, 21 February 2017	1 <i>Haymanot</i> /priests 2 Secular school 3 Health unit/hospital 4 Local social court 5 Borrowing association (<i>'adər</i>) 6 Elders

As the table shows, workshop participants agreed that the faith or the priests/spiritual fathers were their first resort when marriage problems emerged. The qualitative interviews confirmed that the clergy were considered indispensable in marriage, as highlighted in this man's remark: "In the

Orthodox Church one can't do without a priest. It is impossible to be in wedlock without a spiritual father."⁸¹⁸ Yet another man stated: "[Y]ou will have your spiritual father who is on call on emergency. The spiritual father is like God. One can't be allowed to do wrong. One has to confess to the priest."⁸¹⁹ Research participants generally thought that the guidance they received from their spiritual fathers was useful and beneficial, as highlighted in the following comment: "Yes we think that it is useful. These priests, our fathers, come and they say: 'This is good, this is how you should be.' If they tell us, we take it as useful."⁸²⁰ Another male interlocutor opined: "It is good for priests to teach the people at church; and people ask the advice of the priests in order to improve themselves."⁸²¹ The results from the workshops and such testimonies leave no doubt that the clergy were respected and sought after by the laity.

So deep was the respect of the laity for the clergy that one interlocutor affirmed casually that "people in this culture learn to say that priests are always right; they do not allow themselves to judge the priests."⁸²² Such statements would have many nodding, but they need to be nuanced since it emerged that rural residents were not unaware of shortfalls in priests' own lives and marriages. One female rural resident shared the following narrative:

There was one priest who separated from his wife. He was in the church and performed the Sacraments. But afterwards, they were advised by the elders and now they are back together. But, a priest is not allowed to divorce. However, because this particular priest and his wife had (serious) problems in their house, it was allowed for them to get divorced. But [this was] not because it is allowed [for priests] to get divorced. If the priest tries to teach in church about not getting divorced, the people will accuse him of the same thing. They will say, "You didn't do the right thing, you did not keep your marriage, instead you got divorced, so how can you teach me to not get divorced when you couldn't even do it yourself!" There are people who told him this and who did not listen to his teachings.⁸²³

This account may have been exaggerated or distorted due to mouth-to-mouth transmission, but it made evident a perception among laypeople that not all priests were exemplary in their married lives. It also evidences that priests who did not embody the Church messages risked losing their credibility. It is also notable that this female interlocutor knew of the canonical rule that priests were not allowed to divorce and that they could be stripped of their ecclesiastical role should they divorce, which apparently had not occurred in the case of this priest who continued working at the same church.

If the woman's depiction reflected a wider reality, the incident she described demonstrates that the faithful have become more confident in rejecting a priest or a priest's ways when these were

⁸¹⁸ IW33.

⁸¹⁹ IM28.

⁸²⁰ IM13.

⁸²¹ IM17.

⁸²² FIELDNOTES, 22 April 2017.

⁸²³ IW16.

incompatible with Church teachings, suggested also in one man's comment: "[T]here are priests who are bad. We ask ourselves how can they help the people to improve when they are like this? However, there are some very good priests."⁸²⁴ Still, as it was explained, regardless of how willing people were to confront the priests about personal deficiencies, the conviction remained strong that what the priests taught reflected roughly the teachings of the Church.⁸²⁵ This was established best in the remark of one woman, who said: "Who knows what they have inside their marriages. But because what they teach is the word of God it is right; they have to teach it."⁸²⁶

The effect of the priests on people's marriages could be curtailed not only by priests' own failures to match the Church ideals and inspire others, but also by people's own limited comprehension of the priests' teachings. This was brought up when a woman during a *mahbär* in Aksum admitted that while she listens to the preaching in church, she forgets everything as soon as she returns home.⁸²⁷ She justified this on the premise that as a girl she had been excluded from Church education and had difficulty retaining and understanding clergy pronouncements. In parallel, not everyone showed the same motivation to listen to attentively to the teachings of the clergy or embody them in their everyday life, as demonstrated in chapter 4. Thus, in appraising the role of the clergy in conjugal abuse, it is important to remember that the implications of their discourses were always also determined by people's own ability and motivation to receive whatever messages they imparted and to embody them.

Discourses and practices of rural clergy regarding marriage and married life and linkages with conjugal abuse

Clergy discourses were explored both in interviews with the clergy and the laity and by observing how clergy spoke in public events. The clergy generally participated in marriage ceremonies, other life-cycle events and the religious gatherings. It was also typical for clergy to gather after Sunday liturgy in the local church yard and to discuss local church matters, fundraise to cover church bills, teach or resolve conflicts that arose in the community. The researcher attended many of these sessions and listened attentively to the preaching, which was mostly about the faith and proper Christian conduct in everyday life.⁸²⁸ Marriage or conjugal matters and sensitive topics related to abusiveness did not appear to be discussed openly or extensively. Laypeople's private testimonies suggested that most substantive teaching occurred in private sessions, such as when the spiritual father visited homes, for example to attend a *mahbär*, and used the opportunity also

⁸²⁴ IM13.

⁸²⁵ Chapter 7, 172.

⁸²⁶ IW24.

⁸²⁷ FIELDNOTES, 16 June 2017.

⁸²⁸ FIELDNOTES, 12 July 2017.

to ask the couple how they got along and to reiterate Church teachings about the Christian marriage. Another context was when the priest was invited to mediate spousal disagreement or other problems. Theoretically, the laity could visit the priests at church during weekdays as well, but as it was mentioned, churches were often closed due to priests taking care of other matters.⁸²⁹

Marriage practices and virginity

As it emerged, in the rural communities people married primarily by the Holy Matrimony if they met the stipulations of the clergy, or by the *qal kidan* ceremony in the custom, in which clergy were again present and gave their blessing. While clergy and laity alike were aware that the government considered the conventional age of 15 for girls to be illegal, no priest was found to oppose openly under-age marriages when these occurred, and as it was mentioned, the presence of priests at local wedding ceremonies with under-age girls was a norm. It cannot be suggested that ecclesiastical rules caused early marriages, which were believed to have existed since pre-Christian times, but it is possible to explore how clergy discourses provided some grounds for the continuation of the norm in recent times.

The clergy's leniency on marriage practices seemed to co-exist with the traditional emphasis placed by the Church on bodily virginity as the main precondition for the Holy Matrimony. One priest commented: "People before were afraid to marry [in church]. They did not come because the priests did not want to wed them. Thus, people married in the culture, the cultural way."⁸³⁰ A local deacon more explicitly stated that people who are not virgins cannot marry by *Q^wərban* in church.⁸³¹ He confirmed that such couples traditionally married by *qal kidan* in their homes in the presence of elders and the spiritual father. Similarly, a priest and church teacher observed that "the law forbids people who lost their virginity to get married in the church; they can go to confession and get married outside the church by *qal kidan* and have a good marriage."⁸³²

Steps to make the Sacrament more accessible were reportedly taken in recent times. The aforementioned deacon confirmed that the Church allowed everyone to marry in church by the ring ceremony, which should result in the couple taking Holy Communion together following proper penance if they were not virgins.⁸³³ Another priest mentioned that couples who had not preserved their virginity "will only have the prayer of *Fəthā Zäwäld* and be sprinkled with holy water."⁸³⁴ A few priests traced the re-establishment of the marriage by *Q^wərban* for non-virgins to

⁸²⁹ FIELDNOTES, 7 March 2017.

⁸³⁰ IC3.

⁸³¹ FIELDNOTES, 14 March 2017.

⁸³² IC7.

⁸³³ FIELDNOTES, 14 March 2017.

⁸³⁴ IC5.

an encyclical that they reported had been issued by the Church some 15-25 years ago (inconsistent reports). This had informed local clergy that they could perform the church marriage with variations based on whether one or both bride and groom had abstained from pre-marital relations or not. A priest explained that people who came into church to marry were not all the same, some “clean” and some “with sins”, and that a different approach had to be taken with each group of people.⁸³⁵ Still, laypeople’s and clergy’s testimonies suggested rather a ceremony that involved some form of crowning (*’aklil*) but omitted the Holy Communion.⁸³⁶ Second marriages were still unlikely to be performed by rural priests.⁸³⁷

This preoccupation with bodily virginity in association with marriage was again illustrated in a discussion with a rural church teacher who had been trained in Gondar. He was asked why the tradition had stipulated the requirement of bodily virginity in view of the discouraging effect it seemed to have on the laity and in view of the objective of the faith to serve as a medium of spiritual healing. He explained that both spiritual and physical virginity were important in the local tradition.⁸³⁸ Where the Holy Matrimony was concerned, however, he suggested that the former was predicated on the latter. This was implied in a rhetorical question that he asked: “For example, a person who kept their bodily virginity, he or she will be said to have virginity of the spirit, but if they lost the virginity of their body, how could they be said to have virginity of the spirit?”⁸³⁹ While he agreed that deciding who qualifies for a Sacrament on the basis of an aspect of the bodily state ignored for the large part the spiritual dimension, he seemed to remain convinced that physical purity was the underlayer of spiritual purity and should be rewarded with the *täklil*.

Other priests recognised that the emphasis on bodily virginity was problematic because it could incentivise some people to preserve their virginity for ‘worldly’ reasons or to lie about it. Ecclesiastically speaking, when couples told priests that they were virgins and wanted to have a church marriage, priests were expected to accept the people’s word.⁸⁴⁰ However, in view of the pressure that individuals felt to appear honourable and to meet local standards of chastity and purity, some could arguably hesitate to admit their actual situations. A priest highlighted exactly this possibility when he said that “some would conceal the fact that they are not virgins and will get married by the *täklil*, which is against the law and the teachings of the Church.”⁸⁴¹ This was asserted also by a male interlocutor who remarked: “Others who are not consistent, they go

⁸³⁵ IC3.

⁸³⁶ IM21.

⁸³⁷ IC7.

⁸³⁸ IC7.

⁸³⁹ IC7.

⁸⁴⁰ IM28.

⁸⁴¹ IC6.

everywhere, doing what God dislikes and claim to be a virgin. They are on and off with the Church and they confuse the Church.”⁸⁴²

While the emphasis of bodily virginity as a precondition for the Holy Matrimony derives from the Church’s traditional canons, the Church has also spoken in the same breath of spiritual virginity, such as in the pronouncement of the physical, spiritual and mental cleanliness of St Mary.⁸⁴³ The emphasis placed by clergy primarily or almost exclusively on bodily virginity in the context of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony could be then an indication of the Church, via the clergy, adapting to or internalising a societal prioritisation of bodily virginity. It was reported, for example, that the established socio-cultural practice was for older women to check females for virginity at the time of their marriage.⁸⁴⁴ Attitudes that prioritised bodily virginity were discernable among segments of the laity who resisted the opening up of the Holy Matrimony to more people. Especially illustrative was the case of a woman at one of the Ethiopian churches in London who expressed polemical criticisms against the Church’s offering of the Holy Matrimony to non-virgins.⁸⁴⁵

Regardless of what nurtured the clergy’s stance on physical purity, it is important to acknowledge a possible link between this persistent ecclesiastical discourse and the continuation of early marriages among the laity, potentially mediated by a desire to secure the girl’s virginity. While it may be true that the local clergy did not discriminate in their teachings regarding bodily virginity, emphasising that both bride and groom needed to meet the expectation, such a message would not be unlikely to be received in a distorted manner by a society that already prioritised female virginity. This means that clergy discourses, even if not gender-exclusive, could have unintended gender-exclusive effects. In addition, the rigid precondition for bodily virginity as expressed in the discourses of many priests and church teachers and their general leniency regarding the age of marriage, concomitantly with previous studies from Ethiopia that have reported deacons seeking to marry very young girls presumably to ensure their virginity,⁸⁴⁶ offer grounds to think that some members of the clergy themselves did not eschew the influence of folklore standards.

Teachings about the conjugal relationship

The earlier analysis of Church theology established that within this tradition, women and men have been considered spiritual equals with the same potential of achieving likeness with God. This fundamental equality applies to the marital relationship as well, although it has been understood in this tradition that a difference in authority reflects the Providence of God to

⁸⁴² IM28.

⁸⁴³ Such as in the *Darsan Şayon* (FIELDNOTES, 28 December 2016).

⁸⁴⁴ IW39.

⁸⁴⁵ FIELDNOTES, 22 October 2016.

⁸⁴⁶ Jones et al. (2014, 37), FIELDNOTES, 22 October 2016.

preserve harmony in the family. It was already explained that the Church has not taught about a gendered division of labour, but it does uphold an unquestionable understanding of gender roles premised on the story of *Genesis*.⁸⁴⁷

The clergy who were interviewed in Aksum more or less upheld these views, but they pronounced them differently according to their level of understanding, theological training and personal attitudes. One church teacher commented: “The Bible says [that] man and woman are equal, it is culture (*bahāl*) that does otherwise. When they get married, they become one body, one in the likeness of God,⁸⁴⁸ the money belongs to both equally. They share one attitude, they share the work.”⁸⁴⁹ Still, there were clergy who made remarks that appeared to cite biblical passages more literally, as in this case: “The Bible says for the wife to do as her husband says, to submit to him, whether she likes it or not. But nowadays, it is changing (women do not submit).”⁸⁵⁰ The speaker was an ordained, older priest with very poor theological background. His pronouncement of husband headship is exactly the sort of pronouncement that critics of Church teachings have raised, and which the *MQ* has attempted to answer in recent years.⁸⁵¹

The gender-segregated division of labour was central in the local society, and was associated with an unfair division of labour which some interlocutors considered abusive. As it was said, the laity tended to attribute this division to culture, denying that clergy taught this way.⁸⁵² Indeed, all members of the clergy interviewed affirmed that the local gender-segregated lifestyle and the traditional division of labour had been a customary norm contradicting religious teachings. According to a teacher of a local church, “because the woman is physically weaker compared to a man and a man is less capable than a woman, they [people] say ‘this is your work, this is my work.’ The clergy do not teach like that.”⁸⁵³ Another priest condemned a gender-based segregation of labour more directly in reference to Church teachings:

For example, if she asks him for money, he will not give her without hesitation. If she said: “I am tired fetch water for me” or asked him to watch the kettle while she was doing something else, he would say to her “this is your job”, then he would think to himself “what kind of wife have I married, am I a woman that she would ask me to fetch water and watch the kettle?” But this is not a response of an Orthodox or a spiritual person, especially to his own wife. If he saw another woman in distress and in need of help he would have to help; that is what our holy book commands us to do in this case. If there is a widow raising kids by herself, it is a duty for those who can to support her.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁴⁷ Chapter 3, 101.

⁸⁴⁸ The original was *'amsal* (አምሳሌ).

⁸⁴⁹ IC89.

⁸⁵⁰ IC89.

⁸⁵¹ Chapter 3, 102.

⁸⁵² Chapter 4, 124.

⁸⁵³ IC89.

⁸⁵⁴ IC10.

Following the rationale exposed by this priest, a strictly gender-based division of labour was not condoned because it was understood that marriage needed to be a mutually supportive union where spouses were expected to care for each other.

Nonetheless, in the discourses of other clergy such apostolic teachings became secondary to the emphasis of Old Testament standards, overlapping thus dangerously with socio-cultural norms, as highlighted in the following comment by one rural priest:

A husband is a male, with his father Adam's race. A wife is a female, her mother Eve's race. And because God has instructed them to live together, based on that, we still follow that rule. [...] Because a man cannot live on his own, if he wants to marry or if he wants to live with another person, he has to bring a female who is from Eve's race. This female works on keeping the household while the male works outside of the house. They marry and then have children, reproduce, create a child who is like them.⁸⁵⁵

His description does not depart necessarily from the stance of the Church, but it pronounces gender roles in such a manner that a gender-based division of labour is enforced. The rural laity who relied on such clergy discourses to learn about the faith would be challenged to grasp the subtle differentiation between a divinely-instituted gender binary and marital bond, which this priest invoked, and the rigidly gender-segregated division of works that was conventionally upheld in the folklore tradition. And since the gender-based organisation of life reinforced ideals of wifhood predicated on a woman's ability to take charge of her household, give birth and rear many children and other such expectations, these discourses could be indirectly sustaining ideals of womanhood/wifhood that governed the local society.

Clergy discourses about the nature of the conjugal relationship could have equally complex implications. All members of the clergy unquestionably emphasised the lifelong covenant of marriage, invoking Abraham and Sara as the ideal married couple.⁸⁵⁶ They taught that one man should stay with one woman until the end of their lifetime and that divorce was sinful. One priest explained that if a man married a woman and then divorced and then married a second woman and then a third, the first woman would be considered his rightful spouse.⁸⁵⁷ Major emphasis was also placed on the spouses' peaceful cohabitation. A priest affirmed that clergy generally advised people to live in peace and husbands to love their wives, as it was asked in the Bible.⁸⁵⁸ Concomitantly with peace, clergy asked the laity to avoid fighting in their marriages, as highlighted in a priest's comment: "Another thing he teaches is not to fight in marriage. What's holy about fighting? There's no good in fighting. If you fight, it is a sin, it is trouble. It does not

⁸⁵⁵ IC4.

⁸⁵⁶ IC11

⁸⁵⁷ IDC5.

⁸⁵⁸ IC2.

lead you to God.”⁸⁵⁹ Another priest affirmed that clergy always warned people that if they fight, God is not with them; in addition, fighting will result in a bad name for the wife/husband and also in further fight between the families of the two, creating bad blood.⁸⁶⁰

These teachings generally echo the understanding of the Church that marriage is the fundamental base of society and that its integrity must be protected. It also reflects the Church’s teaching on the need for peaceful co-existence with others as a means to achieving the faith’s soteriological aims. If it is considered that much abusive behaviour in the local society was associated with conjugal argument and fighting, such teachings would indirectly serve as a condemnation and deterrence of conjugal abuse as well. However, it must be considered that unqualified statements pronouncing the importance of marriage as a lifelong covenant and the emphasis on the preservation of peace could produce undesirable effects in a socio-cultural matrix that rigidly expected women to be non-confrontational with their husbands and to preserve their marriages as ‘good’ wives, fostering even abused women’s endurance (which will be examined elsewhere).

Regarding marital sex, clergy were not heard to teach openly in ways that would condemn sexual coercion by husbands. It is not unlikely, however, that some members of the clergy espoused the prevalent folklore attitude expecting wives to cater to their husbands’ sexual needs, as highlighted in the story of the priest who expressed disbelief that a wife could refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband.⁸⁶¹ Being one flesh, he implied, meant that wife and husband should not separate anything, including their bodies. Nominally, this view does not contradict Church theology but nor is it complete. Within Church theology, as it was seen, the apostolic teaching that in marriage husbands should consider themselves the servants of their wives has been upheld. This counterbalances the male headship discourse and establishes that coerced sex cannot be entertained as Christian conjugal behaviour. Failing to present marriage as a mutual act of altruistic giving (rather than forceful ‘taking’), while emphasising the oneness of wife and husband could unwittingly nourish, rather than discourage, folklore attitudes regarding marital sex.

In sum, gender roles in marriage, peacefulness and marital sex were spoken about by clergy in ways that did not contradict Church theology and could promote a conjugal relationship of harmonious co-existence, love and mutual sharing. However, simultaneously, when pronounced outside of a comprehensive theological exegetical framework drawing from apostolic teachings on marriage to counterbalance some Old Testament understandings, the overall effect could be the maintenance of norms or attitudes that were associated with women’s mistreatment in the local society.

⁸⁵⁹ IC11.

⁸⁶⁰ IC2.

⁸⁶¹ FIELDNOTES, 14 May 2017.

Pastoral mediation of conjugal problems

When marriage problems were encountered, priests who served as spiritual fathers generally did their best to advise couples according to the faith, as illustrated in one priest's description:

Now, when she goes to her spiritual father, she will tell him what happened to her. And the spiritual father will go to her home to speak with her husband, asking him what she did wrong and why he said he will divorce her! He will also ask if her husband was beating her and all the things she's been keeping to herself. He will then analyse the situation. If the wife did wrong, he will tell her that it was her fault and to not repeat the same mistake again. And if the husband did wrong, he will tell him it was his fault and not hers. This is how a priest resolves the marriage problem. But, if the conflict continues day and night, he then concludes that they should go to the local court and settle things once and for all.⁸⁶²

This comment describes not only the typical mediation approaches of priests in case of marital problems, but also suggests that wife battering was considered to be a possible occurrence, to the extent that some priests interrogated women proactively if they were being abused by their husbands.

If the perpetrator refused to change his pernicious behaviour, research participants reported that the priest could also advise the parents to talk to him and to apply pressure on him to change.⁸⁶³ Other testimonies suggested that priests could take more rigid steps to change the behaviour of the perpetrator, by shaming them or abandoning them to be without a spiritual father. One priest affirmed that a person who refused to hear to the spiritual father's advice and persisted in his/her harmful ways could be excluded from Church life until he/she publicly repented.⁸⁶⁴ In the case that the party at fault still refused to change their ways, the spiritual father threatened to leave them. A male interlocutor thought that such measures were effective because it was unimaginable in the local society for someone to be without a priest:

If the man does not straighten up, the priest will try more; but if the man persists in doing wrong (wronging his wife), the priest will find a moment when most villagers congregate at a festival or some other event and the priest will declare in public that he has withdrawn his services from that man. As you know, in our religion one can't even stay one night without having a confessor. It is taboo (unheard of). After being dismissed, the man will beg another priest saying 'please host me for a night.'⁸⁶⁵ It is difficult to get one unless one promises genuinely [to change].⁸⁶⁶

However, it may be noted that even though spiritual fathers abandoned believers who were unreceptive to their counsel, numerous interlocutors suggested in their interviews that people soon

⁸⁶² IC89.

⁸⁶³ IC89.

⁸⁶⁴ IC10.

⁸⁶⁵ Original was 'ahadruni (አሐድሩኒ).

⁸⁶⁶ IM28.

found a new priest, often by moving to another place or when they remarried. In addition, priests themselves did not appear to insist if someone chose to follow their own will and not the rules of the Church. One member of the clergy observed the following: “The Church tells the priest that if they (the people) don't listen, he should let them go.”⁸⁶⁷ This was highlighted in one woman's narrative:

But the spiritual father said “don't divorce, reconcile with each other, and make your marriage work”, but he (her husband) said (to the priest): “I am not going to do what you said.” Then, the spiritual father said: “If you are going to do differently than what I told you to do, then you can do as you think best.” Then they gave their consent.⁸⁶⁸

These statements exposed the deeper theological premise of this tradition that one should freely choose to follow the laws of God guided by one's conscience, which priests could not coerce anyone into doing so, as highlighted in one rural man's explanation:

But our religion teaches us: “If you do not want to listen to God, it is up to you.”⁸⁶⁹ So the priests accept what people tell them and they are not judgemental because this is what the bible says (“take what is said to you”). For example, I can cheat them (priests) unless I have enough conscience to scrutinise myself. If I do not have a conscience, I can cheat them.⁸⁷⁰

This comment is relevant also to the earlier discussion about Holy Matrimony where it was said that priests generally accepted the word of couples who declared their virginity. These narratives establish that while priests could take public or private measures to apply pressure on spiritual children to change, they have had limited theological grounds for insisting since the faith accepts the fundamental premise that individuals must choose independently to follow God's ways and are responsible for their actions.

Regarding the victimised or faulted party, the case-study in the beginning of this chapter suggested that a priest could advise women facing physical abusiveness to be patient, and this could be associated with the widely postulated norm of women enduring spousal abuse. Other testimonies, however, suggested that priests did not insist indiscriminately that women show forbearance. One priest explained, for example, that when there was a problem in the marriage caused by the husband, the woman was not blamed or made to feel guilty, which could keep her in her marriage. His comment was as follows:

Yes, it (divorce) is not allowed. If the husband is at fault, the wife has nothing to do with it. She is not the one who caused the problem. But tradition hasn't changed yet. The husband can do and live as he wishes, but the wife can't. [...] It needs effort to change the attitude. Yes, it will add another sin for her, it won't be right. So we tell the husband he's the one at

⁸⁶⁷ IC11.

⁸⁶⁸ IW10.

⁸⁶⁹ Origina: *nrə'aska 'aytbəl* (ገርእስኻ አይትብል).

⁸⁷⁰ IM28.

fault, he's the one who is behaving in a bad way and that he's causing all the problems. And we advise him to change his ways.⁸⁷¹

This testimony concerned a marriage where the husband left his lawful wife, which the priest tried to address by involving the family of the man, by speaking to him directly and by reminding him of the sinfulness of his action. The priest explained that in this case the wife was not held responsible, nor was she asked to tolerate the pernicious behaviour. Other testimonies demonstrated that the spiritual father could offer material support to help a woman in distress, without preoccupying too much with forbearance. One woman narrated the following:

Yes, we had one (spiritual father). But the husband left. He (spiritual father) told him to return. But, he did not listen. So, the spiritual father could not do anything. Because nobody holds a person against their will, he (the spiritual father) said to me: "Don't worry, I am here for you, you're going to stay with me." And I'm staying with them (the spiritual father and his family).⁸⁷²

This needs to be appraised in conjunction with the understanding that most women had been traditionally dependent on their husbands for their and their children's sustenance. A husband's departure, which could combine with his refusal to pay child maintenance, put the wife and her children in material uncertainty. This would be exacerbated if the woman had no living relatives to return to for support and no schooling to find some sort of paid work. Without a salary she could not pay the rent of her village residence and would soon be evicted. This was probably the situation that the woman in the previous narrative had found herself in when her husband left: with six children to care for and no sustainable livelihood. The priest responded by inviting her to stay with his family.

These narratives diversify thus the landscape and suggest that while some clergy did advise the preservation of marriage and that abused women could be affected by this counsel, clergy did not always preoccupy with the preservation of marriage, understanding that women were made helpless by the pernicious behaviour of the men, and prioritised their well-being.

Women themselves also did not appear to be acting solely or uncritically on the basis of the clergy's advice, albeit valuing the faith-based counsel, as highlighted in one woman's discussion about the same:

Priests teach in church to be in the ways of the religion so that a lot of grace will come our way. Priests teach: "Women be only with your husbands (be loyal). If you have some money, spend it in your home; if you don't have any, you must live patiently. A wife should not undervalue her husband. And follow your parents' path (i.e. follow the proper steps; do not resort to other ways, e.g. marriage by elopement). Yes we understand your issues, you are the ones who give birth, or you are rearing children, you might face problems, but you shouldn't be waiting (relying exclusively) on your husbands. Otherwise,

⁸⁷¹ IC89.

⁸⁷² IW10.

your husbands will say ‘we’ll never let you go.’” I asked my spiritual father some things such as: “You said that we wives shouldn’t be waiting on our husbands, but we wives face a lot of problems,” and my spiritual father said to me: “If it is hard for you, should he then become a thief or an outlaw!” So yes, a woman lives under a lot of pressure.⁸⁷³

The woman understood the rationale behind the priest’s advice, but she exclaimed that this was a lot of pressure for women to live under.⁸⁷⁴ The expectation to be supportive to husbands, to be considerate to the man’s stresses in view of gender-specific roles and duties and to bear with the material conditions of everyday life seemed to be experienced as a particularly cumbersome reality by her. Nonetheless, she tried to be patient for both faith-related and other reasons. She explained:

In your marriage if He (God) gives you something to eat and to drink, then, it’s important to stay in your marriage. She doesn’t know who she will end up with next time, whether she will be more comfortable or more troubled. She has to stay in her marriage. For example, my mother and father have passed away, so I have nowhere to go [but to stay in my current marriage].⁸⁷⁵

She reasoned thus that one should be thankful to God for what she has and should remain loyal and committed to her spouse. Seeking a better or perfect marriage would be ungrateful and could place the woman in a worse situation since the next man could turn out to be more problematic than the first. Having no parental home to return to because her parents had passed away, she had no options but to remain in the current marriage, even if she had to deal with poverty and a less supportive husband. The sequence in the woman’s comments could suggest that she tried to adapt her thinking to the understanding of her spiritual father, without accepting the counsel uncritically. This story starts to illustrate that women should not be considered mere recipients of priestly advice, but pragmatic thinkers who assessed priests’ advice in view of their conditions and their surroundings.

Still, the clergy’s centring on marriage, which ideally needed to be experienced as a life-long and peaceful affair, could not but put additional pressure on women. Already in the local society it was a wife’s expectation and duty to be non-confrontational with her husband and to avoid conflict in marriage at all times. In such a context, a wife who was advice to show patience in her less than perfect marriage could hesitate even more to act to redress her situation. If such advice was not provided under the proper qualifications that marriage had to be premised on mutual love and respect, it could nurture the harmful attitude of inactivity among women. Most of the situations described here involved problematic but not necessarily abusive husbands, but there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the same patterns could apply in physically abusive situations, which will be discussed elsewhere.

⁸⁷³ IW19.

⁸⁷⁴ IW19.

⁸⁷⁵ IW19.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a more detailed look into the influence of the Church, via the clergy, in the conjugal relationship to draw implications for conjugal abuse. It was previously established that the laity in Aksum blurred the boundaries between socio-cultural norms and faith and that the clergy probably contributed to this since they comprised the main reference point for the laity on faith matters. Juxtaposing clergy discourses to the socio-cultural norms that were highlighted in the previous chapter helps to evidence that the problem might not have been one of acculturation or lack of training exclusively, as many learned scholars believed. Clergy discourses described here did not generally differ from the formal positions of the Church, but these seemed to lack at times the appropriate contextualisation and nuances to ensure that these did not unwittingly condone and nurture some folklore understandings and attitudes, with pernicious implications for women. Additionally, the fact that clergy who espoused societal attitudes could be highly trained directs attention away from the socio-cultural matrix alone to, potentially, the nature of exegetical training in the traditional Church education which might have emphasised Old Testament pronouncements evident also in the vernacular idiom.

The analysis demonstrates that while the Church provided a resource for resolving and deterring marriage-related problems, clergy discourses could be indirectly enforcing some norms associated with conjugal abuse or women's responses to it. Still, no conclusive statements can be made about the role of religious parameters in the realities of conjugal abuse without considering the effects of faith on individual conduct in marriage, a theme that is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Faith experience in the conjugal relationship and implications for conjugal abuse

Introduction

Along with the linkages between the Church, as the discursive work of the clergy, and gender and conjugal realities and norms, relationships with religious parameters should be investigated at the level of the individual. The urgency for such investigations emerged from numerous directions. Firstly, in response to the nature of the faith itself, which was generally described as a system of values and moral standards that should be experienced at the level of the individual comprehensively. Secondly, in response to research participants' narratives, which affirmed that faith could serve as a deterrent to conjugal disagreement and conflict. These widespread beliefs co-existed with other (less frequent) narratives that associated faith with women's endurance of husband abusiveness, pointing to possible gender differentials in faith embodiment that could result in gendered responses to conjugal abuse.

In the context of personal interviews, research participants were asked about the importance of faith (*haymanot*) in their marriage, without being given any indications as to how faith should be understood. Virtually all interlocutors answered by referring to the faith's effect on personal conduct, attitudes and decisions. In some cases, interlocutors made connections between how 'spiritual' (*mānfäsawi*; መንፈሳዊ)⁸⁷⁶ one was and their conjugal behaviour. This chapter examines research participants' invocations of faith in conjunction with marriage and conjugal life and especially with problematic conjugal situations. It explores how laity spirituality could be related to the experience, rationalisation or deterrence of abusive situations in marriage vis-à-vis the local socio-cultural matrix.

Perceptions about the influence of faith on conjugal attitudes and behaviour

In exposing their opinions about the role of faith in marriage, rural participants gave similar replies. One woman affirmed: "[F]aith (*haymanot*) is very useful in married life. This is because *Tāwahādo* faith tells husband and wife to stay together by vows. So we say that faith is useful.

⁸⁷⁶ Appendix 7.38.

Faith is useful to human thinking not only in married life, but in all worldly affairs.”⁸⁷⁷ Here the woman spoke of living marriage and all human affairs with a faith-based mind-set. Another female interlocutor opined: “[I]t is important/necessary to attend church. Therefore, faith is necessary for married life. By faith conscience (*ħallina*) improves.”⁸⁷⁸ In this case, the interlocutor identified religious life and practice with a cultivation of the human conscience, or personal morality, which she considered beneficial.

Moreover, faith was considered a remedy or deterrent to married life problems. One married man remarked: “As I told you, you need to go to the priest. If you have faith, it is good”, adding also that “[a]ll activity (in marriage) has to be by God.”⁸⁷⁹ This man referred to living according to the ways of the faith, which included having a spiritual father and resolving marriage issues according to their advice. One woman also commented: “Faith/being faithful is a solution to married life; the act of kissing the icons, the prayer, the Holy Communion are blessings to married life, they bring peace.”⁸⁸⁰ The woman described aspects of religious life, suggesting that by attending church and listening to the messages of the faith one became humbler and meeker. A wife, who remarked about her husband, reiterated this: “At the church he kisses the walls, then he comes home and he is humbler. If you both go to church and you are similar; this is called married life.”⁸⁸¹ She considered that living a life in church could make husbands more appreciative of and considerate with their wives, while sharing the commitment to live by the faith could make a couple’s marriage more harmonious and manageable. Prevalent was the view that couples who married in the Church, attended liturgy and lived according to Church standards were less likely to face disagreements and more likely to stay together for a lifetime. One man commented: “We have been told by our ancestors that any dispute should not occur in couples who are married by *täklil*.”⁸⁸² A woman observed: “The people who live together by the vows the majority do not have (divorce). They heed the religion of the books and what the faith says. But, it depends on everyone’s works/actions.”⁸⁸³ She added: “Together they fast, [together] they take communion, [together] they go to Church in mutual agreement, together they eat. So, how can there be divorce with such a couple?”⁸⁸⁴ In other words, religious vows were believed to have the force to keep couples dedicated to each other, a force that was fuelled by the couple’s mutual religious life and their own dispositions.

⁸⁷⁷ IW4.

⁸⁷⁸ IW26.

⁸⁷⁹ IM14.

⁸⁸⁰ IW14.

⁸⁸¹ IW34.

⁸⁸² IM13.

⁸⁸³ IW31.

⁸⁸⁴ IW31.

Such testimonies highlight that the positive effect of faith on marriage was perceived to depend not only on individual religious practice or piety, but also spousal compatibility in prioritising the faith and its ways. This point is enforced by testimonies where such compatibility was lacking and was held responsible for subsequent spousal conflict, divorce or separation. A few women affirmed that men did not want to marry in church and that this could cause conflict with their female partners, since this type of marriage could not be done without the free consent of both.⁸⁸⁵ One priest made the default gendered comment: “If she wants to enter the church and the man doesn't want to enter and to do the Holy Communion, it cannot be done alone; it has to be done together.”⁸⁸⁶ Another interlocutor referred to a marriage in which the husband was convinced by his wife to undergo a church marriage without him feeling spiritually drawn to it, which reportedly resulted in spousal conflict and soon concluded in a divorce.⁸⁸⁷ Alongside these statements, numerous female interlocutors expressed the perception that men in general or their husbands were not spiritual (*mānfāsawi*).⁸⁸⁸ One woman opined that men did not attend church, and if they went, they stayed outside because they did not fast or prepare for the communion to enter the church.⁸⁸⁹

In parallel, a few interlocutors thought that faith could be feeding battered women’s endurance in situations of conjugal abuse. One man remarked:

They (wives) say they give their silence to God. Hating/scorning and hitting are not allowed within our culture or religion. The faith says that should someone hit you in the face, turn and give them the other side. The objective is to live by peace and love. That in married life you have to stay until the end with the woman you promise to is the teaching of the faith.⁸⁹⁰

He discerned in women’s endurance a faith-inspired motivation for forgiveness and a commitment to respect their marital vows by doing everything in their power to safeguard a peaceful co-existence with their husbands. Similar ideas were implied in one woman’s comment that “[b]y the faith one should stay quiet”⁸⁹¹ and another woman’s remark that there is “really no solution according to the faith, but for women to be patient.”⁸⁹²

In brief, research participants commonly assumed that spouses marrying and living by the religious ways correlated linearly with their conjugal situation, making them more committed to their marriage and more well-behaving with their spouses. There was also a popular belief among

⁸⁸⁵ FIELDNOTES, 16 April 2017.

⁸⁸⁶ IC11.

⁸⁸⁷ IM1.

⁸⁸⁸ FIELDNOTES, 16 April 2017, 25 June 2017.

⁸⁸⁹ FIELDNOTES, 16 April 2017.

⁸⁹⁰ IM9.

⁸⁹¹ IW39.

