EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY AND LABYRINTHINE ETHNOGRAPHY

INSIGHTS FROM A GENDER-SENSITIVE STUDY OF CONJUGAL ABUSE IN A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

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Abstract. This article draws on an ethnographic study of the realities of conjugal abuse and attitudes towards it in a religious society in Ethiopia. The study was prompted by tendencies in gender and development scholarship to transpose feminist aetiologies of conjugal abuse cross-culturally through sociological methodologies without paying sufficient attention to people's local belief and knowledge systems, especially religious beliefs and spirituality, or without being sufficiently reflexive concerning the influence of the researcher's epistemological locus in the research process. As an alternative approach, I suspend a priori conceptualizations of gender, religion and conjugal abuse, combining an anthropological study with participatory development methods to achieve more people-centred and cosmology-sensitive research. Recognizing the colonial underpinnings of western anthropology and the historically obscure character of the anthropological project, I followed a more reflexive approach that made transparent the process of data collection and analysis and drew attention to the centrality of the researcher's identity and personhood in the research process. Even such measures did not predict or resolve a host of other communicational and analytical challenges that emerged in the ethnographic experience and in the process of 'translating cosmologies.' In this essay, I have made an attempt to describe some of these challenges for didactic reasons in order to make anthropological research more tenable for younger researchers, including practitioners of development who engage with ethnographic methods, and to urge greater openness about the limitations and tentativeness of all research that involves multi-dimensional human individuals and realities.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence is pervasive in most societies of the world and has been reported as being commonplace in parts of Ethiopia as well (Berhane 2005; CSAE 2006, 2012, 2016; MoWCYA 2013). Ethnographic research into how these realities and attitudes may be related to socio-cultural systems and individual rationalizations has been negligible, while many of the existing studies presume an under-theorized feminist or other sociological aetiology of violence without demonstrating the links empirically (Panos and HBF 2002; Jemberu 2008;

Kedir and Admasachew 2010; Semahegn and Mengistie 2015; Beyene 2015). To address this lacuna, in 2016-2017 I completed a year of anthropological research in Ethiopia, also spending six months in the villages surrounding the historical city of Aksum in the northernmost Tigray region (Istratii 2019). My objective was to investigate how the intimate partner violence that was reported to be affecting women and the tolerant attitudes towards it could be understood within local conceptual repertoires and world views, especially in relation to the widespread Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahǝdo* faith, a generally non-violent faith.

The main motivation for this study was to demonstrate the need to depart from a dominant methodology in gender and development whereby conceptual and theoretical frameworks are assumed and transposed for the analysis and design of interventions in societies that fall outside of Anglo-American epistemology. Conventionally, such theoretical frameworks have been grounded in western metaphysics of the human self and gender and have engaged with religious traditions and societies in problematic ways (Istratii 2017). My aim has been to raise reflexivity about these Euro-American assumptions and to consolidate a more reflexive approach that recognizes and heeds the epistemological locus of the researcher and integrates local cosmological systems – especially religious belief and knowledge systems – more substantively into the conceptualization, theorization and alleviation of local issues.

Subsequently, for my study of conjugal abuse in Ethiopia I refrained from assuming an aetiology of intimate partner violence a priori and focused instead on investigating how local people spoke of and understood abusive behaviour or harmful situations in marriage by exploring perceived and actual associations with the local religio-cultural context, religious norms and institutions, and personal faith and spirituality. Methodologically I combined a year-long study of Church history and theology working with official texts, online materials and consultations with informed 'insiders' with a more reflexive ethnographic approach that recognized the centrality of my identity and personhood throughout the research. I also sought to include participatory methods in the research in order to create more room in which research participants in different social configurations could share their own understandings and opinions.

It has been the argument of this study that any analysis that engages with religious communities, especially those little understood in western societies, must be informed by both the view of 'insiders' who have a theology-based familiarity with the tradition and the understandings and experiences of the laity. This is especially urgent for Orthodox and other

Eastern forms of Christianity that have been grounded in claims of historical immutability and the preservation of divine revelations. While lay believers are expected to have diverse understandings and perceptions regarding their own religious traditions, their general framework of existence is expected to be attuned to basic dogmatic premises, deviation from which would risk being seen as heresy. The recognition that most Eastern Christian traditions have been historically embedded in local folklore traditions raises the need for an approach that neither isolates Church discourses from vernacular faith, nor equates the two.

The decision to conduct an ethnographic study of the realities of conjugal abuse and attitudes towards it was also informed by the objective to achieve a better contextualization of gender theorization with local belief and knowledge systems in order to counter easy transpositions of western feminist aetiologies cross-culturally (Istratii 2017). This is especially appropriate in gender-sensitive research in religious contexts on the basis that gender and religious studies have historically often prioritized an ethnocentric 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in approaching foreign religious traditions, failing to recognize the context-specificity of each religious tradition and the importance of unique hermeneutics and exegetical traditions and their historical embodiments by unique populations (Istratii 2018b). It also reflected the intricacies and particularities of conjugal abuse as a phenomenon that manifests itself within specific contextual parameters and intricate relationships (Kalu 1993; LeVine 1959; Levinson 1989; Counts, Brown and Campbell 1992; McClusky 2001; Shaikh 2007), demanding multi-dimensional and people-centred methodologies to be captured and understood.

However, in employing these methodologies it was important to consider how a suspension of assumptions regarding gender or religion could be achieved by researchers who typically espouse different cosmologies or are often trained in a western epistemological paradigm and might be therefore inclined to favour or unconsciously favour thinking in predefined ways about the domains of life being researched (Keesing et al. 1987; Narayan 1998; Sillitoe 1998; Spickard and Landres 2002: 84; Kapoor 2004). Moreover, for most of its history, western anthropology has been an obscure field and a very subjective process, with the anthropologist collecting, collating and 'interpreting' the data away from the eye of the reader, necessitating a more transparent approach. Further recognition of the power dynamics governing relations with research participants, especially in post-colonial or other international development contexts, raised the need for a people-centred ethnographic and immersive methodology. Towards this end, the following strategies were followed in the original PhD project:

- The study incorporated intimate engagement with the historical, dogmatic, patristic and exegetical literature of the local religious tradition and relied on interviews with theologians, clergy and Church historians in order to achieve an understanding of the local theology as very much attuned to the understandings of informed 'insiders.'

- Efforts were made to be transparent about my own Eastern Orthodox Christian background to the research participants and to convey at the stage of writing how my positionality (as identity/ies) and personhood (incorporating values and beliefs) might have affected the research process and these interactions.

