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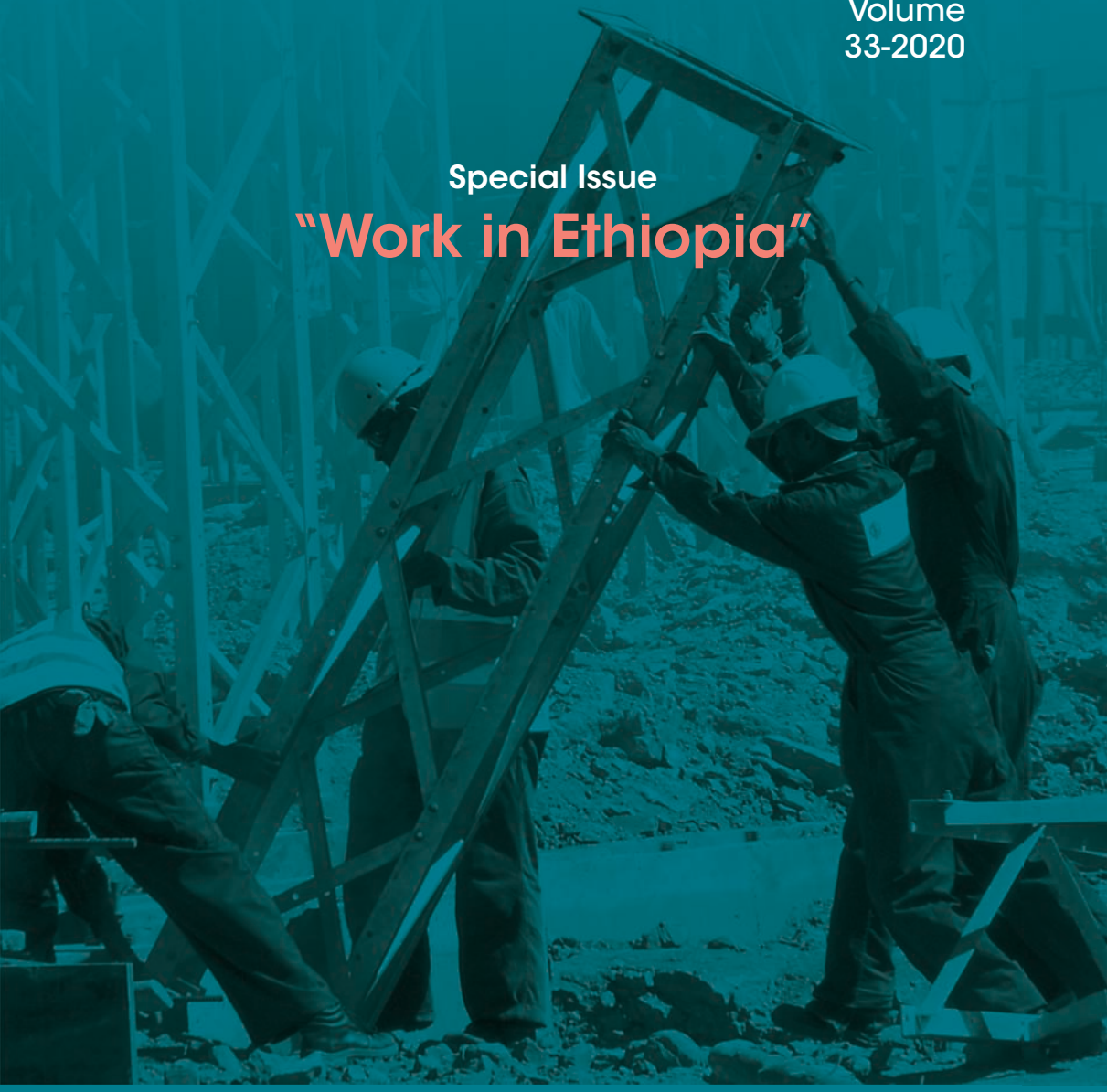

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An ethnographic look into conjugal abuse in Ethiopia: a study from the Orthodox *Täwahədo* community of Aksum through the local religio-cultural framework

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of studies on intimate partner violence in Ethiopia. The latest Ethiopian Demographic and Health surveys have established that marital violence, affecting women primarily, is commonplace and is widely "justified" by populations across Ethiopia. Surprisingly, very little research has been conducted on the ethnographic realities of conjugal abuse or, and especially, on the interface of people's attitudes about the issue with their religious beliefs and folklore systems. Paralleling the wider field of gender-based violence studies in African development, many of the available studies presuppose feminist explanations that associate conjugal abuse with gender inequalities, which are fostered through cultural or religious

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parameters. These are presented without providing, however, rigorous empirical evidence to demonstrate the connections. This paper presents a previously unexplored theology-informed anthropological study into the realities of conjugal abuse and attitudes in the predominantly Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* population of Aksum, Northern Ethiopia. This study utilised a decolonial conceptual and methodological approach and combined a gender-sensitive ethnographic analysis in the local languages with an investigation of the local religious tradition from an informed insider's perspective. This study provides a preliminary look into some of the mechanisms that have contributed to the perpetuation of conjugal abuse and its tolerance in the rural communities and the city of Aksum. It adds considerable complexity to the interpretation of attitudes towards conjugal abuse that are not currently captured in population surveys or existing studies from Ethiopia.

Keywords: conjugal abuse, Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church, Ethiopia, Aksum, ethnographic realities, attitudes, religion, spirituality, decolonial epistemology, participatory methods

Résumé

Ces dernières années, les études sur la violence entre partenaires intimes en Éthiopie se sont multipliées. Les dernières enquêtes éthiopiennes sur la démographie et la santé ont établi que la violence conjugale affectant principalement les femmes est courante et largement légitimée dans toute l'Éthiopie. Étonnamment, très peu de recherches ont été menées sur les réalités plus ethnographiques de la violence conjugale et en particulier sur les connexions entre l'attitude des gens face à la question et leurs croyances religieuses et systèmes culturels. Parallèlement au champ plus large de la violence liée au genre dans le développement de l'Afrique, de nombreuses études disponibles présupposent des explications féministes, associant la violence conjugale à des inégalités de genre favorisées par des paramètres culturels ou religieux, sans fournir de preuves empiriques rigoureuses pour démontrer ce lien. Cet article présente une enquête anthropologique originale, fondée sur la théologie, sur les réalités et les attitudes des individus face aux abus conjugaux chez les chrétiens orthodoxes *Täwaḥədo* d'Aksum, dans le nord de l'Éthiopie. Cette étude a adopté une approche conceptuelle et méthodologique décoloniale et a combiné un cadre analytique sensible au genre théorisé de « l'intérieur » avec une étude approfondie de la tradition religieuse locale. L'étude fournit un premier aperçu de certains des mécanismes qui ont contribué à la perpétuation de violences conjugales et à la tolérance envers celles-ci dans les communautés urbaines et rurales d'Aksoum, ajoutant une complexité considérable à l'interprétation des attitudes face à la violence conjugale qui ne sont actuellement pas prises en compte dans les enquêtes démographiques et autres études produites en Éthiopie.

Mots-clés : violences conjugales, Église orthodoxe *Täwaḥədo*, Éthiopie, Aksum, réalités ethnographiqus, attitudes, religion, spiritualité, épistémologie décoloniale, observation participante

According to statistical evidence, about one in three women in Ethiopia have experienced some form of spousal abuse in their lifetimes (CSAE & ICF, 2017: 305). In the three last Demographic and Health surveys significant numbers of men and women across the country were reported to have "justified" wife-hitting in certain situations, although percentages have declined over time (CSAE & ORC Macro, 2006; CSAE & ICF, 2012, 2017). While conjugal abuse is pervasive and affects most societies in the world as well as Ethiopia as a whole (Yemane Berhane, 2005; FDRE, 2008; MoWCYA, 2013; CSAE & ICF, 2017), the extent of wife-hitting and tolerant attitudes towards it in the region of Tigray is contextually compelling. The indigenous religion of Ethiopia, Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Christianity, was formally embraced in the ancient capital of Aksum where the majority of the population still adheres to this faith[1]. Whilst being a complex and eclectic tradition, it has theologically upheld the dignity of both men and women (Gebre Egziabher Jr., 2015; Heregewoin Cherinet, 2015) and has aspired to the cultivation of loving relationships between the two in accordance with divine commandments (Aymro Wondmagegnehu & Motovu, 1970: 108-109). Additionally, Tigray served as the headquarters of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) during the civil war against the Derg regime (Marcus, 1994; Young, 1997). In this context, Tigrayan women were able to fight alongside men. It is generally agreed that this resulted in the improvement of Ethiopian women's social status (Hammond, 1989; Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, 1991; Minale Adugna, 2001; Mjaaland, 2004; Aregawi Berhe, 2004; Burgess, 2013; *Civil Code 1960*; Krzeczunowicz, 1967). Given this religio-historic matrix, one might presume that there would be disapproval towards conjugal abuse in the region. Instead, studies of the population report favourable attitudes towards conjugal abuse, and these then need to be contextualised within local people's worldviews and material realities in order to be better understood.

Existing studies on intimate partner violence in Ethiopia have primarily focused on the scope of the phenomenon, the affected groups, risk factors or causes, and health-related consequences. The majority use household surveys, qualitative methods, or a combination of the two (Deyessa *et al.*, 1998; Amanuel Gessessew & Mengiste Mesfin, 2004; Yemane Berhane, 2005; Tegbar Yigzaw *et al.*, 2004; Abbi Kedir & Lul Admasachew, 2010; Sileshi G. Abeya *et al.*, 2011; Kebede Deribe *et al.*, 2012; Girmatsion Feseha *et al.*, 2012; Allen & Raghallaigh,

[1] According to the latest available statistics, 95% of the Tigrayan population adheres to this faith (FDRE, 2008: 111).

2012, 2013; Marelign Tilahun Malaju & Getu Degu Alene, 2013; Agumasie Semahegn & Bezatu Mengistie, 2015; Berhane Hailu Gebrezgi *et al.*, 2017; Erulkar, 2013). However, this scholarship has yet to contextualise experiences of intimate partner violence in the local religio-cultural frameworks or more comprehensively and multi-dimensionally within the material realities of the victims. Paralleling the wider field of gender and development, many of the existing studies invoke gender-based violence (GBV) explanations that consider the gendered dimensions of culture or wider social norms responsible for making women vulnerable to men's abuse[2]. These studies fall short on a couple of levels: firstly, they do not provide the necessary empirical evidence to demonstrate the causal connection. This would require a multi-dimensional study that directly engages with people's lived experiences and links these experiences to societal and institutional norms. Secondly, many of these articles make assertive statements about the negative influence of "religion" despite their usually a-theological and a-historical rationalisations (Gemetchu Megerssa, 2002; Tizita Jemberu Kebede, 2008: 15-17; Abbi Kedir & Lul Admasachew, 2010; Agumasie Semahegn & Bezatu Mengistie, 2015: 2; Helina Beyene, 2015: 33-34; Eshetu Gurmu & Senait Endale, 2017). Thirdly, the emphasis on sociological explanations has meant a neglecting of the consideration of ontogenetic (related to biological growth), psychological (personality disorders, intergenerational trauma, etc.), and relational factors (situational violence, couple dynamics) of intimate partner violence that scholarship from North America has drawn attention to in recent decades (see an overview in Lawson, 2013).

While it is not denied that women across Ethiopia have suffered profound forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation (Heregewoin Cherinet & Esete Mulugeta, 2003; MOWA, 2006; Eshetu Dibabu, 1997 E.C.), which would perhaps justify the choice of GBV terminology for many of the authors, these experiences cannot be generalised or painted with a single brush as there exist a host of complex factors that have shaped women's lives and conditions in different societies of Ethiopia. Jenny Hammond's compilation documenting Tigrayan women's participation in the liberation struggle, for example, demonstrated a significant transition wherein there was increased awareness of previous inequalities and less tolerance of these in the aftermath of the liberation struggle in this region and across Ethiopia in general (Hammond, 1989). Helen Pankhurst's study from Menz in Amhara, which provides one of the most comprehensive ethnographic accounts of women's realities to-date,

[2] I am referring here to the scholarship published in English. Studies on domestic violence in Amharic or other languages of Ethiopia may exist that I was not exposed to, but this does not change the fact that the mainstream scholarship and thought tends to a certain ideological stance.

outlined that while women were not free from "oppression," women did "take control" where and when they could, thereby challenging monolithic theories of gender inequality (Pankhurst, 1992). Thera Mjaaland, who investigated women's agency in Tigray in order to understand the mechanisms that enabled women's participation in the liberation war, proposed that in the aftermath of the war, many women willingly returned to their ordinary roles as mothers and wives. This may have been a response to broader cultural constraints and deeply entrenched gender norms and standards (Mjaaland, 2004). These same studies also suggest a nuanced relationship between religious beliefs, the Church, and reported gender symmetries. For example, Pankhurst strongly affirmed that the Church encouraged the "subordination" of women by placing authority in the hands of men and that the local religious tradition played a particularly influential role in the lives of women. However, her study did not reveal how the laity understood and embodied their religious vernacular tradition or how women's embodiment of religious teachings may relate to their experiences of conjugal abuse or their responses to it.

