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**AGENCY AND SISTERHOOD: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF
ETHIOPIAN SEX WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF, AND RESISTANCE
TO, VIOLENCE**

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Thesis Submitted for the degree of PhD

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Centre for Gender Studies
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Dedication

For Rekka, with gratitude for her joyful company from the beginning of this journey.

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Abstract

Sex workers in Ethiopia are both stigmatized by mainstream society and sometimes patronized as victims. Whereas western feminism has engaged with sex work on theoretical grounds, the more specific topic of violence against sex workers has been neglected by academia and usually taken for granted.

It was in this context that I undertook a feminist research into violence against sex workers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia between October 2011 and July 2012. I adopted a post-colonial stance in my research and building on my previous experience in working with sex workers in Addis Ababa, designed a qualitative inquiry that aimed to be as participatory as possible. With the support of a sex workers' association, I conducted five focus group discussions among the same group of 20 sex workers; interviewed 87 sex workers as well as 22 male partners of sex workers, and conducted a survey to assess male attitudes towards sex work among university students.

My findings show that sex workers in Addis Ababa, rather than being victims, exhibit agency in choosing sex work over the other low-paying jobs available to unskilled young women and in negotiating their way within the sector; minimizing the dangers they face and maximising their monetary gains. Sex workers also adopt a pragmatic version of sisterhood, supporting each other in times of need amidst competition. My research indicates that sex workers' commodified sexuality and 'their' men's aggressive masculinity lie on continuums with the constructed femininity and masculinity of mainstream Ethiopian society. Lastly, I argue that the violence experienced by sex workers is only an extreme manifestation of the violence largely experienced by Ethiopian women at large which speaks to the highly patriarchal nature of the gender regime in Ethiopia.

Glossary

All terms are Amharic, unless otherwise noted.

Afesa - clean-up operations whereby street-based sex workers are picked off the streets

Areke - a distilled alcoholic drink

Bal - husband or (male) partner

Be' peace – From the English; 'peacefully'

Buna bet - 'coffee house', a euphemism for a bar where there are usually sex workers soliciting clients

Business yemiseru – 'those doing 'business', i.e. selling sex

Chereba – Stealing of clients' cash and goods

Dirijit - aid agencies

Duriye - rough, ill-mannered men

Fara - gullible

Fresh [sex worker] – a newcomer

Khat (pronounced 'Chat' in Amharic): A stimulant plant the leaves of which are chewed; a common pastime of sex workers in Addis Ababa

Memeresh - cut with a razorblade; a trademark of sex workers in some parts of Addis Ababa

Mewcha - going out fee

Mewtat - Coming out [into sex work]

Mood - Taken from the English but used differently; as in what one enjoys doing

Pensione - (from the Italian), a small hotel or guest room

Set/Setoch – Woman/women; in the sex work context, also taken to mean a sex worker(s)

Setegnaadari – A formal term; sex worker

Setoch bet - women's room; usually found on the premises of a bar where sex workers solicit

Shelae – a shortened version of *Shermuta*; largely used as an insult but also reclaimed by some sex workers

Shermuta- ‘whore’, adapted from the Arabic

Short – a one-time assignation between a sex worker and her client

Sira – work

Tikim - monetary and in-kind benefits

Wend/ Wendoch – Man/Men; in the sex work context, also taken to mean a client/clients

Whisky bet – a bar selling imported whisky as well as other alcoholic beverages

Wuch Zega or Zega – a foreign national

Ye’bet lij– ‘a child at home’; referring to unmarried women still living with their families.

Chapter One: Introduction

Hanna's story of entering sex work is typical of women sex workers in Addis Ababa. A 10th grade student at a secondary school in central Addis Ababa, Hanna left home one afternoon after a particularly bad fight with her stepmother. Desperate to find somewhere to sleep, she left her schoolbooks with a friendly shopkeeper and stood on a street corner in the upscale Bole neighborhood where large villas line the sides of roads that are wider and cleaner than the unpaved *korokonch* of her neighborhood. Cold and afraid, Hanna got into the first car that pulled up in the early evening light. Not knowing any better, she agreed to a fee of 15 Birr (£0.50) in exchange for sex - the minimum charged by street-based workers at that period was 100 Birr (£3.30). She had only had sex twice before, with her boyfriend. The underpaying client also beat Hanna up badly, but when he was caught by the police, he was let go in exchange for paying her a cash compensation for 'medical fees' with which she treated herself to a film at a nearby cinema. Comforted by the presence of the police who came to her rescue, Hanna started selling sex close to the 6th Police Precinct in the Kazzanchis area of Addis. She put herself through school for some time selling sex until she was seen by some of her classmates early one evening. Ashamed, Hanna quit school and became a full-time sex worker. She eagerly adopted the accompanying lifestyle including drinking alcohol and chewing *khat* leaves, a mild stimulant and something of a signature pastime among Addis Ababan sex workers. She dated a series of men who helped 'burn' her money and who regularly beat her. Following an argument, one boyfriend – distinguished from a client because he does not pay Hanna for sex, and because there is an ongoing relationship between them – hit her face so badly that, embarrassed by her obvious bruises, Hanna chose to not work for some days. Two years after she started sex work, Hanna was taken to the warehouse of a factory in the wooded edge of the city by the owner's son who raped her without a condom and left her in the compound in the morning.

She was especially humiliated that the workers on duty knew what had happened – she heard them talking and laughing about her. The rapist’s sister gave her money and told her that she was tired of taking care of the sex workers her brother brought and left at the premises.

In addition to such unplanned encounters with women who have helped her survive violent men, Hanna invests much energy in nurturing her friendships with a select group of sex worker friends. She is part of a tight group of friends who work together on the busy streets of the Bole district of the city. It was the same group of friends, including Gelete (whom in the Ethiopian custom of demonstrating affection and indebtedness, she calls ‘*Enate*’ - ‘my mother’) who took care of Hanna when she became ill with an infection and could not work for a year since her stepmother would not let her back into the house she grew up in. Her women friends, as well as a few of her regular customers, pooled money to pay for her upkeep and rent while her father, influenced by her stepmother (Hanna assumes) has refused to help her.

Now recovered from the ordeal of her illness, Hanna has a more mature take on her life. She is no longer the ‘fresh’ sex worker, excited by her new lifestyle and enjoying long, carefree afternoons with her new, sophisticated, friends who teach her the proper way to chew *khat*, and whose witty banter on ‘business’ somehow makes what they do at night seem not so bad. She says she is over the novelty of having an expendable income, and she does not like to think about how she could have saved the thousands of birr that had come her way, particularly when her youth and inexperience years ago meant she was rarely unoccupied.

Hanna says that she tried to leave sex work after her illness. Seeking the security of a monthly paycheck but unable to find anything better-paying, she became a cook’s assistant at a busy restaurant in Piassa, the oldest part of the city, for 300 birr (£10) per month - an amount she could make in one evening selling sex. It was brutal work and standing on her feet all night chopping meat gave her a backache.

Unable to cover her rent, she left her position after one month and went back to working on the streets.

Hanna says that she does not like being a sex worker but she does not know what other occupation would provide a similar income. She claims to be tired of chewing *khat* but she does it every afternoon as without its intoxication, she claims that could not face the evenings. She no longer has friends who are not sex workers, and all of her male acquaintances are either the boyfriends of other sex workers or clients.

She recognizes that having sex is work but she is sometimes surprised to find she enjoys it, particularly with a handsome or regular client, and with her boyfriend. After more than five years on the job, Hanna has learnt to gauge a client's proclivity to violence and adjusts her behaviour accordingly, adopting either a shy and retiring attitude or being confrontational. In some brazen encounters, Hanna has also been known to throw the first punch at a client or boyfriend. She has also developed a sixth sense for dangerous clients: when she meets one she suspects might treat her violently she quotes unreasonably high fees so they leave – she has found on numerous occasions that the same client she avoided had harmed another woman who had gone with him. Hanna tells new sex workers: 'Trust your instincts.' She says she is usually kind to the new faces of sex workers on her stretch of street and she also has much sympathy for the faceless wives of her regular clients about whom she sometimes asks, but if a woman approaches a regular client of Hanna's, and particularly if she has been drinking, Hanna is likely to get into a physical fight with her.

Hanna says that she does not know what her future will be, and like most Ethiopians, she believes God will provide. At different times, she has made half-hearted attempts to join the various savings groups organized by *dirijit* (aid agencies) but none have provided her with a real alternative to sex work. In fact, what she enjoys most about participating in the meetings organized by NGOs set up to help sex workers is the camaraderie with other sex workers; more than any other, the sex worker identity is the one she feels defines her, and she feels safe with other women who sell sex.

On occasion, Hanna fantasizes about having a husband but she says that she cannot imagine any of the men she knows getting her out of ‘the life’. For now, she knows she is her own care-taker.

Hanna’s story highlights many of the key findings of my inquiry into Ethiopian sex workers’ gendered experience of violence. **My research investigates the agency employed by women and girls to avoid violence and the ways in which sex workers support each other.** The story is useful in showing the prevalence of violence within paid and non-paid sexual relationships, and demonstrates the practical attitudes that many sex workers have towards their work. As illustrated through Hanna’s experiences, I argue in this dissertation that sex workers in Addis Ababa are not usually victims but are independent agents who skillfully maneuver the complex world of sex work, striving to maximize their financial gains while struggling to avoid or overcome the harm that may be considered an ‘occupational hazard’ of their trade. I also assert that sex workers practice a pragmatic form of sisterhood that enables them to get ahead in ‘the game’. However, the sisterhood practiced by sex workers in Addis Ababa is not a manifestation of feminist principles of political solidarity and features as much rivalry and in-fighting as cooperation.

Background Theories of Engagement

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) describes violence against women as ‘a manifestation of historically unequal power relationships between men and women’ (Pickup, 2001:2). In examining violence against women, I turn to classic feminist understandings which posit that the root cause of violence by men against women, and of intimate-partner violence in particular is the patriarchal norm that condones male aggression while women and girls are socialized to be submissive.

At the same time, violence is used to perpetuate and enforce women's subordinate role. Men's violence against women was something that was largely taken for granted until Western feminists started problematizing it; the publication of Susan Brownmiller's international bestselling book *Against Our Will* in 1975 was pivotal in analyzing male power and putting rape and other forms of male violence on the feminist agenda (Segal, 2007:198). Beyond a recording of the perceptions and experiences of violence by sex workers, the feminist and qualitative study I undertook in Addis Ababa during October 2011-June 2012 aimed to explain the prevalence of violence by examining power within the construction of female and male sexuality in Addis Ababa.

Patriarchy, Power, Masculinity and Violence

Men's violence against women is buttressed by patriarchal mores that assume that men must dominate women and expect them to meet their demands. In patriarchal societies the myth that men cannot control their own sexual desires, and that women really want to be over-powered or that they can provoke attack, often results in men's sexualized attack of women. In the case of rape, in particular, feminists have argued that rather than sexual drive, a culture that encourages men to 'conquer' women through sex is the main factor. In addition, male-dominated societies allow men to get away with the physical and sexual abuse of women and girls with little risk of censure (Segal, 2007:195).

In Ethiopia, while sexualized violence against women is prevalent, sex workers in particular who are usually poor and therefore more vulnerable as well as having necessarily sexualized 'bodies' may be considered 'fair game' for violence. Feminist scholars in the West have also questioned the low reported rates of rape and linked this apparent under-reporting with a narrow definition of rape as 'defined by law and custom to refer exclusively to a woman who resisted a man who had no rights of sexual access to her.'

For instance, Barbara Lindermann, in her study of rape in the US state of Massachusetts in the eighteenth century, argues that sexual assault by upper-class or middle-class men on their domestic servants would not have been culturally constructed as such (1984, Cited in Segal, 2007:200). The trend to limit the construction of 'rape' definitely holds true in the Ethiopian context where many men consider it their prerogative to sleep with their domestic help, regardless of whether she consents. According to my findings, this form of male privilege also applies to sex workers whom many men assume they should have free sexual access to as 'non-respectable' and sexualized women. Throughout my research, sex workers described being forced to have sex against their will without conceptualizing or describing the assault as 'rape.' Other feminist thinkers, building on the theories of power developed by Michel Foucault, have made deeper analysis of the complex relationship between power and gender relations which go beyond male possession of power. Foucault describes power as 'exercised, rather than possessed [and] circulating through the social body rather than manifested from the top-down'.

This more textured understanding of power has enabled some feminists to investigate the ways in which women's varied experiences and perceptions are shaped by the very power relations that feminism seeks to debunk (Sawicki, 1988:164). For instance, although feminist theory typically explains women's use of violence in the context of self-defense and retaliation for previous abuse, non-essentializing feminist theory also acknowledges that women may also be violent towards men and other women, (Kurz, 1997:201), a phenomenon which is borne out by my research.

While Foucauldian analysis of power has helped some feminists problematize gendered power, other feminist writers have objected to at least some of Foucault's theory. In Foucauldian terms, these are individual women and men who are completely subject to the discipline of the social control mechanisms of the state through the institutions of schools, hospitals, factories and military establishments – one of the poles of the 'bio-power' articulated by Foucault.

Feminist writers such as Nancy Hartsock have objected to Foucault's designation of these 'docile bodies' as void of the ability to resist power which fundamentally undermines the political aims of feminism (1990: 171-2).

In order to investigate resistance among sex workers in Addis Ababa, I turn to Lila Abu Lughod's application of Foucauldian principles of power and resistance. In *The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformation of Power through Bedouin Women*, Abu Lughod, following Foucault, argues that resistance is an intrinsic component of power relations and that should be viewed as a 'diagnostic of power'. Quoting Foucault, Abu-Lughod asserts that 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (1990:12)'. Abu Lughod further explains that resistance and power occur simultaneously at different stages of society (1990:41). Sex workers continuously navigate the terrains of sex work and resist the rampant violence that is almost an expected part of the work by applying different techniques which requires bravery, quick thinking and guile. In Abu Lughod's terminology, violence within sex work may be classified as a 'site of struggle' (1990:47).

According to R. Connell, masculinity is defined as a configuration of practice within the system of gender relations. She argues that the inequality as pervasive as the one between men and women... 'is hard to imagine without violence' (1995:83). In this arrangement, violence overwhelmingly belongs to the dominant gender – in the service of what bell hooks calls 'patriarchal manhood' (2004:49).

Connell further argues that patriarchal definitions of femininity including culturally constructed dependence and fearfulness collude in the conflation of gendered masculinity by providing 'a cultural disarmament that may be as effective as the physical kind' (1995:83).

Michael Kimmel, on the other hand, defines masculinity not as the experience of power, but as the experience of *entitlement* to power (1987:229). Following Kimmel (1987; 2005) and Segal (2007), I show the linkages between masculinity and culturally-sanctioned male dominance leading to unchecked violence against sex workers in Addis Ababa. Building on the work of feminist researchers who have studied aspects of sex work and masculinity (Segal, 2001; Segal, 2007 and Kaufman, 2001), my research shows that violence within sex work does not happen in a vacuum but rather on a continuum with violence within intimate relationships.

The empirical findings of my research directly speak to the enduring feminist debate on whether sex work should be viewed as a patriarchal construction that always oppresses women and girls or if it should be constructed as work that should be legitimized in order to reduce the harm experienced by women. In this regard, I particularly engage with the writings of authors such as Sheila Jeffreys who is among a group of radical feminists who disagree with the idea that 'prostitution' is regular work, and who draw parallels between the experiences of women she describes as 'prostituted' and 'rape victims' including emotional disassociation for the sake of survival and symptoms of post-traumatic shock syndrome (2009:17). My research findings directly contradict such generalizations about sex workers' experiences and their relationship both to their work and the dangers within it. Using numerous first-person accounts, my research illustrates that sex workers exhibit particular forms of agency in negotiating both sex work and prevalent violence within it.

On Examining Agency

I define the term 'agency' as one's capability to act on one's will. I recognize that the agency of the sex worker community that my research focuses on is informed, expanded and constrained by the experiences and perceptions that the women have of themselves as a sub-group of deviant women whose identity is completely enmeshed with that of their work.

Throughout my thesis, I have worked with the definition of agency as a person's ability to act on one's own will and to act on one's best interests. By contrast, I understand structure to be factors such as social class, religion, gender, sexuality and ethnicity which may determine or limit an individual's capacity to act on her own will. Here, I frame my discussion on agency by referring to the concept as articulated by leading thinkers in the field of social sciences.

The renowned Sociologist Anthony Giddens argued that structure and agency must be regarded as symbiotic - structure shapes agent's choices while the decisions that individuals make in turn reproduces structure. Giddens argues that structures are enacted by 'knowledgeable' human agents who use their structurally-formed capacities in creative ways(1981, 91). In Giddens' view, human understanding of the rules of society makes them capable of appropriate action. Therefore, agency is shaped by the individual's experiences which shape her cognitive belief structure and her understanding of the limitations and circumstances of her environment.

Further elaborating human beings' capacity to act with agency, William H. Sewell of the University of Chicago has posited that the particular range of societal rules in which an agent finds herself shape the universal capacity for agency. Therefore, forms of agency vary largely and are culturally and historically determined (1992, 20). Sewell agrees with Giddens that structures enable or deter agents' capacity differently (1992,21). To frame this argument in the context of my thesis, a young unskilled woman in urban Ethiopia has fewer options other than sex work than a middle-class woman with a university education while both would be exercising agency in opting to enter sex work. In my understanding of agency as it plays out in the lives of sex worker women, gender and work-identity play a more significant role than other possible factors of influence, such as religion and ethnicity. Social class is also an important consideration, rendering poorer women more at risk than those who are better off.

This affects in particular the degree of violence the women are exposed to as well as how the women deal with violence – my respondents, all of whom belong to the lower socio-economic class are more ‘physical’ in their altercations than middle-class or upper-class women.

Lastly, the findings of my research dispelled romantic notions I had previously held about solidarity among sex workers which had been informed by my feminist politics – I had assumed and hoped to find that such a feminized and stigmatized group would work together not only for survival but for also for growth. In addition, I had hoped to find that a sex workers’ association set up to defend sex workers’ rights would use sisterhood among sex workers as a political strategy. The picture that emerged from my research was more complex and highlighted sex workers’ strategic use of mutual support to get ahead in their treacherous field of work.

Research Questions, Limitations and the Significance of the Research

‘To insist upon posing questions about things that other people take for granted can be a political act.’
(Cynthia Enloe, 2007:1)

Research Questions

The overall question that has guided this query is what the feminist analysis into the prism of violence shows us about sex work. Specifically, the research will aim to investigate these two questions: 1) Do sex workers in Addis Ababa have agency as evidenced through their engagement in sex work and the ways in which they deal with the pervasive violence that characterizes sex work in Addis Ababa? And:

2) Is there a sisterhood of sex workers in Addis Ababa helping sex workers navigate the difficult terrains of sex work and underpinning their organizing towards a better future?

By problematizing an issue that is investigated insufficiently, my research provides an original feminist understanding of the gendered dynamics of violence in sex work in the context of urban Ethiopia. My analysis also contributes to the feminist frameworks and debates on the nature of sex work that my research engages with, making nuanced linkages between violence within sex work and patriarchal gender relations in Ethiopia including normalized violence within intimate relationships as an expression of gendered power. In particular, my analysis makes linkages between the practice of violence against sex workers and patriarchal notions that seek to explain it, such as men's uncontrollable sexual urges, and men's feelings of entitlement to women's bodies. As an investigation into the phenomenon of sex work as it is manifested in an urban society in Ethiopia, an African and 'developing' country, another significance of my research is a broadening of the debate on the nature of sex work and associated violence beyond that pursued by western/white feminists. In the Ethiopian context, my research on a topic and from a perspective that has been under-researched contributes to the growth of the nascent trend of feminist scholarship in Ethiopia. Lastly, and from a governance perspective, this dissertation offers a critique of the repressive nature of the Ethiopian government which despite delivering impressive gains in development is failing to protect the security and dignity of all Ethiopian women, with sex workers, as a stigmatized group, disproportionately affected.

Linking patriarchy with formal power, my research illustrates the extremely precarious situation that sex workers find themselves in. Specifically, subject to frequent violence by the Police force entrusted to protect the citizenry, sex workers are offered no protection or redress, forcing them to rely on their own resilience and agency.

Setting the Context: The Ethiopian Political Economy

Although it boasts one of the fastest-growing economies currently, Ethiopia is ranked as a low-income country with a population of 88 million and 29.6% of its population at the national poverty line (Ethiopian CSA, 2014). The economy of Ethiopia is largely based on agriculture, accounting for 46.6% of the gross domestic product. The government has tried to control inflation but it remains high, at 5.4% as of December 2014 (AfDB, 2014). In the following segment, I will examine specific components of the Ethiopian political economy which have bearing on my research. Ethiopian society is highly unequal and the traditionally low value placed on women contributes to a culture where violence against women is the norm. Meanwhile, pervasive urban poverty and vulnerability combined with low unemployment make sex work a viable source of income for an increasing number of girls and women.

Gender Inequality in Ethiopia

Ethiopia ranks 173rd out of 186 ranked countries on the UN Gender Inequality Index, part of the UN Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014). According to the 2011 Demographic Health Survey, sixty three per cent of Ethiopian women are married by the age of 18 compared with 14% of men (Ethiopian CSA, 2014). Partly as a result, Ethiopia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world and the government has recently invested heavily in improving access to maternal healthcare. The economic and political spheres are heavily dominated by men - fewer than 30% of parliamentary seats are occupied by women, and the female-male ratio of estimated earned income is 0.67 (AfDB, 2015).

Violence against Women in Ethiopia: Some Data

A new penal code established in 2001 criminalizes the culturally-sanctioned practice of men abducting women and girls for forced marriage; female genital cutting which is estimated to have been experienced by 70%-80% of the female population; sexual harassment, domestic violence and polygamy.

Despite improvements in legislation, violence against women and girls (and increasingly, against boys) is rampant in Ethiopia. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) multi-country study of 2005, 59% of ever-partnered women in Ethiopia experience sexual violence at some point in their lives (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2006: 1262). Another study conducted in south central Ethiopia in 2002 with 3016 women between the ages of 15-49 from rural and urban areas found that 59% of respondents had experienced sexual violence (defined as physically forced sex, forced sex through intimidation and threats, being forced into sexual acts the women considered to be degrading or humiliating), and 49% had experienced non-sexual physical violence by a partner at some point in their lives. In the 12 months prior to the study, 44% of the women respondents had experienced sexual violence and 29% physical violence. The common forms of violence cited were beating with sticks, slaps on the face, burning, kicking, beating using fists or household objects, stabbing, cutting with sharp objects, verbal abuse, threats using knives or guns, and being restrained and/or tied up with a rope. Consequences included sprains and dislocations of bones (39%), injury to eyes or ears (10%), bone fractures (18%) and broken teeth and in extreme cases, deaths (2006: 1264). In terms of attitude, the report found that women who have experienced violence were more likely than those women who had not experienced it to believe that a husband was justified in beating his wife if she did not complete her housework on time, if she disobeyed him, if she refused to have sex with him, if she asked about his other sexual partners or if he suspected her of being unfaithful (2006: 1265).

Where men's violence against women is an accepted and even expected fact of life, we can describe violence as an ingrained part of Ethiopian gender relations. Sexualized violence against women exists on

a continuum from the home to the public arena and significantly for my research, places sex workers who may be considered as ‘free for alls’ in terms of sexual accessibility, on the opposite end of the spectrum from married women whose sexuality is bound to individual men.

Addis Ababa

With an official population of 2.8 million (Ethiopian CSA, 2014), Addis Ababa is the largest city in Ethiopia and its capital. Addis Ababa is one of two city-states in Ethiopia and as the home of both the African Union (formerly the Organization of African Unity) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA); it is also considered the political capital city of Africa. The city is divided into ten sub-cities and 99 *kebeles* which is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. Population sizes range from close to 430,000 in Kolfe-Keranio sub-city to fewer than 190,000 in Kaliti-Akaki sub-city (Ethiopian CSA, 2014). All eighty of the Ethiopian ethnic groups are represented in Addis Ababa, and the main languages spoken in the capital city include the national languages, Amharic (spoken by 71% of the population), Afan Oromo and Tigrigna as well as Gurage, Silt’e and Gamo. While most residents of Addis Ababa profess to belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox church, a significant minority is comprised of Muslims, Protestants and Catholics (Ethiopian CSA, 2014). Addis Ababa is considered a relatively safe city despite a spike in reports of violence since about 2010 and is undergoing a construction boom of residences, high-rise shopping malls and luxury services such as spas. The latter include a large proliferation of massage parlors some of which are avenues for the sale of sexual services.

Ethiopian Youth

Ethiopia has the largest youth population in sub-Saharan Africa with more than half its population under the age of 25 and 20% between the ages of 15 and 24. The proportion of youth in the population is increasing steadily, from 14% in 1984 (Ethiopian CSA, 2014). Although investments in education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels have increased significantly, the high rate of population growth has

meant that job creation has not kept up with the increased number of graduates (AfDB, 2015). The unemployment rate for urban youth in Ethiopia is 37.5% (Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations, 2010:1).

Youth urban unemployment is partly explained by the low levels of job creation by the formal sector, shortage of applicable skills and entrepreneurship among youth (Ibid). High levels of unemployment combined with the commodification of women's bodies, more disposable income among some men and a traditional tolerance to sex work create a fertile ground for the boom in sex work currently experienced by Addis Ababa.

Political Freedom and the Opportunities for Political Organizing

Although it technically has a multi-party system, Ethiopia has been ruled by the same coalition party, the Ethiopian People's Republic Democratic Front (EPRDF) for the last 25 years. A 2009 law has decreed that associations working on advocacy may not receive foreign funding, damaging the capacity of those few women's organizations that exist to stand up for women's rights. Furthermore, when one considers the complete lack of press freedom – Ethiopia imprisons more journalists than any other country in Africa except Eritrea (Freedom House, 2015)- and the draconian Anti-Terrorism Law effected in 2009 under which bloggers and journalists have been charged on supporting terrorism, we find an extremely constrained space for any sort of political organizing.

Sex Work in Addis Ababa

In Ethiopian cities, sex work is entered into relatively easily. Sometimes, a woman becomes a sex worker after trying to make ends meet by doing other kinds of work, or when some personal hardship such as the death of her parents or an unplanned birth – combined particularly by abandonment by the baby's father – pushes her into selling sex.

However, sex work is also taken up lightly by some, as when a girl runs away from home because of a disagreement, or because a young woman is attracted by her working friends' material possessions or by the perceived glamour of the sex worker lifestyle. In the latter case, some girls' and women's adoption of the sex worker lifestyle appears to be similar to other young women's entry into a 'fast' lifestyle consisting of drinking, smoking cigarettes and marijuana and particularly, chewing *khat*. Such young women usually dress fashionably, are regular participants in the vibrant Addis nightlife centered around the well to-do areas of Hayahulet and Bole as well as at the world class hotels, and are perceived to enjoy frequent sex with multiple partners. Sometimes, it is not clear where lifestyles stop and being a sex worker begins; many of my informants told me about *other* young women who either sell sex informally or are more selective than self-proclaimed sex workers. This group of women are said to finance their lifestyles through 'sugar daddies': older, richer men who may be prevailed upon to buy clothes and give spending money to young women in exchange for youthful company and sex. The implication then is that not all women who sell sex adopt a primary identity as a sex worker. However, in my research, all the women I interviewed strongly identified as sex workers, spoke of the time they 'came out' ('*mewtat*' in Amharic) into proper sex work, indicating a clear boundary from respectability to transgression.

Sex as Commodity

The pervasiveness of sex work is related to the prevalent view of women's sexuality as a commodity held by women and men alike. To this end, sex workers sometimes describe sex as something to be exchanged for a material gain. My informants in the old red-light district of Datsun Sefer close to Piassa, for example, teased their friend who had recently had her first sexual experience as a teenager that they could have made good money with her virginity if she had not 'given it up for candy'. The sex-as-commodity argument extends to the characterization of men as economic agents; a good man is one who provides for his woman economically, and it is common to use the phrase, 'kept' ('*kimeit*') to describe

those women who are provided for by one rich man so that they no longer have to work in the sense of selling sex to multiple clients. Seen in this context, sex work appears only slightly off the continuum of dating, being 'kept' and being married. In the first major ethnographic study of sex work in Addis Ababa from the 1970's, Ethiopian author Lakech Dirasse argues that the dominant concepts of prostitution with the elements of 'remuneration, deviance and detachment' are insufficient in explaining the widely varying patterns of sexual relationships in the Ethiopian capital.

Dirasse proposes an alternative approach which views all sexual relationships on a continuum that ranges from more permanent and legally sanctioned unions to casual sexual encounters including men keeping mistresses ('*kimeit*') or both men and women keeping lovers ('*wishima*') (1991:4). Supporting the continuum argument, Dirasse reports that the relation between the typical sex worker and her regular clients is not a merely commercialized sexual transaction but often involves a mutual emotional attachment with regular clients benefiting from domestic privileges such as meals (1991:7).

However, there are obvious differences within the relationships on this continuum, with payment being a key factor.

Sex Work in the Cultural Landscape

Sex work is entered into easily in part because it is so common, and there are so many sex workers working and living in Addis Ababa. One does not have to go to particular parts of the city to find sex work – it is present everywhere. That said, there are historical parts of the city populated by sex workers such as Wube Bereha and Gedam Sefer where many sex workers grew up, some as daughters of sex workers. Sex work takes place not only in its obvious manifestation of scantily-dressed young women lining the streets in Bole, the richest part of the city featuring malls, restaurants and expensive housing estates; it is also integrated into the drinking culture of Addis Ababa, into the thousands of small bars that dot every

part of the city. Indeed, the line between waiting tables at such bars and sex work is blurred and the former is often the entry point to the latter.

In Ethiopia, although sex work is largely tolerated and un-criminalized, the sex worker is a stigmatized figure within mainstream, 'respectable' society. Specifically, sex work was largely blamed for spreading the HIV virus in the early stage of the epidemic in Ethiopia in the 1990s, and it is still considered a factor in the spread of the disease, particularly as many sex workers enter the trade at a young age making them more vulnerable to contracting the virus. Ayalew and Berhane found in their sample of 650 female sex workers that 41.2% had entered the profession at an age younger than 18 (Cited in Helmut and Hailemariam, 2000:25). Beyond the 'disease carrier' argument, sex workers in Ethiopia, as in many parts of the world, are frowned upon as immoral.

The explanation provided by Minu Pal, an Indian sex worker activist about the status of sex workers in India applies equally to Ethiopian sex workers: '[we] are recognized for the business we profess, a trade that has continued since time immemorial. This society and its respected citizens have sustained this trade for their own urges. Yet this profession is neither given its due in society, nor legal recognition' (Pal, 1998:200).

However, despite the moral rhetoric that surrounds it, sex work is predominantly a matter of economics. A prize-winning report by Lin Lean Lim for the ILO considers sex work to be a phenomenon that is mostly economic in nature. Looking at the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, the study states that due to the rapid rise of the sector in Southeast Asia, 'we can justifiably speak of a commercial sex sector that is integrated into the economic, social and political life of these countries. The sex business has assumed the dimensions of an industry and has directly or indirectly contributed in no small measure to employment, national income and economic growth' (1998, vi).

The economic choice argument has been presented by several researchers of sex work including Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema in whose edited volume Heather Montgomery argues that 'for people who are poor and powerless, prostitution does not seem a unique and ultimate horror (as many outsiders view it) or something they have to be forced into, but one difficult choice among many' (1998:149). Similarly, Ralston and Keeble report that in the Philippines, there is a strong cultural construct of the dutiful daughter who has to do what she can in order to take care of her parents and to support her siblings (2009:103).

The researchers further argue that globalization and the related increase in cost of living and unemployment has resulted in the increase in urban sex work and the 'commodification' of women's bodies (2009:88). All these factors of economics, globalization and familial duties resonate in Ethiopian sex work, and as I argue in subsequent chapters, economics is the largest driving force behind sex work in urban Ethiopia. Specifically, the low employment rates and the low pay associated with feminized, (semi) skilled jobs such as domestic work and customer service, combined with men's increasing availability of disposable income fuel a burgeoning underclass of sex work.

A Brief History of Sex Work in Addis Ababa

Sex work is not new in Ethiopia; divorcees and widowed women were providing sexual service for men in Addis Ababa as the city was being established in a process of internal colonization as far back as the 1880s (Dirasse, 1991:22). The leading historian on Ethiopia, Richard Pankhurst, reports that the rapid growth of Addis Ababa was marked by the appearance of small drinking places mostly owned by women and concurrently, with houses of 'prostitution' (1968 cited by Dirasse, 1991:24).

In addition, there are several reports of travelers from the 1920s onwards commenting not only on the profusion of sex workers but also on the relative level of respect they were accorded. One such traveler commented on courtesans of the time as 'a class apart' (cited by Dirasse, 1991:25). The Italian occupation of Addis Ababa in the period 1935-1942 is largely thought to have accelerated the rise of sex work, actively encouraged by Fascist administrators. There are reports of forced prostitution of women in newly created brothels where some women were kept prisoners. Sex work in that period was fueled by the death of many men in the war and the departure of others to join resistance forces leaving women to support themselves and their families. Citing Pankhurst, Dirasse explains that Fascist authorities, in order to popularize the idea of Italian expansion, sponsored the publication of numerous erotic postcards depicting the beauty of Ethiopian womanhood. Official encouragement was given to the soldiers' song *Facetta Nera*, the lyrics of which included 'Little Black Face, Beautiful Abyssinian...you will be kissed by the invaders' (1974 cited in Dirasse, 1991:29). Dirasse further notes that open soliciting of clients which was virtually unknown in the period before became more common in the post-occupation period (1991:128). After 1942, the Wube Bereha red-light district where many of the sex workers in Addis Ababa lived and worked emerged.

Wube Bereha is adjacent to Piassa, and in its heyday was considered by the respectable citizenry to be a den of hedonism. In addition to rampant sex work in hotel rooms adjoining small bars, a vibrant music scene emerged at the time – urban legend has it that the famous singer Alemayehu Eshete once rode into the narrow alleyways of Wube Bereha on horseback. The 1960s saw the opening of several nightclubs; freelance sex workers catered to a population made more cosmopolitan by the rise of Addis Ababa as a major diplomatic center with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity establishing their headquarters in 1958 and 1963, respectively.

By the time Dirasse was doing her research in 1974, there were an estimated 80,000 women sex workers in Addis Ababa¹. In that year, 25% of the adult female population of the city was estimated to be engaged in sex work, despite the fact that women outnumbered men in the general population as well as in the number of migrants from rural areas. Dirasse draws a benevolent picture of sex work in Addis Ababa in the early 1970s (1991: 129). Although the majority of her respondents (91.6%) reported entering sex work for economic reasons, only half of the women in the sample expressed a desire to leave the profession with the other half reporting a desire to open their own bars and clubs, aspiring to greater success within the profession. As one respondent who had left domestic service for sex work told Dirasse, 'I am somebody now, not just anybody's servant' (1991: 130). Sex work is also at times favorably compared not only to domestic work but to an unfulfilling marriage, another one of Dirasse's informants tells her, 'a good trade is a thousand times better than a bad marriage' (1991: 130).

The trajectory in particular from domestic work and from an unsuccessful marriage to sex work because of the drudgery and low pay associated with the former is still commonly reported in Ethiopia. In the absence of reports of forced prostitution *after* the Fascist era, Dirasse concluded that sex work in the Ethiopian urban context is a pragmatic economic choice for most women participants (1991:90).

Dirasse also notes a large difference in the lifestyles of women who engage in sex work, ranging from the precarious existence of streetwalkers to the more secure and luxurious lifestyles of established madams with secure incomes from running bars who could afford to be selective about their clients (1991:58).

Dirasse's interview of a sex worker who had been a famous courtesan during the Italian rule illustrates the element of wooing on the continuum of sex-as-commodity as argued by Dirasse: 'we used to make the men *dejmatnat* (literally: 'stand in attendance at the gate') just like at the palace. They used to bring us sheep, *areke* (a distilled alcoholic drink) and other presents before we would agree to sleep with them.'

¹ Dirasse's research was not published until 1991.

We were very proud. We were not like the children of today' (1968 cited by Dirasse, 1991:27).² Other respondents also complained to Dirasse about being 'trapped' in sex work in order to take care of themselves and their families, and one respondent mentioned that she hoped her daughter's luck would be different to hers and that she would not end up a '*shermuta*' ('whore') like her mother (1991:119).

Sex Work in Addis Ababa in the 2010s

Street-based sex work is now a common feature of most of parts of Addis Ababa³. Despite large differences in fees based on the affluence of the area of work, street-based workers in general charge less than bar-associated sex workers as the former incur fewer costs, including *mewcha* - 'exit fees' that need to be paid by bar-based workers as they leave with their clients. In Addis Ababa, bars that sell beer as well as local *areke* which are also usually sex work sites are euphemistically called *buna bets* ('coffee houses'). There are three categories of women who work at *buna bets*.

There are waitresses who work for a monthly fee (150-250 Birr); these women sometimes live on the premises of the bar, in the *setoch bet* (women's room). There are also those women and girls who both waitress for a monthly salary, and also do sex work as independent agents, using the bar as a base in which to meet and negotiate with prospective clients. Lastly, there are the *bona fide* sex workers who do not serve drinks and who the bar profits from only through the going out fee that they pay as they leave the bar with a client, even if only to one of the rooms in the back of the bar which is a common feature of

² Although sex work, in its exponential expansion to its present form where it is a common feature of nearly every part of Addis Ababa has become a more straightforward affair, one sometimes comes across 'cultural throwbacks' to the times of the proud, aloof and independent courtesan. I was reminded of this figure when visiting the Kazzanchis area one Tuesday evening; all the bars were quiet apart from the Tinitu Bar which was teeming with clients. The sex worker who was acting as my guide explained that men go to this particular bar for the beautiful owner who reportedly is selective about her clientele and only sleeps with a client who has visited her many times and who is willing to pay a high price.

³ Unlike in many other countries, sex work in Ethiopia is not a crime. The Revised Criminal Code of 1999 makes it illegal for third parties to 'live off the earnings of a woman working in prostitution' but does not criminalize selling sexual services.

buna bet. On a somewhat higher scale than the *buna bets* are the *whisky bets* which also sell beer but are dominated by the sale of imported whisky. Because what they sell is more expensive, I had assumed these places would be bigger and more nicely furnished.

However, I did not see much difference between the *buna* and *whisky bets* that I visited - most are tiny spaces with a few tables lined against the walls and are dingily lit. The really upscale bars include the lounges and clubs that line Bole Road or are situated within the three or four-star hotels and are patronized mostly by expatriates and rich Ethiopians.

Sex Work by Any Other Name

In Ethiopia, as in many other parts of the world, the terms used to describe sex workers are frequently derogatory and indicate patriarchal notions of female sexuality in conflating the sale of sex with a woman's 'loose' morals and having multiple sexual partners. For example, in her ethnographic report of Khmer women and notions of work, Annuska Derks explains that the most common term that depicts people, the majority of them female, who work in the sex business is *Srey Kouc* which means 'damaged' or broken; the same term is also used to denote women who have had multiple sexual partners (2008:93). In Ethiopia, Dirasse reports the normative term for a prostitute/sex worker in the mid-1970s in Addis Ababa was *setegnaadari*, literally, 'one who spends the night as a woman', which she reports did not carry much stigma and which still does not.

However, she also reports that '*shermuta*' (from the Arabic) was also used with fewer stigmas than its English equivalent term 'whore'. This term in its current usage is considered more of an insult (1991:6). More recently and perhaps in an effort to be more accurate, the term *zimutadari* ('one who spends the night in fornication') has been in use by to describe sex workers, while some sex workers have appropriated the term '*shelae*' - a shortened version of *shermuta*- and use it to describe themselves.

Violence within Sex Work

A major shift from the early 1970s when Dirasse was doing her research appears to be in the relationship of sex workers to violence. Dirasse does not mention violence as an issue and states that 'prostitutes' in general were not harassed. A 14-year-old respondent tells her that when she and her colleagues did not have customers, they went to the police station in the middle of the largest open-air market in Ethiopia, the Merkato, to sleep (1991:63). The girl asserted that the police knew them and did not bother them, indicating a level of safety and non-censure then that sex workers in Addis Ababa currently do not have.