- The diary in which the fieldwork experience and its components were recorded daily included thorough descriptions of my role in the ethnographic occurrence, such as details about the context in which a discussion had occurred, the dynamics of a discussion, the formulation of questions and responses, emotional charge and other elements that could influence how information was shared and received.

- Since translation is so intrinsically grounded in a distinct local cosmology and socio-cultural reality which shapes meanings and adds connotations to a language, as far as possible the analysis employed local terms, which were explained with reference to their discursive deployment by my local interlocutors and the wider society.

- Finally, efforts were made to be transparent about the ways and methods by which data were analysed and interpreted in view of the research participants' communication strategies and pronouncements, which were defined *inter alia* by the inherent power asymmetries between researcher and research participants, local politics and individual temperament.

While such strategies did not make the anthropological project a less subjective experience – which I would describe as one individual's articulation of one's existence and interactions in a certain context for a period of time – this more transparent approach made more visible the tentativeness and limitations of anthropological investigations, granting readers a more informed lens through which to appraise the study and its insights.

Such strategies were supplemented with participatory methods for cultural analysis in an effort to provide research participants with more opportunities and platforms to influence the ethnographic process. I had previously employed an innovative dialogical method for data

collection and cultural analysis for my Master's fieldwork among a Muslim Fulani community in Senegal in order to achieve a cosmology-informed gender analysis in that context (Istratti 2015). Within that experience, together with the participants the participatory methodology had helped to delineate the contours of their socio-cultural realities, also capturing some variation in local opinions and understandings (Istratti 2018a). Echoing other scholars, my study found that participatory research methods were particularly useful in identifying local standards or general beliefs, norms and practices that could be easily articulated in public, also providing insights into local power politics and the socio-cultural configurations that influence communication in the public space (Price and Hawkins 2002: 1358; Bergold and Thomas 2012; Elmusharaf et al. 2017). Therefore, dialogical workshops were employed in this investigation of the realities of and attitudes towards conjugal abuse as a complementary method of exploring societal norms and standards about gender relations, married life, conjugal problems in the research population and, where possible, attitudes to conjugal problems and more abusive situations.

Fieldwork methods included consultations with local specialists, immersion in local life by living in the communities of study, life-based interviews and spontaneous conversations. Research participants included domestic violence experts in Ethiopia, scholars and theologians at traditional Church schools and modern theological colleges, monks and nuns, 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 *Maḥǝbärä Qǝdusan* (ማኅበረ ቅዱሳን),[2] and lay men and women from all walks of life in both rural and urban settings. These were combined with insights from six gender-segregated participatory workshops, four of which were held with rural residents and two with members of the *Maḥǝbärä Qǝdusan* in the city of Aksum. In total, the study involved about 244 informants, with an equal percentage of male and female participants, albeit engaged using different research methods.[3]

After spending the first year of my PhD programme conducting desk reviews of at least five different bodies of literature and a text-based theological analysis,[4] I entered the research community with a fair understanding of Church dogmatics and teachings on gender relations, marriage and conjugal abuse (to the extent that the available literature permitted me to draw conclusions) and a good sense of gender realities as reported in the anthropological, historical,

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[2] All Amharic and Tigrigna terms appearing in text are transcribed according to the transcription rules set out by the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.

[3] A summary table of all the research methods used and the number of research participants is provided in the Appendix.

[4] A table with all the texts that were reviewed for this exercise is provided in the Appendix.

developmental, legal, agricultural, health and domestic violence-related literature. The previous summer had been spent delineating a thorough and detailed fieldwork plan that considered all possible ethical and safety issues that could emerge in the field, as well as undergoing a rigorous ethics review process at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). I had also spent the first year learning Amharic and one summer training in Ge'ez, the ecclesiastical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which prepared the ground for the easier acquisition of Tigrigna (the regional language) after my arrival in Ethiopia, initially by taking an intensive course at the University of Addis Ababa with a native-speaking instructor and then alone in the field through various creative strategies (e.g. by mastering the coffee ceremony and using it as a context for chatting and practising the language, and by using a trilingual dictionary to teach the young daughter of my neighbour Amharic and English while she taught me Tigrigna). Despite such thorough preparations and a detailed visualization of how the various steps in the research would be followed, the ethnographic process proved to be considerably more complex, requiring on-going reconsideration, adaptation and close community engagement to be manoeuvred.

A humble suspension of *a priori* assumptions and the mere recognition of the centrality of the researcher's role in research did not predict or resolve the host of other communicative and analytical challenges that emerged throughout the ethnographic experience. Identifying appropriate ways to ask questions that could elicit more genuine replies was a reiterative process of trial and error. Moreover, my interlocutors turned out to be more strategic about what they divulged and in what form, sometimes evading questions by generously giving less pertinent information, sometimes by providing rushed answers that felt superficial, and sometimes by answering with silence or pensive perplexity, which left me wondering whether the question had made little sense to them; whether it had touched a chord, leaving my interlocutors feeling silenced by their own thoughts; whether my interlocutors had little to say about what had been asked; or whether they had too much to say but this was just not the time, the place or the right person to say it to. I found myself constantly trying to decipher both the communication strategies and the content of my research participants' answers.

Subsequently such issues made it very challenging for me to analyse the plethora of interviews and discussions I collected. Despite having trained in three languages in order to be able to conduct this research, and acquiring relative proficiency in two of them, I was challenged to grasp the linguistic manipulations, nuances and implicit connotations of the local language(s) as deployed by my interlocutors, embedded as they were in the tacit politics that governed communication locally. I do not mean to suggest that it was impossible to reach

conclusions about this local society, to which I did not belong, but to underscore that the process was considerably more labyrinthine and tentative, as it required more effort to piece together the information, insights and statements collected in a way that did justice to the multidimensional realities on the ground and that considered transparently the ways in which I influenced the research and the analysis of these realities.

In this essay, I have made an effort to describe some of these challenges for didactic reasons, shedding some light on the relatively 'obscure' anthropological project and urging more openness about the complex and tentative process of 'translating cosmologies'. As a general strategy, I discuss some overarching research themes, important challenges I faced with regard to them and my approach to overcoming them. In this exercise, I am especially keen to address anthropologists engaged in development-oriented research and development practitioners interested in anthropological methods. Anthropology, and especially ethnographic studies of religion, have been imbricated historically in Anglo-American epistemology and thus need to be decolonized through heightened reflectivity about the epistemological locus of the theorist and a better engagement with local belief and knowledge systems multi-dimensionally. Gender-sensitive development researchers, by contrast, have traditionally relied on social theories that tend to overlook local nuances for the sake of promoting feminist objectives and quick 'fixes' to what are assumed to be the causes of local issues. The analysis offered here aims to underscore how much more intricate, personal and tentative cross-cultural ethnographic research truly is and how disconnected generic theoretical frameworks can be from the nuanced realities of specific communities, realities that are in larger part unarticulated or articulated in ways that are not directly intelligible to the (usually non-local) researcher.