⁸⁹² FIELDNOTES, 14 June 2017.

women that men were on average less involved in Church life or less spiritual. Juxtaposing these beliefs to fieldwork observations offers a more nuanced picture. These suggested that couples who married by the religious ways were not necessarily more pious than couples who did not, weakening assumptions about a linear relationship between a religious lifestyle and a religious conscience and, by implication, better conjugal behaviour as a product of spiritual growth. Moreover, it was found that both men and women could attribute life choices to religious parameters, but each gender tended to invoke different dimensions of the faith in different marriage-related decisions or domains. Thus, claims about men lacking spirituality could be obscuring a more nuanced situation whereby faith was influential in ways that resonated with the men's and women's socio-cultural location and conditions. The section that follows aims to substantiate these observations with a more detailed discussion of research participants' discourses regarding choice of marriage type and spouse selection, in which invocations of faith were most recurrent.

The relationship between marriage practices and spiritual motivations

During fieldwork, one interlocutor rationalised his marriage choice as follows: "We marry by the religion (*haymanot*); this is how we live married life; this is how we marry by the traditional/old religion of our fathers and mothers. Because it (religion) says so, we do not argue. We do not know any other religion."⁸⁹³ Such articulations were popular among research participants. However, concomitantly with what was said about rural residents linking faith and socio-cultural norms, such pronouncements could obscure rigidly upheld marriage norms and not necessarily or exclusively spiritual motivations. This seemed to be suggested in a remark by a male workshop participant, who explained matter-of-factly that:

There are two types (of marriage). One is done in church where bride and groom make their promise in front of God and receive the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. The second starts as a relationship and when they want to get married, they can't have a church marriage because they were living with each other.⁸⁹⁴

The man's articulation, which produced the nodding of the other male participants, highlighted that in the local order of things couples who preserved their chastity were allowed to marry in the church with celebration of the Holy Communion. It was simply unheard of for couples who started cohabiting prior to marriage to go to church to marry. Hence, holding a religious marriage followed not solely from personal desire, but also local rules which were rigidly upheld by both clergy and laity. Some narratives explicitly postulated that people simply responded to restrictive preconditions, for example as regards to virginity. A woman stated: "I and my husband were

⁸⁹³ IM13.

⁸⁹⁴ PWM1P1.

virgins so we married by crowning/the Holy Matrimony.”⁸⁹⁵ Another female interlocutor remarked: “[V]irginity is required. I was a virgin. But I don’t know whether he was or he was not a virgin, meaning you cannot know with men. So, for this reason we agreed to marry by the elders.”⁸⁹⁶

In justifying their abstinence from a church marriage other interlocutors spoke of lack of understanding in society regarding the church marriage. One man lamented that the priests in his surroundings did not teach properly about marriage, which resulted in laity failing to grasp the importance of coming into the church to marry.⁸⁹⁷ This was affirmed by other interlocutors who explained that the large segment of the population had traditionally married by the cultural ceremony due to having no understanding of the Holy Matrimony: “Those who marry the traditional way will not know much about the Holy Matrimony, because they are not taught, they don’t have the opportunity to listen about it. They just go for living together.”⁸⁹⁸ There were also interlocutors who considered that people’s fear for being gossiped for their marriage choices kept them away from church. A male *MQ* attendant explained that “psychologically they felt pressure and did not go to the church. They thought about what others would say.”⁸⁹⁹ He also observed: “In general, in Ethiopia social life is connected, somehow strong. Everyone wants to know everyone’s affairs, movements.”⁹⁰⁰ Due to the emphasis placed on physical chastity, couples were expected to come under public scrutiny if they decided to enter the church for their marriage. The concern for exposing oneself or being socially shamed could deter them from going to church.⁹⁰¹

Equally central in research participants’ discourses about marriage choices were beliefs about the indissolubility of the Holy Matrimony. Numerous interlocutors affirmed the permanence of the church marriage, such as in the following case: “We take it (Holy Matrimony) as a very strong principle. We are bound together⁹⁰² until the end.”⁹⁰³ This highlighted the general understanding that these ideas had been transferred generationally and that many people received them as part of their unquestioned heritage which one could not imagine violating. However, this idea of marriage indissolubility, or the ‘one-to-one’ covenant, proved to be equally salient for those marrying customarily, as highlighted in the following comment: “For the rest of the people, it is

⁸⁹⁵ IW25.

⁸⁹⁶ IW12.

⁸⁹⁷ IM16.

⁸⁹⁸ IM17.

⁸⁹⁹ IM24.

⁹⁰⁰ IM24.

⁹⁰¹ An assistant suggested the word *wärdät* (ወርደት) or “losing face” to capture this notion, but this was not directly articulated by the research participants.

⁹⁰² Original: ‘*asrän nän* (አስረን ነን).

⁹⁰³ IM13.

said also that they have to stay together from the beginning until the end.”⁹⁰⁴ An older woman who had married by the cultural ceremony and had a successful long marriage confided that she was happy because this agreed with the religious ideal.⁹⁰⁵ A priest directly mentioned that both types of marriage should be lived by the same commandments.⁹⁰⁶ Yet another member of the clergy said that “although they did not get married in church, the rule of marriage (that prohibits divorce) still applies.”⁹⁰⁷

These discourses demonstrate that marriage norms were not solely a matter of spiritual motivations, but reflected the broader socio-cultural system intertwining with clergy discourses. By implication, if religious marriage did not reflect personal spirituality, the former would not need to result always in a meeker or humbler conduct and a stronger or more peaceful marriage, as highlighted in the fact that generally it was admitted that even those who married in the church often divorced. The other insight that emerges from this discussion is that male interlocutors could also invoke in their explanations religious parameters, which they seemed to experience more as laws or standards of conduct they felt compelled to follow. This interpretation is enforced when male invocations of the faith are juxtaposed to female interlocutors’ rationalisations of spouse selection.

Invariably, in their discourses women invoked God’s ‘thinking’ or ‘consideration’ (Tigr.: *hasab* ሐሳብ; Amh.: *hassab*; ሐሳብ)⁹⁰⁸ in order to explain how they ended up with their spouses. Women’s narratives conveyed a deeper trust in divine energies, and this discourse probably related to their situations of insecurity.⁹⁰⁹ One woman shared that she had lost her father when she was little and that she had no brothers. Hence, when she reached a marriageable age there was no one to ensure that she would be given to a “good” husband for marriage. She also had a physical disability, which she thought had made her less desirable as a suitor. At the time she was very uncertain about her future and she had placed all her faith in God to find her a spouse. She was eventually married at 17 to a priest with whom she bore four children and to whom she still remained married. While their relationship was not without challenges, not least due to her husband’s difficult behaviour, she did not question that her marriage had fallen within the boundaries of divine will. She also affirmed that divorce was not possible in her case and that the appropriate response to her marital challenges was to try to be thankful about everything, reminding herself that the situation was not as bad as it could be. She remarked that patience was necessary.

⁹⁰⁴ PWW1P2.

⁹⁰⁵ IDW13.

⁹⁰⁶ IC3.

⁹⁰⁷ IC7.

⁹⁰⁸ Appendix 7.39.

⁹⁰⁹ IDW12.

Another example comes from a middle-aged couple with whom the researcher resided in Aksum. The wife had grown up in one of the two villages of research, while the husband had come from another rural part of Tigray. After having observed for many months their peaceful marriage and each spouse's considerate conjugal behaviour with the other, the researcher asked the woman why she thought her marriage had worked well in view of the more extensive marriage problems in the surrounding society.⁹¹⁰ Her simple reply was that it was all God's doing. She said that her husband asked her for marriage when she was 17. At the time she was working at the local market and he happened to see her. After a while, he approached her and expressed his interest; he then spoke to her family. When she was again asked why she decided to choose him over anyone else, being that she did not know him, she said that it had been God's will. By God's will everything happened like this, she said.

Narratives such as the above highlight that women's invocation of the divine was often associated with uncertainty or powerlessness to control one's surroundings. In conversations held with male interlocutors no similar statements were made about God's thinking guiding their choices in selecting a wife. This could be related to the fact that men had traditionally more control over the choice of a spouse than women did (although parents were again involved). One young interlocutor with a religious background suggested that he sought a pious wife with a similar faith-based mind-set to his,⁹¹¹ but even he did not explicitly state that he let God decide for him or trusted that God would bring him a suitable wife. These different pronouncements enforce the observation that the experience of faith by men and women probably reflected their different socio-cultural conditions, which tended to lead women to experience faith more holistically and men to be primarily affected by its religious stipulations. While no claim is made that all men and women necessarily experienced faith at slightly different dimensions, such patterns were observed in the research sample. These were substantiated especially in women's and men's invocations of faith in distressful married life situations, which are discussed next.

Women's and men's faith experience in conjugal life

In many cases, women invoked God's thinking to justify or nourish an attitude of forbearance in their difficult marriages, as in the case of the aforementioned wife married to a priest. Such women usually faced difficult but not necessarily abusive husbands, with faith helping them to find strength and to cope. Physically abused women did not generally make such invocations, although spiritual concerns could underpin their more pragmatic motivations. On the other hand, some men invoked faith in rationalising marriage-related decisions that could lead to or deter

⁹¹⁰ FIELDNOTES, 21 February 2017.

⁹¹¹ IDM19.

what some would consider abusive behaviour. In both cases, spiritual parameters could not be isolated from the socio-cultural matrix in which men and women existed.

Faith in women's coping with difficult marriages and in their responses to conjugal abuse

Discourses that suggested faith acting as a coping mechanism for married women abounded. Such situations included dealing with an uncooperative husband or responding to emotional hurt and spousal disappointments, such as a husband's sudden emotional change and his abandonment of his wife, or other situations of uncertainty. In Aksum, married life was especially affected by a pervasive out-migration of husbands who left to look for work in other places, such as Shire, Humora, Adwa or Meqele. This arrangement physically separated the couple and could generate all sorts of negative situations and bad feelings. In the city of Aksum, some women considered this to be an unfair situation to the woman who was left behind to take care of the household and the children, with some interlocutors affirming that this could not be called a marital relationship.⁹¹² Nonetheless, in most cases women still did not break their marriages and seemingly found strength in their faith to endure in the uncertain situation.

The case of a woman whom the researcher knew from Aksum city conveys this effectively.⁹¹³ This young woman was married to a man who lived overseas while she resided with their child in Aksum. The woman reported that her husband called regularly and showed interest in their wellbeing, supporting the family financially and visiting annually to see them. She confided that initially he had wanted her to go to live with him, but she hesitated because she wanted to be at home to support her elderly parents. While he did not contradict this, he continued to live apart from his family for many years and his wife was unable to know where he was, whether or not he had become involved with another woman and generally how he behaved in his new country. The woman shared with the researcher that she had no other option but to show patience and to hope that the relationship would not break down.⁹¹⁴ She observed multiple times that everything was in God's power and that it was important to have faith in God.

There were a number of women in the village who dealt with predicaments of a slightly different nature in a similar manner.⁹¹⁵ The researcher knew also a woman who was married to a reportedly "good" man who failed, however, to contribute substantially to the family's expenses. In order not to have to rely on him and to create pretext for conflict, she started to bake *'əngära* and to sell *səwa* at her home. She could be described as a very hard-working woman who rarely stopped the

⁹¹² FIELDNOTES, 3 July 2017.

⁹¹³ FIELDNOTES, 27 April 2017, 16 May 2017.

⁹¹⁴ FIELDNOTES, 27 April 2017, 16 May 2017.

⁹¹⁵ FIELDNOTES, 30 May 2017.

work and only to go to the market to buy groceries for more baking and beer-making. During one of many informal discussions with the researcher she explained that she tried to accept the situation in order to avoid conflict and to preserve harmony in her home.⁹¹⁶ Her narratives suggested that she tried to be discerning about how to communicate with her husband, especially regarding sensitive money issues. While the woman did not attribute her response to faith-related reasons, she was related to a church teacher's family, appearing to practise exactly those tenets that clergy encouraged in their discourses when they urged wives to avoid arguments with husbands.

Female interlocutors who had faced problematic marriages that had ended in divorce invoked a similar rationale, attributing these again to God's thinking (*hasab*), which seemed to give them some sense of peace. This was highlighted in the comment of a woman who separated from her husband after 20 years of marriage due to an inability to bear children, who said: "Faith is useful, but it does not allow divorce. But, because everything is of God, one cannot do anything. But, we separated by God's thinking."⁹¹⁷ Another female respondent remarked: "Yes, it (faith) is useful (in married life). Meaning, we are taught to be bound together in marriage. But divorce isn't a human's thinking, it's God's thinking. So, there is nothing we can do."⁹¹⁸ A most evocative narrative was provided by the following commentator who described her personal marital history:

We got married by taking vows given that we were worldly people (laity). The ceremony was in a church with one spiritual father and three friends. Our spiritual father said "in sickness and in bad times, never leave her, and also you (the woman) in the times of his sickness and in bad times, never leave him" by making us take this vow, they got us married. But it being God's thinking, he left me.⁹¹⁹

The woman's recognition that her marriage vows were until the end of their lifetimes did not deter her from thinking that it must have been God's consideration for her and her husband to part ways. Like all other women, she seemed convinced that nothing fell outside of God's Providence.

Such rationalisations would indicate the workings of a personal faith, which men never expressed in the same way. This could reflect the circumstances of these women's divorces, which were generally gendered. In the narratives that women told about their husbands' desertions, they said that they could not make sense of their husbands' actions. By attributing senseless events to an omnipotent God, women seemed to find a way to put their uncertainty and disappointment at ease, as suggested in one woman's comment: "I don't know by what justification he left me but I, thanks to God, I have been given years to live and good health. 'Just like you created me, give me

⁹¹⁶ FIELDNOTES, 30 May 2017.

⁹¹⁷ IW12.

⁹¹⁸ IW10.

⁹¹⁹ IW7.

my daily bread'; by begging God and by working, I'm raising my children."⁹²⁰ That women fell back on their faith in God's Providence does not diminish the spiritual dimension of the experience, signifying a functionalist interpretation of faith, but rather evidences its practical embodiment in real-life situations. It could also suggest that women's faith was strengthened by the ordeals in their marriage, as other studies of IPV in religious communities have found.⁹²¹

Despite the demonstrated centrality of faith in women's coping, one must be cautious not to overstress the relationship between women's endurance and faith since this endurance could be fed also by socio-cultural standards. The local society already emphasised non-confrontation for women and made women's separation from husbands undesirable and even shameful. Practical and other matters could also interfere. This was highlighted in a conversation with a woman who explained that she would not go to her family if she faced marriage problems:

When argument arises in a marriage, the solution I would use would be to sit patiently and let the problems/difficulties pass/fade away. Besides, where would a person go with the children? My parents are alive (I could go to them) but what would I say to them! That my husband and I got divorced because we don't agree with each other all the time? No, I don't want to go to my parents. I am keeping my mouth shut and I am struggling to prevent this from happening and to not get divorced. And to my children, I don't want them to get caught up in this.⁹²²

Her comment highlighted that the woman both was practically constrained in her options and probably felt ashamed that she could not manage to hold her marriage together. One discerns also an underlying attitude that it was the responsibility as a wife to "prevent" the marriage from breaking down, highlighted in the woman's commitment to let the problem "pass." The same attitude underpinned other women's narratives, as in the following case: "For example, if he comes from outside angry or drunk and speaks to his wife, his wife must remain quiet, then he will be quiet and if he is drunk he will soon go to sleep and in the morning everything will be peaceful. If you speak with anger, this will create fighting."⁹²³ Another woman remarked: "If you fight, do not say anything. It will pass if you show patience. Then, he will think 'why did I speak to her like this?' But, if you respond, people respond in an inflamed/angry manner. When they come back (to you) they speak with anger. But, if you say nothing, it will pass."⁹²⁴ Thus, while faith could be a pervasive source of strength for women in distressful situations, one should avoid monolithically concluding that faith always or exclusively *motivated* women's endurance or non-confrontational responses.

⁹²⁰ IW7.

⁹²¹ Various contributions in Johnson (2015).

⁹²² IW24.

⁹²³ IW27.

⁹²⁴ IW30.

This is an especially pertinent point for situations of physical assault. In contrast to the perceptions of some research participants that religious values of non-violence and forgiveness fostered some women's patience in particularly abusive situations, most women who had been battered by husbands and the majority of onlookers provided aetiologies that pertained to socio-cultural standards of wifhood/womanhood, practical parameters and psychological motivations instead.⁹²⁵ The fear of retaliation was a pervasive justification, as remarked by one man: "If they tell the police and the man is imprisoned, his aggressive behaviour will worsen. He may even kill. So, they say it is better to be silent."⁹²⁶ A woman, in turn, affirmed: "They do not talk about abuse because they have to return to their marriages and if they report him, they are afraid they will be hit/beaten."⁹²⁷ Yet another woman said: "Yes, some of the women who are assaulted by their husbands they will go to the police. They will say that they (the husbands) cannot return to their homes in this situation (because they fear that they will beat them)."⁹²⁸ This needs to be appraised in conjunction with the analysis made in chapter 7 which explained that perpetrators were incarcerated for a short period of time at the local police station, but returned home soon after and typically continued to live with their wives under the same roof.

A number of interlocutors spoke of women's commitment to preserve their marriage, pertaining to the aforementioned rationale that they should let the problem "pass." This was highlighted in the comment of a man who opined: "Because she wants a home/family, even if he hits, she keeps it inside her, she stays quiet. Then, because the suffering is short, it passes/is forgotten by the following morning."⁹²⁹ In parallel, some interlocutors emphasised the women's fear of harming their chances of reconciliation with their spouses, as in the case of the following woman: "If women are abused in the intimate relationship, they do not speak out. This is because they know that if the truth goes out, their marriage will not be peaceful again. Because when the truth comes out, no solution can emerge, she will keep quiet."⁹³⁰ Another female interlocutor observed: "They do not talk about abuse because [...] they are afraid [...] that they may divorce, or that there will be no peace with their marriage."⁹³¹ In the local, closed society a wife who reported her husband for abuse would be irreversibly damaging her relationship with him. However, there were many practical, socio-cultural and emotional reasons that made divorce undesirable for women.

It was often brought up by interlocutors that women did not want to divorce because they would be considered 'bad' women, as highlighted in a man's remark: "People fear divorce because the

⁹²⁵ IW13, IW37, FIELDNOTES, 28 March 2017.

⁹²⁶ IM9.

⁹²⁷ IW14.

⁹²⁸ IW18.

⁹²⁹ IM11.

⁹³⁰ IW16.

⁹³¹ IW14.

society will badmouth them, especially women.”⁹³² Another male respondent used more codified language to suggest similar ideas: “They do not speak out. If they speak out, it looks like something else. What will change for the woman (if she tells the truth)? Due to this, women remain silent.”⁹³³ The rhetorical question seemed to suggest that practical solutions were generally inexistent, which should be appraised in view of the earlier analysis of institutional inefficiencies perpetuating the problem. However, the comment “If they speak out, it looks like something else” requires closer attention. A cue on how to read this came from another man, who said: “Let me tell you, the women keep silent because they are afraid not to be labelled as aggressive; they believe it is better for them to be humble and calm/peaceful.”⁹³⁴ In other words, women speaking out would tend to be perceived as confrontational or aggressive which could blemish a woman’s identity, highlighting how closely associated wifeness ideals were with meekness in the local society. Since women were traditionally dependent on men for their livelihood, it could be a true disincentive, if not a real source of anxiety, for a woman to be stigmatised as non-wifely material.

Spending most of the days at the village in the company of women made evident that female interlocutors were particularly fearful of being regarded as ‘bad’ wives. At one occasion at the village, the researcher entered into conversation with two young women who were visiting a female neighbour’s home.⁹³⁵ Initially, both women were reticent and made some brief statements that they were married with children. After a while, however, the women shared more about their background and family lives. One of the young women revealed that she had never been formally married to her “husband” and that they eventually decided to separate mutually less than a year ago. She told the researcher that he soon brought another wife who was richer. She also said that their life together had been peaceful and good; she had been a good wife and had cooked and made *’əngära* and taken care of the child. He had worked outside and had a good salary, which meant that money was not missing in the family. The other young woman asserted confidently that she had a fairly happy marriage. When the visitors left, the researcher’s neighbour turned to the researcher and stated simply that the women had given incomplete accounts. She clarified that the former lady’s husband was a good man and that he had left his wife because she repeatedly refused to do household works and behave as a married woman. Moreover, the second lady had also been abandoned by her husband. This incident evidenced not only that people/women were vigilant about other people’s lives, but reinforces also the point that women were careful not to offer reasons that could stigmatise them as bad wives.

⁹³² IM29.

⁹³³ IM16.

⁹³⁴ IM17.

⁹³⁵ FIELDNOTES, 2 April 2017.

It is possible that some women were concerned to protect not only their image as wives, but also the name of their husbands whom they sought reconciliation with. The following was remarked by a female interlocutor: “She is ashamed. She does not want him to be in chains and imprisoned.”⁹³⁶ Another woman stated: “In addition to her hurt, she doesn’t want him to be abused. Basically you shouldn’t abuse. He has to be seriously advised. You should not be beaten by two sticks⁹³⁷.”⁹³⁸ The last sentence could be taken to mean roughly that it was enough damage for a wife to be beaten by her husband for her to want to incur also the damage of social shame and causing the abuse of her husband, perhaps in the form of incarceration. A woman thinking this way could be influenced by a deeply entrenched belief that the affairs of one’s marriage should remain private, but the same aphorism could pertain to the woman’s faith-based values or piety instructing her to respond to violence with non-violence and to forgive injustice done against her.

Other female interlocutors drew attention to women’s emotional despair and depression, which made it difficult for them to redress their situation. One female interlocutor said: “You know, when family breaks and marriage collapses, you get confused, you do not know where you are, where you go. You are in a dark area. They (the abused women) cannot reach the light. Honestly, they cannot reach the light.”⁹³⁹ Other interlocutors moved along similar lines, drawing attention to the emotional attachment of the woman to her husband and her hope that he might change in the future. An interlocutor who had experienced physical abuse for most of her married life made a pertinent comment: “For 20 years, he beat me. The people who lived in the same compound as I did (seven people), only knew, [but] not the ones who lived outside our compound. Even when he used to beat me, I used to keep quiet because I used to hope that he will get better.”⁹⁴⁰ When the woman eventually pressed charges, it was only because elders intervened because the violence had escalated and had disturbed the neighbourhood.

The insight emerging from this overview is that faith had tangible importance in women who dealt with marriage-related challenges, helping them to accept and cope with an unsatisfying situation and to explain negative experiences that were outside of their control. However, women’s endurance was motivated most likely by a host of socio-cultural and practical constraints and considerations. Regarding physically abused women, it is unlikely that faith led them to accept or to justify their husbands’ abuse; however, it is possible that faith enforced some women’s hesitation to take decisive measures against their husbands under the influence of religious teachings that taught non-violence and forgiveness.

⁹³⁶ IW3536.

⁹³⁷ Original: *kältä bätəri kätwəš’ə yäbälan* (ክልተ በትረ ክትውግዕ የብላን).

⁹³⁸ IW3536.

⁹³⁹ IW2.

⁹⁴⁰ IW13.

Faith in men's decision-making about conjugal behaviour

Male interlocutors rarely mentioned God or God's thinking (*hasab*) when they discussed conjugal situations causing them distress. However, there were contexts in which some invoked spiritual parameters in their rationalisation of decisions that could result in bad conjugal behaviour. The few stories that were collected pertained to a husband's potential adulterous behaviour or abandonment of his wife for another woman, which was included in some local interlocutors' definitions of abuse. As opposed to women, who were more direct about their situations, male interlocutors did not generally speak in a personal voice, but more enigmatically and hypothetically, which was probably not unrelated to the researcher's gender. It could also be that men were afraid that if they spoke personally the researcher could communicate this to others, concomitantly with the possibility that they felt shame since they spoke of morally questionable acts.

At one such occasion, a male village neighbour described a marriage dilemma that he sought to overcome, requesting the input of the researcher.⁹⁴¹ He told the story of a hypothetical man who was happily married to his wife who had borne him many children. Suddenly the protagonist of the story had started to feel attracted to another woman. The male narrator remarked that Satan had crept into the protagonist's mind and was inciting him to succumb to the unlawful temptation. The interlocutor was unsure if the protagonist should follow his desire and if what he felt for the other woman could be called "true love" by the standards of the faith. The researcher conversed with the man for some time about the nature of spousal love within Church theology, describing also apostolic teachings about the duty of husbands to love their lawful wives. The man listened carefully and shared his own thoughts, clearly interested in the Church teachings. While he did not disclose his thoughts at the end of the conversation, it was an incident that evidenced that married men could have deeper spiritual concerns and could resort to the religious injunctions/understandings for deciding how to act in marriage-related situations. It could also suggest that men were unlikely to share their dilemmas with others (including spiritual fathers), which was circumvented somehow by the researcher's foreignness.

A similar invocation of spiritual temptations was made in another interview with a married-man at the same village.⁹⁴² The researcher was more familiar with the background of this interlocutor who was married and had children, was a hard-working and well-respected husband, had devoutly held the monthly *ḡakār* in his home and was generally considered an ethical man in his dealings with others. Like most men, during the interview held with the researcher he recognised that

⁹⁴¹ FIELDNOTES, 10 May 2017.

⁹⁴² IM17.

marriage should be a ‘one-to-one’ covenant, but admitted having little exposure to Church teachings about the Christian marriage. Following the conversation with the researcher regarding marriage-related problems in the local society, one of which was affirmed to be adultery, the man remarked that he had seen many bad things being committed by married men in his surroundings and where he had travelled for work.⁹⁴³ Then, with a lowered voice he alluded that he himself had been tempted previously, suggesting that his faith-based conscience (*həllina*) might have had something to do with him preserving his marriage.

Such narratives would seem to suggest that religious considerations could deter some men from committing acts that would be considered abusive by local people. Notably, no other situations were encountered in the research sample where men invoked a faith-based conscience or language to rationalise conjugal attitudes or decisions. This begs the question why this marital context was more likely to generate what could be described as spiritual anxieties. A starting point for exploring this question may be the observation that adultery was considered particularly sinful in the local religious cosmology. As it was mentioned previously, adultery has been a grave offense in Church teaching, so much so that committing adultery was historically one of the conditions for marriage annulment, while those who committed such acts were barred from the Eucharist.⁹⁴⁴ More importantly, adultery has been condemned in canonical books such as the *Ethiopic Didascalia* not merely as an act, but also as an intention in the mind.⁹⁴⁵ Laity would not be expected to have read these books but these messages were also implied in clergy discourses that emphasised monogamy and pronounced the centrality of virginity and chastity (in contrast to fornication).

A look at how men spoke about the ‘sin’ [Tigr.: *ḥaṭi’at* (ሐጠአት); Amh.: *ḥaṭi’at* (ኃጠአት)]⁹⁴⁶ of divorce and adultery in particular enforces the connection with Church discourses. Like their female counterparts, in their narratives male interlocutors did not tend to express remorse for having divorced, despite the general recognition that divorce was a sin. On the other hand, divorcing due to having committed adultery was considered a grave wrongdoing. The story of an 80-year old man, who was divorced by his wife, helps to illustrate these patterns. As per norm, the spiritual father was invited to intervene and to advise the wife against divorcing, but the woman was not convinced. Knowing that divorcing was a sin and a disobedience to Church rules, the man had assumed that subsequently his spiritual father would abandon him. However, the latter reassured him that they could continue their spiritual bond since it was not the man who had disobeyed, but his wife. It was not clear if the man had been to confession for this particular

⁹⁴³ FIELDNOTES, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁴⁴ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 148).

⁹⁴⁵ Mason (1920, 4-5).

⁹⁴⁶ Appendix 7.40.

incidence, but he referred generally to it in his interview when he said: “In confession, if I have done anything I tell the priest. The priest may give me as punishment a prescription to follow. By this way, God will forgive me. If one has done a bad thing, such as divorce or even murder, this is what he/she must do. Except for if you committed adultery.”⁹⁴⁷

It is important to heed attention to his understanding that the sin of divorce or murder required a different form of penance to the sin of adultery. He did not explain why he made this differentiation, but a cue was given in another man’s interview that moved along similar lines. He also considered divorce on mutual grounds to be less sinful than adulterous behaviour, as he remarked: “Discussing on issues and coming to a mutual understanding is not sin. What becomes sin is to do a bad thing and hide it. There are those who don’t speak, yet keep doing bad deeds.”⁹⁴⁸ His explanation suggested that the intensity of the sin was associated with secretive behaviour, which denoted for him a degree of immorality. Another man considered remarriage to be equivalent to adultery-fornication and said that he would ideally like to avoid it.⁹⁴⁹ At a workshop in the village, one man commented the following: “When I get married, it is in order to have children, to continue my bloodline; also, to have someone who can support me in life. Furthermore, to strengthen my faith, because if I am not married I will jump from one woman to another; this is forbidden.”⁹⁵⁰ The other workshop participants agreed with him, evidencing that his articulation probably captured general (or generally approved) understandings or male ideals. This man directly attributed his choice to marry to his faith and desire to avoid fornication/adultery, but he did not explicitly associate procreation with faith. This might suggest that the prospect of fornication was particularly potent in men’s minds and more potently related to religious teachings, reflecting also the gravity that this sin carried in ecclesiastical teachings and texts.

The implication is that some men could experience faith in ways that had consequences for their personal decisions, attitudes and behaviour in marriage, but probably in situations where their acts could lead in transgressions of religious stipulations. The thought of committing a grave sin could be deterring some men from committing conjugal abusive acts because they felt the gravity of the moral transgression in their conscience. It is also not unlikely that such men feared the societal repercussions of being seen by others/other men as morally questionable individuals and losing other people’s respect. This should be considered concomitantly with the fact that in the local society it was usually the male who was associated with wife abandonment and adultery, which could create more pressure among men to avoid being stigmatised as such. It is also notable that

⁹⁴⁷ IM12.

⁹⁴⁸ IM17.

⁹⁴⁹ IM16.

⁹⁵⁰ PWM1P1.

while some women referred also to female adultery and described these women as ‘bad’,⁹⁵¹ they did not invoke the fear of transgressing religious laws as men’s pronouncements did. This highlighted again that men could be more deeply attuned to the regulatory expressions of the religious tradition.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined men’s and women’s faith experience within marriage, complementing the previous chapter that focused on the effect of the religious tradition at the more institutional and normative level. Such an analysis was motivated by the research participants’ frequent invocations that faith deterred marriage problems, but could also underpin battered women’s endurance of physical abuse. It should be recognised that the chapter has not achieved a discussion of laity spirituality in the local society in general, but insights from domains that were more frequently discussed in reference to married life problems.

The analysis confirmed some of the general perceptions regarding faith and marriage, but nuanced them in important ways, showing first and foremost that a religious lifestyle should not be equated necessarily with spirituality and, by implication, the embodiment of a faith-based conscience in marriage; likewise a non-religious lifestyle should not necessarily exclude the embodiment of a faith-based attitude in marriage. In contrast to the general perceptions that men lacked spirituality, it was found that faith was experienced by men and women in ways that probably reflected their gendered identities and socio-cultural conditions. In the narratives explored faith influenced both men’s and women’s conscience, but with gendered implications. Faith experience seemed to give some woman a sort of buffer against uncertainty and disappointments, while providing some men with disincentives against adulterous or wife abandonment. While it could be that faith deterred also women from committing adultery and helped men to cope with marriage-related problems, such discourses were not pronounced in the research sample.

Nonetheless, the perception that women were considered more spiritual than men in conjunction with the understanding that faith could contribute to making them meeker and more considerate suggests that some women could be more prepared to justify men’s abusiveness on the premise that they were not sufficiently spiritual. Such prospects raise the need for a closer look into how men and women understood abusiveness and the relationship with spiritual parameters. These emerged directly in aetiologies of conjugal abuse that invoked the individual personality (*bahri*) and are explored in the final chapter of this dissertation.

⁹⁵¹ Chapter 5, 134.

Chapter 9

Local metaphysics of human individuality and implications for conjugal abuse attitudes

Introduction

As it would be expected from men and women in any society, village residents in Aksum admitted shortfalls in their vernacular lifestyles and practices but they did not attempt to explain conjugal abuse exclusively on the basis of cultural or social norms. This would be even more strongly expected for this society due to a close overlap between *bahāl* and *haymanot* within local perceptions, predisposing people to view their cultural heritage in generally favourable terms. In their discourses regarding conjugal abuse research participants overwhelmingly related abusiveness to the individual personality (*bahri*).⁹⁵² *Bahri* was more strongly or weakly associated with personal attitudes, conscience or intentions, all of which were related to social norms and spiritual parameters in some way, but not definitively or explicitly.

The extent to which *bahri* and individual parameters were recurrently invoked to justify abuse deserves attention since the implied local metaphysics of human individuality appeared to have implications for the perpetuation of society-wide conjugal abuse attitudes. The fact that participants tended to attribute the problem to personal factors, rather than societal, could suggest that they did not expect or apprehend societal mobilisation or structural changes for the alleviation of the problem. Moreover, the local perception that faith should ideally serve to cultivate a conscience to counter temptations and satanic influences leading to un-Christian behaviour, in conjunction with perceptions among women that considered men to be less spiritual, could cumulatively foster a conviction that men were more susceptible to satanic energies and therefore more likely to become abusive. Such understandings could imply tendencies to tolerate or justify male abusiveness and expectations for women to endure it.

This chapter aims to draw attention to the large role that personal parameters proved to have in local explanations of conjugal abuse and to explore what these could mean for the perpetuation of pernicious attitudes about the same. This analysis proceeds through a closer look at how *bahri* was invoked and used in people's discourses and the implied relationships with the natural, social and spiritual dimensions. The aim of this exploration is not to identify a single definition, but to

⁹⁵² Chapter 5, 141.

demonstrate the multiple relationships that were suggested in people’s discourses and what could be implications for local conjugal abuse attitudes.

Ambiguous individuality-based aetiologies of conjugal abuse

In their most fundamental aetiologies of harmful conjugal behaviour invariably all research participants invoked the problematic nature of the perpetrator’s personality (*bahri*). Pinning down how this human personality was conceptualised within the local cosmological framework was, however, a particularly challenging task, not least due the communication modes of interlocutors, who did not seem to think that this terminology needed further explications. However, it became clear that people’s discourses were underpinned by a deeper cosmology which interweaved the natural, social and spiritual dimensions together.

Most rationalisations of bad or abusive behaviour started with statements, such as “[i]t is just character/personality (*bahri*)”⁹⁵³ to suggest that the problem emanated from the unique personality of the individual. Invariably, interlocutors described this personality as ‘natural.’ Usually, these problems were spoken in conjunction with a problem of attitude or thinking, referring to old or traditional mentalities about women and spousal duties in marriage. Others narrowed their focus even further on the mind and spoke of problems ‘in the head’ or ‘empty-headedness’ or ‘foolishness’, as in the case of a male interlocutor who observed the following about spousal conflict and separation: “[It is] misbehaviour; the problem of attitude; it is empty-headedness⁹⁵⁴.”⁹⁵⁵ The same ‘problem in the head’ was invoked when interlocutors spoke about a bad ‘habit’ or ‘manner’ (*’amäl*; አመል)⁹⁵⁶, such as when they discussed the effects of alcohol consumption on individual behaviour. In a cyclical manner almost, this problem in the head and the subsequent behavioural issues were attributed back to one’s ‘natural’ personality (*bahri*).

Such discursive patterns suggested a close relationship between innate personal traits, socialisation or broader social norms (which interwove with gender identity) and the cognitive and mental state of the individual. However, research participants never provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between these individual parameters and the wider socio-cultural system and it was left to the researcher to piece together recurrent statements that could provide a picture of the cosmological understanding behind these discourses. This was complicated further by the fact that within local perceptions, the human individual was also situated within a spiritual dimension and that this was understood to affect human behaviour and

⁹⁵³ IW39.

⁹⁵⁴ Original: *çanqallat yäläm* (ጭንቅለት የለም).

⁹⁵⁵ IM25.

⁹⁵⁶ Appendix 7.41.

potentially foster also conjugal abusiveness, as highlighted in the discussion of senseless conjugal crimes. Again, interlocutors did not generally explain how this spiritual dimension could be accounted for in the conceptualisation of the human personality (*bahri*) or other personal parameters and the relationship with abusiveness.

In the following sections an attempt is made to explore and tease out local understandings of the human personality (*bahri*) and individual parameters in conjunction with abusiveness. These are examined sequentially in terms of the natural, social and spiritual dimension of life as these were suggested in local discourses. While the presentation proceeds in this way, this is only for analytical purposes since the natural, spiritual and social world were perceived to be interwoven and to affect the individual simultaneously.