Moreover, the post-revolutionary Ethiopian state has taken concrete steps to improve women's conditions and to ensure their dignity within the marital relationship. A Proclamation attached to the 1960 Civil Code led to the re-articulation of what were previously patriarchal family laws (*Civil Code Proclamation No. 165/1960*), in the sense that they considered the male the head of the family and responsible of its management. It is widely agreed that the first Civil Code was founded on values that were derived from the indigenous Christian faith, which is exemplified in the *Fəṭḥa Nägäśt* (**ፍትሐ ነገሥት**), the main Canonical book of the Church (Singer, 1970). The most indicative excerpt is the first section in article 635 of the Civil Code, titled "Head of the Family," which was omitted entirely in the Revised Family Law (2000). The section "Management of the Family" was rearticulated under the principles of equality (*The Revised Family Law 2000*). The current legal framework, in general, adopts fundamental human rights that also protect against intimate partner violence and other violent acts committed against women. Article 35 of the Constitution refers to the state's obligation to protect women and to eliminate harmful customary practices and that "[l]aws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited" (*Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,* article 35). The Criminal Code (2004) includes a section on crimes that are committed through harmful practices. Article 564 then stipulates: "[t]he relevant provision of this Code (Art. 555-560) shall apply to a person who, by doing violence to a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union, causes grave or common injury to his/her physical or mental health" (*The Criminal Code of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 414/2004*). There is currently no explicit reference to sexual offences committed within the confines of a

conjugal relationship, although this seems to be implied in Article 625 of the Criminal Code against "Taking Advantage of the Distress or Dependence of a Woman" (*ibid.*).

The general opinion among Ethiopian researchers is that the legal framework in Ethiopia still reflects a lingering influence of historical attitudes that include a partial acceptance or tolerance of intimate partner violence. This acceptance is often evinced through folklore sayings and aphorisms that seem to condone or justify the use of violence against women (Tayechalem G. Moges, 2009: 40; Heregewoin Cherinet, 2015). Some literature has directly associated pernicious folklore norms and intimate partner violence with religious beliefs and the Orthodox Church (e.g. Gemetchu Megerssa, 2002). However, this postulated tolerance could equally reflect the effect of pre-Christian customary norms and understandings, which receives less consideration in the literature. As Norman Singer has previously discussed, customary laws were extant before the introduction of *Fəṭḥa Nägäśt* and did not disappear afterwards (Singer, 1970). It is, of course, not unlikely that within indigenous Christian or Muslim communities of Ethiopia, some spousal abuse was perpetuated through misunderstandings of religious teachings or the deployment of religious language in order to justify folkloric attitudes. However, the existing scholarship rarely provides a people-centred perspective with regards to how religious beliefs may have been experienced locally nor does it explore their effect on people's behaviour with intimate partners or their attitudes about marriage or conjugal abuse. Other studies have found that incidents of conjugal abuse may be underreported and that victimised parties may avoid resorting to formal institutions, instead opting to mediate the situations through informal parties, including families, elders, neighbours and priests (Amanuel Gessessew & Mengiste Mesfin, 2004; Tegbar Yigzaw *et al.*, 2004; Agumasie Semahegn & Bezatu Mengistie, 2015; CSAE & ICF, 2017: 313). However, to date they have provided little information on how local clergy have interacted with victims or perpetrators and if they have had any impact locally on conjugal abuse and corresponding attitudes.

More qualitative studies in Tigray and Amhara, where the Ethiopian Orthodox faith is prevalent, provide useful insights about experiences of abuse and attitudes while also stressing the need for further ethnographic research (Tegbar Yigzaw *et al.*, 2010; Allen & Raghallaigh, 2012, 2013; Achenef Asmamaw Muche *et al.*, 2017). In Tigray, Mary Allen and Ní Raghallaigh found that the rural participants of their study perceived physical and sexual violence to be commonplace and that sexual violence was associated with a culturally specific expectation that wives cater to the needs of their husbands at all times (Allen & Raghallaigh, 2013: 258). Most of the women linked abusive attitudes with male beliefs of superiority and their expectations of holding control over sexual relationships, which they argued then led women to feel

obliged to serve men's needs. This specific mentality was associated with "culture," which, according to the female participants, "has been there for long, and it is still part of us. We females ourselves believed and accepted that we are under the male" (*ibid.*: 267). In a qualitative study conducted in Debre Tabor town in the Amhara region, Achenef Muche and colleagues also explored the community's perceptions and views about violence affecting married women. The authors found that domestic violence was described as common and that marital rape or coercion was not explicitly defined as abuse, which meant that research participants were less likely to openly disapprove of it. Notably, some participants related expectations surrounding marital sex with religious understandings of marriage, but these were not further elaborated. Like the majority of available studies, the authors employed the term "gender-based violence" throughout their article and even translated some of the research participants' reference to abuse to this term without being explicit about the participants' word choice in the original language (Achenef Asmamaw Muche *et al.*, 2017: 105). In general, the GBV scholarship has given little recognition to the fact that terminology is a crucial part of analytical discourse and must be justified. As I will demonstrate in this study, the ways individuals conceptualise conjugal abuse is closely related to how they understand and explain it; hence, closely engaging with terminological choices can foster a better understanding of local attitudes that maintain the existence and tolerance of the phenomenon.

More ethnographically reflexive, Tegbar Yigzaw and his colleagues produced a qualitative study that uniquely explored how local people understood and conceptualised conjugal abuse in their own terms as well as their perceptions and attitudes around the different issues they raised (Tegbar Yigzaw *et al.*, 2010). Their study took place in the city of Gondar in the Amhara region and engaged a diverse group of research participants that included male elders and family conflict arbitrators. The authors found variability in how local people thought about what constitutes abuse in marriage and some grey area between what is permissible and what is unacceptable. While physical violence was generally condemned as unnecessary, participants seemed to be more lenient with regards to cases where spousal conflict escalated to physical violence but where the woman was not seriously harmed. Opinions about sexual coercion were also variable, but the existence of normalised expectations that a wife should have sex with her husband according to his requests became salient. The research sample included both Christian and Muslim adherents and it is notable that some participants invoked religious idioms to emphasize opinions that a husband and wife should not withhold sex from each other.

Although not referring directly to the region of Tigray or Christian Orthodox *Täwahədo* populations, Abbi Kedir and Lul Admasachew's study offers some additional and important insights that are worth a closer look

(Abbi Kedir & Lul Admasachew, 2010). The authors interviewed 14 victims/survivors of different ethnic backgrounds in Addis Ababa, of which there were four housemaids, one housewife, and nine sex workers. Once again, the study assumed a feminist aetiology of intimate partner violence, which affirms that local culture was to blame for keeping women oppressed and submissive and therefore contributed to their abuse (*ibid.*: 443). However, interestingly, the authors found that "except for a handful of outliers, most of the women did not blame culture. Many did not believe that men could be violent and that they expected women to be subservient as a result of Ethiopian culture" (*ibid.*: 447). In other words, while the theoretical framework through which spousal abuse was approached by the researchers was one that considered the normative gender framework to blame, not all of the interlocutors perceived a direct link between culture-specific socialisation and male motivations for abuse.

While insightful, none of the aforementioned studies attempted to relate the discourses, perceptions, and attitudes they identified to the research participants' broader worldviews, vernacular realities, or social norms by means of an ethnographic study. How might the attitudes and perceptions of their research participants have been informed by and perpetuated within wider normative, institutional, and cosmological frameworks? How might these have related to actual human behaviour? Since religious beliefs were invoked in people's narratives as authoritative, how might have gender norms and marriage standards been informed by religious traditions and worldviews espoused by the research participants and their wider communities? If local people do not always blame culture for the abuse of women, how do they instead rationalise motivations for said abuse? Answering such questions requires a multi-dimensional study that engages with multiple levels of analysis, and one that prioritises the vernacular realities and articulations of human individuals. It also requires contextualising research in the specific historical development of individual Ethiopian societies as well as within their particular vernacular experiences with religious teachings and discourses.

In this vein, this article investigates local attitudes and realities of conjugal violence in the Orthodox *Täwahədo* community of Aksum through a gender-sensitive analysis that pays close attention to the local religio-cultural system, the normative and institutional frameworks, and the material conditions of the involved populations by engaging with men, women, and clergy. The research for this study was undertaken as part of a PhD project at SOAS University of London over the course of three years. The study's approach was informed by a practical-ethical objective to consolidate an approach to gender and development that relied on local people's conceptual repertoires and rationalisations in order to understand local issues with possible gender dimensions and to address them within indigenous worldviews (Istratii,

2017, 2018b). I have previously demonstrated that gender-sensitive analytical frameworks and theories have been historically grounded in Euro-American metaphysics of gender: fundamental conceptualisations and aetiologies of gender and gender relations that are dictated by philosophical paradigms dominant in mainstream western feminist discourses (Istratii, 2017: 2). While these conceptualisations have been problematized and diversified through the contributions of Asian, African, African-American women and other minority voices (Amadiume, 1987; Mohanty, 1988; Crenshaw, 1989; Kolawole, 1997; Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 1998; Chikwenye Ogunyemi, cited in Arndt, 2000), surprisingly conceptualisations of gender and gender equality in recent decades have been embedded deeply within a secular western worldview that has either suspiciously perceived religious institutions and parameters or considered them through western Euro-centric lenses (Istratii, 2018a). This tendency cannot be dissociated from western feminists' historical experiences with western forms of Christianity and social sexism, which causes contemporary bias toward non-western religious traditions and especially those of Christian theologies (Istratii, 2018a). As I have argued before, transposing these theoretical frameworks onto non-western exegetical and theological traditions can obscure context-specific configurations between religio-cultural knowledge and gender realities. It can also interfere with efforts to alleviate local issues in ways that 'speak to' the sensibilities of local religious populations.

This observation should not be conflated with a proposition that western theoretical frameworks should not be used outside of their original geographies, but rather that any concept or theory should emanate from a carefully contextualised study that engages directly with local people's discourses and that places emphasis on their lived experiences as contextualised within their own socio-cultural and normative systems. With this, I echo Filomina Chioma Steady who nearly a decade ago proposed that gender-sensitive research in Africa should incorporate "a historical perspective, a holistic perspective, multidimensionality, multiple time frames, multiple levels of analysis, multiple identities and realities, relational and dynamic contexts, comparative methods, oral history, life history and so forth" (2005: 321). Such multi-dimensional studies are more likely to provide a nuanced view into local realities than any theory embedded in the secular epistemology of the academy, which might not perceive or capture important discursive or non-discursive realms due to its epistemological situatedness in western worldviews of gender and "religion." As it was evidenced, these tendencies are not limited to western researchers, but equally apply to local scholars who might not reflect on the influence of Anglo-American epistemology on their thinking and analysis of local contexts. Insofar as I speak of a "decolonial" approach in this paper, I refer to a people-centred, multi-dimensional, and context-specific analytical

and theoretical approach that pays due attention to local conceptual repertoires of gender and "religion," while also recognising and making transparent (to the extent feasible) the subjectivity of the researcher in the research process.

It is not possible to do justice to the original PhD dissertation, comprised of 11 chapters (Istratii, 2019a). However, in this paper I attempt to highlight some key insights in order to make the study more accessible and to illuminate debates surrounding domestic violence and approaches to it in Ethiopia without further delay. With this objective in mind, this paper is structured as follows: the first section briefly explains the employed conceptual and methodological approach; I then move on to an overview of the fieldwork process and the study areas. The next section discusses the Church tradition and provides brief references to historical and contemporary ecclesiastical discourses on gender relations, marriage, and conjugal abuse in order to better make sense of the discourses collected from the laity and clergy in the villages around Aksum. The subsequent sections are dedicated to a presentation of local conceptualisations of conjugal abuse, attitudes toward different forms of conjugal abuse, and the contextualisation of these within the local normative, institutional, and material frameworks. A final section discusses linkages with religio-cultural parameters as well as the implications for alleviating conjugal abuse in the study areas as well as potentially within other Ethiopian Orthodox societies.

1. A decolonial conceptual and methodological approach

The current study was premised on a concerted investigation of the local belief system and relied on the research participants' discourses to extrapolate how gender identity was accommodated within the local metaphysical framework as well as to ascertain whether and how these perceptions became relevant to discourses of conjugal abuse. Attention was given to how interlocutors spoke about, explained, and described human personhood in their society, whether they conscientiously differentiated individuals and on what grounds, how they perceived relations between females and males, what normative understandings and ideals they associated with each, and from where interlocutors drew their standards.