Conceptual and linguistic ambiguities

Given the decision to desist from conceptualizing conjugal abuse a priori, exploring perceptions of conjugal abuse without employing an existing local term that would assume too much or risk becoming too specific in a way that could direct or bias my interlocutors' focus and articulations became an important challenge. I also needed to consider how to introduce the topic in ways that did not cause stress or discomfort to my interlocutors in view of the possibility that any of them could be experiencing some form of abuse or could be acting abusively to their intimate partners. The *desideratum* for a neutral, gradual and non-

judgemental approach at all stages of research (along with me being from the 'outside') reinforced the need for discreet and culturally sensitive investigative techniques.

As an approach, I generally invited my interlocutors to speak first about marriage problems in the local society (*nay ḥadar ṣägämat*; ናይ ሓዳር ጸገማት) more broadly, on the basis of which an exploration of more personal conceptualizations of conjugal abuse could proceed where possible. This gradual interviewing approach was found to be effective in motivating interlocutors to speak about both the positive and negative aspects of married life, which usually resulted in them voluntarily referring to what could be classified as harmful or abusive behaviour and situations within their intimate romantic relationships. In turn, this provided me with opportunities to identify local terminology and to use it in further questioning.[5]

I soon observed that my interlocutors did not generally use any abstract or comprehensive conceptualization for abuse, but multiple specific terms for hitting/striking, hurting, the beating stick, arguing, fighting, misbehaving, etc., each of them in specified situations or contexts. One popular term that seemed to be more general and not limited to physical or verbal/emotional abuse was the Tigrigna verb 'to hurt' or 'to offend' (*bädälä*; በደለ). Discussions with different interlocutors in fieldwork also suggested that the term *bätəri* (በትሪ), for the beating stick, was used symbolically by female interlocutors to represent physical abuse. Male interlocutors did not generally use this term, but tended to denote a physical beating by referring to the heavier stick or staff (*dula*; ዱላ). If I referred to either *bätəri* or *dula* in the context of marriage, interlocutors understood immediately that the question concerned physical abuse. However, asking the question this narrowly limited their attention to physical aggression alone, while the aim of the study was to explore how interlocutors conceptualized abuse more comprehensively.

In most cases when research participants identified some problematic behaviour in marriage, it needed to be established whether they identified any of these with conjugal abuse and, ultimately, to clarify how they conceptualized conjugal abuse, again necessitating a broader term. For the purposes of asking, initially the dictionary term for 'abuse' (Tigr: *ṭəqəʿat*; ጥቐዓት or Amh.: *ṭəqat*; ጥቃት) was tested. Consultations with a Tigrayan linguist suggested that *ṭəqəʿat* had existed in the local vocabulary but that the meaning of 'abuse' had recently been reintroduced from Amharic, causing a slight alteration to previous local usage.[6]

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[5] Ethical processes were followed throughout the research process, which are elaborated elsewhere.
[6] The Tigrayan tutor with whom the author worked explained that in its more conventional usage *ṭəqəʿat* means to 'be on the offensive', as in the advance of soccer players in the field or in the army.

The word was often used by interlocutors preceded by adjectives such as 'physical' ('a*kalawi*; አካላዊ) or 'sexual' (*naywäsib*;ናይ ወሲብ) to denote different types of abuse. In my interviews and discussions I abstained from suggesting any particular form of abuse and spoke in general terms about 'conjugal abuse' asking research participants to share how they understood this in the context of the conjugal relationship.

This was not without challenges for both linguistic and analytical reasons. In the early days of research the difficulty was overwhelmingly linguistic, since I could not pronounce *ṭəqə'at* in the authentic Tigrayan way, being challenged by palatalized consonants and variants. For example, my pronunciation of the '*qa*' (ጇ) as '*qa*' (ቃ) altered the sound of the word slightly, seemingly making it unintelligible to some people. In such cases I needed to paraphrase creatively, asking more general questions about problems in married life (*nay ḥadar ṣgəmat*) in the local community, the reasons behind them and what aetiologies interlocutors could give for them. I often asked how people understood a healthy or good relationship, or its opposite. Another format was to ask how people defined harmful situations or harmful behavioural patterns in marriage.[7] 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 gradually I started to use these as examples to trigger discussion to the umbrella term *ṭəqə'at* with less responsive interlocutors.

Linguistic factors emanating from the versatility of the Tigrigna language itself amplified these challenges. Some of the terms that interlocutors used were specific and referred to easily identifiable actions, situations or human behaviour; other terminological choices were more versatile or ambiguous. Particularly prevalent was the verb 'to disturb' or 'to upset' (*räbbäšä;* ረበሸ), which was deployed ubiquitously, at times with a humorous connotation to suggest that someone was being naughty or annoying, or more solemnly troublesome or even aggressive. Interlocutors used it when they spoke about drunken men picking fights with other men, a husband's difficult behaviour with a wife, youngsters' harassment of tourists, a child's disobedience or other situations. A similarly versatile term was *sədənät* (ስድነት), which connotes misbehaviour or vulgarity. Again, interlocutors could use it across numerous contexts, including the context of the conjugal relationship. The versatility of this and other terms meant that it was not always possible to pin down an equivalent English translation and that the choice of terminology did not always make it evident whether interlocutors considered the situations they were referring to as abusive.

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[7] A table of the different formats of the question asked in Amharic and Tigrigna is provided in the Appendix.

Analytical challenges also interfered with the exploration of local conceptualizations of conjugal abuse. In general, most respondents did not provide a straightforward definition as to how they understood abuse, but rather spoke in terms of exemplary situations or with reference to the real-life experiences of people around them, whom they might or might not name. While I could list all these examples in my analysis, this would require lengthy descriptions that would become tiresome and could distract the reader from the more specific objective of the research, namely to understand how the realities of and attitudes towards conjugal abuse could be related to the local religio-cultural framework. An important challenge, therefore, was to summarize and analyse the various contextual examples without losing the nuances.

