At the frontiers of change?

Women and girls' pursuit of education in north-western Tigray, Ethiopia

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Previous page: Female student in Endabaguna Primary School. Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 1993.

It seems to me that there is an intimate connection between what it is possible to know and what we dare to imagine.

Charmaine Pereira (2002)

CONTENT:

List of abbreviations	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Prelude	v
INTRODUCTION: Education as a site for studying social reproduction and change	1
Introduction	1
Research objective and exploratory foci of the ethnographic enquiry	2 5
Ethiopian education in a historical perspective	
Girls' education in the Ethiopian context	11
Theoretical orientation and conceptual framework	13
Bourdieu's theory of practice and the <i>habitus</i> concept	16
Agency and time	21
At the 'frontiers'	23
Tigray region from the perspective of women	25
Organisation of the chapters	30
CHAPTER 1: Struggles for women's emancipation and social change	33
Introduction	33
Tigrayan women in liberation struggle and beyond	36
The struggle for equal rights	41
Contesting feminism	52
Locating feminist standpoints	58 61
Locations or the hybridity of positions?	64
Telling as emancipation or vulnerability? Layering of communication: telling and <i>not</i> -telling	66
Concluding remarks	71
CHAPTER 2: Intersecting dialogical methods with a narrative core	72
Introduction	72
Participant observation and participation	73
The interview situation and beyond	76
Three generations of women; three life stories	79
Considerations of intrusion and power in the interview situation	83
Some notes on language skills and translation	86
Methodological use of photography: photography as mediation	87
Anthropology and art practice; ambiguity and epistemological uncertainty	98
Exploratory surveys	107
Expert interviews	110
Triangulation as analytical tool	111
Ethical considerations	113
Concluding remarks	116
CHAPTER 3: 'Education as the foundation for development'	117
Introduction	117
Introduction to the Ethiopian education policy and programmes, with a	
focus on development and women	118
Global discourses on education, gender equality and development	122
Doxa in the global educational field	124

Educational discourses in Tigrayan schools	130	
Female and male students' perceptions of education	139	
Imagining a future through education		
Inclusions and exclusions based on having or not having education	149	
Missed educational opportunities and the reverse side of education	153	
Gendered gains from education	158	
Concluding remarks	160	
CHARTER A. Manuing and four a survey in the Timuran and and	1/1	
CHAPTER 4: Mapping spaces for agency in the Tigrayan context	161	
Introduction Some notes on choice	161 162	
Choice, <i>adil</i> and the will of God	164	
∂dil as fate and chance	164	
	174	
Religious practice; gendered implications of sin	174	
Differences in religious practice between women and men; risk preferences	180	
Subjecting religious exegesis and penance to considerations of one's own		
Decision-making in the case of family planning: the issue of authority	183	
At the 'frontiers' of religious sentiments and new government policies	185	
Negotiating reproductive choice	191 194	
Family planning; links to education and development	194	
Concluding remarks	197	
CHAPTER 5: Education, generation and the case of underage marriage	199	
Introduction	199	
The issue of culture	200	
Underage marriage and education	201	
Parents' pressure for marriage; girls' appeal to education	205	
Marriage age considerations	211	
Girls' morality: the issue of virginity	217	
Virginity testing	219	
Generational and gendered household dynamics	223	
The intersection of education with concerns about household viability	224	
Work at home and homework	229	
Education and the gendered division of labour	231	
Notes on gendered aspects of drop-out	233	
Female students' determination and success in education	235	
Concluding remarks	239	
CHAPTER 6: Negotiating femaleness	240	
Introduction	240	
The 'gender distinction'	241	
One and the same, <i>and</i> equal	245	
Reversing gender categories	247	
Incorporating women's participation in combat into motherhood	255	
The visuality of sanctioned femaleness	258	
Hegemonic femininity?	268	
Photographic self-representation and identity-formation	272	
Constituting the female student	274	
At the frontiers of femaleness: the issue of embarrassment	285	
The impact of female modesty for girls' success in education	289	
r		

Concluding remarks	292	
CHAPTER 7: Education and revolutions, power and change	294	
Introduction		
Education and revolution in Ethiopia		
Disrupting continuity		
Situating education in socio-cultural dynamics in the Ethiopian context	301	
Some notes on debate, gemgam and revolutionary democracy		
Educational teaching-learning practices		
Observations in Tigrayan classrooms; gendered implications	307	
Copying, critical thinking and imagination	312	
The teacher as role model and change agent	315	
The meeting and women's participation; from consciousness to awareness	320	
Concluding remarks	325	
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: Theorising change; changing theory	326	
Introduction	326	
The issue of change in Bourdieu's theory of practice	328	
Crisis as a prerequisite for change	330	
Reflexivity in processes of change	333	
A consistent dialectical principle	336 339	
Recourse to practice		
Appropriation and creativity	342	
Concluding remarks	345	
POSTSCRIPT	347	
References	351	
Appendix 1: Education questionnaire	383	
Appendix 2: Household questionnaire		
Appendix 3: List of holy days, holidays and fasting periods in the Tigrayan context		
Appendix 4: Rights of women, Article 35 of the Ethiopian Constitution (1995)	389	
Appendix 5: Notes on transcription		
Appendix 6: A simplified Ethiosemitic Transliteration System		

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

AFWT	Association of Fighter Women Tigray
DATW	Democratic Association of Tigray Women
E.C.	Ethiopian Calendar
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EFA	Education for All
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESDP	Educational Sector Development Programs
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MLLT	Marxist Leninist League of Tigray
MOFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development
SDPRP	Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TNO	Tigray National Organisation
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNGEI	UN Girls' Education Initiative
WAB	Women's Affairs Bureau
WAT	Women's Association of Tigray

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iii

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Thank you!

iv

PRELUDE:

It was during my one-year long anthropological fieldwork for my Cand.Polit. thesis in 2002 that I became aware of the young girls moving away from home and their families in the rural area to the market town Endabaguna in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda from the age of 12-13 to continue their education after fourth grade. Two groups of altogether seven rural female students aged 14-18 at the time had approached me to be photographed in their small rented quarters where they lived two and three together. In fact, these girls that were the daughters of the generation of women that had participated in the armed liberation struggle in Tigray (1975-91) impressed me as much as the female fighters had. When doing fieldwork in 2008 for this study I therefore tried to trace what had happened with these seven rural girls:

'Awetash' (21) had married, and had one daughter, but when admitted to university she placed the child in her mother's care and left to continue her education. Dropping out the following year because of a new pregnancy, she re-entered in 2010. Her sister 'Meaza' (20) had married her boy-friend from secondary school with her parents' blessing, and was opting for nursing school. Not admitted because her marks where too low, she eventually gave up since she could not manage the cost of studying in a private college. Since her mother had stopped her from moving to Addis Ababa to join her husband, the young couple decided to start up a business in a rural centre in the wereda where he got employment in the local administration. When I visited her in 2012 she had just had her first child. The fact that 'Welesh' (21) did not pass her tenth-grade exam had made it difficult for her to continue resisting her widowed mother's insistence on marriage, since she had already broken off one engagement that her parents had arranged when she was a child in order to pursue her education. She divorced her husband half a year later, however, started up her own shop in the market town, and in 2008 she was off to undertake six months vocational training. On her return she moved together with a partner of her own choice and had a child with him. She started up a new business of her own, but experienced the devastating loss of her child in 2011. 'Rahwa' (20), who had escaped underage marriage by insisting on education, but starting to get ill during my fieldwork in 2002, had died in 2005. The secrecy surrounding the sudden disappearance of another of these rural schoolgirls in 2002 I later learned was due to her dropping out of school and running away with her boyfriend to a town in western Tigray when getting pregnant. In 2012 I also managed to establish that the last two of these seven schoolgirls had also joined university.

v

This short prelude touches on some of the themes that will be discussed in this thesis and shows the complexity of processes that surrounds Tigrayan girls' educational pursuit. Together with the fighter women who ventured to the 'wilds' (*bereka*) to fight for social, economic and political change, the above girls' commitments and challenges, successes and setbacks have inspired and informed the ethnographic enquiry for this study in profound ways. Their pursuit for education has served as a constant reminder of both the structural conditioning of these girls' educational pursuit *and* their agency.

INTRODUCTION: Education as a site for investigating social reproduction and change

Introduction

Defining education as a site for investigation, this anthropological research project, which is located in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda (district) in the north-western zone of Tigray region in Ethiopia, explores gendered processes of social reproduction and change from the perspective of women. The historical context and initial inspiration for this study is based on the Tigrayan women's participation as fighters in Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) during the armed struggle to overthrow the military regime Derg in Ethiopia (1975-91). The revolutionary pursuit for political, social and economic reform that the Tigrayan struggle $(\not A h / qalsi)^1$ entailed, had also included the 'woman question' (Hammond 1989: 83). While the Tigrayan women's taking up of arms in itself posed a challenge to gender norms, women were actively engaged in pursuing 'their own revolution within a revolution' (Gebru Tareke 1983, in Tsegay 1999: 82) for emancipation and equal rights. Related to Tigrayan women's contributions during the struggle is, the effectuation of gender sensitive policies and laws after the TPLF-based Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition seized power in Ethiopia in May 1991, implying new entitlements for women and younger generations of girls, and significantly so within education.

Education had been one of the priorities of the Tigrayan people during the struggle, and providing 'education to the people' (???UC: ?:?4.7.6.7/timhirti nihafash) under the tree in the cover of dark – or under temporary-build roofs or huts (?.6.7/das) that could not be spotted and bombed from the air – was understood as one tool in the fight against oppression that, according to John Young (1997b), had strengthened the loyalties to TPLF. In their pursuit of development, education has continued to be a major concern for the present TPLF-based EPRDF government, and an important means for the country to become a medium-income economy. Furthermore, according to the latest education statistics, girls in Tigray have outnumbered boys in primary education (grades 1-8) over a number of years – only surpassed in the Ethiopian context by girls in the capital city Addis Ababa – and are presently on par with the boys in the first cycle of secondary school (grades 9-10) (e.g. TRS-EB 2007, 2010; FDRE-MOE 2009, 2011).

¹ Amharic (the national language in Ethiopia) and Tigriña (or Tigrinya/Tigrigna) spoken in Tigray, have the same base in Geez/Ge'ez (**707**; *Giaz*), which is still used as the ceremonial language in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; all using the *Giaz* alphabet (*fidel*). Transliteration of Tigriña in this thesis follows the simplified Ethiosemitic Translation System (see Appendix 6). Personal names, place names and administrative terms are transliterated according to the most commonly-used spelling in English.

Education in Ethiopia today is part of a 'world or global educational field' (Lingard 2006: 287) implying national commitments to international initiatives like Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (especially MDG 2).² Representative for this global commitment is the vision of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) to accomplish: '*A world where all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming societies where gender equality becomes a reality.*'³ Huge outdoor boards in major cities in Ethiopia with bright-coloured photographs of Ethiopian rural girls in school situations with the text '*Girls' education benefits all*', signed UNICEF, also come to mind.⁴ Traversing intrinsic and instrumental rationales for educating girls, this kind of educational rhetoric points to the current importance attached to women's education in international development discourse (e.g. Tjomsland 2009). The underlying presumption is that women's educational attainment will impact on gender relations and accelerate processes of change that, in a neo-liberal sense, tend to be understood in terms of economic growth.

The two communities in the north-western zone of Tigray region where this anthropological research has been carried out – and which also constituted the locations for my anthropological Cand. Polit. thesis *Ane suqh' ile. I keep quiet. Focusing on women's agency in western Tigray, North-Ethiopia* (Mjaaland 2004c) – is the semi-urban market town of Endabaguna, which is the administrative centre of Asgede Tsimbla Wereda (district), and the rural sub-district, Tabia Mayshek. This study involves three generations of Tigrayan women, including former female fighters, whose lives are structurally conditioned by different historical contexts and diverging opportunities in education. Defining education as a site where generational perspective is chosen in order to access contestations of authority and challenges to gender norms, in the context of new educational opportunities having opened up for Tigrayan girls in present day Ethiopia.

Research objective and exploratory foci of the ethnographic enquiry

The main objective for this anthropological study is to *investigate gendered processes of social reproduction and change from the perspective of women in the historical and socio*-

² UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2: *Achieve universal primary education*, by ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. See: <u>http://www.mdgmonitor.org/goal2.cfm</u>

³ Adopted at the 13 June 2008 meeting of the UNGEI Global Advisory Committee in Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁴ Observed on a visit to Ethiopia in 2003.

cultural context of north-western Tigray, Ethiopia. Based on the ethnographic data from Tigray, I will also contribute to theory-building on the issue of change, by suggesting a modification of Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) generative principle of *habitus* in his theory of practice. The ethnographic enquiry is based on the following open-ended research foci:

- Exploring the meanings education is vested with for different generations of women by both those who have it and those who do not, and the aspirations for the future that access to education generates for the younger generation of girls and boys.
- Exploring the decision-making strategies and the spaces for agency that women utilise in relation to this-worldly and other-worldly authorities, and girls' negotiations of their pursuit of education in the generational context of parents' power.
- Exploring unquestioned presumptions about sanctioned gender identity that are reproduced in spite of structural changes and the opportunity for young Tigrayan girls to do something other than their mothers and grandmothers, through education.
- Exploring how the visuality of sanctioned femaleness, as this relates to appearance and behaviour in society and in school, impinges on women's agency in general and girls' pursuit of education in particular.

Hence, gendered processes of social reproduction and change, is neither studied only, nor primarily in school, but focus on implications of education for women's and girls' agentive strategies. What is explored, then, from the perspective of women, is how education intersects with contemporary processes and gender issues in everyday practices in a particular area in north-western Tigray. Situated in the complex intertwinement of social reproduction and change, the exploration moves back and forth between gendered socio-cultural processes based on the historical context of struggle *and* gendered issues as they play out in relation to education both inside and outside school. This study, thus, deals with gendered socio-cultural dynamics, which go beyond education but nevertheless could impact on girls' educational pursuit. Understood as a social strategy that gives access to socio-cultural dynamics, the narrative accounts of women over three generations – focused on how their present situation and future opportunities are reasoned about – are central in the ethnographic enquiry. The exploratory research foci have also been operationalised by centring on what woman and girls do in practice, how they handle gendered and generational conflicts, and how sanctioned gender identity is managed when women and girls enter new arenas. Alternating between

3

these intersecting perspectives have made it possible to explore the complexity of co-existing processes that risk being lost in more simplified development discourses primarily concerned with the disadvantages that women and girls face in terms of their gender (e.g. Heward 1999; Cornwall et al. 2007a, 2007b, 2008), and not with their agency.

In order to explore the complexity of contemporary processes, the ethnographic enquiry has made use of a combination of methods (see also Chapter 2). This study is based on anthropological fieldworks in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda (district) in the north-western zone of Tigray in July-December 2008 (6 months), April-July 2009 (3 months), October-December 2010 (3 months), and December 2011-February 2012 (3 months). Participant observation draws, furthermore, on my involvement and informal dialogue with people in this particular area of Tigray since 1993 based on my, eventual, fair command of the local language Tigriña. Since it was as a professional photographer that I came to Tigray for the first time in 1993, I also have photographed people over the same number of years. My methodological use of photography – serving as an interactive process that, in this study, gave me access to rural school girls' identity management – is based on my rethinking (over the years) of still photography in anthropological research that goes beyond a use of the photograph as evidence (Mjaaland 2004c, 2006, 2009b). The life-story-based interviews with women over three generations, from 18 to 75 years of age, in both the semi-urban and rural community of Asgede Tsimbla Wereda, has, in representing a historical timeline, given access to processes of change and to what has not changed. Expert interviews with professionals in Tigray working with women's issues and/or education in their work on regional, wereda and tabia levels, together with an introduction to policies covering these issues, have been included to identify the top-down perspectives on these issues in the Ethiopian context. Emerging in the research process was also the need to include more female and male students in the study to establish how they had reached this far in education, and to explore their aspirations for the future through education. This resulted in an exploratory education survey with 200 students in grades 8-11 (see Appendix 1). Having provided important contextual information, a second exploratory household survey, involving 170 women in both areas of study, was conducted to address women's general situation, generational differences, and mothers' attitudes to their children's education (see Appendix 2). To be able to understand the significance of the current expansion of the educational system in Ethiopia, I will begin, however, by giving a swift historical introduction to Ethiopian education, and where girls up until recently occupied a marginal position.

4

Ethiopian education in a historical perspective

The establishment of the first schools in Ethiopia cannot be dated exactly but, according to Teshome G. Wagaw (1979), it is estimated by scholars to have followed soon after Christianity was introduced as the state religion in the fourth century A.D. (see also Bahru 2002), in what was then the Aksumite Kingdom (100-800 A.D.) in the northern part of present day Ethiopia, including Tigray region as well as parts of Eritrea and Yemen. Up until the twentieth century, and the establishment of public schooling in Ethiopia, the provision of education belonged to the religious domain, where the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had gained close to monopoly (Tekeste 1990).⁵ Richard Pankhurst (1992a) notes that while the nobility could send their sons to the Ethiopian Orthodox churches and monasteries for a shorter period of time to acquire reading skills, those who most often attended were sons of the clergy opting for life-long careers within the church as part of an influential and revered clergy.⁶ The church as a traditional learning institution in the Ethiopian context has existed up until the present day parallel to a secular and rapidly expanding public education system.

Christian missionaries also have a long tradition of establishing schools in Ethiopia as an integrated part of their missionary project of religious conversion. The first missionaries, who were Portuguese Jesuits, arrived in the mid-sixteenth century trying to exploit the new military relation between Ethiopia and Portugal for conversion to Roman Catholicism, but were expelled from Ethiopia a century later by Fasilidas (r. 1632-1667) (e.g. Marcus 1994). Lutheran mission schools started operating from the mid-seventeenth century onwards (e.g. Teshome 1979), most often in areas where the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had less, or no, influence. Before Emperor Menelik II (r.1889-1913) had established the first public school in Ethiopia in 1908, called the Menelik II School, he had already sent the first batch of Ethiopians to study in (the Orthodox Christian) Russia⁷ as well as in Switzerland (e.g. Paulos & Messay 2010). While Menelik II has been described as the first Ethiopian emperor with a somewhat modernist vision, Emperor Tewodoros II (r. 1855-1868) before him had in fact

⁵ When referring to Ethiopian scholars in this thesis I will follow the common addressing of a person's with his/her first name, since surnames as such are not in use in the Ethiopian context, where it is the father's and the grandfather's first names that are used to signify kinship. Which name is used when referring Ethiopian authors do, however, vary within the international academic context.

⁶ The traditional Orthodox Christian Church School constitutes different levels of learning, each over several years. The first level is the Reading School (*Nebab Bet*) where reading skills and the reading of selected religious texts are taught. To be able to serve as a deacon (*haleqa*), or a priest (*qeshi*), liturgy (*qidasi*) is then studied at an advanced level in the Music School (*Zema Bet*) or the School for Church Dance (*Aquaquam*). Then further advancement in traditional church education is through the Poetry School (*Qiné Bet*) or the School of Books (*Metsehaf Bet*), which educate the church's teachers (*meregeta*) and scholars (*debtera; deftera* in Tigriña) (e.g. Mulugeta 1959; Teshome 1979; Binns 2005).

⁷ Likewise, during the Soviet-supported Derg regime (1974-91) many went for higher education in the Soviet Union.

established a technological school for arms manufacture with the assistance of Western missionaries, and Ethiopians had also been sent to Europe to learn arms manufacture (e.g. Bahru 1991; Paulos & Messay 2010). The Menelik II School was staffed mainly by Egyptian scholars belonging to the Orthodox Coptic Christian Church, 'as a happy compromise between tradition and innovation' (Bahru 1991: 108). Tekeste Negash (1990) notes that, up until the 1920s the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had strongly opposed any secularisation of schooling, since this was understood as undermining their authority. It was not before the reign of *Ras* Tafari Mekonnen, later crowned as Emperor Haile Selassie I, that Ethiopia in 1925 got its second public school, the Tafari Mekonnen School.⁸ Seeing education as important for the modernisation of Ethiopia, a steady expansion of education followed.⁹ As Tekeste (2006) asserts, however, when the Education Sector Review of 1971-2, during Haile Selassie's reign, proposed to control access to secondary education as the economic sector did not manage to absorb the growing number of secondary school-leavers – and going against urban sentiments when announcing a move of focus to the rural population – it contributed to his fall in 1974 (see also Tekeste 1996). At that time, around 12 percent of the school-age population had access to primary education, 4 percent had access to secondary school, and over 90 percent of the population was still illiterate (ibid: 105-6, Tekeste 1990).

The regime that followed the February Revolution in 1974, where the Ethiopian student movement had played an important role, soon developed into a despotic military regime, termed the Derg (literally 'committee'), claiming to be socialist (1974-91). Dismissing the imperial education system as elitist in its urban focus and production of an educated elite that served the regime, the education system continued to expand during the Derg, which needed qualified personnel for a growing public sector (not least the Ministry of Defence). The surplus of secondary-school leavers were, together with college students, teachers and professors, sent to the rural areas to participate in the first campaign of 'Development for Cooperation' (1976-78) to provide literacy for the masses and, as Tekeste

⁸ Both these two public schools were language-oriented – with French serving as *lingua franca* – and educating clerks and accountants for an expanding state bureaucracy. Alliance Française Schools had been established in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa already in 1912. The Tafari Mekonnen School also had a French director, and the students sat for the French Government Certificate Examination. After the Italians were defeated in Ethiopia in 1941 by joint British-Ethiopian efforts, Britain tried to gain a foothold in the country and went far to contest Ethiopian sovereign rights. Ethiopian sovereignty was for the most part restored in 1944, but Britain continued to make territorial claims to Eritrea and Ogaden up until 1954. In this period the *lingua franca* shifted from French to English (e.g. Bahru 1991).

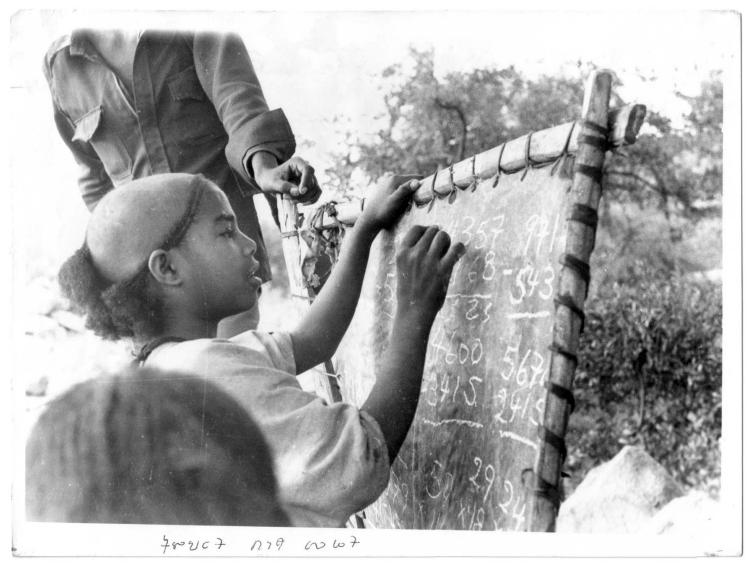
⁹ UNESCO, the World Bank, USAID and Swedish Sida have been positioned as major partners in Ethiopian education planning from the 1950s onwards. The first loan from the World Bank to the Ethiopian educational sector was released in 1966. Sweden's government-to-government support to Ethiopia via Sida dates back to 1954, and was not disrupted (as with USAID) during the Derg regime (Tekeste 1996, 2006; Sida 2004).

expresses it, 'to preach to the peasantry the gospel of the new socialist revolution' (Tekeste 2006: 19). From 1979 through to the mid-1980s the 'National Literacy Campaign' mobilised thousands of secondary-school leavers for the government's literacy programme in the rural areas all over the country, reducing illiteracy, it was claimed, to 37 percent (Tekeste 1990). With the inauguration of girls' education in Ethiopia having been slow relative to boys', Emebet (1998) emphasises the boost these programmes had for women's literacy. The Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA), established in support of the Derg, even claimed that female illiteracy had been reduced from 93 to 50.2 percent by the year 1983 (Emebet 1998: 36). Enrolment to public education continued to increase during the Derg regime, covering 35 percent of the school-aged children 7-16 years old by the end of the 1980s (Tekeste 2006: 19). Tekeste also notes that a mismatch between educational expansion and allocated resources increasingly plagued the educational system during the Derg regime, as more and more resources were directed to war efforts against insurgency groups in Ogaden, Eritrea and Tigray (see also Tekeste 1996).

In spite of the fact that consecutive regimes in Ethiopia during the twentieth century had included education as part of their political nation-building and modernising projects, Jenny Hammond notes that only about 5 percent of the children in Tigray had access to any form of public schooling prior to the Tigrayan struggle (1975-91), and the schools that existed were primarily situated in urban areas (Hammond 1989: 80). The few schools operating outside the bigger towns in Tigray at the time of the commencement of the struggle had readily been closed down by the Derg regime, who claimed that the teachers were TPLF sympathisers (see also Young 1998). Following Hammond (1989), it had been a demand of the people that the TPLF opened schools, and so they did from 1979 onwards. TPLF trained and provided teachers themselves and the local communities were responsible for the school buildings.¹⁰ If these were not available, or not yet erected, schooling was conducted in the shade of a big tree ($\lambda \eta \lambda \gamma \delta \dot{\phi} \lambda \mathcal{P}/ab$ igri gom; literally 'at the foot of the tree'), or in temporary huts (das) [Fig. 1]. A male teacher from the struggle in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda once took me to the well-hidden cave that had been his classroom in a rural village. One female fighter (41) having served as a teacher during the struggle explained: *T was teaching* the farmers ... night and day, even if there was enemy [Derg] activity day and night, without surrendering we carried the 'blackboard' (in English) on our heads; we were teaching the students in the shade of a tree that means.¹¹ Her account points to the underlying idea that

¹⁰ By 1987, 900 teachers had been trained by TPLF (Hammond 1989: 80).

¹¹ Recorded interview 21 December 2008/Tahsas 12, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 41 in Tigriña).



[Fig 1]: Outdoor-school in Tigray during the struggle (1975-91), using a blackboard of animal hide. Dated 1978 E.C. (1986). Courtesy: The Struggle Museum, Mekelle.

the struggle was not only to be won with arms but also with education, and targeted the rural population and their children as well as the fighters themselves. In 1986, however, having educated 27.000 children up to sixth grade, TPLF decided to change its educational focus to those aged 14-25 (Hammond 1989: 80; Aregawi 2009), in the interests of the struggle (see also Young 1997b).

In my study area in Tigray, in what is now Asgede Tsimbla Wereda, secular schools had been non-existent up until 1969, when the Elementary School Building Unit (ESBU)¹² built the first primary school in the market town of Endabaguna and had completed another three schools in the wereda by the time Emperor Haile Selassie was ousted from power in 1974. The following numbers shows the steady increase in availability of education in this area after primary education (then grades 1-6) had started up in the market town in 1969-70 (1962 E.C.).¹³ As far as I have been able to establish from records at the wereda education bureau – the number of permanent primary schools was around nine at the time of the downfall of the Derg in 1991, not including the extensive schooling that had taken place in temporary huts during the struggle. Under the present TPLF-based EPRDF government the number of schools in the wereda had more than doubled ten years later to 24 primary schools and one secondary school. After another ten years, the number of schools in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda for the school year 2011/2012 (2004 E.C.) were 63 primary schools (49 schools grade 1-8, and 14 schools grades 1-4), two secondary schools (Endabaguna, grades $9-12^{14}$, Kisadgeba, grades 9-10), plus 43 satellite schools providing different levels of education between grades 1-4 in temporary built huts (*das*).¹⁵ From January 2012, Alternative Basic Education (ABE) – providing literacy, numeracy and basic education for adults in accordance with an intensified focus in the last Educational Sector Development Program (ESDP IV) (FDRE-MOE 2010b) – was planned to start up in 65 places in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda. In spite of regional differences still prevailing within Ethiopia itself, the education policies of the

¹² The Elementary School Building Unit (ESBU) under the Ministry of Education was financed by Sida. Around 6000 school buildings were constructed all over Ethiopia from 1968 onwards and into the 1990s (Sida 2004).
¹³ E.C. refers to the Ethiopian Calendar which starts the New Year on *Meskerem* 1 (11 September). The Ethiopian Calendar is seven years, eight months and ten days behind the Gregorian calendar. Every month has 30 days, the 5 remaining days (6 in a leap year), constitutes the 13th month, *P* 'agumen.

¹⁴ Grades 11 and 12 will be accommodated in new buildings separate from first cycle of secondary school from the school-year 2012/13 (2005 E.C.).

¹⁵ The primary school in Endabaguna expanded to include seventh grade from 1992/93 (1985 E.C.) and eighth grade from 1993/94 (1986 E.C.). From 2000-01 (1993 E.C.) the first cycle of secondary school (grades 9-10) has been provided in Endabaguna, expanded to include the preparatory level, grade 11 from 2008/09 (2001 E.C.) and grade 12 from 2009/10 (2002 E.C.). Primary education in Endabaguna was also supplemented with a new primary school (grades 1-4) in 2005/06 (1998 E.C.), and extended with grades 5-8 in 2010/11 (2003 E.C.). In Tabia Mayshek first cycle of primary education (grades 1-4) started up from 1994/95 (1987 E.C.), and expanded to include grades 5-8 from 2005/2006 (1998 E.C.) onwards with satellite schools (grades 1-4) established in all three *kushets* (villages) that constitute this rural tabia.

current EPRDF-government have acquired international acclaim for the increased number of children having access to education (e.g. World Bank 2005), and because the gender gap in primary education is in the process of closing (see also Unterhalter 2010). Regional and national education statistics¹⁶ also shows that Amhara and Tigray region are at the forefront in pursuing educational policy goals within Ethiopia itself.¹⁷

A new educational structure was introduced by the EPRDF-government with its Education and Training Policy (FDRE-MOE 1994) and the Educational Sector Development Program (ESDP) I (FDRE-MOE 1997) that followed. The duration of primary school was changed from six to eight years (4+4), and secondary school to four years (2+2) where the last two years were introduced as either an academic preparation for university, or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in public or private colleges or training centres (as privatisation of education was opened up in the Education and Training Policy). National exams are now carried out at the end of eighth and tenth grade (while, earlier, there were national exams at the end of sixth, eighth and twelfth grades).¹⁸ In line with the EPRDF's ethno-nationalist policies of decentralisation to the regions the right recognised in the Education and Training Policy to learn in one's own language means that the language of instruction in primary school (grades 1-8) should be in a local language. While Amharic and English are taught as subjects for all students from first grade, the language of instruction from ninth grade onwards is English (earlier, from seventh grade). In a study conducted for the Ministry of Education in 2006 it is stated that around a quarter of the approximately 80 languages in Ethiopia were covered by then, but also that the shift to English as the language of instruction in some regions can still take place earlier than eighth grade, usually from seventh or eighth grade (Heugh et al. 2007).¹⁹ School fees have been abolished in grades 1-10 from the mid-1990s onwards (e.g. World Bank/UNICEF 2009), but schools continue to

¹⁶ Statistics reviewed in the *Education Statistics Annual Abstracts* from Tigray Regional State Education Bureau cover the school years between 2002/2003 (1995 E.C.) and 2009/2010 (2002 E.C.) (TRS-EB 2007, 2008, 2010). For Ethiopia the statistics reviewed are the *Education Statistics Annual Abstract* between 2001 E.C./2008-09 and 2003 E.C./2010-2011 from the Ministry of Education (FDRE-MOE 2009, 2010a, 2010c, 2011).

¹⁷ Since Tigray and SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region) were targeted for the BESO I (Basic Education System Overhaul) in Ethiopia starting off in 1994 with the support of USAID, this might also have contributed to boosting the educational system in Tigray. That this region is geographically and demographically compact, with cohesive, homogenous population with one primary language was seen as advantageous in this respect (FDRE-BESO 1998: 7). The BESO I lasted over a seven-year period with the primary aim 'to improve quality and equity of primary education in an expanded (and expanding) primary education system' (FDRE-BESO 1998: i; see also Tekeste 1996). The BESO II-BEP (Basic Education Strategic Objective – Basic Education Program) for a new five-year period followed from 2002 onwards targeting Afar, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and SNNPR (USAID 2007).

¹⁸ At the end of twelfth grade there is now an entrance exam for university.

¹⁹ Paulos Milkias and Messay Kebede claim that the present school system in fact contributes to the ethnicisation of Ethiopia at the cost of national integration (Paulos & Messay 2010: 3).

depend on contribution from parents in terms of labour and money. In the second cycle of secondary school (grades 11-12), the yearly school-fee in 2011/12 in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda was 110 Ethiopian Birr²⁰. Cost-sharing was put in place on college and university levels in Ethiopia from 2002/03, and is not unlike the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (*Lånekassen*) where allowances are given as loans during education to be repaid when entering employment. Affirmative action in education in Ethiopia means conducting special tutorial classes (**FAPE ATIN**/*filuy* <u>hagez</u>) for girls only – usually in Maths and English (but can also be extended to include subjects like Chemistry and Physics) – and allowing girls to have lower marks than boys to proceed in the education system. Girls' entitlements in education have, in fact, changed significantly with the education policy and programmes of the current EPRDF-government from the perspective of women's historical marginalisation in Ethiopian education.

Girls' education in the Ethiopian context

While church education was basically a male preserve, its outreach had been limited even for boys. Girls had not been denied participation in the first four stages (usually two years) of elementary church education, but Teshome (1979) notes that, in practice, girls' participation had not been encouraged (see also Seyoum 1991). Girls continued, however, to be marginalised in modern education (Sevoum 1986), even though they were not *de jure* excluded. After the first public school in Ethiopia had been established in 1908, it took until 1931 before the first school for girls only, the Empress Menen School²¹, was established (Bahru 2002; see also Pankhurst 1991). The latter provided both primary and secondary education for upper-class girls first and foremost as a preparation for modern life after marriage (Emebet 1998). In his book Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia, on reformist intellectuals in the early twentieth century, Bahru Zewde asserts, however, that there was a growing conviction that even the highest educational attainment by men was of little consequence if women were not also educated (Bahru 2002: 28). Discussing the status of women in education in Ethiopia prior to 1974, Seyoum Teferra asserts that women's general exclusion from education constituted 'a missing piece in the development puzzle' (Sevoum 1986: 5). When emphasising that 'the question of the emancipation of women, is inextricably linked with their education, and their freedom could be said to be a function of their level of

²⁰ 110 ETB was in 2012 equivalent to approximately 6.1 USD.

²¹ Menen was the wife of the regent, Ras Tafari Mekonnen, later Emperor Haile Selassie I. This private school was shut down during the Italian occupation (1936-41), but when teaching resumed it was as a public school (Pankhurst 1991).

participation in education' (ibid: 16), Seyoum is in line with feminist perspectives on women and education (e.g. Acker 1987; Arnot & Weiler 1993; Weiler 2008) currently mainstreamed into a prevailing premise in global education policies and development discourses (e.g. EFA, MDG and UNGEI mentioned above). This inclusion of women was also in line with the revolutionary sentiments of the Tigrayan struggle.

Two stationary schools exclusively for women were established during the struggle since few of the women who joined had any education. Marta School started up in 1983 and March 8 School was established in 1984; the former school was for female fighters only while the latter was for both civil women and female fighters (Hammond 1989, 1999; Tsegay 1999; Roman 2000). With the establishment of these schools it was acknowledged that women were lagging behind on issues of literacy and education but, also, that not being educated limited their contribution to the struggle. A major concern in the curriculum in these schools was, according to Hammond, to teach women about the 'woman question' and to sensitise them politically. The March 8 School arranged shorter courses, while the teaching at Marta School was, at first, four years before it changed at the end of the 1980s to take only women who had fifth grade already, and limiting the education to one year. The aim of educating women in Marta School was for them to be able to work politically with women of the masses and teach civil women much needed skills on health issues and mother and child care, home economics and agricultural issues, and to enhance the political consciousness of the female fighters, 'to understand their oppression and struggle consciously' (Hammond 1989: 86).

The former fighter Roman Gebreselassie notes in her thesis on women and leadership in Tigray: 'It was important to educate women to make their political participation *visible*. To empower women, education and awareness raising was crucial to the road of equality and political leadership' (Roman 2005: 27; italics added). When holding up women's revolutionary pursuit during the struggle against the large number of Tigrayan girls now going to school – and which is significant also in the Ethiopian context – it seems justifiable to suggest a historical connection. Most of the young Tigrayan girls that I interviewed or talked with did not, however, seem that much interested in, or informed about, the history of the female fighters from their mothers' and grandmothers' generation a few decades ago, and not many linked their present situation to these women's contributions in the past; a point which Young (1997a) notes also concerned the young generation only a few years after the struggle had ended. One exception is the young woman 'Welesh'²² (21) who says: '*Because of their*

²² I have altered the names of all the women who have participated in this research project. They are marked with quote marks the first time they appear in the text, otherwise not.

[the fighter women's] participation in the struggle, as a result of their sacrifices ... now, at the current stage, there are better rights for women that means.²³ A case in point is also the song that the young Tigrayan girl (9) sings for me:

I was oppressed and had nothing With the victory we can go to school today.²⁴

Much has changed in Tigray since the younger generation's mothers and grandmothers were themselves young, and since the Tigrayan women ventured to *bere<u>ka</u>* ($\mathbf{n} \boldsymbol{z}$ ' \mathbf{n} ; wilds/wilderness) to partake in the armed liberation struggle. The narrative accounts that these three generations of women have provided about their lives, when aligned, also constitutes a historical timeline in terms of education. By defining education as a site for investigation that includes global influences and socio-cultural dynamics in the Tigrayan context, this research project seeks to explore processes of change as well as deeply embedded and 'hard-lived' gendered aspects of social reproduction.

Theoretical orientation and conceptual framework

The initial idea for a conceptual framework for this research project was based on the possibility of using an empirical case to discuss the common linking of women's empowerment and education in international and national development policies and strategies, on both government and non-government levels. One example of this causal linking is the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3: *'Promote gender equality and empower women'*, and which targets education *only* to reach this goal. This targeting of education, which is defined in terms of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015, is based on a numerical measure of gender parity *only*²⁵ (see also Kabeer 2005). Similar causal presumptions are underlying the linking of education and empowerment in a Concept Paper from Women's Association of Tigray (WAT) where oppression and discrimination of women is understood as caused mainly by lack of access to education. The emphasis is on the importance of

²³ Recorded interview 6 October 2008/Meskerem 26, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 4 in Tigriña).

'educational enhancement (both formal and non-formal programs) because they are the basis for all sorts of development and empowerment for women' (WAT 2006).²⁶

Empowerment in the Tigrayan context is used in the meaning of 'capacity building' (?ችግ ምሪባይ/aqhmi mibay) which usually implies receiving some kind of training together with micro-finance loans. It is also the case that, while 'empowerment of women' is the term frequently used in the Ethiopian National Action Plan for Gender Equality (FDRE-MOWA 2006), in the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP II & III) (FDRE-MOE 2000, 2005) and the two first Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (FDRE-MOFED 2002, 2006), empowerment is most often used as a gender neutral term pertaining to community empowerment and decentralisation (of power). Savitri Bishnat (2001) emphasises that, from its inception in the 1970s (by Third World feminists and women's organisations), the concept of women's empowerment has slid from being,

explicitly used to frame and facilitate the struggle for social justice and women's equality through a transformation of economic, social and political structures at the national and international levels (...) [to being] focused on enlarging the choices and productivity of individual women, for the most part, in isolation from a feminist agenda; and in the context of a withdrawal of state responsibility for broad-based economic and social support (Bishnat 2001: 11).

After two decades of political disagreement at the UN women's conferences since 1975 in Mexico as to what should count as women's issues (e.g. Sen 2005), the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing 1995 was presented under the slogan, *'Historic global commitment to women's empowerment'*.²⁷ Empowerment, together with the mainstreaming of gender, seems to have offered digestible strategies forward that downplayed former contestations between the North and the South on the issue of feminism. At the same time the thrust of the empowerment concept slid from feminist activism and social mobilisation to the issue of development often initiated by others than the women themselves.

In spite of the wide application of the empowerment concept, there is, as Naila Kabeer notes, 'no consensus on the meaning of the term and it is frequently used in a way that robs it of any political meaning, sometimes as no more than a substitute word for integration or

²⁷ See: <u>http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn_video.html</u>

participation in processes whose main parameters have already been set elsewhere' (Kabeer 1994: 224). Andrea Cornwall notes that the 'empowerment-lite' framework that prevails in the context of development interventions has lost the straight talk about power and calls for equality and justice that once was part of feminist discourses of women's empowerment:

Talk about empowering women turns 'power' into a transferable commodity rather than a structural relation. (...) Making 'choices' says less about the capacity to determine the parameters of the possible than the possibility of selecting the options that development intervention makes available (Cornwall 2007: 1).

Accommodated within a neo-liberal understanding of development and progress concerned with eradicating poverty without stirring up issues of structural injustice and redistribution in relation to the affluent world, the political rigour in the empowerment concept has been lost. In a footnote Kabeer distances her use of 'choice' in relation to empowerment from more neoliberal and individualistic understandings of the term (Kabeer 2002: 18-9, n. 1), and emphasises that for choice to be empowering it has to challenge power relations. She makes a distinction between 'transformative agency' that acts against the grain of patriarchal values and challenges power relations, and 'passive agency' that might increase women's efficiency within the exiting structural context without challenging the structural context itself (Kabeer 2005: 15; see also Kabeer 1999a, 1999b, 2002). As such, 'passive agency' is much in line with Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) perspective on the different strategies that women adopt when bargaining with patriarchy. These perspectives therefore acknowledge that women's agency does not necessarily initiate permanent structural changes in gender relations. For example, while the partaking in liberation struggles like the Tigrayan commonly rests on the presumption that these women were empowered (Roman 2000; see also Stinson 2005), the question from a structural perspective is to what extent their participation implied transformative agency that changed gendered relations of power on a more permanent basis. Ann Levey (2005) further notes that the commitment within liberalism in general to respect autonomy, freedom and a person's choice does not sit well with feminist commitments to political action when women, rather than challenging oppressive structures, choose to comply.

Emphasis on the different historically-situated locations for women's activism and social mobilisation for change in the North and in the South, linking up with feminist postcolonial critique and feminist standpoint theory (see Chapter 1), has also urged, in a feminists sense, an incorporation of the issue of power in this thesis. Structural considerations in relation to empowerment and agency also brought me into a much larger and more

15

fundamental theoretical debate: the well-known problem of mediating structure-oriented and actor-oriented understandings of social life within the social sciences as discussed by, for example, Anthony Giddens (1976, 1982, 1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) and Margaret S. Archer (1982, 1995, 2003). Of these authors, what hereafter will be referred to as Bourdieu's theory of practice, has both fascinated and intrigued me the most. Structurally conditioned by particular material environments (later termed 'fields'), and incorporating the issue of power and domination, his theoretical framework seemed at first to answer to aspects of non-western and postcolonial feminist concerns for how the specificity of power relations in a historically conditioned location intersect in women's lives and struggles. As I will discuss below, insights from Bourdieu's (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* – with the revised version *Logic of Practice*²⁸ (Bourdieu 1990a), which incorporates insights from *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984) – and *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu 2001), enable an analytical approach to the most deeply embedded and 'hard-lived' structural aspects of social reproduction that condition women's agency.

Bourdieu's theory of practice and the habitus concept

With its universal pretentions, Bourdieu's theory of practice is constructed as a '[meta]-theory of the mode of generation of [all] practices' (Bourdieu 1977: 72). The theoretical concept *habitus* constitutes the generative principle (or schema) for the generation of practices and perceptions.²⁹ *Habitus* is generated through practices conditioned by living in a particular material environment, *and* generates practices that make practical sense and that can answer to all eventualities in this particular environment. Through the mimetic learning of practices the structural conditioning of living in a specific environment becomes internalised without conscious involvement. Embodied as 'body *hexis*' (ibid: 82), these internalised practices are, 'turned into permanent dispositions, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*' (ibid: 93-4; italics in original). In this manner the prevailing order is established as self-evident and natural since 'what is essential *goes without saying because it comes without saying*: the tradition is silent, not least about itself as tradition' (ibid: 167; italics in original). Status groups or 'class', refers to 'sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing

²⁸ The French title *Le sens practique* points, however, more to a practical *sense* than to logic.

²⁹ Callewaert notes that Husserl, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim and Mauss have all more or less methodically, made use of a concept of *habitus* (Callewaert 1996: 54)

similar practices and adopting similar stances' (Bourdieu 1985: 725). The main thrust of the *habitus* concept in reproducing the social order and the preferences (or tastes) of that particular order is based on the presumption that the internalised schemes function 'below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will' (Bourdieu 1984: 466). It is in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* that Bourdieu provides his much quoted (and breathtaking) definition of *habitus*:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1977: 72; italics in original).

The generative principle of *habitus*, as explained in both *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Logic of Practice*, is generated by living in a bounded material 'environment' with its social relations in terms of a particular 'habitat' (Sayer 2005: 24).³⁰ In later writings, Bourdieu develops, more specifically, this spatial conditioning of *habitus* in a structural sense into his concept of 'fields' (e.g. Bourdieu 1984, 1985, 1988; see also Warde 2004). 'Field' and *habitus* are understood to enter a two-way relationship where the 'field' structures *habitus*, and *habitus* structures the *perception* of the 'field' (Bourdieu 1988: 784), but where *habitus* has no direct structuring influence on the 'field' through the practices that it generates (see also McNay 2004). According to Bourdieu, 'field' is a 'multi-dimensional space of positions' (Bourdieu 1985: 724) occupied by individual and corporate agents who possess power proportionate to their 'symbolic capital' that is recognised as self-evident within that specific environment (ibid: 731). A key and original insight in Bourdieu's theoretical framework is, according to Craig Calhoun (1993), that there are immaterial forms of capital (cultural,

³⁰ Callewaert (1996) shows how Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* concept has developed gradually together with his theoretical framework from the first works he published on Algeria in the 1960s and onwards where the colonial context, as well as the liberation war, was explicit. The first work with the pretension of constructing a theory of practice is *Esquisse d'une théori de la pratique, précédée de trios études d'ethnologie Kabyle* published in 1972, and that, when published in English in 1977 as *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, is developed further and, hence, is not identical with the French version (ibid.). In both *Outline of a theory of practice* and *Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu under-communicates the colonial context as well as the liberation war at the time of his fieldworks when describing the Kabyle society (see also Sewell 1992; Goodman 2003; Connell 2007).

symbolic and social)³¹ and material forms of capital. These forms of capital can under certain circumstances be converted to other forms of capital (ibid: 69) and, likewise, allows for potential transfer of capital from one 'field' to another (Postone et al. 1993: 5), since coexisting 'fields' are understood as homologous in a structural and functional sense (Bourdieu 1984: 175; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 105). Bourdieu emphasises two properties of 'fields': (1) as a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which the 'field' imposes on all the objects and agents who enter it, and (2) as a battlefield in terms of being a space for conflict and competition (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 17). In the formula Bourdieu presents in Distinction – [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984: 101) – practice, defined as *positionings* in 'fields', is based on the universalistic presumption that agents' positionings are informed by maximisation of capitals to be able to compete for positions in a particular 'field' (see also LiPuma 1993; Calhoun 1993). The 'feel for the game' – and the consequent willingness to invest in the game within a specific 'field' - is based on *illusio* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 98): 'a self-deception necessary to keep players involved in the game' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1993: 41). Refuting the economic/non-economic dichotomy, but proposing to treat all practices, 'including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit' (Bourdieu 1977: 183), Bourdieu comes close to utilitarianism (Callewaert 1996: 68). In Bourdieu's flirtation with game rhetoric the notion of 'moral economy' (Scott 1976) as well as more altruistic strategies would also be classified as economic, since the principle of maximisation of immaterial (and material) capitals is underlying all agents' positionings in all 'fields' at all times.

The prevailing social order is legitimated by a *doxa* (a particular representation of this social order) that produces the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness (Bourdieu 1977: 164) and, hence, legitimates (dominant) positions in a specific 'field'. This representation that enables the reproduction of power implies *misrecognition* of the cultural arbitrariness of the divisions (or 'distinctions') at the base of a particular social order (ibid: 163), including as well gender relations (see also Bourdieu 2001), and underlies Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1977: 191). A particular *doxa* can, however, be challenged by orthodox and heterodox discourses implying 'awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs' (ibid.), but does not require awareness of the deeper workings of power and domination. Bourdieu leaves open two possibilities for change in his

³¹ Diane Reay suggests incorporating 'emotional capital' in Bourdieu's repertoire of capitals (Reay 2004a: 57).

theoretical framework: (1) if the material environment, or 'field', changes, and (2) as an effect of *crisis*, 'which in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structure, destroys self-evidence practically' (ibid: 168-9). The *hysteresis* effect of *habitus* that makes people uphold their practices in times of upheaval, does, however, enable social reproduction in spite of changes in objective reality (ibid: 78).

The strength in Bourdieu's theory of practice is, in my opinion, the relationship he suggests between practice and social reproduction, and the possibility implied in Bourdieu's habitus concept to explain the most taken-for-granted and 'hard-lived' (Bourdieu use 'durable') aspects of practice that enable social reproduction. A focus on practice also makes abstract social structures somewhat tangible and operationalisationable since structure resides in what people do in practice. For example, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2003a) emphasises the potential of Bourdieu's theory of practice for understanding the structural conditioning of the complex contemporary situation for African women. She asserts that, '[w]ith Bourdieu in mind, we can then look beneath the discursive layer and examine the logic of practice at work. Instead of concentrating totally on language and what is *said*, we can then examine what is *done*, what remain unspoken' (ibid: 135; italics in original). Bourdieu (1977) does not presume in his theory of practice, however, that the social implications of practice are transparent and directly reducible to what is observed. This perspective concurs with my ethnographic field-observations in Tigray that have been sharpened by being attentive to what goes unquestioned in practice and the enquiring into gendered consequences of misrecognition of power, in line with feminist concerns.

It is the interplay between *habitus*, 'field', 'class' and 'symbolic capitals' that is at the core of the trajectory Bourdieu (1984) develops in his theoretical framework. Being fruitful for analysing the social reproduction of, precisely, power and domination, the initial focus on everyday practices has been toned down in Bourdieu's work, in favour of agents' positionings and struggles for power and domination in 'fields' proportionate to their 'capitals'. Probing the possibility for a different trajectory in Bourdieu's theoretical framework that manages, to a larger extent, to incorporate processes of change, I will in this thesis return to everyday practices, where the generative principle of *habitus* is structurally generated by the material environment through taken-for-granted practice. My critical engagement with Bourdieu's *habitus* concept is based on my claim that there must be more uncertainty involved in processes of social reproduction and more continuous change taking place than Bourdieu admits in his theory of practice. Bourdieu touches only implicitly on uncertainty in his definition of *habitus* where 'dispositions' in a footnote[!] is explained as *predisposition*,

19

tendency, *propensity*, or *inclination* (Bourdieu 1977: 214 n.1; italics in original). This uncertainty, as to the degree of structural conditioning, or differentiation, is left unproblematised and inconsequential in Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

It is also important to bear in mind that the meta-theoretical habitus concept is not identical with the person. Staf Callewaert emphasises that *habitus* as a generative schema (or matrix) for perceptions and actions, mediates between subjective experience of the environment and objective reality (Callewaert 1996: 111), even though Bourdieu does not use the notion of mediation in his definition of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 72). The uncertainty involved in mediation is also lost in the pervasive and 'overdetermined' (Arnot 2002: 42) effect *habitus* is proposed as having on all practices, representations and perceptions, experiences and aspirations, even imagination (see also Calhoun 1993). By structuring 'the sense of the possible, the impossible and the probable' (Arnot 2002: 42), the person is, in fact, left with no escape from this generative principle. As Bourdieu asserts, '[t]o speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is a socialized subjectivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 126). Brenda Farnell asserts 'that "habitus" has replaced "person" as the agentive power, located somewhere ambiguously behind and beneath the agency of persons' (Farnell 2000; 403). It is, therefore, the limited space afforded agency that can venture *beyond* the structural conditioning of habitus, and the limited possibility for change evolving from diverging and non-compliant practice itself (since practice always complies with the practical sense that *habitus* generates) that will inform the theoretical discussions following through this thesis and ending with a more extensive discussion and attempt to modify Bourdieu's *habitus* concept in the concluding chapter. The reason why I have chosen a theoretical framework, of which I am also critical, is that the resistance that Bourdieu's theory of practice provides has helped sharpen my analytical focus on the issue of power and processes of social reproduction.

Since the repetitive thrust of the *habitus* concept tends to pull agents towards the past in spite of new experiences being continuously incorporated in the *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 133; see also Callewaert 1996), other perspectives are, however, more in agreement with my own position on the issue of agency. Introduced to the field of anthropology with the weight of Fredrik Barth's academic legacy with his approach to individual agency and entrepreneurship still felt in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen (e.g. Barth 1996 [1959], 1967a), one initial influence is clear here. Another influence can be traced to Henrietta Moore's (1988) writings on feminism and anthropology, her perspective on agency that incorporates compliance (Moore 1994), and her

20

emphasis on that the effects of power do not wholly determine the gendered person (Moore 2007). These perspectives suggest that the structural conditioning of culture and what the person does in practice never simply overlap. In Moore's perspective the role of fantasy and desire, as well as unconscious motivations (ibid: 42) – the latter, in my opinion, linking up with the practical sense that Bourdieu's *habitus* generates – are at stake. Since Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998) provide an *analytical* perspective on agency that manages to incorporate an imaginative orientation towards a future that is not overdetermined by the past, their perspective will supplement my analysis.

Agency and time

In their analytical perspective on agency, Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) takes to task what they see as an increasing inadequacy in different social thought perspectives that attempt to show the interpenetration of structure and agency (including Bourdieu's theory of practice), because these perspectives do not, in their opinion, manage to distinguish agency as a category of its own (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 962-3). In the analytical framework for analysing agency these authors develop, their focus on social actors' 'agentic orientation' in relation to *time* is central:

Theoretically, our central contribution is to begin to reconceptualise human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingency of the moment). The agentive dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity, we argue, if it is analytically situated within the flow of time. More radically, we also argue that the structural contexts of action are themselves temporal as well as relational fields – multiple, overlapping *ways of ordering time* toward which social actors can assume different simultaneous orientations (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 963-4; italics in original).

This means that these orientations toward the past, the future and the present are mediated in relational fields at any moment in time where the temporality of both agency and structure inform the context for action. What Emirbayer and Mische call the 'cordial triad of agency' – as three different constitutive elements of human agency – is termed, 'iteration' (repetitiveness) which is directed towards the past, 'projection' towards the future and 'practical evaluation' which responds to the emerging actualities of the present (ibid: 971). Iteration refers to '*the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social*

universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time' (ibid; italics in original). Projection includes, 'the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears and desires for the future' (ibid; italics in original). Lastly, practical evaluation entails, 'the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations' (ibid; italics in original). It is by following the 'agentic orientation' of these disaggregated dimensions of agency in relation to time, which is understood to enable a dynamic analysis of agency that goes beyond the habitual, repetitive, and taken for granted (ibid: 963). Emirbayer and Mische's analytical perspective implies identifying whether the 'practical evaluation' that responds to emerging actualities in the present is oriented towards the past as 'iteration' (repetitiveness) or involves an imaginary 'projection' towards the future (ibid: 971). The iterative orientation of agency towards the past is much in line with the practices generated by Bourdieu's *habitus* concept. 'Projection' on the other hand – implying an imaginary orientation towards the future – lacks any similar agentive thrust in Bourdieu's theory of practice since his agents would hardly ever (except in moments of crisis) imagine anything beyond what one's *habitus* allows one to imagine, and where fantasy is handled as a lack of insight about the structural limits to what it is possible to do in one's life (Callewaert 1996: 76). The practical evaluation in the present that Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest would, however, imply a mediation of these agentic orientations by an actor – as opposed to the unconscious generative principle of *habitus* that produces '*intentionless invention* of regulated improvisation' (Bourdieu 1977: 79; italics in original) that agents act by – without denying the existence of an unquestioned repetitive *orientation* of action. Furthermore, rather than separating these agentic orientations one by one – even though one orientation can be emphasised in one particular moment in time – they are understood as simultaneous. Consequently these orientations also impinge on each other, suggesting a *potential* for social reproduction as well as for change in any moment of time. The above analytical perspective on agency draws attention to the relationally-situated event, in terms of a temporal site, where the rationale for a particular strategy becomes less pre-determining than Bourdieu's habitus concept in its orientation towards the past. Emirbayer and Mische's analytical perspective also brings the 'person' back to the theoretical problem of structure and agency in a manner that incorporates the possibility for Tigrayan girls to imagine a future different from their mothers'

and grandmothers' as part of their practical evaluations and actions in a structurally conditioned present.

At the 'frontiers'

With a literal reference to the revolutionary liberation struggle and Tigrayan women's participation as fighters, the concept 'frontiers' from the empowerment literature, is brought along in the conceptual framework developed in this thesis. In their review of literature on empowerment, Anju Malhorta, Sidney Ruth Schuler and Carol Boender suggest that:

Any given context, at any given point in time can be seen as having behavioural and normative 'frontiers' that need to be crossed for women to be empowered along a specific dimension, within a specific arena (Malhorta et al. 2002: 18).

The use of 'frontiers' as an analytical concept is based on the presumption that conflicting perceptions and interests are generated in the conjuncture between processes of social reproduction and change – that there are struggles and negotiations at stake – not just unquestioned submission to the practical sense that *habitus* generates. While incorporating contestations, the concept of 'frontiers' also includes dynamic and permeable aspects of social processes encompassed in Barth's (1969) understanding of 'boundaries' that more bounded concepts like 'barrier' and 'limit' do not. For example, following women's agentive strategies and decision-making processes at the 'frontiers' means being attentive to whether a specific act pushes the 'frontier' forward, whether advances are pushed back, whether withdrawals are strategic and to what extent the passing back and forth across the 'frontiers' takes place in silence. While the concept of 'frontiers' does evoke the notion of struggle and conflict, direct confrontation is not, then, always assumed, as processes at the 'frontiers' can involve negotiations to *redefine* and *extend* what it is possible to be and to do, in accordance with Sarah Modedale's (2003, 2005) understanding of empowerment.³² Furthermore, the concept of 'frontiers', as it is used in this thesis, signifies any relational event where women run up against conflicting perceptions and interests, and where a transgression of norms that involves a social risk, shows women's and girls' willingness to challenge structural aspects of their lives. Consequently, access to women's agency in general – and in relation to girls' educational pursuit in particular – is, in the narrative accounts and in practice, not only sought

³² Sarah Mosedale defines women's empowerment as 'the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing. Alternatively, women's empowerment is the process by which women redefine gender roles in ways which extend their possibilities for being and doing' (Mosedale 2005: 252; see also Mosedale 2003).

in resistance and forms of non-compliance but in complex combinations of compliance, resistance and cooperation (Connell 1987: 183-4; see also Moore 1994, 2007). This perspective is based on the insight from previous research on women in this area of Tigray that the strategic use of silence and complience is common when women encounter conflicting interests and social sanctions (Mjaaland 2004c). As struggles firmly take place within 'fields' in Bourdieu's framework, I also intend, in the course of this thesis, to direct attention to what takes place at the borders of co-existing and potentially contradictory 'fields'. The focus on 'frontiers' draws attention to these borders that Bourdieu asserts are dynamic. However, with different 'fields' defined as homologous in a structural and functional sense (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 104-5), incompatibilities and contradictions between 'fields', in terms of providing spaces for redefinition and change, are not at issue in Bourdieu's theory of practice. Madeline Arnot notes that what is missing from Bourdieu's perspective, is precisely the struggles, which the social construction of sexuality and gendered division of labour within historical contexts of specific power relations, entails (Arnot 2002: 49). The concept 'frontiers', incorporates the notion of contestations taking place also in gendered relations, albeit not necessarily in a confrontational manner.

The use of the concept of 'frontier' (in Tigriña, *gimbar/nmac*), also relates to the continued use of the notion of 'struggle' (*qalsi*) in the present development context in the Tigray region, to mobilise the population (women and men) in an 'army for development' (Λmax , hartheta, hartheta

³³ Revisions of the Family Law took place in Tigray in 1998 with Proclamation No. 33/1991 E.C. in Tigriña (TRS 1998) and again in 2007 with Proclamation No. 116/1999 E.C. in Tigriña (TRS 2007).

authorised in the new National Policy on Ethiopian Women (TGE-OPM 1993).³⁴ I will return to these latter structural changes below when providing more general information about the Tigray region relevant for my focus on women.

Tigray region from the perspective of women

Tigray is the northernmost regional state in the Ethiopian federation, sharing borders with Eritrea and Sudan. The population in Tigray, according to the Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census (FDRE-PCC 2008), was 4.3 million (while the total Ethiopian population was close to 74 million)³⁵ of which 83 percent continues to be dependent on subsistence farming. Tigray region is divided into five administrative zones that, as of 2004 E.C. (2011/12), were subdivided into 46 weredas (districts) and 727 tabias (sub-districts) with the number of tabias in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda being 27. According to the 2007 Census, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church congregates 95.6 percent of the population in Tigray, while the Muslim community accounts for 4 percent.³⁶ The Ethiopian Orthodox majority on which this study is centred shares, however, much common culture with the minority Muslim community. Since the population in this area of Tigray is close to homogeneous, ethnicity is not that much at stake in social interaction within the region itself (at least not from the perspective of the majority population). The Tigray region is, further, located within what Donald Levine (1965) has called the Amhara-Tigrayan culture complex of highland Ethiopia informed by political rivalry over centuries, and which had been based on a common sentiment in Tigray of political and economic marginalisation (e.g. Gebru 1996 [1991]; Tsegay 1999; Aregawi 2009). As a consequence of the Tigrayan liberation struggle, this power balance shifted in favour of this ethnic group from the north that, according to the 2007 Census, constitutes only 6.1 percent of the total Ethiopian population. Under the present TPLF-based EPRDF regime the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has been reorganised in nine decentralised regional states based on ethnic nationalities and two charted cities (the capital city Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). Prevailing criticism of the present EPRDF government is concerned with the fragmentation of Ethiopia along ethnic lines as well as what is perceived as the continued exercising of control by the central government in

³⁴ Recorded interview with the chairperson of WAT, Tirfu Kidanemariam, 21 December 2008/*Tahsas* 12, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 40 in English).

³⁵ Projected estimates add 2.5 percent population increase per year.

³⁶ On a federal level the numbers according to the 2007 Census are Orthodox Christians 43.5 percent, Muslims 33.9 percent and Protestants 18.6 percent

spite of the decentralisation of power to the regions. Consequently, my study is located in the region of the victors of the most recent struggles for power in Ethiopia.

The semi-urban area of my study, the market town of Endabaguna and administrative centre of Asgede Tsimbla Wereda³⁷, is situated in *wevna doga* (1000-1500 masl) in the cool and sub-humid zone of the lower highlands. The rural community Mayshek, is situated in golla (500-1000 masl), in what is classified as lowlands and a warm, semi-arid zone. The economy of the rural areas surrounding the semi-urban market town is based on rain-fed subsistence agriculture, and the cultivation of *teff* (a grass endemic to Ethiopia), sorghum (meshela), finger-millet (dagusha) and maize together with the keeping of cattle, goats, sheep and hens. Since a majority of the population in Endabaguna have their background in the rural areas surrounding the market town, and with peasants coming in from the rural areas on market days, it might be relevant to say, as Hammond asserts, that 'it is impossible to talk about the towns except in some kind of relation to the rural area, either as interdependence or opposition' (Hammond 2002: 91). Even though the semi-urban market town population is not, to the same extent as the rural population, directly reliant on cultivation, their businesses – besides serving the market town population and civil servants (of which many come from other places in Tigray) – continue to relate to a rural economy. Often involved in formal and informal trade, many of the market-town households can still have livestock kept with relatives in the rural area (some are even kept in the market town), or have a piece of land that is cultivated by kin and that secures them siso (third) or reba (fourth) of the harvest, depending on the agreement about the sharing of work tasks (ploughing/weeding/harvest) and implements (seeds/fertiliser). Some also cultivate maize in their backyards in the market town during the rainy season. In the rain-fed subsistence farming of the rural lowland of this study, *meshela*, *dagusha* and maize are the main crops, together with the keeping of livestock. There is also an interconnection between rural and urban areas in relation to education as rural students move to the market town to continue their education after fifth or eighth grades.

The high number of women-initiated divorces and female-headed households in the highland context of Ethiopia (e.g. Bauer 1977; Pankhurst 1992a; Pankhurst 1992; Poluha 2004), is significant also in a historical perspective. Recent studies from the Tigray region, like the quantitative baseline study *Women in Tigray: Situation analysis of constraints,*

³⁷ According to the 2007 Census (FDRE-PCC 2008), carried out in May and November 2007 (1999-2000 E.C.), the population in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda was 135.561. This number was not broken down further in the published version of the census in English. According to numbers provided by the Asgede Tsimbla Wereda administration, the population based on this census was, for 2007/08 (2000 E.C.), 7302 for the market town Endabaguna, and 4121 for the rural Tabia Mayshek. The projected numbers for 2011/12 (2004 E.C.) is 8041 for Endabaguna, 4549 for Mayshek, and around 150.000 for Asgede Tsimbla Wereda.

opportunities and livelihood conditions points to the fact that more than 30 percent of the households in Tigray are female-headed (Fitsum et. al 2005; see also Meehan 2004). This fact is not only due to warfare- or illness-related deaths of the male population resulting in widowhood, but also to a high divorce rate (of 936 respondents from all five administrative zones in Tigray, the average divorce rate was 40.3 percent) (Fitsum et. al 2005: 226). In another study on female-headed households in four selected weredas in Tigray by Mirutse Desta, Gebregiorgis Haddis and Selam Ataklt (2006), it is stated that divorce is the main way that households became female-headed. These authors note that the high numbers must be understood as 'aggravated partly as a result of the *empowerment* of women following the new policies and laws that were developed in favour of gender equality' (Mirutse et al. 2006: 13; italics added). According to the exploratory household survey that I conducted with women in 109 urban and 61 rural households, 55 percent of the urban and 36 percent of the rural women had been through one or more divorces. When also including death-related causes, the number of women who had been through *more* than one marriage/partnership was 54.1 percent of the urban and 50.8 percent of the rural women. The fact that the older women have been though divorces in their marital careers confirms the historical trend of divorce in this context, as opposed to constituting a 'modern' phenomenon, and suggests that marriage *continues* to be a fragile institution.

The official number of female-headed households in the market town Endabaguna is 42.5 percent while the number of female-headed households in rural Mayshek is 14.7 percent.³⁸ It is therefore interesting that the abovementioned study by Mirutse et al.'s (2006) challenges some common presumptions about female-headed households. In their study, ownership and access to basic livelihood assets of both rural and urban female-headed households (FHH) were compared to rural male headed households (MHH). While the family size was generally larger in male-headed households and involving more dependents, female-headed households were more often constrained by shortage of labour. However, these authors state:

Women's illiteracy and a relative lower tendency to send children to school were also recorded in MHHs. In terms of ownership of large size land, houses, livestock, and annual expenditure, MHHs showed better status. However, when considering the size of land owned and annual household expenditure on per capita terms, FHHs were found to be better off. The other area where FHHs were found to be better than MHHs

³⁸ These numbers were provided by Asgede Tsimbla Wereda administration and are based on numbers from the 2007 Census (not published in the English version), but are not adjusted in later population projections from the wereda administration.

were in the levels of literacy of children and keeping savings in terms of cash. (...) When women in MHHs were compared to women in FHHs, the latter were found to be better in terms of levels of literacy, access to information on gender equality and women's rights and memberships in different locally found political and non-political groups (Mirutse et al. 2006: ix).

These findings show that the common presumption that female-headed households constitute the poorest of the poor implicit in the feminisation of poverty thesis cannot be taken for granted (see also Chant 2003, 2006, 2008). Households continue to be classified in terms of male or female headship on the level of policies and plans in the Tigrayan context. However, what surfaced in my explorative household survey was that, when asked about household headship, and given the alternative 'shared', these urban and rural women, who would otherwise have been automatically subsumed under male headship, emphasised that they *shared* household headship with their spouses.³⁹ Of the urban women who were currently living in a marriage/partnership, 87.3 percent said they shared headship with their spouses/partnership, 98.1 percent said they were sharing headship with their husband.

While land reform was part of the Derg policies, TPLF's land reform during the struggle secured *usufruct* land rights also for women.⁴⁰Today inheritance rights, juridical and economical rights in relation to marriage and divorce, and women's political participation in elected bodies on all administrative levels, are in place. While more gender-equitable laws in Ethiopia have secured women's equal right with men, gender (commonly meaning the dealing with women's issues) has been mainstreamed into the policies of all government bodies, and has also found its way into the administrative structure on all levels. According to Pai Obanya (2004), Ethiopia is seen (in the African context) as having a progressive structural organisation to forward its policies on women. On a federal level, the Women's Affairs

³⁹ This inclusion of shared headship was inspired by discussions with the Senior Gender Expert Tesfay Kinfe at the Women's Affairs Bureau in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda.

⁴⁰ Peasants in Tigray have a sense of ownership to their land (*merét waninet*), in spite of the land being owned by the state. Land is inherited by the peasants' offspring, but will be redistributed if none of them want to settle in the rural area. Landholdings in my study area are commonly 6 *tsïmdi* (1 *tsïmdi* is the amount of land ploughed in one day with one pair of oxen, equivalent to 1/4 hectare). Earlier in the highland context of Ethiopia, entitlements to land was based on the *risti* system, which meant that land could be claimed through both father's and mother's lineages, for both men and women (but in practice favouring men). Sigfried Pausewang notes that the *risti* system, in spite of its egalitarian and flexible character in terms of access to land, was fraught with intrigues, suspicion and conflict (Pausewang 1990: 40). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and nobles also had *gulti* rights over land and former emperors could assign these right to people they considered worthy, implying the right to collect taxes from the population in a particular district (see also Young 1997b; Aregawi 2009). In Tigray a land redistribution system called *t*'ésa also accommodated young families and other newcomers to the community. The main problem in the rural area of my study today is, in addition to scarcity of land for the younger generation, ecological factors like deforestation, erosion and degradation of the soil.

Office, first constituted under the Prime Minister's Office, has since 2005 been a separate Ministry of Women's Affairs, and the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs since 2010. With the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (TGE-OPM 1993), and with equal rights and affirmative measures for women safeguarded in the new gender-sensitive Constitution (FDRE 1995) (see Appendix 4), the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2006-2010 (FDRE-MOWA 2006) has later followed. Implementation of policies and plans on women takes place vertically through the state structure where Women's Affairs Bureaus have been established at all administrative levels, from the federal level to the regional states (kelil), to zone (zoba) and district (wereda), and with a representative on subdistrict/community (*gebele/tabia*) level.⁴¹ There are also women's affairs departments mainstreamed into all government ministries and state institutions (e.g. universities have a separate women's affairs office) and in primary school and secondary school there is a female representative selected from the teachers who is also in charge of the Girls' Club, where women's issues are addressed to the female students. The Women's Association of Tigray (WAT), a Tigrayan NGO organising close to 500.000 women in the region, also considers itself as a driving force behind the changes in legal/juridical rights for women, not only in Tigray but in Ethiopia as a whole, not least in terms of a more gender-just Family Law (FDRE 2000)⁴². WAT also works closely with the Women's Affairs Bureaus. In Asgede Tsimbla Wereda this cooperation has resulted in the leader of the Women's Affairs Bureau becoming the vice-person of WAT. When asked about potentially problematic aspects of this close relationship from the perspective of being a non-governmental pressure group for government policies, leaders on regional and wereda levels of both WAT and Women's Affairs Bureaus assert that this is not a problem since they have coinciding objectives for improving the situation for women in the region. After the new NGO-CSO law, Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (FDRE 2009), came into effect, working with rights issues and gender has meant that not more than 10 percent of the budget can come from foreign donors. In the case of WAT, it has from 2009 split its operations into 'development' and 'advocacy' (WAT 2009). In the case of Ethiopian Women's Lawyers' Association (EWLA), which has also been reckoned as a driving force on women's

⁴¹ The *aebele/tabia* (sub-district) structure that was implemented during the Derg regime, and extended by TPLF to include kushet (village) and gujile (group) can be utilised as much as a democratic structure as a structure for political control (see also Pausewang et al. 2002; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003). ⁴² Revisions of the Family Law took place in Tigray in 1998 with Proclamation No. 33/1991 E.C. in Tigriña

⁽TRS 1998) and again in 2007 with Proclamation No. 116/1999 E.C. in Tigriña (TRS 2007).

legal/juridical rights in the Ethiopian context, it had to downsize its work considerably.⁴³ From this latter perspective, gender issues seem to (still) occupy a somewhat ambiguous space in present politics in the Ethiopian context (see also Biseswar 2008a).

Organisation of the chapters

The following chapters in this thesis are made to encircle each other and to expand understanding from different perspectives that incorporate both contextual issues and detailed ethnographic descriptions where narratives are central; held together by defining education as a site for investigation. Rather than a mere linear representation, the chapters provide different contexts for interpretation based on diverging structural issues that intersect with women's agency and girls' pursuit of education. This kaleidoscope of different perspectives, based on diverging focal distances, deal with how issues pertaining to a global education field have local interpretations; how authority is negotiated in terms of power and control enabling women to claim spaces for agency; how rural girls appeal to education to avoid underage marriages; and how socio-cultural dynamics and 'hard-lived' gendered aspects of practice which pass unquestioned, intersect with female students' performance and success in education in complex ways. This non-linear mode of representing my research is based on continuous triangulation of a combination of methodological perspectives that have intersected the analysis throughout the research process, as the aim of this thesis is not to arrive at one conclusion, but to unfold complex gendered processes of social reproduction and change in the particular historical and socio-cultural context of north-western Tigray.

Chapter 1, *Struggles for women's emancipation and social change*, starts off by providing an introduction to Tigrayan women's participation in the revolutionary liberation struggle (1975-91), linking their struggle to '*specific* locations and histories of struggles' (Mohanty 1991a: 10) in postcolonial feminist theory. The issue of telling from women's experience so central to emancipatory perspectives based on feminist standpoint theory – and

⁴³ Women's organisations in Ethiopia are not a new phenomenon, but the extent to which they have been/are political pressure groups varies. According to Alem Desta (2008) the first women's organisation during the Emperor Haile Selassie's reign was the Ethiopian Women's Humanitarian Association founded in 1935, soon followed by the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Organisation, with the latter merging with the Ethiopian Women's Patriotic Union when this was founded in 1937 to resist the Italian invasion (1936-41). The Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) was founded to support the Derg regime in 1980. Over the last 20 years Ethiopian women's organisations in Diaspora have also been founded, like the peace and rights organisation Ethiopian Women's Organisation (IEWO), which is critical of how women's issues have been handled by successive regimes in Ethiopia as well as by opposition groups. In Ethiopia organisations like Ethiopian Women's Association (EMWA) was founded in 1997 and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (EMWA) was founded in 1997 and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (EMWA) was founded in 1997 and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (EMWA) was founded in 1997 and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (EMWA) was founded in 1997 and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA) was founded in 2001 (ibid.).

which has been utilised politically and epistemologically in both Western and non-Western feminist contexts – will be elaborated and linked to the Tigrayan context where silence is an important agentive strategy, urging the inclusion of non-textual ways of telling. In Chapter 2, *Intersecting dialogical methods with a narrative core*, I account for the methodological strategies informing this research project concerned with encompassing the layered socio-cultural dynamics in this context, with the ambiguity and silences entailed. The multiple methodologies used are based on the aim to unfold the complexity of gendered processes in the contemporary situation in Tigray with its global influences. This strategy, which has allowed for continuous cross-checking of data by way of triangulation (Denzin 1970, 1989; see also Flick 1992), has also enabled the emergence of new questions and perspectives in a research process where the analysis is an integrated part throughout.

In Chapter 3, 'Education as the foundation for development', I will, after starting out with a short introduction to current Ethiopian policies addressing education and women in the context of development, trace national and global policy discourses in the meanings education attains in murals in primary schools in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda in Tigray. I also discuss how female and male students perceive education, and how they imagine their future through education. In Mapping spaces for agency in the Tigrayan context, Chapter 4, I situate women's decision-making within the frames of both this-worldly and other-worldly authorities. In the second part of this chapter, I base my discussion on the issue of family planning and women's contraceptive use, the reason being (1) the role of fertility in international and national education policies and discourses, (2) the increased access to these reproductive technologies in my study area in Tigray, and (3) the possibility this focus provided for ample description of women's decision-making strategies. In Chapter 5, Education, generation and the case of underage marriage, I focus my discussion on how diverging generational perspectives and interests play out in relation to rural girls' education and parents' concern for marrying their daughters when still underage. The discussion in this chapter explores how both rural and urban girls mediate an extension of their possibilities through education against their parents' concern for their daughters' morality as well as household viability. In Chapter 6, Negotiating femaleness, I will discuss consequences of normative understandings of gender for women's agency and girls' educational pursuit. Female rural students' self-representation in front of my camera constituted a possibility to access these female students' attempts to negotiate and mediate conflicting perceptions and interests related to their gender on their way to a future that they imagine to be different from the lives of their mothers and grandmothers.

Chapter 7, *Education, revolutions and change*, returns to the role education has assumed within overlapping revolutionary contexts in Ethiopia and Tigray in the 1970s and 1980s. One focus is on learning practices in Tigrayan classrooms today from the perspective that the mode of learning matters as to whether education becomes merely social reproduction or whether it advances change (e.g. Freire 1972). Of concern is also how gender plays out in the classroom. Finally, the discussion in the concluding chapter, *Theorising change; changing theory*, will bring my theoretical discussion on social reproduction and change full circle. Based on my ethnographic data on actual practice, perceptions and social-cultural dynamics in the Tigrayan context, I will suggest a modification of Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) *habitus* concept in his theory of practice, in order to encompass processes which are more uncertain and differentiated in a structural sense, and that allows for practice itself to be consequential in processes of change.

In the context of around 80 ethnic groups in Ethiopia and as many languages, it is also important to have in mind that my study is neither generalisable to the whole of Ethiopia, nor to the whole of Tigray. While I refer to women and girls that participated in this study as 'Tigrayan women' and 'Tigrayan girls', I do not presume unified categories representing one way of being a woman or a girl in Tigray, since women's lives do not only differ within the region itself but also within local communities. Likewise, when used as a generic term in this thesis, feminism refers to critical theories and political activism that address the issue of power in gender relations, and that involve socio-political and epistemological strategies for structural change directed at improving women's position and situation in society (and hence, not excluding men from being/becoming feminists). Situating my research in the academic context of published work in English from the Tigrayan context, these are both relatively sparse and are commonly based on livelihood issues relating to agriculture and health. Different government bodies and NGOs do, however, conduct surveys to support their work, as for example the studies conducted by regional bureaus on women's issues and education referred in this thesis. As a matter of fact, the increased production of MA research from Mekelle University is commonly conducted in areas closer to the regional capital city in the eastern, southern and central parts of Tigray. It is therefore my contention that this thesis from Asgede Tsimbla Wereda in north-western Tigray will contribute to the filling of a gap in research from this area, as well as providing an ethnographic case that nuances presumptions in prevailing development discourse on women and girls' education.

CHAPTER 1: Struggles for women's emancipation and social change

Introduction

The overthrowing of the Derg regime and seizing of power in Ethiopia was at the base of the Tigravan revolutionary liberation struggle (1975-91). The promise of socio-economic and political reform earned TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) popular support among the peasant population in Tigray, and especially so among women (Young 1997b; Tsegay 1999). When Tigrayan women took up arms to partake in the struggle it was not the first time in the country's history that women had participated in wars as combatants, even though it had been more common for women to take part in war efforts as camp-followers (e.g. Pankhurst 1992a; Tsegay 1999; Minale 2001; Emebet 2005; Alem 2008). Both the fact that women comprised around 30 percent of the TPLF fighters (e.g. Hammond 1989, 1999; Young 1997b; Aregawi $(2009)^1$ that, according to Tsegay (1999), amounted to a total of around 88,000 by the end of the struggle in 1991, and the way women utilised their participation to forward equitable gender politics, surpass any previous involvement of women in wars in Ethiopia [Fig. 2 & 3]. As Angela Veale notes, '[t]he contribution of women as fighters in the liberation struggle against Mengistu's Derg regime is almost legendary. It is widely regarded that fighter women were strong, if not stronger, than the men, and played a critical role in the success of the movement' (Veale 2003: 1). Less known perhaps is, as the former Tigrayan fighter Roman Gebreselassie (2005) notes, that more than 30 percent of the women in TPLF also inhabited leadership positions as public administrators during the struggle.

The Tigrayan struggle was one of many liberation struggles around the same point in time that drew ideologically on Marxist-Leninism, and which saw women's participation as decisive in their pursuit of political change (e.g. Arnfred 1988, Hale 2001). Tigrayan fighter women who premised 'their own revolution within a revolution' (Gebru Tareke 1983, in Tsegay 1999: 82) for social change and women's emancipation on situating women's issues within (not separate from) other social, economic and political concerns, also saw (and continues to see) alliances with men as decisive. In spite of distancing their political pursuit of equality and rights from feminism, their inclusionary and holistic strategy does, nevertheless, resonate with socialist feminist sentiments, in spite of rejecting the [feminist] label

¹ This concurs with the number of women fighters in EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) fighting for independence from Ethiopia at the same time (Hale 2001). Around 3-4 percent of the Derg army (between 13,350-17,800) were women (Veale 2003). Around 20 percent of the 21,200-strong Oromo Liberation Front, that had challenged the TPLF-based EPRDF's seizure of power in Ethiopia, was also women (Colletta et al. 1996).



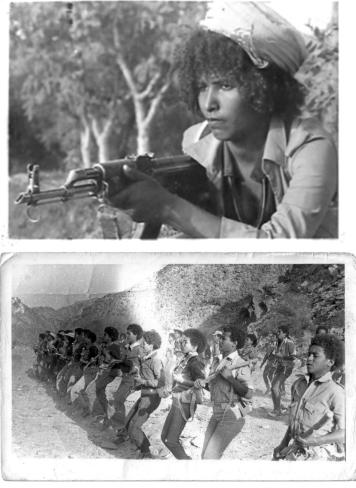






[Fig. 2]: Archival photographs from the struggle in the Ethiopian Millennium music video <u>Hadgi</u>/**4**,**R**¹, (Heritage) also displayed at the Struggle Museum in Mekelle. Above: Female war veterans photographed in Addis Ababa at a ceremony to commemorate the victory against the Italians in World War 2. Photo: Shemelis Desta, 1973.





[Fig. 3]: Left: The mythic Marta, the first woman to join the liberation struggle in Tigray in November 1976. Courtesy: The Struggle Museum, Mekelle (not dated). Above: Photograph from the struggle in the Ethiopian Millennium music video <u>Hadgi</u> (Heritage) also displayed at the Struggle Museum in Mekelle. Right below: Training of female fighters in Tigray 1974 E.C. (1982). Courtesy: Women's Association of Tigray.

(Mohanty 1991a: 7). Based on how Tigrayan women define their *fight* for equality and rights in the context of differently located feminisms – which commonly draw, implicitly or explicitly, on reformulations of (Western) feminist standpoint theory – the discussion in this chapter will deal with how change is premised in these perspectives. For example, the premise for social change entailed in feminist standpoint theory (e.g. Hartsock 1987; Smith 1987; Harding 1987), in terms of the critical formulation, or telling, women can provide of the impact that power relations have in a specific location from their own experience, links up with the idea of critical consciousness and its transformative potential in Marxist and neo-Marxist critical theory. The 'epistemic privilege' ascribed to marginalised women struggling in specific locations in feminist standpoint theory is contested, however, since this position is epistemologically problematic. As I will show in this chapter, feminist standpoint theory does not sit well with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) handling of experience and the limited space given to consciousness, in his theory of practice, either. In the Tigrayan context, standpoint theory would also be problematic since telling, involving biographic information and personal opinions, occupies an ambiguous space in social practice where *not*-telling might offer itself as a more adequate strategy. Below, I will start out by providing an account of women's participation in the Tigrayan struggle based on published literature and the interviews I have conducted with former fighter women.

Tigrayan women in liberation struggle and beyond

Based in the perceived political marginalisation of the Tigray region within the Ethiopian context, and an evolving subsistence crisis in the region since the 1950s, TPLF had emerged as a well organised agent capable of politicising latent discontent into a liberation struggle that eventually gained broad peasant support (Gebru 1996 [1991]: 215).² The Tigrayan liberation struggle was founded on Marxist principles of class struggle and redistribution justice, drawing on Leninist polemic on the right of nations (in this case, Ethiopian regions) to self-determination (ibid: 207) and, further, based on a Maoist strategy of protracted guerrilla struggle (Tsegay 1999: 61; see also Aregawi 2009). Reminiscence of revolution rhetoric surfaced in Tigrayan women's stories when asked to reflect on what the struggle has meant for their situation as women today. These reflections that connected their situation now with their situation in the past pointed both explicitly and implicitly to the changes that have taken

² During its first years (1975-78) TPLF was busy fighting contenders to hegemony in the Tigrayan struggle like TLF (Tigray Liberation Front), EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) and EDU (Ethiopian Democratic Union) as well as dealing with conflicts within its own organisation (e.g. Gebru 1996 [1991], 2009; Aregawi 2009).

place for women in Tigray as a result of women's struggle. The female combat fighter and lieutenant (*meto aleqa*; literally, 'commander of one hundred'), 'Lula' (35), says:

Compared to now, compared to men, women were 'double' (in English) oppressed (*d'f-m./tsegit'i*). For one, she was oppressed by men; secondly, she was oppressed by the regime (*hC9-t/sirat*; system). We fought to get rid of it. It's even guaranteed; it's not like in the past now. Women have made many contributions to a flourishing democratic system unknown in the past; all in all, women have the right to decide themselves in the family and in the society. She can be as independent as any other person, she can decide at home; as this was our aim from the start, we [women] can work outside [of home], also in relation to her husband she doesn't lack anything, she only needs education and mobility, otherwise, it was about [political] awakening (...) about discrimination of women in relation to men, there was no doubt about our objective.³

In the above and other interviews where the notion of Tigrayan women's 'double oppression' surfaced – or a reference to the historical legacy of Ethiopian women's oppression was included – the oppressors referred to 'men' and the past 'system/regime' ($\partial C \partial t / sirat$). This reference to past systems/regimes, which includes the hegemony of the Amhara ruling elites and feudal landowners, as well as the oppressive regime of the Derg, points to a ruling 'class' (RCn/derbi) as opposed to the masses.⁴ In Lula's account, it is the past system/regime that is responsible for not taking up the discrimination of women in relation to men as an issue. She is also confident that women's independence and rights have been secured within a more democratic system/regime to which the female fighters' contribution had enabled creating. One photograph in the Struggle Museum's archive in Mekelle of a painted poster from the second conference of the AWFT (Association of Women Fighters Tigray)⁵ during the struggle, shows a woman with a fro-hair and trousers and a weapon over her shoulder, with a hammer in her left hand and a red book in the other, with the text: 'Without the participation of women there is no successful revolution of the society⁶. This slogan also points to the confidence and optimism that informed these women's struggle at the time. In spite of TPLF's reluctance in its first years to include women (Tsegay 1999), John Young notes:

³ Recorded interview 4 November 2008/T'iqimti 25, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 29B in Tigriña).

⁴ Messay Kebede (1999) asserts, however, that, neither the 'class' concept nor 'feudalism' sits particular well in the Ethiopian context if it presumes static groups of people. He prefers the notion of 'clientship' to account for both (ibid: 159), and which points to the importance of alliance building in the highland context of Ethiopia (e.g. Tronvoll 2003).

⁵ While the Women's Committee was established within TPLF in 1977 (1969 E.C.) it was replaced by AWFT in 1984 (1976 E.C.) at the fighter women's first conference. Civil women were also organised in a mass women's association within TPLF during the struggle. The Association of Women Fighters Tigray (AWFT) and the civil women's mass organisation merged at their first conference together in 1991 after the struggle, and named Democratic Association of Tigray Women (DATW). At DATW's second conference in 1996 the association was re-named Women's Association of Tigray (WAT) and registered as an independent NGO in 1997 (WAT 2003, 2009).

⁶ ብዘይ ተሳትፎ ደቂ ኣንስትዮ ዝዕወት ሕ/ስባዊ ወይነ የለን#

Overcoming the age-old fetters on the role of women was a major concern of the TPLF from its earliest days in the west [western Tigray], in part because attacking women's oppression was consistent with its liberation philosophy, but also because the TPLF needed to use to the full all the human resources of Tigray in the struggle against the Derg (Young 1997b: 178).

Even in the case of mere pragmatic considerations about women's inclusion in the struggle, the fighter woman Lula, above, is confident that there was no doubt about TPLF's objective in the case of addressing the discrimination of women in relation to men. Tsegay Berhe Gebrelibanos even asserts in his study, *The Tigrean Women in Liberation Struggle and its Aftermath, 1975-1996*, that it was the first time in modern history that women were able to act beyond the *frontiers* of patriarchal tradition (Tsegay 1999: 123).⁷ This transgression refers, according to Tsegay, to the blurring of the strict gendered division of labour that took place during the struggle when assigning tasks according to merit, irrespective of gender. The former fighter woman Roman emphasises in her MA thesis, *Women and Leadership in Ethiopia: The Case of Tigray*, that the 'glorified role of women in the armed struggle opened a window of opportunity for the women of Tigray to be recognized and be accepted in society' (Roman 2005: 60). Roman further asserts that women's participation in decision-making positions was the most important aspect of women's struggle and, further, assumes that Tigrayan women are currently better represented in leadership positions compared to women in other regions of Ethiopia.

Women in my study area in Tigray do appreciate the rights they have accomplished through struggle and gender-sensitive laws secured by the present TPLF-based EPRDF government. One woman notes that men complain about the present government's focus on women when drinking in *sïwabéts* (local beer houses) in the market town, saying: *'This government is not for us, it's for women.* ⁸ A middle-aged local (male) merchant in the market town says, *'women are on top now; they make it difficult for men (...) now women are in charge'.* ⁹ The (now late) Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and chief ideologue during the Tigrayan struggle¹⁰, started his speech on Mesqel Square in Addis Ababa 25 May 2010, when

 ⁷ Tsegay's (1999) study of women in the Tigrayan liberation struggle and the impact women's participation had on the revolution itself involved, altogether, 150 female fighters as interviewees and questionnaire respondents.
 ⁸ Fieldwork notes 4 September 2008/*Nehase* 29, 2000 E.C.

⁹ Fieldwork notes 14 January 2012/T'iri 5, 2004 E.C.