Under similar epistemological motivations, I suspended any presumptions of a generic typology or definitions of conjugal abuse in favour of exploring local conceptualisations, rationalisations, and aetiologies. I engaged both men and women and used local terminologies to the best of my ability (as explained in Istratii, 2019b). The study included all marriage unions irrespective of marriage type (Church, cultural, civil) and non-formal relationships that were publicly acknowledged (often described by local experts as "irregular unions"). Furthermore, rather than classifying males as the main perpetrators of abuse and females as exclusively victims, I recognised that both females

and males can become abusive within the context of relationship dynamics, although often with different motivations and consequences. However, as existing statistical data indicates women are more often the victimised parties, my research methodology was designed to prioritise women's safety and to minimise the potential of re-traumatisation throughout the processes of communicating the study, recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent, conducting the research, and, finally, "writing up" the research.

The same context-specific and people-centred approach was followed to approximate the local religious tradition. It is the main premise of this study that religious systems develop historically and interweave with broader belief systems, socio-cultural realities, and human subjectivities in ways that are context-specific. This requires understanding what is considered locally authoritative theology and the conditions that have defined the repertoire of exegetical possibilities, preferably through the perspective of informed "insiders," such as theologians and Church historians. While lay believers might have diverse understandings and perceptions regarding their faith, it was reasonable to anticipate that the general framework of reasoning amongst the laity would not fall outside of fundamental religious tenets. This is not only due to the all-encompassing nature of Orthodox theology, but also the Church's emphasis on immutability and authenticity, with deviations being considered possibly heretical. This theology-informed analysis was juxtaposed to the vernacular religious life of the community to explore further connections.

In view of the colonial underpinnings of anthropology and the abstruse nature of this field, I also employed a more reflexive and transparent ethnographic approach that has been elaborated in a previous work (Istratii, 2019a). My priority was to be overt about my background and my motivations for undertaking this research, sharing with every new interlocutor I encountered my own background within Eastern Orthodoxy and how this informed the research objectives for this study. While in the field, I took measures to make evident how my identity influenced my encounters and research narratives, such as by keeping a detailed diary that discussed my role in each conversation. Additionally, efforts were made to be transparent about linguistic choices and the rationale behind interpreting the narratives of the research participants as I did, which I have highlighted in this study, but I analyse in detail in the original dissertation. Such strategies were supplemented by the use of participatory methods for cultural analysis in an effort to provide research participants with more opportunities and platforms to influence the interpretation of local discourses and observations. On the basis of findings from a previous study within a Muslim community in Senegal (Istratii, 2015a, 2015b), the participatory workshops were anticipated to capture society-wide normative standards or general beliefs around gender relations and marriage. These could also

grant some insight into local power politics and socio-cultural configurations (Price & Hawkins, 2002: 1358; Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Elmusharaf *et al.*, 2017; Istratii, 2018b). To improve their effectiveness, workshops incorporated the coffee ceremony where it was feasible.

Prior to and during fieldwork, considerable time and effort was dedicated to learning the relevant local languages in order to obtain access to the written theological tradition and for communication in the field. One year was spent learning intensive Amharic at SOAS (with which I had previous familiarity) and one summer learning Ge'ez with a tutor in Cambridge prior to fieldwork. Upon arrival in Ethiopia, I joined intensive Tigrigna classes taught by a native speaker professor at Addis Ababa University and I continued my training in Aksum through a series of strategies discussed in Istratii, 2019a. In general, Church theologians, teachers, monks, lay men and urban lay women were fluent in Amharic and this was used during interviews. However, older rural women spoke only Tigrigna, with the majority not having been to school, a trend that has been changing for the younger female generations. In addition, Tigrigna proved to be the main language of the rural deacons and priests, who had been generally trained at local churches and monasteries[3].

2. Study areas and fieldwork

Prior to fieldwork, approximately three months were spent on research activities with Ethiopian Orthodox Churches in London (due to a delay in obtaining a visa for Ethiopia). Subsequently, I spent 10 months conducting research in Ethiopia with six months residing in the study area. Two rural communities among 16 *ṭabɔya* (local administrative) units in the *La'ɔlay May Čäw wäräda* (**ላዕላይ ማይ ጨው ወረዳ**) were selected for the study. The names of these are not provided here in order to reduce the likelihood of participant disclosure[4]. The village units had 8,000 and 5,000 inhabitants respectively, displayed a fairly balanced female to male ratio, and were located at different distances from the city of Aksum. Local livelihoods consisted of farming, primarily teff (although in the second community fewer households owned viable land and more males worked in driving), construction, and day work in the cities of Aksum, Adwa, and elsewhere. The second community contained a high ratio of non-local soldiers and other

[3] Female translators were employed in the beginning stages of research to hold interviews with females. Assistants were not used after about 1.5 months in the field. Most spontaneous conversations with women and all interviews and spontaneous conversations with males were held without the presence of an assistant, which ensured confidentiality of the discussion. [4] As a strategy, the quotations from personal interviews and informal discussions with the clergy and laity were anonymised and coded. Experts who did not express the desire to remain anonymous are cited in-text; those who expressed desire for anonymity are not named but affiliation is often provided.

"foreigners," while the first village community was comprised mostly of native Aksumites. Selection of these locations was informed by research-related questions (e.g. the situation of domestic violence locally and availability of local churches and monasteries) as well as by more practical factors, such as distance from the city, accessibility and transportation, availability of electricity and water, terrain, and availability of cumulative and sex-disaggregated demographics. Initially, staff members at the administrative office in Aksum city were consulted and on the basis of the information obtained, five out of 16 communities in the countryside were identified for visits. During these visits, I held consultations/interviews with local village administrators, court workers, police officers, health personnel, and some priests to obtain a sense of conjugal problems within the communities as well as the corresponding attitudes towards this problem.

In general, I found that there was a lack of systematised recording of conjugal abuse in Aksum. Staff at the Women's Affairs Office in Aksum were able to point only to a survey in Tigrigna that had been compiled over the last six months of 2016 for the *La'ɔlay May Č̣äw wäräda*. It looked at women's issues and the institutions that women sought help to with their issues. No reference was made to conjugal abuse *per se*, but it was found that when women faced "abuses," they generally did not know the state laws, and when they did, they did not know how to take advantage of them (Laelay Maychew Wereda Women's Affairs Office, 2008 E.C.). The lack of a concrete conceptualisation of conjugal abuse in the local society was also reflected in the court system in Aksum, which did not register cases under such a category. This was true both for the village courts, which have inherent power to adjudicate family matters, and the Appeals Court in Aksum city responsible for the countryside that resolved cases appealed at the local social courts. In general, when physical abuse within the conjugal relationship was reported, it was done so under the category of physical assault and was treated as such under the criminal code. Data that was shared with me *in situ* by village court workers suggested that the two selected study communities had variations of conjugal problems. One manifestation emerged as fairly typical: disputes over child maintenance and divorce settlements that were the most ubiquitous problems reported across the countryside. The other community was locally known for the murder of a woman by her husband just the year prior to this research. Importantly, I came across at least five female victims of physical violence who self-reported the abuse over the period of research in the countryside of Aksum.

Living in one of the two villages for the period of the study evidenced that livelihoods, religious life, gender norms, and intimate relationships were undergoing various changes. The patterns of change were more discernible in the city of Aksum, which led to my decision to dedicate over a month of research in that urban context. However, it should be emphasised that

there was no clear divide between mentalities and lifestyles in the countryside and the city, with change being pervasive in all contexts and with conjugal problems not necessarily being resolved in the cities. Alternating between the different sites provided a more nuanced picture of how peoples' attitudes and behaviour varied and changed.

Fieldwork methods included consultations with informed insiders, life-based interviews with men and women, interviews with clergy, and spontaneous/informal conversations with multiple individuals. Specialists who were consulted included Church scholars and theologians at traditional Church schools as well as at modern theological colleges in Addis Ababa, Meqele and Aksum. Other specialists included domestic violence and gender researchers and practitioners and other Ethiopian scholars. Participants in Aksum included clergy in the city and villages of Aksum, members of the All Saints' Association under the Sunday School Department of the Church known as the *Maḫəbärä Qədusan* (ማኅበረ ቅዱሳን), and laity from all walks of life in the rural and urban settings. Ethical considerations were prioritised at all stages of the research, ensuring that the research topic was communicated to participants properly in local language and that they granted their consent with full understanding of the implications of data-sharing[5].

Life-based interviews were vital for exploring individual conceptualisations and rationalisations of conjugal abuse in conjunction with individual life experiences, personal situations, and spiritual parameters. The general strategy was to prompt discussion about marriage problems in broader terms whilst avoiding any direct investigation into interlocutors' experiences of conjugal violence. However, most research participants shared relevant experiences where and when pertinent, which generated some data of abusive/harmful conjugal situations. The interviews with theologians, Church scholars, and historians, in turn, sought to ascertain the local theological tradition and to achieve a more contextualised understanding of the Church tradition as it developed historically within its indigenous context. Interviews with local clergy, on the other hand, sought to provide a deeper understanding of local marriage problems, the role of the clergy in conjugal conflict, and their discourses and attitudes towards conjugal violence. Of particular interest was whether local clergy delivered sermons or advised personally about marriage, conjugal conflict, or other marriage problems, what sources they invoked, and how these related to the laity's discourses and marriage standards. Lastly, the participatory workshops explored: a) norms and ideals in the local society about men and women with reflections on the state of gender relations and definitions of gender equality, b) marriage and conjugal expectations in

[5] Various strategies were devised to achieve this, which are elaborated in the dissertation. See Istratii, 2019a.

Table 1. All research groups and sample sizes. A version of this table first appeared in Istratii, 2019b.

Research group	*Total size (N)*	*Females (f)*	*Males (m)*	*Interviews (voice-recorded or note-taking)*	*Informal discussions*
UK: London					
Laypeople in London	14	8	6	9	5
Clergy in London	2	–	2	1	1
Ethiopia: Addis Ababa and Meqele					
Domestic violence experts in Ethiopia	4	4	–	4	-
Theologians and teachers of the faith in Ethiopia	11	1	10	9	2
Ethiopia: 2 villages and Aksum city					
Laypeople in Aksum	122	76	46	61	61
Clergy and monks in Aksum	23	–	23	12	11
Teachers of the faith in Aksum	12	2	10	9	3
Participatory workshops	56	31	25	–	–
Total	244	122	122	105	83

the society, including the influence of the Church and religious beliefs, and c) problems within married life and how these were considered or generally explained by local people.

In total, six participatory workshops were held. Four were conducted with rural residents (two with males, two with females) and two with members of the *Maḫəbärä Qədusan* in the city of Aksum (one with females, one with males). The duration of the workshops varied with the shortest lasting 1.5 hours and the longest lasting approximately four hours. The workshops with the women were planned beforehand and were convened by reaching out to local women or the secretaries of the women's associations directly. The workshops with the men took the form of more *impromptu* discussions that were held on Sundays when men gathered in village centres for weekly meetings and trainings. Due to often conflicting engagements for the male community on Sundays,

male administrative officers had to mediate in order to help me recruit for these workshops. In the workshops with women, the female secretaries were not discouraged from being a part of the discussions, but in the workshops with men, the male administrator was not invited to attend. Given existing hierarchies of power as well as antagonisms amongst members of the women's associations, there emerged various dynamics in these sessions that interfered with what participants shared. However, the workshops were effective overall in identifying common understandings and issues that people felt comfortable speaking about in front of others.

3. A Look into the Ethiopian Church tradition

The Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahədo* Church (EOTC) belongs to the family of so-called Oriental Churches that separated from the rest of the Christian world following the fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Doctrinally, the EOTC recognises both the Old and New Testaments[6], but an Old Testament heritage and orientation has historically taken precedence. This is evident in the gender differences of the Sacrament of Baptism where girls are baptised at 80 days and boys at 40 days. It is also visible in theological understandings that concern the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony within which the main aim remains identified with procreation in reference to the story of Genesis (e.g. EOTC, 2003a). The observation of the Sabbath has been historically validated and upheld. It is equally noteworthy that the origins of Christianity in Ethiopia have been delineated in the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (**ክብረ ነገሥት**), a book that portrays the Ethiopians as the new chosen people of God (Levine, 1974: 92-93; Semere Tesfamicael Habtemariam, 2017: 61), and a book that the Church cites in its own works (e.g. Mekarios *et al.*, 1996: 6).

Within the EOTC, recognised Church Fathers are considered authoritative sources for biblical exegesis (Matthew, 1936: 63). These doctors of the faith are believed to "have received the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ dwells" and are trusted as teachers after the Apostles and the prophets (*ibid.*: 65). However, the main exegetical tradition of the EOTC, the *'andəmta* (**አንድምታ**) commentary, appears to have been given prioritisation within the traditional education system[7]. A member of the Council of Scholars or *Liqawənt Guba'e*

[6] However, the list of Canon books has not been strictly defined. For example, see Asale A. Bruk, 2014: 61-63.