While Dirasse's respondents may have enjoyed a relatively violence-free tenure, the absence of a narrative on violence in her accounts may also speak to the fact that violence against women in Ethiopia is so normalized as to warrant scant attention. While universal in practice, sex work is largely imbued with societal disapproval and is usually rife with hypocrisy. As Ralston and Keeble explain in their feminist analysis of activism around sex work in the Philippines, while the sale of sex usually defines a woman, it also condemns her; however, the purchase of sex usually does not condemn a man or stick to him as a label (2009:100). In her introduction to *On The Game: Women and Sex Work*, an anthropological study of sex work in the UK, Sophie Day states, 'Sex, it seems, should not be sold, and prostitution speaks to the transgression of boundaries, where matter is out of place, where the inside is placed outside and the privates exposed' (2007:1).

Violence is at least in part a manifestation of the stigma and discrimination experienced by sex workers; particularly where sex work has an ambiguous status, sex workers become easy targets for harassment and violence. While violence may be experienced by all women and girls (as well as some men and boys), the violence experienced by sex workers may be more random and is usually committed by strangers. Because of the nature of their work, violence against sex workers is usually sexual.

Sex workers are usually considered immoral and deserving of violence, and many sex workers consider violence as part of their job. Therefore they are more likely to not report rapes, physical or sexual assaults. Even when they do, complaints of violence by sex workers are not followed up by the police. For instance, an article by Cler-Cunningham et al in *Research for Sex Work* reports on studies among street-based sex workers in Vancouver, Canada and New York City found that a majority of violent incidences were not reported to the police, and out of those that were, only a few were registered by the police with many of the perpetrators never being convicted (2005:4). Similarly, sex workers in Ethiopia experience a high degree of violence within their work. In a 1993 survey of 77 young sex workers, only 13% reported not being raped, sexually abused or physically assaulted by customers. The most common triggers of violence were the girls' refusal to engage in sexual acts they considered deviant, particularly anal and oral sex (Cited in Lalor, 2010:230).

In Lalor's study of 30 teenaged sex workers (average age 13.9 years) in Addis Ababa, he found that 73% of the girls had been raped at least once, the number of instances of rape ranged from one to seven times (one respondent). Fifty percent had experienced gang-rape, 93% had been raped by non-client men including homeless men/youth and 40% of girls had been beaten as part of a robbery (2010:232).

Elsewhere, in a UK survey of 240 sex workers in Glasgow, Leeds and Edinburgh, 50% of street-based sex workers as well as 26% of those working indoors reported some form of violence by clients in the last six months preceding the survey.

Among street-based sex workers, 81% had experienced violence by clients including beatings, being threatened by a weapon, being choked, raped, slashed or stabbed (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002:1235).

In addition, Hilary Kinnell, an activist for sex workers' rights and coordinator of the UK Network of Sex Work Projects reports in an article in the Guardian that in the UK, 118 sex workers were murdered between 1990-2006, over 75% of them street-based sex workers (2008:2). Sometimes, the state is implicated in violence against sex workers.

For instance, there are reports from Bangladesh of sex workers being physically and verbally abused while in state care in the context of a forced 'rehabilitation deal', the only other option of which was life-long imprisonment (Smarajit et al, 2007:146). In addition, according to a Human Rights Watch report, women in India who are arrested for prostitution are sent to 'protective homes' where 'inmates complained of grave mistreatment, including branding with hot irons, rapes and sexual assaults' (Cited in Doezema, 1998:81).

Furthermore, violence by the police is reported globally, particularly where sex work is illegal and the position of sex workers is precarious. Reports from Cambodia (Derks, 2008:112), South Africa (Trotter, 2008:139-141; Wojcicki, 2001:105) and the Philippines (Sobritchea, 2001:107) illustrate a similar pattern where police exhort either free sexual favors or a cash bribe in exchange for not arresting sex workers. In Papua New Guinea and India (Sangram, 2002 cited in World Health Organization, 2005:7), sex workers report a high level of rape and gang-rape in addition to physical abuse and harassment.

However, beyond descriptive statements about the prevalence of violence experienced by sex workers, researchers in general do not offer any theories to explain the prevalence of gender-based violence within the context of sex work.

The available literature on violence within sex work appears to take it as a given component of the profession, with little investigation into what it is about sex work as a consensus-based financial transaction that engenders violence (Ralston and Keeble, 2009:111; Day, 2007:82; Jeffreys, 2009:186; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998:118).

Unexamined Violence

In investigating sex tourism in Kenya, Wanjohi Kibicho reports on the stories of women sex workers who have been subjected to violence. Experiences include gang-rape, having implements such as Coca Cola bottles inserted into their sexual organs, and being threatened by a client who used a knife to demand sexual services without payment.

The author also speaks to a European sex tourist who admits to committing violence against the sex workers he pays for services. Kibicho admits that she initially overlooked mistreatment or violence experienced by sex workers and had not even included it in her questionnaires. However, 86% of her respondents ranked it as the third highest risk they face as part of their work (preceded by the risk of contracting sexually-transmitted diseases and harassment by the police) with mistreatment defined as both physical and non-physical attacks, and most commonly, the refusal of clients to pay for services already received (2009:151).

Despite its prevalence, violence against sex workers remains largely unexplored even within the relatively narrow field of violence against women, perhaps because it is so common as to not warrant scholarly attention, and perhaps due to some researchers' moral bias. In addition, sex workers as a group are usually difficult to access posing methodological barriers to research. Notably, publications based on extensive study of violence against women usually completely ignore the issue of violence against sex workers.

For instance, despite broad reflections on violence against women from twelve countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas and covering topics ranging from female genital cutting to domestic abuse, the systematic harassment of sex workers is not mentioned in the book *Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies from around the World* (Schuler (ed.), 1992). Even an article that deals with 'Prostitution and Trafficking in Women' in Thailand fails to mention this phenomenon, focusing only on the sexual 'othering' of Thai women by Western men who promote and participate in sex tourism. Another

publication that deals elaborately with one aspect of violence against women is *Rape: a History from 1860 to the Present Day* by Joanna Bourke. Despite extensive investigations into reports of rape in the Western world including an analysis into its prevalence, the book is silent on the particular vulnerability of sex workers to rape (2007). It is in this context of the 'non-problematization' of violence against sex workers in social science and even feminist literature that I conducted a feminist, qualitative research into violence within sex work, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Structure of the Dissertation

In the Preface of the Introductory Chapter, I presented a composite story typical of the ones I heard during my research in order to introduce the issues with which the dissertation grapples and some of the features that are common to the women who were my informants. I then introduced my research questions and provided the socio-historical context of sex work in Addis Ababa.

Chapter Two describes in detail the research process, which consisted of focus group discussions and interviews with 68 female sex workers and 22 male partners of sex workers, as well as focus group discussions and questionnaires administered to a group of male university students. I also discuss here some of the key informant interviews I held with members of the police force, academicians as well as other professionals. These interviews shed light on key gaps in my understanding of the dynamics of violence within sex work.

Chapter Three deals with the background to my research by examining cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, and particularly in the form of the question, 'why do men pay for sex?' touching upon the patriarchal notions that men's sexual impulses cannot be controlled. The chapter examines in detail the sense of entitlement among men; firstly, to access multiple sexual partners by paying for sex, and secondly to exhibit a sense of ownership over the women they have paid for sex.

Chapter Four places the violence experienced by sex workers in Addis Ababa on a continuum of violence within intimate relationships. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to the ways in which involvement in sex work – as economic beneficiaries and as the partners of sex workers - compromises some males' masculinity as constructed in Ethiopian culture. Chapter Five examines the feminist idea of agency both in terms of engagement with sex work, and in the creative ways that sex workers avoid or overcome violence. Stealing from clients and 'playing' the justice system are considered forms of agency.

Finally, Chapter Six discusses the concept of 'sisterhood' as well as 'non-sisterhood' among sex workers; this includes a discussion of the 'othering' among different types of sex workers, as well as vis-à-vis non-sex worker women. Chapter Seven is the conclusion and draws together the responses to the research questions the research aimed to address by illustrating that sex workers, despite overwhelming odds practice their own form of agency and a pragmatic sort of sisterhood. The research also highlights the contribution of the research to original feminist thought on sex work.

Chapter Two: The Research

In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the research methods used in this study of sex workers' perceptions and experiences of violence in Addis Ababa. Preceding my presentation of the focus group discussions and interviews, I expound on the personal and political motivation for the research, including

my positionality as a post-colonial feminist researcher, which informed both my selection of research methods and adoption of a 'non-essentializing' stance throughout the research process.

Scholarship of Engagement

The research design was informed by my identities as a student with an intellectual mission to theorize on the experiences and perceptions of violence by Ethiopian sex workers, and as an activist who has some credibility within the sex workers' community in Addis Ababa. There is a continuum between my activism and my academic interests in conducting feminist research along the lines of the 'Scholarship of Engagement' concept developed by Ernest Boyer, in which he calls for the generation of new knowledge through academic reflection on social issues (1996:12). Boyer argues that such engaged activism allows communities outside academia to participate in the production of knowledge, and it also contributes to academic work becoming not only relevant but also accessible to a wider public (1996:13). In addition, shaped by my postcolonial feminist politics, my research was designed to be particularly sensitive to the social and cultural urban context of my research, and particularly to violence within sex work in the urban Ethiopian setting.

Postcolonial Feminism

Along with other feminists of colour, bell hooks has criticized the idea of women's common oppression which was a product of second-wave feminism in the West. She calls this position a 'false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex reality' (1984:49).

Feminist postcolonial theory refers to the acknowledgement, within mainstream feminism, that Western feminism has subsumed the experiences of women of color and that Western feminist theory has made generalizations about 'third-world' women, assuming a homogeneity amongst very diverse groups of women. In addition, Western feminism, particularly during its Second Wave relied on a tokenistic inclusion of a few women to represent all women of colour on the stage of feminism (Lewis and Mills, 2003:9). Postcolonial writers, such as Ien Ang have argued that instead of the inclusion of non-white women, feminism needs to be *remade* so that 'difference is not absorbed, nor ambivalence and ambiguity erased' (Ibid). Further developing the postcolonial feminist perspective, Uma Narayan recommends that Western feminism learns to oppose essentializing women *and* cultures (2000:98). In this regard, Narayan contrasts, as an example, statements that describe Female Genital Cutting as an 'African cultural practice' without showing that not all African women face this 'problem', with more strategic statements such as 'women continue to be discriminated against all over the world...and are subject to many forms of violence' (Bunch 1994, Cited in 2000:97).

On the other hand, radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys who categorises Female Genital Cutting *and* arranged marriages – devoid of the complexity of the practices across time and space – as well as sex work all as nebulously defined 'harmful traditional practices', is less worried about essentializing the women and girls who face these 'problems' than about the normalization of institutions that she sees as inherently harmful to women.

Jeffreys aligns herself with the cohort of (mostly radical) feminists who do not see 'prostitution' as regular work and draw parallels between the experience of 'prostituted' women and rape victims, such as emotional dissociation from their bodies, symptoms of post-traumatic shock, and negative feelings about their bodies and their selves (2009:17). In her book, the *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade*, Jeffreys provides an overview of the arguments against sex work as

work and strongly protests against the legalization of any form of sex work, arguing that it would represent a return to the 19th century situation [in Europe] before feminists initiated the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act in the UK in the 1860s where 'men's prostitution behavior, that is buying women for sex, was an unchallenged prerogative' (2009:16). In a classic case of essentializing, Jeffreys describes sex work as 'prostitutors'...encompassing the stereotyped role of men acting out their patriarchal right to use the bodies of women who wish to be elsewhere, or may even be crying from the pain, for their own satisfaction' (2009:57). In my own research, I did not find such generalized statements about sex workers very useful— while there is often harm in sex work and I am sensitive to the suffering of many of the women I interviewed, it would not have served my interviewees well if I had approached the research assuming that they conduct their work always 'crying out in pain' thereby robbing them of agency before I have had the chance to learn if they have any.

I approached this research with a postcolonial feminist perspective not only because it speaks to my personal politics but also because Ethiopia, although not a post-colony has at times, like most parts of Africa, been a subject of colonizing or essentializing studies, some of which draw simplistic portrayals of Ethiopian/African women. As Narayan explains, postcolonial studies object to the 'representative third world woman' who Narayan asserts is modeled on particularly marginalized women in developing countries (2000: 84). In this regard, in addition to her absolutist stand against sex work, Jeffreys sometimes makes Orientalist generalizations about the 'third world prostitute', which is itself a problematic categorization.

For instance, Jeffreys states in *The Industrial Vagina*, that *all* female migrant sex workers must have been trafficked into debt bondage 'since women from poor countries do not have the resources or knowhow to migrate under their own steam' (2009) while on the contrary, my findings indicate that inter and intra-country migration are important occupational strategies for many sex workers.

In its engagement with academia, postcolonial feminism has problematized researchers 'studying down' by focusing on women of the third world and other marginalized women (Naples, 2003). I did not use my research to espouse the cause of 'saving' sex workers, and my understanding of violence against sex workers was shaped by the perspectives of the women who experience the violence first-hand. As Narayan advises, in order to achieve a non-essentialist stance, I aimed to remain vigilant during the research process to the tendency to make sweeping general statements about Ethiopian culture devoid of historical contexts, or about Ethiopian women and men, including sex workers (2000:88).

Standpoints

While 'outsider' researchers have sometimes claimed to get better information because of their perceived neutrality, in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, Wolf explains that some feminist researchers who study a group to which they themselves belong claim to have an advantage that leads to a privileged or more balanced view of the people or society under study (1996:15). These researchers are equipped with the potential to critique colonialist, racist, ethnocentric or exploitative studies and have the opportunity to balance the distortions presented by researchers from the West, making creative use of their access to their research population (Ibid). Also, according to feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1987, Smith, 1974, Harding, 1991), one's positionality as a woman is crucial in understanding other women. According to this theory, women researchers' special contribution to epistemology or the creation of knowledge is their 'embodied subjectivity' via their own knowledge and experiences.

Criticized for its essentialist view of women devoid of differences, the theory has expanded to women's *standpoints* as influenced by racial, ethnic and class differences – as there can be no single standpoint for all women (Naples, 2003:13). I believe that most of my standpoints – that of being an Ethiopian woman, from Addis Ababa, where my research took place, and an Amharic speaker like all my respondents – while obviously informing the feminist epistemology I applied to my research, also greatly enhanced the

research process and its findings. As a native Addis Ababian who knows the culture and language, I definitely had easier access to participants than a non-Ethiopian researcher, and I was able to capture the nuances of the narratives in Amharic that may have been lost in translation into another language.

My Standpoints

Ethnicity is a complex subject in Ethiopia and as I discuss in the Introduction, all eighty Ethiopian ethnic groups are represented in Addis Ababa. Centuries of centralized rule and wide-spread intermarriage has meant that many Addis Ababians claim multiple ethnic heritages and despite official ethnic-based policies of the last two decades, ethnic differences among Addis Ababians, in general, are not discussed.

Therefore, my mixed-ethnicity standpoint was a non-issue in the context of my research, as was the ethnic background of my respondents which I did not inquire into, and most of whom I could not categorize in terms of ethnicity.

Religious affiliation is usually easier to identify based on dress and accessories (for instance, many Ethiopian Orthodox women from rural areas have tattoos with religious symbolism on their chins and necks; many Muslim men sport long beards and *keffeyyas*) as well as given names – while most Muslim women and men have Islamic names from the Sunni tradition, most Christians have either secular or biblical names. Accordingly, I could categorize most of my respondents as belonging to the Orthodox Christian church, at least nominally. However, while most Ethiopians are devout, Ethiopia is officially a secular country, and there is a long tradition of religious identity remaining in the private sphere. As a result, and because I did not put emphasis on it, religion did not figure as a consideration in my research.

Although these social categories made little impact on my research or the relationship I fostered with the women who took part in it, I could not pretend to be a full ‘insider’ either. I am not a sex worker and for all my solidarity, I did not try to pretend to really know what their lives were like. Although I was

proficient in 'the talk' and had learnt enough to develop a rapport with the women I spoke to, I remained very much an outsider who went back to her comfortable home as the women started getting ready for another night on the job. Indeed, the social category that created the most meaningful difference between the research respondents and I was class.

Wolf notes that even when the researcher's gender, language, culture, nationality and race match those of her research subjects, class differences usually prevail if the researcher is studying urban working-class people (1996:11). Even after years of a socialist-communist rule, followed by a centrally-controlled market economy, Ethiopia is still very much a classist society, and in many ways, social background, access to opportunities and wealth determine a person's standing. More than my non sex-worker status, I believe that my visible privileges (having a tertiary education, driving a car and enjoying other trappings of wealth) created the most significant difference between myself and the poor women to whom I was speaking, resulting in initial reluctance to 'open up' to me and a certain discomfort at the beginning of some interview sessions.

The uneasiness between a researcher and a research participant who would otherwise never sit and drink coffee together was present in all my interviews and focus group discussions with sex workers *and* their partners. These were somewhat abated during the discussions held with students at a private university. There, I did not have to worry about causing confusion by mixing in English terms and I could discuss my PhD program at the University of London with greater ease.

As an antidote to my 'studying down' the research participants, I strove to apply more egalitarian research methods drawn from feminist and participatory research methodology (which will be discussed in further detail below) and to remain vigilant to my own 'filters.' In their edited volume advocating for participatory research in lieu of more traditional approaches to the social sciences, Fals-Borda and Rahman emphasize the importance of feminist research applying continuous attention not only to gender

but to other differences between women, thereby challenging the norm of 'objectivity' that stipulates that knowledge may be collected pure from the filters of the researcher's persona.

As such, feminist and participatory research demand reflexivity on the part of the researcher and value her opinions and emotions as a source of insight. In addition, these forms of epistemology aim to foster non-exploitative relationships within research (1991:73).

A Feminist Engagement

Feminism's engagement with scholarship began with the consciousness of the near complete absence of women in accounts of human interactions. In general, scholarship featured unquestioned and unconscious assumptions of male perspectives and biases as the norm reflecting prevalent sexism until western feminism started challenging the status quo. Understandably, the dominance of men in academia as well as the influence of 'founding fathers' (rarely 'mothers') in most disciplines led to the unchallenged essential roles attributed to men as the custodians of reason.

As Fals-Borda and Rahman complain, 'In masculinist epistemologies, human equals man and woman is considered in relation to man and as a deviation of his essential humanity' (1991:25). The realization of women's absences in knowledge domains and accounts within scholarship on culture, history, social sciences and the sciences had to be corrected through feminist engagement with ontologies which Letherby defines as 'that which is knowable' (2003:5). Feminist ontology – the realization of the various forces and institutions that have created oppression and inequalities - combined with increased individual and collective consciousness of women researchers *as women* as well as the realization that conventional, androcentric research methods cannot fully investigate or construct women's realities led to the creation of new methods that can conceptualize women's experiences (Wolf, 1996:33). In

addition, Letherby explains that feminist research features the political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference in women's lives through social and individual change (2003:4).

She agrees with feminist writer Wichramasinghe that feminist researchers are concerned with the absences in mainstream research as well as with the ways in which the research is undertaken, preferring non-exploitative terms and reversing women's traditional representation as 'the Other' (Ibid).

Letherby further states, 'feminist research practice can be distinguished by the questions feminists ask, the location of the researcher within the process of research and within theorizing' (2003:4). Feminist scholarship is also distinct in the intended purpose of the final product, which addresses the political aims of the research (2003:6). My research is feminist in that I view violence in gendered terms and identify violence against sex workers as a feminist issue. However, despite the influence of my politics on the entirety of the research process which also informed the design of the methodology, I understate that I did not predetermine or prejudge the outcome of the research.

Feminist Research Methods

As feminist inquiry is necessarily interdisciplinary, and due to the influence of identity politics, postmodernism and postcolonialism on western feminist theorizing, there is no single feminist methodology (Wolf, 1996:43). Instead, a collection of research methods adopted from similarly political strands of the social sciences populate the nebulous category of feminist research methods. Feminist researchers use a variety of qualitative tools to provide their narratives. Life or oral histories of women and men, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are all popular research tools. Letherby explains that many feminist researchers consider the life history as a good tool because it does not 'fracture life experiences' (2003:23). In addition, the feminist interview is one in which there is mutual

interaction; the researcher is open to answering questions and reflects back her findings (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991:83).

Feminist and Participatory Research

As a school of thought committed to social change, feminist research methods fit better with qualitative research tools geared towards consciousness-raising, and, I would argue, particularly with participatory approaches. Naples explains that by trying to democratize the research process, feminist researchers sometimes opt for participatory strategies that include the 'researched' in the design, implementation and analysis of the research in a reflective process' (2003:31). Naples also states that participatory research 'challenges feminist scholars to practice what they believe and may preach: more egalitarian approaches to empowerment' (2003:28). Wolf further states that whereas mainstream research usually gives no consideration for research participants in defining the research topic or the mode of research, participatory research offers the potential for research participants to be empowered through the research process (1996:35).

From the design onwards, my research aimed to be participatory and involved selected members of Nigat, the association of sex workers that collaborated with the research. My connection with Nigat precedes my research; two years before I had entered the PhD program at SOAS, I had met the founders at the opening of a 'drop-in center' for sex workers then funded by a local production of the Vagina Monologues, the famous American theatrical production which celebrates the female body and calls for attention to violence against women and girls. Nigat members had taken part in the production. Impressed by Nigat, I joined them as a volunteer and went on to write a proposal that was funded and the next two years were busy with a project focused on violence-free sex work.

In addition to involving selected Nigat members in the second stage of my research process, namely organizing and co-facilitating the focus-group discussions, I encouraged them to do their own analysis of findings as I did mine, with the aim that some useful iterative theorizing about the gendered nature of violence would result. It was my hope that beyond what I produce for academic uptake, the association would receive input into their strategizing against violence against their members, which would have meant that my activist as well as academic aims had been met. The reality was different. Although it retained participatory characteristics throughout, and although Nigat members stayed involved in my research, I realized by the end of the focus group discussions that I had over-expected the feminist theorizing that I could do together with Nigat into the gendered phenomenon of violence against sex workers. While they were interested in the research topic, the group of activists who mostly have limited formal education (the average Nigat member has completed only primary school) seemed to not relate to an academic research project that took nearly a year to complete and even longer to write up. In the latter months of my research and when I requested an introduction to yet another member, I was usually asked, '*ahunim alchereshim?!'*' - 'you are *still* not finished'? Therefore, my research remained academic in nature and did not result in a 'co-production of knowledge' (Behar, 1993:229 cited in Wolf, 1996:34).

Feminist Research and Neutrality

When I first started my field research, I reminded myself that as a researcher, it was not my place to comment or offer advice as I usually feel obliged to do in my activist stance. Attempts at objectivity were, although a relief at first, uncharacteristic for me, and after a few interviews, I surmised that mine is after all, a feminist research and would not be held to the same standards of neutrality required of positivist models of research. As opposed to the neutrality of mainstream modes of research in the social sciences,

feminists usually align their methods to their political stance, aiming to create change through consciousness-raising and activism (Naples, 2003:26).

Accordingly, my political stance and solidarity with the sex workers was obvious; I tried to listen with compassion and to ensure clarity but I was also indignant at the stories of violence that I heard. In addition, I worked with members of Nigat to act upon some of the information rendered by the research to help the association in its engagement with police officers (which will be discussed in subsequent chapters) which would not have been appropriate or possible if I had taken a neutral approach to the research process.

Elaboration of My Research Methods

As a piece of research invested in understanding women's lived experiences within a specific urban culture, the overarching research methodology that guided it was necessarily ethnographic. Sex workers in Addis Ababa form a highly visible and distinct subgroup of society that has a distinct use of language, patterns of behavior and attitudes, justifying an ethnographic approach (Brewer, 2000:10). A requirement of my doctoral study, the research stretched over nine months and required a personal investment from me as the researcher. Although purely qualitative in nature, I used a mix of research methods including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and open-ended questionnaires. The research very much took place in situ, in the homes and workplaces of the women I interviewed, and there was an element of participant-observation of the sex work milieu of Addis Ababa.

Development of Study Instruments

I developed the protocols for the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and open-ended questionnaires before I started the research process and used the first focus-group discussion, three

interviews and first set of questionnaires as pilots, fine-tuning the study protocols based on the quality of responses garnered by the questions.

I accessed all my initial research participants through Nigat, the sex workers' association which greatly aided my research. Established in 2007, Nigat is the first and so far, the only sex workers' association in Ethiopia. Nigat members organized for me a series of focus group discussions with twenty of its members in October 2011.

The focus group discussions were held at the meeting hall of the Nigat office which is located in the heart of a red-light district nicknamed 'Chechniya' (a corruption of 'Chechnya' of the former Soviet Union, and in reference to its history of war-related chaos). Chechniya is considered an up-scale red light district due to its proximity to the clubs and hotels of the Bole area, and it is dotted with very small bars along a large street connecting Bole road with more residential neighborhoods. In addition to the bars with identical exteriors, Chechniya is crowded with eateries open until early morning, butcheries selling fresh meat dishes as well as a large nightclub which contributes considerably to the numbers of cars crowding the main road particularly during weekend nights.

In the focus group discussions I facilitated, the themes followed the main questions I wanted to probe. In the first session, we discussed why, according to the understanding of the women, men pay for sex. This sub-topic touched upon women's and men's sexuality, cultural notions of men's uncontrollable sexual urges, and some men's sense of entitlement to women's (paid for) bodies. The first focus group discussion formed the basis in subsequent weeks for more detailed discussions on the perceptions and experiences of violence, and the 'continuum of violence' faced by my respondents that does not always begin with involvement in sex work but often implicates lovers, benevolent, 'fatherly' bar owners as well as police. A key theme which emerged was the agency with which sex workers withstand violent

experiences and try to get an 'upper hand' by stealing from clients, as well as the factors that make some of the women more vulnerable than others.

The topic of the last focus group discussion was more specific and focused on how Nigat, as an organization whose mission statement includes the protection of the rights of sex workers, should deal with the violence regularly encountered by its members. I also used the last session to relay back to the participants the key impressions I had received from the earlier sessions, and these were largely confirmed with additional insight offered in this last concluding session.

Following the focus group discussions, and building upon the themes which had been enriched by the weekly discussions, I held my first interview in November 2011. I had held 16 interviews by the end of that first month, and my pool of respondents soon snowballed into the non-Nigat friends and acquaintances of my interviewees. The interviews were held mostly in respondents' homes; women were interviewed in mostly twos and threes. Although my initial plan had been to conduct individual in-depth interviews, I found these 'communal' interviews fit my respondents' schedules better as they could be integrated into the coffee ceremony and khat-chewing session that most sex workers engage in daily. The conversations also flowed better at these group sessions - I found that three respondents worked better than one or two, while five or more got unwieldy and difficult to follow. A few times, I conducted individual interviews, often with respondents who had also taken part in group interviews, in order to follow-up on specific points raised. Other interviews were held at the premises of the safe sex project of which Nigat is a partner and which runs 'Drop-in Centers' for sex workers at each of the ten sub-cities of Addis Ababa. Three sets of interviews (one with three respondents and two individual interviews) were held at a bar run by Nigat which employs some members. At the end of my fieldwork, I had held 28 in-depth interviews with 68 women. Lastly, I held 22 interviews with male partners of sex workers and two focus group discussions with 21 male university students - twelve of the respondents belonged to the

Architecture department at a private university while the rest were prospective graduates with Law degrees from the government-run Addis Ababa University.

Considerations for Safety and Risk Reduction

In retrospect, I can see that I did not give sufficient attention to safety considerations. I don't think I put any of my respondents in danger through my interviews which were always held in relative safe spaces - the women's homes or the drop-in center they often spend time in. However, there were a few times where I may have put myself in danger wandering alone in dangerous parts of the city seeking out interviews, and there was an incident in Mercato where a group of sex workers I had not asked for interviews made threatening remarks and gestures which was defused without incident.

Research Definitions and Limitations

My research defined a sex worker as a woman who earns her main livelihood through the sale of sexual services. While the definition of sex work has elsewhere encompassed male and female erotic dancers, strippers, nude performers and erotic massage providers, the Ethiopian context is overwhelmingly dominated by more 'traditional' forms of sex work engaged in by women and girls who exchange sexual intercourse for money working either on the street or from their homes in 'red-light' districts (Tekola, 2005). My research may be viewed as limited to the 'average' sex worker in Addis Ababa, and unreflective of the voices of women selling sex in less straight-forward settings such as massage parlors and strip clubs, of which there are increasing numbers in the more cosmopolitan parts of Addis Ababa. Similarly, I did not speak to any of the richer sex workers who operate independently out of international hotels and upscale nightclubs. These upper-class sex workers are usually educated, strikingly good-looking by contemporary standards of beauty, travel internationally and own cars. As the experiences of

these women (who are a small minority in the sex worker population) are very different from that of the average sex worker who struggles to make ends meet, I have not included them in my study sample.

Lastly, my research did not engage with male sex work, which does exist in Addis Ababa, albeit in extreme secrecy due to pervasive homophobia and the illegality of homosexuality. While it would have been highly interesting to get an insight into violence within this sub-group of sex work, the inclusion would have widened the scope of my research too far beyond my original aim and I did not pursue it.

Nigat as the Focal Point of Research

When I returned to academic study, the association was the natural starting point for my PhD fieldwork research, and I designed the research with a partnership with Nigat in mind. Established in 2007, Nigat is the first and at the time of writing, the only sex workers' association in Ethiopia. It was founded by five sex workers who have since become employees of a local NGO while co-managing Nigat.

Nigat is currently sowing the seeds of activism as a sex worker organization but has a long way to go before it is in a position to defend the rights of sex workers in a meaningful way. Inspired by similar activism by sex worker associations in other countries, Nigat takes these tentative steps of engagement in an environment that is hostile to citizen activism due to government restrictions. This type of activism is also in direct juxtaposition to the domestic NGO sector in the Ethiopian context which when it does engage with sex work adopts an essentializing and old-fashioned attitude towards sex workers as 'fallen women'; interest in 'saving' sex workers was especially heightened in the context of programs designed to reduce HIV infection rates among 'vulnerable' groups.

Research Overview

I conducted my field research between October 2011 and July 2012. My research was entirely qualitative and consisted of five weekly focus group discussions with the same group of 20 sex workers, followed by 28 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 68 sex workers, some individuals and others in groups.

In addition, I held 22 interviews with male partners of sex workers and two focus group discussions with 21 male university students - twelve of the respondents belonged to the Architecture department at a private university while the rest were prospective graduates with Law degrees from the government-run Addis Ababa University. The focus group discussions were held at the meeting hall of the Nigat office which is located in the heart of a red-light district nicknamed 'Chechniya' (a corruption of 'Chechnya' of the former Soviet Union, and in reference to its history of war-related chaos). Chechniya is considered an up-scale red light district due to its proximity to the clubs and hotels of the Bole area, and it is dotted with very small bars along a large street connecting Bole road with more residential neighborhoods. In addition to the bars with identical exteriors, Chechniya is crowded with eateries open until early morning, butcheries selling fresh meat dishes as well as a large nightclub which contributes considerably to the numbers of cars crowding the main road particularly during weekend nights.

The Nigat offices are located on a back-street where every other residence seems to have been converted into a '*pensione*' (from the Italian, referring to a small hotel or guest room) or a massage parlor, both sets of businesses offshoots of the sex work industry that characterizes the area. The focus group discussions consisted of loosely-structured conversations on selected themes around a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony on five consecutive Thursday afternoons. The ceremony usually takes up to two hours and consists of the designated coffee maker (almost always a woman), seated on a low stool washing the coffee beans, then roasting and grinding them over a coal fire while burning small rocks of incense called *etan*. The smell of the brewing coffee, combined with the *etan* produce a warm haze and the coffee, once it is ready is passed to each attendee in small cups. In the focus group discussions I

facilitated, the themes followed the main questions I wanted to probe. In the first session, we discussed why, according to the understanding of the women, men pay for sex. This sub-topic touched upon women's and men's sexuality, cultural notions of men's uncontrollable sexual urges, and some men's sense of entitlement to women's (paid for) bodies.

The first focus group discussion, with 18 women, went well with almost all participants taking a turn to speak. I am sometimes asked how I get the sex workers I've worked with in the past 'to open up' – I think my introduction through Nigat helped and I also knew many sex workers from before I started working on the research so the expected initial awkwardness was minimal. In addition, the easy flow of the conversation, with the stories of violence in particular finding much resonance among participants, and almost all the discussants participating actively in the discussion, indicated that I was on the right track.

However, during some of the focus group discussions, I sometimes wondered if my research topic was not too straightforward. Violence is pervasive in the lives of these women. One of the participants, Bizualem, for example, came to the meeting with the right side of her face blown up like a balloon and her friends were eager to offer the explanation that she was hit the previous night when she refused sex without a condom, causing me to fear my questions might seem superfluous. However, I persevered with my line of questioning their experience of violence, and found that it opened rich insights into not only the perceptions and experiences of violence, but also the social constructions of male and female sexuality in Ethiopia. The first focus group discussion formed the basis in subsequent weeks for more detailed discussions on the perceptions and experiences of violence, and the 'continuum of violence' faced by my respondents that does not always begin with involvement in sex work but routinely implicates lovers, benevolent, 'fatherly' bar owners as well as police. A key theme which emerged was the agency with which sex workers withstand violent experiences and try to get an 'upper hand' by stealing from clients, as well as the factors that make some of the women more vulnerable than others.

The topic of the last focus group discussion was more specific and focused on how Nigat, as an organization whose mission statement includes the protection of the rights of sex workers, should deal with the violence regularly encountered by its members. I insisted that the five original founders of Nigat: Azeb, Kidist, Bayou, Kerry, and Girmawit, the chairperson and the ‘face’ of Nigat, should all be present.

Unfortunately, these sessions did not yield much brainstorming on how Nigat should engage on violence beyond the existing efforts of engagement with the police. However, I also used the last session to relay back to the participants the key impressions I had received from the earlier sessions, and these were largely confirmed with additional insight offered in this last concluding session. The focus group discussions provided a great springboard to the interviewees which I started almost immediately, having identified my first interviewees (Melat and Rahel) at the focus group discussions.

Terminology

In direct contrast to radical feminists such as Jeffreys who use the terms ‘prostitution’, ‘prostituted’, and ‘prostitution victims’ showing that they believe that women and girls who are engaged in any form of sex work to all be victims, the terms I use – ‘sex work’ and ‘sex workers’ is reflective of the position within feminism which emphasizes that in the absence of coercion, selling sexual *access* and services may be considered as work. The difference between the two divergent positions regarding sex work/prostitution within western feminism will be elaborated on in Chapter Five.

Amharic Terminology Selected by Research Participants

In terms of language, at the first focus group discussion, we agreed to use the newly reclaimed term '*shelae*⁴' when referring to sex workers. I struggled with using it; afraid that I might offend despite the license I had been given. When debating terms at the beginning of the session, one respondent said that '*setegna adari*' (a more polite term for 'prostitute') is a term used by '*asatafi*' or 'facilitators' - NGO staff whom they encounter in the context of trainings and is not a term one hears sex workers use to describe themselves.

However, despite our agreement on the term '*shelae*', our focus group discussions relied more on descriptive terms such as '*business yemiseru*' ('those doing 'business'), as in, for instance, one sex worker's explanation that, '*andande business yemiseru setoch polis yitebsalu*' - 'some women who 'do business' date policemen'. Other sex workers talk about what they do as '*meshermot*' (from the word '*shermuta*', meaning 'whoring'); for example, Semayit who works at a bar in the Sengatera area told me '*sint' amet shermuchalehu*' - '*I have whored this how many years*'. It was also interesting that the respondents also use the term '*setoch*' which simply means women and which took me a while to realize they were using to mean specifically sex workers.

This terminology extends to others in the periphery of the sex work world, for instance, bouncers at some nightclubs may cut off the flow of sex workers entering the club announcing '*set beza*' - 'too many women'. Conversely, sex workers refer to clients (either casual or regular) as '*wendoch*' (men), as if indicating that all men have the potential to be the clients of sex workers. The word the sex workers use for a client is simply '*wend*', 'a man.' For instance, Selam told me that, '*ke'wend yebelete yemiaschegir polis new*' - 'more difficult than *wendoch* are the Police', even though I know she meant police *men*.

The Interviews

⁴ Shortened version of '*Shermuta*' – 'Whore' in Arabic and Amharic. In the most brazen declaration of ownership of the term *Shelae* that I heard during my interviews, Soliyana tells clients who call her a *Shermuta* or *Shelae* by way of insult during sex, 'Yes, I am a *Shelae*, hurry up and finish.'

Following the focus group discussions, and building upon the themes which had been enriched by the weekly discussions, I held my first interview at a member's home in November 2011. I had held 16 interviews by the end of that first month, and my pool of respondents soon snowballed into the non-Nigat friends and acquaintances of my interviewees. The interviews were held mostly in respondents' homes; women were interviewed in mostly twos and threes. Although my initial plan had been to conduct individual in-depth interviews, I found these 'communal' interviews fit my respondents' schedules better as they could be integrated into the coffee ceremony and *khat*-chewing session that most sex workers engage in daily.

The conversations also flowed better at these group sessions - I found that three respondents worked better than one or two, while five or more got unwieldy and difficult to follow. A few times, I conducted individual interviews, usually with respondents who had also taken part in group interviews, in order to follow-up on specific points raised. Other interviews were held at the premises of the safe sex project of which Nigat is a partner and which runs 'Drop-in Centers' for sex workers at each of the ten sub-cities of Addis Ababa. Three sets of interviews (one with three respondents and two individual interviews) were held at a bar run by Nigat which employs some members.

At the end of my fieldwork, I had held 28 interviews with 68 women. Fourteen of my respondents, all affiliated with Nigat, work on the streets in or close to Chechniya. Two of the respondents, Berhane and Hewan, were being supported by the association after having recently given birth; I interviewed both at the Nigat premises where they came with their babies whom they nursed while we talked and I nursed my one-year old daughter. I interviewed Nolawit to follow up on her reflections on sex work during our focus group discussions, and Rahel, because I had heard through the Nigat grapevine that unlike all other respondents, she came from a well-off family. While most of the respondents who worked in Chechniya were street-based, four worked in bars. I met Belein's employers at their home where she is an un-paying

tenant: they were friendly - the man gave Belein a playful punch on her arm as he passed us in the compound as I interviewed her, and his wife invited me in for a coffee. Outside Chechniya, I interviewed Esete, a Nigat member, to follow up on her assertion, during one of the focus group discussions that she had been subject to violence at the premises of a government institution. In addition, I interviewed two groups of four friends and one group of three women who worked in the old city center, Piassa which encompasses the traditional sex work areas such as Wube Bereha. One of my respondents, 30-year-old Abiti, had worked and lived for 12 years in the same *Buna Bet* in Gedam Sefer.

Also working in the more traditional sex work area of Datsun Sefer in northern Addis Ababa were eight of my respondents, some of whom rotated between working on the streets and in bars, or in *areke bet* (small bars specializing in the sale of a home-brewed spirit). Apart from the Nigat women I have known for years in the context of my volunteer work, it was this group of friends from the old quarters of Addis whose company I enjoyed the most. One of the women, Zewdie who was upfront about the fact that her mother too had been a sex worker, was something of a leader in that community and organized several interview sessions for me at her home in Gedam Sefer.

Lastly, some of my most poignant interviews were held in the Mercato, the largest market in the country, and generally considered to be the most dangerous area in Addis Ababa to be a sex worker. My youngest interviewees (the youngest was 14) were all street-based and lived and worked in this vast market. This series of interviews offered insights into my inquiries into gendered experiences of violence, creative agency to overcome or avoid violence and the ways in which women or girls support each other. My interviews in the Mercato were unique in that half (nine) were held in the *Setoch Bet* (literally: 'women's house') adjoining the bars where all the women work; I joined several *khat* and coffee sessions in two *Setoch Bet* which housed up to 15 girls, sleeping two to a level of a triple-decker bed. Elsewhere in Mercato, sex workers worked out of tiny shacks that line the *Sebategna* district, made famous by

documentaries on sex work and HIV/AIDS , and by well-meaning aid organizations which regularly engage its residents in 'education.' I interviewed three women in these rooms made of corrugated iron which only had room for a bed; when I stretched out my arms, I could touch both sides of the room. With the afternoon sun, the walls of iron sheets created a furnace-like atmosphere.