¹⁰ Meles died of illness 20 August 2012.

announcing EPRDF's victory (with its allied parties) in the general elections¹¹, by thanking women:

We, the members of EPRDF, with great humility offer our gratitude and appreciation to the voters who have given us their support freely and democratically. We also offer our thanks to the real backbone of our organisation, the women of Ethiopia who are committed to our struggle due to their realisation of our track record on gender equality and who want to forge ahead on this path of peace, development and democratization. Our admiration to the women of Ethiopia is indeed boundless!¹²

Tsegay notes that while women had been indispensable for TPLF's success – not only as combat fighters and army support staff but also as cadre, administrative leaders and *shig weyenti* ('torches for the revolution') propagating and securing popular support for the revolution – the women themselves had understood their participation as a fight for political justice, development and a social progress that included gender equality (Tsegay 1999: vi). The prevailing perception is that these Tigrayan fighter women were extraordinary. The young woman 'Almaz'¹³ (29) says:

It means ... the Tigrayan women who struggled were very clever; they were not afraid. I don't know about now, but during the Derg, not only ... those who took up arms, but also those female fighters who were not armed and fought a clandestine struggle in their home places. (...) The Tigrayan female fighters that struggled were very clever, very ... they joined like the men. They were not afraid of anything, they did not stay at the back, and how many wasn't it that passed away.¹⁴

Likewise, the leader of the Woman's Affairs Bureau in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda, says:

(...) They participated equally and returned victorious that means. Regardless of taking part by serving food [to the fighters], or joining the struggle to participate as equals [with men]; this have made the women of Tigray different; since they have fought more than anyone else. The majority of them became fighters to participate equally in the struggle. $(...)^{15}$

In these two quotes Tigrayan women are not only represented as *fearless* and equal to men, they are also represented as *different* from other women in Ethiopia. In terms of visibility,

¹¹ When the final results of the general elections on 23 May 2010 were announced 21 June 2010, the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition and its allied parties had won 544 (499/45) out of 547 seats in the Parliament/House of People's Representatives, and 1900 (1349/551) out of 1904 of the seats in the Regional State Councils (see European Union's election report 2010).

¹² Official English translation of the speech: <u>http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/pmspeech.pdf</u> Retrieved 15 July 2011.

¹³ Ålmaz had migrated to Eritrea after seventh grade at the age of 14 (after the struggle), but was detained and expelled from the country when the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000) erupted and had returned to her mother's household in the market town.

¹⁴ Recorded interview 4 November 2008/T'iqimti 25, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 12 in Tigriña).

¹⁵ Recorded interview with the leader of Asgede Tsimbla Women's Affairs Bureau, Medhin Teklu, 6 November 2008/*T'ïqïmti* 27, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 13 in Tigriña and English).



[Fig. 4]: We will not betray the legacy of our martyrs!! Banner in the capital city of Tigray region, Mekelle, to commemorate the thirty-fifth anniversary for the commencement of the struggle on Lekatit 11, 1967 E.C. (18 February, 1975). Photo Fili Star, Mekelle, October 2010.

however, representations of the fighter women are rare today (see also Veale 2003), even within the Tigrayan context. The commemoration of the commencement of the struggle on Lekatit 11 E.C. (18 February) every year does, however, generate story-telling about the struggle and women's participation both on the government radio in Tigray (Dimitsi Weyane/'Voice of the Revolution') and Tigriña programmes on the state TV-channel, Ethiopian Television (ETV).¹⁶ Likewise, one visual reminder was the banner made for the thirty-fifth anniversary of the commencements of the struggle in 2010, announcing: 'We will not betray the legacy of our martyrs', with both a female and a male martyred fighter represented [Fig. 4].¹⁷ Apart from these examples, women's contributions during the struggle are seldom talked about, unless urged by a curious researcher. While female fighters might have kept a few private photographs of themselves from the struggle, with afro hair and fighter attire (shirt and trousers), I have found it striking that, while men frequently ask me to photograph them with a Kalashen (Kalashnikov), the only two women who ever did the same had not been fighters [Fig. 5 & 6]. Rather, adult and elder women would prefer to pose draped in their *kuta* (thick white cotton shawl) that they wear when going to church, or *netsela* (thinner white cotton shawl with colourful lining) that they commonly use in public, and pointing to a modesty that seems contrary to the female fighters' forthright and courageous pursuit during the struggle when fighting on equal terms with men. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of rights and equality seems well established among the women I have interviewed.

The struggle for equal rights

Gender inequality in the Ethiopian context was, according to Tsegay, maintained largely by subtle (socio-political) mechanisms that were denying women access to inheritance, wealth, power and prestige (Tsegay 1999: 66). From the perspective of a predominantly vertical ordering of political and societal relations in the Ethiopian highland context (e.g. Levine 1965; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003; Poluha 2004, 2010; Maimire 2010), where women had been placed in the custody of fathers and husbands (Zenebework 1976; Alem 2008), the idea of gender equality during the Tigrayan struggle might seem revolutionary.¹⁸ Alem Desta (2008

¹⁶ A group representing the female and male TPLF fighters did also appear among the cultural troupes representing the multitude of Ethiopian nationalities celebrated in Mekelle 9 December 2011 (*Hidar* 29, 2004 E.C.) under this year's slogan 'Our Constitution for our Diversity, Unity and Renaissance'.

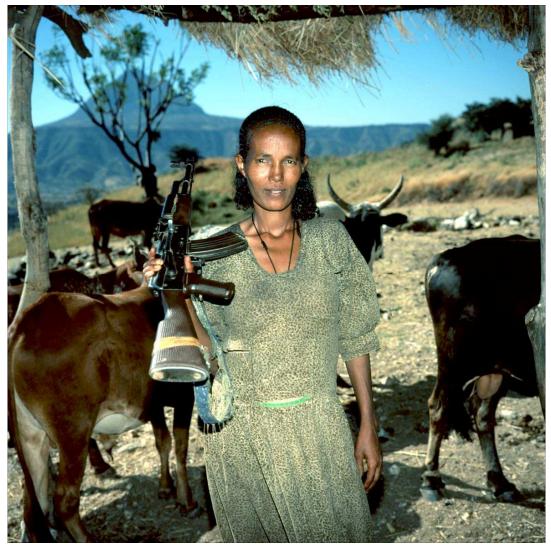
¹⁷ Archival photographs were also used on the music VideoCD <u>*Hadgi/h*</u>, **4**, **4**, (Heritage) issued by TPLF with new recordings of old songs from the struggle for the Ethiopian Millennium (11 September 2007).

¹⁸ In fact, Ethiopia had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 10 September 1981 during the Derg regime, but does not consider itself bound by paragraph 1 of article 29 that allows other states to intervene in each other states internal affairs in relation to interpretation and implementation of the Convention.









[Fig. 5]: Above: Alem (38) is posing with a friend's *Kalashen* (Kalashnikov). Left: Alem also wants to be photographed with her children, including her oldest son Molley's half-brother Mebrahtum (right), when gathering for the yearly church celebration (*kusmi*) for Michel (Michael) in the village on <u>Hidar</u> 12 (November). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2008.





[Fig. 6]: Above: Tsadkan (40). Left: Her husband Tekie poses with their oldest daughter Mozey (20). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2008.

notes, however, that when the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) was established in 1980 by the Derg regime, equality was part of their political rhetoric that was also ideologically based on Marxist-Leninism. Women's participation was also considered important for the success of the revolution (February Revolution in Ethiopia in 1974). Alem refers proclamation No. 188/1980, announcing the establishment of REWA, as stating: 'the Revolution, whose objective is to guarantee justice, equality and prosperity to the citizens of revolutionary Ethiopia, can achieve its ultimate goals only when women, who constitute half of the social force, participate in it in increased numbers' (cited in Alem 2008: 136).

Equality between men and women and the democratic and human rights of women found their way into the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (TGE-OPM 1993) after the TPLF-based EPRDF-coalition had seized power in Ethiopia in 1991. Sosena Demessie and Tsahai Yitbark identify a three-pronged approach in the National Policy on Ethiopian Women: (1) a fundamental reordering of national priorities in favour of women in terms of health, education and employment, (2) elimination of all forms of discrimination and creating awareness of women's legal rights, and (3) support for women's association and women's access to and involvement in all public activities (Sosena & Tsahai 2008: 97). Women's equal rights with men was reconfirmed in the Ethiopian Constitution (FDRE 1995; Article 35, see Appendix 4), and gender equality is a salient concept in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (FDRE-MOWA 2006).¹⁹ When first presenting my research project for the former fighter Roman Gebreselassie, then leader of Tigray Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau in Mekelle (later elected Member of Parliament for Tigray after the 2010 general elections), she emphasised, however, that women's rights and gender equality mean different things in Scandinavian and other European countries than in Tigray; that the context and specific situation of Tigrayan women matters for how women's rights and gender equality are understood. When interviewing Roman on a later occasion I therefore ask her to specify the meanings given to these concepts in the Tigrayan context:

(...) When we say gender equality in Tigray, and Ethiopia as a whole, women are lagging behind. So, to enable women to stand on equal footing [with men], (...) the law is articulated so as to support

¹⁹ The Revised Constitution of Ethiopia promulgated by Emperor Haile Selassie I (1955), had no mention of women but makes reference to human rights (Article 36) equality before the law (Article 37) and nodiscriminatory civil rights among its citizens (Article 38). The new Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE 1987) during the Derg regime similarly considers all Ethiopians equal before the law with equality realised though equal participation in political, economic, social and cultural fields (Article 35). Woman and men have equal rights and women will be provided with special support in education, training and employment in order to participate on an equal basis with men, and appropriate measures will be taken in relation to health and work during pregnancy and maternity (Article 36) (cited in *Annual Review of Population Law* 1987;14:269-71).

[women] on a legal basis, and besides that, affirmative action, especially in education, so as to cope [with] and narrow the [gender] gap. When we say this, it does not mean stopping to work on men['s issues], or in the society as a whole. It's just to bring [women] to an equal bases [with men]. So when we say gender equality, to enable equality between the sexes, we also work on legal aspects, on practical aspects (...) this is why we needed this bureau of women's affairs to [stay] focused, and to facilitate a situation so as to keep working on equality. That is how we see it.

-Women's right is also a concept that is used....How would you explain it in the Tigrayan context?

Women were not having any rights, so we have achieved it through our struggle with our male colleagues. So [it means] to enforce that right, women's rights politically, as participation in parliament, in decision-making and leadership, women's rights economically, as ownership to [land] and property, and women's rights socially, as status [in society], like that.²⁰

While the contexts and present situation for women clearly differs from women's situation in the Scandinavian context, these explanations resemble how they would be understood in Scandinavia. Women's rights ($mac A + \lambda \gamma h + mesel deqi anistiyo$) and gender equality (macret + P + macret sirat tsota) – the latter most often referred to as merely 'equality' (macret) – are concepts that the Tigrayan women in my study area relate to and appreciate. The main difference, when women in the interviews were asked to define women's rights and gender equality, was that these concepts were understood as closely interrelated and taken to mean 'equal rights' in terms of juridical rights and political participation, legal rights in terms of marriage and divorce, economically in terms of property and land, and in terms of equal possibilities in education. When I have queried about how women's rights and gender equality translates at home, women have emphasised that husband and wife should discuss and agree on important issues together and, when pushed on the issue, that the husband could (at least theoretically) cook if his wife is late from work or does something else in the house, or has fallen ill, and there is no one else around.

The prevailing perception among women in my study area is that it was women's participation in the struggle that secured women's equality and their rights. The song from the struggle that 'Beriha' ²¹ (36) starts singing during the interview points precisely to the issue of equality and rights for women. She had participated in one of TPLF's many cultural troupes during the struggle and toured the liberated areas in western Tigray as part of the liberation front's mobilisation strategy. In fact, she is still part of one of the best cultural troupes in the region that partakes in song and dance competitions:

²⁰ Recorded interview 19 December 2008/Tahsas 10, 2002 E.C. (Interview number 39 in English).

²¹ Beriha had approached TPLF together with her younger brother. He was accepted, but she was sent back in spite of having finished fifth grade, which was the requirement for women (and not men), under the pretext that her fighter mother who had divorced her husband to join the struggle, should not risk losing both of them. In fact, her younger brother lost his life during the struggle.

My young women, young women of my country, say hey. Our equality and our rights will be in our hands through the struggle.²²

When I ask the leader of the Women's Association in Tigray in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda how women's rights and gender equality are talked about and explained in the meetings they have today, she says:

Hah! You know what this is Thera, it's not something new!

-Yes, but what about now.

(In a loud voice) It's not new!

-But [what do you say] now that means.

(Angrily) It's not something new! It has evolved over time in the society; what is the equality she has? What can't she get that men have? Since what this is about is understood, you don't raise it as if it's something new; equality is already understood. She understands it. Then, given that she is equal, all you do is give her support to enable her to participate equally with men; however, it doesn't mean that she doesn't know about it. $(...)^{23}$

In this angry response to my question, equality in terms of equal rights is perceived as already understood to the extent that what is needed now is only to support women to put their understanding into practice. One female civil servant (24) working in the rural area, while pointing to the differences between now and then, also suggests differentiating between generations as to changes in gender relations when saying:

In the past ... there was oppression ($\theta \dot{\Phi} \alpha / tseq \ddot{i}t\dot{i}$) in that women were considered to be inferior (+ + + t/tihiti; 'under') to men, but now it's stated in the policy on 'gender issue[s]' (in English) that the woman is equal with the man, the policy says they are equal; that women have to participate equally in education and everything else. In practice, except that mothers haven't changed (AR492-/avgevera) that much owing to the oppression they have been subjected to in the past; in the case of education women have almost an equal chance $(\delta \mathfrak{L} \wedge \partial ddil)$ as men [today].²⁴

While assuring me that the present government has secured equality through their policies, this female civil servant also points to the lasting impact of past oppression on the older generation of women. However, the fighter woman 'Mulu' (36) is sure of changes having taken place:

²² አዋልደይ አዋልድ ዓደይ ዘራፍ በላለይ / ማዕርነትና ነታ መሰልና ብቃልሲ ኣብ አድና Recorded interview 12 December 2008/Tahsas 3, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 35 in Tigriña).

²³ Recorded interview with the wereda leader of Women's Association of Tigray, Berhan Haile, 14 December 2008/*Tahsas* 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 38 in Tigriña). ²⁴ Recorded interview 24 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 15, 2008 E.C. (Interview number 23 in Tigriña).

(...) Unlike in the past when women were oppressed ($\mathcal{P} \cdot \mathcal{P} \cdot \mathcal{P} / m\ddot{c}h' q^{w}an$) by men (...) you have become free ... there is education, unlike in the past when women in the past were belittled and dominated, when they lived and slept dictated by men, now things are good (...).²⁵

Mulu had married her fighter husband during the struggle, and gave birth to their first child in the field. They are still married but, while he has since obtained a diploma in clinical nursing, she dropped out after eighth grade when having their third child. When I probe her on this fact on a later occasion, she laughs and says: 'We fought together during the struggle, but now we have returned to a village life'.²⁶ With her statement, Mulu points to the fact that the gendered division of labour in their home resembles a more traditional division of labour between men and women. She being at home, and he being at work, does not reflect the transgression of gender norms and equal sharing of tasks that she had experienced together with her husband during the struggle, and that she had talked so proudly about in the interview earlier. Together with the above statement from the female civil servant about the older generation of women not having changed, Mulu's concession also suggests limits to the effect of the challenges the fighter women posed to gender norms when venturing to the wilds (*bereka*) to become fighters on equal terms with men (see also Tsegay 1999). Nevertheless, the female fighters are appreciated for their contribution to changes in women's situation. This is reflected in the account of the fighter woman Lula's younger sister (38), who had not been a fighter herself, but had lost her fighter husband to the struggle:

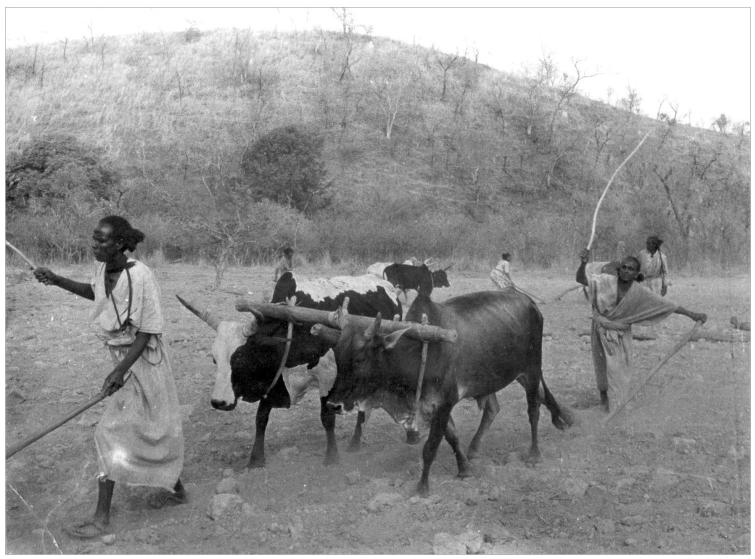
Oh yes! Women secured our rights, they fought and brought about socialism (*R***.0.7***i*/*désinet*) ... they made us proud. They put on men's trousers, something we don't; they fought and came back, so we take great pride in those women today, at least I do. However, some said about these women is she wearing men's trousers? But me I think they wore men's trousers to fulfil their dreams, and since they fulfilled their dreams and mine too, there is no more Derg, no more EDU, and with the current regime in place this makes me very proud, it makes me happy, I'm very happy for these women. What else is there that we have not achieved? What have we not achieved so far? It's only that the dead will not return; otherwise, what is there that is left unachieved? ... While the dead will not come back, we are happy for the possibility to be educated [as a result of their sacrifice]. ... Those heroines who fought ... made it possible [for women] to be educated. Since so many are educated, I would say that those women made it possible for all women to wear trousers, even though we stayed at home.²⁷

While Lula's younger sister emphasises how the heroic fighter women's pursuit benefitted all women, her account also refers to the resistance and insults their transgression of gender norms evoked (issues I will return to in Chapter 6). That the fighter women's challenges to gender norms were contested had also intensified when – contrary to the teaching of the

²⁵ Recorded interview 3 November 2008/T'ïqïmti 24, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 10 in Tigriña).

²⁶ Fieldwork notes 30 November 2008/<u>H</u>idar 21, 2001 E.C.

²⁷ Recorded interview 7 December 2008/*Hidar* 28, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 31 in Tigriña).



[Fig. 7]: Teaching women to plough during the struggle between 1982 and 1984. Courtesy: Struggle Museum, Mekelle.

Ethiopian Orthodox Church – ploughing and slaughtering were introduced by TPLF as tasks women could do [Fig. 7]. Teaching women to plough was understood by TPLF to carry symbolic weight, and became, following Hammond, 'an icon of women's equality' (Hammond 1999: 213). The former fighter woman, 'Saba' (44), provided the following account in 2002 on how they went about teaching women to plough, and for the society to see that a woman was perfectly capable of doing so:

(...) They gave them [the women] training ... there is one [woman] in Asgede, she is still ploughing herself. They [TPLF] trained them properly; there is one woman who has been doing it up till now ... they had been three or more. 'This woman, how can a woman plough', they [village people] said when she took the oxen. They brought her the most difficult oxen, to mock her that means; to ridicule women. ... We watched her (...) a meeting had been organised in [the village] Alogen. I went there and took a lot of women with me for us to see. 'Bring women who can see so they can take the lesson to their home place (*adi*)' [I was told]. Then they brought difficult oxen, too difficult even for men to get under the same yoke that means. They brought the most difficult ones (...) and with these the woman was supposed to plough. 'How can a woman do it?' It was mockery that means, and disrespect. Then the plough-oxen came. The oxen they had brought her, these oxen were difficult to plough with; they refused. She tried to arrange them, the oxen threatened to butt her [with their horns], refusing her, refusing, butting and butting, then slowly she showed everybody that she managed the oxen properly and made them work together. That's it, she ploughed, they saw it themselves, 'wow, this revolution is for women', they said.²⁸

This narrative account is a glimpse into the optimism at the time about TPLF's commitment to provide changes in women's lives. Women had not been allowed to plough before, as it was believed that the harvest would be ruined if she did so, since messing with the gender order would result in God's wrath. When the big famine hit the region (1984-85), clerics in the Orthodox Church in Tigray are also reported to having murmured that the cause for the famine was that nature had been messed with when women had taken on ploughing activities (Hammond 1989, 1999; Tsegay 1999; Krug 2000). John Young (1997b) also emphasises that TPLF had to balance their challenges to the prevailing gender order against continued support for the revolution itself from a highly religious peasant society. Tsegay notes that the patriarchal structures in the sphere of religion had not only provided an ideological basis for the subordination of women but that such perceptions were diffused into most social, economic and political institutions (Tsegay 1999: 65). When reluctance against these gender changes grew in peasant society, the strategy TPLF opted for was, by the mid-1980s, to sacrifice the programme to provide women with new skills and liberties in farming (just a couple of years after it had been introduced) under the pretext that ploughing just added to women's already overstretched workload. It is also a fact that TPLF started to reduce

²⁸ Recorded interview 15 October 2002/T'iqimti 5, 1995 E.C. (Interview number 11A-1 in Tigriña).



[Fig. 8]: A Tigrayan woman participating in the 'army for development' (lematawi serawit). Courtesy: Women's Association of Tigray, 2010.

the recruitment of women from 1984 onwards by requiring that new female (and not male) recruits had finished fifth grade – and which, of course, most of the women in the rural area at the time had not – arguing that the recruitment of women disrupted domestic life (Young 1997b; see also Hammond 1989, 1999; Tsegay 1999). In 1985, TPLF lifted their ban on sexual relationships within the liberation army and introduced the 'democratic marriage'. This was perceived, especially by female combatants, as a revival of male supremacy and a reverting of women to traditional biological and nurturing roles (Tsegay 1999: 117).

The fighter woman Saba, above, ensures me that some women in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda have continued to plough up until the present. Current development interventions which introduce new technologies, like irrigation, also open up new possibilities for women in farming that are not completely predefined by the perceived naturalness of a God-given order of production and reproduction that Tigrayan women challenged when starting to plough during the struggle [Fig. 8]. The permission given by TPLF for women to slaughter was soon banned, however, under pressure from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in accordance with peoples' religious sentiments (including her own). Saba explains:

It's only men who can slaughter. It's not allowed [for women to slaughter]. People would not accept it. Even when Weyane [TPLF]²⁹ said so, the people said it was a mistake (...). It's a mistake it was said. 'How can we accept that?' the people said. Since there is no surviving story in the Bible, having survived from the start [about women slaughtering], it's not possible. It's problematic.³⁰

In an earlier article, I have posed the question whether women were in fact betrayed by the very liberation project that they supported (Mjaaland 2004a). In spite of the rhetoric of equality becoming well established during the struggle, the social transformation of the prevailing gender order encountered challenges, not only from the society but also from within the liberation front itself (see also Tsegay 1999). As Alem Desta notes: 'The impact of this *dual revolution* in creating change cannot be underestimated in having set a spark for change, but did not always fan the flames' (Alem 2008: 147; italics added). These challenges to the transformation of gender relations could also be explained by the simple fact that the predominantly male leadership of the liberation front eased its commitment to gendered change in order to win a war. Based on the common familiarity with and appreciation of equal rights gained through struggle among the Tigrayan women I have discussed this issue with, I have, however, been puzzled by the negative attitude both in Tigray (and Ethiopia) towards

²⁹ Weyane means 'revolution' in Tigriña, and is the popular name used in Tigray for TPLF. Weyane can also be used as a derogative term by those who are critical to the current TPLF-based EPRDF government.

³⁰ Recorded interview 15 October 2002/T'iqimti 5, 1995 E.C. (Interview number 11A-1 in Tigriña).

aligning women's activism for equal rights with any form of feminism, in terms of cultural and political critique and basis for political action (Moore 1988: 10-1). This negativity also disowns the initial convergence between feminism *and* the women's rights and equality rhetoric. While the postcolonial feminist scholar Chandra T. Mohanty (2003) asserts that the shift in language from feminism to women's rights has constituted the most successful move to mainstream feminism, Signe Arnfred emphasises that, as the mainstreaming of women's issues moved to the centre of current gender and development discourse, it lost its critical [feminist] itch (Arnfred 2002b: 79, see also Arnfred 2004). In spite of Tigrayan women's continued *fight* for equality and rights, Western feminism continues to be contested much in line with postcolonial feminist critique.³¹ Below, I will start off by addressing the rationale behind this contestation in the Tigrayan context.

Contesting feminism

Classified during the struggle as the 'woman question' in Leninist parlance (Hammond 1989), gender issues in Ethiopia under the present TPLF-based EPRDF-government continues for the most part to be understood as women's issues (see also Biseswar 2008b). Aregawi Berhe (2009) notes in his book from the struggle that feminism was not accepted within TPLF.³² This negativity towards 'feminist tendencies' is also mentioned by Tsegay (1999: 130-1). Furthermore, Aregawi notes that it had been important for TPLF that the extensive (and indeed impressive) organisational mass network of women evolving during the struggle was situated within the liberation front, not only to add momentum to the struggle but also to be able to control women's political activism:

The TPLF leaders, especially after the take-over of the MLLT [Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray]³³, argued that the rights of women were achievable only *after* the victory of the ongoing revolution. All women's activities had to be subordinated to the armed struggle and the congress passed a resolution condemning feminism in the TPLF (Aregawi 2009: 239-40, italics added).

³¹ Referring to Kumari Jayawardena (1986) and Uma Narayan (1997), Alison Jaggar (2000) questions the notion that feminism understood as a political strategy taken on by women is primarily Western even if the term itself was first coined in the West at the end of the eighteen century.

³² A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975-1991). Revolt, Ideology, and Mobilisation in *Ethiopia* is based on Aregawi's (2008) PhD thesis with the same title. See also Aregawi (2004).

³³ MLLT was a political party established within TPLF in 1985. The party was set at developing the ideological base for the Tigrayan struggle and an eventual take-over of power in Ethiopia with the present Prime Minister Meles Zenawi as its chief ideologue. The establishment of this party has also been understood in terms of a power struggle within TPLF itself (Aregawi 2009).

The former fighter Roman Gebreselassie emphasises in her BA thesis *Women['s] Empowerment in Ethiopia: The Case of Tigray* that 'women's struggle for emancipation and equality is not isolated from the overall struggle for democracy and development' (Roman 2000: 2). Both during the struggle and afterwards, the 'woman question', is sought handled in a more inclusionary and holistic way than what is perceived as a Western feminist approach, seeking to avoid thinking of women's issues in isolation from other social, economic and political processes in *opposition* to men; a concern that could well have been accommodated within socialist feminist perspectives based on Marxism (e.g. Acker 1987).³⁴ When I interviewed Roman, as the leader of Tigray Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau in Mekelle, I ask her about the influences on how Tigrayan women defined their struggle:

As much as we are all in one world we are influencing each other. And [during] the liberation struggle [in Tigray], there were different liberation struggles in the world, especially in Africa (...) in South Africa, Mozambique ... Zimbabwe, so many places, Namibia ... we were also looking to their experiences. The other thing is that we also had the stories and books [about] how they struggled in Vietnam and China, and [about] women in Europe ... how they [strategized] during the First World War, Second World War and (...) [their road to] emancipation. So I cannot say that there was no influence, there were influences. One thing I want to say is, we believe the women's struggle (...) is part and parcel of the struggle of the people. If you alienate it, we strongly believe it does not work. During the struggle we were participating to bring down dictatorship with our [male] colleagues. Even now when we struggle for our emancipation, alleviation of poverty and women's empowerment in all aspects holistically, we should work for change, as a whole, not only for women. If (laughter) we try to [work] only for women, and if the [chauvinistic] mentality is not changed, we will not win, because [that mentality] is [still] there. So, believing this, when we hear about some of these struggles in other areas, extreme feminism, which is narrow and fits women only ... and which [criticises] men, men are doing this, men are doing that, we do not support that. Do you [understand] what I mean? ... So, the Western influence, as a whole ... is not negative. Rather, it has so many positive [aspects]; how the women in Europe were struggling ... for their emancipation in the capitalist society, what problems they have, how they were trying to solve it ... by their own force, by their own organisations. How human rights, women's emancipation, women's participation in elections [were enabled] through the struggle of the whole democratic [movement] of men and women, [as well as] by women themselves. So, we learned positive things from this, but when we [encounter] ultra and extreme feminism, we do not support it. And it will not help women.35

Roman's explication of the influences that Tigrayan women drew on in their struggle for liberation and emancipation, shows the historical context of peoples' struggles for freedom within which the Tigrayan struggle is situated. Tsegay (1999) notes specifically the strong link, the Tigrayan fighter women he interviewed, made to Vietnamese women's military roles in the Vietnamese fight against French and American imperialism. Inspirations from Western

³⁴ According to Susan Arndt (2000), antifeminist positions in their multitude, are often based on stereotypical notions of (white Western) feminism as radical feminism implying, 'hatred of men, penis envy, nonacceptance of African traditions, a fundamental rejection of marriage and motherhood, a favour of lesbian love, and an endeavour to invert the power relationships of gender' (Arndt 2000: 710, see also Nnaemeka 1998).

³⁵ Recorded interview 19 December 2008/Tahsas 10, 2002 E.C. (Interview number 39 in English).

women are not excluded from the multitude of influences in Roman's elaboration, but what is classified as extremist (or radical) Western feminism is perceived as counterproductive to the project of expanding women's equal rights in the Tigrayan context. Hammond notes the practical irrelevance of feminism during the Tigrayan struggle, as 'the central tenet of political analysis is class struggle, not the struggle against patriarchy' (Hammond 1999: 168).

In spite of a continued focus on equal rights, Tigrayan (and Ethiopian) women (and men) share their contestation of (Western) feminism with Afro-American, African womanism/motherism/ feminisms³⁶ and postcolonial feminists alike (e.g. Mohanty 1991a. 1991b; Uma Narayan 1997; Oyewumi 2003c). The most significant critic of Western feminism posed by these non-Western perspectives was that suppression of women under patriarchy was not seen as the *primary* source of gendered oppression. Their concerns as women, while incorporating sexism, dealt with racism and all forms of 'colonising' structures, including as well Western academic knowledge-production. Of concern was also obtaining acceptance for that national liberation struggles and fighting colonialism and imperialism were women's issues. While Afro-American feminists had already pointed to the raceblindness of white (middle-class) feminists, postcolonial feminist critique was also concerned with Western feminists' blindness towards their own privileged position within and, hence, compliance with imperialist and capitalist power structures. The critique of Western feminism as just another imperialist intervention carried out by 'Western feminist evangelists' (Okome 2003: 67), did upset the notion of a 'global sisterhood' based on 'shared oppression' (e.g. Oyewumi 2003a, 2003b). Pointing to vertical power asymmetry at the base of this 'kinship' relation, Nkiru Nzegwu (2003) instead termed this relationship 'sisterarchy'.

The problem 'difference' constituted for a feminism that was built around the presumption of women's shared interests, shared identity and shared oppression had been addressed by Moore in her book *Feminism and Anthropology* (Moore 1988: 10-1). The

³⁶ Questioning the relevance of Western feminism for the Afro-American context 'womanism' was first coined by Alice Walker (1983), and has come to denote the specific situation of black women and women of colour in relation to – not only gender and class – but also race. At about the same time and independently of Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) started to use the term 'womanism' in the African context, incorporating in its philosophy, alongside sexual issues, 'racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations' (Ogunyemi 1985: 64). Authors like Filomina Steady (1987) and others also started to use the term 'African feminism(s)'. Since, in Ogunyemi's opinion, neither Western nor Afro-American variants of feminism managed to incorporate the specificity of the African context and the issues relevant for African woman, she later introduces the term 'African womanism' (Ogunyemi 1996: 114). Cleonora Hudson-Weems (1993) also introduced the term 'African awanism' as an Afro-American alternative to African feminism. Another African alternative is 'stiwanism' (STIWA-Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) introduced by Molare Ogundipe-Leslie (1994). Catherine Acholonu's (1995) 'motherism', as an African alternative to Western feminism, plays tribute to African mother's nurturing role as signifying a powerful subject position (see also Amadiume 1987, 1997).

postcolonial feminist scholar, Uma Narayan (1997, 2000a), also pointed to the fact that the notion of difference was at the base at the Western colonial project (see also Bohler-Muller 2002). Narayan's argument is that the tendency implicit in this kind of relativism to produce cultural essentialisms, locks 'Third World' women up within culture. In what Narayan terms, 'the Package Picture of Culture' (Narayan 2000b: 1084; see also Steady 2002, 2004), potential samenesses between 'Western' and 'Third World' women are omitted. Furthermore, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf emphasises that, 'we must reject outright any attempt to assign a particular conceptual category as belonging to the 'West' and therefore inapplicable to the African situation' (Bakare-Yusuf 2003a: 138, 2002, 2004). In fact, Amina Mama tones down the impact of Western feminism in an interview with Elaine Salo:

To put it bluntly, white feminism has never been strong enough to be 'the enemy' – in the way that say, global capitalism can be viewed as an enemy. The constant tirades against 'white feminists' do not have the same strategic relevance as they might have had 20 years ago when we first subjected feminism to anti-racist scrutiny. Since then many Westerners have not only listened to the critiques of African and other so-called third world feminists – they have also re-considered their earlier simplistic paradigms and come up with more complex theories. Postcolonial feminism owes much to African, Asian and Latin American thinkers. Western feminists have agreed with much of what we have told them about different women being oppressed differently, and the importance of class and race and culture in configuring gender relations (Salo & Mama 2001: 61).

In order to accomplish a true solidarity across borders, the postcolonial feminist author, Mohanty (2003), has expressed the need for a *decolonisation* of feminism itself. Based on Benedict Anderson's (1983) imagined communities, Mohanty envisions political spaces formed as 'communities of resistance' (Mohanty 1991a: 4-5) rather than being based on identity politics (like being a woman). These communities of resistance allow for shared communality across former geography-based divides (like Western versus non-Western or First World/North versus Third World/South) as an overarching 'anticapitalist transnational feminist practice' (Mohanty 2003: 230).³⁷ Inspired by Mohanty's postcolonial feminist perspective in her seminal article *Cartographies of Struggle*, where she emphasises the *'specific* locations and histories of [women's] struggle' (Mohanty 1991a: 10, italics in

³⁷ For example, the Report from the 3rd World Conference on Women in Nairobi 1985 (UN 1986), makes several references to the establishment of a new international economic order as a necessary step to advance the economic and social status of women. The New International Economic Order (NIEO) was initiated by the South and pushed forward in the UN system in 1974 to enable a transformation of the prevailing imperialistic and unjust economic order. Its impact on the strategies of leading world economies has however been minimal.









[Fig. 9]: Different locations for women's struggles in (1) Afghanistan (above left), (2) Eritrea (above right), (3) Mozambique (left below), and (4) West-Somalia Liberation Front (right below). From the then Marxist-Leninist newspaper *Klassekampen* ('The Class Struggle') 3 February 1984, 3 February 1978, 19 November 1977, 10 February 1978. While Eritrean fighter women were frequently represented in the annual circulations that I reviewed, Tigrayan fighter women were not mentioned.







[Fig. 10]: Locations for Norwegian feminist struggles: (1) rallying against imperialism (above left), (2) for abortion rights (above right), (3) at the Norwegian Women's Front's political summer camp (left below), and (4) burning of pornography (right below). All photographs are from the then Marxist-Leninist Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen* ('The Class Struggle') 2 March, 31 May and 21 June 1978, and 8 October 1977.

original)³⁸, I had earlier conducted a pilot review of photographs used in the Norwegian, then Marxist-Leninist, newspaper *Klassekampen* ('The Class Struggle') in the1970s and first half of 1980s.³⁹ I was searching for representations of women partaking in national liberation struggles before and around the time when women in Tigray had joined the armed struggle [Fig. 9]. At the same time, feminists in Norway had been involved in 'struggles' for gender equality, abortion rights, was rallying against all sexual and other exploitation of women, and demanding day-care for their children [Fig. 10]. While these struggles surely differ in terms of historical location in relation to global power structures, the images and articles in the annual circulations reviewed show that not all Western feminists were totally blinded on the issue of imperialism and non-western women's involvement in national liberation struggles.

Nevertheless, Obioma Nnaemeka's 'negofeminism', the feminism of negotiation; a 'no ego' feminism (Nnaemeka 2004: 360-1), seems more in line with Tigrayan women's sentiments that seek to avoid a thinking of women's issues in isolation from other social, economic and political processes in opposition to men. Nnaemeka's proposition that African feminism poses its challenge to power relations through negotiation and compromise, rather than through confrontation and disruption (see also Nnaemeka 1998, 2005), does also converge with the Tigrayan opposition to what is perceived as the more confrontational and exclusionary strategies of Western feminism. The decisive point from the perspective of Nnaemeka's negofeminism, and that has consequences for how Tigrayan women's strategies are handled analytically in this thesis, is that actions based on negotiation and compromise are *not* simply inactive and inconsequential. However, before I discuss some of the socio-cultural dynamics in Tigray that have urged this perspective, I will elaborate on Western feminist standpoint theory that, in my opinion, more or less explicitly, forms an underlying epistemological premise in non-western feminisms and postcolonial feminist theory.

Locating feminist standpoints

At the base of feminist standpoint theory is the formulation of women's experiences from 'women's place' (Smith 1987: 85) as an empirical and theoretical resource that could be

³⁸ The Anglo-American feminist writer Adrienne Rich coined the terms 'locations of power' (Rich 1976) understood as situated within patriarchy, and 'politics of location' (Rich 1985) understanding the female body as one such location. Haraway also talks about the 'politics and epistemologies of location' at the base of knowledge claims (Haraway 1988: 589).

³⁹ The annual circulations of *Klassekampen* reviewed covered 1972, 73, 74, 77, 78 and 1980, 81, 84, 85. This choice of newspaper related to the fact that the liberation movements EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) and TPLF operating in Ethiopia at the time were based precisely in Marxist-Leninism, and hence ideologically linked to *Klassekampen's* journalists and readers. Likewise, the most progressive feminist movements in Norway at the time were founded on leftist-based politics.

brought to bear, not only on feminist politics, but on knowledge production. The critique from feminist standpoint theory was also directed at hegemonic and androcentric assumptions about science as value-free, disinterested, and situationally transcendent (Harding 1986, 2004b). Its main concern was the relationship between production of knowledge and practices of power, not only as an explanatory theory but also as a method or theory of method (methodology) that, in an epistemological sense, could guide feminist research as a *political* strategy (Harding 2004b: 1-2; see also Harding 2004a). For example, Sandra Harding (1987) was concerned with the extent to which a feminist methodology moves beyond merely adding women to existing theory, a strategy that would not challenge prevailing androcentric frameworks (see also Gatens 1991). Situating women as 'agents of knowledge', a critical feminist perspective proposes, in Harding's opinion, an epistemological transformation of knowledge production itself. Thus, the power of feminist research is understood to lie in the challenges it poses, 'to the grand theories and the background assumptions of traditional social inquiry' (Harding 1987: 10).⁴⁰ Feminist standpoint theory was developed at a point in time when the exclusion of women in knowledge production was acknowledged and acted upon as a political matter with epistemological consequences, claiming as well that a philosophy of science should have social relevance (see also Harding 1986).

Feminist standpoint theory as it was first developed by Western feminist scholars like Nancy Hartsock, Dorothy E. Smith and Sandra Harding is based on Marx' historical materialism. It signified a re-emergence in a feminist appropriation of the Marxist standpoint of the proletariat where the oppressed are given access to a 'privileged vantage point' (Hartsock 1987: 159) for understanding their own situation but enabling as well a critique of the oppressor(s). While Donna Haraway acknowledges that being subjugated does not imply an innocent position (see also Mulinari & Sandell 1999), she nevertheless claims that the oppressed are 'least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge' (Haraway 1988: 584). Harding (1987) emphasises, however, that this privileged perspective cannot merely be claimed from the standpoint of *being* a woman. Drawing on the feminist slogan 'the private is political', she emphasises that a particular standpoint is achieved through political struggle. A specific standpoint in knowledge production *can* therefore be claimed by women through a collective formulation of their experiences as oppressed and marginalised, and that is presumed to transform prevailing power relations in line with the emerging of political consciousness in neo-Marxist critical theory. Tigrayan

⁴⁰ Mary Hawkesworth asserts that feminist scholarship – in its systematic enquiry and engagement with the world – is examining more and assuming less than androcentric accounts (Hawkesworth 1989: 557).

women's participation in the revolutionary liberation struggle – including their continued fight for equal rights – would, from a feminist standpoint perspective, imply that these women hold knowledge about their situation that is privileged over other knowledges.

Mohanty asserts that it is precisely feminist standpoint theory and the epistemic privilege implied, together with a postpositivist realist analysis of experience, identity and the effects of social locations, that can answer to issues of marginalisation and the use and abuse of power in the present transnational context (Mohanty 2003: 231).⁴¹ Mohanty has also emphasised recent decades' publishing of numerous autobiographies and life stories by thirdworld feminists, as creating 'a discursive space where (self)knowledge is produced (...) [and where] the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicised consciousness and self-identity (Mohanty 1991a: 34). Mohanty interprets this telling from women's experience as political acts of resisting dominant (western) representations of the 'third world woman' as implicitly ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized (Mohanty 1991b: 56). Knowledge production itself becomes, in her perspective, an important 'discursive site for struggle' (Mohanty 1991a: 32). As Cheryl Hendrix and Desiree Lewis asserts:

[B]lack and/or third world theorists and activists have developed critiques which spring directly from their own struggles against hegemonic theories and exploitative politics and research. Experience of oppression directly affects marginal subjects' theorisation of the complexity of power relations. Their voices also unsettle the canonisation of oppositional knowledge for white and male theorists. Because of this, the voices of black and/or third-world women internationally speak with a special urgency to the dilemmas of (...) African women (Hendrix & Lewis 1994: 64).

Standpoint epistemology is contested precisely because of the privileging of a specific underprivileged standpoint in knowledge production (e.g. Bar On 1993; Lal 1996). Uma Narayan (1992) notes that access to two different and incompatible perspectives (both that of the oppressor *and* the oppressed) do not guarantee that the individual will take a critical stance (Narayan 1992: 266). The question is also, following Charlotte Aull Davies, 'which subaltern position provides the clearest vision' (Davies 1999: 62; see also Jaggar 2004).⁴²

⁴¹ Dick Pels suggests that standpoint arguments 'presently offer the most persistently popular rationale for a politics of knowledge framed by particularist identities and the reclaiming of cultural difference' (Pels 2004: 274); ranging from feminists to religious fundamentalist and right-wing actors.

 $^{^{22}}$ One problem discussed by Cathrine Holst is that feminist standpoint epistemologists have tried to argue for an insight that is not only privileged but also specifically feminist, and thereby exceeds the democratic project that Harding pursues, of 'treating women and men as equals, inside and outside inquiry' (Holst 2005: 112). Holst reminds us that '[t]he idea that women think differently, and do it with more context [which has been one such claim] could be mistaken for a patriarchal caricature' (ibid: 124).

While feminist concerns converge with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice on the issue of power and domination, the political and epistemological scope for using marginalised women's experiences to formulate distinct kinds of knowledges through struggle from specific locations that are intersected by power in diverging ways, is limited in his theoretical framework. Experience is never immediate in Bourdieu's perspective but always conditioned by the structural dispositions of a habitus that is beyond conscious reach (see also Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Political projects for social change, like the feminist one, is hardly worthwhile in Bourdieu's perspective if the relations of domination are not broken by a radical transformation of the social conditions of production that generates the domination by men over women in both men and women (Bourdieu 2001: 41-2). Anne Witz (2004) asserts that, as a result of Bourdieu's 'Kabyle tunnel vision', he continues to use his androcentic and structuralist analysis of the Kabyle society in the 1950s and 1960s as his basis for analysing gender in contemporary contexts (see also Arnot 2002). Witz notes that Bourdieu also circumvents the whole array of feminist epistemological debates since the 1980s when dealing with gender in his later work on masculine domination (Bourdieu 2001). Premising social change on structural change does converge with socialist and radical feminisms and postcolonial feminist perspectives alike, but diverges from Bourdieu's theoretical framework on the possibility for a *critical discourse* to provide radical transformation beyond exceptional moments of crisis. While feminist standpoint theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice also converge on the structural impact of location (material environment/field') in terms of power, the discussion below will show that the idea of location (material environment/'field') might be more complicated and compound than both the feminist standpoint theorists and Bourdieu presume.

Location or the hybridity of positions?

Jayati Lal argues that 'an epistemology of locations cannot spring out of an a priori ontological location' (Lal 1996: 199) but, rather, that this situatedness is intersected by many identities situated in 'contradictory locations' (ibid; see also Mohanty 2003). In Lal's opinion it also makes a difference if these locations are understood as matters of choice, or as being ascribed 'on the bases of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, or other identitybased ontological categories' (ibid.). Lal notes that:

The problems associated with standpoint epistemologies are paralleled in the presumed epistemology of the native insider. Both constructions are essentialist and reduce either the native or the Third World woman to an assumed homogenous entity.

Both suggest subjectivist, ideographic methodologies on the assumption that experience is the basis for knowledge. Both reduce the politics of location to the experience of (a presumed homogenous) identity. Furthermore, such constructions have the unintended effect of reinforcing the very distinctions that they are supposed to erase. This is because the construction of subjugation, nativity, and insiderness, as privileged epistemic standpoints from which to counter the universalism of Western theory, are all premised on maintaining the same borderlines between Us and Them, Self and Other, and Subject and Object that they wish to question in the first place (Lal 1996: 198).

Another critique of feminist standpoint theory – linking up with the restricted epistemological potential of experience in Bourdieu's theoretical framework by implication – is the difficulty that Mary Hawkesworth (1999) emphasises: of distinguishing between error and truth, standpoint and ideology other than by recourse to precisely 'experience'. The status of 'experience' in knowledge production, so central to differently located feminist standpoints continues therefore, to paraphrase Celia Kitzinger (2007), to be situated in an unresolved tension between (1) the (feminist) politics of voice (e.g. Spivak 1988), (2) experience as ontology, and the epistemological considerations concerning representation of experience, and (3) the self-representation implied in data that are self-reported. Hawkesworth suggests a move from seeing standpoint theory as enabling epistemological claims, to seeing standpoint theory as an analytical tool, which requires the moving out of insulated standpoints to the engagement between standpoints and a 'heightened interrogation of precisely that which is taken as unproblematic in competing accounts' (Hawkesworth 1999: 153). Hawkesworth's point can therefore be seen to have some resemblance to Haraway's positioning of differently situated knowledges in 'webs of connections' (Haraway 1988: 584)⁴³, requiring a critical methodology to avoid ending up in an impregnable epistemological relativism. Consequently, these webbed connections need, in my opinion, to be relatively unbound, non-exclusionary and sufficiently fine-meshed, as well as allowing for, in a figurative sense, diverging ways of spinning or weaving, in order to transgress the impregnable relativism of feminist standpoints. The consequence is that no one position in these knowledge webs could claim privilege, and hence, be exempt from critique. Hendrix and Lewis also question the possibility, or, for that sake, the desirability, of an entirely autonomous black or third-world tradition of oppositional knowledge (Hendrix & Lewis 1994: 64). Drawing attention to the limits of both the outsider and insider perspective, Allison Jaggar (2000) is sympathetic to the need for specific

⁴³ The term 'web' also draws attention to the pragmatist W. v. O. Quine's concept of 'web of belief' about scientific knowledge (Quine, in Hollis 1994: 83). I do not agree with him that knowledge cooks down to *beliefs*, although I follow his claim that knowledge is readily revisable. I understand Haraway's webbed connections as a productive image of the interrelational and processual aspects of ongoing knowledge production and revisions.

communities to consolidate their position and develop their own discourses in exclusion from potentially more hegemonic knowledge communities for a period of time. Jaggar's morally-informed pursuit is to develop a 'practical feminist discourse' situated in a meeting point attentive to power asymmetries. Lal's suggestion to "work the hyphens" between Self and Other, rather than reproducing the tension between Us and Them' (Lal 1996: 207) also brings me back to Nnaemeka's negofeminism, as based on a 'third space of engagement':

The third space is not the either/or location of stability; it is the both/and space where borderless territory and free movement authorizes the capacity to simultaneously theorize practice, practice theory, and allow the mediation of policy. The third space, which allows for coexistence, interconnection, and interaction of thought, dialogue, planning, and action, constitutes the arena where I have witnesses the unfolding of feminisms in Africa (Nnaemeka 2004: 360).

It was Homi Bhabha who coined the term 'third space' as a liminal space where the process of cultural hybridity, that presupposes *translation* as a prerequisite for both the constitution of culture and contact across incommensurable cultural differences, 'gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable' (Bhabha & Rutherford 1990: 211; Bhabha 2006 [1994]). Nnaemeka's emphasis on negotiation and compromise as active and consequential is therefore much in line with Bhabha's understanding that '[s]ubversion is negotiation: transgression is negotiation; negotiation is not just some kind of compromise or 'selling out' which people too easily understand it to be' (Bhabha & Rutherford 1990: 216). Paul Routledge suggests that, in 'the third space of critical engagement', 'neither site, role, or representation holds sway (...) one continually subverts the meaning of the other' (Routledge 1996: 400), through the enactment of a hybrid moment (ibid: 407). The notion of a third space, therefore, offers a space for engagement that challenge the outsider/insider divide in knowledge production. As Kirin Narayan asserts:

Instead of the paradigm emphasizing a dichotomy between outsider/insider or observer/observed, I propose that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux (Narayan 1993: 671).

When understanding outsider/insider from the perspective of a continuum (see also England 1994), degrees of difference and similarities intersect in diverging ways in different locations and situations forming differing relational constellations. Narayan (1993) also reminds us that

a person that is considered an insider would know about a society only from particular locations within that society (see also Srivastava 2006). Attentive to the critique from nonwestern feminisms and postcolonial feminist theory, I do acknowledge the privileged position from where I - in the present global order – no doubt write. However, from the perspective of Narayan's 'enactment of hybridity' (Narayan 1993: 672) that situates researchers 'as subjects simultaneously touched by life-experience and swayed by professional concerns' (ibid: 682), the result of this engagement is more open-ended. It is in this sense that the notion of hybridity constitutes a third space from where to engage critically with ethical and epistemological issues when doing research in a non-Western context. This hybrid approach to locations also challenges the more fixed understanding of material environment/'field' and the unequivocal internalisation of that material environment or 'field' as structural dispositions in *habitus* that Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) presumes. Based on the opposition to feminism in Tigray (and Ethiopia) and the call for a non-confrontational approach that includes women's issues in more inclusionary and holistic processes of social change, the perspectives above on hybridity, where both subversion and transgression imply negotiations and where challenges to power relations can take place through negotiations and compromise, seem relevant. This point relates to my discussion in the next and last part of this chapter where I will situate Tigrayan women's narrative strategies in socio-cultural dynamics, where the emancipatory and epistemic potential of telling from women's experiences seems more uncertain.

Telling as emancipation or vulnerability?

Narration of individual or collective experiences is commonly understood as a particular kind of *authentic testimony* when utilised politically by disadvantaged groups, feminist or other, to draw attention to their own concerns, as for example human rights abuses (e.g. Farrell et al. 2005; Smith 2005). On a collective level, as in the Truth and Reconciliation process in South-Africa after apartheid, a reconciling and implicit healing effect on a scarred population was presumed through the giving of testimony by those who had been subject to gross violations of human rights, as well as their perpetrators (e.g. Ross 2003). Hammond notes, however, in her book from the struggle, *Sweeter than Honey. Testimonies of Tigrayan Women*:

Tigrayan peasant women have no habit of self-expression, of attributing importance to their experience or emotions. Those who have become fighters have in addition dedicated themselves to a cause which prioritises the revolutionary struggle over the private emotional life. These stories are spare and concise, without any embroidering self-indulgence. Those who expect harshness of experience to be reflected in expressions of emotion will be disappointed (Hammond 1989: 34).

While the struggle carved out a space for Tigrayan women to participate in political processes and to voice their concerns, biographic narratives still resemble the description given by Hammond, above, except when deceased children or loss of other loved ones are mentioned with a sigh or a holding back of tears. Giving vent to agonising emotions in other social situations than the institutionalised spaces and time for socio-religious rituals in the case of death⁴⁴, is most often perceived as extremely unpleasant and upsetting for the people present and will be stopped immediately, or the (female or male) person in agony will be abruptly moved to a more private space to stop the crying there. While the assumed therapeutic qualities of telling within psychoanalysis and Western folk psychology is contested as a cross-cultural perspective (e.g. Nordanger 2006), the emancipatory and epistemic aspect of telling implied in Mohanty's (1991a) postcolonial feminist perspective, above, sharing its basic tenet with feminist standpoint theory resonates with Ursula M. Staudinger's (2001) research on autobiographic memory from the perspective of social-cognitive theory.

Staudinger's (2001) asserts that constructing stories about our lives, or 'life reviews', is more than an act of 'reminiscence' but, is enhanced by an urge to make meaning out of experiences and life in general. While life reviews are understood to entail reminiscence, it involves more than mere remembering – in terms of 'recall', 'retrieval' or 'picking up' past experience from memory – as it is also dependent on a degree of analytical sophistication in relation to these events. Staudinger emphasises, further, that the process of reviewing one's life relies on prior knowledge structures, on social context, and on emotional and motivational components. She also points to empirical evidence having demonstrated that 'retrieval of events and autobiographic materials is a problem-solving process, one in which stored information is selected, transformed, and reorganised, often depending on current emotional conditions and social context' (Staudinger 2001: 150), resulting in a '(re)contructed event' (ibid.). To accommodate this mixture of cognitive, motivational and emotional elements, Staudinger introduces the term 'life reflection'.⁴⁵ According to Staudinger, life reflection

⁴⁴ These socio-religious rituals, which I have observed from the perspective of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (and not the smaller Muslim community in my study area), start from the instance of death to the burial the same day, expressions of grief continues during the mourning period <u>hazen</u> (-hur), lasting for 7-12 days afterwards when people come to give their condolences and mourn together with the deceased's family in their home.
⁴⁵ Life reflection from Staudinger's perspective is based on 'narrative processing' and 'autobiographic reasoning'. 'Narrative processing' of life experiences involves, according to Singer and Bluck, the construction of everything from brief anecdotes to fully developed autobiographies based on, 'vivid imagery, familiar plot structures, and archetypical characters and are often linked to predominantly cultural themes or conflicts' (Singer

provides insight about our lives, assisting us in accomplishing future goals, and refers to this quality of life reflection as 'epistemic' or 'emancipatory'. The epistemic refers to the possibility that reflecting on ones life *can* provide us with knowledge about ourselves, as well as about life in general. The emancipatory implies that life reflection *can* provide us with the means to 'transcend extant structures of knowledge and self-understanding' (Staudinger 2001: 154). In line with Mohanty's (1991a) argument on narrative practice as a resistance strategy enabling (political) consciousness – but counter to Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) perspective on *habitus,* which implies a taken-for-granted complicity with the structural conditioning of one's life – life reflection, as a *willed activity,* would make (self)knowledge possible. While knowledges gained from this reflexive process are understood to be enhanced by being told to another person, an important point is that – counter to a basic premise in feminist standpoint theory – life reflection does not depend on actual telling to have epistemic and emancipatory qualities. This latter point also sustains the epistemic and emancipatory qualities of life reflection in a context where layering of communication and *not*-telling are as much at stake for the person in social interaction as actual telling.

Layering of communication: telling and not-telling

Story-telling is valued in the Tigrayan context (see also Hammond 1999). As observed on several visits and fieldwork over years, stories are shared when people gather in socio-cultural contexts like the coffee ceremony, celebration of religious holidays and religious associations (*mahiber*) on holy days (*beal*)⁴⁶, in the *siwabéts* (local beer houses), bars and teahouses, or when friends and neighbours gather informally (just to mention a few occasions). The overlapping categories of telling that I propose here, and which are not exhaustive or absolute, include (1) amusing events where the teller was an observer or participant, making a laughable story out of it (playfulness), (2) general perceptions of injustice, individual or collective, and where the teller explicitly or implicitly pleads for support for her/his view, and includes more general concerns like, for example, rising grain prices (communion against injustice), and (3) gossip as a way of keeping track of other people's movements and laughing at their expense in social interaction, is a common activity in social interaction, but something that most people (men and women), for their own sake, would try their best to avoid

[&]amp; Bluck 2001: 92). 'Autobiographic reasoning' relates to how individuals 'reason about, interpret, and evaluate their memories. This reasoning process leads to inferences, lessons, and thematic insights' (Singer & Bluck 2001: 92). Coined by Tillman Habermas and Susan Bluck, autobiographic reasoning is seen as 'a process of self-reflective thinking or talking about the personal past that involves forming links between elements of one's past and the self in an attempt to relate one's personal past and present' (Bluck & Habermas 2001: 136).

⁴⁶ See Appendix 3 for a list of religious holy days and holidays.

(normative social control). Concerning the first category of storytelling, being a good teller – commonly utilising direct speech to personate the implicated parties – and making others laugh their heads off seems to be given much emphasis in social interaction. People find time to share with others and 'play' (*tetsawet*, 'chat'). In fact, 'come and play' seems to be the most frequent appeal in social interaction. The second category of telling suggested above is concerned with pleading for communion and support where there are conflicting interests or injustice at play. Standing up against others, like family and authorities, could be risky, however, especially if social relations or political issues are at stake. The extent to which gossip as the third category of telling makes someone the laughing stock, or the object of derision, points to social control, and as such is inherently normative. The provision of information about others can also be utilised in social relations as 'symbolic capital' in a Bourdieuan sense.

Crosscutting these categories of telling in Tigray, in the highland context of Ethiopia, is a skilful layering of communication that can be placed in the context of *qiné* (Φ **z**), a valued poetry tradition that is also taught as part of the traditional religious education within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (e.g. Teshome 1979; Benns 2005). As Girma Amare explains:

The study of *Kine* [*qiné*] derives its significance from the fact that this is the most highly refined expression of Ethiopian culture, which, it is said, is characterized by ambiguity, vagueness and secretiveness. *Kine* may be defined as the art of detecting other's ambiguities while increasing the subtleties of one's own. This art is acquired through the mastery of two types of poetry, *Semena-Work* (Wax and Gold) and *Wusta Waira* (Inside the Olive Tree) (Girma 1967: 3; italics in original).

In the frequently referred to wax-and-gold trope of the art of *qiné*, the 'wax' signifies the surface meaning and the 'gold' signifies a deeper hidden insight. Donald N. Levine (1965) suggests three mundane situations where the *qiné* dynamic is involved: (1) if one wants to insult someone in a socially accepted manner without risking social sanctions, (2) as a way of defending one's privacy against social intrusion like rumours and gossip, and (3) a potentially bold way of challenging power that is concerned with avoiding any punishment for criticising authorities.⁴⁷ Levine terms this practice of layering communication in the Ethiopian highland context a 'cult of ambiguity' (Levine 1965: 10). In later writings he also bases this ambiguity on an ideal type of 'secretogenic' social structure in the Ethiopian context (Levine 1985: 33).

⁴⁷ In the Ethiopian highland context Tigrayans are often understood to be more outspoken and direct than the Amharas, with whom they share much common culture, including the art of *qiné*.

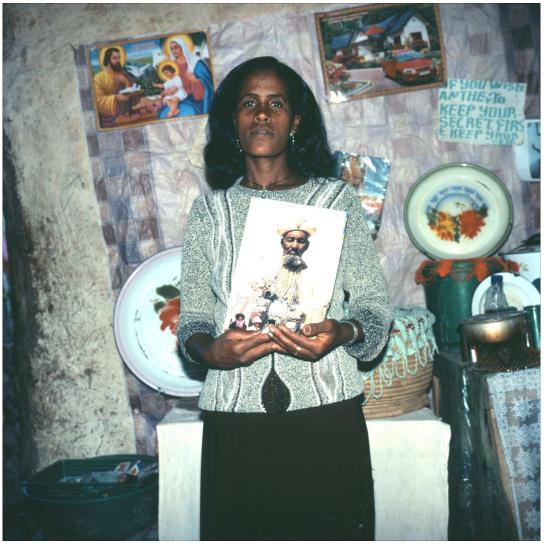
It is important to note here that my incorporation of the *qiné* dynamic is not based on a mastery of this poetry tradition but is concerned with the *effect* of this layering of communication – and the *ambiguities* and *silences* entailed – on social practice. One of the main findings from my previous research in Tigray was that the expression often used by women, ane suq ile, meaning, 'I keep quiet' or 'I hold back', constituted a strategy of containment to avoid social sanctions when acting beyond the (gender) norm; securing women spaces for agency (Mjaaland 2004b, 2004c). Hence, the *giné* dynamic does not only allow for layered communication, what people do can be under-communicated or made secret if a strategy challenges the norm or the authorities, to avoid gossip and other social sanctions. In line with my argument, Maimire Mennasemay asserts that the contradictions implied in the wax-and-gold trope of the qiné dynamic is not only underlying communication in the Ethiopian context but informs as well social practice (Maimire 2010: 74-75). Maimire understands the subversive and subjugated dimension of the *qiné* dynamic, the 'gold', to harbour non-actualised meanings in terms of a critical potential that is 'active silently' (Maimire 2010: 76; see also Maimire 2005-6). Hence, the art of *qiné* is much more than a poetry tradition, and constitutes an important aspect of socio-cultural dynamics in this context which is dependent on the person being able to contain the 'gold'.

The important point is that this layered socio-cultural dynamic in the Tigrayan context of highland Ethiopia, is, as Maimire emphasises above, active acts that constitutes telling with the silences or *not*-telling implied – as a social practice that venture beyond mere representation. Telling, which discloses biographic information and personal opinions without consideration as to whom it is told, exposing what is considered too much about one's immediate or future plans, or voicing potentially controversial opinions directly, is considered irresponsible or outright foolish. Rather than the emancipation that telling from women's experiences presumes in feminist perspectives based on standpoint theory, telling risks making the woman (or man) socially and politically *vulnerable*. It is with these reservations about telling in mind that peoples' general enthusiasm for being photographed has been interpreted as offering a silent medium for visual telling [Fig. 11 & 12]. I will return to this issue in Chapter 6 when I discuss rural female students' self-representations with their schoolbooks, and where the photograph offers a visual narrative space, or 'discursive site for struggle' (Mohanty 1991a: 32) in a visual sense, from where prevailing gender norms and girls' understandings of what it is possible to be and to do can be reaffirmed, negotiated and resisted.









[Fig. 11]: Above: Genet in her niece's home in the market town with an image of bishops of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church after having participated in the yearly celebration of Mariyam Tsion in Axum on <u>Hidar</u> 21 E.C. (November). Left: Genet posing at the treadle-pump and draped in a flowering bush with her older sister Medhin at her irrigation plot in the rural area Mayshek. Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 2008.









[Fig. 12]: Eden (27), a business woman, photographed in her own cafeteria in the market town of Endabaguna, and at home with her son Simon (8). Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 2012.

Concluding remarks

What I will bring with me from the above discussion of how change is premised from the perspective of Tigrayan women's *fight* for equality and rights in the context of different feminist perspectives, concerns not only how socio-cultural dynamics in Tigray influence how women's emancipation can be thought, and what it takes to bring about change. For example, contrary to the understanding of location in feminist standpoint theory as constituting a site for emancipatory struggle and epistemic privilege, the structural conditioning of a specific material environment/'field' in Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice signifies a blindspot consciousness-wise based on complicity with the structural dispositions of *habitus*. While a critical stance to ones' own oppressed position is possible *only* as a result of crisis in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, he presupposes a fundamental change in the environment/'field', which is beyond conscious and practical reach, for structural transformation to take place. The epistemological critique of feminist standpoint theory that bases locations and positions on hybridity do, however, offer an opportunity to differentiate the impact of the material environment/'field' and positions within 'fields' in Bourdieu's theory of practice which I will return to in the concluding chapter of this thesis. The hybridity that follows from translation across incommensurable differences in the third space in Bhabha's perspective (Bhabha & Rutherford 1990; Bhabha 2006 [1994]) does not only allow something new and unrecognisable to emerge from negotiation but also presupposes that negotiation is inherent to both social reproduction and transformation. In Nnaemeka's (1998, 2004, 2005) negotiminist perspective on the third space of engagement, challenges to power relations are likewise posed through negotiation and compromise, rather than through confrontation and disruption, much in line with Tigrayan women's concern. Similarly, 'life reflection', in Staudinger's (2001) perspective on autobiographic memory, retains its epistemic and emacipatory potential without being dependent on the telling to others. This suggests, in line with Maimire's (2010) understanding of the subversive and subjugated 'gold' of the *qiné* dynamic that, being active silently, does not render Tigrayan women's agency inconsequential in a structural sense, when they under-communicate their experiences and keep quiet about what they do in practice. These layered socio-cultural dynamics in the Tigrayan context of highland Ethiopia have, however, been consequential for how the ethnographic enquiry, where women's narrative accounts as social strategies are central, have been handled in a methodological sense.

CHAPTER 2: Intersecting dialogical methods with a narrative core

Introduction

A combination of methods have been used in this study in order to incorporate methodologically the socio-cultural dynamics of layering communication and undercommunicating practice in the context of complex, and globally influenced, contemporary processes. In what I have termed an 'intersecting dialogical methodology', participant observation, long-term informal dialogue in the field and the methodological use of photography – together with life-story-based interviews with women over three generations – are foundational to the ethnographic enquiry. One explorative education survey, where female and male students also were asked to write a story about their future, together with one explorative household survey, was carried out. Lastly, interviews with experts working with women's issues and education have been conducted. To call this dialogical methodological strategy 'intersecting' is to draw on Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) analytical concept of intersectionality in a methodological sense. This means going beyond a mere adding up of different methods, to being attentive, in an analytical sense, to the unanticipated constellations that emerge in the intersection of different methodological approaches. The methodological strategy applied here is also based on what Armi Pekkela conceptualises as a 'dialogical methodology' that situates the researcher as an active part of the phenomenon that is studied (Pekkala 2007: 175; see also Pink 1999; Mjaaland 2004c). Hence, it is interestedness rather than disinterestedness that is emphasised in this research project (see also Goodson 1995). Aaron Cicourel's understanding of the research process as an 'encounter' where the interplay of interaction and context constitutes an emergent process that changes through time and space (Cicourel 1992: 293) also helps explain my positionality as a researcher in an epistemological sense. Furthermore, Stephen Tyler's conception 'evocation' (Tyler 1986: 123), suggesting a shift from knowledge production as description to knowledge being evoked, is also important here because it suggests inroads to the use of still photography in anthropological research that goes beyond realist documentation and the production of evidence (see also Mjaaland 2006, 2009b). These intersecting methods that are utilised to incorporate socio-cultural dynamics and the complexity of contemporary processes in the Tigrayan context, has also much in common with triangulation (Denzin 1970, 1989) used as 'an additional epistemological source' (Flick 1992: 176; 2006), in terms of the unanticipated meanings that can be evoked in the intersection of different methodological approaches.

In addition to providing a descriptive overview, including epistemological considerations of the multiple methods used, I will centre my discussion on the implications of using these methods in the Tigrayan context. Since telling occupies an ambiguous space in layered socio-cultural dynamics in the highland context of Ethiopia, my discussion in the first part of this chapter will address what might seem a contradictory significance ascribed to narration as a methodological approach in this study. However, this is based on narration being approached as a social strategy, rather than as more, or less, transparent representations of personal experiences. My long-term involvement in this area of Tigray with several visits and fieldwork trips over almost two decades would qualify this study for being classified as 'multitemporal' in Signe Howell and Aud Talle's (2012) conception (see also Howell 2011).¹ This multitemporality has enabled the 'walking with' (Lee & Ingold 2006) people through parts of their lives with the possibility entailed to hold on to particular dialogues over years, involving as well visual communication through photographs (see also Pink 2007, 2011). This time aspect in both a literal and visual sense has constituted one analytical approach to access contestations and contradictions in socio-cultural practices. Finally, this intersecting dialogical methodology also accommodates an exploratory attitude towards scientific investigation most often relegated to art practice.

Participant observation and participation

Foundational to anthropological methodology, the use of participant observation in this research project is not primarily centred on observing, since – as in earlier research from the same area in Tigray (Mjaaland 2004c) – I have opted for a more intervening role as a social agent (see also Fangen 2004). While Marlene de Laine notes that '[i]n contemporary fieldwork the trend is for more participation and less observation' (Laine 2000: 2), Tim Ingold emphasises that participation is not *opposed* to observation but rather a precondition for it (Ingold 2011b: 11). This emphasis on participation, therefore, acknowledges the intervention that participant observation always entails (Clifford 1986), but that is not always explicated in anthropological research. Using intervention as a methodological strategy is also based on my first anthropological fieldwork experience in Tigray where observation alone did not come across as a particularly fruitful method, since what was *made* visible was not necessarily what was going on. A more interventionist methodological strategy in the Tigrayan context has

¹ Visits to this area have taken place almost yearly since 1993, usually 2-3 months each time. The fieldwork for my Cand. Polit thesis (Mjaaland 2004c) lasted one year from December 2001 to the end of November 2002. Fieldwork for this present study was carried out July-December 2008 (6 months), April-July 2009 (3 months), October-December 2010 (3 months), and December 2011-February 2012 (3 months).

therefore centred on being a challenge to the layering of communication in socio-cultural practice in order to access the ambiguities and silences implied. However, rather than an unveiling of personal secrets, my focus is on the implication of this layering of communication for socio-cultural practices. Another reason for this interventionist strategy is based on the possibility of accessing what Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) sees as the taken-for-granted in social practice and that allows for social reproduction to pass unquestioned.

This interventionist strategy is also contained, on a basic level, in my strategy of *not* trying to 'blend in' with the Tigrayan women in my study area, by *not* conforming to the common dress-code for respectable women in this area: ankle-long colourful dresses and tightly plaited hair. In fact, my initial attempts to conform on my first visits to the area in the 1990s had failed: the dresses I wore where not considered the right ones, I cannot stand the pain of having my hair plaited, and I do not have gold according to what was expected of a 'rich' female foreigner. I therefore gave up and resorted to my jeans and shirts/blouses while gathering my long hair in a pony-tail, or in one plait. Together with the fact that I have not borne any children and move around on my own, I often fell into the category 'man', and was often addressed as 'Mr. Thera'.² Since my 'white otherness' makes me stand out as different anyway, this methodological strategy of enhancing difference has further involved: (1) being open about my opinions and reactions to peoples' practices and justification of them, as an approach to access conflicting interests and perceptions in day-to-day interactions, and (2) making 'mistakes' and utilising non-conformity (especially in relation to gender norms) to create ruptures in perceptions that enable a potential explication of what otherwise 'goes without saying' (Bourdieu 1977: 167). This methodological strategy also answers to what George Marcus (1997) has commented on as the 'complicity' that anthropologists have commonly been entangled in to accomplish rapport with fieldwork subjects. In what Barbara Tedlock suggests as 'observation of participation', ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others' co-participation within the ethnographic encounter (Tedlock 1991: 69). Going even further, Bourdieu seeks through what he has conceptualised as 'participant objectivation' to objectify the researcher's relation to the researched by way of the researcher's own relation to a specific academic field (Bourdieu 1999, 2003, see also Pels 2000). Less pretentious, at stake in this thesis is an attempt to provide an explication of my positionality, both in a methodological and epistemological sense, and which on a basic level

 $^{^{2}}$ As a language strategy, gender reversals can take place in both Amharic and Tigriña. Helen Pankhurst (1992) notes that these gender reversals are utilised (1) to communicate closeness and intimacy between friends, (2) as insult, and (3) to honour someone.

means that I will not speak about myself as a researcher in third person but use the personal pronoun 'I' to explicate my position when tracing the path this study has taken.

My understanding of participation has much in common with Jo Lee and Tim Ingold's (2006) conceptualisation of participation during fieldwork as a literal 'walking with' – as opposed to (just) 'being there'. Understood in a more figurative sense than Lee and Ingold proposes, 'walking with' requires an *attunement* not only to a temporally shared material circumstance but to the pace and the route women's lives take within and beyond the temporality of the actual periods of fieldwork. Participation has also involved a wish to learn, not only the multitude of practices that women are involved in, but to understand how these practices are reasoned about from a gendered perspective. These practices range from daily work tasks at home, like making food and washing clothes to education and business activities, agricultural work and women's house-building tasks as well as religious practices like going to church and the participation in religious associations (*mahiber*), celebrations like christenings and weddings, and rituals surrounding death and mourning. Hence, 'walking with' has involved following the flow of mundane daily life, spending my days visiting women in their homes. My long-term involvement with people in the semi-urban market town of Endabaguna since 1993, and the lowland rural community tabia (sub-district) Mayshek since 2001 has also enabled a tracing of correspondence (or lack of it) between what people say and what they do in practice. Potential contradictions between saying and doing have further been utilised as the basis for new discussions to understand the rationale behind women's priorities. The data generated from this methodological approach is contained in fieldwork notes that refer to these daily interactions together with informal dialogue. The fieldwork notes also include my reactions and reflections on what took place, suggestions for new perspectives to be investigated, and analytical considerations.

Participation has in no way been a straightforward issue. People were often worried that I would get tired or dirty (or both), suggesting that I rested instead and *only* observed. The fact that one female-headed household in the neighbourhood in the rural area was short of labour made my contribution more acceptable, especially in relation to this household's irrigation project where there was a need for two: one to handle the treadle-pump and one to guide the water. In the female-headed household in the market town where I rented a room, I was also allowed – when hands were too few – to contribute by peeling onions, potatoes and other vegetables for the restaurant they ran. Since people tended to treat me as someone unable to work (a common perception of white foreigners), it was on the issue of participation that we most often clashed. That I continued to walk three hours on foot to Mayshek after

road-connection from Endabaguna through Mayshek to Edaga Hibret was established in 2010, and transportation was available a few times a day (but at no regular times), was inconceivable to most people since lack of money was considered to be the only reason for continuing to walk. While I tried to explain that walking on foot cleared my mind, insisting on walking over the years and carrying my own backpack to the rural areas has earned me the classification of tegadalit (+.29A, +; female fighter) or beal sire (19A AZ; literally, 'those who wear pants', meaning 'men'). The above restrictions on participation also reflect ambivalence and contradictions as to what it takes to learn practice: on the one hand, the extent to which it is a requirement to be a Tigrayan to be able to learn, while on the other, suggesting that involvement in certain practices influence ascribed gender identity (a point I will return to in Chapter 6). My involvement over time in this area, might, however, have worked to reassure people of my earnest commitment. An important aspect of the life-story-based interviews was precisely that the interview situation (with a few exceptions) constituted but one instance in long-term dialogical relationships where women had come to trust me over time by testing my ability to keep quiet and not circulating the information given to others in the community. It is these 'multitemporal' dialogues, which cover a much longer time span of 'walking with' than the delimited situation where the life-story-based interviews were conducted, that is at the base of my discussion of the methodological use of narrative accounts in this thesis.

The interview situation and beyond

The life-story-based interviews were carried out during the six-month period of fieldwork in 2008. Altogether 25 women were interviewed, aiming for an equal distribution between the semi-urban market town and the rural community. Some of those interviewed in the market town did, however, have their background in Mayshek or other rural communities. Aiming as well for an even age distribution between the women, ranging in age between 18 and 75, participation in the research project was based on purposeful selection through my own network in the two communities. I also sought to include some of the former fighter women, and other women, who defined themselves as having been involved in the struggle. A few participants were also selected through the networks of those women that had already been interviewed. Of the 25 interviewed women, five had been interviewed for my earlier research on women and agency in 2002 (Mjaaland 2004c), and were included in order to follow the path of their lives and potential changes in their life situation. This second interview provided, in most cases, more detailed elaborations on themes we had touched on in the previous interview and in informal dialogues in between.

When basing the interviews on life stories, I was aware of the fact that the literary genre 'life story' as a chronological linear representation is not applicable cross-culturally. I was also aware of the fact that telling one's life story (ソクト ナご方/hiwot tarik)³ is not established as a valued socio-cultural practice in Tigray, since the provision of biographic information, including personal experiences and opinions, tends to be surrounded by (protective) secrecy (see also Mjaaland 2004c).⁴ I therefore had to exert much effort in explaining what I meant by a life story, and to specify the exact information I was after, to get the women started. Hence, the initial question in the interview situation was, 'could you tell me your life story from the beginning, meaning where you were born, education, engagement, marriage, children, job and the like'. These specifications were based on a common life trajectory in the Tigrayan context, and formed the basis for further questions and elaborations. Education was also used as a framework for enquiry to establish if it had a place in their, or their children's lives, and if so, in what ways. Questions on education further addressed how these women had strategised (or not) in relation to education, and what education meant for them. Issues relating to gender equality, women's rights and empowerment were included to establish how these global concepts were perceived locally. Questions pertaining to government policies as well as Women's Association of Tigray's (WAT) activities were asked to establish to what extent the women had knowledge about prevailing development strategies concerning women in general and education in particular.

Peoples' experiences with being interviewed in this area is first and foremost based on surveys done by different government bodies like agriculture and health, women's affairs and education bureaus, or local NGOs, such as the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) or Women's Association of Tigray (WAT), in matters most often related to livelihood and health issues. When the tape recorder stopped, ending the hour-long interview, the female fighter Saba (50) also tells me that she had been interviewed two or three times on the radio channel *Dimitsi Weyane* ('Voice of the Revolution', now the regional government's radio channel in Tigray) just after the liberation struggle. She says, 'recently, one Ethiopian woman was here to make radio interviews of different fighter women for the [Ethiopian] Millennium celebration.⁵ The wereda administration picked us out. She did not know my name and I didn't know hers. I cut off the interview. It didn't feel right to broadcast what I really feel.⁶ Having pondered on her

³ The word *tarik* (2.67) in Tigriña is used both in terms of 'story' and 'history'.

⁴ I came to understand later that one situation where (edited) biographies or life stories play a role in the Orthodox Christian highland context of Ethiopia, is at a person's funeral, and hence when a life has ended. ⁵ Ethiopian New Year was celebrated 11 September 2007/*Meskerem* 1, 2000 E.C.

⁶ Fieldwork notes 3 November 2008/*T'ïqïmti* 24, 2001 E.C.

answer for a while, I brought up the issue again a few weeks later. I ask Saba if she can explain to me why she had ended the interview with the journalist: 'What did the journalist ask you?' I ask her. 'She asked me how I felt about my son dying in the struggle. She asked me how I felt about my own participation in the struggle. I told her that we got our freedom; that the Derg was overthrown', she says. 'What did you not tell her?' I ask. 'I did not tell her how hard it is to be surpassed by those who did not sacrifice anything for the struggle; how unfair it feels to not be given compensation, or a pension. (...) I have spoken up about it, even to the [the former regional] president (who came from a neighbouring village).' 'Does it have to do with the fact that you were not a combat fighter at the frontline?' I ask. 'Others that were behind the frontlines have been given compensation. Our present wereda leader has never loosened a shot, but he still got compensation. I know about others too.' 'But how come you can tell the president, wereda officials and me about it, but you cannot say it when you are asked to express yourself on Dimitsi Wevene? Is it because it will be broadcasted to the people?' 'Yes', she says, 'I want people to focus on what we gained from the struggle. To say something else was impossible. It stopped here', she says and puts the tip of her right-hand fingers to her throat.⁷ Saba's explanation shows precisely the consideration at play as to what is told to whom in which contexts for what purpose.

Conducting interviews in the Tigrayan context did not only have to incorporate attentiveness to how stories are commonly told, with the silences and ambiguities implied in the socio-cultural dynamics of layering communication and practice. The fact that stories can be portioned out in bits and pieces in different situations over time, depending on the situation and who is present, had also to be considered. As noted in my earlier research from Tigray:

People would be both conscious of, and selective about, which information was shared with whom, and for what purpose. Information might likewise be portioned out in bits and pieces at different occasions. This choosing of a particular version or fragment in a particular situation, might not always be obvious. However, realising that there are divergent versions at play, and even lies, is important to catch a glimpse of how social interaction is instructed by a need to hold some means for negotiation (Mjaaland 2004c: 118).

The methodological strategy of keeping narratives going over time, and patching pieces, which are not necessarily consistent, together, is therefore attuned to the layered sociocultural dynamics in this particular context. The narrative accounts that are represented in this thesis must likewise be understood as cut-outs from a telling that has taken place at many

⁷ Fieldwork notes 11 December 2008/Tahsas 2, 2001 E.C.

different points in time both before and after the actual interview situation. Furthermore, I had observed over the years how women, who consider themselves as friends, would find a place that allowed them some degree of privacy when plaiting each others hair (which takes five or six hours, sometimes almost the whole day), and that emitted a sense of intimacy and confidentiality. When asking about it, it was confirmed that this twosome-ness constitutes *one* space were they can talk freely from their heart (*libi zereba*) without fear of what they say being circulated to others in the community. While moments of confidentiality in everyday life can be brief – as other people come and go – the fact that there is a cultural space for twosome confidential telling was decisive for trying to conduct the life-story-based interviews as much as possible with only the interviewee and myself present.

Three generations of women; three life stories

To give an impression of the narratives women told I will present how three women from three different generations took on the task of telling their life stories in the interview situation. The discussion of these mostly unemotional and matter-of-fact accounts, which are also quite sparse, apart from being dependent on knowing the socio-cultural context, also depend on what these women have already told me in other situations. The first example is the young, peasant woman, 'Barnesh' (24), living with her husband and two children in a separate household at her in-laws' compound in the rural area:

Okay. (Silence). I was born in Mayshek. The place I was born was Mayshek. Engagement, first I started school, after having been to school, I was engaged. However, I dropped out of school when I entered marriage. I dropped out in grade 4. After 4th grade I got married. After I was married however, I took up my married life, that means. After having taken up my married life, I gave birth to three children, meaning I have given birth to two children. (...) I have given birth to two, after two [more] children however, I only think of living a good life. Meaning we, it's afterwards that we will lead [a good] married life. After continuing our married life, I think now I wish (*zimine/ngr'i*; hope) to have up to four children, however then it will be enough for me.⁸

One reason for this short story has of course to do with the fact that Barnesh is quite young; she claimed to be 24 at the time of the interview. When I probed her on her age and we counted it together, relating her age to her sisters' age and the age gaps between them, she is more likely around 21. In Barnesh's case, the claim to be older than she actually is also works to disguise the fact that she, and many girls with her in her village, are actually married off around the age of 15, and points to a common parental strategy of manipulating their daughters age to circumvent the legal age for marriage, which now is 18 for both girls and

⁸ Recorded interview 16th November 2008/*Hidar* 7, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 17B in Tigriña).

boys. The fact that she lost one child in her first childbirth, which was a set of twins, but tells it in a manner that could be misinterpreted as a slip of the tongue or a situational miscounting, points also to the fact that death-related issues are usually avoided. Her wish to have four children is significantly different from former generations of women, including her mother, who gave birth to eleven children of whom three died, and also correlates with the current family planning policy in Ethiopia to reduce birth rates. When I interview her mother 'Nitsihiti' (46), a peasant woman who had been married at the age of 12, her story follows the same sparse telling. In Nitsihiti's case, she also refers her life to more general circumstances and the changed situation for women enabled by the liberation struggle in Tigray:

From the beginning, [from the time of] marriage? We were small children when we got married in the past. Now, today, there are rights; it's good. The improvement of marriage age is also good. They [girls] stay until the time comes when they marry by their own will. In the past, we got married when we were small children 9 years, 12 years old. [Now] our back aches, we are worn out (*libina tesewiru*; literally 'our harts swirl'), and our skin has turned black. You have seen it yourself. Today it's good. Rights are secured after marriage and concerning marriage age. This government is good; it's doing fine today. ... Today it's good, thanks to this government, it's doing fine, land is [distributed] rightly, the [marriage] age is right ... nobody is abused, it's all enjoyment. If you want to marry, you marry, or I can live alone (*beyney kihadir*; literally 'sleep alone'). (Laughs). If you say you want to live alone, it's good today. [Give me] another of your questions, go ahead.⁹

Nitsihiti's life story-based account starts out with the hardships women and herself faced in the past (being married as children) and the workload that has worn them out (with aching backs and their skin burned by the sun in the field). However, her account also confirms and appraises the improvements for women under the present regime and, as such, refers to a more collective political narrative with reference to the Tigrayan liberation struggle. John Borneman's conceptualisation of biographic narratives, with their reference to master narratives, as *life constructions*, is instructive here. Borneman argues that '[t]he coherence of the life reconstruction lies not in the plot produced by the chronology of experience, but instead in the *emplotment* of those experiences in a story made coherent by appeals to common narrative' (Borneman's 1992: 46; italics in original). This emplotment in the Tigrayan context – sometimes involving an imperceptible sliding from 'I' to 'we' during the telling – also points, as in Nitsihiti's account, to a marked shift in women's opportunities as a consequence of revolutionary struggle and consequent regime shift. It is also a fact, however, that the improved situation Nitsihiti refers to where girls today can marry according to their own will, does not necessarily apply to what she requires of her own daughters. In Nitsihiti's case, her four eldest daughters, including Barnesh, had been married off one after the other

⁹ Recorded interview 16 November 2008/<u>H</u>idar 7, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 18B in Tigriña).

while still underage. While her account above is an appraisal of current policies, when later asked more specifically about her opinion about the current marriage age, she says: 'For boys it's right, for girls it's not. If she goes to school it is good, but if she doesn't, 16 is better, otherwise she will run off by herself without permission. Both our religion and culture say she has to be a virgin when she enters marriage'.¹⁰ In her first account, Nitsihiti downplays that she disagrees with the provisions concerning marriage age in the revised Family Law, as well as the conflicting interests between religion and culture on the one side, and current policies on the other. Since I did not expect the women to tell me 'everything' in the actual interview situation, this example also shows the importance of returning to issues. It is also important to notice that Nitsihiti, as did many of the interviewees, expected me to take the lead in the interview situation, making sure that she is not giving away more information than necessary.

Some turned out to be more talkative and elaborative in the interview situation. 'Guimesh' (67), a *shig weyanit* (literally, 'torch of the revolution'), a supporter of the revolution assisting in mobilising the people and performing as a singer during the struggle, was one of them. She now ekes out a living in the market town by selling *sïwa* ($\hbar \varphi$; local millet beer) and *areqi* ($\hbar c \cdot \varphi$; liquor). Guimesh had been married at the age of 7 and had born eight children, whereof two sons had died and one daughter had disappeared in Sudan. She is the head of household and lives together with her youngest son (24) born in a second relationship after her husband died. Guimesh tells:

We were farmers. He [my husband] went to the Sudan and died there. Their father, the father of my children was in Sudan and he died from the problems, the hardship. Then afterwards, I and my children faced hardship too, it was a problem for me. However, by grinding [grain for others], selling firewood and plaiting [women's hair] I brought them [my children] up. When they had grown up, that's it, they left. Where they went, where they are ... they make their own living now. I have a fighter [daughter] also who was in Somalia. It means she was posted close to Somalia. Another [daughter] is married to an Oromo fighter, and she is in Sidamo; that is where she is, my daughter. After they left I faced hardships, I faced problems, but I'm grateful [to God] that they escaped death, and I pray [for them], otherwise they are enough for me. I always say that I shall bear the problems myself, that I shall manage the hardships myself, that I shall manage poverty myself, only that they must be there to bury me in due course, to take care of me then, that's what I say. I tell Him thanks God (Amlak), I tell Him thank you Lord (Govta), I tell Him thank you, that's it, I sleep, I wake up, I sleep. I do my prayers. My prayers accommodate me, thank you God that He takes care of me. Hah! I am fine. I miss my children; mourning (hazen), missing my children makes me cry at night when I'm in bed. When I'm with people and think of my two children (the two she has mentioned above) I say thank you to God, and pray that they do well, that they live and will burry me in due course, I'll say that's it. In this manner I go on, I laugh, I play, I pretend I'm happy, that I have no problems. I'm telling you, I thank God, I thank Him for that. However, first we were farmers, we were rich. Later however, due to people's jealousy, I became poor; people made problems [for me], that's it. Destitution, I was so destitute that I had to sell my clothes. Now however, thanks to God, I'm fine. That's it, from then onwards I have been fine. (...). I have no problems, I work and make a living

¹⁰ Household questionnaire 23 June 2009/Sene 16, 2001 E.C.

(literally; eat), I brew *sīwa*, I sell *areqi* ... everything (...). With the jealous, with the likeable, I keep up a good behaviour, I sleep, I wake up, if they insult me I laugh ... if they talk to me I laugh, if they make me angry, I pretend I'm happy, that's it, that's how I get on. I'm fine (...) I swear to you, hah! (Laughs). I'm doing fine, my dear sister.¹¹

While Guimesh does mention her sorrow for the loss of loved ones and the agony deprivation has caused her earlier in life, it is uttered matter-of-factly. What is significant in her story is also her concern with representing herself as managing her life in spite of hardships, thanking God for what she has, and not complaining about what she has lost. Her self-representation is informed by coping in spite of crying at night in solitude. This strategy coincides with the coping that Dag Ø. Nordanger (2006) refers to in his study of trauma management in Tigray after the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000). Indulging in agonising emotions is understood as complaining to God about one's fate and carries the risk of losing divine protection in life with consequences for one's afterlife, and the possibility of entering Heaven. Hence, giving vent to grievance beyond the spaces and time sanctioned through socio-religious rituals in relation to death, could contribute to one's situation deteriorating even further. Nordanger also notes the common perception that grief has an effect on health: that crying taps the body for liquid, causes damage to ones eyes (even blindness), makes one's knees weak and bends one's backbone (ibid: 18). Hence, giving extensive vent (for too long) to agonising emotions would risk leaving the person in the Tigrayan context vulnerable without spiritual support and tapped for his/her physical strength (see also Nordanger & Mjaaland 2006; Nordanger et al. 2006). Giving vent to strong emotions like jealousy and anger also risks opening the body up for malign forces like Shetan (the Devil) or other Devil-like entities like jinni or aganinti. If a person gives in to grievance or loses self-control, these forces can take advantage of this 'cracking up' of a person's bodily *containment* and take hold of that person (see also Mjaaland 2004c, 2006). These evil entities are also perceived as being able to put people up against each other and create conflict in social relations, threatening social interaction itself. In fact, in her account above, Guimesh attributes her loss of wealth and deprivation to peoples' jealousy. She had told earlier that people had put fire to their harvest and poisoned their cattle, since they were rich farmers. Such malevolent acts can also be set in motion by paying a deftera (in Amharic, debtera), a male sorcerer loosely connected to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church said to use the Holy Scriptures together with biographic information¹² for

¹¹ Recorded interview 2 December 2008/Hidar 23, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 27 in Tigriña).

¹² Biographic information relates for example to one's baptismal name which is kept a secret as much as possible (a person's official name being a different one) and date of birth (which can also relate to not knowing exactly when one is born).

healing as well as evil purposes.¹³ Finally, centring her self-presentation on playfulness, Guimesh gives a description of how she negotiates her situation in social interaction – by keeping up her appearance and not giving away what she actually feels – relating precisely to the importance of 'holding back' and on being able to *contain* oneself at the base of the layered socio-cultural dynamics in this context.