The natural dimensions of the human personality (*bahri*)

The first pattern that was observed in how interlocutors explained *bahri* is that the latter was almost always described as ‘natural’ or was associated with ‘nature’ (*täfätro*; ተፈጥሮ).⁹⁵⁷ Some preferred to speak of problems of ‘behaviour’ or ‘temperament’ (*täbay*; ጠባይ),⁹⁵⁸ which etymologically can also pertain to ‘nature’ and ‘essence.’⁹⁵⁹ Both the terms *bahri* and *täfätro* have connotations pertaining to the story of creation in *Genesis*, with *bahri* encompassing within its etymology the idea of ‘essence’ or ‘substance’,⁹⁶⁰ and *täfätro* pertaining to ‘fashioning’ or ‘making.’⁹⁶¹ It is worth reiterating the *’andämta* dedicated to the section of *Genesis* describing the fashioning of the first humans, where both terms are used: “Man and woman He created them. (Explanation) At this time Eve had not yet been created, it was later that (he) said that he (Adam) knew her. Another one says thus, that she is in Adam’s nature/make.”⁹⁶² Here *bahri* seems to capture not only the shared human dispositions and characteristics of Adam and Eve, but also their similar fashioning by God Himself.

Despite these etymological and theological connotations, in general, research participants did not make biblical references when discussing *bahri*. This may well emanate from the fact that they referred to ‘bad’ *bahri*, behaviour and habits and it would not be expected for interlocutors to identify in the same sentence a relationship with the divine, which local people were almost at awe to discuss. However, since nature and all human affairs were perceived to exist within the

⁹⁵⁷ Appendix 7.42.

⁹⁵⁸ Appendix 7.43.

⁹⁵⁹ Appendix 7.44.

⁹⁶⁰ Appendix 7.45.

⁹⁶¹ Appendix 7.46.

⁹⁶² Original: ወንድ ሴት አደርጎ ፈጠራቸው፡ (ሐተታ) በዚህስ ጊዜ ሌዋን ገና አልተፈጠረችም በኋላ ከታወቀ ብሎ፡ አንድም በእሱ ባሕርይ አለችና እንዲህ አለ። (Anonymous 1999 EC, 19).

realm of God’s control, as highlighted in women’s deployments of God’s thinking seen in previous chapters, it is not unlikely that when interlocutors invoked *bahri*, they were conveying subtly and inevitably a belief that the individual displayed a unique personality that was granted by God. This could suggest a sort of acceptance or a degree of irreversibility that one needed to embrace. Contemplating on the bad behaviour of a hypothetical male perpetrator, one man said: “It is by his nature;⁹⁶³ it is his own character/personality⁹⁶⁴. Who knows? It is by nature/making, it is his own [character].”⁹⁶⁵ A female interlocutor, in turn, remarked: “It is the problem of the husband. Some [husbands] are good, not all are the same. But why is it so? [It is so] because this is a problem of his nature⁹⁶⁶.”⁹⁶⁷ A woman who had been physically abused by her husband for almost two decades rationalised his behaviour as follows: “It was his individual problem. There was no family history with such a problem. It was not his father’s problem. It was not his mother’s problem. He was naturally troublesome/misbehaving⁹⁶⁸.”⁹⁶⁹ In her understanding, the problem was with the individual personality of the husband and his natural predispositions. Later in the interview she added that “not all people are the same. Not all men have a bad character. Not all women have a good character.”⁹⁷⁰

This highlights a second pattern that was made visible in these discussions. While interlocutors invariably attributed problematic behaviour to the natural personality of the individual, simultaneously they also qualified their statements by adding that not all men/people were the same⁹⁷¹. A male interlocutor observed: “Every individual has a natural personality. Some have [problems in character]; some do not. People have different characters. It is like this. That’s that.”⁹⁷² A female interlocutor remarked: “There is a mentality/attitude problem among many. Nature/Creation is variable.⁹⁷³ But not all are the same.”⁹⁷⁴ This interlocutor not only held that people were different in their make/personalities, but also made a direct association between people’s given personalities and their attitudes. While attitudes were associated generally with social norms⁹⁷⁵ statements such as these suggested simultaneously that they were not disconnected from the natural inclinations of the human individual. It could be that in some local perceptions

⁹⁶³ Original: *nay täfätro* (ናይ ተፈጥሮ).

⁹⁶⁴ Original: *ba’alu bahräy* (በዕሉ በህረይ).

⁹⁶⁵ IM22.

⁹⁶⁶ Original: *nay täfätro šägäm ’äyu* (ናይ ተፈጥሮ ፀገም እዩ).

⁹⁶⁷ IW27.

⁹⁶⁸ Original: *bätäfäträ’u räbaši ’äyu* (በተፈትረኡ ረባሺ እዩ).

⁹⁶⁹ IW13.

⁹⁷⁰ IW13.

⁹⁷¹ Original: *hadä ’aynät* (አደ አይነት).

⁹⁷² IM22.

⁹⁷³ Original: *fäträt buzuh ’äyu* (ፍጥረት ቡዙክ እዩ).

⁹⁷⁴ IW40.

⁹⁷⁵ See also Chapter 6, 155-156.

natural dispositions defined (partially or entirely) the kind of attitudes that one formulated in the social realm.

While a sense of irreversibility was conveyed, it was not stated to what extent this natural or essential personality was immutable or changeable. When interlocutors explained that bad/abusive behaviour emanated from someone's *bahri*, often shrugging their shoulders with what could be interpreted as resignation, they seemed to suggest that one had no control over this and could do little to change or subdue the pernicious 'natural' proclivities. Only in some instances did a few interlocutors state that *bahri* changed, but these changes were not for the better but for the worse, as highlighted in the following comment: "What reason? It is because of character (*bahri*). I don't know how, but their character is unstable."⁹⁷⁶ Another woman remarked: "First, he had a good temperament/personality. But what changed him is beyond me. He did not share his plans with me when he left."⁹⁷⁷ Here the woman referred to her husband's sudden change of heart and abandonment of her, an extensive form of perceived abuse in the local society. In such narratives, female interlocutors explained that they had not expected the husband to leave when he did and that they could not understand the reason.⁹⁷⁸ Women tried to rationalise their husbands' behaviour through various logics, including that the men had wanted to go to a wealthier wife, that they had sought a more comfortable life, or that they had lost interest in their wives. Some rationalisations invoked the effect of magic or other sorcery guiding their husbands' actions.⁹⁷⁹

While the immutable quality of the personality was identified with nature, this inherent changeability or fickleness seemed to be identified with external stimulants or forces. As it was documented earlier, *bahri* was associated with personal attitude/thinking (*'atāhasasba; ḥasab*) and the state of the head (*çəŋqəllat*). All these components or dimensions/aspects of *bahri* were changeable and susceptible to external factors, as evidenced in the postulation of mentality changes having occurred in the local society (such as when gender norms were discussed). Here may also be mentioned the pervasive perception that *səwa*, the local beer, hit the man straight "in the head", making him less inhibited and more likely to misbehave.⁹⁸⁰ Interlocutors' rationalisations of very serious conjugal crimes which were attributed to demonic forces acting in the human mind/head and inciting senseless actions are another example.

In sum, the analysis suggests that *bahri* incorporated biological/innate traits but it interfaced with more temporal mental and psychological states, which were particularly susceptible to external

⁹⁷⁶ IW39.

⁹⁷⁷ IW13.

⁹⁷⁸ IW7, IW10, IW38, FIEDLNOTES, 22 October 2017.

⁹⁷⁹ FIEDLNOTES, 22 October 2016.

⁹⁸⁰ FIEDLNOTES, 3 April 2017.

stimulants such as alcohol or satanic inducement. However, how one developed one's *bahri* and how this and other personal parameters related to socialisation, or how the spiritual forces penetrated one's mind and under what conditions, were topics rarely addressed. The following section explores the linkages with the social domain where these were implied in research participants' discourses.

The relationship between individual parameters and the social dimension

When exposing their rationalisations of abusiveness, many interlocutors spoke of a lingering 'old' mind-set or mentality (*'atāhasasba*) which they thought contributed to the men's abusive behaviour. It was previously suggested that this 'bad' or 'old' mentality could refer to pernicious understandings about marriage and spousal expectations that perpetuated gender asymmetries, feeding into other forms of conjugal abuse, or some men's tendency to treat their spouses as lesser, justifying their abusiveness with them.⁹⁸¹ While the aim in previous chapters was to identify these norms and mentalities, this section aims to explore how this mentality was invoked in reference to the individual with implications for abusiveness.

As it was explained earlier, such pernicious attitudes were mostly associated with the 'old' generation, the poor or the illiterate segments of the population, as highlighted in the response of a male interlocutor:

If I, let's say, fight with my wife, we have to split all our wealth, all our money. Some (men) do not give any wealth, there are those who say (to the female) "leave as you are." In short, it is the mentality. It is poverty. It is lack of education. The most important problem is that there is no thinking. It is the problem of the poor in the country. It is the poor of the country. They cannot work (have no options). There are no technology factories (to offer work). They are very few.⁹⁸²

Another male interlocutor referred to the attitude of men who refused to support their wives in daily works and the societal pressure to perpetuate traditional models of wifehood and husbandhood. He remarked:

The wife brings water; the husband does not carry water. This is culture (*bahəl*). If the husband brings water, they (other men) tell him: "You have become a wife". If he brings water by donkey, however, there is no problem. But, some still make fun of this. The attitude that this is the man's work, this is the women's work is not by the faith/by the teachings of the Church; this is bad culture (*bahəl*). I, personally, can bring water and there is no reason to go to the court about the division of labour. If there is equality in work

⁹⁸¹ Chapter 5, 143 and Chapter 6, 155-156.

⁹⁸² IM25.

everything is good. It is the mentality/attitude (*'atāhasasba*), the brain is empty, it does not work; they do not think. If she works and he works, then there will be no problem.⁹⁸³

The bad culture that the interlocutor made reference to pertained to a problem of general attitudes toward women, which were considered to have shaped historically many men's misbehaviour toward their wives. The second interlocutor considered men's refusal to work as a sign of lack of consideration and foolishness, which he related to the men's way of thinking and general mentality.

In the villages there was the general belief that such practices and attitudes had changed for a multiplicity of reasons in recent decades associated with the expansion of education and government awareness programmes. As a result, attitudes upholding hitting one's wife were said to have diminished, with one man remarking: "It is the old [attitude]. Now, it (hitting one's wife) is not allowed; before it was [allowed]."⁹⁸⁴ Another observed: "Before, those who hit were people who had not been to school. Both spouses are getting schooling now. People in old times who had this problem were without education. In our times, there is equality. So, the previous mentality has been disappearing. Now, if there is hitting, they divorce."⁹⁸⁵ Interlocutors reasoned that more individuals (women?) now understood that they did not have to tolerate spousal abusiveness and that many chose to separate, which the existence of social courts was believed to facilitate. In these discourses, these attitudes were associated with external parameters that were favourably changing.

However, not everyone considered that husband abusiveness had been exclusively due to lack of education, as highlighted in the comment of a woman who opined: "It is their attitude, but it is not the lack of education."⁹⁸⁶ Her statement seemed to locate the men's attitudes beyond the realm of socialisation within the topography of the more intimate self. One man more explicitly made associations with a bad culture, but he also specified that he referred to specific mentalities and practices. He said: "The culture must be improved. The mentality must be changed. The wife works the works of the husband, but he does not; this is bad culture."⁹⁸⁷ The aforementioned TPLF veteran who had intervened to dissuade a husband for hitting his wife also made a connection to culture, providing a *caveat* that helps to demonstrate how even explanations that invoked cultural parameters were filtered essentially through individual states and motivations. He said:

Married life will improve if the mentality/attitude of the people changes. For example, men can lift their influence over women only if they start believing that they should not be doing

⁹⁸³ IM11.

⁹⁸⁴ IM21.

⁹⁸⁵ IM25.

⁹⁸⁶ IW10.

⁹⁸⁷ IM11.

that (dominate women) anymore. This will be possible when we think women are our wives, our sisters, our mothers and our daughters and [when we] treat them that way. Additionally, the society should believe and accept that women can contribute better ideas and [that] they can speak better. Then problems can be solved. The society cannot change old habits and cultural practices/norms⁹⁸⁸ overnight. But step by step, it is possible to bring attitudinal change⁹⁸⁹ in the society through education. But as things are currently, if you give your opinion (openly), there may be people who say “it is none of your business.” The new generation may change its attitude in the future. The old people, however, except for those who have been in the political struggle like me, will say “what does a woman know?” or “A woman has nothing to do” etc. Our political party during our struggle taught us for about 40 years and helped us to understand that it was not good to undermine women.⁹⁹⁰

This interlocutor considered that pernicious attitudes emanated from an old prejudiced mentality toward women which he considered to have interwoven with the cultural fabric. He suggested that education could be conducive to changing these mind-sets, but this would not suffice unless people themselves realised the need for change and committed to different ways and practices. Currently, old mentalities persisted, as another man observed: “The old mentality has not changed very much. Women say that they are equal to men. But, men stay quiet.”⁹⁹¹ This meant that despite external changes some men still expected women to perform and to meet traditional ideals. It is pertinent to consider here an aphorism provided by a young male interlocutor, which went something like this: “You cannot change a person from the outside/externally unless they decide by their own heart first⁹⁹².”⁹⁹³ In other words, unless one changed their mind-set and intentions first, nothing external could motivate this change effectively, not even education. Essentially, the problem was not located in the culture or general attitudes, but in the individual’s state of mind.

Interestingly, while interlocutors postulated that some *positive* attitudinal changes were occurring around them, which would suggest that some men did change their outlooks, no positive changes were suggested at the level of the human personality (*bahri*). Nor did anyone unequivocally ever state that the problem of abusiveness could be resolved if one changed their *bahri*. This seemed to enforce the earlier observation that *bahri* was perceived to have a higher degree of immutability that made it more difficult to change, as compared to attitudes and one’s outlook on things. This is because the human personality comprised the deeper essence of what made one a unique individual, those traits and temperament that shared socialisation could not possibly explain. Still, some changeability was granted to human behaviour, and by implication also to *bahri*, in participants’ discussion of evil spiritual energies acting on the individual. The following section draws attention to the workings of the spiritual world to continue exploring the motivations of abusiveness and perceptions about its reversibility.

⁹⁸⁸ Original: *yä duro ləmd ’əna bahəl* (ዮድሮ ልምድ እና ባህል).

⁹⁸⁹ Original: *yä ’astäsasäb läwuṭ* (የአስተሳሰብ ለውጥ).

⁹⁹⁰ IM12.

⁹⁹¹ IM9.

⁹⁹² Original: *mäkirkən ’alibi, mäwiṣkan ’aysini* (መኪርካን አሊቢ፣ መዋፅካን አይሲኒ)

⁹⁹³ IM28.

The relationship between individual parameters and the spiritual dimension

The exploration of research participants' understandings of the faith established that participating in the sacramental life of the Church and embodying its traditions (such as praying, fasting or venerating the saints) was expected to cultivate one's faith-based conscience (*həllina*).⁹⁹⁴ This was directly linked to morals and decision-making regarding how one should act in a given situation (such as when one was faced with an opportunity to steal or was called to help someone in need). Ideally, if one cultivated a Christian conscience, one would then embody Christian morals in one's everyday decisions and actions. It was understood that these behavioural patterns and actions, by being embodied reiteratively but conscientiously, should result in a consolidation of the faith-based *həllina* in almost a cyclical movement.

However, in this process the individual was said to have to face temptations and to wrestle with thoughts and intentions. This was so because humanity was perceived to be prone to sinning and to be constantly pestered by evil forces. A *MQ* attendant after a prayer session in Aksum made the pertinent remark that while many people recognised Church teachings and formulated attitudes in view of these, their practices were not necessarily and always compatible because people's lives were driven also by temptations and sin.⁹⁹⁵ This was exemplified in the narratives of the husbands who attributed temptations inciting adultery to Satan. These demonic energies influenced people's intentions and if they were not overcome, they could result in sinful behaviour. Similarly, if bad intentions were not dismissed, they could lead to terrible evil acts and even murder. Some statements implied that one was more likely to sin if one already had a naturally evil or bad personality, as highlighted in the comment of a male interlocutor: "It is a sin. It is bad. But if the character (*bahri*) of the person is like this, he will do it."⁹⁹⁶

The implication of this belief system is that the human individual was attributed a degree of independent decision-making about doing good or evil, and this decision-making was not necessarily isolated from the natural proclivities of the unique personality one was attributed. This was also suggested previously where it was mentioned that drinking excessively was essentially attributed to the individual, a habit that men with a bad *bahri* were expected to be more likely to develop.⁹⁹⁷ The *desideratum* was obviously for people to follow the laws of God, which might not always match individual desires. In parallel, people's cognitive and affective capacities were considered to be invaded by demonic forces that compelled them toward sinning, which could lead to a further departure from God's laws and ways. The earlier descriptions of conjugal

⁹⁹⁴ Chapter 4, 114.

⁹⁹⁵ IDM9.

⁹⁹⁶ IM9.

⁹⁹⁷ Chapter 4, 128.

murders suggested that satanic inducements acted in the mind of the individual and were believed to be capable of shaping temporarily the human intentions or blanking one's faith-based conscience (*həllina*).⁹⁹⁸ The perception that such terrible acts were mostly accidental and occurred in exacerbated conflict evidences that the affective dimension of the individual was equally susceptible to evil energies.

It is here where the intensity of personal faith became crucial and could decide the outcome of the spiritual strife. This was illustrated in a woman's explanation of homicide which explicitly invoked the oscillation of the individual mind between good and evil. She explained that the Holy Spirit abandoned entirely someone who committed a crime.⁹⁹⁹ In this vulnerable time, the person came under the inducement of Satan and had little awareness of what he was doing. She believed that when the crime was done, he would come to his senses and would start to feel afraid of being discovered. He could also feel overwhelmingly guilty and regretful and even lose his mind as a result of thinking about the crime he had committed. In this narrative, it was understood that it was the individual's evil intentions combined with a weak faith that drove the Holy Spirit away in the first place, providing thus an open window for Satan to enter the human mind and to induce or enforce bad acts. By letting the bad intentions to take over one became essentially a vessel for satanic acts.

Such descriptions suggest that the human individual, who was understood to be imprinted with some traits, characteristics and inclinations presumably by natural or divine 'creation', was simultaneously perceived to be a vessel-like agent with personal intentions. The idea seemed to be that one could direct one's personal intentions, despite the pressure of social and spiritual forces that induced one to temptations or bad acts, and that one was still held responsible for one's actions. Such an understanding sheds light on why interlocutors could speak about sudden changes in human behaviour, but still conceptualise *bahri* as natural and essential. People understood that despite the natural traits and characteristics which one had, one was also constantly defined within one's conscience and heart, where intentions were being formulated and which directed how one acted.

Since personal faith was considered to counteract temptations and sin, it follows that those who displayed a stronger faith or spirituality could be considered less likely to become abusive. Such were the perceptions expressed previously, when research participants spoke about faith serving as a vehicle to peacefulness and meekness in marriage.¹⁰⁰⁰ In combination with many women's perception that men tended to be less spiritual, this belief system could prospectively foster some

⁹⁹⁸ Chapter 5, 145.

⁹⁹⁹ FIELDNOTES, 23 July 2017.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Chapter 8, 193-195.

tolerance of male abusiveness or even abused women's general attitude of endurance. A closer look at the gendered underpinnings of the individual parameters invoked so far becomes imperative to refine the analysis.

Gendered individual parameters and implications for attitudes about conjugal abuse

In their discourses, many interlocutors proposed that differences in *bahri* transcended gender, as suggested in the following statement: “Yes, personality differs by person. [For example] I and my wife, we have different personalities. By thought we differ. People are not all the same.”¹⁰⁰¹ However, the previous chapters have made evident that there were in the local society different understandings and ideals associated with wives and husbands. Consequently, it begs asking if any aspects of *bahri* or other individual parameters were predicated on gender and what the implications could be for abusiveness and people's responses to it.

To explore deeper understandings of gender identity, during the participatory workshops participants were encouraged to discuss how they understood ‘woman’ and ‘man’ and their unique characteristics. This question was usually asked at the beginning of the thematic section dedicated to gender relations and prior to a discussion on marriage. However, it was soon found that this abstract question made little sense to participants, who apparently were not used to questioning what they considered to be merely natural or given facts of life. On the other hand, when they were asked to consider the same question in the context of the conjugal relationship, interlocutors were more responsive. This was a strong indication that within the local conceptual framework a woman or man was rarely conceptualised in isolation from her/his role as wife/husband as suggested previously, and even that embodying gender roles in marriage gave men and women their ontological status.¹⁰⁰²

This provides some justification as to why research participants did not generally question gender roles (chapters 6 and 7). Many research participants lamented the unfair distribution of work, but this was never a critique of gender roles *per se*. Women and men, but especially women, still focused on becoming a rightful female or male by doing what was considered appropriate/expected for each gender in the local socio-cultural system. Becoming a female meant essentially preparing to be a ‘good’ wife, which required embodying a predefined set of qualities and attitudes, such as meekness, a hard-working spirit and a non-confrontational attitude with others, and especially with one's husband. Thus, within the local cosmological system one might

¹⁰⁰¹ IM22.

¹⁰⁰² See also Chapter 6, 164.

need to speak of womanhood/wifeness concomitantly, with the woman-*cum*-wife being a female-bodied individual who manifested the behavioural patterns, types of thinking and activities as defined by local gender standards.

Simultaneously, a woman who manifested this gender identity was also attributed, like all human individuals, a unique and ‘natural’ *bahri*. A person with a good *bahri* in the local cosmology seemed to invoke Christian morality: someone who was righteous and hard-working and who preferred peacefulness over argument. These appeared to be genderless ideals and could have been developed and perpetuated through centuries of using the lives of the monks as a behavioural yardstick, as suggested by one theologian in Addis Ababa.¹⁰⁰³ Despite their universality, however, some of these characteristics seemed to be especially pronounced for women. While both men and women were expected to be meek and forgiving, modesty and non-confrontation were undeniably more binding for a ‘good’ woman. This has been demonstrated earlier where the fear that women/wives felt of being presented as aggressive was shown.¹⁰⁰⁴ The implication here is that conceptualisations of individuality, although deeply entrenched in discourses of the natural and the created, did not eschew the influence of societal gender standards.

These gendered dimensions could influence how people thought about and responded to female and male aggressiveness. As the analyses in the previous chapters suggested, when a man became aggressive, this did not seem to lead necessarily to his alienation by the rest of the society or his abandonment by his wife. Socio-cultural mechanisms were in place to apply pressure on him to change, but nowhere was it said that by becoming aggressive and failing to change he ceased to be a man/husband. On the other hand, a woman/wife with a confrontational attitude was an almost intolerable notion, to the extent that some people considered it better for a woman to divorce her husband than confronting him to change. One man who was asked what a wife should do if she dealt with a perennially troublesome husband, remarked the following: “If she is good woman, she will say: ‘If you always drink and come home drunk, give me half of my property and I will leave. When you drink beer and you get drunk I do not want to be troubled.’ She should say, ‘give me my half share and I will go.’”¹⁰⁰⁵ According to this man, a ‘good’ woman would choose to leave than force her husband to amend his pernicious habit. While the man could have believed that the husband’s pernicious habits were irreversible and that the woman would only endanger herself by speaking out, it is significant that he invoked the discourse of a ‘good’ wife as opposed to a discourse of safety.

¹⁰⁰³ ICE3.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Chapter 8, 203-204.

¹⁰⁰⁵ IM13.

Could these gendered connotations, which made abusiveness seem more acceptable for males than for females, interface with beliefs about spiritual inducements to aggression, resulting in a tendency to justify abusiveness on the part of men and expect endurance on the part of women? The discussion of conjugal crimes, one of which included an attempted murder by a wife, evidences that in local perception demonic forces could affect both genders indiscriminately. This also resonates with the observation that at their human core man and woman were conceptualised as similar: vessel-like entities located in a perennial strife between evil and good, granted a conscience and personal intentions. However, these particular crimes were considered extreme and were appraised slightly differently from milder forms of conjugal abusiveness, raising the need for understanding how evil spiritual activity was described for men and women in conjunction to routine conjugal life.

A closer look at such discourses suggests that understandings of spiritual activity did not eschew gendered socio-cultural boundaries either. Routine evil forces that were mentioned in interlocutors' discourses were not limited to spiritual entities, but extended to human individuals who became agents of evil by their own choice. Thus, a pervasive fear among interlocutors was that of the *däbtära*-cantors, who were consistently associated with evil works and satanic activity.¹⁰⁰⁶ The evil works of this group was at times differentiated from the works of the cultural 'magician' or 'wizard' (*tänq'ay*; ጠንቅቂ),¹⁰⁰⁷ who indulged in trickery and magic. The stories that people shared suggested female protagonists finding victims in men or in women for motivations such as revenge or jealousy.¹⁰⁰⁸ The 'evil eye' (*buda*; ቡዳ),¹⁰⁰⁹ referring to someone who has the power to cause harm, was associated by some interlocutors with cultural sorcerers and by some with Satan.¹⁰¹⁰ Incidents attributed to the *buda* included the sudden sickness of a young female student who died soon afterwards.¹⁰¹¹ A couple of incidents were attributed to Satan, such as a young man's sudden death while farming.¹⁰¹² The researcher enquired also about *zar* (ዘር)¹⁰¹³ agents, spiritual forces that possessed people as identified in other works from Ethiopia.¹⁰¹⁴ Their existence was also confirmed, but the perception seemed to be that the *zar* was simple and mild, while the works of Satan were more dangerous.¹⁰¹⁵ The stories that were told about the *zar* referred to female protagonists, but these were scant.¹⁰¹⁶ In terms of consequences, some female

¹⁰⁰⁶ IM22, IDM3, FIELDNOTES, 5 November 2017.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Appendix 7.47.

¹⁰⁰⁸ FIELDNOTES, 26 December 2016, 25 June 2017.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Appendix 7.48.

¹⁰¹⁰ FIELDNOTES, 9 March 2017, 9 July 2017.

¹⁰¹¹ FIELDNOTES, 9 July 2017.

¹⁰¹² FIELDNOTES, 7 April 2017.

¹⁰¹³ Appendix 7.49.

¹⁰¹⁴ Pankhurst (1992b) and Binns (2017, 34-35).

¹⁰¹⁵ FIELDNOTES, 9 March 2017.

¹⁰¹⁶ FIELDNOTES, 9 March 2017.

rural residents affirmed that if a woman was known to have the evil eye she would become unmarriageable or could be divorced if already married.¹⁰¹⁷

Although these discourses appear gendered in some ways, the scattered accounts do not allow conclusive remarks such as drawn by Helen Pankhurst in her study from Menz.¹⁰¹⁸ Pankhurst had observed that the domain of folklore spirit beliefs was generally the domain of women and proposed what could be described as a functionalist logic to explain this gender differential.¹⁰¹⁹ While her proposition might have had a degree of accuracy for that context, it should be an important limitation that Pankhurst engaged in her study primarily with women. Concerning the Aksumite rural society, as Harald Aspen found to be the case in his research site in Shewa, no clear demarcations could be drawn between the “Great Tradition” (Orthodox Christianity) and the folklore system of spirit beliefs.¹⁰²⁰ This is premised on the observation that folklore spirit categories were essentially embedded into a Christian cosmology that positioned the individual within a spiritual battlefield between forces of good and forces of evil. This meant that the most prominent and feared evil forces were traced usually to the arch-enemy of humanity, Satan.

It would be more accurate to suggest that the gendered connotations in discourses of spiritual activity reflected the societal reality that was itself organised in a gendered manner. The fact that magic/sorcery was often traced to female jealousy or a desire for revenge resonated with the local perception that more women were generally abandoned by husbands (usually for other women) who would have reasons to hold a grudge against men or against other women. Moreover, the gendered descriptions of spirit possession (a woman who is affected by *buda* becoming unmarriageable) could be understood in view of the fact that it was usually the woman who was scrutinised for her marriageability in the local society. A sick woman could not possibly meet the expectations associated with a traditionally desirable wife, which would justify why people would preoccupy with the female gender in discourses of spirit possession. The conclusion is that just as ‘natural’ *bahri* did not eschew the strictures of social gender norms, the spiritual world did not either.

It is not unlikely that these gendered discourses fostered gendered aetiologies about the manifestation of abusiveness and gendered responses to it. It is useful to revisit the story of Abeba’s assault by her husband, the case of the battered woman cited in Thera Mjaland’s study from Tigray.¹⁰²¹ Abeba had chosen to endure the sudden and unprecedented assault of her

¹⁰¹⁷ FIELDNOTES, 9 July 2017.

¹⁰¹⁸ Pankhurst (199b2).

¹⁰¹⁹ Chapter 1, 52.

¹⁰²⁰ Aspen (2001, 23).

¹⁰²¹ Chapter 1, 53-54.

husband who beat her violently for over two hours, giving Thera the following explanation for her husband's behaviour and her reaction:

“I am sure it was Satan who took hold of him, *sheyt'an hizuwu*. There had not been anything bad in advance; no bad talking, no quarrelling or other problems that would make him do so. ‘How can they start quarrelling in the morning,’ people wondered. There was no previous problem; Satan had come.” She had told me before she had not been afraid, now she confirms: “I was not afraid; *shey'tan* had taken hold of me too.” Her husband had told her that if she screamed, and people came, he would kill them all. “God was looking after us, I believe. To keep quiet was the best thing, I think. If people came he threatened to shoot them down. ‘Why did you not cry out?’ people asked me. Blood kept running from my head, my nose all that time, two and a half hour.” Abeba, and other Tigrayan women with her, made me aware that it is considered the best thing not to resist violence if you cannot escape, and keep quiet.¹⁰²²

Abeba discerned in her husband's sudden and unreasonable abusiveness the works of Satan. Later in the conversation she attributed this to jealousy/shame that her husband might have felt because of being teased by his peers for having married a woman who was wealthier than him. If Abeba had considered her husband to be under satanic influence, in view of the analysis in this chapter, it is likely that she also believed that his conscience had temporarily blanked out and that he was in that moment abandoned of the Holy Spirit and thus capable of senseless acts. This could justify why she chose to keep quiet and not to call for the other lodgers. It could also help to understand why her husband told her after being released by the police that she had “saved his life” and why Abeba said that God was watching over them. It can be assumed that had she screamed, people would have come in, which could have led her (temporarily irrational) husband to worse acts and homicide as he had threatened to do. This would have resulted in his imprisonment and also in graver sins. Abeba also must have believed that his loss of conscience was temporary and reversible otherwise she would have not begged him stoically to stop.

Interesting is what she said about herself also having been taken hold by Satan. This appears to be suggesting that Satan affected everyone indiscriminately regardless of the state of their intentions, which would contrast with this study's findings. This may not be necessarily so, but depends on how Abeba understood being affected by Satan. Her attribution of the evil eye or her sudden sickness one mysterious night to Satan in the same interview suggested that satanic influence was associated with a wide-range of bad situations with different consequences, as it emerged also to be the case in Aksum. Abeba identified being taken hold of Satan with the loss of her sense of fear, what could be described as a blacking out of conscience resulting not in uncontrollable abusiveness, but in forbearance. Simultaneously, Abeba discerned behind this reaction God's Providence at work, who “was looking after” them. This is probably because by being petrified

¹⁰²² Mjalaand (2004, 95).

Abeba did not confront her husband, which she must have believed could have provoked him further to kill her.

Abeba's story helps to illustrate that how spiritual activity was understood to affect men and women was probably filtered through people's gendered socio-cultural realities. This was highlighted in Abeba's need to rationalise her husband's demonic inducement on the premise that he had felt insulted or demeaned due to peer remarks about his wife's wealth, which could directly tie to local standards of a male's identity as breadwinner. On the other hand, Abeba's perception that she had also been affected by Satan, leading to a petrified reaction, enforces the observation of this study that while both genders were considered susceptible to demonic energies, these effects translated somehow differently for men and women which, notably, aligned with local behavioural gendered standards. Theoretically, satanic energy could have made Abeba also uncontrollably abusive, but this would breach local socio-cultural norms that expected the woman to be always meek and non-confrontational.

In view of these observations it may be said that gendered underpinnings to local beliefs about the human individual and the workings and the effect of evil spirits on human behaviour could be fostering also gendered responses to abusiveness. While in Aksum abusiveness was invariably traced to a genderless problematic personality (natural dispositions, personal mentality/attitude, thoughtlessness, selfishness) and while satanic energies could affect both females and males presumably to shape their intentions and lead to equally aggressive acts, these beliefs and understandings were still pronounced within a socio-cultural framework premised on rigid gender ideals and standards that made aggression unlikely for women and compelled them into behavioural patterns that enforced ideals of meekness and timidity. These beliefs could co-exist with other beliefs that men were generally less spiritual than women, a spirituality that was believed to protect from evil energies inciting bad acts. The interface could work in such a way so as to cultivate attitudes that accepted or justified some degree of male abusiveness, and could be underpinning at a more fundamental level some women's forbearance in abusive situations.

Conclusion

Virtually all research participants in the villages of Aksum condemned conjugal abuse, affirming that neither faith nor culture condoned or justified it. However, simultaneously an implicit tolerance became visible in the ineffectiveness of institutions to address the problem, a tendency among research participants to rationalise conjugal abusiveness by invoking personal parameters and motivations without indicting culture or cosmology, and women's endurance of physically abusive situations. In response, a framework has been developed that has related faith and socio-

cultural institutions and norms in order to provide a nuanced presentation of what could be fostering these discourses and realities. A discussion of structural and normative underpinnings to marriage and gender relations emanating from interlocutors' discourses of conjugal abuse was previously provided to suggest some contributing factors (pernicious norms, gender asymmetries, modernity's distortions, etc.). It was also proposed that Church teachings could intertwine with gendered socio-cultural standards via clergy pronouncements to enforce some patterns associated with the perpetuation of conjugal abuse realities. The discussion of faith experience in marriage suggested that a faith-based conscience could act as a deterrent to some abusiveness on behalf of men, but also could enforce some abused women's hesitation to pursue formal solutions. This chapter adds a deeper layer of analysis by drawing attention to more fundamental metaphysics of human individuality.

In general, research participants espoused a belief system that centred on the natural personality and proclivities of the individual, who was simultaneously embedded within spiritual and social realities. This essentially meant that the cosmological, structural, institutional and spiritual parameters that were explored in previous chapters were filtered through concrete individual circumstances and personalities. In this system, individuals were considered responsible for their abusiveness, but not entirely able to avoid it always or effectively due to external overpowering inducements or a weak faith-based conscience. The gendered dimensions that seemed to underpin how interlocutors understood both personal traits and the motivations to abuse could have enforced slightly different responses by men and women, fostering a tendency to want to understand abusive men and to expect female endurance. Overall, these cumulative understandings could mean that interlocutors did not generally expect a structural or societal solution to the problem of conjugal abuse, since abusiveness was always located in the topography of the human self. This could help to explain the relative tolerance or lack of mobilisation regarding conjugal abuse that was observed at the level of the wider society.

Conclusion

Returning to the epistemological concerns of the thesis

This thesis has presented an interdisciplinary study of conjugal abuse that has aimed to contribute a counter-discourse to gender-based violence paradigms within international development. Epistemological concerns regarding gender theoretical frameworks and practices employed widely in this field have been a major driving force behind this thesis.

The thesis is firstly a response to the field's historical reliance on gender theories that have been disproportionately attuned to western feminist metaphysics (as these evolved) than to local understandings of gender. This has coexisted with a tendency to interpret locally collected data through pre-existing theoretical frameworks as opposed to relying on local conceptual repertoires and exploring the relevance of prominent theories in different cosmologies. It was proposed that such tendencies could contribute to obscure local conceptualisations and aetiologies shaping perceptions, attitudes and norms important for understanding gender-related issues, such as IPV. Conjugal abuse is one of the most complex problems that affect the global population indiscriminately, but how it manifests, what motivates it and what perpetuates it differs by society, community and individual. As an alternative, it was suggested that local cosmologies and people's understandings need to be given due credence to consolidate an analysis from 'within.'

Secondly, the thesis responds to tendencies within the field that have appraised religion through Euro-centric understandings and western societies' experiences with Christianity and secularisation (shaping feminist discourses as well).¹⁰²³ Instead of applying viewpoints that see religious parameters through a binary, as either conducive to societal problems (such as to IPV) or as instrumental to development, it was proposed that religious parameters—ideally studied through a prism that combines a theological, sociological and anthropological perspective—should be analysed as inextricable from local cosmological and socio-cultural systems. On the premise that religious parameters are multi-dimensional, monolithic statements about the effect of 'religion' in human life are unrealistic. Religious parameters are expected to intertwine simultaneously with other non-religious dimensions or domains of life to result in a matrix that is embodied differently by different individuals. While some aspects might be conducive to fostering some perception or practice with harmful implications, another might be

¹⁰²³ This point has been made more generally about the field of religions and development, such as in Jennings and Clarke (2008) and Davin and Deneulin (2011).

precisely countering these implications, while simultaneously co-acting with yet another parameter to create impact elsewhere.