Silence and secrecy

Another formidable challenge resulted from the fact that some forms of conjugal abuse were either never talked about or talked about in ways that left a lot to subjective interpretation. The existing literature on domestic violence in Ethiopia identified sexual aggression in marriage as an important problem, as in research emerging from Tigray (Gessessew and Mesfin 2004; Erulkar 2013; Allen and Raghallaigh 2013; Semahegn and Mengistie 2015; CSAE 2016: 44). However, my female respondents never spoke about this issue: curiously, it was mostly male participants who confirmed that this was a problem in some couples in later phases of the fieldwork. My initial response was to assume that most women were ashamed to discuss this issue because this was taboo in the local society and because they did not wish to expose themselves to gossip. To explore this further, I made a conscious effort to ask more generally about issues of sexuality in marriage, including family planning, when the opportunity and context allowed.

On such occasions, my female interlocutors did not seem to feel shy of talking openly about these issues with me. As women got to know me, they became more willing to admit that, within the local normative system, wives were expected to sleep with their husbands and should not refuse, except for reasonable situations when they physically could not or when it was taboo to do so, such as during pregnancy, post-partum, when they were sick, during their menses or during important fasting seasons. During fieldwork, I was told about the case of an old couple who on a certain day came to the administrative office of the village where I was living to seek advice after the wife refused to have sexual relations with her husband. Subsequent discussions I held with the local health worker and the secretary of the local

women's association, who had been involved in this case, left no doubt that by customary standards the woman was in the wrong and that she should not have refused her husband without a reasonable excuse. On the basis of such incidents, I started to think that sexual coercion was probably an issue for numerous women, but was not considered 'conjugal abuse' *per se* due to the deeply ingrained expectation that wives should not refuse their husbands, which made it their problem if they did.

On numerous occasions, I managed to ask my interlocutors if they thought it was right and acceptable for a husband to pressure his wife to have sex with him when she did not wish to. Virtually all interlocutors, men and women alike, answered 'no.' I often persisted by asking directly if they perceived this as abuse, and they usually agreed that it was indeed a form of abuse. This proved to me not only that the way in which the question was asked mattered and probably provoked my interlocutors' admissions, but also that earlier definitions or examples of conjugal abuse that my interlocutors volunteered should not be treated as comprehensive. Since sexual matters were rarely discussed in public, it is likely that this form of abuse was not immediately salient in women's minds. Moreover, the local society was characterized by a widespread norm of secrecy fuelled by both fear of gossip and what appeared to be inherent mistrust toward others in the community. Despite my exploratory attitude, local social norms, cultural conventions and my interlocutors' personal priorities and society-specific politics impeded full disclosure, as well as conclusive statements on what motivated people's silence each time.

Daedalean communication and interpretation

Ambiguities and challenges in my communication with research participants were especially highlighted in the investigation of individual aetiologies for married life problems and forms of abuse that were reported to exist locally. I was constantly challenged to align my interlocutors' justifications with information they shared at other times, including in participatory workshops, other bits and pieces of information collected in fieldwork and with my own empirical observations. As one important example, all my respondents agreed that the problem of abusiveness was primarily one of men, and more precisely, men's problematic 'character' or 'personality' (Tigr.: *bahri;* ባህሪ or Amh.: *bahrəy;* ባህርይ), often described as 'natural' (*bätäfäträwu bahri*). Most interlocutors did not explain exactly what they meant by this, which left a lot to exploration.

Recognizing that my respondents adhered to a religious tradition that understands humanity to have been created in the 'image' of God, my initial inclination was to read this answer theologically: my interlocutors probably perceived a person's character to be partially inherent or less easily mutable on the basis of personality traits and inclinations granted by means of biological and divine creation. The emphasis placed on sin could reflect a widespread faith-based understanding that the Fall had corrupted human nature and that every person was inclined to human passions, not excluding the likelihood of their becoming abusive to others. Equally plausibly, it could reflect the more empirical observation that different people had different personalities and that these were not easily changeable.

Interestingly, when respondents attributed men's problems to their 'natural' character, they virtually always added that not all men, and more generally, people were the same. This recurrent statement indicated that they were not speaking about an inherent inclination toward aggression, but rather about an individual's bad character or heightened use of aggression for reasons that were not made immediately explicit. In addition, my numerous discussions with laypeople, theologians and clergy suggested that the majority of people in the countryside could not have arrived at a deeply theological understanding of *Täwahǝdo* Orthodoxy, since it was widely recognized that the vernacular religious tradition had been transmitted customarily, with few interlocutors being able to provide a theological explanation of their religious tradition (see below). Such research cues led me to settle on the unsatisfying conclusion that respondents probably attributed the individual with a distinct, partially inherent character with a possible indigenous Christian underlayer, conscious or unconscious. However, this did not exclude the possibility that such understandings could equally be informed by personal and relational experience with the more biological and sociological aspects of human existence.

A further piece of the puzzle was uncovered in some respondents' affirmation that certain men's or people's bad character (*bahri*) was closely linked to or encouraged by a certain 'attitude' or 'mentality' (Tigr: *'atäḥasasba;* አተሓሳስባ or Amh.:*'astäsasäb;* አስተሳሰብ) that such individuals espoused. Such discourses could denote a problem with the wider normative framework, of which the gender asymmetries and norms were often highlighted; they could also refer to some men's selfish mind-set that prioritized their own comfort and well-being over their wives'. However, when I asked if interlocutors felt that the historical gender-based division of labour and the conventional organization of life in the family could have influenced the type of attitude they were speaking about, their answers suggested that

they had not thought of traditional gender roles in a negative way – most interlocutors only criticized the unfair distribution of labour between the sexes. Most men and women associated gender roles with the bio-physical particularities of male and female persons and did not entertain the possibility of changing them. In other words, by having recourse to mentality or attitude, my interlocutors seemed to denote a certain mind-set that some individuals espoused, but they did not necessarily relate this to gender-specific socialization, wider gender norms or their local 'culture' (*bahəl/bahli*; ባህል/ባህሊ.), probably because they themselves were uncertain and wanted to abstain from making generalizations.

This signified to me, once again, that, despite all the conscious efforts I made not to allow epistemological biases to creep into my analysis, some had done so implicitly nonetheless. In my view, the very fact that I expected my interlocutors to have an elaborate and comprehensive explanation for everything they thought reflected an epistemological bias, since this is what I was used to within the Anglo-American academic community. It should be made absolutely clear here that I am not doubting the ability of local people to theorize social phenomena in depth, since it was precisely what I learned from my research participants that enabled and informed the theoretical insights in this study; rather, I am noting that it was not common in the local population to intellectualize everything. This, in fact, resonates well with the local religious tradition, which is equally experiential and does not privilege the intellect, especially since the mind seemed to be considered particularly susceptible to passions and evil spiritual agents.