The discussion of the three life stories presented show that a great deal of contextual knowledge and additional information is needed to understand the significance of what these women tell (e.g. Goodson 1995; Bourdieu 1999). The fact that there are distinct spaces for what people say to whom in the Tigrayan context could also be accommodated within the frames of Erving Goffman's (1959) concepts of 'back-stage' and 'front-stage'. Without denying the self presentation involved, John Knudsen focuses on the life history as a situationally-conditioned construct in space and time, involving the simultaneous cognitive chaining of selected elements, not only from the past and present but also including a projection towards the future (Knudsen 1990: 122). Instead of focusing on a potential split between reality and fiction in life-story constructions, Knudsen asserts that it is more important to study the *role* of a particular narrative (ibid: 131). It is by following the flow and disruptions of telling, including the ambiguities and silences evolving from the layered sociocultural dynamics in the Tigrayan context, that I have come to understand the role of telling as an agentive social strategy. While issues of social vulnerability seem to be the major concern for the interviewees in this context, central to academic concerns are the issues of intrusion and power in the interview situation.

Considerations of intrusion and power in the interview situation

In his article, *Domination through interviews and dialogues*, Steinar Kvale delivers a forceful critique of the research interview understood as a 'warm, caring and empowering dialogue' (Kvale 2007: 198). Much in line with Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of 'symbolic violence', the notion of empathy disregards, in Kvale's opinion, issues of exploitation and domination at play in the situation. Kvale refer to the feminist communitarian ethical model (e.g. Tong 1993) that is based on the building of collaborative, reciprocal, trusting and friendly relationships in a research process based on care, *and* feminist critique of the

¹³ Maimire Mennasemay (2010) defines the *debtera* (in Tigriña *deftera*) as an intellectual within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (see also Chapter 7). This interpretation of the *deftera* as an advanced scholar prevails in many recent texts where traditional education in Ethiopia is discussed (e.g. Paulos & Messay 2010; Messay 2010; Paulos 2010). The local understanding of the *deftera* in my study area in Tigray is as a sorcerer that can both heal and harm, even cause death, with his knowledge. There is generally a lot of anxiety, even fright, related to the doings of the *deftera*.

exploitation that this 'caring' and 'liberating' relationship can entail (e.g. Burman 1997). The power asymmetry is also commonly understood as being intensified when the research is done in a majority world (non-western) context by a minority world (western) researcher. One consequence of this critique is, however, that the interviewee is disregarded as an agent. Seeing all talk, including cross-cultural talk, as social encounters, Anne Ryen asserts that 'the reference to geographical dualism as in western versus nonwestern is itself a description detached from talk as interactional occasions.' (Ryen 2008: 462). While Ryen is concerned with seeing agency in talk, Kvale points to the interviewees' countermeasures or counter controls in terms of refusing to answer or deflecting questions, diverting their talk, telling what they think the interviewer wants to hear, or withdrawal (Kvale 2007: 203-4). These resistance strategies are much in line with what James C. Scott (1985, 1986) has termed 'weapons of the weak'. An example that could be interpreted as counter control from my fieldwork experience in Tigray, is a literal walking out on me to attend to other tasks, instead of answering my question for an interview. The reason most often given for not showing up for the interview appointment, or for not being home when I came as agreed, was that something more urgent had turned up. If the second appointment was also cancelled, I did not follow it up further since this avoidance of telling me directly points to the common layering of communication in socio-cultural practice.

Kvale's critique addresses dialogues and interviews which are based on the assumption of empathy and consensus. In his opinion the 'agonistic interviews' (Kvale 2007: 206) constitutes an alternative that acknowledges power asymmetry and conflicting views in the interview situation, allowing both parties to ask questions, and for the active and confrontational follow-up of answers. Kirsten Hastrup (1992a), who acknowledges that there is always degrees of asymmetry in the ethnographic encounter, suggests (with a reference to James Clifford 1983) that some kind of violence in terms of pressure is necessary to be able to challenge traditional categories of thought, since, as she claims, 'no reality can ever be exhaustively apprehended in its own categories' (Hastrup 1992a: 341; see also Hastrup 1992b). Hastrup also suggests that it is in the asymmetrical relationship between the researcher and the researched that its potential creative nature resides, if this asymmetry is recognised (Hastrup 1992a: 341). In the Tigrayan context it was my participation and engagement in informal dialogue over time that opened up a space for challenging *each other*. They would also challenge my choices and life strategies, the most intense discussions being based on the fact that I do not have any children and do not want to have any. These were also situations where they, to a larger extent than in the interview situation, were in charge of the

terms of interaction. One peasant woman also says laughingly one day when chatting with the peasant women outside my quarter in the rural area: *Now when you have started to speak Tigriña better, you reveal your sharp tongue*^{1,14} In the interview situation, my concern was first and foremost with making the women elaborate in more detail about how they perceived their lives, and reason about particular issues that, in many cases, we had already touched on in our informal dialogue, and would continue to talk about also after the interview was over.

To be able to reduce as much as possible the 'symbolic violence' in the interview situation, Bourdieu asserts that 'social proximity and familiarity provide two of the conditions of "nonviolent" communication' (Bourdieu 1999: 610), but risking, in my opinion, that takenfor-grantedness and blind-spots based on similar structural dispositions are reproduced. Counter to Bourdieu's (1999) perspective, Ivor F. Goodson (1995) understands the differential structural location occupied by the researcher as the most important element in developing a viable trading point in the interview situation. The seeing of the world through a different prism of thought and practice can, in Goodson's view, enhance understanding for both the interviewee and the interviewer. This is much in line with Kariane Westrheim and Sølvi Lillejord's perspective on the interview situation as a 'zone for deliberation' (Westrheim & Lillejord 2007: 376) where they recognise that not only the experiences of the implicated parties but also the frames of reference are fundamentally different. Drawing on (among others) Bhabha's 'the third space', where the cultural hybridity emerging from translation across incommensurable cultural differences gives rise to something new and different (Bhabha & Rutherford 1990; Bhabha 2006 [1994]), the encounter between differently-situated persons in the interview situation is dependent on a collaborative process of listening, understanding and learning. These authors understand the zone for deliberation as a *locus*, 'a temporary meeting place that should be used to air different and differing perspectives' (Westrheim & Lillejord 2007: 376), enabling understanding through 'challenging the parties involved to critically reinterpret and reformulate their positions' (ibid: 373). This dialectical and dynamic process is, as Westrheim and Lillejord note, contextual and communicative rather than idealised and empathetic, and the expected outcome is not consensus, but recognition. Furthermore, they understand this dialogical process as having the power to change those involved, including the researcher(s), if 'the parties agree that the intention is to listen, understand and learn' (ibid: 381). The extent to which the researcher is willing to be influenced and potentially changed in the process therefore works to minimise

¹⁴ Fieldwork notes 19 October 2008/T'iqimti 9, 2001 E.C.

intrusion and the exercising of power. Hence, interestedness is, here, not obstructing knowledge production, but making it ethically sound.

It is my conviction that my otherness has made possible a dialogical space precisely because we are differently situated. Since the boundary between social relationships and research commonly becomes blurry during fieldwork, the interview situation, which was made explicit by the use of a tape recorder, enabled an explication of my position as a 'researcher'. Since I already knew quite a lot about these women's lives before I interviewed them, the interview situation constituted a possibility to make explicit what I already knew, get their opinions and explanations and, hence, establish whether this particular information could be referred to in the thesis. Rather than the interview situation, it was the participation in daily-life situations over time that constituted a space for challenging each other.

Some notes on language skills and translation

Since most people who speak English to a level where it is possible to keep up a conversation in a meaningful way are administrative personnel and civil servants like teachers, learning Tigriña has been important to enable communication with grassroots women (and men). While I speak, read and write Tigriña by now, I cannot claim fluency. The use of a tape recorder during the interviews (which all the interviewees accepted) therefore helped me to preserve more of the nuances in the language and enabled me to quote them correctly without the presence of an interpreter, which would have changed the dynamics of the interview situation, from a twosome space for confidential telling, to a more public space with two persons 'against' one. Issues like the interpreter's age, status (level of education) and gender, together with the issue of being a local or not, would also be actualised. In the case of the interpreter being a local person, the fear of gossip would be an issue in the interview situation. If it was an unknown person from another district, the uncertainty about whether this person might have anything to do with government affairs would potentially intervene. No doubt, the interviewees were in command, language-wise. Having to ask again to be sure I had understood them right did have the secondary effect that women often started to explain in more detail. Getting everything right was also the reason given when I explained the use of the tape recorder for the interviewees. They, in turn, received a copy of the cassette afterwards. When the interview was finished some of the women also asked to listen through the cassette with my recorder. Some were positively surprised by the confidence with which they had spoken. When hearing through parts of the taped interview before she hurriedly

resumed her work in the field, the peasant woman and female head of household 'Senait' (50) says, with a laugh, '*I could have been a chairperson (adi wenber)*'.¹⁵

As Bourdieu notes about transcription from taped interviews, 'the most literal form of redaction (the simplest punctuation, the placing of a comma, can determine the whole sense of a phrase) represents a *translation* or even an interpretation (Bourdieu 1999: 621). Bourdieu asserts that the difficulty of being *faithful* to everything that happens in the interview situation is one of two constraints informing the transcription process; constraints that are difficult to reconcile. The other constraint is *readability*, which takes into consideration that a strict phonetic restoration, including intonation and rhythm, together with descriptions of gestures and body language in the interview situation, would prove inaccessible for an outside reader. I therefore think it is important to have in mind that the taped interview is an extract from the interview situation, and even if the transcription has been done meticulously with audible interruptions and silences noted, the situation is lost (see also Appendix 5). Even though the circumstances surrounding each interview is captured in the fieldwork notes, to track gestural details and body language in the course of the interview was beyond my capacity, when concentrating on understanding what was said. Since the translators of the Tigriña transcriptions to English were inclined to polish the language more than I wanted, my concern has been with restoring some of the rhythm of how these women talk and reason. Keeping some of the oral roughness of telling is not, then, based on a notion that the most direct translation is the most truthful translation, but is an attempt to encompass the agency these women display in the telling.

Methodological use of photography: photography as mediation

From my first visit to Tigray in 1993 as a professional photographer working within the arts, photography has played a major role in my communication and interaction with people in this area. Initially I had set out to document ordinary everyday life in post-war processes when the attention of the world media was directed to catastrophes other than Ethiopian famines and wars. The strategy of non-intervention on which the documentary genre is based failed, however, since people would pose as soon as they spotted my camera. Thus, 'forced' to take the photographs *they* wanted, I eventually gave up on my photo-documentary project, and accepted to photograph posed portraits instead. Before I spoke the language, and well before I had started to study social anthropology, photography had drawn me into Tigrayan social life

¹⁵ Fieldwork notes 25 November 2008/Hidar 16, 2001 E.C.

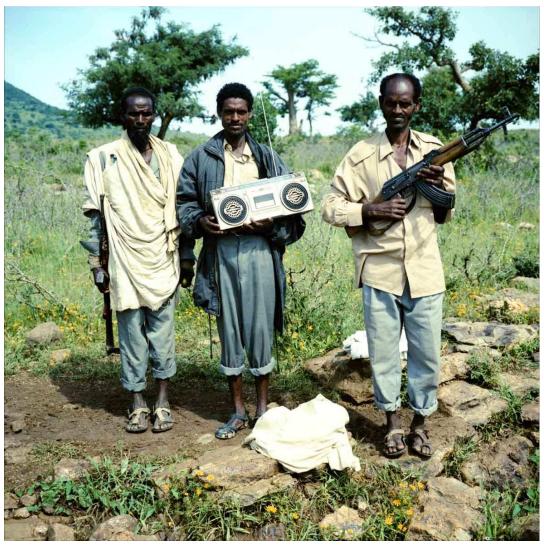




[Fig. 13]: Above: The priest mihirey Cherqos and (left below) Negga on the road near the village Adi Akebay, Tigray. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 1993.







[Fig. 14]: The priest *mihirey* Zewraweru, Mammay (with the radio) and Abraha asking to be photographed on their way from their village Alogen to the Saturday market in Endagabuna. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 1997.

as 'the photographer'. While several photo-studios can be found in urban and semi-urban places like the market town [Fig. 13], as a photographer I would, rather, fall into the role of the ambulant photographers who frequent public places where people meet, and whom people can call upon to attend celebrations in people's homes. I have also tried as much as possible to bring back enlarged copies of the photographs (20 x 20cm) to the people I have photographed (or their families) on later visits. The critique of the first photographs I brought back was concerned with people being represented far too darkly-skinned and the fact that I had not included the whole person (since the images where mostly half-figures). This critique initiated a dialogue that taught me not only about how they want to be represented photographically but also how the person is understood. Neutrality of expression (that is not always successful) and wholeness of the person point again back to the importance of *containment* at the base of layered socio-cultural dynamics in this context. While frontal poses with arms along the side are seen as village-like (in the sense of 'backward') from the point of view of people living in urban areas in Tigray, the issue of controlling one's self-representation in terms of what is given away and what is contained continues to be at issue also in more elaborate 'modern' poses.

From the start these photographs were informed by a clear male bias, since more men than women wanted to be photographed [Fig. 14]. Interestingly, some of the interviewed women used their participation in the interview as an opportunity to be photographed. This was the case with the peasant woman Senait who asks when we had finished the interview, *'when will you photograph us?'* When I answer that I can do it now or the next day she decides to do it right away. Together with her granddaughter (18) who lives with her, they slip their best dresses over their working clothes in a hurry. Her granddaughter also puts carbon black from the paraffin lamp on her eyebrows and under her eyes with broad stokes. When one of the young girls in a neighbouring household passes on her way to school, she is invited to partake, posing with her schoolbag. The photographing is done outside in the field not far from the house in the shadow of a huge stack of newly cut *dagusha* (finger millet), before we move inside the compound where Senait's granddaughter arranges the utensils for making coffee to be included in the photographs. After we have finished they remove their best dresses, Senait takes up her sisal (*matsid*) and returns to the field to cut *meshela* (sorghum), while her granddaughter resumes her work in the kitchen.¹⁶

¹⁶ Fieldwork notes 25 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 15, 2001 E.C.

As a result of wanting to learn how they wanted to be represented the aesthetics of these photographs have developed in a dialogue with people over time [Fig. 15 & 16]. Most often I am asked to photograph them, rather than the other way round. People have also been in control of their own poses (since I do not instruct them). Unless they provide a backdrop in terms of a tarpaulin, a blanket, or other pieces of cloth, I choose the 'studio-backdrop' from the surrounding landscape or their walls at home. The issue of preferred fairness of skincolour has been solved by always using a flash both when photographing inside homes and outside in the field. The fact that I have been resorting to the half-figure – instead of the fullfigure pose from a distance – is, however, *not* in accordance with peoples' preferences for the inclusion of the whole person in the photographic representation. The rationale behind not conforming to this local preference for 'contained wholeness' is based on my intention to establish a sense of closeness and identification, in relation to a (Western) viewer of the photograph, that would prevent the viewer from being positioned as a voveur of the 'other' (e.g. Martinez 1992; Lutz & Collins 1993, 2003; Mulvey 1989). Positioning the camera at the same level as the person in a frontal pose, has – together with the potential challenge implied in eye-contact – been the compositional strategy utilised to counter issues of power that can be reaffirmed in visual representations through the constitution of a particular point of view¹⁷.

My perspective on the methodological use of photography in anthropological research shares a basic tenet with Sarah Pink's interventionist understanding of photographic practice in the field 'as a dynamic relationship between those who occupy the spaces on both sides of the viewfinder' (Pink 1999: 83). This means that who holds the power to define, in what I have termed the 'photographic situation'¹⁸ (Mjaaland 2004c: 51), is not solely the photographer. Not to forget, the photographic situation often includes more people than those who are represented in the final photographic image, and who are involved in holding backdrops and instructing people how to behave in front of the camera. The interactive methodological use of photography that has developed in the encounter with Tigrayan people, who have insisted on taking control over their own self-representation, has – together with the critique of the photographs afterwards (accepting only those images that coincide with their

¹⁷ Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama (2003) use the phrase 'semiotic resource' for the photographer's positioning or 'point of view'. The angle used by the photographer in relation to the photographed subjects is seen as constituting a 'meaning potential' (in contrast to the term 'code', which implies a more fixed interpretation). The meaning potential on a vertical axis relates to what degree of symbolic power (or lack thereof) is involved in the relationship, whilst the meaning potential on a horizontal axis relates to the closeness or remoteness of the relationship. However, as we commonly do not reflect on the interpretation that we make, these semiotic resources can also be understood to act as a visual *habitus*.

¹⁸ This conceptualisation refers to Max Gluckman's (1958) 'social situations' as well as Simone de Beauvoir's [1998(1949)] embodied situation as a contextual moment for agency (see also Mjaaland 2009b).





[Fig. 15]: Above: Rahwa, Burtukan and Fana photographed in the market town when around 5 to 6 years of age. Left above: Attempting to copy their pose 16 years later when Rahwa has become a teacher, Burtukan is in her second year for a diploma in nursing and Fana has a degree in management. Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 1996, 2012.









[Fig. 16]: Above: Burtukan and Rahwa as bridesmaids in a friend's wedding, posing with Fana (in the middle). Urban and market town weddings are properly documented if resources allow. For this market town wedding, one video- and one stills photographer were hired. Here I am in action at the photo session at the outskirts of the town of Shire/Endaselassie, where I found myself 'bullied' for not using a digital camera. Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 2012.

own perception of who they are) – enabled a certain degree of 'shared authority' (Frisch 1990; see also Shopes 2003), or 'shared anthropology' in the French filmmaker Jean Rouch's conception (Rouch 2003: 101), and more so than in the interview situation where women expected me to take the lead. Since the power to define also includes the selection of images afterwards, series of photographs rather than single images are often included here to indicate the photographic process where around three images are commonly taken of each person. These photographic images that have been conceptualised as 'visual biographic narratives (Mjaaland 2006: 44) in terms of a visual telling that allows for silences and ambiguities, made 'visible' the imperative bodily and emotional *containment* in the Tigrayan context.

The representational strategy of 'contained wholeness' and neutrality of expression also refers to a photographic studio portrait convention from the time when photography was introduced during the first half of the nineteenth century, and that has followed the photographic medium to other continents, including the African. Heike Behrend and Jean-Francois Werner note that '[w]hile, on the one hand, photography was integrated into already exiting visual traditions, on the other, it also shaped and transformed African practices and discourses, especially those in relation to memory and the construction of personhood' (Behrend & Werner 2001: 241). Exploiting the formative and discursive aspects of photographic representation, it was first and foremost the Ethiopian royalty and nobility's embrace of portrait photographs in their quest for, or reaffirmation, of power that prepared the path for photography's popular reception in Ethiopia (Pankhurst 1992b; Pankhurst & Gérard 1999). While Ethiopia managed to fend off Western colonisation, the introduction of photography in African societies had gained momentum, according to Werner (2001), through the requirement by colonial powers and the state for ID photographs. People did also start using photography for their own ends, 'to show others how they succeeded in finding a place in the new social and economics order' (ibid: 263) [Fig. 17]. Behrend (2001) emphasises further that the photographic image of success does not have to be based in 'real' life, but can be made to anticipate a desired future precisely because of the realism involved.¹⁹ According to Werner, a gradual shift took place from an authoritarian use of photography to a subversive mixing of fiction and reality to create personal worlds in African portraiture, which points to

¹⁹ Mette Sandbye notes that since the realism of photographic images is based on both convention and *belief*, the latter based on a 'mental realism' arising from affect, memory and recognition, photographs have shaped not only how we 'see' reality, but also our understanding of what realism *is* (Sandbye 2001: 37-9; see also Sontag 1977: 87, 161). Susan Sontag (ibid.) notes that the 'photographic distortion' – the difference between the way in which cameras and the human eye depict and interpret perspective – was often commented on in the early days of photography. Since then we have become accustomed to a 'photographic seeing', which is, in reality, a distorted one.









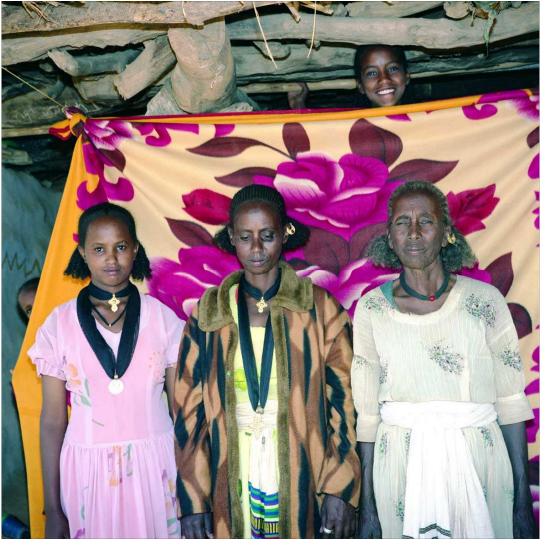






[Fig. 17]: Examples of photographic studio photographs taken in Photo Titi's studio in Shire/Endaselassie; the last photograph is of the researcher. Photo: Aster Dagnew/Photo Titi (2002). The arrival of larger chain photo studios like Photo Desta and the transfer to digital photo have later squeezed small photo studios like Photo Titi out of the marked. The coming of digital technology has also resulted in more elaborate retouching practices and montage. Recently, I also have found myself more often being the photographic subject as people take snapshots with their cell-phone cameras.





[Fig. 18]: Above: Three generations of women, Tijan (right), her mother Almaz and grandmother Haddas, with Tijan's sisters Meaza (at the top) and Megebey in charge of the backdrop, photographed in their rural home in Mayshek. Left: Haddas holds the *mokombia* which the bride uses as a head decoration at her wedding. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2009.

the remarkable 'plasticity' of the photographic technology of representation (Werner 2001: 264; see also Pinney 1997).

The anxiety surrounding photographic representation in anthropology when photography was first introduced – and that Deborah Poole asserts was based on the extent to which 'the aesthetic and affective appeal of the visual could be somehow brought in line with contemporary scientific ideals of objective observation' (Poole 2005: 168) - refers precisely to the photographic medium's plasticity and the ambiguities implied. This plasticity also generates anxiety within anthropology today as the photographic image continues to be dealt with as realistic documentation, if not as evidence. Based on remnants of the positivist requirement of detachment, this anxiety also points to the fact that the positioning of the photographer – and the intervention on which the ethnographic encounter is always based – is visible in both photographic still images and film, as a partial view from a specific place. For example, in Karl Heider's writings on anthropological film based on objectivist ethnographic principles of non-intervention and a 'holism' that required the inclusion of 'whole bodies', 'whole people', 'whole interaction' and 'whole acts' (Heider 2006 [1976]: 5), the filmed persons were not supposed to look into the camera to make the photographer 'visible', or make the viewer of the film (or photograph) aware of their own gaze (see also Wolbert 2000). Interestingly, Wilton Martinez (1992), who have studied students' responses to ethnographic films based on the abovementioned ethnographic principles, asserts that these representations, rather than increasing understanding, tends to leave the audience not only bored but also with reinforced stereotypical perceptions of the 'Other' as subaltern 'other' to the West with colonist and racist implications retained (see also Krautwurst 2002). Martinez asserts that:

The positivist notion that the more 'objective' and distant accounts of culture are more 'truthful' and 'neutral', and therefore better entrées into 'authentic' instruction, may prove false and naïve because it overlooks the mediating role of interpretation before, during and after the construction of 'factual' knowledge, and thus also conceals the ideological impact of visual media (Martinez 1992: 153).

While Heider's ethnographic prescription resonates with the local preference in my study area of Tigray for 'whole bodies' [Fig. 18], his demand for an inclusion of the entire scene from a distance risks ending in images that are neither very telling nor engaging for the viewer. The way photography is used methodologically in the photographic situation in the Tigrayan context, therefore, repositions the researcher from being a 'neutral' observer using photography for objective description and the production of evidence, to a social *agent* in an 'evocative encounter' (Mjaaland 2009b: 393) based on interestedness and the willingness to

understand and learn. In this respect, the photographic situation is much in line with the hybridity of Bhabha's third space (Bhabha & Rutherford 1990; Bhabha 2006 [1994]; see also Nnemaeka 2004) and the collaborative process on which Westrheim and Lillejord's (2007) 'zone for deliberation' is based. In this kind of space it would also be possible to turn the voyeuristic gaze from looking *at* to looking *with* (Ingold 2011b: 1; see also Pink 2011; Laine 2012). Photography, as it is used methodologically in this thesis, is not based on detached realist documentation, but on photographic representation as intersecting with social practices in ways that cannot simply separate the two. This leaves questions as to how the photographic *image* is to be interpreted in this thesis, and which I, below, will discuss from the conjuncture of anthropology and photography in the context of art practice.

Anthropology and art practice; ambiguity and epistemological uncertainty²⁰

Due to its involvement in the evolutionist science project, still photography and film were (too) easy to exclude from the anthropological project when the focus was shifted to structural-functionalism (Morphy & Banks 1997: 9). This exclusion also relates to the fact that social structures are - to use Bourdieu's conceptualisation here - not easily 'photographable' (Bourdieu 1990d: 6). When established as a sub-discipline to social anthropology in the 1970s visual anthropology also came to mean film, not photographic still images.²¹ The shift in focus to 'observational' ethnographic films – which implied a situating of the filmmaking process in an intersubjective ethnographic encounter (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2005: 22) – did not spill over to a re-visioned use of still photography in anthropology. Similarly, the increased focus on the archival ethnographic image from the perspective of asymmetrical power relations (e.g. Tagg 1988, Edwards 1992, 2005; Pinney 1997, 2011; Hight & Samson 2002; Poole 2005; Morton & Edwards 2009), was - together with the postmodern discussions of photographs truth-value that took place as photography pushed its way into the contemporary art scene – not conducive to a re-entering of the photographic still image in anthropological research. Relegated to a use as visual aides-memoires from the field, the photographic still image has continued to inhabit an inferior position within

²⁰ A paper titled *Traversing art and science; examples from photographic practice*, and based on the discussions in this chapter, was presented in the panel 'Photography as Mediation' chaired by Anna Laine and Thera Mjaaland on the SANT-NAF (Sveriges Antropologförbund & Norsk Antropologisk Forening) conference in Stockholm 4-6 May, 2012. This section also forms the basis for an essay in the book *Anthropology and Art Practice*, edited by Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (forthcoming) with the title, *Traversing art practice and anthropology; notes on ambiguity and epistemological uncertainty* (Mjaaland, forthcoming).

²¹ For example, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* edited by Paul Hockings (1975) was primarily concerned with ethnographic film. *Visual Anthropology: Photography as Research Method* (Collier 1967; Collier & Collier 1986) constituted for a long time the sole exception that based its methodology on the photograph as evidence.

anthropological texts, not least due to the insignificant role these most often amateurish visual 'illustrations' continue to play in anthropological analysis (see also Edwards 1997; Davis 1999; Wolbert 2000). Rather, being aware of the illusions about objectivity implied in photographic representation, Fredrik Barth (1981) drew attention to the distraction taking photographs represented for the full immersion in participant observation during fieldwork.

Based on the discouraging outcome of her own (inadequate) photographing during fieldwork, Kirsten Hastrup also argued that still photography is not able to transform the sensory experience and totality of a social event into a two-dimensional photographic image (Hastrup 1992c: 9). Hastrup uses this realisation to argue that text and visual representations in anthropological research assume a hierarchical relationship in terms of authority. Her much-quoted argument (e.g. MacDougall 1998; Wolbert 2000; Pink 2011) hinges both on the failure of photography to provide authentic representation in an objectivist sense and the assumption that because the photographic representation is realistic it 'must be taken at face value' (Hastrup 1992c: 21; italics added). While her argument circumvents entirely the problematic aspects of textual representation, Hastrup does point, even though implicitly, to the ambiguity of photographic representation. As Mary Warner Marien asserts, the photographic image simultaneously confirms and denies truth while emphasising the appearance of accuracy (Marien 2002: 234). It is this inherent ambivalence that Barbara Wolbert terms 'the subversive potential of photography' (Wolbert 2000: 338), and that she suggests is the reason for photography's marginality in modern anthropology precisely because it 'tends to undermine ethnographic authority' (ibid: 322). I will therefore discuss this problem from the opposite direction and ask: If ambiguity is approached as the most potent aspect of photographic representation, what is the role that photography can play in anthropological research?

The practice-base for a re-thinking of photography in anthropological research is based on my Tigrayan portrait project that has evolves since 1993 and later given the title *Encounters*²² [Fig. 19 & 20]. My initial travels to Tigray had also brought me to the study of social anthropology and research that included an approach to photography that I had developed in my photographic art practice. In the meantime, a disciplinary field of art and anthropology had also emerged (e.g. Schneider & Wright 2006, 2010; Marcus 2010). For example, in the book *Redrawing Anthropology* edited by Tim Ingold (2011a), a major concern is with understanding the processes implied in different art practices in order to establish 'an

²² See: <u>http://thera.no/?document_id=344</u>



[Fig. 19]: Encounters. Afworki, Goytum, Tella, Haddish, Asheberum, Guish and Tesfay. Mayshek, Tigray 2001. Photo: Thera Mjaaland.



[Fig. 20]: Encounters: Fesseha, Kidanemariyam, Gebrekidan, Guish, Ibrah, Guish, Tekie and Mesgenna. Mayshek, Tigray 2001. Photo: Thera Mjaaland.

approach to creativity and perception capable of bringing together the movements of making, observing and describing [anthropology]' (Ingold 2011b: 2). Instead of basing the anthropological knowledge project on descriptions of what has already passed, the concern is with the possibility of establishing a 'non-retrospective ethnography' (Schneider 2011: 188), which would also imply a letting go of usual patterns of thinking (Farnell & Wood 2011: 97). Central in the attempt to bring making, observing and describing together is a shift in epistemological perspective that joins forces with forward-moving processes attuned to emergent knowledge (Ingold 2011b: 16; Ravetz 2011: 158). As part of the postmodern critique of representation in the 'writing culture' debate during the 1980s, Tyler's (1986) conceptualisation of 'evocation' was likewise informed by sentiments common in art practice. For example, evocation in his understanding 'makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented' (Tyler 1986: 123). Tyler's concern with the meaning of sociocultural processes that is evoked in the dialogic encounter between the author, the text and the reader (see also Foley 2002: 479), concur with my interventionist use of photography in the field, and the interpretation of these photographic images, as 'evocative encounters' (Mjaaland 2009b: 393). As Tyler writes:

The whole point of 'evoking' rather than 'representing' is that it frees ethnography from *mimesis* and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails 'objects', 'facts', 'descriptions', 'inductions', 'generalizations', verification', 'experiment', 'truth', and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writings of ethnography (Tyler 1986: 130, italics in original).

However, photography's entanglement with realism continues to inform the interpretation of photographic images in terms of realist (and truthful) descriptions. It is in this context that C. S. Peirce's (1958-60) semiotic theory, with the concepts 'icon' (likeness/substitute), 'index' (pointing to/indication) and 'symbol' (rule/convention), has been used to sort out the *relationship* between the photographic image and reality. While other images are classified as icons, Peirce emphasises that photographs are indices, albeit with iconic qualities (Peirce 1958-60: 159, 1992). The reason why the photograph is classified as index is due to the fact that the photographic image not only produces likeness, but as an imprint of reality produced by light, creates a *connection* to the referent (understood as that which was present in front of the camera when the picture was taken) by pointing back to the referent, and, hence, beyond itself as image (see also Larsen 1999). According to Peirce, the index establishes 'a *real* connection between his [and her] mind and the object' (Peirce 1958-60: 162; italics added) by

way of observation. One aspect of photographic representation that Peirce's indexicality does not include, is the potential implicit in photographs to *point to* and *indicate* something that is beyond the frame of the photographic image and, hence, *not* directly (or only partly) observable in the actual photograph. If linking the index up with qualities commonly assigned to the metonymy – based on accepted causal links in time/space, or conceptual relationships based on closeness that can stand in for each other, like smoke indicating fire – the indexicality of photographs can in a cognitive sense be extended beyond what is actually observed in the image.

Roland Barthes' (1993) reflections on photography in *Camera Lucida* provide a link to the metonymic aspect of photographic representation. Opposed to the denotative level of the photograph which Barthes (1993) calls studium, and which involves mere registration of what is represented in the photograph with detached distance, the connotative level which Barthes calls *punctum*, has – by way of personal attraction or distress, even pain – the potential to move the viewer's imagination beyond the actual image. Barthes asserts that implicit in the *punctum* is a power of expansion which is often metonymic (Barthes 1993: 45). He continues, '[t]he *punctum*, then, is a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see' (ibid: 59, italics in original). Peter Larsen (2004) ends his discussion on Barthes' interpretive approach to photographs – where Larsen links the *studium* to voyeurism and the *punctum* to fetishism – by saying that 'the Photograph is the most ambiguous of all known image forms. Photographs are always closeness, eternal presence, and fullness. And always - at the same time - absence, eternal past, and loss' (Larsen 2004: 285, my translation from Norwegian). Discussing indexicality in the context of metonymy and the metonymic beyondness implied in Barthes *punctum*, includes the *potency* of absence in photographic images, expanding the connection made by pointing to, from what can be observed, to what can be imagined.

The aspect of *time* in photographic representation also points to the other *punctum* that Barthes asserts is contained as an undercurrent in all photographs as a painful realisation. Precisely because the photograph is a fragment in time – it points to Time (Barthes 1993: 96) creating a connection with a now of the viewer and a *that-has-been* of what is actually represented in the image; reminding us of death. My visual strategy utilises the fact that the photographic image is *always* a fragment of reality both in space (by being a 'cut-out' of reality from a specific perspective), and in time (by 'freezing' the moment). By emphasising (rather than denying) this fragmental character of the photographic image, and the absences implied, the viewer will be involved in the 'filling in' of a visual narrative. This filling in has

103

a parallel in the cognitive theory of connectionism which assumes that, instead of predefined concepts, our thought-processes involves a linking of fragmental building blocks into loosely-defined 'scripts' or 'schemata' (e.g. Block 1994; Strauss & Quinn 1994, 1997). This linking together and filling in between fragments therefore situates imagination as an inherent aspect of cognition. As Maurice Block notes,

the concept of house is not a list of essential features (roof, door, walls, and so on) which have to be checked off before deciding whether or not it is a house. If that were so we would have no idea that a house which has lost its roof is still a house. It is rather that we consider something 'a house' by comparing it to a loosely associated group of 'houselike' features, no one of which is essential, but which are linked by a general idea of what a typical house is (Bloch 1994: 277).

From a connectionist perspective of human cognition there is no reason to underestimate the viewers' ability to read the photograph as fragment. A conventional understanding of the photograph as truthful description of realty might, however, have trained viewers of photographs to *expect* an unambiguous representation of that reality. As Martinez' (1992) study of students' receptions of ethnographic films, mentioned above, showed, the scope for expanding understanding by way of films that comply with the realist principles for objective photographic representation is limited. Drawing on Umberto Eco's (1979) distinction between 'open' works (or 'work in movement') as opposed to 'closed' works, Martinez study showed that those films that were 'open' invited more elaborate and reflexive responses (Martinez 1992: 135). Contrary to more 'closed' ethnographic films based on objectivist principles of realist representation – and that to a larger extent resulted in the reaffirmation of stereotypes – the 'open' films that used narrative, experimental or reflexive styles allowed the viewers 'space to negotiate meaning in a more dialogic, interactive way of reading, generally resulted in more complex interpretations' (ibid: 136).

It is from this perspective Elizabeth Edwards' (1997) assertion that, rather than realist ethnographic photographs it is the expressive (and ambiguous) aspects of photography utilised within art which are in tune with the theoretical intentions of modern social anthropology, makes epistemological sense. In the same vein, Barbara Wolbert asserts that, '[w]orking with ethnographic photographs today, then, requires a completely different type of interest, an interest in experimentation and a curiosity about pictures which *disturb our visual conventions*' (Wolbert 2000: 338, italics added). In my photographic portrait work from Tigray that traverses art and anthropological research alike, the concern is neither with reproducing reality in photographic images, nor denying a connection to reality, but to utilise the notion of photographic realism and the ambiguities implied to create a visual disruption of the stereotypical image of the 'other' that in the Ethiopian case refers to the prevailing image in Western media of a catastrophe-ridden people in spite the huge changes taking place. On another level - and through the provision of a space for self-representation - it is the ambivalence implicit in realism that can be, and *is*, utilised by Tigrayans themselves in the photographic self-representation to produce an ideal self-image (see also Mjaaland 2004c, 2006). Hence, my point is not to re-invent photography to suit an anthropological enquiry more adequately but to acknowledge the inherent 'ambiguities of the realist paradigm' (Edwards 1997: 55) as a potent communicative asset of the medium, not only within art photography but also within anthropological research. Instead of restricting the photographic image by objectivist requirements to enable its use within anthropological research, a way forward is therefore to utilise this ambiguity – and the epistemological uncertainty that follows – as a potential in knowledge production. This uncertainty can be situated in what Nick Hamlyn has classified as 'places of epistemological doubt' (Hamlyn 2003: 126) where habitual patterns of assumption are questioned both in relation to knowledge production and the media of mediation (see also Schneider 2011). Due to the fact that photography continues to pose a challenge to anthropological authority, the visual in anthropology therefore presents itself as a *punctum* that has the potential to expand the anthropological discipline beyond its own realist representational conventions, to harness its critical aspirations.

The elaboration above of how *presence* and *absence* are implicit in the photographic medium, and can be worked with explicitly in the production of photographic still images, is central for the interpretation of the photographic images included in this thesis [Fig. 21]. On a basic level, these are photographs where first and foremost self-representation is at issue. The way norms and conventions are negotiated in these photographic self-representation, in terms of what is made visible, and what is made invisible is important here, and is, in an analytical sense, dependent on contextual knowledge that is absent in the actual photographs. Hence, these photographic self-representations do not only point back to the person, or referent, but points beyond the frame to socio-cultural dynamics in this particular context. These photographers in accordance with local understandings of personhood (see also Mjaaland 2006) – and current popular visual culture in terms of posters and cards locally available, that I will place in the context of historical images from the Tigrayan struggle (see Chapter 6). Hence, it is the intersection of these photographs with multiple methodological approaches, and the (unanticipated) meanings evoked in the emergent process of knowledge









[Fig: 21]: Encounters: Negassi, Mayshek. Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 2001, 2010.

production, enabled by continuous triangulation (and that I will return to later in this chapter), which inform the interpretation of the photographs in this anthropological research project. Finally, photographs (and films) are also a constant reminder that our academic research is about real people, who are mediating their past and aspirations for the future, not only in their lives in the present, but also before the camera.

Exploratory surveys

The intersection of data generated by multiple dialogical methods has also included being attentive to the need for other methodological approaches. In fact, surveys were not anticipated in the original research design, and were included to see if tendencies in the interview data, together with data from participant observations and informal dialogue, could be identified in a larger data material. The interviews had also generated the need to investigate contemporary processes in relation to education, not only in the socio-cultural context out of school but also *in* school. Of concern was also to include the boys, since the regional statistics for Tigray suggest similar rates of repetition and dropout for girls and boys in grades 1-10.²³ Both of the questionnaire-based surveys were carried out in May and June 2009. The exploratory education survey, included girls and boys in grade 8 in two primary schools, one in the semi-urban market town, and one in the rural area, and grades 9-11 in the secondary school in the market town.²⁴ This selection was based on the levels of education available in these two localities at the time of my research. These grades are also seen by teachers and the education experts working in the Asgede Tsimbla Wereda Education Bureau, as crucial in relation to students' continuation of education (or dropping out) for both girls and boys in this area. The questionnaire-based household survey focused on the woman/wife in the household in the same two communities. Even with quantitative parameters in place, these explorative surveys were not designed for statistical purposes but to establish to what extent findings from the interviews could be substantiated, and, likewise, were important to probe if I had missed out on important issues.

With a few out-of-school youth (14 girls and 4 boys), the education survey included altogether 200 participants, 113 girls and 87 boys aged 14-20 (one man from the rural and one from the semi-urban area were aged 40-50). The larger number of girls included in this survey is based on the fact that the actual number of girls in school in this area up to tenth grade is

²³ Statistics reviewed in the *Education Statistics Annual Abstracts* from Tigray Regional State Education Bureau covers the school years between 2002/2003 (1995 E.C.) and 2009/2010 (2002 E.C.) (TRS-EB 2007, 2008, 2010).

²⁴ Grade 12 started up in the market town from the autumn 2009.

higher than the boys, but starts reversing from eleventh grade onwards. The three schools included in the survey were Endabaguna Primary School (grades 1-8), Endabaguna Secondary School (grades 9-11), and Mayshek primary school (grades 1-8). The random selection of one class on each level among parallel classes in eighth grade in the two primary schools and in ninth, tenth and eleventh grade in the secondary school was done by the school directors,²⁵ but teachers commented afterwards that it was the most active classes that had been selected. Since many students come from the rural area to continue secondary school in the market town, but also on lower levels of primary school in cases where the rural village has education up to fourth grade only, the urban/rural divide becomes blurry since the urban location of the schools does not mean that the students' origin is urban.

The questionnaire-based education survey included questions about place of origin and age, marital status (since early marriage is still practised especially in the rural areas), reasons for dropout and repetitions (if any), parents and siblings education, who support them morally and economically, together with a few questions where the students were asked to elaborate more, as in one question where they were asked to reason about the importance of education (Appendix 1). Lastly, they were given the task of writing a short essay/story about their wishes for the future.²⁶ The class was given one school hour (40 minutes) to answer the questions anonymously. Since this was close to the exam period, the eighth grade selected in Endabaguna was summoned outside school hours in order to not take time from exam preparations. The class of eighth graders in Mayshek were captured right after their last exam and asked to stay one more school hour after their Tigriña exam and an evaluation of the exam period had taken place. Since tenth grade had already finished their lectures and were home preparing for their exam, one class was selected and asked to participate in the survey on the day they were gathering to register for their exam.

The explorative household survey was also conducted by using questionnaires (Appendix 2). It included women in 170 (109 urban and 61 rural) households in the same

²⁵ In eighth grade in the rural area (1 class and 22 students) all 13 girls and 9 boys participated. In eighth grade in the market town (5 classes and 306 students; 165 girls and 141 boys) 22 girls and 20 boys participated (out of 61 students in the selected class). In the market town in ninth grade out of 705 students (14 classes and 705 students; 454 girls and 251 boys); 27 girls and 13 boys participated (out of 51 students in the selected class). Of 426 students in tenth grade (8 classes 426 students; 242 girls and 184 boys); 22 girls and 21 boys participated (out of 56 students in the selected class). In eleventh grade and 102 students (3 classes and 102 students; 40 girls and 62 boys); 15 girls and 20 boys participated (out of 38 students in the selected class).

²⁶ This inclusion of writing a story was inspired by my colleagues at the University of Bergen working with the research project Youth at the Margins [of Europe]. In their project, the influence of globalisation on the future plans and dreams of Tunisian, Czech and Norwegian youth (aged 14-15) is sought in a range of data among them essays where these youngsters on the verge of adulthood were asked to write about how they imagine their futures (Haukanes & Tjomsland 2010).

semi-urban and rural communities in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda. The questions addressed issues like headship of household and marital status, births and attitudes towards family planning, the household members' educational background, their opinion on the importance of education, and means of subsistence. Questions on access to micro-credit and participation in culture-specific economical and religious networks (equb, *ïdir* and mahiber) were also asked to identify issues of social inclusion and reasons for exclusion. The aim of the explorative household survey was to establish how a larger number of women, (1) relate to education, and (2) how they define their own position in the household, to what extent they are aware of changes in the Family Law and marriage age, how they negotiate church, government and their husbands' authority in the case of family planning. Included in this survey were, therefore, questions relating to the well-established development presumption that those women who are educated have fewer children than those who are not. It has also been important to define which other processes of change are taking place parallel to education, the impact in practice of equitable and gender equal constitution and revision of laws, and to what extent deteriorating ecological (and economical) conditions in the rural areas in Tigray enter into these processes.

While I used the household survey to re-approach the women I had interviewed, in order to reach a reasonable number of households, three female assistants were appointed. These women were not trained as researchers but knew the area well. The rationale behind this decision was that it would be more productive to appoint somebody known to the women to ask the questions and write down the answers, rather than bringing better-trained personnel from, for example, the University of Mekelle, who, in spite of being insiders in the region, would have been outsiders in the two communities in question. Issues pertaining to the assistants' position in their respective communities or neighbourhoods, and not least the position of their parents and immediate family, could, however, have influenced the rapport these three local women were able to establish with their respondents. The assistants were asked to approach only people they knew in advance so that their position in the community was known. They were given a short training and drilled about explaining the research and issues of consent. They were equipped with a letter from the wereda administration stating their involvement in the project together with a copy of my research permit, and were followed up regularly during the whole period (approximately one month). All three assistants were currently living in the market town, but two of them were born in the rural area where the research was conducted, and had their families there. This strategy is much in line with Bourdieu's (1999) perspective that the similarity in social position diminishes aspects of

109

intrusion and 'symbolic violence' in the interview situation. The reverse of this strategy is, as already noted above, the potential blind-spots it might entail. Discovered too late to do anything about it, I found out that one of the assistants had not filled in the column on marital status in the table with offspring's age and education, which had been included to probe the general presumption that early marriage is an important factor for girls' dropout in Tigray region, since she had considered it 'not important'. This might also have been the most unpleasant issue that she had to deal with in her encounter with women in her home community.

Expert interviews

Expert interviews have been utilised to situate women's narrative accounts within institutionalised strategies and policy discourse, and fifteen experts (eight female and seven male) working with women's issues and education were interviewed. The expert interviews included teachers (two female and one male), school directors (two male) in one primary school and one secondary school as well as the (male) leader of the Asgede Tsimbla Wereda Educational Bureau. The (female) leader of the Tigray Region Women's Affairs Bureau (TWAB) in Mekelle, the local (female) leader and one (male) Senior Gender Expert of Asgede Tsimbla Wereda Women's Affairs Bureau, were also interviewed. Additional informal talks have taken place with these experts during all the fieldwork periods (often with new people in the positions). Interviews with two female chairpersons of the local NGO, Women's Association in Tigray (WAT), on regional as well as wereda level, were conducted. Visits to Health Bureaus on regional and wereda levels (for statistics on family planning), and interviews with two (female) health extension workers together with one (male) leader of the agricultural extension service in the rural area about women's issues and concerns at the tabia level in the rural area, were also carried out. Tigray Region Education Bureau in Mekelle has provided both the official regional education statistics, and unpublished exam results (grades 8 and 10), as well as recent research conducted by the bureau. Questions asked to the experts addressed women's situation in general, and in relation to education in particular, including policy implementation. While the focus in these expert interviews was achievements and challenges, with particular interest given to how eventual challenges were explained in terms of socio-cultural processes, experts' attitudes towards the people for whom they were supposed to create development and change, was also of concern. Since women's education in global education policies is linked to the issue of family planning where the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, up until recently, has voiced their opinion against the government's family

planning policy and use of contraceptives, one orthodox priest was interviewed to discuss religious concerns in relation to new national policies on women. All the experts were also asked about their own educational path to their respective positions.

It might be relevant to note here that I have not used these experts in government and NGO positions to direct me to people at the grassroots level. While the Asgede Tsimbla Wereda Education Bureau did provide contact with the school directors and authorised the education survey, the selection of interviewees and participants in the explorative household survey has taken place through informal networks. One of the interviewed experts emphasised the importance of discussions with the local leaders as they have a lot of knowledge about their respective communities. A former (male) fighter (45), however, voiced his concern for caution in these exchanges with authorities: 'They will give you the politically correct answers, and tell you that everything is fine now. That is not necessarily correct. ²⁷ These interviews with experts at government bureaus and other leaders have been important to understand the rationale behind how government policies on women's issues and education were implemented in practice. The appeal from one expert to explicate the politico-historical context, especially if I touch on controversial issues in relation to women - since, as she said, 'the research is to be read by [Western] people who might think that nothing has happened' – is incorporated in this research project. 'There has been a lot of change [in Tigray] over the past 30 years', she assures me. 'You have to discuss the issues at stake [in relation to women] in the light of these changes.²⁸ In fact, contextualisation has been a key to the analysis of the data in this research project where continuous triangulation is central.

Triangulation as analytical tool

The use of a combination of methodological approaches, letting information generated by way of one method inform the enquiry with another, and allowing for potential synergies in the research process, is, in an analytical sense, in line with the principles of triangulation. Underlying Norman K. Denzin's (1970) initial elaborations on triangulation, as the examination of the same phenomenon from as many different perspectives as possible, was the understanding that research methods are not neutral a-theoretical tools but represent distinct means of *acting* on the research environment (Denzin 1970: 298; italics added).²⁹

²⁷ Fieldwork notes 25 May 2009/Ginbot 17, 2001 E.C.

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 13 July 2009/<u>H</u>amle 6, 2001 E.C.

²⁹ Even though it is Norman K. Denzin who is credited for having coined the term triangulation as a research strategy, Uwe Flick (1992) notes that the idea of triangulation – a term taken from navigation and military

Since each method represents different lines of action, the data that is generated from diverging methodological strategies are different. Furthermore, it is not only methods that should be triangulated in Denzin's perspective but investigators, theory and data too. While triangulation has most commonly been used as a strategy for validation (e.g. Erzberger & Prein 1997), Uwe Flick (1992) emphasises a tendency to see triangulation as a research strategy to accomplish in-depth understanding in line with Denzin's revised perspective on multiple triangulations as a fully grounded interpretive research approach based on the assumption that objective reality will never be captured (Denzin 1989: 246). According to Flick, '[t]riangulation is less a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation, which increases scope, depth, and consistency in methodological proceedings' (Flick 2006: 390). While this perspective has informed my research, what is also included is to see triangulation as Flick suggests: as 'an additional epistemological source' (Flick 1992: 176). This perspective on triangulation links up, in my opinion, with Kathy Davies' interpretation of intersectionality as encouraging complexity, stimulating creativity, avoiding premature closure, inspiring new questions and exploring uncharted territory (Davis 2008: 79). Triangulation in this thesis has involved giving analytical attention to what takes place in the intersection of different methodological approaches in tune with Ingold's (2011b) and Ravetz' (2011) perspectives on research as an emergent process of knowledge production. This is not to say that triangulation has not been used for the cross-checking of data but that the continuous process of triangulation used as an analytical tool, has enabled the emergence of unanticipated constellations when analysing the data.

Imperative in this continuous analytical process is the potential entailed in triangulation to incorporate the issue of complexity and in-depth understanding. To avoid premature closure and enable exploration of uncharted territory, narrative accounts and practice-based data is handled, not merely as findings that should be cross-checked, but as that which takes the enquiry forward. Goodson's approach to life stories, as a *starting point* for the *beginning* of a process of coming to know (Goodson 1995: 98), is instructive here. His analytical perspective draws on Bourdieu's use of life stories as an approach to access the socio-cultural conditioning of a particular life (Bourdieu 1995, 1999; see also Steensen 2006, 2007; Callewaert 2007). The fact that I have interviewed women over three generations from between 18-75 years of age also makes it possible to compare the life stories to trace generational changes in the socio-cultural conditioning, as well as differences in the

strategy implying that an object's position is located by the use of multiple reference points – had been a methodological principle in social research since the 1960s.

trajectories of Tigrayan women's lives over time. Borneman's (1992) perspective on the life story, mentioned earlier in this chapter, where the *emplotment* of peoples' experiences in common master narratives is central, has also been used in the analytical process to search for traces of political rhetoric and discourses in different policies on women and education in narratives, including in the stories that female and male students produced about their future.

This analytical strategy, based on triangulating different methodological approaches to socio-cultural processes, has also been used to trace deeply embedded and 'hard-lived' gendered presumptions that have followed from one generation to another. The ethnographic examples that are presented in this thesis are selected both according to their general relevance and based on the richness of description. Drawing on the genealogical model that Michel Foucault (1977) developed with a base in Nietzsche, Maria Tamboukou (1999, 2003) also emphasises the importance of being attentive to disruptions in narratives. This perspective, while drawing on the assumption that ambiguities and contradictions might break through, both within and between narratives (see also Skeggs 2004), is also a reminder of the disruptions and discontinuities between, what is said, and what is done in practice. Finding its visual expression in the photographs, included in the analysis is also the issue of identity work, which incorporates negotiations over self-categorisations and self-representations (e.g. Silverman 2006). To situate the photographs in the context of multiple methodological approaches has also made it possible to glimpse aspects of socio-cultural practices that otherwise might have been overlooked.

Ethical considerations

Bourdieu (1999) starts off his introduction in *The Weight of the World* by asking: 'How can we not be anxious about making *private* words *public*, revealing confidential statements in the context of a relationship based on trust that can only be established between two individuals?' (Bourdieu 1999: 1; italics in original). In terms of the perceived socio-cultural and political vulnerability, it has been important to guaranty confidentiality and anonymity to the participants in this study. When asking about it explicitly, many of the women interviewed for this research project were, however, not concerned about being anonymised, but would rather prefer to be credited for their contribution to my work. Others were more specific about wanting anonymisation, since information, especially about underage marriage of their children and grandchildren that in a juridical sense could result in prosecution, was provided. While the fact that girls continue to be married underage is common knowledge in the community, also among those who are in a position to prosecute (but refrain from doing so),

being explicit about it in the interview could impinge on their possibility of playing on ambiguity in relation to these girls age in their negotiations with state authorities.

The Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD), to which Norwegian social science projects have to report, and from which this project has got its clearance, requires anonymisation of all data that make a person identifiable when handling sensitive data. Data is considered sensitive if it is concerned with racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical belief, crime-related suspicion, charge, prosecution and/or sentencing, health matters, sexual matters, or trade union membership. Counter to this ethical requirement, there is no mention of issues of anonymity in the Memorandum of Agreement signed by researchers to obtain a research permit from the Office of the Vice President for Research & Dean of the School of Graduate Studies at the Addis Ababa University. Looking through recent social science master theses, both from the University of Mekelle and Addis Ababa University, the prevailing practice seems to be that interviewees are credited with their full names. Ryen notes that in Tanzania, for example, the accepted procedure is to have a list of interviewees' names included, and that deviating from this procedure could be perceived negatively, if not as outright arrogance (Ryen 2004: 221). The Norwegian practice, therefore, diverges from Ethiopian research practice that gives credit to the participating persons.

NSD's ethical requirements, which are based on the Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and Humanities (NESH 2006), likewise complicates the making of explicit links between the photographic self-representation and life-story-based interview of one and the same person. While Tigrayans in general appreciate being photographed, the ethical side of this issue is, as in my previous research in Tigray (Mjaaland 2004c), solved by splitting up the interviews and the photographs. Not providing the photographed person's name at all would, in my opinion, contribute to a long colonial tradition of seeing Africans as an undifferentiated mass and not as individual persons. While the interviewees' names have been changed according to NSD's requirements, I have kept the full name of some of the most central experts. I have also kept the first names of the photographed after having obtained their consent since they are recognisable in the photographs anyway. In fact, the censoring of authorship implicit in anonymisation could be seen as perpetuating the asymmetrical power relation between the minority world (western) researcher and the majority world (nonwestern) researched, as opposed to acknowledging degrees of 'shared authority' (Frisch 1990; Shopes 2003). While neither the researcher nor the researched can possible foresee all consequences of the research (e.g. Schepher-Hughes 2000), anonymisation is no doubt as much a way for the researcher to protect her own back as to protect the interviewees. As a

114

guiding principle for this study I find de Laine's perspective instructive, when suggesting that '[a]n 'ethic of relationship', when carried over to the text, directs authors not to say in print anything they would not say to people themselves' (Laine 2000: 213).

The considerations above address the issue of transferring ethical principles from one part of the world to another. Knut Dalen, Finn Jellestad and Kamal Kamaloodien state that '[a]lthough ethical principles are international and global, they have to be interpreted and applied in the context in which the research is conducted' (Dalen et. al 2007: 618). Catherine Kohler Riesmann similarly points to 'the inherent and practical risks associated with ethical universalism' (Riessman 2005: 487). She gives an example from South India, where the signing of an informed consent form created suspicion and mistrust, interpreting it as government intrusion and perceived as more threatening than the actual act of being interviewed with a tape-recorder. Riesmann asserts that what we need are alternatives, and suggests 'an ethics-in-context' (Riesmann 2005: 487), a situated ethics that is able to adjust to the particularities of the fieldwork. The Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) requires 'informed consent', implying that the persons have an understanding of the facts, implications and consequences for participating in the research project, and have understood that they can discontinue their participation at any point. However, I have *not* asked the interviewed women in Tigray, or those who have been photographed, to sign consent forms. As Ryen notes, the signing of formal consent documents 'may work to accentuate existing differences rather than building relations in cross-cultural settings' (Ryen 2004: 220). Informed consent in this research project relies on face-to-face oral information since signing a paper would be perceived as a breach of confidentiality and anonymity (see also Nordanger 2006), which would increase socio-cultural and political vulnerability.

The Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (1998) interprets informed consent as a dynamic and continuous process that should be 'initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of dialogue and negotiation with those studied' (AAA 1998: A4). Related understandings of ethical concerns suggest conceptualising this as 'negotiated consent' (Moody 1988: 69), or 'process consent' (Munhall 1998: 156). In Elaine J. Lawless' (1992) understanding of 'reciprocal ethnography', she invokes a full hermeneutic circle in the research relationship and suggests including in the final text the interviewee's interpretation of the researcher's interpretation. While a full interpretive circle has not been attempted in this research project, I have kept up the dialogue with the Tigrayan women at intervals throughout this research project and cross-checked interpretations more generally as part of ongoing informal dialogues. I have also brought back all the photographs. While people have consented to being photographed, since they most often are the ones who ask me to photograph them in the first place, the question of consent has been renegotiated with the photographed (and the schoolgirls' parents) when revisiting the study area.

Concluding remarks

The intersecting dialogical methodology elaborated above is selected in order to access the ambiguity and silences that, the socio-cultural dynamics of layering communication and under-communicating practice, entail. The use of a combination of methods is also adjusted to the need for continuous contextualisation of complex contemporary processes where women's issues and girls' education are also global issues. The methodological approaches provided by participant observation and informal dialogue over time, interventionist use of photography, interviews and explorative surveys have not only enabled the viewing of issues of social reproduction and change from different perspectives but have also constituted an intersected space where complexity and in-depth understanding have been evoked. My interventionist positionality when placing myself as a social actor in the field where the enquiry is based on interestedness, is also inspired by the feminist epistemological notion of situated knowledges that, according to Haraway, runs counter to the disembodied ideological doctrine of scientific objectivity, which, as *unlocatable* knowledge, produces irresponsible knowledge claims (Haraway 1988: 576). From a scholastic point of view, to draw on Bourdieu (1990b) here, my positionality as a social anthropologist, with a political and epistemological interest in the multitude of feminist perspectives, is also influenced by my initial training within the visual arts and my practice as a photographer over three decades. The seeing of creativity as an integral part of the research process is, from this point of view, part of my professional habitus that spills over from art practice where epistemological uncertainty is handled as an inevitable fact that inspires exploration, rather than as a problem.

116

CHAPTER 3: 'Education as the foundation for development'

Introduction

The policies issued by the current TPLF-based EPRDF government, after seizing power in Ethiopia in 1991, point to the fact that education not only had a central place during the Tigrayan struggle but also continues to be attributed a pivotal role in the current development process of the country. Securing free primary education in Ethiopia from the mid-1990s, the educational reform process had started off with the introduction of the Education and Training Policy (FDRE-MOE 1994) and followed up by the Educational Sector Development Programs (ESDP) I, II, III and IV.¹ For example, the *vision* of the educational sector explicated in ESDP III is: 'to see all school-age children get access to quality primary education by the year 2015 and realize the creation of trained and skilled human power at all levels who will be driving forces in the promotion of democracy and development in the country' (FDRE-MOE 2005: 5). The sustainable development and poverty reduction plan, Growth and Transformation (FDRE-MOFED 2010), and the Educational Sector Development Program IV (FDRE-MOE 2010b) for the same five-year period (2010/2011-2014-15), are aligned in their goals to produce 'democratic, efficient and effective, knowledgeable, inspired and creative citizens who contribute to the realization [of] Ethiopia's vision of being a middle income economy' (FDRE-MOFED 2010: 86). Based on socio-economic development and poverty reduction, becoming a middle-income economy by the year 2025^2 is stated as the long-term vision for the education sector in ESDP IV with the main goals being:

to <u>improve access to quality basic education</u> in order to make sure that all children, youngsters and adults, with particular emphasis on females, acquire the competencies, skills, values and attitudes enabling them to participate fully in the social, economic and political development of Ethiopia and to <u>sustain equitable access to quality</u> <u>secondary education</u> services as the basis and bridge to the demand of the economy for middle level and higher level human resources (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 6, underlining in original).

The Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP) are further aligned with the global commitments in Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG 2) aimed to provide universal access to primary education by 2015 (e.g. ESDP II). In the present context of 'educational globalisation' (Ball 2008: 32), national policies on education, which

¹ ESDP I 1997/98-2001/02 (FDRE-MOE 1997), ESDP II 2000/01-2004/05 (FDRE-MOE 2000), ESDP III 2005/06-2010/11 (FDRE-MOE 2005) and ESDP IV 2010/2011-2014-15 (FDRE-MOE 2010b).

² The anticipated year is 2020-23 in the Growth and Transformation Plan (FDRE-MOFED 2010: 1).

are increasingly intersected by international educational policies, are also increasingly premised on neo-liberal ideologies (e.g. Brock-Utne 2003; Blackmore 2005; Rizvi 2006), with the underlying causal presumption of (linear) progress, running from education through gender equality to development. I have, therefore, also included examples in this chapter, of educational discourses found as slogans in school murals in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda in Tigray, in order to trace underlying presumptions on education. Perceptions about the importance of education will, further, be sought in the female and male students' answers in the exploratory education survey and in the stories they wrote about how they imagine their futures through education. In the interviews with Tigrayan women over three generations, the issue of missed opportunities and the consequent exclusions that the lack of education to the current EPRDF-government's policies, programmes and plans on education in their period of governance since 1991 from the perspective of development and women. Trying to unpack what is meant by development in the Ethiopian context, I will also draw on poverty reduction plans, and polices on women issued during the same period.

Introduction to the Ethiopian education policy and programmes with a focus on development and women Including both formal and non-formal education, the Education and Training Policy of 1994 envisions education and training as producing responsible and good citizens that respect human rights and democratic values for the country to achieve (general) equality, justice and peace. The last paragraph of the introduction to this educational policy sums it up as follows:

Overall, the education and training policy envisages bringing-up citizens endowed with human outlook, countrywide responsibility and democratic values having developed the necessary productive, creative and appreciative capacity in order to participate fruitfully in development and the utilization of resources and the environment at large (FDRE 1994: 6).

While entailing a forward-moving strategy towards change and development³, the Education and Training Policy also recognises that education does not operate in isolation, and that an integrated approach is necessary for education to be able to contribute to human development as well as all-round development of society. Acquiring knowledge, ability, skills and positive

³ Different terms in Tigriña cover the notion of development and change. The term *lewt'i* ($\Lambda \omega \cdot m$.) that signifies change as process is close to the meaning of development, while *miqiyar* ($\mathfrak{P} \stackrel{\bullet}{\mathcal{P}} \mathcal{C}$) means change in terms of replacement. Other terms for development are *mizbale* ($\mathfrak{P} \stackrel{\bullet}{\mathcal{P}} \Lambda$) and *lemat* ($\Lambda \mathfrak{P} \stackrel{\bullet}{\mathcal{P}} \mathcal{C}$), while *abiyet* ($\delta \cdot \eta \stackrel{\bullet}{\mathcal{P}} \mathcal{C}$) means growth. There is no direct translation in Tigriña for transformation, and the English word is used directly in both Tigriña and Amharic as in the Growth and Transformation Plan (FDRE-MOFED 2010).

and productive attitudes through education are understood as a prerequisite for the development of competent professionals (both women and men) who can participate in the development process of the country. Hence, the role of education as an *instrumental* strategy to forward the development of the country is strong in the policy but without revoking the *intrinsic* value of education and training for the individual person (see also Tekeste 2006). In accordance with the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (TGE-OPM 1993), affirmative action to remedy the legacy of inequality and discrimination in the case of women was incorporated in Education and Training Policy of 1994, and later reaffirmed in Article 35 on 'Rights of Women' of the new Constitution (FDRE 1995; see Appendix 4).

Following up the Education and Training Policy are the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP) from 1997 onwards that are indicative of a twenty-year educational reform process. These programmes are influenced by consecutive Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans⁴ that also deal with education's role in poverty reduction and that promote sustainable and equitable development as an integrated process where education is part.⁵ These poverty reduction plans explicate the commitment to the eradication of poverty as the country's main development goal, and acknowledge the gender dimension of poverty and the gendered inequalities that hinder long-lasting change and equitable development (e.g. FDRE-MOFED 2002: viii). In this first Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Plan (SDPRP) (ibid.) – where a more equitable development or pro-poor growth strategy, that is gender sensitive and designed to change the distribution of gains from growth, is introduced to accomplish long-lasting change – the level of educational attainment is seen to have a direct bearing on poverty. With the focus in the Growth and Transformation Plan (FDRE-MOFED 2010) on sustaining rapid and equitable economic growth, the focus on equitable and sustainable socio-economic development in the Educational Sector Development Program (ESDP IV) (FDRE-MOE 2010b) is, likewise, more explicitly linked up with economic growth

⁴ The World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fond) launched the Debt Initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) in 1996. To be considered for this programme, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) process started in Ethiopia in 2000. The Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction programme (SDPRD) 2002 builds on four pillars, or building blocks: (1) Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI), (2) Justice system reform and civil service reform, (3) Decentralization and [community] empowerment, and (4) Capacity building in public and private sector. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) 2006, builds on eight pillars: (1) Building all-inclusive implementation capacity, (2) A massive push to accelerate growth, (3) Creating the balance between economic development and population growth, (4) Unleashing the potential of Ethiopia's women, (5) Strengthening the infrastructure backbone of the country, (6) Strengthening human resource development, (7) Managing risk and volatility, and (8) Creating employment opportunities.

⁵ The first Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) (FDRE-MOFED 2002) and the second Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (FDRE-MOFED 2006), which linked up with the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, have been followed by the third Transformation and Growth Plan (2010/11-2014/15) (FDRE-MOFED 2010).

than in earlier education programmes. Poverty, which is not mentioned in the Education and Training Policy (see also Tekeste 2006), is incorporated in the Educational Sector Development Programs (e.g. ESDP II, III & IV). The goal to turn Ethiopia into a middleincome country by the year 2020-23⁶ (FDRE-MOFED 2010: 1) is dependent on – as already anticipated in the Education and Training Policy and previous education programmes – developing highly qualified, motivated and innovative human resources, and producing and transferring advanced and relevant knowledge in order for socio-economic development and poverty reduction to be accomplished (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 7). With science and technology understood as decisive for this endeavour, an enhanced emphasis on science and technology at university level compared to social sciences, in a ratio of 70:30, has also been instituted in the second cycle of secondary school (grades 11-12) that prepares students for university.

First mentioned in the objectives of the Education and Training Policy, '[t]o gear education towards reorienting society's attitude and value pertaining to the role and contribution of women in development' (FDRE-MOE 1994: 11), there is a general emphasis in the Educational Sector Development Programs (ESDP) on gender in terms of girls and women (see also Rose 2003a). As stated in ESDP IV: 'Integrating gender issues across all levels of education system is one of the means of addressing educational equity. Accordingly, the global goal for gender equality under ESDP IV will be to promote equal access and success in education and training for women and girls' (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 71). There had been no direct reference in the Education and Training Policy to 'gender equality' and 'women's rights'. Rather, the Education and Training Policy states the giving of due attention to 'equality' and 'equity' in general, 'human rights' and 'gender issues'. While 'gender equality' is used in Educational Sector Development Programs, as in the excerpt above, the emphasis is as much on 'gender equity' and 'equity' in general. In the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (FDRE-MOWA 2006) that notes its influence from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN 1995) and the Beijing +5 and + 10 processes, the causal presumptive and frequent links between gender equality, development and education are, in the introduction, many:

Gender inequality is entrenched in social, economic, cultural and political structures and thus closely intertwined with every development challenge ranging from the elimination of poverty to the promotion of peace and democracy. In other words, countries will not be able to combat poverty, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and ensure sustained development without a deliberate attempt to overcome gender inequality. In

⁶ The anticipated year is 2025 in the EDSP IV (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 6).

the last twenty years, there has emerged a wealth of knowledge and experience on the nature of gender based discrimination as well as the steps needed to achieve gender equality. It has also been realized that the attainment of equal rights between the two sexes and improved women's status benefits men as well. For instance educating girls translates into better conditions for the whole household, in terms of better health, nutrition and education for the family. An educated woman is more likely to delay marriage, practice family planning resulting in a smaller family size, more available food for the family, and resources to educate the children. Investing in girls' education therefore has high social and economic returns and is instrumental in achieving sustainable development and economic growth (FDRE-MOWA 2006: 1).

The instrumental thrust in the linking of gender equality, development and education, in the excerpt above, puts women and girls at the forefront of the Ethiopian development pursuit, but not always only for their own sake. In the first poverty reduction plan, Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), there had been a more explicit concern with the intrinsic value of educating women for women's own self-development:

Women's education is one of the important aspects of their self-development, and is closely related to their participation in productive activities, control over their own life and body, the education of their children (particularly daughters), and their negotiation ability vis-à-vis institutions and men (FDRE-MOFED 2002: 123).

Running though these policies, as it is expressed in the next Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), is a strong thrust on 'unleashing the potential of Ethiopia's women' (FDRE-MOFED 2006: 46). It is also important to emphasise here that this potential is not understood to be unleashed through education alone:

Unleashing the potential of Ethiopian women who constitute about half of the population is central to the PASDEP strategy. This involves liberating women from low-productivity tasks, and increasing their participation in the work force and social and political processes of the country. Measures to achieve this include the major push to increase girl's and women's education, to improve access to water supply and sanitation, to focus on services related to mothers and women's health, and to adapt agricultural programs and technical and vocational training to the needs of women (...). In addition, safeguarding rights such as access to land, credit, and other productive resources are central to the strategy, as is protecting women from the multiple forms of other deprivations, such as longer working days, and violence and discrimination against women, which are still widespread in the country (FDRE-MOFED 2006: 171).

Stephen J. Ball (2008) emphasises that rethinking and reimagining education rests on the invariable commitment entailed in education polices towards change and improvement from a state of inadequacy (Ball 2008: 5-6). In the Ethiopian context, education constitutes but one

policy strategy in the integrated pursuit to reach the goal of becoming a middle-income country by the year 2020-23 (FDRE-MOFED 2010: 1), or year 2025 (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 6). Depending on women's social, economic and political participation in society on equal terms with men, the commitment to bring women along as a prerequisite and resource for growth and transformation is, however, to a large extent, based on incorporating women and girls into education and non-formal training. No doubt, as a result of education reform in Ethiopia under the current EPRDF-government, access to education has increased significantly for both girls and boys, marking a clear shift in educational attainment from their parents' and grandparents' generations, also in rural areas. While the specificity of socio-cultural processes in the Ethiopian context is at the base of the policy documents addressed above, the forward-moving thrust in the educational policy and programmes towards development, and the causal presumptions implied that link up with gender equality, resonates with international education policies. Hence, in the following I will provide three examples of the kind of causal presumptions that tend to inform international education policies from the perspective of development and gender equality.

Global discourses on education, gender equality and development

Drawing on a Michel Foucault's (1972) understanding of discourse, Ball asserts that policy discourses 'mobilise truth claims and constitute rather than simply reflect social reality' (Ball 2008: 5). It is therefore this discursive persuasiveness that will be at the centre of the discussion in this section when giving a few examples of the causal presumptions that tend to follow global initiatives and interventions in education. Founded on the basic assumption of education as a human right, the background document for the first global UNESCO-initiated Education for All (EFA) conference in Jomtien in 1990⁷, *Meeting basic Learning Needs: A Vision for the 1990s*, states under the title: *Educating Girls: An Investment in Development*:

Evidence is overwhelming that education improves health and productivity in developing countries, and that the poorest people benefit the most. The evidence further shows that when schools open their doors wider to girls and women in particular, the benefits multiply. A more educated mother raises a healthier family. She has fewer and better educated children. She is more productive at home and in the workplace and is better able to get further education. Indeed, failure to raise women's education to a par with men's exacts a high development cost – in lost opportunities to raise productivity and income, and improve the quality of life (EFA 1990: 34).

⁷In fact, the UNESCO-initiated Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa in Addis Ababa in 1961 had agreed on providing universal literacy in Africa by 1980 (Tekeste 2006).

The mainly instrumental rationale underpinning the above argument for educating women and girls relates to both issues of poverty alleviation and development. The educated woman promotes change in the family, both in relation to reproduction (by giving birth to fewer children) and (work) productivity. The general health of the family is presumed to be improved, and she makes sure that her own children get an education. In the second example, paragraph 69 in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (UN 1995), based on a human rights perspective on education:

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empower women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable (UN 1995: 26).

The link between education and gender equality is strong in the above excerpt, where education is presumed to spill over to more equal relationships between women and men. While the issues in this paragraph of the Beijing Declaration on education are concerned with women's empowerment and participation in decision-making processes in society as change agents, the link between education's social and economic returns in terms of development and economic growth is also reaffirmed. The mainly instrumental rationale underpinning the above excerpts is based on the returns from education, both in social and economic sense in the society but also in terms of lower fertility, better health and education in the family.

A direct causal link between gender parity in education and gender equality in society is also made in the third and last example taken from *Gender achievements and prospects in education. The GAP report. Part One* (UNICEF 2005), and which declares:

Educating girls has cascading benefits. Educated women are less likely to die in childbirth; more likely to have healthy babies; more likely to send their children to school; are better able to protect their children and themselves from HIV/AIDS, trafficking and sexual exploitation; and are more likely to contribute fully to political, social and economic development.

Educating girls benefits both boys and girls. The most effective way to ensure quality education for all children is to eliminate the barriers for girls: schools that are

long distances from home, school fees and other hidden costs, lack of safe water and sanitation, discrimination and the threat of violence.

Gender parity in education will lead to gender equality in society. Educating girls is a means to an end. Quality education is the gateway to equal access to information, opportunity, self-determination, and political and social empowerment (UNICEF 2005: 5, bold in original).

The intrinsic value of education for the girls is stated explicitly here, but the instrumental argument for educating girls is still strong. Girls' education is presumed to have cascading benefits for a range of issues, for both boys and girls. While pressing issues like HIV/AIDS, trafficking and sexual exploitation have been added to the list of issues that will be affected by girls education, health benefits for the women and their children – who more likely will be sent to school if their mothers are educated – are again emphasised. Education's role in enhancing women's contribution to political, social and economic development, as well as women's self-determination in terms of political and social empowerment and equal opportunities, is also presumed as significant in this last example. The causal assumption that gender parity in education will lead to gender parity in society, as in the Beijing Declaration above, is also stated. In the first two examples, the link between educating girls and economic development is also mentioned as, 'lost opportunities to raise productivity and income' (EFA 1990: 34), and as, 'the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable' (UN 1995: 26). Christine Heward asserts that, '[w]hile gender, education and development practices on the ground are increasingly complex, the assumption and concerns of the dominant [global] discourse remain those of education as a return on investment' (Heward 1999: 4; see also Wynd 1999). In the present context of 'educational globalisation', Ball also notes that there is an 'increasing colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives' (Ball 2008: 39). It is this economic understanding of education that will form the basis for the discussion in the section below.

Doxa in the global educational field

In the context of a global field of education, national education policies are increasingly influenced by international trends (e.g. Tikly 1999, 2001). In a Bourdieuan (1984, 1985, 1988) understanding of 'field', corporate agents' positions in the global field of education will be legitimated by a particular *doxa* that, by conceptualising education as 'good', can misrecognise the issues of power and domination at play. For example, Leon Tikly (2004) asserts that, since education is a key aspect of the World Bank and other multilateral agencies

vision of development, education has become central to the new imperialism in the postcolonial era. Likewise, Jill Blackmore notes that, 'educational policies globally have been increasingly framed by neoliberal political ideologies during the last decades of the twentieth century' (Blackmore 2005: 243). Discourses about development could in Tikly's opinion be interpreted in a Foucaultian sense, as aspects of an 'emerging global governmentality' (Tikly 2004: 178), where education becomes part of a 'disciplinary technology' (ibid: 168). Following from this neo-liberal ideology is also the economic role education is presumed to have in poverty reduction, as in the UN report *Rethinking Poverty*, from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs: 'Education can play a key role in poverty reduction. Research shows that education and human resource investments promote economic growth. (...) Thus, education can have a positive impact on poverty reduction owing to its growth-promoting effects' (UN-ESA 2009: 122).

In the case of reaching gender equality in education, Christopher Colclough, Pauline Rose and Mercy Tembon claim, however, that economic growth is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition (Colclough et al. 2000: 26). Using Guinea and Ethiopia as two cases, these writers point to the fact that there are poorer countries that have not reached full enrolment in primary school but where the gender gap is closing, while richer countries with higher levels of general enrolment might have larger gender gaps. A related point is that there is no necessary link between education and a relevant professional career (e.g. Teigen 2006; Tjomsland 2009)⁸ and, likewise, that it cannot be taken for granted that education actually challenges prevailing gender norms and hegemonic gender-structures (e.g. Arnot 2002). Stephen Klasen, who is convinced that gender inequality in education undermines economic growth, admits that in fact this causality cannot be proven (Klasen 2002: 370). Critics like Zoë Oxaal also points to the issue of *direction* in the causality underlying these economic arguments on the outcome of education:

Much of the theoretical debate about the role of education and economic growth has focused upon whether education is productive in an economic sense. There is much evidence that levels of schooling amongst the population are highly correlated with levels of economic development. But whether the former has helped cause the latter, or whether causality runs from income growth to educational expansion, remains open to debate (Oxaal 1997: 3).

⁸ Mari Teigen (2006) notes that the number of Norwegian women pursuing higher education is now slightly higher than that of men, but women are less active on the labour market (as many work part-time to manage child-care and household chores), they are in the minority when it comes to the most prestigious jobs (for instance as professors), and are likewise lacking behind in terms of salary. While Norway is often referred to as a gender-equal country, women in Norway are in fact the most 'traditional' in Europe when it comes to choice of occupation (ibid.).

Fazal Rizvi notes a global convergence in the 'neo-liberal imaginary in education policy', since similar policy solutions to educational problems tends to be accepted by nation states that otherwise have different social, historical and economical characteristics (Rizvi 2006: 200; see also Dale 2000). Writing on the Ethiopian context, Tekeste (2006) notes in the same vein that perspectives presuming a direct link between investment in education and development of society, in line with Theodore W. Schultz's human capital perspective on education (e.g. Schultz 1960, 1961), is not applicable in any context at any point in time:

It is only when the economy is growing that investment in education can lead to returns in terms of higher income for the individual investor and consequently an increase in national income. In stagnating or stagnant economies returns on educational investment can actually be negative as a growing number of unemployed and unemployable secondary school graduates can testify (Tekeste 2006: 14).

If conceptualising the neo-liberal political ideology within Bourdieu's theoretical framework where (international and national) agents' positionings and representations of these positions in the global field of education is legitimised by a *doxa*, the causal link presumed between investment in human capital through education *and* development of society as economic growth can come to seem 'natural' since the arbitrariness of this claim, and the power underlying it, risks being misrecognised (cf. Bourdieu 1977: 163-4). For example, the inclusion of girls in education from the perspective of global rights-based as well as social justice perspectives on schooling (e.g. Unterhalter 2007), allows, in Blackmore's critical discussion of how rights discourse and neoliberal understanding of choice operate together in global education policies, gendered, racialised and classed aspects of neoliberal economics and politics to pass unquestioned (Blackmore 2005: 246-7).

The question is who dominate the global education field when education is based on an understanding of development as economic growth. Following Ball (2008), the major international institutions that influence the education field are: (1) the World Bank, with its focus on privatisation in education, and focus on primary education rather than higher education (e.g. Brock-Utne 2003; Tjomsland 2009), (2) OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), through its research work and accomplished advisory role, and the seeing of education as any other institution in terms of performativity within a neoliberal framework (see also Rizvi & Lingard 2006), and (3) WTO (World Trade Organisation), with its focus on breaking down barriers for transnational capital to do whatever it wants, wherever and whenever it wants, also in education (Ball 2008: 36).⁹ Nelly P. Stromquist also notes that the 'growing integration between economics and schooling is shaping both the knowledge that is considered legitimate and the forms schooling will take' (Stromquist 2002: 90). This economic growth aspect of education has also been strengthened by the notion of a global 'knowledge economy', where, according to Roger Dale, "'knowledge" has taken over from "production" as the key driver and basis of economic prosperity' (Dale 2005: 146; see also Robertson 2005; Ball 2008). In fact, doubts about compatibility between education and economic growth has effectively been subsumed in the term 'knowledge economy' itself.

Even though neo-liberal perspectives on education, basing development on economic growth are contested (e.g. Wolf 2002, 2004), the causal presumptions underlying these perspectives are seeping into national polices together with loans and funding (Heward 1999; see also Rizvi 2006; Tekeste 2006). In Ball's understanding of policy discourses as constitutive of how reality is understood, '[p]olices are very specific and practical regimes of truth and value and the ways in which polices are spoken about, their vocabularies, are part of the creation of their conditions of acceptance and enactment. They construct the inevitable and the necessary' (Ball 2008: 5). The way specific presumptions of causality are restated and reaffirmed in national and international polices alike might thus overrule complex contemporary processes on the ground. Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison and Ann Whitehead are concerned with how inaccurate representations about gender issues, together with essentialist notions of women, have become embedded in international development policies and feminist engagement with development alike (Cornwall et al. 2007b: 2; see also Cornwell et al. 2007a, Cornwall et al. 2008). These authors draw on Albert Hirschmann's contention that development needs to create and sustain belief in its own myths (Hirschmann 1967, in Cornwall et al. 2007b: 4) where heroic development interventions according to Emery Roe are envisioned along the story line of a 'fable' with 'happy endings' (Roe 1991, in Cornwall et al. 2007b: 6). More complex and nuanced empirical findings can also be downplayed in final policy documents in order to create agreement in international fora (Cornwall et al. 2007b: 9) and, likewise, when aligning national policies to global concerns. A one-sided focus on global influences on national educational policies from UN bodies and the

⁹ The fourth major influence comes from the European Union (EU) where the European countries (including Norway) are bound by the Bologna Convention with the goal of 'harmonising' higher education in Europe (Ball 2008).



Right: Mayshek Primary School (grade 1-8) (the top-texts on the wall above the periodic system are):

One who is uneducated is useless, like a millstone without grooves.

Educating girls, is educating half of the population.

Let's protect the children from abuse!!

Education is the foundation for development!!



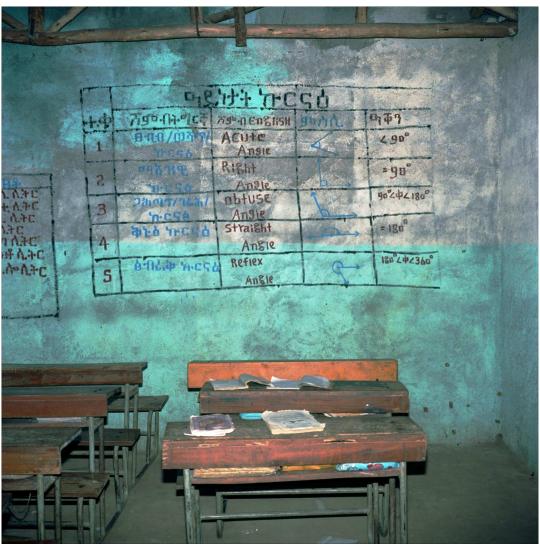


[Fig. 22]: Above: The periodic system is decorating one outside wall in Mayshek Primary School (grades 1-8). In the foreground is the school bell; an old bomb shell. Left above: A figuration of the Emperor Tewdros and the Imperial Lion together with the federal and regional flags of Ethiopia and a relief world map on the ground. Below: The hero Hayelom from the Tigrayan struggle has been added to the assemblage. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010, 2012.









[Fig. 23]: Above: Inside of a classroom in Mayshek Primary School (grades 1-8) with mathematics and the human respiratory system (left above) painted directly on the walls. Left below: The inside of a first year classroom in Kisanet Primary School, Endabaguna. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010.

World Bank, together with other influential donors like USAID, might, however, result in an overlooking of how these discourses are negotiated and appropriated in complex ways in practice on different levels in a given society. Ball emphasises that:

Policies are contested, interpreted and enacted in a variety of arenas of practice and the rhetorics, texts and meanings of policy makers do not always translate directly and obviously into institutional practices. They are inflicted, mediated, resisted and misunderstood, or in some cases simply unworkable. It is also important not to overestimate the logical rationality of policy. Policy strategies, Acts, guidelines and initiatives are often messy, contradictory, confused and unclear (Ball 2008: 7).

Writing on the Ethiopian context, Judith Narrowe likewise emphasises the need to examine, 'the dynamics of the *encounter* between centrally directed, international, development cooperation policies on the one hand, and local responses on the other' (Narrowe 2010: 129, italics added; see also Tikly 2001). It is a similar encounter that I will discuss below when turning to the school murals in primary schools in my study area of Asgede Tsimbla Wereda in Tigray, where policy discourses on education intersect with local means of representation.

Educational discourses in Tigrayan schools

Visiting different schools in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda, I was struck by the colourful murals that are decorating foremost primary schools with messages about education.¹⁰ These educational slogans are based on rights-based *intrinsic* gains for the individual and *instrumental* aspects of education in the context of democratic processes and development. Murals, found both outside on the school walls and inside the classrooms, represent academic subjects such as anatomical models, different animal names in Tigriña and English, geometry and the periodic system [Fig. 22 & 23, previous pages]. World maps and maps of the Tigray region, the national and regional flag, together with the national anthem, are also frequently represented. The elaborate figurations signifying Ethiopian and Tigrayan history together with a huge relief world map on the ground found in Mayshek Primary School are more exceptional though. These murals also list the principles of Ethics and Civics education. In the example below, the list of ethical principles is represented as it is written on the wall in Rahwa Primary School in both Tigriña and English (with my alternative translations in brackets) [Fig. 24]. While the order of these principles can differ, this list of ethical principles can also be found in image frames in government offices as Principles of Ethical Service:

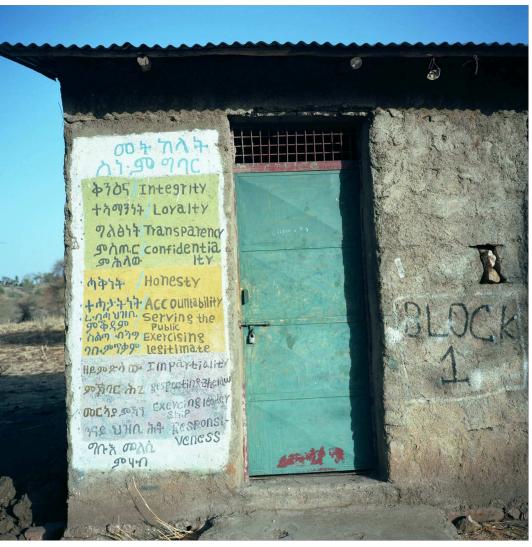
¹⁰ These primary schools are Endabaguna and Kisanet Primary Schools in the market town of Endabaguna, and the rural primary schools Mayshek, Edaga Hibret, Rahwa and Alogen.



Below: Mayshek Primary School (grade 1-8): The basic principles of ethical skills listed beside the map of Tigray region are:

Integrity (righteousness) Loyalty (trustworthiness/integrity) Transparency Confidentiality Accountability Honesty Exercising legitimate authority Impartiality Responsiveness Serving the public interest Respecting the law Leadership (being exemplary/model)





[Fig. 24]: Above and left above: Rahwa Primary School (grade 1-8) with a list of the Principles of ethics education. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010, 2012.

- Integrity (righteousness)
- Loyalty (trustworthiness, integrity)
- Transparency
- Confidentiality
- Honesty
- Accountability
- Serving the public interest
- Exercising legitimate authority (the last word has been left out here)
- Impartiality
- Respecting the Law
- Exercising leadership (being exemplary/model)¹¹
- Responsiveness

The principle outcomes of Civics education, as listed in Kisanet Primary School in the market town of Endabaguna below, are as follows:

- Democracy
- Supremacy [of the Law]
- Equality
- Justice
- Love for the country/patriotism
- Feeling of responsibility
- Devotion for work/industriousness
- Independence/self-reliance
- Economic use of resources
- Active community participation
- Pursuing knowledge/wisdom¹²

These principles of Ethics and outcomes of Civics education also point to the specific qualities of citizenship that are prioritised by the current government in Ethiopia. Education in these Tigrayan murals are also situated within the context of international conventions when drawing attention to aspects of human rights and rights of the child that is relevant in this particular context, as in Endabaguna and Edaga Hibret Primary Schools [Fig. 25 & 26].

The most common slogan in the murals, in the primary schools I visited, was: *Education is the foundation for development*?¹³ As in the examples from Kisanet Primary School in Endabaguna and Rahwa Primary School, this slogan when placed together with the image of the female and male graduate student in graduation attire – which in the Ethiopian context means American-style black robe and square hat ('mortar board') – links gender equality in education with development. The text accompanying the mural that shows a

¹¹ Leadership is also the common translation in English in government offices, but *meraya mikan*, or *merayanet*, means 'becoming/being a [role] model/exemplary'.

¹² ዲሞክራሲ / ልዕልንት / ^ማዕሮንት / ፍትሓውነት / ፍችራ ሃገር / ስምዒት ሓላፍንት / ሀርኩትንት / ዓርሰኻ ምኸኣል / ምቹጣብ / ንሙፍ ተሳትፎ ሕ/ሰብ / ምንዳይ ፍልመት እዮም

¹³ ትምህርቲ መሰረት ልምዓት/ምዕባለ እዩ!!



Above: Democratic Rights

The right to speak The right to have an opinion, the right to gather, make public protests and ask for appeal The right to organise and move freely The right to self management The supremacy of the people

Right: Human rights

The right to life Free from illegal arrest Free from physical violation and harassment The right to human dignity and respect The right to have a religion of your choice



[Fig. 25]: Endabaguna Primary School (grades 1-8). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010.



Above: Rights of children

To live a life To have a name and a nationality To know ones parents or the one who has custody To not work above ones capacity To be free from punishment

At the bottom it says: Think about what to do, not about what to say.