[7] The origins of the exegetical tradition have not been concretised and current explanations are rather hypothetical (Mersha Alehegne, 2012: 116). According to theologians who were interviewed, the *'andəmta* has been based on the teachings of the Church Fathers who participated in the early Ecumenical Councils, and some subsequent works of Orthodox theologians, such as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom. The commentaries, however, were composed and organised by Ethiopian scholars and clergy over the period of many centuries (Lee, 2011: 42-43).

(ሊቃውንት ጉባኤ) explained that students are first introduced to and master the *'andəmta* on the Gospels and only when they are exposed to the Old and New Testament interpretation do they study the Church Fathers (ICE7). As the *'andəmta* is considered a result of the Holy Spirit acting through the enlightened individual, it is generally considered unalterable (Haile Gabriel Dagne, 1970: 96; Cowley, 1974: 170; Semere Tesfamicael Habtemariam, 2017: 181). Although, it can be noted that some theological works that were examined in the context of this study quote beyond it[8].

While it is impossible to convey in this brief essay the complex teachings that define this eclectic Judeo-Christian tradition, it can be said that the premise of the EOTC is a theology of healing human passions. The Church affirms the Orthodox worldview that God created a "very good" world and humanity in His likeness (Aymro Wondmagegnehu & Motovu, 1970:108-109). As in Eastern Orthodoxy, it is taught that disobedience of the first-fashioned couple, Adam and Eve, resulted in the fall from heaven and the corruption of their human nature (*ibid.*). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world, which is defined as the "restoration of the world to its direct and unimpeded relation with God" (EOTC, 2003b). Following the incarnation, those baptised in the name of Christ are called to establish communion with God by participating in the Sacraments and by following the Church commandments in all realms of life. These prescriptions include: loving the Lord and keeping to all of His commandments, loving one's neighbour, loving one's Christian brothers and sisters, loving one's enemies, and fulfilling one's duties to all men and women whether ill-disposed or friendly (Aymro Wondmagegnehu & Motovu, 1970: 108-109). It is understood that when believers participate in the Sacraments and do works of love the Holy Spirit dwells in them.

In recent years, graduates of modern theological colleges in Ethiopia have drawn attention to the process of achieving likeness to God or *'Ǝgziabhern Mämsäl* (እግዚአብሔርን መምሰል). This is likely in response to recent developments in the country, including the spread of Pentecostalism, which have renewed interest in the works of the Early Church Fathers and in rediscovering the Orthodox tradition. While achieving likeness to God is an implicit or explicit teaching in the works of many Early Church Fathers accepted by the Church, it is questionable if this was articulated as such within local ecclesiastical and vernacular experience. As some theologians stressed and was

[8] One particularly interesting example that appears to have been well-received by EOTC theologians is Heregewoin Cherinet's (2005 E.C., 2015), which cites some western Church Fathers, however, without deviating from accepted dogmatics and theology. Another example was noted in tendencies among learned clergy or theologians to quote directly the Bible, as opposed to the *'andəmta*.

also confirmed in fieldwork, the tendency among the laity would be to assume a large hiatus between their "sinful" lay lives and the perceived saintly living of the ascetics (ICE3; ICE14).

In addition to understanding some of the fundamental premises of this tradition, it is also important to have a sense of the kind of theological training that was imparted traditionally to clergy. Until Haile Selassie introduced the governmental education system, education had generally been the responsibility of the clergy. The type/duration of the religious training depended on the role that the candidate wanted to hold in the Orthodox Church. The key roles that were identified included deacon (*diyaqon*, ዲያቆን), priest (*qes*, ቄስ), reader (*'Anagnoṣtis*, አናግኖስጢስ), *däbtära* (ደብተራ), *märigeta* (መሪጌታ) *or* *mäzämmər* (መዘምር) and church teacher (*mämhər*, መምህር). The *märigeta* was described as the chief of *däbtära*-cantors, who are non-ordained specialists in ecclesiastical hymns, dancing, and poetry (Lule Melaku, 2010: 21). The entire cycle of education could take up to three decades (Enbaqom I. Kalewold, 1970: 1-2), with the most demanding being the training required for teachers of interpretation (ICE10).

Both theologians and clergy posited that the level of training of the clergy depended on individual skills/talents, commitment and practical factors. However, it was generally affirmed that the average priest was unlikely to have achieved training in interpretation (ICE2, ICE4). The interviews that I held with local clergy in Aksum and the villages of study confirmed this. Among the interviewed priests, few had formal training in the interpretation of the Gospels, including one *märigeta* with six years' training that included biblical interpretation (IC6) and one church teacher with 15 years of study (IDC6). The reasons for this lack of training are complex and can be only briefly outlined. Historically, students have had to rely on the public's almsgiving to secure their daily sustenance (ICE19), and this societal sponsorship in many cases was not sufficient to sustain students for long periods of time. In addition, students could face health issues, hardship, and other scarcities that interfered with their capacity to learn and reach the highest level of interpretation (Enbaqom I. Kalewold, 1970: 19). Moreover, within the EOTC deacons must marry before becoming priests, which means that they have to cater to the needs of both their brethren and their families. Under such conditions, they may simply not have the time and capacity to continue their studies (ICE10). Theologians and Church historians also referred to historical and political events, including foreign invasions and the Derg regime, in rationalising some of the clergy's diminished capacity to teach.

3.1. *Church teachings and discourses on gender relations, marriage, and conjugal abuse*

Efforts were also made to understand some of the key teachings articulated in the Church tradition regarding gender relations, marriage, and conjugal abuse that are pertinent to this study[9]. Although nuanced, these indicated that the faith has nominally propounded equality between men and women. Abba Melaku at the Frumentius Theological College in Meqele explained this theology as follows: "Our faith teaches that men and women are equal and are one body. You can't find anywhere in the Holy Bible or in any religious place a teaching that says women are less than men. The teachings are [that] they are equal." (ICE10) He cited the story of *Genesis* to establish that man and woman were created alike and with equal honour. Indeed, the traditional *'andəmta* on the relevant biblical verses states: "Man and woman He created them. (Explanation) At this time Eve had not yet been created, it was later that (he) said that he (Adam) knew her. Another one says thus, that she is in Adam's nature/make[10]." (Anonymous, 1999 E.C.: 19) Moreover, it is said that man and woman were both given authority to govern over the created world (Cowley, 1988: 219). Father Serapim of Aksum also confirmed this theology of equality, stating: "The woman is not created above the man or the man above the woman; they both are created equally and are both the image and likeness of God." (ICE13) He suggested that this theology extended to the mystery of marriage, where one spoke of oneness: "Equality in the teachings of the Church means oneness of the two. The Church teaches that there is no way that the one is better than the other; they are one and equal." (ICE13)

Within written tradition, the Canon Book of the Church, *Fətha Nägäśt*, quotes verses from Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians to explain that marriage is in accordance to God's plan and that every man must take one woman for his life and stay united with her. In that marriage one becomes the owner of the other. The *Order and Canon of Marriage* explains that marriage "was instituted from the very beginning along with other commands which God first gave to Adam." (Abba L. Mandefro, 1976: 1). In regards to the age of marriage, the *Fətha Nägäśt* specifies as majority age for males 20 or 25 and for females 12 and 15 depending on wealth class (Paulos Tzadua & Strauss, 1968: 140). The more recent versions of the *Book of Marriage* published by the Church stipulate: "[A] virgin (girl) from 15 years and above; a virgin (boy) from 18 and above" (Anonymous, 2008 E.C.: 75). Another important document based on apostolic

[9] These consisted of reading Church-related materials and conducting interviews with Church scholars. A list of materials is included in the Appendix of this article. [10] Original: **ወንድ ሴት አደርጎ ፈጠራቸው: (ሐተታ) በዚህስ ጊዜ ሔዋን ገና አልተፈጠረችም በኋላ ከታወቀ ብሎ፡ አንድም በእሱ ባሕርይ አለችና እንዲህ አለ።** See also the slightly different translation given by Cowley (1988: 217).

teachings, the *Ethiopic Didascalia*, emphasizes that husbands must be patient and loving with their wives: "Bear patiently with one another y[ou] sons of God. And let the husband also bear patiently with his wife, and not be haughty or false; but let him be merciful and upright, and cherish her alone in love and humility." (Mason, 1920: 4-5). In the *Fətha Nägäśt*, Paul was cited to establish that husbands "owe" love to their wives, and that wives owe "obedience" to their husbands (Paulos Tzadua & Strauss, 1968: 80). The following admonition by Peter is also included: "O men, servants of God, every man among you shall bear the weight of his woman. He must not be haughty, not deceitful, but shall be merciful and upright, one who hastens to do that which pleases his wife." (*ibid.*) In the *Order and Canon of Marriage* male headship is predicated upon the husband's responsibility for the wife's welfare (Abba L. Mandefro, 1976: 6-7).

Considerably less has been written about conjugal abuse within the Church, although relevant teachings and initiatives exist. The *Fətha Nägäśt* cites damage suffered by one of the spouses as one of the accepted reasons to end a marriage: "[If there is] damage to the life of one of the couple by the other, and their quarrel results in bitter violence involving enmity [the marriage is dissolved]." (Paulos Tzadua & Strauss, 1968: 149) The same section also mentions that adultery is prohibited: "lest the killing of one of the partners or indeed of the seducer be occasioned by jealousy, or lest the killing of the one who devises the marriage of one of the adulterers happen" (*ibid.*). The way these teachings are articulated underscores the Church's central tenet that marriage should be a peaceful affair, which within this study was echoed in the discourses of the clergy in Aksum and the surrounding countryside.

Heregewoin Cherinet, a female theologian who has been active in efforts to address domestic violence in the country, in her ground-breaking book *Women and Donkeys in Ethiopia: Gender and Christian Perspective* (**ሴትና አህያ...። አዲስ አበባ፡ ሐረገወያን ችርነት።**) reports about a seminal effort made by Ethiopian Church Scholars to create a manual against gender violence based on the Gospel (Heregewoin Cherinet, 2015: 66). According to Cherinet, this manual was published in 2009 with the title *Developmental Bible* (*Yäləmat Wängel*, **የልማት ወንጌል**) and takes a clear stance against any violence or maltreatment of women, deeming it un-Orthodox and calling everyone to "follow God's will…to protect women from suffering" (*ibid.*). In a recent post on the *Maḫəbärä Qədusan* platform, Deacon Gebre Egziabher also referred to conjugal abuse (Gebre Egziabher Jr., 2015). He drew examples of abusive relationships from the Old Testament, such as a wife's pressure on her husband to commit adultery (Sarah and Abraham), a husband's neglect for his wife (King Solomon) and a crime that is motivated by sexual lust (King David). The Deacon explained these acts as the outcome of the fall from heaven and proposed that only by following God's commandments could these be avoided and the motivations leading to them overcome.

Despite teachings that generally stipulate the ontological equality of men and women (if I may use this characterisation), and also whilst propounding a normative marital order for the preservation of peace, the Church has still maintained some gender asymmetric practices. These include practices such as the aforementioned baptismal differences and prohibitions about women's entrance into church when menstruating[11]. This was described by theologians as a heritage stemming from the Old Testament where the tradition had been preserved as an authentic element and not with the intention to demean women. In parallel to explaining this emphasis on women as an inherited tradition, they clarified that prohibitions around bleeding were addressed at both genders (see also Mekarios *et al.*, 1996: 36). On the other hand, Heregewoin Cherinet (2015) stresses that the prohibition of menstruating women entering church emanated from a folklore mentality, which was not condoned in patristic theology. She cites Saint John Chrysostom as an authority (*ibid.*: 272-273). Other Church associates have attempted to respond to critiques about gender bias by re-affirming a theology of conjugal complementarity premised upon differentials that emerge from a divinely instituted gender binary (Ayalew ZeEyessus, 2009; Gebre Egziabher Jr., 2015).

4. Local understandings, rationalisations and attitudes towards conjugal abuse

Whilst inquiring into local perceptions of conjugal abuse I found that my interlocutors mostly expressed their understandings of conjugal abuse indirectly or through context-specific examples. Most research participants did not isolate the discussion of conjugal abuse from more general problems that affected marriage in the local society, or they spoke of conjugal problems without clarifying if they included these in their definition of abuse. The enquiry was also challenged by barriers to communication, not least due to the sensitivity of the topic within the research participants' socio-cultural environment (with the fear of gossip being prevalent), and by my foreignness, which could lead interlocutors to be more cautious with the information they divulged or alter their answers[12].

In order to explore how my research participants understood conjugal abuse, the dictionary term for "abuse" (Tigr.: *ṭəqʿat*, **ጥቕዓት**; Amh.: *ṭəqat*,

[11] It may be also observed that certain churches or monasteries in Ethiopia have been historically reserved only for males. This was not mentioned by the theologians and Church scholars I spoke to perhaps because this specific occurrence is not considered part of the Old Testament heritage but has other theological justifications (e.g. a monastery is only for men to avoid temptations that can likely emerge in interactions with the other sex). [12] A detailed presentation of communication and analytical challenges in this project is given in Istratii, 2019b.

