

# ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES: TAKING STOCK OF LESSONS AND APPROACHES IN THE ERA OF DECOLONISING KNOWLEDGE

Webinar, 26 November 2020

Hosted by Dr Romina Istratii, UKRI Future Leaders Fellow in the School of  
History, Religions and Philosophies at SOAS University of London

Principal Investigator of the UKRI-funded project "Bridging religious studies,  
gender & development and public health to address domestic violence: A  
novel approach for Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK."

# HOUSEKEEPING

- The webinar is delivered from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. While the connection has been stable, in the case of disruptions, please do give me some time to reconnect.
- The event will be recorded so please do keep your cameras off if you do not wish to be known.
- The recording will be disseminated directly via the Zoom link to the registered attendees and via the project's social media platforms at a future date.
- If you have any questions, please do post them in the chat and I will do my best to respond during the session if addressed to me.

# AGENDA

- Contextualisation of the webinar theme and overview of aims (10 minutes)
- Speakers' presentations (15 minutes each)
- Q&A session with the audience (20+ minutes)

## BEFORE PROCEEDING...

I invite you to keep a minute's silence for the civilian lives that have been lost in the on-going conflict in Tigray, northern Ethiopia.

We pray that peace can be restored soon to avoid further human loss and war trauma.

# CONTEXT AND AIMS OF THE WEBINAR

- Efforts to address domestic violence in religious communities are not new - increasing recognition that religious beliefs and religious personnel need to be integrated better in domestic violence research and practice.
- Research on domestic violence has been disproportionately informed by studies in western societies, while conceptualisations of 'religion' reflect distinct experiences with secularism that might not capture lived religious realities and understandings in other contexts.
- While ethnicity and race have received more attention, a substantive engagement with religio-cultural worldviews requires understanding how these intertwine with collective histories, gender norms and individual psychologies to affect attitudes about and responses to domestic violence in communities of distinct religio-cultural traditions.
- This webinar aims to examine current approaches to domestic violence in religious communities, to reflect on lessons learned and contributions made by these initiatives and to identify directions for the future.
- It aims to do so with reflexivity of the limitations of ethnocentric understandings of 'religion' and tendencies in gender-sensitive practice to appraise religious parameters as monolithically negative, which fails to appreciate the importance of religious beliefs for adherents and their potential resourcefulness.
- The webinar hopes to promote more knowledge exchange between Northern and Southern societies, in an effort to promote a decolonisation of domestic violence theory and practice and to cater better to multi-religious and multi-cultural populations and communities in an increasingly globalised world.

## BACKGROUND

- I am a scholar and practitioner with decade-long anthropological and development experience in sub-Saharan African rural communities working to analyse and address gender-related issues in religio-culturally sensitive ways.
- In the past five years I have been actively involved in decolonising knowledge production and research and to reverse asymmetric and unreflexive practices in international collaborative research.
- The webinar is part of a new UKRI-funded project that builds on this experience and aims to develop religio-culturally sensitive domestic violence support systems working in locally integrated ways and in collaboration with local specialists, stakeholders and communities.
- The overall aim of is to raise awareness about the complex role of religious traditions and stakeholders have in domestic violence in different cultural contexts.

## RESEARCH ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

For example, research with the Ethiopian Orthodox community in the north of the country demonstrated the prevalence of religious language in how people understood and experienced domestic violence and the salient role of the clergy in teaching about marriage and mediating abusive situations. While some clergy lacked the preparedness to respond with awareness of the complex psychology of victims and perpetrators, others used theological language resourcefully and in ways that could reverse rigid or pernicious folklore attitudes associated with some forms of conjugal abuse.

- ‘Faith, human psychology and domestic violence: Some ethnographic insights’, *Partner Violence & Mental Health Network*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHJ32YqcMic&feature=youtu.be>
- ‘The Complex Role of Religion in the Experience of Conjugal Abuse in Northern Ethiopia’, *Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCZTYRpIFkA>
- ‘Adapting Gender and Development to Local Religious Contexts: A Decolonial Approach to Domestic Violence in Ethiopia’, *SOAS Centre of World Christianity*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRkQwD70Rqw&feature=youtu.be>

# THE PROJECT

UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship (£1,287,659) to bring to fruition a challenging and novel project titled “Bridging religious studies, gender & development and public health to address domestic violence: A novel approach for Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK”

The project seeks to promote a decolonial approach to addressing domestic violence by engaging substantively with the religio-cultural belief systems of domestic violence victims/survivors and perpetrators and understanding how these interface with gender, material and psychological parameters to facilitate or deter domestic violence.