Right: Outcomes of Civics and Ethics education

- 1. Flourishing of democracy
- 2. Supremacy of the law
- 3. Equality
- 4. Justice
- 5. Love for the country
- 6. Responsibility
- 7. Independence
- Economic use of resources
 Full participation of people
- 10. Acquiring knowledge
- 11. Devotion for work



[Fig. 26]: Edaga Hibret Primary School (grades 1-8). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010.

female and a male graduate student in Edaga Hibret Primary School, also declares more explicitly that: Education does not discriminate by sex [Fig. 27, next page]. Positioned side by side in graduation attire in the same visual proportions, these images and texts do not only suggest that girls and boys have equal prospects for reaching graduation, and that the development gained from education is attainable for both women and men, but also indicate that both female and male students are needed in the country's development pursuit. The slogan accompanying the image of the female and male students at the gate in Alogen Primary School is also clear about what it takes to be able to gain something from education: Be hard-working to achieve your goals!! [Fig. 28]. In Rahwa Primary School the message on the top of the image representing a female and male student, similarly declares: To accomplish our wishes, we have to intensify our efforts. In this mural a torch is placed between the female and male student. The torch has a reference in the Tigrayan struggle as people, who where engaged in mobilising others, were called *shig weyenti*, 'torches for the revolution'. In fact, the torch is also used as a symbol on the fencing around the Tigray Regional State Education Bureau's new building in Mekelle, and points, in the Tigrayan context, beyond knowledge as enlightenment. The torch, as a symbol in this context, points back to mobilisation in the sense that knowledge enables the educated to take the lead and show the way for others, with an implicit appeal to follow those who carry the light. While these murals draw on causal presumptions that link up with both national and international policy discourses on education, the way these visual and textual slogans are communicated, as murals, also draws on local conventions and meanings of certain kinds of representation.

First, the murals with the painted images of the female and male graduate students resemble the photographs taken on this occasion in Ethiopian photo studios, also in Tigray [Fig. 29]. The value graduation photographs have attained when finishing any kind of course or education after secondary school, for both female and male students in the present context in Tigray (and elsewhere in Ethiopia), is significant here. Enlarged and placed in golden frames and put up on the wall at home, with smaller versions tucked into albums and passport size versions exchanged with friends, these photographs constitute the person as educated, representing a visualisations of *success* – in terms of 'social capital' in a Bourdieuan sense – and hence a visual token of status gained that is also acquirable for women. Secondly, I interpret the textual messages in these school murals as relating to the tradition of using proverbs ($\mathcal{P}^n \Lambda / misla$) to guide moral conduct in interpersonal relations of love (and conflict), including relations to God. Most homes, where at least one of the members are literate, would have proverbs handwritten commonly on A4 pieces of paper displayed together with posters

135



Above: Mayshek Primary School (grade 1-8) Welcome.

Below: Edaga Hibret Primary School (1-8):

Education does not discriminate by sex. To accomplish your wish, beware of Aids!!





[Fig. 27]: Education is the foundation for development!! Kisanet Primary School (grades 1-8), Endabaguna. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010.





Above: Alogen Primary School (grade 1-8): Be hardworking to achieve your goals!!



[Fig. 28]: Above : Rahwa Primary School (grades 1-8). The text around the mural says: *Eductation is the foundation for development* (left and right side). The top-text: *To accomplish our wishes, we have to intensify our efforts.* The torch between the female and male student has a reference to the Tigrayan struggle. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2012.







[Fig. 29]: Above: A photograph of a female graduate student takes up the centre of the poster decorating the outside of Photo Desta's studio in the regional capital Mekelle in Tigray. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010. Left: Kebra's graduation photographs when getting her certificate from TTI (Teacher's Training Institute) in Adwa. Photo: Frew Video Center, Adwa, 2005.

of religious personages, images of women in traditional attire conducting the coffee ceremony, and Indian actors from Bollywood films (that have long been appreciated in this area). The school-mural draw, in my opinion, on this tradition of communicating short messages of wisdom: as what is unquestionably *right* in a moral sense. Finally, the primary school murals utilise the inside and outside school walls in a manner similar to the use of the blackboard in the classrooms: as a *surface* where knowledge is represented and described by a teacher who knows the indisputable *truth* (see also Poluha 2004). While education policies constitute their own regimes of truth and value in Ball's (2008) Foucaultian understanding of discourse, the impact of the educational slogans in the Tigrayan school murals is reinforced by the moral implications of proverbs and the truth-value assigned to written knowledge. The fact that a differentiation of ideological slogans from academic knowledge becomes difficult in this context also has a bearing on learning practices in Tigrayan classrooms (which I will return to in Chapter 7).

In spite of an integrated pursuit in Ethiopian policies, plans and programmes addressed in earlier sections of this chapter, the national and international policy discourses concur on the causal presumption underlying education as a forward-moving strategy towards development. Anticipating a linear pursuit running from education, through gender equality to development, the story line of this 'fable' (Cornwall et al. 2007b), is also imbued with the expectation of a 'happy ending' with equitable gender relations and economic prosperity for all. One slogan in Kisanet Primary School in Endabaguna is telling in this respect: *Learning means making your life comfortable forever*!¹⁴ It is from this perspective that I will discuss Tigrayan female and male students' own perceptions of education as these emerged in questionnaire answers in the explorative education survey (see Appendix 1).

Female and male students' perceptions of education

Going through the written answers in the exploratory education survey to the questions: *-Do you think education is important/beneficial? Why?*¹⁵, there were two themes that caught my initial attention. The first theme was a collapsing of education and knowledge where knowledge is constituted more as an object than as something that is understood. One example is the female eighth-grade student from the rural school writing: *-Education is*

¹⁴ ምስትምሃር ማለት ንዝልአለም ሂወትምዋዕዓም ማለት እዩ!

¹⁵ My initial question in English was -Do you think education is important? Why? This was translated into: ትምህር ተ. ጠቻሚ ዶ ይመስለኪ?/ካ? ንምንታ ድ? in Tigriña, and which I later realised is closer to -Do you think education is beneficial/useful?

knowledge. (...).¹⁶ One male eighth-grade student in the market town writes: *-It is said* [*education is important*] *because of the knowledge it has.*¹⁷ A male classmate also writes: *-If you learn you get knowledge.* (...) *What knowledge does an uneducated person have*?¹⁸ The last answer also suggests that knowledge is limited to what you get in school. Two female eighth-grade students in the same class also write (probably in cooperation since their answers are identical): -Since education is knowledge, and since knowledge leads the way, it/education is important.¹⁹ In this last answer knowledge itself will 'lead the way' [to a better future].

The second theme that first caught my attention in the questionnaire answers suggests an explicit link between education, development and processes of change, as in the following answers from three female eighth graders in the market town: -Education is development (**Ponn**/miəbale) for the country.²⁰ -Because if the society is educated, people are developed.²¹ -Because, if the society is educated the country is developed.²² One male eighth-grade student from the same class writes: -If you have knowledge it will be growth (618-14/2010et) for the *country and the family*.²³ Further, two male eleventh graders write: *-Because education is the* basis of development (mibbale) for yourself and your country; without education there is no kind of change ($\hbar \sigma \cdot n$ /lewt'i) in your life.²⁴ -Especially, if all parents were educated, our country Ethiopia would have been changed/transformed (+#, ec/teaevira). So education is *important*²⁵ The following female eleventh grader writes: *-If you are educated you can* change/develop (*hihorf*/kitliwit') yourself, your family and your country.²⁶ Education in these answers is given a pivotal role for change and development to take place regarding oneself, one's family and the country; in short, on all levels of society. Discussing the underlying thrust of similarity in these answers about education's role as foundation for development with two (male) secondary school teachers, they confirm that these are also discourses used by the teachers.²⁷ On being asked, one school director says with a laugh: 'It's the political answer'.²⁸ Students' answers are also much in line with prevailing global education discourses that link education and development in forward-moving processes of

- ²⁴ Education questionnaire M11U-20.
- ²⁵ Education questionnaire M11U-14.
- ²⁶ Education questionnaire F11U-7.

¹⁶ Education questionnaire F8R-4.

¹⁷ Education questionnaire M8U-15.

¹⁸ Education questionnaire M8U-19.

¹⁹ Education questionnaire F8U-8/12.

²⁰ Education questionnaire F8U-1.

²¹ Education questionnaire F8U-10.

²² Education questionnaire F8U-13.

²³ Education questionnaire M8U-2

²⁷ Fieldwork notes 22 May 2009/*Ginbot* 14, 2001 E.C.

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 26 May/Ginbot 18, 2001 E.C.

change. In fact, it seems justifiable to suggest, with Borneman (1992), a recurring emplotment of the national and global policy discourses on education, as master narratives of development, in these female and male students' answers. There are, however, questionnaireanswers that relate development to local perceptions of obligations in social relationships.

More or less implicit in the students' answers is the responsibility that an educated person has. One male student in eighth grade in the market town writes: -Education is important because if I am educated I can develop my relatives, parents, and my country.²⁹ One female eighth-grade student in the same class writes: -Once we are educated and have gained knowledge, we will educate our parents and siblings.³⁰ The passing on of knowledge to siblings and parents also includes other people (like neighbours) who have not been fortunate enough to get an education, in the pursuit to develop/change/transform the society/country. This point also relates to the issue of taking on roles as leaders when educated and refers to the use of the torch as a symbol in the educational context in Tigray discussed above. For example, one male student in eighth grade in the market town writes: -You can become one who knows, a knowledgeable person, get a job, [and] lead your parents and your country.³¹ One female student in eleventh grade writes: -When educated we can do *important work; when educated we can lead our country.*³² That education puts one in a position to lead others also surfaces in the short stories that female and male students were asked to write about their future on the last page of the questionnaire, and which I will return to below. The fact that both female and male students envision themselves leading, even their own parents, marks a shift from authority acquired by age to authority acquired by education. It also shows that leadership is envisioned as both a female and male obligation.

There were also other themes surfacing in the education questionnaire as answers to the question: -Do you think education is important/beneficial? Why? Mentioned by both girls and boys, on a more practical level, is the prospect through education of either getting a government job with a salary or, if one does not qualify, creating one's own job/business. This is in line with the seeing of educated youth as 'job creators' in the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP III) (FDPE-MOE 2005: 11) and, in ESDP IV, seeing education as creating 'competent and self-reliant citizens' (ESDP IV) (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 52). Along this line of reasoning, many of the students also mention the prospect of education enabling oneself and one's family to reach improved living conditions and improving one's

²⁹ Education questionnaire M8U-1.

³⁰ Education questionnaire F8U-5. ³¹ Education questionnaire M8R-14.

³² Education guestionnaire F11U-12.

level/rank/position/status in society: in Tigriña encompassed in the word dereja (只义). The desired *dereja* is either described as 'good' (bft \$\frac{1}{5}/ts\vec{i}buq) in terms of 'better', or 'higher' (*nnon/zileale*). One female eighth-grade student from the rural school writes: -*The* importance of learning is to have a good life and achieve a good level/position.³³ One male student in the same class writes: -[Education is important] for knowledge, because if you learn and when you reach a higher level it is development (miəbale) for your country.³⁴ In this last answer, reaching a higher level is perceived as more than a self-fulfilling endeavour, but also as the individual's contribution to the development of the country. Female and male students on all levels and across rural and semi-urban areas mention this reaching of a better and/or higher level/rank/position/status, and more so in their short stories about the future that I will come back to below. The acquiring of knowledge/skills to be able to create new innovations through science and technology in the vision of both the Education and Training Policy and the intensified focus on science and technology in ESDP IV, is only mentioned by two male eighth-grade students from the rural area in their answers as to why education is important/beneficial. One of them writes: - To be able to apply different innovations, without uneducated society.35

Relating to this overall development/change pursuit by way of education, many female and male students across grades, as well as rural and semi-urban locations, mention education as a means to gain awareness ($\hbar + \hbar \eta \eta \eta/ate\underline{h}asasiba$), to get rid of ignorance ($\pounds \uparrow + \pounds C f/dinqurna$) and backward attitudes/thinking ($\pounds \cdot \hbar C h + \hbar \eta \eta \eta/di\underline{h}ur$ ate<u>h</u>asasiba), backwardness ($\pounds \cdot \hbar c \cdot \hbar / di\underline{h}iret$) and poverty ($\pounds \cdot \eta \cdot \hbar / di\underline{k}inet$). One female eleventh-grade student writes: *-The reason I would say education is important/beneficial is because it eliminates any backward attitudes*.³⁶ One female eighth-grade student from the rural area writes: *-It's important because your knowledge will enable you to live a good life rid of ignorance and poverty*.³⁷ A tenth-grade male student writes: *-It rids us of backwardness and poverty*.³⁸ Related to the effect of education on awareness, one female eleventh-grade student writes more specifically: *-Education is very important because it is the way to social, economic and political development, and to know ourselves* (in English).³⁹ A sense of self-

³³ Education questionnaire F8R-2.

³⁴ Education questionnaire M8R-1.

³⁵ Education questionnaire M8R-8.

³⁶ Education questionnaire F11U-9.

³⁷ Education questionnaire F8R-11.

³⁸ Education questionnaire M10U-3.

³⁹ Education questionnaire F11U-10.

knowledge is also at the base of the answers from three female eighth-grade students in the market town, writing: *-When gaining knowledge you can express your thoughts/opinion.*⁴⁰ While their identical answers run counter to this assumption, my attention was drawn to the fact that many students copy from each other, not only in their questionnaire answers.

To the question why education is beneficial/important, there is only one response from a female student that deals with gender issues in her answer. This could of course be a consequence of not asking explicitly about it in the questionnaire. This one female ninthgrade student writes: -Education is very important. For example, educated manpower is necessary in the development of a country. In previous times women were dependent on men. Now, however, when equality is secured, she can utilise her chance (bs: A/addil; fate) to work hard and learn.⁴¹ An issue that can be understood as related is the prospect of becoming independent/self-reliant/managing on one's own (**βC**λh hh, h/arsika kilka) more generally, which both female and male students mention. One female tenth-grade student answers: -Education is important, because first of all you will gain knowledge, then you can be selfreliant/independent (ንባዕልኻ ርእስኻ ትኸእል/nibaəlika risika tikil; literally, 'you can be the head/leader of yourself²)⁴². There is also a notion underlying many of the answers that what is learned through education is truly one's own and lasting. A female ninth grader writes: -(...) What you have learnt is yours; no one can take away your education, it lasts forever.⁴³ Likewise, a female eighth grader from the rural area writes: -(...) Once you are educated, the knowledge will not leave your brain. I will release myself from dependency and become a teacher and help release those who live bad lives.⁴⁴ This last answer also refers back to the fact that the independence gained through education, carries a *responsibility* that goes beyond the improvement of one's own life. As in these two ninth-grade female students' answer: -[Education is important] because you can be independent and support your country.⁴⁵ -Because you can be independent. When you are independent you have a responsibility for your country.⁴⁶ Independence in terms of self-reliance and the ability to manage on one's own is not, then, oppositional to taking responsibility for others but is understood as a consequence of this independence. This sense of obligation also runs through the students' short stories about how they imagine their futures addressed below.

⁴⁰ Education questionnaire F8U-3/4/6.

⁴¹ Education questionnaire F9U-7

⁴² Education questionnaire F10U-11.

⁴³ Education questionnaire F9U-21.

⁴⁴ Education questionnaire F8R-4

⁴⁵ Education questionnaire F9U-13.

⁴⁶ Education questionnaire F9U-14.

Imagining a future through education

In many cases the students returned to the issues discussed above and provided an elaboration of their perceptions of education when they on the last blank page of the questionnaire were requested to: *-Write a short essay/story about your wishes for the future (education, job, family/marriage, children, etc.)*?⁴⁷ These specifications were meant to get them started, and were based on issues commonly informing life trajectories in this area, but with the risk of limiting alternative stories. While I had presumed that a short story would fill one page, 'short' seemed in most cases to have been interpreted as a few sentences, and which means that the stories below are cited in full. Again stories are told matter-of-factly, as in the examples below written by two female eighth graders, the first from the primary school in the market town, and the second from the rural area:

When I have got a job I will support my parents. I will graduate starting from Diploma to Masters, I will go abroad, I will help my family. I wish after having finished school and graduated with a degree I will support my parents and my family. I will help my family and educate my siblings and my country. When I have finished school I will live a good life, get married and when I have children, I want them to graduate starting from kindergarten to Masters. When I'm getting old, I want (*P.R.A./yideli*) them to hold me in high regard. My wish (*P.P.Y.B./yiminey*; 'my hope') is that my children will help their children. I want to live a good life.⁴⁸

I want (*yïdeli*) to learn and get a good result. I want to help my parents. When I get a good result I will help my family. Having learned eighth grade I want to move from Tabia Mayshek to learn in another [place] because I want to continue learning and get a good result. When I have got it, and have left my bad marriage, I want to contribute in some way to my sisters and my parents. I want to learn and reach a good level (*dereja*) of education, to become a competitor in school, so I can become a student in university or college.⁴⁹

These female students see themselves as continuing education to university level. The responsibility that education entails for giving something back to parents, siblings, their own children and the country is also central in their short stories. Marriage and childbirth is in the first story envisioned to come *after* education. While girls (especially in the rural areas) might still be married underage at around 15 (the legal age is 18), what caught my attention is also the mention in passing in the second story about leaving the 'bad marriage' (arranged by her parents). In the questionnaire she states that she is 16, and has ticked off the box for 'engaged'. Hence, she sees herself going through with this marriage, but also that she will be able leave it later *through* education and good results in school. The case is also that she does not see marriage as breaking off her education. The first of these female eighth-grade students

⁴⁷ ንመፃአ. አንታይ ክትገብሪ/ር ከምትደልጹ/ሊ ሓዒር ታሪክ ፀሓፊ/ፍ? (ከትመሃሪ/ር፣ ክትሰርሒ/ሕ፣ ቤተሰብ ክትምስርቲ/ት፣ ሓዳር ክትገብሪ/ር፣ ቆልዑት ክትወልዲ/ድ ወዘተ)

⁴⁸ Education questionnaire F8U-5.

⁴⁹ Education questionnaire F8R-6.

also mentions going abroad. In fact, both female and male youth in this region talk a lot about going abroad, and do leave to work in Sudan or Arab countries (if not trying to reach a Western country). In the pressured economic situation – including the scarcity of land for the younger generation in the rural areas – this strategy implies an attempt to improve their lives and support their families if their educational pursuit is disrupted, or discontinued, by low marks. The story below written by a male eighth-grade student in the market town proposes a similar life-trajectory:

First I will finish primary education in Endabaguna, then secondary school in Endabaguna; I have a hope (1992, 1/timnit) to study at Mekelle University. When I have joined Mekelle University I wish (*PP*¹/*yimine*; 'hope') to graduate with a diploma and then graduating with a doctorate [degree]. If I manage to have a doctorate. I can work properly on my own. I can also take care of my younger siblings and try to persuade them to work like me. When I'm 22 years of age and have finished school and started work I will marry. When I have married with the girl that I want to marry, she can also have a job. Then I will have 2 children because, first of all, I wish (ngo'/zimine; 'hope') to live well and become rich. My children will start learning in kindergarten, and when they start [school] I will advise them so that they will pass with a good rank (dereja); in such a manner I will educate them. When they have finished kindergarten I will send them to Mekelle to learn in primary school there, and when they have finished grade 1-8 in Mekelle, I want them to finish as 1st or 2nd in rank. If they work properly in school I will provide them with books and exercise books. If learning properly, when they have finished [grade] 10-12 all is possible; I will advice and persuade them like this. Then they will go to Addis Ababa to learn, when they have learnt at Addis Ababa University, they will go abroad and continue education in Australia. I wish for them (29")?(A"9")/?imineyelom; 'I hope for them') to learn properly and finish university with good marks. When they have finished education they can go to Australia if it's God's will (nay Amlak hasab; literally, 'God's thought').50

Projecting his educational pursuit all the way to a Doctoral Degree and paired with the intention to help his siblings to work like him (to become educated), to educate all his (future) children, is an intention emphasised by most students in this survey, and would, no doubt, give education a generational momentum if carried out in practice. In many of the stories, their children's education includes not only the trajectory from kindergarten to university but, as in the above story, to go abroad 'if it's God's will'. This male eighth-grade student also expresses the common notion that through education '*all* is possible'. While many of the students in their stories head for education in colleges and universities, they are generally, with a few exceptions, not very specific about which field to study; rather, it seems that any field will do. In fact students are to a large extent assigned to a field of study according to their marks, and points to a narrowing of possibilities as the increased requirement for good marks intensifies after primary school. A common understanding is also that one's own

⁵⁰ Education questionnaire M8U-14.

choice of path through education and hard work might not always be enough if what one tries to accomplish is not God's will (a point I will return to in Chapter 4).

Another theme in these female and male students' stories is that the number of children they want differs significantly from their parents' and grandparents' generations, where between six and ten children were common. One eighth-grade male students from the rural area, writes:

For the future, by joining higher education I want ($\lambda \beta \Lambda$./*ideli*) to develop (*miabale*) my living, my knowledge for myself, and help my parents and my country. Similarly, I have a big hope to join the natural science field at a higher level in the university and study to become a physics researcher. I plan to stay unmarried for at least 5 years after my graduation from university. Then I will marry, it means I will establish a married life with my girlfriend 'Hirut'. Throughout my life I will have only three children. Then, I don't want ($\lambda \beta \beta \Lambda$./*aydelin*) to give birth to any more, in order for my children to grow up properly, to learn, and to know.⁵¹

While a few of the male students still expect their parents to choose a wife for them, the male eighth-grade student above is explicit about wanting to marry his girl-friend, and suggesting an understanding of married life as based on love and affection. Both the male students above also limit the number of children they want to two and three children. In fact, the number of children female and male, rural and semi-urban students want is a maximum of four children (defined as two girls and two boys). Two male and two female students in secondary school also mention family planning explicitly, as this female tenth-grade student writes:

What I want ($\eta R \Lambda / z \ddot{i} deli$) to do for the future is to learn properly and reach the desired level (*dereja*), I want (*P.R \Lambda / y \ddot{i} deli*) to teach and help my parents and my siblings to reach the level they want, and lead my society according to my gained knowledge. I will not take any kind of job. I want to protect and respect my family on the basis of what I have learnt. Afterwards I will use my awareness ($\Lambda - \Lambda \Lambda \eta / ate hasasiba$) and perspective ($\lambda < \lambda \Lambda P / area \ddot{i} y a$; 'view') on family planning to limit the number of children I want to have. When I give birth it will be in accordance with the principles of family planning. If I limit myself to have 3 or 2 I will be able to provide them with proper food, clothes and shelter and to educate them. When they are educated I will tell them in advance that I need rest and am tired so that they can support and take care of me. If I wasn't educated and didn't think about this there are many ways I could be harmed. I could be harmed by having too many children if not knowing how to use it [family planning].⁵²

The rationale for wanting fewer children expressed by both rural and semi-urban students is that it will increase the chances for their children to have a good upbringing, a good education and a better life. I also interpret the above female student's reference to being harmed as relating to the few possibilities former generations of women had to reduce childbirths, and the consequences this had for their health. Continued from earlier generations is the

⁵¹ Education questionnaire M8R-4.

⁵² Education questionnaire F10U-22.

expectation of being respected and taken care of in old age, and necessitated by public social security schemes being non-existent and pensions following from having had a government job being minimal. The tenth-grade female student above does not intend to take a job, but she nevertheless imagines herself taking a lead in society, and in the household, as a result of having an education. Most of the female and male students that took part in the education survey, from the rural and semi-urban areas alike perceive, however, education as leading to a government job or self-employment; placing both girls and boys in the role as breadwinners in urban areas. The following story from a female eighth-grade student from the rural area also provides some reflections on not making it in education:

I really want (*yideli*) to learn and to achieve a good result. I want to pay my parents back for educating me. Since they made an effort to educate me I want to finish my education with a good result. After finishing school I want to have a good life. If you learn and fail you will still have gained knowledge, and even if you cannot get a government job you shouldn't despair. If you despair about happening to fail, or think you will fail, it [education] is not without purpose or in vain. I want to reach a good level/status (*dereja*).⁵³

In this latter example education is given intrinsic value, irrespective of ending in a job or not. While her goal is to reach a good (in terms of better) level/status (*dereja*) through education, the value of the gained knowledge for one's own life is important here, as there is an increasing awareness among students that not everyone makes it in education. Nevertheless, the recurring answer to the question about the importance/benefit of education addressed above – to reach a better or higher level/rank/position/status – appears even more frequently in these short stories about their futures. A female eleventh-grade student writes:

What I want (*yideli*) to do in the future is to be educated and have a government job. If I learn and get a good result and pass to university, and if I graduate with good marks from university, it will be development (*miabale*) for me and for my country. I will take a government job that will benefit me and my family. When I have a government job and have reached a higher status/position (*dereja*) I will advise and teach my parents and siblings so that they can be educated like me and reach a good level (*dereja*).⁵⁴

To reach a better or higher *dereja* as a result of being educated cross-cuts students' gender as well as rural/semi-urban origin. This upward socio-economic mobility implied in these answers is, further, based on a vertical understanding of society, where classifications based on political positions and status means that *who* holds positions is in flux as individuals move up and down in the vertical power structure as gains or losses in status/wealth/position allows

⁵³ Education questionnaire F8R-8.

⁵⁴ Education questionnaire F11U-11.

(Messay 1999; see also Bauer 1977). No doubt education qualifies more people, including women, to compete for positions and status in society than just those men who, in historical times, competed for political power and wealth in Ethiopia. For example, Messay (1999) has emphasised the commitment to social mobility at the base of Ethiopian highland sentiments, where individuals move up and down in the vertical power structure as gains or losses in status/wealth/position allow. The sense of responsibility following from being educated, and which is a recurring theme in the Tigrayan students' answers and stories about their futures, does in fact resemble the redistribution practices of the former feudal system in Ethiopia based on 'clientship' (Messay 1999), or 'patron-client relations' (Poluha 2004).⁵⁵ Scott (1976) has conceptualised redistribution practices of patron-client relations as 'moral economy' that Aihwa Ong, in the present global context, defines as forming 'a web of unequal relationships of exchange based on a morality of reciprocity, mutual obligation, and protection' (Ong 2006: 199). My point here is that, while women are increasingly allowed to compete for status and positions, the aspiration for a better or higher level/rank continues to take as its basic presumption a vertical understanding of the social order. Female and male students' strong sense of responsibility when they want to bring their siblings, parents and their country along as they themselves reach better positions can, likewise, be placed in the redistribution practices of these patron-client relations of former feudal Ethiopia. Hence, the predominantly vertical social structure in the highland context of Ethiopia seems to pass unquestioned, and as such, continue to structure what is imagined in a vertical direction, to follow Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice here. The students' narrative accounts above where they envision themselves living different lives from their parents' and grandparents' generations, do, however, relate to the 'agentic orientation' of projection in Emirbaver and Mische's analytical perspective on agency, which incorporates the potential of imagination to reconfigure structural patterns of action through these students hopes, fears and desires for the future (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 971).

Education can also create (new) conformities. In fact, it was only one female student in ninth grade that answered 'no' to the question about whether education is important or not. When I asked her to specify why, I later realised that she had left without handing the questionnaire over to me at the end of the session, instead of standing up for her own point of

⁵⁵ As noted in Chapter 1, Messay (1999) emphasises that feudalism in the Ethiopian context has to be understood in the context of 'clientship' that mediated power and resources between rich and poor, and where a poor could rise to riches and power, and a rich could fall from power to poverty (see also Bauer 1977).

view. It is also from the perspective of standing out from the crowd that the following short story by a female eighth-grade student caught my attention:

When I have finished 10^{th} [grade] my wish (*yïmïney*; 'my hope') is to become a car driver. I want to live in a town where one can think of eating pasta, macaroni and rice. The reason I want to be a driver is that I feel very happy when I see women drivers. The thinking about becoming a driver has been an expressed wish since my childhood.⁵⁶

In spite of the groundbreaking challenge to gender roles that the fighter women represented by taking on tasks that before were considered male (including driving cars), there are not many (if any) female drivers in this particular area of Tigray today. While challenging gender norms explicitly can still have its price in terms of social sanctions (see Chapter 6), the questionnaire answers confirm that the situation for women and girls continues to change. While underage marriage is still at issue, especially in the rural areas in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda (a point I will return to in Chapter 5), some of the girls that have been married do in fact return to school. That the level of drop-out and repetition are similar for both girls and boys in the educational statistics from Tigray⁵⁷, is also confirmed in my exploratory education survey. When ticking off for number of female and male siblings, and how many of them go to school, difference between sisters and brothers as to *accessing* education is minimal and, hence, no longer only in favour of boys. Rather, the trend is that more boys than girls in the rural areas never go to school, or start late because of herding activities. Consequently, girls, in the rural area of my research, increasingly have more education than their husbands when marrying. While there are both mothers and fathers who have Diplomas and Degrees in this exploratory education survey, the fact that, in most cases, the students' parents have little or no education (and more so in the rural area), is another indication of the significant changes that have taken place from one generation to the next in the Tigrayan context.

Inclusions and exclusions based on having or not having education

Education can also create new inclusions and exclusions. Two proverbs (*misla*) were mentioned as answers to the question about whether education is important/beneficial in the education survey. The first proverb, written by a male tenth-grade student in the market town, and which I also found written in a mural in Mayshek primary school, says: *One who is*

⁵⁶ Education questionnaire F8U-1.

⁵⁷ Statistics reviewed in the *Education Statistics Annual Abstracts* from Tigray Regional State Education Bureau covers the school years between 2002/2003 (1995 E.C.) and 2009/2010 (2002 E.C.) (TRS-EB 2007, 2008, 2010).

*uneducated is useless, like a millstone without grooves.*⁵⁸ The second proverb written by two female students in tenth and eleventh grade in the market town, both with rural backgrounds, is simply: *For the uneducated there is no mercy.*⁵⁹ These proverbs suggest a disqualification of other (more traditional or practical) kinds of knowledges. This disqualification is also implicit in the answer that the peasant woman Nitsihiti (38) gives in an interview in 2002. Sharing household headship with her husband, and pregnant with her eleventh child, she says, when asked about the kind of knowledge she considers having:

-Ehe ... but what can you do? What kind of knowledge do you have?

I?

-Ehe.

What kind of knowledge I have? I don't have any (ሰ ቕ አ.ስ/sug ile; 'I keep quiet').

-But I think you know a lot, don't you?

Me?

-Ehe, about life; knowledge about life?

I? I don't know. My knowledge is minimal. I only know how to survive (literally 'how to eat and drink'). (Laughs). 60

Knowing how to survive, in the harsh rural environment where she lives, is not insignificant knowledge. Understood in the context of modern education, this knowledge becomes devalued in Nitsihiti's answer. When I ask her in the household survey if she thinks education is important, she says: *-It is very important, but we are weak (senef) [when it comes to education]. Knowledge is important, it leads the way. Other things die, but education will bring you forward.*⁶¹ In most cases, learning was not an option for these women when growing up. Others grew up as education started, but did not attend. I ask 'Aster' (38), a divorced, landless female head of household in the rural area, married early without any education, and struggling to make ends meet for herself and the three youngest of her then six children by way of a few cows, some hens and (seasonal) day-labour:

-If there had been education in the past ... would you have wanted to learn, or?

⁵⁸ ዘይተማዛሬ አይድሕን ዘይተወቐሬ አይዋሕን# Education questionnaire M10U-1.

⁵⁹ ዘይተማየረ ዘይተመሓሪ እዩ# Education questionnaire F11U-15 & F10U-1.

⁶⁰ Recorded interview 22 October 2002/T'iqimti 12, 1995 E.C. (Interview number 18A in Tigriña).

⁶¹ Household questionnaire 23 June 2009/Sene 16, 2001 E.C. (TM-15R).

Yes, had I been educated, had we been educated instead of starting married life, we say that if we had got all that knowledge, we wouldn't have been so miserable and could have gone far away afterwards and been better off (chases a chicken away); we wouldn't have been so miserable. Instead our brains were shut; we didn't enlighten our reason (Ang/libina; literally, 'our hearts') that could have told us how to make things better. Had there been a little of what is called moral support, hah! We have become lost, that's the way it is: it's just to stay hurdled in this ramshackle house. Illiteracy however, through education illiteracy will be eradicated little by little, and when it leaves, disappears, sleeps, by way of knowledge, then one can leave to another place and have one's problems lessened. Instead they brought us here, they harmed us and left us here without education; now, if you ask me to write my name, I cannot write it. I don't have it [that knowledge]. I don't know it. They say he hu (U U; Giaz alphabet), that's it, but we, except for preparing grain and filling our stomachs, we didn't ask what they were learning or how they could say what they did; about what they said, that's it, I never understood anything, I didn't know it at all. Now when you see the educated children and those who are going to school, we have low self-esteem, we have become worthless ($C\eta\eta/rikash$; 'cheap'), we have failed (*m*, *4*, *4*, *wediqua*; literally 'fallen') and been thrown away; we failed and became worthless that means. When you look at them you envy them. ... While they are educated and have come to know everything, I'm sitting here idle, they can read the letters they received; had we been educated, had they [our parents] sent us to school ... had they given us everything, we could have competed like everybody else, we could have known. If we were to be killed, we could have read it [the message] and known; we could have known everything that is coming. But ours [our life] is one of just thanking my Lord (Goytay) and begging Him to help you and give you food to eat, and then you sleep. That's all the knowledge we have; there is nothing else we know now.

-But then, when you were young Weyane [TPLF] was here; I think they started to talk about school. Were there talks about education then?

Yes, about education, school came to this area before I had given birth to these [6] children. When I gave birth to my first child school had come here, but instead of going to school we told ourselves that we couldn't possibly learn; we only went to collect firewood, to fetch water and weed, that's it; we didn't think that we could go to school like the rest of our people. While taking up married life we said; what's all this talk about going to school? What will it do to them? How is it? The fact is that if one had learnt and got good marks one would have been secured a job and a salary. The ones who failed have become inferior and useless. As for us, that's it, when we see them we say, hah, and can do nothing but looking. (...).⁶²

Aster's detailed narrative account clearly shows the schism that has arisen between those who have education and those who do not. The perception of education that surfaces in Aster's account, in terms being 'enlightened', and being able to handle 'everything that is coming', constitutes for her *the* way out of a miserable life. In her life, however, education represents a missed opportunity. When education was introduced in her village she did not demand to start school, nor did her parents urge her to learn; instead she was married. Aster mentions low self-esteem and worthlessness as a result of failing to have an education. She also addresses the generational schism arising from not having education while their children are learning where the 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1977) acquired through education impinges on the social status and respect acquired by age. When I ask her again in the household survey if she thinks education is important, she answers: *-You can develop your understanding and get*

⁶² Recorded interview 13 November 2008/Hidar 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 14 in Tigriña).

*what you want. If you have an education you can live a descent life.*⁶³ 'Tigist' (40), another peasant woman with no education sharing household headship with her husband, emphasises her responsibility to provide her offspring with education and allowing them to have a future according to their own thinking:

However, this is how I think; to educate my children, whether they are boys or girls, for them to learn at the university, to learn in college and to be able to identify what is good and what is bad in their own lives, and not like in the past when I was forced that means; I will not pressure them to marry. Theirs [their future] should be according to their own thinking. Next, in general, education is good for both men and women; I would say it's necessary. (...). However, I'm frustrated because I was not educated (laughs), for not being educated I'm frustrated. For where can I get it now? (Laughs).

-Could you have started now if you wanted?

To learn?

-Yes! Is it not possible?

It's not possible, it's not possible. I'm old (laughs), otherwise, I like education a lot, it's like a thirst for water, but what can I do? It's not possible. Otherwise, it would have been nice to have an education. However, it's not possible for me to start, I'm old and there are responsibilities at home, so how can I do it? Yes, how can I close up the house now and go to school leaving the animals (**7711-11**/*genzeb*; literally 'money') behind; how can I do that and leave? It's not possible. If it had been in the past, when I was the age of my children, but today it's impossible, it cannot happen.⁶⁴

While Tigist's 'thirst' for education could not be satisfied, she wants both her daughters and sons to learn and to decide themselves with whom and when to marry (her eldest daughter had in fact married her boyfriend from school). Like in Tigist's account, parents want to give their children the opportunity to learn that they did not have, and for them to have a better and less harsh life than they have had. This point is also present in the education survey, where the students, regardless of their own success in education, will see to it that their own children are educated. Again, this points to the generational aspects of the education project where every generation takes education a step further. When I came back in 2012, Tigist's next daughter in line had, however, been taken out of school after ninth grade and married when still underage. This suggests that there are considerations at play that gain priority over an educational trajectory and a presumed better life (see Chapter 5). This also suggests that parents are still prepared to use their power as elders in situations where the priorities of the younger generations differ from their own sentiments. Tigist's daughter is determined to continue school the following year, as her parents' had promised her, to make her comply with their wish for marriage. If she manages remains to be seen, as her husband, who is learning in

⁶³ Household questionnaire 24 June 2009/Sene 17, 2001 E.C. (TM-16R).

⁶⁴ Recorded interview 23 November 2008/<u>H</u>*ïdar* 14, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 22 in Tigriña).

church school to become a priest, might want to have a say about her continuation of education that goes against the agreement she has with her parents.

Missed educational opportunities and the reverse side of education

In the above narrative accounts, not having an education leads to being inferior and useless, including a feeling of frustration for possibilities that are closed off. It is also the case that not all fighter women utilised to the full the opportunity that education represented during the struggle. The female fighter and cadre Saba (50), later appointed *t'ernafit* (leader/organiser) of a local branch of Women's Association of Tigray, gives a glimpse into processes of inclusion and exclusions that has followed education from the struggle to the present:

-But during the revolution ... I think there was education ... that's what I heard... under the tree, under straw roofs (das), in caves, education was given like that in the countryside, in... in the wilds (bere<u>k</u>a). Was there this kind of education also for the fighters?

Yes, there was education. During periods of rest, after battles... after ... long marches, in their spare time, some of those who have been through third, fourth grade, would teach others. From this area too ... there were teachers, those who were in third grade three, fourth grade, who went there to teach. They would teach in the shade of a tree during periods of rest, even half an hour they would teach you. But me, if you want me to tell you, I didn't learn then ... it had to do with me. They used to load me with errands, many errands, then I couldn't grasp the lessons; but I had started writing my name. I didn't go beyond that, I only ran around working and never thought of learning. But those [women] who were there then, they learnt ... they became nurses, there was one like me it means, she works in the hospital now ... one was also assigned to the women's affairs department in Mayshek. There is also one who reached seventh grade or something by learning parallel [to her work]. ... Of those fighters who are now in leadership at zone [level], who lead the zone, lead the wereda, lead the region, were educated then. They made it to fifth [grade], they made it to sixth, they made it to seventh in the wilds (bereka) in the shade of a tree during their spare time that means. (...) Except that they added [education] later, but it was in the shade of a tree that they started learning ... they are the ones who are known now. I may have forgotten their names, but there were many who were learning then, it means. ... There is the leader of the wereda administration, for the *tabias* and everywhere, since he learned, he now has a Degree, a Diploma (laughs) that means. ... All of them, that's it, they were there learning under the tree, and then they completed [their education while working] in the region [as civil servants], they completed [while working] in the [administrations] in the region (...) there are also women that means. There was education, but concerning me; some of us were not capable (senef; weak). That's what I mean.(...) I never thought of learning to get a big salary. It was my choice (ana 2.9./memaretsi), I thought I would die. What was the use of education I thought, if I am going to die now? ... Others would survive I thought, but for me to learn and continue with a salary in the future, I never had a wish (*imp t/timnit*) for that. As to a wish [for the future], I only thought I would die. I didn't know what would happen to me. [How could I think of] earning a salary when I didn't know what would happen to me. That was my choice.⁶⁵

Earlier Saba had said, 'I made a mistake not to use the opportunity during the struggle to learn. I could have had a wenber (literally chair, meaning having a position) in the

⁶⁵ Recorded interview 3 November 2008/T'iqimti 24, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 11B in Tigriña).

administration now. ⁶⁶ Saba's account suggests that not all were able to prioritise education during the struggle. She also emphasises that those who did start their educational trajectory during the struggle were preferred when administrative positions where filled afterwards:

These people ... who didn't like the struggle at all, but that now have an education; they are the ones who are selected. It is education that decides, and since we didn't learn, we cannot say anything; we (76.8. A.B./naddilev), eh! If I had gone to school, where could I have been now? Meaning, I would say I would have had my salary and lived without worrying now. Because I didn't learn, I wasn't offered a job. ... Except for the fact that I didn't receive the [fighter] compensation either ... I cannot complain about not being offered a job [in the administration]. Since I didn't learn, I wasted my chance (6.8: A.g./addiley) myself. Had I learnt then, I could have had my own office. Meaning, I could have gained if I had pursued that objective myself. However, not being educated I couldn't get it [a job], since I didn't learn there is nothing I can say now. Others, those who are educated, the educated got them [the jobs]. It's about the educated that the government is talking now, it calls for the educated, the educated, the educated, that's it, and there is nothing that I can do about it. My own chance (bs: A/addil), I ruined it myself. (...) What year was it, 74 E.C. [1982] or so, they took me for training to be a cadre, they made me a cadre, a teacher for the people, they said. Then they took me [for training]. Then they gave me the task of leading the people, to be a leader (*t'ernifi*) for free [without any salary]. (...) I used to have a leading position (wenber; literally 'chair') here. Then I had to leave that job. (...).

-It was about education that means, since you didn't have an education you had to leave?

Yes! Heh, that's why I had to leave it [the job]. Since I didn't have an education I had to leave, otherwise I wouldn't have left that job. I'm hundred percent sure that's it (laughs). I'm hundred percent sure. (...). Since I had no education, I had to leave. Except for my lack of education there were no other shortcomings; that [education] was the problem.⁶⁷

Since Saba did not use the educational opportunities during the struggle, she found herself excluded afterwards. From being a leader during the struggle, she now makes a living from brewing *sïwa* (local millet beer). She is convinced that the lack of education is the reason for being excluded, and asserts that it is the ones who did not sacrifice anything during the struggle that benefit today. Saba blames herself, and possibly her fate (*addīl*; chance) for her lack of education. In the end she blames herself even for having ruined her fate/chance. Her reasoning about how she was excluded points also to the intricate relationship between individual choice, a persons' agency and *addīl* (fate/chance), which I will return to in the next chapter. For Saba, it is education that constitutes the present criterion for getting a position in the administration, or for getting a (government) job as a civil servant. This point is emphasised by the female combat fighter and former lieutenant Lula (41), living alone in the market town, surviving by selling a few bottles of beer every day from her house:

⁶⁶ Fieldwork notes 8 October 2008/Meskerem 28, 2001 E.C.

⁶⁷ Recorded interview 3 November 2008/T'iqimti 24, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 13B in Tigriña).

Now generally, having been a fighter is not a criterion; it is education. One who has finished education is offered a job, without an education there's no job. Now here, women in the administration itself, there have been women, there have been fighters, but since they didn't finish their education, they aren't there [now]. If they have an education they will get it, there's no such thing as respect for having been a fighter now. There's no position just because of having fought. Even a fighter, regardless of being a man or a woman, it's only those who have finished their education that get a job. Since this happens to be the criterion, everybody is striving now to make it, myself included, except for that my 'certificate' is in Addis Ababa, I could have continued. That's the way it is. Only those who have finished education get a job, otherwise there's nothing just because they were fighters.

-Meaning through education, the way [forward] is through education that means?

It has come to be through education.

-Yes.

A position is not occupied just because one was a fighter and trustworthy then, if you have an education you will be appointed, the government policy says that's how it is today.⁶⁸

In fact, 'Lula' had finished eighth grade during the struggle and in the time afterwards when she was stationed in Addis Ababa, but dropped out in ninth grade when demobilised. About the demobilisation of women she says:

The women though, even if they were fit, the period and time for war had passed. There were those [women] who were spared under the cover of education, many of those who had no education were demobilised and went home. Why? They were sent back to the society to live there, to give birth and start a family, that's what was said; they were demobilised.⁶⁹

Lula's account suggests that education was used as a criterion in the demobilisation of women after the struggle. In fact, when the Tigrayan contingent had to be reduced in the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) after the general elections in 1994, when the Parliament/House of People's Representatives had decided that the army was to be constituted by all the Ethiopian nationalities (Tsegay 1999), the majority of the 20-30.000 Tigrayans that were demobilised were women, under the pretext that they had insufficient qualifications (Colletta et al. 1996: 35). Instead of going back to her home place to start a family, Lula went abroad to take up work in different Arab countries, and had been arrested and imprisoned for illegal migration both by Eritrean and Yemeni authorities on two of her three trips across the Red Sea. Having had all her papers confiscated, including her school certificate (which she has not been able to replace afterwards), she could not continue her education as she wanted when finally returning to her home place. Consequently, she found herself part of a large

⁶⁸ Recorded interview 4 November 2008/T'ïqïmti 25, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 29B in Tigriña).

⁶⁹ Recorded interview 4 November 2008/T'iqimti 25, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 29B in Tigriña).

group of women in the market town trying to survive on brewing siwa, selling tea or injera (sour pancake, which is the staple food), and beer without much profit.

The importance of education for the female fighters is also emphasised by the previous leader of the Tigray Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau, Roman Gebreselassie, herself a former fighter with a Bachelor degree from Sweden (Roman 2000), and a Masters Degree from the Netherlands (Roman 2005).⁷⁰ Roman explains that, when the struggle was nearing its end, there was an intense discussion among the female fighters on how to strategise. The two options discussed were either to join the national defence force or to go the educational way and develop skills that would be needed in society. Roman notes that it was the latter that was opted for.⁷¹ When I cross-check this version of struggle history with the fighter woman Lula, she says resolutely: 'It was a political decision! We never discussed the option of entering the army. If they had [given me that option] I would have stayed. When the decision was taken to demobilise the women we were given three options; going home to establish a family, education, or being resettled in Dansha (an agriculture project in the western lowlands of Tigray). The leadership said the women had done enough, and was concerned about women going home and giving birth to replace all those people who had died during the struggle.' When I repeat Roman's assertion that there had been meetings among the female fighter to discuss this issue, Lula says: 'But she is part of the leadership! We [the *female fighters] were never included in any discussion about continuing in the army. During* the struggle I had fought paying with my sweat. If I had been given the option of continuing in the army with a salary, I would have chosen that. From the options we were given, I chose education, but since I had a daughter and lacked resources, I dropped out in ninth grade.⁷² While, on one level, pointing to vertical structures of power among the fighter women themselves, both Lula's and Saba's narrative accounts suggest that education has been decisive as to how the Tigrayan fighter women have fared since the struggle, as both draw attention to education becoming the criterion for any advancement in society. However, the job market continues to be constrained whether one has education or not. Lula says:

There aren't many jobs. There are no [big] enterprises in this place, and since there are no such enterprises, those who failed school in tenth [grade] don't get employment. The only choice $(\lambda \eta \partial \eta \partial \eta)$ is the military [or police/federal police force]. (...). There are those who are employed as agricultural extension workers (gebrena), as teachers, those who didn't pass [their exams] are asked to wait, there are lots of people who didn't pass, even those who are educated are idle (**'hs** *nnn/kif zibel*; sitting); whether one has finished education or not, one is sitting idle (...).

 ⁷⁰ Roman has been a Member of Parliament since the 2010 general elections.
 ⁷¹ Fieldwork notes 21 August 2008/*Nehase* 15, 2000 E.C.

⁷² Fieldwork notes 23 December 2011/Tahsas 13, 2004 E.C.

There are no jobs in this place, all you see are [women] opening siwa houses (h q.e/kubaya; literally 'cup'), opening tea [houses], that's what you see, what can you call that? This isn't business, this isn't a job; it's what people do to make themselves occupied instead of spending the day in bed. There are too many people for what is called jobs; there are too many.⁷³

No doubt education represents expectations as to career possibilities, improved living standards and increase in status/position in society. The question often remains as to what to do after finishing the first cycle of secondary school (grades 9-10) if failing one's tenth-grade exam, or one's marks are neither good enough for continuing to the second cycle that is a preparation for university (grades 11-12), nor qualifying for a free public TVET-college providing technical and vocational education and training. A mismatch between the number of students eligible for the first cycle of secondary school (grades 9-10) and those who can be accommodated, is also acknowledged in the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP III) (FDRE-MOE 2005). Since the aim of the first cycle of secondary school is to produce 'trainable persons', and expansion of secondary school is 'purely determined by the demand for trained human power' (ibid: 47), the number of students advancing in the education system at secondary level, has in fact been regulated. In the ESDP IV the aim to accomplish universal secondary education coincides with the goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2025 (FDRE-MOE 2010: 7). The reverse side of the impressive improvements in education over the last couple of decades, is, however, not unlike during earlier regimes, an over-production of students who find themselves stuck in the middle as 'unemployed and unemployable' (Tekeste 2006: 30; Tekeste 2010: 17). Even though the public job sector is expanding, the current EPDRP government does also, as noted above, envision the educated youth as 'job creators' rather than being provided with jobs (FDRE-MOE 2005: 11), leaving the question pending as to what these younger generations of educated youth are able to accomplish in the other end of differing levels of education in a pressured economy.

The reference in ESDP IV (FDRE-MOE 2010) to the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy, which assigns to agriculture a leading role in the growth of the economy, is also of significance here.⁷⁴ What the ESDP IV does not explain is that the Rural and Agricultural Development Policies and Strategies, of which ADLI is a foundational part, presumes that up to 70 percent of the educated youth in the rural areas should be retained

 ⁷³ Recorded interview 4 November 2008/*T'ïqïmti* 25, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 29B in Tigriña).
 ⁷⁴ Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) is also one of the four pillars in the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) (FDRE-MOFED 2002).

in agriculture in order to modernise the sector (FDRE-MOI 2002: 47).⁷⁵ While two of the male students in the education survey I conducted, did, in fact, perceive education as a way for them to improve and create innovations in agricultural techniques, most of the female and male students envisioned themselves moving to urban areas where they could get a government job or start a business. Getnet Tadele and Asrat Ayalew (2012) note the contradictions implied in these two policy strategies, since those who have some level of education in most cases will *not* go back to the rural areas (and if they want to, might not have land) and, hence, are left 'disconnected' if they do not manage to get a job in the urban areas. The failure of past regimes to attend to the youth that are stuck in the middle, with too low marks to continue education, and too little education to get a job, has from a historical perspective resulted in upheavals in the Ethiopian context with decisive political consequences (e.g. Paulos 2010; Messay 2010) (see Chapter 7). Hence, in spite of a significant momentum in education in the Tigrayan context (and in Ethiopia in general), accommodating female and male youth with increasing levels of education into the economy is not as straightforward as the forward-moving development discourses might suggest.

Gendered gains from education

While the lack of reference to specific gender issues in the exploratory education survey was most likely based on not being asked explicitly about it, I did ask the three generations of women to elaborate on the issue of gender in the interviews. The peasant daughter 'Welesh' (21), now living and having her own business in the market town, explains when I ask her:

-Do you think education has changed you as a woman?

Yes, meaning ... as a woman, uneducated women work at home, doing housework only, cooking food and the like. Other than that, for the uneducated there is no change ($\Lambda \sigma \cdot m/lewt'i$) whatsoever. But me, being a woman that has learned, that's it, I have become almost like a man that means (laughs). I can work outside [home] ... it is a good change ($\Lambda \sigma \cdot m/lewt'i$) in awareness ($\Lambda \cdot t \cdot \Lambda \Lambda n/late hasasiba$) that means, and in wanting to create new innovative jobs ... me, because I'm educated, I think of creating a new job. ... What is more that means, I have acquired awareness of how I can change; of how I can achieve change. ... Since I'm educated, it has brought about a lot of change in the way I think, meaning in my awareness. Being educated is not only to be employed in government [jobs], but I know that one can also develop (*lewt'i*) ones own job.⁷⁶

In spite of being part of the expanding group that has failed their tenth-grade national exam, Welesh sees education as enabling her to be innovative and to create her own job in line with

⁷⁵ This point was brought to my attention by the Ethiopian M.Phil. student Asrat Ayalew at Gender and Development, UoB, and refers to the Amharic version of the *Rural and Agriculture Development Policies and Strategies* (FDRE-MOI 2002).

⁷⁶ Recorded interview 6 October 2008/Meskerem 26, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 4 in Tigriña).

what is stated in the Education Sector Development Programs III and IV (FDRE-MOE 2005, 2010b). Welesh also uses the distinction between uneducated and educated women to explain change. She links uneducated/educated to the inside/outside home dichotomy, and implicitly to women's increased mobility as a consequence of education making her *almost like a man* (a point I will return to in Chapter 6). Welesh also sees herself as having changed since she has acquired awareness, both about how to change herself, and how to achieve change in her life. For the uneducated woman, however, there are rather bleak prospects of change in her account. Welesh's mother 'Meharit' (44), who has church education and is an elected member for her tabia in the wereda council and active in the Women's Association of Tigray, explains the importance of education for change in gender relations at home: 'She [a woman] cannot challenge him [her husband] because she is not educated and doesn't know, that's it, she would simply accept what her husband tells her to do, and stay at home.⁷⁷ The peasant woman Tigist, who, above, expressed a 'thirst' for education that had not been satisfied, answers in the household survey: -It [education] is important for everything, for getting a good position/status (dereja), for work, even equality and women's rights was accomplished through education.⁷⁸ Her daughter 'Meaza' (20) who opted for college after tenth grade (but was not admitted because of low marks) also draws attention to potential changes in gender relations as a consequence of education when I ask her about the issue of gender equality:

Yes, if the men are not educated, they don't believe in it [equality], but if they are educated, that's it, it is equality; they say it's equality. It's said that all educated people would say that it's equality.

-What did they say in school about equality ... gender [equality], what did they say? What did you learn?

... We had lessons where it was said that any woman can go to school equally with men, and she can also work equally with men. That's it, we used to learn about equality, democracy, rights, and duties that means. Now, [between] men and women, there is no difference. That's it, it's equal; there is no discrimination by sex, whether in education or in work, there is equality in all areas.⁷

While Meharit sees education as enabling a woman to challenge her husband at home by her coming to know through education, Meaza sees education as a prerequisite for *men* to change. In fact, there is no reason to doubt that changes are taking place in girls' perceptions of what they can be and do, and female and male students' perceptions of gender relations, and that a major impetus behind these changes is education.

 ⁷⁷ Recorded interview 15 November 2008/<u>H</u>*idar* 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 15 in Tigriña).
 ⁷⁸ Household questionnaire 20 June 2009/*Sene* 13, 2001 E.C. (TM-13R).

⁷⁹ Recorded interview 15 October 2008/T'iqimti 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 5 in Tigriña).

Concluding remarks

The forward-moving thrust towards development via gender equality, in national and international education policies, has, in this chapter, been followed back to underlying causal presumption expressed in the murals in primary schools in my study area in Tigray. The insights from this discussion are based on how the pervasiveness of educational policy discourses that link up with presumptions about development, intersect with socio-cultural dynamics in the Tigravan context. Firstly, when educational slogans in the school murals draw on the common display of proverbs as to what is morally right, and knowledge written on surfaces in school, with a reference to the blackboard, is considered true, this does not only signify a blurring of a distinction between ideology and knowledge, it also points to an attitude towards knowledge as indisputable, and which also impinges on the beholder of knowledge (a point I will come back to in Chapter 7). Secondly, the way students irrespective of gender conceptualise the outcome of their educational pursuit in terms of better or higher status/rank/level/position (*dereja*), points to a vertical upward movement. The way that independence gained from education entails responsibility for one's siblings, parents and the country also points to the redistribution practices entailed in patron-client relations of former feudal Ethiopia and a historically-based vertical social structure that seems to pass unquestioned, and therefore, from the perspective of Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice, can continue to be reproduced also in education. While a vertical social structure works both ways, as an oppressive structure and as an opportunity structure that women are increasingly allowed into through education, not having an education creates new exclusions. Thirdly, the female and male students who answered the education questionnaire, do *imagine* a future that differs significantly in scope from earlier generations, and by pursuing a life trajectory through education can be involved in reconfiguring structural patterns of thought and action (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 971), in spite of the economic and ecological uncertainties that continue to structure also these youngsters' lives. Finally, I have been struck by the similarity between female and male students' answers in the education survey, together with the lack of significant differences in the students' answers between the rural and the semi-urban areas. This suggests that education and educational policy discourses to some extent even out former divides and differences, at least on the discursive level of perceptions and representations. Both female and male students see education as enabling them to take the lead in relation to other family members as well as in society to develop their country – in a rhetorical sense, not as 'torches for the revolution' but as 'torches for development'.

CHAPTER 4: Mapping spaces for women's agency in the Tigrayan context

Introduction

Surfacing in some of the students' answers and in interviews with women, is the perception that, to succeed in education (or for that sake in any strand of life), one's own efforts might not be enough: one is also dependent on the will of God and a favourable $\partial d\vec{i}^{l}$ (b.s.A. fate/chance). In this chapter I will therefore map how decision-making is conditioned from the perspective of a spiritual/religious dimension that in Tigray is dominated by the influential Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The focus is on identifying spaces for agency based on negotiations of authority in the relationship between God and the person, and between the church, the government/state and the Tigravan women themselves. My discussion hinges on the significance 'choice' has gained as a parameter in the empowerment literature together with 'options', 'control' and 'power' (Malhorta et al. 2002). For example, in Naila Kabeer's much-quoted definition of empowerment she suggests that '[o]ne way of thinking about power is in terms of ability to make choices: to be disempowered, therefore, implies to be denied choice' (Kabeer 1999a: 2; see also Kabeer 1999b: 436, italics in original). The frequent reference to God's will and *adil* in Tigrayans' reasoning about their own plans and actions, successes and failures in all strands of life, including education, suggests that God constitutes a significant agentive power in their lives. However, the way *adil* is understood and talked about in the Tigrayan context does not only imply 'fate' in a fatalistic sense, but points to 'chances' beyond the predictable.

Empowerment frameworks circumvent this spiritual/religious dimension. In Malhorta, Schuler and Boender's literature review of empowerment, the 'frontiers' that are encountered in social interaction, and potentially transgressed, are situated along dimensions defined as economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political or psychological (Malhorta et al. 2002: 12). I will therefore include a spiritual/religious dimension when discussing Tigrayan women's decision-making strategies in the first part of this chapter. In the last part of this chapter I will take the case of family planning as point of departure for discussing how different this-worldly and other-worldly authorities are dealt with when women make their decisions on contraceptive use. The relevance of focusing on women's reproductive choice is based on that (1) fertility rates, in international and national education discourses, are

¹ Other common transliterations based on Amharic are *eddil* (Levine 1965) or *idil* (Messay 1999); earlier I have also used *eddil* (Mjaaland 2004c). From Tigriña, a more correct transliteration, according to the simplified Ethiosemitic Translation System, is, as used here, *adil* (see Appendix 6).

understood to be affected by the level of women's education, (2) increased access to reproductive technologies in line with government polices, also in rural areas, gives female students the possibility of avoiding pregnancies while still in school, or to postpone childbirth (if married underage) and continue their education (if that is what they want), and (3) the schism between religious sentiments and government policies on contraceptive use and abortion posed itself as an opportunity to access contestations of authority in decision-making processes. The mapping of spaces for agency enabled by focusing on decision-making strategies in this chapter is, thus, not concerned with establishing to what extent people have a choice or not, or in a normative sense should have it. Neither is choice understood as always bringing about the best result per se. Rather, by focusing on contestations of authority at the frontiers of decision-making, choice is used as an analytic devise in order to map spaces for agency from the perspective of power. Furthermore, the discussion in this chapter is not concerned with education directly but lays the ground for understanding the negotiations female students' are involved in with their parents when pursuing an education (in Chapter 5 & 6). As Bourdieu's understanding of choice and his 'field' concept are actualised in this chapter, I will in the following section start off by addressing the issue of choice from the perspective of habitus in Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice.

Some notes on choice

Perspectives that base women's empowerment on the ability to make choices (e.g. Kabeer 1999a, 1999b), stand in stark contrast to Bourdieu's understanding of the generative principle of *habitus* as 'the unchosen principle of all "choices" (Bourdieu 1990a: 61). With his *habitus* concept, Bourdieu has placed himself in a position that allows him to criticise subjectivist perspectives on choice – like the Sartrian that sees every incident from the perspective of unprecedented possibilities – *and* rational-choice theories alike (Bourdieu 1977, 1990a, 1988; see also Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). For example, debates that have dealt with whether religious belief is rational (e.g. Bruce 1993; Ellison 1995; Iannaccone 1995; Spickard 1998; Mellor 2000; Sharot 2002; Jerolmack & Porpora 2004) – implying the non-rational/irrational as its opposite – is, from the perspective of *habitus*, simply beside the point since the dialectical principle, which Bourdieu claims underlies this generative principle, overcomes dichotomised thinking altogether. The maximisation and competition that constitutes the basis for all strategies in Bourdieuan 'fields', and relative to the symbolic capital every person has managed to accumulate, do, nevertheless, resemble the economic behaviour of agents in rational choice theory. In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, however, agents are not rational

162

except in moments of crisis when the fit between subjective and objective structures (between *habitus* and the field), becomes brutally disrupted (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 131). Choice, in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, implies that agents refuse what is perceived as impossible and love what is within the reach of loving. Based on this 'double negation' (Bourdieu 1977: 77) choice is never 'free', it just feels as if it is (see also Bourdieu 1990c). The implication of seeing *habitus* as the unchosen principle of all 'choices' is that agents do not project their desire beyond the possibilities that *habitus* make one think one has in any moment of time (see also Certeau 1988). This understanding also suggests an internal consistency between choice and behaviour that authors like Amartya Sen (1993) have refuted. And, while choosers in most cases are more social than the 'economic man', whom Sen classifies as close to 'a social moron' (Sen 1977: 336), agents are nothing but social in Bourdieu's perspective. To be able to counter the notion of rational choice Bourdieu therefore ends up at the opposite extreme:

But, at a deeper level, how can one fail to see that decision, *if decision there is*, and the 'system of preferences' which underlies it, depend not only on all the previous choices of the decider but also on the conditions in which his 'choices' have been made, which include all the choices of those who have chosen for him, in his place, pre-judging his judgement and so shaping his judgement (Bourdieu 1990a: 49-50; italics added).

The problem I see with Bourdieu's perspective on choice that is neither rational nor irrational but conditioned by a *habitus* that produces 'structures/systems of preference' similar to the sour grapes' structures that Jon Elster (1982, 1983) has termed 'adaptive preference formations'², is that this perspective places people in a constant state of false consciousness. Being able to adapt to structural conditions might seems to be both a sensible and necessary human capacity but, as noted by Anthony Giddens, '[i]f we do not see that human agents stand in a position of appropriation in relation to the social world, which they constitute and reconstitute in their actions, we fail on an empirical level to grasp the nature of human empowerment' (Giddens 1991: 175). Bourdieu would have said that this is exactly what his agents do, when *habitus* allows for '*intentionless invention* of regulated improvisation' (Bourdieu 1977: 79; italics in original) that agents act by. Bourdieu asserts:

² Jon Elster's adaptive preferences are first and foremost seen to increase well-being in affluent contexts. Amartya Sen (1984, 1999) and Martha C. Nussbaum (2000) have therefore developed their capability approaches in response to the issue of adaptive preferences in contexts of deprivation and exploitation (see also Teschl & Comim 2005).

The *habitus* is the principle of a selective perception of the indices tending to confirm and reinforce it rather than transform it, a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical to or homologous with the (past) conditions of production; it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world, the only one it can ever know (Bourdieu 1990a: 64).

Basing the generative principle of *habitus* on a 'network of circuits of causal circularity' (ibid: 97) orientated towards the past, rather than on a dialectical principle, the future becomes stuck in the past in Bourdieu's theory of practice, with few possibilities to look up and envision something beyond the structural dispositions habitus allows one to see. As Toril Moi (1991) so poignantly asks: 'Is Bourdieu implying that social power structures *always* win out? That *amor fati* – love your destiny – is an appropriate motto for every socially determined act?' (Moi 1991: 269; italics in original). In Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) perspective, their cordial triad of agency – iteration (repetitiveness), projection towards the future and practical evaluation in the present – opens up for the possibility that a generative principle like *habitus* does not permeate every aspect of practice to the same degree in any moment of time. While I do acknowledge that choices are structurally conditioned, albeit to varying degrees, my suggestion is to situate agents more firmly at the frontier of ongoing mediations and negotiations in social interaction. As the notion of 'choice' is commonly based on a unambiguous understanding of the person that takes for granted personal integrity and bodily autonomy, I will include in the discussion below the conditioning of decision-making from the perspective of other-worldly authorities that also impinge on the *act* and *effect* of choosing.

Choice, *adïl* and the will of God

The Ethiopian Orthodox Christian religion is monophysite in the sense that Jesus' nature is solely divine (not human *and* divine) (e.g. Messay 1999).³ In addition to God (*Amlak/Egzabiher/Goyta/Geta/Aboyezgi*)⁴ and a host of benign entities like angels and saints, malign entities like *Shetan*/the Devil, *jinni* and *aganinti/*evil spirits that can take possession over people are also encompassed within this spiritual/religious universe, as are other

³ When asked if I am a Christian, I have answered 'I was *born* a Protestant (*Kenisha*)', as I was baptised in the Norwegian Protestant church by my parents. My present position as an agnostic is commonly quite inconceivable in the highly religious context of Tigray.

 $^{^{4}}$ Amla<u>k</u> (አምላክ) is a general term for an Almighty God with supernatural powers shared by all religions in Ethiopia: Islam, Judaism, Christianity, even pagans. *Egzabiher* (አንካብደር) points specifically to the Christian God. *Goyta* (ንይታ) in Tigriña and *Geta* (ንይታ) in Amharic, means Lord (also used to show elder men/fathers respect). *Aboyezgi* (አባይአንክ,) is most often used in the context of God's provision of rain.

demanding non-religious spirits like *zar* (in my study area most often referred to as *buda-zar⁵*) and *qolle*, the latter two possessing women in particular (e.g. Pankhurst 1992; Aspen 1994; Mjaaland 2004c). While these other-worldly entities that, at times, can unsettle personal integrity and bodily autonomy, and can impinge on what the person decides to do, a personhood based on 'contained wholeness' (see Chapter 1 & 2), nevertheless, points to the importance for the person of being in control (see also Mjaaland 2004c, 2006).

When interviewing women for this research project, I found, however, that their use of the word 'choice' (\mathcal{PC} -n/m; ch'a) was scarce, and most often (but not always) relating to my asking explicitly about it. For some, like in Aster's (38) case, choice had no meaning at all:

-But does it mean that everything is about God, about God's will or is some of it your choice (mïrch'a)?

By my own choice?

-Ehe.

What am I to say? What can I get by working according to my own choice? What, what is it that I can get from my own choice? If there is something, you tell me what it is and how to do it and I will work according to your choice; otherwise I don't know since I'm not educated, so what can I tell you? If you know about it, however, and you tell me that by choosing like this, by doing like this, you explain it to me, and then I will enter into it that means. Otherwise, all I can do is to beg Lord (*Goyta*), since to work according to what is called choice (spit) what would that be? What am I to say; I have no idea (*R*•**7**+: \wedge **0**,/*difinti libi*). It's nothing (*suq iya*; it keeps quiet), for me it's nothing, I cannot think of anything. (...)⁶

Aster is a landless illiterate female head of household in the rural area. Her first three children stayed on with her husband when she ran away from him. At the time of the interview she had three more children with two different men without receiving any regular support from these children's fathers (in 2012 she had got one more child with the latter of these). Hence, I interpret Aster's answer to be informed not only by her religious belief, but also by her experience of being stuck in hardship with few possibilities of improving her own life situation. This is not to say that the women do not have desires about their own lives and the future of their children. As in the stories female and male students write about their future addressed in the previous chapter, 'I wish' (*JCP*¹/*yimine*), which can also mean 'I hope' (*I*.*GP*¹/*P*/*temeneye*) and 'I want' (*JCR*⁰/*yideli*), with the latter also meaning 'I need', are

⁵ Zar possession is believed to have originated in Ethiopia and spread from there to other countries in the area like Somalia, Sudan and Egypt (e.g. Lewis 1996), regardless of religious and cosmological conviction (see also Boddy 1989). *Buda-zar* in my study area unites the qualities of *buda* (evil eye) and *zar* since, when possessing someone, they both 'eat' that person from within causing that person's death. A person who manages coming to terms with their *zar* can, however, develop clairvoyant and healing powers (see also Aspen 1994).

⁶ Recorded interview 13 November 2008/<u>H</u>ïdar 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 14 in Tigriña).

frequently used in their accounts. To account for the course of one's life – offering explanations as to why things did, or did not, happen – people would often use the word ∂dil ($\partial S: A$; fate/chance), which in English translations is most often interpreted as 'fate' or 'destiny', but in my study area is more commonly explained as 'chance'. Claiming that I came to the small market town of Endabaguna the first time in 1993 by ∂dil is much in line with how people would reason about the often unpredictable unfolding of life – regardless of positive or negative outcomes. ∂dil contains the realisation that the person is not in control of everything that happens in his or her life, since God's will is involved in the process. Messay Kebede asserts that the notion of ∂dil in the Ethiopian context synchronises the Orthodox Christian vision with the social order and individual aspirations:

The call of destiny imparted a metaphysical meaning to individual ambitions and provided the fundamental norm of social order: each must be in the right place, that is the place allotted to him/her by the Almighty. Thus, heroism became a form of piety, in fact its highest expression, equating the defense of faith with the defense of the social system which, in turn, turned into a vindication of one's proper place (Messay 1999: xxi).

What is important to understand in the Ethiopian context is the specific relationship that $\partial d\vec{i}l$ implies between God and the individual person. Fate does not just befall the individual from an Almighty God; He is dependent on the individual person for divine manifestation in the social order. Hence, neither does individual choice denounce God nor does $\partial d\vec{i}l$ make choice irrelevant. In the life-story-based interviews, questions about choice, $\partial d\vec{i}l$, God's will⁷ – and what can happen *agat'ami* (λ .299%; incidentally/suddenly) as a coincidence – were included to establish how the women distinguish these interrelating concepts in an agentive sense. The intention with this line of enquiry was to access issues of power and control in the context of decision-making and, likewise, whether one's own efforts are understood to make a difference in relation to $\partial d\vec{i}l$ and the will of God. Mastering the church language $G\vec{i}z$, as she had learnt in church school to the level of *haleqa* (deacon) with her father, who was a priest, the female head of household and peasant Meharit (44) explains when I ask:

-There is one question about ... ədül, about God, about choice (mïrch'a) that means ... how has this worked for you that means; you have made choices yourself, then maybe ədül came in between, meaning the way forward may have been another [than you choose]? How do we know if it is the work of God? What is your thoughts about choice... ədül, about God, how do these work together, did you understand the question?

⁷ God's will is entailed in the following expressions: biamla<u>k</u> dilét (ብአምሳኸ ድሌት; 'God's wants'), biamla<u>k</u> figad (ብአምሳኸ ፍቻድ; 'God' permission'), and biamla<u>k</u> hasab (ብአምሳኸ ፍቻድ; 'God' sthought/plan').

Now I understand. Now, something for example ... I sow grain, eh? I sow grain, and then the grain, for one ... you apply manure, you move the enclosure [for the cattle to manure the whole field], you plough the first time, you apply fertiliser and it grows. If you do nothing (sug ilka; keep quiet) and you say God (Amlak) God knows and then do nothing (sug ilka), and if it [the crop] fails, one cannot say it is God who made it fail, or God made it work. If people expect good results, one must sow, work hard, apply manure, fertiliser, plough, and afterwards God will provide rain, yes, he provides rain for it to grow. If God doesn't provide rain, there is nothing that one can do. ... Again, adil in education there are some who say it's God who didn't give it to me, it was him who made me fail, and the same if one happens to fall ill, eh? If a student falls ill, if he falls ill while in school, and if in the course of education he faces problems, if there is lack of provisions, if there is no 'budget' (in English), that's it, if there is such things [and he therefore fails school] that's what is said [that God made him fail]. However, if the education is good, there is enough money, and one is healthy, if he fails or doesn't fail you cannot say that God made him fail. Then the reason is either laziness or being smart. For one, when it comes to matters of life ($\delta \mathcal{R}$ on $\mathcal{PA}\mathcal{R}$ / $\partial dme guday$; literally 'issue of age'), that's it, it's God who prolongs your life or shortens it; in our culture (nun, bahli) it's called God's commandment (ትληη/tiizaz).... That's it, he decides about the rain and now there is talk about water technology [irrigation] and things, that's it, but the fact is, if God (*Egzabiher*) wants to bring good times, for it to rain He has to provide it, but if God denies us [rain] it will be drought and people will perish. That's the domain of God (Se APAN 7-8.e./nay Amlak guday); there's nothing people can do about it, that's it. Like what happened the other day for example, you remember it rained on Saturday? It was sent by God; and why did He do that to the harvest? That's it, He did that after being disappointed about seeing people engaged in bad doings, prostitution, and the like while [people] claimed to keep the fasting, the holy days (**19A**/*beal*) and the like. 'Please, please, have mercy, have mercy', we said; that's it, he has forgiven us now. This is the domain of God; there is nothing people can do about it. That's what is said.

-But does adil mean by God or by something else? What does adil mean; is adil [given] by God?

 $\partial dil!$ ∂dil means, how is it do you think? Now for example, one's ∂dil could be to have money, you could buy goats and if they die, it's said, 'that is what ∂dil had in store for him'. If they multiply, it's said, 'God (*Amlak*) created it for him (*Am.-A./fet'irulu*)', that's it, his ∂dil turned out to be good; that's it, God created it for him. That's what is said; that's how our culture (*bahli*) is.⁸

Twice married – divorcing her first husband after a couple of years, and now widowed with six children – Meharit does not expect to sit down and wait for God to provide her with everything. The fact that she is a model peasant in her village, being one of the first to use irrigation techniques with both treadle and motorised pumps, shows that she is not sitting around waiting. As a subsistence peasant reliant on rain-fed cultivation she delimits her power and control in relation to what is not affected by her own efforts: the rain. In this sense, what could be classified as 'nature' is perceived as solely in the hands of God. She also emphasises that if your work is not in line with your *adil*, then it does not matter what you do, since you will not achieve it anyway. Meharit also includes the issue of punishment if what God has commanded is not followed. God can punish, for example, by sending rain at a time of the year when it could destroy the harvest (as had actually happened the previous Saturday in

⁸ Recorded interview 15 November 2008/<u>H</u>*ïdar* 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 15 in Tigriña).

November before our interview), or by not sending rain when it is most needed when ploughing starts in June (and which happened the following year). The efforts Meharit puts into farming as well as religious and political activities, as the only person (male or female) in her village that has been re-elected to the wereda council three times, are not only considered impressive by me but is often commented on by others in her community. *'I strive to manage our lives, but the effort itself will finish me'*, she says one evening when we are sitting outside in her compound looking at the stars. Thinking about my father who had just died, I say: *'One day we are here, the next day we are gone'*. *'All is God's doing'*, she says.⁹ However, when, on a later occasion, I ask her about why her husband died, she says: *'I think somebody cast a spell on him; Shetan (the devil) caused his death'*.¹⁰ Hence, God is not the only other-worldly power impinging on matters of life and death.

Meharit's perspective on how far a person's power and control extend is similar to that of another female head of household Senait (55), living together with her granddaughter (16). She is an illiterate peasant with a seat in the tabia council in her village. Again, my question is about the relationship between *odil*, God's will and choice:

-(...) It means, now we, that's it, whether to get married or to go to school, is it a choice (mirch'a) that means ... if we drop out [of school], does it mean it was by our own choice? ... In this place religion is very strong, yes, so it's also about adil, about God's will (Amlak dilét). If I go to school, if I start school and if I happen to be lazy and drop out, is this the work of God or by my own doing? Does God have a different 'program' or did I do it myself? Is that the result of what people do ... my own doing or that of God?

Eh ...! If that is what you are addressing, then people have no power (A.C.A./<u>havli</u>). I can express myself in honesty (1001, e/bilibey; 'from my heart'), right? 'I want to do like this and that', I say while working hard; if God supports me I can achieve it, otherwise if God rejects me (+RC0.8.2/tederbiyuni; 'throws me'), I will die. It's all by the will of God (አምላኸ ፍንድ:/Amlak figad; God's permission). There's no way that I can betray God or anything, I couldn't say I can reach here by my own power; it comes by way of God. I can work according to my will (ARA+P./bïdilétev), but it's only if God supports me, it's by God, by God (Egzabiher), Him; it's God, by Him. If you drop out of school, it's God's [will], and if you say, 'I will go to school', it's God that guides you. It's by God. Let's say you want to do something by your own will, right? Say, I have sowed and ploughed, and if God (Amlak) does not provide rain to make it grow, what can I do about it? It's by the will of God (Amlak fiqad). If that is what you are addressing, it's by God (Amlak); there's nothing I can do by my own power only. What is the power I have anyway? I will keep quiet (sug kibilive), and if God supports me, I will achieve it. I will place my children here [on my farm], then I will serve religion by joining the church, even living in celibacy [as a nun], even I will take the Holy Communion (*qurban*) and live alone on roasted grain if that's what it takes. That's what I think about, and if God let me, I will achieve it, and if he tells me; no, go this way, then it is God's will (Amlak figad), that's the will of God (Egzabiher *figad*). I think that is what your question was about?

⁹ Fieldwork notes 17 October 2008/T'ïqïmti 7, 2001 E.C.

¹⁰ Fieldwork notes 19 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 10, 2001 E.C.

-Yes! Yes, that is what I had in mind. Yes.¹¹

As in Meharit's account above, Senait bases her answer on her own life situation in an unpredictable rural environment. In both examples God is perceived to play a supportive/ guiding, and fulfilling role. It is also the case that, in spite of being included in my question to both these women, they do not follow up on the matter of choice. Not picking up on the issue of *adil* either, Senait expands on the role of God and claims that, even if she has a 'want' $(\mathfrak{K} \mathbf{A} \mathbf{A})/d\mathbf{i}/d\mathbf{i}/d\mathbf{i}$; 'need') for something, people have no power of their own. In her perception it is only by the support of God one can achieve what one wants. Senait also mentions what is common in old age for followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: to devote the rest of one's life to God as a nun or monk to secure one's afterlife in Heaven. The power of God and the limits to the person's control is, in both Meharit's and Senait's narrative accounts, based on actual experiences of what cannot be controlled in this harsh material environment in rural Tigray: defined as nature, ill-health and death. Counter to the influential thirteenth-century Ethiopian monk from Shoa, Tekle Haymanot (celebrated the 24th E.C. of every month) promising: 'If your first concern is the spiritual, God will provide the material' (in Mercier 1997: 64), these women do note the decisive importance of work and what a person *can* do in practice, even when it might not be enough to sustain one's living in this harsh semi-arid environment. The lack of a clear distinction for where God's power ends and the person's control takes over suggests, however, that there is some degree of volatility at play here.

Ədïl as fate and chance

In spite of different locations and means of survival, the market-town business woman 'Zaid' (48), a female head of household with education up to ninth grade, explains the relationship between *adil* and God's will with the same emphasis on the person's work as the peasant women Meharit and Senait above. Zaid has her own business, which has grown steadily over the last thirty years. Earlier she had told me: '*I started my first business [teahouse] with a packet of tea and 1 kilo of sugar*'¹². Many of the successful businesses in the market town are in fact run by women who have worked themselves up from scratch. I ask:

-But what does adil mean; is it by God or incidental (agat'ami) that means?

∂dïl is incidental (*agat'ami'yu*). It's both incidental and by God (*bïamla<u>k</u>*). It's by God and if ... God command something for you ... if God wants it, now look, it's said that God decides it for me or you ...

¹¹ Recorded interview 25 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 16, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 26 in Tigriña).

¹² Fieldwork notes 28 October 2008/T'iqimti 18, 2001 E.C.

the level you will reach, as you can see, you are educated in your country and came here, have started a good job, you have a volition, receive a good income; you have got a good *adil* that means. How was that possible? By God that is what it means. Now, I didn't get the *adil* I wanted. However, in between I didn't do that badly. Meaning, even if I thought it was a problem for me from the start, it wasn't. That's because of my own labour, my own work and not because of other people, that's it; I had no special support from people whatsoever. I'm telling you, I didn't have anything like the *dil* other people have. Independently, by selling my labour cheap as to not lack work and have trouble, and since I think about the children I have, I'm working hard (13,89 Ach/tegweyive serihe; literally 'run working'), and we have survived in this period without problems that means. I don't have that much profit, however; otherwise I have brought up my [four] children [and fostered one child] all this time. Even taking care of your children, to bring up your children in your own place and in your own home; it's in itself quite an *adil*. Yes! How many of my friends are there who live far below [my standard], meaning who are in trouble, who have problems, who have no house of their own. This is because of adil. Your adil ... if God decides that you get it, you get it, if he keeps quiet (sug ilu) [you get nothing]; everything is by God that means. Even adil comes if it has been commanded by God. Otherwise, if He keeps quiet (sug ilu) adil doesn't come just like that.¹³

Zaid sees herself as fairly successful as a result of her labour in spite of what she understands as her initial unfavourable *adil*. While she asserts that it was incidental that it was she who got that particular *adil* from God, the volatile transition between God, *adil* and her own initiatives constitutes a space where divine power and her own control can be negotiated, and where her own initiative has a *chance* to make a difference. When I consult an orthodox priest (*qeshi*) in the market town, *mihirey* (literally, 'teacher') 'Tadesse' (75), his emphasis on God's role tends, however, more towards fatalism. The following dialogue evolved as other people, who were coming and going during the whole interview, started to comment on our discussion:

-What is ədül in your opinion?

Ədïl?

-Yes, what does it mean?

∂dïl, how *∂dïl* comes about that means? Is that what you say?

-Yes, what does ədïl mean?

(A woman: -What is the meaning of *adil*?)

Ədïl?

(One girl: -For example when one is created)

How one is created ...

-Yes, according to you, yes, in your opinion.

¹³ Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 37 in Tigriña).

Listen! When one is created, it's according to one's ∂dil either to be poor or rich. Eh? ... One is made rich by God (*Amlak*) and the ∂dil that He gives; the other one is made poor. One is made ill and another is given good health; this is ∂dil . That is what is called ∂dil . Eh? ∂dil is like that. One achieves wealth, becoming rich is ∂dil , poverty is ∂dil ; to go through life ill, or with a disability, is ∂dil . That is why they say, 'how did my ∂dil turn out like this, eh? Is this my ∂dil ; do I get the ∂dil to do this? God must have wished this to happen to me that means; God gave me this.' ∂dil is always given by God, eh? A person can never give it. Who do you think gives it? God (*Egzabiher*). When you are born God has decided if your ∂dil is to be rich or if you will end up in poverty, as I have already said, even illness or other things. Would you say that people are the same? People are not the same; one is rich, one is poor, and one is ...

(A women: -good or bad)

... the one in poverty might be given work power (*gulbet*) ... to work carrying one *quintal* (100 kilo). Then that is the $\partial d\vec{i}l$ given by God ... God has ordered for them to pass their life like that. One is called for poverty, without wealth. People can pass their lives being rich; that is $\partial d\vec{i}l$. That's because of $\partial d\vec{i}l$. This is $\partial d\vec{i}l$ that means; nothing else.

(A woman: -(...) when passing though life)

-So why does God give them different adïl?

Some are ... listen! Some are kings, some are not; some are kings.

(...)

(One girl: -He [God] differentiates)

(A woman: -One can become deprived; deprivation is a matter of *adil*)

-I was born in a rich country; what have I done [to deserve that]? Some, that's it, some have an extremely difficult adil simply because they are born in another place. Why is it like that? (Laugh).

For you? For you? Do you know what he destined (literally; told) you? He destined you to travel around, nothing else.

(One girl: -(Laughing) He destined for you to travel around)

He destined you to travel around, and see, you are travelling around, eh? That is your *adil* (fate). (Laughs). That is your *adil*; that is what *adil* means. (Laughs).

-Ehe (laugh).

(A woman: -(...) what questions! Eh!)¹⁴

When I ask *mihirey* Tadesse whether being a priest was *adil* or his choice, he says: 'God gave me the *adil of priesthood that's it, 'pass your life in priesthood', He said; He marked me out to become a priest.' Mihirey* Tadesse also emphasises that this-worldly *adil* is temporal, 'like one or two nights [in eternity]', and that the greatest *adil* is given to us if we are allowed into

¹⁴ Recorded interview 13 December 2008/Tahsas 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 36 in Tigriña).

Heaven. He notes that, 'you have to earn your adil to Heaven, however. The adil to go to Heaven depends on performing in practice what the Bible (*mb*-hs/metshaf; literally 'book') commands. 'This confirms a common perception among followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in this area that an important aspect of life is to earn your place in Heaven. Observance of religious practice (which I will return to below) must therefore be considered in this afterlife perspective.

Based on the significance of *adil* in people's reasoning about life, one question about adil was also included in the education survey questionnaire: -If you are able to get a good result on your test do you think it is because of your choice to work hard, or is it because of *adil? Explain.*¹⁵ Most of the students answered that it was by working hard. There were also those who wrote that it was by adil only, and some claimed it was by way of both. One out-ofschool girl, who had failed her tenth-grade exam, writes: -It's by adil. I was copying (cheating) without studying, but I feel so sad about it. In grade 10 I thought I was doing fine, and I didn't copy (cheat) on the national exam, therefore I couldn't make it. I used to think that it is by adil, but now I will study and take the [grade] 10 exam as a private.¹⁶ These answers show that *adil* is also considered in the school context together with (or without) hard work. The extent to which students talk about the test/exam practice – where the ticking of boxes of multiple-choice answers is the rule – as guess-work, likewise reinforces an understanding of exams as a matter of *adil*. In fact, *adil* is also used in the introduction to the five-year strategic education plan in Tigray when stating: 'The achieved developments (*miabaletat*) in education constitute development (*miabale*) in the lives of our people. From the point of view of education any failure and shortcoming impact on the future life and *adil* of our people (...)' (TRS-EB 2006: iii; translated from Tigriña).

Donald N. Levine explains the concept of *eddil* (∂dil), translated as 'fate' in his book *Wax and Gold. Traditions and innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, in overall fatalistic terms. ∂dil signifies God's will in relation to the person, and, in Levine's opinion, is 'more important than human effort in attaining one's goal' (Levine 1965: 87). What Levine understands as reaffirming this fatalism is reverence for former generations, disdain for activities that could resemble crafts that are connected to socially-inferior artisan groups (e.g. smiths and potters), and the acceptance of religious or cultural ideas as unchangeable, altogether adding up to a lack of inventiveness and a general conservative attitude towards change. In his critique of Levin's perspective, Messay classifies *idil* (∂dil) as a particular style

¹⁵ ኣብ ፌተና ፅቡ'ቅ ነዋቢ (ማርኪ) እንተረኸብኪ/ካ **ਗንኪርኪ/ካ ንምስራ**ሕ ብምምራፅኪ/ካ ድዩ ወይስ ብዕድል? ግለዒ/ግለፅ

¹⁶ Education questionnaire F/OoS-5.

that informs and authenticates all aspects of Ethiopian life (Messay 1999: 208). In line with how the concept of *adīl* is used in my study area in Tigray, Messay also incorporates a reference to 'chance':

It [*adil*] is doubtless related to fatalism since it serves to indicate the inevitable. Even so, it means not so much necessity as *chance*. For an Ethiopian, an event can be inescapable without being determined; especially, its inevitability is due to its being an occurrence rather than a determined outcome. The Ethiopian calls this *chance*, whether the event is good or bad (ibid.; italics added).

Messay further emphasises that, 'Ethiopians will not accept that birth, age, or any natural attributes prevents social rise and decides their fate' (Messay 1999: 165). While adil can be understood as *doxa* in Bourdieu's framework, as legitimating a specific social order that misrecognises the power (of religious institutions), *adil* does open up for a possibility to go beyond the inevitable. It is from this perspective that it is interesting to juxtapose *adil* with the structural conditioning implied in Bourdieu's habitus concept. An important aspect of adil is precisely that it *can* take one beyond the structural circumstances of the context one is born into – as envisioned in the female and male students' short stories in the previous chapter of achieving better or higher status/level/rank/ position (dereja) (see also Poluha 2004). This positioning would, from the perspective of Bourdieu's theory of practice, be less likely, since the virtue of necessity implied in the *habitus* concept is 'to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable' (Bourdieu 1977: 77); in short, amor fati (Bourdieu 1990a: 63), to love one's destiny. Messay emphasises that the use of *adil* expresses opportunity 'in the sense that it should be sought. Not only is chance conditioning people, it is also a pursuit, an ideal' (Messay 1999: 208). Hence, what he sees as the fleeting nature of the concept of *adil* and the volatile nature of fate (ibid: 208-9) do not only allow for an acceptance of a particular fate, or the love of one's destiny, but allows as well for the projection of individual ambitions beyond the position in the social structure one is born into. While Aster's experience of deprivation and lack of choice, above, seems to constitute the limit for what she is able to imagine, it is on the issue of transgression that *dil* differs from the structural dispositions implied in Bourdieu's habitus concept. More in line with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) perspective on agency, *adil* opens up for the possibility to transcend structural dispositions. It is from this perspective that I, in the following, will address religious practice by focusing on female followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in my study area in Tigray.

Religious practice; gendered implications of sin

The focus on the spiritual/religious domain in this chapter is based on the fact that people spend a significant amount of time on religious practices. For example, the revering of nonwork holy days (**19A**/*beal*) every month for a host of divine entities, saints and angels, like Selassie/the Holy Trinity, Michel (the Angel Michael), Abune Aregawi (Tigrayan saint), Mariyam/Saint Mary and Beal Egzabiher/God (to mention but a few), requires going to mass (ቅዳሲ/qïdasi) or paying a visit to the church to worship (ምስሪም/mïsïam; literally, 'kiss'). These Orthodox Christian holy days carry different weight that can also differ from area to area within the Ethiopian context. In general, Michel, Mariyam and Bal Egzabiher carry the most weight, but in Tigray Abune Aregawi is also significant. These holy days - together with Saturdays (when people venture to markets in urban areas) and Sundays – add up to around twenty days every month that, in my area of research in Tigray, require refraining from agricultural activities – like ploughing, weeding, harvesting and threshing – as well as the grinding of flour (leaving only around ten days for cultivation every month). These holy days are not no-work days for civil servants in state institutions (administration, health, education, etc.), and people in commerce would work even on Sundays. There is also a difference between the market-town and the rural communities in my study area in terms of the extent to which religious practice is always complied with, as well as the amount of time spent; in the market town a quick visit to the church in the morning might be considered sufficient, together with the lighting of a candle at the coffee ceremony later that day. Holy days come in addition to the main religious holidays, some of which are *Lidet* (Christmas) and *Fasika* (Easter), Timget (Jesus Baptism), Marivam (Saint Mary) and Mesgel (recovery of the true cross). Fasting, which takes up over half the year, includes every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year and longer or shorter fasting periods before the major religious holidays, and means refraining from eating meat, eggs and milk products, with restrictions on when to eat the day's first meal differing between the different fasting periods (see Appendix 3 for a list of holy days, religious holidays and fasting periods). While, when to *not* work and when to fast is common knowledge, the ranking of holy days can vary from area to area. Together with the fact that one would revere more those divine entities one prays for protection from, and whose *tsebel* (**bn**A/holy matter in powder or liquid form) one carries on one's body (or put in one's home), this opens religious prescriptions up for differentiation and interpretation. The rather fleeting answers I get when asking about which prescriptions apply and when, together with my observations over time that certain kinds of work are in fact done *if needed*

on holy days when farming and other activities are not supposed to take place, suggests that other, both pragmatic and subjective considerations are at play, also in religious matters.