ጥቃት) was tested[13]. Consultations with a Tigrayan linguist suggested that *ṭəqə̱'at* had existed in the local vocabulary, but that it had been previously used with a slightly different meaning[14]. While it made sense to ask my interlocutors how they understood conjugal abuse (*nay ḥadar ṭəqə̱'at*, **ናይ ሓዳር ጥቕዓት**), I could not avoid a degree of uncertainty whether this term was comprehended as I intended it. In addition, I invited my interlocutors to explore definitions of an unhealthy/healthy relationship or a harmful/beneficial married life or how they understood harmful situations or harmful behaviour in marriage, which I found to be more effective (see Table 2). Listening to local responses, I gradually identified the terms that were used most often to name types of problems and abuse in the intimate relationship, and I began to use these as examples to trigger discussion when people were less responsive to the general term *ṭəqə̱'at*.

Table 2. Formats for asking about local conceptualisations of spousal abuse. A version of this table first appeared in Istratii, 2019b.

How do you (f/m) understand spousal abuse?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, nay ḥadar ṭqə̱'at 'entay malät 'əyu?* (**በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ናይ ሓዳር ጥቕዓት እንታይ ማለት እዩ**?) *Bä hasabš/h, yä tdar ṭqat məndənäw?* (**በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ የትዳር ጥቃት ምንድነው**?)
What is the meaning of spousal abuse?	*Nay ḥadar ṭqə̱'at tärgum 'entay 'əyu?* (**ናይ ጥቕዓት ተርጉም እንታይ እዩ**?) *Yä tdar ṭqat mən tärgum 'alläw?* (**የትዳር ጥቃት ምን ተርጉም አለው**?)
How do you (f/m) understand an abusive marriage?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, ṭqə̱'at zäläwo ḥadar 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (**በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ጥቕዓት ዘለዎ ሓዳር እንታይ ማለት እዩ**?) *Bä hasabš/h, ṭqat yalläw tdar məndənäu?* (**በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ጥቃት ያለው ትዳር ምንድነው**?)

[13] (Ge'ez) *ṭaq'a* **ጠቅአ** (v.): "'be intrepid, be harsh, be ruthless' associated with the Ethiopic *ṭäq'ə* 'oppress' and the Amharic *täqqa* 'to strike, to attack'" (Leslau, 1991: 595). (Amh.) *ṭəqat* **ጥቃት** (n.): "attack, aggression, assault, oppression; scorn, subjection; maltreatment" (Kane, 1990b: 2128). [14] The Tigrayan tutor I worked with explained that in its more conventional usage *ṭəqə̱'at* has meant to "be on the offensive," such as in the advance of soccer players in the field or in the army. Gradually, the meaning of the word was influenced by its usage to indicate all types of abuse in Amharic.

How do you (f/m) understand abusive/harmful situations in marriage?	*Bä ḥasabḳi/ḳa, ṭqṣ'at/bädäl zäläwo ḳunätat ḥadar wəst 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (**በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ጥቕዓት/በደል ዘለዎ ኩነታት ሓዳር ውስት እንታይ ማለት እዩ**?) *Bä hasabš/h, ṭqat/bädäl yalläw huneta tdar wəst məndənäu?* (**በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ጥቃት/በደል ያለው ሁኔታ ትዳር ውስጥ ምንድነው**?)
How do you (f/m) understand harmful behaviour in marriage?	*Bä ḥasabḳi/ḳa, bädäläña ṭäbay ḥadar wəst 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (**በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ በደለኛ ጠባይ ሓዳር ውስት እንታይ ማለት እዩ**?) *Bä hasabš/h, bädäläña ṭäbay tdar wəst məndənäu?* (**በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ በደለኛ ጠባይ ትዳር ውስጥ ምንድነው**?)
How do you (f/m) understand an unhealthy relationship/marriage?	*Bä ḥasabḳi/ḳa, zäyṭṣuy rəḳəb/ḥadar 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (**በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ዘይጥዑይ ርቅብ/ሓዳር እንታይ ማለት እዩ**?) *Bä hasabš/h, ṭṣna yälelläw gənəñunät/tdar məndənäu?* (**በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ጤና የሌለው ግንኙነት/ትዳር ምንድነው**?)
How do you (f/m) understand a harmful relationship/marriage?	*Bä natḳi/natḳa ḥasab, bädäl zäläwo rəḳəb/hadar 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (**በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ በደል ዘለዎ ርቅብ/ሓዳር እንታይ ማለት እዩ**?) *Bä hasabš/h, bädäl yalläw gənəñunät/tdar məndənäu?* (**በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ በደል ያለው ግንኙነት/ትዳር ምንድነው**?)

While some interlocutors responded by using the term abuse (*ṭṣqṣ'at*), it should be stressed that this terminology did not emanate from local discourses. Hence, in the presentation of the study I have avoided using the term "conjugal abuse" when translating the discourses of the participants, unless they themselves used the term abuse (*ṭṣqṣ'at*) in their responses to me. Moreover, it is important to recognise that typifying the variable understandings and contexts of harmful/abusive behaviour in the intimate relationship that interlocutors spoke about would do a disservice to the variety of discourses and situations that emerged in their narratives. I have thus only roughly classified them for the purposes of this analysis and presentation.

4.1. *Situational or interactional abuse*

Much of the abuse that my interlocutors discussed manifested incrementally and was perceived to emanate from the dynamics of the conjugal relationship.

"Argument" or "quarrel" (Amh.: č̣əqəč̣č̣əq **ጭቅጭቅ**[15]), "disagreement" or "lack of understanding" (Tigr.: zäyməsməma', **ዘይምስምማዕ**; Amh.: 'alämäsmamat, **አለመስማማት**[16]), and "hurt" or "offend" (Tigr.: bädälä, **በደለ**) were frequently cited under what could be grouped as situational or interactional abuse. For instance, one female interlocutor answered that "abuse means problems" (IW13) and one male respondent affirmed: "Abuse for me is when there is no peace, no love and lots of argument in a marriage." (IM19) The majority of my interlocutors described similar situations, as highlighted in Table 3:

Table 3. Conceptualisations of abuse expressed by the laity in Aksum.

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

[15] (Amh.) *č̣əqəč̣č̣əq* **ጭቅጭቅ** (n.): "argument, dispute, quarrel, altercation" (Kane, 1990b: 2222). [16] (Tigr.) *zäyməsməma'* **ዘይምስምማዕ** (n.): "1) disagreement, difference, discord, disapprobation, division, dissent, being at loggerheads (with), misunderstanding 2) dissonance, variance" (EPLF, 2003: 482). (Amh.) *'alämäsmamat* **አለመስማማት** (n.): "disagreement, discord, dissimilarity" (Kane, 1990a: 464).

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

As conveyed in these narratives, the primary catalysts were men's failure to act as breadwinners, their drinking and spending money on alcohol, or their critical and cantankerous attitude with their wives when they returned home inebriated. Arguments were usually amplified by a commonly reported shortage of money and situations of poverty. One woman commented: "When there is shortage of money, argument surfaces." (IW5) Another female interlocutor added: "It's argument. Poverty, shortage of money; if you (masculine pronoun) work and the money you earned isn't spent in and for your home, argument will arise." (IW8) Yet another woman stated: "We just argue because of money. There are some spouses who argue in everything." (IW24) Male interlocutors cited similar pretexts for arguments, with one rural resident asserting: "We have no other reasons to argue. When there is shortage of money, this creates argument. So, there is no other reason for argument." (IM13) Another man offered more detail: "After the working day he receives his monthly salary and then he goes and drinks and to women. Then the wife asks for money for food, but he has spent it. Where can he get it from? And then that leads to argument." (IM23) Importantly, both women and men traced some abuse to women's failure to *respond* appropriately to their husbands in emotionally charged situations. A male interlocutor commented that while both spouses needed to show patience, the wife had more of a responsibility to do so because she was the one who reacted to her husband and faced the highest risk (IM9).

Other interlocutors thought that the extensive marital conflict they described was fostered by a lack of deeper understanding, emotional attachment, or healthy communication between the partners, which could be amplified by differences in personalities and mind-sets. A female village resident asserted that in many marriages husbands and wives often argued because they did not

think carefully before they spoke and did not try to understand their partner's point of view (IW6). Some related this directly to a lack of love or emotional intimacy, such as a male interlocutor who said: "In the marriage there are problems not explained, because as I told you, there is no love. If there is love, you can understand (each other)." (IM21) A female interlocutor also commented: "Lack of communication, [not] helping each other, [not] helping each other. [It is] not financial. It is selfishness." (IW2) Others emphasised behavioural or personality incompatibilities between the spouses, such as this man who said: "Even if husband and wife love each other, bad behaviour always make them to separate/divorce. The problem is variation in behaviour." (IM9)

The overarching aetiology that the majority of interlocutors gave for the abuse, however, was the individual's problematic "personality" or "character" (Tigr.: *bahri*, **ባህሪ**; Amh.: *bahrəy*, **ባህርይ**[17]). Some interlocutors referred to "intense" or difficult individuals (Tigr.: *ḫayal*, **ሓያል**; Amh.: *ḫayläňňa*, **ኃይለኛ**[18]), such as when a woman described her husband who was known to be a loud and demanding but not physically abusive man (Fieldnotes, 21-23 March 2017). On another occasion, an elderly woman who was married to a very meek man was described as *ḫayläňňa* because she put too much pressure on her husband to work all the time (Fieldnotes, 19 May 2017). Very problematic men, usually entirely neglectful of their wives, or men with perceived serious vices, tended to be described as naturally "bad" (Tigr.: *ḳəfu'*, **ክፉእ**; Amh.: *mätfo*, **መጥፎ**[19]).Women who were adulterous with their husbands could also be described as *ḳəfu'* and so were women who failed to govern the household properly and complained constantly about money or husband shortfalls, therefore fomenting disharmony in married life. Men who were abusive in variable ways with their wives were often said to have a "problem of the head" or "empty-headedness/foolishness" (Tigr.: *bado ḫangol*, **ባዶ ሓንጎል**; Amh.:

[17] (Tigr.) *bahrəy/bahri* **ባህርይ/ባህሪ** (n.): "1) nature, quality, attribute, kind 2) character, temperament, disposition, trait, kidney 3) complexion" (EPLF, 2003: 235). (Amh.) *bahrəy* **ባህርይ** (n.): "nature, character, temperament, personality; trait, attribute, characteristic (n.), essence, disposition (nature), property (of an element), jewel" (Kane, 1990a: 856). [18] (Tigr.) *ḫayal* **ሓያል** (adj.): "1) powerful, forceful, mighty, potent, violent, tremendous 2) strong, robust, doughty, virile, nervous 3) energetic, pithy 4) vehement, lion 5) redoubtable, swinging" (EPLF, 2003: 36). (Amh.) *ḫayläňňa* **ኃይለኛ** (adj.): "strong, powerful, mighty, violent, impetuous, vehement, terrific, intense, ardent; severe (judge, weather), sharp (pain), extreme (heat), high (fever), harsh (words), heavy (drinker)" (Kane, 1990a: 25). [19] (Tigr.) *ḳəfu'* **ክፉእ** (adj.): "1) ugly, evil, dissolute 2) ill-favoured, bad, disgusting, miserable, impious, hideous, vicious, malignity, spiteful, vile, mean, mal" (EPLF, 2003: 422). (Amh.) *mätfo* **መጥፎ** (adj.): "bad, evil, wicked, foul (weather), repugnant (odor); miserable (meal); harsh (climate); unpleasant, nasty" (Kane, 1990a: 363).

bado ḫənqəllat, **ባዶ ጭንቅላት**[20]). Some interlocutors associated this personality problem with an "old" "mentality" or "attitude" (Tigr.: *'atäḫasasba*, **አተሓሳስባ**; Amh.: *'astäsasäb*, **አስተሳሰብ**[21]), which was thought to sustain some of the men's demeaning behaviour and abusiveness towards their wives.

4.2. *Gender-related asymmetries*

Other collected narratives emphasised women's mistreatment and gender-related asymmetries. After providing a definition that described different and complex situations, a female interlocutor also added: "[e]arly marriage is also abuse" (IW14). Another female interlocutor explained that "[a]buse means that she was not educated and as a result she would be disrespected, she would not be able to work (a paid job), these are the reasons. It is called suppression (**ፀቅጢ ዝባሃል**)." (IW4) Numerous other male and female interlocutors identified abuse as a situation where the wife worked and the husband did not or alternatively where the wife was overworked, such as in this woman's account: "My abuse is that I work until exhaustion. It is about work, we have no other problems." (IW10) A male respondent also made reference to this in saying: "[a]buse means to watch her getting tired; watch her work hard. The woman is exhausted. A woman does not have the ability that a man has." (IM16) Some interlocutors referred to other wrongdoings, such as husbands who abandon their wives without justification. One female interlocutor explained that, "[a]fter having six children together, he left me for another woman. This certainly is abuse." (IW10) Recurrently, my female interlocutors reported cases of husbands suddenly abandoning their wives and then subsequently failing to sufficiently support them with child maintenance.