Ultimately, the thesis has aimed to depart from development interventions that are designed based on theoretical frameworks from ‘without’ neglecting to integrate the insiders’ conceptual repertoires and value systems. It can be observed that interventions have often been attuned to a variety of feminist standards emanating from western epistemologies. This is reflected on concepts of gender equality and empowerment, which have been underpinned in large part by feminist ideals of a liberal current.¹⁰²⁴ The main argument of this thesis is that strategies to address problems such as conjugal abuse should emanate from within people’s worldviews and be enacted through resources that are likely to make sense and have some credibility with the local population. If external values or resources are to be integrated, which this thesis is not opposed to, these should be integrated in concert with local communities’ belief systems and standards.

In response to these concerns, a gender-sensitive investigation of conjugal abuse in the countryside of Aksum in Tigray was implemented that suspended non-local understandings of gender, conjugal abuse and religion and relied instead on the local cosmological prism to formulate conceptual repertoires. Part of the study’s motivation came from the unique outlook of Tigray, which combined an ancient faith premised on non-violence and peace with high levels of wife-hitting and equally high levels of ‘justification’ of it. Given the prominence of the religious tradition historically, a primary concern was to pin down the influence of the folklore Christian tradition in the local socio-cultural (potentially gendered) matrix and the relationship with conjugal abuse realities and attitudes in the local society. It was also important to consider the feasibility of theology-informed and clergy-centred interventions to address the problem.

Research participants’ discourses formed a mainstay methodology in order to identify terminologies for conjugal abuse and to be guided by local people’s understandings and aetiologies for identifying pertinent parameters for its investigation. Religious beliefs and spirituality emerged to be central in these discourses, as were gendered parameters that governed married life in the local society. Equally prominent were local metaphysics of human individuality that underpinned everything else to define conjugal attitudes. However, these different parameters were barely ever connected in research participants’ discourses to suggest how religious parameters could be related to conjugal abuse attitudes and realities. In such circumstances, it was necessary to elucidate and piece different pronouncements together, evidence their discursive deployments and suggest various associations relevant to the research questions.

¹⁰²⁴ As demonstrated in Mahmood (2005) and Istratii (2017).

The research participants' tacit or strategic communication approaches also needed to be taken into account and be decoded in view of the researcher's background and identity, research participants' location in socio-cultural configurations, personal circumstances and temperament. The researcher's foreignness appeared to make interlocutors more cautious with the information they shared, which did not reflect necessarily an inherent mistrust toward her person but also inherited historical sentiments emanating from the country's experiences with foreign invaders and political missionaries. Moreover, in view of the researcher's gender, pronouncements by male interlocutors probably had one additional layer of coding than did women's pronouncements, although the researcher being from 'outside' could have made some men more willing to share personal thoughts. On the other hand, the researcher's background, located within an eastern Christian tradition and epistemology, provided some bridges to access the cosmological framework of the interlocutors. Such commonalities do not guarantee at all that the researcher will attune to the perceptions of the research participants, but they highlight again the crucial implications that the researcher's epistemological position has in the research process.

These epistemological and communication challenges essentially pertain to the process of 'translating' cosmologies, a process inherently tentative and subjective. When gender-based violence studies within international development rely on existing theoretical frameworks to make sense of IPV, assuming the salience of gender or considering religio-cultural parameters to be conducive to (presumed) inequalities and abuses, the process of cosmological 'translation' takes a secondary place. Very little attention is paid to people's own concepts, their aetiologies of IPV and the relationships with wider belief systems that might guide their thinking. However, it is exactly this conceptual and metaphysical repertoire that has the potential to provide significant insight into local perceptions, attitudes and behavioural norms in regards to conjugal abuse, as this study has shown.

Alternatively, it may be necessary to suspend pre-theorising the nature or aetiology of IPV (or other issues) and to cultivate a capacity for exploring other people's terminologies and their connotations by engaging more directly with their belief systems and epistemologies. Essentially, this pertains to cultivating a competence in 'conversing' with different cosmologies and adapting accordingly. The study echoes others in the field who have called for integrating better anthropological methodologies and people-centred perspectives within practice-oriented research, but it underscores that this could not be achieved without cultivating epistemological reflexivity through all stages of research.

Moving beyond gendered violence paradigms

As an alternative to assuming how gender should be understood and what its salience might be for IPV, cross-cultural investigations that aim to be gender-sensitive might incorporate a more comprehensive study of local metaphysics of subjectivity. Without denying the possible gendered underpinnings of intimate violence, it is suggested that any conceptualisations should be guided by local beliefs and knowledge as embodied by the local population.

Adopting this approach, the study established that the participants of this research perceived the human personality (*bahri*) to be an important factor for explaining conjugal abuse. Piecing different testimonies together suggested that *bahri* pertained to a person's distinctive character or temperament, combining biological, sociological and spiritual dimensions. Embedded in a folklore Christian worldview, research participants seemed to be especially concerned to pronounce those aspects in their *bahri* that upheld Christian standards. Such genderless notions of *bahri* deeply influenced how individuals were viewed, appraised and valued in the local society. However, the notion of *bahri* and other individual parameters that were discussed did not eschew gendered underpinnings predicated on local understandings of womanhood/manhood. Gender identity, as opposed to western feminist tendencies, was neither contemplated nor theorised in the local society. In this system, gender identity was considered given and inalienable to the bio-social individual, permeating all these dimensions and belonging to no dimension in particular. This essentially meant that local metaphysics of individuality and gender metaphysics overlapped in unclear ways to influence local conjugal abuse attitudes. Pertinent to the work of Saba Mahmood countering liberal understandings of agency as universal, this study found that a rigidly gender-segregated lifestyle that clearly implied constraints for female individuals co-existed with what could be described as an ontology-based freedom of choice that all human individuals were attributed in the local cosmology. As divinely created, bio-social and spiritual entities, all women and men were located in the strife between good and evil, both were called to choose and both were held responsible for their choices. This begets the need for formulating more nuanced, multi-dimensional analytical understandings for agency, avoiding simplistic binary conceptualisations (compliance versus subversion).

Without these nuanced, but still conjectural, observations the gender-segregated organisation of life in the villages could lead one to presume that subjectivities, relations and social structures were premised on hierarchical gender identity. This would be especially so, if a theoretical framework was employed that assumed domestic violence to be primarily a gender issue. Such a perspective would probably proceed to explain spousal abuse in terms of the gender-segregated arrangement of marriage, the traditional patriarchal system and non-egalitarian mentalities or the local emphasis on female timidity and non-confrontational traits, reminiscent of Hilde Jakobsen's

interpretation of her data from Tanzania.¹⁰²⁵ While all these parameters contributed in some ways to pernicious attitudes and practices in the local society and made it difficult for women to benefit from institutional and informal support in abusive situations, these were not the only or the most potent parameters that underpinned and nurtured the deeply entrenched attitudes and norms fostering society's tolerance of the problem or women's endurance of it. Instead, as demonstrated, conjugal abuse attitudes could be related to how local people understood the boundaries between their religious tradition and socio-cultural norms, how they thought about gender identity in conjunction with wifehood/husbandhood, and their deeper beliefs or understandings regarding human nature vis-à-vis the natural, social and spiritual dimensions.

Moreover, while the aforementioned gendered aspects of local life were associated with many pretexts for or with harmful conjugal behaviour and situations, a plurality of norms and attitudes many of which contradicted visible gender asymmetries and pernicious attitudes toward women, existed as well. These included religio-cultural values that emphasised mutual help, respect and righteousness, interference to stop abuse, or societal sanctions in the form of general criticisms of immorality. In the Introduction it was argued that social norms theories are perhaps more equipped to allow for this kind of plurality in local norms, attitudes and ultimately human behaviour.¹⁰²⁶ However, as this study evidences, these norms cannot be isolated from broader belief systems, how these are related in local perceptions to valued traditions, as well as individual parameters that define one's understanding and mentality. In Aksum it was found that individuals could display different understandings about the relationship between *haymanot* and *bahāḷ*, which had implications about how people felt about norms and practices conducive to conjugal abuse. While many followed prevalent norms, not everyone embodied these in the same way, according to their level of awareness, spirituality, life circumstances, and other factors.

Motivated by the EDHS 2005 and 2011 rates of high wife-beating 'justification',¹⁰²⁷ this study has hoped to contextualise such conjugal abuse attitudes in the local cosmological and socio-cultural matrix of rural Tigray. Respondents' expectation of wife-hitting in the four surveyed situations could be understood in view of discussed gendered standards and spousal duties.¹⁰²⁸ However, while these expectations were an important part of the story, they do not evidence that people accepted conjugal violence as being right. A closer look into research participants' understandings of human individuality in conjunction with abusiveness suggested a degree of understanding and resignation regarding human aggression. It may be more accurate to say that interlocutors accepted the reality of conjugal abuse because they believed that its motivations were not

¹⁰²⁵ Jakobsen (2014 ; 2015).

¹⁰²⁶ Mackie et al. (2015).

¹⁰²⁷ CSAE (2006; 2012).

¹⁰²⁸ Chapter 6, 161-163.

something that anyone could control sufficiently. It is important not to conflate their rationalisation or aetiology of wife-hitting with an acceptance of it as normative. Alternatively, it may be more appropriate to explore attitudinal questions ethnographically to contextualise them in their proper context and avoid misguided interpretations.

Identifying linkages between religious parameters and conjugal abuse in Aksum

The aim of the thesis was to explore conjugal abuse realities and attitudes vis-à-vis the local religio-cultural cosmology, and in particular linkages with religious parameters that incorporated Church teachings, clergy discourses and personal faith. These parameters were given priority due to their general neglect in the existing GBV scholarship internationally and from Ethiopia and in view of the reported historical prevalence of the religious tradition in Aksum.

Undoubtedly, the realities and attitudes of conjugal abuse that were presented reflect the local religio-cultural context and its interface with what was associated with modernity, such as secular education, urbanisation and new technologies. Some of the forms of abuse that were salient in people's minds reflected deeply entrenched folklore mentalities that expected men and women to fulfil rigid criteria associated with their gender. Early marriage could be related to socio-cultural norms that emphasised bodily virginity and purity, and probably childbearing by a certain age. Some gender asymmetries, including some husbands' abandonment of wives, were related to customary attitudes toward women and local standards of ideal womanhood. Sexual coercion, which was not generally identified as a form of conjugal abuse, was found to be underpinned by deeply entrenched ideals about gendered conjugal rights within the marriage. Some forms of abuse were exacerbated by modern developments, such as spousal conflict due to changing demands on the part of wives. Regarding local attitudes, which nominally condemned conjugal abuse (as locally conceived), these were reflected in general ideals of non-violence that may be associated with the vernacular religious tradition. A discernable tolerance at the societal level seemed to be underpinned by a host of socio-cultural factors, being enforced in complex ways by clergy discourses and personal faith, concomitantly with deeper metaphysics of individuality.

Pinning down the linkages between conjugal abuse and religious parameters poses therefore challenges due to various overlaps, interdependencies and complexities. The thesis' main premise has been that the religious tradition itself developed intimately with its socio-cultural surroundings. While Church theology incorporated apostolic teachings that emphasise the spiritual equality of all individuals, some practices that suggest gender asymmetries legitimated in reference to Old Testament teachings, have also been preserved. This reality in combination with

the limited understanding of apostolic Church theology among both clergy and laity has tended toward an emphasis of Old Testament teachings that aligns with the surrounding cultural environment. The examination of laypeople's perceptions about their religious tradition in Aksum evidenced that the average person did not distinguish between folklore practices and norms from their faith, and often deployed religious language to justify vernacular practices that arguably had Judaic nuances. And while there were interlocutors who differentiated between norms enforced in the culture and teachings of the Church, in effect all local people to some degree still followed these conventions.

In the countryside the clergy remained the primary point of reference for the laity on matters of faith. While there were numerous priests who achieved the training of a church teacher or a *mārigeta*, the average priest had limited exegetical training. Thus, while a priest remained broadly within the boundaries of Church theology, he was unlikely to pronounce religious teachings within their intrinsic hermeneutics. In most of the cases examined, clergy discourses opposed pernicious culture-condoned practices, but their unclear demarcations vis-à-vis folklore understandings made their discourses at times conducive to an enforcement of pernicious conventions. The very nature of a Church tradition that has pronounced its Old Testament heritage has probably contributed to this, as exemplified by the fact that even clergy with knowledge of biblical exegesis did not eschew these tendencies. Such relationships were evidenced in the clergy's emphasis on gender roles in marriage in conjunction with the gender-segregated local lifestyle, their emphasis on virginity paralleling society's own upholding of female chastity and under-age marriages, their prioritisation of peace and meekness and society's own expectation for non-confrontation on behalf of women, and their understanding of the marital bond in conjunction with the local expectation that a wife should never refuse to have sexual relations with her husband.

The clergy's pastoral approaches to mediate conjugal situations were generally described to have the interest of the woman (or the party who was faulted) in mind. Additionally, priests generally did not apply pressure and abandonments of spiritual children who did not abide by their advice were frequent. Women did not necessarily follow the priests' advice blindly. On the other hand, their counsel could also be serving to enforce attitudes of forbearance in distressful situations among some women. This need not be assessed negatively, but could be associated with women's normalised endurance of husband abusiveness. This is so because counsel encouraging patience and forgiveness aligned also with the folklore ideal that expected women to be timid and non-confrontational with their husbands at all times. The cumulative effect could be that women felt unable to speak to their husbands openly about their harmful habits and deficiencies, granting men a safe haven to continue their problematic behaviours, while still expecting their wives to meet local standards of wifeness/womanhood.

A closer look at the influence of spiritual parameters on conjugal attitudes and conduct suggested possible gender differentials in the ways that faith could become salient in men's and women's lives with implications for conjugal abuse. Collected testimonies suggested that faith for some men could serve as a sort of buffer against 'temptations' that instigated men to adulterous behaviour or wife abandonment because of notions of sinfulness. For women research participants, faith was mostly invoked in distressful conjugal situations and discourses of coping, although spiritual concerns could potentially make some women more reluctant to take formal action against abusive partners. Such motivations, however, interfaced with socio-cultural, practical and psychological motivations in intricate ways. Moreover, the perception that men were less spiritual, concomitantly with understandings about human metaphysics and abusiveness in the local belief system, could foster attitudes that responded to male abusiveness with some resignation, while encouraging female endurance.

Exploring local discourses and resources for addressing conjugal abuse

Although the thesis has avoided the typical practice of providing authoritative recommendations regarding what interventions should be implemented in the local society, the research experience grants the possibility to explore ways in which the discursive landscape could be manoeuvred to weaken or counterbalance norms, attitudes or behavioural patterns that were associated with conjugal abuse and its perpetuation.

Many of the domestic studies from Ethiopia reviewed in chapter 1 identified the importance of education and awareness-raising regarding gender-asymmetries for changing pernicious attitudes and norms, while others emphasized the need for consolidating the legal and institutional framework for dealing more effectively with conjugal abuse. These are important components of any alleviation strategy also in Aksum, but they would need to be informed by the local religio-cultural cosmology to which this dissertation has drawn attention. The effect of institutional interventions in this society would be probably mediated by more fundamental beliefs about the aetiology and reversibility of conjugal abuse and the perceived limited ability one had in changing another person. The emphasis that research participants placed on individual personalities and mental/affective states suggested that they did not generally expect structural interventions to be able to alter human behaviour, despite many acknowledging the usefulness of education or the need for attitudinal change. This recognition would necessitate developing (in parallel to any structural intervention) counter-discourses to cultivate new beliefs that people can improve and that abusiveness need not always be irreversible or uncontrollable. Since people's understandings about the individual were embedded in the on-going spiritual strife between good and evil, it would be appropriate to employ religious discourses in creating such a counter-discourse.

As a starting point, the Church's teaching of healing and spiritual growth might be considered. The notion of *theosis* or achieving likeness with God, explained in chapter 3, could become influential under the right preconditions. As it was discussed in chapter 3, *theosis* essentially speaks of the ability of the individual to imitate and follow the ways of God to the extent that they become one with Him. This path to a saintly life characterised by meekness and love is not alien to the rural residents of Aksum; however, two *caveats* about the concept of *theosis* in particular need to be considered. *Theosis*, as a more concrete discourse, has been deployed by theologians, but has been almost unknown to rural residents. More importantly, within this Church tradition saints have been venerated in such a manner that their saintly life has often been considered too distant from the laity and their 'sinful' ways. Thus it is not exactly clear to what extent deploying this concept could impact on the laity, who might dismiss it as an unachievable state for them.

The co-existence of extensive divorces and conjugal abuse combined with the EDHS results from 2011 that divorcees were more likely to justify wife-hitting¹⁰²⁹ suggest that a reversal of separations and divorces might help to prevent some pernicious conjugal attitudes. Many of these separations were associated in chapter 5 with conjugal conflict emanating from the gender-segregated organisation of marriage. This seems to raise the need for developing discourses to strengthen the conjugal relationship and to address some of the gender asymmetries highlighted in chapter 6. A starting point could be to increase awareness among the laity about the subtle differentiations between Church teachings regarding a divinely-instituted gender binary and rigidly enforced customary norms that prescribe a gender-based division of labour, since the latter was a prevalent *locus* and pretext of conjugal abuse and conflict. Church teachings upholding the New Testament messages of spiritual equality of the spouses and presenting marriage as a union for achieving righteousness and holiness, can offer the language for promoting more constructive models of conjugal interaction. Pronouncing marriage as a union of mutual consideration and sharing could prospectively help to displace lingering perceptions that husbands should be served by wives, or that it is a disgrace for men to do women's works.

Such discourses could be enforced either through the clergy's public preaching following Sunday liturgy or in private sessions with spiritual children. However, more sensitive conjugal issues, such as sexual coercion, would need to be addressed privately since these are not generally discussed in the open. Clergy have already been contemplating how best to counsel their spiritual children on sex-related matters. Some priests seemed to understand the theological premise of spouses being 'one flesh' in marriage to mean that husband and wife were not allowed to withhold themselves from each other. This is an inaccurate understanding in view of the emphasis on individual choice in this Church tradition, exemplified also in priests' unwillingness to apply

¹⁰²⁹ CSAE (2011, 259).

pressure on those who were unreceptive to their advice. One priest even commented: “Only an animal would impose himself on others by force.”¹⁰³⁰ Such discourses could be pronounced regarding sexuality specifically to consolidate the understanding that husbands have no inherent premise to impose themselves on their wives, countering sexual coerciveness.

These clergy-centred strategies, however, would require creating the preconditions under which the clergy would be willing and prepared to engage in the development of a counter-discourse vis-à-vis more folklore pronouncements. The analysis in this thesis and especially chapters 4 and 7 evidenced that clergy discourses were often more conducive than contradictory to socio-cultural norms. Theologians and scholars believed that the issue was primarily one of limited theological training and acculturation, an understanding that has probably fostered Church-led trainings for clergy reportedly to cultivate their ability to differentiate between vernacular religious practice and theology, as well as on how to preach and to give pastoral advice most effectively.¹⁰³¹ This study evidenced that these were not the most potent issues since very learned clergy could also espouse folklore understandings, as exemplified in their discourses of marriage and virginity. The issue was partially emanating from the nature of the very theology that these priests invoked, which was disproportionately attuned to Old Testament messages. It is likely that some members of the clergy lacked awareness that their discourses could be enforcing pernicious norms, while others understood the nuances but pronounced Judeo-Christian messages that placed them favourably with the community. One theologian remarked: “Most priests do not have theological training. But even if they had it, their attitudes would not change radically primarily because any change can make them look heretical and [can] associate them with the *Tāhaddāso* movement.”¹⁰³² To this could be added a degree of dependence that the clergy were said to have on the laity (who tended to offer some monetary reimbursement for their services). These observations suggest that engaging the clergy in any intervention would need to be combined with a realistic understanding of the conditions of their existence and what incentives might need to be put in place to encourage their activity. These incentives would have to counterbalance any fear of being suspected for departure from tradition by deploying discourses that remain attuned to local hermeneutics and teachings of venerated saints known to the public, placing however more gravity on New Testament messages.

In conjunction with this point, it needs to be recognised that currently clergy have limited resources to inform themselves about Church teachings on marriage, as highlighted in the comment by one *māriḡeta*: “[I] they (priests) are teaching about marriage they will go to the Old and the New Testament and will quote verses and elaborate on them a bit further and that is

¹⁰³⁰ IC10.

¹⁰³¹ ICE13, ICE13.

¹⁰³² ICE3.

all.”¹⁰³³ The interviews with members of the clergy confirmed that beyond the Bible and the *Māṣḥaf Tāklil* ordained priests used no other resources.¹⁰³⁴ While some more commentary is provided in the *Fāṭḥa Nāgāst*, this was typically studied at the higher levels of Church education that most priests would not be expected to have achieved. In addition, the provisions on marriage in *FN* are also fairly basic and not fully attuned to the needs of current times. More concrete but concise and easily comprehensible guidance written in the local language would offer a permanent resource for priests to use at any time. In view of the undisputed status of John Chrysostom as a local authority on theological matters and his pertinent commentaries on apostolic teachings on marriage that reverse some Old Testament understandings, his explanations could provide the grounds for such a manual. However, as opposed to the top-down trainings delivered by the Church a more participatory format, in the lines of the workshops conducted for this study, offer a more appropriate and effective way to engage the clergy in reflective conversation and to help them to assimilate gradually and critically apostolic messages regarding marriage, the conjugal relationship and spiritual growth.

Beyond the impacts that theology and the clergy discourses might have on norms and attitudes, priests could have a more direct effect on the conjugal relationship through their role as spiritual fathers. It was generally found that priests mediated directly marriage problems and possibly also conjugal abuse situations. The literature on domestic violence from religious communities holds that clergy should not try to work with the victim or the perpetrator alone, but coordinate with specialised service providers and referral services.¹⁰³⁵ Ideally, the priests who are approached by the abused party (usually a woman) should try to assess and alleviate the risk for her in appropriate ways, referring her to specialised domestic violence services. Regarding perpetrators, clergy should confine themselves to providing spiritual support, without intervening thoughtlessly in ways that could anger the perpetrator or lead to more violent behaviour. However, such guidelines might be especially hard to meet for clergy in Aksum due to a lack of other service providers dealing with conjugal abuse and priests’ very central role in the affairs of the married couple, in conjunction with priests’ weak understanding of the psychological and socio-cultural underpinnings of (male) abusiveness that would enable them to respond to victims and perpetrators appropriately.

Available studies have indicated that clergy may be unequipped to recognise the signs and symptoms of conjugal abuse.¹⁰³⁶ The same literature has warned that priests may be misled by abusers’ tendencies to minimise the abuse or to blame it partially on the victimised party or their

¹⁰³³ IC6.

¹⁰³⁴ IC89.

¹⁰³⁵ Johnson (2015, 5), Nason-Clark et al. (2018, 17, 82).

¹⁰³⁶ Johnson (2015, 5).

expression of remorse seeking forgiveness.¹⁰³⁷ Although in the research sample there were priests who appeared to interrogate women proactively if they faced any physical violence by their husbands, there were also priests who were convinced that spousal abuse did not exist in their communities.¹⁰³⁸ It may also be recollected that spiritual fathers could consult with both spouses to reach a verdict of who was at fault. However, it was never discussed what happened when the stories contradicted each other. Would the word of the male have more gravity or would the victimised party's narrative be prioritised? In view of many priests' acculturated pronouncements of conjugal teachings, it can be entertained that the man's word could hold more weight.

Moreover, the study evidenced that priests did not hesitate to engage directly with the perpetrator and took measures to discourage the pernicious behaviour. However, their counsel did not appear to affect substantively male recipients, which might be linked with the use of judgemental pastoral approaches, as was suggested by an aforementioned interlocutor who remarked that people do not like being judged. The clergy might find alternative discourses to talk to men that would be less judgemental, more understanding and considerate, but simultaneously develop the men's sense of accountability.¹⁰³⁹ The discussion of faith and marriage in chapter 8 showed that the sin of adultery or fornication could be particularly compelling with men. Priests might need to employ a language of righteousness when addressing male interlocutors, speaking of conjugal abusiveness as an unjust and unrighteous act and motivating them to be 'moral' by treating their wives well.

Individual and institutional caveats

The strategies considered so far have been underpinned by the understanding that rural residents would be receptive to and could be influenced by the clergy's advice. However, the landscape was more diverse and for a large segment of the population faith was experienced in a vernacular idiom. Others appeared to be more oriented toward urban lifestyles and norms, despite generally venerating the religious tradition. While this does not reduce the relevance of theology-informed or clergy-centred strategies to address conjugal abuse, it means that clergy will need to be more prepared and equipped theologically to counsel individuals of diverse relationships with the Church, including those who might not exactly fit the religious ideals, such as couples in irregular unions who also emerged to be affected by conjugal abuse but were often without a spiritual father.

¹⁰³⁷ Kilmartin (2015, 17), Nason-Clark et al. (2018, 67).

¹⁰³⁸ IC3, FIELDNOTES, 8 February 2017.

¹⁰³⁹ Nason-Clark, (2018, chapter 3).

Such strategies might need to be combined with other approaches not necessarily emanating from the Church and faith. As the IPV studies examined in the Introduction showed, abusiveness usually has more profound psychological motivations that need proper intervention programmes engaging with men and women over a longer period of time to help them to recognise their abusiveness and cultivate ways to respond to emotionally charged situations without conflict. This essentially raises the need for multi-dimensional interventions organised around the community that can both instigate more general normative and attitudinal changes in marriage and incorporate more specialised programmes to reverse the problematic behaviour of abusive men directly. This, in itself, raises a new host of challenges due to the lack of resources in the village communities and the reported inefficiencies in the institutional framework, such as in registering conjugal abuse cases properly and enforcing the law with perpetrators. For example, setting up a referral programme for perpetrators coordinating with the police and the health units would require an operational legal and criminal system.

Whichever multi-dimensional approach is followed, a degree of engagement between state and Church is desirable. The study evidenced that formal institutions were inevitably influenced by or depended on informal institutions and standards to address marital problems and even conjugal abuse. Hence, state-led interventions would need to consider the effect of informal institutions and norms on institutional operations, requiring an understanding of the local religio-cultural cosmology and socio-cultural matrix. On the other hand, any intervention to address conjugal abuse could not omit engaging with the clergy. However, approximations between government agencies and the Church might be obstructed by the state's unwillingness to become involved with the Church or the Church's own prioritisation of Church Canons, as exemplified in the clergy continuing to perform marriage ceremonies for under-age girls. While there is clearly need for both clergy to be supported by state-led programmes in dealing with victims and perpetrators and for the state to consider the cosmological system and leverage on a theological angle, finding bridges between the two might require considerable work.

Appendix

Appendix: Introduction

1.1. Mainstreamed gender theorisations cannot be understood unless they are embedded in the progression of feminist politics in the past century. Inherent within (western) feminist theory has been the (political) concern to unite the subject of the feminist movement, the ‘woman’, for more effective action against perceived social sexism.

Initially, feminist writers were not concerned with questioning the idea of binary sex or sexuality, but rather concentrated their attention on showing that accepting ‘natural’ differences between men and women should not mean accepting that the latter were inferior to the former. Some feminist-minded writers, in fact, deployed the idea of ‘essential’ woman in order to enforce egalitarian positions and more positive representations of women. Linda Alcoff has referred to these earlier paradigms within feminist theory as “cultural feminism.”¹⁰⁴⁰ As she explained, “[c]ultural feminism is the ideology of a female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in an effort to re-validate undervalued female attributes.”¹⁰⁴¹ Theorists in this group, such as Mary Daly and Andrienne Rich, pronounced thus women’s positive attributes and characteristics, such as nurturance, peaceful demeanour or advanced self-awareness. In addition, according to Alcoff, for cultural feminists the problem was not so much the social context, but rather masculinity itself and sometimes “male biology.”¹⁰⁴² This suggested that ontological maleness was pronounced as much as essential femaleness. However, as Alcoff observed, so-called cultural feminists did not generally manage to provide a systematic answer as to “what it means to be a woman.”¹⁰⁴³

The second-wave feminist movement appropriated the concept of ‘gender’ to overcome what it considered to be previously ‘essentialist’ positions on women and to draw attention to the socially constructed nature of ideas of femininity and masculinity in society, making visible the role that unequal power relations between men and women had in the perpetuation of such ideals. Prior to being absorbed within feminist politics, ‘gender’ had been employed in the early 20th century by western psychoanalysts who worked with transsexual individuals and needed a language to differentiate their clients’ self-identifications as men or women from their sexed bodies. Robert Stoller, a psychologist who tried to “explain why some people felt that they were ‘trapped in the wrong bodies,’”¹⁰⁴⁴ used the term ‘gender’ to refer to the internal sexual identities that his clients claimed they had. In this sense, western psychologists were the first to challenge the conventional understanding of sex which had traditionally subsumed under it both ontogenetic and anatomical characteristics, demeanour and other personality traits.¹⁰⁴⁵ Asia Friedman has observed that in the early usage of gender, sex was conceived as the anatomical body and was considered *mutable*, whereas gender was understood as the internal self-identification as man or woman which was believed to be *immutable*.¹⁰⁴⁶ As a result, many felt that physical anatomy could be fairly easily changed through surgery to match what was conceived to be the immutable internal gender identity.¹⁰⁴⁷

By appropriating the concept, feminist theorists reversed these implicit meanings. Christine Delphy has confirmed this in a pertinent comment:

¹⁰⁴⁰ Alcoff (1988).

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴³ *Ibid.*, 411.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Mikkola (2016).

¹⁰⁴⁵ Friedman (2006, 2/20).

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3/20.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

“Sex” denotes and connotes something natural. It was therefore not possible to question “sex” head on, all at once, since to do so involves a contradiction in terms. (“Naturalness” is an integral part of the definition of the term). We had first to demonstrate that “sex” is applied to divisions and distinctions which are social. Then we had not only to separate the social from the original term, which remains defined by naturalness, but to make the social emerge. This is what the notion of first “sex roles” and then “gender” did. Only when the “social part” is clearly established as social, when it has a name of its own (whether it be “sex roles” or “gender”), then and only then could we come back to the idea we started with. We had first to design and lay claim to the territory for the social, having a different conceptual location for that of sex, but tied to the traditional sense of the word “sex”, in order to be able, from this strategic location, to challenge the traditional meaning of “sex”.¹⁰⁴⁸

In other words, gender was conceived as the analytical tool by which ‘sex’ could be separated in domains of natural and domains of social. As Asia Friedman aptly observed, the discursive shift Delphy described caused a reversal in the early conceptualisation of gender as the immutable internal identification as female or male and was now defined as *mutable* social aspects, while sex was relegated to the biological or ‘natural’ immutable realm.¹⁰⁴⁹

In this early feminist theorisations, sex was defined as the biologically given anatomy with some primary and secondary traits (e.g. hormones), and gender as the socially constructed identity of men and women, with the strong implication that gender was founded on or dictated by sex. However, this seminal reversal of meaning resulted in an awkward conceptualisation of gender positioned on the dichotomisation of the human existence in natural and social realms, while the implied causal relationship of gender reflecting sex suggested an unhelpful biological determinism of sorts. It is not surprising that soon different theorists started to critique the early dichotomisation that had seemed so easy.

Linda Nicholson was among those who criticised second-wave theorisations (1970s-1980s) on the premise that they assumed biology-founded conceptions of women, naming specifically the works of Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow.¹⁰⁵⁰ In a 1994 article, Nicholson first traced the early conceptualisation of gender from 16th to 20th century theories of socialisation in western epistemology. She observed that in the medieval times, when Christian theology was prevalent in western societies, individuality and sexual identity tended to be theologically explained. As the Bible lost its authoritative grip on society, human individuality was opened to scientific explorations that placed an emphasis on the body. According to Nicholson, this emphasis on biology was not abandoned, but it evolved steadily to become more intertwined with social spheres of existence. In the 20th century, human personalities were increasingly conceived as reflective of social processes, but they were not taken to exclude the possibility that “biology is the site of character formation.”¹⁰⁵¹ She attributed to this “materialist metaphysics” the ‘co-track’ tendencies she saw in feminist theorisations. This referred to “the idea that there exist some physiological givens that are used similarly in all cultures to distinguish women and men and that at least partially account for certain commonalities in the norms of male and female personality and behaviour.”¹⁰⁵² She observed that it was this simultaneous rejection of biological determinism and acceptance of commonalities premised on shared biology (“biological foundationalism”) that offered feminist thinkers the ability to transpose gender cross-culturally.

Nicholson’s argument was that such persistent conceptualisations of gender hindered efforts to understand differences among men and women and the cause of the distinction in the first place. In order to deem gender relevant to all societies, it would be necessary to forego the ethnocentric

¹⁰⁴⁸ Delphy (2001, 418).

¹⁰⁴⁹ Friedman (2006, 4/20).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Nicholson (1994).

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid.*, 89.

assumption of the centrality of the body and to incorporate the body also within the exploratory analysis of gender. She proposed the need to appraise “social variations in the male/female distinction as related to differences that go ‘all the way down’, that is, as tied not just to the limited phenomena many of us associate with gender (i.e. to cultural stereotypes of personality and behaviour) but also to culturally various understandings of the body and to what it means to be a woman or a man.”¹⁰⁵³ In other words, Nicholson suggested a theorisation of gender premised on a closer look at how embodied human subjectivity was more fundamentally understood within specific cultural systems.

In a 1983 article titled “A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction” Moira Gatens noted the emergence of the sex/gender dichotomy and undertook to ascertain whether it was a valid distinction. Gatens observed that the binary was employed by groups of different ideologies, namely Marxists, homosexual groups and feminists, who had invariably argued for “a neutralisation of sexual differences and sexual politics.”¹⁰⁵⁴ She argued that such an engendering approach, premised on liberal philosophical positions of re-education, assumed that the body and the psyche are *tabula rasa* and could be changed, re-socialised in ways that are considered desirable for social transformation. According to this approach, gender is an issue of the mind and the effect of internalising social ‘lessons’, while the body serves only as the passive recipient of these ‘inscriptions.’ Gatens argued that the body is not neutral and that the connection between gender (femininity and masculinity) to the female and male body is not arbitrary. She aimed to show that the idea of re-socialisation is misguided for these reasons.

Gatens noted that the feminist tradition on the socialisation of gender relied on the findings of psychologist Robert Stoller, whose work was already mentioned. Stoller ascertained the relationship between sex and gender as follows: “[T]he biological sex of a person has a tendency to augment, though not to determine, the appropriate gender identity for that sex, (i.e. masculinity in the case of the male sex; femininity in the case of the female sex).”¹⁰⁵⁵ Because gender identity was attributed to post-natal psychological effects, Stoller ultimately suggested that these could override biological sex, resulting thus in cases such as that of the transsexual individual. What decided the relationship between biological sex and gender identity was potentially the male child’s relationship to the mother. If this extended for too long, or it was experienced in such a way that the child would be unable to develop its identity independently, this could lead to a boy self-identifying as a woman.

Gatens observed that early feminist theorists (such as Kate Millett and Nancy Chodorow) relied on Stoller’s findings to dismiss the importance of the biological sex and emphasise socialisation, proposing re-socialisation as a possible social transformation strategy, and argued that this was hastily done and that Stoller’s conclusions had not been carefully examined. According to Gatens, if Stoller’s analysis were to be considered accurate, this would mean that “the body is neutral and passive with regard to the formation of consciousness”¹⁰⁵⁶ under the understanding that consciousness or mental states are primary. It would also follow from this view that “the important effects of the historical and cultural specificity of ‘one’s lived experience’ is able to be altered, definitely, by consciously changing the material practices of the culture in question.”¹⁰⁵⁷ Gatens argued that these assumptions presumed a rationalist and ahistorical understanding of gender which it premised on a neutralised body and consciousness.

According to Gatens, the sex/gender theorists presupposed a body/consciousness split which was historically untenable, proven especially in psychoanalytical studies. Gatens cited as example Freud’s analysis of hysteria, which he had described as a disorder that involved both body and

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Gatens (1983, 144).