Religious practice, like going to mass way before dawn on an empty stomach, is, together with the numerous fasting periods during the year, informed by an emphasis on endurance. Enduring the discomfort of keeping oneself awake through several hours-long masses during the night while standing upright praying, and enduring abstinence through fasting, are meant to invoke humbleness. In fact, Messay (1999) places this ability to endure at the very base of survival in the Ethiopian context. Religious and other celebrations are, on the other hand, informed by *abundance* in terms of food and drink (*siwa*; local millet beer). For example, for the three weddings I attended in January 2012 in the rural area, the brides' households had slaughtered on an average two to three cattle and brewed 2000-2500 litres (20-25 barrels) of siwa. For the merchant wedding that I attended in the market town, these quantities were doubled. On a smaller scale, abundance is also an important aspect when celebrating holy days (*beal*) in a religious association (**MADC**/mahiber) devoted to the particular saint, angel, or divine entity whose day of the month it is. While Senbet mahiber (Sunday after mass) takes place outside the church compound in smaller groups and includes everyone present, the *mahiber* that takes place in people's homes is commonly constituted by twelve households that take turns every month to host the celebration of a particular saint (see also Pankhurst 1992; Flemmen & Mulumebet 2009).¹⁷ Friends and relatives of the household that hosts the gathering will also be invited, but will eat separately from the group of members. Women commonly form *mahibers* for Mariyam, but women are also members together with men in what was formerly exclusively men's mahiber. Most often women enter these men's circles after the death of their spouses. Women can also take their spouse's place after a break-up of marital relations when the spouse has left to live somewhere else. It is also possible to enter a mahiber through friendship relations (which was the way I was included in one *mahiber*). In the exploratory household survey I conducted, the most common reason given by women for not being a member of a religious association, both in the rural area and in the market town, was economic. These religious associations are meant to strengthen both this-worldly and other-worldly relations, and imply both inclusions and exclusions from social networks. The siwa one drinks (or even gets drunk on) on this occasions is considered *tsebel*, holy, with protecting and healing properties. If one, for some medical reason or other,

¹⁷ In the market town, the *mahiber* for Mariyam (on the 21st E.C. every month) that took me in has 23 female members. This means that it takes two years before a person is eligible to host the gathering again.

does not drink *sïwa*, a tiny sip is recommended before applying this holy matter on one's face, arms and legs.

Most Orthodox Christian households have a priest assigned to them, abo nefsi (An ሃፍሲ: spiritual father)¹⁸, who gives advice in religious matters concerning life and death and orders punishment for sins (hf?i/hat'iyat) committed. The abo nefsi is invited (as could also other priests from the local church) to participate and bless the *mahiber* in people's homes, but does not always participate if there are too many invitations on that particular day. The following describes one *mahiber* for Mariyam where I was present: The *abo nefsi*'s arrival prompts the women to stand up to kiss the hand-sized cross Orthodox Ethiopian priests always carry with them. With everyone still standing, the priest delivers the blessing by heart [in *Gi*²] in a monotone voice, occasionally speeding up the pace, continuing to speak on his inward breath, and with his voice differing in audibility. He finishes by blessing the siwa, which the hostess has filled up in a green plastic jug, by drawing a cross three times over the top of the jug with his brass cross before everyone sits down. He continues by blessing the kitcha (unleavened dry bread) prepared with melted butter and berbere (chilly-based spice) that is brought in, slicing it up into smaller pieces and distributing it to everyone present, before the main course, *injera* with different sauces is served. When eating has finished, the priest says a last prayer when women again are standing up; three of the women also kneel down in turn at the large ceramic jar with siwa for Mariyam in the corner of the room embracing it in submissive prayer (usually on issues related to fertility, pregnancy and childbirth which is considered Mariyam's domain). The priest reminds everyone to worship this day, but also the other holy days according to the scripture. He stops to hush down three women who have kept on talking during his preaching. Finally he says, 'you have had enough [preaching] now'. The women agree. He leaves, and immediately, the minute he is out of the compound, the women start to sing and dance. Since there is no electricity in this village, and no battery driven tape recorder available, they depend on their own songs. One by one everyone is offered to enter the dancing ring. They ululate, clap hands, and some even tease each other sexually (by bringing each other down on the floor miming male penetration with their hand).¹⁹ When I ask one of the women the next day if they were inhibited by the priest's unusually-lengthy presence (he had been seated beside me questioning me about my religious belief, and I had told him the 'shocking' fact that women could be priests in the Norwegian Protestant Church), she immediately answers: 'Yes! We thought he would never leave. In the

¹⁸ In Tigriña *nefsi* means both 'soul' and 'body'. The word can also be used about something 'heartfelt'.

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 28 July 2008/<u>H</u>amle 21, 2000 E.C.

end we had to ask him if he did not have other tasks to tend to. ²⁰ Hence, the respect for the priests' authority does not necessarily extend into every space of women's lives.

Differences in religious practice between women and men; risk preferences

The *abo nefsi* can also monitor that the weekly days of fasting and longer fasting periods are observed in a household, and can punish those who do not fast – commonly by adding more fasting days. During *Filseta* (the hardest fasting period of the year in August before the yearly celebration of Mariyam), the first meal is after mass (*qïdasi*) at around 2 or 3 pm. The orthodox priest *mihïrey* Tadesse explains the reason for fasting:

You know from when, from when the Lord (*Geta*) started fasting? After being baptised He went to a place in the wilds (*bere<u>k</u>a*) called 'Gedam Korento'; he went there and fasted. Why? For us; otherwise, He had no sins (<u>*hat'iyat*</u>) [that would require him to fast]. So when He commands us to fast, we fast.

When I urge him to expand on the matter of why there is fasting, he says:

What did I tell you David said (quotation in *Giaz*): 'a person who is fasting on earth will be saved'. The one who fasts on earth will be saved. He said this in his psalm, 'fast and pray'; the disciples also said, 'fast and pray'; they said, do your prayers and fast. So what do you think fasting is for? It's for all sins. Greediness is the main sin (*hat'iyat*), but fasting cures (cleanses) all; cleanses all sins. Eh?²¹

Fasting seems to be followed with universal precision in the rural areas, relating as well to the fact that rural households would rarely slaughter livestock (referred to as *genzeb*; literally 'money') for household consumption anyway. In the market town observance of fasting seems to be subject to more bending, especially by men. In general, women seem to observe holy days by going to church and following the fasting days and periods (only being exempted after child birth) more meticulously than men. When I ask the business woman Zaid why more women than men go to church in the market town, she says:

Yes, this is their own [consideration]; it's theirs [men's]. Otherwise, now if you look at the market town, it's mostly the women who worship at the church, that's it. When it comes to the men, they are not many; meaning it's according to their own [considerations]. Otherwise, according to religion it's the same, but in our place men do not worship at the church that much. Women, however, they worship, they fast, now we even stay fasting till after the mass (*qïdasi*) in the afternoon, but men, there is only some, that's it; you will only find some elders, the rest they don't focus much on the church. Otherwise, the religion is the same for all of us; it presents itself to us in the same way.

-Yes? (...)

Ehe, yes, I think it's habitual (AAP &/bilimdi) that men are not that many.

²⁰ Fieldwork notes 29 July 2008/*<u>H</u>amle* 22, 2000 E.C.

²¹ Recorded interview 13 December 2008/Tahsas 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 36 in Tigriña).

-Maybe women have more fear that means about life, about giving birth, about illness and the like. Meaning is that so?

Yes. Women that means, yes, since there are problems, we will pray, we will worship ... meaning you know ... it's we [women] that receive the problems, like the many problems in relation to giving birth. 'Forgive me', you say that means, and beg God (*Amlak*) for everything. Since women have a lot of problems, they beg God and worship at the church. For a man, however, if he worships or doesn't worship it doesn't matter that much, he's 'careless' (in English), that's it. Once in a while ... when there is a big holy day (*beal*) that means; like now when Gebriel (the arch-angel Gabriel) is coming up, that's it, both men and women worship. At some holy days there are a lot of men worshipping. Now on Gebriel's day, except that you happened not to go, you could have seen it, on the 19th [E.C.]; that's it, men, children and the old worship en mass. However, this is based on ones own belief, that's it, it's belief that means.²²

Zaid confirms that there are differences in religious practice between women and men – while emphasising that some holy days carry more weight than others – she also notes that personal considerations play a role. The notion that men are more careless is also mentioned by Beriha (36), who, since her second divorce, lives with her children in her mother's household in the market town, with the main income coming from brewing *sïwa*:

Generally, when it comes to worshipping at the church there's no one worshipping like women. Men don't match that here in the market town, you don't see that. (...)...They [men] have no reason (suq ilom iyom; literally 'they keep quiet'), they are careless, they're careless. It's not that many. In this place there are many women [who go to church]. There're a lot of women, there aren't that many [men]. They know about [drinking] siwa, they [only know about] siwa (laughs). (...) They [women], yes, now for the sins they have committed, they say forgive me, I'm sorry. But the men say nothing (sug ilu) since they are superior ($74 \times 72 \cdot n \ddot{a} g dmit$) he says, what do I have [to ask forgiveness for]. But they [the women] ... go [to church] to say release me from my wrongdoings ... she will say, if I have sinned forgive me. If she wants to give birth, they [women] will go and pray. They're like that. (...). I would also say what [problems] do they [men] have; the sin ($4 \cdot 7 \cdot 9 \cdot 1 / hat' iyat$) is in us [women].²³

What strikes me here is Beriha's notion that women carry more $\sin(-\hbar \Phi P \dot{P} h dr' iyat)$ than men. This is confirmed by the orthodox priest, *mihirey* Tadesse, when relating women's larger part of the responsibility for human misery to Hiwan's (Eve's) eating the forbidden fruit ($\hbar \theta$ - $\Omega \wedge \Omega / l tse-Beles$) in the Garden of Eden:

It was the eating of the forbidden fruit that above all made women inferior $(\lambda^{3} h. \lambda^{3} h)$ aniisatkin); the sin that was committed then was grave; you couldn't say it was minor. It was this which caused death; it was precisely that [sin]. Eh? It was this that brought us all into trouble.²⁴

²² Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 37 in Tigriña).

²³ Recorded interview 12 December 2008/Tahsas 3, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 35 in Tigriña).

²⁴ Recorded interview 13 December 2008/Tahsas 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 36 in Tigriña).

While the number of men and women going to church seems to be more equal in the rural area, it is nevertheless important to take note of this gendered aspect of religious practice. This aspect is mentioned by other authors on Ethiopia (e.g. Wright 2002: 51; Biseswar 2008a: 142), and is also at issue in writings on women's religiosity in other cultural contexts on other continents (e.g. Miller and Hoffmann 1995; Iannaccone 1998). Alan S. Miller and John P. Hoffman attempt to explain gender difference in religiosity by way of 'risk preferences', which means interpreting religious practice as risk-averse behaviour and, conversely, that rejecting religious belief is risk-taking behaviour (Miller and Hoffmann 1995: 64). These authors note that gender differences in risk-taking have commonly been understood as based on biological strength and difference in gendered socialisation into risk-taking behaviour, including as well the structural location of risk as it relates to gendered divisions of labour. In their study from the US, gender differences in religiosity are found to correlate with risk preferences, but only in part (ibid: 73). In my study area in Tigray, a general economic as well as ecological insecurity makes life risky for *both* women and men. Women's position in relation to pregnancy, child birth and their pivotal role in child care – together with the instability of conjugal relationships – suggests gendered aspects of insecurity that, from the perspective of risk preferences, *might* increase their religiosity relative to men. Women are also considered more vulnerable to spirit attacks, the evil doings of the *deftera* (sorcerer) and the evil eve of $buda^{25}$ during pregnancy, the first twelve days after childbirth when it is risky even to leave the house, and up to the Christening of her child (which is forty days for a boy and eighty for a girls) when she again can enter church (see also Mjaaland 2004c). One young woman (18) explains: 'Before one year I was three to four months pregnant. Then one day I fell from the kitchen hut stairs because a buda (evil eve) cast a spell on me.²⁶ She shows me the place; it is a fall of about a half metre. She also shows me the assembly of *ketabs* (amulets) she wears around her neck to be protected from buda and deftera believed to operate on behalf of someone whom is envious of her. The fact that both clergy and the women themselves seem to think that they carry the responsibility for Eve's sin, as women, might increase their commitment in religious matters compared to men's. However, when the women above were eager to see the priest leave for them be able to start the dancing at the

²⁵ Buda is a male or female witch taking bodily possession of other people through his or her evil eye, by 'eating' that person from within. The local interpretation is based on the issue of jealousy and envy in social relations, and implicitly warning people not to stick their neck out too far and becoming too visible in social interaction (see also Mjaaland 2004c, 2006).

²⁶ Fieldwork notes 21 June 2009/Sene 14, 2001 E.C.

mahiber for Mariyam, this suggests that, it does not necessarily follow from their sincere religiosity that religious prescriptions permeate every aspect of women's practices.

Subjecting religious exegesis and penance to considerations of one's own

Laurence R. Iannaccone (1998) also takes note of the uncertainties connected to religiosity itself since the *effect* of religious practice is in fact unpredictable. The women that were involved in praying for rain in the rural area of my study in Tigray in 2009, when the rain had not started by the middle of June, also subjected their religious exegesis to pragmatic considerations. 'We have been begging [God] for rain (**PUA45**/mihilelana)', a group of women tell me when coming from church around mid-day. When I ask the peasant women Nitsihiti (44) about it later, she says: 'We started on Monday and will continue for seven days'. 'If it does not start raining by then, what will you do?' 'We will continue to pray for rain', she says, 'till it starts raining', 'Are there only women who pray for rain at the church?' I ask. 'Mostly it is women, but also some elder men were present', she says, and adds, 'one of the priests were also there'. While the women were praying, the men had been ploughing and sowing since early morning in spite of the lack of rain, suggesting the possibility for a gendered division of labour also in relation to religious practice. The landless women, Aster, shows me how they had been walking in a circle outside the church compound, bent to the ground, hitting the ground alternately with their palms and the top of their hands while singing (which explains why Nitsihiti had complained about back-pains earlier).²⁷ There had been about 40 women the first day, the neighbour women Meharit explains later. 'Mostly elderly women?' I ask. 'All ages, but mostly the elder [women]. Some younger people do not understand that they have reasons to be afraid', she says. Two days later I ask Nitsihiti and Aster how many they were at the church that morning to pray for rain. 'Not many', Nitsihiti says, and starts counting by mentioning their names. 'Seven', she then says. 'When the first rain came, they dropped out.' 'How long will you continue', I ask, 'if the rain that comes is not enough?' 'Till Meskerem (September) [end of the rainy season] if we *have to*', she says.²⁸ In the above account, religious exegesis and practice seems to be firmly linked to risk preferences and risk-averse behaviour (Miller and Hoffmann 1995). If the rain does not come, it can in fact be a matter of life or death in this area. The older generations know this, and those who today are around 30 years of age, and above, have memories of the

²⁷ One of their praying for rain songs goes: All must beg/pray for rain together with us / In our begging/praying for rain we clothe ourselves with soil / With Mariyam we also speak for those who are absent. ለምንአ ድአ አሳምናና 1 ንማሀለል ት ሽዲና ሓመድ / በማሪያም ክንብንዮ ዓድትን ውዑሉን: ²⁸ Fieldwork notes 20 June 2009/Sene 13, 2001 E.C.

big Ethiopian famine in 1984-85 that hit Tigray hard. In spite of this, not everyone in the village came to pray for rain, not even all the women came, and not all the women who did come persisted in their pursuit to ensure rain through the entire rainy season.

Penance can likewise be subject to considerations of one's own. For example, to make sure that her sins have been forgiven before she dies, the market-town business women Zaid has ventured on numerous pilgrimages in the region to churches and monasteries' yearly celebrations (hām/2/kusmi) to seek absolution for previous sins:

When I go to worship [at the church], that's it, I say forgive me for my past sins ... forgive me for my wrongdoings, let me confess before I die, meaning let me confess before I die about what I did that I believe was a sin. Meaning, at first, I had given birth with a Muslim, but afterwards, that's it, I have dropped everything and will take the Holy Communion, meaning I wish to become a nun ... a religious person. Now, when I go to worship at the church, in the early morning (...) I pray, my dear Lord (*Goytay mearey*) I beg him, 'the past harms I have done forgive me; let me confess before I die, lead me along the right path, give me a long life'. That's it, because God forgives, he forgives you. You will admit the sins you have committed that means. I have also been to Waldiba to worship there ... to Aksum, to different places in the country side ... thanks to Thera I have also worshiped in Lalibela; I have worshipped in many churches. Because, that's it, even Debre Damo, I asked forgiveness for the sins that I have done, meaning what is said to be a sin, even though deep down (<code>Afl hflg.e/ab kebdey;</code> literally 'in my stomach') I don't believe it [was a sin] that means. Since I hear it's a sin, that's it, I'm asking God's forgiveness, however, I'm tired of worshipping at all these churches. (...)²⁹

Zaid is an active churchgoer and I have followed her to different churches in the area on holy days setting out before dawn in stumbling darkness. As she mentions above, we did in fact travel together to the rock-hewn churches in Lalibela in 2001. Similarly to Senait above, Zaid mentions that she will become a nun and devote herself to religious practice at a later point in life to secure her Afterlife. However, Zaid also sets a limit on her penance when saying she is tired of all these pilgrimages. She even believes her relationship with a married Muslim man and having three children with him was *not* a sin. When I ask her explicitly about it, she says:

That is what they [the priests] say. It's said it is a sin; according to religion some say it's a sin. But me, in ... in my own belief, I don't call it a sin. The reason is that according to my own belief I have not sinned since the difference is only that we are Muslims and Christians, otherwise, I know myself that we are the children of one God (*Egzabiher*). What is sinful is to steal, to lie, to kill people, to put the blame on other people; that's what is called a sin. Otherwise, in my belief, to be with a Muslim ... to give birth with a Muslim, myself, I would say that I haven't sinned. $(...)^{30}$

Zaid's opinion is counter to what the priests have told her, and counter to how it is generally understood by other Orthodox Christians in her community. In her account Zaid refers to her *own* perception of what should be considered a sin or not. In her opinion she has done no

²⁹ Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 37 in Tigriña).

³⁰ Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 37 in Tigriña).

wrong; she has not sinned. One of her daughters (23) does, however, express unease with being the child from a religiously mixed relationship. She says: 'It's said in the Holy Book (Metshaf Qidus; Bible) that Christians and Muslims should not be together. My mother was told by the priests that she would end up on the fire [meaning in hell] when she dies because she has given birth to three children with a Muslim. It's considered a big sin (hat'iyat). However, she went on foot to the monastery in Waldiba [western Tigray] and has made up for it. Now it will be okay', she assures me. 'Do you think that when we die there are two heavens, one for Christians and one for Muslims', I ask. 'Yes', she answers. 'Women should also have just one man', she continues, 'but the same does not apply for men'. 'If it did', I suggest, 'there would be only women in heaven'. She laughs and leaves the room.³¹ No doubt her mother has had to live with negative attitudes and gossip about her choice of a Muslim partner, even from her closest family. Zaid's narrative account is also about her standing up against the local clergy in the case of baptising her children in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, finding a more tolerant priest in another town to do it. Zaid does not go about voicing her reservation towards the Orthodox Church's influential teachings, however, and keeps up her religious practice for everybody to see her dedication. On my last field visit in 2012 she had reduced her church visits, however, in favour of her business because of tiredness from year-long hard work.

My concern above has been with, firstly, identifying how the volatility of concepts in relation to God's power and a person's control entails interpretations that enable spaces for agency. For example, while signifying 'fate' and 'destiny', the openness in the concept *adil* for the 'chance' to transgress the structural conditions that one is born into, runs counter to the more deterministic aspects of the *habitus* concept, which does not allow for this kind of transgression unless the environment changes. Secondly, in the narrative accounts referred to above, religious exegesis and penance are, irrespective of 'risk preferences' (Miller and Hoffmann 1995), subject to reflection and considerations that might run counter to clerics' prescriptions and common religious sentiments in the community. Considering themselves to be more vulnerable than men as a consequence of their reproductive roles and Hiwan's (Eve's) sin, these women are, nevertheless, involved in subjective deliberations when deciding to comply, or not, with what is perceived as required religious practice. It is from this perspective that I will discuss how the authority of the church and the authority of the

³¹ Fieldwork notes 8 October 2008/Meskerem 28, 2001 E.C.

government play into women's decision-making strategies on the issue of reproductive choice in my study area in Tigray.

Decision-making in the case of contraceptive use: the issue of authority

As noted above, the priests interact directly with people on the household level as spiritual fathers (abo nefsi), giving religious advice as well as punishments, and by partaking in the household's celebrations (e.g. mahiber, christenings and weddings), and in the case of deaths. After the mass (*qidasi*) on holy days, holidays and Sundays, the priests can also approach the congregation outside the church to give religious teachings in Tigriña about what is considered correct interpretation of the scripture, since the mass is in the church language *Giaz* that most people do not understand. This time after mass is also an arena that community leaders and civil servants (like teachers and agriculture- and health extension workers) use to mobilise people on issues like the yearly communal projects of terracing to prevent soil erosion, give information on the next vaccination campaign in the area, or on the importance of sending their sons and daughters to school, to mention but a few examples. On the occasions when I participated, both the priests and the (male) community leaders, while standing between the men's and women's side at the church outside the compound, addressed primarily the men's side. The result is that it is often impossible to hear what is said from where the women sit. Instead, the women spend their time chatting, implicitly withdrawing from concerns emphasised by both religious and government authorities. Nevertheless, government representatives, like the civil servant below, is concerned with the hold priests continue to have on their religious followers: 'Priests, in Ethiopia that means, every ... every person they trust the priests; priests hold the farmers ... by force.³² The explanation provided by the peasant daughter Welesh (21) also points to the intricate relationship between the authority of the church and the authority of the government:

Yes, the church too respects their government. The government will bring about complete change *(lewt'i)*. So ... what they [the clergy] say is that it's by the power of God (11-h.e.A. $\lambda g^{a} \Lambda \hat{n} / bihay li$ *Amlak*) that the government works, and works rightfully, in everything that means. And we too, it's it [the government] that has ensured the respect of our rights. It's it [the government] that has facilitated the basis of our work. Meaning, it's God who has created the situation for this to happen. However, it's not to say that God is governing [us]... God is doing this for us. It means the government; they also trust God that means. They believe that the government is acting under the reign of God, and then the government is governing us.³³

³² Recorded interview 16 October 2008/T'iqimti 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 6 in English).

³³ Recorded interview 6 October 2008/Meskerem 26 E.C. (Interview number 4 in Tigriña).

Welesh's elaboration comes close to how Messay explains the historical relationship between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the state where the church has served as authenticator of God's choice of emperor, and ensured that divine guidance descended upon the state (Messay 1999: 71). While relying on an autonomous status to fulfil this role, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has not been detached from issues relating to political power in the Ethiopian context. As Messay notes, the doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church unites, on a fundamental level, the political and the religious (ibid.). In spite of the Derg regime disrupting this historical link, the church's power continues to seep into political processes by way of the considerable influence it has on people's lives in Tigray (see also Young 1997a). As was the case during the liberation struggle according to Young (1997b), pressuring the church too far on issues of reform, like in the case of women, might not only result in losing the clergy's support in the present development process but, more acutely, the support of the people itself. Most experts I interviewed within education, health, agriculture and women's affairs downplayed potential tension between the authority of the church and the authority of the government when asked explicitly about it. Priests can, however, counteract government policies, as the male civil servant working in the rural area, referred to above, asserts:

There is also a problem in relation to the religious aspects; women [according to the priests] should ... must stay at home. The priest, all priests here they ignore them [the women] as participants in [community] work. They say that women inherently, according to their nature, that women must keep to the house. She must not participate in [community] work, in the meetings or assemblies ... in things like that, so the priests ignore them. This is hard to change. Priests in general ... we believe in God, every farmer that dwells here, every farmer that lives here they believe in God, that is why they are fright[ened] of the priests. As a [community] expert, I have told (...) the priests, not to say that women must stay at home. So all the priests say, 'this is our custom, this is none of your business. Do not interfere with our teaching. We are the ones who know. You have no [right] to say that'. But I ignore them, I do not accept their teaching, for the future also I will not accept it. I'm going to teach them as an expert from [the domain of] science, as the government says.³⁴

Government policies under the present EPRDF government, especially those that address the opening up of spaces for women that earlier was subject to limitations (e.g. education, marriage rules, political participation, family planning), do not only challenge religious sentiments, they also challenge the religious institutions' authority on these issues. In the above account, the authority of the church is challenged by laying claims to (government) authority in the domain of science where religious authorities should not interfere. The Tigrayan peasant daughter and divorced day labourer 'Guey' (30) also sums up the different domains assigned to these authorities in a similar manner when asserting: '(...) the

³⁴ Recorded interview 16 October 2008/T'ïqïmti 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 6 in English).

*government follows science, scientific education, the clergy [follows] only religion; so there is a difference*³⁵ The above references to a distinction between the religious domain and the authority of the church and the authority of the government being situated within the domain of science, actualised the use of Bourdieu's 'field' concept on these domains.

While Bourdieu's writings on religion are relatively sparse, David L. Swartz and Vera L. Zolberg note that Bourdieu drew on the classical tradition in the sociology of religion (Marx, Weber and Durkheim) when developing the basic concepts in his theoretical framework, including the concept of 'field' (Swartz & Zolberg 2004: 5; see also Dianteill 2004). It is from this point of departure that the religious 'field' structures a religious *habitus*, which structures practices and representations, aspirations and hopes justified by a *doxa* that misrecognises the limits to the church's actual knowledge (Bourdieu 1991a: 14). In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, where different 'fields' are relatively autonomous (Bourdieu 1990a: 130), but structurally and functionally homologous (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 105), with dynamic borders (ibid: 104), relations of power in one 'field' can reaffirm power relations in another, much in line with, as noted above, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's role in the past as authenticator of God's choice of emperor and, hence, of a particular social order (Messay 1999). While Bourdieu acknowledges discrepancies between intersecting 'fields', these discrepancies result in a 'destabilized *habitus* torn by contradictions and internal division, generating suffering' (Bourdieu 2000: 160, see also Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127). However, as I will discuss below, the authority of the church in the 'field' of religion and with the authority of the government situated in the 'field' of science, the contradictions between these 'fields' on the issue of contraceptive use, when handled analytically as a 'frontier', show decision-making processes that are more dynamic than the effect of intersecting 'fields' that resemble a 'trauma' in Bourdieu's understanding, suggests.

At the 'frontier' of religious sentiments and new government policies

It is important to bear in mind when addressing reproductive choice that having children is imperative, not only in the Tigrayan context but in Ethiopia in general. A woman that does not give birth will most likely be divorced, regardless of whether it is her 'fault' or not (e.g. Fikir 2011). The fact that a couple in the market town had lived their whole life together, in spite of not producing any children, was seen as nothing short of remarkable. When the woman died of old age the fighter woman Saba commented: '*A life without giving birth is a*

³⁵ Recorded interview 17 October 2008/T'ïqïmti 7, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 7 in Tigriña).

*wasted life*³⁶ The fact that I myself do not want to have any children is met with explicit protests and attempts to make me change my mind, classifying me as foolish and selfish. If I say God or Mariyam did not give me any, I am met with pity or considerate silence. Many women, both in the rural area and the market town, relegate authority to Mariyam in reproductive matters. Women's reverence of the holy day (*beal*) for Mariyam the 21st day of every month (E.C.), and their celebration of her in a mahiber (religious association) the same day, attest to the fact that women perceive themselves as needing protection in these matters (in addition to available health care). Many of those women, who answered in the exploratory household survey that they did not consider using family planning, said that it is Mariyam who has authority in this matter. This is also the case with Senait's granddaughter (17), who was married at the age of 15, and about to move together with her husband as she approached the age of 18. I ask her, 'earlier you said that you will wait two years before you get pregnant. Will you use contraceptives?' She says, 'Mariyam will prevent me herself', she says. 'How?' I ask. 'Do you pray to Mariyam not to get pregnant?' I ask. 'Yes', she says, 'I pray to her.³⁷ Praying to Mariyam is understood to provide divine contraception and constituted the main preventive measure women could resort to before reproductive technologies were introduced. Currently, contraceptives for women are available free of charge from government health institutions in Tigray, both from health posts in the rural areas and from the health centre in the market town. The contraceptives that are distributed from the rural health posts are basically injections that last for three to six months. The government health centre in the market town also distributes implants that last for three years.³⁸

Because of free access to reproductive technologies also in the rural area of my study, together with the fact that the church's stand on the issue of contraceptive use was interpreted in different and opposing directions, I included one question about family planning both in the interviews with women and in the exploratory household survey. The question was: -Do you know about family planning? Would you consider using it? Why?³⁹ In those cases where the church attitude in relation to the government strategy was addressed in women's answers, these have been grouped in three categories according to the following criteria: (1) those who will not use contraceptives and explain this with a reference to religious sentiments and/or that the church does not allow it, (2) those who interpret the church' current silence on the

 ³⁶ Fieldwork notes 12 February 2012/Lekatit 4, 2004 E.C.
 ³⁷ Fieldwork notes 21 June 2009/Sene 14, 2001 E.C.

³⁸ Contraceptives are also available from privately-run pharmacies together with contraceptive pills, emergency pills and condoms, and can be prescribed and injected in private clinics for a fee.

ብዛሪባ ምጣን ስድራ ትፈልዋዶ? ክትዋቀሚ ትሓስቢዶ? ንምንታይ?

issue (in public) to mean that it is now allowed by the church and that they are free to use it if they want, and (3) those who believe that the church is still against contraceptive use, but will use it anyway. It is this last category of answers that will be at the base of my discussion here because of the contestations of authority implied and the spaces for agency these contestations generate. As a result of the divergence in the answers about the church position on the matter, I brought up the issue of contraceptive use and abortion when interviewing the orthodox priest, *mihirey* Tadesse, in the market town. Again, the people that were present in the room (referred to in parentheses) intersect our conversation. They also start asking the priest questions that point to the fact that they are not sure about the church's stand on the issue of contraceptive use either:

-Yes, now the Weyane (TPLF) government allows birth control, but is it allowed now according to religion?

This has nothing to do with religion.

-Contraceptive use that means?

It might be mentioned, but this is not our concern. She can say she will give birth, or she can say I will leave it, and leave it (laughs). About birth, what is it called again [contraceptives]; we [the priests] have no say. If she claims that she will not be able to raise them, that she doesn't have the means; how can we interfere? Eh? If she says, 'oh my, I want to have many children'; to have a child is her decision.

(A man: -What is underlying the question is (...))

(A woman: -Is it a sin (*hat'iyat*)?)

-Is it sin, or?

(A man: -Is it a sin (...) to control birth?)

Oh! We cannot say this or that about birth control.

(A man: -Is it allowed by religion?)

We cannot say this or that about this, but in the past He told us to multiply, and if that is what He says, that is what happens (laughs).

(A man: -Is there a law in the Bible about contraceptives?)

Hah! We never say anything ... about stopping to give birth; we do not teach them [about that]. Do we say stop giving birth? We don't teach them to do so. ... If they stop giving birth, if they give birth, they give birth, if they stop; I would say it's up to them.

(People are discussing)

-But, does it mean it's a sin if a woman uses birth control; is it a sin now?

Hah! We never say; we never say that. Even in the book [Bible] ... we found nothing in the Bible about giving or not giving birth. (...) But one thing that I told you earlier, the Bible says (quotation in Giaz), 'multiply', and as to not multiplying as He said, the government says that we have already multiplied past what is required; that's what they say, hah! We don't interfere if that's what it [the government] wants. We never tell her to leave it, we never tell her to stop, to stop giving birth, nor do we tell her to give birth; she will act according to her capacity. (...) According to us, according to the Bible, this book doesn't say this or that, it doesn't differentiate. It doesn't differentiate between not giving birth. [Contraceptive] medicines that weren't used before are also introduced now.

(A woman: -It's a sin if she does an abortion (ምስዳድ/misidad) after getting pregnant)

That is indeed a sin.

-*Ehe, is that so, yes, is that how it is?*

Getting pregnant, and when pregnant doing an abortion?

-Ehe?

That's a sin. First, who told her to get pregnant in the first place? What has it [the foetus] done to not [be allowed] to grow up? This is obvious. But if she aborts she is a murderer; she is killing a person that means.

-Yes, yes?

That is a big sin.⁴⁰

Mihirey Tadesse's claim that the use of contraceptives has nothing to do with religion suggests that the issue has been relegated to the government to handle. When asking at the wereda health bureau if there are conflicting views between the government policy and the church on the issue of contraceptive use, I am told: *'The priests might be against family planning and contraceptive use, but they don't express their opinion openly any more. They don't raise the question or express their resistance at the church. They don't express support for it either. They simply keep quiet about it.* ⁴¹ Women I have asked explicitly about it confirm that the priests keep quiet about the issue in their teachings at the church, and that the focus is now on the issue of marital fidelity in the case of heightened risk posed by HIV/Aids, *and* against abortion (**PhR £**/*misïdad*). On the issue of abortion the church's view coincides more unanimously with the general religious sentiment. While still classified as illegal in Ethiopia in the new Criminal Code (FDRE 2005) (Articles 545-49), regulations in Article 551 open up for abortion in the case of rape or incest, in cases where she is not able to take care of

⁴⁰ Recorded interview 13 December 2008/Tahsas 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 36 in Tigriña).

⁴¹ Fieldwork notes 30 June 2009/Sene 23, 2001 E.C.

the child because of psychical or mental deficiencies or minority (in practice defined as girls under 18), or in cases concerned with the mother or child's health (see also FDRE-FHD 2006). This opening up of access to safe abortion is, however, not commonly known. Health extension workers that I interviewed in the rural area simply said that abortion is illegal without expanding on the issue. Illegality or moral condemnation has seldom prevented women from resorting to induced abortions, even in Ethiopia. In an interview with Nitsihiti (38) in 2002 when pregnant with her eleventh child, she says:

I had thought it was enough [children]; I had thought of taking contraceptives. Instead I got pregnant. (...) I don't like abortion (*mïsïdad*), so I didn't do it. I was afraid.

-But is abortion allowed?

It's not allowed. It is bad (<u>hemag</u>); a sin (<u>hat'iyat</u>). It's murder (デキナヘ/mïgïtal). (...) The book [Bible] says it is likened to killing.

-But do women around here do abortion sometimes?

Yes. Some do it. But it's bad. (...) When you do abortion, it means you kill it [the foetus] or you might even kill yourself. So we are afraid. You can kill yourself or you fall ill; that's what we are afraid of. (...) I had thought I would start using contraceptives, but then I got pregnant.⁴²

It is not only religious sentiments that inform Nitsihiti's answer; she is also afraid of the very real danger for her own life if doing so (before safe abortion was available in government health institutions down to wereda level). A death in my neighbourhood during one of my fieldwork trips, was a reminder of the fact that unsafe abortions continue to be carried out even with legal provisions in place and vacuum equipment available at the local health centre in the market town.⁴³ While the official statistics are not aggregated by age, I am informed at the wereda health bureau and the health post in the rural area where women's age is in fact registered that there is a steady increase in women's contraceptive use in both the rural and urban areas in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda, including among female students. It is also noted at the wereda health centre that the number of safe abortions conducted on female students is on the increase, suggesting that contraceptive use is not always incorporated in youth's testing of their own sexuality.⁴⁴

Some of the women in the exploratory household survey were concerned about the risk of contraceptive use making them barren, and they would therefore refrain from using it before having given birth to the number of children they wanted. Relating to this fear of

⁴² Recorded interview 22 October 2002/T'iqimti 12, 1995 E.C. (Interview number 18A in Tigriña).

⁴³ The health centre in the market town does have vacuum equipment for abortion.

⁴⁴ These discussions in 2009 and 2012 have been with Maternal and Child Health Service expert Desta Abate.

becoming barren, none of the women voiced their opposition against contraceptive use as clearly as one peasant woman (62), surely past her child-bearing age: 'What if I became infertile by using contraceptives? It was not allowed for our parents either. It's a sin that sends us to hell, so I rather not use this bad thing.⁴⁵ It seems, however, that the older generation of women are increasingly accustomed to the idea of family planning. 'Elsa' (70), a divorcee living alone in the market town, says: 'What about it; it's good to give birth, but if vou don't want to, vou can prevent it. The priests don't have knowledge about this: it's the doctors who know. Who will tell them [the priests] about it?⁴⁶ By dismissing the church as an authority on contraceptive use, her answer links up with the relegation of authority from the religious to the scientific 'field' addressed above. As Guey (30), who grew up in the rural area but have lived many years in town areas, says: 'It is right [to use family planning]. But my opinion and the priests' opinion are different. They say it is hat'iyat (sin); that it's not allowed. From the point of view of science it's allowed, I think.⁴⁷ Furthermore, a peasant woman (46) in the rural area says: 'About [if it is a] sin; we don't ask the priests. Who will ask them [permission] anyway?⁴⁸ One peasant woman with seven children says: 'I will take it [contraceptives] from now on, I have enough children now. It's said it's a sin, but who will tell them [the priests]?⁴⁹ The landless rural woman Aster (38) also says: 'I don't know if it's allowed or not. We [women] will allow it ourselves! ⁵⁰ In fact, these women do not feel obliged to tell the priests what they do when it comes to their reproductive decisions. Instead, women lay claims to their own authority on the matter, as women, in spite of the risk of committing a sin. This confirms, as Miller and Hoffmann assert, that explaining gender difference in religiosity by way of 'risk preferences' – which means interpreting religious practice as risk-averse behaviour – only partly explains women's reproductive strategies (Miller and Hoffmann 1995: 73). Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky's (1982) understanding of risks as ranked according to the dangers worthy of attention makes more sense in a context where real risks to women's lives and health in relation to pregnancies and childbirths can be ranked above the risk of committing a sin. As a 'frontier' between 'fields' where authority is contested, the schism between the 'field' of religion and the 'field' of science on the issue of family planning, constitutes, in the above examples, a space for agency where women, based on their claim to their own authority, make their own decisions.

⁴⁵ Household questionnaire 13 June 2009/Sene 5, 2001 E.C. (MT-17R).

 ⁴⁶ Household questionnaire 1 July 2009/Sene 24, 2001 E.C. (TM-6U).
 ⁴⁷ Household questionnaire 1 July 2009/Sene 24, 2001 E.C. (TM-4U).

⁴⁸ Household questionnaire 23 June 2009/Sene 16, 2001 E.C. (TM-14R).

⁴⁹ Household questionnaire 12 June 2009/Sene 5, 2001 E.C. (TM-4R).

⁵⁰ Household guestionnaire 24 June 2009/Sene 17, 2001 E.C. (TM-16R).

Negotiating reproductive choice

Women are also willing to decide against the authority of their husbands' (or partners') on the issue of contraceptive use, if needed, since it is not uncommon that husbands are against their wives taking contraceptives. While women might prefer to be in agreement with their husbands on the issue of family planning, at the wereda health bureau it is emphasised that a woman does not need her husband's consent; it is her right to decide on the issue of contraceptive use and abortion. The wereda health bureau and the health extension workers in the rural area also confirm that family planning services can be provided in secrecy to avoid husbands denying their wives this right. Also of concern is to avoid neighbours or others knowing about it and, hence, to protect women from stigmatisation and gossip. At the wereda health bureau it is noted that there can still be a certain stigma of promiscuity connected to women's contraceptive use. Family planning services can also be provided on house-to-house visits by local health extension workers or during vaccination campaigns, when it is often the mothers who come with their children. The nurse that was employed to give advice on health issues at the secondary school in the market town was authorised to distribute the contraceptive injections if the female students asked for it.⁵¹ The perception that the church is against contraceptive use and that it is a sin to use it does, however, prevail. When I ask Nitsihiti's daughter Barnesh (22) and mother of two, if contraceptives are allowed by the church, she says:

No! It's bad; it's said it's not allowed, but what about it? It's said it's a sin (*hat'iyat*), but they [women] use it [contraceptives], meaning some of those who use it are wives of the priests. Otherwise, that's what is said. But the wives of the priests are making use of it, meaning, for three years, for two years. Afterwards, I will also do that. Now, I'm fine (laughs), but later I will do that too.

-But do the clergy say it's a big sin (<u>hat'iyat</u>)?

They say, yes! Ehe, they say that, yes. That's what they say, but what about it? (...) Hah! About my life from now on that means, I wish (*yimine*) to give birth to two [more children]. But after [those] two, after [that] I can't give birth [anymore]. Meaning, there is disease, there is old age and, since it's so [difficult] to cope, I cannot give birth anymore. About afterwards, God knows (*Amlak yifelit'*). Otherwise, I think I will use contraceptives. I think it's better to make use of contraceptives and bring up the children I have borne, if they live up. I wish that; that's what I wish. What my husband will say, I don't know, I'm yet to hear (laughs). Whether he says, give birth, whether he says don't give birth, we are to hear later. If he refuses [the use of contraceptives], I will do it secretly that means. I will do it myself, but if he will be angry, let him be angry, meaning that is what I think. That is what I wish that means, I will give birth to up to four [children], then I will not give birth [any more], I think. This is what I wish.⁵²

⁵¹ When this position eventually was removed it was as a result of conflict about who should pay her salary, the wereda health bureau or if it should be taken from the secondary school budget.

⁵² Recorded interview 16 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 7, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 17B in Tigriña).

Again, Barnesh's answer shows the willingness to stand up against what is perceived as the church stand against contraceptive use. Barnesh is also willing to go against her husband on the matter if necessary and decide what is best for her. When I point to the difference between the clergy's point of view and the government on the issue of family planning one female student 'Awetash' (21), married with one three-year-old child, and just about to leave to start a university degree programme, also emphasises her own authority on the issue:

But, I will go my own way. Whether I'm to have a child or not, or whether I'm to continue my education; I act according to what I think is right. (...) About the clergy, they cannot do anything about it [the use of contraceptives]. There is no problem with contraceptives. To have two men ... is not allowed in our religion, otherwise there is no problem or other with using contraceptives. In my opinion, people can think for themselves. To commit other sins is bad; otherwise what is it with [taking contraceptive] injections? If you want to protect your life, you use contraceptives. What use is there of bearing a child when you yourself are leading a bad life; when you don't have the means to raise it. It doesn't make sense to have a child. It's no sin [to use contraceptives] in my opinion, I don't know about others (laughs).⁵³

Awetash emphasises that she will decide for herself according to what she thinks is right on the issue of having or not having a child, as she has in the case of continuing her education. In her opinion the clergy has no authority in relation to contraceptive use. She further claims that there is no point in giving birth to a child that one cannot provide for. 'Almaz' (29), a married housewife living in the market town with her six-year-old son while her husband is employed as a civil servant elsewhere in Tigray, says:

... According to our religion it's not allowed. To use medicines [to prevent childbirth] is not allowed by our religion. But, we don't respect our religion that much [on this issue], so we use it. I, myself use it now. Meaning, to avoid unwanted pregnancy and other things [diseases], so far, I have taken care of myself properly. Otherwise, it's prohibited by our religion; it doesn't say take the [contraceptive] injection. According to our religion it's said to be a sin (<u>hat'iyat</u>) (laughs...). But I keep quiet (sug ile). I use it [contraceptives] by my own choice (*mirch'a*). If I want to give birth, if I want it, I will stop it [taking contraceptives]. (...) I don't tell them [the priests], to them ... the priests, that's it, they tell [us to do] this, this, and that. Then we say okay, and listen to them. But in practice it's not done, it's not done in practice, it means. ... If we follow what they say it might not be good for our lives. But, that's it, we tell God (*Amlak*) [what we did] and say, Lord (*Geta*) forgive us, and do what we want (laughs).⁵⁴

Almaz asserts that contraceptive use is prohibited by the clergy, but questions the clergy's authority on the matter; she even doubts if what they say is good for women. As with many women, her strategy is to keep quiet; to not tell the priests. She admits it before God, however, and asks forgiveness. I also ask the peasant woman Tigist (40):

⁵³ Recorded interview 28 October 2008/T'iqimti 18, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 8 in Tigriña).

⁵⁴ Recorded interview 4 November 2008/T'iqimti 25, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 12 in Tigriña).

-But what do the clergy say about contraceptive use? Is it allowed?

Hm! It's not allowed, it's not allowed by the priests; they don't allow it. They say why [do you do it] and get angry. You keep quiet (*sug ilki*) and don't tell them; you keep quiet (*sug ilki*) and take the injection. 'Why are you late [why don't you give birth again]?' they ask you, and I keep quiet (*sug ile*). 'Hah! Have you taken the injection?' [they say, and you say], 'no, I didn't take the injection'. Otherwise, they become angry.

-That you must give birth to all, is that what they say that means?

Yes, ehe, ehe. They say all people should give birth. How can the priests open up [for the idea of not having children]? They say it's a sin; taking the [contraceptive] injection is a sin. They say you commit a sin. (...). Yes. Yes, it's a sin ... meaning, if you take the [contraceptive] injection, the priests say it's bad according to religion. 'Don't take the injection simply (*sug ilka*) give birth', otherwise, 'if you take the injection and say, 'I haven't taken it'. ... If he [the priest] asks, 'did you take the injection', you say, 'I didn't do it'. [You] keep quiet (*sug*). [If the priest asks], 'why don't you give birth?' 'That time has passed' (laughs) you tell them, 'time has passed'.⁵⁵

Tigist's account above also points to the fact that while the clergy might downplay their opinions on contraceptive use in public teachings, their concern might still be part of the advice given on the household level as spiritual fathers (*abo nefsi*). Tigist's strategy is nevertheless to keep quiet and make her own decisions in spite of believing that the church is against it; she is even willing to lie (which is in fact also considered a sin).

Above I have followed the decision-making strategies of those women who believe that the church is against contraceptive use, but who will use it anyway if they want. What I understand as significant in these women's narrative accounts is, firstly, the possibility entailed in the existence of what is perceived as different domains, or 'fields', to move the basis for legitimating contraceptive use away from the authority of the church and the 'field' of religion to the authority of the government and the 'field' of science. This co-existence of contradictory fields also enables women to make claims to their own authority, reserving themselves from the interference from *any* other authorities (including husbands) on the issue of reproductive choice. Contrary to the suffering generated in Bourdieu's theoretical framework when a destabilised *habitus* is torn and divided by incompatibilities of intersecting fields (Bourdieu 2000: 160; see also Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127), contradictions between 'fields', can, based on the above examples, be interpreted as structurally ambiguous spaces that allow for agency. Doing what they want/need, with the possibility retained to pray God for forgiveness afterwards, it is also important to have in mind that this flexibility in practice does not challenge the foundation of these women's religious faith. By placing

⁵⁵ Recorded interview 23 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 14, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 22 in Tigriña).

contraceptive use in the 'field' of science these women can avoid potential dilemmas in relation to their religion. Secondly, what I find to be significant in the above accounts is that, this challenge to authority is done in a non-confrontational manner. In fact, women's own strategies when going against the authority of the church or their husbands, the church's strategy when downplaying their opposition to contraceptive use publicly, *and* the health institutions' practice of providing family planning services to women in secrecy if needed, *all* use silence as a strategy. This way of negotiating authority at the 'frontiers' of decision-making in the case of contraceptive use, draws again on the skilful layering of communication in social practice in the Tigrayan context and, hence, reproduces the socio-cultural dynamics where challenges to authority in the predominantly vertical social structure of highland Ethiopia are put forward by being 'active silently' (Maimire 2010: 76). It is also important to note here that if the pressure on family planning from the current government exceeds women's own interests, the socio-cultural dynamics that women's decision-making strategies intersect with, allow women the possibility to refrain from using contraceptives – again by keeping quiet.

Family planning; links to education and development

The relevance of focusing on women's reproductive choice in this study, apart from the access it has provided to decision-making processes and the negotiations of power and authority implied, is based on the presumed impact of education on fertility rates in international and national educational policies. For example, there are links made in the National Population Policy of Ethiopia (TGE 1993b) between the issue of population growth, development and women's education. While the Education and Training Policy (FDRE 1994) does not link education with family planning issues, the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP), following from 1997 onwards, make references to international research when stating that 'a person with at least 4 or 5 years of primary education is more responsive to attitudinal changes in nutrition, health, family planning, etc.' (FDRE-MOE 2000: 28, FDRE-MOE 2005: 31-2). The formulation later used in the Introduction to the National Action Plan for Gender Equality is similar:

An educated woman is more likely to delay marriage, practice family planning resulting in a smaller family size, more available food for the family, and resources to educate the children. Investing in girls' education therefore has high social and economic returns and is instrumental in achieving sustainable development and economic growth (FDRE-MOWA 2006: 1).

In the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) it is stated:

Increased education levels have been shown worldwide to be a major determinant of fertility and family size. Women's education in particular contributes to lower fertility levels. Slowing the rate of population growth will also dramatically reduce the amounts that need to be spent each year in the future on providing education; and will allow better quality education, by reducing overcrowding and class sizes, and allowing more resources per student in the form of textbooks and teaching time (FDRE-MOFED 2006: 169).

It is, however, important to take note of here that, the National Population Policy of Ethiopia (TGE 1993) does not only emphasise (1) the incorporation of population and family life education topics as integral parts of formal education curricula at relevant levels of education but also (2) the incorporation of population-related topics in the package of information carried to the rural population by agricultural extension workers, informal community leaders, and other community level development practitioners (ibid: 17). Population and Family Life Education is also incorporated as a component in both teachers' education and in education in general in the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) IV (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 23). This strategy means that the issue of family planning is addressed explicitly on many levels of society and, hence, not assumed as an outcome of education by implication. Education's impact on fertility rates as a development issue, and girls' education as contraception, is also contested on the grounds of being oversimplified (e.g. Heward 1999). For example, Sharada Weir's asserts in her research from Ethiopia that returns of parents' and especially mothers' education on their children's attainment in education is more ambiguous and complex than the prevailing argument presume (Weir 2000, 2007; see also Weir & Knight 2004, 2006). When including one question on family planning in the household questionnaire as well as in the interviews with women, my concern was also with establishing from where women had acquired their general knowledge of family planning. Women's answers reflected the common sources for information about family planning and contraceptive use in my area of study in Tigray, including health centres/clinics in the urban and semi-urban areas or the health posts in the rural areas, where female health extension workers approach women in their homes to inform about health issues and provide family planning services, in public meetings and in schools, including the schools' Girls' Clubs.

Analysing the exploratory household survey I was also struck by the similarity in the answers given by the women in the semi-urban and rural areas. For example, women both in the rural and the market town use economy as a rationale for reducing childbirth, in spite of

195

difference in hands needed in urban households and in rural households reliant on labourintensive subsistence farming. As in the education survey elaborated in Chapter 3, considerations about number of children seems to be in the process of shifting from educating only a few of one's (most clever) offspring, to thinking that having fewer children enable them all to be educated, in both the rural and semi-urban area of my study, irrespective of women's level of education. One illiterate peasant woman, who has given birth to seven children, says: 'We want to give our children a good upbringing. If they are too many how can we manage? To use contraceptives is not a big sin though; abortion is.⁵⁶ Guev (30) who has four years of formal education says: 'If you don't have enough means to raise many children, it's the right thing to do. 57 The illiterate peasant woman 'Alganesh' (58) who has given birth to eleven children (whereof three have died) touches on the same economic aspect from the opposite angle when she says: 'Since we were rich [then] there was no reason to reduce the births. Since it was not a problem for me, I didn't use it [contraceptives]. 58 The peasant woman Barnesh (22), with four years of formal education, says when pregnant with her third child: 'It will be a problem if we become too many in the family.' 'Is it not a sin (hat'iyat)?' I ask. 'The priests say it is hat'iyat, but we will use it anyway. There is not enough land now; what shall we eat [if we have too many children]?⁵⁹ Hence, this willingness to consider using contraceptives must also be seen in relation to ecological degradation and the scarcity of land for the younger generations in this area of Tigray. The reasons given for using contraceptives in the household survey questionnaire, or being positive to its use, are in many of the answers based on economic development (lewt'i; change), escaping poverty and improving general living conditions for themselves and their children. One peasant women (49) with five children and no education, also says: 'Family planning means for the mother not to suffer. In social life it works to make me equal, and so that I'm not inferior to my husband (...). ⁶⁰ Her answer also situates the issue of contraceptive use in a larger context of gendered change.

Some younger women note that it is not only the priests but also the parent-generation that is against family planning, especially their mothers, who seem to think that their daughters should be able to cope, as they had coped. The fact that many of the older women (with some exceptions) are positive about contraceptive use, is based precisely on the

 ⁵⁶ Household questionnaire 12 June 2009/Sene 5, 2001 E.C. (TM-4R)
 ⁵⁷ Household questionnaire 1 July 2009/Sene 24, 2001 E.C. (TM-4U).

⁵⁸ Household questionnaire 13 June 2009/Sene 6, 2001 E.C. (TM-5R)

⁵⁹ Household questionnaire 10 June 2009/Sene 3, 2001 E.C. (TM-1R).

⁶⁰ Household guestionnaire 16 June 2009/Sene 8 2001 E.C. (MT-23R).

experience of hardships that they themselves have had to cope with through frequent childbirths since neither education nor contraceptives had been available for them. The peasant woman Nitsihiti (45) is one example when saying, T have ruined my back on bearing all these [eleven] children, but we knew nothing at the time about family planning. Now I tell other women, "don't do as I did". I say, "take care of your health and take the *[contraceptive] injection*".⁶¹ There are also a few of the younger women with some level of education that are negative about contraceptive use and will give birth to the number of children God gives. While the level of education in the market town is generally higher than in the rural area - and the younger women have more education than the older ones women's justifications for using contraceptives do not correlate with levels of formal education in my exploratory household survey. Instead, there is reason to assume that the impact of the multilevel information strategy on family planning has overridden the differences that are commonly expected between rural and urban areas. Likewise, the fact that there is no significant difference in perceptions of family planning on contraceptive use between educated and non-educated women suggests that community learning and a progressive health programme that provide access to family planning services and contraceptives for free in both rural and urban areas have had an effect, irrespective of whether women have an education or not. The Tigrayan women's answers together with the female and male students' answers in the education survey elaborated in the previous chapter also suggest a twist in the argument about the relationship between education and a decrease in fertility rates. Rather, the argument goes that having fewer children makes it possible to educate them all.

Concluding remarks

In the ethnographic examples based on narrative accounts, above, the volatility of concepts and the flexibility inherent in religious exegesis and practice, create ambiguities that open up spaces for agency where power can be challenged and authority claimed. While the women in my study move the issue of contraceptive use from the religious to the scientific 'field', contradictions between intersecting fields is interpreted as constituting structurally ambiguous spaces that allows for agency. Furthermore, while women's contestations of the authority of the church on the issue of family planning finds support in current government policies, these women also make claims to their own authority on the issue, *as women*, in spite of the risk

⁶¹ Fieldwork notes 15 November 2010/<u>H</u>ïdar 6, 2003 E.C.

attached to contraceptive use being a sin. At the same time it is also important to bear in mind that, in claiming their own authority on the issue, these Tigrayan women are not denouncing their religion. Neither does their non-confrontational strategy of doing what they want/need in silence disrupt the socio-cultural dynamics of layering communication and undercommunicating practices that are conditioned on a predominantly vertical social structure. Nevertheless, based on an expanded range of actual options to choose from, Tigrayan women's agency at the 'frontiers' of decision-making, when redefining (who holds authority in the case of family planning) and *extending* (their own authority on the issue) resonates with Sarah Mosedale's (2003, 2005) definition of what it takes to be empowered. The above interpretations do not sit well with Bourdieu's theoretical framework, however, where incompatibility between intersecting fields is handled as generating suffering rather than constituting spaces for agency that are structurally ambiguous. A more dynamic and differentiated understanding of 'field' is therefore needed in order to incorporate incompatibilities and contradictions as opportunities for alternative and reconfigured actions (which I will return to in the concluding chapter of this thesis), incorporating as well the possibility entailed in the concept of *adil* in the highland context of Ethiopia, to venture beyond the structural conditioning of one's life.

CHAPTER 5: Education, generation and the case of underage marriage

Introduction

Anthropology has, over the past half century or so, relied on a concept of culture that incorporates dynamic and mediated processes of continuity, encompassing actors' agency as an impetus for change. In research on education from the perspective of gender and development, finding its way into international and national educational polices and plans, the understanding of 'culture' seems, however, more static. The cultural factors most often referred as causes for girls' drop-out and lack of success in education in the Ethiopian context - early marriage, work-burden at home, parents' attitudes towards girls' education (e.g. son preference and negative perceptions of girls' capacities), and female vulnerability to sexual harassment (in school, and on their way to school) (e.g. Zenebework 1986, 1990; Genet 1991, 1998; Rose et al. 1997; Rose & Al-Samarrai 2001; Rose 2003a, 2003b; Wilberg 2004; Kidusan 2006; Yeshiwork 2008; Shibru 2008) – are cases in point. For example, in a comparative study of poverty, schooling and gender inequality in Guinea and Ethiopia, Christopher Colclough, Pauline Rose and Mercy Tembon (2000) argue that what impedes girls' enrolment, persistence and performance in education, relative to boys, are 'adverse cultural practices' operating within the domains of household, school, labour market and society at large in relation to gender roles; and more so than poverty-related causes.

In these problem-centred studies, 'culture' carries implicitly or explicitly a heavy explanatory burden as the reason for girls' challenges in education. From this perspective, girls also risk being represented as pervaded by culture and devoid of agency, or in Emebet Mulugeta's wording, 'portrayed as helpless victims of circumstances' (Emebet 1998: 39). While Emebet does identify 'barriers' to Ethiopian girls' education operating in the family and in school in terms of both economic and cultural factors, her study also shows how these barriers are negotiated, challenged and resisted by female students (see also Emebet 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2004). In this chapter I will therefore centre on the negotiations that take place between parents and female students, based on two of the abovementioned cultural factors that stood out as significant in my study area in Tigray: (1) the practice of underage marriage¹ (especially in the rural areas), and (2) girls' work-burden at home, as it is based on the gendered division of labour. The focus will be on girls' negotiations with their parents when parents' preference for underage marriage conflicts with girls' desire for education, and on

¹ Instead of 'early marriage', which is commonly in use in international educational and development discourses, the term in Tigriña hat δ\$: σ σ C9/tihti adme mera, literally means 'underage marriage'.

how education intersects with gender-specific labour requirements and parents' considerations of household viability. Situating girls' negotiations of their educational pursuit in the context of generational power relations, has enabled access to conflicting perceptions and interests, including unquestioned gendered presumptions. Parents in my study area are generally positive about their children going to school and wish that a less-harsh life can be realised for them through education; but parents are not *only* concerned about education when making their priorities in household matters. Basing my discussion on the institution of underage marriage in the rural area and household dynamics in both the rural and semi-urban area of study in Tigray, I will, in the last part of this chapter, also address how these issues impinge on girls' success in education. But, first, I will reaffirm a dynamic understanding of culture in order to encompass the negotiations and mediations that take place in relation to what is commonly classified as 'traditional' or 'cultural practices'.

The issue of culture

One example of a more dynamic culture concept is Fredrik Barth's (2002) understanding of culture as knowledge (see also Barth 1995). In Barth's anthropological perspective there are three interconnected 'faces' or aspects of knowledge that can be analytically distinguished: (1) the corpus of substantive assertions contained in any 'tradition of knowledge' (substantive corpus), (2) the instantiation and communication of that knowledge through a particular medium (communicative medium), and (3) the enactment of that knowledge within a series of instituted social relations (social organisation) (Barth 2002: 3). Barth's thesis is that 'these three faces of knowledge appear together precisely in the particulars of *action* in every *event* of the *application* of knowledge, in every transaction in knowledge, in every performance' (ibid; italics added). While Barth is concerned with securing spaces for *agency* in the analysis, his concern is also with the *relational* aspects of knowledge. By focusing on knowledge and traditions of knowledge, Barth (1995) suggests that culture is articulated in a transitive form in the *interaction* between people. He also suggests that, 'variation, positioning, practice, exchange, reproduction, change, creativity' (ibid: 66) come to the fore when we model culture on these three 'faces' or aspects of knowledge. These three interdependent 'faces', in Barth's perspective, also impose on each other differing degrees of constraint when knowledge is realised in action in a particular relational event through a specific medium (Barth 2002: 3). It is also in these communicative moments of acting knowledge that persistent repetitiveness, or change, can be identified in the relational event itself (see also Barth 1967b). Hence, this conception of culture do resemble Emirbayer and Mische's analytical perspective on agency

200

in terms of a cordial triad with 'iteration' (repetitiveness) directed towards the past, 'projection' towards the future and 'practical evaluation' responding to emerging actualities of the present that can be more or less influenced by these temporal agentic orientations (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 971). African feminist scholars, like Desiree Lewis, also emphasises the increased attention to the ordinary and seemingly insignificant aspects of everyday life, where culture encompasses all socially-inflected exchanges and mediations as a site for localised struggles and transformations (Lewis 2002a: 1, 2004: 28). As in Sherry Orther's (2006) processual perspective, culture is mediated and reproduced, negotiated and challenged in every event in actual practice.

In these dynamic perspectives on culture, actors' agency also impacts more on processes of both social reproduction and change than the 'intentionless invention of regulated improvisation' (Bourdieu 1977: 79; italics in original) that Bourdieu allows his agents to act by, when *habitus* puts a structural limit to the scope for alternative strategies that an agent can imagine. According to Edward LiPuma, Bourdieu can also circumvent an analysis of the structure of cultural categories and classification systems and their relationship to social structure because his theoretical framework is based on a close fit or 'almost perfect homology' between structures of culture, structures of social organisation and the actions of agents (LiPuma 1993: 16; see also Moore 2007). No doubt, culture under these tight-knit structural conditions also becomes more determining for agents' actions than Barth's understanding of culture as 'traditions of knowledge' that – while incorporating the structural weight of tradition – is more open-ended in relational events of action in a specific moment of time. In line with these dynamic perspectives on culture that incorporate actors' intentional mediations and agency, I will in the following argue – without denying that cultural factors continue to impact on women's lives and girls' pursuit of education in the Tigrayan context that if the existence of adverse cultural practices and structural barriers are taken at face value, we will miss out on girls' appeals to education in their negotiations with their parents. These negotiations also take place in a generational context where children are not supposed to oppose their parents' authority as elders; in fact education itself challenges this authority.

Underage marriage and education

Underage marriage and child marriages are historically significant in the Ethiopian highland context (e.g. Haile 1994a, 1994b). Underage marriages (in the second s

201

that I interviewed in the market town, had been married in her village at the age of 8. The peasant woman Nitsihiti says when I ask her in 2002 (aged 38 at the time):

-When did you marry?

Marry? (...) I was 12, I married when 12, the same age as my daughter 'Roman' is now.

-Yes, but when was your engagement (*All/h*ïtse) arranged?

I was engaged when I was born; at my baptism (laughs).

-(Laugh) is it true? Is that true?

It's true.

-0h!

I was promised (*monorhylmetsibia*) then. When I had grown up a bit, when I was the age of my daughter who is now 5 years old I was bound [to him]. When I was her age they gave me the *maateb* (*monorhylmetsibia*) silver cross and ring) [as a sign of the engagement].²

The girls' age at the time of marriage in my rural study area is currently around 15-16 years of age, while in the semi-urban area it is more likely to be closer to 18 and above. In fact, the issue of marriage age had been incorporated as an issue in the Tigrayan struggle's (1975-91) revolutionary thrust to improve the situation for women. The marriage age that was instituted in the new Family Law in Tigray (TRS 1998; *Hedar* 1991 E.C.) was 15 years for girls and 22 for boys. This new law laid the ground for a new federal Family Law in Ethiopia (FDRE 2000) with the legal marriage age for both girls and boys set at 18. Later, the Revised Family Law in Tigray (TRS 2007; Lekatit 1999 E.C.) was made to encompass the new provisions in the federal law, including these last changes in marriage age. Not mentioning marriage age specifically, the new Constitution (FDRE 1995) in Ethiopia had instituted mutual consent as a principle for marriage (Article 34/2). The reasons for sustaining the practice of underage marriage have been based, according to Haile Gabriel Dagne's (1994a, 1994b) research from northern Ethiopia, on (1) securing children's future before their parents get old and die, (2) alliance building between families and enhancement of status through marriage, and where waiting too long might leave their daughters out of the competition, (3) avoiding that the girl is stigmatised as either having low morals, or as too old to marry, and (4) the issue of virginity.

² Recorded interview 22 October 2002/T'iqimti 12, 1995 E.C. (Interview number 18A in Tigriña).

The customary marriage in Tigray was arranged and agreed upon by (male) members of the two families, often with neither the girls' mother nor the girl herself being consulted. The requirement in the new Constitution in Ethiopia of mutual consent seems to have changed this, but does not prevent consent from taking place under a lot of pressure. At the engagement ($\hbar \theta / h$ *itse*), gifts are still given by the groom's family to the bride in the form of dress and jewellery. Earlier the jewellery was a *masteb* (**76**1.1), a silver cross and ring to be worn in a black band around her neck to show that she was engaged to be married. This practice has been discontinued over the past ten years or so in my area of research. The most common explanation is economic, but it is also a fact that wearing the *maetab* would disclose who is engaged to be married while still underage. While urban marriages are increasingly picking up on the 'white bride'-style wedding in terms of attire and a significant documentation of the wedding with both videos and still photographs [see Fig. 16, in Chapter 2], it is still based on the customary wedding ritual with its transactions. The main wedding season is in January (T'iri) after harvesting has finished, but can in more urban areas also take place at other times, required that the fasting periods are avoided. The wedding will start off with a party in the girl's home. Depending on the amount of *siwa* (local millet beer) the girls' family's household has brewed and, hence, how long they can keep the party going, the groom and his friends will come in the evening to join the party and take the bride under the cover of dark (just before dawn or in the evening the next day) to his parents' home where the party continues. In the rural area, this transportation of the bride is still carried out on a mule; in urban areas it will be by car. At the bride's place exchanges take place, with the groom and/or his family giving shilimat (酒內內), a prize (gold/clothes/money) for the girl's virginity, and with her parents reciprocating with, ideally, the same amount of money (or more or less, according to their ability). The bride will also be given a dowry (*THP*/gezmi) by her parents in terms of cattle (or money) as an advance payment of her inheritance (similar to what will be given to the boy by his parents). These exchanges, announced by (male) elders at the wedding in the bride's home, constitute the capital by which the young couple eventually can start up their own household.³ The girl will be brought back to her parents by the groom and his friends, after she has spent one month or more feasting in seclusion (0.7 97, 197/bét *mihitsan*) in the groom's parents' home,⁴ and celebrated again on her return ($9\cdot \eta \lambda/gibi$). In the case where the groom and/or the bride are students, they will be absent from school during

³ If they later divorce she can take back what she brought into the household and half of what they have gained together. The bride's cattle can also be kept in her parent's place to avoid eventual disagreements if the conjugal relation does not work out.

⁴ Older women tell that they were secluded from 40 days up to 3 months.

this period. If they have communicated with the school, they can be allowed back after one month if important exams have not been missed. In the past it was common that the girls stayed one more year at home after the wedding, or till she reached puberty. In fact, while the new Family Law has not stopped underage marriages in the rural area of my research, it has become common that the girl does not move permanently to her husband's place until she is around 18. While the customary marriage is not legally binding, there are an increasing number of couples who legalise their relations by way of a marriage certificate from the local administration. It is also possible to be legally married without having gone through a customary marriage. As divorce is common it is also the case that it is not, to any significant degree, stigmatising for any of the parties (see also Fikir 2011). New marriages will be celebrated with less festivity though. Living together is termed <u>hadar</u> (ABC), a term that does not differentiate if the couple is actually married or not.

In this part of Tigray it is also common that the first marriage, when the bride is a virgin, will be consummated in 'secrecy' before the actual wedding celebration. This event is called *muluq* (**m** A **4**), but is commonly not differentiated from *ch'iluq* (**P** A **4**), which means a small wedding. A *miluq* is arranged both in rural and urban areas when there is a fear that someone who is jealous of the relationship, or for other reasons disapproves of it, might appoint a *deftera* (a sorcerer loosely connected to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) to cause the consummation of the conjugal relationship to fail. In the rural area of my study, the *muluq* takes place around three months before the actual wedding and lasts for three days. In urban areas it will take place closer in time to the actual wedding. The only people who are supposed to know about the consummation of the conjugal relationship are the couple's parents, the groom's best friend and a priest. After these three days, when the conjugal relationship has been consummated, the celebration can be extended up to two weeks, when a limited number of relatives and friends are invited to take part. While the *muluq* is meant to avoid the *deftera*'s malevolent doings, it also gives the groom a chance to send the girl back if she is considered not to be a virgin *before* the actual wedding and a big party is launched. Sometimes the girl also refuses to go through with the marriage afterwards. The conjugal relationship can (but does not have to) be strengthened by entering a qurban (Holy Communion) marriage at the time of the *muluq* and, hence, before the couple consummates their relationship. This will be done in the cases where the groom is a cleric and both the groom and the bride are supposed to be virgins. In other cases this will most often take place at a later stage in life (if at all) when it has been established whether or not the conjugal

relationship works out. The *qurban* marriage is supposed to be life-long and indissoluble, but no marriage agreement in my area of study is absolute in practice.

Parents' pressure for marriage; girls' appeal to education

While girls today seem to be aware of the fact that arranged marriages require their consent, the question is still to what extent they can withstand parents' pressure to marry, and at what cost. The peasant woman Nitsihiti (38) referred to above – still living with the man she was promised to at her baptism. When I interviewed her in 2002, her first daughter was already married and the second had been prevented from following her age-mates from the village to the market town to continue school in fifth grade in order to marry her off in the coming January. At the time of the second interview in 2008, Nitsihiti's (44) next two daughters in line had also been married. Having appealed to education in her negotiation with her parents, Nitsihiti's fourth daughter 'Genet' (15) finally gave in to the pressure, and married. Both families had promised her that she could continue school after she was married; a promise her parents had also given her older sister, but never kept. Having lost two months of the school year while in seclusion after her wedding, Genet did in fact continue school afterwards and took her eighth-grade exam in the village the same year. She was prevented from continuing to ninth grade in the market town, however, in spite of having good marks and an intense desire to continue to learn. After the seclusion period was over and she had been returned to her parents' home, Genet had shown reluctance towards her husband, and at the end of the first year she divorced him. As there were two men in the village wanting to marry her afterwards, Genet (her age now approaching 17) was soon remarried to the first of these to make a serious request for her, as it was feared she could be abducted by one of them.⁵ As her mother Nitsihiti (44) asserts: 'It would have ruined her reputation [if she was abducted]; she would have been considered a shermut'a (prostitute). ⁶ Nitsihiti also tells that her daughter Genet's second marriage deal had included a generous amount of gold given by the groom's family. When I say, 'gubo (**?n**), bribe', she laughs, but says nothing.⁷ When I came back around one year later, Genet (18) had tried to run away with a female cousin who was also unhappily married. Genet tells, 'we had decided to run away to some faraway place where our parents could not find us. However, my mother found out about it and put a stop to it².⁸ When I probe her mother on the issue of Genet's education, Nitsihiti says her daughter is free

⁵ Abduction is not that common in my area of research as in other parts of Ethiopia, but people say it can happen.

⁶ Fieldwork notes 15 November 2010/Hedar 6, 2003 E.C. ⁷ Fieldwork notes 15 November 2010/Hedar 6, 2003 E.C.

⁸ Fieldwork notes 5 January 2012/Tahsas 26, 2004 E.C.

to continue education if she wants to. Genet herself notes that 'no husbands here [in the rural area] want you to learn' (since they often have less education than the girls). At a later stage, her mother Nitsihiti counters her earlier assertion, when saying: 'She cannot go back to school now that they will start living together (hadar). Only if she divorces him can she continue *education*^{',9} In fact, the case is also that Genet had not been well for the last year. She complains about continuous headaches and irregular heartbeat. While I interpret these symptoms as due to all the pressure she has been subject to for the past three years, it was explained by recourse to the *deftera*, who was thought to have distributed magic substances (*A.o.*A/*fewsi*; 'medicine') to make her resist her second husband too. With her education after eighth grade still pending, Genet says, 'what can I do? Till now my parents haven't listened to me'. 'What about your husband and in-laws? Didn't they promise you to continue education if you agreed to marry?' She says, 'afterwards they haven't mentioned it with one word!' By saying that they can continue their education afterwards, parents trick their daughters into marriage, well knowing that the husband might be reluctant to let her continue, or count on her soon getting pregnant. Genet also explains that sending her for treatment to different traditional healers in the area (since medical doctors could not find anything wrong with her), and paying another *deftera* a significant amount of money to release her from the spell, is not only aimed at her physical recovery but also to make her accept her fate and settle with her husband. A female student from her village, now in tenth grade in the market town, explains the pressure that these rural girls are under: 'If the girl refuses to marry, she risks being thrown out from home. They will tell her, "leave"! With no means to continue her education on her own, she will comply.¹⁰ Welesh's (21) account below is one telling example of how rural girls negotiate their parents' pressure for marriage:

-But ... but ... at the beginning ... you were engaged by your mother that means. I think you wanted to learn first?

Yes, at first ... I said, 'not before I have finished school'. However, they had engaged me before I was born. They [the boy's parents] had told my father to promise that he will give me to them after I was born. He then told them something like, 'okay, we shall see'. Suddenly (*agat'ami*), when I was in third grade, my father died. After the death of my father, later on, they told my mother to give me to them [in marriage], and she told them, 'hah, let her mature first (A**1**. $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{7}{10C}$ /*libi tigiber*; literally, 'produce a heart', in terms of understanding), learn, and afterwards if she wants to, she can get married. If she doesn't want to, she will not.' Then ... when they told me to marry I didn't want to. 'I will learn', I told them. Then it was dropped, the engagement was broken off. He got married to another that means; I went to school.

⁹ Fieldwork notes 2 February 2012/T'iri 24, 2004 E.C.

¹⁰ Fieldwork notes 6 January/Tahsas 27, 2004 E.C.

-Meaning, according to your own will (ድልዮት/dïlïyet)?

Yes, even after finishing school (...) I didn't want marriage that much. But later on, she [my mother] told me to get married and, later, when I had finished school, I got married just like that. But I had refused to get married, before [finishing] education. Before [I had finished my] education, I told her, 'no, I will not marry'.

-But ... then when you got married, after your second engagement... was it according to your own will (diliyet), or your mother's will?

The second?

-Yes, the second.

-But ... when you said no ... was your mother angry?

Hah ... very much so! I told her, 'he's not my type; he's not for me and the like'. She said, 'in the past you broke off the engagement for the same reason. Now again, you are telling me the same thing.' She said, 'while I listened to you, you don't listen to me, now it's better for you to say that I'm not your mother'. I felt the pressure of the hard words she spoke to me. That's it, I kept quiet (*suq ile*) and got married. I told her, 'let it be [as you wish]'. I kept quiet, and got married.

-Then, did you have a rural wedding in every respect (laugh)?

Yes, yes, in every respect ... she brewed over eight barrels of *sïwa*, slaughtered three cattle; [people] feasted for about a week. That's it, and we came here [to the market town].

-But ... it was a big wedding that means?

Yes, very much so (laughs). It was a huge wedding, except that the marriage didn't last (laughs).

-Were you divorced on the will (£A+/dilét) of both of you, or on your will?

That's it, the divorce was according to my will. I said then, 'I don't want it'. He or even my parents told me not to divorce. I told them, 'I don't want it', and then we divorced that means.

-But ... at that time, was your mother angry?

Yes, after ... that's it ... because we did not get along [my husband and I] because we used to quarrel a lot, she [my mother] said, 'if you don't feel happy, leave it'. That's it, she was not happy about it, but there was nothing she could do. However, she was not happy about the divorce.¹¹

The reason why I have referred Welesh's story in full is because it shows some of the power dynamics at play between parents who want to marry their daughters and the young girls' own strategies in their pursuit for education in the rural area of my research. The first time Welesh refused to marry, she managed to convince her parents – and after her father died, her mother – with her appeals to education. She experienced pressure to marry, but was not

¹¹ Recorded interview 6 October 2008/Meskerem 26, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 4 in Tigriña).

forced, and was allowed to continue school as she wished. Welesh had also depended on her mother being willing to support her when moving to the market town, after fourth grade at the age of 12, for food provisions, money for house rent and exercise books. When she finished tenth grade and failed her exam, her mother again put pressure on her to marry; in fact her mother threatened to reject her as her daughter if she did not comply. This is the point where Welesh did not push further and complied with her mother's wish. She married, but divorced six months later. Rural families might well push for a new marriage after divorce, as in Genet's case above. When Welesh found a new partner and moved in with him in the market town, her mother did not intervene. Welesh's mother Meharit (44) had also divorced her first husband after having given birth to their firstborn, and had soon remarried, to Welesh's father. Other young women of Meharit's generation had utilised the armed struggle and joined TPLF in the 1970s and 1980s to escape from underage marriages or what was conceived as intolerable domestic situations (see also Hammond 1989, 1999; Young 1997b; Tsegay 1999; Krug 2000). Tigrayan girls have, however, run away from underage marriages and demanded divorce before the liberation struggle, or education, constituted alternative options. The peasant female head of household Alganesh (58), twice divorced, explains:

At 13, at 12, I was engaged, I wore the cross and ring [*maəteb*]. After doing that at 12, I stayed for three years as engaged. I stayed till I was 15 years old before I was married. After being married, I told him [my husband], 'I don't want to see your face, or listen to your voice'. I detested him, I divorced him, and came here to this one [second husband].¹²

Alganesh was determined to divorce her first husband in spite of their marriage being an indissoluble *qurban* marriage with the taking of the Holy Communion, since her first husband was a *haleqa* (deacon) in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Her divorced husband (or even in the case when the wife of a cleric dies) would lose his position within the church *if* he remarried. This being at stake, Alganesh's marriage was nevertheless dissolved. Alganesh's marriage experiences (her second husband had beaten her frequently and eventually thrown her out after she had given birth to eleven children with him) had, however, little or no consequence for what she demanded (especially) of her eldest daughters in terms of marriage. Her daughter 'Rahwa' (18) explained in an interview in 2002, when she was a seventh grader in the market town, how she had refused to be engaged when she was 11 years of age:

[In the past] they wanted us to marry and we married. Education is however far better than marrying, but they wanted us to marry. In the past, we [girls] were married to someone we didn't know ... and were told to give birth, and we gave birth. (...) Education, I and Kahsu [older sister] said that it's

¹² Recorded interview 23 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 14, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 21 in Tigriña).

better to continue education. We said that we didn't want to be married. My younger sister did the same thing. All of us [refused to be married]. (...). [When] they [elders] came representing one boy, they came with a dress that means and offered me the *maateb* (silver cross and ring). I threw it all ... I said I didn't want it. ... Then they were angry. 'Why, why? What are you doing now that you know about education?' they asked. They were angry. Then afterwards, if they had forced me to marry I would have run away; disappeared.¹³

Education in Rahwa's account marks a shift for women that allows them to decide for themselves instead of just being married and giving birth according to others' decisions. The forthrightness informing her resistance also comes to the fore in her intense account. Her parents, on the other hand, question what education does to her as she is challenging their authority. Rahwa's account also shows that, while parents can threaten girls to leave home (as mentioned above), girls can also threaten their parents with running away. To disappear is also what her older sister 'Kahsu' (31), who had been pressured into marriage at around 13-14 years of age, had considered:

Then when I said I will divorce, as much as I tried to explain to them [my parents], I was beaten and the like and sent back [to my husband]. At that time, what had I seen? That's it, I wanted to go to school or to Asmara [in Eritrea]. I wanted to go to Asmara then. Now, that's it, it would have been better if I had just disappeared.¹⁴

When finally breaking off her marriage after four years, in spite of her parents' beatings to make her stay, Kahsu moves back home with her parents and attends the school that had just started up in her home village. While underage marriage in problem-centred perspectives on education is represented as preventing girls from continuing their education (which is not wrong *per se*), it is important to see how female students can *appeal* to education to avoid being married. In all the examples above, these appeals to education are central in the negotiations these girls are involved in with their parents. Some of these girls' insistence also results in parents changing their minds, especially if the girls manage to mobilise support for their claim from other family members or teachers, and are clever in school.

Bourdieu does acknowledge generational conflicts, because different material environments in a historical sense and, hence, different 'modes of generation', have generated differences in parents' and offspring's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 78). This means that what one generation defines as impossible, possible or probable, another generation can define as natural, reasonable or unthinkable (ibid.). Bourdieu's main argument is that power and forms

¹³ Recorded interview 9 October 2002/*T'ïqïmti* 29, 1995 E.C. (Interview with A.A. in Tigriña). Having started to get ill when I interviewed her in 2002, as a result of what she explained as a *buda-zar* possession, she dies in the autumn 2005, aged 21.

¹⁴ Recorded interview 9 November 2008/T'iqimti 30, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 3B-2 in Tigriña).

of exploitation are misrecognised in the affectionate kinship relation between parents and offspring, since the affectionate dispositions generated by this relationship enables *habitus* to generate impulses of feeling and injunctions of duty that make offspring comply with the older generation's priorities (Bourdieu 1990a: 159). A feeling of duty towards the older generation is much in line with the respect and obedience that children are socialised into in the Tigrayan context. According to Eva Poluha (2004), Ethiopian children learn *respect* and *obedience* in their relationships to parents, elders and older siblings, teachers and other religious- and state authorities, who, on their part, provide *supervision* and *control* as expressions of love and care, including praise/rewards and punishments (in terms of advice or insults, the threat of exclusion, even the use of force or violence). Poluha emphasises, however, that relationships based on what she understands as a cultural schema of patron-client relations with a base in former feudal Ethiopia, are fragile, not only because the client is at the mercy of the patron's punishments or rewards but also because, if a person gains nothing from subjection to someone in this vertical structure, attention can be moved to somebody else (even within kinship relations).

Tigrayan girls who challenge their parents' authority on the issue of underage marriage and education by threatening to run away (which is not uncommon in the Ethiopian context) become, in Bourdieu's perspective, a mere exception that confirms the rule. Parents' use of pressure in the accounts above shows, however, that the structural dispositions of *habitus* is not enough to simply make their offspring comply with what they as parents consider important. Threatening to reject their daughters and throw them out from home or to hold back resources for education is in fact an *explication* rather than misrecognition of parents' power. Appealing to education and the authority of the government/state also challenges parents' authority at home as elders in similar ways that women challenged the church authority on the issue of family planning (in Chapter 4) by appealing to the government's authority in the 'field' of science. The rural female students above also *explicate* their resistance towards parents' authority on the issue of underage marriage versus education, constituting a 'frontiers' were generational conflicts plays out in ways that *might* make children comply, but not necessarily. Simply classifying underage marriage as a cultural factor that impedes girls' education, misses out on these generational negotiations that, Barth's (1995, 2002) conceptualisation of culture as knowledge, would manage to encompass. Furthermore, while these Tigrayan girls have government laws and policies on their side (at least *de jure*), parents, who continue to marry their daughters underage, do on their side contest the law on the issue of underage marriage.

Marriage age considerations

A common way for parents to get around the Family Law, which institutes 18 as minimum marriage-age for both girls and boys, is by manipulating the girls' age. In fact, Nitsihiti's (44) daughters had all been around 15-16 years of age at the time of their marriages, their parents claiming they were 18. Since I have known these rural girls' age since they were children, it has been possible to observe that they often jumped a couple of years at around the age of 15 if marriage was involved. The way I have discussed the issue of age with these girls' mothers is by reference to the age gaps between their children compared with these children's agemates in the neighbourhood. Even though 'everybody' knows, parents will not openly admit this manipulation, and will insist that their daughters are 18. One exception is the peasant woman Senait (50) who says right-out: 'Simply we say she is 18, even if she is only 15', and laughs, pointing to her granddaughter, who was married off at the age of 15.¹⁵ In spite of having been in the local leadership of Women's Association of Tigray (WAT) that works against underage marriage, Senait remarks, on a later occasion when we again discuss the issue: 'I know your opinion on underage marriage, but even I married both my daughter and granddaughter underage, 'she says, again while laughing. 'My daughter even married her *[second] daughter at the age of 13.* 'she says.¹⁶ According to the Criminal Code (FDRE 2005) the implied parties are liable to imprisonment if a girl is married below the age of 18. In the case of the girl being above 13 years of age, the imprisonment can be up to three years; but up to seven years if the girl is under 13 (Article 648). Because of the lack of registration at birth, exact age would, however, be difficult to prove. This is a point also mentioned by the wereda t'ernafit (leader) of WAT:

Yes! You know what the problem is? There is a loophole in relation to the law. You know what is not practiced here? That when I give birth the birth-date is not registered at the municipality; this continues to be a big problem. Even if you sue them [for underage marriage] what is the use? [For example] I have a daughter, she is 14 years old, and if I will have her married at the age of 14 that means, if I marry her, the women's affairs can sue me. I will call upon a neighbour or others to witness and they will testify that she is 18 years old. The witnesses will say that she is 18. Then what do you think will happen? There are such false testimonies; but at least, what will be done finally if you take the case to court? Medical tests can be carried out. Even when people have testified, if it's medically established that the girl is underage, the marriage can be annulled. If the marriage has already taken place, the implicated parties can be sued and imprisoned. But the trick is that, you send (marry) your 15-year-old daughter without announcing it (*suq ilki*; keeping quiet), you send her at the age of 15 without an official marriage, and once she gets pregnant she will be made to settle with him. (...) So, what is done is to raise the society's understanding (**7740**/*ginzabe*; 'grasp') through cooperation with male and female teachers in school. Once there is information about a planned [underage] marriage you can stop it from happening by cooperating with the teachers who are in a position to make the

¹⁵ Fieldwork notes 21 October 2008/T'iqimti 11, 2001 E.C.

¹⁶ Fieldwork notes 25 November 2010/<u>H</u>idar 16, 2003 E.C.

parents understand that it is not permissible. Otherwise it's difficult to prevent it because most such marriages are conducted secretly. It cannot be said that there is much understanding (*ginzabe*) about this since even those who organise these [awareness-raising] forums, the leaders themselves and others, are seen marrying their sons [to underage girls] as well as their daughters [underage]. $(...)^{17}$

There are three issues at stake here: (1) the difficulty of proving age resulting from the lack of birth registration as well as false testimonies about age, (2) the practice of secrecy to circumvent the law, and (3) the fact that the community leaders themselves continue the practice. When I confront one community leader with the fact that his daughter had been taken out of school after ninth grade to be married underage, he simply says: 'We have *demolished that law ourselves*.¹⁸ Furthermore, rather than utilising the possibility for prosecution enabled in the Criminal Code (FDRE 2005), it is, as in the account above, awareness-raising that is opted for. Here, teachers in particular, but also other civil servants like agriculture- and health extension workers in the rural communities, are utilised as change agents in the communities. One male agricultural extension worker in the rural area says he would discuss the issue of underage marriage with parents pleading for the girl to continue her education. In some cases parents would listen to him, in others not. 'But as a government representative, you could report it', I remark. 'But I don't want to do that', he says, 'then I would lose their [the peasants'] trust'.¹⁹ Likewise, one male teacher says: 'If the law was enforced, it will create conflict with the community'.²⁰ In spite of being insiders as Tigrayans, these civil servants are often outsiders when arriving in a rural community as educated experts. If their interventions stir up too much resistance, they would not be able to reach the government's policy goals within education, health and agriculture. More likely these civil servants would take part in the festivities when an underage marriage takes place. As the wife of the community leader referred to, above, told me when we discussed their daughter's underage marriage: 'If you don't come to the wedding, our relationship is over'.²¹ Hence, in spite of the juridical rights these girls have gained, their rights continue to be put aside in relation to what is considered more important political or societal issues.

In the explorative household survey one question was asked to establish if women had knowledge about the legal age for marriage according to the last revision of the Family Law in Tigray (TRS 2007). Both in the semi-urban and rural areas many claimed that the marriage

¹⁷ Recorded interview with Leader of WAT in Asgede Tsimbla wereda Berhan Hailu 14 December 2008/*Tahsas* 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 38 in Tigriña).

¹⁸ Fieldwork notes 31 December 2011/Tahsas 21, 2004 E.C.

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 30 June 2009/Sene 23, 2001 E.C.

²⁰ Fieldwork notes 2 January 2012/Tahsas 23, 2004 E.C.

²¹ Fieldwork notes 31 December 2011/Tahsas 21, 2004 E.C.

age was 15 for girls and 22 for boys.²² When they were told the right age – and also in those cases where the current legal age was known – many from both areas said that the Weyane (TPLF) was *wrong* on this point. There are two reasons why this law is considered wrong: (1) juridical gender equality is here understood as running counter to an ideal age gap between the spouses (5-10 years) and, hence, conflating juridical and normative aspects of age difference in conjugal relationships, and (2) the considered-impossible task of protecting their daughters virginity until the age of 18. I discussed this latter issue with the peasant woman Meharit (44), who, because of her political involvement, is well versed in laws and policies:

-But, earlier ... I remember you said the new law is a problem for the peasant, when it comes to marriage at 18, do you remember? Why is postponing marriage to 18 for girls a problem for the peasants?

What is called the 18-years policy on underage marriage in the Family Law; when was it issued in the 90s [E.C.]? I don't remember, was it in 95, in 96 ... or around 94; anyway there was a policy issued. It had to do with underage marriage in what is called the Family Law, but the society has not accepted it. What is the reason for that? It's said that if the girl has to wait until the age of 18, she will lose her virginity ($h \ge h + 9Ch \lambda g/higa kitefiris iva$), another boy will have an affair with her, in the meantime she will lose her beauty, and when married he [her husband] will divorce her. This is why the society doesn't accept it [the law]. Why is this so? It is because it [the society] doesn't understand what is to be gained [from the new law]. Otherwise, what the policy says, that's it, when setting the age for marriage in the Family Law to18 the reason given for this is that at 18 she will be matured, she will also be physically ready for marriage, she will have developed love for her married life (hadar) and therefore will not divorce; that is what the government policy says. What the peasants' 'policy' (in English) says, however, is that if she waits until she is 18, she will lose her virginity (*higa kitefiris iva*), another boy will have an affair with her, and the boy she marries will divorce her. These [views] do not meet; the awareness (AtAAAA/atehasasiba; 'thinking') of the educated and that of the uneducated is different. Since the society is not educated, that's it, otherwise [according to the government policy] if she stays until 18 years of age, she will be able to finish her education, she will start school at the age of 7, and finish at the age of 18 when she can marry. But if she gets married at ... 17, 15, 14 years of age, she will be prevented from going to school, she will be excluded and left disadvantaged the government policy says. But in our society, in particular the women, it is the women who say they want to marry her [underage]. Now, that is the difference. If not marrying her until 18 the society will say, she has become an 'old girl' (90.8 3A/abay gwal; a girl considered too old for marriage), that's it ... they will insult us [parents] by saying how come she is mature () () and not married, that's it. So, for this reason, the society is not respecting this law, that's it.