Reflections on the Focus group discussions and Interviews

I was able to hone my interview protocol after each interview so that the questions I asked elicited deeper responses while I discarded questions that were not as useful.

In terms of ensuring accuracy, I had promised in my original research proposal to 'reflect back' every quote and statement I heard from all my interviewees and focus group discussions. While this was difficult to do practically, I tried to verify that I understood the concepts and ideas that I heard, and to double-check some of the more implausible stories. At the five focus group discussions, I read my notes from the previous session(s) before the following session to ask for points of clarification; this also worked as a recap for the last session. In addition, I was also committed to representing viewpoints that may be very different from mine and to refrain from embellishing or romanticizing the truth as I heard it from my research participants.

In reality, this was a challenge sometimes; particularly near the end of my fieldwork period, I found myself passing judgment, albeit silently, particularly at what I saw as the wastefulness of the sex worker lifestyle. Lastly, although it was easy enough to express indignation at the stories of violence experienced by the women, keeping silent at their stories of theft or false accusations of rape was a challenge, as although I could not condone these acts, I also did not want to lose the trust I had established with my respondents by expressing disapproval. Furthermore, although I was careful to not speak for sex workers in general or on behalf of my respondents as a sub-group, I cannot claim that the voices as reflected in

this dissertation are 'pure' and entirely free of my interpretation; as Letherby states, 'we take away their worlds and then analyze the data from our political, personal and intellectual perspective' (2003:78).

The Male Perspective

Men in general were the 'elephants in the room' in my research; interviewees and I talked about men all the time. They are in essence the basis of the women's livelihoods and trade, the fathers of their children, they are the clients who abuse or treat sex workers well and they are the majority of the police force that poses a major threat to their security. However, men remained largely invisible; while I spent all my working time with the women engaged in chewing *khat*, I had not yet met any of these men until I was almost done with the interviews. I wondered how my respondents' *bals* (husbands or partners) negotiate Ethiopian patriarchal notions of manhood that demand sexual fidelity on the part of the woman (but not the man), and which expects the man to economically provide for 'his' woman. When, following my last set of interviews with sex workers, I turned to questioning the male perspective, it was logical for me to try to solicit interviews with these men who had piqued my interest. While it was difficult to access clients who were willing to speak to me, I interviewed some male partners of sex workers, and held focus group discussions with two groups of university students.

On the issue of involving men in feminist research, Fals-Borda and Rahman state that in a system of patriarchy, it is important to find out what men think and feel about themselves and about women. The authors also caution that many men find it difficult to open up in the context of research, particularly on emotional issues (1991:138). However, I found the men I interviewed to be forthcoming, including on the emotionally difficult role some of them have as partners of women who sell sex and their frustration that they are not able to provide for 'their' women and to protect them from harm as patriarchal social mores

dictate. I found these sessions to be highly informative, and while mostly corroborating the experiences and perceptions of my sex worker informants, the interviews and focus group discussions provided a unique male perspective into violence within sex work.

Interview with Male Partners

My first set of interviews of male partners was facilitated through the Nigat informal network; it was with three friends in their early 20s who were all partners of sex workers. My pool of male respondents soon snowballed into twenty-two interviews of male partners of sex workers. Some of the men I met through their girlfriends whom I had gotten to know during my earlier set of interviews. I was put in touch with others through Nigat acquaintances. Most of these interviews took place in very small, dark and unventilated rooms; in some cases, these were rooms rented by the men for a daily rate as a place to chew *khat* together with their friends. In other cases, they were the homes they shared with their sex worker-partners. I was particularly careful with these interviews, reframing my questions which I had not even written down as delicately as I could, and trying my best to appear non-judgmental. I focused my questions on how these men felt about the occupation of ‘their’ women and I particularly wanted to understand how this may impinge on their masculine identities. As it turned out, the interviews with the men were smoother than I had anticipated, and I was surprised to find that I had much sympathy for the precarious positions in which most found themselves, particularly where their affection for their partners was apparent. In other interviews, I found it difficult to hear about the routine violence they subject their sex worker-girlfriends to.

Interviews with Other Men

As illuminating as these interviews were, they only represented a group of men whose lives and identities were mired in sex work. I wanted to know what other groups of men thought about sex work and the violence associated with it. Aiming to access a ‘captive audience’ of young men, I sought out interviews

with male university students. Armed with questionnaires discussing male and female sexuality and containing a series of questions on respondents' potential treatment of sex workers, I approached acquaintances in the Addis Ababa academic scene.

A young woman instructor at the Law Faculty of Addis Ababa University graciously finished her last class of the semester in mid-May early so I could have a discussion with her students, and a former dean of the Architecture Department at a private college facilitated for me a two-hour session with second-year students. All but one of the law students and three of the future architects were men, and all were willing to take part in my survey. In total, twenty-one male university students took part in two focus group discussions, and twelve male respondents at each of the institutions (aged 20-28) filled in the questionnaires. Although not representative by any means, the interviews with male partners of sex workers and the focus group discussions with male students offered a useful glimpse into male perspectives of sex work. In particular, my understandings about Ethiopian masculinity and femininity were enhanced by these conversations. Furthermore, seeking to investigate particular aspects of my findings, I held key informant interviews with two leading psychiatrists, a renowned social anthropologist, three key federal and Addis Ababa Police personnel, and three Federal Police officers, all in Addis Ababa.

From a mental health perspective, the two psychiatrists I interviewed agreed with my characterization of violence against women in Ethiopia as so normalized as not to warrant attention, and with the non-problematization of violence against sex workers in particular. On the other hand, the police officials I spoke to gave mixed responses to the extensive complaints of violence attributed to them by sex workers; while rank-and-file female and male police officers were unimpressed and offered justifications for mistreating sex workers, those of higher rank, including the Deputy Commander of the Complaints Division for the Ethiopian Federal Police Force, appeared genuinely shocked at the allegations. The Deputy Commander expressed his willingness to work with Nigat to bring alleged perpetrators to justice.

True to his word, the Deputy Commander helped a former sex worker who had allegedly been raped by a Federal Police member and whom I took to his office a few weeks after I had interviewed him (this incident will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two).

Lastly, the Nigat women and I hosted a meeting in late July for a group of twelve female and male police officers working in the police stations surrounding Chechniya. Each of the 17 Nigat members who came to the meeting spoke of difficult interactions with the police, ranging from officers who ignore sex workers who go to police stations bruised and in tears, to officers who hit, insult and threaten them. Two Nigat members testified about their alleged rape by police officers. While the police guests at the meeting were mostly defensive and defiant, particularly around the 'light' forms of violence they mete out to sex workers, the meeting ended on a positive note, with plans for future collaboration between their various stations and Nigat. It would have been naïve to think that one meeting with the police would change their views and treatment of sex workers, but what the Nigat leadership and I hoped to achieve by hosting the meeting was to 'problematize' violence against sex workers. This served as an important 'stepping stone' between my research and our collective activism.

Other Considerations

Consent and Confidentiality

All participants of my research expressed a willingness to take part in the study, and most signed the consent form I had prepared in Amharic. In addition, all participants of the focus group discussions and semi-structured in-depth interviews were ensured of the confidentiality of their responses; I have used pseudonyms in transcribing interviews and in this dissertation. There were no names recorded on the questionnaires to assess attitudes towards sex workers in the university setting. Lastly, although I preferred to tape-record interviews so as to not be distracted by taking notes, some respondents at the

beginning of my research expressed their unwillingness to be taped after which I recorded my interviews by hand.

Challenges

Despite the ease with which I was able to access sex worker respondents, a major gap in my research remained the perspective of male clients of sex workers. Only a few male university student respondents, in the context of a focus group discussion, were up front about their experiences with sex workers.

Although there is not as much shame in patronizing a sex worker in Ethiopia as there is in some western countries, it was still difficult to access men who were willing to admit to paying for sex.

A further challenge arose from my own inflated expectations from Nigat. At the beginning of my fieldwork period, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Nigat had moved into very nice offices that seemed almost custom-made for them, with a small shop, 'the First 24-Hour Condom Shop' in Addis and with rooms and showers in the back for their members to rest and refresh themselves. Furthermore, through the support of the local NGO that has long partnered with Nigat, the association now has representation in all ten sub-cities of Addis Ababa. 'A bittersweet success', I thought, because, while spreading its reach, Nigat has also watered down its approach.

Unable to register as a sex-workers' association (Girmawit told me that the male officer at the government body that registers charities and associations had asked them, 'what, you are going to try to *spread* prostitution?'), Nigat is simply now a 'women's association.' In addition, the new Civil Society Organizations legislation (passed in 2009) which stipulates that non-profit charities which receive most of their funding from outside the country may not participate in advocacy work, could potentially affect Nigat. However, for now, the safety of the Association which remains steadily apolitical seems assured.

The Pitfalls of Feminist Research

A major worry in planning my fieldwork was that I would be overly 'extractive'. As Naples writes, one of the challenges within feminist research is producing a text that does not glorify the researcher while [further] marginalizing those being researched (2003:23). Safeguarding against this risk linked to my personal objective of at least doing no harm to the women who had agreed to share their stories with me. I had wondered if the women would find my questions intrusive but found that they did not seem resentful at my questioning. I was also able to justify taking two to three hours out of my respondents' afternoons because I usually conducted interviews while the women chewed *khat* or took part in a coffee ceremony, so I did not take them away from other responsibilities or engagements. Only after a few interviews did I realize that talking to me did not disrupt their days significantly. However, aware of the immense debt I owed my respondents, I sometimes wondered if the activism I engage in with the association, as well as the ad-hoc support I extend to some members I had become close to (accompanying one member to her court dates after her alleged rape by a Federal police officer, or paying for the medical treatment of another member's baby) was adequate compensation for the contribution that Nigat members made to my research. In the end, I had to accept that all research, even feminist research may be at least partially extractive.

When I finally did my first 'blind' interview in mid-December by going to a red-light district to interview women who I did not know without one of my usual Nigat chaperones, I felt less than welcome. I wandered around in the infamous *Sebategna* district where sex workers were standing outside the doors of their small rooms which are closely packed together, getting ready to start work in the mid-afternoon. I left after thanking the second sex worker who declined to be interviewed, feeling exactly as I had feared

I would in designing the research: like one more privileged woman exploiting much less privileged women for her own ends.

In addition to well-meaning NGO workers, sex workers sometimes complained that journalists who approach them for interviews are extractive. Some of the journalism in Ethiopia may be characterized as irresponsible, and the sensationalistic coverage on sex work in recent years has worried me. Beyond regular newspaper columns, men and women journalists frequently go 'underground' to 'expose' the lives of sex workers, and their dramatic descriptions, allusions and recriminations do not offer anything more substantial than a titillating read. For example, two graphic sets of interviews with sex workers as well as an 'expose' of sex workers' lifestyles (published in Amharic in 2009, 2011 and 2014) in the Kazzanchis and Chechniya areas where I eventually conducted many of my interviews were hugely popular in the months before I started my fieldwork, and according to my informants, fueled sex work in these localities. Therefore, I was not surprised that some of my respondents expressed a disdain for journalists. I found that they were much more open to the idea that I was engaged in research for 'school' as that represented to them a different kind of research than that which journalists engage in. In addition to my worry about being extractive, another cause of discomfort regarding the research concerns the compensation of respondents for their time.

Outright cash payment is generally considered unethical in research, and yet the reality was that without some sort of compensation to this group of women and men who are usually short of cash and who work daily to get their spending money for the following day, I would not have managed to get even a fraction of the interviews and focus group discussions that I did. Although there were a few instances where I was put in the position of directly paying cash to an interviewee at the end of an interview session, I remained uncomfortable with this breach of research ethics. Therefore, the workable if still uncomfortable compromise I reached was to 'sponsor', as we say in slang Amharic, the refreshments provided by Nigat

during the focus group discussions. As noted above, most of my interviews were held with women in their homes; usually, a sex worker I was already acquainted with hosted me at her home having invited three or four of her friends to an interview session.

During these sessions, I usually provided a lump sum to my host to cover the coffee and *khat* consumed during the interviews. In addition, all focus group respondents were offered 20 Birr (less than £1) for their transport costs to and from Nigat. I interviewed some of my male respondents in bars where I paid for our food and drinks, and I compensated some of my university student respondents with token mobile phone credit.

Prior to starting my research, I did not take the idea of addiction to *khat* seriously; after all, almost everyone I know in my age group has or currently chews casually, on Saturdays, or on a trip out of Addis Ababa without making it a regular habit. Chewing *khat* is also a way of life in Eastern Ethiopia and a part of wedding ceremonies and funerals. Therefore, I used to laugh it off when older Ethiopians complained that the youth of today do not work because of their *khat* addiction, or when they say that so-and-so's son or daughter 'eats' *khat* and is obviously on her way to ruin. However, after more than 50 interviews with sex workers, I started to appreciate the impact of chewing *khat* constantly, day-after-day. I only met one sex worker who did not chew.

Partly because of their schedule (they are after all, free all afternoon) and because when combined with alcoholic drinks (the combination is referred to as *chebsi*), it is considered to stave off cold, *khat* is a major part of the lives of sex workers. Also, the addiction is real - it used to amaze me when many of my interviewees arrived with small, clear plastic bags full of green leaves and after a while, I realized that the women (as well as all the male partners I interviewed) believed that they could not get through the day without the drug. Furthermore, I learned that the time of day that *khat* chewing normally starts, around

3pm or 4pm dictates the rest of the day's activities: my respondents usually got restless or drowsy around that time if they had not brought a stock of *khat* with them.

My growing concern about *khat* misuse contained within it some unease that in the context of my research, I had 'sponsored' many a *khat* session. However, I also thought that it would be patronizing for me to feel guilty for paying for an activity that occurs every day even without my contribution, and so my uneasiness is measured.

I was also concerned that my non-condemnation of sex work should be equated with condoning it, particularly where young sex workers are involved. Although my personal views on sex work in general were challenged and honed during the research process, I remained uncomfortable with the idea of girls who are legally still children, and I believe, not equipped to make life-changing choices, sell sex for a living.

Furthermore, feminist and other researchers concerned with relations between the researcher and the researched face a danger that comes with more relaxed boundaries. Feminist researchers sometimes strive to create a more 'friendship-like' rapport which includes the researcher sharing information about herself in an attempt to create a more dialogic rapport than the more formal question-and-response formats of traditional research. However, Wolf observes that researchers forming real friendships with 'subjects' is more the exception than the rule and warns that data obtained from such friendships may end up being more manipulative than more traditional positivist methods. (1996: Xii).

The feminist qualitative researcher De Laine agrees, 'a paradox of the communicative process is that the more relaxed the participants are in the company of the researcher, the less likely the transfer of personal and secret information will be inhibited, and the more likely betrayal and trust could occur with

disclosure' (2000:76). In this regard, my relationship with one former sex worker in particular caused me discomfort. The ethical 'sticking point' with my relationship with Helen arose from lines blurred between friendship and research. During my fieldwork, I spent more time with Helen than any other Nigat member in the context of seeking out interviews.

As we got to know each other well, over coffee or beers or driving through red-light districts at night, there were many stories she told me, about the child she had to give away and her own troubled relationship with her father that I later wondered if I should include in my dissertation. Although Helen knew I was doing research, and I expressly asked her permission to include a certain story or reflection, there were times that doing so felt like betrayal.

Lastly, the research process was challenging to me personally as many of the stories of violence were disturbing to listen to. Early on in the research process and after I had shared with her a few upsetting stories involving some young respondents, my mother commented that perhaps 'this research is not a job for a mother of a baby girl.' Although I have always been empathetic to the experience of violence by girls and women, it was true that it was much harder to listen to violent stories as a mother. Particularly talking to teenage sex workers in the Mercato area, I remember imagining being the mother of one of these young women. When Fatima, aged 14, showed me multiple, deep scars on her arms, talked casually about her western 'clients' and stated matter-of-factly that she does not sleep with her friends' boyfriends, I remember thinking that this girl was some mother's baby not so long ago.

Conclusion

Despite my initial misgivings as well as some challenges faced during the research process, I think the research process went very well and I gathered a wealth of information on the experiences of Ethiopian sex workers, their agency and sisterhood. The feminist, participatory methods I chose to work with,

informed by my feminist and postcolonial politics proved to be a good fit for my research. The focus group discussions and interviews I conducted stretched over eight months, a good amount of time that allowed me to get to know well many of my research respondents. My previous service with Nigat provided me with trust and acceptance which translated to useful introductions to sex workers while equipping me with basic sex worker 'talk'.

In addition, I was able to work with the strictures of the women's schedule and to go to their homes, helping to create a sense of trust and a friendship-like rapport. From the focus group discussions and interviews, I was able to get strong insights into the experiences of sex workers and the violence that they are exposed to while my conversations with the men rounded my understanding of Ethiopian female and male sexualities as well as the seemingly inevitable violence that characterizes intimate relationships and in particular, sex work. I came away from the research process with the realization that there is no 'single story'; sex workers, who may be considered to have even less formal power than other women are not usually victims, and the men in their lives struggle with the frustration of not living up to notions of normative masculinity. Lastly, I had to accept that my personal ideals of the sisterhood I thought I would find sex workers practicing among each other are not always manifest, even among such a highly feminized sub-group.

Before presenting my analysis of violence within sex work as symptomatic of the violence that is prevalent in intimate relationships (Chapter Four), I examine, in Chapter Three, gendered notions of masculinity and femininity which undergird much of the interaction between men and women in the context of sex work.

Chapter Three: Constructing Ethiopian Sexuality

Chapter three provides a detailed analysis of the construction of female and male sexualities in the Ethiopian context and examines its implications for the prevalence of violence within sex work. My research reflects the findings of similar inquiry from other parts of Africa as well as the west – that human sexuality is usually constructed along patriarchal lines which pre-determine male sexuality to be dominant and aggressive, while women and girls are socialized not only to be submissive but also to view and use their sexuality as a barter tool for material gains. In discussing Ethiopian sexualities in general terms, I show the continuities between paid and non-paid sexual relationships as well as between ‘regular’ women and sex workers. In terms of male sexuality, sex workers sometimes conflate the identities of ‘men’ and ‘clients’, implying that *all* men could potentially be clients (Hart, 1994:59), and my research demonstrates that the unpacked category of ‘clients’ is so nebulous that the men in question could refer to any men in Addis Ababa. Therefore, I argue that sex work in present-day Addis Ababa, rather than being an aberration is actually an extreme manifestation of the male sexual aggressiveness and the commodification of female sexuality that characterizes many of the sexual relationships in the city.

Aggressive and For-Sale: Notions on men’s and women’s Sexuality

Normative Male Sexuality

In the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist theorists such as Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Robin Morgan and Susan Griffin were theorizing that male sexuality, in and of itself, 'is at the heart of male dominance', as well as of all other power relations in society (Segal, 2001:102). Lynn Segal argues that men's intrusive and unwelcome [sexual] attention to women has the effect of establishing a gender hierarchy, affirming in men a shared sense of themselves as the dominant and assertive gender (2001:206).

In her book *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, Segal explains that rape is a product not of male libido but rather of a culture which encourages men to see sexual activity as a way of 'conquering' women, and of a society which allows men to indulge in the sexual exploitation and physical abuse of women with little risk of punishment (2007:209). Segal further asserts that the possibility of men's sexual coerciveness towards women has been socially tolerated if not expected and encouraged. She concludes that 'the symbolic is...sustained by the impact of social practices upon it' (2001:109).

Rape Culture

Rape culture is a phrase used to describe a cultural milieu where rape is normalized due to pervasive attitudes about gender, and female and male sexuality. A term first used by the 1975 documentary film of the same name and popularized by second-wave feminists, rape culture has been used by both feminist academics and activists to highlight the prevalence of rape and its direct role in denigrating women and shaming their sexuality while extolling men's aggressiveness. As Segal (2001:105) has argued, everyday sexism, including sexist jokes and 'boy talk' foster a society tolerant of normative Sexism, while women and girls are taught that if they are raped, it must be their fault. In Ethiopia as in many other countries, police and medical staff routinely shame rape survivors or question the veracity of their reports. This discourages women from coming to the authorities when they have been attacked, leading to even lower rates of rape reports. I believe that the concept of rape culture can usefully be applied to

describe the prevalence (and tolerance) of sexual violence in urban Ethiopia, resulting from the cultural construction of male sexuality as always being aggressive. In Ethiopia, men and boys are taught to define their power in terms of their capacity to assert their will, particularly over women, regardless of whether or not they have their consent.

This speaks to the ascribing of biased gender roles – young men are trained that to be ‘masculine’ is to be not only assertive but also aggressive, while girls are socialized to be subordinate and submissive.

Similarly, in South Africa where gender norms are comparable to Ethiopia, young [Black] men grow up watching their mothers and other women submit to the domination of men (Simpson, 1993:17)⁵.

In studying convicted rapists, Diana Scully found that men who rape are not [usually] irrational, but rape because they have learned that sexual violence is rewarding, and ‘because they did not think they would be punished for what they did’ (1990, cited in Kimmel, 1987:189). Rape is also sometimes a way for men to seek revenge for rejection or as a form of retaliation for perceived female transgressions or behaviour the men do not approve of.

Emphasizing the acquisitive nature of normative, Western notions of male sexuality, Michael S. Kimmel, a feminist researcher of masculinity states:

‘To always seek sex, to seek to sexualize relationships with women; to never refuse an offer of sex – these are crucial elements in the normative definition of masculinity. Sexual pleasure is rarely the goal in a sexual encounter; something far more important than mere pleasure is on the line: our sense of ourselves as men’ (Kimmel, 2005:85).

⁵South Africa also reports very high levels of male-on-male violence. One theory is that such ‘hypermasculinity’ arose out of frustrations during apartheid, where Black men were totally powerless and thus looked to wield power where they could, against women and weaker men (Simpson, 1993:17).

Kimmel further argues that men's artificially-created sense of sexual scarcity and an almost compulsive need for sex *in order* to confirm their manhood feed one another, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of sexual deprivation and despair. Such normative expectations of the sexual behaviour of men were reflected repeatedly in my research.

In two focus group discussions with a total of 21 male university students between the ages of 20-28⁶, the respondents agreed that a 'real' man is one who, in addition to being able to handle alcohol, can convince many women to sleep with him. According to my respondents, such men invest time and energy into getting to know the preferences and interests of their 'targets' so that they can successfully 'conquer' them. In addition, men who '*metbes*' (literally, 'fry', meaning to initiate a sexual relationship) for '*tikim*' (monetary and in-kind benefits) were cited as 'real' men by my respondents. However, deliberate performance of sexuality may preclude violence; responding to an anonymous questionnaire in my research, most respondents of a group of male students agreed with the statement that 'a real man would never hit a woman', while slightly fewer than half stated that 'a real man is always in control of his sexual encounters'. In addition, most of the 24 male questionnaire respondents (aged 20-28) agreed that sexually aroused males can control themselves, and affirmed that a woman may refuse to sleep with a man she has 'led (him) on' by dressing provocatively, kissing or flirting with him.

Notions of Female Sexuality

In the West, the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s produced a heightened acceptance of sexual relationships outside traditional marriage, and emphasized sexual satisfaction for women as well as men

⁶. In terms of respondents' own sexuality, there was a stark difference by institution with all respondents at the private university reporting sexual activity while half my respondents at the Addis Ababa University across town reporting sexual inactivity. While the respondents from the private university, mostly Addis Ababans, showed a more liberal attitude towards gender relations, the Law students, almost all of whom were from the regions exhibited a more traditional outlook; a 23-year-old from Tigray, in Northern Ethiopia admitted that the notion that women are weaker 'has not left him yet'.

(Mansson, 2001:143). In some cases, women's sexual liberation has taken the form of them 'acting like men' including in paying for sex either locally or as sex tourists accessing the services of 'foreign' men (Kibicho, 2009:162).

In this regard, most of my male questionnaire respondents agreed that women can enjoy sex more than men. One of my focus group discussants at a private university affirmed that in terms of sexual desire, '*ketejemere, ye'set yibelta'* – 'if it is turned on, women's [sexual desire] is much higher than men's'. However, women's 'slow' rate of sexual arousal as well as their requirement of intimacy and 'connection' was considered tedious by the all-male group, and one respondent said that some women act 'like they are doing you a favour [by having sex]'. In addition, peer pressure and cultural constraints on women's expression of sexual desire were noted as negative components of Ethiopian femininity, for example, one male college student said that he thought that women their age do not want to appear 'easy' and therefore forego their own desires for sex.

The male university students who responded to my questionnaires and who took part in the focus group discussions also complained that sexual relationships have become business transactions. The students I spoke to at a private university in particular insisted that it is cheaper for them to pay for sex than to maintain relationships with women, and all my respondents spoke at length about the material demands of female students; one 22-year old respondent described it as 'women piercing men.' In addition, the young men informed me that women leave their boyfriends for men who have more money; one respondent humorously said, 'she will tell him [the jilted boyfriend] *'nikaw'* (loosely translatable as 'hit the road').

In these discussions with men students, these kinds of sexual transaction between female university students and their 'sugar daddies' was roundly condemned. Some respondents argued that aided by

westernization, it is materialism and narcissism that motivate such relationships; one respondent said that the same women students that he sees waiting in line to receive monthly bursaries of 200 Birr (7 Pounds) provided by the university wear outfits that cost hundreds of birr while they are seen being picked up and dropped off by older men.

During the focus group discussion, there was some debate on whether such transactional relationships constitute sex work and the consensus was that it is 'worse' than sex work and that these students are 'lower' than sex workers because the students are motivated by what the men saw as greed and materialism - whereas sex workers presumably sell sex in order to survive. I argue, however, that making a distinction between those women who do engage in transactional sex for 'survival' and those who do it because they are 'greedy' for material things indicates a narrow understanding of sex work. My sense was that beyond moral outrage, the men who took part in this discussion may also be envious of the women for their material acquisitions, and of the so-called 'sugar daddies' for the sexual conquests of their women classmates. In addition, such simplistic categorization between sex workers ignores the fact that sex work is a production of economic supply and demand, and adopts an uncritical moralizing stance towards sex work. The continuum of the commodification of Ethiopian female sexuality runs the gamut between 'transactional' sex as engaged in by the university students mentioned here to more formalized exchange of cash for immediate sexual access which characterizes *bona fide* sex work. Furthermore, the institution of marriage, which has been targeted by radical feminists as constricting of women's freedoms, may also be considered to lie on the continuum insofar as getting sexual service remains the absolute prerogative of a husband, and to provide it is the unquestioned duty of the wife who in exchange, expects to be provided for in material ways⁷. The non-criminalization of marital rape within

⁷ Criticism of the (heterosexual) institution of marriage dates back to the founding mothers of western feminism with American suffragists such as Mary Wollstonecraft characterizing marriage in their own societies as a state of 'legal prostitution' (Spector, 2006:78). During the second wave of western feminism, famous theorists such as Marilyn French, Germaine Greer and Shulamith Firestone wrote in opposition to marriage (Fagan et al, 1995). More

Ethiopian law is an indication of the absolute acceptance of women's sexuality being a possession of her husband. The disadvantage that marriage can put women at was indicated in my research.

When Girmawit, one of the founders of Nigat, asked a client about his wife, he told her that as long as he provides for [his wife] and 'her' children, how he spends his time or whom he sleeps with is none of her business. The sex workers I spoke to also elaborated the argument that Ethiopian female sexuality is mostly commoditized, indicating their view that *all* women exchange sex for comfort, safety or respectability. For instance, Aleme, who lived and worked in a tiny shack which barely fit a bed and a chest of drawers, complained bitterly about her married landlady who charges her an exorbitant daily rate amounting to the money she makes from four 'short' (a one-time sexual act, as opposed to an overnight engagement) jobs. Aleme said that her landlady 'probably only has to give sex to her husband once a week as she can comfortably live on the money that I make, selling my body to all types of men.'

Who Are Sex Workers?

If the commoditization of female sexuality exists along a continuum in which almost all Ethiopian women in sexual relationships with men find themselves, the obvious question is who are the women who decide, in so far as it is a conscious decision, to make a living through selling sexual access⁸? As I have argued in Chapter One, sex work in Addis Ababa is entered into comparatively easily because it is a sector that has been normalized throughout the city's history, and because there already are very many sex workers making a relatively better living than they would from other, non-professional occupations.

Most of the uneducated young women who made up a majority of the sex workers with whom I spoke said that they had transitioned to sex work from domestic work or serving tables, both of which are

recently, radical feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys have complained that even in the more egalitarian Western world, marriage reinforces the subordination of women to men in exchange of subsistence (2009:43).

⁸ The agency of sex workers in entering/re-entering sex work, and maneuvering it for maximum monetary gain will be discussed in Chapter Five.

menial and under-paid jobs. However, it is obvious that not all poor women and girls become sex workers and that although most sex workers start off poor, it is not uncommon for economically better-off women to engage in exchanging sex for money, albeit at the higher end of the industry.

In addition, although I agree with the sex-positive position that argues that sex work is work, it is not *any* work, and I recognize the illicit nature of the trade – only the most brazen of my interviewees had ‘come out’ to their families about what they do for a living. Therefore, we can deduce that it is only certain women who step out of the realm of respectability (as denoted by the term ‘*ye’bet lij’*– ‘a *child* at home’) to enter a social space that allows transgressions from social norms. Although hailing from a traditional red-light district such as some parts of the Piassa may make some women more prone to enter sex work as a ‘regular’ occupation, I found that the women I spoke to came from all parts of Addis as well as from other parts of the country. One might also think that one of the reasons that some women become sex workers while many others in similar situations do not is because their mothers or other close family members were sex workers before them, setting an example of sorts; however only one of my sixty-plus respondents reported a sex worker mother while another had a sex worker aunt who supported her.

Beyond economic arguments (Chapter Five), becoming a sex worker requires personal traits such as bravery, sociability and ‘street smartness’ that not all women (or men) possess. I am reminded of a conversation with a group of three men, all friends with each other and partners of sex workers. The men recounted to me numerous women whom they used to know as domestic workers, waitresses or high school students who had later turned to sex work. All these women, argued the men, are ‘*fast*’ meaning quick thinking and adaptable. In this regard, Daniel described a domestic worker in their neighborhood whom he had been harassing; when her employer scolded him, the domestic worker winked at him behind her employer’s back. It was the men’s conclusion that such a playful domestic worker who obviously knew how to manage a man’s attention can soon expect to join sex work. Hanna, a sex worker agreed that it is easy for women to transition into sex work and she stated: ‘there is no criterion for sex

work. Any woman with a makeup case can sell sex'. However, I did hear a few reports of women who could not withstand the rigors of 'the life'; another respondent known to Hanna, Selam, failed to do so.

While most sex workers start looking 'the part' very soon after starting work, Selam, with her long dresses, traditional hairstyle and soft-spoken ways had trouble attracting clients - one man asked her what 'a lady' like her was doing trying to solicit clients in the middle of the night. Selam, who is very religious, who never spoke during focus group discussions and who looked shocked at the profanity that characterized interviews, is the only one of my respondents I know to have left sex work (to go back to domestic work) during my research period.

Unapologetic Resource

Most of the sex worker participants of my research were very clear about the fact that sex is a highly prized commodity whose returns extend beyond their basic needs. While they saw the sexual act as an expression of intimacy when performed with the men that they love, they considered it otherwise to be a commodity to be given only in exchange for money or protection. Thus, it was not unusual for a sex worker to ask a stranger who had just raped her for money. Extending the commoditization argument, Niguest, one of the founders of Nigat told me 'we would not mind 'giving sex to policemen for free if it meant that they would protect us in times of trouble.' With such conscious commoditization of their part of the sexual encounter, the female body and particularly the vagina and its economic value were an important locus of conversation with and among sex workers. There was, for instance, the *shelae* 'mantra' of 'better borrow [money] from your vagina than from people', and I heard women who admit to 'giving' sex for comparatively low sums of money admonished with the rhetorical question, '*eka mekeleja new?*' - 'is your tool/thing something to joke with?' Furthermore, a particularly brave sex worker I spoke to in Mercato told me that she stood up to the manager at a hotel where I heard some of

the worst reports of violence against sex workers and told him, 'I would rather have 'it' sown shut than give it to you for free.'

In addition, a group of sex workers with whom I spent a few afternoons in a traditional red-light district in the middle of Piassa were particularly articulate about the monetized role of the vagina: I walked into the group's usual chewing place to hear Barry being teased at great length after she described the six rounds of sex her vagina 'gave' the previous night as she did not want to have to give back the money the client had already paid. Her friend Heran told her, 'not even for the *bal* (boyfriend) that I love would I put my vagina through that.'

Beyond the characterizations of sex work and sex workers, understanding the cultural construction of female and male sexualities in Ethiopia was imperative for my main task of examining facets of violence within sex work. In the next section, I examine the prevalent notion that men cannot control their sexual urges which has been used to justify men's purchase of sexual access.

Notions of Male Uncontrollable Sexual Desire

Segal argues that the science of sexology that developed in the mid-nineteenth century colluded in depicting male sexuality as an overpowering instinct. In addition, popular media, advertising as well as pornography promote the image of masculinity as 'some type of insatiable sexual appetite' (2001: 102). Feminists have also articulated that the prevalence of rape as a social practice exists particularly because of the myths surrounding it, including that women 'invite' or provoke attack and that men become overpowered by their own sex drives(Ibid). Beyond academic theorizing, the patriarchal notions of men's uncontrollable sexual desires and entitlement to women's bodies are reflected in the findings of research within the social sciences. For instance, a 2002 research in Soweto, South Africa found that even those women who regularly accept money for sex do not go into the taverns wearing skirts so as to not be

labeled a 'prostitute' and risk being raped. Short skirts are believed to 'naturally' lead to rape and a woman respondent is reported as saying 'this is the cause...that makes these boys to rape these girls' (Wojcicki,2002:278).

As the researchers explain, in that particular context, a man is not considered to be able to control his sexual urges and there is a strong communal belief that if a man wants a woman sexually, he should be able to have her (Ibid). A striking example of the deeply-held belief that a man has the right to have sex with the woman he desires, no matter her sentiments – what Jeffreys calls the 'male sex right' (2009:27), was also reflected in my research.

The construction of male sexuality as overwhelmingly strong was reflected in the focus group discussions I held prior to the interviews, and it became an important theme of my research. One of the first focus group discussions I conducted among Nigat members featured a heated debate as to whether men can control their sexual urges. While some respondents argued that if men were able to control their sexual urges, they would not have to pay for sex, particularly when they are married or have a girlfriend, others cited cases of clients who *try* to be faithful to their wives or girlfriends who may be away by not actually engaging in sex but in other related activities. However, all the male students I spoke to at two universities insisted that men can control their sexual desire. One student said, in English, 'We are not animals, we can control ourselves'. Other sex worker respondents said that it was 'mind-over-matter' and disputed the notion that male sexual desire is uncontrollable. However, some respondents thought that for some men, buying sex may become addictive.

This notion of addiction not just to sex but to paying for it was echoed in some interviews where sex workers told me of clients who ask for credit when they do not have enough money and apparently have the need to have bought sex right there and then. One client asked a respondent, '*be'min lakezkizew?*' 'How else can I cool down [my sexual urge]?' Similarly, in his research of portside sex work in Cape Town,

South Africa, Trotter found that the sailors he encountered were not necessarily proud of having sex with the 'sugar girls' they met with at the port, however, they saw it as a practical measure taken to handle their natural sexual urges.

In addition, their almost all-male work environment created an enabling culture for accessing sex work. Trotter observes that no one on the ship was going to make them feel guilty for cheating on their wives; 'after all, they are human – and males to boot' (2008:39). Furthermore, in her fieldwork in the main sex work site on the east coast of Spain during the early 1990s, Angie Hart found that both sex workers and their clients often conflated the categories of 'men' and 'clients' by referring to the fundamental male sex drive to justify their payment for sex, and as the researcher saw it, to diffuse responsibility for the unsavory act of paying for sex. For instance, Hart quotes an 80-year-old client-respondent: 'I've been to ['prostitutes'] all my life. A man likes a change and needs a lot of sex. Women don't need so much.' Another 59-year old client also reported, 'Trouble is my body asks me to come here and have sex. I need it a lot; if I did not get it, I'd feel physically ill - I would go mad and hardly be able to see straight' (1994:59). Some of my respondents echoed this sentiment; Rahel and Melat told me that some clients claim they need sex for medical reasons while others use it as a form of 'sport'.

Hart reports that a popular expression she heard from sex workers was 'most men come because they need to' (1994:62). Similarly, in discussing the conflated notion of 'maleness' and the discourse of men's uncontrollable sexual desires, Mansson and Linders argue that if there is an image of the client, it mainly builds upon a view of men's sexuality as being high and constantly unchanging, disregarding the fact that sexuality is socially and culturally constructed (Mansson, 2001:141). In this regard, most of my sex worker-respondents used their own experiences to support their assertion that men cannot control their sexual desires. Symbolizing uncontrolled sexual activity, '*wisha*' ('dog') was a description I often heard attributed to male sexuality. Similarly, Hart found that her [sex worker] respondents often used examples

of certain clients' behavior to illustrate negative ideas about men in general. One respondent told Hart, 'ninety per cent of men are animals', citing clients' non-discriminating selection of sex partners.

Some western feminists who have built on the Foucauldian principles of power as exercised and circulated throughout society (as opposed to that exerted from the top-down) and have thereby challenged the domination of victimization in feminist understanding of gender relations, have called for a more nuanced understanding of power in women's and men's lives (Sawicki, 1988:164). I found in my research that the power to construct male sexuality as uncontrollable was exercised by both women and men and while it was often unquestioned as a form of male privilege, I observed instances where women used the cultural construction to their own advantage as when they negotiate for a higher fee *during* sex, attesting to men's uncontrollable or insatiable sexual desire.

Furthermore, sex workers refer to men's behaviour during the sexual encounter as proof that male sexuality is untamable. In one interview, the women described clients who, unable to control themselves, ejaculate just by watching the sex worker undress. Other clients, in an effort to *appear* to have insatiable sexual appetites as per the norm of idealized masculinity, take Viagra to make them last longer during sex, including with multiple partners. In this regard, Segal cautions us that despite the pervasiveness of the discourses and imagery of an uncontrolled male sexuality, the real experiences of men in relation to sex with women often differ from the image (2001:103).

When Male Sexuality Falls Short

Segal finds that in reality, it is actually through sexual relations that many men experience great 'uncertainties, dependence and deference in relation to women' (2001:106). Furthermore, what Michael Kaufman, the founder of the White Ribbon Campaign which mobilizes men against violence, refers to as 'men's contradictory experiences of power' lie in the internalized standards of masculinity which are

often impossible to live up to. Particularly for young men, failing to meet the criteria of an ideal man produces personal insecurities that are often compensated for through violence.

Kaufman argues that in this case, violence against another adult or child who may be physically weaker or unprotected may be a way of 're-establishing the masculine equilibrium, of asserting to oneself and to others one's masculine credentials' (2001:41). In my research, I often found that notions of hegemonic male sexuality create standards that many men fail to meet, often creating a sense of inadequacy that may be internalized as shame or expressed violently. In one of my earlier discussions with a small group, I was told about a regular client, a journalist who rents a room at the small hotel run by a group of sex workers. Well-known to all my respondents, they enjoyed imitating his mannerism in describing his usual solicitation of their services, and complained that this particular *Mihur* (scholar, as they referred to him) finds it difficult to be aroused sexually, making the women's work difficult. Having heard about his 'problem', Melat told him, '*Yante yaschegiral*' - 'Yours is difficult.' While this particular client seems to have a good relationship with his sex worker acquaintances, other men do not handle their failure with equal grace. One client who could not get an erection hit Selam in frustration and embarrassment. Discussing sexual frustration as well as failure to perform sexually 'as a real man', a renowned Ethiopian psychiatrist told me that he has most often seen such *werdet* (shame, failure) lead to depression rather than aggression. He gave as an example a recent suicide by a former client who had been unable to de-flower his bride in order to consummate their marriage. This psychiatrist's views supported those of some of my sex worker-respondents, that the reaction of the woman is a key determinant: a woman who makes fun of a man for not living up to his 'manly' expectations or one who insults or taunts him may be confronted by a violent reaction whereas a woman who is encouraging and patient (who calls her lover '*yene anbessa*'- 'my lion' as he put it) may see improvements in her sex life as the confidence of the man to sexually perform is enhanced.