These more gender-specific forms of abuse were often associated with the "bad" or "old" mentality that was previously mentioned. A statement from a female interlocutor highlights this: "[i]t is a problem of thinking/mentality. Some men are aware that being abusive is a problem, but they continue to abuse their wives. The [men] do it deliberately they want to humiliate/to undermine the wives." (IW18) However, most interlocutors attributed gender asymmetries and wife abandonment to men being "selfish" (Tigr.: *ʚsu'*, **ስሱዕ**[22]). Interlocutors would often use the Amharic phrasing *yä hodaččäw*

[20] (Tigr.) *ḫangol* **ሓንጎል** (n.): "1) brain, grey matter 2) mind, the upper storey" (EPLF, 2003: 33). (Amh.) *ḫənqəllat* **ጭንቅላት** (n.): "skull, head" (Kane, 1990b: 2230). [21] (Ge'ez) *'astaḫasaba* (v.): "call to account" (Leslau, 1991: 244-245). (Tigr.) *'atäḫasasba* **አተሓሳስባ** (n.): "thought, idea, mind, psychology, psyche" (EPLF, 2003: 356). (Amh.): *'astäsasäb* **አስተሳሰብ** (n.): "way of thinking, idea, opinion, notion, suggestion, reasoning, mentality" (Leslau, 1976: 130). [22] (Tigr.) *ʚsu'* **ስሱዕ** (adj.): "1) greedy, avaricious, grasping, rapacious, pig, piggish, hog 2) ravenous, vulture 3) selfish, self-seeker 4) insatiable" (EPLF, 2003: 182).

(**የሆዳቸዉ**[23]), which is used to describe people who only think of their own desires and interests whilst ignoring the needs of their spouses.

4.3. *Physical violence*

Hitting and beating were also frequently mentioned in discussions of abuse. Usually interlocutors spoke of physical assault together with issues of poverty and conjugal arguments, which suggests that they understood this abuse as a result from the interaction of the spouses, frustration, and other stresses of marriage. A female interlocutor commented that "[a]buse means to argue, to hit in marriage" (IW10). Another said, "[a]buse means economic shortage and physical abuse" (IW18). The most common form of physical violence that interlocutors described was "hitting" or "striking" (Tigr.: *mwuqa'*, **ምዉቃዕ**; Amh.: *mämṭat*, **መምታት**[24]). Both female and male interlocutors often brought up the beating stick (Tigr.: *bätəri*, **በትሪ**[25]) or the heavier stick/staff (Tigr.: *dula*, **ዱላ**[26]) to signify the existence of physical assault, such as with the following comment by a Tigrigna-speaking male interlocutor: "He doesn't help. She asks him for money and he does not provide. Conflict, misunderstanding and quarrelling follow; and even *dula* follows." (IM22)

The common understanding was that the physical abuse of wives by husbands had been widespread in the past, but had now become rare as a result of government legislation and domestic violence awareness programmes, which were reported to have been implemented a few years ago[27]. A female interlocutor remarked that "[i]t has changed. Nowadays, it has changed, there is no hitting. Wife and husband do not hit. It has changed, they do not hit. Nowadays, they are equal, everyone." (IW33) An elderly woman also affirmed that, "[n]owadays, it is not allowed. Before, it existed. There was beating and she still would not leave the house. Nowadays, however, there isn't. It is not allowed. Today, it is good times." (IW39) A male interlocutor also reported that, "[b]efore, those who hit were people who had not been to school. Both spouses are getting schooling now. People in old times who had this problem were without education. In our times, there is equality. So, the previous mentality has been disappearing. Now, if there is hitting,

[23] (Amh.) *hod* **ሆድ** (n.): "stomach, belly, abdomen, inside (of the body), heart, mind" (Kane, 1990a: 29). [24] (Tigr.) *mwuqa'* **ምዉቃዕ** (v.): "hitting, beating, lashing" (EPLF, 2003: 131). (Amh.) *mätta* **መታ** (v.): "to beat, to hit, (also with a bullet or some kind of missile), to strike, punch (with the fist), to spank, to rap, to smite, to thrash, knock (hit)" (Kane, 1990a: 241). [25] (Tigr.) *bätəri* **በትሪ** (n.): "stick, cane, rodwand, cue" (EPLF, 2003: 230). [26] (Tigr.) *dula* **ዱላ** (n.): "club, mace" (EPLF, 2003: 522). [27] Accounts about the nature of these programmes, who coordinated them and when they happened were inconsistent. Enquiries that were made at the Women's Affairs Office in Aksum did not clarify the situation.

they divorce." (IM25) However, the rather transitional nature of the situation became evident in comments such as the following: "There isn't [physical abuse]. But also, there is. They (women[28]) endure it. But mostly, there isn't due to the current government." (IW39)

While the aforementioned forms of abuse were primarily associated with men, a few interlocutors referred also to abuse perpetuated by women. One female interlocutor stated that "[m]en are not the only ones who abuse others. There are some women in the society who are a problem. They live without working, so inside their families there is never peace." (IW15) Another female interlocutor affirmed that "[a]buse means hitting or physical violence. This exists in some couples. The problem could be with the man, or with the woman." (IW23) Numerous research participants opined that in the past women used to remain silent when confronted with their husbands' misbehaviour. In current times, however, women were more likely to speak up or challenge their husbands, which was associated with an increase in conflict. A male interlocutor affirmed that, "[b]efore, the woman stayed quiet. But in our times we have equality. The woman rejects her husband's thinking and her defiance strengthens/triggers more disagreement." (IM9)

4.4. *Sexual coercion: A hardly ever discussed issue*

As the data suggest thus far, my interlocutors did not generally speak of sexual forms of abuse, which have been extensively reported in studies from Ethiopia. I initially assumed that this may be because the topic was generally taboo and that women were perhaps too shy to discuss it with a foreign researcher. As an alternative strategy, I explored how women thought about sex in marriage more generally, including how they approached family planning. However, even as relationships of trust were built and women shared details with me about their sex life, none openly admitted to having experienced rape or sexual coercion in her marriage. I gradually realised that the lack of mentions of intermarital sexual coercion or even rape may have been due to the fact that a wife sleeping with her husband when he requested it was a normalised expectation in the local society (Fieldnotes, 14 February 2017). Only pregnancy, the post-partum period, sickness, or important religious fastings and celebrations seemed to be accepted as exceptional situations wherein denial of sex is permissible by both women and men.

There is one case that I came across that is particularly illustrative. A female interlocutor whom I knew well and who worked at the local seed house

[28] The parentheses within quotes are added explanations by the author to help to clarify what the interlocutor meant to say each time. These clarifications reflect the intentions of the speaker as they emerge in the overall interview and were decided in collaboration with local research assistants and language tutors who assisted in refining the translation of the recorded interviews.

brought to my attention that an old couple had visited the administrative centre to resolve a marital issue (Fieldnotes, 14 June 2017). They were in a stalemate because the husband wanted to continue having sexual relationships with his wife, and the wife refused. The latter was looking for the women's association representative to seek advice. My interlocutor explained that neither the husband's request for a sexual relationship nor the wife's denial breached any existing laws since there was no legislation to govern these matters. She added that, in this case, the issue would be resolved by the elders of the community according to their customary understandings and practices. When I later interviewed the representative of the women's association about this case, she confirmed it and explained that by local standards the man was right to say that it was his wife's problem, which meant that there was not much that the wife could do (IW42). It is then not surprising that a local health worker confirmed that sexual problems existed, referring to "sex whenever the man wants it" (Fieldnotes, 12 February 2017).

Only a couple of women described sexual coercion as abuse, but often did so indirectly, such as with the following comment: "Abuse means problem, conflict, maladies and other such things; these are all called abuse. If the husband imposes on the woman to sleep with him without her consent, this is also abuse. But my husband did not give me such kind of difficulty because he does not go to another woman." (IW15) She seemed to suggest that if men became involved with women other than their wives, this could result in sexual abuse. One reason could be that a wife who knew that her husband slept with other women would be afraid that the husband may give her STDs. She would then refuse to lie with him, and this could result in his forceful act. The earlier woman's reference to "maladies" would seem to condone this view. This also echoes the results of the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey (EDHS) that describes how 84% of women in Tigray are more likely to believe that a woman is justified in refusing sexual intercourse with her husband if she knows he has had sex with other women (CSAE & ICF, 2017: 264).

4.5. *Attitudes about conjugal abuse*

Contrary to recent demographic studies from Ethiopia, both the laity and the clergy in Aksum considered abusive situations (excluding sexual coercion, which was rarely openly addressed) to be wrong by both cultural and religious standards. All research participants affirmed over and over again that neither

culture (*bahəl/bahli*, **ባህል/ባህሊ**[29]) nor faith (*haymanot*, **ሃይማኖት**[30]) permitted abuse, with the distinction between culture and faith being volunteered by my interlocutors. Such results seem to parallel an earlier study that reported that female interviewees did not blame culture for men's abusiveness (Abbi Kedir & Lul Admasachew, 2010: 443). One male interlocutor, for example, opined that, "*[h]aymanot* teaches good: to kill, to argue is not allowed. The woman is like a sister, like a mother. She must be loved and respected. Of all, the woman deserves the most (respect)." (IM9) A younger male interlocutor also said the following about conjugal abuse: "This is a very inappropriate act. Within *haymanot*, it means abusing oneself because the married couple is considered to be one (one body/flesh)." (IM29) A female interlocutor in turn stated that "[i]t [abuse] is not allowed/permitted. But, there are some who permit themselves to hit." (IW17) Another woman commented with the following: "It is not allowed [by *bahəl*]. By *haymanot* it is also not allowed. But, it is their mentality/thinking. It is not the result of the education they received at home/how they were raised at home." (IW13)

Moreover, interlocutors invoked local norms that would allow for divorce in cases where peaceful cohabitation was not possible. A woman, for example, remarked that "[i]t [*bahəl*] doesn't allow physical violence, because if you hate the other person, you just give him an answer and you let him/her go with respect, but you don't physically hit [them]." (IW7) Another female interlocutor opined the following: "It [abuse] is not right. The reason is [that] they should decide to divorce by agreement/consent." (IW9) Yet another said that "[t]here is [abuse]: fighting, arguments are created, if there is hitting and they become angry they may even kill their wives. So in order not to reach this stage, they divorce." (IW27) Interestingly, these testimonies reflect the canonical stipulation in *Fətha Nägäśt* that spouses should divorce should there be persistent enmity in the couple (Paulos Tzadua & Strauss, 1968: 149). This was also echoed in the discourses of the rural clergy, which will be discussed.

Due to data presented in existing demographic studies, it was anticipated that more people would justify wife-hitting or condone its tolerance. While this study cannot be taken to represent the attitudes of the wider population, the consistency amongst the diverse and heterogeneous research participants'

[29] (Ge'ez) *bahla* **በህለ** (v.): "'say, speak, call, announce, command' which passed into Cushitic as *bahəl* 'custom, tradition'" (Leslau, 1991: 89). (Tigr.) *bahli* **ባህሊ** (n.): "culture" and *bahlawi* **ባህላዊ** (adj.): "cultural" (EPLF, 2003: 234). (Amh.) *bahəl* **ባህል** (n.): "culture, tradition, custom, convention; nature; manner of speaking; syntax, conjugation" (Kane, 1990a: 855). [30] (Ge'ez) *haymana* **ሀይመነ** (v.): "to be a believer, be faithful (in the religious sense), have the faith (denominative)" (Leslau, 1991: 221). (Tigr.) *haymanot* **ሃይማኖት** (n.): "religion, faith" (EPLF, 2003: 5). (Amh.) *haymanot* **ሃይማኖት** (n.): "faith, religion, belief (religion)" (Kane, 1990a: 25).

positions is notable, especially considering their multifarious contextual situations. It is not unlikely that some of my interlocutors' responses were affected by a concern to present their local culture (*bahəl*) in a favourable light to me, perhaps in defence of possible essentialist generalisations by outsiders. It is also plausible that some interlocutors adapted their narratives so that they would reflect expectations of what they thought that I expected to hear. However, it was also the case that my interlocutors attributed abusive behaviour to the individual and did not generally relate this to cultural or religious socialisation.