-In your culture, when marrying it's very important that she's a girl (virgin) that means?

Yes!

-Yes... what about it (...) what is it, meaning why is it necessary that she is a girl (virgin) when marrying, in your opinion, why is that necessary?

To stay a virgin ($\Re \Im A/dingil$) is an honour ($h \Pi c/kibri$; respect)! It's an honour; for us to stay a virgin ($\Im A/gwal$; literally 'girl') means to gain respect. It's ... that's it, it's a rule ($i \Lambda A/hegi$; 'law') for

²² Even one school director in the rural area claimed that marriage age for boys is still 22. When I corrected him by referring to the revised Family Law (TRS 2007), he left the office without a word.

us that she has to keep her virginity (\hbar . θ : $\hbar/h\ddot{c}a$ tseni<u>h</u>a), if she stays a girl (virgin) she is respected, that's it, even the boy [who marries her] is respected, and it also means respect for the family. If she hasn't stayed a girl (virgin) that's it, it's a shame (θ ·CR· $\hbar/w\ddot{i}r\ddot{i}det$; 'degrading') [for her and the family]; in our culture it's an insult.

(...)

-But what about the boys?

Eh?

-The boys?

Boys?

-Ehe (laugh).

Boys, there is nothing whatsoever. Nobody asks if a boy is virgin (*dingil*), or whether a boy has ever been with a woman and the like, never, but it's not right! In our system, in our law, in the laws of the Orthodox Church, boys and girls are equal; both must stay a virgin. But in practice, in reality, in the society, there is pressure ($\partial^2 \dot{\pi} m/tseq \ddot{u}t'i$) however. A boy even if he is having affairs with women, he will not be insulted if he has lost his virginity ($\partial_1 \tau \lambda \hat{n} \hat{c} \partial_1 \lambda \hat{n} \frac{h}{lgu} afrisu \ddot{u}yu$). But the girl, even if she was raped ($\partial^2 \pi n/tseq \ddot{u}t'i$) or abducted by force, people will not be considerate towards her. She will be considered to have given away her virginity, to be a prostitute ($\partial_1 c_{ab} - n/shermut'a$), that's it, and will be divorced. This difference is not addressed by the law, that's it, this suppresses ($\partial^2 \pi n/tseq \ddot{u}t'i$) women. But the boy, even if he has affairs with women, that's it, he's not considered to have prostituted himself ($\partial_1 c_{ab} - n/shermut'u$), but if the girl loses her virginity ($\partial_1 \cdot 2 \lambda T d_2 \lambda / higa at 'ifa$), she is insulted. That's how it is.²³

Meharit understands the revised Family Law in Tigray (TRS 2007) as running counter to the community's (including her own) sentiment on this issue. She also relates this to a difference in awareness, or thinking, between the educated and the uneducated. Having learned in church school up to the level of *haleqa* (deacon), she sides with the uneducated society on this issue. While the Ethiopian Orthodox Church requires that both boys and girls should enter their first marriage as virgins, this has no practical consequence for the boys, unless he plans a career in the church. Sending their daughters to the market town after eighth grade (earlier fifth grade) to continue school outside their parents' control, involves risks that impinge not only on their daughters' morality, but also on the family's respect and honour $(\hbar n \ell / kibri)^{24}$ and, hence, status in the community. Even in the case of rape or abduction, the girl can be accused of having loose morals. Girls' morality can also be questioned by the very fact that they go to school. As the peasant daughter Rahwa (18) explains:

²³ Recorded interview 15 November 2008/<u>H</u>idar 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 15 in Tigriña).

²⁴ Dan Franz Bauer interprets *kibri* in his study of households in Tigray as 'status-honour', which incorporates the fact that *kibri* impinges on the person's position in a vertical social order (Bauer 1977: 36-7).

Yes, in my home place (...) when we go to school [in town] they say it's the same as being educated in prostitution, 'you go to school because you want to prostitute yourself'. There is a lot of offending talk about [female] students saying, 'all of you are prostitutes/whores'. In the countryside this kind of talk is offending indeed ... and when we refuse to get married as well, that's it. We try to ignore it; where have they seen us being involved in prostitution? However, they keep on insulting you by saying, 'you whore'! (...). They also call you 'old girl' (91£ 3A/abay gwal; too old for marriage), saying how many men has she been taking ($\omega A. A/wesida$; slept with) even if they haven't seen it, since they have never seen you with somebody you keep quiet (suq ilki), but then, that's it, it's very hard. If I only come back [from school] with a boy, if I laugh with him, if I chat with him, it's said, 'she is his girlfriend', that's it, this kind of talk is devastating. It makes me sad, since I haven't started yet [to have sex]. When you put on weight and [your breasts] become bigger (gejaf), they would say, oh, she is not a virgin (girl) anymore; she has been with many men.²⁵

Rural girls' independence and mobility that is enhanced by education – especially when moving to the market town in order to continue school – makes girls more vulnerable to this kind of stigmatisation. Bethlehem Tekola identifies three categories of women encompassed in the word *shermut'a* ($(\mathbf{n} c \mathbf{m} \cdot \mathbf{m})$) in the highland context of Ethiopia, and derived from (1) her marital status and her position vis-à-vis men as *not* attached to a particular man, (2) her occupation and means of livelihood, and (3) personal 'character' that relates specifically to her sexuality (Bethlehem 2002: 5). Hence, while being classified as shermut'a (prostitute/whore) is a derogative term, it also points to a woman's independence and agency (see also Pankhurst 1974; Zenebework 1976). As a consequence of the increased mobility and independence involved in female students' pursuit for education, this stigmatisation does not only follow girls into education but is enhanced by education. When I discuss the issue with the peasant woman Senait (52), she says, '(...) when they have finished eighth grade or tenth grade, even twelfth grade they will start to make their own decisions. Lately fifteen girls have run awav from a nearby village to Sudan.²⁶ There is work there, but many end up in prostitution. We therefore marry our girls early to prevent them from going astray. Don't men in your country care if she is a virgin or not?' she asks. 'It's not much of an issue', I say. 'In fact, that would be more correct, ' she concludes.²⁷

School, in this context, is not only understood as a place where one gains academic knowledge but as an arena where parents have limited control, and where girls start to make their own decisions in sexual matters. Like the divorcee Elsa (70) in the market town, herself having no education, said, when I asked her opinion about education:

It's not good. How can it be good? Can't you see those girls who used to be nice are hoying in the night? The number of them [girls] roaming around has increased, there are a lot of diseases, there's a

²⁵ Recorded interview 9 October 2002/Meskerem 29, 1995 E.C. (Interview A.A. in Tigriña).

²⁶ While it is a fact that girls venture to Sudan for work, I have not been able to cross-check this actual number.

²⁷ Fieldwork notes 25 November 2010/<u>H</u>üdar 16, 2003 E.C.

lot of Aids; you can see people are dying. It's obvious! Well, education, education is good, but you can see how [girls] go astray. It's in every place, it's not only here; you can see even young girls being allowed to roam around. You can see it for yourself, where is it [education] then?²⁸

The above quote shows some of the moral concerns in relation to girls' agency perceived as following from their access to education. While marriage age in the rural area of my research has risen over the past couple of generations from 10-13 to 14-16, the reason for continuing to claim 15 as the age when girls *should* be married, is based on the common perception of when girls reach sexual maturity and, therefore, will start to test out her sexuality anyway. When girls (and boys) are due for secondary school at 15-16 years of age they are perceived to have entered *tikus adme* (**Ana bg**, ilterally, 'fire age'), and hence, are considered sexually 'hot'. Girls at this age are believed to run off with a boyfriend as soon as she gets a chance if she is not controlled by parents, older brothers or a husband. When I ask one father in the rural area about the age of the daughter he is about to marry, he says 18. When I say, 'lie (hoh/hasot)', he starts laughing and says, 'she is 17', while continuing to laugh. (His daughter is in seventh grade and more probably around 15 years of age). A couple of weeks earlier he had been talking engaged about educating all his children in a *mahiber* (religious association) where I was present. I ask him: 'But how can you say in one mahiber that school is good and then marry your daughter off before she has finished school?' He says, 'she wanted it!' 'But if she does not finish tenth grade and college that education is not worth much', I say. 'But if she continues to college she will get pregnant with someone. Then there will be no marriage at all', he objects. 'But there are contraceptives', I say. 'They [female students] don't know about it', he says. 'It's available for free in any health post/centre, and they inform them about it in school'. His younger brother confirms this. 'If she is clever in school you should have let her continue, finish school and get a job before she gets married.' 'She is not that *clever in school*', he says.²⁹ In fact, this dialogue incorporates most of the concerns that parents commonly have when deciding to marry their daughters underage.

While I will come back to the issue of success in education in the last part of this chapter, the important point here is the general perception among parents, teachers and other civil servants, in the rural and urban areas alike, that these girls *want* marriage. One male teacher in secondary school who presents the same argument says, *'the girls only think about getting married'*.³⁰ While there are cases where teachers have intervened, the argument that

²⁸ Recorded interview 2 December 2008/*<u>H</u>idar* 23, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 28 in Tigriña).

²⁹ Fieldwork notes 20 January 2012/*T*'iri 11, 2004 E.C.

³⁰ Fieldwork notes 20 December 2011/Tahsas 10, 2004 E.C.

girls *want* to get married, works as a justification for *not* intervening when underage marriages take place, since civil servants, including teachers, are more concerned about not severing their relationship with the local community. In spite of underage marriage being discussed in school, and in the Girls' Clubs in schools, and being a theme in dramas conducted in the school context, there is a general reluctance to support these young girls *in practice*. By claiming that *she wants it*, the problem of underage marriage becomes individualised, and up to the girls themselves to handle, in spite of the juridical backing these girls have. The pressure on underage marriage with consequences for their education is less acute for urban girls and girls in the semi-uban market town, who most often continue to live at home under the control of their parents while in secondary school. Encompassed in the term *shermut'a* (Bethlehem 2002), and as implied in Elsa's comment above, there continues to be a thin line between girls' (and women's) independence and agency *and* their morality also in urban areas.

Girls' morality: the issue of virginity

Haile's (1994a, 1994b) research on early marriage in northern Ethiopia was conducted before the intensified focus over the last two decades on girls' education could have had an effect. The reasons he identified for marrying girls underage seem to be 'hard-lived' though, and especially those reasons relating to a girl's morality and virginity. A marriage in this area can still be called off if the girl is found not to be a virgin, unless this has been discussed openly and agreed on before the marriage, as in the case of Genet's second marriage, above. The peasant woman Alganesh's (58), reasoning about virginity, marriage and education in relation to her youngest daughter 'Kiros' (14), is informative here:

-I thought, that's it, couldn't she make her own choice?

Why she couldn't?

-Is it about finding out that she is not a virgin at the time of marriage that means?

Yes!

-... Is it about culture, culture is one thing, but it is also about receiving [a share of the family's] property that means as dowry (11197/gezmi). If she chooses herself will she not get a dowry that means?

She doesn't get it [gezmi; dowry], she doesn't get it; after all she took off herself. Yes, since she took off herself, since her parents are sad, she knows the consequence. If, however, it was me who had made the engagement, I would have given her what I can that means. I would have given her money and if I had cattle, I would have given her cattle too that means. A female student is given money, she is not given cattle, but the farmers give her oxen, cows. Yes, since she has gone to school, since she has been educated for ten years, twelve years, she has finished the money already. Eh? Yes, you sell something, you give her something, she finishes it [the money] while going to school. Afterwards, she will be employed, and once she gets a job, she will not ask anymore [support]; in fact she will support you even more, eh? She will even support you more [than you were] that means. Now, you say, hah, don't marry her before the age of 18, yes, but according to my feeling the problem with letting her wait till she is 18, hah, to not marry her without her consent as you say, she will not be able to know what will benefit her or what will not in the long run. Eh? If she is made to fall (Am A, #/awidiga; 'lose her virginity') she will not know how to go on since she is a child. Eh? When parents marry her early it is to prevent her from ending up in something, to not be involved; there are *barïva* (9C, *P*/literally; slaves), there are 'evil eye' ($\alpha \eta$. η /*i*'ebib, also called *buda*) at school that means, and if she has a friendship with him she can end up in something. Eh? That being the reason, to stay until the age of 18, parents say it's too long. Eh? Now, it's at the age of 15 that they are married, that's the age they are married. If she waits until the age of 18, something might happen to her since it will be too long to keep her away from *bariva*, or even from the well regarded ($\omega \Phi/ch'ewa$). Eh? But, now if she is 16, 15, 16, what her parents tell her she will not go against that, yes, they choose, they choose and give her [in marriage], her parents that means. She will go there and there will be peace.

-How old is Kiros now that means?

Kiros, you mean Kiros?

-Yes, 16? 15?

No, she will be 15; she is in [her 15th year]; she will turn 15 in August.

-Yes, does it mean that she will be engaged?

Yes! Now, Kahsu [her older sister] told me not to engage her. Kahsu told me to leave her be and let her learn. But me, if I could find somebody who would let her finish school. Eh? If I find someone who will let her finish school I will engage her, without marrying or living together [right away]. Eh? I will get her engaged, and after the engagement, they can stay [unmarried] while bound by the promise.

-Then she will stay until she finishes school that means?

I don't mind if he takes her with him, let him take her if she can continue her education. Yes.³¹

Apart from Kiros' older sister Kahsu (31) (who is a teacher) influencing their mother to let her youngest sister continue in school, there are two major issues at stake in Alganesh's

³¹ Recorded interview 23 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 14, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 21 in Tigriña).

explanation above. The first issue is that the girl is not expected to be able to control her sexually matured. It is in this context that Alganesh thinks it is better to marry her youngest daughter Kiros to someone that would let her continue in school in order to protect her reputation. To marry their daughters is also parents' way of reducing the risk of sexual harassment, since boys are believed to take advantage of the girls when they reach puberty. Marrying their daughters is also a way of protecting these girls from themselves that implicitly acknowledges girls' agency as sexual agents in their own right. While letting her youngest daughter continue to secondary school in the market town without marrying or engaging her, what Alganesh feared the most had materialised three years later. Meeting Kiros (18) again when in eleventh grade in the market town, she had given birth by a boyfriend. Kiros was determined to continue school after the three months maternity leave she had been given from school, and was planning to share child care with a female friend who attends a different shift in school during the day. It is also the case that if the girl is not a virgin it prevents her parents from using her as an asset in strengthening alliances with other families. In that case, she will not only miss out on the customary marriage, but also the economic transactions that take place on this occasion. As Alganesh notes above, her daughter will lose out on the gezmi (**THP**; dowry) in terms of economical transfer of assets (livestock/money as an advance payment of her inheritance) if she takes off on her own and makes her own decisions in sexual matters. She will also lose out in terms of shilemat (\tilde{n}, Λ^{m}) ; the prize for her virginity) given by the groom and/or his family, usually in terms of gold and clothes. The point is not that girls should not have sex at this age but that her transition from childhood to becoming a woman is not made in a culturally-accepted way – through a marriage arranged by her parents where her (first) husband is given the role as catalyst for her womanhood (see also Mjaaland 2004c). It is from this perspective that, in the following section, I will elaborate on what continues to pass unquestioned in these negotiations on girls' morality as it plays out in the virginity norm.

Virginity testing

While boys go free because their virginity cannot be tested, it is commonly believed that it is possible to test a girl. Virginity, in the area of Tigray where I have done my research, is commonly understood as an imperforated hymen.³² This understanding of virginity has also

³² The hymen is a smaller or larger circular mucous skin fold around or a crescent fold at the rear end of the vagina opening. As commonly understood, it is not a 'seal' inside the vagina, but can be inspected from the

been remarkably persistent in parts of the world where the social significance of virginity has lost much of its value, as in my country Norway. This virginity myth is also based on the assumption that the condition of the hymen can indicate whether a girl has had sexual intercourse or not. Catherine Addison notes however that, 'female virginity is probably just as difficult to pin down as male virginity' (Addison 2010: 73). Physiologically, it is not possible to know with any degree of certainty if the girl is a virgin or not by inspecting the hymen since both the degree to which the girl has a hymen in the first place and the state of the hymen differs, *irrespective* of having had sexual intercourse or not (e.g. Hobday et al. 1997; Addison 2010; Kinkead 1887[!]). While Addison (2010) notes that the significance and meanings of virginity have differed socio-culturally and historically (see also Boddy 1989), in the context of HIV/Aids, the pressure on girls' virginity and the holding back of female sexuality is on the increase in many places (e.g. Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Mitike et al. 2008). A different example of how virginity can be used to hold young women back in a political sense is also entailed in the reports that women had been subjected to forced virginity testing when participating in the uprising on Tahrir square in Cairo during the Arab spring in 2011.³³

In an interview in 2002, the Tigrayan fighter woman Saba (44) explained the procedure used in the past to check a girl's virginity (3A hAA/gwal kulela). It was done with the butt end (around one centimetre in diameter) of a *mesfe* (long needle) that women use for basket work and when untying and plaiting their cornrow braids. If the women that checked the girl could insert the butt end of the needle into the girl's vagina, it was considered proof that the girl had slept with a boy already and, hence, was 'damaged' (InAM) *P*/*tebalashiya*). Saba also tells how the custom of sending the girl home on a donkey, if it was discovered she was not a virgin, had changed during the struggle:

Virgin, if they found that she is a virgin (girl) ... [that's fine]. However, if it is found that she is already a woman, he would say, 'go home' and will send her accompanied by people, but not on a donkey. This is how it is still. If she is not a virgin he will send her back, but not on a donkey. He will say, 'come and take her, I found out that she is damaged ($+nn\pi\rho/tebalashiya$), so take her back', and he will send her back with respect. Why? During the Weyane he would have been arrested [and asked], 'why do you send a person on a donkey; a person should be respected; why do you use ridicule?' Because of this, that's it (...) (laughs) it was getting better at the time of Weyane [TPLF].³⁴

outside. The hymen is seen as a reminiscent from the foetal stage of development and, while the extent to which a girl has a hymen or not at birth can differ, the state of the hymen will be in a natural process of change as the girl grows older, irrespective of sexual or other physical activities. If it happens that the hymen is still imperforated at the time when the girl starts menstruating, the menstrual blood cannot pass (Hobday et al. 1997; Addison 2010; see also Kinkead 1887).

³³ E.g. <u>http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12854391</u> and <u>http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13620712</u>).

³⁴ Recorded interview 15 October 2002/T'iqimti 5, 1995 E.C. (Interview number 11A-1 in Tigriña).

According to Saba, it was the *way* the bride was sent back that was changed during the struggle, not the fact that she *was* sent back. And, while it is possible to be legally married outside tradition, the common sentiment is that the first marriage should be a customary marriage where virginity is the norm. However, if the girl is not trying to fool the boy by saying she is a virgin if she is not, and if the relation is based on love, a customary marriage can take place if the parties are in agreement on the premises. For example, the rural student Meaza (20) did marry her boyfriend from school with both parents' blessing within the frames of the customary marriage. So, while the frame for the customary wedding is kept, some of its premises can be redefined as part of the marriage negotiations.

While it is commonly presumed that the virginity norm is stronger in the rural areas, the norm is not abandoned in the semi-urban market town of my study. In fact, I was present in a household in the market town in 2002 when one of the daughters, aged 15-16 years at the time, agreed to be taken to the hospital in Shire for a medical test of her virginity to calm her mother down after rumours that she had a boyfriend. The girl had locked herself up in a bedroom for a few days to avoid her mother's rage (and beatings), and was brought food by her younger sisters when their mother was not around. When I asked about the issue of virginity more generally in the interview with her mother in 2008, she asserts that virginity is not a big issue in the market town. If based on a (secret) love affair between the woman and the man, and she is open on not being a virgin, her mother claims that virginity would not matter. This shows that virginity can be negotiable, and especially so in the cases where the relationship is based on love as opposed to an arranged alliance. She notes, however, that if it is something that the man finds out later he would probably send her back even in the market town. When I mention the episode with her daughter in 2002, she says:

When she was roaming around a lot I kept quiet (*sug ile*), that's it ... afterwards I became suspicious that means, but she had not done anything. She was interested in him ... meaning in that man, they had discussed it and he was also interested. However, I didn't know that. Then I came to hear rumours about it from other people, I got angry, I even spied on her, following after her, I used to watch her and the like. As many things happened and I used to hear things from other people ... I talked to her that's it.³⁵

In spite of the assurance that virginity is not that much of an issue in the market town, her reaction to her daughter's presumed affair shows that it continues to be a concern for her as a parent. When it was stated at the hospital that her daughter was still a virgin, her mother gave her a small piece of gold jewellery as a reward, reaffirming that virginity does matter.

³⁵ Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 37 in Tigriña).

In the case of sexual relations with or between minors (that might or might not end in pregnancy) the boy can risk prosecution for 'damaging' (deflowering) the girl, equalling 'sexual outrage' (Article 620-627), or 'rape'/ 'sexual outrage' (Article 628) in the Criminal Code (FDRE 2005).³⁶ One example is a young couple that married without much festivity in my neighbourhood in the market town. She was 16 years of age, eighth-grade and pregnant. He had the option of marrying his girlfriend or, if prosecuted, serving a sentence in jail from three to fifteen years for having taken her virginity (and 'damaged' her) before she was 18.37 In my informal dialogue with representatives from the Ethiopian Women's Layers Association (EWLA), prosecution of rape is, in practice, mostly linked to a girl being deflowered, meaning that if she is not a virgin it is more difficult to have it classified as rape. This point suggests that, in spite of having incorporated women's concerns in gender sensitive Ethiopian laws, the virginity norm itself passes unquestioned in these new juridical regulations. As the peasant women Meharit, who is well versed in both religious prescriptions and government laws and policies, asserts above, the fact that this difference between girls and boys on the issue of virginity is not addressed in the law, suppresses women, since the gendered power aspects informing this ideal, to follow Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) framework here, is misrecognised.

Hence, the ideal of female virginity can continue to institute a gender-specific 'holding back' based on modesty, which conditions these girls' agency differently than boys, and that can continue to inform sanctioned femaleness precisely because the ideal itself passes unquestioned. While girls do negotiate with their parents and challenge their authority on the issue of underage marriage by appealing to education, the issue of female morality is more difficult to negotiate, as it is ascribed by society on the basis of being independent and mobile, as when going to school in the market town outside parents' control. To avoid the social label of being 'damaged', or 'immoral', one agentive strategy that these girls (and women) can, and do use, in order to accomplish their educational (or other) goals, is – in terms of negotiating her way out of society's moral gaze – to comply with the pressure on morality and female modesty, and 'hold back'. While the way independence and agency intersect with female morality, makes virginity itself a 'frontier' where these rural girls' pursuit of education is at

³⁶ In the Criminal Code (2005) the punishment for 'sexual outrage' when the girl is a minor above 13 of age is between 3 and 15 years imprisonment. If the girl is under the age of 13 the imprisonment is between 13 and 25 years. If she was inflicted with grave bodily or mental injury or death the offender faces imprisonment for life (Article 620-627). Further, 'rape' or 'sexual outrage' can be punished with 5 to 25 years of imprisonment if the girl becomes pregnant, if she is infected with a sexually transferable disease, and where the victim is driven to suicide out of anxiety, shame and despair (Article 628).

³⁷ Fieldwork notes 31 August 2008/Nehase 25, 2000 E.C.

stake, these girls' strategies also enter into the socio-cultural dynamics in the Ethiopian highland context of layering communication and under-communicating practice. For these girls' parents, however, the work capacity of both rural and market town households, is also of concern.

Generational and gendered household dynamics

In spite of wanting a better future for their children, the parents' generation is not only concerned with their children's education but also with the viability of the household, where the gendered division of labour tends to impinge on girls' pursuit of education in different ways than on boys. To understand household dynamics in my area of research in Tigray, Meyer Fortes' (1969) seminal article on the 'time factor' in the cycle of development of the domestic group of a particular household is instructive. In his perspective, the social institution of the household is understood in relation to the life spans of individuals inhabiting it and passing through three phases: (1) 'expansion' after a young couple has established a new unit and have their own children, (2) 'dispersion' or 'fission' when children start moving out, and (3) 'replacement', where the youngest child takes over the farm and takes care of parents till they die. Dan Franz Bauer (1977) also bases his analysis of the Tigrayan household on Fortes' three household phases. However, Bauer also points to issues where Fortes' three phases of the household are extended or disrupted in the Tigrayan context. For example, the practice of including other members (kin or other) into the nuclear unit to meet the household's requirement for labour can extend the expansion phase beyond the period where biological children are old enough to work or start moving out. In the context of rainfed subsistence agriculture and a high degree of ecological uncertainty there is also a thin line between being a rich household and becoming a poor one, which might start the dispersion phase of the household cycles earlier as its members seek possibilities elsewhere. Bauer notes as well that a high divorce rate also impinges on the dispersion phase of Tigrayan households. Even in the case of the youngest son taking over the farm, he will not simply replace his parents in their household. When resources allow, he will, even if staying in the same compound as his parents, build his own house based on the nuclear unit and constitute himself as an independent actor both vis-à-vis his parents and the community (ibid.).

In my study area, household dynamics do, even today, resemble the household cycles described by Fortes with the adjustments to the Tigrayan context that Bauer provides. In fact, both in the rural and urban areas, the married couple establish their own household based on a nuclear unit. The rare occurrence of land redistribution in rural Tigray because of scarcity of

223

land – together with small land-holdings that will not be viable if parcelled out to more siblings than the youngest son who is supposed to take over his parent's farm – tend, however, to *push* youth out of the rural areas. The establishment of tiny rural towns that, in my study area is simply called the 'new town' (hadish ketema) which enables the starting up of small businesses, might prevent some youngsters from being pushed out of the rural areas. While education *pulls* youth from rural to urban areas, being taken out of school and married underage to a peasant's son with land is one way that female students are *pulled back* to, or retained, in the rural areas. The pressured economic situation in Tigray, making accommodation into the job market of more or less educated youth difficult, contributes together with the fact that many female and male students have too low marks to continue education, and too little education to get a job - to the upholding of underage marriage as a more *viable* alternative than education for many rural girls. The majority of the female and male students in the exploratory education survey that I conducted do, in fact, envision themselves settling in the urban areas and/or with other occupations than their peasant parents, in spite of (as noted in Chapter 3) Ethiopian agriculture policies depending on 70 percent of these educated rural youth returning to the rural areas to work in the labourintensive agricultural sector (FDRE-MOI 2002: 47). Nevertheless, the trend, which is also observable in other parts of Ethiopia (e.g. Getnet & Asrat 2012), is that, once out of the rural areas, the chance that these youth with different levels of education will return, in spite of difficulties with fulfilling their dreams in urban areas, is minimal. And, if they want to return, they might not have access to land. Some might come back, though, as civil servants: teachers, agriculture- and health extension workers with a wage. These points form the context for my discussion on the intersection of education with agrarian household dynamics. Instead of simply presuming that girls' work tasks in the household are a problem for their education *per se* as in problem-centred perspectives on girls' education, I will follow the considerations at play in securing household viability when parents open up for education as something that (at least potentially) can secure their children's future.

The intersection of education with concerns about household viability

In the labour-intensive subsistence agriculture in the rural area of my research, all household members that are able to work take part one way or another. There are also periods of the year that are more labour intensive than others, relating to cultivation (ploughing/sowing/weeding) during the rainy season (*h29*-*t*:/*kiremti*) in June, July and August, and harvesting (cutting/threshing) from the second half of October, through November up until December.

Work tasks are gender specific but are also based on age and generation. As offspring grow older, and as a peasant woman's childbearing period is nearing its end, her daughters take over more and more of the household tasks (like cooking/baking, grinding, fetching water and firewood, washing clothes). Still taking part, the woman's role becomes more as an organiser, something which gives her some space to prioritise other tasks in cultivation (instead of having to do both), religious commitments and political responsibilities as elected representatives in tabia or wereda councils, or the social court. It is the oldest daughter at home who will be given the largest responsibility in the household as a preparation for her own marriage. As she marries and the time comes for her to move to her husband's place (now commonly around the time when she turns 18), the next sister in line will take over, and so on. This puts a strain on these girls' school participation, *but not equally on all of them at the same time.* When the youngest son is married and takes over the farm, the daughter-in-law moves in and takes over these household.

Both girls and boys are sent herding cattle and goats from the age of 5 or 6, at first with older siblings before they are given full responsibility. In fact, both rural and market town girls in my study area seem to experience a lot of freedom in mobility up until puberty. Restrictions would set in at around the age of 11 to 12 when girls are most often relieved of herding tasks that would keep her away from the house all day, and becomes increasingly obliged to take on more tasks at home, also in the market town. In cases where the household does not have (enough) sons, as in the peasant woman Nitsihiti's case with seven daughters and only one son, girls will continue to herd, with younger sisters taking over as the older ones grow older. Observing more closely these herding activities in my neighbourhood in the rural area, I realised that Nitsihiti's two youngest daughters (8 and 10) were also taking turns in one of their older sister's newly-established household on a weekly basis, since they lacked children to do the herding. Together with their two-year-older sister they also had to tend to their own household's herding. Likewise, these three sisters were taking turns in going to school. One of the reasons why Nitsihiti's daughter Genet had managed to stay on in school till she had finished eighth grade (apart from being both determined and clever), is based on the fact that her older sisters still remained at home, taking care of the household tasks, while her younger sisters herded. When her two-year-older married sister eventually moved out, Genet was the next in line to take over these household tasks in her parents' home. While married at this time, the reason for her educational pursuit having come to an end, in spite of her wish to continue, do also relate to this take-over of household tasks as the oldest daughter

225

at home. In periods where grazing possibilities in the rural area are scarce or non-existent, the older (and only) son would take the cattle (while the goats remain in the vicinity) to *bere<u>k</u>a* (the wilds) around the Tekezze River for a period. This moving of cattle to better pastures starts from the hottest season (A.?.P./<u>h</u>agay) and lasts into the rainy season (*kiremti*), when grazing (if the rain comes) resumes in the village. Herding is less crucial during the period when farming activities have finished (from November to June) since they do not have to keep the animals staying in the village out of the grain fields, enabling more children to go to school during this period. Because of herding activities, Nitsihiti's only son had already dropped out of school after first grade. Except for one older sister, the remaining six sisters all have more education than him. This is also a trend in many of the other households in my neighbourhood in the rural area.

Going to school in the rural area of my research often means attending only on the holy days (*beal*) that, according to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, are no-work days in cultivation. This means that many of the (female and male) students in this rural area are going to school only a couple of times every week. Released from outside farm tasks on these holy days, Genet's mother Nitsihiti takes on herding till her youngest daughters come back from school around 2-2.30 pm. As the peasant woman and female head of household Alganesh (58) says once when I follow her to the river to water her cattle: *'See how it has become. Today the elders are herding* '.³⁸ Herding is considered a task for children. For household tasks to be carried out while educating their sons and daughters, the established social order of authority in generational relations as this relates to practice, is in fact sacrificed. Alganesh's account of how education intersects with household dynamics in the rural area is a case in point:

Ploughing, yes, since all of them go to school, when there is ploughing; they [two sons] go to school in turns in June. One of them ask permission and does the ploughing all day today and tomorrow, once it's [him], and once it's [the other one] that returns [from school] after having requested permission and does the ploughing today and tomorrow all day, while the other one goes to school. Eh? That's how they do the ploughing. That's the way the ploughing is done. And me, I herd the cattle myself, I herd myself. Eh? Concerning weeding, during the rainy season when the school is closed we weed together; autumn ($\Phi \omega \cdot q / q e w i i$), we work like that in the autumn; autumn and rainy season (k i remti), summer (hagay) and autumn I herd the cattle myself, in the rainy season also since they are off doing other things like panning gold. Since they are off to do other things I herd the cattle myself. Eh? Like a child, I have become like a child that means when herding myself. Why is that? I want my children to learn for them to become educated, for them to become intelligent, to become knowledgeable; that's why you see me falling and stumbling in the hills herding the cattle. Eh? They, however, will go to pan gold in the rainy season, they will go to school during the summer, and during the autumn also, they will [do farm] work while going to school. Eh? I'm doing fine now that means. As far as I'm

³⁸ Fieldwork notes 11 November 2008/*Hidar* 2, 2001 E.C.

concerned I'm fine, I don't tell them that I'm hard pressed herding the cattle when they learn. Eh? I tell them to learn, since I didn't learn they have to learn so that they can escape the hardships that I have been through. So, you see, it means I herd the cattle while they learn. This way I sent Kahsu to school and now she has a job. Eh? She has a job; she has become graced that means. [One of her younger sisters] also, even though she had a love affair and was cheated, after having dropped out in grade 8, she's now in grade 9. Eh? Now, her baby [2] will come here and I will look after him for a while; I will herd the cattle with the baby on my back. She will learn, that's so, I don't want her to become like me; I was hard pressed when I grew up, and since I didn't go to school and didn't know I fell into hardships, that's what I fell into. Otherwise, if I had education, I would have been high up in life. Eh? For my children, however, I wish that they will learn and have a salary, that they will be conscious ($h'\bar{r}dr/kineqihu$) and find rest, that is what I wish; that's what I'm working for, yes, that's what I do.

-For both your daughters and your sons that means?

Yes, in terms of education?

-Yes.

All of them are the same, they will not be left behind, neither the girls nor the boys will be left behind; I'm the leader (*mCF2-i*/*t'ernafit*) at home, meaning the organiser (*t'ernafit*), one is working here and one is working there, I'm at home holding everything together. Eh? Yes, when going [to school] they come back around midday, at midday they come back and start working. Yes, they come back and start working. I'm hard pressed, however, why am I hard pressed; I'm hard pressed now, I'm herding cattle even if I'm old with a child on my back I'm climbing hills, even if climbing doesn't do me good, but instead of the hardships I experienced I want my children to have a good life. Isn't it like that? Eh? Yes, that's how it is. Now one son is in third [grade], one is in sixth. Eh? Actually, he should have been in tenth [grade] now had I not taken him out of school when I didn't have somebody else to plough. When I couldn't find anybody to do the ploughing, I took him out [of a school] for a while to do the ploughing, but now they both take turns in ploughing while they are learning; their teachers give them permission when they ask and they are doing fine in school. Me, too, I'm happy about that. Eh? I'm happy even though I'm hard pressed, but I don't tell my children I'm hard pressed while they are learning. Eh? Isn't that good? Yes, that's how it is for me, I'm fine now that means. (...)³⁹

Alganesh's account is a detailed description of how she goes about handling household tasks as well as educating those of her offspring that are still at home. Wanting her offspring to escape the hardships she has experienced, Alganesh is willing to renounce on her status as an elder, and herd. This point shows the significance education is beginning to have within peasant household dynamics. In order to maintain household viability, elders are sacrificing their status as elders but the female and male students are also sacrificing some of their time in school. Both male and female students would be absent from school on those workdays when their contribution in the household is crucial in order to get tasks done on time.

Absence from school is not accommodated in the official education statistics, even though the teachers have to report it. One female teacher in the rural area also admits: 'We do not report actual numbers. If there are 15 in the class out of 40, I will report that 35 were

³⁹ Recorded interview 23 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 14, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 21 in Tigriña).

present and 5 absent. (...) It's a lot of false reporting in this wereda. ⁴⁰ This tendency of underreporting is also confirmed by other teachers in the rural area, and points to teachers' own career strategies. For example, one former male teacher, who had worked in a village school just outside the market town, laughs when I mention this issue and says: *'There is an [anecdotal] story about one teacher who passed a student and ranked him 5th in his class at the end of the school year. However, that student had died in October.* ⁴¹ Teachers claim that reporting absences will impinge on their own rating as teachers and, hence, the chances of having an upgrading of their education (from certificate to diploma and onwards to a degree) paid for by the government. Which numbers are reported will also impinge on the aim teachers commonly have to be promoted from rural to urban areas. This underreporting also shows how teachers negotiate with state authorities to secure their own careers in a context where New Public Management requirements for reporting performance in education (e.g. Ball 2008) have also found their way to Ethiopia.

The director in one of the two primary schools in the market town claims that absence is not an issue to the same extent there as in the rural areas. In the secondary school in the market town, where students from the surrounding rural areas learn, this re-emerges as a problem during ploughing in June and harvesting in November, unless the students have moved to the market town on a more permanent basis. Most households in the market town also rely on other means of income than the agrarian rural household. Household members can have salaries as government employees (civil servants) in the wereda administration as well as employment in the health-, agriculture- or education sector in the market town. These semi-urban households can also be based on formal or informal businesses where both sons and daughters will contribute with their labour. The gendered division of labour, implying that it is the girls who are expected to help their mothers at home, does, however, follow girls into urban households. While boys in rural households also have tasks like herding and ploughing that can impede their education, boys in urban areas are not tied down by daily household tasks to the same extent. Depending on the economy of the household, boys would be obliged to help in their parents' businesses or earn money at odd jobs in their spare time. The fact that the school in the market town provides two shifts daily also give some space for strategising in between work tasks and education.

⁴⁰ Fieldwork notes 23 November 2010/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 14, 2003 E.C.

⁴¹ Fieldwork notes 27 November 2010/*Hidar* 18, 2003 E.C.

Work at home and homework

It is not only in the rural area but also in the market town that the labour required to sustain the viability of a household might not add up with girls' wish for an education. After having taken her tenth grade exam three times (two times as 'private') to get a mark above 2.0, 'Bilen' (20) finally gets 2.2, allowing her to advance to nursing college, which is her greatest wish. She registers for nursing college but, when the time comes to leave, she remains at home. The reason she gives is that her mother and female head of household lacked labour for her restaurant and bunabét (bar; literally 'coffee house'). In spite of having grown up taking part in the work to run this business, her mother is clear about not wanting her three daughters to take over. Bilen knows very well the hard work her mother has put, and still puts, into her business to make it prosper, and her consideration for her mother's work situation wins over her wish for nursing college. Continuing on to college would have meant going to a town three hours away by bus and staying there on a permanent basis. When we had discussed her education two years earlier, when Bilen was awaiting her result from her second attempt to improve her tenth-grade exam, she started to cry and said: 'All my friends have left to continue their education. I cried for two months when I realised I could not continue. And it is hard to work for my mother; she insults me for the smallest mistake.⁴² While Bilen's sense of duty seems deep-rooted, her loyalty and consideration for her mother does not necessarily earn her appreciation in practice. Later that autumn Bilen is allowed to attend a half-year, part-time computer course in the nearest town (half an hour away by bus) in the afternoons. Coming back after her first day at the course, Bilen smiles and bows down to kiss her mother on her knees before she kisses her cheeks to express her gratitude: a bodily gesture that is one example of how children learn to accept parents' or other elders' authority. The account below expands on the difficulty Bilen has in satisfying her mother and keeping their relationship affectionate, even when she complies. It is also the case that the wish Bilen's mother has for her daughters to pursue work other than she has had, is not necessarily followed up in practice.

While underage marriage has not been at issue in this household, both moral reputation and household viability are. Her mother's and older sister's reaction when Bilen, on a later occasion (when having been allowed to include an English class after the computer course) but did not manage to catch the last bus back in the evening at around 6-6.30 pm, shows how she is 'punished' if falling out of line with their expectations. Bilen says, 'everybody is angry with me since I did not come home yesterday. When I called my mother to

⁴² Fieldwork notes 27 August 2008/Nehase 21, 2000 E.C.

tell her, she hung up on me. My oldest sister (25) is angry too [since I was not able to sleep over and guard my sister's shop that night]. They immediately think that I will use the opportunity to sleep with a boy-friend. But I have made my choice; I want to learn. It did not even help that my father called to tell that I was with them [his other family]. I'm so distressed when I see their angry faces. My mother encouraged me to learn, but now she is angry. I'm afraid I will not manage. (...) However, I will help them again as soon as I have finished the training', Bilen says. The next day she is home early again. She has skipped her English class. When I ask her about it, she says she will sleep over in the town tomorrow so that she can attend the class. In fact, she does not. When I ask her again she says, 'I will start from Monday'. Later I learn that Monday is an Islamic holiday so schools are closed. Instead, she stays at home washing the family's laundry. She says she will start from Tuesday, but at the same time she reveals that she is worried about her mother who will be left with the work in the *bunabét* alone – except for two (considered unreliable) maids – and the help she gets from another of Bilen's older sisters (23). Contrary to Bilen, this sister did in fact pass her tenth-grade exam but, instead of continuing school that she claims she did not like, she plans to join the increasing work migration to Arab countries. When Bilen goes to town on Tuesday, she comes back early; she has dropped out of the English language class for good.⁴³

When I come back a few months later, Bilen says she would have wanted to add a three-months computer course to the six months she had finished by then, but adds *'since we did not have a maid, I had to help my mother*^{.44} Bilen holds on to her wish for education in our informal dialogues though. She also tries to balance this wish for education with her mother's expectations for help and her own sense of duty to help her. When she gets unexpected moral and economic support from a relative one year later, she does, however, leave to start her education as a nurse. Coming home for major holidays, Bilen immediately finds her place in the kitchen and starts working after having greeted everybody. Assuming that parents' power is misrecognised, and that offspring simply comply with parents' interests, as Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) does, miss out on parents being *explicit* about their obligations and their dependency. Consequently, Bourdieu misses out on the structural impact of generational conflict. In fact, while Bilen's sense of duty towards her mother seems deeply embedded and 'hard-lived', it did not prevent her from pursuing her education when a chance (*adil*), that made her less dependent on her mother's support, materialised.

⁴³ Fieldwork notes 3 December 2008/<u>H</u>*ïdar* 24, 2001 E.C.

⁴⁴ Fieldwork notes 9 May 2009/Ginbot 1, 2001 E.C.

Education and the gendered division of labour

What becomes clear from my participatory observations both in the market town and in the rural area is also that education is considered to be *in* school, leaving little concern for schoolwork at home. One week before Bilen's third attempt to take the national tenth-grade exam (ten subjects) as 'private', she is nervous, but has not opened a book in the course of the last two years since she took her exam the first time. '*Do you think it will come from God (bïamlak)*?' I ask. She laughs.⁴⁵ There is hardly any time during the day for her to read, and in the evenings she immediately falls asleep when her work is finished. On the day of the national tenth-grade exam, she puts on nice clothes, asks me for a pencil, and takes off. 'Miraculously' she manages to get 2.2 this third time.⁴⁶

Many of the female rural students that I discussed the issue with do, however, emphasise the importance of finding spaces during the day to do homework. For example, when Meharit's (44) daughter 'Fetien' (17) has been taken out of school and married at the age of 16 for economic reasons, she explains, and for her widowed mother to get access to much-needed farm labour through her husband, she nevertheless says, when asked whether girls' work at home impedes their homework: 'Baəlen (96A7), [it's] themselves', she says. 'But they have to do a lot of work at home', I say. 'When I went to school I did a lot of work at home too, but I was best in class of the girls, and fourth or fifth of all of them. When I had finished work at home I studied. My mother asked me to leave it since she thought I used too much kerosene for the lamp in the evening. My [younger] sister just does her work tasks. *Then she sleeps. It's possible to do both if you are determined'*, she says.⁴⁷ One week later Fetien shows me her photo album. In two of the photographs she is sitting outside in the field smiling with her schoolbooks spread all around her on the ground.⁴⁸ Likewise, the youngest daughter (15) of the family living next door in my rural quarters, and who is a third grader, often takes her schoolbooks outside in the evening when she has finished her work tasks. The neighbour's son and her older brother often cluster around her chatting while she tries to keep her concentration. One evening when I return to my quarters at dusk she sits outside alone doing her homework. When I look outside a while later, she is still at it, using a torch.⁴⁹ Emebet notes in her study of Ethiopian female students that were successful in their educational pursuit: 'In their busy schedule the girls found time to study or means to

⁴⁵ Fieldwork notes 18 May 2009/Gïnbot 10, 2001 E.C.

⁴⁶ Fieldwork notes 25 May 2009/Ginbot 17, 2001 E.C.

⁴⁷ Fieldwork notes 14 June 2009/Sene 7, 2001 E.C.

⁴⁸ Fieldwork notes 21 June 2009/Sene 14, 2001 E.C.

⁴⁹ Fieldwork notes 23 November 2010/<u>H</u>idar 14, 2003 E.C.

accommodate their studies' (Emebet 1998: 132). This suggests that it is possible to do *both* work at home and homework if you are determined enough. For example, the peasant daughter Genet says: '*For many students school is only a pastime. It wasn't like that for me* (...). ⁵⁰ Hence, *not* finding time to do homework, does not only relate to the amount of actual work tasks but, might also point to lack of motivation and determination for education. When I ask the director of the Asgede Tsimbla Education Bureau to expand on differences between rural and urban areas, he says:

(...). There is a difference between the rural and the urban areas. How is the problem reflected in towns? The problem in town is reflected in the form of failure to properly understand the lessons offered in school, spending the day in video houses without permission, watching television [instead of studying]; that is the problems we have in town. It's not because they are that much engaged in work, and it's not as a result of parents holding them back [from school] that they [students] in towns are becoming weak (*nny-intro./zisenef zelewu*; 'lazy'). It has to do with lack of seriousness, roaming around in the streets, wasting their time, and failure to study according to the plan. We started to address this problem last year, and we are still at it. What is observed in the villages, however, as I have stated earlier, is the need to use their [children's] labour. The problem we see in the countryside is that the peasants want their children to work for them, and do not let them go to school a full academic year. Contrary to this, the kind of attitude we see in the town, as I told you ... is that students don't spend the day in school despite having been sent to school by their parents. Such students simply (*sug ilom*) carry their exercise books around and spend their days in video houses and by watching television. There are such attitudes, and having realised and evaluated this (*npro.gr.f.gemgiminayo*), we are now working on ways of improving this for the future.⁵¹

Because of the gendered division of labour, boys are usually exempt from household tasks that are assigned to girls (but can be sent to fetch water, which is a female task, if a donkey is available and/or they receive money for it). While both girls and boys are involved in different gender-specific household tasks in the rural areas, which seem to impinge on their education in somewhat similar ways, the household dynamics in the market town tend to give more spare time to male than female students. The male students in the market town might also have less regular tasks at home than their rural male age-mates. With no restrictions on their mobility, there seems to be a tendency that boys in the market town use their time out of school to roam around with their male friends if not involved in different odd jobs to earn money. Hence, it is important to take note of here that, while girls in the market town might do more work at home than market town boys, this does not imply that the boys necessarily spend more time doing their homework.

⁵⁰ Fieldwork notes 13 December 2010/Tahsas 4, 2003 E.C.

⁵¹ Recorded interview with Director Abraha Weldegebreal at Asgede Tsimbla Wereda Education Bureau 9 December 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 30, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 33 in Tigriña).

Notes on gendered aspects of drop-out and pass rates

With a focus on girls and the problems they face in education, what is often missed is that Tigrayan girls and boys, according to statistics from the region, tend to drop out at much the same rate in primary education⁵², albeit for different reasons. While underage marriage continues to be a cause for girls' dropout in the rural area of my research, boys' involvement in paid work (urban) and herding activities (rural) cause boys to drop out. Market town and rural boys alike are also involved in panning for gold in the wilds (*bereka*) in Tigray; an activity that has intensified in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda over the past years due to rising gold prices on the world market. Below, I will give one example of the gendered distribution of drop-out and pass rates, taking Genet's eighth-grade class in 2008/2009 (2001 E.C.) in the rural area as a case: In spite of having been married in January that year, Genet passed her national exam in June but stayed behind when some of her class-mates continued to secondary school. There had been fourteen girls in her class when starting eighth grade, but one girl dropped out during the year and the remaining thirteen girls all passed the national exam. Of the twelve boys in her class, three boys had dropped out during the year and the remaining nine boys all passed the national exam. Of the thirteen girls and nine boys that had passed, six girls and four boys continued to secondary school in the market town or other urban areas.

The number of girls and boys in Genet's class that continued to secondary school concurs with the larger number of girls not only in primary school, but also in ninth and tenth grade in the market town, compared to boys.⁵³ A gendered shift in favour of boys (continuing into tertiary education) starts after tenth grade, and coincides with the time when the pressure on girls' morality intensifies. Three years later, Genet notes that, of her former classmates, three girls and three boys had made it to eleventh grade without interruption. With only a few in Genet's age-group in the rural area persisting *through* education, this does not only concern the girls, but the boys too. This point also surfaces in one of the many discussion I had with the peasant woman Senait (50) on underage marriage and education. I ask: *'But wouldn't it have been better if they [girls] finish school first?' 'You know, there is not that much outcome from education. Most of them would not qualify for a job with salary anyway.'* Then she adds, *'to live in the countryside it's enough if they can read and write. Then what they need is to learn the different work tasks necessary for a peasant life.' 'But if there are some female*

⁵² Tigray Region Education Bureau, Education Statistics Annual Abstract 1999 E.C. (2006/2007), 2000 E.C.

^{(2009/2008),} and Tigray Regional State Education Bureau, *Education Statistics Abstract* 2002 E.C. (2009/2010).

³³ Statistic numbers provided by Endabaguna Secondary School, June 2009.

students who are very clever, isn't it good to give them the chance to get an education?' She says, 'yes, but those girls, or even boys, are not that many.'⁵⁴ As more rural parents consider education as a potential way forward for their children, they might find that their sons and daughters do not necessarily *succeed* in school. The figures below from Asgede Tsimbla Wereda that, are above the average for Tigray region, suggest that the chance of passing the eighth-grade national exam is reasonable for those, both female and male students, who have managed to persist this far in school:

Pass rates at the eighth-grade national exam 1997-2002 E.C. (2004-2010)												
Place	1997 E.C.		1998 E.C.		1999 E.C.		2000 E.C.		2001 E.C.		2002 E.C.	
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009		2009/2010	
	Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate	
	Μ	F	Μ	F	Μ	F	Μ	F	Μ	F	М	F
A/Tsimbla	86.4	72.8	95,9	91.1	79.4	71.8	87.4	85.3	96.4	96.6	94.5	96.7
Tigray	82.0	77.0	79.7	66.8	75.6	69.0	80.2	77.5	83.3	77.5	84.2	79.8

Statistical numbers provided by Tigray Region Education Bureau in Mekelle.

Below is also an overview by gender of how many female and male students passed their tenth-grade exam in the two secondary schools in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda (Endabaguna and Kisadgaba that, while situated in semi-urban areas, educate students from both rural and urban areas) compared to Tigray region and the national average of Ethiopia:

Pass rates at the tenth-grade national exam 1997-2002 E.C. (2004-2010)												
Place	1997 E.C.		1998 E.C.		1999 E.C.		2000 E.C.		2001 E.C.		2002 E.C.	
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009		2009/2010	
	Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate		Pass rate	
	М	F	М	F	М	F	М	F	М	F	Μ	F
Endabaguna	33	24	40	53.2	37.5	25.6	27.8	13.2	31	22	32.4	38.9
Kisadgaba	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	16.7	11.8	20	40	12.5	20
Tigray	38	28	31.7	38,5	33.1	22	33.5	24.5	37	39	29.2	32
Ethiopia	50.3	29.1	54.7	36.9	56.1	39.5	44.6	28.6	49.9	32.2	69.7	52.7

Statistical numbers from the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE) in Tigray are provided by Tigray Region Education Bureau in Mekelle. The national numbers are from *Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2001 E.C./2008-09* and *2003 E.C./2010-11* (FDRE-MOE 2010a, 2012).

While there is a tendency on a national level for pass rates for boys to be higher than for girls, pass rates in eighth and tenth grade in Tigray region and in the two secondary schools in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda (Endabaguna and Kisadgaba), are more variable gender-wise with

⁵⁴ Fieldwork notes 25 November 2010/<u>H</u>üdar 16, 2003 E.C.

sometimes more girls than boys passing. The low pass rates at the tenth-grade national exam are, by the teachers I discussed the issue with, most often attributed to the shift from Tigriña to English as a teaching language from ninth grade onwards. In fact, both Tigrayan girls' and boys' pass rates at the tenth-grade national exam should be subject for concern.⁵⁵ The above statistics also suggests that parents' investment in their children's education is risky. This adds to parents' concerns about household viability as well as their moral concerns when sending (or not sending) their daughters to the market town outside the family's control after eighth grade. The fact that Genet's education is left pending, in spite of her determination, relates also to female (and male) students' dependency on parents' or other relatives' moral and economic support to be able to succeed.

Female students' determination and success in education

In terms of girls' education in Ethiopia, there is also an emerging research literature that is concerned with identifying the strategies of those girls who are successful (e.g. Emebet 1998, 2004; Desalegn 2006; Fikir 2008; Mehbuba 2008). The issue is not only girls' access to education, but also - to paraphrase Duncan Wilson's (2003) and Ramya Subrahmanian's (2003, 2005) perspective on educational rights – their success *in/within* and *through* education. In her study of girls' education in Ethiopia referred to above, Emebet also identifies 'facilitators' as decisive for girls' success in education. As facilitators she includes, parents/older siblings and other relatives, as well as teachers in their capacity as mentors and role models (Emebet 1998: 123). This is in line with the answers given in my exploratory education survey to the question: -Who motivate and support your education morally? In addition to the facilitators mentioned above, classmates are also mentioned by these students. It is also mentioned that teachers sometimes go beyond tutorial inputs and moral support and, in some cases, also help with providing exercise books and additional teaching material for students. The important point here is that in the case of lack of parents' support there might be others who take on this role, or supplement parents' support; there might also be a combination of persons that provide moral and economic support for female and male students. In some cases students also decide to manage themselves in spite of lack of support, as the peasant women Alganesh's daughter Kashu (31) did. Her younger siblings, including Rahwa and Kiros (referred to above), followed in her footsteps, with their parents slowly

⁵⁵ Endabaguna secondary school did achieve the best results in Ethiopia in 2009/2010 (2002 E.C.) and 2010/2011 (2003 E.C.) on the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) in twelfth grade to qualify for university.

changing their attitude towards education in the process. As the first daughter in the household to resist marriage and demand education, Kahsu did, however, face considerable challenges in her educational pursuit:

There was no school in the vicinity [when I grew up]. Since there was no school, my parents weren't much concerned about education. So, until I was a little older I was herding cattle and herding goats, and looking after smaller children that means. Later, when I was older, when I was 13 or so, I got married according to my parents' will. I was married and started married life (HRC/haddar) that means. At that time a school had opened, but since my parents weren't interested I couldn't go to school. It was my parents' pressure (bo3+/tsinto) that got me married. Then, what was my choice $(\mathcal{P}C \circ \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{P}/m irch'av)$? I wanted education, even when I was a little child that means. Then, since married life wasn't my wish, I broke it off, my married life that means. When I had matured (AO. 37970Ch/ libi endageberku; literally 'when I had produced a heart'), I refused and left. Even then, it wasn't in my parents' interest to give me an education. What about it? Simply, that's it, I broke it [the marriage] off myself, even if they would beat me, and punish me, if that would happen, I just kept quiet (sug ile) and left that means. After I had broken it off, incidentally, when I had left my married life a school opened around here from first up to fourth grade, so I registered and started. Even when I was in school, there was a lot of pressure from my parents. They didn't want to educate me. But I just kept quiet, I had a strong determination and was able to learn grade 1 up to 4 while staying at home, [since the school was] close to our house. Then I had to move to another school to study in fifth and sixth grade. Even then, my parents had no interest in educating me, no interest whatsoever. Then, as I have told you before, when I had reached sixth grade, incidentally I had a boyfriend, and because of that boyfriend I gave birth that means. When I had given birth, in seventh grade I dropped out of school. I dropped out of school in seventh grade ... I dropped out for one year, after one year I was back in school. Then again, my parents didn't help me, nor did the one I had given birth with. Myself, I just kept quiet; as I said, I had a determination [to learn]. Meaning, I managed my education by working as a housemaid. Incidentally, in ninth grade also, I dropped out, since I lacked the means, I dropped out. Afterwards, that's it, I won it myself ... I kept quiet and the like as I told you, and continued my education. I finished up till tenth grade. When I had finished tenth grade, incidentally I also got a good result ('μη, 'ω', 'ω', λ. λ. β./net'ibi'win metsiuley; literally 'the marks also came to me'). In fact, it wasn't incidental, I had triumphed, that's it, I had won, even when having to work, even then I had triumphed. Since I got good marks I joined TTI. Do you know TTI? It means, teaching [college]. I was assigned for teaching in primary school after being trained for one year. Then I was assigned here where I'm working now. Here ... I have worked for two years.⁵⁶

Kahsu's narrative account shows that while her parents' decision in relation to marriage and education had run counter to her own interests, determination made her pursue her goals and eventually enabled her to succeed in becoming a teacher. On a later occasion she says, '(...) *since I liked education so much that you have to wonder, it became true*'.⁵⁷ As her parents did not want to send her to school she was married underage, but divorced (after four years) before she started school at around the age of 18 (finishing the first four grades in two years). Kahsu's account also shows interruptions in her pursuit of education as she dropped out of school twice: after giving birth to her first child with her boyfriend (later husband), and because of economic problems. In the school vacation during the rainy season in 2002 I had

⁵⁶ Recorded interview 16 September 2008/Meskerem 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 3B-1 in Tigriña).

⁵⁷ Recorded interview 9 November 2008/T'iqimti 30, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 3B-2 in Tigriña).

followed Kahsu to pan gold in one river in her home village, in her attempt to manage school without her parents' support. While the financial foundation for pursuing education might deteriorate from time to time, this does not necessarily mean a *permanent* dropout. Rather, as Melaku Gebremichael (2003) suggests, dropping out from school can be understood as a coping strategy. Hence, education, when intersecting with other pressing concerns for managing one's life, does not necessarily follow an uninterrupted linear trajectory. This point also surfaces in educational statistics when comparing Net Enrolment Rates (NER) and Gross Enrolment Rates (GER), primary and secondary school, where progression for both girls and boys in education, does not necessarily follow expected age categories.⁵⁸

A local female health extension worker in the rural area answered, when she was asked how she herself avoided underage marriage: 'I was very clear about wanting education', she says. 'So your parents didn't force you?' I ask. 'No, they didn't. You know some of those girls who marry early don't like school, and they don't get good enough results either [to be able to continue].' 'So there are no other alternatives [for girls] in this place, than education or underage marriage?' I ask. 'No there isn't', she says.⁵⁹ An elderly woman (83) in the market town, herself having married at the age of 13 and having no education, sums it up as follows about a young female relative: 'She doesn't want to go to school, and she doesn't want to marry. If she doesn't go to school, she has to marry ⁶⁰. When I meet one of this girls' female friend from school, she says: 'I failed the tenth-grade exam and married *instead.* ⁶¹ When asking a female student from the rural area if her parents have ever pushed her to get married, she says, 'never', and continues, 'they will not do so as long as I don't fail [my exams].⁶² When I ask her the same question again later she admits that her parents' had wanted to marry her when she was in fifth grade but that, she had managed to withstand the pressure by seeking help from a teacher to reason with her parents. She had been ranked first in her class (out of both boys and girls) in seventh grade, third in eighth grade and was fourth in her class in ninth grade after having continued to secondary school in the market town.

Determined students might also do, as Kahsu above did, *keep quiet and do what she wants anyway*, if open challenges to their parents' authority on the issue of education does not work out. Emebet notes in her study from Ethiopia that the female students that resisted and persevered in education against the odds, used both these strategies:

⁵⁸ Statistics reviewed in the *Education Statistics Annual Abstracts* from Tigray Regional State Education Bureau covers the school years between 2002/2003 (1995 E.C.) and 2009/2010 (2002 E.C.).

⁵⁹ Fieldwork notes 25 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 16, 2001 E.C.

⁶⁰ Fieldwork notes 27 May 2009/*Günbot* 19, 2001 E.C.

⁶¹ Fieldwork notes 27 October 2008/T'iqimti 17, 2001 E.C.

⁶² Fieldwork notes 16 December/*Tahsas* 7, 2003 E.C.

They [the female students] realized that their objectives were in some ways contradict[ing] the demands and expectations set by the norms in the society. They did not accept the values and practices that interfered with their education. They resisted in their own ways. Sometimes they confronted, other times they ignored some of the messages, and they did things the way they saw fit (Emebet 1998: 170).

Emebet asserts that female student's 'aspiration and faith determines how much work she puts into her education. The more a girl aspires the more she works hard, and the more chances she will have to succeed' (Emebet 2004: 94). Girls' (and boys') actual performance and success in school must also be seen as entering into parents' considerations as to support their children's education. This point relates to the extent a household can afford to send all their children to school and for how long. The peasant women and female head of household Meharit (44), says: '(...) instead of sending them all to school and see them all failing, I thought it would be better to send half of them to school so that they can move forward, while the other half will live on doing peasant work.⁶³ It is an increasing possibility that those who are performing well in school are allowed to continue, regardless of being a boy or a girl. One business woman in the market town also notes: "The children who are clever in school are a blessing. It's wrong to take them out of school. They will never be able to settle down completely afterwards."⁶⁴ Since there now is a primary school (grades 1-8) in the rural are of my study, the chance of letting their daughters stay in school through eighth grade has also increased. This suggests that it is not only parents' concerns about their daughters' morality and household viability which impinge on girls' education, but that these female students' own performance and success in education also plays a part. While girls outnumber boys in primary school and first cycle of secondary school in Tigray, and the gender gap in pass rates is in the process of closing on these levels in my area of research, mark distribution between boys and girls at the eighth- and tenth-grade national exams in the unpublished statistics from Tigray Regional State Education Bureau show that boys' scores are, on average, better than the girls' (see also TRB-EB 2011a, 2011b). A focus on underage marriage and work burden at home does not in my opinion explain satisfactorily why not more girls, who in fact are in school, *perform* better. While underage marriage, which is more of an issue in rural areas, tends to be more negotiable if girls are clever in school, not all girls (or boys for that sake) thrive *in* school. The question that will be returned to in the last part of the next chapter,

⁶³ Recorded interview 15 November 2008/*Hidar* 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 15 in Tigriña).

⁶⁴ Fieldwork notes 15 January 2012/*T*'iri 6, 2004 E.C.

which addresses gender identity in the Tigrayan context, is concerned with the consequences of female modesty and 'holding back' for girls' performance in school.

Concluding remarks

While Bourdieu (1977) acknowledges generational conflicts, because parents and offspring are born into different material environments along a historical timeline that creates differences in the structural dispositions of *habitus*, he seems to be more concerned with how social reproduction takes place in this relationship than on the potential for change that generational conflict entails. In Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, affectionate dispositions generated in the relationship between parents and offspring enable *habitus* to generate impulses of feeling and injunctions of duty that make offspring comply with parents' interests and priorities (Bourdieu 1990a: 160). While Tigrayan girls in my study feel this sense of duty, and parents do have the benefit of generational authority and power over resources, the outcome of these negotiations, where both duty and power are recognised (as opposed to being misrecognised in Bourdieu's framework), is not predetermined. Female students' negotiations with their parents can, however, be encompassed in Barth's (1995, 2002) dynamic perspective of culture that includes actors' agency, and which encompasses both social reproduction and change much in line with Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) analytical perspective on agency. As with Emebet's (1998, 2004) focus on how Ethiopian girls in her study negotiate, challenge and resist economic and cultural barriers to their educational pursuit, I have positioned Tigrayan female students analytically at the 'frontiers', where their determination to pursue education runs up against their parents' concern with their daughters' morality as well as household viability. While these girls' determination for education becomes decisive for their pursuit of education, they are still dependent on someone who can provide moral and material support, if parents refuse to do so. While underage marriage hits rural girls harder than their urban age-mates in my study area, female students, both in the rural area and the semi-urban market town, run up against 'frontiers' in relation to morality in ways that the male students do not. The virginity ideal in the Tigrayan context, learning girls' to 'hold back' to not be 'damaged' and, hence, continuing to institute modesty as sanctioned female behaviour, is a case in point that resonates with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theoretical perspective, as the gendered power aspect at its base pass unquestioned. The fact that rural girls in my study move away from home to the market town, outside parents' control, would, however, be acknowledged as a possibility for change also in Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice, since a change of material environment is involved.

CHAPTER 6: Negotiating femaleness

Introduction

In informal discussions about gender relations in the Tigrayan context, people have explained that, as God's creations, the categories 'woman' and 'man' are distinctly different by 'nature' women and men gender-specific practices and behaviours that should not go against God's order.¹ Both being understood as stable categories that seem to answer to most gendered eventualities, 'nature' and 'culture' are mutually reinforcing. For example, the different reproductive tasks assigned to men and women by 'nature' means that (heterosexual) sexuality can neither be tamed nor changed.² Likewise, 'culture' encompasses gendered practices and behaviours informed by a moral obligation to comply with what is perceived as the best (or most convenient) way of fulfilling the natural order; holding gender relations in check (see also Krug 2000). Messing with this natural order of gender-specific practices and behaviours – and especially those that have to do with biological reproduction and agricultural production³ – becomes a religious matter, since deviating practices would offend God and arouse His wrath. Basing legitimisation of gender relations on a religiously-founded doxa – the tendency in every established social order to produce 'the naturalization of its own arbitrariness' (Bourdieu 1977: 164) - can, when playing out in a predominantly vertical social structure, as in the highland context of Ethiopia, reinforce hierarchical gender relations not only as natural but as God-given (Zenebework 1976: 21).

When Tigrayan women ventured to the front to take part in the revolutionary liberation struggle (1975-91), their pursuit implied a venturing to normative and behavioural 'frontiers', which in a gendered sense, had divine legitimisation. As noted in Chapter 1, the cause for the big famine in (1984-85) had been interpreted by clerics in the Orthodox Church in Tigray as caused by women messing with the natural order of things when starting to plough (a male task) during the struggle (e.g. Hammond 1989, 1999; Tsegay 1999; Krug 2000). On their way to a future that no doubt will be different from their mothers' and grandmothers', female students in Tigray today continue to encounter 'frontiers' in their educational pursuit in ways

¹ To differentiate between 'sex' and 'gender' is not common in daily parlance in Tigriña, and it is the term *tsota* (P-P-), which signifies 'sex', that is most often used. 'Gender' as social construction, is, however, encompassed in the term *sirate tsota* ($\hbar C P$ -P-P-).

 $^{^{2}}$ Homosexuality is taboo and belongs to the unthinkable, not only in Tigray, but in Ethiopia in general.

³ In Tigriña *mi<u>h</u>ares* (**π**-4*c*ħ) means 'to plough', but if used as *qiné* (words and expressions with double meanings) can also mean 'to have sexual intercourse'.

that boys do not. In this chapter I will therefore go deeper into aspects of gendered practices that challenge gender norms, and where gender identity is at stake. In the last part of this chapter I will also discuss how rural female students' self-representations in front of my camera can be understood as attempts to negotiate their pursuit for education at the 'frontiers' of sanctioned femaleness. First in this chapter I will expand on the issue of gender relations in the Tigrayan context from the perspective of Bourdieu's theoretical framework, before elaborating on how the fighter women's transgressions of practices and behaviours assigned to their gender has been conceptualised locally.

The 'gender distinction'

Assigning specific gendered practices to women and men is a common phenomenon in all societies. These practices might differ in kind and rigidity, means of ideological legitimisation, and the extent to which these practices are contested. The way female and male gender in the Tigrayan context constitutes two distinct categories based on difference with gender-specific practices and behaviours assigned to them, resonates with how gender difference is internalised as structural dispositions in *habitus* through the gendered division of labour in Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a, 2001) theoretical framework. It is the dissymmetry in antagonistic complementarity between the mother and the father that enables gender difference to be internalised in childhood through the mimesis of gender-specific practices (Bourdieu 1977: 89). Based on a one-dimensional structural ordering of sex in relation to social space, and above all, the (Kabyle) house, the sexual division of labour and the division of sexual labour constitute one opportunity to internalise as inseparable schemes the relationship between men and women (ibid.). The 'androcentric society' (Bourdieu 2001: vii) is, from this perspective, reproduced as a self-evident and universal male order because it is so deeply engrained in the 'gendered *habitus*' of both men and women that it does not need any justification (Bourdieu & Waguant 1992: 171).

Male domination assumes the character of a fixed universal taking precedence over all other social stratifications like class and age in Bourdieu's (2001) theoretical framework (see also Krais 1993). The problem with Bourdieu's perspective, according to Raewyn Connell, is also that '[t]he gender system is mapped as a simple dichotomy and simple hierarchy' (Connell 2007: 42). A more dynamic generative principle could have managed to incorporate all these social stratifications, including race/ethnicity, in the *habitus* concept in complex ways more in line with an intersectionality perspective that implies an analytical move away

241

from simple category-thinking to focus on the unanticipated ways power and inequality intersect (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Moi asserts in a footnote:

Bourdieu's general understanding of women's oppression is hardly original or new to anyone vaguely familiar with feminist thought in this century (...) [however], the concepts he develops (*habitus*, field, symbolic capital, distinction, and so on) remain deeply useful for certain kinds of feminist projects (Moi 1999: 283 n.21).

Acclaiming his conceptual framework, Leslie McCall notes that Bourdieu 'simply fails to go far enough in exploring the fascination as well as tragic drama of gendered social life' (McCall 1992: 852). The extent to which feminists scholars continue to deal with Bourdieu's theoretical framework, both critically and creatively, attests to both constraints and potentials in his theory of practice in relation to gender (e.g. Adkins & Skeggs 2004). Moi (1991, 1999) emphasises, however, that gender remains under-theorised in Bourdieu's framework (see also Postone et al. 1993; Krais 1993), and suggests an 'appropriation' of his framework in terms of 'a critical assessment of a given theory formation with a view to taking it over and using it for [in her case] feminist purposes' (Moi 1991: 1017). The most important outcome of this appropriation is, according to Moi, that the *habitus* concept enables a *dialectical* reconceptualisation of gender that avoids the sex/gender and essentialist/non-essentialist divides. While Bourdieu (1977, 2001) is concerned with how two distinct gender categories and a (universal) male domination is structurally reproduced through the spatial ordering of sexed practices, Moi's appropriation of the *habitus* concept that accentuates the *dialectical* base of this generative principle, enables a seeing of the 'immense variability of gender as a social factor' (Moi 1991: 1035).⁴ From this perspective, the postcolonial feminist critique of what has been seen as universalising Western conceptualisations of gender (e.g. Oyewumi 1997, 2003c; Steady 2002, 2004), would also be answered to, by allowing a myriad of intersected and dynamic understandings of gender. Because of the distinctness of the two gender categories in the Tigrayan context, I also suggest appropriating Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'distinction' in terms of a 'gender distinction'. When juxtaposed with 'frontiers', the concept of 'gender distinction' is made to encompass the processes to *maintain* the distinction as well as (potential) contestations and struggles over the social construction of

⁴ Moi asserts that while the sex/gender divide was useful to counter biological determinism – that biology determines social norms – poststructuralist deconstruction of the concepts has not necessarily challenged the divide itself. Upholding a sex/gender division that continues to feed into the mind/body binary does not advance our understanding, Moi asserts, on 'what the sexually different body has to do with being a woman, or with women's oppression, and in providing a sufficient nuanced account of individual subjectivity' (Moi 1999: 25).

sexuality and gendered division of labour taking place that, Arnot notes, is missing from Bourdieu's framework (Arnot 2002: 49).⁵

Bourdieu's (1984) develops his understanding of 'distinction' in relation to how one 'class' distinguishes itself from another 'class/status group' in terms of distinct preferences (tastes) as a sort of 'social orientation, a "sense of one's place"' (Bourdieu 1984: 466). While 'distinction' in terms of 'class' and 'status groups' does not sit well in the highland context of Ethiopia, since who is incorporated in a specific group is in flux, as people tend to move up and down in the vertical social structure as socio-political alliances, hard work and *adïl* (fate/chance) permit, the important point is that the 'distinction', in Bourdieu's conception, is, in a symbolic sense, arbitrary. Concerned, in my case, with which practices and behaviours are assigned to which gender, it is the fact that this arbitrariness assumes a naturalness which is taken for granted when associated with biological difference that makes 'distinction' useful as a concept in relation to gender in the Tigrayan context. As the 'distinction' between female and male gender in this context is constantly guarded, as ambiguities in gender categories are actively sought to be avoided, juxtaposing distinction with 'frontiers', further incorporates, as Arnot (2002) suggest above, that gender difference is not just internalised, but that also contestations and struggles can take place.

The 'gender distinction' in the Tigrayan context of highland Ethiopia also intersects with a predominantly vertical social order stratified along age and status (position/wealth). The fact that the husband continues to be older than his wife, commonly by five to ten years, reaffirms a male-female supra-subordination in conjugal relationships. The case is, however, also that gendered power relations change over a lifetime, since women's authority commonly increases with age, and especially when she has passed menarche. One example of how age intersects with gendered relations in the Tigrayan context is provided when discussing the 'hard-lived' division of labour in the Tigrayan context with members of staff in a women's affairs bureau. The male gender expert tells about an incident when he was invited to a female colleague's home together with another female colleague. *We bought bananas and sugar and I carried it to the bus*, 'he says. *Well on our way, my female colleague asks me to hand her the bananas and the sugar*'. Another female colleague breaks in and explains, *'when there is a party men come without anything, while women are expected to contribute'*. Commonly, urban women will bring sugar (and now also fruit), or in the rural areas *injera* (sour pancake, which is the staple food). The male civil servant says he told his female colleague, *'here we*

⁵ R.W. Connell notes that Bourdieu right-out ignores 'conflict and contradictions in the forming of a person and within the person formed' (Connell 1983: 152).

are teaching people about gender equality, and so I'm not allowed to carry the contribution for the party?' She had seen his point and kept quiet. But after five minutes she had said, 'but you are older than me, so you'd better hand me the goods anyway'.⁶

In addition to gender and age, the predominantly vertical ordering of societal relations is in this context also based on status (position/wealth), which can change in an upwards (or downwards) direction for both women and men over a lifetime (e.g. Bauer 1977, Messay 1999). While social relations are commonly ordered vertically, according to how status, age and gender intersect, friendship is a more *egalitarian* relation, often between age-mates of the same gender and same social status (see also Poluha 2004). This makes a gendered person's social position situation- and context dependent. The different social spaces assigned to gendered work tasks (with the main exceptions being school and employment), mean that gender hierarchies do not intersect with all aspects of women's lives to the same extent all the time. Kandiyoti emphasises also that '[e]periences of gendered power relations are not merely fractured by class, race and ethnicity but by the complicated emotional (and material) calculus implied by different organisations of the domestic realm through women's and men's unfolding life cycles' (Kandiyoti 1998: 144). Furthermore, it cannot be taken for granted, as Oyewumi (2000, 2002, 2004) notes, that the husband-wife relation is the most significant social relationship at any point in time in all women's lives everywhere. The historically high prevalence of female-headed households in Tigray also attests to the fact that women have not kept up with their husbands/partners (which may include being beaten) if they had nothing to gain (often defined materially but interpreted as a measure for the man's emotional involvement) from the relationship. The way Tigrayan women keep active relations with friends, neighbours and kin, and other-worldly divine entities and include in their social alliances mahiber (religious association), *aqub* (**b**4-fl; traditional loan association) and *idir* (**A***C*; burial association), suggests that women do not base their social security on fragile conjugal relationships alone. Below, I will also elaborate on how the idea of gender equality, which has found its way into equitable and gender sensitive legislation in Ethiopia, intersects with the perceived God-giveness of the 'gender distinction' that can continue to legitimise the social reproduction of hierarchical gender relations as natural and morally inevitable.

One and the same, and equal

To probe the relationship between new polices on gender equality and the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, I bring up gender relations when interviewing the orthodox priest

⁶ Fieldwork notes 4 September 2008/Nehase 29, 2000 E.C.

mihirey Tadesse (75) in the market town. Again with comments from others present in the room included in parentheses, the conversation goes:

-... What does your religion say about women today (...) in relation to the present [government] laws ... at home ... about the work she does in the household.(...). What can she do in the society?

We [are] the same (*h k*/<u>*h*</u>*ade*; literally 'one').

-What law is there [in your religion] concerning women?

According to our [religion] we are one.

-Ehe?

I and my wife are the same, we are one in the flesh it's said; secondly, it's not said that we are two, we are said to be one. Our money is the same, eh? (Silence). Secondly, our property is one. There is nothing that can discriminate a man and a woman today; they are the same. Our money is one. We breathe separately; otherwise we are one and the same. Our [religious] law is this; it doesn't discriminate. In the past some [men] used to belittle ($PS\lambda \partial \Phi/yenaiswa$) woman, but that was in the past, a woman is not inferior ($\partial PS\lambda \partial/tinaas$) today; she and her husband are united in flesh it's said. Let me quote what Paulos said (quotation in *Gioz*), 'God has united a man and a women in flesh', He made them one; it's said that they are one. This is the same as in the past, but they [men] put themselves first and women were simply (*sug ilom*) oppressed ($PA \partial' \Phi/yiniogiwa$); they [men] were belittling women, today, however, it's different. Nowadays, if anyone belittles his wife, it means he is belittling himself. Eh? ... Instead it's said [they are] one in flesh. This is the law that we who belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church follow that means. She is not inferior, a women is not inferior.

-Meaning, according to religion and (...). Is it like, is it the same as Weyane[TPLF] said [about gender relations]. Does it mean the same?

It began in the Bible; it originates from the past that we [man and woman] are one (AR/hade).

(A woman: -Yes, that of, yes, yes, what she is referring to is equality (*mocrit/maarnet*) as of Weyane).

-Yes, equality.

Hah! So isn't that the same $(AR/\underline{h}ade)$, isn't that the same as I told you; equality is the same, equality means that something is the same.

(A woman: -One body (አካል/akal) [created in] the same image (አምሳል/amsal))

Yes! One body (akal).

-Meaning, according to religion ...

[It's] the same according to religion.

-Does it mean the same as the politics of Weyane?

What they [Weyane] do is to maintain what is in the Bible to not discriminate [women]; 'we will maintain what is in the Bible', they said. They said, 'let the law be according to the Bible and our religion and books of the past that they are one flesh'. Now they say a man and a woman are the same

in relation to their wealth; the Weyane has maintained that no one is superior and no one is inferior; they are the same. Rather they maintained this [which had existed from the past] that there is no difference. It's like this.

-Does it mean according to your religion, the orthodox, that husband and ...

Yes, according to the orthodox.

-Are husbands and wives one (hade) and the same (hade)? The same? One?

It's the same. It is the same, it's the same; we do not differentiate them.

-But in the past, before Weyane, I think women were inferior to men; so was this not according to religion, or was it something else that means?

According to religion? ... It was rather the people and the society itself ... that belittled women as I told you, however she didn't have to be belittled; rather some of those who didn't know, belittled them [women] ... otherwise, our law has been like this from the beginning. This is the law that has existed from the past; it's not a newly introduced law. $(...)^7$

In *mihirey* Tadesse's opinion, as a priest, the historical oppression of women evolved in society and was not based on religion. The fact that he claims the present government in Ethiopia bases equality on what is actually a religious principle from the past points again to the intricate relationship between the state and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in terms of legitimisation of the state's authority (Messay 1999). In the above account, new policies on gender equality are reconciled with religious belief by conflating being 'the same' and 'one in flesh' with gender 'equality'. Stephanie Krug (2000), who studied the demobilisation and resettlement process of Tigrayan female fighters after the struggle, asserts that even if gender equality during the liberation struggle was claimed, the extent to which gender relations were challenged in the liberation front itself was limited by the fact that (1) gender was premised on the 'male', and (2) gender difference was made irrelevant since all were reckoned as equals in the pursuit to overthrow the *Derg* military regime and seize power in Ethiopia. In terms of the gender project that the struggle entailed, Tsegay also emphasises that the TPLFfighters were not immune to the impact of their own (gendered) socialisation (Tsegay 1999: 122) - or, in Bourdieu's parlance, their gendered dispositions. In her discussion, Krug emphasises the significance of *bereka* ($\Omega < \eta$; wilds/wilderness) for understanding the liberation front's revolutionary project and the issue of gender equality within it:

During the struggle, *berecha* (*bereka*) was their cultural space (*Kulturraum*) where they were provided for, where they lived, where they moved around, slept, fought and died. For the male and female fighters *bereka* constituted a communal protected space

⁷ Recorded interview 13 December 2008/Tahsas 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 36 in Tigriña).

(*Schutzraum*) that secured their [ideological/political] orientation as well as survival and informed their social reality. This social space (*soziale Raum*) led to specific meaning constructions relating to 'those who lived in the wilderness', and that involved the power to make their own moral categorisations (Krug 2000: 42; my translation from German).

Bereka (wilderness), in the Tigravan context, designates unpopulated rural areas inhabited with wild animals and uncontrollable spirits. Its connotation is not necessarily that of security since *bereka* also represented a space where *shiftas* (bandits) had reigned in the past. Different central governments in Ethiopia had not been able to extend their control to these areas (see also Aregawi 2009). Bereka, therefore, represented a politically- and socially-unruly space that enabled a *redefinition* and *extension* of the social order, and where the notion of gender equality could develop (more or less) removed from the society at large. Since the revolutionary liberation project, from this perspective, could be understood as located in the wilderness as a *liminal* space 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967, 1995) - an exception producing an *anomaly* – this did not make a gender order based on equality readily transferable to civil society afterwards (see also Mjaaland 2004c). If gender equality was based on the 'male' category in *bereka* (wilds), a redefinition and extension of the 'female' category that would have impinged on relations of power between genders, or made gender categories blurry, was avoided. The priest's conflation, above, of women and men being 'the same', 'one in flesh' and 'equal', makes challenges to the prevailing social order of gender relations not only irrelevant, but redundant. These conceptual conflations could, from Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theoretical perspective, however, be understood to misrecognise the power relations informing the 'gender distinction' in the Tigrayan context. In the following section I will therefore elaborate in more detail on these gendered dynamics, basing my discussion on women's (and men's) transgressions of the 'gender distinction' when engaging in practices that are *not* assigned to their gender.

Reversing gender categories

Writing from the perspective of historical optimism after the February Revolution in Ethiopia in 1974 (and before the tyranny of the Derg's military regime was fully realised), Zenebework Tadesse (1976) notes that women's active participation in this revolution had actualised the question of women's oppression and started the awakening of women's consciousness (Zenebework 1976: 2). She also emphasises both the structural base of male superiority in feudalism in the Ethiopian context *and* the religious reaffirmation of this superior status as

247

God-given norm. Zenebework's description of the 'hard-lived' aspects of gender relations also touches on another aspect of gender in the Ethiopian context:

So submission is so embedded in the attitude of society towards women that *energy* and *creativity* are synonymous with masculinity in spite of great contributions by women. Whenever a woman appears to be particularly gifted, she is complimented by comparison with men (Zenebework 1976: 4; emphasis in original).

With a reference to Zenebework, Bilen Gisaw asserts that, '[f]orthrightness in women is viewed as unfeminine' (Bilen 2002: 36). Similarly, Tigrayan fighter women tell that they could be classified as 'men' by the civil society. While afro hair and trousers constituted a *visible* sign of this transgression, venturing to the 'wilds' (*bereka*) to take active part as combatants also constituted a break with practices and behaviours assigned to women as mothers and nurturers at home – and that, together with the increased mobility obtained as fighters – made female gender unruly.⁸ Taking on practices that were previously assigned to men (like driving cars, operating technical equipment, being leaders, and participating in combat), rather than *redefining* and *extending* the category 'woman', placed these women within the category 'man'. These socially-ascribed gender reversals are not only based on the recent participation of women in the Tigrayan armed struggle. With a reference to Gebreselassie Wolde Aregay 1959 E.C. (1967), Tsegay notes that Emperor Menelik's daughter Zewditu and his wife Tayto, who was leading her own contingent, had fought in the anti-colonial battle against the Italians at Adwa in Tigray in March 1896, just 'like men' (Gebreselassie in Tsegay 1999: 45).

While socially-ascribed gender reversals used in relation to the Tigrayan fighter women's participation in the struggle points to an acknowledgement of these women's forthright heroism, gender reversal can also be insulting. The fighter women Saba provides one example of how fighter women had been insulted during the struggle: 'Does she sit when peeing?' (Mjaaland 2004c: 77). Another example of this kind of insult that questions biological sex is one woman asking me: 'Is trousers the only thing you have in common with the men?'⁹ The fact that I am often called 'Mr. Thera' is a reminder that my appearance (always wearing jeans) and behaviour in terms of mobility and independence is classified as

⁸ This is a phenomenon also taking place elsewhere when women engage in practices and behaviours that are considered male. One example is that female (muscular) athletes can be obliged to 'prove' their femaleness, sometimes literally in the form of sex-testing. The South African runner Caster Semenya is a case in point that was followed by the international media in 2009 (e.g. <u>http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8215112.stm</u> and <u>http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8215112.stm</u>).

⁹ Fieldwork notes 8 January 2012/Tahsas 29, 2004 E.C.

'male'. As a language strategy, gender reversals are used in both Tigriña and Amharic. Helen Pankhurst (1992) notes that these gender reversals can be utilised (1) to communicate closeness and intimacy between friends, (2) as an insult, and (3) to honour someone. Sociallyascribed gender reversals in relation to the fighter woman, thus, have a double edge: they can both acknowledge a woman's impressive and heroic efforts *and* be insulting. Gender reversals were also used by women to insult men who were reluctant to participate in the Tigrayan struggle. Following Tsegay (1999), these insults were meant to arouse men's need to defend their honour and pride *as men* by joining the struggle:

Youngsters, if you resist struggling Take our dress and give us your trousers We [women] will struggle wearing them [trousers]¹⁰

Indeed, Tigrayan women have proved that they can manage tasks that are assigned to the opposite sex. While the high prevalence of female-headed households in Tigray attests to many women managing on their own, men seem to be more at a loss. This is implied in the following dialogue when I was confronted by a group of men in the rural area with the fact that I had left my (then) Tigrayan husband behind in Norway during fieldwork: '*Maybe he will take another woman in your absence*?' one man suggests. '*How can he manage without a woman*?' 'For the household tasks it is no problem', I say, 'he learnt everything when he was living alone as an agricultural extension worker here in this village. And how can it be a problem to sleep alone for a while?' I add. The man still insists, 'it is a problem for men to be without a woman, while women can manage everything perfectly without a man. A woman can do both men's and women's work, while men cannot manage alone.'¹¹ The perception that a man cannot manage on his own without a woman is an argument I have heard many times in this area – relating to both household tasks being ascribed to women and to sexuality – makes men more vulnerable on their own than women.

Many (usually younger) men do manage without a woman by their side. Since female and male teachers and agricultural extension worker are sent to the rural areas at an age when they commonly are not married yet, men can be observed cooking and washing their own clothes. If a woman comes into their lives (or if their mothers or sisters are around), these women would take over without question. When I ask Bilen (18) in the market town why she washes her older brother's clothes when he perfectly well can manage, since he used to do so

¹⁰ መናእስይ ምንጻል እንካብ አብዥማና / እንኩ ቀሚሽ ስራሹማ ነቡና / ክን. አዳለሉ እ.ና (Tsegay 1999: 95; the English translation is modified from the one provided by Tsegay).

¹¹ Fieldwork notes 21 September 2008/Meskerem 11, 2001 E.C.

when he was stationed in the rural area as a teacher, she says: 'If there is a woman in the house, men are not supposed to wash.' 'But he is a grown up man, not a child, 'I say. 'It's like that' she says. 'But he has lived in the rural area for four years; he knows how to wash, 'I insist. 'If there is a woman in the house, men do not wash,' she repeats. 'But does he tell you to wash?' I ask. 'I just do it myself,' she answers.¹² While Bilen's brother would probably expect her to wash his clothes, he does not have to ask her, since she takes it for granted that she has to. A man can also be classified as a woman if he is involved in nurturing practices and other female activities like cooking, or is bold enough to take on the ultimate female task of conducting the coffee ceremony with other women present (which they in most cases would not allow him to do, or if they do, endure uneasily). Men would comply to avoid ridicule, but also because women are commonly very persistent when demanding to take over *their* tasks. To illustrate the considerations at play in these matters, I will present in full my discussion with the rural female student Rahwa (18) in 2002:

-But what is new now (...) in this place in the past there was one kind of work for men and one kind of work for women; has it become more equal now, or is men still doing one kind of work and women doing household tasks like making food, making coffee and the like?

It's the same even now.

-Still now a husband would go to the field, while ... [the wife] what is it called, will make coffee, eh?

Making coffee?

-Ehe. (...). Can he make coffee if he wants to?

Now they don't work [at home], they don't work; they don't make coffee.

-Isn't it possible?

He doesn't work [at home].

-But, what if he wants to make it [coffee] himself would it be possible?

It's possible. However, if I'm sitting [idle] when he is [making coffee] I would not be happy, I would not be comfortable with him making coffee while I'm sitting idle; otherwise it's possible.

-What is it about women making coffee?

Making coffee?

-Should only women make coffee?

Yes!

¹² Fieldwork notes 3 September 2008/Nehase 28, 2000 E.C.

-My husband is always making coffee [for me].

Does he make coffee for you?

-Ehe.

Does he make it?

-He is making it, yes.

He makes it for you?

-Yes, I like that very much ... it makes me very happy, but for Habesha [Ethiopian] women that would be difficult.

But here we don't like that men make coffee, because they [women] should take care of him.

-What?

She should take care of him.

-How is that?

Since they say that he is always working and working they don't want him to do it, that's how it is.

-Is it because it's not good or because it's not possible?

A man never tries to make coffee, even if he says he will make it the woman would never let him; they would say, 'no, I will make it myself'. They [women] say, 'no, we will make coffee ourselves', if he tells her he will make coffee. They will tell him, 'leave it' (*kla*) we will make it ourselves' (...) eh!

-Say it again (laugh).

I will make it clear for you. You see, according to the government there is equality so that men can do any kind of work ... [but] if a man says he will make coffee the women would say, 'it's our culture, this is our culture', so for a man to make coffee and the like is difficult according to culture, for a man to make coffee while you are told to sit down is difficult. Instead she will tell him, 'no, leave it (*kla*), I will make coffee myself, myself', and he ... complies.

-But is it the women who say like this or people in general?

 (\ldots) It's the women.

-Is this coming from the women?

Ehe, there is similar talk about culture in relation to baking *injera* ...if the man makes *injera* it's like that ... when I was ploughing there was a lot of talk about whether a woman could plough, there were a lot of discussion about how a woman could plough and that a woman should not do work that was meant for men. To me, however, when I was ploughing the men told me, 'good, she is clever, clever, clever, clever ... the women, half or some of them would say, 'good, good, she can plough', while the rest of them said, 'she is doing what men should do before she masters her duties as a woman' ... that is the language of culture. It's the same if a man says he will make coffee; they [women] would say, 'a man making coffee is like a woman', eh, 'I will do it myself, I will make coffee', there is no men

whatsoever. Men don't say, 'I will make coffee myself'. What a man would tell his wife is, 'will you make coffee', 'will you make sauce', that's all.