I faced similar challenges when I tried to unravel my interlocutors' aetiologies about why victims of abuse generally chose not to divulge their ordeals, which was reported to be a common practice. One respondent reasoned that women tried to endure the abuse in order to save their marriages and to secure their children's welfare. One elderly male characteristically affirmed: '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' (14 May 2017). This was a sensible thing to do, since traditionally women in the local society had gone without education, and divorcing meant being left without livelihood options, especially if the woman's parents were deceased. However, it was interesting that this man described such attitudes or thinking as 'culture' (*bahəl*). This was, *prima facie*, at odds with virtually everyone's assertion that *bahəl* did not allow any form of violence. It is not unlikely that in this instance the man employed the word *bahəl* slightly differently than how it was used on most occasions. My sense from having had multiple conversations with him about

his own marriage is that he meant to say that women's silence on the matter was so widespread that it had become a norm. However, such a 'reading' should still be accepted with caution since he never made the meaning of his words explicit to me.

A younger male respondent considered this and gave a similar answer, although not without some vagueness and elusiveness. He said to me: 'They do not speak out. If they speak out, it looks like something else. What will change for the woman (if she tells the truth)? Due to this, women remain silent' (25 April 2017). The rhetorical question of what would change if she told the truth suggested how practically constrained the average woman was in the local society, which resonated with many women's criticisms of the ineffectiveness of local institutions and the implied destitution that women faced if they divorced. The first phrase, however, '[i]f they speak out, it looks like something else', needed to be deciphered in relation to wider phenomena and culturally specific codes of behaviour and idiosyncrasies. During fieldwork I found that women had reasons not to report the true nature of their conjugal problems, such as a fear of retaliation, shame or a hesitation to expose their husbands to public criticism. Their fears and hesitations reflected the local society, which was described as a community in which everyone watched and scrutinized everyone else's actions, often from a cynical and suspicious point of view. In view of these affirmations, the male respondent cited earlier could be saying that, if women spoke about their problems, those hearing them would doubt that they were telling the truth and might attribute their actions to 'darker' ulterior motives.

Virginity and marriage type

Another instance of ambiguous discourses emerged in my exploration of the links made between virginity and marriage. According to the church canon as practised, couples must be virgins in order to be married by the service of the Holy Matrimony known as *täklil* (ተክሊል). This was widely recognized by both men and women in the villages, who in fact observed that traditionally the church ceremony had been performed for deacons only. However, when interlocutors discussed their own personal marital experiences and confirmed that they had married in accordance with the customary marriage, outside the church, the reasons they gave for this were almost never associated with virginity (or the lack of it). My interlocutors simply stated that they had not been to church to marry and rarely elaborated further. Some admitted that they or their spouses had been virgins, but still did not make explicit connections with the choice of marriage type.

This is illustrated in the case of one man who was relatively more knowledgeable about the theological meaning of marriage and its aims and who expressed his commitment to replicate the love of Christ for the church in his own marriage. In a fairly casual conversation with him I had the opportunity to ask if he and his wife had married by *täklil* and whether they had been virgins. The man answered that 'She had been' (25 April 2017), without elaborating further. His reply could imply that he had not been a virgin and could reflect a local reality where men were more likely to have had an active pre-marital sex life and are not to be questioned about it. However, later in our interview he referred directly to the option of marrying in the church, explaining that '[t]o do like this here is hard' and affirming that 'there are not many things religious here'. My intuitive reaction to hearing that they had not married in church, taken in combination with his later affirmations, was to assume that he referred to the strict preconditions imposed by the local priests and local society in relation to *täklil* (i.e. that both bride and groom must be virgins). However, since he never made the association between not being a virgin and not marrying in the church, and in fact blamed the clergy for not being sufficiently knowledgeable in theological matters, his statements could suggest something different.

Canonically speaking non-virgins could still marry in church, but in a different ceremony that would mark one or both of them as non-virgins. Assuming that local priests performed this (most priests in the local society had traditionally not done so), such couples could, theoretically speaking, still go through a ceremony in the church. This, however, disregards the public disgrace that they would likely experience were they to marry in a ceremony that would reveal their active sexual life prior to marriage to the community. A woman not married by a church ceremony that marks her as a non-virgin could be treated with disrespect by her neighbours and could be disparaged in future arguments. This is what one research assistant understood as 'losing face' (*wrdät*), although this expression was rarely used in the field. It is likely due to such fears that most people in the local society decided to marry in a traditional or 'cultural' non-Church ceremony, going to church only to obtain the priest's blessings. Marrying in the 'cultural' way did not immediately indicate whether one had or had not been a virgin and secured some privacy for the couple. This explanation is sensible, since respondents repeatedly confirmed the pressure of social criticism. However, no participants articulated their rationalizations unambiguously, which means that these suggestions should be considered tentative. This underscores again how easy it can be to misinterpret an articulation and to attach a meaning to it that might in fact be very far from the intended meanings and motivations of the human subjects involved.

The interface of culture and religion

Another area that proved challenging to investigate was the relationship between 'culture' (*bahǝl*) and 'religion' (*haymanot;* ሃይማኖት), two concepts that participants named and implicitly or explicitly differentiated. As already mentioned, my main objective in this project was to explore the local religio-cultural cosmology in view of Church theology, societal norms and customs, and gender beliefs and ideals in order to achieve a better understanding of how this cosmology might be underpinning attitudes towards conjugal abuse and existing codes of behaviour that were conducive to or alternatively obstructed the various manifestations of the problem.

The terminological choice of the phrase 'religio-cultural' in my study was deliberate and reflected a conscious decision not to demarcate spheres of life premised on western epistemology and societal experience. While in western Europe specific histories of secularization have relegated 'religion' to the private sphere, steadily separating it from public 'culture', in other societies which have experienced neither western Christianities nor a history of post-Enlightenment secularization, such demarcations might be totally irrelevant. This decision was also a response to my exposure to the indigenous *Täwahǝdo* Orthodox Church, which I understood as a holistic way of life in light of a current condition and an ultimate objective. Here the reference point is humanity's fall from grace, and the aim is restoration of its relationship with God, the Father, and the achievement of salvation and eternal life. According to the Church, God's commandments should be lived holistically in all spheres of life, shaping thoughts and attitudes and guiding decisions and behaviour. In a society embedded in such an all-encompassing religious cosmology, a strict separation of 'culture' and 'religion' would be inappropriate. I therefore approached the investigation of the local religio-cultural cosmology and context holistically and multi-dimensionally, exploring the research themes at the cosmological, institutional, relational and individual levels interdependently.