On the other hand, most interlocutors did describe that abused wives demonstrated extensive endurance because of local normative and institutional frameworks. One man said that "[women] let it go (forgive the abuse) because of the cultural influence, and not because of *haymanot*" (IDM23). A male interlocutor, in turn, reasoned with the following: "Because she wants to keep the marriage, she wants to endure it; because she wants to look after her kids. It's the tradition. But her not telling anyone is wrong." (IM20) Socio-cultural pressures seemed to be reinforced by shortcomings within local courts and police units, which were described as ineffective in dealing with women's reports of conjugal violence. For example, it was widely believed that police personnel (who tended to be male) were unlikely to take action against a violent husband because they accepted in-kind bribes by these men (Fieldnotes, 30 June 2017, 3, 18, 24 July 2017). One former victim once explained to me why she had not reported her abuse to the police during her abusive married life: "He (the husband) will take him (the police officer) out for drinks and pay for all the drinks. This action is greater than my request for justice." (IW38) Barriers were also reported with regards to the local women's associations and more informal mediators, such as elders, families, and neighbours. Despite the possibility of family or neighbourly interference and the support systems these informal mediators provided, the narratives reported about such mediations suggested that they mostly intervened when the situation became dangerous for the woman and were often ineffective in altering the perpetrators' behaviour.

5. A rough contextualisation of conjugal abuse in local realities and worldviews

The conceptualisations and attitudes that have been thus far outlined begin to suggest the influence of a host of socio-cultural, material, and other factors with gendered dimensions that emerged to underpin the realities of conjugal abuse and the attitudes towards it in the study areas. These realities and attitudes were also found to be influenced in complex ways by the discourses of the clergy, instances of personal faith, and deeper understandings of humanity.

My fieldwork demonstrated that marriage and the conjugal relationship were underpinned by gendered norms and ideals that had prevailed in

the "old times" and continued into contemporary times whilst also being challenged by changing realities. While it was widely affirmed that in the past the family was a strictly patriarchal arrangement that tended to favour the male, in recent years there was more equality between the spouses as women had more education, mobility, and autonomy. Still, men and women alike agreed that there was still a need for a more symmetrical division of labour between the spouses. Some of the gender-related asymmetries that were described in relation to conjugal abuse, such as women being overworked, could be traced to the rigidly gender-segregated model of marriage. However, this arrangement could also indirectly affect the intimate relationship and potentially foster some types or cases of conjugal conflict. Due to the gender-segregated organisation of married life, a husband's failure to financially provide for his wife often meant that the wife was unable to fulfil her own gender-specific expectations. Her husband's shortfalls as a breadwinner often made a woman unable to accomplish the essential tasks associated with wifehood. Husbands, in turn, despite their own failures to provide, still expected their wives to behave according to deeply entrenched conventional standards and be non-confrontational. One can see how this situation could escalate to conflict and even abusiveness where the mindsets of the spouses were incompatible.

Other instances of spousal conflict could reflect tensions between changing demands on wives or husbands and the persistence of conventional standards regarding marriage. A male interlocutor echoed other testimonies when he explained that in the past "men were expected to be high-income, to have a strong personality to be selected for marriage. Women had to be virgins and to have good quality of personality." (IM24) On the other hand, rural women postulated that a good wife needed to be "modest" (*ṭḥut*, ትሑት[31]), know how to cook, have food available for their husbands, and take care of the children. Local women also stressed recurrently that wives ought to be quiet and careful because "Tigrayan men do not like arguments" (Fieldnotes, 14 February 2017). While younger women in the villages increasingly expressed preference for educated men and more urbanised views on gender roles, they still expected men to continue to be breadwinners and to be able to provide for them materially. Similarly, younger men suggested that they would like a wife with the education and sophistication of the women of the city, but many still looked for meek, non-confrontational, and hard-working village women to marry. In this new scheme of things, conventional standards seemed to become harder

[31] (Tigr.) *ṭḥut* ትሑት (adj.): "1) low, lowly, poor, coarse, bad, common, miserable, short, meagre, lean, inferior, 2) humble, gentle, polite, courteous, modest, maidenlike, maidenly, suave, smooth, self-effacing, mannerly, decent, coy, good 3) small, mean, 4) deep, 5) raffish" (EPLF, 2003: 302).

to fulfil and this likely generated frustration that contributed to new tensions in the relationship.

While it was not a primary objective of this project to look at the psychological motivations behind violence, it is important to recognise these dimensions, such as those described in attachment and personality disorder theories of violence (Dutton, 2006; Mills, 2006; Dutton & White, 2012). Attachment problems are generally traced to early childhood parenting styles and can influence adult romantic relationships; these are correlated to certain personality disorders. Within psychological studies, lower levels of empathy have been associated with anti-social personality disorder, which in turn has been shown to correlate with avoidant attachment profiles (Mauricio *et al.*, 2007). In the local society, many women reiterated that their husbands did not understand their feelings, lacked the ability to express their emotions, and were often unable to communicate with their wives (Fieldnotes, 8 February 2017, 2 April 2017). Moreover, the manifold problems that arise when men abandon their wives and their subsequent failure to provide for child maintenance could suggest lower levels of empathy among this group of men. It is also notable that the abuse of male children by their mothers was common in the local society, and this could be linked to intergenerational violence and could have indirect consequences by resulting in insecure attachment profiles. Focusing exclusively on gendered asymmetries (normative or material) would not capture such complex psychological parameters.

As it was discussed, many of my interlocutors believed that abusiveness emanated from a bad personality. While there is no space to provide a thorough discussion of the complex ideas around *bahri* and the likely theological connotations, *bahri* was almost always described as "natural" or was associated with "nature" (*täfäṭro*, **ተፈጥሮ**[32]). Some preferred to speak of problems of "behaviour" or "temperament" (*ṭäbay*, **ጠባይ**[33]), which etymologically can also pertain to "nature" and "essence[34]." In parallel, my interlocutors described or implied an individual who was susceptible to evil social or spiritual forces, temptations, and passions, suggesting a degree of fickleness in the human personality. Participating in the sacramental life of the Church and embodying its traditions, such as praying and fasting, was expected in order to cultivate

[32] (Tigr.) *täfäṭro* **ተፈጥሮ** (n.): "nature, creation" (EPLF, 2003: 296). [33] (Tigr.) *ṭäbay* **ጠባይ** (n.): "1) nature = **ባህሪ**, character, apanage, complexion, feature, element, kind, property" (EPLF, 2003: 563). (Amh.) *ṭäbay* (n.): "nature (character), disposition, conduct (behaviour), temperament, character, manners, personality; characteristic, property (physics)" (Kane, 1990b: 2150). [34] (Ge'ez) *ṭäbayə'* **ጠባይዕ** (n.): "natural disposition, nature, elements, essence" (Leslau, 1991: 587).

one's faith-based "conscience" (*ḫəllina*, **ኅሊና**[35]) as a buffer to pernicious inclinations. Simultaneously, there was a perception amongst women that men were generally less spiritual, which could suggest, by inference, their heightened susceptibility to passions and fickleness. These beliefs about human nature did not eschew gendered connotations, which meant that this fickleness could manifest in men and women differently.

On the other hand, women's tolerance of abusive husbands was not only due to the ineffectiveness of local institutions (police, social courts, women's associations) to respond effectively to abused women's reports, as interlocutors suggested, but it also reflected material parameters and socio-cultural pressures that most women considered when they faced partner abuse. The fear of divorce was strong because divorce had practical, material, and socio-cultural repercussions in the local society. In general, the patriarchal organisation of the family whereby the male served as a breadwinner and the female administered the household made divorced women especially susceptible to poverty and increased their hesitation to leave their husbands. Moreover, women could be considered "bad" wives as a result of a previous divorce. This was an important risk for women with children, for whom remarriage was one of the few options for achieving some sort of material security. Other parameters, such as attachment and love for the husband or a fear of retaliation, amplified such socio-cultural and material pressures.

5.1. *The influence of clergy discourses*

In general, but particularly in the villages, the clergy remained the primary point of reference for the laity on matters of faith, and their teachings were highly valued. My rural interlocutors repeatedly affirmed that the priests taught the "word of God" and even when certain priests failed to lead exemplary married lives, their teachings were still considered to echo God's word. While priests typically taught that husband and wife should share the workload, some could inadvertently emphasise the normative gender-segregated model of marriage if they failed to provide a sufficiently nuanced exegesis of Church teachings that differentiated a divinely instituted gender binary from a rigid division of roles as enforced in everyday married life. Moreover, priests generally pronounced bodily virginity as a prerequisite for marriage (but especially Church marriage), and links could exist between this emphasis and the historical prominence of early marriage in the local society. It is notable that while the majority of priests and deacons encouraged the laity

[35] (Ge'ez) *ḫallaya* **ኀለየ** (v.): "consider, think, ponder, keep in mind, mediate, look after someone, take care of, watch, reason, reflect upon, turn over in one's mind, perceive, decide, devise, imagine" (Leslau, 1991: 262). (Amh.) *ḫəllina* **ኅሊና** (n.): "conscience, mind, reason; thought, idea (Ar.)" (Kane, 1990a: 5).

to respect the legal age of 18 for marriage, they still participated in affirming marriages between spouses who were under the age of 18. Additionally, as stated, the problem of sexual coercion appeared to be underpinned by deeply entrenched ideals about spousal rights and a wife's duty to her husband. Local clergy were not heard to teach openly in ways that would condemn sexual coercion by husbands, even though some thought in this way. On the other hand, some, like the rest of society, expected wives to cater to their husbands' sexual needs, including a priest who expressed disbelief to me that a wife could refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband with whom she had become "one flesh" (Fieldnotes, 14 May 2017).

Many theologians in Addis Ababa, Meqele, and Aksum linked what they considered to be an inadequate or distorted understanding of theology amongst the laity to the low acquisition of advanced religious training among the clergy. A learned member of the clergy explained that "because most teachers and those who serve in the Church do not enter or finish the *Mäṣḥaf Bet* (School of Books) they are not able to teach or improve the understanding of the people" (ICE13). Another interlocutor reasoned that some members of the clergy had the knowledge but not the capacity to share it publicly in a compelling manner (Fieldnotes, 13 June 2017). However, this study demonstrated that the clergy's discourses did not deviate substantively from Church discourse but tended to be delivered in an insufficiently contextualised manner. This could indeed reflect lack of theological exegesis, but not always or necessarily. The Church's own emphasis on its Old Testament heritage seemed to lead a few priests to make rather rigid theological statements that did not adequately reflect the nuanced theology of the Church (e.g. when a Church teacher affirmed to me the primary importance of bodily virginity over spiritual virginity to justify rules around the sacrament of marriage). This emphasis on the Old Testament may have combined with some priests' limited knowledge of the New Testament to enforce the vernacular religious practices, including those with more pernicious implications for the spousal relationship.

The mediation of the clergy in situations of conjugal conflict was postulated to be as influential as their teachings. The participatory workshops I held included an activity that asked participants to identify the institutions they first reported to in cases of conjugal problems and the Church, priests, or elders were agreed to be cardinal resources. The narratives that lay women and men shared suggested that in their mediation, priests tended to prioritise practicality. For example, whilst priests invariably emphasised the preservation of marriage and its lifelong commitment, they did not generally oppose divorce when there was no peace and the situation was harmful to the woman (although priests could advise women to endure if they did not realise the gravity of the situation). On the other hand, despite both men and women generally listening to the clergy's advice, not all followed it, and many acted

according to their own interests and situations. Women who faced challenges with their husbands were equally influenced by psychological, material, and socio-cultural considerations and pressures, as discussed. Still, it is not unlikely that the priests' general counsel to women to show patience and forgiveness towards less than perfect husbands could have unwittingly reinforced folklore ideals that expected women to be non-confrontational with their husbands at all times. This could have also influenced their responses to highly abusive situations.

5.2. *Exploring closer links with lived faith*

My interlocutors invariably expressed the conviction that faith was beneficial for married life and that it could serve as a deterrent to conjugal disagreement and conflict. In some cases, they made direct connections between how "spiritual" (*mänfäsawi*, **መንፈሳዊ**[36]) one was and their conjugal behaviour. Contrasting this prevalent opinion, only a couple of narratives associated religious values with women's tendency to forgive husband abusiveness. A closer look at the influence of spiritual parameters on conjugal attitudes and behaviour suggested possible gender differentials in the ways that faith became salient in men and women's lives with variable implications for conjugal abuse and responses to it. Discussions with men in the villages suggested that faith could serve as a sort of buffer against what men considered morally questionable, "sinful," or immoral behaviour, such as adultery or wife abandonment without justification. For female research participants, faith was mostly invoked in distressful conjugal situations and within discourses of coping. In many of the narratives that I heard, women invoked God's "thinking" (Tigr.: *ḥasab*, **ሓሳብ**; Amh.: *ḥassab*, **ሓሳብ**[37]), seemingly to make sense of situations that they could not explain otherwise or that had been particularly painful. While it is not unlikely that spiritual concerns made some women reluctant to take formal action against abusive partners, all of my female interlocutors invoked religious teachings to condemn abusiveness.