Segal notes that two large scale studies from Canada (in 1983 and 1978) found that the most extreme forms of violence against women were committed by men with a fundamental sense of doubt over their masculinity including fears of homosexuality and a history of using sex as a means of ascertaining their masculinity. Both studies found that the most violent men shared a history of violent childhoods, feelings of inadequacy, dependency and fear and had been teased for their lack of 'manliness' (2000:210). Furthermore, cultures which validate the expression of anger in boys and men while teaching them to repress or ignore feelings of fear, rejection, hurt or pain result in many types of emotions being channeled into anger and expressed through violence (Kaufman, 2001:41).

Substance Use

Combined with men's supposedly ungovernable sexual appetite, alcohol or drug use is largely considered to 'lead' men to commit sexual crimes. In general, clients who are 'high' on hashish or marijuana are reported to have a higher level of sexual demands and to become violent more often. In discussing experiences of violence during a focus group discussion, Nolawit recounted that three years earlier, she was raped by ten men who took turns over a period of thirty-six hours; she thinks that their marijuana use throughout the act influenced their violent act. In the context of bar-based sex work in particular, the women often had the view that drinking seems to 'lead' men to buy sex. Indeed, paying for sex after a night of drinking was rated as 'common' or 'regularly done' by the college students who filled in my questionnaire.

In terms of rationale, many respondents said that students pay for sex without planning for it beforehand, when the situation, such as drinking at a bar with scantily-dressed sex workers who are

available for sexual encounters makes paying for sex appealing. In other contexts, a male student said he pays for sex when he has no other sexual outlet, because he does not have a girlfriend.

Other male respondents characterized paying for sex as a shortcut to sexual gratification compared with the process of attaining non-paid sex including the need to get know a girlfriend and convince her to sleep with him. The respondents agreed that in general, 'men don't need intimacy for sex.' From the sex worker side, Kidist, one of my earliest interviewees, said that while drinking, some men convince themselves that they need to have sex which contributes to the cultural construction of male sexuality as ungovernable. Conversely, some men are reported to drink on purpose, to create a justification for their subsequent demand for paid sex. In relation to drinking, some of my interviewees enjoyed telling me stories of clients who in a spirit of drunken generosity give all their money to the women and ask for some of it back in the morning for transport or breakfast. Some men try to get their money back by force or try to steal it.

Drinking supposedly also makes other clients more amorous - Melat said 'some men promise you marriage while drinking which they often do not even remember in the morning'. Drinking is also considered a contributing factor to some men's short temper. Ayni who works at a hotel on the outskirts of Addis Ababa indicated that men cannot be expected to be rational while drinking; she repeatedly said that it is up to the woman [during a sexual encounter] to be patient and handle the client *be'peace* – 'peacefully' which again speaks to the 'boys will be boys' mentality prevalent in Ethiopian society.

An intoxicating substance that is used by Ethiopian men as much if not more than drinking alcohol is chewing *khat* which has become a very popular urban pastime among men and women since the late 1990s. The sex workers I spoke to complained bitterly of clients who come having chewed *khat* and who ask the women to arouse them sexually. *Khat* is widely considered to decrease sexual interest and ability (while it has the opposite effect on some men), but many men who chew the mildly narcotic leaves

follow it up with drinking alcohol which, as Birrenesh said, causes them to ‘need a woman’ (the relationship that sex workers have with *khat* is discussed in Chapter Seven).

Tied in with the notion of men’s uncontrollable sexual desires are cultural norms that regularize buying sex. In the next section, I offer a brief synopsis of some of the reasons that men choose to pay for sexual access as it is understood by the sex workers I interviewed.

Paying for Sex

In their analysis of interviews with sixty-six Swedish male clients of sex workers, Mansson and Linders found that for men who have difficulty in finding sexual partners, buying sex was often seen as their only option (2001:142). The author also quotes a North American research project undertaken by Martin Monto in 2000 which found that 42% of 700 male client interviewees said that they were ‘shy and awkward’ when trying to meet women, and that 23% felt unattractive physically (Ibid).

Similarly, when I asked sex workers why so many men approach them for sex, many women said, often with compassion, that some men have no other access to sex while acknowledge that most clients are married men. Also, in the urban Ethiopian cultural context, it is common for a young man’s first sexual experience to be bought – sex workers report that some men or boys are shy when they approach the women for sex, particularly if they are virgins.

Many sex workers I interviewed said that they often ask their clients why they choose to pay for sex. They offered rich insight into the sense of entitlement that allows men to buy sex in often anonymous settings. Where clients are married, the ‘bad sex at home’ argument was a prevalent theme. Helen recalled being sympathetic to the ‘unseen wife’, a major preoccupation of sex workers, when a client she was drinking with at a bar called his wife on his mobile phone and informed her that he was with another woman.

When he called his wife *gered* ('servant' or 'maid'), Helen objected indignantly saying 'I too am a woman;' the client reacted by throwing a bottle and hitting her.

'Makeup Is For Whores' – Sex Workers' Disciplined Bodies

The complaint that sex with their wives is boring was commented upon by several informants. One client asked Helen, 'if you ate the same thing every day, would you not get tired of it?' A male respondent told me, '*wend yiselechal*' – 'men get bored [of the same partner].' Many clients seem to justify their infidelity to their partners through paying for sex by referring to the deliberate attractiveness of sex workers as compared to the ordinary looks of their wives or regular partners. For instance Hibist, a very pretty street-based sex worker was told by a regular client that that he goes to sex workers because his wife does not comb her hair or take care of her appearances so '*Ezih rekiche ligba biye new*' - 'I might as well get my satisfaction here, before I go home'.

As Sitamri who works in the old part of Addis Ababa, the Piassa, observed, some men 'air their dirty laundry' (*gemena*) and talk about their wives to sex workers, complaining that their wives don't invest in their own attractiveness as they spend their energy and time on their children and their household. She agreed with this distinction, observing that sex workers usually keep themselves clean, dress well and make up their faces. Other respondents also told me matter-of-factly that clients come to sex workers because they dress sexily and appear to be better-looking than their wives at home. The most telling story I heard in this regard was from Berhane, one of whose regular clients told her that his wife used to be a 'princess' but that after they had children, she became careless with her appearance. Berhane demonstrated to me the humorous miming her client had done of his wife putting on makeup which he asked her to do like she used to before they got married; his wife's response was that she is now a married mother and dresses and acts accordingly. She argued that makeup was for 'whores'. Berhane's client complained to her that his wife is not burdened by childcare as they had house-help, so he was not

sympathetic with her explanation. Disappointed that his wife was not willing to please him, he told Berhane that he could 'do what he wants to do, with a woman he finds attractive', and that he has told his wife as much.

Berhane told me that she has learnt an important lesson from this client, and that she warns female friends who are considering marriage to be careful to not let go of their looks. Feminist analysis of women actively aligning their bodies to an ideal norm in order to enhance marketability has made extensive use of Foucauldian ideas of disciplinary practices (Lennon, 2010). In this context, power is played out through sex workers 'dressing the part' as accorded by social norms to signal their desirability and availability while disregarding concern for demonstrating respectability⁹.

It is not only wives' loss of attractiveness but also their perceived inadequate sexual performance that buttresses the sense of entitlement that many men exhibit towards paid sex. In fact, the two are often inter-woven together with clients complaining that not only are their wives not as attractive as the sex workers but also not as pleasing to them sexually. Berhane's *other* regular client provides a case in point. He tells Berhane that he only cheats on his wife with her (and only her) because '*be' sex anitatamim*' with his wife - 'we are not compatible sexually.' He says that his wife is often shy when he wants to try new things sexually, and tells him to go 'do that with the woman who showed it to you'. In addition to sexual capacity, the sexual inaccessibility of 'their' women underlies some men's sense of entitlement. For instance, both Emy and Titi who work together in Mercato have encountered clients who justified their payment for sex by explaining that their wives were pregnant (many Ethiopian women refrain from sex

⁹In addition to Foucault's analysis, Simone de Beauvoir's descriptions of women living their lives in an objectified way, internalizing the gaze of men and producing their own bodies for the enjoyment of men was an early and important contribution to the understanding of the female body in western feminism (1953:304).

during pregnancy as it is considered a time of rest); the term they quote the clients as using is ‘*argizabign*’ as if getting pregnant is something that the women *did* to them, to deprive them of sex.

Conversely, a client explained to Zewdie, a long-time occupant in the red-light district of Wube Bereha that he buys sex because he loves his wife and does not want to bother her for sex; he said, ‘*aznilatalehu*’ – ‘I care for her’, as if sex would be a painful or unpleasant experience for her as opposed to a shared expression of affection. Lastly, some men justify paying for sex as a result of having fought with their wives or girlfriends. Haeman, a teenage sex worker I interviewed at a bar in Mercato told me thoughtfully that some men view sleeping with a sex worker as a form of revenge against their partners for some slight or another.

‘What you pay for is Sweeter’

While many men offer justifications for their extra-marital and paid pursuits of sex, other men do not express the need to do so. Etete whom I interviewed at her small room in Sebategna, said that she sometimes ‘interviews’ clients as if she were a journalist because she wants to understand why men, including those who are dignified and married, pay for sex. She said that she is most often told by the men, simply, ‘*yimechenal*’ ‘we enjoy [paying for sex]’. Also, Haya, a sweet 18-year old told me that a married client explained, ‘*be’birr yehone ytafital*’- ‘what is bought is sweeter’. In addition, most of my respondents said that they think that men prefer the sex they pay for rather than the ‘free’ sex they get from their wives or partners. Lastly, other respondents reiterated to me the saying that I have often heard in non-sex work contexts by women or men who speak lightly of cheating on their partners: ‘*yetesereke neger ytafital*’ - ‘what is stolen is tastier.’ Furthermore, Birqae, a very animated 14-year old street-based respondent from the Mercato observed that some men go to sex workers because of *limad* (habit) and because they get used to the kind of sex that they cannot get from their non-sex worker wives

or partners. In the context of paid sex, what is 'tastier' or 'sweeter' appears to be related to the opportunity for varied sexual experiences including sexual acts that would be considered taboo by the non-sex worker mainstream society.

'Exotic' Sex

In their analysis of interviews with sixty-six Swedish men clients of sex workers, Mansson and Linders identified a range of motives for buying sex including the desire for 'something different.' The researchers also found that as the general preoccupation with sexuality in society increases, the appeal of paid sex seems to increase along with what the authors call 'a commodified perspective towards sexuality' (2001:143).

In addition, the researchers also found that the sex work milieu itself creates its own excitement which encourages men to try to experience a sexual encounter with one of these exoticized women whose accessibility to fulfill the socially-constructed sexual 'needs' and desires of men is almost mythologized (Mansson, 2001:141). Sex work as practiced in some parts of Addis Ababa can certainly be said to be creating its own demand for 'exotic' and 'better' sex. For their part, the sex workers admitted that some positions '*ye'gid new*' - 'you have to agree to [perform] some sexual positions' because '*leedeset new yemetaw*' - 'he came to enjoy himself'. The association of sex workers with these 'exotic' forms of sex combined with the construction of their constant willingness and availability led many of my respondents to complain, '*normal' yelem*' - 'no one asks for 'normal' sex anymore.' Specifically, a group of women I interviewed in Datsun Sefer told me that when they try to convince prospective clients to settle for 'normal' sex, some men respond that they can get '*ye'Abbaba ena ye' Emama*' ('mothers' and fathers' - sex in the missionary style) at home. Apart from oral and/or anal sex, the '*leyet yale*' sexual acts include non-traditional sexual positions. In this regard, Mahli, a street-based sex worker in Piassa also complained that some clients ask for sex on a chair, or to have sex standing up, 'when there is a perfectly

nice bed in the room.’ Furthermore, Martha, a friend of Mahli said that it is not only *Zega* (a slang term adapted from *Wuch Zega* – ‘a foreign national’) clients, in whom such ‘strange’ sexual tastes are considered more acceptable, who request ‘exotic’ sex, but increasingly Ethiopian clients as well.

In addition, indicating that sexual requests out of the ordinary are and ought to remain the domain of an elite class of clients, Martha complained that *’andandu begiru eyehede yiteyikal’* – ‘even some clients who are walking [because they don’t own cars] ask for oral sex’.

The Shela and the Wife

In relation to the continuum of sex-for-maintenance discussed in the previous section, many sex workers have an ambiguous relationship to the ‘unseen’ wives of their married clients. Some sex workers view themselves as agents who are more independent than the wives who are bound, by law and by patriarchal norms, to one man. They often express sympathy to the ‘princess’ at home. In this regard, my focus group discussants debated the double standards that make it permissible for a man to cheat on his wife with a sex worker or another woman while the same latitude is not provided to women. Hanna recalled that when she asked a client how he would feel if his wife, unsatisfied by their sexual relations, sought sex elsewhere [as the client had justified himself to Hanna], he responded, *’alekelat’* – ‘she would be finished’. Although this apparent double standard appears to be widespread, I frequently heard reports of wives cheating on their husbands, and even in a small number of cases, paying for sex¹⁰.

In addition, not all sex workers felt solidarity with their clients’ wives. Some respondents expressed sentiments closer to envy of the security and respectability accorded to the position of the wife. For instance, reiterating the sense that ‘exotic’ sex including various sexual positions are the domain of sex

¹⁰Women, argued focus group participants, are not drawn to have sex with random passersby in the same way as men. However, although nowhere on the same scale as men, women are increasingly paying for sex with women and with men street-based sex workers. Some particular locations in Bole are reportedly ‘hot spots’ for these interactions.

workers, respondents in Piassa told me that they did not think that clients would ask their wives *whom they respect* to ‘turn around’ during sex or to get into other sexual positions.

In one focus group discussion with Nigat members, the women recounted clients telling them that they could not ask their wives to perform the ‘dirty’ sex they engage in with sex workers because they fear their wives would be turned off, and because in their eyes, it would undermine their wives’ respectability. One client reportedly told Helen, ‘*mistae’ma yetekeberech nat*’ – ‘but my wife is respected’. Echoing my findings was a study conducted in London where three quarters of male clients said that they view sex workers as ‘inferior.’ The report quotes clients who said [in buying sex], ‘I don’t have to ask or think...is that too dirty for her?’ and ‘I don’t really have to be as respectful as if it was my girlfriend or wife or partner’ (Coy *et al.*, 2007, Cited in Jeffreys, 2009:29). Beyond disrespect, paying for sex engenders in many men a sense of entitlement over the sex worker, creating a fertile ground for violence.

‘I bought you in the First Place, You Whore’: Entitlement to Women’s (Paid For) Bodies

One respondent recalled her friend being introduced to a group of her client’s friends as the ‘sheep’ he bought for 150 Birr (6 Pounds). In addition, Melat told me that a client once told her, ‘*Birr’en new yemibedaw*’ – ‘I am fucking my money’. The sense of entitlement over the body of the woman who has (already) been paid for sex is exemplified by the common saying among clients: ‘*Endefelegu litekem echilalehu*’ - ‘I can use [you] any which way I want.’ The equation of a sex worker being paid for her sexual services with ‘buying’ her personhood was, surprisingly for me, echoed by many sex worker-respondents¹¹. For example, Birqae and Missi, teenaged sex workers from the Mercato, complained to me that ‘some men behave as if ‘they have bought you for a year and not for a day.’

¹¹ Sex workers’ largely passive descriptions of their work relates to this point. For instance, my respondents often said ‘*awetagn*’ (‘he took me out’) or ‘*sex aregegn*’ or more aptly, ‘*tetekemebign*’ (‘he used me’) to describe sex with

Mahli from Piassa said with evident bitterness that a client feels entitled to do whatever he wants because, '*be'genzebu geztoshal*' – 'he has bought you with his money.' The sense of entitlement that many men exhibit in their sexual demands is not matched with a corresponding level of obligation on the part of sex workers, and making the requests does not mean they will be met. In fact, a large proportion of disagreements arise over men demanding the sexual activities that sex workers are not comfortable providing. For instance, Sena was asked to perform oral sex on a man who showed her a video of such an act on his mobile phone. When Sena retorted, 'do you think [your penis] is a *tuto* [a baby's bottle]?' he pulled out a gun and threatened her with it if she did not give him back his money. She said that she challenged back, '*wend' neh, tekus*' - you are a man, shoot.¹² Furthermore, speaking to how demeaning she considered such forms of sex to be as well as the ever-present danger of harm when selling sex, Hibist told me, 'violence is being forced to perform [anal or oral sex] so a client does not kill you.'

While many men take 'no' for an answer to their demand for oral or anal sex, I heard several reports of men, including policemen in uniform, physically forcing sex workers to perform such acts. Kaufman agrees with the feminist analysis of men's violence against women often being the logical outcome of men's sense of entitlement to certain privileges. He further demonstrates that if a man beats his wife for not having dinner on the table on time, it is an indication of his sense of entitlement to be waited on, and if a man sexually assaults a woman on a date, it is about his sense of entitlement to physical pleasure, even if the pleasure is only one-sided (2001:40). Kaufman further argues that this sense of male entitlement is buttressed by the explicit or implicit permission given to the practice of violence against women in social customs (Ibid).

a client. Sex workers also use '*metekem*' (using) in a wide range of contexts, sometimes denoting that they are distancing themselves from the sexual act their bodies are involved in, for example, a sex worker might start a story with, '*litekem sil*', 'as he was about to use...' to mean as a client was about to have sex with her. The women's passivity in the sexual transaction is further elaborated when a street-based sex worker says a client '*chanegn*' ('*he put me in his car*'); the action of the '*wend*' (the man) is always active; he stops his car ('*akomelign*') for a woman he chooses to pay to 'use'.

¹² Sex workers' agency in dealing with violence as well as its implication for understanding masculinities will be examined in Chapter Five.

This argument is even more salient in the context of violence against sex workers whose position in society is precarious either due to their illegal status or even where sex work is not criminalized as in Ethiopia, in the stigma that surrounds selling sex for money.

‘Candy Is Better Unwrapped’: Entitlement to Unprotected Sex

In addition to their frequent request for ‘exotic’ sex, a common complaint that Addis Ababa sex workers had against their clients was the demand for unprotected sex. The fact that many men were or became willing to engage in unprotected sex was taken as further illustration by the sex workers I spoke to that men cannot control their sexual urges – further entrenching the cultural construction of the male libido as constantly high and demanding. In one interview, my respondents said that many clients thought to ask of the women’s HIV-status only *‘liboun kaderese behuala’* - ‘after he has done his heart’s desire.’ Four employees of a bar in Kara-Kore, on the edges of Addis Ababa, asserted that because men’s uncontrollable desire makes it difficult for them to control themselves, it is the responsibility of the women to ensure that a condom is used. My interviewees concluded, *‘Wend lij simet wist kegeba yakomal mallet zebet new’* - It a joke to think that a man can stop once he’s sexually aroused.¹³

While many men reported being careful to use condoms – including all the male partners of sex workers to whom I spoke– some sex workers reported of men who try to get sex workers to have unprotected sex with them either by guile or force. According to Titi, a 14-year old sex worker from Mercato, these men take these risks because of the common complaint that sex with a condom is not as satisfying as unprotected sex. Some clients reportedly ask sex workers for unprotected sex because as Ruth explained, they recognize that the women are more careful in using condoms than are *ye’bet lij* and so are likely to be HIV-negative. However careful sex workers are, however, there is an obvious risk to anonymous sex.

¹³ The request for unprotected sex, when it emanates from a sense of entitlement to get whatever one desires out of a paid sexual arrangement will be discussed in the next section.

There is furthermore a widespread assumption among sex workers that men who ask for unprotected sex must have already contracted the HIV virus. When they are not able to convince sex workers to have 'bald' sex, some men are said to force sex workers to submit to their demands.

'Give Me Back What You Drank': Entitlement Created by the Purchase of Drinks

Apparently, for some men, the sense of entitlement begins even before they pay for sex, when they are paying for the drinks of sex workers. Fatima, a 14-year old former street-dweller said that when she has refused to go with a client who has bought her a beer, he has told her, '*Yetetashiwin amtch*' – 'give me back what you have drunk'. The very title of an article in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* journal, '*She Drank His Money: Survival Sex and the Problem of Violence in Taverns in the Gauteng Province, South Africa*' indicates that a man buying a woman (sex worker or otherwise) a drink can create a problematic sense of entitlement. The research found that in the cultural construction of the area, a woman becomes obligated to sleep with a man if she accepts a drink from him (although some women exhibited agency in 'dodging' the men they did not want to sleep with) or risks being raped or beaten by the men in the tavern, as discussed earlier (Wojcicki, 2002:278).

When I brought up the issue of entitlement with a group of male focus group discussion participants at a private university in Addis Ababa, one respondent affirmed that after paying (and he added, 'and payment is always done ahead of time'), some men feel as if they have 'bought' the woman. In addition, some men behave as though sex workers may always be 'bought' if the price is right – Titi and her friends in Mercato, all in their teens, told me that when they have refused to go with a client known to be violent towards sex workers, they have been asked, 'It is money that you want, right?'

The idea that sex workers, because they are paid to have sex with, are useable or acquiescent is contrasted with the relative un-malleability of women who are not sex workers. For example, four men I interviewed in Datsun Sefer, all of whom were the boyfriends of sex workers, told me in all seriousness that one of the main reasons that they did not date *non*-sex workers was what they perceive to be the stringent laws on gender-based violence. They said that they did not want to be accused of rape after having consensual sex, which they had heard happens. When I pointed out that the law protects sex worker women equally, they were not convinced. Birouk said, '*Esua legenzebua new*' - 'that one does it for money', as if that negates her rights to not be harmed and to complain about being forced to have sex, providing a clear example of the low position that sex workers are accorded in Ethiopian society. In addition, Birouk's friend Adane said that he tells his sex worker- girlfriend, 'I bought you in the first place, you whore.' Further illustrating the notion that payment to sex workers disqualifies them from experiencing violence and complaining about such violence if they do experience it, a male student I spoke to at a private university expressed confusion at the concept and said 'but [a sex worker] would have already agreed and been paid for whatever will be demanded of her.'

While the students I spoke to at the private college agreed that sex workers experience a high degree of violence, the consensus among them was that for the most part, it is not students who commit violence against sex workers, as they do not have power or money that many older men have. Another man said that when students go into a bar to drink or to buy sex, they want to do it as discreetly as possible (sometimes, hiding from each other or going back to the bar after their friends have left) and so would not call attention to themselves by getting into an altercation. In addition, it was reported that students mostly sleep with sex workers on the premises of the bar where they work, and so would not have the same opportunity to commit violence against a sex worker as would a client who takes a sex worker home; however, where they saw sex workers 'inviting' violence, as for instance, when they steal, then they may be hit by student clients.

Although the sex workers I interviewed often insisted that some men may be ‘pushed’ into committing violence by the actions of women, many of the women were also eager to tell me that ‘not all men hit’. In discussing their clients, my interviewees frequently said that they like men who pay them only for their company or to sleep holding them; some such ‘good’ clients even give sex workers money without exchange for sex.

In their responses, the sex workers clearly identified such men to be the minority who embody a non-typical model of masculinity either because they are *Zega* – non-Ethiopian or because they are uncommonly good Ethiopian men.

Cowards or Caring: ‘Good’ Ethiopian and *Zega* Men

When I asked a group of 20 sex workers to free-associate with the term ‘*wend*’ (‘male’ or ‘man’) in my second focus group discussion with Nigat members, the most common responses were: ‘*sira*’ (‘work’) and ‘*gebi*’ (‘income’). In addition, terms more loosely related to sex work that were used to describe men were *chekagn* (‘cruel’), *aremene* (‘savage’), *yebelai* (‘superior’), *sayashenif yemaitew* - ‘one who will not be defeated’, and *yemimata ena yemidefir* (‘one who hits and rapes.’)

Most of the group of women agreed that men are, for the most part, without kindness because they do not give birth like women. However, men were recognized by the respondents to also be fathers and brothers, and Etetu, a respondent who along with her roommate was raped by a group 16 men said that she was happy to have a son because ‘*emekabetalehu*’ - ‘I can rely on him to defend me.’ In that regard, the women also called men ‘*askebari*’ - ‘one who gets you respected’. One respondent recognized that men may experience harm from women as well and another respondent called men ‘*gojim tekamim*’ ‘harmer *and* provider’. Other respondents were eager to qualify the term ‘men’ and explained that some men are kind, gentle and ‘*enat yehonu*’ - literally, ‘they are mothers.’

In this regard, Azeb, one of the founders of Nigat said, emotionally, *'akfo yemitegnam ale'* – 'there are also men who hold you as you sleep', while - an important indication of consideration in their line of work - other men ask sex workers if they have 'finished' or had an orgasm which I guess may have as much to do with the men's 'caring' as with proving their sexual prowess. Furthermore, Martha in Piassa said that some men are 'good' and add a tip to the agreed amount, *'be'adnakot'* - 'in admiration' of her services. Yet others pay for the women's time even without an exchange of sex, perhaps buying her dinner or give her transportation money, as they offer her advice to leave 'the life'. Although the unsolicited counsel is considered tiresome by most of the sex workers who described them, the kind intentions behind them are often acknowledged. Other men bond with sex workers over common experiences. One such man was a client of Azeb, a single mother. He told her of his son whom he had been raising alone after his partner left them when the child was an infant. In addition, although stories of male violence abound in the narrative of sex workers, there are also accounts of men coming to the rescue of sex workers as did a passerby who incurred a blow trying to defend Bizualem from a client who was attempting to rape her.

Sex workers, while they are at the extreme end of the commodified-sexuality continuum, and while dealing with more than their fair share of aggressive masculinity, understandably also accepted idealized versions of masculinity. A 'good' man was one who supported them financially and who protected them. For instance, an entire category of men who were expected to defend, in a gender-stereotyped role, sex workers were the owners and managers of the bars where many women and girls work. When Haya's verbal argument with a client was broken up by the owner of the bar where she worked, the client accused her of demanding unprotected sex, prompting Haya's employer to reply that 'my 'daughter' would not do such a thing', and to ensure that she kept her payment.

Similarly, Berhane, who offered interesting insight into the psyche of clients, told me that although he pushed her into sex work, she appreciated her first employer. She said that as a ‘*fresh*’ sex worker, she received guidance from this bar owner who kept her earnings for her and gave her spending money so that she did not waste her earnings.

Adane, whose live-in girlfriend is a sex worker, also told me, perhaps to de-shoulder the culturally constructed notion that he should ‘protect his woman’, that it is the job of male personnel at the *buna bet* to come to the rescue of a sex worker who screams for help¹⁴. In reality, sex workers often complained that the men charged with protecting them blamed them when they got in trouble; the women are often told to stop their screaming as ‘*wedesh new yegebashiw*’ - “you chose to go with him.’ However, they said that sometimes hotel guests as well as more responsible hotel staff would come into the hotel room where a woman is being attacked, and try to intervene; they would often ask the client who is being violent ‘*Ehit Yelehim?*’ – ‘Don’t you have a sister?’

‘Zega’ Clients

In addition to the men *within* the sex work industry who after all depended on the earnings of sex workers, a significant category of men who were largely considered to be kind and non-violent are non-Ethiopian or ‘Zega’ clients. It is very common for Ethiopians to ‘lump together’ non-Ethiopian people as a single category, and I often had to ask for specification on where the *Zega* clients in question had come from. In many cases the sex worker did not actually know her client’s country of origin beyond ‘West Africa’ or the nebulous category ‘Arab’. Some stereotypes were reflected in the women’s responses, for

¹⁴ The theme of protection within the relationship between sex workers and their boyfriends will be further investigated in Chapter Four.

example, Rozina, joking about the stereotypical large-sized penises of non-Ethiopian African clients, mimed gagging while having sex with them.

However, I was surprised to find that it was *Zega* of all stripes - Chinese, 'Arab', other 'Africans', as well as *Ferenj* (white Westerners) who were considered to be 'good' and non-violent clients by sex workers - as surely the artificial category of *Zega* created by Ethiopian sex workers does not preclude differences in the constructed masculinities of *Zega* clients who represent a range of nationalities.

Teret, a humorous sex worker had a story about a 'West African' *Zega* client who not only treated her to dinner and wine, but who also bought her toiletries. In addition, Bizualem had an Arab Sudanese regular client who made her dinner when she would go to his house. She told me that he trusted her and left her in his house when he went to work. She added, with unaffected pleasure, 'and his shower is warm!'

Friends of Teret, Sinide and Fiker affirmed that *Zega* clients 'do not hit or rape sex workers.' Fiker said that Caucasian clients in particular were 'like the way they are in films' in how well they treat women, and making the effort to 'warm up' the woman with foreplay. Sinide added that, even if they do not end up having sex, [white men] still give sex workers money, and even pay over the agreed amount. Bilein, who works in Chechniya also told me that the *Zega* clients who come into her bar of employment include Arabs and Americans and they treat her and her colleagues well.

In addition, Birqae in Mercato talked with affection of her regular Chinese client whom she said treats her well; Birqae and her co-interviewees agreed that 'Chinese clients in general are no hassle.' *Zega* clients, concluded Ruth of Chechniya, '*enkibikabe alachew*' - literally: 'they have caring'. She also said that she finds it sad that rather than the men of her country, it is 'others' who are considerate to Ethiopian women. In addition, *Zega* clients are largely considered to be a windfall of money as many expatriates are hired at salaries that are much higher than locals', and because weak exchange rates stretch visitors' currencies considerably. In the absence of other academic research into violence within sex work in

Addis Ababa, I took reports of generous and non-violent *Zega* clients without further investigating the constructed dichotomy of *Zega* clients as good and Ethiopian clients as overwhelmingly violent.

Furthermore, even though the definitions of violence that my sex worker-respondents supplied in the context of my research did not conceptualize buying underage sex (which is also illegal in Ethiopia as in many countries¹⁵) as violence, I argue that there is surely a sense in which it can be considered a form of violence. Several of the women I interviewed were in fact underage girls whose clients were *Zega*. This undermines the claim that *Zega* clients of sex workers in Addis Ababa are ‘good’ and are not involved in violence against them.

Examining reports of *Zega* men as non-violent towards sex workers corroborated my argument that Ethiopian masculinity is socially constructed as being more aggressive than other nationalities’ masculinity. I make this observation as, combined with praise for being ‘caring’, the view that *Zega* men, in acting less aggressive than their Ethiopian counterparts, demonstrate a collective masculinity that falls short of the idealized view of ‘a real man’ where sex workers are concerned. In this regard, after Tena was faced with a *Ferenj* client who was quick to retreat from an altercation, she reported that she thought Caucasian men were *feri* (cowards). Birqae in Mercato said of her two regular Kenyan clients who treat her well that they were afraid to be violent, because ‘It is our country and we would kill them [were they to turn violent].’ Beyond describing *Zega* clients, I heard an illustrative use of the term *feri* in my very first interview when Melat, in describing two Ethiopian men who tried to rape her, said that she thought one of them must have been *feri* because only his friend was trying to hit her into submission.

¹⁵ Ethiopian Law does not criminalize the buying or selling of sex. However, an adult having sex with a male or female minor (under the age of 18) is a criminal offense.

Implications for Femininities and Masculinities

In this chapter, I have shown that rather than being deviants as often characterized in the social sciences (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994), sex workers are in fact in many ways typical Ethiopian women whose sexuality is commodified, who perform female sexuality as prescribed by Ethiopian gender norms but whose bodies are disciplined in a more extreme fashion than non-sex worker women including wives. Furthermore, the discussions above indicate that even while they suffer from it, sex workers in Addis Ababa uphold hegemonic notions of male sexuality. This leads them to seek financial support and protection from men; it also features an acceptance of male aggression and notions of uncontrollable sexuality. Apart from the cultural construction of men's sexuality as belligerent, I argue that it is also the 'normalization' of violence within sex work as well as within mainstream intimate relationships which explains the prevalence of violence against sex workers in Addis Ababa. Chapter Four will deal with this notion of a continuum of violence within sexual relationships.

Chapter Four: Continuum of Violence within Sex Work and Beyond

While she was making coffee for one of my focus group discussions, Kidist, a prominent Nigat member, gave a loud slap to her then three-year-old son Abi for some minor misbehavior - she also called him 'sai'tan'- 'the devil'. Not overly bothered by this brand of discipline, Abi adores his mother and keeps a photo of her inside his uniform shirt to show his teachers. I have known Kidist since Abi was born and know her to be a devoted mother, and I also realize that she would be shocked to think that anyone would consider her thoughtless smacks to be forms of violence.

Hitting is so common in the Ethiopian context, and used to resolve all sorts of problems so that it does not constitute 'violence' in a notable way. Although all Ethiopian women face violence due to the gendered forms of violence in Ethiopia, sex workers are uniquely vulnerable to sexualized violence at the hands of men. The violence faced by sex workers is so prevalent that I realized quite early on in my research that many sex workers, including 'empowered' sex worker-activists, do not view the violence they routinely experienced as a crime as would be the case if it had happened to a non-sex worker woman. When I asked one sex worker why she did not go to the police after being raped, she told me, 'but I was not a virgin [before the rape].' Having internalized their place in the social order, sex workers in Addis Ababa often do not realize they are entitled to medical and legal recourse when they experience violence. The crucial differences in the definition of violence has had an impact on the parameters of my research, and articulating sex workers' *own* definition of violence has been an important component of it. This chapter will elaborate on my respondents' perceptions of what kinds of acts constitute violence. I also discuss the impact of such pervasive violence and offer an analysis of the prevalence of violence against sex workers in Addis Ababa, as indicated by the limited available data. The chapter expands my central argument to consider the prevalence of violence outside the sex work milieu as acted out in the home.

The last section, entitled 'The Other Man: Love and Dating within Sex Work' offers a glimpse into the complicated relationship that sex workers often have with their intimate partners, and deals with the gendered roles that sex workers and their partners perform, often circumventing societal expectations that the men should protect women from violence by other men while regularly subjecting them to violence themselves. The conclusion reexamines the dominant discourses of Ethiopian femininity and masculinity and shows that the high level of violence against sex workers indicates widespread Sexism as well as a trend of resorting to violence in order to resolve conflicts that is integral to Ethiopian urban society.

Rounding Up My Understanding of Normative, Aggressive Masculinity

In order to explain the prevalence of sexual and physical violence in the lives of sex worker women in Addis Ababa, I turn to the ecological framework. The ecological framework, developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) argues that there is a range of factors which explain why some individuals or groups of people are more prone to violence than others (WHO, 2015). According to the framework, it is the relationship among many factors at the societal, community, relationship and individual levels which produce interpersonal violence. At the level of the individual, being subjected to violence and witnessing violence as a child often leads to adult women and men becoming violent or more likely to become victims of violence, as do psychological or personality disorders, alcohol and/or substance abuse.

Michael Kaufman, the founder of the White Ribbon Campaign by men to end violence against women has pointed out that many boys and girls grow up in violent households where their mother is beaten by their father and come to see violent behavior towards women as the norm (2001:39).

In addition, many boys grow up experiencing physical or sexual abuse (though this appears to be less frequent than amongst girls), creating a learned response of violence. They also grow up fighting and bullying which may enable an acceptance and internalization of violence (Kaufman, 2001:44).

According to the ecological framework, relationships with family, friends and intimate partners may increase the risks of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. For example, having violent friends may influence whether a young person engages in or becomes a victim of violence. Furthermore, the contexts in which social relationships occur, such as schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces also influence violence. Risk factors may include unemployment, the proliferation of drugs and guns, and population density. The societal factors which influence violence are the acceptance of violence as the normative mode of conflict resolution and prevalent inequalities between groups of people. Therefore, it is not surprising that reports of high levels of violence against sex workers correlate with overall high levels of rape and sexual assault experienced by women in the general population in Ethiopia, as has been noted in South Africa as well. The UN Special Rapporteur on Sexual Violence estimates that for a country not at war, South Africa has the highest reported rape statistics in the world, estimated at 135 per day (Wojcicki, 2002:270). Lastly, the cultural acceptance of men's dominance over women is one of the strongest threads in the ecological framework to understand violence. In my thesis, I have demonstrated that the term 'hegemonic masculinity' which applying Gramsci's term examining cultural control, discusses dominant roles attributed to men in mainstream society. Implicit in the theory of hegemony is struggle for dominance, and masculinity studies from the 1970's on found hegemonic masculinity to be sustained through the norms and practices that position men over women.

Hegemonic masculinity is also positioned vis-a-vis subordinated Masculinities (of gay men, for example), and while few men might enact it, it's normative - it is understood to be how men should act. The authors explain that hegemonic masculinity 'ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women by men' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 832). Hegemonic masculinity does not create men's violence, although it may be sustained by force - rather, it is 'ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion' (ibid). The ecological framework treats the interaction between factors at different levels with equal importance to the influence of factors within a single level.

Violence Preceding Sex Work

Rape by individual or multiple assailants was often reported not only in the context of sex work but also as an ordeal that some of my respondents faced *before* entering sex work. This speaks to the vulnerable position many poor young women find themselves in within a male-dominated, violence-ridden urban society. Before she became a sex worker and she was living on the streets of Mercato, Missi was raped by a man who promised to pay for a room for her to sleep in for a night. He took her to Sebategna which is famous for its lack of space and the attic-like sleeping spaces built into people's one-bedroom houses. She said she tried to escape once she realized he was going to rape her but the owner of the room had locked the door behind her so she was trapped. Fourteen-year old Mirafe was tricked into going from Addis Ababa to Harar in Eastern Ethiopia to be a domestic worker for a single man who had lied to her that he had a family. She first resisted sleeping in the same bed as him but he insisted and raped her, taking her virginity. She recounted that he was so violent that she could not sit for a few days and a male employee of the man took her to a clinic but she was afraid of her employer and so did not tell the health workers that she had been raped.

Not knowing what else to do, she became a sex worker soon afterwards. In my research, none of my respondents questioned the fact that as women, their lives would be marked by frequent violence which was treated as an unavoidable part of being a woman.

Normalizing Violence

Sex worker women normalize many forms of violence, so that their own definitions of what constitutes violence may differ from those who do not encounter such extensive violence in their own lives.

Indeed, getting to know my respondents, I realized that those acts that I consider to be forms of violence such as being hit, slapped or shoved by partners or other men are considered by the women to be normal parts of their lives and perhaps not as worthy of note as they would be in a less violent society.

Perceptions and Definitions of Violence

The second focus group discussion I facilitated among twenty Nigat members was entirely focused on defining violence. Over three hours, the women debated what kind of physical and sexual acts they considered to be forms of violence, and how the various forms of violence compare in severity. Often, I found definitions of what constitutes violence to be very personal. For example, Melat emphasized during the group discussion and in her individual interview, that in her mind, the worst violence is being forced to have sex without a condom, and following other respondents' disclosure of various forms of force, she often asked anxiously, 'Did he use a condom?'

Rape

All my focus group discussants as well as subsequent interviewees agreed that being forced to have sex against one's will, even when not conceptualized as 'rape,' constitutes a serious form of violence. Even where a sex worker has agreed to have sex with a client, coercion to do so without a condom (some clients reportedly try to rip the condoms they are wearing in an effort to experience 'better' sex as discussed in Chapter Three) or being forced to perform oral or anal sex were all described as violent offenses. Esete said that she considers rape, particularly by multiple perpetrators as she experienced when she was raped by three Federal Police officers inside the Ministry of Justice compound two years ago, to be the most extreme form of violation. Comparing rape to being hit, she said, '*metash, aleke*', 'he hits you, it's over, finished.'¹⁶

¹⁶ Here, I note that despite the extensive use that feminists have made of his theories, particularly relating to sexuality and the human body, Foucault did not distinguish rape from other forms of physical assault, stating that by

In addition to the incident by the police officers, Esete was also raped by her brother's friend soon after she started sex work; he took her to a wooded area outside Addis by promising to introduce her to a *ferenj* (western) client and after violently pushing her into the ground, raped her. Elsewhere, fourteen-year old Titi was walking home to Mercato when she was caught by seven street boys who raped her in turn after ripping her clothes off. Unlucky Titi was also taken by a client to his house where his friend was waiting and the client who brought her told her to turn around. Afraid of she thought he would do to her, she offered to have 'regular' sex with him for free. But the friend slapped her and she turned around after which the two men anally raped her. They also kicked her out of the house without giving her any money. She recalled that was so hurt physically that she was not able to walk for days. Adding humiliation to her physical pain, she said that she overheard people in the neighborhood who had seen her leave her rapists' house say that she had been 'used' by two men.