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid., 147.

mind.¹⁰⁵⁸ She also cited Freud's work on perception, which was understood not as something limited to the consciousness but which extended into the unconscious and subconscious. This implied that the subject is in constant activity, even if activity is not consciously undertaken. Therefore, instead of identifying perception with consciousness or the body, it would be more accurate to attribute it to the activity of the subject as a whole. Similarly, bodies are not neutral because they come in two forms which are valued differently within society. Thus, Gatens argued that the issue is not gender, but sexual difference. And because the male and female bodies have different social value, the consciousness is ultimately affected and marked by these different significances.¹⁰⁵⁹ In Gatens's words:

The imaginary body is socially and historically specific in that it is constructed by: a shared language; the shared psychical significance and privileging of various zones of the body (e.g. the mouth, the anus, the genitals); and common institutional practices and discourses (e.g. medical, juridical, and educational).¹⁰⁶⁰

Gatens concluded that "The problem is not the socialisation of women to femininity and men to masculinity, but the place of these behaviours in the network of social meaning and the valorising of one (the male) over the other (the female) and the resultant mischaracterisation of relations of difference as relations of superiority and inferiority."¹⁰⁶¹ She also added that "'masculinity' and 'femininity' correspond, at the level of the imaginary body to 'male' and 'female' at the level of biology. It bears repetition that this statement does not imply a fixed essence to 'masculine' and 'feminine' but rather an historical specificity."¹⁰⁶² In other words, while Gatens continued the tradition of envisioning an intimate association between masculinity/femininity and male/female anatomies, she questioned the metaphysics of gender, proposing that this was not inherent or essential, but reflected different social valuations of sex-marked anatomies which were cultivated discursively, psychically and institutionally. Gatens, thus, bridged gender and sex, a move which would be completed by Judith Butler about a decade later.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler criticised all feminist attempts to find a common definition for 'woman' on the premise that universal definitions are not merely descriptive, but simultaneously normativising and thus contributed to the gendering of persons according to norms, perpetuating what she conceptualised as oppressive regulatory framework. She wrote: "Identity categories are neither merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary."¹⁰⁶³ The idea of a universal, stable 'woman' was identified as a regulatory norm, even if employed for emancipatory purposes.¹⁰⁶⁴ In her understanding, attempts to define 'woman' universally replicated historical western appraisals of other women in essentialist ways and created room for exclusion and fractionalisation in the feminist movement. She proposed instead "to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the maternal or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings may come to bear."¹⁰⁶⁵

Butler then proceeded to develop a different theorisation of gender which located gender neither within the body nor outside of it, but identified it with the very locus of the subject's coming into being or becoming socially intelligible. In the words of the author: "Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves."¹⁰⁶⁶ Gender was theorised

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid., 155.

¹⁰⁶³ Butler (1995, 50).

¹⁰⁶⁴ Butler (1990, 6).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Butler (1995, 50).

¹⁰⁶⁶ Butler (1993, 7).

as a means or a process that constructs the subject, who does not pre-exist the normative classifications of the world. She reasoned that even though sex is usually spoken in a binary, if gender is the cultural meaning of the sexed body, it is not necessary for gender to manifest exclusively in a binary form. If the immutability of sex is questioned and is understood as culturally constructed, then perhaps sex has also been gender all along. Butler's theory was ultimately an argument against a humanist "metaphysics of substance" that assumed some innate quality to gender or sex.

Alternatively, she attributed psychic gender and sexual desire/orientation to gender identity and she theorised these to emerge from within the gender discursive means that pre-exists the 'I.' She reasoned: "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"¹⁰⁶⁷ and: "Gender is the repeated stylisation 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."¹⁰⁶⁸ In other words, she envisioned gender as an oppressive process whereby human bodies, psyches and identities become pronounced and materialised reiteratively within a pre-existing regulatory apparatus made of normative categories, with primary being the norm of the sex binary.

Butler's theory found much appeal in feminist circles, but it was also criticised on the premise that she had not convincingly integrated in her theoretical framework the material bodies and anatomical differences. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler presented her more comprehensive theory of 'gender performativity.' Gender performativity signified the reiteration of gender norms, as configured in power-laden discourses, a reiteration that according to her produced and constituted the gendered subject. Following Michel Foucault, Butler conceptualised the subject as the effect of power because she believed that power shaped the matrix of practices and relations in which the subject is subjectivated (becomes an oppressed subject) and the body materialised as a result of becoming intelligible to itself and others. This power was not located inside or outside of the subject, but rather in the very process of acting reiteratively within the regulatory framework. Butler proposed: "There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability."¹⁰⁶⁹ In other words, the power was located in the process of reiteration, which was understood to be powerful because through persistent reiteration 'sex' (the regulatory norm) is given a "naturalised effect" and is perpetuated through subjective psychological embodiment. Thus, it should be clear that, the "power of recitation is not a function of an individual's *intention*, but is an effect of historically sedimented linguistic conventions." (emphasis in the original).¹⁰⁷⁰

Nonetheless, Butler did leave room for subversive outcomes so as to be able to account for the existence of multiple sexualities and therefore genders (as was mentioned, for her sexuality is understood to be quintessential to gender). She explained that in the process of reiteration fissures may be opened, which create the discursive space for norm subversion. She appeared to conceive these *arbitrary irregularities* in the reiterative performativity process, which "escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labour of that norm."¹⁰⁷¹ Butler wrote:

[I]f we call into question the fixity of the structuralist law that divides and bounds the 'sexes' by virtue of their dyadic differentiation within the heterosexual matrix, it will be from the exterior regions of that boundary (not from a 'position' but from the discursive possibilities opened up by the constitutive outside of hegemonic positions), and it will

¹⁰⁶⁷ Butler (1990, 34).

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Butler (1993, 9).

¹⁰⁷⁰ Butler (1995, 134).

¹⁰⁷¹ Butler (1993, 10).

constitute the disruptive return of the excluded from within the very logic of the heterosexual symbolic.¹⁰⁷²

In other words, the reiterative process which sediments the (heteronormative) norm into gendered bodies could generate also deviances from the norm. According to Butler's thinking, these subversive irregularities are the result of discursive possibilities that opened up outside of the hegemonic discourse. This conceptualisation of the normative and the deviant implied that it was not the human subject who decided to conform or not, but the *process of reiteration itself* which could beget non-hegemonic discourses and an entry point to subvert the heteronormative system. In her own words:

In this sense, the agency denoted by the performativity of the 'sex' will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (assujettissement) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power."¹⁰⁷³

Therefore, in Butler's theory, the subject *has* no power to subvert the system by mere intention, since there is neither a 'voluntarist' subject nor power that inheres in the subject. Butler rather imagined a subject who is formed and subjectivated discursively and saw in this process also the possibility for agency and subversion (which overlapped in her work).¹⁰⁷⁴ It should then be clear that in this theorisation the construction of gender was not seen as something one chose. Gendering occurred in a strictly circumscribed normative repertoire, which would be counter to the idea of a conscious, coherent agent deciding the direction or reiteration of the subjectivation process. However, the reiterative process itself, being discursive and complex, could create rifts for subversion. Butler was emphatic about this: "Gender performativity is not a question of instrumentally deploying a 'masquerade', for such a construal of performativity presupposes an intentional subject *behind* the deed. On the contrary, gender performativity involves the difficult labour of deriving agency from the very power regimes which constitute us, and which we opposed." (emphasis in the original).¹⁰⁷⁵

Butler did not annihilate the subject as subject, but the idea of an autonomous subject as evidenced in her response to Seyla Benhabib's criticisms that she had proposed nihilistic conceptions of the self. Butler explained that the doer was not annihilated, but was conceived as the effect of arbitrary combinations of discursive possibilities, which countered historical ideas of an autonomous human ontology endowed with inherent power. "There is no 'bidding farewell' to the doer, but only to the *placement* of that doer 'beyond' or 'behind' the deed. For the deed will be itself and the legacy of conventions which it reengages, but also the future possibilities that it opens up; the 'doer' will be the uncertain working of the discursive possibilities by which it itself is worked." (emphasis in original).¹⁰⁷⁶

In parallel to gender theorisations such as Butler's, more attention started to be given to how classifications and language determined how bodies became understood in society, that is to say, the metaphysical edifice that traditionally sustained binary sex. For example, Anne Fausto-Sterling in an article titled "The Five Sexes" (published 1993) observed that while multiple sexes and intersexuality existed in nature, in medical and social classifications the sexes had been conventionally limited to two. She therefore pointed to the power of classification in determining 'nature.' She also attempted to counter claims that intersexuals could not lead normal lives by

¹⁰⁷² Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Butler (1990, 44).

¹⁰⁷⁵ Butler (1995, 136).

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid., 135.

examining records of such individuals from the United States to examine whether their intersexuality had been associated with psychological and other problems that medical sciences apprehended. By this gesture, the understanding of sex as biologically dyadic was itself shaken since theorists had now reasons to think that the dichotomy into male and female bodies itself was a social normative defined within power relations.

Albeit the influence that post-structuralist and constructionist theorisations had on shaping feminist thought, they were still rife with limitations. In a pertinent 1988 article, Linda Alcoff summarised the positions she perceived characterised post-structuralist theorists and proposed a more historical approach. Alcoff observed that post-structuralists rejected any kind of biological determinism because they believed that subjects were “overdetermined (i.e. constructed) by a social discourse and/or cultural practice” and that “[we] really have little choice in the matter of who we are, for as Derrida and Foucault like to remind us, individual motivations and intentions count for nil or almost nil in the scheme of social reality.”¹⁰⁷⁷ She thus argued that “post-structuralists deny not only the efficacy but also the ontological autonomy and even the existence of intentionality.”¹⁰⁷⁸ Her conclusion was that for post-structuralists “an effective feminism could only be a wholly negative feminism, deconstructing everything and refusing to construct anything.”¹⁰⁷⁹

Alcoff proposed an alternative understanding of woman building on her concept of ‘positionality.’ As opposed to post-structuralists who perceive, according to her, all individual circumstances as the result of a continuous discursive process, Alcoff aimed to emphasise the distinctive circumstances of all women and to use this as her point of departure. She employed the concepts of identity politics and positionality to make an argument that she believed was non-essentialist (the conceptualisation of gender or ‘woman’ was not based on biology and nature), but which could enable gender or woman to be treated as a uniform category, facilitating feminist politics. She explained:

The essentialist definition of woman makes her identity independent of her external situation: since her nurturing and peaceful traits are innate they are ontologically autonomous of her position with respect to others or to the external historical and social conditions generally. The positional definition, on the other hand, makes her identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on.¹⁰⁸⁰

In other words, Alcoff proposed that the women’s identity, with all the integral and external paraphernalia this implied, “is constituted by women’s position”, which was shaped by various elements in her surroundings at various analytical levels. She argued that this theorisation “should not imply that the concept of ‘woman’ is determined solely by external elements and that the woman herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by these forces. Rather, she herself is part of the historicized, fluid movement, and she therefore actively contributes to the context within which her position can be delineated.”¹⁰⁸¹ In other words, positionality was not to be studied to discover meaning, but rather to uncover *how women became aware of and experienced their own subjectivity*. In Alcoff’s words, “The concept of woman as positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values.”¹⁰⁸² This seemed to call for a prioritisation of the woman’s lived consciousness and her cultivation of values, perspective and subjectivity with the historical and cultural context of her existence.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Alcoff (1988, 416).

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 433.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 434.

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*, 434.

It may be observed that arguments such as Nicholson's, Butler's and Alcoff's reflected feminists' increasing awareness of white solipsism in early feminist theory, as numerous non-western women or women of colour in Northern societies exposed over time.¹⁰⁸³ Such critiques steadily led feminist theorists to face the metaphysical assumptions that had underpinned earlier gender theories and to recognise that the simplistic understanding of gender as grounded on dual sex identity did not consider how other lines of difference contributed to define the very understanding of bodies (Nicholson), the social matrix that sustained and valued this imaginary body (Gatens) and how individuals interpreted and constructed their gendered subjectivity within their historical conditions (Alcoff). Subsequently, gender theorisations incorporated more 'intersectional' perspectives and enlarged their analytical dimensions to consider political, historical and economic dimensions.¹⁰⁸⁴

Another step forward was taken in Raia Prokhovnik's theoretical work in *Rational Woman* (2012). In her work Prokhovnik attempted to show the erroneousness of thinking in terms of a gender/sex binary due to the unrealistic dichotomies that such a demarcation inevitably implied regarding mind and body and subsequently reason and emotion. As Prokhovnik observed in her work, the historical sex/gender binary had unwittingly disconnected the emotional underlayer from rational function and had given priority to "a narrow cognitive understanding of the mind as separate from lived and inscribed corporeality."¹⁰⁸⁵ Drawing from neurological findings, she demonstrated ways in which reason entailed emotion and proceeded to develop a social constructionist theory of emotions.¹⁰⁸⁶ She premised this on three explanations: "culturally-interpreted natural emotional predispositions, socioculturally-prescribed rules of emotional meanings, function and expectation, and the role of individual agency."¹⁰⁸⁷

To overcome the rationality/emotion dichotomy that had been implicit in the historical sex/gender conceptualisations, Prokhovnik drew from the work of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz to emphasise the need to theorise an embodied gender. She referred to Grosz who had spoken in terms of 'psychical corporeality' to further denote the intertwinement of reason and emotion. She also drew from the work of Butler which departed from the idea of an internal subject formation and proposed a dynamic subject-formation located in the discursive realm that pre-existed the subject.¹⁰⁸⁸ She proposed moving toward thinking in terms of *psychical corporeality*, an integrated view of subjectivity that pronounced three interdependent dimensions: body, reason and emotion.¹⁰⁸⁹ Prokhovnik thus enlarged the theorisation of gender to the embodied cognitive-emotive consciousness, which she still embedded in a wider discursive matrix.

In recent times, while theorists writing within a western epistemological framework have agreed that gender is socially constructed, they have yet to agree on the metaphysics of social constructionism. As Mikkola has pertinently observed:

Nowadays it is more common to denote this by saying that gender is socially constructed. This means that genders (women and men) and gendered traits (like being nurturing or ambitious) are the 'intended or unintended product[s] of a social practice' (Haslanger 1995, 97). But which social practices construct gender, what social construction is and what being

¹⁰⁸³ For example, Amadiume (1987), Mohanty (1988), Kolawole (1997), Oyèwùmí (1997), Nnaemeka (1998), Ogunyemi in Arndt (2000), Narayan (2004), Steady (2005).

¹⁰⁸⁴ The concept of 'intersectionality' itself was the product of Black feminist thought in North America mainstreamed in feminist theory to a large effect because of the increasingly recognition that white women's theorisations could not capture black women's multiple oppressions, that is to say, the implications of race for the construction of gender subjectivities. See Crenshaw (1989) and Carastathis (2014, 304).

¹⁰⁸⁵ Prokhovnik (2012, 9).

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

of a certain gender amounts to are major feminist controversies. There is no consensus on these issues.”¹⁰⁹⁰

This ultimately reflects an underlying inconclusiveness about the metaphysics of the self, essentially a divergence of thought among prominent theorists as to how bodies intertwine with consciousness (cognitive, emotional) and how either may be conceived in relation to social categories and processes.

1.2 Andrea Cornwall, for example, with reference to Moira Gatens’ and Judith Butlers’ works argues against “naturalising” sexual difference through the deployment of gender binaries that remain stubbornly tied to the anchor of sex essentialism.”¹⁰⁹¹ Jerker Edström, in a recent Institute of Development Studies publication on masculinities, also draws theoretical insights from Judith Butler’s gender performativity theory, stating that “This helped to clarify the role of relational performativity or habitual and structured practices in the social constructions of gender (rather than sex explaining the patterns of our habits and performances).”¹⁰⁹²

1.3. Because intimate partner violence has been conceptualised differently by different actors, it has been explained and analysed in various ways. David Lawson in a recent Wiley publication by the American Counselling Association on domestic violence identified the following types of theories: social cognitive learning theory, feminist theory, attachment theory, family systems theory and the broader ecological model as refined by Bronfenbrenner.¹⁰⁹³ Among these theories some focus on factors that concern the individual, such as psychopathological parameters, other emphasise societal and cultural context and psychosocial influences, and other take a micro-approach to focus on human biology and behavioural genetics.¹⁰⁹⁴ All these explanations seem to come together in the ecological model which offers a broad, multi-level aetiology of abusive behaviour at different analytical levels: individual, family, societal and systemic.

In his book Lawson referred to Bronfenbrenner’s conceptualisation of the ecological system, in which human behaviour is presented in terms of individual and environmental contexts called the ontogenetic/individual level, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. At the individual/ontogenetic level are factors that “influence family violence through biological and contextual elements that shape the individual’s responses to microsystem and exosystem stressors.”¹⁰⁹⁵ These may include behavioural genetics, biological and non-biological factors. The microsystem “refers to the relationships and interactions between family members (e.g. communication skills) and identified risk factors for violence (e.g. insecure attachment).”¹⁰⁹⁶ The exosystem includes the external factors to the individual and the family that may influence individual behaviour, such as “occupational settings, religious groups, mass media, friendships, and support groups.”¹⁰⁹⁷ The macrosystem finally refers to cultural influences on individual beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, such as “societies’ acceptance of men’s use of violence against women.”¹⁰⁹⁸

As Lawson shows in his book, and becomes evident in the scholarship on domestic violence, among most popular theorisations are feminist and family theories of domestic violence, which tend to focus on different aspects of the ecological model and to conceptualise IPV according to the assumptions each has about the nature of violence. Although it is recognised that within both

¹⁰⁹⁰ Mikkola (2016, online).

¹⁰⁹¹ Cornwall (2007, 76).

¹⁰⁹² Edström (2014).

¹⁰⁹³ Lawson (2013, 17).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Lawson (2013, 18).

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid., 19.

schools of thought there is diversity and debate, Lawson identifies some general characteristics for the two approaches. The former group, he notes, is generally comprised by academics, activists and service providers who espouse a feminist understanding of human relations in society, which means that they accept female oppression as their reference point and tend to see IPV as a male-on-female affair enabled by a society-sanctioned patriarchy. This also means that most violence is understood to be the product primarily of male socialisation as opposed to mental, cognitive or psychological problems.¹⁰⁹⁹ However, it should be noted that in recent years feminist theorisations have departed from speaking only in terms of patriarchy and have increasingly incorporated social, political, economic and global forces that are understood to influence human social relations and societal arrangements.¹¹⁰⁰ Under the influence of different feminist schools of thought some scholars have departed from binaries and have put more emphasis on power.¹¹⁰¹ It is also generally true that feminist writers tend to focus on more extreme forms of intimate violence (that they may know of working in shelters for battered individuals) and to put emphasis on the consequences rather than the act of violence.¹¹⁰²

The family studies group, on the other hand, is comprised mostly by academics who consider intimate violence to be mutually perpetuated by both men and women and emphasise a more commonplace type of violence. Both men and women are conceived as possible abusers and the violence is appraised through a more symmetrical frame with emphasis on the violent act (and less on its consequence). This understanding is grounded in community-based studies from North America and elsewhere¹¹⁰³ that have shown both men and women to be abusers in intimate relations and to perpetrate physical violence at almost equal rates. Studies that demonstrate this, have recognised, however, that men perpetrate more sexual violence and cause more harm and fear on female intimate partners.

In recent years the debates between feminist and non-feminist groups have sharpened, and have escalated often to become explicitly antagonistic.¹¹⁰⁴ Family studies scholars have pointed to a volume of empirical findings, such that violence occurs in gay and lesbian couples, that women often abuse men not in self-defence but because they are violent, that more women than men abuse children, that not all men in societies that perpetuate the norm of man-on-woman abuse are violent, and other findings to suggest the need for a more holistic understanding of IPV beyond gender.¹¹⁰⁵ Feminist writers have insisted in turn that such findings do not prove that gender is not important, but that these rather emphasise the need for more research into *how* exactly gender becomes influential.¹¹⁰⁶ Feminist scholars have repeatedly observed that non-feminist writers fail to engage with the voluminous theoretical work that has been done in feminist and gender studies, with some scholars arguing that a limited understanding of what is meant by gender has contributed to ongoing “confusion about how partner assaults are gendered.”¹¹⁰⁷ Feminist writers have also criticised various commonly used methodological approaches to measure violence, such as the Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS), on various grounds, including the premise that they focus on the act of violence rather than the consequences, do not consider motivations of violence and finally do not account for societal gender inequality.¹¹⁰⁸

However, many scholars that take a more psychological approach to IPV consider feminist explanations limited and insufficient to explain the individual motivations of abusiveness. For the discussion of this batch of psychological studies of IPV, it is important to lay down some

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., 7 and 21.

¹¹⁰⁰ See for example DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz (2007).

¹¹⁰¹ Lawson (2013, 21).

¹¹⁰² Anderson (2005, 853).

¹¹⁰³ Such as the ground-breaking study by Strauss, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980).

¹¹⁰⁴ This can be seen for example in Dutton (2006) and DeKeseredy (2011).

¹¹⁰⁵ Lawson (2013, 21).

¹¹⁰⁶ For example, Anderson (2005) and Jakobsen (2014).

¹¹⁰⁷ Anderson (2005, 854).

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 853.

conceptual tools. One of these central theoretical frameworks comprises attachment theory which has dominated IPV studies in recent years. Attachment theory was formulated by John Bowlby¹¹⁰⁹ and developed by Mary Ainsworth and colleagues¹¹¹⁰ to explain children's responses as the proximate availability and responsiveness of the caregivers changed and the implications of this early relationship for personality development and later social behaviours.¹¹¹¹ Depending on infants' early contact with their parents, secure, anxious or avoidant attachment styles could develop, although these do not have to be determinative and can be reversed as a result of later experiences. Attachment styles can be understood as "patterns of relational expectations, emotions and behaviours that result from internalising a particular history of attachment experiences."¹¹¹² These are also known as internal working models (IWMs) and influence both how one thinks about oneself and the availability of the other figure.¹¹¹³ Children whose parents are proximately available and consistently respond with warmth are likely to develop secure models of attachment and will learn to think that people may be counted on, while those who are neglected can become anxious and seek more attention or entirely deactivate their attachment system as a method of achieving self-sufficiency. The premise of attachment theory is that these early experiences will mediate how these children will create relationships with peers and intimate partners later in life. Adult insecure attachment profiles are often typologized as secure, fearful and avoidant. Individuals with anxious attachment are generally insecure about losing the attachment figure. People with avoidant attachment types, on the other hand, consider attachment futile, downplay the importance of intimacy and prioritise their independence.¹¹¹⁴

Attachment insecurity has been increasingly related to the development of personality disorders characterised by borderline traits and anti-social behaviours, which are not considered mutually exclusive.¹¹¹⁵ As Donald Dutton and Katherine White have put it, "attachment might be a risk marker for violence, but has to 'crystallize' into something more: a chronic disturbance of the self with angry acting out as a behavioural characteristic or angry temperament."¹¹¹⁶ The evidence base includes a study that found an association, mediated by some personality disorder, between avoidant attachment and psychological and physical violence and a direct relationship between anxious attachment and psychological (only) violence.¹¹¹⁷ The available scholarship agrees that attachment problems and personality disorders are equally relevant for male and female abusers.¹¹¹⁸

It has equally been related to a reduced sense of empathy, which refers to the capacity to understand emotions (such as distress or pain) felt by others. Researchers usually distinguish empathy into two components, the affective and the cognitive.¹¹¹⁹ The former refers to the spontaneous vicarious feeling of what the other feels, while the latter defines the empathic response that follows conscious mentalization or perspective-taking of the situation of the other.¹¹²⁰ Mentalization has been described as "the capacity to reflect upon one's own thoughts, emotions, motives, and behaviour, as well as those of others, in a regulated manner."¹¹²¹ In general, empathic capacity will result in pro-social actions (consideration, compassion, altruism), but this does not preclude the possibility of more ego-centric responses associated with 'negative

¹¹⁰⁹ Bowlby (1969; 1980)

¹¹¹⁰ Ainsworth et al. (1978).

¹¹¹¹ For a thorough reading on attachment theory and major findings see Grossman, Grossman and Waters (2005) and Simpson and Rholes (2015).

¹¹¹² Mikulincer and Shaver (2015, 126).

¹¹¹³ Mauricio, Tein and Lopez (2007, 140).

¹¹¹⁴ Li and Chan (2012, 408).

¹¹¹⁵ See the systematic reviews by Dutton and White (2012) and Cameranesi (2016).

¹¹¹⁶ Dutton and White (2012, 479).

¹¹¹⁷ Mauricio, Tein and Lopez (2007).

¹¹¹⁸ For female abusers see Goldenson et al. (2007).

¹¹¹⁹ Schaffer, Clark and Jeglic (2009), Howe (2013, 13-14).

¹¹²⁰ Schaffer, Clark and Jeglic (2009, 587).

¹¹²¹ Stern, Borelli and Smiley (2015, 3).

empathy.’¹¹²² Individuals with such empathic capacity have been described as self-centred, unconcerned with other people’s feelings as long as these do not impinge on their own, and generally difficult people to be in a relationship with.¹¹²³ It is postulated that the development of empathy is closely associated with the type of care and responses that the child receives from her/his caregivers at a young age.¹¹²⁴ Scholars have recurrently found associations between parenting styles that are warm and reliable and higher levels of empathy and pro-social behaviours in children, while authoritarian, harsh or dismissing parental caregiving tactics had been identified as risk factors for later anti-social behaviour.¹¹²⁵ It has been shown in various studies that even when girls and boys develop similarly, girls evidence a higher empathic ability.¹¹²⁶

Donald Dutton’s work on IPV has been seminal in modelling how attachment styles and abusiveness in the intimate relationship could be combined in the same framework.¹¹²⁷ In his aforementioned monograph he drew attention to the evidence that children who experience abuse in childhood tend to become abusive themselves in later life, boys more so than girls. Dutton focused on boys and noticed that abuse by the parents was likely to foster in the boys aversiveness and withdrawal, while the lack of a healthy relationship with the caregivers hindered his personality development. Frequent changes in the parent’s caregiving tactics will likely obstruct the development of attachment security in the child, such as when a mother responds to her son at times warmly and at times in a detached manner. The mother’s parenting styles may, in turn, be mediated by her having to deal with an abusive husband, which highlights another mechanism for the generational perpetuation of family violence. Dutton observed that such boys were likely to develop a personality characterized by Borderline Personality Organization (BPO), a milder form of the aforementioned borderline personality disorder. The intimate relationships these boys entered in as adult men simply provided the context in which their childhood-related attachment and personality problems manifested. Many of the abusive individuals Dutton had worked with were attachment-fearful, which meant that they felt fear of being abandoned, while being unable to form balanced relationships with their female partners. Men with a BPO profile seemed particularly prone to feelings of fear, anger or jealousy and had a tendency to interpret the behaviours of the partner under a distorted lens shaped by their own personal fears and personality defects. The attachment-avoidant men, on the other hand, tended to perceive their partners’ attachment to them more negatively (as clinginess) and seemed to display reduced empathic capacity for female partners.

Like Dutton, Linda Mills has approached partner abuse as an intergenerational phenomenon that relates to parenting styles and child abuse.¹¹²⁸ She centred on the fact that childhood victimisation made it more likely that this child would become abusive in adult romantic relationships or show proneness to remain in destructive relationships and blame oneself. Men abused in childhood were found to be more likely to respond to abuse with aggression, as opposed to women child victims who generally turned inwards and fell into depression, although as Mills noted, “these gender reactions may be evolving as gender roles have correspondingly changed over time.”¹¹²⁹ The use of violence was associated with the *perception and feeling* of one “losing their position of power and control”,¹¹³⁰ which led to shame and the need to replace shame with pride by shaming others. Mills relied primarily on the seminal work of James Gilligan who had argued that criminal offenders he had closely worked with had been driven essentially by shame, a feeling that he

¹¹²² Howe (2013, 88).

¹¹²³ Ibid.

¹¹²⁴ Bischof-Köhler (1991), Strayer and Roberts (2004), Schaffer, Clark and Jeglic (2009).

¹¹²⁵ Schaffer, Clark and Jeglic (2009, 588).

¹¹²⁶ Primary references included in Li and Chan (2012) and Allemand, Steiger and Fend (2015).

¹¹²⁷ Dutton (e.g. 1994, 2006, 2007).

¹¹²⁸ Mills (2006, 2008).

¹¹²⁹ Mills (2008, 632).

¹¹³⁰ Ibid, 633.

conjectured they tried to overcome by shaming others with abusive language and actions. This position pertained to a different understanding of power than the one held by feminist writers which holds that it is a threatened ‘masculinity’—a social construct fostered in power hierarchies premised on gender—that leads many men to become abusive with intimate partners. Mills’ analysis rather put emphasis on mental states and feelings as motivational forces of violence, suggesting the centrality of childhood abuse history in understanding both abusiveness and why some individuals might endure partner violence more than others.

Other psychological perspectives have been more accommodating to feminist perspectives of violence. Psychologist and psychoanalyst Adam Jukes, for instance, has emphatically spoken in terms of masculinities to explain the motivations and dynamics of abuse in intimate partnerships. Although he fully condoned that these abusive masculinities are socially conditioned, he did not appear to dismiss entirely the idea of certain psychological processes that are shared. In *Men Who Batter Women* (1999) he proposed that abuse is dependent on three variables, namely: 1) the intensity of the original frustration, which he explained using Freudian psychoanalysis and in particular the Oedipal syndrome, 2) the models of masculinity available to the developing infant and young male, and 3) the extent of culturally approved and legitimised violence in the culture in which he is raised, also in relation to females.¹¹³¹ He drew heavily from Freudian Oedipus syndrome theory and introduced variations of his own, thus preoccupying considerably with the unconscious and the impact of the super ego on the conscious self. In other words, Jukes combined a quasi-essentialist with a constructionist view of masculinities, the first of which enabled him to universalise certain properties, and the second to allow for variability (reminiscent in my view of Nicholson’s “biological foundationalism”).

1.4. The paradigmatic shifts in the international/development scholarship on domestic violence can be delineated through three works over the span of ten years. In all these works, as it will be seen, the fundamental premise has been that domestic violence is gendered, although the theorisation of what this means has evolved over time.

In *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women’s Response* (1999) December Green employed the concept of ‘gender violence’ to analyse domestic violence and female genital mutilation (FGM) in the African context. Inter alia, the book combined insights and information from cases of domestic abuse in different African societies and made an attempt to provide a picture of the complexity of the phenomenon in a way that was reflective and avoided generalisations. Green used three analytical frameworks from the feminist paradigm (Radical, Marxist and Liberal) to analyse spousal abuse, looking first at the institutions of family and marriage, then macroeconomic conditions and globalisation and finally state legislation on gender violence. Her study provided various directions in identifying factors that contributed to perpetuate spousal abuse across the countries she reviewed and it was helpful that she often cited directly women’s testimonies. Overall, the book drew attention to how gender relations and expectations about marriage and gender relations might be contributing to spousal abuse, how socio-economic pressures might be affecting gender relations, and also what role the state might have in the perpetuation of the problem. Green admitted in the introduction of her book that most of her work was descriptive, and that she had been conscious not to “essentialise” and “other” African women and not to project them as victims and “objects.”¹¹³² She often drew from Black feminist theory to present a more nuanced picture of women’s everyday lives and experiences of resistance.¹¹³³

In her book, Green first established that gender violence was a human rights abuse and she cited various international conventions to justify this. The definition and aetiology for ‘gender violence’ she employed was articulated as follows:

¹¹³¹ Jukes (1999, 159).

¹¹³² Green (1999, 9).

¹¹³³ Ibid.

Gender violence is commonly defined as violent acts (real or threatened) perpetrated on females because they are female. Whether gender violence operates as direct physical violence, threat, or intimidation, the intent is to perpetuate and promote hierarchical gender relations. It is manifested in several forms, all serving the same end: the preservation of male control over resources and power.¹¹³⁴

In other words, violence was understood as constitutive of gender inequality. While Green's aim for the book was to look at domestic violence as it emerged from the local context,¹¹³⁵ she clearly preconceived its aetiology and employed previously conceived feminist theories as her main lens of analysis. She combined a Radical, Marxist and Liberal feminist lens because she understood gender violence to be the result of interlocking oppressions.¹¹³⁶ She therefore proposed a multi-level frame of analysis that incorporated family relations, economic relations, legal structures and changes within the economic sphere. She espoused first the radical feminist stance that sexual relations in the family provide a locus for female subordination. Radical feminists, as she explained, located women's abuse in marriage and the family which was understood to perpetuate sexual relations and socioeconomic arrangements that subordinate women and position them at a disadvantage, often under the control of husbands and male kin. She then employed a Marxist frame to discuss how "gender violence expresses the economic relations of power."¹¹³⁷ Under the Marxist school of thought, "the lives of women are determined by economic and ideological assumptions on an international scale."¹¹³⁸ Finally, she used a liberal feminist lens to look closely into the realm of politics, laws and state ideology. According to this school of thought, the state has the potential to solve gender violence but due to various failures, unintended or intended, the state does not do this effectively.¹¹³⁹ In brief, Green employed three western feminist theoretical frameworks,¹¹⁴⁰ all of which in some form were premised on the presupposition of an oppressive system and "patriarchy." She gave the following definition of patriarchy in her book:

It is commonly argued that patriarchy is a web of public and private structures, ideology, and mechanisms for the control of women in which the family plays a unique role. According to Radical feminists, the family is the institution most central to patriarchy because it indoctrinates males and females through psychosocial conditioning and socialisation into gender roles. In other words, the family provides the foundation for the social construction of sexuality.¹¹⁴¹

Green used the radical feminist lens to appraise the institution of marriage and the family as the *locus* of women's subordination and a contributing factor to wife battering, which suggests that she worked through the above definition. Although she clearly stated that one should not generalise societies in the African region, she noted that "'traditional' African marriage is commonly understood as an alliance between two kinship groups for the purposes of realizing goals beyond the immediate interests of the husband and wife, namely procreation and survival"¹¹⁴² (my emphasis). She also appraised wife battering as exemplifying "how the family controls 'purity' by imposing ideals of female behavior."¹¹⁴³ Later on she cited Freeman's work to suggest that religious marriages often reinforce the deference around marriage which contributes

¹¹³⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

¹¹³⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹¹³⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹¹³⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹¹³⁸ Ibid., 54-55.

¹¹³⁹ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁴⁰ These are described as 'western' because they first emerged and were formulated with the theoretical presuppositions described by Green within western epistemology and societal experience. This does not mean that local variations do not exist, influenced by these mainstreamed theories or emerging independently.

¹¹⁴¹ Green (1999, 15).

¹¹⁴² Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁴³ Ibid., 20.

to women internalising oppressive norms.¹¹⁴⁴ She quoted Wini Breines and Linda Gordon to suggest that “Violence by husbands against wives should not be seen as a breakdown in social order but an affirmation of a particular sort of social order, namely a patriarchal one.”¹¹⁴⁵ She quoted again these authors, Freeman and Klein to enforce her opinion that spousal violence is not individual pathology of deviant behaviour, but “a behaviour that emerges out of the social relations of domination.”¹¹⁴⁶ In other words, the author’s work displayed the conventional dismissal of psychopathological and other ontogenetic factors and espoused the line of thinking that violence is primarily an indication of a functioning patriarchy.

Afterwards, Green looked at macro-level economic changes and proposed that as women’s employment patterns changed, relations in the family could become disruptive for a number of reasons. Abuse might be a male response of insecurity to the socioeconomic realm, which could suggest that men with the least coping mechanisms could be in more danger of becoming abusive. However, as Green noted, research had shown that middle-class men also became abusive, which pointed to the existence of other mediating factors.¹¹⁴⁷ Finally she referred to the state and the role of family laws and their contribution to perpetuating domestic violence, accepting most scholars’ position that family laws reflect “particular standards and constructions of how women must conduct their personal and social lives.”¹¹⁴⁸ She wrote that in many African contexts, upon marriage the wife becomes the powerless partner in the union.¹¹⁴⁹ She also noted that in many cases divorce laws might not provide women with options, perpetuating their abuse. Women themselves might be reluctant to divorce not to lose custody of the children,¹¹⁵⁰ for instance, because they cannot own property or because they might lose access to husband property. Sexual abuse within marriage might also be related to state or customary laws, if these do not recognise marital rape as rape or do not condemn it as explicitly as other forms of rape and abuse. Women themselves might not report this violence because they would not like to see their husbands incarcerated.¹¹⁵¹ Green mentions also the unavailability of divorce as a potential factor for domestic abuse. Divorce may be infeasible due to lack of money on the bride’s side to return bridewealth. It might also be associated with social stigma.

With a degree of reflexivity, Green noted that looking only at social context cannot be sufficient because abuse must also be seen as an individual choice. As she explained, not all men abuse their wives, even when this is the norm in the wider socio-cultural context. This would point to the need to look at individual decision-making processes and how social norms and beliefs play into this decision-making. Faith was also mentioned in various testimonies that Green included in her book, although she did not incorporate spirituality directly in her gender analysis. She included for instance the testimony of one woman who said that she had stayed with her violent husband because she was a Catholic and they had children together,¹¹⁵² and another woman in South Africa who said that she had shared her ordeal with a religious instructor but was sent back after being told not to provoke her husband.¹¹⁵³ Another woman said the following about her husband: “He has children by another wife, but because he had to pay a lot of bridewealth for me and we were married in church he says he cannot divorce me.”¹¹⁵⁴ Such testimonies suggested strong religious influences, but regretfully these were not contextualised and further analysed.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

In her book Green provided a detailed, carefully weaved presentation of spousal abuse without however substantive contextualisation. Subsequently, because context was not investigated thoroughly in her work, religio-cultural influences were not discussed. And despite her genuine effort to remain reflexive, she did not consider the power of her own epistemological location. Although Green's study is well-researched and diverse, once it is recognised that the information she included was ultimately interpreted through a preconceived lens, it becomes questionable how effective this study is for understanding how those who experience the violence locally think about it and perpetuate it through their own perceptions, attitudes and behaviour.