-What does this mean?

He would say, 'give me injera, haven't you made sauce yet?' 'Make sauce', that's it, by force.

-By force?

There are some [men] in the town, some who do it ...that's it, who has come to work, however, I have not seen it; I have never seen a man make coffee. However, my [older] brother, if his wife is ill ... he does it himself; he bakes *qich'a* (thin unleavened bread) and makes coffee ... but this is only when she is ill. It's difficult [for him] to make coffee if she is fine.

-But for you ... would it be nice if your [future] husband wanted to make coffee for you?

Hah! Why not if he is ready to do it, yes, but if there are other people they would gossip saying, 'she is sitting idle while he is making coffee', that I dislike.

-Aha, aha.

However, I would be very happy if he had told me, 'sit down my sister I'm going to make coffee for you'; I would sit down and keep quiet (*suq_ile*). If there are other people living in the same compound they will talk, 'she is sitting idle while he is making coffee', that kind of talk is difficult, otherwise it's good, it's good if he does it. Then if he makes sauce I can make *injera* that's nice; it's being equal. But what people would say to him is, 'why did you bring a wife if you are going to make coffee yourself', that is difficult. Even one time when my brother took grain to the mill people said, 'what's the use of bringing a wife if you continue to use the motorised mill [meaning she could have done it for free at home by hand]'.¹³

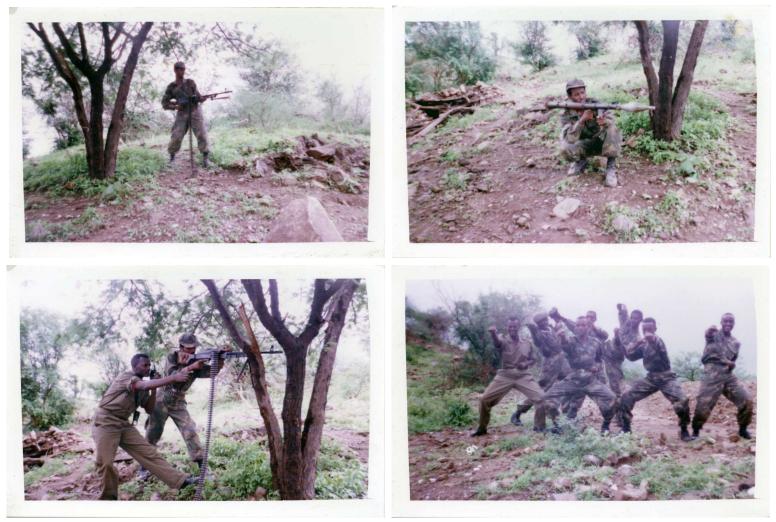
In Rahwa's detailed description of what is commonly expected of a woman and a man in relation to work, she seems at first reluctant to let a future husband make her coffee. She refers this to the fact that making coffee is women's culture, and that the man will be insulted (called 'woman') if he does. Women would also be insulted for just sitting idle. When she and her older sister Kahsu took on the task of ploughing for their mother after she was divorced, and their brothers were still too young to do it, they were also insulted. Rahwa also mentions that her older brother would bake *qich'a* (Φm ; thin unleavened bread) and make coffee if his wife falls ill (and there are no other female persons around to do it). One expression that is often used when taking on practices that are assigned the opposite sex is *newri iyo* (*im c h.e.*), which means that something is considered unacceptable, even 'taboo'. Rahwa's main reservation lies in the fact that people will gossip. If nobody *sees* it, it is okay. Relating to the layering of social practice in the Tigrayan context, the preferred strategy is to keep diverging practices as much as possible out of *sight* not only to avoid gossip but insults too.

¹³ Recorded interview 9 October 2002/Meskerem 29, 1995 E.C. (Interview AA in Tigriña).

There is a clear link in the accounts above to Bourdieu's theory of practice and how structural dispositions in a gendered *habitus* are internalised through the *sexual division of labour* and the *division of sexual labour* (Bourdieu 1977: 89; italics in original). But while structural dispositions in a gendered *habitus*, in Bourdieu's theory of practice, is simply internalised through sexed practices in the social space of a particular material environment/'field', Kay Bussey incorporates, from the perspective of social cognitive theory, processes of differentiation when (sanctioned) gender identity is internalised:

The more differentiation there is between the genders within a given context or society, the more the social consequences for activities and pursuits differ by gender and the more likely that gender identity provides the basis for the regulation of conduct and activities (Bussey 2011: 613).

Bussey emphasises that not only do expressions of gender identity vary for different people in different situations, there is also diversity as to what becomes part of one's gender identity, since neither children nor adults adopt all aspects of behaviour related to their gender (ibid: 612-14). While the perceived God-given 'gender distinction' itself passes unquestioned in the Tigrayan context, this aspect of uncertainty in internalisation processes is also supported by the fact that social sanctions do continue to be needed to uphold the 'distinction'. The examples above show the constant maintenance work to uphold distinct difference between the categories 'woman' and 'man' in terms of social sanctions like insults and gossip to avoid gender ambiguities. These examples also points to the part women play in the reproduction of prevailing gender norms at the base of gendered relations. As the avoidance of gender ambiguity is decisive, two strategies are used to deal with transgressions of the 'gender distinction' in the examples above. One societal strategy is the ascription of gender reversals that keep the 'distinction' intact when practices do not conform to 'female' and 'male' categories by reversing that person's gender. Another strategy that the person can use is to keep practices that do not conform to the norm out of public sight. Rather than women's forthrightness, female modesty based on 'holding back' can, thus, continue to define the category 'woman', not only to secure her morality (as discussed in the previous chapter) but also to prevent her from going 'male'. Actualised by the fact that the fighter women were involved in combat is also the (commonly problematic) relationship between violence, in terms of killing, and the category 'woman'. In the following I will elaborate on how this violent aspect of the female fighters' participation in the struggle has been reconciled with the sanctioned female category.



[Fig. 30]: Amateur photographs taken around the time of the Ethio-Eritrean war 1998-2000. Photographer unknown.

Incorporating women's participation in combat into motherhood

Perceiving their participation in combat as a measure of equality and a *libratory* strategy, it was, according to Tsegay, important for the Tigrayan fighter women to surpass rather than to fall behind men to avoid being excluded (Tsegay 1999: 120-1). Equality being based on male physical strength (ibid.), anecdotal stories go that the Tigrayan female fighters fought more fiercely than men. However, aggressive behaviour does not sit well with common perceptions of femaleness and femininity. Finding legitimisation in hegemonic understandings of masculinity, killing is commonly reserved for men [Fig. 30]. As Kate Stinson notes: 'The idea of women acting as agents of violence runs completely counter to expectations of femininity' (Stinson 2005: 10-1; see also Veale 2003). It seems justifiable to say that (if not universal) there is a common uneasiness about incorporating the whole spectre of human behaviour, including violence and killing, in the category 'woman'. While heroic Tigrayan fighter women were ascribed <u>habo</u> (-h0), a male prerogative signifying courage and guts, as well as 'Tigrayans' determination, integrity and desire for revenge in the face of injustice' (C. Rosen in Young 1997: 74), they challenged socially-ascribed femaleness in the process.

Women's participation in the Tigrayan struggle suggested a transformative leap in terms of what a woman could be and do. I have in my earlier writings suggested that, these Tigrayan fighter women's often quick recourse to culturally-sanctioned female appearance and gendered practices afterwards, seemed to suggest that their experiences as combat fighters were excluded from culturally-sanctioned notions of womanhood (Mjaaland 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). I based this argument on Gananath Obeysekere's (1981) assertion that it is necessary for an individual experience to be moved from the private sphere and incorporated into an existing cultural symbol system to become accepted by the wider community. The fact that the female fighters were classified as men complicated the incorporation of their experiences within sanctioned womanhood in the Tigrayan society afterwards. When working with this present study, it was brought to my attention that these Tigrayan female fighters are also referred to as haras nebri (ሓራስ ነብሪ) or harasat anabir (ሓራሳት አናብር; in plural) as 'breastfeeding tiger(s)'.¹⁴ As it was explained to me by a former female fighter, the analogy goes that a tiger that has just given birth fights the most fiercely, even kills, to protect her offspring. From being classified as 'male', Tigrayan fighter women's participation in combat is redefined as legitimate self-defence and care for her children, as mothers.

¹⁴ For examples in the music VideoCD <u>Hadgi/4</u>κ. (Heritage) that was issued by TPLF with old songs from the struggle for the Ethiopian Millennium (2000 E.C./2007) to commemorate the Tigrayan liberation struggle 1975-91, and the book <u>Harasat Anabir Tigray/4</u>. A for A 76. (Breastfeeding Tigers of Tigray) published by Women's Association of Tigray (2005) in relation to the 30th Anniversary of the commencement of the struggle.

In her discussion of feminist standpoint theory, Bat-Ami Bar On (1993) asserts that, the common grounding of epistemic privilege in the *identity* and *practices* of the socially marginalised accompanied by authenticity claims for certain practices (see also Lal 1996), has resulted in an idealisation of women's nurturing practices, and practices of resistance. Following Bar On, nurturing practices presuppose certain female essential dispositions, which feed into a biological determinism that feminists have been arguing against.¹⁵ In the case of resistance practices, these are most often understood as either essentially untouched by oppressive forces, or as glorifying women's counter-hegemonic powers without reflecting on that counter-hegemonic practices (in a Gramscian sense) are influenced and changed by the very oppressive system they resist. It is much in the same vein that Lewis (2002a, 2004) notes that Catherine Acholonu's (1995) 'motherism'¹⁶, as an African alternative to Western feminism – while claiming to play tribute to African mother's nurturing role, and signifying a powerful subject position opposed to both a western feminist position and representations of the third world women as victimised and powerless – risks applauding oppressive gender stereotypes. In her discussion, Lewis draws attention to 'the extent to which culturally resonant oppressive icons and practices continue to inform thought that claims to speak in the name of African women's liberation' (Lewis 2002b: 6):

In Africa, nationalist and ethnic projects, both during the colonial and post-colonial periods, have galvanised the iconography and practice of mothering to prescribe supportive and purely symbolic roles for African women. This poses considerable challenges for African feminists, seeking to celebrate women's powers and contributions to communal and anti imperialist struggles, while at the same time critically assessing the pressure placed on women to perform supportive roles. That much recent work simply celebrates strong mother and superwoman images is an index of the enormous need for careful further reflection on the construction and historical evolution of women's subject positions in the context of powerful masculinist nation-building and ethnic projects in Africa (ibid.).

Motherhood, to deal with women's use of violence in terms of killing, can also be traced in the Vietnamese mother-warrior myth. According to Paige Whaley Eager, the myth goes that one of the female generals in the uprising against the Chinese overlords in 40 A.D. gave birth during the battle, strapped the baby to her back and fought her way to safety (Eager 2008:

¹⁵ For example, as Connell emphasises, research shows more character similarities between men and woman than differences. She therefore refutes the notion of character dichotomy presuming distinct psychological traits between men and women; that '[w]omen are supposed to be nurturant, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive and sexually loyal; men are supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic and promiscuous (Connell 2009: 60). She also points to the fact that biological differences between men and women vary over a lifespan.

¹⁶ See also Ifi Amadiume (1997) Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture.

120-1). Referring to the fighter women as 'tigers' to signify their heroic contributions in combat during the struggle is also mentioned in Jenny Hammond's book from the Tigrayan struggle (Hammond 1999: 279). Tigrayan women who contributed to the struggle in other important and non-violent ways were also classified as 'mothers of the revolution' (ibid.). Tsegay (1999) also notes that, in the context of struggle, both the Tigray region and TPLF were referred to as 'mother'. This use of mother also surfaced in the songs that the *shig Weyanit* (torch of the revolution), Guimesh (67), used to sing during the struggle, and which she starts to sing during the interview I had with her:

As to the Weyane [TPLF] our good mother Don't be afraid She is a fighter loyal to our goals Our mother Weyane¹⁷

That's what I used to sing, yes!

The tree of the heroes, the mother of the heroes The tree of Dedebit [the place where the struggle started], mother of the heroes She is our mother Our mother organisation [TPLF]¹⁸

That's what I sung (laughs) my dear Thera. (...) I was jumping up and down as I beat my drum, yes. I was a singer; indeed a singer. ... Except that I have forgotten it now because of old age, but I used to sing many, many, many, many songs. I was a singer:

Keep my yoke and my plough; I will come back my Tigrayan mother Tigray my country, my mother, I will come back My Tigrayan country, keep my yoke and my plough I will come back My mother Tigray¹⁹

That's what I used to sing, that's it (...).²⁰

In his research on the female fighters in Tigray, Tsegay (1999) also draws attention to the civil women's intermediating role in the relationship between the fighters and the peasant society. Not leaving their daily life contexts, many peasant women were willing to go against their husbands if necessary to support the struggle for liberation and a new social order that also promised changes for them as women. Mobilising their husbands and other members of their households for the struggle, these women were also active in providing food for the fighters, caring for the wounded and hiding them if necessary. Tsegay notes that these peasant

¹⁷ ካብ ወይነ ሰናይ አዴና / ተሪር መዓንጣአ አስጢማ / ተቓላሲት ስዓቢት መትከልና / ወይነ አዴና

¹⁸ ዳዕሮ ጀ*ጋ*ኑ ወሳዲት ጀ*ጋ*ኑ / ዳዕሮ ደደቢት ወሳዲት ጀ*ጋ*ኑ / ንሳ እያ አዴና / ወሳዲት ውድብና

¹⁹ አ**ቸምዋለይ አርዑተይ ነዊተይ ክምለስ'የ ትግራዊት ወላዲተይ / ትግራይ** ዓደይ ወላዲተይ ክምለስ'የ / ትግራወይቲ ዓደይ አርዑተይ <u>ነ</u>ዊተይ አቸምዋለይ ክምለስ'የ / ትግራይ ወላዲተይ

²⁰ Recorded interview 2 December 2008/*Hidar* 23, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 27 in Tigriña).

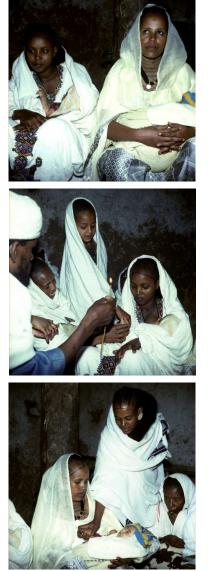
women in fact utilised their ascribed gender role as mothers – which placed them outside suspicion of being involved in political activities – to work clandestinely. Under this cover they were able to bring messages to town in grain sacks when going to the market, or use their movements during the working day when fetching water and firewood, to inform the fighters about the movements of Derg *banda* (squads).

These Tigrayan peasant women brought the struggle into the household. Iina Soiri's (1996) notes in her study from Namibia that women's participation in liberation struggles does not of necessity challenge gender roles. Instead, she introduces the concept 'radical motherhood' about Namibian family-mothers who adopted 'an active role produced by their traditional self-perception without challenging the male dominance' (Soiri 1996: 91). While redefining Tigrayan fighter women as 'breastfeeding tigers' incorporates killing within motherhood itself, this redefinition hardly extends the socially-sanctioned category of 'woman', or challenges prevailing gender relations, since women's killing constituted an exception in the wilds (*bereka*); an *anomaly* also removed from the human domain. Motherhood in the Ethiopian context has not been subjected to the same kind of contestations as within feminism in the West (e.g. Beauvoir 1988 [1949]; Rich 1976) [Fig. 31]. More than once have Tigrayan women stuck their hands under my shirt to check if I have breasts (to establish if I am a women), urging me intensely to get at least one child. The photograph chosen for the first banner outside the headquarters in Mekelle of Women's Association of Tigray (that originated during the struggle) also bore the inscription 'Mothers' Dedication'. The image shows a Tigrayan woman with a spade working in a development project (fighting poverty) with a child strapped to her back [Fig. 32]. While motherhood is a decisive constituent of Tigrayan (and Ethiopian) womanhood, there are also other gendered aspects that continue to inform femaleness in this context, in a visible sense.

The visuality of sanctioned femaleness

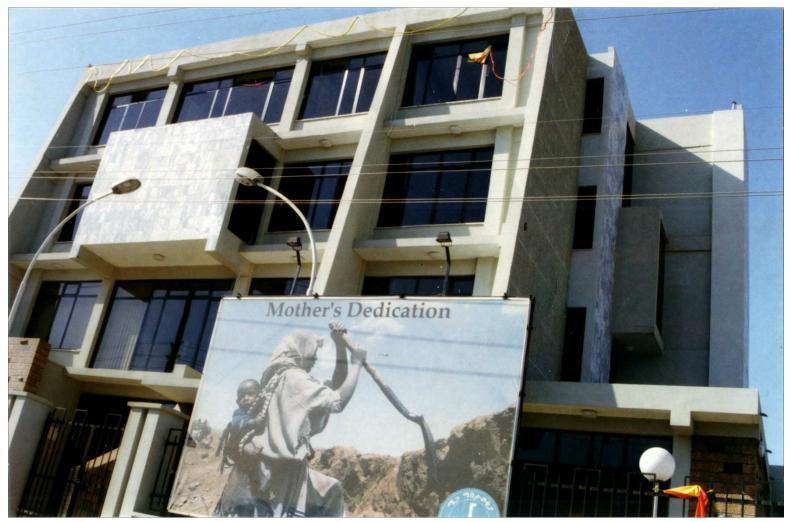
Female fighters' afro hair and trousers, signified a *visible* break with the sanctioned hairstyle and dress code for Tigrayan women, where tightly plaited cornrows released at the neck, and colourful dresses with tight bodies and long skirts, continue to inform female appearance in rural areas, and in urban areas among elder women [Fig. 33]. While women are used to carrying heavy loads, these are more often 25-litre jerry-cans of water, huge bundles of firewood, or a child strapped to her back than a weapon over her shoulder. As noted in Chapter 1, photographic representations of the fighter women are rare even in the Tigrayan context, except in specific cases where the struggle is commemorated [see Fig. 2-4].

258





[Fig. 31]: Above: Telaynesh with Rodas at her Christening party 80 days after birth (boys are baptised after 40 days). Left: From the Christening ceremony at the church where three girls were baptised at the same time. The appointed God-mothers (*abalīgīnet*; also used about God-fathers) are standing up taking hold of the baby-girls' right little finger with their own right little finger. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2002.



[Fig 32]: The banner outside Women's Association of Tigray's headquarters in Mekelle before wear and tear by the weather tore it down. Courtesy: Women's Association of Tigray.





[Fig. 33]: Above: The female fighter friends Mammit from tabia Mayshek and Aregay (left) photographed one year after the TPLF-based EPRDF seized power in Ethiopia. Photo: Photo Genet, Mekelle, 1984 E.C. (1992). Left: Mammit (36) photographed wearing her gold jewellery and (bottom left) a traditional dress (*t*^{*}*l*(*t*)) in her home in Endabaguna where she lives with her fighter husband and their three children. Photo: Thera Mjaaland, 2008.

Rather, a tendency in popular visual culture – as in the two examples of popular Ethiopian Millennium celebration posters (now reprinted with new texts), together with Ethiopian New Year cards – is the recourse to 'culture' and a celebration of the 'traditional' woman [Fig. 34]. While the Tigrayan fighter woman carry little symbolic weight in other parts of Ethiopia – and not unrelated to discontent with the power having shifted from the Amharas to the Tigrayan minority from the north – it might be pertinent to ask if there were no other images of Ethiopian women available to celebrate the Ethiopian Millennium. Where are the educated women, the politically-active women, the female model farmers taking on board new technology [see Fig. 8, Chapter 1], or even the incredible female Ethiopian runners who have won international acclaim? While these female (and male) runners are followed on television in Ethiopia when excelling in international championships, it is the woman conducting the coffee ceremony and the woman carrying the water vessel filled with flowers - together with Saints and angels within Orthodox Christianity and Indian (and some American) film stars that decorate the walls in tea- and local beer houses, bars and restaurants, and rural and market town homes alike. This recourse to tradition in popular imagery (including music videos) could be understood within a gender- and nation framework as suggested by Nira Yuval-Davis (1997). The position allowed for women in such a framework is one of production and reproduction of people and culture, but also of adding legitimacy and symbolic value to the nation. As Tsegay notes, '[t]he determination and charismatic presence of women "humanized" the armed struggle' (Tsegay 1999: 129). On the national day celebration Ginbot 20 E.C. (28 May) arranged by TPLF-EPRDF in the market town in 2009, both female and male youth served the guests with himbasha (sweet bread) and *gollo* (popcorn), coffee and tea. Positioned in front of the audience was one woman in a white traditional embroidered dress (*t'ilfi*) conducting the coffee ceremony in silence while three men from the wereda administration had been selected to do the political talking.²¹ These examples stand in a sharp contrast to images on exercise books from the struggle, as constituting one site for the visualisation of a more gender-just agenda that, would enable civil women to break out of old chains and join forces with the fighter women, to become political participants in a new society [Fig. 35 & 36]. Thus, rather than the forthrightness of the groundbreaking fighter women, who - by participating in the struggle went 'male' - it is the traditional and modest woman that seems to be reaffirmed in the present context where images on exercise books can be more concerned with international (male) football heroes.

²¹ Fieldwork notes 28 May 2009/Ginbot 20, 2001 E.C.









[Fig. 34]: Far left: Ethiopian Millennium posters reprinted with new texts. Above: Example of Ethiopian New year cards sold in Tigray and elsewhere in Ethiopia. Left: Ethiopian Tirunesh Dibaba wins 5000m (and 10.000m) at the Olympic Games in Beijing, August 2008. Ethiopian Elvan Abeylegesse running for Turkey takes the silver medal and Ethiopian Meseret Defar wins the bronze medal.

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[Fig. 35]: Cover for exercise book. Right side: Education to the people! Left side under the image: [The chains of] slavery will be broken by our rage, our equality will be secured through our participation. Courtesy: Struggle Museum, Mekelle.

	ትምህርቲ ንሓፋሽ! ቀቅሪ.5
<mark>ድር የር የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ የ </mark>	NAME 9/1-9-UC-1: <u>58-2ёл: (4:02n): Килтла</u> SUBJECT

[Fig. 36]: Cover for exercise books. Right side: Education to the people! Left side under the image it says, if translated literally from Tigriña: Our double oppression will be solved with a double struggle! Courtesy: Struggle Museum, Mekelle.

Women I have discussed the issue of female appearance with assert that they risk being insulted if diverting from the prevailing hair- and dress code. When I ask the rural woman Aster (38) if she would be insulted if she plaited her hair in two big plaits on each side of the head, like the female students in the market town commonly do, she says: *'Certainly, they will insult us if we wear jeans and shorter skirts too'*, she says drawing her skirt up halfway between her ankle and knee. *'By whom?'* I ask. *'The women,'* she says. *'Men are okay, the women are vigorous'*.²² I therefore ask Aster to expand on this issue when interviewing her the next day:

-(...) [Y]ou mentioned the insults when women have different braids or a different kind of dress, that's it, that women's talk is hard when it comes to these things that means; what is it about?

Yes! If you walk upright like this and if you change dress ... if she walks wearing pants, hah! 'How cheap she is!' they will say about you. And if you happen to not have enough to eat, hah, they would say about you, 'look at her (...) she has no food, what will she eat; may death come upon her'. About your braids, and if they see you in a bad shape everybody will belittle you, insult you. In this place, if you are well dressed and carry your baby properly on your back, they will say about you, 'look at this beautiful woman, with pretty braids and nice dress who carry her baby on her back'. If you happen to be knowledgeable and conscious (744h/niqihat) and they see you wearing pants or a skirt [as opposed to a dress, they will insult and belittle you that means. People don't acknowledge that as time has passed our children have become conscious while we continue to live according to religion; instead they will insult them. It's said that education is to blame for [girls'] silliness and the silly way they dress, there are such silly people, there are many of them. That's silly however, hah! It's thanks to being educated that our daughters are doing fine, are getting on, are doing well, hah, while their parents are still living according to religion, am I right? From the past parents have been worrying [about their daughters] and how they respected their parents; it's even said that [when they go to school] they engage in demeaning activities. Instead of being happy that the students develop their brains and graduate like you, instead of keeping quiet, they go around insulting them. (...) People are simply engaged in backbiting and nobody would give praise. That's it; all is about belittling, backbiting, lying and gossiping.23

Aster's account draws attention to the negative attitudes towards a woman standing out in terms of her self-confidence (walking upright), how her morality is questioned if she diverts from the dress-code (being cheap), but also the low status attached to being poor as she herself is as a landless female head of household with no education. Aster's account also links the moral implications of educating their daughters with the female students' change in appearance and what is perceived as their involvement in demeaning activities (becoming 'prostitutes'). Social sanctions in terms of insults are amplified when female students resort to attires that are more town-like and 'modern' in terms of being ready-made rather than the locally-tailored dresses with tight bodies and long skirts, which their mothers wear. Female

²² Fieldwork notes 12 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 3, 2001 E.C.

²³ Recorded interview 13 November 2008/*Hidar* 4, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 14 in Tigriña).

students would often plait their hair in loose braids or fewer ticker braids instead of the tightly plaited cornrows that their mothers resort to. The important point here is that these generational differences in female appearance, often reinforced by girls' educational pursuit and their move to urban areas as students, again links up with perceptions of female morality. One young rural woman (22) having returned to school after her husband had left her, and attending ninth grade in the market town says, 'you should hear the insults we get in the village when we wear clothes like this [slim long skirt with matching jacket] and go to school in the market town. They call us shermut'a (prostitute/whore)', she says.²⁴ In line with Aster's account above, this shows how social sanctions are commonly carried out, as insults, backbiting and gossip.

There are also specific spaces, like the *bunabét*, (literally 'coffee house', meaning 'bar') that respectable women would be reluctant to enter, as it would impinge on their moral reputation. The issue of female students' mobility is also based on parents' fear of their daughters being lured into, or attracted by this kind of morally-unruly places when going to school in the market town. The women who own and run these *bunabéts* are often female heads of households who would allow prostitutes in their establishments without themselves being directly involved in prostitution. I am told that the profitability of these establishments will decline if the woman gets married or has a particular partner (at least openly), since other men would be reluctant to step into what would be considered the space of another man, and would move their drinking elsewhere. Dealing with men and sexuality in intricate ways, one way these female business negotiate their respectability – in addition to keeping as close as possible to sanctioned female appearance – is by way of their material status (some of these establishments are in fact economically successful) as well as by way of religious devotion.

When the rural peasant woman Meharit (46) asked me to photograph her inside her stone house (*hïdmo*) in the rural area, she positions herself in front of the clay wall, which is decorated with posters of Saints, Indian actors, photographs that I have taken of her children years back, and homemade basket work. She puts on her white *kuta* (thick cotton shawl) – covering her head and most of her body – and posing while reading from her *Dawit* (prayer book)²⁵. The fact that Meharit constitutes herself as a devout religious woman not only in front of my camera but makes herself *seen* as such in the community could likewise be understood as negotiations of her respectability in a context where she is also *seen* in the community as working like a 'male'. Her independence and mobility as a female head of

²⁴ Fieldwork notes 13 October 2008/T'ïqïmti 2, 2001 E.C.

²⁵ Fieldwork notes 26 November 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 17, 2001 E.C.

household being politically active, and 'always' on her way to some meeting in the village or in the market town, would commonly impinge on a woman's moral reputation. When I observe Meharit dancing with the other women at a village wedding – her body erect and covered in her white shawl only her feet and face showing with her eyes cast downwards – she seems to embody female 'holding back' and modesty, but also pride and confidence.²⁶

As I have argued in my earlier work from the region, compliance cannot be taken at face value as it – in a socio-cultural context where layering of communication and undercommunication of practice are strategies both women and men use to challenge authority – women can also utilise this strategy to *avoid* social sanctions when her actions go beyond the sanctioned gender norms (Mjaaland 2004c). Under-communicating their strategies by keeping them as much as possible out of public *sight*, women can negotiate spaces for agency beyond the norm precisely by complying with sanctioned appearance and behaviour. While women's status and power increases with age, sanctioned female appearance and behaviour continue to define kibri ($\hbar \eta c$) in terms of being considered a respectable and honourable woman. As the woman next door in my rural quarters was a *qonanit* (one who plaits hair for money), I was given ample opportunity to observe how much time women put into keeping their hair properly plaited. Commenting on the volume of the peasant women Nitsihiti's (46) hair when she has undone her plaits with a *mesfe* (long needle used for basket work) I say, 'now it looks nice'. She says, 'do you want me to look like a mad?' I ask, 'did you say the same about the female fighters [who instead of plaiting their hair had cut it short like men]?' 'No, we thought they were heroic (jigina), ' she says.²⁷ When I eventually did plait my hair during a visit to the area in 2010 she tells me: 'Now you have become a proper woman.'²⁸ In spite of their heroism, Nitsihiti's perception of proper femaleness, in terms of the visuality of sanctioned female appearance, has not been redefined by the Tigrayan fighter women's pursuit.

Hegemonic femininity?

It is not only fighter women who risk having their gender identity questioned. As Poluha notes in her research on young female and male students in an Addis Ababa primary school: 'Good girls were active agents at home for the family and also in school but became bad if found to be too active especially with matters that were not thought of as female. They were taught modesty, to use a subdued voice and not to speak unless spoken too' (Poluha 2004:

 ²⁶ Fieldwork notes 9 January 2012/*Tahsas* 30, 2004 E.C.
 ²⁷ Fieldwork notes 12 November 2010/<u>H</u>*ï*dar 3, 2003 E.C.

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 8 November 2010/T'iqimti 29, 2003 E.C.

143). Active and outspoken girls, who move around more than a girl is supposed to do when she has reached puberty, can also be classified as a 'boy' in the Tigrayan context (see also Aasen 2011). The market-town business woman Zaid (48) says about her foster daughter (13) whom she has cared for since she was 2 years old when her parents went abroad:

The last ten months she has started to disappear suddenly without any notice or prior quarrels. She just leaves the house. She was supposed to advance to eighth grade this year, but has to repeat seventh grade. (...) I'm afraid now that she will start to go with bad people that will influence her or cheat her. She will be damaged ('lose her virginity'). These days girls down to 12-13 years old start as prostitutes (*shermut'a*). And there is Aids. (...) Two times she has set off to Shire by foot (22 km away). We went after her, one time with the bus, one time with a motorbike. I have told her mother that I cannot be responsible for her anymore. (...) She is a boy, only boys are running around like that twenty-four hours a day.²⁹

Her foster daughter's behaviour diverges from how girls reaching puberty should behave: spending more time at home helping their mothers. Instead she roams around with friends most of the time, outside her foster mother's control. One male neighbour tells me that she had disappeared for two days some time ago. *'When she finally returned home, she was beaten [by her foster mother]*', he says and adds: *'Only the stick will teach them.'*³⁰ This example shows that femaleness is not simply internalised as structural dispositions through mimesis of gendered practices as Bourdieu (1977) asserts, as there is resistance and non-compliance at play. Sanctioned female behaviour required to stay at the 'right' side of the 'gender distinction', might even have to be beaten into the body, in a literal sense.

A similar classification of active girls, as 'boys', is found in Claudia Cockburn and Gill Clark's (2002) study of British teenage girls (13-14 years of age). The extent to which these girls involved themselves physically or not in the school's sports education resulted in active girls being classified as 'tomboy', while those who resisted participation were classified as 'girlie'. Cockburn and Clark base these polarised images on collective gender identities emerging from the polarisation implicit in heterosexual masculinity and femininity in British society, and which resembles the polarised understanding of gender in the Tigrayan context. These authors also assert that the classification 'tomboy' is characterised by a 'femininity deficit' (Cockburn & Clark 2002: 661). The fact that the Tigrayan female fighters' in their liberation pursuit went 'male', and the fact that energy, creativity and forthrightness continues to be associated with masculinity in the Ethiopian context (e.g. Zenebework 1976; Bilen 2002) – indicating a 'femininity deficit' in these kinds of activities – have no doubt

²⁹ Fieldwork notes 15 August 2008/Nehase 9, 2000 E.C.

³⁰ Fieldwork notes 6 August 2008/Hamle 30, 2000 E.C.

complicated the extent to which younger generations of Tigrayan girls can project their aspirations in the fighter women's direction and use them as role models. Poluha suggests that, since some ways of being a woman (or a girl) are privileged over other alternatives in the Ethiopian context, it is possible to talk about 'hegemonic femininity' (Poluha 2004: 149).

The issue of hegemony in gender relations, conceptualised by R.W. Connell and colleagues in the early 1980s with the term 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1987: 183, 1995), is based on alternative masculinities being subordinated to the hegemonic ones. Since hegemonic masculinity was understood to serve the preservation of patriarchy and the subordination of women, this perspective does not include hegemonic femininity. Instead, Connell introduces the concept of 'emphasized femininity' (Connell 1987: 187), where women are presumed to comply with their subordination in relation to men. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note that this single pattern of power based on a global dominance of men over women suggested in these first writings (and which is also at the base of Bourdieu's understanding of gender relations) does not hold, since Gramsci's concept of hegemony implies that hegemonies are contested and subject to change. In their rethinking of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt emphasise that,

gender hierarchies are also affected by new configurations of women's identity and practice, especially younger women – which are increasingly acknowledged by younger men. We consider that research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848).

In their reformulation of hegemony in gender relations, one of the things Connell and Messerschmidt emphasise, is the need for a more complex model of gender hierarchy that emphasises women's agency. As noted in the Introduction, access to women's agency in this study is not only sought in resistance and forms of non-compliance but complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation (Connell 1987: 183-4). From this perspective, what it would be worthwhile risking in terms of punishments and social sanctions, or potentially gained from compliance, are part of ongoing negotiations.

Having been mentioned in many of the accounts in this thesis, the case is also that women themselves contribute to the keeping up of hegemonic understandings of gender (see also Genet 2007). I was also reminded of girls' contribution to this gate-keeping one evening when I was sitting outside observing Saturday nightlife (around 7-8 pm) in the market town together with a neighbour. The former fighter Saba's granddaughter (8) had joined in the dance at the street corner. Her older sister (14) sees her and runs after her to chase her home. She falls when trying to escape, and the older sister slaps her several times in the face. She breaks loose and continues to run away. Finally, her grandmother arrives at the scene and brings her home (I cannot tell if this meant she was rescued or was punished further once inside). When her older sister passed me afterwards I ask her, 'is she not allowed to dance?' 'She cannot dance like that in the street', she says.³¹ This means that sanctioned femaleness (which does not allow for showing off in public) is also guarded (often violently) by older siblings, in this case a sister. Another example of gate-keeping is provided by Bilen (18) when I ask her why her family does not approve of her older brother's girlfriend, with whom he is expecting a baby. Bilen says, 'she was a shermut'a (sexually active) running around with many different boys. But, the main reason is that she is not making a home for them even if they have decided to live together. She is not making food, they eat outside (in restaurants), and all their furniture is rented.' 'But when they both work, it is not only her responsibility to make food', I say. 'I'm sure your brother can cook from his time as a teacher in the rural areas.' 'He can', Bilen says, 'but that is not how it works here when a man and a woman start living together. When my older sister was pregnant she was busy making a home. This woman does nothing of the kind. That is what we dislike most about her', she says. 'But don't you think it's fair that if both the man and the woman work outside home that they should share responsibilities at home?' 'But there are no such men yet, at least not in Tigray', Bilen says. 'The woman would do everything at home even if she has another job outside.'³² The fact that her brother's girlfriend is running her own business does not seem to earn her credit as long as she does not comply with what is expected of her as a woman and mother-to-be. Interestingly, having had many boyfriends seems to be less of an issue than not complying with the female task of home-making, suggesting that compliance in one area can lessen, or amplify, the effect of non-compliance in another. Hence, we would miss out on the negotiations at the 'frontiers' of the 'gender distinction' if taking it for granted that gender difference is simply internalised by the sexual division of labour and the division of sexual labour (Bourdieu 1977: 89; italics in original). As Arnot emphasises above, there are contestations and struggles involved (Arnot 2002: 49). Complex combinations of compliance and resistance also surfaced when young female students have asked me to photograph them. The fact that these young girls' identitywork in front of my camera included representing themselves as 'students' will be the focus

of the discussion below that starts off with introducing some perspectives on self-definition.

³¹ Fieldwork notes 23 May 2009/Ginbot 15, 2001 E.C.

³² Fieldwork notes 18 May 2009/Gïnbot 10, 2001 E.C.

Photographic self-representation and identity-formation

One approach to processes of self-definition and self-identity has been based on what James L. Battersby has termed the 'the narrative identity thesis', 'which insists that our identity is a function of the story that we construct about ourselves '(Battersby 2006: 27). For example, Anthony Giddens has asserted that self-identity is 'the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography (Giddens 1991: 53; italics in original). Giddens' point is that, '[a] person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (ibid: 54; italics in original). I do not interpret Giddens to mean that this particular narrative has to be 'true', but his perspective seems to imply that, (1) the individual holds on to one particular story over time as opposed to diverging and even contradictory stories in different contexts, and (2) that this self-defining narrative is per se textual and, hence, not including other bodyrelated communicative practices of representation based on visuality. The social vulnerability implied in the Tigrayan context when dispersing biographic information (addressed in Chapter 1), together with the ambiguities and silences implied in the common layering of communication, would impinge on the potential for biographic narratives to be utilised in processes of self-definition; that is, if telling is understood exclusively as a textual strategy.

Gidden's argument is situated in the postmodern language turn in the humanities and social sciences concerned with the constitutiveness of language and discourse for life and identity (e.g. Bruner 1986, 1991, 2004) as well as for experience (e.g. Scott 1987, 1991); a premise that seems to have spilled over to psychological research on 'autobiographic memory' (e.g. Conway & Pleydell-Pearce 2000; Singer & Bluck 2001; MacAdams, 2001; Bluck & Habermas 2001; Staudinger 2001; Conway 2001, 2005; Conway, Singer & Tagini 2004). The reason why this research is relevant here is because of its inclusion of mental imagery (e.g. Brewer 1996), emotion and sensory perceptions (e.g. Reisberg & Heuer 2004; Reisberg 2006), and what David B. Pillemer (2001) calls 'sensory imagery' (including visual, auditory, olfactory, or tactile perceptions). To be self-defining, the narration evolving from these memories have to punctuate the stream of mundane life as distinctive, circumscribed, highly emotional and influential episodes that are understood as important, even life-altering (Pillemer 2001: 123). These 'personal event memories' are identified as (1) time and place specific, (2) involving personal circumstances, (3) evoking sensory images, bodily sensations and the re-experiencing or reliving of events, (4) a linking of these details or imagery to a moment of phenomenal experience, and (5) are believed to be truthful representations (ibid: 124; see also Pillemer 1998). Only vivid personal event memories that include emotion,

sensory perceptions and mental imagery are understood as having a consequence for selfdefinition. Among the vivid personal event memories that impact on self-definition are memories of 'momentous events' that include *memorable messages* with moral significance; symbolic messages interpreted as lessons or guidelines; originating events for an interest, or a goal; turning points that redirect a life span; anchoring events reinforcing an interest or commitment; and, lastly, analogous events suggesting a pattern in a person's life (Pillemer 2001: 125-8). Based on the common perception that the photographic image is a truthful representation, what is relevant for my discussion of Tigrayan female students' selfrepresentation with their schoolbooks, below, is the extent to which the 'photographic situation' (Mjaaland 2004c: 51) constitutes a memorable and anchoring event, which, since the photograph helps memorisation, which reinforces an interest or commitment in terms of these girls' pursuit for education. The insights from autobiographic memory also emphasise the non-textual aspects of cognition and the impact of emotion, sensory perceptions and mental imagery on self-definition. Counter to the presumption underlying the narrative identity thesis, the differentiation implied in terms of the emotional and sensory vividness necessary to impact on self-definition, suggests that not just any kind of telling will do. The fact that it from the perspective of autobiographic memory, is not by necessity a *textual* biographic narrative which is at the base of identity-formation and what the person makes visible in these processes, opens up for the possibility that self-defining biographic narratives can also be visual (see also Mjaaland 2006).

As a discursive strategy, I have, in my earlier work, argued that the photograph can form and reaffirm identity (Mjaaland 2004c, 2006; see also Hoel 2005). I have also argued that this visual strategy gains particular significance in Tigray because of the need to layer communication and create ambiguities in social interaction about one's person and what one does in practice. Jaques Lacan's (1996 [1949]) understanding of the mirror stage (6–18 months) and the impact on personhood of the coherent image of self that for the first time is apprehended in the mirror, has been used to understand how photographs can enter into selfdefining processes. Marianne Hirsch asserts that the 'mirrored' self, as we know it from personal photographs, produces an 'ideal self' that 'disguises the profound incongruities and disjunctions on which identity is necessary based' (Hirsch (1997: 101). This is enabled by the realism of photographic images that also disguises the 'ambiguities of the realist paradigm' (Edwards 1997: 55) that, while giving the impression of being true, can be fiction (e.g. Behrend 2001; Werner 2001). It is in this manner that photographic self-representation utilised in self-defining processes as a 'technology of the self' in a Foucaultian (1988) sense,

273

can be involved in what Olu Ogiube terms 'ritual self-imagining' (Oguibe 2001: 117). As an ambiguous medium for biographic narration and self-imagination able to under-communicate the ambiguities at the base of personhood, the photograph can produce an ideal self-image which, in the Tigrayan context, is concerned with bodily and emotional containment, or containing the 'gold'. It is from this perspective that, what I have termed a 'visual biographic narrative' (Mjaaland 2006: 44), offers itself as an alternative discursive strategy in identity-forming processes.

Constituting the female student

In my study area in Tigray, to be photographed holding different objects is well established as a photographic convention (with roots back to nineteenth century photographic studio practices). Understanding these material attributes as objects of identification, they can include everything from green leaves, flowers and cultural artefacts, to weapons and a radio [see Fig. 13 - 21, Chapter 2]. Rural female students holding their schoolbooks in their photographic self-representations were first beginning to emerge in my photographic material from my fieldwork in this area of Tigray in 2002 [Fig. 37]. I also noticed that these female students would often change their appearance from more town-like attire to more village-like dresses when leaving for home in the rural area. It is also a fact that I have never encountered their female age-mates in urban areas, or boys, representing themselves in the same way [Fig. 38 & 39]; the only visual reference being to clerics holding on to a holy book when being photographed. As discussed in the previous chapter, the moral implications of moving outside their parents' control after eighth grade hits the rural girls harder their female age-mates in the market town (who can continue to stay at home), and harder than both rural and urban boys (whose sexual morals are not questioned). It is from this perspective that being photographed with school books can be understood as part of these rural girls' negotiations between the gendered obligations of an agrarian society and new possibilities opened up for these girls by education in an urban context [Fig. 40].

The reason why I propose these self-representations as negotiations is based on the fact that these girls shift their self-representation between cultural artefacts like the *mokombïa* (which is used as a head-decoration for the bride at her wedding, as a wall decoration, or to cover the cooking pot when serving the meal), *and* school books. One of these female students also wants to be photographed holding the plastic chalice (which is a modern version of the *wanch'a* made from a calabash) for *sïwa* (local millet beer) brewed and served by women – and an important ingredient in socio-cultural and religious celebrations – before

274







[Fig. 37]: Akberet (14) when in fifth grade in the market town after having finished grades 1-4 in the rural area. In the above photograph she is off to her village and has changed to a more village-like dress than when she was posing with her schoolbook (left). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2002.









[Fig. 38]: Above: Megebey (10), when in second grade, decides to be photographed with a school book. Terhas (7) is herding cattle (but starts school the following year). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2009.



















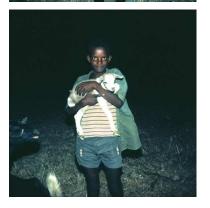


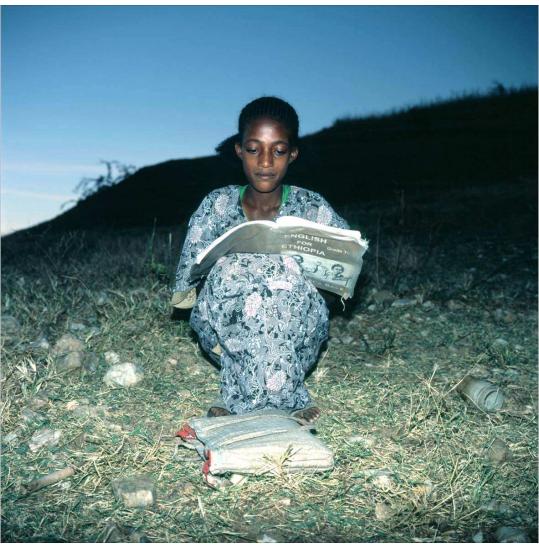


[Fig. 39]: Left above: Tidjan, Meaza, Hiwot and Megebey photographed in 2002. Seven years later, Tidjan has dropped out of school after fourth grade and is married. She is posing with a *mokombia*, which the bride wears as a head decoration at her wedding. The basket work behind her is put up specially for the photographing. Her younger sisters, Meaza (14), Hiwot (12) and Megebey (10), are sixth, fourth and second graders, respectively. When their brother Molley (18), who is a second grader, comes back from herding with their little sister Terhas (7), who started school the following school year, he puts himself forward bringing two hens. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2009.







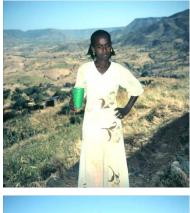


[Fig. 40]: Lettaselassi (14), a third grader, with her textbook *English for Ethiopia*. Her younger brother Teklay (12) herds the family's livestock, and had not started school when this photograph was taken (but started school the following year). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2008.

bringing her schoolbooks and changing to the dress she uses at school (before school uniforms were introduced in this rural area in 2011/12) [Fig. 41]. In addition to including artefacts and schoolbooks as objects of identification in their self-representations, the rural female students' choice of dress and hair style as well as posture challenges common sentiments of their mothers' generation in the rural area. Many of these girls want to pose in ready-made clothes, affiliating themselves with a more urban (and 'modern') context. Poses that involve placing one hand on one's hip also diverts from the more conventional straightforward poses with hands along the sides and emotional neutrality (Mjaaland 2004c, 2006). When I ask those of the female rural students who had advanced to secondary school in the market town if I could photograph them in their school uniforms when coming from school, they agreed reluctantly, and soon changed to their more town-like clothes. However, the school books continued to figure as objects of identification also in self-representations where more 'modern' attire was chosen [Fig. 42]. The event that is made memorable through these rural female students' photographic self-representations with their schoolbooks, when anchored in their interest and/or commitment for education, can, from Pillemer's (2001) autobiographic memory perspective on self-definition, impact on these rural girls' selfidentity. The realism of photographic representation enables these girls to visualise their educational pursuit and constitute themselves as students. In line with Emirbayer and Mische's definition of 'projection' as one element of the cordial triad of agency, 'the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears and desires for the future' (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 971; italics in original), the photograph as self-imagination allows for a projection towards the future, as educated women, in accordance with both the rural and semi-urban, female and male, students' aspirations in the exploratory education survey.

Furthermore, the 'photographic situation' constitutes a space for self-representation where gender identity can be acted out and tested; a 'discursive site for struggle' (Mohanty 1991a: 32) in a visual sense. While more elaborate poses are common in modern photo studios in larger towns in the region, it is in this rural context most often understood to be an act of showing off too much, being too (sexually) daring, or simply silly (*qelal*). From the perspective of appearance, where the traditional and the town-like 'modern' are negotiated in choice of dress and hairstyle, I understand these self-representations as subtle negotiations, in a visual sense, of ideal femaleness based on modesty. The way these girls negotiate their appearance and postures in these images might challenge, but does not necessarily constitute a

279









[Fig. 41]: Kichin (14) when learning in eighth grade in her home village photographed during the annual church celebration (*kusmi*) for Michel (Michael) <u>Hi</u>dar 12, E.C. (November) when siwa (the local millet beer) is brewed and guests are invited. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2008.



















[Fig. 42]: Above left: Kichin (8) in her home in the rural area in 2002. In the rest of the images Kichin (16) is photographed at the back of her sisters teahouse in the village (left), and in her rented room in the market town where she is a tenth-grade student when holding her schoolbooks in her blue school uniform and in more 'modern' attire (right). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2002, 2010. break with, sanctioned gender identity and the modest femaleness they are socialised into (see also Mjaaland 2010). Giddens' elaboration on the embodied self and bodily control can therefore – and more fruitfully than the proposed constitutiveness of the textual biographic narrative – be brought to bear on self-definition in the examples above:

Bodily control is intrinsic to the competent social agent; it is transcultural rather than specifically connected to modernity; and it is a continuous feature of the flow of conduct in the *durée* of daily life. Most importantly, routine control of the body is integral to the very nature both of agency and of being accepted (trusted) by others as competent. (...) Regularised control of the body is a fundamental means whereby a biography of self-identity is maintained; yet at the same time the self is also more or less constantly 'on display' to others in terms of its embodiment (Giddens 1991: 57-8; italics in original).

As to what Giddens calls 'regimes of self-adornment', appearance is a means of symbolic display. Involving both concealment and revelation, self-adornment in Giddens' understanding, gives external form to narratives of self-identity – while at the same time connecting convention to basic aspects of identity (ibid: 62-3). The identity-forming processes implied in body control (demeanour) and self-adornment (appearance) also gives meaning to my examples above in their relation to visuality. Giddens' perspective on appearance and demeanour involving both revelation and concealment also suggests seeing the rural female students' self-representations in the Tigrayan context as managing both *visibility*, and *invisibility* [Fig. 43], by implicitly utilising the absences and presences implicit in the photographic medium (addressed in Chapter 2).

Deborra Battaglia's concept of 'invisible foregrounding' (Battaglia 1997: 205) is relevant here. She asserts that '[w]hen something is made invisible and hence problematised, it does not simply occupy the logical space or place of presupposition or product of discourse. Rather it makes apparent an attempt to assert that space or place – in a word, to control it' (ibid: 203). Battaglia further notes that there is complex work of ambiguation (the making ambiguous) taking place at the 'frontiers' ('borders' in Battaglia's parlance) conjoining the domains of the stated and the unstated (ibid: 210). What is relevant for my discussion of how the rural female students in my example negotiate the 'gender distinction' – in the context of Bourdieu's theory of practice, where (unconscious) taken-for-grantedness is at the base of the distinctly differentiated practices that constitute gender identity – is that making something invisible in Battaglia's understanding, by way of absence and displacement, implies a move from the presupposed (and taken for granted) to a (conscious) taking control. Rural female students' self-representations are not without challenge to sanctioned femaleness when posing

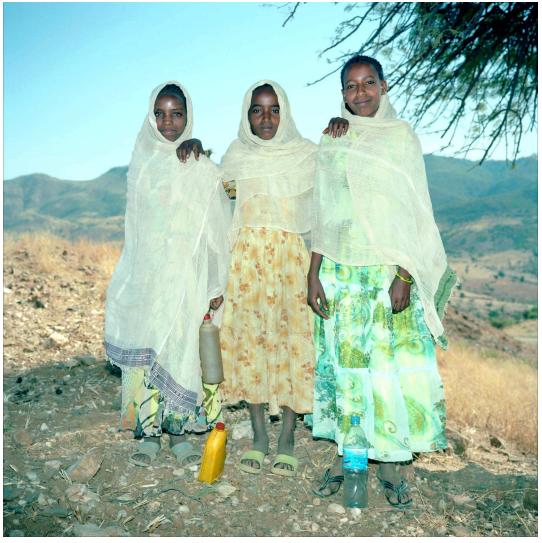


[Fig. 43]: Above: Nichey (14) when a seventh grader in her home village (above) in 2009. In the photograph left above Nichey is in ninth grade in the market town and is photographed with her class-mate Abrehet from the same rural village. Left below: Abrehet asks me to photograph her again when in tenth grade. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2009, 2010, 2012.









[Fig. 44]: Above: Zaid (14), second grade, Teraf (12), fifth grade, and Gidey (15), fifth grade, asking me to photograph them when coming from the religious celebration of Timkat (Jesus baptism) *T*'iri 11 E.C. (20 January) with bottles filled with blessed water (*may dīgam*). They also asked to be photographed in their school uniforms. On the wall is written: *From a prize in gold [to the bride], there will be a peaceful life*. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2012.

in more 'modern' town-like attires like trousers or with their hair loose; drawing on influences from a larger context of global youth culture that is also transmitted through fashion and television in the market town. At the same time, their poses seem to continue to draw on the female modesty ideal in the Tigrayan context [Fig. 44]. Invisible foregrounding, by making invisible, is one strategy that can be used when pursuing an education impinges on girls' ascribed morality in terms of being classified as 'damaged' or 'immoral', or their independence and mobility result in being classified as 'boys'. At the 'frontiers' of the stated and the unstated, the Tigrayan girls, above, can be understood to be involved in complex ambiguation work in their handling of visibility and invisibility, since it is still important both to be *seen* as respectable girls and to make *invisible* the 'maleness' of their forthrightness. After all, photography is a silent medium that does not require that she speaks up.

At the frontiers of femaleness: the issue of embarrassment

During the National Day celebration on *Ginbot* 20, 2001 E.C. (28 May 2009) referred to in an earlier section of this chapter, the male convenor, in an attempt to involve the audience, asks which day of the week was the downfall of the *Derg* regime. Many men raise their hands and are given the microphone to talk about their whereabouts that day, and what they had done. After a while the microphone is given to one of the women present, since all the speakers till then had been men. She keeps quiet. The convenor says, '*hafira, she is embarrassed*', and by his comment makes the audience laugh (surely not lessening her embarrassment).³³ When I ask the female fighter Saba's daughter Beriha (36) – who had been a singer in a cultural troupe during the struggle writing her own songs and have been performing in a host of different places in the Tigray region up to the present – if she speaks up in the community meetings, she says:

I'm embarrassed ($P - h \in C$ h(y)<u>ih</u>afir iye; shy), otherwise, I would love to speak, but how can I do it when there is this embarrassment ($h \in A + /h$ <u>if</u>iret; shyness); I'm very embarrassed. I think I will make a mistake if I speak. Otherwise, that's it, indeed, meetings attract me very much, that's it. I would be very happy if I could voice my complaint, but I'm embarrassed, since many people have gathered how can I speak? There is this polite reservedness (laughs).³⁴

From the first time that I came to this area in Tigray I have noticed how women (in some situations also men) would hide the lower part of their faces holding one hand over their mouth with (or without) a shawl. I have also taken note of the fact that by the time girls reach

³³ Fieldwork notes 28 May 2009/Gïnbot 20, 2001 E.C.

³⁴ Recorded interview 12 December 2008/*Tahsas* 3, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 35 in Tigriña).

school-age (or even before) they would assume this bodily gesture in situations when wearing a shawl, as when accompanying their mothers to church on major holidays. Except for situations when humility is expected (as at the church) women (and men) would do the same in situations where strong emotions (like grief) or insecurity might shatter the general sentiment of bodily containment. In the case of women this gesture can also involve shyness and/or embarrassment ($\lambda \kappa c h/hiftiret$). The issue of embarrassment also surfaced when I returned, in the interview with Beriha's fighter mother Saba in 2008, to the issue of women ploughing, which she had talked about with much pride in an interview I had with her six years earlier:

-Yes, but today many women ... they don't plough that means, what happened in between (laugh)?

Since the society belittles (AAIIGXA/silezenais) women ... they have abandoned it. [She repeats the story about how they taught women to plough during the struggle referred in Chapter 2]. That was how it was, but afterwards their motivation was lost (P&A) P&t/moralin moytu; literally 'their moral died'). It was their own weakness; because of their own weakness they abandoned it. Otherwise, people didn't force them [to abandon it]. Their own weakness made them abandon it.

-Some people say there were a lot of insults if women ploughed themselves, meaning there were insults, the problem is [peoples'] talk that means (laugh)?

I told you. Now, I told you about the experiment, the experiment where those difficult oxen awaited them [the women]. What does it mean? Imagine a woman who ploughs they said, they belittled her that means, a woman who ploughs ... how can a woman plough they said, and belittled her since they couldn't imagine it, because of this kind of thinking, they [the women] abandoned it. They were embarrassed (<u>hafiren</u>) that means; it was an embarrassment (<u>hifiret</u>). (...) One of the women is here now, she does nothing of the kind now (sug ila), she doesn't plough anymore that means (laughs). ... The other one also, in fact all of them have abandoned it. ... Otherwise, yes, they were [ploughing], yes, but it was their own weakness that they couldn't bear the humiliation of the insults; they were defeated by men's insults and abandoned it. They lost what they had gained that means; they gave away what they had gained themselves. Otherwise, insults do no harm (**BC4.** h&Y7 h&F# &AY7/tserfi kïdanen aygedelenïn; literally; 'insults cannot tear a dress') (laughs).³⁵

According to the fighter woman Saba, women renounced what they had gained because of the insults it produced in the society, and with the consequent embarrassment and demoralisation it caused. Instead of blaming the liberation movement for toning down their gender project vis-à-vis the rural society (e.g. Young 1997b), Saba puts the blame on the women themselves for not enduring insults and humiliation, and carrying on. In the context of having obtained constitutional and juridical rights in Ethiopia today, women are often blamed for not managing to take advantage of these new possibilities. This same line of reasoning is used in the case of girls' lack of success *in* and *through* education in the context of access to primary

³⁵ Recorded interview 3 November 2008/T'ïqïmti 24, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 11B in Tigriña).

education in Tigray region, stating that it is *her own fault if she does not make it*. One male civil servant in the market town says, when I tell him about my research on women and girls' pursuit for education and that they seem to be less successful in school than the boys: *'Baəlen (96A'7)*, *[it's] themselves. They are not there yet [to manage education]*. ³⁶ This blaming of the women or girls themselves means that the society can write off its responsibility and, hence, gives men leeway to not consider their gendered role vis-à-vis women. In this context, believing in oneself, ones' self-confidence (9CA X9"7:Arase iminet), becomes a decisive factor for success. Having managed on her own through education to become a teacher, Kahsu (31) explains, when asked what problems women face today:

... In general, the problem many women face today is that they don't believe in themselves (arse *iminet*). What problems do women have, I'll tell you what I think, it's that we don't believe in ourselves. If we are to do anything, we lack self-confidence (arse iminet). Now for example, among the teachers that means, if you tell me that I'm going to lead the department, I would tell you that I don't manage to lead the department. Why can't I manage! What is the reason you cannot manage it? You are a teacher; you have the same training as the male [teachers], right? We can manage it, we manage, that's it. We have been given rights (*mhAh/meselis*) like them, we are equal (*hok/maare*), and if that's what we say, if that's what we talk about, if that's what we got, why are we holding back? That which was during the past regime (*nC9+/sirat*; system), we are keeping up this bad system ourselves, by holding ourselves back we keep it up, meaning without knowing it. What can we do? First ... we have managed to learn, but we say, 'I cannot manage to be a leader', we say, 'how can I manage it when even the male [teachers] don't'? (Laughing). The men, what are they? What are the men, what are we ... it's about ourselves, we do it ourselves, since we don't believe in ourselves that means. If we have had self-confidence we could have become leaders of departments, or the leader of the teachers ... head teacher ... meaning 'unit leader' (in English) yunit merahiti in Tigriña that means. I think we can become leaders if we believe in our own capacity. That's the problem for women from the start, that's it, we don't believe in ourselves. [We think], 'I cannot manage it if the male [teachers] don't' (laughing). The men, what are they, women, what do we think we are ourselves, that's it ... we have to throw that [attitude] away? If I'm told to do something, I would say I have to do it. Now, even the female students, if they are asked to become monitors (the teacher's assistant in class), even if you think she can execute it, she would absolutely not do it, she doesn't become a monitor. The boys however, the male [students] they [don't ask] 'can I manage it, can I do it?' That's the kind of problem we [women] have.³⁷

Kahsu poses the question about why women are 'holding back' in spite of having the same rights and being equal with men in a juridical sense. She perceives this lack of self-confidence *as women* as carried over from past (oppressive) regimes and, in perfect line with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice, she suggests that *without knowing it, women keep up this system by holding back*. She also suggests that this 'holding back' has been transferred to the younger generation of girls who, in her example, are reluctant to step forward and take on the role as monitors to assist the teacher in her class. When asking the same question about what

³⁶ Fieldwork notes 3 June 2009/Ginbot 26, 2001 E.C.

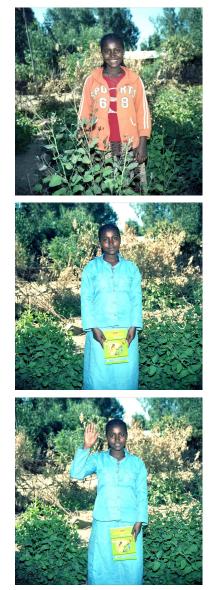
³⁷ Recorded interview 9 November 2008/T'iqimti 30 2001 E.C. (Interview number 3B-2 in Tigriña)

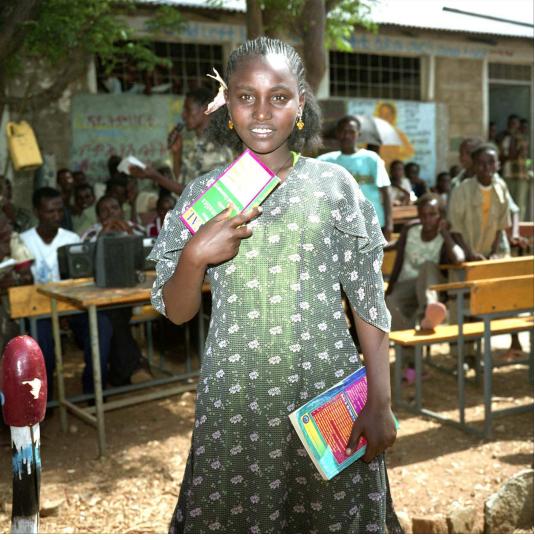
she would consider to be the problems women encounter today, the business woman Zaid (48) expands on this gendered tendency of 'holding back':

In my view, you know what women's problem is, it's the holding back (*suq ilka*; 'keeping quiet') that comes from minding what is said about oneself, shyness (<u>hiffiret</u>; embarrassment) that means, there is embarrassment about what might be said about you, that's it, about what people might say. It means if you do this, or if you say that; it constrains her. It's this minding what others say that means, otherwise ... I don't think woman have any other problems. However, it's this shyness. They mind about what people say, and hold back since they don't want to become like men. Otherwise, concerning the system, in relation to women, the system when it comes to the legal aspect, I'll tell you, women have been given full rights; it's good. The other thing, however, is this minding about what others say that's it; in this respect we women are backward (x h A h/dihiret). It's because we are shy, it's this embarrassment and nothing else; otherwise, there is no other problem.³⁸

It is interesting that Zaid draws out the issue of women 'holding back' as a fundamental problem rather than economic issues, which is what she would most often talk about in our informal dialogues, and that are part of most women's daily worries in this area. While her elaboration of women 'holding back' relates to the talk (or insults) that deviation from sanctioned gender norms can result in, the explanation she gives as to why women would hold back since they don't want to become like men is understood as significant here. The female modesty ideal requiring 'holding back' – in terms of making invisible the maleness of their forthrightness – seems to be taken full circle here, leaving women (and girls) shy and embarrassed. This also brings me back to another point in Cockburn and Clark's (2002) study referred to above, where the girls often referred to their experience of crossing the 'gender' distinction' when being active (as boys), in terms of embarrassment. These authors emphasise that the embarrassment that is evoked when being more active than sanctioned femininity allows 'is not merely vanity but a self-defence mechanism against the "gaze" that threatens to expose the disjuncture between a teenage girls' feminine image and her lived self' (ibid: 658). This point suggests that women's and girls' embarrassment marks the 'frontier' of the 'gender distinction', as a reaction to that, actions, which entail a 'femininity deficit' (ibid: 661), challenge internalised aspects of sanctioned gender identity. It would also make a difference for processes of social reproduction or change if women and girls handle their embarrassment in daily-life situations, including in meetings or in school, by continuing to 'hold back', or by doing what they intend in spite of the embarrassment involved [Fig. 45].

³⁸ Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 37 in Tigriña).





[Fig. 45]: Above: Terhas (14) received two 1st prizes for her performance in seventh grade in her home village. Left: Terhas photographed as a ninth grader in her school uniform in the garden outside her rented quarters in the market town. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2009, 2010.

The impact of female modesty for girls' success in education

Discussing the issue of speaking up and asking questions in class, female students in my study area in Tigray commonly refer to their shyness and embarrassment, even when the girls are considered to be clever students. While the gender gap has closed in terms of access, dropout and repetition in primary and first cycle of secondary education in this area of Tigray, and even though teachers in the market town emphasise that there are both girls and boys among the most clever students, girls in general do perform more poorly than boys in school (a point also mentioned in Chapter 5). The fact that girls' socialisation into holding themselves back impacts on their education is implied in Genet Zewdi's assertion below:

While boys are encouraged in ways that will enable them to achieve, compete and win, girls are discouraged to develop such traits because, they are not necessary for the stereotyped roles of housewives and mothers. Such an encouragement, which the girls are denied is a key factor that helps boys to develop the sense of competitiveness in their educational endeavours. (...) Being brought up in a patriarchal society, many women have developed a withdrawn attitude about their capacities and potentials in participating in education (Genet 1998: 27).

Bussey asserts that there are numerous examples within social cognitive theory that perceived self-efficacy – a person's belief in her/his own capabilities to achieve a certain goal and acting in specific ways – especially in the domain of achievement which impacts on educational and occupational pursuits, is informed and reaffirmed by gender difference (ibid: 614-5) [Fig. 46]. The point here is that girls can hardly escape relating to and negotiating the implications of their female gender, as students. One male teacher says, 'the problem lies with the girls themselves. They don't think that they are able to perform as well as the boys. It has to do with their self-confidence as it is inculcated by culture.³⁹ Interesting here is Kinfe Abraha's (1998) article on the educational intervention that was carried out as a quasi experiment in relation to female eleventh-grade students in Atse Yohannes Secondary School in the regional capital of Tigray, Mekelle, in 1988-89 E.C. (1997), and that had also been carried out in higher educational institutions elsewhere in Ethiopia prior to this particular experiment. This interventional model was set at improving female students' performance in mathematics. The teaching included the learning of (1) general methodology of building self-confidence, (2) principles of time management, (3) mathematics study skills, and (4) mathematics. The results in the final exam in twelfth grade of the female students who went through the whole training did not only stand out in this particular school but also on a regional level (Kinfe 1998: 58).

³⁹ Fieldwork notes 30 January 2012/T'iri 21, 2004 E.C.









[Fig. 46]: Girls' Club meeting at Endabaguna Secondary School. Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2012.

While special tutorial classes (*filuy hagez*) in English and maths (sometimes also chemistry and physics) are also available for the girls in primary and secondary school in my area of study as part of the affirmative action that gives special attention to girls in education in Ethiopia, the issue of girls' self-confidence is not worked with directly.

As in Emebet's (1998) research on Ethiopian female students, many of the Tigrayan girls in my study have stood up to their parents in relation to underage marriage, have endured insults when moving from the rural area to continue school in the market town, and have shown considerable agency in their educational pursuit. As noted in the previous chapter, while female students' determination does impact on their success in education, their selfconfidence will matter when they have to shoulder the structural burden of the female modesty ideal also in an educational context. According to Emebet, socialisation into the female role in Ethiopia implies being obliged to take care of others: 'Being ambitious and giving priority to their study is taken as being uncaring' (Emebet 1998: 150). Girls' success in education in this perspective is also dependent on the extent to which female students take on education as a self-fulfilling project in the sense of being able (or willing) to set herself before others. As long as female agency that transgresses the 'gender distinction' implies gender reversal, or is defined in terms of immorality, obliging girls (and women) to hold back, the female modesty ideal will continue to impede on the drive and energy necessary for educational attainment. This holding back also stands out as the most 'hard-lived' aspect of female gender identity that risks being reproduced within the current educational system if it is not subject to more explicit scrutiny in practice. While Tigrayan fighter women risked reversing their gender when venturing to the 'frontier' to pursue liberation, there are still 'frontiers' where femaleness is at stake for the young girls who, in Tigray today, pursue their education.

Concluding remarks

Appropriating Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'distinction' to incorporate the continuous work taking place to maintain and justify the 'gender distinction', has enabled an analytical focus on gendered dynamics at the 'frontier' of two distinctly different gender categories in the Tigrayan context. What has emerged is gender reversals, the social sanctions at play to enforce the female modesty ideal preventing women and girls from being classified as immoral or from going 'male' (and men/boys from going 'female'), and the strategising taking place beyond the gender norm based on the socio-cultural dynamics of layering communication and under-communicating practice. The rural female students' self-

292

presentations with their schoolbooks has also made visible that girls' negotiations of gender identity, as when linked up with their pursuit for education, involve complex combinations of resistance and compliance (e.g. Connell 1987; see also Moore 1994, 2007). Much in line with the ambiguities and silences involved in the socio-cultural dynamics of layering communication and under-communicating practice in the Tigrayan context of highland Ethiopia, 'invisible foregrounding' - involving the work of ambiguation (the making ambiguous) at the 'frontiers', where the stated and the unstated, the visible and the invisible conjoin in Battaglia's (1997) perspective – suggests a move from the presupposed (and taken for granted) where gender identity is simply reproduced through gender-specific practices, as Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) presumes in his theory of practice, to taking a stand, which incorporates degrees of conscious/unconscious resistance, compliance and control. The slippages at play in invisible foregrounding, giving way for ruptures and relocations of significance, can also destabilise fixed positions and relations of power and authority (Battaglia 1997: 211). Furthermore, the 'ambiguities of the realist paradigm' (Edwards 1997) - which is based on the presences and absences that the photograph always entail (see Chapter 2) – make photography a suitable medium for the ambiguation work implied in these rural female students' self-representations with their schoolbooks. In these photographic selfrepresentations, rural female students make their educational pursuit and their future aspirations as educated women visible while being concerned with containing what would challenge the gender norm (too much). At stake at the 'frontiers' of the 'gender distinction' in these photographic self-representations is a foregrounding, in a visible sense, of the female modesty that their educational pursuit challenges, while making the maleness of their forthrightness invisible. Since female students' forthrightness, in this context, risks exposing a 'femininity deficit' (Cockburn & Clark 2002), the embarrassment that commonly follows from challenging the female modesty ideal, might well impact on female students' success in and through education if their 'holding back' is reinforced, rather than challenged, in school. While education during and after the struggle has brought Tigrayan women into decisionmaking and leadership positions, it seems, nevertheless, that the daring forthrightness which made the female fighters take up arms, has been lost as legitimate female behaviour. As for bereka (the wilds) today, it has reverted to a predominantly 'male space' for cattle herding and gold panning.

CHAPTER 7: Education and revolutions, power and change

Introduction

The effect of modern education in Ethiopia has, according to Bahru Zewde (1991), been twofold. Besides the provision of skilled staff to fill positions in the state bureaucracy. education has also meant the dissemination of 'ideas of change'. Bahru, therefore, sees education as having prepared the ground for a radical tradition of intellectual critique that was amplified in the Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Both the student involvement in the aborted coup in Ethiopia in 1960, as well as in the Ethiopian February revolution of 1974 resulting in the downfall of the Emperor Haile Selassie I, attest to this fact. This revolution took an unanticipated direction when, as one female Tigrayan fighter who had participated in the Ethiopian student movement before joining the Tigrayan struggle explained, 'the student movement and the slogans of the student movement were soon *'kidnapped' by the military [Derg] regime'*.¹ The Derg's eventual targeting and killing of students during the Red Terror Campaign at the end of the 1970s – with many Ethiopian students fleeing the country – shows that the student movement was perceived as a potent political force. It was also within this student movement at the then Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa that the Tigray National Organisation (TNO) - later Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) – emerged. Starting out with Tigrayan students boycotting the Derg's literacy campaigns in the rural areas, the struggle ended with the TPLF-based EPRDF coalition seizing power in Ethiopia in 1991 (e.g. Young 1997, 1998; Tsegay 1999, Aregawi 2009; Gebru 2009). Joined by one Tigrayan in Shire/Endaselassie with experience from former uprisings, the story about the initial group of seven (male) Tigrayan students venturing from Addis Ababa to Dedebit in *bereka* (the wilds) in the north-western lowlands of Tigray to start the struggle on Lekatit 11, 1967 E.C. (18 February 1975), with four outdated rifles (Aregawi 2009), is legendary.² The resolute (and violent) handling of the student protests at the Addis Ababa University in 1993 after the firing of university lecturers on what was perceived as political grounds, and in 2001 when demanding student democracy after the university administration had banned their newspaper and shut down the student council meetings, suggest that the TPLF-based EPRDF government currently in power is well aware

¹ Recorded interview 19 December 2008/Tahsas 10, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 39 in English).

² The number of students and rifles differ in different accounts (e.g. Hammond 1999). Since Aregawi Berhe (2009) was part of this initial group of students who ventured to *bere<u>ka</u>* (the wilds) to start the Tigrayan struggle, I have referred his numbers here.

of the political thrust of student protests and its potential to spread outside the campus by way of general discontent. In this chapter, I will draw on Ethiopian authors who have focused on the role of education in revolutions and processes of change in the Ethiopian context, and which also touch on issues related to the social reproduction of power in the context of learning. Based on the revolutionary presumption that education as critical consciousness can enable transformation and change (e.g. Freire 1972), I will also take a closer look at teaching-learning practices and gender issues in some Tigrayan classrooms today. Starting out with the public meeting that was used to raise consciousness during the struggle, and where women had stepped forward and raised their voices, I will return to the meeting in the last part of this chapter to establish how this arena is perceived by Tigrayan women today.

Education and revolutions in the Ethiopian context

Education during the Tigrayan struggle also assumed a two-fold intertwined character, as it was set to provide both literacy and political training. John Young (1997b) explains TPLF's take on education as based on the understanding that political education and non-political education could not be separated:

Schools were particularly attractive for the TPLF, because not only did they advance the cultural level of the people, but they also served to deepen political and national consciousness, and train a future generation of youth who could be utilised in the struggle. Employment of Tigrigna as the language of instruction in schools graphically illustrates the TPLF's goal of winning control of Tigray's culture from outsiders. The study of history in turn was used as a means to examine the oppression of the Tigrayan people, the record of resistance, and the role of the TPLF in the struggle for self-determination. Indeed, all the subjects taught in the TPLF-established schools were used to advance the consciousness of the people and strengthen their loyalty to the [Tigray Peoples' Liberation] Front (Young 1997b: 173).

During the Tigrayan struggle, the meeting was used as an arena for mobilisation and participation in community-based discussions. Gathering for meetings under the tree (*ab igri qom*) this arena was also utilised for providing education to the people in the liberated rural areas. The peasant woman and female head of household, Senait (50), explains in the interview I had with her:

Then after TPLF came [here], the revolution ($\sigma e \partial / weyin$) that means, meetings were conducted under the tree (laughs), from which we were able to gain some consciousness ($\partial \dot{\partial} A \partial / nigihat$), we came to know some of these people, we knew people; then school was opened immediately. Then we started learning in the shade under the tree, they maintained their commitment to education and we were sending our children to school in every tabia; we were fine. It brought change (*lewt*'i); it was bringing about development (*lewt*'i), after the TPLF change has come. (...). They [people] gained consciousness and so did women when learning and starting to state what is good for them or not and choose for themselves ($9\deltah7 mc07/baəlen$ meritsen). This change came about as a result of education, it brought about change that means, they [women] become conscious and knowledgeable, as was true for the men too, that's how they came to know what was good for them; there was change (...).³

In Senait's account, the revolutionary teachings brought consciousness and knowledge to the people enabling change for both women and men. Women also moved into the political arena and acquired consciousness and knowledge in order to choose for themselves. This account also touches on the transactions that were taking place between TPLF and the people as, receiving education for their children and other developments, secured peasant-support for the struggle itself without the use of coercion (see also Young 1997a, 1997b, 1998). The former *shig weyanit* (torch for the revolution) and singer Guimesh (67), with no formal education, elaborates on how teachings in the meetings under the three were carried out:

During the Weyane [TPLF] I was trained orally; I learned a lot. Talking about education ... I learned that they were much better for us than the class-based Derg [regime] that made people disappear. By listening, it was absorbed into my heart through my ears; there is nothing that I have learnt through written papers. I learnt orally from what they were saying. I answered their questions and posed questions myself in meetings; they said I did well and used to thank me [for my contribution]. Eh? They told us about the struggle; how this struggle had started? How the victory would come gradually? These were things that had been hidden for us, very much hidden for us, and we told ourselves that had we known about it we would have fought earlier, we would have been educated in the past and it [the Derg] wouldn't have come to power; that it [the victory] would have come even faster. If it was foolishness that had made you keep quiet (sug ilka) towards the enemy, or if it was a matter of lack of [political] awakening (*o*·*h***/***wune***; 'regaining consciousness'); all the same, we were** very upset. However, we were very happy with the lessons they gave us, happy indeed. Where there was no development (*limat*), there came development; where there was no joy, only disappointment and theft, it was rectified ... we own our own crop, we have our own wealth, our own property and resources and are very thankful, very happy for being able to survive [literally 'eat and drink']. I used to tell the fighters that everything was thanks to them. Now, there is nothing like it; it was good [then]. (Laughs).4

As in the above account, these meetings are most often referred to with much enthusiasm by those who participated during the struggle, including (impressed) foreign observers (e.g. Hammond 1989, 1999; Young 1997b). TPLF was not the only Marxist-Leninist-inspired liberation movement in Africa and Latin-America at the time that included education in their struggles (e.g. Poole 1998; Ngoga 1998; Hammond 1998). The separatist movement PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) is another example where education has been integral to the armed struggle from its inception in the late 1970s up till the present (Westrheim 2009). As with PKK's educational project, TPLF's focus on enhancing consciousness of the people through

³ Recorded interview 25 November 2008/<u>H</u>idar 16, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 26 in Tigriña).

⁴ Recorded interview 2 December 2008/Hidar 23, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 27 in Tigriña).

education resonates with Paolo Freire's 'conscientization' (*conscientização* in Portuguese) (Freire 1972: 19). His critical pedagogy evolving from Marxist and neo-Marxist critical theory is based on the potential to free people from oppression and initiate change through the transformative act of learning. At the base of Freire's pedagogy is the assumption that it is possible to understand one's own oppression through learning and that the critical consciousness acquired would initiate a *struggle* for change. It is in this sense that education is political in Freire's perspective (see also Ginsburg 2000). Similarly, the meeting during the struggle is, in the accounts above, referred to as an arena where 'consciousness' (**'i+A+**/*niqihat*) in a political sense, and (political) awakening (**m**./*wune*; literally regaining consciousness after illness or injury), is part of the process of learning. Writing on Freire's work, Jianping Shen asserts:

Perhaps his [Freire's] most generative idea is that education is always a political act. (...) Hence, not only is it impossible to remain neutral in education, but one has to constantly realize that all educational policies and practices have social implications. They either perpetuate exclusion and injustice or they assist us in constructing the conditions for social transformation (Shen 2001: 129).

In Freire's understanding, according to Shen, emancipatory education is never a simple transmission of knowledge (ibid: 130). 'Rather, knowing is constructing oneself as a subject in the world, one who is able to rewrite what one reads and to act in the world to radically alter it' (ibid.). Ronald David Glass sums up Freire's perspective:

Critical consciousness is mindful of the relation among *consciousness*, *action* and *world*, and gaps the *why* of the world in the constructive nature of knowing. Freire argued that knowledge was not a state of mind nor a type of warranted proposition that could be settled in the matter of mathematical equation, but rather it was a *way of being* that reflected the deepest human capacities for producing culture and history. Critical knowledge enfolds the knower and the known in a dialectical unity embodied through the creative powers of existence (Glass 2001: 19; italics in original).

Michael W. Apple also notes that, for Freire, 'an education that was not connected to the struggles for emancipation and against exploitation was not worthy of the label "education" (Apple 1999: 5).⁵ Paulos Milkias' emphasis on the 'close and intrinsic relationship that has always existed between schooling and political processes [in Ethiopia and elsewhere]' (Paulos 2010: 45), is, likewise, a reminder of the thin line between education as a transformative project and political indoctrination where struggles for power is at stake.

⁵ Apple is concerned with current ideological struggles over education by neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas (among others) running counter to Freire's understanding of emancipatory education.

Disrupting continuity

The role of education in revolutions is also touched upon by the former shig weyanit and singer Guimesh when asserting, about the youngsters who had joined the struggle as fighters, among them her own daughter who had reached eighth grade before she left: 'They were students when they joined the struggle. Wasn't it thanks to precisely education that they struggled?!⁶ Likewise, the peasant woman Senait (50) reasons: 'Without any education whatsoever, how could I join the revolt (*o.e.* 3/wevin; TPLF)? Eh?⁷ Revolutionary upheavals emerging *in* education in the Ethiopian context do not necessarily link directly up with critical consciousness as such, but relates, according to Paulos Milkias (2010), to the expectations that education in the Ethiopian context have created, but not fulfilled. Paulos asserts that, while education during the imperial period was at the core of the modernisation project in Ethiopia, the challenge this posed to the traditional polity of the autocratic state was neither anticipated, nor incorporated into its structures. The result was two parallel and contradictory social forces where the modernised order of the educated started to demand a democratisation of power and privileges that the elites of the autocratic state were not prepared to give up, leading to the imperial state's fall.⁸ According to Paulos, 'rebellion starts when there is a significant discrepancy between actual and anticipated circumstances or the perception that there is an intolerable gap between a state of affairs believed possible and desirable and a state of affairs actually existing' (ibid: 44). As the Ethiopian school system in the current socioeconomic situation continues to produce what Tekeste calls 'unemployed and unemployable' secondary school-leavers (Tekeste 2006: 30; Tekeste 2010: 17), education can, potentially, continue to act as 'a stimulus for political upheaval' (Paulos 2010: 49) if feeding into the discrepancy between what is imagined possible, and what is possible in practice.

Another strand of argument on education and revolutions in the Ethiopian context, centres on the separation, or what is perceived as the alienation of Westernised secular education, from what Messay Kebede considers a more 'Ethiocentric' (Messay 2010: 26) traditional education as provided by the religious institutions. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church had resisted secular education, not only because it was by and large imported from the West but also because it challenged the church monopoly on education and, consequently, their power (e.g. Tekeste 1990). From a traditional educational system that, according to Addis Alemayehu, had managed to integrate spiritual and mundane life (Addis 1956, in Messay

⁶ Recorded interview 2 December 2008/<u>H</u>üdar 23, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 27 in Tigriña).

⁷ Recorded interview 25 November 2008/*Hidar* 16, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 26 in Tigriña).

⁸ For an extensive account of these processes see also Paulos Milkias' (2006) book, *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia.*

2010), the result was two parallel educational trajectories in Ethiopia. Rather than taking on an inspirational relationship, these trajectories became distinctly separate, with the hegemony shifting from religious to secular education. Following Messay (2010), the church's rejection of science as part of its teaching moved the religious doctrine towards a rigid dogma, alienating itself from the project of modernising Ethiopia in the process. As noted by Messay:

As so rigid a system was particularly unfit for modernization, Ethiopia, like all third world countries, reached the conclusion that the best way to get out of the disabilities of the traditional system and catch up with the economic and social advances of western countries was through the resolute sidelining of traditional schools and the rapid spread of modern education. (...) For Ethiopia, the adoption of the Western system meant an *abrupt shift* from religious content of the traditional system to a secular teaching, just as it implied the dissolution of the traditional conservatism by the inculcation of the innovative spirit characteristic of modernity (Messay 2010: 28-9; italics added).

Accepting that the traditional educational system needed reform, the 'abrupt shift' that Messay asserts followed is perceived as having removed Ethiopian education from its historical and spiritual roots necessary for the development of a specific Ethiopian modernity (see also Tekeste 1996), creating, instead, what Maimire Mennasemay has termed 'homeless education' (Maimire 2010: 74).⁹ In Messay's (2010) perspective, revolutions in the Ethiopian context are not situated in the discrepancy between what is imagined possible and what is possible to realise in practice, as Paulos (2010) asserts above, but in the alienation from one's roots which the introduction of modern education entailed. Instead of a process where novelty was reconciled with heritage, the 'rupture' in the historical/religious continuity and the alienation that was created, links up, in Messay's perspective, with the espousal of radical ideas (Messay 2010: 36), like the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, on which both the Derg regime and the TPLF based their political ideologies.

This proposed disruption links up with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) understanding of crisis, which is based on a break of the immediate fit between subjective and objective structures, between the *habitus* and the 'field' (material environment), destroying the self-evidence and naturalness of what has previously been taken for granted (Bourdieu 1977: 168-9). Bourdieu has not much to say about revolutions in his theory of practice, however, in spite of doing his research in Algeria in the 1950s-1960s at the time of struggle against French colonialism (see also Sewell 1992; Goodman 2003; Connell 2007). Staf Callewaert (1996)

⁹ The Ethiopian case is often contrasted with the more successful Japanese case where Western imported modern education was invested with a national foundation of purpose (Messay 2010: 35; see also Getachew 2001, 2005, Paulos 2006).

notes that the consequences of the colonial intervention and the war for independence had been dealt with in Bourdieu's earlier published work on Algeria, and that Bourdieu's interest in his study of the pre-capitalist agrarian society of Kabylia was not transition but to understand this society in a hypothetical sense, outside transition (Callewaert 1996: 144). This latter study laid the ground for what Bourdieu has termed the *hysteresis* effect of *habitus*, which tends to make people uphold their practices rather than changing them in times of crisis (Callewaert 1996: 32, 61). This is based on the presumption that, if the new socio-political and economic environment is too distant from the environment where the *habitus* was initially generated, it is not able to adjust its generation of practices adequately to the present situation, and will continue relating to the structural circumstances of the past (Bourdieu 1977: 78).

In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, regulated transformation can take place at specific conjunctures – implying specific historical constellations or objective events which agents find themselves in and that demands a determinate response – but *only* by those whose dispositions allow them to think in revolutionary terms defined by similar occurrences in the past (ibid: 82-3). Bourdieu also emphasises that even the most radical critique is limited by the objective conditions of its own production (ibid: 169), suggesting that also revolutions are ingrained in the structural conditioning of social reproduction and change in a specific material environment. Christopher Clapham notes that, '[e]ven in Ethiopia, where there was a strong tradition of statehood, this was accompanied by equally ancient traditions of rebellion or banditry' (Clapham 1998: 5).¹⁰ Clapham also finds it striking that the most effective insurgencies with the highest level of discipline were, in the African context, found in hierarchical societies with long traditions of statehood, as in the highland context of northern Ethiopia (ibid: 11; see also Clapham 1988). Clapham's observation that revolutions intersect with historically-defined structural circumstances that impact on the revolutionary movement itself resonates with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) perspective in his theory of practice, where habitus also structures what he terms 'regulated revolutions' (Bourdieu 1977: 82). Revolutions initiated by Ethiopian students in the course of the past half-century have no doubt removed regimes from power in Ethiopia. Bourdieu's reservation about the possibility for revolutionary change (or even intended change altogether) directs the focus not only to what has been changed by Ethiopian revolutions but also to which socio-cultural dynamics are reproduced in this context.

¹⁰ For example, the peasant uprising in Tigray in the 1940's against the Emperor Haile Selassie I (referred to as *kedamay weyane*, the 'first revolution', with the TPLF-struggle defined as *kalay weyane*, the 'second revolution'), was effectively quenched by the imperial regime, when, assisted by the British Royal Air Force, core areas in eastern Tigray were bombed (e.g. Hammond 1999).

Situating education in socio-cultural dynamics in the Ethiopian context

One critique of the traditional education provided by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has centred on what is perceived as its inability to foster creativity and imagination (Mulugeta 1959; Binns 2005). Interestingly, Maimire (2010), in his critique of westernised modern education as it is implemented in the Ethiopian context, also scrutinises traditional church education in terms of its failure to initiate emancipatory social transformation. Maimire bases his argument in the Ethiopian literary trope, Wax and Gold (*Sam enna Worq*) contained in the art of *qïné*: the skilful layering of communication and social practice (see Chapter 1). In this hermeneutical tradition that 'rejects the transparency of discourse', 'wax' signifies manifested meanings of the hegemonic order, and 'gold' signifies the hidden meanings contradictory to this order (ibid: 74). In Levine's writings on the *qïné* dynamic in the Ethiopian highland context, the 'gold' contains a 'unique kind of wisdom, dark and deep' (Levine 1965: 8). Relating to the 'gold' in the *qïné* dynamic, Maimire has introduced the concept of 'surplus-history' (Maimire 2005-2006: 2) that entails 'non-actualized meanings' (ibid: 7):

Surplus-history is the ensemble of subjugated meanings, values and practices – surplus meanings, in short – that expresses and articulates the emancipatory dimensions and utopian energies that inhabit Ethiopian social practices and culture as the repressed other of the hegemonic order and its history (Maimire 2010: 74).

Understanding socio-cultural dynamics in the Ethiopian context requires, according to Maimire, more than observation of what the hegemonic order makes visible. It requires that the polysemous nature of social practices is recognised and that these practices' contradictory meanings are unpacked (ibid.). For Maimire it is crucial 'to recognize Ethiopian culture as a historical process producing *plurivocal* social practices' (Maimire 2010: 75; italics added). Operating counter to the hegemonic order, this polyphonic subterranean world is understood to contain repressed ideas, values and practices that incubate new forces, identities, hopes and ideals that mature unnoticed and can surface as revolutionary ideas or social movements at certain points in time (ibid.). As part of the assemblage constituting Ethiopian culture, Maimire understands traditional education itself as producing surplus meanings critical of its hegemonic meanings and which, similarly, is relegated to surplus-history. From the perspective of the 'wax-and-gold' trope of the *qïné* dynamic, 'wax' would signify mere imitation and copying of knowledge and skills that uphold and legitimate the hegemonic order. The 'gold', or surplus-history, signifies the questioning attitude to truth incubated in its surplus meanings entailing *imagination* and utopian thinking that ventures beyond the conditions out of which they have emerged (ibid: 85-6). Relegating the imaginative and utopian aspect of education to the surplus meanings of traditional education, as a potential, Maimire asserts that these aspects of education are totally missing from the westernised modern education as it is implemented in the Ethiopian context. To explain the utopian aspect of surplus history Maimire utilises the concept of *tezeta* (nostalgia) from the Ethiopian musical tradition, and inserts it into the surplus meanings of traditional education:

Modern education, deaf to educated *tezeta*, is all *Sam* [wax] and no *Worq* [gold]. It generates and accentuates the erosion of our historical consciousness, cultural confidence, social hope, imagination and utopian energies, rendering us incapable of conceptualizing and resolving our problems through our own critical reflections on our history and life-conditions (Maimire 2010: 88).