Other clients steal sex workers' money – their own payment to the woman as well as other money she has on her. Etta said, 'asking for money back is just like being robbed or raped – all are the same, all are forms of violence.' In addition, an ever-present danger for street-based sex workers is being abandoned in the dark. A client took Melat to a neighborhood in the easternmost part of the city and a 20-minute drive from her work place to have sex with her. After she refused to carry out a sexual act that he demanded, he abandoned her and drove back to the city. She was terrified of the dark and saw hyenas close by. A taxi driver gave her a ride back to town but because she did not have any money on her, she complied to his demand for sex by way of payment.

leaving sexuality out of the equation, the sexual organ [should be treated] the same as "a hand, a hair, or a nose" (Cahill, 2000). This designation has been hotly contested by feminists who point out the specifically sexual nature of the harm inflicted by rape; Cahill observes; "few women would agree that being raped is essentially equivalent to being hit in the face" (2001).

Being Threatened

Titi, Mirafe, Fatima and Nolawit, all teenage respondents I spoke to in Mercato were threatened by a man they call 'Teddy' they said was a seasoned criminal who had escaped from prison. According to the girls, Teddy usually approached his selection for the night and informed her of his decision to sleep with her - refusal could result in him threatening to throw acid in her face or hitting her in the face with a rock. Even though my respondents said that he 'flashes the same 100 Birr (3.4 Pounds) note at them', Mirafe said that he kicked her out one night with a payment of 10 Birr (30 pence). They said that two other friends of theirs who are even younger than they are sleep with Teddy for free because they are afraid of him. Both Mirafe and Nolawit use their boyfriends as covers to refuse going with Teddy who once told Mirafe's boyfriend that if Mirafe really is his girlfriend, then he would not force her to sleep with him.

Insults and Name-Calling

Ayni whom I interviewed with her friends in Kara-Kore on the outskirts of Addis said, '*sidibima moltwal*' – 'there are plenty of insults [by clients]'. In addition, all my other respondents agreed that it is common for them to be insulted or called names by clients. Some respondents did not consider this treatment to amount to violence. Melat said, '*ayletefibishim*' or 'it doesn't stick to you' - and prefers such verbal abuse to physical violence, and Semayit and Zewd who defined violence as '*masgeded*' ('being forced' [to have sex], particularly without a condom), did not consider name-calling or insults by clients as a form of violence. Semayit said, '*esuma, yisadebalu*' – 'of course, they insult' because 'they are arrogant due to their maleness.' However, other sex workers considered insults and name calling as forms of violence, particularly those insults that 'get to the mind.' One respondent said, 'I know it is his money insulting me.'

In addition, Seble told me that when clients insult her mother (considered the worst insult in Amharic); she considers it a form of violence and finds it very hurtful because her mother has passed away.

Soliyana, a sex worker who lives in Piassa said that she sometimes ‘feels’ insults, particularly if it is by a client she had considered to be nice, but that she usually just laughs them off.

Hitting or Beating

Melat, my first interviewee said: ‘*Wend lij bimetagn minim aymeslegnim*’- ‘a man hitting me does not bother me.’ However, her friends Rahel and Selam said that they consider being hit to constitute an experience of violence. Rahel also said that she considers a client who hits her as ‘*balege*’ - ‘bad, ill-mannered’. Stories of being hit or beaten by clients, often badly, were the most frequent stories of violence I heard from my sex worker respondents. For a reason that she said was not clear to her, Firaie was punched in the face by a client after they had had sex.

In addition, Mirafe, who looks even younger than 14, says that the first night she sold sex she cried. The client slapped her, asking why she was crying like someone who had been mistreated. Rihan, Seble and Iman whom I interviewed at the *Setoch* in Mercato, told me that the night before my interview, a girl from another establishment, nicknamed China, had been badly beaten by a client who kicked her out of the bedroom, covered in blood, and pushed her out of the gate onto the street completely naked. He also set her clothes on fire in the compound and threatened others who tried to intervene - Iman asked me defensively, ‘should we have had our throats slit [to defend China]’? At the same establishment, Rihan had been badly beaten and scarred by an older client who said that he did not know what a condom was and who got suspicious when she produced one and asked him to wear it. Meanwhile, in nearby Piassa, the feisty 15-year old Birqae was strangled by a client as they were walking to a hotel. She reported that she went into shock and could not speak. Tsige, who worked in a bar in a quiet part of the outskirts of Addis Ababa, was badly beaten by a soldier client.

Police came to the scene but she did not pursue the case and the client only paid her a sum of money towards her medical treatment. In addition, Titi said she had been hit unexpectedly by a man drinking whom she had not even spoken to; he later apologized and his friends convinced her not to make a complaint to the police. Lastly, like many of my respondents, Bisou had encountered ‘Sammy’, an infamous stalker of sex workers in the Bole area. Sammy was reputed to be HIV-positive and to have been in and out of prison on charges of violence. Bisou said that due to his reputation, she usually avoided Sammy, but that one evening, she did not recognize him as he was wearing a hat and a scarf. Driving her into a residential area in Bole, Sammy beat her up when she asked him to let her out. After snatching her money and mobile phone, he kicked her out of the car. A passerby saw them, and helped Bisou get back home. In addition to the violence commonly meted out by clients, sex workers are subjected to violence by other men, including the customers of the bars they work in and in the case of street-based sex workers, passersby and homeless men and boys.

Police-Related Violence

When I asked a group of teenage sex workers from the Mercato how they defined violence, Birqae responded simply: ‘police.’ Her friend Missi expressed her view that police must have been given the right to beat them, and even to kill them. She said police don’t care if sex workers are pregnant and they hit randomly. Firaе, who moved to Chechniya from the more violent Mercato and who I know had several altercations with the police, said that what she considered to be a form of violence is ‘unfair accusations of robbing clients.’ The teenagers I spoke to in Mercato all said that police usually take the side of clients, blaming all sex workers for the *chereba* (stealing from clients) of some sex workers¹⁷.

¹⁷ Stealing from clients, which I recognize as a form of agency on the part of sex workers, will be addressed in Chapter Five.

Furthermore, during one of my focus group discussions, one respondent said that police get jealous over the money that sex workers make, often asking: '*le'anchi new 300 Birr yemikefelew?*' – '300 Birr (10.3 Pounds) for YOU?' There are reports that police often extort money from sex workers as well as their clients, in the case of the former, by asking them to share the fee they are helping them recover, and in the latter by using violence or threatening to arrest them for disturbing the peace. They said that when they have gone to the police with a complaint about a client, the respondents have often been told '*Yibelish*' - 'you deserve it' or 'you had it coming' or were told that they were criminals.

Similar to some hotel attendants, police also reportedly tell sex workers '*wedesh new yegebashiw*' – 'you chose to go [with the client]'. Police also are said to often assume that sex workers must have stolen from the client to cause him to be violent, and to tell sex workers that they will not get involved in 'private' conflicts between men and women. Police also tell sex workers, '*tewechiw!*' – 'Deal with it!' One respondent was asked why she minded being called a '*shermuta*' – 'whore' - because, assumedly, that is what she is.

Sex workers often have a complex relationship with the police who are frequently clients, but whom they also often date for protection or to get warnings of impending *afesa*.¹⁸ Niguest, one of the founders of Nigat, explained to me that it is common for police to pick up a sex worker after hours, and have sex with her inside the compounds of the government buildings they are assigned to protect.

¹⁸ *Afesa* are 'clean-up operations' usually done ahead of visits by international dignitaries and used to consist of sex workers being piled onto pickups to be dropped off at out-of-town locations. Since about 2000, it is more common for police to soak the women in water so that they won't go back out to work. This takes place in the compound of the various police stations where the women stay until the next day, until the officer who arrested them comes back to release them. Even though many aim to complain to the police superiors about their treatment, Hanna said that they are so tired by the next day that they just want to go home. The workers leave after signing that they will not work in the area but respondents said that they usually give false names.

When I mentioned that it is at least 'business' - consensual between sex worker and police-client, Niguest laughed and said that it is only 'business' for one day, after that, the police simply call out '*ney!* - 'come!', and because police are intimidating in their uniforms, the girls go to them and have sex without payment. In addition to an unfair use of their power to extract financial and sexual favors, some policemen also commit outright rape. Rahel was 'rescued' by two police officers patrolling an area where they overheard her being threatened by a prospective client. However, after he left, she said that she was raped by both officers. Seble reported her experience with a police officer client who tried to force her to have sex without a condom, and who kept threatening her, 'I am a police officer, I can kill you.' She said the client who was not in uniform, repeatedly showed her his police ID as proof. In this regard, in *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing*, Didier Fassin has argued that police officers' own morality determines the type of 'justice' they mete out to a group that is already 'othered' as are poor young women in the urban context of Ethiopia (2011:86).

Elsewhere in Africa, Trotter, in his ethnographic research into sex work in South Africa found that police often take advantage of the illegal status of sex work to exhort free sex, money or drugs from sex workers who want to avoid arrest. One of Trotter's respondents was blackmailed into paying not only a weekly 'protection fee' but also to provide 'occasional orgies' for local police officers (2008:139)

Men's violent masculinity is used to rationalize violence by the police which, despite limited female membership is an institution that is very much masculinized. During a conversation with four street-based sex workers in Piassa, the fact that given Ethiopian notions of masculinity, violence by the police is to be expected was made explicit. Mahli said that '*andande polis yidersilinal, ke'rebeshin gin yichemirilinal*' - 'The police sometime come to our rescue, but if we disturb the peace [or create problems], they 'add' to [the violence we are subjected to].' Soliyana informed Mahli, 'they are only carrying out their duties in hitting us.'

In this regard, Didier Fassin explains that the state is expected to protect society from violence through law and law enforcement, and in exchange, 'it is granted the monopoly of legitimate violence.' Fassin also argues that this fundamental violence of the state, as well as any potential resistance to it, commonly are made visible through violence enacted on the bodies of women and men (2011:86). Violence by state-sanctioned law enforcers is common in every part of the world. For instance, in a survey conducted in India in 2002, 70% of sex workers reported being beaten by the police while more than 80% reported being arrested without evidence. Also, in Bangladesh, the National HIV Surveillance Agency in 1999-2000 found that 52%-60% of street-based sex workers had been raped by men in uniform in the previous 12 months [Government of Bangladesh (2000) quoted in WHO, 2005:6].

Investigating sex workers' own definitions of what constitutes real violence produced the detailed list of experiences that I have discussed so far in this chapter. As common as these stories of violence were, it is important to qualify that in most of my respondents' definitions, *real* violence was considered to be a severe physical attack that might require medical care or leave scars. The following story clarifies the distinction often made between forms of physical attack. Haya, an 18-year-old who worked at a Mercato bar and who surprised me by initially claiming that she had never experienced violence, went on to say that her boyfriend had once slapped her. However, she did not consider that act to be a form of violence as it was a 'light slap' - she said it was the kind of slap you may get at home if you misbehave. Such minimization of acts of violence speaks both to the normalization of violence within inter-personal interactions and the low value that women give to their own gendered identity as well as their personal security. The hierarchy of forms of violence that is imposed on sex workers by men, and the definition of only certain forms of physical and sexual aggression as 'violence' is interesting, but further analysis is required to understand *why* only some acts are perceived of as violent.

Just as sex work is normalized by the vast number of women and girls who make a living out of selling sex, I argue that violence is largely normalized because it *is* the predominant mode of conflict resolution in Addis Ababa. This speaks to the generalized and gendered nature of violence.

In fact, it was some time into my research before I realized that among my respondents, the terms for arguments, altercation or conflict— *tseb'* or *til'* — were actually interchanged with physical violence so that when I had often thought that sex workers were describing a verbal argument with a partner, a client or a sex-worker colleague, they actually meant physical fights. One male partner of a sex worker whom I interviewed clarified it for me and said that *til* is the same with men or women and always involves physical fighting. I saw some of the physical scars obtained during skirmishes— sometimes these marks were displayed almost proudly, as a badge of honor, as was demonstrated by Fatima who showed me a deep, dark scar on her upper arm where she had been cut by a man with whom she had refused to sleep. However, the impact of violence on the bodies, psyches and dignities of women, and particularly teenage girls goes beyond physical scars and often affects all areas of their lives.

Prevalence of Violence against Sex Workers

Verifiable data, even on mainstream topics, let alone something as sensitive as violence, are hard to come by in Ethiopia. For reasons that are still not clear to me, the police have not centralized their information system so that it was difficult to gauge the level of violence experienced by sex workers throughout the city. As there is no official estimate of the number of sex workers operating in Addis Ababa — and the few published estimates by NGOs I do not consider to be even close to accurate — it is not possible to calculate the proportion of sex workers affected by violence. Secondary data on the subject is likewise scarce.

It was also difficult to ascertain the *frequency* of violent encounters among the women I researched. Sometimes they happened in waves; for example, there was a spate of attacks on a group of women from a particular area while I was conducting my focus group discussions, but my respondents also said that one could go for months without hearing of a violent attack on a sex worker. When pressed for an indication of the frequency with which she has experienced violence, Esete estimated that three out of every ten men she provides services to turn violent. She said there are ‘plenty of men’ who hit or spit at sex workers and who try to force them to perform oral or anal sex or try to get out of paying.

Differences by Area

Violence does not seem to be a significant feature of *all* sex workers’ experiences. I found discrepancies in women’s responses of experience in different parts of the city. When interviewed, a group of five friends in the traditional red -light district of Datsun Sefer close to Piassa, did not have many violent incidents to report. Rakeb, who had been selling sex for five years since the age of 17, said she only had had three clients who were violent, which was low compared to reports from other areas.

When I expressed surprise, her friend Betty said that even though Datsun Sefer is poor, it is a peaceful area – she said the focus there is on drinking and dancing. When I probed further and said that the street-based workers I spoke to in the more up-scale neighborhood of Chechniya had reported many more incidences of violence, Betty and Helen said that Chechniya is a ‘damned’ or ‘cursed’ neighborhood and that it did not surprise them that there is much violence reported there. I found it difficult to assess why sex workers in some areas face more violence than in others. One contributing factor may have been that some areas experience higher rates of crime overall, as in Mercato, one of the most violent and crime-ridden neighborhoods in the country. Mercato is the hub of the main bus stations for immigrants from rural areas and so has many transient residents who do not become regular customers of sex workers, as occurs frequently in other parts of the city.

In addition, Mercato's reputation for lawlessness allows violence to go unpunished; some of the sex workers I interviewed in Mercato complained that even the police, who are often paid by bar owners for 'protection,' do not come when their help is requested. Although Mercato is mostly poor, with a few pockets of middle class housing, I did not find a correlation between poverty and levels of violence. Sex workers who I interviewed from equally poor or middle class neighborhoods reported fewer incidences of violence. As discussed above, Chechniya, in the middle of a rich neighborhood, produced some of the most serious stories of violence that I encountered. Another explanation for the severity of violence appears to relate to familiarity. Where sex workers have a 'home base' such as a bar or set of bars out of which they work, or seem to belong to a community of other sex workers who all live and work nearby, they appear to be much safer than unidentified street-based sex workers who work in Chechniya and Mercato. Although bar-based sex workers experience violence, particularly in the Mercato, those clients whose very intentions in approaching sex workers appears to be to commit violence seem to target street-based workers whose anonymity further protects the men who harm them.

Generalized Violence: In the Home and Beyond

My fieldwork research was the first opportunity I had to dig deep into the experiences of violence, and the nature of some of violent acts committed against sex workers – the accounts of gang rape, beatings to the point of body disfigurement and even murder shook me. While I had long been disturbed by the way in which violence within intimate relationships is treated as something 'normal' by men and women alike, I had been unaware of the extent of the violence. As a group, sex workers in Addis Ababa, as women working in similar conditions almost everywhere else, are outliers and their experiences of violence do not represent what normally takes place between women and men in more 'mainstream' relationships.

However, the fact that many of my respondents experienced rape and other extreme forms of violence *before* entering sex work, and their continued engagement in violent intimate relationships outside sex work has convinced me that in Ethiopia, violence within intimate relationships is situated on a continuum. Violence also takes different forms from the ‘light’ slaps and punches that are usually tolerated and often meted out by the women themselves, to forms of violence that would be recognized as extreme anywhere, including gang rapes, and ultimately, murder.

The nonchalant attitudes about violence which took me aback at the beginning of my fieldwork in October 2011 were still surprising in May 2012 when, following an interview with a former partner of a sex worker that Hanna had introduced me to, the two casually traded stories of how he used to ‘tear up’ his girlfriend’s face while he lived with her. He seemed proud of the excesses of his ‘passion’ and Hanna told me that he had once hit his girlfriend so hard that her ear had become stuck to the side of her face with blood. Hanna casually remarked that the woman in question recovered from such beatings remarkably quickly, and he agreed that yes, had it been Hanna, she would not have recovered as well, as if he also knew Hanna’s threshold for beatings.

Dr. Mesfin Araya, the Provost of a leading hospital in Addis Ababa, confirmed that violence against sex workers is highly tolerated in Ethiopian society where male dominance is almost complete. Both psychiatrists I spoke to agreed that male violence against women is a norm in Ethiopia and is expected if not encouraged. Hitting a wife or lover is an expected behavior for a man, and is often construed as a sign of love and taken so by women. This issue was brought up during a focus group discussion I held among male students at Addis Ababa University. The cultural context that *expects* men to ‘discipline’ their wives was emphasized. A respondent from Tigray region in the northern part of the country said that it is a ‘shame’ for a man with a misbehaving wife to fail to beat her into proper behavior, and that some men beat their wives out of pressure, even if they do not want to.

The young man asked rhetorically, 'if he is called a man, how else can he show domination [except for beating his wife]?' There was a debate during my focus group discussion with the students about whether husbands *should* beat their wives. One respondent said that he considered it acceptable where 'it helps the woman correct her mistakes', and as long as it does not entail physical injury. Another respondent from Amhara region, also in the north of the country argued that the perceived stability of marriages in Ethiopia as compared to the west may partly be due to the culture of men physically 'disciplining' their wives. However, the consensus of the group was that it is not acceptable for women to beat their husbands, and that such women are 'shameful' and would be outcasts in their communities. My respondents also agreed that there is no such thing as 'loving' violence, as in men and women who hit their partners 'lightly', in the context of petty disagreements.

Where violence is a common feature of relationships in the home, it often also affects children. Berhane ran away from her home in Shashemene in southern Ethiopia because, she said, as hard as she tried to get along with her stepmother, she always ended up making her upset. Her father used to hit his wife for fighting with Berhane, and her stepmother often left the house, taking only her youngest child so that the other children in the house were neglected.

Her father also drank heavily during these times of conflict, and her stepmother used to take out her anger by beating Berhane's youngest sister (her own daughter). Feeling as if she was the cause of discord in the family, Berhane chose to leave home and to travel to Addis Ababa where she initially worked as a waitress and later became a sex worker. Physical punishment of children is situated on continuum, depending on its severity. All my respondents from the focus group discussions I held with University students have been physically punished as children and one respondent from Tigray laughingly said that he is still hit occasionally when he visits home. Another respondent told me that he used to be hit 'at least twice a day' and that being physically punished has helped him develop into a moral citizen.

Only two of out of twelve respondents said that they were never hit as children. The consensus was that although there might be a few students originally from Addis Ababa who may not have been hit by their parents, most *kiflehager* children–youth from the regions where ‘traditional’ values have not been watered down by Western values that contest hitting children by way of punishment– are regularly physically punished.

The Impact of Violence: Contextualization

The constant resorting to physical action to resolve conflict in the home and beyond is indicative of how violence is normalized in Ethiopian society. It is not surprising that Ethiopian boys who grow up being physically punished learn to resort to hitting to resolve conflicts in their future relationships, and that girls learn to expect to be hit – particularly by ‘real’ men. In this regard, Gossaye et al. (2003) found that women who had experienced physical or sexual violence were more likely to report that their partners fight with other men; that the women’s own mothers and mother-in-laws had experienced violence by their partners and that their partners themselves had experienced violence as compared to partners of women who reported no violence (28).

Compared with other women, survivors of rape and assault are generally less healthy and experience more symptoms of physical illness (Gossaye, 2003:23). Furthermore, a community-based study in a rural part of Ethiopia over a period of twelve months showed that physical violence by an intimate partner including emotional violence and control were associated with depression among women (Deyessa, 2010:8). Lastly, violence greatly affects women and girls’ self-worth and self-esteem and may create, in survivors, the notion that women deserve to experience violence.

The Other Man: Love and Dating Within Sex Work

It was a few interviews into my fieldwork before I realized that for the sex workers of Addis Ababa, being in intimate relationships *outside* paid sexual encounters is the norm rather than the exception. The only time I saw my respondents appear abashed or embarrassed was when they discussed their *bal* – boyfriends or lovers, particularly where their relationship had been cemented by having a child together. As Esete put it succinctly during one of the focus group discussions, ‘a man is a real *bal* if a [sex worker] gets pregnant for him’. Understandably, most sex workers meet their boyfriends in their work setting; the men often start off as paying clients or as customers of the bars where the women work.

Melat and Rahel both live with their partners. Their small houses are made of corrugated iron sheets and adjoin one another. Rahel’s partner is the father of her then 14-month old son, Kaleb. Melat, although she lives with another man, keeps in touch with the father of her ten-year old son. Her former partner visits his son and provides for him when he can. Similarly, Hibist lives with the father of her 19-month old daughter nicknamed Simounee (after the 25-cent coin); she told me matter-of-factly that the money she makes is hers and she does not ask her partner for money.

The women’s work was an obviously contentious issue in my interviewees’ account of their romantic relationships. Hibist’s friend Hagar argued that in general, it is better if men do not know that their partners sell sex so that they do not use it against them – Hibist said, ‘at the very least, he will bring it up when he is drunk.’ A third respondent, Hiber said that she plans to tell her future *bal*- as she hopes to leave sex work soon -that she used to be a sex worker but will warn him not use it against her as what she calls ‘*aemro dula*’ - ‘a stick against the mind’.

Speaking to the complication inherent in dating while doing sex work, Hanna described, during a focus group discussion, a former boyfriend who lived with his family while they were dating. Hanna said that he

mostly did not mind her work until he spied on her with her regular client who was paying her as his exclusive *kimit* (mistress) and realized that unlike his previous assumption, the regular client was young and handsome. Touchingly, her boyfriend became afraid that Hanna would fall in love with her client, and tried to stop Hanna's relationship with him. He begged his sister for money to pay Hanna's rent, saying that he needed the money because he was unemployed. Although he and Hanna loved each other, the relationship did not survive for long after that incident. Hanna told the group, with some appreciation, that although he did not make money to help her, at least her former boyfriend had not expected her to provide for him. This led to a discussion about men who live on the earnings of *shelaes*.

According to my respondents, some men, mostly unemployed, are 'bought' by sex workers in exchange for food, *khat*, drinks and entertainment. In this case and in a reversal of gender norms, it is often the woman who pursues and 'buys' the man of her choice, sometimes going through his friends. In addition, dependence on the earnings of the sex worker may extend to the man's family. Such men are spoken of disparagingly by sex workers. Outspoken Bisou said that she was grateful that she had only given 'her vagina and her love' and never money to a man.

Men Using Sex Workers

Many women complained about men using sex workers and their resources. I got an interesting perspective into relationships and sex work during the weeks that I was interviewing male partners of sex workers. One afternoon I was regaled with stories of adventures about living with sex workers by Haile and his friends. During our conversation – held in a tiny room entirely constructed of cement blocks, and sitting on mattresses on the concrete floor – Haile came across as being in a serious relationship with Helina. Helina had left sex work and joined his sisters in doing housework in Abu Dhabi.

He admitted that when he first started dating her, he did it for her money, but that when he fell in love with her, he felt uncomfortable taking money she had made through sex work and wanted her to stop working. He also said that he has been faithful to his girlfriend and expressed his hope that they will live together when she comes back after her three-year contract. He claimed that he would wait for her, having 'changed into a more responsible citizen'. I was impressed with his apparent commitment but as I left with Kidist, who had arranged the interview, she told me that this is the same man that Little Hiber, another Negat member, had 'fed' for six years before Haile met his current girlfriend. Kidist said that Little Hiber still talks about Haile frequently and I remembered Little Hiber's own stories of going into a bar where her former lover was drinking to 'make noise.' Poor Little Hiber, I thought - for all Haile's stories about the sex workers that he had dated he had not even mentioned her in the interview which I took to indicate that she was not important to him.

Most of the twenty-two men I spoke admitted taking money from their sex worker-girlfriends regularly. Although many of the men are casually or irregularly employed, even those who have good jobs, such as Gizaw, who is a technician, said that he takes money from *all* the sex workers he dates concurrently; he emphasized that he dates *only* sex workers, and only for *tikim* – material gain.

According to Gizaw, one of his girlfriends was so in love with him that she had offered to buy him a car with the money that her elderly 'sugar daddy' gave her. Gizaw claims that she knows he will not get serious with her and said with unconcealed arrogance 'but she loves me, and she wants to do things for me.' In addition to regularly giving them spending money for *khat* and alcohol, many sex workers also let their boyfriends drink at the bars where they work and they get their clients to buy drinks for the men they pretend are their brothers or friends. Faris explained how this worked, saying, '*wend lij mata yewah new*' - 'men are innocent at night'.

Extending the argument that sex workers often feel used by their boyfriends, Martha in Piassa said that a lover is 'likely to leave you if you don't work - and give him money for three days.' She also told me that she had broken up with a boyfriend in resentment because he used to sleep while she 'drank the cold' and because she thought that he was only with her for *khat* money. Esete who has been with the only boyfriend she has had for close to ten years, corroborated, '*wend lijima kalaregshilet aykoyim*' - 'a man will not stick around if you are not 'doing for him' (giving him money').

Failure to live up to masculine ideals of making money and supporting one's partners was obviously a salient issue among the male partners of sex workers that I interviewed. Most of the men I interviewed – except those few who boasted openly about living on the earnings of 'their' women - expressed strong dislike for sex work. Displaying masculine expectations, Ishak who is married to a sex worker, told me that 'we don't mind the women working to *help* us provide for our families'. However, he concurred with his two friends that it should not be 'that way', i.e. through sex work. The reality that the women were not merely supplementing their men's income as the discourse on femininity dictates but rather providing money often not only for the immediate family but also often the partners' family was not mentioned by my respondents.

This avenue for frustrated or injured masculinity may go some way to explain the normalization of violence by the male partners of sex workers as one way of re-establishing the idealized masculine ideal of the Ethiopian man as the breadwinner with 'his' woman playing a supplementary role. From my interviews, it appears that sex workers' access to love and affection is commodified similarly to their sexuality. It exists on what we may call 'an economy of maintenance'. While maximizing the monetary gains they get from client men in exchange for sexual access, sex workers often pay, often in literal terms, other men to provide them with companionship and a form of affection. Money appears to compensate for the respectability and social standing that sex workers do not have.

The male partners' expectation of monetary support is also an indication of the commodification of 'love', affection and relationships in the social space occupied by the men and women that I interviewed.

Male Protection

A group of male friends I interviewed said that they keep up appearances as protectors in their communities by walking 'their' women to where they stand on Bole Road to solicit clients. If they have made sufficient money; the women usually share a taxi home at the end of the night. The protection that the men can provide is limited, however, and none of them had been called by their partners to defend them against a violent altercation. While my married respondent said that his wife has not experienced serious violence (he did not consider being hit as serious violence) on the job, or at least has not told him about it, another respondent said that sometimes, he does not need to ask his girlfriend what happened, as 'the bruises on her face tell me.' Expressing frustration at his inability to protect her, he said, '*gejera yizhe alweta*' – 'it is not like I can go out [and attack her assailants] with a machete.' My other male respondents who were in committed relationships with sex worker women echoed the frustration that comes with limited opportunities to protect their girlfriends.

Wolle and Ishak, for example, said that they see the women off as they leave together to go to work in the streets in the early evening, and then spend the evening together, watching TV in the small house the two couples share. They wait up for the women and walk them into the compound they share. When I asked the men if the women call them if they get in trouble while working, Ishak said that the women 'think for them', meaning they do not want to put their men in harm's way and so do not call them. However, for their part, the men said, 'you are a *bal* so you will take risks to protect your woman.' I recalled Rahel telling me of the time she fell out of a running car after her client would not stop.

Her partner told me that she had not called him then, and that he only saw how badly she had been hurt when he saw her bruises. Rahel has a compelling reason not to call; she would not want her partner to leave their son alone at home to come rescue her.

In a rare example of effective protection, two friends, Birouk and Besufikad described picking up the latter's girlfriend and a client in Besufikad's taxi. She would often use the taxi in order to bring business to Besufikad. The men overheard the client telling the sex worker that he wanted her to perform oral sex, and unable to control himself, Besufikad parked his car and told the client to get out. He also returned the money the client had paid her in advance. Birouk is less bothered than Besufikad by his girlfriend having sex for money, but said he had 'warned' her that she better not sleep with someone he knows, no matter how great the offer of money. After she was once tricked into going to a client's house where she was raped by two men, he asked her to not tell him when she is subjected to violence as he reasons there is nothing he can do about them. Whether the protection they provide is considered effective or not, retaining boyfriends or *bal* for the sake of protection is considered almost a necessity, particularly in the more violent parts of the city. In Mercato, street-based teenagers told me that they could not work without having boyfriends- Mirafe was advised by her girlfriends to date a man she did not like '*le'mekeberia*' - 'for respect'.

Titi said that she and her friends date men they don't even like if they think they will effectively protect them. A particular brand of protection relevant to sex workers relates to the disclosure of HIV status among potential boyfriends and clients. Nolawit, also of Mercato, told me that her boyfriend tells her which of his friends have HIV, and she in turn tells her friends not to sleep with them.

The men's efforts to protect 'their' women, and the expectation from the women that they will be protected by 'their' men, is underpinned by the normative notions of Ethiopian masculinity that feature elements of aggression and force. After Eskedar was raped by a Federal Police Officer in April 2012¹⁹, she told her boyfriend who is also a member of the Federal Police Force. In line with the gender regime prescribed to Ethiopian men, Eskedar's boyfriend threatened to kill her assailant, who used to be his friend, claiming, '*be'nae hiwot meta*' - '[the rapist] has threatened my life' - in reference not so much to Eskedar's 'honour' as to the risk posed to himself in contracting HIV. His act was based on his having heard that the rapist and his girlfriend Kerry were largely rumored to be HIV-positive. After telling him that she had been raped, Eskedar said that she had fallen on the ground, with her arms wrapped around her boyfriend's leg 'like a snake' to stop him from a rash action, telling him that she believed she could bring her assailant to justice. The alleged rapist would probably not have been surprised if Eskedar's boyfriend had attacked him. She said that after he had raped her twice, he had told her he expected her boyfriend to want to attack him. With some bravado and referring to their armed status as Federal police officers, he had told her, 'the game will be with weapons.' He had also said that either he will 'walk on the corpse of Abera [Eskedar's boyfriend], or Abera will walk on my corpse.' In addition, although he was out of Addis Ababa when the rape happened, Eskedar wanted to tell her older brother whom she lives with about the rape but was worried he would want to attack her therapist – who was armed – as well thereby putting himself in harm's way.

Speaking to her expectations of aggressive Ethiopian masculinity and the cultural construction of men protecting women as another avenue for patriarchal showmanship, Eskedar said, '*Wend new, litala maletu aykerim*' - 'he's a man, he is sure to want to fight'.

¹⁹ This incident will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

‘What Else is being a Man?’ : Violence within Intimate Relationships

Forceful, sexualized and often violent masculinity is played out by the partners of sex workers, not only in protecting the women but also, conversely and without irony, in the violence *they* subject them to. If inability to protect or provide for ‘their’ women bruises their male egos, my respondents have other ways of asserting their gendered roles. When I asked two male partners of sex workers if their girlfriends ever complain that they do this work for the men, one young man was quick to tell me, ‘Sure, she complains, but it is nothing a slap won’t stop.’ Another respondent told me that when his girlfriend comes home after work and collapses into their bed, she often wakes him up which makes him angry enough to hit her. Both respondents assured me that their slaps and kicks are light and almost playful; the second informant told me that he would never hit her on the face. When I asked the men, by way of confirming, if they often hit the women, my second respondent asked me back, ‘what else is being a man?’

All the men regularly hit their girlfriends; Gizaw who admitted whipping one of his girlfriends with a belt told me, ‘they need to be whipped or punished.’ He has also knocked her out with a punch to her face. The violence committed by Gizaw and his friends extends beyond women they are dating to other sex workers. His friends recounted that a street-based sex worker who likes Daniel follows him home sometimes and ‘*be’dingai yemelisatal*’ - ‘he sends her back with rocks [that he throws at her]’. Daniel also told me of a time he punched a drunken sex worker who accused him of stealing a mobile phone and who later apologized to him when she realized she had mistaken his identity. Beyond physical violence, verbal abuse is also common. Birouk and Faris admitted that “‘*shermuta’ aykerim*’ – ‘using the word ‘whore’ [in the context of a fight] is inevitable.’ Both said that they regret their name-calling afterwards as they know that their girlfriends do what they do because the men are failing to take care of them.

Besufikad on the other hand said that his sex worker girlfriend calls *him* '*shermuta*', particularly when she is jealous of his interactions with other women, although he said that he is largely faithful to his girlfriend, having only ever kissed another woman while drinking.

In a show of gallantry that does not problematize acts of violence committed by one's male self, Wonde, whose name translates fittingly enough to 'my man', sometimes intervenes to stop clients from being violent towards sex workers. He said that he tries to break up fights, and where that fails, he gets into physical fights to protect sex workers. On the other hand, Haile said that because he has often seen his girlfriend 'turn around and insult people who break up our fights', he does not stop other men from hitting their girlfriends. In this regard, in addition to telling me how 'difficult' sex workers are and how deserving of violence, the men were also at pains to tell me that some women like to be hit, and 'ask for it' over and over again. Daniel said he stopped trying to prevent his friend from beating up his sex worker girlfriend when he realized that she was actually trying to get hit by consistently picking fights with him. In addition, although no woman actually told me that she likes to be hit, *other* women's desire for their men to hit them as proof of love was discussed in one of the focus group discussions I held at Nigat. Further illustrating the conflation of women's sexualized passion with violence; my male respondents consistently asserted that violent interactions usually culminate in sex, which 'cools the women.' For instance, Besufikad said that he has to be highly provoked to hit his girlfriend but will do so if required to 'calm' her violent emotional outbreaks.

Violent Women

Perceived or actual cheating by 'their' men appears to be the main spark that ignites violent reactions in sex workers against their partners. According to urban lore, which I heard often during my interviews with male interviewees, sex workers allegedly get more jealous than other women, and often fight with their boyfriends if they suspect them of infidelity. In the bars where the men often interact with sex workers, they are often labeled as 'so-and-so's boyfriend' so that they are off-limits to other women. Faris, who DJs at one of the bars in Chechniya told me that he frequently fights with his sex worker-girlfriend if she sees him talking to another woman at their common workplace. Their fights are usually of a short duration but often include him hitting her, and then consoling her. Over at Nigat, Nebiat retaliated against her boyfriend for some minor infraction by scratching at his face as he was sleeping, and Esete said '*Ekul edebadebalehu*' – 'I fight equally or to the same degree [as my man]'. At one of the focus group discussions, Esete described the very violent physical fights which usually start with her partner hitting her if he so much as dislikes a joke she has made. She said she fights and insults back because, 'you feed him, why should you get hit or insulted?' However, Esete also explained that the physical fights have diminished because her partner now 'sees his child.' She says that hearing their son cry out when his father beat her made her partner regret his actions and he has since stopped hitting her. However, the couple continues to trade insults with regular frequency. Sometimes, women attack back in self-defense or following repeated physical attacks, often seriously harming their partners.

At other times, they seem more proactive. For instance, I considered Bisou's former partner only mildly violent by Ethiopian standards - although she was often violent towards him, he used to walk away without hitting her back. Unfortunately, he started hitting her after she gave birth; the first time was

when their baby daughter Betty was diagnosed with bacteria in her digestive system which her father blamed on Bisou's *khat* use.

Whether they throw the first punch or they fight in self-defense, when they find they are not equal matches for physical fights with 'their' men, most women retreat. Yohannes said that they then 'cover their faces, which they need for their work.' Often during my interviews with male respondents, the stories of 'crazy' sex workers who—while drunk – hit men *and* women, throw rocks and '*memeresh*' - cut with a razor (as one respondents' girlfriend apparently is adept at) led to the common expression: '*Esua sai'tan nat*' - 'that one, she is a devil'. Segal explains that in many working class cultures, violence is not reserved only for men, with girls and women engaging in physical violence which in that social milieu may not even be constructed as 'unfeminine' (2007:205). The violence that sex workers in Addis Ababa engage in blur the lines of victimization and speak to a culture of structural violence which I will discuss in the conclusion of this chapter.

Masculinity and Violence within Sex Work

Michael Kaufman, the founder of the White Ribbon Campaign by men to end violence against women, explains that men's violence against women does not occur in isolation but is linked to men's violence against men as well as to the internationalization of violence; what he refers to as 'a man's violence against himself.' Kaufman further argues that male-dominated societies feature not only men's supremacy over women, but also draw a hierarchy of some men over other men, an order which is often established through violence. Kaufman contends that this 'triad of men's violence' creates a nurturing environment of violence (2001:39).

The real experience of violence as a way of addressing conflict and asserting masculinity is a common experience of men all over the world. Many boys and girls grow up in violent households where their mother is beaten by their father and come to see violent behavior towards women as the norm.

While this produces revulsion towards violence in some men, others learn to use violence in their own lives beyond childhood (Kaufman, 2001:43). In addition, many boys grow up experiencing physical or sexual abuse (though this appears to be less frequent than amongst girls), creating a learned response of violence. They also grow up fighting and bullying which may enable an acceptance and internalization of violence (Kaufman, 2001:44).

It is not surprising that reports of high levels of violence against sex workers correlate with overall high levels of rape and sexual assault experienced by women in the general population, as has been noted particularly in South Africa. The UN Special Rapporteur on Sexual Violence estimates that for a country not at war, South Africa has the highest reported rape statistics in the world, estimated at 135 per day (Wojcicki, 2002:270).

Connell explains that violence can become a way of claiming masculinity in group struggles. She argues that in the West, the youth gang violence of inner-city streets is an example of the assertion of marginalized masculinities against other men, and that this is congruent with the assertion of masculinity in sexual violence against women (1995:85). Providing a further link between masculinity and violence, Segal argues that in cultures where masculinity is constructed around ideas of dominance, social power and control but where not all men fit into this model, subordinated men may be more likely to resort to violence as the only form of power they can assert over others (2007: 215). Furthermore, Will Courtenay, who has researched masculinities from a health perspective, has identified what he terms 'Resistant Masculinity' with implications for violence against women or other men.

For instance, working class men in US cities engaging in physical violence may be understood as an attempt to claim power and authority they have not been granted through economic or cultural resources (2000:120). The argument of compromised masculinity leading to violence is borne out by research in other fields.

Chris Dolan, in his cross-disciplinary study of the war in Northern Uganda and the response of the government which created camps or 'protected villages' of thousands of civilians from the mid-1990s concludes that dynamics of violation or what he terms 'social torture' within the camps led to a sense of humiliation and 'a collapse of masculinities' (2009:191). Dolan argues that unable to live up to traditional hegemonic masculinity which included being married – marriage which was traditionally based upon payment of bride-wealth became difficult with men lacking income opportunities – and without the opportunity to develop alternative masculinities, men often experience social (as well as physical) impotence and humiliation, some resorting to acts of violence against either themselves or against 'their' women as seen in a rise of domestic violence or in participating in mob justice or joining either government or rebel armed forces (2009:192).