The paradigmatic shift that occurred in gender theorisation due to critiques by non-white woman and the introduction of intersectionality theory is visible in the volume *Domestic Violence at the Margins* (2005) compiled by Natalie Sokoloff and Christina Pratt. Although this book does not focus on Africa, it includes case-studies from around the world. Contributing authors take an intersectional approach to the analysis of domestic violence, and aim to account for racial, ethnic and other social parameters that are perceived to be constitutive elements of social identities and subject positions. Its editors confirm this in the introduction of the volume where they state that:

The scholars in this anthology reject simplistic analyses of the role of culture in domestic violence. Rather, they argue for addressing how different communities' cultural experiences of violence (including domestic violence) are mediated through structural forms of oppression such as racism, economic exploitation, colonialism, *heterosexism*, and other systems of inequality. These scholars and activists are wary of characterising culture as a purely negative force: and yet many recognise the danger of justifying violence against women with 'cultural explanations.' (my emphasis)¹¹⁵⁵

This passage indicates a departure from the conventional predisposition to appraise culture in monolithically negative terms regarding gender (and specifically domestic) violence, without however dismissing altogether 'cultural explanations.' However, as the above passage and the works in the book suggest, the heteronormative framework continues to be directly tied to gender and to be conceptualised as part of the regulatory gender edifice that sustains gender violence (gender and the dual-sexuality system are never disassociated from each other).

In this volume the authors also show awareness that intimate violence among gay and lesbian couples has shown gaps in feminist theorisations and make attempts to address these conceptual gaps. According to Pratt and Sokoloff, "LGBT women find little sanctuary in feminist theories of domestic violence that are built upon the premise that domestic violence manifests male oppression of women."¹¹⁵⁶ In Chapter 6 of the same anthology, Valli Kalei Kanuha provides a more detailed discussion of IPV among lesbian couples of colour proposing that racism interacts with sexism to marginalise lesbian women of colour and to render them helpless both in the white heterosexist and racist society, and their own ethnic communities. In this way, lesbians of colour are silenced, which sustains an isolated existence. In addition, because of living in what are assumed to be homophobic and racist societies these lesbians of colour have few conduits to seek solutions for the violent relationships they experience. The author concludes that "violence between lesbian partners differs significantly from violence in heterosexual couples owing to the powerful effect of societal homophobia that silences and obstructs help-seeking."¹¹⁵⁷ Although well-argued, this explanation focuses primarily on external structures (where racism or homophobia are defined), and does not explore the implications of intimacy on the relationship of the couple or the personality characteristics of the partners and their expectations in the intimate relationship.

A final work that is important to examine is Sally Engle Merry's *Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective* (2009) which is often cited within international development cycles. Merry's book is

¹¹⁵⁵ Sokoloff and Pratt (2005, 6).

¹¹⁵⁶ Kauer (1999) cited in Sokoloff and Pratt (2005, 20).

¹¹⁵⁷ Kanuha (2005, 71).

especially helpful also because she provided a genealogy of paradigmatic thought about domestic violence in the development context. Merry first traced the original discourse of gender violence to the North American battered women's movement. She explained that gender violence in those days centred primarily on the battering of women in intimate relationships, and specifically white middle-class women. Gradually the conceptualisation of gender violence was picked up by the international feminist movement and was expanded to incorporate other types of violence. The issue of gender violence was further internationalised during the 1990s, when the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women (1993) was passed by the United Nations and the Beijing Platform of Action (1995). Although initially gender violence referred primarily to the battering of women in intimate relationships, it was gradually used to refer also to war-time violence (such as mass rapes of women), sexual abuse in prisons and customary forms of violence such as female genital mutilation or dowry-related murders.

In parallel, the theorisation of both 'gender' and 'violence' was revisited, not least due to contributions from the field of anthropology. According to Merry, anthropological works on violence, emblematically represented in the works of Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) and Veena Das (2008), gradually fostered an understanding that violence is an everyday phenomenon, hidden in the ordinariness of life, as opposed to being comprised of 'senseless' acts of violence in extremely stressful conditions such as war. This understanding led many scholars subsequently to transfer their interest from understanding motivations to exploring the meanings of violence. In this paradigm, violence cannot be conceptualised outside of its socio-cultural context, because it is understood that this context gives it meaning. Within the domestic violence discourses of North America 'violence' also expanded to include not only physical or sexual abuse, but also psychological violence, such as name-calling in marriage which was understood to be motivated by the desire to make women feel worthless.¹¹⁵⁸

In parallel, refinements were made to the concept of 'gender.' These were highlighted in the earlier genealogical analysis and included: "the shift from sex to gender, from roles to performances, and from essentialised gender identities to intersectional ones."¹¹⁵⁹ Merry opined that the shift from speaking in terms of sex to speaking in terms of gender had been reinforced by new anthropological work that showed that sex roles "were highly variable and that they were produced through social processes of learning and training that instilled ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman into each person's consciousness."¹¹⁶⁰ Under the influence of post-structuralist theory and, in particular, Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, anthropologists started to conceptualise gender as performative practice. Subsequently, doing violence became conceptualised as being indivisible from doing gender. As Merry explained, "[b]y putting up with violent assaults without complaint, minimizing the violence, calling it deserved, or treating it as inevitable, women 'do' gender."¹¹⁶¹

As a result of these conceptual shifts, the very theorisation of domestic violence changed over time. In the earlier days of the battered women's movement in North America the prevalent idea was that violence was inflicted primarily by men and was enabled by a patriarchal system that disempowered women and made them susceptible to such treatment. This emphasis on patriarchy was not merely the effect of the fact that the movement was dominated by a white middle-class majority, but because it was politically expedient to use this terminology for furthering the feminist agenda by politicising the private sphere. Merry explained that, "[b]y defining violence as fundamental to patriarchy and patriarchy as a set of institutions and ideologies that subordinates all women, violence against one woman became violence against all."¹¹⁶² It is not curious, then, that the theory of patriarchy being the single most important factor of women's

¹¹⁵⁸ Merry (2009, 4).

¹¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 15.

oppression and abuse was soon criticised. Inter alia, it was countered for sustaining the monolithic perception of men as perpetrators and women as passive victims and also refusing to see instances where women actively challenged and negotiated their victimhood and in which men also were victimised. Violence in lesbian couples in particular, which was increasingly shown to be mutual violence, even further weakened conceptualisations of gender violence as the product of a patriarchal normative system.

Merry proposed in her book her own understanding of gender violence within the context of anthropological approaches. She defined gender violence as the mediator of ‘doing’ gender, “as violence whose meaning depends on the gendered identities of the parties”¹¹⁶³ and “violence that is comprehensible because of the gender of the interaction.”¹¹⁶⁴ Thus, women are targeted because of a system that breeds masculinities which are defined and sedimented through the use of violence. Transsexuals, in turn, are targeted because they depart from normative sexualities. In other words, violence was understood in reference to the genders of victims and victimisers and the gender norms associated with these gender identities in a specified sociocultural system. Although in various individual cases that Merry mentioned in her work violence seemed to have had psychological, emotional and mental health parameters, such as in her testimonies of lesbian intimate violence, she focused exclusively on the cultural conditions of the gender violence.¹¹⁶⁵ Even as she acknowledged these parameters, she appeared to consider them as constitutive of gender violence, as highlighted in her observation that, “both individual features of emotionality and anger and the collective use of violence in social life shape the...gender violence.”¹¹⁶⁶ In brief, both the form of violence and its expressions and manifestations were located in the gendered regimes that were imagined to underpin every society and to define subjectivities and social relations.

Merry’s work highlights some trends that are visible in virtually all scholarship of domestic violence in the development context, and also in many feminist studies in the international scholarship on domestic violence. These include the tendency to assume a theory of violence based on influential (western) feminist theories, usually conceptualised at the interactional and structural level. As far as this volume is concerned, while Merry drew testimonies from previous anthropological studies she had conducted as well as from the available scholarship, she did not feel the need to embed these testimonies in a thorough presentation of local cosmological and value systems. Despite the increasing expansion of GBV scholars into anthropology,¹¹⁶⁷ researchers within international development sector who have questioned the premises that domestic violence is ‘gendered’ or have problematized the fact that gender has been consistently understood in reference to non-local theories of the self and the mainstreamed gender metaphysics as previewed earlier have been almost non-existent. A more critical and exceptional work is Hilde Jakobsen’s study from Tanzania, which is discussed in the main body of the thesis.

1.5. In an article that attempted to clarify feminist positions on gender and violence Kristin Anderson argued that the difference between family studies and feminist analyses of domestic violence is not only methodological,¹¹⁶⁸ but also theoretical, and has to do first and foremost with how gender has been conventionally understood among the different groups. According to Anderson, “amid the controversy over the definition and measurement of violence, intimate violence researchers have neglected to recognize that there is equivalent controversy over the conceptualization and measurement of gender.”¹¹⁶⁹ She attributed this confusion in part to the diverse and often conflicting conceptualisations of gender within feminist and gender studies, and

¹¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹¹⁶⁷ For example, see the list of contributions in Dauer (2014).

¹¹⁶⁸ As suggested in Johnson (1995).

¹¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

also to “dramatic” changes that have taken place in gender theorisations in more recent years. The progression of gender theory, she noted, has not been communicated effectively in domestic violence literature and their insights not yet incorporated in the discussion of IPV. She proceeded therefore to examine a number of gender theorisations in order to demonstrate that how one understood partner violence to be gendered depended on how one conceptualised gender.

Citing Risman’s typology (1998), Anderson discussed three theoretical approaches to gender, the individualist, interactionist and structuralist approach. She argued that conventional studies of sex-symmetry, such as those in family studies, had generally employed an (implicit) individualist conceptualisation of gender, which meant that gender had been often conflated with sex, and had been conceived as an individual trait. This, she noted, was reflected in surveys where the sex of the respondent was made an independent variable and then correlated with domestic behaviour. Most of these studies had found gender-neutral results (i.e sex did not matter). Another example that she referred to was the Bem Sex Role Inventory which incorporates individuals’ own assessment of how feminine, masculine or androgynous they consider themselves to be. Studies that employed this inventory had showed that more feminine men and women were less likely to become violent than masculine men. A final example were surveys that classified males as traditional or egalitarian, and had found that more traditional men were more likely to engage in violent behaviour. Anderson argued that all these studies had been underpinned by an individualist conceptualisation of gender, which ignored many other dimensions of gender as theorised in feminist theory. Not surprisingly, scholars had found different results because they captured different aspects of gender.¹¹⁷⁰

Anderson emphasised that an individualist conceptualisation of gender (gender as individual characteristics and behaviours) was not sufficient in domestic violence research as it could not, for instance explain or make sense of the cases of intimate partner abuse among gay and lesbian couples. She explained that,

This “sex differences” approach ignores the complex ways in which gender operates in social interactions between same-sex people. For example, studies of masculinities and violence suggest that much of male violence perpetrated by youth is intended to impress an audience of male peers (Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 1993). Moreover, researchers who use the data on same-sex partner violence to claim that gender does not matter ignore the intricate ways in which gender and heterosexuality are constructed in mutually-reinforcing ways in contemporary Western societies (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995). Gay men and lesbian women must negotiate a world in which their masculinity and femininity are called into question due to their sexual identity. Findings that partner assaults occur within gay male and lesbian relationships at the same, lower, or higher rates as within heterosexual relationships do not challenge the argument that gender is an important component of intimate partner violence. Rather, these findings lead to additional questions about how gender interacts with heterosexism to influence the dynamics of violence in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.¹¹⁷¹

Anderson’s comment suggests that gender conceptualisation is grounded in a theorised direct relationship between gender and binary sexuality, a binary characteristic of western societies. It also emerges that gender is underpinned by a binary understanding of agency, of subordination or subversion of the normative regulatory framework, highlighted for example in Anderson’s observation that “Gender exists in the expectations and demands that we place on people and in their desire to meet (or subvert) these expectations.”¹¹⁷² Such associations are evident in the broader scholarship of gender studies.

¹¹⁷⁰ Anderson (2005, 855).

¹¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 856.

¹¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Anderson also discussed the interactionist and structuralist gender theorisations to demonstrate that gender can be conceptualised as an element of social structures and social relations, in addition to being a characteristic of individuals. As she noted, “the interactionist approach shifts our thinking from the question of how masculinity causes violence to the question of how violence causes masculinity.”¹¹⁷³ In the interactionist model, violence has meaning and an audience and serves a clear purpose. The meaning and purpose changes according to the gender identities of those who are involved in the interaction. How one responds to violence by individuals of certain gender identities may also depend on gender. According to the interactionist model, becoming masculine is to do violence, which helps to predict that a male might use violence when he feels the need to establish his masculinity. One such instance may be when his masculinity is questioned or threatened, for example when a male loses his role as breadwinner in a societal context in which such a role is valued and is a constitutive element of identity formation.

In the structuralist model, Anderson explained, gender is conceived as the very edifice that underpins societal organisations, identities, attitudes and interactions. She writes: “The structuralist theory of gender suggests that an adequate understanding of gender and intimate partner violence must consider the ways in which gender is used to organize social life.”¹¹⁷⁴ Anderson argued that the institution of marriage and the use of violence are organised by gender, the latter because boys are trained in it from an early age whereas girls are generally barred from it. It follows from this that within the structuralist model, gender is again directly linked to dual sexuality and the heteronormative framework. Regardless of what conceptualisations of gender Anderson discussed, interactionist or structuralist, the underpinning belief appeared to be that gender was useful as a lens because it allowed one to account for the different ways in which classifications in society, and the ideas, meanings and expectations that sustained those, influenced human behaviour and the experience of violence.

Appendix: Chapter 2

2.1. Historical conceptualisations of religion within western epistemology have been inextricable from the West’s experience with Christianity. Roughly speaking, stages in western history included the reign of Roman Catholicism, Reformation struggles to liberate theology from politics, and post-Reformation Enlightenment to liberate ‘reason’ from theology. While Christian theology still held sway it was used as a prism to analyse other traditions and to find the ‘essence’ of religion through comparative exercises (the known as ‘phenomenological’ approach within religious studies). As secularisation and the domination of ‘reason’ spread in western societies, thinkers of all sorts started to define religion in various ways that resonated with the stage of the secularisation process (as a ‘natural’ phenomenon, as transcendental *sui generis* or ‘of its own kind,’ as system of symbols and rituals, and so forth) all of which essentially drew attention away from the historical and contextual nature of theological traditions and local exegetical traditions.¹¹⁷⁵ Vestiges of these historical paradigms can be seen in development thinking about religion today, as exemplified in tacit demarcations between secular and religious, belief and reason or private and public.¹¹⁷⁶ The post-modern movement seems to have contributed to the departure from textual analysis and the centring on everyday embodied experiences, preferably of less privileged groups and marginalised segments.¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁷³ Anderson (2005, 856).

¹¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 859.

¹¹⁷⁵ Geertz (1993), Asad (1993), McCutcheon (2001), Sutcliffe (2004), McCutcheon (2006), Saliers et al. (2010).

¹¹⁷⁶ Rakodi (2011) and Deneulin and Rakodi (2011).

¹¹⁷⁷ Saliers et al. (2010).

Appendix: Chapter 3

3.1. *Kəbrä Nəgäst* tells the story of Makeda, the Queen of Sheba (whose Ethiopian identity has yet to be established) and her trip to Jerusalem to meet King Solomon.¹¹⁷⁸ In this trip the Queen was so impressed with Solomon's wisdom that she decided, the story goes, to abandon worshipping the Sun and to worship the God of Israel. In this trip the Queen also ended up spending a night in the palace of King Solomon, where she was seduced by him. On her return to Ethiopia the Queen gave birth to a son who was named Menelik. According to the story, as a grown man, Menelik revisited Jerusalem where he was officially recognised by King Solomon as his son. Before returning to Ethiopia, Menelik and his companions stole the Ark of the Covenant and brought it to Ethiopia, where it is said to have been held since, specifically at the Church of Mary Zion in Aksum.

3.2. Two historical examples are illustrative. As one instance, in the 13th century Jesuit missionaries instigated theological controversy when they criticised circumcision in Ethiopia as un-Christian practices and proposed that this needed to be abolished. This created much ado among the local clergy and the laypeople, until Emperor Gelawdewos issued a Confession of the faith to settle the matter. In this, he argued that such practices were not upheld as the Law of Moses in Ethiopia, but as “the culture of men.”¹¹⁷⁹ He subtly differentiated between the veneration of the Old Testament as religious law and the preservation of Old Testament practices as custom and habitual practice.

Another example is the controversy that arose over the observation of the Sabbath also in the 13th century. According to local accounts, Abba Ewostatewos, who came from Northern Tigray, was a staunch supporter of the Sabbath. While he was opposed by other learned clergy at the time, he managed to create a fellowship who continued to defend the position on the rightness of observing the Sabbath even after his death. Eventually, Zara Yaqob, the Emperor who arbitrated the controversy at the time, had to propose a middle ground in order to bring unity into the Church, which seemed to have disturbed local life for over a century. He decided on the preservation of both Saturday and Sunday as worship days, while the followers of Ewostatewos agreed to respect canonical rules they previously refused to follow due to the theological disagreement.¹¹⁸⁰

3.3. For example, Lule Melaku in his history of the EOTC mentioned St Abuna Iyesus Mo'a of Debre Hayq, the founder and abbot of Debre Hayq St Estefanos Monastery, listing him as one of the prominent monks who revived monastic life in the 13th century. He then narrated how this monk cooperated with Yikuno Amlak, the King who re-established the Solomonian dynasty after the Zagwe era, to ensure that the Aqabe Seat (the most important ecclesiastical official post at the time) would be conferred to him and his predecessors in Debre Hayq monastery. Melaku concluded that “Monasteries and Churches which enjoyed royal or local princely patronage provided the cultural leadership that kept Ethiopian Christendom alive.”¹¹⁸¹

3.4. Such tensions were believed to originate in the un-Orthodox mentalities of some members of the Church, administrative staff and clergy alike, which interfered and opposed the work of the *MQ*. This was not acknowledged as formal conflict, but as informal problems within the body of the Church remnant of historical heresies/theological debates that affected and divided the

¹¹⁷⁸ Levine (1974, 92-93).

¹¹⁷⁹ Melaku (2010, 113-115).

¹¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 63-69.

¹¹⁸¹ Melaku (2010, 56).

Church.¹¹⁸² Other interlocutors suggested that differences between the Council of the Scholars and the *MQ* may exist, including how each has responded to a changing society. A few theologians and learned clergy explained that the hierarchy has been fairly hostile to any form of change, resulting in the Church becoming almost irrelevant to a fast-changing society. The *MQ*, on the contrary, has been active and innovative in its teaching and dissemination approaches, employing also new technologies, which might have made them more appealing to the younger generations.¹¹⁸³ Essentially, the problems seemed to concern power dynamics within the Church and financial issues.

According to the Academic Vice Dean of the Holy Trinity Theological College, the tension between the Church hierarchy and the *MQ* could be underpinned by a concern among the former that the latter have become powerful, and therefore potentially uncontrollable.¹¹⁸⁴ For this reason, the hierarchy may try to contain it as best as it can at this early stage. John Binns has also suggested this: “While it is supported by some bishops, others are concerned at the extent of its power and influence.”¹¹⁸⁵ This opinion is enforced by the fact that the *MQ* has been kept organisationally limited, comprising only a small part of the Sunday School Department. This is at odds with the widespread influence and authority it has managed to establish among Church believers.

Finally, a few proposed that some tensions have had financial or money-related causes. The Church has been infamously associated with corruption and mismanagement of the funds it collects from believers. The *MQ* seems to have emphasised and encouraged the introduction of regular audits so as to address the problem and appease the criticisms. This has fostered tensions with those officials who are currently in power and benefit from whatever corruption might exist, as suggested by one learned scholar: “The *MQ* says that the church should be managed properly and audited and because that threatens people’s personal benefit, it creates conflict. For example, if I am a church official and use the church’s money for my personal benefit I will not accept for my church to be audited.”¹¹⁸⁶

3.5. The Council was convened in 451 AD to establish that Jesus Christ was both Man and God, in response to the Eutychian doctrine supported a one ‘*physis*’ (nature) position. The Ethiopian Church, at the time under the Patriarchate of Alexandria, did not attend the Council but followed the decision of its mother-Church to reject the Council’s postulation of Christology. The Council concluded with the decision that Christ exists in two ‘*physeis*’ united ‘without confusion, without change, without division and without separation.’ The EOTC conformed to the decision of the Council of Chalcedon and condemned Eutyches who had formulated the doctrine of a single nature. However, it regarded Dioscorus, who was condemned by the Council (although admittedly not on theological but rather canonical grounds) as a saint.¹¹⁸⁷

3.6. According to the EOTC, they came from Constantinople (4), Caesarea (1), Asia Minor (1), Cilicia (southern Asia Minor along the Mediterranean coast) (1), Cosia (today’s Cyprus) and Antioch (1).¹¹⁸⁸ Semere Habtemariam also reported the origins of a few by name citing the book titled *Gedle Alef*: “Liqanos hailed from Constantinople, Yimata from Cosait, Sehma from Antioch, Guba from Cilicia, Afse from Asia Minor, Alef from Caesarea, and Aregawi, Isaac (Gerima) and Pantelewon from Rome.”¹¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the disparity seems to be in the number of saints who came from Constantinople or Rome, but it may be that Rome could refer to ‘New Rome’ which meant

¹¹⁸² ICE20.

¹¹⁸³ ICE2.

¹¹⁸⁴ ICE2.

¹¹⁸⁵ Binns (2017, 243).

¹¹⁸⁶ ICE20.

¹¹⁸⁷ Isaac (2012, 20).

¹¹⁸⁸ Mekarios et al. (1996, 129).

¹¹⁸⁹ Habtemariam (2017, 134).

Constantinople. Sergew Hable Selassie in turn has written: “[T]hey came from different parts of the Eastern Roman Empire, such as Constantinople and Syria. They were all adherents of the same doctrine however.”¹¹⁹⁰

3.7. In general, scholars define these two schools according to the exegetical approach they took regarding Christology, with Alexandrians being associated with a more allegorical approach—reportedly influenced by the works of Origen—that emphasised the ontological unity of Christ’s divinity and humanity, and Antiochians being viewed as more ‘history-grounded’ and tending to a distinction between the Logos and the incarnate Christ. As another writer has observed, these two schools should not be considered homogeneous and reflective of the work of those Fathers who are associated with each, but as a system of organisation that tends toward gross generalisations.¹¹⁹¹ It needs to be considered, for example, that Cyril of Alexandria was at odds with certain Antiochian figures who spoke of the dual nature of Christ, such as Theodore of Mopsuestia. However, John Chrysostom was also from Antioch and a close friend of Theodore of Mopsuestia, but arguably he shared Christological understandings similar to Cyril’s.¹¹⁹²

3.8. One member of the clergy in Aksum with modern theological studies provided the following explanation about Origen’s location in the tradition: “The Ethiopian commentary is written by Ethiopian scholars but Origen’s main contribution to the church was theology. He was an educated man and a philosopher and because he was in the early years of the Christian expansion he used his philosophical background to do Christian theology. There are two commentary books, the one with Ge’ez to Ge’ez translation and the other From Ge’ez to Amharic. [...] There is no evidence of him being excommunicated in any particular place or time. And his works are not considered to be heretical, but in his later writings he thought because God’s mercy is boundless and far surpasses even the sin of Satan, even Satan could or would be forgiven and said we should not oppose Satan being forgiven. This teaching was refused by the church scholars who claimed Satan will not be forgiven. Other than that he did not offer any heretical teachings on Christology, Pneumatology, on Lady St Mary or the saints that I know of or read. The reason the church does not accept him fully or cut him off entirely and say he is a heretic is because his works should be studied and researched before speculating he is a heretic, because this is a religious matter and for that his writings need to be found. In theology school we were taught that Gregory of Nyssa was his disciple and he said Origen had written about 6,000 works and that he was a pure church father. So before saying anything about who he was, his original works in Greek and Hebrew need to be found. But for the most part he is considered to be a good theologian and church father among theologians in Patristics.”¹¹⁹³

3.9. A popular perspective relates the beginning of the exegetical tradition with the visit of Menelik I (the son of Queen Sheba and Solomon) to Jerusalem. It is said that he was accompanied by a priest named Zadok who brought back Books of the Old Testament to Ethiopia. Another perspective, traces the beginnings in the 17th century and the work of foreign exegetes.¹¹⁹⁴ It is furthermore narrated that in the 18th century, during what is known as the Gondar period, a famous teacher of exegesis Esdros compared critical manuscripts from different places (the Lalibela Gospel, the Gerima Gospel, and the Kebran Gabriel in Lake Tana) and enhanced the *’andāmta* interpretation. The establishment of the Ge’ez–Amharic AC is in fact attributed to Esdros. Subsequently, there have been two AC traditions: the *Lay Bet* (Upper House) and the *Tač Bet* (Lower House). The *Lay Bet* is the one that did not accept the innovations of Esdros and the *Tač Bet* is the one that accepted them. The tradition holds that the AC was revised subsequently by additional teachers who created their own branches of commentary.

¹¹⁹⁰ Selassie (1970b, 7).

¹¹⁹¹ Steenberg (2005).

¹¹⁹² Lawrenz (1987).

¹¹⁹³ ICE14.

¹¹⁹⁴ Alehegne (2012, 116).

3.10. One particular work that has been positively received by the EOTC community of theologians and displays interesting patterns of exegesis is the seminal book *Women and Donkeys in Ethiopia: Gender and Christian Perspective* (available in both English and Amharic) written by Heregewoin Cherinet, a female graduate of the Holy Trinity Theological Seminary in Addis Ababa.¹¹⁹⁵ In the book Cherinet makes a theology-informed attempt to set straight the Church’s position on women and their role in the Church, exposing customary attitudes and understandings from folklore that contradict theology and are disadvantageous to women. What is interesting in Cherinet’s work is that although some references are made to established Church Fathers (such as John Chrysostom), many of the quotations she uses are taken directly from the Bible, which suggests that she does not feel the need to filter her reading through the existing and accepted interpretations of any known Church father (although it is not unlikely that in her interpretations she follows the unattributed *'andämta*). Furthermore, she often quotes and employs understandings by non-EOTC theologians, such as Michael Harper and St Augustine. This speaks of a lack of a single standard in the exegetical tradition of this Church or a standard that is becoming increasingly malleable, perhaps reflecting Ethiopians’ widely postulated openness to non-native civilisations and their tendency to critically assimilate variable influences as long as these do not distort their fundamental beliefs and values.

3.11. According to Haile Gabriel Dagne, “in rural areas, parents generally discourage the education of girls, since their function is to be housewives, and for this role no formal education is felt to be necessary.”¹¹⁹⁶ The fieldwork experience suggested that these traditional gender expectations and norms were probably propagated not only by parents, but possibly by members of the clergy as well. A woman at one of the villages of work asserted that religious education “was only for boys” and girls could learn about their faith primarily “[a]t the practice of psalms (*māzmur*; መዝሙር) at the choir and the women’s monastery (*gädam*; ገዳም).”¹¹⁹⁷

A teacher at the St Paul Theological School rather reasoned that in reality girls rarely followed this path because they could not hold any substantive role in the Church.¹¹⁹⁸ This should be assessed also in view of the fact that the role of deaconess was abandoned early in the history of the Ethiopian Church. This was confirmed by Heregewoin Cherinet (2015) in her theologically informed book, which explains that a woman can be a deaconess and this never changed doctrinally. However, traditionally people have not been aware of this.

Moreover, the *Nəbab Bet* (ንባብ ቤት) which girls might have attended more often to learn Ge’ez, did not include any philological or exegetical training. As Tadesse Tamrat has observed, “[t]he question of understanding and comprehension was not important at this stage.”¹¹⁹⁹ Therefore, while some girls could be familiar with Ge’ez prayers recited in the Church, they would lack understanding of their meaning and capacity to interpret them theologically. This was highlighted during choir practices at two Ethiopian Orthodox churches in London led by impressive women who knew the Ge’ez hymns, but who were generally unable to translate well or to interpret the meaning of the verses.

3.12. The Academic Vice Dean of the Holy Trinity Seminary explained that the word *däbtära* has Greek etymological origins and means ‘writer’ preserved in the Amharic word for notebook (*‘däbtär*).¹²⁰⁰ The Greek etymology was not given but the word pertains to the Greek word for hide (*δέρις <διφθέρα*) that was used as writing material prior to the advent of the papyrus.¹²⁰¹ The original use of the name might have signified, however, something different. One scholar

¹¹⁹⁵ Cherinet (2015; 2005 EC).

¹¹⁹⁶ Dagne (1971, 83).

¹¹⁹⁷ IW2.

¹¹⁹⁸ ICE6.

¹¹⁹⁹ Tamrat (1970, 22-23).

¹²⁰⁰ ICE2.

¹²⁰¹ Lidell and Scott, ‘*διφθέρα*.’

explained that in the old days, when there was no fixed state capital, the priests would follow the Emperor and camp where he camped, bringing with them the Arc of the Covenant. These priests were eventually named servants of the tents. According to this scholar, it is a norm in the local culture for people to be called by their house and the house by the people. Since the scholars lived in tents, they were called after them (*διφθέρα* could then refer to skins used to build tents). According to the same interlocutor, these priests were the highest educated scholars, such as *Giyorgis of Gasäčča*. If there were not educated, they could not be part of the servants of the tents. A change in meaning occurred over time, however, as these educated priests started to ignore their duties. They were not priests anymore, but Church servants without necessary training in the Gospels. *Däbtäras* have since designated the role in the Church that is neither the role of the priest nor the role of the deacon.

Some theologians explained that *däbtäras* are believed to have aspired to hold a religious role, but due to a sin or shortfall, they were unable to claim priesthood. The role of *däbtära* allows them to remain within the church, albeit their sin, in the role of a servant known as *'awodaš* (አዎዳሽ) or 'one who prays.'¹²⁰² According to another author, “[s]ince the physically disabled did not qualify to serve as priests, they often took the *däbtära* path, a thoroughfare that helped them become well-educated persons in magico-medical fields.”¹²⁰³

3.13. The teacher provided the following rough description: “There are three main positions or stages which can be ranked based on level of knowledge in our traditional religious education. The first one is the *Nəbab Bet* (ንባብ ቤት) or School of Reading. Here a student learns Ge’ez. He starts from alphabet and goes on until he becomes able to read well all the books in Ge’ez. Then he becomes a *diyaqon* (ዲያቆን) or deacon. To become an excellent and qualified *diyaqon*, it may take from three up to five years of studies. [...] Then he learns *Qəddase* (ቅዳሴ), *Kidan* (ኪዳን), and some other prayers to become a priest (*qes*; ቅስ). The second [stage/role] is called *mārigeta* (መሪጌታ) or *māzāmmər* (መዝሞር). A *diyaqon* or *qes* can study hymnology, such as *Mə’əraf* (ምዕራፍ), *Šomä Dəgg’wa* (ጸመ ድጋ), *Zəmmare* (ዝማሬ), *Māwasə’at* (መዋሥእት); poetry [*Qəne* (ቅኔ)] and spiritual dancing [*Aq’aq’wam* (አቋቋም)] in addition to his knowledge as *diyaqon* in order to become *mārigeta*. There is a third and highest stage known as *māmhər* (መምህር). A *mārigeta* should select one department: it could be *Qəddase*, *Dəgg’wa* (ድጋ), *Qəne*, or *Māšəhaf Tərgum* (ምጽሐፍ ተርጉም). If a *mārigeta*, for instance, wants to be a teacher of *Zema* (ዜማ), he needs to deeply study *Dəgg’wa* and go to a place (equivalent to a university) where he can be examined or tested and get certified by a *Zema māmhər* (ዜማ መምህር). Then he officially becomes a teacher of *Zema*. If one wants to specialise in the interpretation of holy books, he can join one of the theological colleges, such as: Holy Trinity Seminary, *Säwasäwä Bərhan* (ሰዋሰወ ብርሃን) and *Käsate Bərhan* (ካሣቱ ብርሃን), and colleges also found in Gondar, Aksum and other places.”¹²⁰⁴

3.14. In their historical account, Jones and Monroe referred to such an ordination process from the 16th century which highlighted its poor structure. The authors cited excerpts from the accounts of Francisco Alvarez who headed the Portuguese embassy sent to Abyssinia in 1520. As Alvarez described, in this typical ordination process hundreds of men participated to be ordained by the Coptic Bishop. The only requirement that excluded people was their previous involvement with more than one woman. As opposed to Church Canon, disabled men were also ordained. Concerning the role of deacon, young boys and even infants were ordained, because, as the abuna reasoned, it was not known when the Coptic Church would send another bishop and therefore one had to make the utmost of the opportunity. The authors’ description is as follows: “Ordinations took place nearly every day, and the abuna was continually escorted by crowds shouting, ‘My lord, make us priests and deacons. And may God grant you a long life.’ One day two thousand three hundred and fifty-seven candidates presented themselves for the priesthood. They were

¹²⁰² ICE2.

¹²⁰³ Negwo (2015, 42).

¹²⁰⁴ ICE19.

marshalled on a large plain and the abuna rode out on his mule and made a proclamation in Arabic which was translated into Abyssinian. It was to the effect that anyone who had or had had more than one wife must depart under pain of excommunication. The candidates then advance in three queues to three priests who made them read a few words out of a book after which they were stamped with a seal in ink on the right arm. They then filed past the abuna, who laid his hands on their heads and recited a few words over them. The abuna then said Mass and all the new priests communicated. The only point which shocked Alvarez in this ceremony was that the candidates were inadequately clad and that some of them were, contrary to canon law, blind or maimed. The abuna promised to rectify these errors. The ordination of deacons was similar, save there was no examination in reading. The candidates were all unmarried, mostly boys and some babes in arms. Alvarez objected to the ordination of infants, but the abuna replied that he was now very old and there was no knowing when another abuna would be ordained –there had been an interregnum of twenty –three years before his own arrival- and therefore provision must be made for the future.”¹²⁰⁵

3.15. One research participant who was the son of a priest told the researcher a pertinent personal story. His own father had not allowed him to go to school and when he decided to attend by defying his father’s will, the latter threatened to disown him. He nonetheless proceeded to enrol and at 13 years old he left home to study until the 10th grade. Throughout his education he worked to pay his schooling expenses. Eventually, the man’s father accepted that his son had graduated from the secular educational system (who then went on to pursue college studies) and stopped speaking critically about it. This probably concurred with a wider, growing acceptance of secular school among local clergy. Today, while clergy in Aksum continue to teach that the secular school is dangerous because it can lead one away from God and faith, they also agree that schooling is beneficial and young boys interested in becoming members of the clergy can attend both types of school.¹²⁰⁶

3.16. A close examination was completed of the Amharic AC commentary on *Genesis*, on Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians and Galatians (referring directly to marriage and the conjugal relationship) and on verses in the four Gospels referring to marriage and the conjugal relationship. This was completed with the help of a native Amharic speaker who was also a theology student of the modern Holy Trinity Theological College, Leul Mekonnen. The researcher and the student met regularly and read together the Amharic AC on relevant passages. In reading the commentary, the group started with the Ge’ez original which the student had profound knowledge of. The researcher could follow due to having undergone some training with a Ge’ez tutor in Cambridge prior to fieldwork.

Canonical texts that were reviewed included the *Fätha Nägäst* (ፍትሃ ነሰት) or the “Laws of Kings” and the *Ethiopic Didascalia*, both in English translations. The *Ethiopic Didascalia* is said to have been written by the Twelve Apostles and many scholars postulate that it appears reminiscent of to the *Apostolic Constitutions*. This was selected because it includes a number of important statements on marriage, primarily of an apologetic nature. The *Fätha Nägäst* is believed to have been used in Christian Ethiopia since the mid-15th century and to have been influential both in the Church and society. Books used by the clergy were also consulted, such as the *Mäṣ’haf Krəstəna*, *Mäṣ’haf Täklil*, *Mäṣ’haf Qändil* (መጽሐፍ ክርስትና፣ መጽሐፍ ተክሊል፣ መጽሐፍ ቀንዲል) which outlines also the teachings and prayers of the Church for the Sacrament of marriage.

The work of John Chrysostom, one of the most frequently quoted and acknowledged theologians and saints in this Church and one of the most prolific homilists on marriage, was also examined to the best ability of the researcher. Two indigenous books that have been compiled by Ethiopian scholars and clergy are the Homilies (*Dərsan*; ድርሳን) and Admonitions (*Tägsaṣ*; ተግዛፅ) of John Chrysostom, as mentioned also by Roger Cowley in his work. One was read by the researcher in

¹²⁰⁵ Jones and Monroe 1935 (75-76).

¹²⁰⁶ IM15.

Amharic and one by a monk with whom the researcher knew in Aksum. Additionally, since Chrysostom's commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews was reported to be studied in the *Mäs'haf Bet*, both his original commentaries and the AC section attributed to him were examined. The original Chrysostomic commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews could not be retrieved in an Ethiopian language and were studied in the original Greek.