The appropriateness of this choice was validated early in my fieldwork, which revealed the impossibility of separating non-religious spheres of life from religious spheres because religious symbolism, norms and meanings were pervasive. Many of my participants in fact asserted over and over again that theirs was a 'religious culture' (*haymanotawi bahǝl*). This widespread conceptualization notwithstanding, local people still spoke in terms of *bahǝl* and *haymanot*, which suggested that these two concepts were given distinct meanings, even

though they were perceived to be intertwined in vernacular life. For example, most interlocutors agreed that it was *bahəl* to segregate labour according to gender and that *haymanot* never taught such a division. In other instances, interlocutors affirmed that, while *haymanot* did not permit divorce, people often divorced and that this was acceptable in the local culture. Most pertinent to the research question of this project, it was repeatedly stated that neither *haymanot* nor *bahəl* allowed violence in the conjugal relationship. Such distinctions raised the need to explore how my interlocutors understood these concepts and to define their boundaries, which I did by inviting them to elaborate when they referred to one or the other. In later stages of fieldwork I incorporated a more direct question in my interviews, asking research participants to share how they understood their 'correct/proper Orthodox faith' (*təkəkkəl 'Orthodoks haymanot*; ትክክል ኦርቶዶክስ ሃይማኖት).

As suggested earlier, *bahəl* in most discourses seemed to encompass the set of social conventions, norms and ways that local residents were familiar with and reproduced in their everyday living. *Haymanot* was identified rather with Church tradition, the word of God, the teachings of the Church and clergy. Numerous participants were of the view that in the past their customs had been in full harmony with *haymanot*, justifying the popular phrase *haymanotawi bahəl*. However, they reasoned that gradually the 'religious'(*haymanotawi*) character of *bahəl* had declined, with the vernacular religious reality deviating from Church canon and theology as a result of multiple factors, including a gradual hybridization of the former religious culture with surrounding non-Orthodox cultures, the influence of western values and norms as a result of globalization, and many people's own departure from an indigenous Orthodox way of life due to the influence of modernity and an increasingly feeble embodiment of religious customs and traditions. It was typical to describe this emerging person as 'worldly' (*'alämawi*; ዓለማዊ). While this viewpoint, which was also shared by many religious scholars, was quite convincing, it proved too linear and did not capture the complex realities that a closer examination of the meanings of *bahəl* and *'Orthodoks haymanot* and local testimonies revealed.

Researching in greater depth how my interlocutors conceptualized *bahəl* was one of the most challenging aspects of this study because of local people's widespread habit of speaking in examples and providing ambiguous or incomplete answers that needed to be deciphered and to be pieced together in a comprehensible framework. Moreover, I felt that in some situations interlocutors were split between wanting to let me know of the more problematic aspects of their vernacular realities and wanting to present their culture in the most positive light, defending it against possible essentialist representations from the outside. For example,

while many respondents attributed some men's misconduct to a certain pernicious attitude or mentality that was sometimes associated with *bahəl*, my interlocutors never explicitly referred to wider norms of socialization, society-wide gender-specific norms or ideals or other social parameters. Other conversations revealed that *bahəl* could have both positive and negative connotations or components, including the highly valued tradition of having elders intervene when a couple were facing problems in their marriage in order to reconcile them. One respondent spoke in turn of 'a culture of helping each other and sharing the work' (25 April 2017). Others referred to the religious gatherings for the veneration of saints (*maḫbär; ማኅበር*) as *bahəl*. Since these were often criticized as having lost their spiritual character and being reproduced out of social 'habit' (*ləmdi; ልምዲ*), the notion of *bahəl* seemed to have more negative connotations here. *Bahəl,* then, represented local identity and traditions holistically, which included both aspects that were perceived more favourably and aspects that were judged more critically, to different degrees by different people.

Regarding the meaning of *haymanot*, this seemed a bit more straightforward, without eschewing its own set of intricacies. In general, when my interlocutors spoke about their faith, they referred to their religious heritage and the glorious Aksumite history, Church teachings or the word of God, and moral values and standards that should be embodied holistically. It was not surprising that respondents most often reiterated to me what they had heard priests teaching in church or learned from their spiritual fathers. These teachings came in the form of prescriptions, such as 'go to church and listen to its teachings, respect the one-to-one covenant of marriage, live in peace with your spouses, do not syphon ('eat') other people's money, keep the fasts, do not divorce and do not argue because God is not with you'. Members of the laity who knew a little more about the Church and its history often added that the Orthodox *Täwahədo* faith has been grounded in the teachings of the Early Church Fathers. Apart from these definitions, people offered no other explanation of their *haymanot* that would indicate an informed theological understanding. Most interlocutors displayed an experiential understanding of the faith that was deeply ingrained in a Christian Orthodox understanding of human life and reality, without eschewing some syncretism with non-Orthodox belief systems. The sinfulness of humanity and desired state of 'Eternal Life' (*yäzälä'äläm ḫəywät; የዘለዓለም ሕይወት*) were universal premises that everyone in the local society could and did articulate.

Interestingly, the way in which marriage and the conjugal relationship were understood and experienced – a central concern for this study – was rarely placed within this framework

of overcoming sin and achieving eternal life, even though most interlocutors spoke about the ideal of a life-long, monogamous ('one-to-one') marriage and the precondition of peaceful co-existence between the spouses to ensure God's blessings. For the most part, marriage was discussed as a social contract in which the spouses should live together monogamously for the purpose of procreating and helping each other in everyday life. While local people clearly attributed the one-to-one covenant to God's laws, they never showed they considered marriage as a spiritual bond or a vehicle for salvation. This indicated that, while *haymanot* denoted the word of God, which comprised the wider metaphysical edifice governing and holding together the local society, it was not necessarily theology that shaped most people's understandings and experiences of marriage.

Capturing the non-discursive

This naturally leads to an exploration of the role that personal faith and spirituality played in married life and its influence on conjugal behaviour. Any such objective is challenging by its very nature, since both spiritual experience and human conscience are largely unseen realms of human existence and might underpin individual rationalizations, motivations and behaviour in myriad implicit and multi-dimensional ways that an observer can never know in full. As a pragmatic research strategy, I explored how research participants' religious beliefs and faith-based values and standards (as expressed in their discourses) underpinned decisions about marriage, divorce and most importantly abuse, while participating as much as possible in local religious life to observe and experience how local residents embodied their faith and possible implications for their interactions with others in their society. The religious gatherings, of which I attended around fifteen to twenty during fieldwork, offered a very important space in which to experience vernacular religious observance, also providing me with a comparative measure for understanding better behaviour in more private realms, including the conjugal relationship.