It will generate new research and intervention approaches working with Ethiopian and Eritrean collaborators and rural and urban communities and will apply knowledge from the respective countries to inform approaches for integrating and supporting better ethnic minority and migrant populations affected by domestic violence in the UK.



# THE PROJECT TEAM

## Principal Investigator:

Dr Romina Istratii, SOAS, UK

## Project Manager:

Ms Estela Papagianni, SOAS, UK

## Partners and collaborators:

Aksum University, Aksum, Ethiopia

St Frumentius Theological College, Mekelle, Ethiopia

Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Diversity Resource International, London, UK and Asmara, Eritrea

## Co-Investigators for project activities in the UK:

Dr Parveen Ali, The University of Sheffield, UK

Professor Gene Feder, University of Bristol, UK

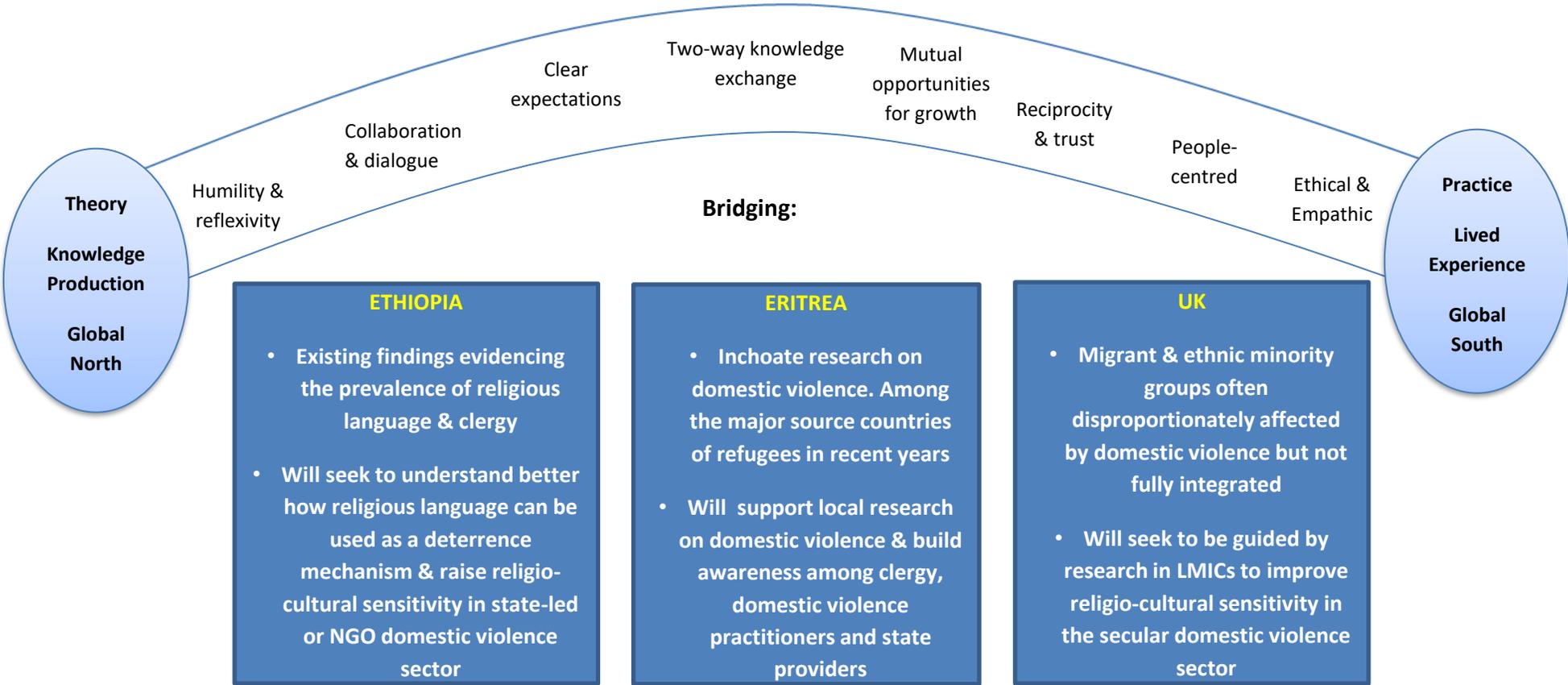
## Mentors:

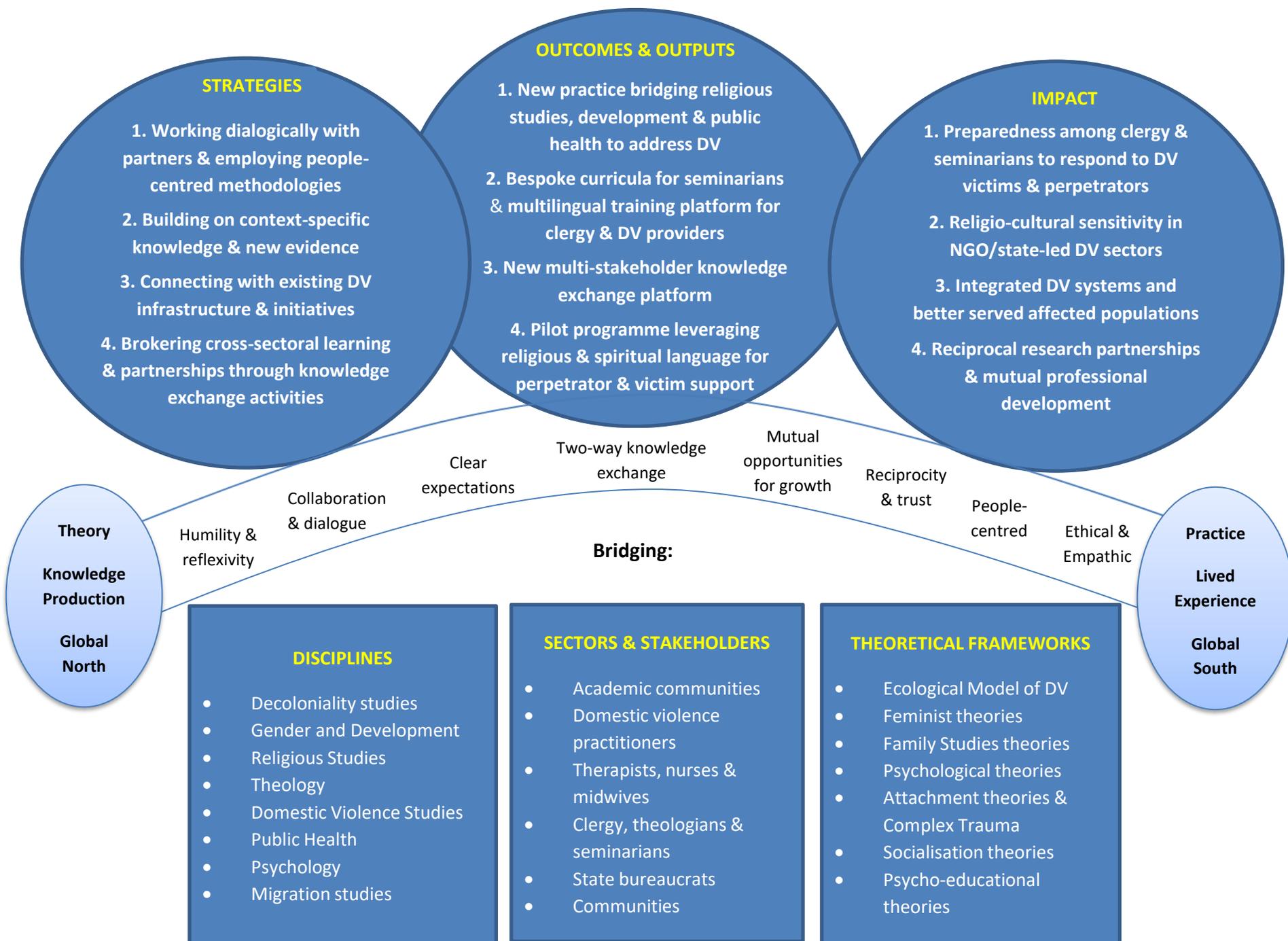
Dr Lisa Aronson Fontes, The University of Massachusetts Amherst, US

Dr Erminia Colucci, Middlesex University London, UK

Professor Lindiwe Dovey, SOAS, UK

# Bridging religious studies, gender & development and public health to address domestic violence: A novel approach for Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK





## THANKS ARE DUE TO:

Peace and Development Centre in Addis Ababa  
for hosting the webinar at their offices  
<https://pdcethiopia.org/>

If you'd like to discuss the project, please email Dr Romina Istratii at [ri5@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ri5@soas.ac.uk).