A number of other sources accessed through the British Library written by Ethiopian theologians and clergy and other Church publications around the topics of interest were also reviewed. These included the *Order and Canon Law of Marriage of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church* first written in 1942 by the Council of the Learned Men of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and later translated in English for "those of African origin born in western countries who do not speak Amharic"; a book on marriage in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention written by Kessis Kefyalew Merahi premised on his experience in the provision of moral education, family pastoral care, and counselling training to Sunday School students, evangelists and priests; and a book published in London and translated by Rev. A. F. Matthew which includes a questionnaire on different theological and ecclesiastical questions addressed to Ethiopian Täwahdo theologians. The questionnaire was produced by the daughter of Dean Payne Smith of Canterbury and the answers were provided by Ethiopian theologians working under the direction of Abuna Matthaëos at the time of Emperor Haile Selassie. These resources confirmed the official positions of the Church about marriage and divorce in the EOTC.

In Ethiopia, relevant books sold in *MQ* bookstores and outside of churches in Addis Ababa were purchased and read, such as an English book by Kassis Kefyalew Merahi titled *The Spiritual and Social Life of Christian Women* and an Amharic book attributed to Qomos Samuel of the St Paul Theological College titled *Married Life (ትዳር ኑሮጫ)*.¹²⁰⁷ A final book that was examined, but this was an independently published work not affiliated with the Church, was a seminal effort to translate Chrysostom's works on marriage titled *The Commentaries on Married Life: As Taught by Saint John Chrysostom (የትዳር አንደምታው: እንደ ቅዱስ ዮሐንስ አፈወርቅ አስተምሮ)* published by *Mämhär* Shimelis Mergiya.¹²⁰⁸ Another seminal book that was studied was Heregewoin Cherinet's book *On Women and Donkeys: Gender and Christian Perspective* which has been published both in English (2015) and Amharic (2005 EC).

3.17. The canonical practice in this Church is to baptise boys at 40 days and girls at 80 days following their birth which has been justified in reference to Old Testament laws. For example, in a history of the Church Mekarios et al. cited *Leviticus* and *Luke* and observed that "[i]n the Old Testament males entered the house of God forty days after birth. Females also entered the house of God eighty days after birth."¹²⁰⁹ The EOTC webpage on the Sacrament of Baptism furthermore directs readers to the page of the Coptic Church (which would suggest that the EOTC espouses the Coptic position, despite some theologians speaking of contradictions between these two Churches on matters of marriage), and there again it is confirmed that this rule is established in the Book of Leviticus. The Coptic Church justifies the difference by noting that "[a]lthough there may not be an explanation for this difference in the New Testament, we must obey this commandment without argument or complaint, as the Christian Church obeyed this divine order through all eras, and let us remember also the obedience of the Virgin Mary to this divine order."¹²¹⁰

3.18. The first instance states: "If a priest or a deacon fails in his duties by allowing a woman who is menstruating to enter into the church, or gives her the Eucharist during the days of her menstruation, he shall be deposed even if the woman is from the royal family."¹²¹¹ The second

¹²⁰⁷ Qomos Samuel (2008EC).

¹²⁰⁸ Mergiya (pb. 2004 EC).

¹²⁰⁹ Mekarios et al. (1996, 36).

¹²¹⁰ The Coptic Church. 'Sacrament of Baptism.'

¹²¹¹ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 46).

repeats that, “[a] woman in menstruation shall not enter the church nor shall she receive the Eucharist until the days of her menstruation are over, even if she is the wife of the king.”¹²¹² The specific injunction is attributed by the translation to the Melchite version of the second part of the canonical book written after the Council of Nicaea.

3.19. During fieldwork, the researcher attended the funeral of a local priest who had been fatally injured in an unfortunate car accident. After the procession reached the church of St Michael in Aksum, thousands of people who attended gathered and sat down in the wide church yard. However, only male relatives were allowed inside the inner yard of the church where the body of the priest was buried. His mourning wife was not allowed inside the church compound to witness the burial of her own husband. A sea of female supporters waited far back with her in the larger church compound, behind the men and the young boys who had swarmed to the inner compound of the church to take a peek into what was happening in the inner church compound and the burial site.

3.20. These are outlined in a recent *MQ* post as follows: “The canon of the church requires that before matrimony is affected (sic) the following conditions should be met. 1. Both couples should be Christians to obtain the grace of God. 2. Both should belong [to] the Orthodox Tewahedo Church. If any one of them is not a member, he/she should first be a member of the church. 3. No pre-marital sexual relationship is permitted. 4. Both should consent to be united in marriage. 5. No marriage is allowed within seven generations so as not to break the rule of kinship that forbids marriage between close family relations. (Lev. 18:6-21; Deut. 7:3-4). 6. As the marriage of Christians epitomizes the unity between Christ and the church, it shall not be broken. (Eph. 5:32). 7. In our church one to one marriage only is allowed. 8. Re-marriage cannot be conducted by any one of the two partners unless divorce is affected because of adultery or one of the partners dies. (Mt. 19:6-9). 9. The sacrament of matrimony is celebrated by bishops and priest. 10. Matrimony is not performed without Holy Communion. (Fetha Negest Article 24:899). 11. Parents should be consulted and their consent should be sacred.”¹²¹³

3.21. We may look at some historical evidence as compiled by Jones and Monroe, who state: “The marriage customs of Abyssinia have never been brought into conformity with canon law. Divorce is extremely easy, being permitted for causes stipulated in the marriage contract and being punished only by the payment of damages by the deserting partner. Concubinage is also a regular practice. What the attitude of the Church was in early times is not known, but since the Middle Ages it has, under the inspiration of Alexandria, set its face against these abuses, refusing communion to all who were according to its canon living in sin. The condemnation of the Church has had very little effect despite successive campaigns by successive abunas. Another struggle against polygamy is recorded towards the end of the 11th century. It was temporarily successful, even the king being persuaded to dismiss all his wives save the first, but it had no permanent effect.”¹²¹⁴ According to the authors, one of the corrective steps that the Church took against non-Christian practices was to refuse Holy Communion to those who were sexually active. These early interventions could underpin the modern-day practice in the Church of unmarried people (who are generally associated with sexual activity) abstaining from Holy Communion. It is not impossible that such historical rulings left their mark on the clergy in subsequent centuries, enforcing more exclusivist tactics regarding the penitential marriage.

3.22. The exact passage from *Fətha Nəgəst* reads: “IX. Prohibition against shedding the seed outside the uterus of the woman. This provision is based on the books and on reason. The first because the primary end of marriage is the leaving of offspring [...] The second, because of the word of God who said in the Law that one who lies down with a woman and removes his seed

¹²¹² Ibid.

¹²¹³ EOTC Sunday School Department-Mahibere Kidusan (2009).

¹²¹⁴ Jones and Monroe (1935, 52).

form her shall not escape from death. And when Onan the son of Judah (and this evil deed was intended to destroy those who exist) united with his brother's wife, he spilled [his] seed upon the ground as the Book says, his deed was detestable to God, and slew him. And Chrysostom said in his explanation of the Gospel according to Matthew: They set about avoiding the natural fruit, and this is worse than destroying those who exist. And this evil is attained by giving the seed and sending it where it will not become seed, or by using poison in order to prevent contraception.”¹²¹⁵

3.23. “[T]he accounts of Abraham and Jacob that their wives through their lack of faith in the blessings and promises of GOD, that they abused their husbands in forcing them to have children with their handmaids (Gen 16:1 – 3; Gen 30:1 – 4). In Solomon we find the abuse of the husband against the wife, for we find that King Solomon had seven hundred wives (I Kings. 11:3), thus neglecting the first wife he had received. And we find that David killed the husband of one woman to covert his wife, taking her after to be his own wife (II Sam 11:14, 15, 26, 27); of course all these acts did not go without the just judgment of GOD.”¹²¹⁶

3.24. In a comprehensive 1996 EOTC publication on faith and order Chrysostom is cited authoritatively on a number of issues, such as concerning Pentecost, the relationship between faith and good deeds, God and the manifestations of His works, and almsgiving. Chrysostom is also cited in the very brief statement of the EOTC's official doctrine on the topic of the Seven Sacraments, and twice in reference to the Real Presence during the Eucharist. In all cases, his comments are evoked as indisputably authoritative.¹²¹⁷ Chrysostom is again invoked in *Fətha Nəgäst* where the “prohibition against shedding the seed outside the uterus of the woman” (contraception) is mentioned.¹²¹⁸ As Abba Abera Bekele did, many religious writers cite Chrysostom in relation to issues of lived faith. The sermons in Keon-Sang An's study show that he is also invoked in Church by priests on issues of Christian living, such as charity. He is also cited authoritatively in a book of the Church multiple times.¹²¹⁹ One member of the clergy in Aksum even reported: “Our fathers say that the Ge'ez by Ge'ez *andəmta* was compiled by John Chrysostom.”¹²²⁰ Finally, Chrysostom is venerated as a local saint and celebrated twice a year (under the local name *Qədus Yohannəs Afäwäraq*). His life story is told in the *Ethiopian Synaxarium*,¹²²¹ a document that *apropos* mentions his name 26 times.

3.25. In “Patristic Introduction in the Ethiopian *Andəmta* Tradition” (1980), Roger Cowley listed Chrysostom's commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews as one of the commentaries that were studied in the *Mäṣ'haf Bet*.¹²²² Apart from this homily, no evidence was found that other homilies by Chrysostom have been available in full in Ethiopia. In the prologue that Roger Cowley translated no information was provided as to how these commentaries reached Ethiopia and why they were selected to be taught in the traditional religious school of interpretation, provided that this was intentional. The researcher's speculation is that the EOTC's Old Testament orientation might have contributed to this outcome, given that the Epistle was addressed to the Jews (the imagined ‘ancestors’ of Ethiopians), and that Chrysostom's commentary is ample with stories and citations from Old Testament sources that may have resonated well with this audience. It is also noteworthy that in Homily 17 Chrysostom refers to ‘Ethiopia,’ although most likely to mean the furthest part of earth.¹²²³

¹²¹⁵ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 146-147).

¹²¹⁶ Egziabher (2015).

¹²¹⁷ ‘Doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.’

¹²¹⁸ Tzadua and Strauss (1968, 146-147).

¹²¹⁹ Mekarios et al. (1992, 18, 28, 68, 90, 96, 113).

¹²²⁰ ICE4.

¹²²¹ Budge (no date, 506-507).

¹²²² Cowley (1988).

¹²²³ Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, p. 89: “εἴτε ἀπὸ Βαβυλῶνος, εἴτε ἀπὸ Αἰθιοπίας.”

Some references to Chrysostom’s commentaries on the Letter to the Romans and the Acts of the Apostles were found,¹²²⁴ but very little on the Ephesians, Colossians, Corinthians, or Sermons on Genesis and On Virginity, in which he spoke more elaborately about marriage. Ralph Lee’s analysis of the *’andāmta* evidences that these homilies have been known and incorporated in the tradition,¹²²⁵ although perhaps less emphasis was placed historically on his teachings regarding marriage. It must also be considered that the references made to Chrysostom differ in wording from the original Greek versions. There exist also a number of references to Chrysostom that cannot be identified with any of his known works. Roger Cowley noted for instance the existence of a Ge’ez homily attributed to Chrysostom on the story of the sinful woman who anointed Christ with oil, which he could not “identify it with other (pseudo)-Chrysostomica.”¹²²⁶ It is thus unclear to what extent Chrysostom has influenced the tradition substantively.

3.26. This is not curious if many of these were based on Chrysostom’s commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, as Roger Cowley suggested. According to Cowley, Chrysostom’s commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews was translated from Greek into Arabic by Abdallah ibn al-Fadl and is organised in two groups, the *Dārsan* (34 ‘homilies’) and the *Tāgsaṣ* (34 ‘admonitions’). In reading the *Dārsan* the author of this dissertation found no substantive references to marriage. This was confirmed by a native monk who had read the books. Since linguistic ability was not sufficiently proficient, it was challenging to draw parallels with the original Greek version.

3.27. In recent years Amharic translations of some Chrysostomic homilies have emerged in the Ethiopian market and are sold outside of churches in Addis Ababa and in the *MQ* bookshop in *’Aməst Kilo*. Two examples are John’s Chrysostom’s commentaries on Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians (የሐዋርያው የቅዱስ ጳውሎስ መልእክት ወደ ፊልጵስፎስ ሰዎችቅዱስ ዮሐንስ አፈወርቅ እንዳስተማሪው)¹²²⁷ and Paul’s Second Epistle to Timothy (ሁለተኛው የሐዋርያው የቅዱስ ጳውሎስ መልእክት ወደ ጢሞቴዎስ ሰዎችቅዱስ ዮሐንስ አፈወርቅ)¹²²⁸. These books were compiled by the *MQ* in recent years and appear to have been translated from English. The bibliography directs to Philip Schaff’s relevant volumes available on Ethereal Christian Encyclopaedia which were consulted also in this dissertation and juxtaposed to Chrysostom’s original commentaries in Greek. The *MQ*’s reliance on English translations signifies that the specific homilies had not been available in Ge’ez.

The most relevant other resource that was located was the aforementioned book titled *The Commentaries on Married Life: As Taught by St John Chrysostom* (የትዳር እንደምታው፡ እንደ ቅዱስ ዮሐንስ አፈወርቅ አስተምሮ)¹²²⁹. This book also made use of Philip Schaff’s available English translations of Chrysostom’s homilies. However, this one was *not* a verbatim translation of the original in full, with the author at times abridging the saint’s commentaries, including personal comments, and formulating questions in ways that are not clearly distinguished from the voice of the saint. In casual conversations, it was reported that this book was written by an independent theologian and did not have the official stamp of approval by the Council of Scholars of the Church. Still, this was a fairly recent publication and may not reflect the traditional understanding of the Church regarding Chrysostomic teachings.

3.28. While this approach was not unsound if the full homily was translated from Greek into Ge’ez, it has limitations. It has been postulated many times before that “most of the Patristic texts were written in Greek and then translated into Ge’ez”,¹²³⁰ however, this would not be factoring in

¹²²⁴ Cowley (1988, 280), ‘Doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church’, Bekele (no date).

¹²²⁵ Lee (44-46).

¹²²⁶ See Cowley (1988, 57).

¹²²⁷ Anonymous (2008 EC).

¹²²⁸ Anonymous (2009 EC).

¹²²⁹ Mergiya (pb. 2004 EC).

¹²³⁰ Chaillott (2002, 92).

the possible omissions, alterations or additions that likely occurred in translation processes, especially if certain commentaries were first translated into Arabic. The other limitation is that reading the Greek originals would inform us on the content of Chrysostom's homilies but not on the AC commentary on such Patristic works. However, it may be observed that a number of references to Chrysostom suggested that even when the original Greek wording was not preserved, the meanings appeared roughly unchanged, such as the six citations in Mekarios et al. (1996) and in citations by Abba Bekele in 'Christian Doctrine and Living.'

3.29. The Epistle to the Hebrews in many Christian traditions is included as one of Paul's 14 Epistles. This authorship has been disputed by some scholars within the West, given that the Epistle was not attributed to a specific author.¹²³¹ Within the EOTC the controversy is acknowledged, but various justifications are provided to support that Paul was its author. Roger Cowley in his translated version of the Epistle included five different Ge'ez prologues to the Epistle all of which agree that Paul was the author. Three also postulate that the Epistle was written by Paul when he was in Rome and sent by the hand of Timothy, and one says that Paul wrote it in Hebrew and Luke translated it in Greek.¹²³² Pauline authorship is also asserted in the prologue to Chrysostom's Ge'ez commentary on the Epistle. According to Cowley's translation, the latter starts with the sentence "the blessed Paul spoke this book, and John Chrysostom interpreted it."¹²³³

About the content of the Epistle it is postulated that Paul wrote it because he heard that his people were becoming faint-hearted and were increasingly reversing to the Mosaic Law. The Epistle may be seen as a careful attempt by the author to remind the Jewish readers of the great battle they fought in the past to preserve God's faith, as a way to reinvigorate their faith in the New Covenant. For this reason the writer exhausts considerable effort in showing that the incarnation of Christ became the New Covenant and that this was not contradictory to the Old laws, but their manifestation in a more perfect form. With great heed he pronounces that the New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant not because the latter was not good, but because those who were responsible to preserve and teach the laws had become corrupted themselves. Therefore, the New Covenant, with Jesus Christ as the Archpriest, aimed to circumvent such corruption and to instil the laws of God within human consciousness. The writer encourages the readers to adhere by their faith and translate it into concrete conduct in everyday life. It is here where marriage is pronounced to be honourable and the marital bed to be pure.

As opposed to most Pauline epistles, in this homily references to marriage are brief, which may not be accidental. Pauline teachings make evident that in the New Testament the aim of marriage shifted from procreation to salvation and was being understood as a bond of mutual submission by the spouses to each other equally. Within the Jewish community, which is agreed to have been a highly patriarchal society, it is questionable how welcome such a change would have been at the time. Given the overall ill-disposition of the Jews to Pauline teachings about the New Covenant, one can assume that a similar ill-disposition would have been shown toward more egalitarian views on marriage, which may have led the writer to avoid raising this issue directly.

The agreement has been that Chrysostom spoke these homilies during the last years (402/403 AD) of his episcopate in Constantinople. This understanding has been premised on the fact that Chrysostom's speech has a clear episcopal tone, and the understanding that these homilies were compiled and published post-humously by Constantine, the Presbyter of Antioch. This is premised on the title of the 34 homilies "*Εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολὴν, ἐκτεθεῖσα ἀπὸ σημείων μετὰ τὴν κοίμησιν αὐτοῦ, παρὰ Κωνσταντίνου πρεσβυτέρου Ἀντιοχείας*" which means "On the Epistle to the Hebrews, published after his Falling Asleep, from Notes by Constantine Presbyter of Antioch." This Constantine has been conventionally identified with Chrysostom's

¹²³¹ Schaff (1889b, 656-679).

¹²³² Cowley (1988, 268-275).

¹²³³ Ibid., 41.

good friend Costantius who is known to have visited the former during the years of his exile. Some scholars have questioned this view, suggesting that it is likely for some or all the homilies to have been articulated during Chrysostom's time as deacon in Antioch.¹²³⁴ Despite modern disagreement about the timing of these homilies' composition, it is evident that Chrysostom was concerned to relate the epistle's contents to the conditions of his own times and a society that he thought relished in sensual entertainment, had become unconcerned about propriety and decency and prioritised the satisfaction of physical desires as opposed to spiritual beautification. He aimed to sensitise his audiences on the true meaning of Christian living and to instil in them the desire for a virtuous life.

In his commentaries, Chrysostom made a number of references to marriage and lived faith that are, however, relevant to this discussion. In Homily 7, when commenting on Paul's admonition to believers to make no provision for the flesh in avoidance of lust and physical desires, Chrysostom observed that these beatitudes were made both to the solitary and the married.¹²³⁵ He explained that if it were not possible to live a life in virtue while being married, marriage would not have been conceded in the plan of God in the first place since it would directly exclude many from salvation.¹²³⁶ Chrysostom proceeded to explain that a virtuous life could be lived by the married if they experienced marriage as if they were not married at all, that is, without exaggeration (*"μετὰ συμμετρίας"*) and with prudence (*"σωφροσύνην"*). He drew the parallel with drunkenness, saying that it was not wine that led one to become drunk but one's loss of measure.¹²³⁷ Therefore, if one were to treat the pleasures of marriage not as its *telos*, but rather as one aspect that must be experienced in moderation, marriage would not interfere with one's lived faith and could in fact secure one's place in the Kingdom of Heaven as could a solitary life in asceticism.

The previous observations reflected Chrysostom's broader understanding that marriage was honourable. As a divinely ordained bond, marriage could become conducive to the preservation of the holiness of the faith (*"τῆς πίστεως ἁγιασμόν"*), by providing man and woman with a haven so that they could turn inwards and strengthen their defences to temptations of the flesh, such as fornication and prostitution.¹²³⁸ However, these were not the only benefits of marriage. He explained that marriage was intended to have an edificatory purpose, like all intimate human relations. This became evident in Homily 30 where he entreated his listeners to edify one another (*"Εἰς τὸν ἕνα οἰκοδομεῖτε"*) and not to neglect the gift of intimacy that empowered them to positively influence one another.¹²³⁹ As Chrysostom clarified elsewhere and implied also in the story of Job presented in this commentary, in marriage wife and husband were not two people, but became one person and had tremendous power to influence each other.¹²⁴⁰

In Homily 20 Chrysostom invoked the example of Job. Job was the faithful servant of God in the Old Testament to whom Satan sent various misfortunes. Job was married, and when the misfortunes started to fall on him and his family (including a terrible disease that had covered Job's skin with burns) his wife reprimanded him for continuing to retain his faith and encouraged him to denounce his God.¹²⁴¹ Chrysostom understood that Satan had tried to tempt Job into renouncing God, but the steadfastness of his faith had proven an insurmountable obstacle. He then turned to tempt Job's wife because she was the most proximate to him and could veer him away from his faith. According to Chrysostom, this bond had been granted by God's Providence to build a "strong wall" around the couple and strengthen them against earthly temptations. Knowing this, Satan attempted to make the wife's influence his weapon for Job's destruction. It is for this reason that Chrysostom said that the woman (in the capacity of wife) is a great good but also a

¹²³⁴ Allen and Meyer (1995).

¹²³⁵ Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 44.

¹²³⁶ Ibid.

¹²³⁷ Ibid.

¹²³⁸ Ibid., PG, 152.

¹²³⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁴⁰ Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Colossenses*, PG, 70.

¹²⁴¹ Job, 2: verses 7-10.

great evil (“*Μέγα ἀγαθὸν γυνή, ὡσπεροῦν καὶ κακὸν μέγα*”), speaking not of inherent properties but of what she was capable of doing because of the unique power she had on her husband.¹²⁴²

Upon reading the previous passages one could think that Chrysostom’s commentary had an androcentric tone, but this would not reflect Chrysostom’s apostolic conscience. It is true that throughout this and other commentaries Chrysostom often addressed directly the husbands even when he exhorted the wives about certain behaviours. This is understandable to some degree because Chrysostom acted in a society that considered husbands the guardians of their wives. This practical and strategic choice that Chrysostom made, however, did not suggest that the woman was ontologically inferior to man, given that he established their common origin and common nature elsewhere.¹²⁴³ It is true, however, that in his commentary on the Hebrews Chrysostom appeared to associate many negative practices with women, such as gossiping neighbours and saying improper things, laughing in an inconsiderate manner in church and relishing in superficial accessories. The admonitions that he made should be understood within Chrysostom’s larger concern to edify women, as well as to liberate women from their enslavement to materialism and men.¹²⁴⁴

This became evident in Homily 28 where he spoke of the futility of material ornaments in conjunction to married life. Chrysostom explained that the glory of the daughter (woman/wife) shined from within (“*Πᾶσα ἡ δόξα τῆς θυγατρὸς τοῦ βασιλέως ἔσωθεν*”) and that a woman did not require external adornment to be beautiful but rather simple attire (“*λίπὸν ἱμάτιον καὶ ἀπλοῦν*”) and a pure soul. He referred specifically to marriage and argued that when the husband saw that the wife was not interested in ornaments and other superficialities, he would respect her more. The husband would start to treat her as equal and she would cease being his slave. Ceasing being slave to material possessions, she would cease being slave to his gifts. Her self-sufficiency and composure would grant her a newly-found liberation and the husband’s pride would break. This highlighted again that Chrysostom did not ask wives to change their ways to become meek for their husbands, but rather to change themselves in order to change the attitudes of the husbands toward them. Like a marriage counsellor, he explained that a profligate man would not change his ways with a profligate wife, but only by a wife who herself was freed of extravagance. On the other hand, a chaste husband would be saddened and disappointed if his wife were to adorn herself and expose herself to other men. This would raise feelings of “ill-will and jealousy” (“*τὸς δὲ φθόνους καὶ τὰς βασκανίας*”), spoiling therefore the love and intimacy of the spouses. These admonitions and their contextualisation evidenced furthermore a strong concern in Chrysostom’s commentary to strengthen the spousal relationship and deem it a locus for mutual spiritual edification.

Central to this spiritual edification was his concept of virginal life. Virginity has been an ideal both in the Ethiopian *Tāwahādo* Church and society and it merits closer attention. Although Chrysostom undoubtedly advocated and encouraged chastity and sexual abstinence, it is of outmost important to underline that he prioritised virginity of the spirit (the cleanliness of the mind) and he expected this from both men and women. To convey these ideas, in Homily 28 Chrysostom invoked the parable of the Ten Virgins. This told the story of ten virgin women who were expecting with their torches to join a procession that would take them to meet the bridegroom. Five of the virgins forgot to bring oil for the torches and five being wise had anticipated that oil would be needed when the night would fall. When the procession came, only the five joined the bridegroom. The rest missed the opportunity because they had gone back to bring the oil they realised they needed. The moral of this parable was that these five had not been spiritually vigilant and prepared. This made their physical abstinence irrelevant because the purity did not extend to their mind-sets and conduct. Chrysostom then entreated his readers to cultivate the beauty/cleanliness of the soul and continence of the mind and not merely of the body.¹²⁴⁵ This

¹²⁴² Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 104.

¹²⁴³ Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Ephesios*, PG, 97 and 98.

¹²⁴⁴ Gardiner (1889, 933); Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 145.

¹²⁴⁵ Gardiner (1889, 934); Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 145-146.

purity of mind would then enforce one's desire for physical virginity. Furthermore, when Chrysostom called believers to cultivate Christian virginity in preparation for the Bridegroom he spoke inclusively of himself and the other men in the church.¹²⁴⁶ And although he used extensively the metaphor of the virgin, he clearly also referred to married individuals. When he said “[f]or the uncorrupt soul is a virgin, though she have a husband,” he referred to the wife who could still lead a virginal life as long as she preserved the purity of her soul, which encompassed conscience and conduct.¹²⁴⁷

Appendix: Chapter 4

4.1. Table: List of most popular days observed monthly in Village 1

'Abunä Libanos (አቡነ ሊባኖስ)	3
Səlasse (ሰላሴ)	7
'Arba'atä 'Ənsäsa (አርባተ እንሰሳ)	8
Mikael (ሚካኤል)	12
Giyorgis (ጊዮርጊስ)	13
'Abunä 'Abəyāzgi (አቡነ አብዩ እዝጊ)	19
Marəyam (ማርያም)	21
Mädhani'aläm (መድሃኒዓለም)	27
Bäal 'Əgziabher (በዓለ እግዚአብሔር)	29

Appendix: Chapter 5

5.1. Table: Formats for asking about local conceptualisations of spousal abuse

How do you (m/f) understand spousal abuse?	<i>Bä hasabki/ka, nay hadar tqə'at 'entay malät 'əyu?</i> (በሐሳብ/ካ ናይ ሓዳር ጥቕሳት እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) <i>Bä hasabš/h, yä tdar tqat mändənäw?</i> (በሃሳብ/ህ የትዳር ጥቃት ምንድነው?)
What is the meaning of spousal abuse?	<i>Nay hadar tqə'at tärgum 'entay 'əyu?</i> (ናይ ጥቕሳት ተርጉም እንታይ እዩ?) <i>Yä tdar tqat mən tärgum 'alläw?</i> (የትዳር ጥቃት ምን ተርጉም አለው?)
How do you (m/f) understand an abusive marriage?	<i>Bä hasabki/ka, tqə'at zäläwo hadar 'entay malät 'əyu?</i> (በሐሳብ/ካ ጥቕሳት ዘለዎ ሓዳር እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) <i>Bä hasabš/h, tqat yalläw tdar mändənäw?</i> (በሃሳብ/ህ ጥቃት ያለው ትዳር ምንድነው?)
How do you (m/f) understand abusive/harmful situations in marriage?	<i>Bä hasabki/ka, tqə'at/bädäl zäläwo kunätat hadar wəst 'əntay malät 'əyu?</i> (በሐሳብ/ካ ጥቕሳት/በደል ዘለዎ ኩነታት ሓዳር ውስት እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) <i>Bä hasabš/h, tqat/bädäl yalläw huneta tdar</i>

¹²⁴⁶ Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 146.

¹²⁴⁷ Gardiner (1889, 934); Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG, 146.

ቀለብ ቆልዑት (child maintenance)	30	50 (ወንጀሎች)
ቀሪ (repayment of residual debt)	1	
አፈፃፀም (resolution)	13	
ዝተወደአ (closed/completed)	10	
ዝቀርየ (left unresolved)	3	
ደን ዝተወደአ (decided by judge)	39	
ደን ዝቀርየ (left unresolved by judge)	11	

5.4. Perhaps the most salient marriage-related issue that was recurrently discussed by both laypeople and clergy in the two villages was divorce. A local nurse illustrated the extent of the problem when she asserted that “today someone may marry on Saturday and divorce on Monday.”¹²⁴⁸ She explained that “people have beautiful and big weddings, but you may ask after one week what happened to them and people will say that the marriage broke down. It is like this here.” One male interlocutor showed the extent by commenting that “if there are 100 people, one can’t find 10 people/10 percent who stay in the wedlock (who are not divorced).”¹²⁴⁹ The sentence that marriage breakdowns and divorces “abounded” in this society was, in fact, on everyone’s mouth. The reasons for these extensive divorces appeared to vary according to era and also the demographics and characteristics of the village communities.

In the past, when early marriages were commonplace, divorces in first unions were not unusual. Many research participants identified as causes family grudges and family interference. For instance, a female workshop participant had divorced from her husband because of family disagreements; she was then married again to a “very good” husband, but she confided that she and her first husband had been very well together and that she still loved him.¹²⁵⁰ Other reasons included failure to procreate and fertility problems. One couple had divorced after 20 years of marriage because they could not have children.¹²⁵¹ The woman’s narrative suggested that the spouses had always assumed that the problem of infertility had been the wife’s, although she had never been medically examined. Eventually, the husband married another wife and fathered children. The divorce was reportedly agreed between the two by mutual consent.

Others reasoned that since parents arranged most marriages and partners had not known each other, they could often lack intimacy and understanding that resulted in incompatibilities and divorce. For example, one male interlocutor commented:

Divorce is the result of lack of understanding each other. It is because there is no capacity of listening to each other or to understand each other. This is a problem that existed before. Because they married by the decision of their parents many lived together without intimacy and understanding. I myself and my wife did not know each other.¹²⁵²

Numerous other female respondents explained that their first marriages had soon collapsed because there had been no understanding between the spouses. This usually meant that the girl had been too young to understand the concept of marriage and to handle the expectations of the much older husband; the spouses had little intimate connection to each other and as a result

¹²⁴⁸ FIELDNOTES, 27 February 2017.

¹²⁴⁹ IM14.

¹²⁵⁰ PWW2P1.

¹²⁵¹ IW12.

¹²⁵² IM26.

marriage was imbricated in constant conflict until someone abandoned the other. Usually, the girl returned to her parents' home, provided that the parents were still alive.

In more recent times, family interference and fertility problems continued to be salient but these were affected or intertwined with what interlocutors identified as products of modernity. Additional disruptions to married life included rising levels of male drunkenness, money shortage, an increasingly materialistic attitude toward marriage and changes in gender relations underpinned by what was said to be women's increasingly demanding attitudes with their spouses. In most scenarios that were described, conflict emerged due to the problematic behaviours on the part of men. Problematic behaviours in females, such a failure or stubborn refusal to meet the responsibilities of the home, were cited primarily by female interlocutors.

Men's problematic behaviours generally resulted in arguments or dissatisfaction in their partner who could not rely on them. This highlighted the gender-segregated organisation of family life in the local society, which generally expected men to be breadwinners and women to take full charge of the household, cooking and the children. Female interlocutors thus emphasised men's drinking problems or their unwillingness to work. Male interlocutors confirmed these trends, but they were also more considerate of environmental factors that interfered with men's ability to earn a living. For example, a male interlocutor observed:

The question of divorce usually comes from women. "You (husband) what are you doing? You do not work, you do not bring money," she says. She separates. But the man works. It is just that the land is not enough. Clothing, food, school expenses; the costs of the married life are high. If it is difficult to meet all these necessities and the wife says "bring me money," and if the husband will answer "I don't have any. Where can I find it?," argument will proceed and we end in divorce.

Some conflict and women's argumentative attitude in particular were said to result in divorces. The same interlocutor observed: "Sometimes, the woman says bad things [to him]. She argues. For this reason he says 'for me it is better to divorce,' and [he] divorces."¹²⁵³ Other male interlocutors also emphasised the conflict or disagreement prior to the separation, although some presented this as the problem of the men. For example, one married man said: "But after having born children, he says I will not pay and he goes. This is not good."¹²⁵⁴ Female interlocutors confirmed such behavioural issues on behalf of men, emphasising in particular his sudden change of heart and departure. They narrated personal stories of what had been peaceful marriages to Tigrayan men which had ended when the husband suddenly decided to go, leaving the woman powerless to argue or to change his decision. One previously married woman explained: "First we stayed in marriage but the problems of a man are unknown, meaning, whether he has another wife or not is unknown. I don't know by what justification he left me but I, thanks to God, I have been given years to live and good health."¹²⁵⁵ A woman who got married to her husband at 15 years old and stayed with him for 20 years narrated the following: "Our marriage was good. For 20 years we stayed together and we gave birth to six children. Then, without any prior conflict he went to another wife."¹²⁵⁶ Further down in our interview she added: "We didn't have anything bad going on. We were good. I worked where I am now (in the home) and he worked outside. We were good. It has been four years since we separated. I didn't know why we divorced." In such narratives, interlocutors explained that they had not expected the husband to leave when he did and that they could not understand the reason.

Female interlocutors who had no clear justification for their husband's departure tried to rationalise their behaviour through various instrumentalist logics. Explanations they gave included that they husbands had wanted to go to a wealthier wife, that they had sought a more

¹²⁵³ IM9.

¹²⁵⁴ IM11.

¹²⁵⁵ IW7.

¹²⁵⁶ IW10.

comfortable life, or that they lost interest in their wives. One female interlocutor reported: “He has a wife, [but] then he leaves her to go to another woman. There are more problems of this kind.”¹²⁵⁷ Referring to her own husband in the same interview, she said: “He didn’t have any problem. He had everything that’s why. There was no problem. He thought [that] he conquered me.” In her rationale the husband, whom she described as a good and hard-working man, had taken her for granted. According to her, after he had “conquered” her, the man’s interest subsided and he chose to move to the next woman. This rationalisation was repeated by another Tigrayan woman (from Eritrea) who was interviewed in the UK: “Once she is married to a man, he thinks ‘she is under me, under control now, I can do whatever I want to do.’ He will run everywhere, every night you do not know where he is going. The woman is waiting in the house, she is not cared for by the guy.”¹²⁵⁸ One Tigrayan woman in London with a similar story justified her husband’s departure when she was back home by invoking supernatural causes. She was convinced that their separation had been facilitated by dark magic or sorcery by another woman.¹²⁵⁹

In one of the communities, local women frequently entered in relationships with non-local men and this was identified as a risk factor for later abandonment. The social court worker who was cited earlier reported that 85 women in a six-month period had been abandoned by predominantly non-local soldiers referred to this village. Many left when they were reassigned, or if they were seasonal workers, when they completed their work. During fieldwork, it was possible to speak to two couples involved in such irregular unions and they affirmed that the problem of abandonment was extensive and that part of the reason was the men’s foreignness. One soldier in a relationship with one woman interviewed in this study opined during an informal discussion that in his hometown such abandonments were not extant and he conjectured that this was because husbands and wives were locals and lived close to their families.¹²⁶⁰ He thought that this made it unlikely that husbands or wives would misbehave both because they shared a cultural background and because they would hesitate to displease their parents and parents-in-law.

After separations occurred, not all men continued to support financially their children and those who did often did so limitedly or inconsistently, which meant that women had to rely on their ingenuity to find alternative livelihoods. In most cases, women remarried, often to men who had previous failed marriages and this was often associated with more marriage stresses. One middle-aged married man noted, for example: “The man abandons his own child. The woman has her own child. It is not an easy life. This is called suffering.”¹²⁶¹ Another male interlocutor explained: “You see, one starts a family, but it (the couple) is not comfortable, if they don’t like the married life. One may have three, four or five children, but the family gets dispersed.”¹²⁶²

Married life in the local society appeared to have been deeply affected by a pervasive out-migration of husbands to look for work in other places. In the countryside of Aksum many men used to go to Shire, Humora, Adwa or Meqele in order to find work to support their families. This arrangement physically separated the couple and could generate all sorts of negative situations and bad feelings. For example, the researcher knew a woman whose husband had left to work in Humora. She reported that her husband visited often and paid for her child and her, but he did not stay long. When asked if she was comfortable with the situation, the woman said that it was very difficult without him.¹²⁶³ A close friend of the woman who happened to overhear the conversation opined that it was not fair for the wife because she was the one who had to experience the daily worries associated with raising children and keeping the home, while her husband only focused

¹²⁵⁷ IW38.