Elsewhere in Africa, investigating the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemics in post-Apartheid South Africa, Fassin, borrowing a term coined by Johan Galtung, discusses structural violence whereby women's and men's abject living conditions of poverty, isolation, abandonment and humiliation translate into lower value of life and more literally, a lower life expectancy. In a more subjective sense, the embodiment of violence in the past and present creates a vision of the world clouded with resentment and suspicion (2011). Finally, a quote from a focus group discussion with sex workers in Miami, USA summarizes structural violence well; one woman states: 'it is like there are two worlds, there's a good world, and then there's a violent world and it's like all we know is violence, all we know is violent men' (Surratt et al., 2007).

The argument that failed or compromised masculinity fuels gendered violence was borne out in my research. The economic inequality and social injustice that characterizes Ethiopian (urban) society has created a perpetual state of structural violence which is imprinted, largely, on the bodies of poor women.

In this regard, many of my respondents insisted that it is only *duriye* ('street' or 'rough' men or boys) who are violent or ask for their money back; other men, and particularly older men are usually 'peaceful' and even following a disagreement tell difficult sex workers '*wichilign*' – "just leave"²⁰. In addition, sex workers often told me their observation that It is particularly those who are poor (often described by the women as '*tesfa yekoretu*' – 'those who have given up hope') who engage in systematic violence such as *yedama* – forced group sex. The role that sex workers play in pushing men, some of whom appear to be 'on the brink', in particular by stealing from them was discussed at one of the focus group discussions. Given men's socialization to be violent, particularly if provoked, sex workers often blame themselves or other sex workers for 'pushing' men to be violent. None of my respondents questioned men's violent responses to provocation as 'natural.' For instance, Aleme, in Mercato told me with conviction that some sex workers 'cause' clients to be violent by teasing them sexually and then refusing to have sex with them. Furthermore, the blatant Sexism prevalent within Ethiopian society belies the violence against women in general and sex workers in particular. Rahel, who has experienced much violence by clients, said that many men have told her that they hate women or that 'women can't be trusted.' She went on to observe that 'some men are so violent [towards women] that you would not think that they were given birth to by women.'

Another respondent at one of the focus group discussions said that a client, objecting to her self-defense to his taunts, told her '*set eko nesh, takriaralesh ende?*' - 'you are a woman, and you dare to talk back?' Other clients have told respondents that they are violent towards sex workers because they want to get even with sex workers who have infected them with the HIV virus. One client told Melat, after he forced

²⁰It follows that there is often a form of prejudice by sex workers that older, richer clients are 'better' – for instance, Bilein who lives and works in upscale Chechinya told me that most of the clientele at the bar where she works are *dehna sew* - 'well-to-do' people whom she described as older men with cars and so do not try to force her to do things she does not want to do.

her to have sex without a condom that he attacks women because his life was ruined when his wife left him. Although they are overwhelmingly on the receiving end of violent encounters, sex workers are not passive victims but also often, instigators, often physically attacking men and women²¹.

What the Margin Speaks of the Center

bell hooks, in writing about African American men, has identified a culture that condones violence as a means of social control with patriarchal masculinity identified by the will to be violent; she states, 'all men living in a culture of violence must demonstrate at some point in their lives that they are *capable* of being violent' (2004:49). In addition, Liz Kelly describes men's 'taken for granted' use of aggression which enables their gender power to override other power relations. In this patriarchal arrangement, men as the gender with more power are allowed to express anger at, and often use force against, the less powerful with relative impunity (1988:88). While violence may usually be an ingredient of patriarchal cultures, the level of violence may rise and fall with factors such as urbanization and a breakdown in the social fabric of society. In Addis Ababa, anecdotal data as well as baseline research recently commissioned by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) in 2012-2013 indicates that inter-personal violence and violence against girls and women in particular is on a sharp rise²².

The reader will note that in Dirasse's ethnographic study of sex work in Addis Ababa in the early 1970's (which I discussed extensively in Chapter One) violence was not considered a big problem which is in great contrast to my findings.

Given pervasive Sexism and a culture of structural violence, it is expected that there is so much violence against sex workers in Addis Ababa. However, analyzing the causes, forms and prevalence of this form of

²¹ I will deal with sex workers' violence towards clients as a form of agency in Chapter Five, and as a feature of the (non)sisterhood I observed among sex workers in Chapter Six.

²² This is an unpublished report.

violence is also telling of the larger society that the sex worker population forms a significant sub-component of. My findings highlight the confusion of sexual passion within intimate relationships and particularly actual or performed jealousy as imbued with violence. It also sparks a conversation on the dominant Ethiopian discourses of masculinity as sexually aggressive and violent; and femininity as sometimes passive but often wily and even hostile.

What this analysis does not expose right away is the fact that under these stratified discourses of masculinity and femininity, there is actually much room for maneuvering outside one's prescribed roles of sexuality. Sex workers, I would argue, have particular opportunity to circumvent these boundaries and often employ creative tools to negotiate with sex work itself – their (re) entry into it in the context of their often limited economic choices, and particularly relevant to my research, with violence - in terms of avoiding or overcoming it. Sex workers are not only victims but also protagonists of violence and crime and the next chapter will examine the calculated risks they take and their unique efforts to manipulate the legal system to their advantage.

Chapter Five: 'Long Live My Vagina': Resistance and Body Boundaries within Sex Work in Addis Ababa

In this chapter as throughout the dissertation, I argue that in the absence of trafficking or forced prostitution in the current time, sex work in Ethiopia is largely a rational choice chiefly driven by economic factors and those who take part in it are not overly burdened by moral considerations. This chapter largely focuses on agency which I define as the capacity to choose and to act in one's own interest. In exploring sex workers' roles in not only choosing to enter and stay in sex work but also in negotiating the difficult terrains of the occupation, I will engage with some of the western feminist literature on the topic and respond to some feminists' assertions that sex work is always imposed on women and girls and cannot be taken up by choice.

On My Engagement with the Radical Feminist Position on Sex Work

Throughout my thesis, I have argued with the one-dimensional view that sex work is always violence and that sex workers can never choose to sell sexual services as an economic means. However, in my minor revision following my examination, I have come to believe that choice and agency pertaining to sex work are complicated. Sex workers' choices are constrained as are the choices of most poor Ethiopian women and girls; however, the decision they make to sell sex for a living, in exchange for much higher payment than they would make with 'legitimate' occupations is often an informed and deliberate decision. Therefore, while I recognize that the women I got to know through my research are survivors, making the best of their limited assets, I acknowledge that they also are victims at the same time, both of their sexualized identities in a sexist society that devalues them and increasingly commodifies their bodies, and of economic poverty which limits their options.

Furthermore, each woman's story is differently shaped by her unique experiences and personal characteristics. The complexities and contradictions in the women's lives shape how they deal both with sex work and with violence within it. The richness of the personal accounts I heard illustrate that my

earlier assertions which emphasize that sex workers have agency were simplistic and I acknowledge that it is a more complicated matter.

Theories of Engagement in Examining Agency

'We respect everyday resistance not just by arguing for the dignity or heroism of the resisters but by letting their practices teach us about the complex inter-workings of historically changing systems of power' (Abu-Lughod, 1990:53).'

In order to investigate resistance among sex workers in Addis Ababa, I turn to two concepts; Lila Abu Lughod's application of Foucauldian principles of power and resistance (1990) and the 'everyday resistance' concept articulated in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* by James C. Scott (1985). In *The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformation of Power through Bedouin Women* (1990), Abu Lughod, following Michel Foucault, argues that resistance is an intrinsic component of power relations and that should be viewed as a 'diagnostic of power'.

Quoting Foucault, Abu-Lughod asserts that 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (41). Abu Lughod further explains that resistance and power occur simultaneously at different stages of society. Abu Lughod also rejects [some] academia's tendency to romanticize resistance, consciously redirecting focus of academic study from resistance and the individuals who practice it to a study of the structures of power as a whole (1990:53).

Scott agrees that power engenders resistance, but unlike Abu-Lughod, he *is* interested in individual agents' resistance to pervasive exploitation, in this case, by rich landowners. His work is the result of a two-year study of a Malay village in the late 1970s; what he calls 'a close-to-the ground, fine-grained account of class relations in a very small place (seventy families, 360 people) experiencing very large changes (the 'green revolution')' (1985:26). Scott asserts that instead of the historically rare occurrences

of consciousness-driven open revolt, most resistance to power takes ordinary forms such as petty theft, foot-dragging, gossip, sabotage and feigning ignorance (1985:317). In my research, I saw that sex workers continuously navigate the terrains of sex work and resist the rampant violence that is almost an expected part of the work by applying different techniques; this requires bravery, quick thinking and guile. My finding that resistance is an inherent part of the unequal power relations between women and men which sustains sex work supports Abu Lughod's and Scott's theories. The resistance that sex workers offer is not driven by a consciousness of their subordinated class or gender or work-identity, nor does it qualify as a political struggle. Rather, their acts more closely resemble the 'everyday' forms of resistance and 'weapons of the weak' articulated by Scott (1985).

The Feminist 'Sex Wars'

When I first started researching how feminism views sex work, I found that much of the arguments within the literature were based on writers' own (non-sex worker) convictions or principles with scant attention given to the lived realities of sex workers. As my research was to be based on the experiences and voices of sex workers, I found myself drawn to the voices and arguments of sex worker-activists such as Cheryl Overs and Jo Doezema (1998). The difference within the various feminist positions on the nature of sex work is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

However, in order to set the context of my engagement with the literature, I will describe the major division within western feminism as those feminists defining 'prostitution' as sexual domination and the essence of women's oppression (Barry, 1979 & 1995 Cited in Jeffreys, 2009:18; Jeffreys, 2009:20) and those who maintain sex work is work that women can opt for, which I refer to as the sex work position. In addition, there are writers and activists who argue that while sex work is unlikely to disappear soon, it is

important to recognize the elements of coercion and minimize the risks that sex work poses to its participants. One of the strongest advocates of the 'neo-abolitionist' view internationally is the Coalition against Trafficking in Women (CATW), founded by Kathleen Barry. She is closely supported by the radical feminist, Sheila Jeffreys a professor at the University of Melbourne who is one of the co-founders of the Australian chapter of CATW. A five-country study by CATW saw violence and degradation as *inherent* conditions of 'prostitution sex' because 'men's 'prostitution' use of women and the acts carried out are sexual enactments of a culture and system of subordination of women'(Raymond et al, quoted in Ralston and Keeble, 2009:110). Furthermore, in her critique of feminists in the sex work camp, Jeffreys accuses them of not listening to survivors who expressed different experiences of prostitution to the dominant discourse of sex workers who see their work as a conscious choice and who find it to be a positive experience.

To this end, she cites organizations such as SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation) an organization of 'prostitution survivors' that takes the position that 'prostitution' should be understood as violence against women but which have not been as influential as sex workers' groups in the opposite camp (Hotaling, 1999,Cited in Jeffreys, 2009:17).

Jeffreys also accuses sex worker activists such as Jo Doezema of the Network of Sex Workers' Projects²³ who seek to decriminalize sex work as downplaying the harm that they themselves experience inside the institution (2009:25).

²³One of the successes of the NSWP is its successful lobbying, together with the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to ensure that the discussion on 'prostitution' as a form of violence against women would be prefaced by the word 'forced.'

For their part, Doezenia and other activists such as Cheryl Overs, who is a former sex worker and who incidentally inspired and assisted in the formation of Nigat in Ethiopia, have complained that feminist 'puritans' have thwarted the budding activism of sex workers, preventing their development of their own ideologies and strategies. In an interview, Overs states that 'it had been hurtful, as well as frustrating, that for many years [some]feminists have said that our demands for recognition of sex work as valid work were a product of false consciousness which blurred our perceptions of our damaging experiences as victims of the sex industry.' Overs goes on to appreciate the support that came from [non-sex worker] women once a pro-sex feminist theory was articulated in the mid-1990's; she says that for the first time, members of the women's movement were listening to sex workers (Doezenia ,1998:205).

Jeffreys also argues against some feminist theorists' inclusion of sex work, together with domestic labor, into the category of 'reproductive labor.' Jeffreys argues that although domestic services might fit the category of reproductive labor as 'socially necessary', 'prostitution', which is a socially constructed idea does not (2009:18-19). Socially necessary or not, the institution of sex work in its various manifestations has existed for millennia, and the experiences of women from all over the world show the deep variation in the experiences of women who sell sexual services.

This rich spectrum of experiences makes it difficult to dismiss reports of women *choosing* to be sex workers and the intricate ways in which women sex workers negotiate the dangerous world of sex work in order to maximize their monetary gains and minimize the harm they may encounter as the voices of 'victims.' I acknowledge that there is often harm encountered by women who sell sex but many women have found creative ways to counter that danger which is part of the focus of this chapter. In addition, although sex work may have developed, generations ago, to cater to men's sexual demands and within a culture of women's subordination as CATW has argued, many women sex workers have since learnt to subvert the power within sex work to their end, enjoying the sexual license granted by the occupation.

Indeed, I found in my research that many sex workers do not blame men for sex work; in one of the focus group discussions I facilitated, there was a heated ‘the chicken or the egg’ kind of debate on whether women become sex workers because men will pay them for sex, or whether men buy sex because there are women willing to sell it. Some participants argued that it is women who are responsible for sex work; and a participant commented, ‘women have turned sex into business.’

I consider this recognition of women’s role within sex work as a form of agency. Before providing a detailed analysis of other forms of agency within sex work, the first of this chapter which is concerned with sex workers’ own reflections on sex work, will engage with some of the sex positive literature on the topic, making linkages with my findings from sex workers in Addis Ababa.

On My Engagement with the Radical Feminist Position on Sex Work

Throughout my thesis, I have argued with the one-dimensional view that sex work is always violence and that sex workers can never choose to sell sexual services as an economic means. In the minor adjustment I made following the oral exam to defend my thesis, I state that in my revised understanding, that choice and agency pertaining to sex work are complicated.

Sex workers’ choices are constrained as are the choices of most poor Ethiopian women and girls; however, the decision they make to sell sex for a living, in exchange for much higher payment than they would make with ‘legitimate’ occupations is often an informed and deliberate decision. Therefore, while I recognize that the women I got to know through my research are survivors, making the best of their limited assets, I acknowledge that they also are victims at the same time, both of their sexualized identities in a sexist society that devalues them and increasingly commodifies their bodies, and of economic poverty which limits their options.

Furthermore, each woman's story is differently shaped by her unique experiences and personal characteristics. The complexities and contradictions in the women's lives shape how they deal both with sex work and with violence within it. The richness of the personal accounts I heard illustrate that my earlier assertions which emphasize that sex workers have agency were simplistic and I acknowledge that it is a more complicated matter.

Getting (Back) Into Sex Work – Sex Workers' Reflections

The argument that 'no woman would choose to do sex work if not forced by poverty' has been criticized by the sex work camp. In particular, Doezeema argues against this kind of generalizing by pointing out the obvious fact that many poor women in poor countries *don't* choose to be sex workers (1998). The 'poverty as force' argument also ignores the range of other reasons behind women's decisions to enter sex work or to migrate in order to engage in sex work. Although poor, sex workers as a category are not the poorest group of Ethiopian women. In a previous extensive study that I was involved in, commissioned by an aid agency, we found that domestic workers, women with disabilities and homeless girls are far more vulnerable to poverty and exploitation than sex workers (Teferra and Gebremedhin, 2010:13).

Sex work is perhaps the most economically viable option for poor women but it is certainly not the only option. Furthermore, the view of poverty, often an undifferentiated paradigm driving women and girls into sex work is dangerous where it is used to ascertain the innocence of some sex workers, and therefore their merit and need for protection. Such an approach implies that those women and girls who have *not* been forced into such work by poverty do not deserve protection or dignity (Doezeema, 1998: 30). This prevalent view was reflected in my research; as discussed in Chapter Three, *non sex workers'* commoditization of female sexuality was loudly censured by my male respondents. One young male student told me angrily that while his female colleagues have a right to do as they please, they should not

expect protection from other [men] when they face violence from their ‘sugar daddies’, as ‘they ask for it’ through their materialistic desire. Meanwhile, the same students expressed pity for sex workers who sell sex because they have no other means of an income. However, none of the women who took part in my research indicated that they sell sex *only* for survival.

Of course, sex work provides them with money for food and shelter for themselves and their children, and for many poor women and girls, it is something they get into to avoid deprivation. Fatima became a sex worker at age 14 soon after she started living on the streets and she was raped, because other girls she met living on the streets were selling sex. She recalls that they told her it was better than being poor and hungry. Ejigae, who ran away from her domestic employment after mistreatment by her colleague, slept on the streets in Mercato until a sex worker took her in. The woman told her, ‘this is a difficult job but you have to do it as you have nothing to eat, nothing to wear.’

In Addis Ababa, sex work is often respected as ‘*sira*’ – ‘work’. Apart from the common usage of ‘*sira*’ or also ‘*business*’ – adapted from the English - to describe what sex workers do; when I asked during one of the focus group discussions whether sex work is ‘work’, one of the women retorted back, ‘it is feeding us, isn’t it?’

I also often remember a striking statement from Etete who described returning to a street that police officers had told her to leave, because - ‘I want to work, I want to eat.’ She didn’t say ‘need’, she said ‘want’. Others describe sex work as ‘*metedaderia*’, literally, ‘that by which one sustains oneself’ and respect it accordingly, showing up on time for work and carrying out their responsibilities. However, other respondents say they do not consider sex work as ‘legitimate’ work and are often ashamed of what they do. Ekram said that when she had taken time off from sex work to engage in ‘regular’ work, as a cleaner at a massage parlor, she had enjoyed having a regular income as well as the relief of ‘clean’ money. In addition, apart from a few emboldened sex workers who seem to rise above the stigma

associated with sex work despite its prevalence, even seasoned sex workers who strongly identify with the '*Shelae*' identity hide their work from their relatives. I found that perhaps unsurprisingly, those sex workers who claim pride in their sex worker identities also claim to be good at it. Nebiat, a Nigat regular, often boasted of the large clientele she retained because she made an effort to look pretty and to treat men well. She told me of famous personalities she counted as clients and said that due to her popularity at her bar of employment, she worked through her (third) pregnancy and went back to selling sex within a month after giving birth.

I did not come across any sex worker who left sex work as soon as she had made enough money to get over a difficult period; as in any other occupation, sex workers try to maximize the monetary gain they get out of it - by investing in making their bodies more attractive so as to get better paid for their sexual services – and minimize their effort or harm encountered. They also often try to move up the sex work ladder, sometimes changing locations of work, or moving from the streets to bar work (or vice versa) in search of better pay for the same work or for 'better' clients who do not demand as much in terms of services.

Sophie Day, who led a research project into the lives of sex workers in London, found a similar trend: 'our data on individual careers do not support the view that sex workers were simply trapped - notions of enterprise were not simply about wealth and social mobility, but also about independence' (2007:91). Currently, the ultimate top of the ladder in the Ethiopian sex work context appears to be migrating to the Gulf countries, sometimes to do domestic work but more commonly to continue to engage in sex work. The commonly heard saying among sex workers: '*Shelae Arab ager yikenatal*' – '*Shelae*s get lucky or fortunate in [the Arab countries]' is a testament to this trend. In addition, Lorraine van Blerk, who has conducted research among young sex workers in Ethiopia found a myriad of reasons for sex workers migrating *within* the country, including better economic opportunities linked to men's seasonal

agricultural work, avoiding family, seeking excitement and new opportunities as well and particularly for those who are HIV-positive, to deflect suspicion and stigma (2009:172-174).

Drifting into the 'Sweet' Life and Easy Money

Nebiat seems as surprised as anyone at her success because like many of my respondents, she said she had drifted into sex work without much thought, after she was hired at a bar to clean and wash dishes.

As I commonly heard, she said she found the sex worker lifestyle and quick, easy money to be 'sweet'.

Berhane too became drawn to the *chawata* - literally, 'play', wit and banter of the sex workers at the bar where she worked as a waitress after she ran away from her family and she learnt to chew *khat*. It did not take much for her new friends to convince her to join them as a sex worker, and once she learnt 'business talk', she became highly successful. Berhane's brother found her and came to the bar to 'rescue' her, taking her back to their hometown to work in his café, but she tired of his controlling ways and of their small town and ran away again. She was back in Addis and in sex work two weeks after she left. When I asked if she knew she would be back into sex work, she asked back, 'what else?'

Other respondents complained of being tricked into sex work by brokers and the owners of the bars where they believed they would be cleaners or dish-washers, only to find out later that they were also expected to sell sex. Although this may technically be considered trafficking, I heard no reports of forced entry into sex work; rather, many reported having taken up the associated lifestyle of sex work willingly. Some sex workers report that having entered the trade unintentionally, they continue with it because 'their lives have already been ruined'. In addition, I presume that perceived or actual stigma may dissuade sex workers from considering a change in occupation. Lastly, a major factor for drawing in many women and girls is the apparently glamorous lives of their sex worker friends. Adey in Mercato said that she left home at 16 with the intention of becoming a sex worker because she coveted her friend's spending money and new clothes; she got pregnant on the first job where she lost her virginity for 200

Birr (7 Pounds). While many women and girls drift into sex work without much consideration for what the work entails, for others, it is a choice often made after careful deliberation - most often by poor women, but not only by poor women and not by most of them. In this regard, a sex worker in Kenya explained to Kibicho that 'the number of [sex workers] is growing in tandem with the increasing number of customers. Sex business is demand-driven...it is simple economics' (2009:46). In addition, a male sex worker in Malindi on the Kenyan Coast tells the author, 'We are here for business. We need to be paid- the bottom line is that my twin daughters are waiting for food at the end of the day' (2009:169).

Fully aware that their stigmatized identity weakens their negotiation power vis-à-vis the male consumers of the trade, the sex workers I interviewed exhibit agency and rational decision-making in becoming sex workers. In my research, I found that the rational economic argument was applied most frequently in comparing sex work with waitressing, or more frequently with housework – the two most common types of work employing women with limited formal education or skills. For instance, Amira was two months pregnant when she decided to become a sex worker. Her boyfriend had just left her and she knew she would lose her waitressing job when she started showing.

So making a point of 'learning the ropes' from acquaintances already selling sex, she became a sex worker, earning in one evening an average of 250 Birr (8.6 Pounds), the equivalent of her monthly salary as a waitress. She stopped sex work when she was six months pregnant, and went back to it after having her baby girl. She told me, '*siraw yastelal, birru gin des yilal*' – 'it is ugly work, but the money is good.' Similarly, Trotter found in his research into what he terms 'dockside prostitution' that the woman he interviewed did not usually view themselves as victims but rather as survivors and agents. He remarks, 'their decision to go into [prostitution] was an act of self-empowerment rather than one of compulsion' (2008:25).

Although it is hard work, Etta and Kidist agreed that sex work is at least better than house work where one has to deal with madams who are often abusive towards house help. Kidist said '*mereregnina wetahu*' – 'I was sick and tired (of the treatment) and I left housework'²⁴. The interviewees quoted another sex worker friend: '*emsae wila tigba*' - 'long live my vagina', praising 'her', as a vagina is personified as a female, for providing an alternative source of income to housework. Imbued as it is with shame and danger, there is no doubt that sex work provides low-skilled women with the means for economic independence. In addition, many respondents believe that there is a version of beginners' luck where a sex worker who is usually very young (in her mid to late teens) makes a lot of money very fast, helping her dig deeper into the trade and into a sex worker identity. Soliyana, one of my interviewees from Piassa, was upfront about the values provided by 'this life': she said she likes eating good food and has become used to chewing expensive *khat*²⁵ and would not be able to 'downgrade' to for example, a waitressing job.

Similarly, at the end of her research for her dissertation in the *Patpong* district of Bangkok, Cleo Odzer concludes that the sex workers had advantages over non-sex worker Thai women who didn't belong to the rich upper class. They had more independence and opportunities to travel, work abroad and to learn English and other languages. Odzer also found that sex workers had more money which allowed them not only to fulfill their obligations but to buy the symbols of success and the choice to escape bad relationships or the hardships of village life (1994:302).

Agency: Getting Paid

²⁴ While other sex workers report housework to be better than sex work, the trend is certainly for domestic workers to join sex work, not the other way around.

²⁵ Depending on its source, different grades of the *khat* leaf fetch different prices. The most expensive type, the 'Colombia' – which attests to its potency likened to cocaine – is sold by the gram.

As sex work is very much about money, and perhaps in cognizance of the personal efforts required to make sexual access available to strangers, most of the women I spoke to are very serious about 'getting paid.' Sex workers often value their time and are careful to not allow clients to 'kill' their time and usually they discuss prices before drinking with a client or getting into a car. When we discussed clients who try to cheat or underpay sex workers out of their agreed fees, Esete said, '*Yigelegnal enji aywetam*' -'He would have to kill me to leave [the room]'. Melat, who describes herself as 'difficult' said that she gets very upset if she is paid even a birr less than what has been agreed. She explains that she gets emotional and often insults clients, sometimes leading to a client becoming violent. As in any other job, sex workers aim to maximize the money they can get out of their work; Rozina, from Datsun Sefer explained that she may sometimes get sexually aroused, particularly by a regular client who she is comfortable with; otherwise, her mind is always on the money she is making. Firaie, an HIV-positive sex worker from Piassa often agrees on a fee with a prospective client, asks him to buy her dinner and drinks, and after receiving her money, shows the client the card which entitles her to free ARV treatment after which clients often 'freak out' and ask her to leave, which she does, with the money she's already been paid.

Feminists such as Jeffreys acknowledge that sex work is an increasingly (global) economic sector. However, in her book, Jeffreys makes yet another generalization that the 'the profits are largely going to those who control the business rather than to the individual 'prostituted women' themselves' (2009:28). However in Addis Ababa, there is no culture of men 'pimping' women, and all the women and girls I spoke to identified themselves as free agents. Thus in this context, Jeffreys' argument does not hold. A more salient concern for me was not that the women do not get their financial due but that as committed as they are to doing so, this tenacity does not often translate to saving their hard-earned

money. In fact, a characteristic of the *Shelae* lifestyle may be what many sex workers characterized as their ‘unblessed money that has feet to run away with.’

The ‘Easy Come, Easy Go’ Income of Sex Work

The high pay which characterizes sex work as compared to other low-skilled work was mentioned in almost all interviews and focus-group discussions. However, sex workers do not live in better conditions than other poor women; the houses I visited were usually dilapidated and although the women usually dressed well, as they needed to in the context of their work, they are also perpetually broke. As consistently as my respondents talked about the ‘easy money’ they make – often comparing it with the monthly income of professionals – they also talked about the lack of a savings culture among sex workers; Zeni in Datsun Sefer said matter-of-factly: ‘*kuteba anawkim*’ – ‘we don’t know such a thing as saving’ because they believe they can make the same amount of money the next day. Sex workers also say that their lifestyle has an expensive price tag which includes *Khat*, *shisha* (smoking water pipes), cigarettes and alcohol. In addition, sex workers often pay more in rent, particularly in red-light districts such as the infamous *Sebategna* district in the Mercato.

Similarly, Trotter states of sex workers in Cape Town, ‘after all, their children need maintenance, their parents need assistance, their cell phones need airtime and their bodies may need drugs or alcohol - the ease with which they can make relatively large sums of money on any given night inspires them to stay with sex work longer than they expect’ (2008: 25).

Wastefulness appears to be another hallmark of the *Shelae* identity and while upfront about their expensive lifestyles which prohibit saving their considerable income, many sex workers also believe, reflecting moral ambiguity towards sex work, that the money they make is without *redaet* – blessing and

so disappears quickly. Sitamri phrased it another way, '*ye'Shela Birr ergiman alew*' - 'the money of *Shelaes* is cursed'.

Sex Work Hangover

The money that comes easily and runs away as easily, as Abiti phrased it, is a key factor for women to remain sex workers, even when they are not happy with it, a trend I came to think of as 'the hangover.' Berhane, who recalls that she really enjoyed 'the life' when she first started, says that now, four years into sex work, she is tired of sex work and of 'the kind of people you meet' in the night scene. So she works less now and says she has to convince herself to chew and drink in order to be able to face the cold and go out. She concluded that sex work is '*alem*' - 'the world' when one is inside it, but is surrounded by darkness when one tries to leave it. Hirut who is a relative newcomer to sex worker said, '*yih sira aylekim*' - 'this work does not let you go'. She told me with little conviction that she would like to save her money and 'get out' but she had not given much thought to what work she would do. Sex work as both identity and as work is easy to fall back onto, sometimes even after years. In the following sections, I will discuss the 'normalization' of sex work within Ethiopian urban society which makes sex work a predictable and easy choice, in particular for poor women with limited opportunities.

Sex Work as the Norm

In some parts of the city I got to know well during my fieldwork, I often got the impression that most if not all of the women engage in sex work. This was not only in so-called red light districts where generations of girls whose mothers were or are still sex workers grow up into the trade, but also in 'mainstream' poor neighborhoods such as Urael that lies adjacent to affluent Bole Road.

Indeed, many of my respondents stated that the many friends and neighbors they know who engage in sex work help make the situation 'normal'. The men I spoke to were particularly perceptive of this trend

of seeming universality. A group of male friends I spoke to in Datsun Sefer, long a hub of sex work in the middle of the city, have had or are currently in multiple relationships with various sex workers, all working in nearby *buna bets*. During an interview, without intending judgment, I asked if they *only* dated sex workers, and Birouk defended the group stating, '*ayferedibinim*' - 'you can't blame us' and explained that their neighborhood is full of bars. Daniel in particular told me repeatedly that he has known *buna bet* women all his life.

Some of the stories of the young women who 'drifted' into sex work without giving it much thought as discussed in the previous section also lend credence to the idea of the 'normalization' of sex work in some parts of the city. Some of my respondents looked at me blankly when I asked if they had held other jobs previously – sex work appears to be almost an unquestioned option for some poor young women disillusioned with their prospects, so much so that when Martha told me her wish that 'God would deliver her from 'the life'', her friend Soliyana asked her back, '*Lela min ale?*', 'what else is there?' Elsewhere, Rozina was unemployed and living with her family until her friends who were doing 'business' advised her to join them; she said they told her, '*kuch kemitiye*' - 'it's better than sitting [idle]'. She was also not a stranger to the work as her aunt used to support her and the rest of her family with selling sex.

Chereba and Manipulation: Maximizing the Gains of Sex Work

Most of the sex workers I spoke to do not see themselves as victims. Even when the women describe episodes of violence, it is often in terms that characterize them as the equals of the men they are fighting, for instance, an intervention by outsiders is often described as *magelagel* or breaking up of fights, rather than as being rescued.

In addition, many of the girls and women I spoke to, particularly in Mercato and Piassa call clients '*fara*' (slang for 'gullible') because as Nolawit said, all clients, finding themselves in a compromised position of seeking paid sex are open to manipulation. Similarly, Dahlia Schweitzer argues that stripping for money enables women to take power over men: 'With men the suckers, and women pocketing the cash, the striptease becomes a reversal of society's conventional male/female roles' (1999, Cited in Jeffreys, 2009:88). Indeed, many of the interviews I did featured sex workers making fun of their clients as a way of claiming power over a category of men who are otherwise their social superiors.

However, as the girls I spoke to in Mercato conceded, when the tables between client and sex worker are turned and *they* are tricked out of their money or used sexually with underpayment, then it is themselves who are made '*fara*'. The girls spoke as if they and their clients, who are usually older and richer than them are in fact on a level playing field as far as making each other '*fara*' is concerned. Making a client '*Fara*' is most applicable when he is robbed or cheated out of his money by a sex worker. When I asked Aida in Mercato if she steals from clients, she responded '*gid newa!*' – '*I have to!*' This made me laugh out loud. Her response indicated beyond a necessity, almost an obligation to get what she can of her clients' money which in *Shelae* slang is referred to as *Chereba*.

Chereba

Stopping at the Nigat center for coffee one afternoon, I chanced upon an entertaining conversation on the different forms of *chereba* employed by the women. Apparently, *chereba* of clients' cash and goods (most often mobile phones) are so common that in some big hotels, the reception desk calls the client in the room to ask if they should let the sex worker leave the premises, giving clients a chance to check they have not been robbed by the women.

While some sex workers such as Nebiat have earned something of a name for consistently robbing clients - she abashedly acknowledges her reputation - *most* of the women I felt comfortable asking confirmed that they do steal from clients if they can get away with it. Mahli in Piassa said that not only is she careful to protect her own money - '*Slemikochish, kechalish, kesu'm chemamresh tiwochalesh*' - 'so you don't regret it [afterwards], if you can, you also add from his.' Mahli has also once ran off with the shoes of a client who would not pay, blurring the line, in my mind at least, between crime and ensuring receipt of what one is due. Also straddling the fence between agency in the form of self-protection and stealing, Mekdi told me that she carries razor blades in her purse, not so much for protection as for 'work' - she specified that she uses them to tear the insides of clients' trousers to get to their wallets. Rahel described tricking an older man by playing up to his masculinity ego - she said she wanted to buy more condoms than the pack he had with him and left the hotel room, quickly running out with her fee as well as a stash of cash from his pocket. Maria stole 900 Birr (32 Pounds) from another client and hid the money inside her bra which she carefully took off. When the client realized that the money was gone, he called the guards of the hotel and together, they searched her three times - she even took her panties off for them to see that she had not hid the money there. She said, 'what do I care [that they saw her naked], it was 900 Birr.'

There are different kinds of *chereba* in addition to the straightforward robbing of cash found on a client's person; when I asked respondents in Datsun Sefer if they steal from clients, Rozina looked confused and asked back, '*how can you survive without jarrae?*' - another slang term for stealing. All the women said that at the very least, they drink water pretending it is beer to scam clients; Rakeb said, laughing, some clients wonder at how quickly she downs her beer. Other forms of *jarrae* include receiving payment and going out of the room on a pretext and locking clients in.

For instance, after receiving payment for the sex that she did not have, 15-year old Mirafe cried out for help while she quietly ripped three packets of condoms, dropping them on the floor of the hotel room. When the manager came, she complained loudly that after having 'used' her three times already, the client was bothering her for more. She said the client held his head in shock at her accusation but she was adamant and the manager believed her because he saw the torn condoms, and let her go with her 'payment'. In the traditional red-light district within Piassa, Zewdie and Amal took turns describing a client they stole from twice, an older man who told them suspiciously that they look like a pair who have stolen from him before to which Zewdie replied that they have only recently 'come out' [onto the streets, to work as sex workers]. Zewdie walked away with his mobile phone having asked to make a call while Amal distracted him.

Stealing from clients or others is a form of agency in that it represents efforts to maximize the financial gains out of sex work. This reading supports my argument that entry into and staying in sex work are usually rational economic choices for most of the women and girls that I interviewed. While I was careful to keep my opinions to myself so as to not risk losing the trust and openness of my interviewees, the reader should note that I am not condoning stealing.

In fact, in the context of the hyper-masculinity models presented to Ethiopian men which almost *require* them to be violent when encountered with indignity, I can see how stealing from clients or hitting them contributes to the spiraling of violence within the sex work milieu. In this regard, I found an interesting contrast to the assumption that clients who are robbed necessarily turn violent in Trotter's account; whereas he sometimes encountered stories of sailor-clients [hailing from Asia and Europe, for the most part] robbed by sex workers who take advantage of the men's inebriated and distracted state of mind

(2008:64), he does not mention that the men turn violent which lends credence to my arguments in Chapter Three of Ethiopian maleness in particular as imbued with violence.

Another form of agency that requires quick thinking and creativity on the part of sex workers is the manipulation of the justice system, often abetted by their symbiotic relationships with male police officers.

Using the Police

An approach often used by sex workers relates to the complicated relationship that the women have with the police. Some street-based workers make a point of dating police officers or become their informants on criminals of their acquaintance in exchange for protection from *other* police officers or other violent men, and also so that they are forewarned of impeding *afesa*. Beyond relationships, police officers are also some of the major culprits in committing violence against sex workers, and the women require agency to deal with the threat posed by police officers who may also be clients. When a Federal Police officer tried to force Sitamri to have sex without a condom and when she screamed attracting the attention of police on *rond* - doing rounds, they arrested him – Sitamri said with some pride, '*asaderkout*' - 'I made him spend the night [in prison]'. In addition, sex workers' manipulation of the law extends to false accusations of rape or assault, sometimes as a way of getting even with other men.

In this regard, I often struggled to reconcile my respect for Helen with a story she gleefully shared at one of the earlier focus group discussions. Just before she started sex work, Helen was hit by two male acquaintances that she got into a verbal disagreement with. When a woman Community Police Officer came upon them, Helen lied and said that the men had raped her. Because the older woman knew Helen and believed her, she testified at the police station that Helen had indeed been raped, and the men were sentenced to prison.

The relationships that sex workers develop with the police come in useful when sex workers want to redress an injustice they have experienced; Barry, five months pregnant was cornered by three men and crying the whole time, raped on a side street by one of the men. Having got a good look at the rapist and identifying him to her friend Zewdie's police boyfriend, Barry had the satisfaction of watching her rapist get severely beaten by a police baton a few days after the incident.

I argue that main problem with this kind of 'vigilante' justice is that it further entrenches sex workers in their disrepute, further reinforcing stereotypes that women who sell sex cannot be trusted. This position is particularly dangerous in that it weakens sex workers' bargaining power vis-à-vis the justice system. This view was corroborated through my discussions with members of the Addis Ababa Police Force. Three male officers I spoke to in mid-January 2012 complained that sometimes sex workers approach them to accuse the men they have been walking peacefully with of attacking them or cheating them out of money. All my police respondents agreed that they come across at least one violent incident between sex workers and their clients every night that they are on patrol duty and they implied that it is mostly the women who are to blame. One officer strongly complained that drunken sex workers insult or throw rocks at police doing rounds at night and although he and the others denied that any police officers they know harass sex workers, his response went some way to explain the maltreatment of sex workers.

He said: 'it hurts [to be insulted]...when we work at night in the cold, to ensure peace and to protect the rights of citizens.' Efforts to take the law into their own hands arise out of sex workers' well-founded distrust of the justice system which fails them, as 'disreputable women', even more than it fails 'respectable' citizens, and this trend is reflected in research from other parts of the world on sex work. Day reports that the women hated the criminal justice system more than any other state institution and that [assuming] that the law was largely irrelevant, they tried to avoid all dealings with the state(2007:86).

The purpose of this chapter is not to debate the morality of the actions that sex workers engage in but to demonstrate that sex workers in Addis Ababa do not take violence ‘lying down’ as some radical feminists have argued. Manipulating the justice system or using the police force to exact personal revenge may not be laudable actions but they *are* forms of agency. The ordinariness of sex work on the Ethiopian urban landscape and sex workers’ efforts to maximize their economic gains from it underlie the fact that, as discussed in Chapter Three, sex work is thoroughly ridden with violence. Therefore, a strong *Shelae* skill is coping with the threat of violence or its actuality, employing a variety of tools that may be adapted to the context, demonstrating sex workers’ own brand of agency.

Minimizing Harm

Violence within sex work may belong to what Abu Lughod classifies as a ‘site of struggle’ within power relations (1990:47). Abu Lughod found several ‘sites of struggle’ within gender relations in the Bedouin community where she conducted her research, indicating the relationship between power and resistance. One such area was the contestation around women’s freedom of movement and their culturally sanctioned roles. Abu Lughod argues that the women did not confront these issues directly. Instead, they employed ‘everyday forms of resistance’ including keeping secrets from men, covering for each other, and silence (1990:43).

Body Boundaries

A deceptively simple ‘everyday’ form of resistance employed by the sex workers I interviewed is the application of what has been termed ‘body boundaries’. In response to the common experiences of violence in the repertoire of sex workers, I found that sex workers practice what Sophie Day refers to as ‘body boundaries’ in order to be on guard even where the experience of violence is not imminent (2007:72).

Beyond a form of self-protection from violence, body boundaries also act as a barrier imposed by sex workers between themselves and their clients so that it really is *sexual access* they are selling and not their selves, or even their bodies.

Consistent Condom Use

There is no question that condoms save lives. Their proper and consistent usage undermines Jeffreys' statement that there is no way to make 'prostitution' safe since 'the transmission of diseases, unwanted pregnancy, pain and abrasion cannot be avoided in the ordinary work itself' (2009:26). Out of 65 respondents, Mahli was the only one to say that she has sex without a condom if she is paid a high enough fee. The sex workers I spoke to largely insisted on condom use, even with regular clients (*denbegna*), although the rules might be looser for *bals* or lovers. Awareness-raising work by NGOs and particularly the Safe Sex project that Nigat partners with deserve credit for the widespread impact among sex workers in Addis Ababa and other urban centers²⁶.