The conversations I had with various interlocutors indicated that the religious gatherings were viewed mostly as social events that enabled community members to gather together, to share news about each other and others around them and to drink in a socially acceptable context (especially for women, who could not go to local beer houses or bars as men increasingly did). However, this does not exclude the possibility that local people were simultaneously or fundamentally motivated by a deeply ingrained understanding that these religious gatherings brought blessings to their families and that adherents were expected to

fulfil them as part of their faith. The way in which these were delivered and experienced, often resulting in excessive drinking by some men, which was associated with reported incidents of aggression toward others (including wives), may be compared to more unusual cases of individuals who felt that this vernacular practice of experiencing and living the faith had departed from a theologically meaningful *praxis* and who attempted to embody these highly valued religious norms in a more conscientious and pious manner.

While such differential embodiments could suggest these individuals' different spiritual states and a stronger or weaker faith-based conscience, this could not always or automatically be established both because the internality of the individual could never be penetrated and because faith was experienced in so many ways and realms that it could be manifested unconsciously or in more implicit ways in the rationalizations and actions of most people in the local society. The same challenge emerged from a closer look at faith in marriage, especially around local people's divorce stories. Repeatedly, my respondents affirmed that divorce was a sin and that it was opposed to God's ideal for a monogamous, long-lasting marriage. However, when I asked if this recognition had influenced their decisions to divorce, they replied without hesitation that they had had no other option. For example, one female respondent and her husband divorced after twenty years of marriage because she was infertile. When I asked whether she thought divorce was a sin she answered affirmatively, but added also matter-of-factly that she and her husband had been unable to have children, suggesting that this generally sufficed as an explanation for divorce in the local society. More importantly, like most other divorced women I spoke to, she attributed her divorce to God's thinking by affirming: '*Haymanot* is useful, but it does not allow divorce. But, because everything is of God, one cannot do anything. But, we separated by God's ḥasab' (12 March 2017). Another female respondent similarly observed: 'Yes, it (*haymanot*) is useful (in married life). Meaning, we are taught to be bound together in marriage. But divorce isn't a human's ḥasab, it's God's ḥasab. So, there is nothing we can do' (12 March 2017). The term ḥasab (ሐሳብ) can be translated as 'thought', 'idea', 'opinion' or 'intention', conveying essentially the notion that all things happened for a reason that was beyond human capacity to understand in full, but that these did not fall outside of God's omniscience and good intentions for each individual. Despite not being able to fulfil the religious ideal of a life-long marriage, it would be wrong to conclude that these women lived without a consideration of divine laws, since it was precisely their perception of God's relationship to and presence in human life that helped them 'make sense' of their disappointing divorces and to cope in their aftermath.

The complexities surrounding the study of lived faith were also evident in how research participants selected their spouses and rationalized this choice, as well as how they experienced their married life. For most rural male residents (who had more say in this decision-making compared to women), the choice of spouse was based on physical, material and socio-cultural factors, with marriage being largely a matter of practicality and basic attraction. On the other hand, more heartfelt Christian men sought a spouse who could fulfil religious standards and ideals as they articulated them. Regardless of personal piety, however, most women and men in the local society believed that spouses who shared the same commitment to the faith experienced marriage in a more fulfilling way and suffered less risk of the possibility of divorce. To a large extent this was found to be accurate, but here too the situation proved to be more complicated and nuanced. It is interesting to juxtapose, for example, the case of very pious women and the strong loyalty that they displayed for their husbands and family life with women in society who married primarily for practical reasons and were more prepared to divorce their husbands if the latter failed to meet their responsibilities. One female interlocutor, whom I came to know very well, was especially committed to following her husband in everything he did, attending to his needs with tremendous eagerness and dedication at all times. Our more confidential conversations suggested that she did not do this because he was an exceptionally good husband to her (he, like many other men in the society, downplayed intimacy and did not pay her the attention she desired), but because she was driven to do so *regardless* of his behaviour. This was a highly educated professional woman married to a highly educated professional man who raised seven children, for the large part by herself ,since her husband was often working or travelling across the country. It is also notable that this woman did not have any theological training; rather, her behaviour reflected her traditional upbringing, strong faith and personality. This type of dedication was noticeably different from the dedication many other women showed to their husbands, for whom marriage was understood and experienced as a social contact in which they and their husbands had to meet their respective duties and expectations. While these women would not hesitate to divorce if their husbands failed to meet their conjugal responsibilities (e.g. being responsible breadwinners), the former wife appeared prepared to endure her husband's faults in the most challenging of situations.

Religious upbringing and motivations, therefore, could partially determine women's attitudes as wives, but it could also influence men's decisions and behaviour in their marriage. An encounter I had with a married man in one of the villages of study is particularly illustrative. After lamenting his married life in a private chat, he sought my theology-

informed advice on how a hypothetical husband attracted to another woman should respond to this situation in a Christian manner, without admitting that he was talking about himself at any point in our conversation. This hypothetical man had been married to his first wife for many years, with his wife giving birth to 'good' children, suggesting that she had fulfilled her expectations as a woman and wife in the local society. However, he had suddenly developed an attraction for another woman and was contemplating an illicit affair or a divorce from his wife and a second marriage. My interlocutor was acutely aware of the immoral connotations that such actions could have, since his hypothetical man would be divorcing his wife with no reasonable justification. He himself attributed the protagonist's unlawful 'temptation' to Satan: it was Satan who had entered his head and had implanted in it the desire for another woman. Yet, he still wondered if the love for the other woman could be considered genuine love according to the understanding of the faith. Since I never pretended to be impartial about these debates, I drew on Pauline teachings and suggested why, within Orthodox theology, human actions outside God's 'laws' would not be considered truthful love. My response seemingly made sense to my interlocutor, who intuitively exclaimed that this was 'the' Orthodox understanding, despite my insistence that he should speak to his spiritual father and consult with him about the matter. To this he nodded, although he appeared quite torn over the prospect of talking to the local priest about such a morally questionable matter.