¹²⁵⁸ IW2.

¹²⁵⁹ FIELDNOTES, 22 October 2016.

¹²⁶⁰ IDM11.

¹²⁶¹ IM23.

¹²⁶² IM14.

¹²⁶³ FIELDNOTES, 3 July 2017.

on his work. This was neither egalitarian nor healthy, she retorted. In her opinion, living separately was not called a marriage.¹²⁶⁴ She referred also to the destructive effects on the marriage of husbands' involvement with other women in these areas of work, which was reported to be a common occurrence in the local societies. The woman considered that this could have psychological repercussions, resulting in women's loneliness and mild depression, as well as occasional drinking to overcome the emotional hurt.

It is then not surprising that adultery was identified as another marriage problem in the local society. One male interlocutor conveyed this with a hypothetical sentence: "Now, I am a man and I have a woman. For example, one woman has good money or she is fine I will enter that way. But I am also with my wife. My wife does not know."¹²⁶⁵ A female interlocutor offered a more extensive comment, which suggested that adultery and separation were underpinned by poverty factors:

Divorces happen because some women accuse the men for going to other women. Other women tell the men to stay with them even in poverty when the husband wants to go to a rich woman. [This happens] when you face money shortage, and you cannot afford all necessities. [But] This is nothing compared to those who have nothing. We endure all the difficulties. Let me tell you, some they say 'we do not want to endure all this' and they go in search of wives who own land. And they leave the previous wives with all their problems and poverty. There is so much more going on...¹²⁶⁶

Adultery could also be associated with women. For example, one male interlocutor commented: "Women may fall in love with another man, or they may need to go to another for the reason of money."¹²⁶⁷ In fact, one of the most violent conjugal (attempted) crimes that were reported for the local society was committed by a woman who had left her husband for another man.¹²⁶⁸

In recent times, the most salient problem emanated from what people identified as an increasingly calculative mentality motivating marriage decisions and spouse selection. There was a general belief that more and more people did not marry for love, but out of practical and economic concerns. Subsequently, the rationale went, since the relationship was based on weak emotional foundations it could be easily threatened by changes in the behaviour of the partner and other external factors. A rural female interlocutor made the pertinent comment that many people divorced quickly when some challenge arose because they did not genuinely care about their partner whom they married to satisfy their own desires and needs.¹²⁶⁹ She said that for most people marriage was approached as a contract in which each party was expected to fulfil certain expectations and responsibilities. Consequently, when any of the two did not fulfil these expectations, or refused to do so, the other party without hesitation would send them away or move to the best next alternative.¹²⁷⁰

Conjugal problems were also increasingly associated with imbalances in gender roles and relations, although these were articulated as such primarily by urban populations in Aksum and other cities. A Tigrayan male interviewed in Addis Ababa spoke of the increasing pressure that women put on men to provide for them, which in his view had been amplified under the gender equality agenda that had led women to express their demands more openly or urgently.¹²⁷¹ He referred to his own experience with his former spouse, who had asked a divorce. He explained that he had spent most of his life working hard to give his "beautiful and young" wife and their

¹²⁶⁴ FIELDNOTES, 3 July 2017.

¹²⁶⁵ IM17.

¹²⁶⁶ IW39.

¹²⁶⁷ IM25.

¹²⁶⁸ FIELDNOTES, 5 June 2017.

¹²⁶⁹ FIELDNOTES, 9 July 2017.

¹²⁷⁰ Original: *ḥadä 'ambi 'antäyalu takalä'ayati kid tbal* (ሓደ እምቢ እንተይሉ ታካልአይቲ ኪድ ትብል).

¹²⁷¹ IDM1.

children everything that was needed for a good life. The man mentioned that she had been unable to provide a formal justification for ending the marriage when their spiritual father tried to mediate their reconciliation.¹²⁷² He believed that progressions in gender relations that had made women increasingly more demanding and family pressure on his wife’s side for materialistic gain had dictated his wife’s decision to divorce.

Family interference has arisen in recent times as a major issue threatening to undermine marriages. In numerous testimonies, family pressures appeared to intertwine closely with the previously affirmed calculative mentality about marriage. It was commonly believed that families were particularly conducive to this because they advised men and women to marry partners who were better-off and paid little attention to the kind of person the prospective partner was and if that partner would be a good match to their son or daughter. A couple motivated to marry by such concerns was expected to face marriage problems sooner than other couples. A priest in one village community referred to frequent arguments that ensued between spouses due to marriage contracts that wives were asked to sign by husbands who had siblings and needed to share property.¹²⁷³ This was explained in more detail by a local gender worker who said that relatives tended to advise the wife or the husband on how to deal with their assets prior to the marriage to ensure that should the spouses divorce the property would not be lost to her. This must be appraised in view of the national legislative framework according to which currently wives are granted half of the commonly held assets at the time of divorce from their husbands. In a different scenario, the husband could decide to transfer his assets to his parents, the parents of the wife would find out and feel insulted, raising the possibility of a rift between the families and termination of marriage.

Family interference could result or encourage divorce in various other ways, not necessarily related to contemporary influences. A Tigrayan woman in the UK told the researcher that she and her husband had split as a direct result of family pressure underpinned by political antagonism between Ethiopians and Eritreans following the 30 year-long struggle for Eritrean independence. The woman explained that her marriage had been stable and peaceful before the family interfered: “We had (good communication), he was nice guy, he was a nice guy. The problem is I am Ethiopian, he is Eritrean. There is a family problem as well. The family, not him.”¹²⁷⁴ The woman was convinced that the redrawing of national boundaries and redefinition of national identity led the family to perceive their daughter-in-law more negatively and to pressure the son to leave her. She further explained: “Even if I accept (if I let go of the political antagonism), the families do not accept. And when they (the men) go back home the families make them marry again. Imagine! They have wives abroad, when they go to Eritrea they marry again.” The ulterior motive of the family was to marry off the son to an Eritrean woman, despite the fact that Eritreans and Ethiopians shared, as this woman put it, “the same colour, the same culture....”

Appendix: Chapter 6

6.1. Table: Marriage history for female and male workshop participants in village 1

Participants		Current status	Number of marriages	Marriage types (as described by participants)
Gender	Age			

¹²⁷² The man quoted the three reasons identified in *FN*: long absence from home, refusal to consummate the marriage, inability to provide offspring.

¹²⁷³ IC2.

¹²⁷⁴ IW2.

F	58	Married	2	First unspecified; second traditional- <i>qal kidan</i>
F	47	Married	2	First marriage by <i>täklil</i> ; current marriage involved taking communion in church (<i>Q^warban</i>)
F	35	Divorced	Unspecified	<i>Täklil</i>
F	40	Divorced	Unspecified	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	46	Widowed	Unspecified	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	48	Widowed ; Divorced	2	First marriage by <i>täklil</i> ; second marriage by <i>qal kidan</i>
F	43	Divorced	Unspecified	<i>Täklil</i>
F	36	Married (to priest)	1	<i>Täklil</i>
M	45	Married	1	<i>Täklil</i>
M	42	Married	2	First marriage unspecified; second marriage <i>bahälawi</i>
M	32	Married	1	Traditional- <i>bahälawi</i>
M	36	Married	1	Traditional- <i>bahälawi</i>
M	28	Married	1	<i>Täklil</i>
M	32	Married	1	Traditional- <i>bahälawi</i>
M	46	Married (priest)	1	<i>Täklil</i>
M	40	Married	1	Traditional- <i>bahälawi</i>

Table: Marital status and marriage type for women in village 2

Participants		Marital Status	Marriage type as described by participants
Gender	Age		
F	28	Divorced	Traditional way with blessings from priest; local court
F	40	Divorced	Traditional way with blessings from priest and confession
F	30	Widowed	<i>Täklil</i> ; traditional way through elders (<i>šəmagälle</i>) - <i>qal kidan</i>
F	35	Widowed	Communion in church (<i>Q^warban</i>); <i>qal kidan</i>
F	34	Divorced	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	35	Divorced	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	35	Widowed	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	32	Divorced	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	40	Widowed	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	30	Married	<i>Qal kidan</i>
F	30	Married	<i>Qal kidan</i> (mentioned that both partners had been sexually inactive, but they still did not marry by <i>täklil</i> because she said this was only for the deacons)
F	35	Divorced	<i>Qal kidan</i>

6.2. Table: What men and women do on a typical day according to female MQ attendants¹²⁷⁵

¹²⁷⁵ PWF MQ.

Men	Women
<p>1. They may be working from home or outside/in an office all day</p> <p>2. Dedicating time and money to social responsibilities (for example, attend and support weddings and funerals)</p> <p>Weddings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - chopping the meet - building tents <p>Funerals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - building tents - serving and assisting <p>3. Providing for the household financially</p>	<p>1. Raising children</p> <p>2. Day to day household chores</p> <p>3. Social/cultural responsibility of visiting women who just gave birth</p> <p>4. Running the house (household necessities and groceries)</p> <p>5. Not being able to make decisions</p> <p>6. Without one's autonomy and having to live under the influence of the husband and act with his permission</p>

Appendix 7: Dictionary References

For Ge'ez dictionary references the transcription rules laid out by Wolf Leslau apply:

ሀከ ለሌ ሐከ መጠ ሠኝ ረገ ሰኝ ቀገ በኮ ተተ ጎከ ነጠ ኦ' ከኦ ወጠ ዐ' ዘኝ የጎ ደገ ገገ ጠገ ጳገ ጸኝ ፀገ ፈገ ፕገ

Vowels were transcribed from 1st to 7th order as follows: *a, u, i, ā, e, ə, o*

1. Means 'rejuvenation, refresher' (Kane 1990a, 955).
2. Means 'to be united/to be made one' (Leslau 1976, 166).
3. Translates as: 'remedy, cure, medicine, medicament, drug, poison; Redeemer (Jesus)' (Kane 1990a, 321).
4. *θεωσις* (n) translates as 'becoming God' or as 'deification.' See 'deification' in Cross and Livingstone (2009 [2005]).
5. (Ge'ez) *haymana* ህይመነ (v): 'to be a believer, be faithful (in the religious sense), have the faith (denominative)' (Leslau 1991, 221). (Tigr.) *haymanot* ሃይማኖት (n): 'religion, faith' (EPLF 2003, 5). (Amh.) *haymanot* ሃይማኖት (n): 'faith, religion, belief (religion)' (Kane 1990a, 25).
6. (Ge'ez) *bahla* ባህሊ (v): 'say, speak, call, announce, command' which passed into Cushitic as *bahäl* 'custom, tradition' (Leslau (1991, 89). (Tigr.) *bahli* ባህሊ (n): 'culture' and *bahlawi* ባህሊዊ (adj.) 'cultural' (EPLF 2003, 234). (Amh.) *bahäl* ባህሊ (n): 'culture, tradition, custom, convention; nature; manner of speaking; syntax, conjugation' (Kane 1990a, 855).
7. (Ge'ez) *hallaya* ጎለየ (v): 'consider, think, ponder, keep in mind, mediate, look after someone, take care of, watch, reason, reflect upon, turn over in one's mind, perceive, decide, devise, imagine' (Leslau 1991, 262). (Amh.) *hallina* ጎሊና (n): 'conscience, mind, reason; thought, idea (Ar.)' (Kane 1990a, 5).
8. (Tigr.) 'alämawi ግለማዊ (adj): '1) temporal, profane, worldly, terrestrials, earthly, 2) secular, mundance (ዘይመንገሳዊ) 3) lay (ዘይካህን)' (EPLF 2003, 449). (Amh.) 'alämawi ግለማዊ (adj): 'worldly person, one who lives a life of ease, sensuous; temporal, secular, profane' (Kane 1990b, 1105).
9. (Tigr.) *zämānawi* ዘመናዊ (adj): '1) modern, modish, up-to-date, new 2) modernistic' and *ዘመናዊነት* (n): 'modernism' (EPLF 2003, 473). (Amh.) *zämānawi* ዘመናዊ (adj): 'modern, up-to-date, contemporary (furniture), popular (song)' (Kane 1990b, 1619).
10. (Ge'ez) *fatana* ፈተነ (v): 'try, test, put to test, investigate, scrutinize, explore, examine, search, probe, tempt, prove, probe, (T), melt' (Leslau 1991, 170). (Tigr.) *fätāna* ፈተና (n): 'exam=examination, quiz, test' (EPLF 2003, 603). (Amh.) *fätāna* ፈተና (n): 'test, trial (test), trial run; exam, examination; experiment; temptation, tribulation' (Kane 1990b, 2311).
11. (Ge'ez) *haggaga* ሐገገ (v): 'lay down laws, write laws, legislate, ordain, decree, institute laws' (Leslau, 1991, 227). (Tigr.) *hægi* ሕገገ (n): '1) law, code 2) act 3) regulation, rule, precept, principle' (EPLF 2003, 49). (Amh.) *hægg* ህግ (n) 'law, rule (of law, of grammar), legislation, dogma, doctrine (eccles.), measure (legislative), virginity, virgin state (woman); religious marriage' (Kane 1990a, 33).
12. (Ge'ez) *lamada* ለመደ (v): 'be accustomed to, be familiar with, be used to, be trained, learned' (Leslau 1991, 315). (Tigr.) *læmdi* ለምደ (n): '1) tradition, institution, lore, custom, 2) practice,

- habitude, indulgence, usage, rule, rut, groove' (EPLF 2003, 18).). (Amh.) *lāmd ልምድ* (n): 'usage, habit; experience; s.th. known, studied, customary' (Kane 1990a, 50).
13. (Ge'ez) *badala በደለ* (v): 'do wrong, commit and injustice, inflict (pain)' (Leslau 1991, 86). (Tigr.) *bädälä በደለ* (v): wrong, offend, trespass, 2) insult, affront, injure (EPLF 2003, 232).
14. (Tigr.) *bätəri በትሪ* (n): 'stick, cane, rodwand, cue' (EPLF 2003, 230).
15. (Tigr.) *dula ዱላ* (n): 'club, mace' (EPLF 2003, 522).
16. (Ge'ez) *taq'a ጠቅኦ* (v): "'be intrepid, be harsh, be ruthless" associated with the Ethiopic *täq'ä* "oppress" and the Amharic *täqqa* "to strike, to attack"' (Leslau 1991, 595). (Amh.) *təqat ጥቃት* (n): 'attack, aggression, assault, oppression; scorn, subjection; maltreatment' (Kane 1990b, 2128).
17. (Tigr.) *räbbäsä ረበሽ* (v): '1) disturb, upset, agitate, oil 2) din, arrange, set' (EPLF 2003, 147). (Amh.) *räbbäsä ረበሽ* (v): 'to disturb, to make trouble' (Leslau 1990a, 394).
18. (Tigr.) *sədanät ሰድነት* (n): 'impoliteness, impudence, incivility, cheek, barley' (EPLF 2003, 190).
19. (Amh.) *čəqəččəq ጭቅጭቅ* (n): 'argument, dispute, quarrel, altercation' (Kane, 1990b, 2222).
20. (Tigr.) *zäyməsməma' ከይምስምማዕ* (n): '1) disagreement, difference, discord, disapprobation, division, dissent, being at loggerheads (with)m, misunderstanding 2) dissonance, variance' (EPLF 2003, 482). (Amh.) *'aläməsmamat ከለመስማማት* (n): 'disagreement, discord, dissimilarity' (Kane 1990a, 464).
21. (Tigr.) *bahrəy/bahri ባህርይ/ባህሪ* (n): '1) nature, quality, attribute, kind 2) character, temperament, disposition, trait, kidney 3) complexion' (EPLF 2003, 235). (Amh.) *bahrəy ባህርይ* (n): 'nature, character, temperament, personality; trait, attribute, characteristic (n.), essence, disposition (nature), property (of an element), jewel' (Kane 1990a, 856).
22. (Tigr.) *ḥayal ሓያል* (adj.): '1) powerful, forceful, mighty, potent, violent, tremendous 2) strong, robust, doughty, virile, nervous 3) energetic, pithy 4) vehement, lion 4) redoubtable, swinging (EPLF 2003, 36). (Amh.) *ḥayläñña ኃይለኛ* (adj.): 'strong, powerful, mighty, violent, impetuous, vehement, terrific, intense, ardent; severe (judge, weather), sharp (pain), extreme (heat), high (fever), harsh (words), heavy (drinker)' (Leslau 1990a, 25).
23. (Tigr.) *kəfu' ክፉኦ* (adj.): '1) ugly, evil, dissolute 2) ill-favoured, bad, disgusting, miserable, impious, hideous, vicious, malignity, spiteful, vile, mean, mal' (EPLF 2003, 422). (Amh.) *mätfo መጥፎ* (adj.): 'bad, evil, wicked, foul (weather), repugnant (odor); miserable (meal); harsh (climate); unpleasant, nasty' (Kane 1990a, 363).
24. (Tigr.) *ḥangol ሓንጎል* (n): '1) brain, grey matter 2) mind, the upper storey' (EPLF 2003, 33) (Amh.) *čənqəllat ጭንቅላት* (n): 'skull, head' (Kane 1990b, 2230).
25. (Ge'ez) *'astahasaba* (v): 'call to account' (Leslau 1991, 244-245). (Tigr.) *'atahasasba ኣተሓሳስባ* (n): 'thought, idea, mind, psychology, psyche' (EPLF 2003, 356). (Amh.): *'astāsasāb ኣሰተሳሰብ* (n): 'way of thinking, idea, opinion, notion, suggestion, reasoning, mentality' (Leslau 1976, 130).
26. (Tigr.) *səsu' ሰሰዕ* (adj.): 1) greedy, avaricious, grasping, rapacious, pig, piggish, hog 2) ravenous, vulture 3) selfish, self-seeker 4) insatiable (EPLF 2003, 182)
27. (Amh.) *hod ሆድ* (n): 'stomach, belly, abdomen, inside (of the body), heart, mind' (Kane 1990a, 29).

28. (Tigr.) *mwuqa* ምዉቃቆ (v): ‘hitting, beating, lashing’ (EPLF 2003, 131). (Amh.) *mätta* መታ (v): ‘to beat, to hit, (also with a bullet or some kind of missile), to strike, punch (with the fist), to spank, to rap, to smite, to thrash, knock (hit)’ (Kane 1990a, 241).
29. (Tigr.) *märə’a* መርዓ (n): marriage, bridal, wedding, espousal, union, match (EPLF 2003, 61). (Amh.) *gabəṣa* ጋብቻ (n): ‘marriage, matrimony’ (Leslau 1976, 212).
30. (Amh.) *särg* ሰርግ (n): ‘marriage, nuptial feast’ (Leslau, 1990a, 495).
31. (Tigr.) *hadar* ሓዳር (n): ‘matrimony’ and *nay hadar* ነይ ሓዳር (adj.): ‘conjugal’ (EPLF 2003, 38). (Amh.) *tadar* ትዳር (n): ‘marriage, conjugal life, married life, home life, household, management, occupation.’ (Kane 1990a, 996).
32. Translates literally as ‘word of covenant.’ (Ge’ez) *akeda* ‘take testimony’ (Leslau 1991, 301).
33. Translates literally as ‘father of the soul’ (Ge’ez) *nafs* ነፍስ: ‘soul, spirit, breathe a person, a person, life, self’ (Leslau 1991, 389).
34. (Tigr.) *thut* ትሑት (adj.): ‘1) low, lowly, poor, coarse, bad, common, miserable, short, meagre, lean, inferior, 2) humble, gentle, polite, courteous, modest, maidenlike, maidenly, suave, smooth, self-effacing, mannerly, decent, coy, good 3) small, mean, 4) deep, 5) raffish’ (EPLF 2003, 302).
35. (Tigr.) *səməmə* ሰምምዕ (n): ‘1) agreement, treaty, accord, settlement, concordat, convention, contract, compact= indenture 3) consent, assent, conformity, compatibility, correspondence, concurrence 4) concord, concordance, consonance, tune concert, unison 5) negotiation, conclusion 6) bond 7) conciliation’ (EPLF 2003, 179). (Amh.) *səməmmənnät* ሰምምነት (n): ‘settlement, agreement, treaty; harmony, consent, accord, conciliation, concord, consensus’ (Kane 1990a, 464).
36. (Tigr.) *sälam* ሰላም (n): ‘1) peace, pax 2) hello, hallo, salaam’ (EPLF 2003, 158). (Amh.) *sälam* ሰላም (n): ‘peace, tranquillity, safe (peaceful), greetings’ (Kane 1990a, 444).
37. (Tigr.) *gəłši* ግልጺ (adj.): ‘1) plain, blunt, candid, point-blank, direct, overt 2) outspoken, plainspoken’ (EPLF 2003, 551).
38. (Ge’ez): *anfasa* v): ‘breathe, exhale, make breathe, rest, find rest, revive, refresh, give rest, give relief, soothe’ (Leslau 1991, 389). (Tigr.) *mänfäsawi* መንፈሳዊ (adj.): 1) ghostly, spiritual 2) mystic 3) pious, devout 4) psychical’ (EPLF 2003, 76). (Amh.) *mänfäsawi* መንፈሳዊ (adj.): ‘spiritual, devotional, devout’ (Kane 1990a, 288).
39. (Ge’ez) *hasaba* ሐሰበ (v): ‘think, believe, impute, consider, estimate, esteem, appreciate, regard, deem worthy, take into consideration, have regard for’ (Leslau 1991, 245). (Tigr.) *hasab* ሓሰብ (n): ‘1) idea, thought, contemplation, notion 2) suggestion 3) breast 4) reflection, reflexion 5) meaning, intention 6) impression 7) image’ (EPLF 2003, 29). (Amh.) *hassab* ሓሰብ (n): ‘opinion, point of view, idea, notion, thought, concept; stand, position, mind (opinion); proposal, suggestion, motion (parliamentary); worry, concern; computus’ (Kane 1990a, 11).
40. (Ge’ez) *haṭ’a* ካጥአ (v): ‘lack, be deprived of, not find, miss, be in want of, not have, be bereaved, be destitute, be desolate, fail, (Y) sin’ (Leslau 1991, 268). (Tigr.) *haṭi’at* ሓጥአት (n): ‘1) sin, evil 2) transgression 3) trespass’ (EPLF 2003, 39). (Amh.) *haṭi’at* ካጥአት (n): ‘sin, crime, spiritual impurity, sperm, fig. copulation’ (Kane 1990a, 34).
41. (Tigr.) *’amäl* አመል (n): ‘habitude, wont, manner, temperament, individuality’ (EPLF 2003, 335). (Amh.) *’amäl* (n): ‘character, temperament, conduct (behaviour), habit (usually has a negative connotation); habitude.’ (Kane 1990b, 1119).
42. (Tigr.) *täfäṭro* ተፈጥሮ (n): ‘nature, creation’ (EPLF 2003, 296).

43. (Tigr.) *täbay* ጠባይ (n): ‘1) nature=ባህሪ, character, apanage, complexion, feature, element, kind, property’ (EPLF 2003, 563). (Amh.) *täbay* (n): ‘nature (character), disposition, conduct (behaviour), temperament, character, manners, personality; characteristic, property (physics)’ (Kane 1990b, 2150).
44. (Ge’ez) *täbayä* ጠባይ (n): ‘natural disposition, nature, elements, essence’ (Leslau 1991, 587).
45. (Ge’ez) *bahri/bahräy* ባሕር/ባሕርይ (n): ‘pearl, precious stone, essence, element, nature, substance, quality, hypostasis’ (Leslau 1991, 91).
46. (Ge’ez) *faṭara* ፈጠረ (v): ‘create, fashion, produce, fabricate, device, invent, feign, contrive, inscribe (or carve), magic letters, make incisions on the skin’ and (Ge’ez) *tafaṭro* ተፈጥሮ (n): ‘nature, creature’ (Leslau 1991, 171-172).
47. (Amh.) *tänqʷay* ጠንቋይ (adj.): ‘magician, wizard, witch, witch doctor’ (Leslau 1976, 233).
48. (Amh.) *buda* ቡዳ (n): ‘spirit who causes harm by means of the evil eye; person who has the power to cause people to get sick. Popular tradition in rural areas held that traditional workers in iron possessed this capacity. Custom forbids a person from looking at a baby ‘lest the *buda* eat him’ (Kane 1990a, 934).
49. (Amh.) *zar* ዳር (n): ‘spirit which inhabits lakes, wilderness areas or tressand which possesses people, fig. sharp-witted person’ (Kane 1990b, 1624).

Glossary

<p><i>'Abba Sälama Käsate</i> <i>Bərhanä Mänfäsawi</i> <i>Koleṣ</i> አባ ሰላማ ከሳቴ ብርሃን መንፈሳዊ ኮሌጅ</p>	<p>Theological college dedicated to Frumentius located in Meqele, the capital of Tigray.</p>
<p>Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim el Ghazi <i>or Grañ</i>, the left-handed</p>	<p>Muslim leader who invaded Ethiopia in the 16th century, causing considerable damages to ecclesiastical property and life</p>
<p><i>'aklil</i> አክሊል</p>	<p>The crowns used in the ceremony of the Holy Matrimony</p>
<p><i>'anagnostis</i> አናግኖስጢስ</p>	<p>Translates as ‘reader’ of the Holy Scriptures in the Ethiopian Orthodox <i>Tāwahədo</i> Church</p>
<p><i>'andəmta</i> አንድምታ</p>	<p>The main exegetical tradition in the Ethiopian Orthodox <i>Tāwahədo</i> Church which is considered generally immutable</p>
<p><i>'Aq^waq^wam</i> አቋቋም</p>	<p>Translates as ‘how to stand’ and comprises the faculty of ecclesiastical dancing for the accompaniment of hymns in the traditional Church education</p>
<p><i>'awodaš</i> አዎዳሽ</p>	<p>Translates as ‘one who prays’ and refers to the role of a church servant</p>
<p><i>'Əgziabḥern</i> <i>Mämsäl 'Ortodoksawi</i> <i>Təmhərt Däḥənät</i> እግዚአብሔርን መምሰል፡ ኦርቶዶክሳዊ ትምህርተ ደኅነት</p>	<p>Seminar that was organised by the Association of Theologians to promote and to discuss the concept of <i>theosis</i> in the Ethiopian Orthodox <i>Tāwahədo</i> tradition</p>
<p><i>'əçäge</i> አጩኔ</p>	<p>Ecclesiastical title for monks who historically served as the <i>de facto</i> heads of the Ethiopian Church; historically the primary head of the <i>Däbrä Libanos</i> Monastery</p>
<p><i>Däbtära</i> ደብተራ</p>	<p>Non-ordained cantor; may have healing education and be involved in non-permissible prayers and practices or the black arts</p>
<p><i>diyaqon</i> ዲያቆን</p>	<p>The post of ‘deacon’ in the Ethiopian Church</p>
<p><i>Dəgg^wa</i> ድጃ</p>	<p>A book of hymns and music attributed to St Yared who lived in the sixth century; comprises also the faculty of Church hymns in the traditional Church education</p>
<p><i>Dərsan</i> ድርሳን</p>	<p>A compilation of commentaries attributed to John Chrysostom</p>
<p><i>Fətha Nägäšt</i> ፍትሐ ነገሥት</p>	<p>Translates as ‘Law of the Kings’ and comprises the traditional Canon Book of the Ethiopian Orthodox <i>Tāwahədo</i> Church</p>

<i>Fəthät Zäwäld</i> ፍትሐት ዘወልድ	The ‘Prayers of Absolution’ said in the penitential form of the Holy Matrimony
<i>Friminaṭos</i> ፍሪሚናጦስ	The first Archbishop of Ethiopia to whom is attributed the Christianisation of the royal family in Aksum in the fourth century
<i>Haymanotä 'Abbäw</i> ሃይማኖተ አበው	Translates as ‘Faith of the Fathers’ and it is a doctrinal text studied at the highest levels of Church education
<i>Käsate Bərhan</i> ከሣቴ ብርሃን	Translates as ‘Bringer of Light’ and refers to the first Archbishop of Ethiopia, Frumentius
<i>Kidan</i> ኪዳን	Translates as ‘covenant’ and comprises liturgical book of the Church
<i>Kəbrä Nägäšt</i> ክብረ ነገሥት	Translates as ‘Glory of the Kings’ and is an epic of national importance that establishes the Judaic roots of the Ethiopian Orthodox <i>Təwahədo</i> Church and tradition
<i>Liqawənt Guba'e</i> ሊቃውንት ጉባኤ	The Council of Church Scholars of the Church
<i>Liṭon</i> ሊጦን	Translates as ‘praise’ and comprises a liturgical book used by ordained priest
<i>mädhanit</i> መድኃኒት	Translates as ‘Medicine or Redeemer’ and may refer to the Orthodox faith or Jesus Christ
<i>māmhər</i> መምህር	Translates as ‘teacher’ and refers to the highest role in the traditional Church education
<i>mārigeta</i> መሪኔታ	Leader/Chief of hymn-singers in the Ethiopian Church
<i>Mäṣhaf Bet or</i> <i>Tərgʷame Bet</i> ምጽሐፍ ቤት or ትርጓሜ ቤት	Translates as ‘School of Books’ or ‘School of Interpretation’ and is the highest level of education in the traditional Church education
<i>Mäṣhaf Tərgum</i> ምጽሐፍ ተርጉም	Translates as ‘Book of Interpretation’ and is taught at the highest level of Church education
<i>Mäwasə'ət</i> መዋሥኢት	A book that contains prayers sung during feasts and funerals
<i>Mäzämmər</i> መዘምር	Cantor in the Ethiopian Church who intones the hymns at the accompaniments of musical instruments
<i>Maḥəbärä Qədusan</i> ማሳበረ ቅዱሳን	Translates as ‘Association of All the Saints’ and comprises of smaller groups that had been organised to venerate the saints at the local level following the Derg regime in Ethiopia
<i>maḥbär</i> ማሳበር	Religious gathering for the veneration of the saints
<i>Meron</i> ሜሮን	The anointing of oil in the Church

<i>Mə'araf</i> ምዕራፍ	Hymns attributed to St Yared that are sung during the fasting period
<i>näfs 'abbat</i> ነፍስ አባት	Translates as 'spiritual father' and refers to the individual priest assigned to each member of the laity who performs confession and provides spiritual counsel
<i>nätäla</i> ነጠላ	White woollen scarf worn traditionally by Ethiopian (men and women) in Church and other religio-cultural occasions
<i>Nəbab Bet</i> ንባብ ቤት	Translates as 'School of Reading' and is the first level of education in the traditional Church education system
<i>qäläbät</i> ቀለበት	The rings exchanged in the Holy Matrimony
<i>qes</i> ቄስ	Translates as 'priest' and is the main ordained role in the Church
<i>Qəddase</i> ቅዳሴ	Translates as 'liturgy' and comprises liturgical book of the Church
<i>Qəne</i> ቅኔ	The traditional genre of poetry practised in Ethiopia that can be read with a double meaning
<i>Qərallos</i> ቅርሎስ	Cyril of Alexandria; also text studied in the highest school of interpretation in the traditional church education attributed to St Cyril
<i>Q^wərban</i> ቅርባን	Holy Communion, Eucharist; baptism; service of death commemoration
<i>Sä 'atat</i> ሰዓታት	Translates as 'Hourly' and comprises liturgical book of the Church
<i>Säwasäwä Bərhan</i> ሰዋሰው ብርሃን	The St Paul's Theological College in Addis Ababa
<i>šlāmat</i> ሸለማት	Translates as 'reward' and describes the Holy Matrimony, preserved traditionally only for those who abstain from pre-marital relations
<i>Šomä Dəgg^{wa}</i> ጸመ ድግ	Collection of hymns attributed to St Yared sung during the fasting period
<i>ṭabəya</i> ጣብያ	The smallest administrative unit equivalent to a village community
<i>Täḥaddäso</i> ተሐድሶ	Means literally 'reformed' and refers to a local Ethiopian Church that has set to reform the indigenous Orthodox faith under the influence of Evangelical and Charismatic theology
<i>Tägsaś</i> ተግሳፅ	Compilation of commentaries attributed traditionally to John Chrysostom
<i>Täklil</i> ተክሊል	Means literally 'crowning' and refers to the Sacrament of the Holy Matrimony performed in Church
<i>wäräda</i> ወረዳ	Administrative unit that includes multiple villages under its jurisdiction

<i>Wəddasə Maryam</i> ወደሴ ማርያም	Translates as ‘Praises of Mary’ and comprises liturgical book of the Church
<i>yä qolo tämari</i> የቆሎ ተማሪ	Describes the student of the traditional Church education; the designation <i>yä qolo tämari</i> summarises the typically modest conditions of the students, meaning literally “student of the roasted barley”, with the latter being an affordable snack consumed widely in Ethiopia
<i>Yäləmat Wängel</i> የልማት ወንጌል	Translates as ‘Developmental Bible’ and comprises book compiled by theologians and western donors to condemn domestic violence in Ethiopia with reference to religious teachings
<i>Yohānnəs ‘Afäwäraq</i> ዮሐንስ አፈወርቅ	John Chrysostom, a highly venerated saint and influential theologian in the tradition
<i>Zämänä Mäsafənt</i> ዘመነ መሳፍንት	Translates as ‘Era of the Princes’ and describes a period in the 19 th century when Ethiopia was imbricated in internal wars among different princes
<i>Zema</i> ዜማ	The Department of Songs in the traditional Church education
<i>zema mämhər</i> ዜማ መምህር	Teacher of the Department of Songs in the traditional Church education
<i>Zena ‘Abbäw</i> ዜና አባው	Subsection of the School of Interpretation dedicated to the fathers/patriarchs
<i>Zəmmare</i> ዝማሬ	Hymns sung during the Eucharist

List of Experts Consulted

Domestic violence experts in Addis Ababa (4)

- IDVE1. Interview with Feven, EWLA representative, 20 December 2016
IDVE2. Interview with Heregewoin Cherinet, 29 December 2016
IDVE3. Interview with Hirut Terefe, Addis Ababa University, 4 January 2017
IDVE4. Interview with Zenebe Mulumebet, Addis Ababa University, 18 January 2017

Theologians and Church scholars in Addis Ababa and Meqele (11)

- IDCE1. Informal discussion with recent graduate, Holy Trinity Theological College (unnamed), 7 December 2017
ICE2. Interview with Academic Vice Dean Girma Batu, Holy Trinity Theological College, 8 December 2016
ICE3. Interview with teacher, Holy Trinity Theological College (unnamed), 13 December 2017
ICE4. Interview with *Mämhär* Dessie Keleb, scholar of history and Ge'ez, 16 December 2017
ICE5. Interview with Heregewoin Cherinet, graduate of Holy Trinity Theological College, 29 December 2016
ICE6. Interview with teacher, St Paul's Theological College (unnamed), 17 January 2017
ICE7. Interview with Mr. Aymero, Council of Scholars, 21 January 2017
ICE8. Interview with Dean Tesfay, Frumentius Theological College, 27 January 2017
ICE9. Interview with teacher Yared (Jr.), Frumentius Theological College, 30 January 2017
ICE10. Interview with Aba Melaku, Frumenius Theological College, 30 January 2017
ICE11. Informal discussion with teacher, Holy Trinity Theological College (unnamed), 3 August 2017

Theologians and Church scholars in Aksum (12)

- ICE12. Interview with theologian/*Qes* at the administrative office (unnamed), Aksum city, 25 March
ICE13. Interview with Father Serapim, Mariam Tsion Church, Aksum city, 1 April 2017
ICE14. Interview with Father Serapim, Mariam Tsion Church, Aksum city, 19 April 2017
IDCE15. Informal discussion with graduate of traditional church education (unnamed), Aksum city, 22 April 2017
ICE16/17. Interview with *Mämhär* Hiwot, female teacher, and Wolette Yohannes (title unspecified), St Yared Traditional School, Aksum city, 22 April 2017 (x2)
ICE18. Interview with *Mämhär* Alemayehu, Aksum city, 27 April 2017
ICE19. Interview with *Mämhär* Askare Bereket, St Yared Traditional School, Aksum city, 26 May 2017
ICE20. Interview with Aba Andreas, Aksum city, 19 July 2017
ICE21. Informal discussion with *Mämhär* Askare Bereket at St Yared Traditional School, Aksum city, 23 July 2017
ICE22. Informal discussion with Father Serapim, Mariam Tsion, Aksum city, 28 July 2017

List of Participatory Workshops

Participatory workshops in Aksum (6, total participants 55)

- PWW1. Workshop with woman in village 2, 21 February, total number: 12
- PWW2. Workshop with women in village 1, 26 February, total number: 11
- PWM1. Workshop with men in village 2, 23 April 2017, total number: 10
- PWM2. Workshop with men in village 1, 30 April 2017, total number: 8
- PWMMQ. Workshop with male *MQ* attendants, 5 May 2017, total number 7
- PWFMQ. Workshop with female *MQ* attendants, 4 June 2017, total number: 8

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