[36] (Ge'ez): *'anfasa* v): "breathe, exhale, make breathe, rest, find rest, revive, refresh, give rest, give relief, soothe" (Leslau, 1991: 389). (Tigr.) *mänfäsawi* **መንፈሳዊ** (adj.): "1) ghostly, spiritual 2) mystic 3) pious, devout 4) psychical" (EPLF, 2003: 76). (Amh.) *mänfäsawi* **መንፈሳዊ** (adj.): "spiritual, devotional, devout" (Kane, 1990a: 288).

[37] (Ge'ez) *ḥasaba* **ሐሰበ** (v.): "think, believe, impute, consider, estimate, esteem, appreciate, regard, deem worthy, take into consideration, have regard for" (Leslau, 1991: 245). (Tigr.) *ḥasab* **ሓሳብ** (n.): "1) idea, thought, contemplation, notion 2) suggestion 3) breast 4) reflection, reflexion 5) meaning, intention 6) impression 7) image" (EPLF, 2003: 29). (Amh.) *ḥassab* **ሓሳብ** (n.): "opinion, point of view, idea, notion, thought, concept; stand, position, mind (opinion); proposal, suggestion, motion (parliamentary); worry, concern; computus" (Kane, 1990a: 11).

However, lived faith could also influence the conjugal relationship through more indirect mechanisms. In general, local people thought of their culture and faith as interdependent, despite variations in opinions of how close these were in contemporary times and what caused their differentiation. Those who equated the two were generally more likely to associate social norms with their religious tradition, which made them more defensive towards deviations from marriage, gender or other social norms framed in religious language. Attitudes surrounding drinking at religious gatherings (sing. *maḫbär*, **ማኅበር**) held for the veneration of saints and other religious celebrations provide an illustrative example. While all my interlocutors affirmed that the religious gatherings comprised part of the local religious tradition, there were many who expressed critical opinions. This group held that religious gatherings had become "cultural events," "repetitive habit," and lacked spiritual meaning. This was then associated with excessive drinking on behalf of some men and some husband abusiveness. Members of the clergy also considered alcohol consumption on these occasions to have become a habit that they could not easily abandon, although they were unaware of theological stipulations against it. Despite such criticisms, both the laity and the clergy perpetuated the convention as a result of how religious tradition was understood by the vast majority in vernacular life. Within the local climate of uncertainty, caused in part by the expansion of Pentecostalism in the country, departing from vernacular religious norms was highly risky for either clergy or laity as they could be considered deviants or heretical. This was a pressure that both theologians and members of the laity expressed to me many times. Moreover, in a society where everyone depended on the rule of reciprocity for their social functions, it was highly unlikely that people would openly challenge social norms because they did not want to alienate their peers. Instead, they would opt to more discreetly embody attitudinal differences.

6. Providing nuance to the scholarship on intimate partner violence in Ethiopia

Motivated by the widely reported justifications for and attitudes towards wife-beating in rural Ethiopia (CSAE & ORC Macro, 2006; CSAE & ICF, 2012, 2017), this study sought to contextualise conjugal abuse and attitudes towards it in the local religio-cultural and institutional matrix whilst also paying due attention to the influential religious tradition. This closer look, despite being limited by my positionality in the local society and other analytical and communicational factors (Istratii, 2019b), suggested that local people did not generally accept conjugal violence as being right and tended to reason that people should simply divorce to avoid becoming abusive with each other. This understanding paralleled the local clergy's emphasis on a peaceful marriage and their general flexibility with allowing for divorce when there was disharmony in the family.

A closer look into the research participants' rationalisations of abusiveness that invoked the human personality and spiritual influences suggested a degree of resignation about the reversibility of some human aggression. It could be proposed that people partially accepted the reality of conjugal abuse because they believed that its motivations were not something that anyone could sufficiently control. It is not unlikely that such perceptions were enforced by more profound human metaphysics informed by the local religious worldview, as well as the inevitability of some degree of conflict in marriage as suggested by Yigzaw and colleagues during their research in Gondar (2010). Still, it is important not to conflate this rationalisation with an acceptance of violence as permissible or as morally right, since this was invariably condemned on religio-cultural grounds.

The manifestation and continuation of conjugal abuse in Aksum could be potentially understood in light of reported gendered asymmetries and a rigidly gender-segregated arrangement of marriage or the local emphasis on female timidity and non-confrontational traits, as has been suggested for another East African context (Jakobsen, 2014, 2015). While all these parameters seemed to contribute somehow to pernicious attitudes and practices in the local society and made it difficult for women to benefit from institutional and informal support in abusive situations, the local society also displayed a plurality of beliefs and norms, of which some contradicted gender asymmetries and pernicious attitudes toward women or their maltreatment. These included religio-cultural values that emphasised mutual help, respect, righteousness, family or neighbourly interference to stop marital conflict/abuse, and societal sanctions in the form of general criticisms of immoral behaviour. More importantly, despite the gender-segregated arrangements of marriage that often led to women being overworked, my interlocutors affirmed that gender dynamics in marriage have been increasingly equalised and never suggested that men and women were ontologically unequal, instead affirming that human equality preceded differences in gender. Within local narratives, all women and men located themselves in the strife between good and evil, and both genders were called to choose as well as be held responsible for their individual choices. A more nuanced framework that would better integrate local understandings of humanity is required to depict the situation of women and their responses to conjugal abuse in this society and potentially other societies embedded in local belief systems that are likely to espouse context-specific understandings of humanity.

Potential interventions for the alleviation of conjugal abuse in the countryside surrounding Aksum need to better consider the local religio-cultural cosmology and how this is embodied by different individuals to enforce or deter pernicious conventions. I echo the observation made by Yigzaw and colleagues that educational interventions need to employ culture-sensitive information

(Tegbar Yigzaw *et al.*, 2010: 44). However, as this article has demonstrated, culture is imbricated with religious idioms and these idioms cannot be neglected in such sensitization. The emphasis that research participants placed on the individual seemed to co-exist with a belief system that cumulatively accepted a degree of fickleness in human behaviour, which could anticipate or justify some aggression in men. This worldview drew some of its basic premises from Christian theology, even if in syncretistic ways. As a remedy, the Church, as an influential local force, could try to cultivate more positive beliefs about human nature and the human personality, to communicate to the local population that despite the influence of human passions and evil forces, individuals should be able to improve, which rather agrees with the theological aim of achieving likeness to God.

This study also reinforced the observation by Yigzaw and colleagues that building conflict resolution skills and healthier relationship models might be needed to alleviate some conjugal abuse (*ibid.*: 44). The co-existence of extensive divorces and conjugal abuse combined with the EDHS results from 2011 that divorcees were more likely to justify wife-beating (CSAE & ICF, 2012: 259) suggest that a reversal of separations and divorces might help to prevent some pernicious conjugal attitudes. Many of these separations were associated with conjugal conflict that emanated from the gender-segregated organisation of marriage. In light of Saint John Chrysostom' authoritative influence in this tradition[38], and the fact that his relevant commentaries emphasise *apostolic* marriage teachings and important departures from some Old Testament understandings that still prevail in Ethiopian society, his commentaries could become instrumental. His teachings could help to articulate a model of marriage that fosters *mutual* cooperation, dignity, and spiritual empowerment (see Istratii, 2018b). These teachings could then leverage the influence of religious idiom and the clergy on the local Orthodox society with the potential to have more impact on the rural population.

The strategies considered so far have been underpinned by an understanding that rural residents would be receptive to religious idiom. However, the landscape emerged to be more diverse with some individuals being more oriented toward newer lifestyles and norms outside of the Church, even if still venerating the religious tradition. While this does not reduce the relevance of theology-informed or clergy-centred strategies, it means that the clergy will

[38] Despite being considered one of the most authoritative theologians in the EOTC, St John Chrysostom's commentaries on marriage have only limitedly been known or integrated in this Church tradition. Local theologians proposed multiple reasons for this, which are elaborated in the dissertation. A full analysis of Chrysostom's influence in the EOTC tradition was made in the dissertation (Istratii, 2019a), while an overview of his commentaries on marriage has been given in Istratii, 2018a.

need to be more prepared and equipped theologically to counsel individuals who might not exactly fit the religious ideals or follow a religious lifestyle, such as couples in irregular unions who were also affected by conjugal abuse but were less likely to have a spiritual father. Such strategies would likely need to be combined with other approaches, such as psychosocial services provision to support couples faced with conflict or abuse or to address any underlying intergenerational or psychological dimensions of violence.

Ultimately, there is a need for more integrated approaches that collaboratively engage state and Church stakeholders. Currently, multi-stakeholder initiatives by government agencies and the Church might be obstructed by the unwillingness of the state to work integrally with religious bodies or the Church's prioritisation of Church Canons, as best exemplified in the clergy continuing to perform marriage ceremonies for under-aged girls. State-led interventions would need to consider the effect of informal institutions and norms on people's attitudes and the shortfalls of state-led institutions to respond effectively to victims and perpetrators. On the other hand, the lack of exegetical knowledge amongst members of the rural clergy, which could be reinforcing folklore understandings and norms related to some forms of conjugal abuse, begets the need for the Church to engage the clergy in theological training in modes that can help them to assimilate the information and to relate it to their practical realities and everyday discourses with the laity.

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Table 4. Appendix. Types of Church-related materials examined (not exhaustive; modified after Istratii, 2019b).

Canonical/liturgical books and relevant *'andəmta* commentary

- *Fətha Nägäśt*, translated and edited by Paulos Tzadua and P. L. Strauss, English, 1968 (Paulos Tzadua & Strauss, 1968).
- *Ethiopic Didascalia,* translated by J. H. Mason, English, 1920 (Mason, 1920).
- *The Bible, the Old and New Testament Books*, Amharic, 2000 E.C. (Anonymous, 2000 E.C.).
- *The Book of the Old Testament, Genesis and Exodus: Commentary and Interpretation*, Amharic, 1999 E.C. (Anonymous, 1999 E.C.).
- *The Book of Baptism, Holy Matrimony and Unction*, Amharic, 2008 E.C. (Anonymous, 2008 E.C.).
- *The Book of St Paul, Reading and Interpretation*, Ge'ez and Amharic, 2007 E.C. (Anonymous, 2007 E.C.).

Theological works

- *Order and Canon Law of Marriage of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church*, by Abba L. Mandefro, English, 1976 (Abba L. Mandefro, 1976).
- *Notes on the Teachings of the Abyssinian Church: As Set forth by the Doctors of the Same*, translated by A. F. Matthew, English, 1936 (Matthew, 1936).
- *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, by Mekarios and collaborators, English, 1996 (Mekarios *et al.*, 1976).

EOTC web materials/pages

- *Doctrine of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church*, English (Anonymous, s.d. a).
- *The Sacrament of Matrimony*, English, 2003 (EOTC, 2003a).
- *Christian Doctrine and Living: Introduction to Christianity* by Abba A. Bekele, English (Abba A. Bekele, s.d.).
- *Divine Plan and Gender Equality* by Gebre Egziabher (Jr.), English, 2015 (Gebre Egziabher, 2015).
- *Sacrament of Holy Matrimony*, English (Anonymous, s.d. b).

Relevant books found in the Ethiopian market

- *The Spiritual and Social Life of Christian Women*, by Kessis Kefyalew Merahi, English, 1998 (Kessis Kefyalew Merahi, 1998).
- *The Order of Marriage and Social Ethics*, by Kessis Kefyalew Merahi, English, 1990 (Kessis Kefyalew Merahi, 1990).
- *Married Life and its Living*, by Qomos Samuel, Amharic, 2008 E.C. (Qomos Samuel, 2008 E.C.).
- *On Women and Donkey: Gender and Christian Perspective*, by Heregewoin Cherinet, Amharic, 2005 E.C.; English, 2015 (Heregewoin Cherinet, 2005 E.C., 2015).
- *The Commentaries on Married Life: As Taught by Saint John Chrysostom*, by *Mämhər* Shimelis Mergiya, Amharic, date not specified, probably 2004 E.C. (Shimelis Mergiya, 2004 E.C.).

John Chrysostom's commentaries

- Chrysostom's commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews (In epistulam ad hebraeos), in Greek (Chrysostom, s.d.).
- Chrysostomic contributions to the *'andəmta* on the Epistle to the Hebrews, translated by W. R. Cowley, English, 1988 (Cowley, 1988).
- The traditional compilations of Chrysostom's commentaries by Ethiopian scholars:
- *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom (Dərsan)*, Amharic, 1987 E.C. (Anonymous, 1987 E.C. a);
- *The Admonitions of St John Chrysostom (Tägsaṣ)*, Amharic, 1987 E.C. Anonymous, 1987 E.C. b).

En couverture : « Coopération », chantier sur le site de la ferme éolienne d'Ashegoda en 2012 (photo Constance Perrin-Joly).

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