The reason I tell this story is to show how a faith-based sense of morality and righteousness seemed to influence this man's discourse and rationalization, potentially deterring him from a decision that could hurt his wife and spoil his marriage (assuming that the story referred to him). Moreover, this example draws attention to the more unusual and personal situations and conversations during fieldwork that enabled me somehow to penetrate men's (and women's) internal worlds and embodied spirituality. One might argue that expressing my personal opinions or knowledge could influence my participants' views or 'interfere' with their lives, but it would be hypocritical to suggest that any research of this type does not currently do that. I would rather argue that it was precisely my transparency about who I was as an Eastern Orthodox woman and my motivations in conducting this study that enabled me to build relationships of respect and trust with the local people and to achieve more intimate conversations with some of my interlocutors, leading to the insights and observations that have informed this study. My experience suggests that all people appreciate mutuality and equal treatment, so that if we would like our research participants to share their views with us, we must be willing to do the same with them.

Conclusion

Within gender and development studies, researchers have consistently favoured sociological methodologies that have paid little attention to local discourses or the process of 'translating cosmologies' in the analysis of local issues. Many have raised the need for epistemologically reflexive research and for anthropological and multi-dimensional engagement with communities immersed in non-western belief and knowledge systems, but few ethnographic experiences have been made sufficiently transparent to demystify the anthropological process and demonstrate a more transparent and people-centred approach. The objective for this essay was to share some of the more challenging aspects and deeper lessons of my study on intimate partner violence in a religious society outside Anglo-American epistemology, which attempted to overcome some of these limitations. The paper has drawn attention to the intricacies of cross-cultural research, underscoring the urgency for more transparent discussion about data collection and analysis that accounts explicitly for the researcher's role in the anthropological process and affirms openly the limitations and tentativeness of all research that involves multi-dimensional human individuals and realities.

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Appendix: Tables 1-3

Table 1. All research groups and sample sizes

Research group	Total size (N)	Females (f)	Males (m)	Interviews (voice-recorded or note-taking)	Informal discussions
London					
Lay people in London	14	8	6	9	5
Clergy in London	2	-	2	1	1
Ethiopia (excluding Aksum)					
Domestic violence experts in Ethiopia	4	4	-	4	-
Theologians and teachers of the faith in Ethiopia	11	1	10	9	2
Aksum city and countryside					
Lay people 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

 * Personal interviews followed the formal process of asking for consent prior to the conversation taking place. Most but not all were voice-recorded, according to the preference of the interlocutor.

**Informal discussions were more impromptu, being opportunistic discussions of considerable length that had a more general (as opposed to personal) tone. In some cases, multiple discussions were conducted with the same interlocutor. The information was transferred to the fieldwork diary and then collated into a single record of discussions per interlocutor. Permission to use the information in an unattributed fashion was sought usually during or after the conversation.

Table 2. Types of Church-related materials examined (not exhaustive)

Canonical/liturgical books and relevant Andəmta Commentary (AC)

- *Fətha Nägäśt (FN)*, translated by Paulos Tzadua and edited by Peter L. Strauss, English, 1968
- *Ethiopic Didascalia (ED),* translated by Harden John Mason, English, 1920
- *The Bible, the Old and New Testament Books,* Amharic, 2000 (EC)
- *The Book of the Old Testament, Genesis and Exodus: Commentary and Interpretation,* Amharic, 1999 (EC)
- *The Book of Baptism, Holy Matrimony and Unction*, Amharic, 2008 (EC)
- *The Book of St Paul, Reading and Interpretation*, Ge'ez and Amharic, 2007 (EC)

Theological works

- *Order and Canon Law of Marriage of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church,* by Abba L. Mandelfro, English, 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
- *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, by Mekarios et al., English, 1996

EOTC official web materials and webpages

- 'Doctrine of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church', English
- 'The Sacrament of Matrimony', English
- 'Christian Doctrine and Living: Introduction to Christianity' by Abba Bekele, English
- 'Divine Plan and Gender Equality,' by Deacon Gebre Egziabher (Jr.), English, 2015
- The Coptic Church, 'Sacrament of Matrimony' (link provided on the EOTC website), English

Relevant books found in the Ethiopian market

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

John Chrysostom's commentaries

- Chrysostom's commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, original Greek
- Chrysostomic contributions to AC section on the Epistle to the Hebrews, translated by Roger Cowley, English, 1988
- The traditional compilations of Chrysostom's commentaries by Ethiopian scholars:
    - *Dərsan*, Amharic, 1987 (EC)
    - *Tägsaṣ,* Amharic, 1987 (EC)

Table 3. Formats for asking about local conceptualizations of conjugal abuse

How do you (m/f) understand spousal abuse?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, nay ḥadar ṭgə'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 ṭgə'at tärgum 'entay 'əyu?* (ናይ ጥቕዓት ተርጉም እንታይ እዩ?) *Yä tdar ṭqat mən tärgum 'alläw?* (የትዳር ጥቃት ምን ተርጉም አለው?)
How do you (m/f) understand an abusive marriage?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, ṭgə'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?)
How do you (m/f) understand abusive/harmful situations in a marriage?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, ṭgə'at/bädäl zäläwo kunätat ḥadar wəst 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ጥቕዓት/ቢደል ዘለዎ ኩነታት ሓዳር ውስት እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) *Bä hasabš/h, ṭqat/bädäl yalläw huneta tdar wəst məndənäu?* (በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ጥቃት/ቢደል ያለው ሁኔታ ትዳር ውስጥ ምንድነው?)
How do you (m/f) understand harmful behaviour in a marriage?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, bädäläňa ṭäbay ḥadar wəst 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ቢደለኛ ጠባይ ሓዳር ውስት እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) *Bä hasabš/h, bädäläňa ṭäbay tdar wəst məndənäu?* (በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ቢደለኛ ጠባይ ትዳር ውስጥ ምንድነው?)
How do you (m/f) understand an unhealthy relationship/marriage?	*Bä ḥasabki/ka, zäyṭəuy rəkəb/ḥadar 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ዘይጥዑይ ርቅብ/ሓዳር እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) *Bä hasabš/h, ṭəna yälelläw gənəňunät/tdar məndənäu?* (በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ጤና የሌለው ግንኙነት/ትዳር ምንድነው?)
How do you (m/f) understand a harmful relationship/marriage?	*Bä natka/natki ḥasab, bädäl zäläwo rəkəb/hadar 'əntay malät 'əyu?* (በ ሓሳብኪ/ካ ቢደል ዘለዎ ርቅብ/ሓዳር እንታይ ማለት እዩ?) *Bä hasabš/h, bädäl yalläw gənəňunät/tdar məndənäu?* (በ ሃሳብሽ/ህ ቢደል ያለው ግንኙነት/ትዳር ምንድነው?)