Titi and Nolawit, teenaged friends from Mercato, told me that before they attended the trainings provided by the NGO, they did not know the importance of condom use and used to consent to unprotected sex. After the trainings, they say that they would not have sex without a condom for any amount of money offered²⁷. Fatima said that she was once offered 5000 Birr (as opposed to 150-200 Birr/night payment) for sex without a condom and although she hesitated, in the end, she declined the

²⁶ Many activists in the Sex Work camp, including Kamala Kempadoo who has conducted important research into sex tourism in the Caribbean acknowledge the importance of 'AIDS money' in not only empowering sex workers on safe sex but also in facilitating the formation of new sex worker organizations (1998, Cited in Jeffreys, 2009). In Ethiopia, Nigat has directly benefited from such international funding.

²⁷ Consistent condom use among my respondents (whom I accessed through Nigat which provides safe sex training) may be higher among the general sex worker population.

offer. Beyond refusal of monetary offers, sex workers apply other techniques to ensure their clients always use condoms, sometimes despite the men's reluctance.

Semayit and Zewd who work in Sengatera both said that they insist not only on condom use but on using condoms bought at the hotel or from the women's own supply as some clients have been known to bring with them pre-pricked condoms that will tear during sex. The women also put condoms on their clients themselves which allows them control of the situation and which makes it less likely that the condom will burst or tear. It also enables her to check the client for diseases; Semayit gave back half the fee after refusing to turn off the light as a client requested and seeing that his penis had open sores on it. In addition, Salsawit from Datsun Sefer said that she encourages clients to not be shy, and tells them that she likes 'open' sex with the lights on so that she can ensure that they are wearing a condom properly²⁸. The practice of body boundaries and consistent condom use as forms of resistance have the impact of creating, in a literal sense, a space of autonomy in a work sector where many forces are aimed at curtailing the women's personal power.

Where There is No Barrier – Body Boundaries around Kissing, Fondling and Touching

Every sex worker I have asked replies vehemently in the negative when I ask if she consents to kissing on the mouth. They often ask me back, 'How can I? I don't know him!' Adey asked me rhetorically, 'how many things are on a man's mouth?' As contraceptives designed for oral sex are not largely available in Ethiopia, some women also said that there is no barrier equivalent to a condom for their mouth. It is partly in fear of diseases such as tuberculosis that the workers refuse to kiss clients but also because it is intimate, and to be saved for their own lovers. My understanding is that a further advantage of condom use is that it creates a sort of physical barrier between the woman's body and the client's, so that he is not really touching her and so is still operating within her body boundaries. Even though some sex

²⁸ As may be recalled from Chapter Three, some clients try to remove condoms by stealth or by force.

workers are more engaged in the sexual act - Sinide said that she uses different sexual positions to please a client so he finishes quickly - Nolawit in Mercato said that she doesn't let clients 'touch' her body anywhere, allowing them access to only her vagina.

Furthermore, Rozina said that she won't allow her breasts to be fondled by a client. She said that the body parts that she engages while she has sex with her boyfriend are different from those used when she's with a client. In addition, a group of four sex worker friends I interviewed in Kara Kore complained of men who 'touch' or stroke their bodies; Ayni said with a shudder that some men put their hands up and down her body 'like a snake'. Other women said after the sex act is completed, the women just want to sleep but some men act entitled to touch them, arguing that they have paid their money. When a client asked her to sleep facing him, Titi, who at 14 is too young to be married legally, asked him, 'what am I, your wife?'

Beyond consistent condom use and body boundaries created and implemented by sex workers to preserve their sense of selves, sex workers most often assert their agencies by refusing to perform certain forms of sexual acts, most often oral and anal sex, as discussed in Chapter Three. Bilein told me that it is her decision what kind of sex she has with a client and that she usually refuses to have oral or anal sex. Similarly, one respondent told Trotter, 'We are whores. We don't give blow jobs. That's for wives and girlfriends' (2008:89). Trotter explains that the sex workers he interviewed are actually quite conservative when it comes to the *type* of sexual service they are willing to give, 'approximating the behavior of 'good girls' in the straight world' (2008: 90).

In addition to the type of sex requested by clients, a common source of disagreement is over the number of sexual episodes that a client feels entitled to within an overnight (non-'*short*') assignation. Melat said

that her policy is to 'be patient' while a client has sex with her up to three times, and then to 'raise hell', after which point he would usually agree to stop. As Gerda Lerner, in her seminal research into the creation of patriarchy explains, it is women's sexuality and reproductive capacity which was reified and commodified with the rise in the exchange of women in marriage and the practice of bride price - she clarifies that women never become 'things', instead retaining their 'power to act' (1987:212).

Jeffreys however, argues that a distinction between women's selves and their sexualities is moot, and finds that the 'mind/body split' which she characterizes as the 'base of contemporary [sex work]' as a damaging aspect of the sector (2009:46). However, I have shown in this chapter that the application of body boundaries is in fact a form of agency; this refutes Jeffreys' essentialist statement that 'prostituted women have to learn to disassociate their minds from their bodies while being used in prostitution if they have not already learned to do this from experience of child sexual abuse, and those who do not are not able to tolerate the abuse' (Ibid).

Lastly, a major area of interest from the perspective of this dissertation is the agency that sex workers must locate within themselves in order to protect themselves or to counteract the major 'occupational hazard' they faced by most of them – violence meted out by clients and other men.

Agency: Resisting Violence

Etta told me that if a client takes her to his house, she looks around as if in appreciation of the room but really in an attempt to identify implements she can use to defend herself if he gets violent. She said that if she looks at a vase, she is weighing in her mind the potential for 'breaking it over his head'. Some sex workers carry small daggers –*chube*– for protection against violence. Melat said that she carries a small bag of *berbere* or *mitmita* (hot pepper spices), and Etete and Nolawit carry razor blades in their bags. Etete told me that she also sometimes carries broken pieces of glass to protect herself with.

Furthermore, many sex workers only agree to go with their clients to those hotels where they are on friendly terms with the management and staff, so that they can appeal to them for help in case of violence. Sena and Zewd say that they only go outside their neighborhood with clients if they are with other sex workers. Working within sight or earshot of other sex workers enables women to at least 'scream together' when a sex worker is attacked, as some focus group participants told me.

Screaming loudly when threatened with or encountering violence is the most commonly used tactic to try to frighten off violent men although it often results in increasing the severity of the attack. In addition to screaming, sex workers often apply creative skills to stave off attack or ensure the payment they may or may not be due.

Creative Agency: Guile and Ruse

In a striking story from one of the focus group discussions, a sex worker who was being coerced to clean the house of two clients, in addition to providing her sexual services, jumped onto the top of the roof of their small house and started screaming. When this story was told amid much laughter, the resounding response from participants was, tellingly, '*wend nat*' – 'she's a man', referring to the woman's bravery and smartness.

My interviewees often said that a client's agreement to a very high fee is often an indication to sex workers that they would be expected to perform 'strange' sex or that the client may be HIV-positive and is planning to demand unprotected sex. Therefore, it is not unusual for a sex worker to turn down a client even after he had agreed to her high fee. Rozina said that in order to avoid a violent encounter, she quickly offers to return payment following a disagreement, but if other people come to her rescue and

she thinks she can get away with it, she won't actually return the money. Birrenesh said that she does not give back all the money even if she and a client disagree over condom use or a sexual position and they do not have sex because she needs to be paid for the time she has wasted on him. If an altercation results with the client insisting on getting all his money back, my informants said that arguing loudly in front of other clients is a good strategy as it shames some men and they leave before becoming violent.

Other sex workers complain that some men try to get them drunk so as to get the kind of sex they might normally not agree to. Bilein said that she often encounters clients who are eager to buy her drinks in quick succession. Bilein is happy to get the free drinks but describes herself as 'sand' (permeable) and very difficult to get drunk after having chewed *khat*.

Kidist says that she protects herself by staying awake after a sexual encounter because she doesn't trust clients. She sleeps with her money under her pillow and makes it clear to her client that she is awake - she said that if he mutters or clears his throat, she does the same. Because many clients try to steal back their money, the girls I spoke to in Mercato hide their money under the mattress on their side of the bed, or deep inside their pockets. Where shaming, screaming, or saying 'no' are not options and where the threat of violence is imminent, many women choose to handle the situation '*be peace*' – a slang term adapted from the English to mean, 'peacefully.'

Being accommodating

During the focus group discussion dedicated to handling or overcoming violence, the women shared their own strategies by way of advice to the other Nigat members – one woman said, 'you have to handle [the client] with patience' and another respondent said that '*sitimelaleshi new we'de mit yemiameraw*' - 'it is trading insults back and forth that leads to being hit'. Several respondents said that it was up to the woman to handle the client or boyfriend '*be peace*', calming him as he gets upset as a way to both avoid and overcome violence. Haya who works in violence-ridden Mercato credits her own demonstrably

sweet nature for her claim to not ever having been hit seriously. Conversely, Melat blames her own *afegnanet* – ‘loud-mouth’ - for her many experiences of violence. I found such discussions among the Nigat women to be highly indicative of the prevalent gender regime in that there was total acceptance of the sexist notion that a man provoked is a man who is expected to hit. I also thought that it was in line with other respondents’ characterization of non-Ethiopian or *Zega* men as ‘cowards’ in failing to hit the women in the context of altercations as discussed in Chapter Three.

Despite the fact that many women fight ‘equally’ with men, and particularly in the context of their intimate relationships as I have demonstrated in Chapter Four; the prevalent notions of the capacities of men and women also dictate that women have no physical strength to rely on in case of conflict and so cannot afford to get angry and pick fights as men do - which many women have internalized and apply in their chosen mode of agency in avoiding violence. At one of the focus group discussions, a participant argued, ‘*Akmin awko arfo mekemet new*’ – ‘you should recognize your own capacity (for fighting) and sit quietly’. Furthermore, in our interview, Haeman repeatedly said, ‘*set negn, gulbet yelegnim*’ – ‘I am a woman, I have no power,’ indicating that she believed that the way to avoid or overcome violence was to handle clients meekly. She reported that her very first client was rough with her until she started crying, after which he stopped mistreating her. However, as much as many women have internalized their physical incapacity to fight back physically, ‘being peaceful’ is only one tool among many others, and a ‘meek’ sex worker may not remain so in the face of continued aggression.

Until Being Accommodating Does Not Work

In dealing with a client who has become aggressive, Hibist says that she is patient and quiet until she has put on her clothes, because she wants to avoid the indignity of being caught naked by other people who might come to her rescue if she screams. When required, she pleads with a client and cries. Sometimes, this strategy works and clients calm down; other times, they become emboldened - one client told her he wanted to 'pour gasoline on all women and set them to fire'. When begging or crying are ineffective in stopping a violent client, Hibist has at times grabbed naked clients by their testicles and squeezed hard until *they* begged her to let them go. Similarly, Fatima told me that with most clients, being *kilislis* or shy and retiring works in avoiding violence. However, she added, some clients need *tie'bit* - arrogance.

Her friend Nolawit agreed on the strategy of '*endametatu memeles*' - 'you have to adjust your treatment [of men] to how they treat you'. Of course, applying such a variety of tactics requires the presence of mind and strength of character that not everyone can access while in the face of danger. Birqae, a leader of a group of 14 and 15-year olds who work in Mercato, told me that *mekosater* or showing a stern face to a client sometimes prevents violence. She said if a client becomes difficult, she talks at him brashly, which intimidates some men. However, Ejigae said that she is not good at showing a stern face and in fact breaks down in tears if a client is 'mean'. While some respondents choose to not do anything when encountering violence, particularly if they have nowhere to run or way of escaping, others take a more pro-active approach.

Attacking Back or Threatening

Etta's advice is succinct: '*satikedemi mekdem new*', '*better to beat him to it*'. When she was followed in the dark by a stranger, Mekdi picked up a sharp rock and turned around to threaten him with it; he then left her alone. Kidist who had been a timid new sex worker when I met her seven years ago while she was living at the first Nigat office with her newborn baby, said loudly at one of the focus group discussions

that if a man tries to hit her, she kicks him in the groin and as he's doubled over, she leaves, sometimes with his shoes. As discussed earlier, it is assumed that hitting a client (back) is paramount to asking to be hit; by their explanations, the women made clear that they would not have 'respected' a man who failed to hit in response to such indignity.

However, some of the bolder women such as Adana do not hesitate to hit clients, either preemptively or in response to their aggression. 15-year old Missi does not believe she should hit clients but says she has done so a few times, after which they 'of course, hit me back.' While being hit back is at least considered inevitable, sometimes, self-defense is a natural reaction in the women that also preserves their sense of self-worth.

When a client tried to remove the condom during sex, an inebriated Ribka tried to stop him and was hit badly on the face. She fought back by throwing a beer bottle at him, because she is, as she put it, '*Almot bai tegadai*' – 'a survivor who won't accept defeat'. In this regard, Parrot and Cummings in their book *Forsaken Females: the Global Brutalization of Women* (2006) argue that women who defend themselves in violent situations appear to have psychological advantage over women who submit without a fight who may then feel an overwhelming sense of helplessness resonated with my respondents. Women who resist appear to have a better sense of being in control, and there is some proof that they may get better support from their surroundings (196).

Considered young even by sex worker standards at 14, Fatima is admired by her friends for standing her ground and refusing to go with men who try to hit her into submission. Fatima showed me a deep and long scar on her arm which she said was inflicted with a razor blade by a man she had refused. Fatima's friends also like the fact that she only cries while she is being hit and that after she gets away, she 'laughs all the way home to Mercato.' While an adult listener can recognize the repressed pain behind such nonchalance towards numbing violence, Fatima's show of bravery was certainly held up as a model to

emulate by her teenaged colleagues who, even if not in so many words, seem to recognize brazenness and humor as forms of agency to counteract the violent reality of their lives²⁹. Fatima certainly performs ‘toughness’ consciously. When her friend Titi told us a funny story of being paid 400 Birr (14 Pounds) by an older man for her to whip him with his belt and Titi objected because of his age, Fatima told us, ‘if it was me, I would have given it to him good.’ She also said, ‘as long as he does not hit me, I would not be begging to not hit *him*.’

Lastly, Birqae boasted during our interview that during altercations with clients, she has twice hit men where they least expect it – in the groin. When her friends, my other respondents expressed amazed fear at her strategy and timid Ejigae asked her, ‘what if he dies?’, Birqae replied quickly, ‘So, let him die!’ what are they going to do, find my fingerprints on his penis?’ to which none of us had a satisfactory response.

Conclusion

Applying a post-colonial feminist approach which places the lived experience of sex workers at the core of its analysis, this chapter responds to the assertions of radical feminists such as Jeffreys who in their vehement opposition to ‘prostitution’ fail to recognize the experiences of women and girls who participate in sex work as individual agents. The women I interviewed and got to know during my research cannot be lumped into an undifferentiated ‘victim’ category that abolitionists would place them into. To paraphrase the post-colonial feminist Ratna Kapur who strongly criticizes the focus on victimization, the sweeping generalizations in Jeffreys’ writing construct a completely helpless sex worker subject which was not reflected in the findings of my research (2002, Cited in Jeffreys, 2009:22).

²⁹ Some feminists in the Sex Work camp, including Julia O’Connell Davidson and Dianne Otto have explicitly argued that children [or teenagers] participating in sex work may have autonomy and agency (Jeffreys, 2009:58).

Jeffreys makes clear in *The Industrial Vagina* that she opposes the sex work position because it does not contest male sexual demand which is central to 'prostitution'. She argues that this leaves women only with the options of meeting the demand and allowing sexual access to men. However, my research indicates that the ability to allow or disallow such a form of access is often a source of power to sex worker women. I further disagree with Jeffreys that the sex work position, because it does not oppose men's right to want to pay for sex, negates the possibility of women's 'sexual agency.'

I found the women I interviewed to be far more 'liberated' than the non-sex worker Ethiopian women I know in terms of their sexualities as expressed through their stories, modes of dress and reference to their own bodies. As my research focused on *poor* sex workers who choose sex work because it pays better than other unskilled labor, I acknowledge that it may not be much of a choice but it *still* is a choice.

In addition, the sex workers I know apply quick thinking and rational choices every day to minimize the harms they encounter within an industry which is rife with danger, while maximizing their monetary gains from it. The bravery and creativity on which the sex workers depend to get through every day indicate a degree of personal agency that needs to be recognized if the full picture of sex work is to be understood.

Abu Lughod argues that some forms of resistance only result in discrete, individual gains and do not essentially affect the unequal power relations that make resistance necessary in the first place (1990:48). Scott agrees that 'everyday resistance' as practiced by the poor members of the community he studied is aimed at routine material goals as opposed to a pervasive 'revolutionary consciousness' (1985:320). Scott also challenges the distinction between 'mere' survival tactics and political agency, illustrating that survival itself, amidst stark power imbalances, may be a forceful statement. Similarly, I found in my research that the resistance of sex workers does not fundamentally challenge the status quo of gender

inequality in general and the inequality between sex workers and their male clients in particular.

However, the fact that sex workers survive and often overcome the violence that is an ever-present part of their work is worthy of note.

Abu Lughod extends her argument to remind us that resistance is often rooted in power structures themselves and does not lie outside them. From her own research, Abu Lughod describes the use of *ghinnawas* (lyrical poetry) among Bedouin women as a form of resistance. The traditional art form is used by women to express sentiments such as romantic love that would be considered risqué in their society.

It is Abu Lughod's conclusion that the use of a cultural art form to protest against the strict moral codes of the same culture supports her (and Foucault's) argument that resistance lies within, and not outside, power relations (1990:46-47).

Similarly, my research showed that while resisting instances of violence, sex workers operate in full acceptance of the gendered status quo. I consistently found that women's inferiority to men was an unquestioned paradigm. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Five, I found that it is not only inequality between women and men but also its characteristic trait, violence against women that is taken for granted among sex workers.

Another facet of sex work in Addis Ababa that my research highlighted speaks to my feminist examination of the ways in which sex workers relate to other sex workers as well as to other women. The penultimate chapter of this dissertation discusses the feminist concept of sisterhood, as enacted in the ways in which sex workers support and undermines each other as well as the subtle ways in which they other non-sex worker women as well as sex workers who may work differently than them. A section of Chapter Six will also feature Nigat - its achievements and challenges to effect feminist organizing.

Chapter Six: The Women's House: Sisterhood and Social Capital within Sex Work in Addis Ababa

My first interview was held at Melat's house in Urael, and as we sat around a *jebena* - the traditional Ethiopian coffee pot - with her best friend Rahel chewing freshly-bought *khat*, I asked her if I could put my legs up as I got comfortable on the bed. She replied, indicating I need not have asked, '*ye' set bet new' – 'it's a woman's house'* .

In many ways, the fieldwork research I did among sex workers in 2012-2013 fulfilled a deep personal desire to witness and be part of a community of women. Implicit in my selection of the topic was the almost complete feminization of sex work in Ethiopia, which I knew would provide me with access to a large community of women to get to know and understand. Both my support to Nigat in the period preceding my entry into a PhD program, and the development of my research topic related to a cherished feminist wish to observe and engage with women working together to help themselves. This chapter builds on the feminist concept of sisterhood, as well as the broader theory of social capital taken from

Sociology to assess whether sex workers in Addis Ababa can be understood to support one another in tangible forms.

Theories of Engagement

Sisterhood

The term 'sisterhood' emerged in second wave feminism to express women's solidarity with each other, particularly in the context of feminist activism. Robin Morgan, in her Introduction to the famous anthology, *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* proclaims:

'I, as a not-starving white American woman living in the very belly of the beast, must fight for those black and brown oppressed sisters to survive before we can even talk together as oppressed women (1970, xxxv).'

The sisterhood envisioned by Morgan and her compatriots emphasizes collective struggle and is couched in feminist theory. The concept of sisterhood also implies that women have unique characteristics and that women relate to one another in ways that differ from to how they relate to men. However, sisterhood is a concept that stumbled as soon as it emerged. In the same anthology edited by Morgan, a group called the New York Radical Feminists write that although they aimed to provide a place of moral support for 'Sisters' where they could form friendships and exchange stories of personal grief, they found that their own group became divided between those women who were better educated and others who had not had such privilege, with the result that meetings were dominated by a few women who also often intimidated and manipulated their less educated 'sisters' (1970, xxviii). In addition, black feminists including bell hooks, Michele Wallace and Audre Lorde have critiqued what they perceived to be classist and racist assumptions by Morgan and colleagues, suggesting notions of sisterhood among the upper/middle-class white feminists who dominated the second wave feminism were sometimes false

(Weiss and Friedman, 1995). While highlighting the gaps in white feminists' social analyses, feminists of color nonetheless have proponents of the concept of sisterhood among them. hooks states:

'Women who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to relinquish the belief that they exercise some measure, however relative, over their lives. They cannot afford to see themselves solely as 'victims' because their survival depends on continued exercise of whatever personal powers they possess. They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources – this is the woman-bonding feminist movement should encourage- it is the type of bonding that is the essence of sisterhood' (1984: 68).

Social Capital

Although there are several theories of Social Capital within the field of Sociology, I use definitions set out by two influential thinkers; Robert Putnam (1993) and Alejandro Portes (1998). Putnam, following research into regional government in Italy (1993) and into social capital and public health in the US (2000), formulates social capital as 'the nature and extent of networks and associated norms of reciprocity' (Putnam, 1993, Cited in Szreter and Woolcock, 2004: 662). Putnam views social capital at a relational level – it belongs to individuals but only because they belong to a certain group which is made up of individuals who come together in pursuit of their own interests. Social capital allows persons to access resources and favors and entitles them to have reasonable expectation of how other people in the group will behave [towards them]. One effect of social capital is that it allows group members to do things they could not manage on their own; it serves as a resource that group members can draw on in certain circumstances (Putnam, 1993, Cited in Szreter and Woolcock, 2004: 663). Similarly, Portes defines social capital as 'the ability to secure benefits through membership in networks and other social structures' (1998: 17). According to Portes, social capital relies on trust, reciprocity, expectations and

obligations which facilitate social and economic exchange between group members (1998: 17). Although some social scientists have asserted that social capital is always good, Putnam and Portes agree that social capital, like knowledge, is useful in and of itself but may be put to dubious use such as building weapons (Putnam, 1993, Cited in Szreter and Woolcock, 2004: 663).

In addition to my exploration of sisterhood among sex workers in this chapter, I investigate the concept of social capital among sex workers in Addis Ababa. I demonstrate that the social capital furnished by sex workers translates to tangible support in times of need, with genuine rallying even by fellow sex workers they do not always get along with. Indeed, as Amal told me, ‘there is actually a lot of love between sex workers; we would not last otherwise.’

In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of the sisterhood that exists among sex workers, illustrating that intense competition and antagonism may exist together with mutual support, and often, genuine affection. I will then discuss *non*-sisterhood and Othering between sex workers and non sex worker women, including in the reflection of male respondents, and with a focus on the antagonism that often exists between sex workers and women police officers. Subsequently, I narrow my gaze to the sex work milieu to discuss the differences that sex workers draw between themselves along class lines, according to the kind of sexual services they provide, and do describe the rivalry and conflict commonly observed among sex workers. Following a discussion of an incident at Nigat, the last section of the chapter examines Nigat’s quasi- feminist organizing from a social capital theory perspective.

‘We cry at each other’s funeral’: Sisterhood within Sex Work

Misrak and Amele agreed that fighting is common among sex workers but amended that ‘*lekifuken endersalen*’ – ‘But we are there for each other in times of trouble.’ In examining the complex relationship that sex workers necessarily have with another, Trotter explains that while clients are mostly transitory in the lives of sex workers (particularly, in the international port setting he studied where clients hail from

all parts of the world), their sex worker-colleagues are in their lives for longer periods, necessitating a protocol of sorts (2008:93). It is an ambivalent relationship that sex workers in Addis Ababa (like those that Trotter studied in Cape Town) have with each other. On one hand, they are necessary competitors in an ever-tightening market; on the other hand, they are all members of a stigmatized sub-category of society and survival makes working together a necessity. According to Trotter, the women he interviewed in Cape Town manage the delicate balance between rivalry and mutual support through 'a certain level of civility' and by insisting on generosity and lending support to friends in need (2008: 93).

The fact that sex workers often compete with each other but also support each other and that this is not necessarily contradictory is supported with evidence from other parts of Africa. Mtetwa, Busza, Davey, Wong-Gruenwald and Cowan found in research into social support among 836 sex workers in three Zimbabwean towns, pervasive mistrust and competition over clients, with more established sex workers chasing away and using violence to intimidate newcomers. However, fighting between sex workers was largely recognized as temporary and not 'serious'. A high proportion of sex workers reported mutual support between sex workers in terms of sharing financial services, support related to healthcare and emergency support, including pooling resources for funeral costs, and in relation to work, warning each other of difficult clients. The researchers quote a 45-year old sex worker from Mutare who said: 'We check on each other daily. My friends are more important to me than my own relatives' (2015: 4).

My research found remarkably similar trends in the (non) sisterhood and the support/antagonism which characterizes the relationship between sex workers in Addis Ababa. The volatile nature of sex work makes *some* collaboration between sex workers inevitable; when a client turns violent as often happens, the first line of rescue are usually the other women working in the bar who may then prevail on a male bouncer/manager/owner to intervene. In one of my interviews, Rakeb spoke of an incident where she

and other sex workers rescued a sex worker they did not know who was about to be raped; Rakeb heard her plead with the men, crying out to 'Ye' *Set Amlak*' (the 'God of Women') and quickly rallying her friends, they confronted the would-be rapist and walked the shaken woman home. In addition, sex workers are often not assured of the income they will make on a particular night, and combined with the absence of a savings culture, they often find themselves broke and depending on one another for food or a loan. Alem who works in a lowly *areke bet* in Piassa, said that the women who work with her support each other in times of trouble, and 'when we are hungry.' It is important to note that for all the stories of competition and fighting, sex workers also tend to be there for one another at the most important moments in women's lives; giving birth, illness and death.

When I asked if sex workers mostly support each other, Zemi said that 'it is [other sex workers] who *mares* (take care of a woman during her confinement period after giving birth).' Nigist, who organized many of my focus group discussions, told me that *shelaes* support each other so much that '*yeweledsh aymeslishim*' - 'you don't feel like you have given birth'. She painted a rosy picture whereby all *shelaes* share everything they own and disclose all their earnings, but her friend Dinqae laughingly interrupted to announce 'I hide what I make.'

At the time of our interview, Blaine and her six-month old baby had been staying at Nigat; when she was evicted for not paying rent, her sex worker-friends pooled money to help her out and to buy diapers for her baby. Although she had not known them for very long, the other residents of Nigat help watch her baby when Blaine goes out to work. A story I found highly illustrative of the emotion-laden support that sex workers provide for one another was from my interviews was by Seble who told me '*adebabai wetan*' - 'we went public', indicating that she and her friends had abandoned all shame in asking their acquaintances to contribute to a friend's treatment fund. This friend, Saba, had not told her friends that she had HIV until she was very sick, and they knew her to sleep with 'every good looking man that she

could find.’ As Saba had no family, her sex worker friends were also the ones who finally buried her. Indeed, according to Ayni, one of the main ways in which sex workers support each other is to visit those who are sick, and ‘*alkiso mekber*’ – ‘we cry at each other’s funeral’. Undermining these touching sentiments and the social capital that sex workers create by offering each other support are the real ways in which sex workers create differences among themselves and with other women.

Sex Workers versus ‘Regular’ Women

Through the Male Gaze

Perhaps because I made it clear from the onset that my research focused on sex workers, male respondents were often at pains to describe sex workers to me from a mainstream or non-sex worker perspective, which featured much stereotyping and contrasting sex workers with other women. My male interviewees seemed to enjoy talking about ‘them’, freely drawing on their experiences dating sex workers but also on the prevalent urban legend of the loving yet volatile, generous yet emotionally unstable *Shelae* (sex workers’ relationship with their intimate partners is detailed in Chapter Four). Some male respondents, all of whom had dated multiple sex workers, agreed that essentially sex workers were better girlfriends than *ye’betlij*. My male respondents emphasized that sex workers had more ‘love’ than other women; they said that if a sex worker decided that she loved a man, she was usually loyal to him. Daniel added that he preferred sex with a sex worker who was ‘free’ sexually – that is, more available than *ye’betlijs* (who may chafe under parental control) and also more proficient in sex – he said, ‘*min atagelegn*’ - ‘why should I struggle to get sex from a ‘good’ girl?’ As sex workers’ sexual passion goes together with their reputed commitment to practicing safe sex, they were considered good sexual

partners. However, sex workers were also described as wild with ‘uncontrollable mouths’. In addition to their trademark insults, Besufikad said that ‘glasses and razor blades are ‘their own’, meaning that sex workers often throw glasses during fights, and many use the razor blades they carry to ‘*memeresh*’ (cut) the faces of the men or women they fight with.

Unlike my other male respondents, Suleiman told me that his contact with sex workers is limited to friendship. When I tried to clarify that he did not actually have a girlfriend who is a sex worker, he said, ‘no, I have a normal girlfriend.’ I found the use of the word ‘normal’ very telling in this context.

If one considers that as in many other cultures, ‘whore’ or *Shelae* is a grave insult when leveled at a non-sex worker woman, and is often considered hurtful by sex worker women as well, then sex workers may be described as the foil against which non-sex worker women gauge their own respectability.

Indeed, sex workers’ fraught relationships with ‘normal’ women attests to this most fundamental form of difference based on transgressive sexuality.

Treatment by ‘Regular’ Women

When she found out that Hibist was selling sex, her college student friend insulted her and told her that she probably had HIV. The perceived association of sex workers with disease and particularly with the most-feared sexually transmitted disease, HIV, obviously underlies much of the ostracism by ‘normal’ women against sex workers. Despite impressive progress over the last decade in the treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS, and the accompanying de-coupling of sex work from HIV/AIDS as sex workers develop a reputation for consistent condom use, many women and men from the mainstream world continue to discriminate against sex workers on the grounds of their perceived HIV-status.

Female neighbors or landladies are often accused of callous treatment of sex workers – Kidist told me she was hurt when she saw the food that she had prepared for her landlady being given to the dog. In

addition, Missi, a 15-year old from Mercato complained that as she was walking home with a bleeding forehead after being hit by a client, older women in the neighborhood had laughed at her. Other 'regular' women are considered to be as dangerous as some sex workers.

A group of four teenagers I spoke to in Mercato described a woman who cut the face of a sex worker who was talking to the woman's lover. Beyond violence, a major complaint that sex workers have against 'regular' and particularly rich women is that they try to take advantage of poor women, including sex workers. As there is a direct relationship between unsatisfactory domestic employment and entry into sex work, many sex workers, when describing their entry into sex work, included invectives against difficult women employers who blamed their house-help when supplies ran out or took out their marital frustrations on them by being violent or verbally abusive.³⁰

Taking Advantage

In defining violence, Kerry, one of the founders of Nigat, said that she considers the *Akafai* system where a sex worker shares half of her earnings with her 'landlady' (the owner of her bed as well as the small shack it is housed in) to be a form of violence. I did not understand what Kerry meant until I went to *Sebategna* to interview Mirafe, who was standing outside the door of her tiny shack in a pair of black tight shorts as we came up the street. She was gracious and invited us in then invited her friend Amele to join us. Although many of her neighbors are *Akafai*, Mirafe is not (according to my reports, *akafai* and non-*akafai* landladies of sex workers are almost always women). However, she pays 70 Birr per day for

³⁰ During my interview period, the only times I felt distant from the sex workers I interviewed was when they disparaged women employers of house-help or *Emebets* - as I am one. Although I try to treat my employee well, these sessions were an uncomfortable reminder of a class divide. I had to admit to myself that I cannot identify with house-help the way I do with sex workers because while bound by gender to both groups who are also for the most part of a different class to me, I am only purely the 'other' to women who work as house-help – perhaps because, to my knowledge, no sex worker has lived in my house and because sex work is completely removed from my life apart from an academic and activist concern.

her tiny work/living space which comes to 2100 Birr per month, the amount a family would pay for a house in a much nicer part of Addis. As expensive as this rent is, it is not even secure as she may be evicted at any time.

These arrangements echo those found in other places. In Kolkata, India, many sex workers are either *Adhiyas* who give 50% of their income to a Madam (who further deducts from the *Adhiyas'* earning for food and rent), or *Chukris* who are debt-bonded to a particular madam. These sex workers, who are often illiterate, are often cheated out of their dues by the madams who also act as moneylenders (Evans, Jana and Lambert, 2010: 9). Because 'respectable' women often treat them without respect and exploit them, it is no wonder that sex workers largely express dislike of 'regular' women. However, no group of women is held with as much contempt as those charged with law and order.

'Women are Evil': Sex Workers vs. Women Police Officers

Many of the interviews and focus group discussions with women sex workers featured bitter complaints about women police officers. The consensus among my respondents was that women in uniform are 'worse' than their male colleagues. In general, women police officers are not considered responsive when sex workers go to them to complain of ill-treatment by clients and reportedly often respond, '*Min ageban?*'- '*How is it our business?*' Furthermore, Rahel complained that female police officers do not believe sex workers work out of need, and in times of *afesa*, they are reputed to be often violent and intimidating towards arrested sex workers. Some of my respondents even reported being threatened with being thrown to hyenas. Melat recounted a woman police officer from Tigray in the northern part of the country who was visibly offended when she was told that one of the arrested sex workers was also Tigrayan. She threatened, '*be'tiyit new yemilat'* – 'I will hit her with bullets[i.e., I will shoot her]'.

Beyond threats, Hibist once had to stop a woman police officer from hitting her at a police station during an *afesa* by snatching her stick from her – the officer asked her, ‘why should you not be hit [like the others?]’. Hibist also threw a rock at the officer and missed.

The officer was described by my interviewees as particularly ‘evil’, often taunting sex workers and telling them they deserved their mistreatment as they had probably left their warm homes in search of sex. However, Hibist noted, theirs is work that the officer herself might have entered if she was in their situation. Helen observed about women officers: ‘*set lijima metfo nat*’ - ‘women are evil’, and Rahel added that women [in general] are cruel.

When I tried to probe into the particular animosity between sex workers and women police officers, Mahli told me thoughtfully that sex workers often assume that women police officers are jealous of their beauty and overt sexuality, and that is why they mistreat them. Indeed, sex workers and women police officers reportedly often compete over the sexual attention of male police officers. Lastly, women police officers probably resent sex workers’ lack of willingness to identify criminals. Zewd said that when a woman police officer approached her for information on a burglary, she told her to go look for the burglars herself. While sex workers’ relationship with other women provided an interesting comparative perspective, my research focused on the ways in which sex workers create differences among themselves.

Not All Sex Workers are Equal: Othering³¹

After I interviewed Bizualem at Nigat, Azeb, one of the founders, greeted me with some doubt, asking if the interview went well. When I praised Bizualem as *gobez*– smart and well-organized – Azeb claimed,

³¹ In Feminist Theory, Simone de Beauvoir developed the notion, originally proposed by Hegel and expanded by Edward Said (1978) of the Other to describe woman as the Other in relation to man in male-dominated cultures. Beauvoir explains that where ‘man’ refers to human beings in general, men represent the positive and the neutral whereas women represent only the negative, ‘defined by limiting criteria.’ (1989:79)

‘but she does not even know how to speak!’ in reference to Bizualem’s thick accent which indicates that she is Oromo, a dominant but somewhat marginalized ethnic group³².

This othering process appeared to be two-way. Bizualem, although she had not heard my exchange with Azeb, seemed to have created a defensive wall against the other sex workers at Nigat who were mostly from Addis and native Amharic speakers. Bizualem spoke disparagingly of those sex workers who had worked for a long time (she had only worked for six months when I spoke to her in November 2011), saying they were different from someone like her who had ‘grown up in a proper home.’

I found it interesting to note the ways in which sex workers put each other down based on background (urban and fluent in Amharic vs. an accent indicating a rural upbringing) which is also a proxy for differences in social class. In addition, sex workers who had been brought up in a family and who had moved on to sex work, by choice, were often seen or at least self-described as much more ‘respectable’ than those sex workers who had grown up in red-light districts with their mothers and other women family members selling sex. Unlike in most other professions, the ‘newly arrived’ status is valued more than experience in sex work – I have often heard sex workers say dismissively *‘ahun new yewetahut’* – ‘I have only recently come out’³³, particularly when they want to disassociate themselves from the unpleasant components of sex work. The women also use the phrase to emphasize their desirability and untainted-ness, particularly to clients who often claim to desire variety and ‘freshness.’

Locale and Fees

Sex workers also often ‘other’ those women who work in a different locale (street vs. bar-based) as well as neighborhoods different from theirs. My respondents in Kara Kore on the outskirts of Addis said that they did not steal from their clients because they work at a fixed location and would be easily caught;

³²Addis Ababa, although mainly Amharic speaking is ringed with Oromo villages and small towns.

³³ The equivalent term used by the sex workers Trotter interviewed is ‘crossing the line’ (2008, 25). Both terms indicate a demarcation posed by entry into sex work, one that may not be crossed back easily into ‘respectability.’

they said that it is those women who work on the streets or in ‘parking’ (having sex in clients’ cars) who steal from clients. I found that women who work in Piassa speak admiringly of sex workers in Bole, currently the most expensive part of Addis with some of the nicest restaurants, shops and bars.

Ribka said that to work on the streets of Bole, one needs nice miniskirts and not the trousers she wears in Piassa. She also said that the workers in Bole are very ‘kid’ - from the English word, to indicate that they are often very young, as an apparent criterion of desirability. Her friend Sitamri added the rumour she heard that the women at certain bars in Bole won’t go with a client for less than 100US Dollars– a large sum in Ethiopian Birr, and said with some admiration that such women can afford to pay for their own drinks and club fees. In discussing fees, Rozina said that if a client tries to negotiate below 200 Birr for an overnight service and 50 Birr for a ‘short’ - she tells him, ‘go look for that in Mercato – (where a ‘short’ costs as little as 40 Birr).’

The fee that a sex worker will acquiesce to is an important indicator of respectability among sex workers. Mirafe, in Mercato, said that even if she has been cheated out of money by a client, she would not admit it to her friends because that will get her disrespected. Another cause of disrespect among some sex workers is the ‘face’ or visible encouragement that some sex workers show to male police officers which usually results in the women being asked or pressured to provide sexual favors. Rahel said that such women undermine the integrity of all street-based sex workers - ‘*tastekanalech*.’ However, according to my findings, no other category of sex worker is as disrespected or even as despised by the group of sex workers I conducted my interview among as those who agree to perform oral or anal sex – for a higher than normal fee.

Performing ‘Strange’ Sex

As discussed in Chapter Five, there is much anger directed at those sex workers who agree to anal and/or oral sex. Such women are ostracized as participating in ‘unnatural’ sex, and ruining the work for the rest. The only time a respondent got angry at my questioning was when I mustered the nerve to ask a group of women who work in Piassa why they object so much to oral sex. Amal cut her eyes at me and said coldly, *‘gim new!’ - ‘it is disgusting!’* Then all the women in the interview started talking at once.

Helen told me that performing oral sex is not good for one’s hygiene, and Maria said that it would not be so bad with a lover, but being in such close contact with a stranger’s body part would be unacceptable. Amal then told me the story of how she found out that a good friend of hers who often took her out partying (paying Amal’s exit fee from the bar of her employment) performs oral sex when a client common to both Amal and her friend asked her to perform the same. Amal told the client sternly, ‘my mouth was created to eat with!’ Although considered deserving of censure – Kidist said that the only sex worker ever hit was when she hit one known to perform oral sex - my respondents also spoke with compassion of one Nigat member, Millena, who admitted that she performs such acts when forced to by clients. Only 16 years old, Millena was considered very naïve and unable to take care of herself. My interviewees mostly agreed that *some* of their colleagues must consent to oral or anal sex since there was a continued demand for it among their clients³⁴, although these women usually do not admit it to their friends.

Male Sex Workers

Another category of sex workers often othered and spoken of with derision are male sex workers, a phenomenon so well-hidden in Addis that many mainstream residents deny it exists. As mentioned in a previous chapter, homophobia is pervasive in Ethiopian society as in most African countries, and men (and to a lesser extent, women) are sometimes jailed for ‘practicing’ homosexuality. Interesting from the

³⁴ In addition, it is largely assumed that the frequent portrayal of anal and oral sex within pornography which is commonly found in Addis Ababa fuels the demand for such acts.

perspective of my research, female sex workers, far from identifying with their male counterparts, find them objectionable. Hanna told me that she met '*Yebushitwochu Aleka*'- which I can only translate as 'the Boss of the Faggots', the organizer of the association of male sex workers, at an international conference on HIV/AIDS and STIs held in Addis at the beginning of December 2011 where Nigat proudly made a presentation of their work on sex workers and HIV/AIDS. Hanna said she was disgusted to even shake the man's hand.

When I asked her how what he does is different from what female sex workers do, she said that it was 'normal' for women to sell sex, hinting at the overwhelming commodification of Ethiopian female sexuality which does not have an equivalent in male sexuality.

'We only fight when we are drunk': Rivalry and Conflict among Sex Workers

As in most other sectors, there is rife competition within sex work. A larger number of sex workers in a bar or on a street mean more options for customers and lower fees when the women do get business. As discussed previously, it may also make it more difficult for sex workers to insist on 'normal' sex if there are other sex workers willing to provide 'exotic' sex. It is a common complaint that new sex workers not only take away business opportunities but because they are less experienced, settle for lower rates, bringing down overall fees. In his account of 'dockside prostitution' in Cape Town, Trotter explains that while there is an agreed going rate for a sexual contract – 500 Rand at the time – some women undercut the others with lower prices. 'Scarlet', a 25-year old, tells Trotter, 'because the young ones are fresh and pretty, they attract business. But because they're stupid and don't know any better, they also accept less money. That makes it harder for the rest of us because then the guys expect to go with us for peanuts' (2008:96). As a result, sex workers in Cape Town, as in Addis Ababa, keep their eyes out for competition from 'fresh meat.' Trotter describes the 'bruising initiation' that newcomers often receive from established sex workers; he describes a violent beating that one of his informants received from

colleagues at a club she had just started to solicit (2008: 134). Similarly, I often heard how street-based sex workers often intimidate newcomers by making fun of them, insulting them and sometimes physically attacking them. According to Hanna, the four or five sex workers who first started working around a particular hot-spot in Bole regularly used their boyfriends to intimidate or rob newcomers.

Melat, exhibiting a proactive streak I had not recognized in her before, told me that she had in the past tried to organize the women she works with to drive out the competition from women who bring prices down and agree to irregular sex, but that she was not successful in doing so.³⁵ As far as I could gather, there is no precedence in Addis of sex workers banding together to set fees or to assign work zones as has been reported in other parts of the world. For instance, the Malindi Welfare Association (MWA), a sex workers' association located on the Kenyan coast, determines 'zones' for sex work, designating the areas with many hotels, guesthouses, discos and bars as a 'high-potential zone' whereas other zones are labeled 'potential zones' or 'low potential zones', the latter servicing mostly local clientele. The association determines the maximum number of sex workers that can operate in the different zones, depending on the number of tourists who frequent the area; it also determines prices for sexual services. All members agree to a code of ethics developed by the Association, and there is a Disciplinary Committee which settles disputes between members and their clients (Kibicho, 2009: 188).³⁶

In Addis Ababa, I found that while close friends or colleagues who work in the same bar find it easy enough to tell each other of their bad experiences and name or point out dangerous or difficult clients so

³⁵ In this regard, Portes argues that social capital often includes the trait of exclusivity, deterring outsiders from joining in (1998:22).

³⁶ Unfortunately, Nigat, the only sex workers' association in Addis Ababa, has not organized itself along the lines of associations such as the MWA and has not been able to coordinate the work of its members in a meaningful way. The next section will deal specifically with Nigat.

that the other women know not to go with them, trying to warn sex workers one does not know well often backfires. At one of the focus group discussions, Esete recounted trying to warn a colleague from getting into the car of a client who had hit her previously, but the woman insulted her as she got into the car, presumably because she thought Esete wanted to steal her business. Other discussants agreed that sex workers work well with women they trust and consider to be friends but will likely be antagonistic towards sex workers they do not know.

Reports from other parts of the world corroborate my finding that sex workers are often suspicious of one another and find it together to band together. In Kolkata, a research project in collaboration with a large sex workers' association, found that sex workers tend to mistrust one another in an atmosphere of intense competition. One sex worker reported, 'all day we are standing next to one another but not talking, just thinking about which one of us will catch the next customer' (Evans, Jana and Lambert, 2010:8).

The underlying animosity among sex workers, who are after all operating in the 'underworld' which although not criminalized, nevertheless exists outside the self-regulating boundaries of 'respectability' is perhaps not surprising. However, the unfortunate effect on splintering the solidarity among sex workers is a feminist concern, particularly when the antagonism is so serious that sex workers, albeit a few, report having no sex worker friends at all, preferring to face the dangers and challenges of sex work alone.

'Women Are Not For Me': Avoiding Making Friends

In his book, Trotter describes women who, after years in 'the game', remain wary of their colleagues. They sit apart from other women at the bars and keep to themselves. A 29-year old sex worker tells him, 'I don't come to the clubs to make friends. I come to make money. These girls don't give a damn about me, and I don't give a damn about them - they would stab you in the back while smiling at you' (2008:96). Other respondents explained that having friends can sidetrack or sabotage the women's focus on their

financial goals. During one of my earliest focus group discussions with Nigat members, I was taken aback when Rozina, whom I knew to have been a street-based sex worker since she was ten, said she preferred to 'work alone' as too many friendships had left her disappointed. I had always assumed that sex workers must prefer to work in close proximity to their friends, for protection as well as company during the long, cold nights. indeed, Rozina was berated by the others for her preference.

In addition, Etete whom I interviewed in the *Sebategna* red-light district within Mercato said that she generally tends to keep to herself, chewing and eating by herself in her tiny room that only has space for a bed and a chest of drawers. She said that when she sees her neighbors who are friends and chew together turn against one another, she is glad that she keeps to herself. Across town, Esete, the Nigat member who is known for 'fighting like a man' stated openly that she does not like the company of women and said that she prefers to physically fight to resolve a problem, rather than gossip or spread rumours which are considered the more feminine modes of conflict management in the Ethiopian context. Esete's only friend is another Nigat member, Dana who, at the time of my interview was staying with Esete and her partner, sleeping on a mattress on their floor. A few other respondents also claimed to not like to socialize with other women. Even though the community of sex workers at Nigat took care of her after the birth of her baby, and even after Nigat members invited her to live with them and gave her their children's clothes for her daughter, Ruth did not have much to say in praise of women. She described sex workers are 'cruel' and stated categorically, '*set ayhonegnim*' - 'women are not for me' and even that she prefers the company of stranger *Duriye*— rough, ill-mannered men - to that of other women. Even where sex workers do form at least a few friendships as most do, they are often fraught. Sex workers sometimes get violent with each other, and insults, picking fights and intimidation are common.

Reasons to Fight

When I asked a group of teenaged sex workers who live in Mercato if they sometimes fight among each other, they all laughed and simultaneously responded, '*Awo, be'bal!*' – 'Yes, over boyfriends!' Titi told us of a time she slept with her friend's boyfriend because he paid her and because she had been upset at her friend and this led to a huge fight between the two girls. Titi said that her friend 'gave me no space to sit or stand,' a common Amharic expression meaning she would not drop the subject.

After a few weeks, the friends made up when her friend decided to forgive Titi, stating that a man should not ruin their friendship. However, it is not only regular boyfriends who are the causes of fights among sex workers, but also, understandably in light of their importance in the finances of sex workers, clients. During my interview of two friends in Mercato, Misrak teased her friend Amele about her jealousy over regular clients – she said that Amele behaved as if the client in question were her legal husband. Amele did not deny her jealous streak but clarified that she no longer picks fights with other sex workers over clients. In Piassa, Ribka complained that after she started doing business with her friend's regular client, her friend got upset, they got into a fight and she started a rumor that Ribka has *medhanit* (a magical potion/medicine) buried on her person³⁷. Ribka sounded perplexed at the development and explained that she continued to sleep with the client because '*sira sira new*'- 'work is work'. In another interview, Soliyana was adamant that she is not afraid to fight other sex workers over work turf or clients; she said with derision that some women tell her '*yizeshibign hedsh*' 'you took[him] away from me', adding rhetorically, '*Eitalatalehu, agebat 'ende?*' '*I will fight her, is he married to her?*' She also said that she is known at the [police] station for her frequent altercations with other women. When other women try to threaten her away from their work areas, Soliyana said, '*ene' bisalehu*' 'I [get angrier] than the woman

³⁷ While I often heard sex workers in Addis Ababa say *other* sex workers, particularly those they are trying to discredit use magic and potions, Trotter found that some of the women he spoke to in Durban report using *muthi* (traditional medicines and charms) to cast spells and to have a supernatural advantage over the competition (2008: 56).

threatening me’ and invites her to fight. She told me that it is not as if her competitor has leased the land that she is working on, and that they are both working for *injera* (daily bread).

Fighting over work space as well as clients was reported as often in poor Mercato as in upscale Bole – Leah who solicits in a rich part of the city told me: ‘if you try to take away a client’ – ‘*be’set goremsa timechalesh*’ – ‘you will be hit by a girl gangster.’

Trotter’s finding in South Africa is very similar. He describes a ‘typical catfight’ he witnessed between two sex workers over a common client, one of them heavily pregnant, while bystanders watched and laughed. Trotter states, ‘Everyone agrees that if a club girl gets caught poaching, she deserves a beating because it amounts to theft; it is the one rule that all the women are supposed to adhere to’ (2008: 133).

Trotter argues that in the competitive atmosphere of the clubs and in a lawless environment, such violence is expected (Ibid). As in Addis Ababa, the most common fights between sex workers are over stealing clients, and disagreements seem to descend into violence as quickly, speaking to my earlier argument (Chapter Four) that violence exists on a continuum.

In addition to outright competition among sex workers in Addis Ababa, an increase in the number of sex workers lining the streets of Addis Ababa means less work for all of them, and sometimes, idleness and boredom are relieved by a few brawls among colleagues. Sex workers often fight each other on the streets when ‘*sira yelem*’ – ‘there is no work.’ Sex workers often talk as if fighting with their colleagues is inevitable - Bilein told me that sometimes, any excuse would do. She also said, ‘*koma katach tibelashalech*’ – ‘if a sex worker does not find work [as she is standing outside her door, waiting for a client], ‘she will eat you.’

Often, envy is the great driving force behind sex worker fights. Obviously still upset about the incident, Abiti told me that she had ‘raised’ one of the women from the position of house-help hired to wash

sheets, teaching her to '*meshermot*' (the verb: 'to whore'). Apparently, this upstart soon after became the mistress of the establishment after the male owner 'had a taste' of her. According to Abiti, the owner was sleeping with Abiti's nemesis while his wife was dying and installed her as her replacement once she died. The new mistress became proud and looked down on Abiti with the tension erupting in a physical fight. As a result, the owner of the place asked Abiti to leave after twelve years of service.

In addition to success as a sex worker, however achieved, exceptional good looks or self-confidence may also irk other sex workers and cause them to fight with the pretty sex worker. Sena in Piassa told me that one cannot expect peace if sex workers are living in groups of three or four – she said 'they will fight the one who looks better than the others'. Soliyana agreed: '*complex'ima ale*' - 'there is [resentment arising from an inferiority complex]'.

As sex workers place a great premium on their looks and compete for 'business', it is perhaps not surprising that they often compete over degrees of attractiveness. However, it was often disheartening to hear these accounts of feminized fights among sex workers which unfortunately feed into and reflect patriarchal stereotypes of 'shrill' women who cannot get along with one another.

'Is She Not a Woman?' - Unraveling Sisterhood

As I have briefly mentioned in one of the earlier chapters, a dramatic episode that marred my year of fieldwork research with Nigat was the alleged rape in April 2012 of an active Nigat member, Eskedar, by the boyfriend of one of the founders of the association. The 'other' woman in the rape case was Kerry whose boyfriend - a Federal Police Officer - was the accused rapist. I got the opportunity to hear her perspective when I ran into her at Melat's place as I was finishing my interviews; I was surprised to see Kerry as I had heard she had become a social outcast in Nigat circles following her boyfriend's arrest.

My initial reaction at seeing her was a feeling of guilt; I do not think she would have been as friendly towards me had she known that I had taken the police to her house in search of witnesses. However, unaware of my role in ensuring that Eskedar's case was taken seriously, Kerry was more than happy to talk and gave me an earful of the 'conspiracy' against her by the other Nigat members, whom she feels have all taken the side of Eskedar. Kerry corroborated what Eskedar had told me the previous week - when she first heard about the incident; Kerry had asked Eskedar angrily 'who told you to go with him [to Kerry's place, where the rape took place]?''

The way Kerry described the incident, Eskedar and Kerry's boyfriend were drinking together until 2am and came back to Kerry's place after that – Kerry was out of Addis Ababa on a training assignment for Nigat and her boyfriend had a key to the room she rented. Although her landlady and her husband told Kerry that they had heard arguments that night, Kerry chose to interpret these as something of a lover's spat.

Although Kerry obviously did not think her boyfriend was above raping her friend, her blame was directed at Eskedar for agreeing to go to Kerry's house late in the evening and thus setting herself up for rape. She asked rhetorically, '*set aydelech?*' - '*is she not a woman?*' adding, '*metebek neberebat*' - '*she should have expected [to be raped]*'. Kerry also told me with some derision, '*Esuamende'chewa set tedeferkutilalech?*'- '*She claims to have been raped, as if she is a good girl?*' She then repeated to me the rumour that Eskedar had had a baby by her uncle. More the reason to feel sorry for her, I thought, but apparently Kerry did not agree.

My conversation with Kerry represented for me the absence of feminist theorizing or indeed solidarity among Nigat members. Kerry had founded Nigat along with Girmawit and three other friends, but despite her role in organizing an association that stands for the rights of a disenfranchised group of women, and despite her knowledge and expertise on sex work, she fell into the trap that Ethiopian

women commonly find themselves in – that of blaming the ‘other woman’ for one’s male partner’s transgression. Kerry also did not seem to question a man’s prerogative to rape – to get the sexual gratification he seeks. As discussed in Chapter Three, this feeds into the notion prevalent in Ethiopia, as in many other societies, that men’s sexuality is wild and over-powering. As sympathetic as I was to Eskedar’s situation, I was also worried about Kerry and told her so. Even though I am sure she felt betrayed that her boyfriend had sex with her friend, and by force at that, she feigned nonchalance to me and implied that she knew to not expect a man to be faithful.

Again, I found this line of argument that men cannot be trusted to reflect the culture of attributing limited responsibility to men when it comes to their own sexual behavior. Lastly, despite her long experience in selling sex and expressed identity as a *shelae*, Kerry resorted to othering Eskedar as a ‘non-good’ girl whom she implied should not even be allowed to make a claim of rape.

I understood that Kerry was upset that she heard about the rape thirteen days after it happened - after the other women had discussed it behind her back and following the arrest of her boyfriend. In what appeared to be over zealous self-righteousness, the Nigat women ‘blacklisted’ Kerry for her association with an alleged rapist, but as she rightly pointed out, visiting an alleged criminal after his arrest or taking him food is not a crime. Furthermore, when I spoke to her, Kerry threatened to ‘bring Nigat down’ if she got kicked out of the association as was being instigated by the other leaders. She told me threateningly that she would not be kicked out of the association she had built through her sweat. Kerry’s monthly income from the local NGO that the Nigat founders were employees of was a fortune by (former) sex worker standards and it was in jeopardy. She told me with bitterness, ‘I can tell secrets that would make the association shut down’ (The next Footnote details how the Nigat leadership won this battle with Kerry). From the perspective of Nigat, I saw the rape episode as a watershed moment for the

association, where the leaders' indignation at the rape of 'one of theirs' and subsequent censure of Kerry who was after all, a founding member, highlighted the fissures in the association.

Nigat: Hits and Misses of Quasi-Feminist Organizing

One of the focus group discussions held at Nigat focused on the views that the participants, most of them registered members of Nigat, have of the association. Mostly blank looks followed my line of questioning and I was reminded of my previous impression that there is not much dialogue that occurs between the Nigat administration and the membership, which at the time numbered about 100 sex workers.

In terms of expectations, some interviewees echoed the sentiment that Nigat should work with the Police to mitigate the violence routinely experienced by sex workers, and that 'they' should offer practical help and solutions when sex workers approach the office with complaints related to violence. Melat specified that 'Nigat should be our *tekerakari* - advocate.'

While some members I spoke to referred to Nigat as an association or an entity, most of the women I spoke to seemed to confuse Nigat with its leadership which was limited to five founding members. Even those sex workers who are members of the association refer to it as something owned and operated by the founders; and even where they pay nominal membership fees – which are collected irregularly – there does not seem to exist a sense that the association is theirs to shape and contribute to.

Furthermore, when I ventured outside the Bole/Chechniya areas where Nigat is active, most sex workers had not even heard of the association, even though many of them had benefitted from safe sex trainings provided by the organization in conjunction with a more established NGO. Nigat won the prestigious

international Red Ribbon award in 2010 for its work on promoting safe sex among thousands of sex workers not only in Addis Ababa but also in most Ethiopian cities through its collaboration with an internationally-funded HIV/AIDS project. However, Nigat has obviously not done an effective job in promoting itself among prospective members.

In addition, although Nigat states in its mission that it works to promote the welfare of sex workers and there was, at least in the beginning, real activism around the rights of the sex worker, at other times, the leaders seem to give the impression that they have ‘done good’ to exit sex work.

There is real resentment among members that only the leadership has really benefited from the windfall of money that has come the way of Nigat. The leaders are usually the first ones to sign up for any benefits such as the computer lessons sponsored by funding I helped secure from a European Embassy, and although they have set up a traditional savings scheme or *ekub*, the monthly amount they have decided to contribute is so high that only the founders with regular employment can afford to ‘throw in’ that amount regularly.

There is also limited theorizing at Nigat, and I found that the status of the founders as former sex workers who presently benefit greatly from funding that comes in the name of sex workers created a tense and often confused atmosphere. In addition, the women in leadership position often treat the association as their own ‘house’. Birqae in Piassa characterized Nigat as hiring and firing the professionals hired to assist them at will, without the decision going to the General Assembly as per the norm for associations.

Furthermore, Girmawit, the only chairperson the association has had told me that rather than formal qualifications, an employee’s ‘mood’ or her demeanor is a more important criterion for hire at Nigat. It follows therefore that the real perceived merit of Haimi, the manager at the time of research, is that she

is comfortable chewing with them, rather than her skills in proposal writing or facilitating meetings.

Furthermore, Nigat members often complain that the benefits that they get are arbitrary and tied more to personal connections with the women in leadership positions than to any clear criteria. After months of quiet observation, it was my conclusion that because there was no oversight over the work of Nigat, there was also no professional standardization of the treatment of members.

While the leadership has set the tone for the absence of a real, grassroots-type of activism, the membership must also bear some responsibility for its lack of participation and efforts to institute a sense of ownership over the association set up in the name of sex workers. From what I could see, members came to Nigat to see what they could get in terms of financial benefits; including the ‘transport allowance’ they are customarily provided with to attend the safe sex trainings as well as regular meetings. In addition, I observed that, perhaps because there is no precedence of organizing in sex work in Ethiopia, the members do not hold Nigat accountable to them as a community.

Returning to my original characterization of sisterhood as a feminist principle, it is my assessment that Nigat is failing its role as an association of sex workers. Its representation and modes of operation are particularly disappointing when compared with the broad-based activism of sex work associations elsewhere. I mentioned in the previous section the Malindi Welfare Association in Kenya which sex workers join by paying a registration fee after which they pay a monthly fee. In addition to low-interest loans, members receive financial assistance to pay rent and hospital bills for themselves and their families. In the case of the death of a member, the association covers full burial costs (Kibicho, 2009: 181).

In West Bengal, India, sex worker associations which operate under a state-wide sex workers’ collective called Durbar have actively engaged in political advocacy, community and economic development, including the creation of a sex workers’ collective which provides micro-credit and even banking services.

This co-operative, called USHA is one of the most successful in the state (Evans, Jana and Lambert, 2010:11).

Meanwhile, in Suriname, the Maxi Linder Association which is named for a well-known sex worker who was a role model for other sex workers focuses on building solidarity among sex workers to look out for each other while they were working (Cannings, Dusilley et al, in Kempadoo, Kamala and Jo Doezema (eds.), 1998). Lastly, while working in Thailand in 2005, I had a chance to visit the Chiang Mai offices of EMPOWER which impressed me and is credited by its members as a laudable association. Since 1986, EMPOWER has been providing legal literacy to sex workers. The association which is run by current and former sex workers provides its members with healthcare, and provides free English-language lessons to enable sex workers to better communicate and negotiate with their clients. EMPOWER works in the suburban areas of Bangkok as well as in Chiang Mai in the northern part of the country (Seabrook, 2001:172).

For me personally, the rape incident I discuss in the previous section, and the way the Nigat leadership dealt with it, marked the beginning of the end of my involvement with Nigat. The timing coincided with the conclusion of my research which would not have been possible without Nigat and I was grateful for the contribution of the leaders. However, I had come to realize that the concerns I had with the Nigat leadership were large enough to make further collaboration unfeasible. Having concluded the last of my interviews, and still on good terms with all, I slowly withdrew my presence and support at Nigat until nothing remained apart from the occasional phone call from members who wanted to say hello³⁸.

³⁸Postscript on Nigat

Beyond Sisterhood

I found sisterhood to be a highly complex issue within sex work. As I have shown throughout this chapter, I came across principle-affirming stories of sex workers coming to each others' aid in times of crisis, and helping raise each other's children, and I also observed fierce acts of loyalty and defense of other women. On the other hand, I was often disheartened to see sex workers attack one another and fail to benefit from working in unity. Nigat, in particular, I argue, has missed its opportunity to rise to its label of a sex worker association and is often hobbled by personality clashes and the removal of its founding members from a potential popular base.

Sex Workers' Social Capital

A membership of Nigat, as nebulous an entity it is, does furnish some sex workers with some of the formal benefits that Portes states is a component of social capital including access to training and 'travel allowance' (1998: 19). However, it is my observation that what really equips sex workers in Addis Ababa with social capital is the informal groupings that sex workers find themselves in s members of a highly visible, yet isolated Addis Ababa underworld. As Portes explains, the relational aspect of social capital depends on reciprocity; trust, obligations and expectations which facilitate social and economic exchange between group members (1998: 22). It follows that in return for support during illnesses and childbirth, sex workers in Addis Ababa are expected to adhere to the social norms of reciprocity and exclusivity which include shunning other sex workers who operate outside the self-policed standards of sex work in Addis Ababa such as agreeing to 'deviant' sexual acts and lowering standard fees.

Kerry died a few months after this incident. From what I heard from a fellow volunteer who facilitated a reconciliation dialogue between Kerry and the other leaders, the latter had decided to 'forgive' her for her many transgressions and for her continued association with Eskedar's alleged rapist after Kerry had spoken to the women in private. Having suffered ill-health for as long as I have known her and rumored to be HIV-positive, Kerry apparently got sick soon after that meeting and died in October 2012.

Has Sisterhood Outrun Its Course?

At the beginning of my research period, I had imagined I would spend a year immersed in sisterhood, learning and documenting all the ways in which Addis Ababa sex workers support each other and organize for a better future. In retrospect, I see that my romantic understanding of sisterhood was naïve at best, and my personal disillusionment has given way to a more nuanced understanding of the realities of a community of women working together. I have seen the complex pull-and-tug of mutual support and competition and realized that real life does not neatly fit into the ideals of feminist solidarity.

Therefore, I echo the statement by Charmaine Williams and Shirley Chau, feminist academicians of colour writing on feminist collaboration across ethnic lines, that sisterhood is perhaps a notion that has outgrown its usefulness (2013: 293). The authors' argument that we cannot rely on a group of people who are thrown together by 'accidents of birth and the coincidence of marginalization' to effect social change strikes a chord in my analysis (Ibid).

My interviews and focus group discussions provided ample evidence that sisterhood as a political concept or a form of solidarity that sex workers consciously adopt in order to move forward together is completely absent in both the narrative of Nigat and in the everyday interactions of sex workers in Addis Ababa. However, as Williams and Chau conclude, 'we need to stop looking for sisters and start looking for collaborators. Privileging political commitment over identity equivalence opens up new possibilities' (2013: 293). The informal networks of support and sex workers' budding social capital may offer possibilities for this moderated version of sisterhood, if the existing partnerships and supportive (yet informal) networks discussed in this chapter are built upon. I hope for small steps towards a sisterhood of sex workers who may not tackle the macro issues challenging them just yet but who can work together to make their daily lives a little easier.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

When I presented my initial research findings at a public seminar at SOAS in October 2012, an older Ethiopian man in the audience asked me why I wanted to research a topic as unsavory as the violence experienced by sex workers in the city we both call home. He said that sex workers are a tiny proportion of the Ethiopian (female) population and that their experiences are not representative of the relationship between men and women in Ethiopia.

I have often reflected on these comments during my writing period. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, both sex work and the endemic violence within it are not the unattractive outliers of the gender regime in Ethiopia; they are very much part of the fabric of the gendered social life of Addis Ababa. Sex work is only the extreme manifestation of women's commodified sexuality, and although numbers are hard to come by, even a cursory scan of the nightlife in Addis Ababa shows that sex work is booming. In addition, the sexualized violence that sex workers experience lies on a continuum with the violence they and other women experience *as women* in Ethiopia. The clients of sex workers are the same men whose masculinity is prescribed by patriarchal norms to be aggressive and violent and who risk being labeled '*feri*' ('coward') if they hesitate to hit women into submission.

Sex workers in Addis Ababa are marginalized, stigmatized by mainstream society as 'bad' women and patronized by the NGO industry as 'victims'. Sex work in general and the violence engendered within it has been neglected by feminist inquiry and where radical feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys have engaged with the topic, it has been treated solely as an extreme example of patriarchal objectification with little or no room for sex workers to exercise agency or choice.

It was in this context that my research aimed to complicate sex workers' experience in the specific milieu of Addis Ababa, against the backdrop of Ethiopian gender roles and relations. In the field research consisting of focus group discussions and interviews with 87 sex workers, as well as scores of male respondents, I considered how men and women's sexuality is constructed in Ethiopia and how this positions sex workers at the far end of the commodified-sexuality continuum. Combined with the construction of Ethiopian male sexuality as deliberately aggressive and violent, the role that sex workers play on the gender relations front sets them up for particular vulnerability to violence, although this is only an extreme manifestation of what most Ethiopian women experience in the context of intimate relationships. In this regard, I often heard the phrase, '*Birq New?*' - 'Is that anything new?' when an interviewee would share an account of violence. That rhetorical question underscored for me the pervasiveness of violence in the relationship between men and women, and particularly between men and sex workers. In addition, Zeni's nonchalant statement: '*set nesh, timechalesh*' - 'you are a woman, you will be hit' illustrated the fact that violence is weaved into the fabric of normative intimate relationships in Addis Ababa. The violence that is meted out to sex workers is condoned by societal norms where violence against women has not sufficiently been problematized, particularly when it is targeted against those women transgressing social norms.

However, sex workers are not hopeless victims – I found my respondents to be women with agency, doing the best they can with the opportunities they have been given. Most have entered sex work for a myriad of reasons that integrate circumstance with choice, and this agency carries through to their responses to violence. They instigate violence, they fight back and if they can get away with it, they steal from clients.

‘What Is the Use of Staring at Each Other?’

I asked Soliyana, the outspoken sex worker I introduced in Chapter Five, if her siblings, whom she supports, know what she does for a living. She affirmed and asked me back what good it would do to ‘just stare at each other in helplessness’ when she can go out, make a decent living selling sex and support all of them. While the level of agency that sex workers have may be open to debate, the important point is that according to my research, sex workers in Addis Ababa do not view themselves as victims. As I have argued in Chapter Five, sex work is usually taken up by choice following a rational weighing of the sex workers’ admittedly limited economic options. Many sex workers say that they do want to leave sex work but as with other occupations, they want to move on to an easier, better-paying job; when I told Melat and Rahel, whom I had got to know quite well, about openings at my neighborhood supermarket, they looked into the jobs, decided they could not make ends meet at the 500 Birr (17 Pounds) monthly salary and did not ask me to look out for a new line of work for them anymore. When I interviewed the two in January 2012, Melat had recently moved to *Asphalt* (street-based) work from a bar because she preferred the hours; she felt that her son Girum who was ten years old at the time needed more of her supervision. When sex workers navigate their labour, they try to move ‘up’ the social ladder, to work in clubs or emigrate; they do not want to move ‘down’ to less-paying and unvalued lines of work such as domestic labour, waiting tables or customer service in supermarkets. The smart economics arguments, as well as the self-perception of sex workers as entrepreneurs as opposed to victims, was reflected in both Trotter’s study of sex work in Cape Town and Durban in South Africa (2008) and in Kibicho’s *Sex Tourism in Africa: Kenya’s Booming Industry* (2009).

Beyond individual exercises of agency, sex workers often help each other to prevent or address the violence that is a permanent occupational hazard for them. However, these episodes of mutual assistance do not necessarily translate into sisterhood in the feminist sense of the term. I did not find the community solidarity I had envisioned in designing the research, although I did find some evidence of nascent social capital among my respondents. As I discuss in Chapter Six, a strong driving force behind my research was a deep-rooted and quite personal desire to find sisterhood as an academic pursuit in line with my feminist perspectives. By the end of my research, I had to admit that this romanticized wish had perhaps led me to expect too much from Nigat and what it could achieve in bringing sex workers together to fight for their rights. This was unfair as I knew before I started my research that Nigat has never claimed to be a feminist organization, much less asked to be part of my PhD inquiry. There was not much academic or organizational theorizing behind the organizing of a sex workers' association in 2006; its establishment itself had been a huge feat. In addition, the creation of a community of sisterhood was never on the Nigat agenda. The association provides essential support to sex workers, particularly in the form of safe sex trainings, but in many ways, it is a service provider organization rather than a grassroots movement that seeks to redress the violence encountered by sex workers by bringing together their collective power.

Through my research, I have come to realize that women's solidarity is not as straightforward as (perhaps old-fashioned) feminist ideals would have us believe. In her book, *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War* (2011) the future Nobel Peace Prize winner, Leymah Gbowee, describes the impressive Mass Action Movement she led in Liberia, galvanizing thousands of women to participate in sit-ins to create pressure on warring factions to end the 14-year old conflict in the country. After the war ended and democracy brought in the first elected woman president of Africa into power, the women's groups that Gbowee leads continue to hold the government accountable for gains in women's rights.

However, as Gbowee explains, the stunning success of these women's groups was pocked with infighting among the women-only leadership, the questioning of characters and what she describes, quoting Gloria Stenem, as 'Pull Her Down' syndrome (2011, 199). Women in the Liberia case, like those in my research in Addis Ababa, were not a monolithic group and it is perhaps essentializing of feminism to think that we can always cast all our other labels, prejudices and categories to work effectively *solely* as women or as feminists, or even as in the case of Nigat, as sex workers. It is unfortunate, but not surprising, given the women's difficult lives, and the absence of political consciousness, that Nigat remains an 'every woman for herself' kind of association.

Despite these personally disappointing findings on the sisterhood front, I still believe that sex workers in Addis Ababa can work together creatively and in solidarity, accommodating differences and overcoming boundaries to achieve some of the communal power observed in similar settings elsewhere. As with all women and other oppressed groups, small steps toward challenging the dominant powers are required to bring about positive change.

If my interlocutor at SOAS were to ask me again, I would now tell him that I chose to study an 'ugly' topic that will not go away just because it is ignored, because it affects a significant (and possibly increasing) proportion of Ethiopian women and girls. Also, as I have pointed out, researching the 'margins' of society has yielded interesting information on the 'center' – on the gendered, commoditized relationship between Ethiopian women and men. Feminist analyses are almost non-existent in Ethiopia, even on 'gender issues', and examining a topic that had been completely neglected, that of the experiences and perceptions of a stigmatized group of women has been a worthwhile endeavor because it has revealed truths about both this marginalized group and the wider society within which it operates.

Although I argue that Ethiopian sex workers may represent Ethiopian women as a group in that their sexuality is commodified (albeit to a more obvious degree)³⁹ and they may realistically expect to experience violence in their intimate relationship with men, sex workers are also outliers to the Ethiopian woman identity which as a post-colonial feminist, I refrain from essentializing down to a single identity (Narayan, 2000). In addition to adding to the limited feminist theorizing that occurs in Ethiopia and Africa at large, this thesis engages directly with the ‘Sex Wars’ within western feminism which pits those feminists who completely oppose sex work (Barry, 1995; Jeffreys, 2009) with those Sex-Positive feminists who argue that devoid of coercion, sex work may be viewed as a legitimate occupation (Doezema, 1998; Kapur, 2002). Recognizing the agency of sex workers and locating the problem with unbridled violence and Sexism rather than sex work *per se*, I support the sex-positive camp within feminism and advocate for the safety of sex workers.

Personal Reflections

I am often asked if my position means I ‘like’ sex work –my response is that I dislike it even more now that I have researched it. Apart from the associated stigma and danger, the very act of sleeping with anonymous men, over and over again seems deadening to me. So when Amira, the mother I discussed in Chapter Five, told me at the end of my research period that she had started a catering course organized by a religious organization (which thoughtfully, also provides a crèche for the children) and had stopped working, I found myself relieved and happy to hear it. I wanted to urge her ‘make sure you don’t fall back into sex work’ but I was careful to not alienate the other sex workers taking part in the conversation. As I discuss in Chapter Five, many of my respondents view sex work *as* work but that does not mean that I think it is a job like any other; as many sex workers as I know through my activism and research, I would still be taken aback if a close friend were to disclose that she sells sex.

³⁹ Ellen Strong, a radical feminist who sold sex for a period of years in the 1960’s states, ‘All the prostitute has done is eliminate the bullshit [of women using their bodies as commodities to exchange for material gain].’ (1970: 291)

As I have argued in the Introduction and Chapter Three of this thesis, sex work is normalized in Addis Ababa for a variety of reasons, and I choose to work with the reality – that sex work is the chosen economic path for a large segment of Ethiopian women – rather than my personal dislike for the buying and selling of sex. I admired the tenacity of the women in navigating the treacherous world of selling sex but also often despaired, privately, at their wastefulness and the ways in which they worsened their own situation, from throwing rocks at police officers to false accusations of rape.

Although it was an eye-opener into the gender regime of my city, my field research was also often very hard - I encountered more ugliness than I had known exists in the city where I have lived for most of my life. The stories of violence I heard were often harrowing, and left me feeling helpless. It was also very important to me to not be ‘extractive’ and I worked hard to win the trust and acceptance of sex workers in order to access their stories. However, I am certain that at the end of my year-long journey with Nigat members, I benefited more than they could have.

Negative Images

Implicit in the chiding by the man who objected to my research topic was the fear that the end product of this research will cast a negative light on Ethiopian women and men, and on our city and country. As the thesis is produced primarily for a non-Ethiopian, academic audience, I am of course wary of negative representation – and my thesis is the kind of knowledge production that is frowned upon by the Ethiopian government which is currently highly concerned with ‘image building.’ However, an academic inquiry cannot hope to unearth only the positive facets of any society, and after all, my themes; feminism, patriarchy, violence, sex work and sisterhood are universal, and should be understood as such.

Policy Implications

An obvious question might be how this thesis or its subsequent publication may benefit sex workers. It is a product of pure academic curiosity and does not pretend to make policy recommendations surrounding sex work in Addis Ababa. However, sex workers are seriously underserved by all services except safe sex education – which speaks more of a public health concern than a feminist, rights-based view of sex work. If policy makers or aid/development workers in Addis Ababa were to read my thesis and gain an insight into the women they often try to ‘save’, that would be a welcome output of my efforts.

Beyond Sex Work

What will the lives of the sex workers I spoke to look like after five or ten years of ‘doing *business*?’ Asking about their future hopes and dreams was always a minefield, often misinterpreted as judgment that my respondents were not planning ahead, and so I omitted that question from my interview protocol early on. As most Ethiopians, most sex workers who I did discuss the future with said that they trusted that ‘God will provide for tomorrow.’ From my understanding of sex work, I assume that most of my respondents will continue to sell sex for as long as their looks allow; some might move on to become ‘*Akafai*’ landladies for younger sex workers while others may diversify to related fields such as selling *khat* or to open their own drinking places. Others will concede that they would rather make less money that is nevertheless ‘clean’ and go back to domestic work as did Salam, while a few, like Birqae, may find their passions elsewhere – inspired by a photographer she met through Nigat, she left sex work to train as a photographer’s assistant.

More others will gladly take the training in hairdressing or food preparation; feminized work that NGOs try to direct sex workers towards as Ejigae and Messi did⁴⁰. A few who are considered lucky will emigrate to one of the Gulf countries and if they can stand the rigors of that life, may come back relatively rich. Some of these returnees, sophisticated and highly attractive, will rejoin sex work at the higher echelon; as masseuses in one of the many new '24 Hour' massage parlours in the Bole area or as exclusive contractors providing services to Arab and Western tourists. Some sex workers will probably get married – one of the founders of Nigat left sex work and got married early on in my research but was divorced by the time I finished. Although she has not gone back to sex work, sex workers often talk about acquaintances who have gone back to selling sex if their marriages fail. Lastly, for all the efforts to instill condom use for every sexual encounter, some of the sex workers will contract HIV and perhaps die of its complications. No matter how long they stay in 'the game', sex workers will continue to provide for their children and support their elderly parents with their earnings while investing in their own attractiveness and providing their bodies with their *sous* (addictions), mostly to *khat*.

As I have shown in this thesis, the normalization of sex work has not been matched with an acceptance of the sex worker as a member of society. All Ethiopian women and girls (and occasionally, boys and young men of limited power and means) are at risk of experiencing sexual violence; sex workers, as a stigmatized and feminized sub-group of women are always in particular danger. If violence against sex workers is to be taken seriously, it will require the committed engagement of sex workers' associations such as Nigat who will need to speak up for themselves and engage with both policy makers and law enforcers.

⁴⁰ The strongest incentive for taking these months-long trainings, paid for by NGOs is the generous per diem the women are given to attend the trainings which allow some to stop sex work as long as the training continues. However, I know of very few cases where the women have gone on to use the training to find work that allows them to permanently transition out of sex work.

Beyond the imagined ‘Sisterhood of *Shelaes*’, there need to be strategic collaborations that will move beyond safe sex rhetoric to the acknowledgement of sex workers as members of society deserving protection. The outlook for such organizing is extremely dim, particularly considering the repressive character of the Ethiopian government which looks in suspicion at most forms of organizing. Increased political freedom with an improved check-and-balance system - where stronger women’s rights organizations and a freer media are able to hold the government accountable on its mandate to protect its citizens - would at least create the necessary pre-conditions for Ethiopian society to tackle violence against women in general, and against sex workers in particular.

The Way Forward

Although seriously weakened, there are still some embers of activism on the ground, although very little of it may be considered feminist or grassroots. A couple of women’s groups based at Addis Ababa University are making good use of social media to instigate questions of women’s rights, particularly around reports of escalating sexual violence, and a feminist group I co-founded nearly a year ago, Setaweet (‘Of Woman’) engages with civic groups, high school students and influential organizations to create an Ethiopian feminist platform, and to examine dominant forms of masculinity. The Setaweet Circle is composed of fifteen to twenty feminist women; it meets once a month and aims to facilitate consciousness-raising and learning led by members – a recent session was on sexual minority identities in Ethiopia, another taboo subject⁴¹. At the end of the day, perhaps what any one of us can do is limited to this; a very small chipping of the overarching patriarchy that deems men as violent and equips women with all but defensive, sexualized agency.

⁴¹ As Setaweet and its sister groups are volunteer-led and do not receive funding, they are not affected by the legislation curtailing advocacy work.

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