What Maimire calls 'educated *tezeta*' containing 'educated hope', not unlike Freire's (1994) 'pedagogy of hope', is a 'call for imagining a new society that embodies emancipation and that defeats not only the inherited but also new sources of oppression, inequalities and injustices' (Maimire 2010: 88). Educated tezeta, in Maimire's understanding, further enables processes of non-disruptive transformation in its incorporation of oppositional knowledges, contradictions and conflicts, and forms the basis for a 'context-transcending knowledge' that can bridge the gap (in a dialectical sense) between a traditional education that is confined to the past, and a modern education that is rooted in the West (ibid: 91). Maimire draws on Ernst Bloch's understanding of a forward-looking non-repressed unconscious committed to the concrete hope of emancipation, and that is situated in a three-dimensional temporality in the present encompassing past and future. Much in line with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) temporal perspective on agency, surplus-history becomes 'unclosed both backward and forward' (Bloch 1986, in Maimire 2010: 76). Counter to Bourdieu's assertion that habitus structures not only what one does, but also what one can imagine – imagination and utopian thinking can bring one *beyond* the conditions they have emerged from. Maimire's perspective therefore transcends the 'double negation' implied in Bourdieu's *habitus* concept, and which means choosing away (refusing) what is perceived as impossible and loving what is within the reach of loving (Bourdieu 1977: 77). Juxtaposing the habitus concept with the 'wax-and-gold' trope of the *qiné* dynamic – where the 'non-actualized meanings' of surplus-history ('gold') are not merely unconscious but, while subjugated, are 'active silently' (Maimire 2010: 76) – suggests a take on Bourdieu's generative principle that is less one-dimensional and determining in a causal sense, and more unclosed backward and forward in a temporal sense.

Some notes on debate, gemgam and revolutionary democracy

The revolutionary struggle in Tigray could be understood to have brought to the surface the surplus-history of a Tigrayan sentiment long subjugated to (Amhara) hegemony and marginalisation in the Ethiopian context; evoking hopes for an emancipated future. The fact that there were few schools in Tigray prior to the struggle could, potentially, have opened up for new ways of thinking education. Teachings in community meetings under the tree included also those who, by and large, had been excluded from formal education in the Ethiopian context or had not been reached by the Derg regime's literacy campaigns; meaning the Tigrayan population in general and women in particular. Introducing new administrative structures based on democratic pretentions in the liberated areas, the community meetings conducted by TPLF included political debate and discussions (**P. P. P. //***mivivit*) (Tsegay 1999). Based on Leninist/Maoist self-criticism and criticism sessions where the people could criticise its leaders, and visa versa, this reconfiguration of the traditional evaluation institution of gemgam (**19**.**29**), redefined what up till then had been the privilege of elders (n.magile), not only to mediate and give advice but to evaluate. According to Aregawi, 'undesirable behaviour' in terms of not being seen by the leadership in TPLF as conducive to the struggle and the eventual seizing of power in Ethiopia, was scrutinised in gemgam sessions (Aregawi 2009: 96). As Young emphasises, however, since 'civil society in Tigray exerts few controls on the TPLF's system of government and administration, (...) gem gum [gemgam], even with its dangers of manipulation and human rights abuse, is potentially a powerful means of accountability' (Young 1997a: 95; see also Young 1998). Being incorporated within governing institutions and the state bureaucracy on all administrative levels in Ethiopia today, *gemgam* has enabled transgression of earlier barriers to criticising one's leaders.

Kaatje Segers and colleagues (2008), notes the tendency in practice that these evaluations are predominantly top-down disciplining interventions (see also Aalen 2002a, 2002b; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003). The agreement required within the collective leadership of TPLF during the struggle had meant that internal conflicts could end in exclusions rather than reconciled solutions (Aregawi 2009; see also Gebru 1996 [1991])¹¹. Aregawi notes that the purpose of conducting meetings with political discussions was to persuade people to

¹¹ According to the biographic information provided in Aregawi's inside account from the Tigrayan struggle, four of the eight founding members of TPLF ended up in exile (one of them in Norway) in the course of the struggle (Aregawi 2009). The disagreement within the TPLF Central Committee in March 2001 on the handling of the Ethio-Eritrean border conflict, likewise, ended with exclusion of the dissidents and their supporters from other parties within EPRDF, when the dissidents walked out of the meeting (see also Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003).

accept the revolutionary agenda (Aregawi 2009: 229). When 'revolutionary democracy' (*abiyotawi demokrasi*) was introduced by the TPLF-based EPRDF government and discussed in community meetings in my study area in Tigray in 2002, the participants were fully aware that they could not influence this ideological guideline itself. As Aregawi notes, revolutionary democracy as a political formula of rule implied consulting with the constituency without accepting the changes proposed before 'the correct policies' were implemented top down (Aregawi 2009: 190).¹² The Tigrayan struggle had been dependent on people standing up against the repressive Soviet-supported Derg regime with its massive military machinery, united and in agreement. According to Aregawi, the idea of revolutionary democracy likewise presupposes agreement for Ethiopia to move forward and develop in times informed by globalisation (ibid: 191; see also Segers et al. 2008). Lingering in the slogan from the struggle displayed in the Struggle Museum in Mekelle, saying '*Our people's revolution is long and bitter, our victory is inevitable* '¹³ (see also Aregawi 2010: 142), is a *habitus* of disciplined resistance structured by a Tigrayan revolution that required agreement to be successful, being carried over to the rule in the present where the goal is development.

The disruption of historical/religious continuity and alienation caused by the 'abrupt shift' from religious to modern secular education gave way, according to Messay (2010), for radical ideas alien to the Ethiopian context. The Tigrayan revolution that sprang out of this disruption, in spite of being based on 'alien' Marxist-Leninist ideology, does not seem to have caused a similar disruption in the hierarchical 'culture of power' (Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003) in the Ethiopian context, since the Tigrayan struggle, according to Clapham (1998), depended on this hierarchical social order and a high level of discipline for its seizing of power. With the emphasis on persuasion and the decisiveness of agreement, the rhetoric of critical consciousness from the struggle seems somewhat shallow. It is also the case that the issue of consciousness has disappeared from those polices and programmes that I have consulted for this thesis (discussed in Chapter 3), including the Education and Training Policy (FDRE 1994) and the Educational Sector Development Programs that have followed from 1997 onwards. Authors on Ethiopian education have pointed out that imitation and copying of knowledge and skills continue to take precedence over imagination and critical thinking, not only within traditional church education (Mulugeta 1959; Binns 2005) but also within modern education (e.g. Poluha 2004; Derebssa 2006; Maimire 2010). Based on the presumption that

¹² Aregawi asserts that the Leninist inspired notion of 'revolutionary democracy' with its symbolic link to the Tigrayan people's struggle for liberation, under-communicates its Stalinist roots and the top down power structure implied (Aregawi 2009: 190-1, see also Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003).

¹³ ህዝባዊ ወደነና ነዊሕን መሪርን ዩ ዓወትና ናይ ግድን ዮ

transformation is possible through an education that evokes imagination and encourages critical thinking, I will, below, discuss teaching-learning practices in the Ethiopian context, before turning to my own classroom observations in a few Tigrayan schools.

Educational teaching-learning practices

The centrality of memorisation in the different Ethiopian educational systems' pedagogy suggests, rather than (abrupt) disruption, *continuity* between traditional and modern education. While modern education was central in the modernisation of Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I, Messay notes that the pedagogy had continued to be based on 'extensive copying and memorization as methods of learning' (Messay 2010: 30). Derebssa Dufera Serbessa asserts that traditional educational practices continue to provide the cultural framing for teaching and learning practices in modern education in the Ethiopian context today (Derebssa 2006: 132). Derebssa lists three factors that constitute this cultural framing: (1) obedience to authorities, (2) rote learning (memorisation) with a low requirement for understanding, and (3) knowledge as a stable entity that can be passed on without question (ibid: 131-2; see also Girma et al. 1974; Poluha 2004, 2010). While Maimire (2010) refers to memorising as an inward process (potentially) linked to the reservoir of surplus meanings of emancipation in surplus-history, Derebssa's perspective relates to how the use of rote learning, which constitutes knowledge as a transferable object, prevents a questioning attitude that could deepen understanding. This understanding of what it means to learn which accepts pre-defined answers, relates to my discussion of the education slogans in primary school in my study area in Tigray (see Chapter 3) that, when based on proverbs that are unquestionably *right* in a moral sense and academic knowledge that is indisputably *true*, not only become difficult to differentiate but reinforces the lack of a questioning attitude towards knowledge.

As noted by Girma Amare, the purpose of church education was not primarily to expand understanding but to enable the acceptance of the existing order, to preserve what had been inherited, and to pass it on unchanged to the next generation (Girma 1967: 4). For example, as Teshome G. Wagaw (1979) has emphasised, questioning church dogma was considered *sinful* (see also Messay 2010). John Binns, who studied traditional education in a local Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Gondar in 2003, also notes that, '[q]ualities such as curiosity, creativity and critical analysis are [still] not valued in traditional education. Cautionary tales are told to the young students illustrating the dangers of curiosity. Obedience is valued above creativity' (Binns 2005: 110). As a young school director with a university degree in mathematics explains, *'the priests tell us not to discuss what is written [in the holy*

305

books], but just accept it, and keep it inside^{1,14} When interviewing a civil servant in the rural area he addresses the same point after having emphasised that he considers himself a religious person: *'The priests say you should not question what the scripture says. Since I do, they call me Shetan (Devil). I would say the priests in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, with this attitude, work against development*^{1,15} While several decades have passed and regimes have come and gone in Ethiopia since Girma Amare and colleagues emphasised that the passive absorption of sacrosanct knowledge informing the rote learning of traditional education ran counter to the development of a scientific attitude (Girma et al. 1974: 3), this teaching-learning practice continues to be reproduced in modern education. Memorisation might also seem inevitable when teaching is carried out in languages that students do not fully master: *Giaz*, which is used as the ceremonial language in the Orthodox Ethiopian Church (but which commonly only clerics master) and English, which is used from ninth grade upwards in modern education (e.g. Mulugeta 1959; Teshome 1999; Derebssa 2006; Maimire 2010; Tekeste 2006, 2010).

In Poluha's description of the learning situation in a primary school in Addis Ababa in 2000-1, memorisation of knowledge and knowledge understood as 'bounded, stable and unchangeable' (Poluha 2010: 155), likewise, informs learning (see also Poluha 2004). Poluha notes that the children were 'not encouraged to question the information they were taught; on the contrary initiative and inquiry were discouraged' (Poluha 2010: 155). In her description, the teacher is understood to provide knowledge to the students who memorise it without questioning, leaving the majority of the students inactive. The teachers, in her study,

conceptualised learning as the transmission of knowledge which ideally took place through memorisation, imitation and repetition, methods which were understood to be the best means to obtain the main educational goal, namely to *fill* the students with the required information (Poluha 2010: 101; italics added).

Poluha emphasises that students were, 'not encouraged to give their own interpretation of what they had read or heard, or express themselves in their own words, but were expected to be able to repeat the key words used' (ibid: 105; italics added). This pedagogy based on the accumulation of knowledge can be incorporated within what Freire calls the 'banking' concept of education, where students' minds are handled as empty vessels to be filled; implying receiving, filing and storing knowledge (Freire 1972: 58), as opposed to giving students the power to re-appropriate dominant knowledge for their own emancipation (Shen

¹⁴ Fieldwork notes 2 June 2009/Günbot 25, 2001E.C.

¹⁵ Fieldwork notes 18 June 2009/Sene 11, 2001 E.C.

2001: 131). In spite of an increased focus on a more active learner-centred teaching in Ethiopia, Derebssa notes that the student-teacher relationship continues to be informed by the effect of a socialisation that requires a younger person 'to fulfil without question any request made by an older person' (Derebssa 2006: 132). Encompassed in the concept of 'symbolic violence' is the reproduction of legitimate power in the relationship between the teacher and the student, since this power is not recognised as part of the pedagogical work (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990 [1977]: xx-xxi, 32).

Social reproduction through a particular school system has also been central in different feminist perspectives on education. While liberal feminist perspectives, according to Sandra Acker, have been concerned with equal opportunities (albeit within the existing socioeconomic structure), socialisation and sex stereotyping as well as sex discrimination in education – socialist feminist perspectives that presume structural changes to prevailing power structures – have been concerned with how education relates to the reproduction of gender division within capitalism and perpetuates class divisions (Acker 1987: 423-6). Structural change is also at the base of radical feminist perspectives that have been concerned with the male monopolisation of culture and knowledge and the sexual politics of everyday life in school (ibid: 429). In line with the attention to the school curriculum of these different feminist perspectives, Naila Kabeer emphasises from an empowerment perspective that the 'hidden curriculum'¹⁶ of educational practices can reinforce gendered attitudes pertaining to inferiority and self-esteem within the school system itself (Kabeer 2005: 17; see also Arnot & Weiler 1993; Arnot 2002). Kabeer asserts, nevertheless, that there is evidence that education can enable changes in cognitive ability, can have effects on power relations within and outside the household and *can* enhance self-esteem and how women look after themselves (as well as their families). She emphasises, however, that, 'unless it [education] also provides them [women] with analytical capacity and courage to question unjust practices, its potential for change will be limited' (Kabeer 2005: 23-4). The above points urged me to do my own observations in Tigrayan classrooms.

Observations in Tigrayan class-rooms; gendered implications

When conducting the exploratory education survey in 2009 I also sat in on a few classes in secondary school to observe classroom dynamics.¹⁷ Since these observations were few in

¹⁶ Philip W. Jackson coined the term 'hidden curriculum' in his book *Life in Classrooms* (Jackson 1968: 34).

¹⁷ These observations where done in two ninth-grade classes of which one was a double class, and two eleventhgrade classes, one of them also a double class (one period each).

number, they were supplemented during my last fieldwork visit in 2011/2012.¹⁸ I will

nevertheless use the first observation as a point of departure for my discussion in this section

since the consecutive observations both reaffirmed and expanded on these observations:

Observation 9th grade (double class): Biology. 55 girls/26 boys:

-The students sit 3-4 on one desk in many cases only boys or only girls together, but they are also mixed.

-Sitting on the back row it is difficult for to hear the (male) teacher and some of his English is difficult to understand.

-The teacher gives his lecture without interruption.

-The students write down what the teacher writes on the blackboard.

-One girl signals to another that she does not have a pen.

-There is a continuous low humming of voices.

-One boy on the first row has fallen asleep and is waken up with a dash to his head with the teacher's notebook and is asked to leave the room.

-When two boys sitting at the same desk see my drawing of the classroom where I have marked the sleeping student with zzz, they bring my attention to a girl that has fallen asleep on the fourth row, and who has not been spotted by the teacher.

-One girl comes late.

-Teacher asks for questions before the next topic, but no one says anything.

-The teacher summarises the main points in Tigriña.

-One male student wipes the board before the teacher continuous to the next topic.

-The last minutes of the lesson the teacher asks questions to see if the students have understood. -A couple of girls and a two-three boys are active with most of the (female and male) students being inactive.

-One girl speaks in Tigriña, but when asked to try in English, keeps quiet.¹⁹

I will take the last point from this class-observation first, as it links up with my discussion in the previous chapter where I asserted that sanctioned femaleness would influence female students' attainment if the modesty ideal, which makes girls 'hold back', is reinforced, rather than challenged in education. My observations on all levels in secondary school (grades 9-12) affirm that female students are holding back in class, as many of them seemed to crumble in embarrassment when the teacher asked them directly, resulting in continuing to keep quiet rather than trying to answer. However, the majority of both the female *and* male students in secondary school were, in fact, silent in class. Commonly, two-three boys and a couple of girls were involved in responding to questions in spite of the teacher's repeated (and often futile) attempts to activate all the students. While these attempts to activate the class made more boys step forward, the girls would often continue to keep quiet; even actively refusing to speak. I first attributed this general inactivity of both female and male students to large classes

¹⁸ These observations included observations in one secondary and three primary schools in the market town and the only primary school in the rural community of my research in five eight-grade classes (three periods in each) and in two ninth-, two tenth- and seven twelfth-grade classes (one period in each), all classes randomly chosen.

¹⁹ Fieldwork notes 20th May 2009/Günbot 12, 2001 E.C.

of around 40 to 60 students that, when occasionally lumped together for differently reasons of convenience as in the example above, could be up to 80 to 90 students in one classroom. However, when observing in a twelfth-grade social science class where the number of students was less than 20, the classroom dynamics were the same. According to my observations, there seemed to be close to gender parity in both activity and inactivity in these secondary school classes. The female and male teachers were often left to communicate with the clever students who were, reaffirmed as clever because they spoke in class and were praised as clever by the teachers, giving the shyer or weaker students a chance to 'hide' behind them. When engaged in group work, which was frequent in the primary and secondary school classes that I observed, the other students seemed to wait for the one who was considered the cleverest (often) male student in the group to take the lead. While both female and male students in the exploratory education survey saw education as enabling them to lead others (as elaborated in Chapter 3), my observations suggest a gender bias in terms of more male than female students taking on the leading role in the group discussions in the classroom in practice. Most often it was when the group was a predominantly female or only female group that one girl in the group would lead the discussion by providing the others with the 'right' answers.

When including eighth-grade classes in my observations I was therefore struck by the significant difference between eighth-grade and secondary school classes in terms of activity. The general impression was that both female and male students in the eighth-grade classes I observed in both the rural and semi-urban area were active and more so than both female and male students in the secondary school classes. While the shift from primary school to secondary school concurs with the time around 15-16 years of age, when both girls and boys are considered (sexually) 'hot' and the pressure on girls' morality intensifies, most teachers attributed this shift in classroom activity between eighth grade and ninth grade to the shift from using their mother tongue Tigriña to using English as a teaching language. When I asked one secondary school director about English as the teaching language he says spontaneously: *'It's killing us!*²⁰ Many of the students that I have talked with say that they have difficulties understanding what they read in their textbooks or even the texts they themselves have copied off the blackboard into their exercise books but, nevertheless, claim that learning in English is important to stay connected to the world. Both the education survey I conducted, where some of the students had answered in English (since I gave them a choice to use Tigriña or

²⁰ Fieldwork notes 15 December 2010/Tahsas 6, 2003 E.C.

English), *and* my observations in class confirm that students' command of English is generally low. It is also the case as suggested in the director's answer above that teachers themselves might struggle. Being entitled to teach and to learn in a language that one does not master fully is therefore one pedagogical aspect that is carried over from traditional education to the pedagogy of modern education from secondary school onwards; only with the language in question having changed from the church language *Giaz* to English. In spite of many of the teachers making a short summary of the lesson in Tigriña, when the teacher ended his/her lecture in secondary school with 'any questions?' silence most often followed. The tendency that the knowledge which the teacher presents and writes on the blackboard is considered true and pass unquestioned (Poluha 2004, 2010), is, thus, reinforced by the use of English as the language of instruction.

The Educational Sector Development Program (ESDP IV) envisions: 'A strong improvement in student achievement through a consistent focus on the enhancement of the teaching/learning process and the transformation of the school into a motivational and childfriendly learning environment' (FDRE-MOE 2010b: 6). In the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP) the focus is on increasing 'children's learning through more teachers using better teaching practices' (FDRE-MOE: 36).²¹ Better textbooks and more qualified teachers are mentioned, but what exactly an active learning methodology implies in practice, is not expanded on in the quality improvement strategy. The frequent use of group work seems to be one strategy used in the Tigrayan classrooms that I observed, but tends to institute one of the cleverer students as leader instead. With the common use of the white frock, the authority of the teacher is reconfirmed when entering the classroom and taking up position in front of the class, with the extent to which the teachers move between the blackboard and the students varying. Possibly as a result of bigger classrooms, the distance between the teacher and the students is increased in a spatial sense from primary to secondary school in the classrooms I observed. While the copying of knowledge from the blackboard to exercise books is accompanied by a general mumbling, and a not uncommon writing in shifts, since there are always some students who do not have a pen, there seems to be no problem of discipline in class. The challenge, rather, seems to be to keep the students' attention in these big classes, with only one fifteen-minute break halfway through six periods; with students

²¹ The General Education Quality Improvement Package contains 5 major components: (i) Curriculum, Textbooks, Assessment and Inspection; (ii) Teacher Development Program, including English Language Quality Improvement Program; (iii) School Improvement Program, including school grants; (iv) Management and Administration Program, including Education Management Information System; and (v) Program Coordination, including monitoring and evaluation activities (FDRE-MOE 2008: 4).

sometimes falling asleep. There is a marked decrease in concentration from the first period to the third before the break, and again from the first period after the break to the sixth, and last period. Even as an observer, I struggled with my concentration through three intense consecutive periods with different topics, and even more so in the evening shifts when the classrooms might be hotter than during the morning shift.

The gendered use of space in the classrooms was also brought to my attention in these observations because it differs from how gender commonly plays out in relation to space: as for example the spatial ordering of gender at the church, where women and men are segregated on each side of the church, or as practices commonly play out spatially in relation to the still-prevailing gendered division of labour. In the eighth-grade classes both in the semiurban and rural areas the students were seated in five or six gender-mixed groups with five to ten students in each group. In the secondary school, the students were seated in three lines with desks placed behind each other facing the blackboard and the teacher. While the number of students were usually two to three at each desk (sometimes four), and boys could sit with boys and girls with girls, female and male students also sat together at one desk. In all the classrooms I observed, boys and girls were spatially spread somewhat evenly out in the classrooms. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990 [1977]) presume that the 'secondary pedagogic work' that takes place in school is a continuation of the 'primary pedagogic work' from home and, hence, that education as the secondary pedagogical work reaffirms rather than restructures *habitus* (see also Arnot 2002).²² In spite of a couple of active female students in each class (compared with two-three boys), in terms of raising their hands when the teacher asked questions, these girls still seemed to struggle with embarrassment and shyness as their voices where hardly audible to the rest of the class. In taking the lead in the group work in class, girls also seemed more reserved, even in the case of being a clever student when there were other clever boys in the group. However, if gendering of social space matters for the generation of a specific gendered *habitus* as Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) asserts, a reconfiguration of gender relations does take place in Tigrayan classrooms. When presenting myself for the classes and asking if there are any difference between girls and boys in school, the students also answered in unison: 'There is none'. When asking the class who is the cleverer, boys or girls, they answered, again in unison: 'We are equal'. The students may well have given me

²² Arnot (2002) notes that Bourdieu & Passeron (1990 [1977]) presume that the woman takes on the primary pedagogical work at home and the man is the teacher (outside home) in the secondary pedagogical work in school, reconfirming the division of labour between the mother and father in relation to social space and the authority confined to these positions as it plays out in the domestic/public divide.

the answers they considered 'right', but these answers suggest that a sense of gender equality is being instituted in the school context, both in a spatial and a discursive sense.

Copying, critical thinking and imagination

When carrying out the exploratory education survey (in grades 8-11) I emphasised, when handing the students the questionnaire, that I was not asking for 'right' answers on the few open-ended questions that were included, but for their own opinions. An unforeseen effect of these open-ended questions was that they seemed to create frustration and uncertainty among many of the students as they became unsure about what to respond when there was no predefined answers to choose from. This alerted me to the impact on students' analytical abilities of a teaching-learning practice that is centred on providing 'right' answers. Observing in a first class in a rural satellite school (grades 1-4) in 2010, where the teaching took place in four *das* (temporary built huts made of branches, in this case, under big trees). I took note of the prevailing use of 'yes' and 'no', 'right' and 'wrong' answers instituted at this stage. On the tenth-grade national exam that I observed in the market town in 2009, the number of prefabricated answers had increased to three or four. Increasing the number of possible wrong answers, there was still no requirement for the students to produce answers of their own.²³ Not only is the attitude towards knowledge as a stable entity installed early, it follows through the students' educational trajectory. While these 'right' answers are not necessarily 'wrong', my point is that they are producing agreement, not critical thinking. One male secondary school teachers also explains, 'the time we have for discussion, to develop the student's own [critical] thinking is limited. One period is 40 minutes; that time is hardly enough to go through the *textbook, let alone have any discussions.*²⁴ Teachers also emphasise that the shift system, while making it possible for many more students to go to school since they will be able to do farm- and household work for the other half of the day, the four hours (with six periods) the students are in school is so short that there is little time to encourage independent thinking.

Since big TV screens had been fitted in all the classrooms in the market town secondary school, I had also hoped to observe the televised teaching (called 'plasma') that has been produced for Ethiopia in South Africa from 2004/2005 onwards. During the first observations in May-June 2009 electricity in the area was cut off most of the time, and when I

²³ Paulos (2006) refers this type of tests to the strong US influence (together with funds) on the curriculum in Ethiopian education from the 1950s onwards. Examination on all levels of education changed from 'essay' type to 'objective' type tests reducing the possibility for self-expression and credible formulation of the student's own ideas together with a deteriorating quality of spelling and handwriting (ibid: 81).

²⁴ Fieldwork notes 22 May 2009/Ginbot 14, 2001 E.C.

came back in 2010 and there was electricity, the televised lectures were not up and running because the new printed teaching material to go with the revised programmes had not yet arrived. On my last fieldwork trip in December-February 2011/12 there were further delays because of technical problems. These televised lectures in English intended for all levels in secondary school in Ethiopia, I am told, compensate for teachers' differing qualifications and command of English, and add a visual element to the learning process that helps memorisation. The problem for many students seems to be to understand what is said, since the instructors in the programmes are said to talk too quickly, and since the text accompanying the images shifts before the students manage to write it down. When asking a secondary school-leaver how she managed ninth and tenth grade when it was taught in English, she says: 'I did not understand that much'. 'What about "plasma", how did that work for you?' 'We saw it as a film and discussed the appearance of the people in the programmes afterwards', she says. 'How did you manage the tests?' I ask. 'By "copying" from the others', she says.²⁵ Even when cheating she did not pass her tenth-grade exam.

The occurrence of identical answers in the education survey questionnaire in those few questions where they were asked to elaborate their opinions had also directed my attention to cheating, or *miqididah* (ምቅዱዳሕ), 'to copy'. One of the colourful painted signs in Mayshek Primary School in the rural area of my study reminding students that: 'To copy is a sign of a *weak student*¹,²⁶, points to cheating takes place. When asked directly about it, the teachers confirmed that it is a problem on all levels of education. Probing a female teacher in secondary school about why girls seem to perform more poorly in school than boys, beyond the common reasons given about girls' work at home, she says: 'They [the boys] are braver in cheating on the tests'.²⁷ A primary school director, when asked if there is any difference between boys and girls when it comes to cheating, says: 'Girls are, generally speaking more afraid than boys of doing so. '28 When asking about gendered implications of cheating, during the presentation I gave of my research for the teachers in the secondary school on my last fieldwork trip, they accepted my assertion that boys' 'bravery' in cheating relative to girls could be *one* factor that affects exam results in gendered ways. I cannot conclude from my data that boys perform better because they cheat more, but I find it interesting that girls are again perceived as 'holding back', even in the case of cheating.

²⁵ Fieldwork notes 29 June 2009/Sene 22, 2001 E.C.

²⁶ ምቅዱዳሕ መግሳዒ ሰነፍ ተምሃራይ እዩ!!

²⁷ Fieldwork notes 21 May 2009/Ginbot 13, 2001 E.C.

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 26 May 2009/Gïnbot 18, 2001 E.C.

While education is understood as an important impetus in processes of change and development in the Ethiopian context today, the prevailing mode of teaching-learning tends to install 'right' answers rather than utopian thinking and imagination. This runs counter to Freire's (1972) perspective on education as a transformative act, where the ability to think critically is at the base of any struggle for change in practice (see also Glass 2001). However, this perspective on critical thinking can hardly be encompassed within Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical framework, where it is only in situations of crisis when self-evidence is disrupted that a critical discourse can emerge. In the reaffirmation of the primary pedagogic work from home in the secondary pedagogic work that takes place in Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990 [1977]) perspective on education, it is the reproduction of power taking place in the teacherstudent relationship that is at stake. In their perspective, the teacher-student relationship is based on the archetypical relationship with the father. In the highland context of Ethiopia, Poluha (2004, 2010) bases this relationship on the cultural schema of patron-client relations requiring students' obedience and respect, and teachers' supervision and control as expressions of care; with the teacher in charge of giving praise/rewards and punishments (see also Chapter 5). While Poluha's perspective moves reproduction of vertical power relations into the classroom, she emphasises the fragility of patron-client relations, since obedience and respect can be moved to someone else if, in this case, the student does not gain anything from his/her obedience. What caught my attention in the school murals (see Chapter 3), and in my observations in class, was also the notion that being knowledgeable entitles one to take the lead and tell others what is 'right'.

Seeing education as a transformative act from the perspective of critical consciousness might seem far-fetched in the Tigrayan classrooms that I have observed, where the mode of transmitting knowledge by way of the teacher writing on the blackboard, often in silence, before explaining and with the students writing (copying) this represented knowledge into their exercise-books and listening, seems to prevail. As Derebssa asserts, obedience to authorities, rote learning with a low requirement for understanding, and knowledge as a stable entity that can be passed on without question (Derebssa 2006: 131-2), continues to provide the cultural framing for educational practices in the Ethiopian context. There seems also to be a gap between prevailing teaching-learning practices in Tigrayan classrooms and the creative and innovative students that the Ethiopian education policy and programmes envision, and that the current TPLF-based EPRDF government depend on in its development pursuit (unless development is already predefined). Telling others the 'right' answers might well lead to change as more and more people come to know more, but seems counter to the idea of

consciousness from the Tigrayan struggle that presupposes critical thinking for structural change to take place. Prevailing teaching-learning practices run, as Maimire claims, counter to the questioning attitude and critical spirit incubated in the 'gold' of subjugated surplus meanings that could have posed a constant challenge to the 'wax' of the hegemonic order and, hence, to relations of power also in modern education.

The teacher as role model and change agent

For the educational project to succeed in leading to change and development, teachers play a decisive role. The question that will be addressed here is to what extent prevailing teaching-learning practices concur with teachers' understanding of their role as agents of change, not only in school but also in the society. The school murals that I addressed in Chapter 3 also included references to what is understood as a 'good' and 'effective' teacher [Fig. 47]. Another example, in the director's office at the secondary school in the market town, is a typed A4 poster in proverb style saying in English: '*A teacher is a servant of mankind, but a King of himself!*' With an increasing number of female teachers in my study area, and most significantly in primary school, the teacher in these representations is still male. With these representations in mind I, therefore, wanted to trace female and male teachers' own perceptions of their role and of what it is possible to accomplish through education. When I asked the female teacher 'Tirfu' (22) in a rural primary school, where she is one of four female and seven male teachers, about why she became a teacher, she says:

(Laughs). So I, I wanted to be a teacher in order ... to teach the whole society. A teacher means a teacher of the whole society not only for the children, but for the whole society to change; [to bring about] rapid change in our country. So, I became a teacher to alleviate different problems in the society; in order to teach the society I became a teacher.²⁹

Tirfu's rationale for becoming a teacher has much in common with the students' wish to educate their parents and their society/country that emerged in the exploratory education survey elaborated in Chapter 3. On my question about what the main problems for girls' education in her rural school are, teacher Tirfu asserts that, the society's perspective ($\hbar c \lambda \hbar \rho/areaiya$; 'view') on education is based on the challenges education poses to girls' morality, and the economic advantages of marrying their daughters and, not to the same extent, what can be gained from educating them. So I ask her:

-What can the teachers' do about it, or what do you do about it?

²⁹ Recorded interview 24 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 15, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 24 in Tigriña and English).

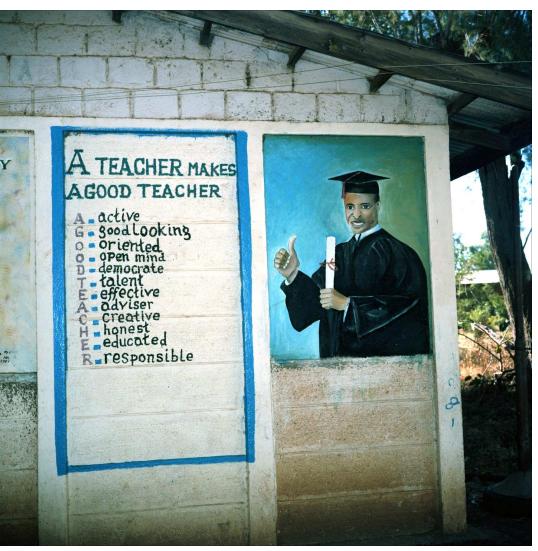


Below (left side of the door): The personality of an efficient teacher

Committed Righteous Successful Leader Knowledgeable Hardworking Forgiving

On the right side of the door are the Ethiopian flag and the Tigray region flag (originally the flag of TPLF) with the national anthem written below.





[Fig. 47]: Murals that define what it takes to be a 'good' and 'effective' teacher at Endabaguna Primary School (above) and Mayshek Primary School (left). Photo: Thera Mjaaland 2010.

The role of the teacher?

-Yes! The role of teachers in changing the attitude [of the society]?

The 'attitude' (in English) of the society, okay. As for the society, the teacher will do as much as he can, and as much as he participates in the society by visiting homes, or being present on different occasions, for example in religious places ... at cultural ceremonies; what they do is to provide teaching. They make different contributions to raise the 'awareness' (in English) of the society, and even to return some of the student [who have dropped out] to school. The teachers also promote education for female students when teaching the society at these different occasions. For the teachers, a major concern is, first, to change (*milïwat*'; develop) the situation for female students in school, secondly, to change/develop the society at any possible occasion when they [teachers] are present; they have, what is it called, a great 'role' (in English) in changing the [society]. I would say they are bringing about 'change' (in English).³⁰

The above account shows that Tirfu has an understanding of herself as a teacher (in spite of referring to the teacher as 'he'), as forwarding change, both in school and in society. Teacher 'Hayelom' (28) also emphasises that these female teachers constitute important role models for the female students:

Like teachers, now when they [female students] see the female teachers, and seeing them as opposed to not seeing them, we let them [the female students] understand how they [these women] became teachers; that it's thanks to learning, thanks to making an effort that they reached where they are after having convinced their parents. So we let them understand by saying that there is no reason that you cannot be like them.³¹

Teacher Hayelom also notes the importance of female role models when many of these girls have to convince their parents to be able to continue school. Teacher Tirfu, who herself came from another rural area in Tigray, says that her parents had an understanding of education since they both had learned for a few years in primary school. She now has a Diploma which allows her to teach in grades 5-8, and has started on a Degree programme (attending lessons during the rainy season when school is closed and with distance learning the rest of the year). While a certificate gained after one year in a teacher's college is required to teach grades 1-4, the number of female teachers tends to decrease with higher grades and the requirement for a diploma or degree. In the secondary school in the semi-urban market town, where a degree is required to teach (but where, also, teachers with diploma are accepted) there were three female and 38 male teachers in May/June 2009.³² At the same time, in one primary school in the market town teaching grades 1-4 (and grades 1-8 from 2010) there were eighteen female

³⁰ Recorded interview 24 November 2008/*<u>H</u>idar* 15, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 24 in Tigriña and English).

³¹ Recorded interview 19 November 2008/<u>H</u>idar 10, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 20 in Tigriña).

³² In 2011/12 the number was 13 female and 64 male teachers, with the director and vice director being male.

teachers and three male (including the male director).³³ One of these female teachers is 'Zofan' (24). She answers my question as to what role education plays in relation to understanding gender issues and changing gender roles by pointing to her own role as a teacher in these processes:

Okay, ehe. Yes, meaning, when we look at the issue in Ethiopia, there is the need, to create ways for different women to take on different leading positions. For example, 'I am, as a teacher' (in English), as a teacher I must create conditions for female students that would enable them to attain a good level/status (dereja) as I have achieved as a teacher ... as a woman I will work so that also the society will change (*kiqiyir*) and convince the society that those women who have learned can attain a better position (dereja). What is more, women are also among those who gain skills (mova). These skills make women able to administer women's affairs. They too must play a bigger role. Because, the question is; what have you done as a 'chairman'? 'What is the result?' (in English). What is the result you have achieved? Since this is so we as teachers must exert any effort to provide change (nikiliwet'), so that female students can achieve a higher level (*dereja*) and take on leading positions in our country by way of installing her with self-confidence (arse iminet; 'belief in oneself'). What's more, the principle for those women occupying leadership positions must be to create ways of promoting women's issues. This is not about holding a chair just for the sake of it and collecting a salary. [We must ask] in what respect have people changed (teqeviru)? I, as a teacher, how have I shaped them (the students)? What am I teaching them? What has the result of my work been? For example, it's the same teachers who taught me that are also teaching today. These are the ones who taught me when I was in grade one. So, they are happy when they see in me the fruits of their work. That is because their efforts have borne results. In the same way, I also feel happy when I see my student achieving good results. So, the women administrating women's affairs must create ways to promote these ... 'gender issues' (in English) to make and effort ... to make an effort concerning women's issues. We also, as women there is no reason for not trying, since we want our sisters to achieve a good status. However, I personally would say that they [women] must play a bigger role when they take up leadership positions. (...).³⁴

In this account, teacher Zofan understands her role as a teacher as one that can enable female students and the society to change. She also points to the responsibility of women, who have achieved a leading position, to ensure that women's issues continue to be given priority. When I ask her explicitly if she considers herself a role model, she does not hesitate with her: *'Yes!'* Later in the interview she also asserts that *'teaching skills shape every other skill'* in the sense that the teacher is at the base of learning in every profession. In the context of education, those women who actually reach a position as a teacher (together with female agricultural extension workers and health extension workers that are all sent to the rural areas to enable change), do show that women can in fact reach somewhere with education. On the importance of female role models, the (male) director at a rural primary school notes:

³³ In 2011/12 there were 25 female and 8 male teachers, with both the director and vice director being female.

³⁴ Recorded interview 9 December 2008/*Hidar* 30, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 34 in Tigriña).

[F]ew females think that they can reach a prominent or high status/position (*dereja*) by learning since they haven't seen many women who have learned and become somebody, and since this is a rural area, except for many boys, it is not imagined that woman can acquire prominence through education. $(...)^{35}$

As role models, these female teachers constitute not only examples of what is possible for girls to achieve, but also of what it is possible to *imagine*. However, if education is weighed up against economic prosperity, it is a fact that those who have acquired riches in this area are not those with education but those (women and men) who run successful businesses and work within trade, now also including some of those (male) youngsters that venture off to pan gold in the same wilds (*bereka*) that had accommodated the Tigrayan liberation's struggle. While girls might also pan gold in their school vacation during the rainy season to finance their education, they usually (but not always) do so closer to home in the rivers that become flooded for a shorter period. The school director, above, mentions this economic aspect in relation to the prospects entailed in education:

Since there is gold in our vicinity they [mostly male students] look for gold; they even ridicule their teachers. They ask the teachers, 'how much is your salary', and if I tell them, 'I earn 600 [Birr]', they say, 'I can get 600 in one day by panning gold', and they drop out [of school] saying, 'for what purpose do I need education'; they rather believe in gold.³⁶

Likewise, teacher Kahsu who has struggled her way to acquire an education to be able to work as a teacher and, in 2012, had been accepted for a three-year Diploma course with distance learning, says: *'I'm thinking about buying gold. As long as I don't have it, I'm not valued here. Simply, I'm someone who has happened to do this and that, but nothing of real (material) value.* ^{'37} While being educated is a positive characteristic for Tigrayan women (Wilberg 2004³⁸), to give birth (that Kahsu has done to three children) is together with acquiring wealth, still decisive prerequisites for a woman to gain respect (*h*·fl*c*/*kibri*), or 'status-honour' (Bauer 1977: 36-7), in a predominantly vertical social order. This value system might not have expanded sufficiently to enable a redefinition of the basis for respect in terms of other qualifications, like being a clever teacher; unless being a teacher includes having children and the acquisition of wealth. While Kahsu has challenged gender norms and her parents' authority, and got where she is now by her own efforts and determination (see

³⁵ Recorded interview 19 November 2008/*<u>H</u>üdar* 10, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 19 in Tigriña).

³⁶ Recorded interview 19 November 2008/*Hidar* 10, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 19 in Tigriña).

³⁷ Fieldwork notes 3 February 2012/T'iri 25, 2004 E.C.

³⁸ The MA thesis *Factors constraining girls and women from enrolling and continuing their secondary and tertiary education in Tigray, Ethiopia* has later been published under the name Jeanette Wilberg Scibbye (2009) with the title *Exploration of female education in Tigray, Ethiopia. Factors constraining girls and women from enrolling and continuing their secondary and tertiary education.*

Chapter 5), wanting to be respected in the rural community where she is born and now teaches, draws her back into the fold of what it means to be a respectable woman. In the informal dialogue I have had with teachers, both in the rural area and the market town, a growing frustration and de-motivation as to their role as teachers commonly surface. The acquiring of wealth continuing to be a stratifying aspect in society in terms of status/position also challenges the perception that the road to a higher *dereja* in terms of level/position/status in society is by necessity through education.

The meeting and women's participation; from consciousness to awareness

Even though Freire is criticised for not considering the specific location for women's oppression in his pedagogy (Weiler 1994, 2001) his emancipatory perspective on education does resonate with feminist reformative and emancipatory concerns in education (e.g. Acker 1987; Weiler 2008). The Tigrayan struggle did no doubt open up both a new political arena for women and new possibilities in education. Government bodies on the wereda and tabia level in my area of research continue to use the meeting as an arena for mobilisation and learning in processes related to development and change. For example, on the wereda level, the Women's Affairs Bureau, whose role it is to implement on the community level, the intentions in the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (TGE-OPM 1993) and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (FDRE-MOWA 2006) (see Chapter 3), and to oversee the mainstreaming of gender on all administrative levels and in all government bodies' activities in the wereda down to the tabia level, uses the meeting as an arena where women are informed/trained and women's issues are discussed. The meeting is also the arena that other government bodies use to inform/train and discuss with the people on other community thinking from the struggle that informs the present policy discourse on education or on women, but 'awareness' (አተ ሳስባ/atehasasiba; 'thinking'/ attitude'). The elaboration given on the issue of awareness by the leader of Women's Affairs Bureau on the wereda level is instructive here:

participation in learning ... is approximately 50-50 [between boys and girls] in the primary schools already; so our guess is that this will continue to improve (laughs). However, the key problem now is that 'awareness' (in English) is not created quickly with a low budget. It is also about the society's view ($\hbar c \lambda \hbar \rho/areaiya$; 'perspective') on women ... even women's own awareness leaves a lot before she can be called competent.

(...).

-But...up till now you have been having ... meetings for a long time, since the struggle and up till now people have been asked to participate, but they [the women] are quite few. I know it from the rural area, right?(...). Why are they [women] not coming to the meetings?

The meetings ... this also, what is this? It's backwardness (S: A A H/dihiret). Up till now it has been a matter of both men's and women's 'attitudes' (in English). Because in some tabias, if the man leads the household the man will come, if the woman leads the household, she comes to most of the activities in the tabia. She has her own motivation for coming. If you have a husband (laughs), if there is a husband ... he doesn't allow her to go. Since she is not allowed to go, 'why should a woman go there', 'what would she get out of it', 'why can't she just stay at home', are the things that are said. So it means due to this pressure (0³/4m./tsegit'i), she just stops going; she stays behind. All in all, like I told you, it's both the 'attitude' (in English) of men and the 'attitude' (in English) of women; the 'challenge' (in English) will be [to change] the awareness (atehasasiba) of both. This 'challenge' (in English) is being created since they [women] are not coming to the forums [to speak up]. Therefore, the key strategy in our work is to create 'awareness' (in English) for women whenever they participate; meaning our key [strategy] is to make them come forward and speak. It means that not coming to the meeting is a key problem; we are working to improve that. So the problem, the problem of not coming, is taken to lie with her. It's a problem of her awareness. Another [problem] is those who have a husband, it can also be male arrogance (קפ מחאב לקיהא t/nay sebay timkihiti); 'since I'm going, what is the use of her going', that means. (Laughs).³⁹

³⁹ Interview with Leader of the Asgede Tsimbla Women's' Affairs Bureau, Medhin Teklu, 6 November 2008/*T*'*ïqimti* 27, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 13 in Tigriña and English).

⁴⁰ Recorded interview 2^t December 2008/<u>H</u>*ïdar* 12, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 41 in Tigriña).

⁴¹ The goal to reach 30 percent representation of women in the federal House of Peoples Representatives, set before the 2005 election, had reached 27.8 percent (152 out of 547 seats) after the 2010 election. See number of Women in Parliament compiled by Inter-Parliamentary Union as of 30 June 2012: <u>http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm</u>

either for women only or for both men and women. In fact, it is not the confidence and selfesteem from the struggle that the leader of Women's Association of Tigray in the wereda emphasises:

(...) For a woman to be the one coming to the forum saying, I will say this, this is my opinion, like they used to do in the past, this has become a big problem; instead it's the men who come forward now, it's not the women who come forward to speak their opinion. It's not the [present] system that oppresses her, that's it, it's rather the hang over from the past system that is holding women back from coming forward and from gaining awareness; that there is no change/development (*lewt'i*) in attitude is a big problem for women. (...)⁴²

I therefore brought up this issue of women's participation in the interviews. In the example below, the peasant woman Tigist (40) explains when I ask:

-In the past there were a lot of meetings organised by the Weyane [TPLF]. Now, these meetings for men and women and the public in general have continued. But everyone says that women are not coming [to the meetings]; that's what the women's affairs bureau says. ... 'How can we discuss with the women ... and inform them when they don't come to the meetings?' [they say]. Why don't they [women] come that means? (Laugh).

I don't know! (Laughs).

-You don't know? (Laugh).

I don't know.

-Do you go to the meetings?

To the meetings?

-Yes!

Hah! I don't go, I'm staying behind. I used to go in the past, hah; [then] I simply went (*sug ile*). But now, I'm [always] staying behind, I don't know [why].

-But does that mean that meetings are not good?

It's good; it's good indeed.

-But [if they come] do women speak up, or are they simply sitting there keeping quiet that's it; not making it worthwhile [to come]?

Yes! (Laughs). For us the meetings were good [in the past], the meetings were good for us [women]. They taught us, it made us conscious ($P_{2} + A_{2} + 2e_{2}/2e_{1}$), but I don't know how it turned out that we simply (*suq*) are absent [now]; we are told [to come] but are absent, they tell us and we don't go; they [women] simply keep quiet (*suq iya suq*).

-Is it because of tiredness? Is it because of a lot of work at home?

⁴² Recorded interview 14 December 2008/Tahsas 5, 2001. E.C. (Interview number 38 in Tigriña).

Ehe, that's a problem, it's the household tasks that prevent us from going [to the meetings]. Meaning, now it is the harvest season ... and we don't have anyone who can look after the animals (**1711**-1/*genzeb*; literally 'money'), to look after the house; because of these problems we are absent [from the meetings].

-Is there any other reason?

There is no other [reason]. This is it, there is no other reason.

-Could it be that husbands tell them to stay at home maybe, other women that means? (Laugh).

I don't know about the others, they themselves know better.

-Ehe, yes!

Yes! About others, I only know about myself; I don't know about others (laughs).

-Does it mean that your husband didn't tell you like that [to stay at home]?

In fact my husband says, 'come'. He repeatedly says, 'come, come to the meeting'.

-Then you stay behind (laugh).

Yes! (Laughs). My husband tells me to come. Since he is always there, he repeatedly says come, come. However, I don't go. Then, he comes home in the evening and gets angry [with me]. It's a problem for me, what else can I do? I have the children and the animals (*genzeb*; literally 'money') in my care; I tell him it's a problem.

-But wouldn't it affect equality, gender equality that means, since the men are informed about many government policies while you are sitting at home?

Sit and keep quiet (kef sug) (laughs).

-If you haven't even heard that means? (Laugh). Where did the equality go?

Where is it (laughs)? Hah! Their [women's] keeping quiet (*suq iya*) (laughs) means there is no equality? (Laughs).

-If you stay behind, yes. Maybe you could have asked questions [in the meeting] (laugh).

It means, our [intention] is not to be absent, it's not to abandon the meetings, but maybe there are some who say, 'why do we have to go', and prefer to stay behind (*sug kibila*); I myself, it's because of problems, otherwise meetings are good. Why? Isn't it because we gathered in meetings, because we learned that we have come to know all what we know today. Indeed, the reason why I don't go to the meetings is because of my own problems, I have many things to attend to at home, the children are students ... the animals will eat the grain [if someone doesn't herd]; then, for this reason I don't go [to the meetings].⁴³

Tigist and many with her blame the work load at home for not participating in the meetings. Significant is also that 'I keep quiet' ($\lambda i \wedge \dot{a} \wedge \Lambda/ane \ sug \ ile$; 'I hold back') is repeated (in different versions) throughout Tigist's account above; an expression that women in this area

⁴³ Recorded interview 23 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 14, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 22 in Tigriña).

often use when deciding to do something else than what society (or others) expects of them (see also Mjaaland 2004c). Since the peasant woman Meharit (44) is politically active and is used to speaking up both on tabia and wereda levels, I ask her:

-What if she goes to the meeting and speaks up, will there be a problem later at home that means?

Yes, at home, if she speaks up at the meeting, ah silly! They will say that the wife of so and so is talkative, that's it, they [people] will keep quiet at the meeting, but afterwards they will talk behind her back saying she said this and that at the meeting they will insult her, laugh and gossip. It will be said that she is silly, talkative and the like. That way she will be silenced (*sug tibil*).

-In tabia Mayshek ... there are 100 or so [128] households run by women.

[Female] headed households?

-Yes ... but do they come to the meetings, or do they not come?

They don't come. The reason is as [female] heads of households, you are right that there are many of them, but you know what they say, 'if the women who have husbands don't come, that's it, why should we who have no husband (*ankgnit*) derogative term for a single woman) come'; even with nobody around to scold them they hesitate and don't come. They hesitate. While needing no permission to move around and with no husband to scold her, it's said, 'doesn't she have anything else to do?' Since that's what is said about them, hah, they say, 'we will not go', and they stay behind. (...)⁴⁴

Women can, according to Meharit, be punished for their outspokenness, both at home and in the community. In spite of women standing up and speaking her opinion in the meetings during the struggle being reversed in the present context, Tigist above resists my suggestion that staying at home and keeping quiet will impinge on the gender equality women have gained. The wereda leader of the women's association above understood women's holding back as a carry-over from past oppressive regimes in a structural sense. Women coming to the forefront to speak up and discuss in meetings as they did during the struggle seems, from this perspective, to be a mere exception that, when the society returned to normalcy afterwards, had not generated a new gendered *habitus* in a Bourdieuan sense. Nevertheless, it cannot be taken for granted that women's lack of participation in the meetings, or their keeping quiet, is merely a backlash, since this strategy can contain resistance to authorities based on the sociocultural dynamics of layering communication and under-communicating practice. The question that remains to be discussed in the next, concluding chapter, where I return to a more thorough discussion of Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice, is to what extent change takes place when women keep quiet, and when keeping quiet can mean, as Maimire express it, being 'active silently' (Maimire 2010: 76).

⁴⁴ Recorded interview 15 November 2008/Hidar 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 15 in Tigriña).

Concluding remarks

The twofold character of education has in this chapter been situated in a dialectic tension between socio-political socialisation and structural reproduction of power (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron 1990 [1977], Harker 1984), and the potential of education to enable emancipation and change (e.g. Freire 1972, 1994; Maimire 2010). The political thrust of learning to gain 'consciousness' from the revolutionary liberation struggle in Tigray, is, in the present context, replaced by the (less political and critical) notion of 'awareness' and 'awareness-raising'. Rather than critical thinking, it is the creation of the 'right' awareness or knowledge that, can replace what is 'wrong' and/or 'backward' that seems to inform prevailing teaching-learning practices both in classrooms and meetings, where those who possess the 'right' knowledge are entitled to lead. As Bourdieu asserts in his theory of practice, '[t]he theory of knowledge is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power to impose the principles of the construction of reality – in particular, social reality – is a major dimension of political power' (Bourdieu 1977: 165). More than explicit expressions of power in the teacher-student relationship, it is the power implicit in possessing knowledge and to impose that knowledge as legitimate that, in my opinion, becomes misrecognised in the school context when the space available for critical thinking is limited. Nevertheless, gender relations are in the process of restructuring in school: (1) on the level of how girls and boys are spatially situated side by side in the classrooms, which reconfigures gender in relation to space, (2) through the visualisation of female and male students as equal in the primary school murals (addressed in Chapter 3), and (3) based on the extent to which female and male students perceive themselves as equal in education (both in the exploratory education survey and as referred to above from the classroom observations). While the number of female and male students that are active in class is not significantly different, more boys than girls seem to take the lead in the group work. The female modesty ideal, and the 'femininity deficit' (Cockburn & Clark) contained in girls' (and women's) forthrightness, and that results in embarrassment when their 'holding back' is challenged, follows girls into the classrooms in my study area in Tigray, especially in secondary school, when the pressure on female morality intensifies. Furthermore, if the critical spirit that, Maimire (2010) asserts is incubated in the layered socio-cultural dynamics of highland Ethiopia, is released in education – and that counter to Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) perspective in his theory of practice can venture beyond the structural conditions in which it has emerged – it would make the utopian imaginable for the considerable number of female (and male) students that now occupy Tigrayan classrooms.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: Theorising change; changing theory

Introduction

Changes have no doubt taken place in both the rural and the semi-urban market town in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda in north-western Tigray over the time span of the three generations of women that have participated in this research project. Historically, the lives of these Tigrayan women also span three different regimes with different political ideologies, together with the occurrences of major crises in the Tigray region like the big famine (1984-85), the revolutionary struggle (1975-91) and the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000). Since I first came to this area in 1993 there are also significant and observable changes in the material environment in terms of infrastructure, like clean water-supply and health posts/clinics, electricity/ telecommunication and roads/transportation, and schools have popped up 'everywhere' in the wereda, also in remote rural villages. While the market town of Endabaguna has expanded steadily over these years, the ecological situation in the rural area of my study has deteriorated further, in terms of deforestation and soil erosion. The strong focus in policies and plans of the current TPLF-based EPRDF government on development, in terms of growth and transformation, and where education is central, has, no doubt, brought an unprecedented number of girls and boys into school, not only in Tigray, but in Ethiopia in general. With new gender-sensitive laws and policies in place that have brought more women into leadership positions, the notion of equal rights has, likewise, challenged and continues to challenge gender relations. Both the female and male students that participated in this study have opportunities that their parents and grandparents never had, and can imagine their future as different from the lives of previous generations.

Centring on deeply embedded and 'hard-lived' gendered aspects of socio-cultural practices from the perceptive of women, my analysis of the ethnographic data in this thesis also shows that processes of change are complex and intertwined with social reproduction – pointing to 'continuity in change' (Howell & Talle 2012: 11). For example, Clapham (1998) attributes the effectiveness of the Tigrayan struggle to the fact that it was structurally situated in a hierarchical society with a long tradition of statehood accompanied by a corresponding, and equally ancient, tradition of rebellion and banditry. In fact, upheavals and revolutions, having resulted in the downfall of regimes in Ethiopia, have, historically, constituted a vehicle for political change in this context (e.g. Paulos 2010; Messay 2010). Furthermore, in spite of being a people's struggle which, eventually toppled the Derg regime, the Tigrayan society had

not necessarily changed to the same extent as the female (and male) fighters, who had ventured to *bere<u>ka</u>* (the wilds) in pursuit of a revolution. Hence, the fighter women's new equality perspective on gender relations that they had developed during the struggle, based on their experience of having fought on equal terms with men, was not readily incorporated into the local communities after demobilisation (e.g. Krug 2000; Mjaaland 2004c).¹ On a structural level, possibilities for women have opened up over the past couple of decades, and significantly so in education. In the present context of change and development, with affirmative measures for women in place to remedy past inequality and discrimination, the requirement for being a respectable girl or woman continues, nevertheless, to be informed by female modesty and 'holding back'.

Based on my ethnographic data from Tigray, I have also explored the analytical potential of Bourdieu's theory of practice in relation to processes of both social reproduction and change. As a generative principle (or schema) for action and perceptions, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* manages to explain the most 'hard-lived' aspects of social reproduction from the perspective of power convincingly but, in my opinion, does not manage to incorporate intentional decisions to do something other than the 'regulated improvisation' (Bourdieu 1977: 11) that the practical sense, which *habitus* generates, makes agents act by. The problem with Bourdieu's framework is also, in my opinion, that *habitus* always pulls agents towards the past, with few possibilities to envision something beyond what is already structurally dispositioned in the *habitus*. The more open-ended analytical perspective on agency that Emirbayer and Mische (1998) have developed, allows for both repetitiveness and reconfigurations of structural dispositions, as both the actor's 'agentic orientation' in a temporal sense (towards the past or the future in the present), and the temporality of both structure and agency, inform action. Underlying the theoretical discussion in this chapter is the fact that the changes which have taken place in Tigray have come about because what people have *envisioned*, and how they have *acted*, constituted intentional breaks to the continuity of taken-for-granted practices. My critical engagement with Bourdieu's theory of practice is concerned with the limited possibility for incorporating reflexivity as an integral part of everyday practices alongside more unconscious motivations, and which, (1) limits the possibility for the *person* to venture beyond, or resist, the practical sense generated by habitus, and (2) limits the scope for *practice* to be intentional acts that matter in processes of change. My discussion is inspired by the more complex dynamism that is enabled in relation

¹ See Kjetil Tronvoll (1998) for a similar point after the liberation struggle in Eritrea (1961-91).

to the structural dispositions of *habitus* in feminist appropriation of Bourdieu's theoretical framework (e.g. Moi 1991, 1999) and that, more consistently, utilises the consequence of *habitus* being defined by Bourdieu (1977, 1990a) as a *dialectical* principle (but which tilts towards causal circularity in his theory of practice). Based on the assumption that a material environment/'field', which can be intersected by contradictory 'fields', structures women's lives in unanticipated ways, I will discuss the possibility for a more dynamic *differentiation* in the internalisation and externalisation of structure through practice than Bourdieu's handling of the generative principle of *habitus* allows.

The issue of change in Bourdieu's theory of practice

In spite of assertions that the practical sense generated by *habitus* is inventive, unpredictable and improvisatory (e.g. Petersen 1995: 136, my translation from Danish), there exists, in Bourdieu's framework, no action or perception that is *not* conditioned by the generative principle of *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 126; see also Callewaert 1996). Authors disagree on the degree of predetermination the *habitus* concept, as it is utilised in Bourdieu's (1977, 1990a) theory of practice, entails. I am not alone in interpreting this generative principle as tending towards determinism (e.g. Jenkins 1982; Certeau 1988; Sewell 1992; LiPuma 1993; Arnot 2002; Throop & Murphy 2002). Critics have also noted the lack of a more comprehensive attention to agency and processes of change in Bourdieu's theoretical framework (e.g. Calhoun 1993; Farnell 2000; Atkins 2004a; Skeggs 2004; Ortner 2006). Bourdieu goes, however, against deterministic interpretations of his concept:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal! Having said this, I immediately add that there is a probability, inscribed in the social destiny associated with definite social conditions, that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 133; italics in original).

Bourdieu emphasises here that new experiences are incorporated into *habitus* continuously, while at the same time maintaining, as Moore notes that, 'new experiences are always overdetermined by past ones' (Moore 1994: 79). In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, there is no immediate experience that can reconfigure the past and give rise to something new, since experience is conditioned by a *habitus* that also conditions subjectivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 126). Steph Lawler emphasises that the practical sense generated by *habitus*,

while not determining a pre-constituted subject, in fact generates the subject *qua* subject (Lawler 2004: 112). In a footnote she notes that Bourdieu, by emptying the human subject of its essentialism, wants to challenge what he perceives as the illusion of the person's self-mastery (ibid: 125, n.1). Based on the fact that many authors have also criticised Bourdieu for not addressing emotion, motivation and desire in his theory of practice (e.g. Connell 1983; Calhoun 1993; LiPuma 1993; Strauss & Quinn 1994; Moore 1994, 2007; Reay 2004a; Probyn 2004), the question is, as noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, whether Bourdieu has ruled out the person altogether or, as Farnell notes, if *habitus* has replaced the 'person' as an agentive power (Farnell 2000: 403).

This disagreement on the degree of predetermination that the structural dispositions of habitus entails rests, in my opinion, on the extent to which authors accept this limit to agents' imagination and intentional acts - that the 'intentionless invention of regulated improvisation' (ibid: 79; italics in original) and 'regulated liberties' (Bourdieu 1991b: 102) generated by *habitus* allows agents to act by – as an objective, or real, limit for the *person*. Complex combinations of compliance and resistance, non-compliance and co-operation that I have found in relation to Tigrayan girls' strategies in their pursuit of education, both when negotiating with their parents (Chapter 5) and in their identity strategies (Chapter 6), would in Bourdieu's theory of practice simply confirm that the generative principle of *habitus* is inventive, rather than opening up for the possibility that these girls are at the 'frontiers' of change. The material environment in Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice is internalised as structural dispositions in *habitus* through practices that go without saying and generate the practical sense that needs no explanation and enables agents to cope with unforeseen and constantly changing situations in that particular environment (Bourdieu 1990a: 61). Irregularities in practice have no consequence in terms of change in Bourdieu's framework unless the material environment, or the 'field', which produces specific structural dispositions, changes, since diverging practices are understood to be generated by a *habitus* that can answer to all eventualities in that particular environment, without resorting to the same practice each time (see also Callewaert 1996).

It is from this perspective that I think it is fruitful to juxtapose the *habitus* concept with the contradictory meanings and polysemous nature of social practices in the Tigrayan context of highland Ethiopia. Situating the 'wax-and-gold' trope of the *qiné* dynamic, with the layering of communication implied, in the predominantly vertical structure, Maimire sees Ethiopian culture as a historical process producing *plurivocal* social practices (Maimire 2010: 75; italics added). The polyphonic subterranean world of repressed ideas, values and practices

that incubate new forces, identities, hopes and ideals are seen as maturing in the repository of surplus-history subjugated by the hegemonic order (ibid.). These subjugated surplus meanings that, Maimire attributes to the 'gold' of the layered *qiné* dynamic, entails the critical spirit of imagination and utopian thinking that can venture *beyond* the structural conditions out of which they have emerged (ibid: 85-6). The way *adil* is understood in the Tigrayan (and Ethiopian) context, not only as 'fate' in a determining sense, but as 'chance' beyond the structural conditions a person has been born into (e.g. Messay 1999), contains this same potential. These socio-cultural dynamics resonate with Emirbayer and Mische's analytical perspective on agency that incorporates both repetitiveness and imaginary projection towards the future, and which counter to the illusion fantasy entails in Bourdieu's theoretical framework (e.g. Callewaert 1996), may - through actors' hopes, fears and desires - suggest alternative trajectories of action that, potentially, can restructure received structures of thought and action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 971). The complex layering of communication and social practices at the base of socio-cultural dynamics in the context of highland Ethiopia could well be encompassed within Bourdieu's *habitus* concept, as a practical sense that makes sense in this context. In addition to the unconscious or 'pre-conscious' (Callewaert 1996: 54)² preparedness for action that *habitus* provides, these socio-cultural dynamics suggest, however, also intentional actors that might, or might not, decide to act counter to the structural dispositions, in silence if necessary (see also Mjaaland 2004c). The way these socio-cultural dynamics are explained by authors like Messay (1999) and Maimire (2005-06, 2010), suggests, however, that processes of social reproduction and change are not only layered and intersecting in complex ways, they are also more volatile and uncertain than Bourdieu presumes in his theory of practice.

Crisis as a prerequisite for change

Agents in Bourdieu's theory of practice might struggle for power and domination within 'fields', but they do not, as intentional actors, move up against 'frontiers' in their practices that challenge to break the practical sense that *habitus* generates, or the 'feel for the game' which, based on self-deception, or *illusio*, makes agents willing to invest in the game without questioning the rules. Bourdieu's agents simply *find* themselves in a changed material environment that *habitus* adjusts to by generating a practical sense that is adjusted to these changes, and which suggests an important human capacity for adaptation and, hence, survival.

² Callewaert proposes to use 'pre-conscious' in spite of Bourdieu's own use of 'unconscious' to distinguish the term from Freud's understanding of the unconscious (Callewaert 1996: 114-15).

Arnot remarks, however, that how these material (or objective) circumstances of social production change 'remain unspecified' (Arnot 2002: 49) in Bourdieu's theoretical framework. This imperceptible transformation over time that is at the base of his understanding of history is one mode of change that Bourdieu allows for in his theory of practice, unless more disruptive events happen, as in his second mode of change that materialises as a effect of *crisis*:

The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective *crisis*, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically (Bourdieu 1977: 168-9; italics added).

A crisis, which enables change, in Bourdieu's perspective, takes place 'when the routines of everyday life and the practical feel of the habitus cease to operate' (Bourdieu 1988: 783). This disruption that destroys the self-evidence of a particular social order enables a move from misrecognition of the power relations at play to the awakening of political consciousness (Bourdieu 1977: 170). Bourdieu's understanding of crisis is based on a disruption of the practical sense and the self-evidence that enables power to pass unquestioned in practices and representations, with the critical discourse emerging from the disruption of this taken-forgrantedness carrying forward the possibility for change and transformation. Moi (1991, 1999) notes the Marxist (and neo-Marxist critical) roots of Bourdieu's perspective when he links change to the surfacing of a new and critical discourse that would bring the undiscussed into discussion. In Moi's appropriation of Bourdieu's conceptual framework, change take place [w]hen the everyday order is challenged by an insurgent group, hitherto *unspoken* or *private* experience suddenly finds itself expressed in public, with dramatic consequences' (Moi 1999: 278; italics in original). Bourdieu emphasises, however, that while crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of the *doxa* that legitimates a particular social order, it is not sufficient for the production of a critical discourse (Bourdieu 1977: 169), since a radical transformation of the social conditions that has produced these structural dispositions, is required. In order to generate changed structural dispositions in *habitus*, this second mode of change is, therefore, also dependent on structural changes in the material environment, or 'field', and which agents cannot influence through intentional or unintentional changes to practice, since their actions comply with the practical sense that *habitus* generates.

It is, however, in moments of crisis that a reflexive actor can see through the principle of a particular *habitus* in Bourdieu's theory of practice (see also Atkins 2004a: 10; Atkins

2004b: 191), at least, as Bourdieu notes, 'among those agents who are in a position to be rational[!]' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 131). In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, where social reproduction operates in complicity with the unconscious, agents can in fact become 'something like "subjects" only to the extent that they master the relation they entertain with their dispositions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 136-7; see also Throop & Murphy 2002). The question is also whether crisis as a mode of change can be attributed to *exceptional* events only. In fact, when pursuing their goals, Tigravan women and girls in my study, do not only risk social sanction but they are also willing to venture beyond the comfort zone of their *habitus*. The relationship between the material environment or 'field' (as a space of positions) and the practices and postionings habitus generates by having adjusted to that particular environment, does in fact presuppose a 'situation of [general] equilibrium' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 105), rather than more unstable situations based on potential fit and probable misfits that can break self-evidence on a more regular basis in everyday practices and daily life situations. This point relates, in my opinion, to Bourdieu's one-dimensional understanding of material environment, or 'field'. For example, Reidar Grønhaug has emphasised the multiplexity of structural determinants in his use of the concept of 'field'. He further asserts that, '[i]n the total picture, locality is just one "field" among others, and we need a multi-field picture to evaluate how significant locality is in comparison with other fields, i.e. how strongly it determines the formation of the societal whole and the social person' (Grønhaug 1978: 86). Grønhaug's application of 'scale' (size in terms of personnel and extension in social space), further informs the structural impact of different 'fields' intersecting one another. Grønhaug's analytical take on 'fields' opens up for more uncertainty as to the structuring effect of the material environment, or 'field', on the *habitus*, and furthermore, the extent to which structuring dispositions are unequivocal.

While the intersection of contradictory 'fields', in Bourdieu's framework, creates a 'destabilized *habitus* torn by contradictions and internal division, generating suffering' (Bourdieu 2000: 160; see also Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127), the mulitplexity of structural determinants that Grønhaug (1978) suggests, would allow for gaps, or spaces, which are ambiguous in a structural sense, and where inventiveness beyond the structural dispositions of *habitus* would be possible. As elaborated in Chapter 4, Tigrayan women's considerations in relation to contraceptive use where contradictions between 'fields', and women's manoeuvring between them, suggests that rather than suffering, spaces for agency are generated where women can claim their own authority: a case of entrepreneurship that Bourdieu (1991a) only attributes to the prophet and the sorcerer. One strand of critique of

feminist standpoint theory has also pointed to the hybridity and structural contradictions implied in the notion of a specific location (Lal 1996; see also Narayan 1993), and which suggests that the internalisation of structural dispositions would always be differentiated and ambiguous. Bourdieu (2000) acknowledges that there are degrees of structural integration, but he uses this realisation to argue that structural contradictions generate suffering rather than opening up spaces for agency and creativity. The current context in Tigray suggests influences from many different 'fields' on the social person, where the societal whole no doubt also draws on a larger context of global influences, not least in the 'field' of education.

Andrew Sayer notes that 'Bourdieu *asserts* that there is an "ontological complicity" between habitus and "field" (Sayer 2005: 30; italics in original), and that this 'default assumption' of complicity and compliance makes it impossible to understand how anyone could react against and resist the structural impact of some parts of their habitat or material environment (ibid: 31), as the girls who resist being married underage in the rural area of my study in Tigray, do. Sayer emphasises the partiality and selectiveness at the base of structural influences and the person's susceptibility to these influences (ibid: 33). He further asserts that the *habitus* concept is invoked by Bourdieu to explain too much, and suggests supplementing Bourdieu's habitus concept 'with a recognition of the close relationship between dispositions and conscious deliberation, the power of agency and mundane reflexivity, and by addressing actors' normative [in terms of ethical] orientations, emotions and commitments (ibid: 50-1). The reflective elaborations about power and control that the Tigrayan women referred in this thesis have provided, also suggest that the material limit of the environment constitutes a 'frontier' for negotiation and reflective reasoning, even when practices are reproduced. Without denying unconscious motivations of actions, it is this possibility for inserting conscious deliberation and reflexivity into everyday practices (see also Crossly 1999; Reay 2004b) that will be discussed in the next section, where I attempt to lay the ground for a more consistent dialectical principle at the base of the *habitus* concept.

Reflexivity in processes of change

The space given for reflexivity in Margaret S. Archer's perspective on structure and agency is based on two premises underlying her 'analytical dualism': (1) the analytical separability of structure and agency (as their properties are irreducible to each other) and (2) the temporal distinction between structure and agency (Archer 1995: 67; see also Archer 2003). Archer argues against conflationist solutions to the structure and agency problem in the social sciences (of which Bourdieu's *habitus* is one example) and asserts that it is only by examining

the interplay between the two over time that these stratified aspects of social life can be linked (Archer 1995: 65). She acknowledges Anthony Giddens for having included temporality in his theory of structuration³ (e.g. Giddens 1976, 1982, 1984), but doubts if he has emphasised it enough. In line with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) analytical perspective on agency, it is temporality, Archer argues, that enables the possibility for radical and unpredictable reshaping in the interplay between structure and agency over time – a process she terms 'morphogenesis'⁴ (Archer 1995: 75). According to Archer, 'analytical dualism' makes it possible to study *both* structure and agency as processes based on the *historicity of emergence* (ibid: 66); that is, of change taking place over time. Archer notes:

Without a stratified view of agency which allows of prior structural conditioning *and* individual personality differences, we lack an account of both the regular patterning of wants in different parts of society *and* of the personal differences which do indeed make actions something quite different from mechanical responses to hydraulic pressures (Archer 1995: 132; italics in original).

Archer's argument is based on 'the proposition that our *human powers of reflexivity have causal efficacy*' (Archer 2003: 9; italics added), and which, much in line with perspectives which draw on critical theory's and the impact of consciousness (e.g. Freire 1972), can enable change. Seeing structure and agency as harbouring distinctively different and irreducible properties, social agents' reflexive deliberations are seen to mediate between structure and agency by way of an 'internal conversation' (ibid: 15-6). Deliberation through the internal conversation is, in Archer's perspective, understood as the mediating – and potentially transformative mode – operating in the temporal space between structure and agency as a continuous process. Archer acknowledges that the extent to which people engage in internal dialogue differs, and distinguishes between four types of reflexive persons: (1) the *communicative reflexive*, depending on similar others, and fostering continuity and replication (Archer 2003: 209), (2) the *autonomous reflexive*, strategic change agent who might underestimate structural circumstances (ibid: 253-4), (3) the *meta-reflexive*, whose reflexivity never ends (ibid: 296), and (4) the *fragmented reflexive*, whose reflexive powers have been more or less suspended (ibid: 298). In Archer's perspective, the temporal interplay between structure

³ In Giddens' definition of *structuration*, 'as the reproduction of practices, refers abstractly to the dynamic process whereby structures come into being. By the *duality of structure* I mean that social structure is both constituted *by* human agency and yet is at the same time the very *medium* of this constitution' (Giddens 1976: 128-9). Giddens further argues that 'neither subject (human agent) nor object ("society", or social institutions) should be regarded as having primacy. *Each is constituted in and through recurrent practices*' (Giddens 1982: 8; italics in original).

⁴ Archer notes that the term 'morphogenesis' was first coined by Walter Buckly referring 'to those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state'' (Buckly, in Archer 1995: 75).

and agency constitutes a space where reflexive deliberation *can* take place as a way of dealing with *tension* between structure and agency; allowing for change to be initiated by reflective actors. Bourdieu has avoided this tension by instituting complicity and compliance between material environment or field and the *habitus* concept, only disrupted by occasional crisis.

In spite of Bourdieu and Archer commonly being understood, as Jette Steensen (2006, 2007) notes, to share an epistemological base in critical realism⁵, their conflationist and stratified perspectives on structure and agency respectively, differ in terms of how reflexivity is handled. Reflexivity, as an *ongoing* 'internal conversation' that actors engage in – albeit to differing degrees – has no structural consequence in daily life situations in Bourdieu's perspective, as critical reflexivity only breaks through in situations of crisis. To be able to explain how social reproduction is enabled through a taken-for-granted practical sense that urges no critical questions, Bourdieu has not only relegated *habitus* to a blind-spot, consciousness-wise, but, with it, also conscious deliberations and reflexivity as an integral part of daily life practices that can challenge what the structural dispositions of *habitus* might make us think. Bourdieu's perspective also limits the 'epistemic' and 'emancipatory' potential of Staudinger's (2001) 'life reflection' (see Chapter 1) that can, as in Archer's perspective on reflexivity, also be an internal process. Uniting theory and practice, 'action-reflection' (Freire 1972: 76) also forms the basis for processes of transformation in Freire's critical pedagogy (see also Glass 2001). The dialectical relationship between theory and practice implied in his emancipatory learning as 'conscientization' (Freire 1972: 19) or critical consciousness, does not only presuppose actors capable of critical thinking in relation to practice, but makes practice an integral part of this analytical and reflexive capability. Freire's perspective on critical thinking incorporates what I miss in Bourdieu's theory of practice, which in spite of claiming that *habitus* is a dialectical generative principle, does not encompass a consistent dialectical relationship between reflexivity and practice. The assumption that it is possible to see through one's own oppression at the base of Freire's emancipatory educational project, is limited in Bourdieu's theory of practice (see also Callewaert 1996), as this potential is relegated to situations of crisis only. Given the imperative importance of reflexivity in Bourdieu's work, as a scrutiny of the researcher's academic *habitus*, there is a contradiction here as, reflexivity has come to be situated in an inapproachable position (see also Certeau 1988; LiPuma 1993). Archer's perspective opens up for conscious deliberations and

⁵ Critical realism, as defined by Roy Bhaskar (2008 [1975], 1989), is an objectivist, realist approach based on a fallibilist theory of knowledge – and presuming a dialectical relationship between ontological realism and epistemological relativism.

reflexivity (albeit to varying degrees) as an ongoing process that mediates between structure and agency and, hence, not only restricted to exceptional moments of crisis but, as an ongoing process of mediating the tension between structure and agency in everyday practices. It is this relationship between practice and reflexivity that will be discussed in the next section, in conjuncture with feminist understandings of embodiment.

A consistent dialectical principle

The predetermination in Bourdieu's theory of practice rests, in my opinion, on the fact that he never sustains a consistent dialectic relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. structure and agency, mind and body. The proposed dialectic, on which the generative principle of *habitus* is based, becomes, as Richard Jenkins (1982) asserts, subsumed within objectivity (see also Lau 2004). In the 'dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality' (Bourdieu 1977: 72; italics in original), the close fit, Bourdieu assumes, between the material environment, or 'field', that structures habitus through takenfor-granted practices, and the structural dispositions of habitus, which generate the practical sense that agents act by, without any conscious involvement (unless a crisis disrupts the selfevidence implied), is based on 'circuits of circular causality' (Bourdieu 1990a: 97), not a dialectical principle. It is in this manner Bourdieu's habitus concept attains its deterministic thrust towards social reproduction. A temporal disjunction between structure and agency, in an analytical sense, like Archer's (1995, 2003) presumes in her perspective above (see also Emirbayer & Mische 1998), could have enabled the inserting of a space for reflexivity in Bourdieu's framework as an ongoing process (see also Farnell 2000; Lizardo 2004).⁶ It is with these points in mind that I, in the following, will juxtapose Bourdieu's understanding of the embodiment of structural dispositions of *habitus* through taken-for-granted practices in a particular social space, with the focus on embodiment in feminist theorising of gender.

Feminist understandings of embodiment have enabled the inscription of society in the body while at the same time making the body the base for subjectification and agency. For example, based on Simone de Beauvoir's (1988 [1949]) concept of 'body as situation', Moi asserts that, '[f]or Beauvoir, a woman defines herself through the way she lives her embodied situation in the world, or in other words, through the way in which she makes something of what the world makes of her' (Moi 1999: 72). Beauvoir understands body as 'the instrument

⁶ One critique presented by Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman (1994) is that Bourdieu does not specify which processes of mediation and transformation take place in the process of relating body and society, and relates this point to a similar 'mystical leap' often made between mind and body.

of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor of our project' (1988 [1949]: 66). Referring to Moi, Bakare Yusuf notes that, 'the continuous interaction between world and embodied being suggests that through [her] lived experience, a women is always involved in the process of determining her project: discovering who she is, and what she will become' (Bakare-Yusuf 2003b: 6).⁷ Lois McNay notes that the idea of embodiment in feminist writings emphasises 'the unfinished and unstable elements of corporal existence' (McNay 2000: 32). In this perspective, '[e]mbodiment expresses a moment of indeterminacy whereby the embodied subject is constituted through dominant norms but is not reducible to them' (ibid: 33). Hence, the process of embodiment is not fully predictable either as to the incorporation of the world in the body, or as to how this incorporation is realised in the world. As Moore emphasises, '[t]o be a gendered individual is to be market by the effects of power, but not to be fully determined by them' (Moore 2007: 19).⁸ McNay (2000) refutes that the generative principle of Bourdieu's habitus is as predetermined for social reproduction as many, including myself, interpret it to be, precisely because she assumes that temporality *must* be involved in the process of internalisation and externalisation. When McNay uses the terms 'incorporation' and 'realisation', instead of the more mechanical terms 'internalisation' and 'externalisation' in Bourdieu's theory of practice, she enables more active processes of *mediation* between subjective experience of the world *and* the world itself, precisely because the basis for these processes is the person as body and mind, and not a meta-theoretical *habitus* concept that have taken over as 'taskmaster' inside the person, outside the person's control. Moore also notes that the notion of a distinction between unconscious and conscious motivations and actions as well as potential conflicts between them is not developed in terms of a theory of the body in Bourdieu's framework (Moore 1994: 78). Rather, as Moore asserts, '[h]is strongly socialized and collective view of the body in its relationship to habitus means that he does not adequately theorize individual experiences and motivations' (ibid: 79).

 $^{^{7}}$ Arnfred (2002a) notes that those aspects of Beauvoir's perspective that – are seeing women as 'other', the transcendence/immanence line of thought in relation to man/woman, as well as her rather negative view of motherhood – are not productive in the African context. These more problematic aspects of Beauvoir's perspective can however be seen as resolved in her conceptualisation of 'body as situation'.

⁸ One perspective on the social embodiment of gender is found in one of Bourdieu's critics R.W. Connell (see Connell 1983). In Connell's (2009) body-reflexive practice perspective, bodies have both agency and are socially constructed, gender is grounded in bodies that are 'both *objects of* social practice and *agents in* social practice' (Connell 2009: 67; italics in original). While contesting the sex/gender divide, gender is seen as a specific form of social embodiment, 'linking bodily processes and social structure (...) [which] occur in historical time, and change over time. They add up to the historical process in which society is embodied, and bodies are drawn into history' (ibid.). Connell terms this process 'social embodiment' or 'body-reflexive practice' (ibid.). Since the system of gender relations is constituted in a historical process, they can neither be fixed, nor exactly reproduced (ibid: 71).

In Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn's discussion of Bourdieu's theory of practice from the perspective of connectionism, which is based on the internalisation of many coexisting schemata and a multitude of possible connections between them, and not only one schema that incorporates everything (as in the case of *habitus*), actors do not only acquire an embodied sense of what is natural but also strong motivations of what is desirable, which also include the involvement of emotion, making actors enact some cultural practices more than others (Strauss & Quinn 1994: 285)⁹. As discussed in Chapter 6, insights from autobiographic memory research on identity-formation, also suggests that internalisation is differentiated, as this process is intensified when emotion, sensory perceptions and/or mental imagery are involved (Pillemer 2001). In the case of internalisation of gender identity from the perspective of social cognitive theory, Bussey's (2001) emphasis on that, not every aspect of gendered behaviours is adopted or enacted to the same degree by everyone, child or adult, further links up with Sayer's argument above about the partiality and selectiveness at the base of structural influences and the variability in the person's susceptibility to these influences (Sayer 2005: 33). These perspectives suggest that internalisation and externalisation are more unpredictable processes of conscious and unconscious, reflective and un-reflective mediations, and where the relationship between incorporation and realisation is not directly overlapping.

Exempt from conscious scrutiny and reflexive interference by the person, the process of internalisation and externalisation in Bourdieu's theory of practice, rather than constituting a dialectical principle, upholds the mind/body dichotomy. Brenda Farnell terms this a 'residual Cartesianism' (Farnell 2000: 408) in Bourdieu's theoretical framework. To avoid rational choice perspectives on action, Bourdieu has, in Farnell's opinion, reintroduced the mind/body dichotomy. Farnell asserts that '[t]he Cartesian mistake is to separate thought from action, presuming that such action is unconscious if not accompanied by self-reflective, propositional thought' (ibid.). Farnell's concern is, however, not only that the mind/body dichotomy is reintroduced in Bourdieu's theory of practice but that consciousness is understood exclusively as a discursive faculty only (Farnell 2000: 409) and, hence, conflating consciousness with rationality. In a footnote on one of the last pages in the brick-sized work,

⁹ Quinn & Strauss are not the only authors who have criticised Bourdieu for not addressing emotion and/or motivation in his theory of practice (e.g. Connell 1983; Calhoun 1993; LiPuma 1993; Reay 2004a; Probyn 2004). In fact, Bourdieu does not have that much to say about emotion in his theory of practice other than being illusory. In a footnote he asserts: 'Emotion, the extreme case of anticipation, is a hallucinatory "presenting" of the impending future, which, as bodily reactions identical to those of the real situation bear witness, leads a person to live a still suspended future as already present, or even already past, and therefore necessary and inevitable – "I'm a dead man", "I'm done for" (Bourdieu 1990a: 291 n.12, see also Bourdieu 1977: 230 n. 102).

The Weight of the World, Bourdieu does make an (almost hidden) concession on the conscious/unconscious dichotomy in a parenthesis[!]:

(The opposition between conscious and unconscious 'knowledge' we have resorted to here for purposes of communication is actually totally artificial and fallacious: in fact, the principles of scientific practice can be both present to consciousness – to varying degrees at different times and different 'levels' of practice – and function in the practical state in the form of incorporated dispositions) (Bourdieu 1999: 621 n.14).

Bourdieu does not extend this more dynamic, and closer-to-a-dialectic understanding of conscious/unconscious in relation to his scientific practice, to everyday practices (see also Sayer 2005). The case is further that, if the mind/body and conscious/unconscious dichotomies are allowed a consistent dialectic status alongside objectivity/subjectivity and structure/agency in Bourdieu's theory of practice, the consequence is neither full selftransparency, nor a denial of 'hard-lived' dispositions that no doubt, at least temporarily, can be inaccessible to conscious and reflexive deliberation. A more consistent use of the dialectic principle that, Bourdieu asserts, is at the base of the *habitus* concept would also eliminate the need for a 'stratified habitus' that Rogers Brubaker suggests, to be able to explain the possibility for reflexivity within academic practice (Brubaker 1993: 226). A more consistent dialectic principle would also avoid the awkward introduction of a 'divided' or 'torn habitus' that is the result of discrepancies between intersecting fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127; see also Bourdieu 2000: 160), and instead allow space for agency that is structurally differentiated and ambiguous. It is also important, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) emphasise, that it cannot be taken-for-granted that agency and reflexivity are directly overlapping across 'agentic dimensions' at any point in time, since agency, in their opinion, can be both reflective and un-reflective. The irony of Bourdieu's theory of *practice* is, in my opinion, that neither unintentional nor intentional variations in everyday practices have a structural effect, since the person would not consider acting beyond the variations that the practical sense, which *habitus* generates, makes agents act by. Rather, the agency that Bourdieu's theory of practice allows agents would, in Kabeer's (2005) perspective on empowerment, be classified as 'passive agency', as opposed to 'transformative agency', since these actions do not pose a challenge to the structural circumstances in which they take place.

Recourse to practice

Based on the ethnographic data from Tigray, what women do in practice and their reflexivity about what they do and why – their willingness to challenge authorities and their active

silence when seemingly in compliance with sanctioned gender norms – points to intentional actors that do not take everything in their lives for granted – at least, not all the time. The changes that have taken place in Tigray over the lifespan of the three generations of women that are included in this study cannot only be explained by the fact that the material environment, and the structural possibilities that the younger generation have today, are simply different because time has passed by, but point to the fact that the women who participated in the struggle and the girls who pursue their education *in practice* did (and do) something other than the previous generation. For example, in Bourdieu's Kabyle example, where cross-cousin marriage is the norm but where it is not necessarily followed in practice, the fact that *habitus* is understood as unaltered shows that actual change in practice is inconsequential in his theory of practice. Rather, Bourdieu explains away the consequences of any changes to, or inconsistencies in, practice:

In fact the persistence of the effects of primary conditioning, in the form of the *habitus*, accounts equally well for cases in which dispositions function out of phase and practices are objectively ill-adapted to the present conditions because they are objectively adjusted to conditions that no longer obtain (Bourdieu 1990a: 62).

Ill-adaption is explained as the *hysteresis* effect of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 78), and which invokes the practical sense of the past in new environments that are too distant for *habitus* to adjust and generate adequate practices. Situating the *hysteresis* effect of *habitus* in a disjunction or misfit (which coincides with his definition of crisis) between the material environment or field and *habitus*, instead of opening up for a (potential) transformative leap that is not over-determined by the structural dispositions of *habitus*, Bourdieu's agents are again pulled back towards the past. Hence, ill-adaption and divergence in practices simply confirm social reproduction in Bourdieu's theory of practice. While the possibility that people might *refuse* to adapt, or might *decide* to do something other than the practical sense makes one feel makes sense to do, seems unimaginable in this framework, Bourdieu does note:

It is, of course, never ruled out that the responses of the *habitus* may be accompanied by strategic calculation tending to perform in a conscious mode the operation that the *habitus* performs quite differently (...). But these responses are first defined without any calculation, in relation to objective potentialities, immediately inscribed in the present, things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a probable 'upcoming' future, which (...) puts itself forward with an urgency and a claim to existence that excludes all deliberation (Bourdieu 1990a: 53).

What seems at first glance a concession about the person's ability to resist the practical sense that *habitus* generates is, in the same breath, renounced by his claim that this resistance itself is generated by *habitus*. Hence, Bourdieu's dubious and patronising assertion that '[i]t is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know' (Bourdieu 1977: 79), continues to provide the basis for what agents do in practice.¹⁰ Counter to the layered socio-cultural dynamics entailed in the 'wax-and-gold' trope of the *qiné* dynamic in the highland context of Ethiopia – where subjugated meanings incubated in the 'gold' contain a critical spark that can challenge the hegemonic order (Maimire 2010) – Bourdieu can circumvent an incorporation of the ambiguities and potential subversiveness of everyday practices as strategic or tactical acts (Certeau 1988), which can challenge social reproduction.

Lisa Atkins (2003, 2004b) draws attention to this ambiguity and subversiveness at play in social reproduction when pointing to the fact that the project of social reproduction often fails. Elspeth Probyn (2004) also notes that in Marcel Mauss's use of the *habitus* concept as a 'physio-psycho-sociological assemblage of series of actions' (Mauss 1979: 120),

Mauss allowed for human foible within his sociology of humanity. That humans habitually do things wrong or clumsily, that our actions and techniques attest to trial and error, mistakes and sometimes plain stupidity was not only accepted by Mauss but often corroborated by examples from his own experience (Probyn 2004: 233-4).

In Mauss own wording, '[n]aturally, social life is not exempt from stupidity and abnormalities. Error may be a principle' (Mauss 1979: 120). At stake here are all the unintended consequences of *any* action or practice (see also Ortner 1984, 2006; Sewell 1992; Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Throop & Murphy 2002). This unpredictability could have implied a *potential* for change if practice itself had a structural impact in Bourdieu's theory of practice. It does not, however, since *all* actions performed in a structured space comply with the structural dispositions of *habitus* which is generated by this particular material environment through practice (Bourdieu 1990a: 75). Bourdieu acknowledges that a particular *habitus* is 'durable, not eternal' (Bourdieu 1992: 133) and, likewise, that *habitus* as a system of internalised structural dispositions *tends* to structure practice according to these dispositions (Bourdieu 1977: 72), which, in fact, incorporates change by implication. However, Bourdieu does not follow up on the *consequence* of this uncertainty in practice.

¹⁰ Michel de Certeau notes that the consequence of this argument is that: 'an ethnologist was required to know what the society was without knowing it. Today, an ethnologist would no longer dare say (if not to think) that. How can Bourdieu compromise himself in this way in the name of sociology?' (Certeau 1988: 56).

Sherry Ortner's question: 'whether in fact *all* practice, everything everybody does, embodies and hence reproduces the assumptions of the system' (Ortner 1984: 155; italics in original; see also Archer 1982), is also timely. Stephen Turner (1994, 2001) even rejects altogether the notion that habitual practices are shared and, hence, have a structuring effect on social life. In his critique of Turner's position, Joseph Rouse emphasises that it is important to differentiate between practices. Rouse asserts that,

what a practice is, including what counts as an instance of the practice, is bound up with its *significance*, i.e., with what is at issue and at stake in the practice, to whom or what it matters and hence with how practice is *appropriately* or *perspicuously* [meaning cleverly] described (Rouse 2001: 193, italics in original).

This differentiation of the structural thrust of practice suggests that the *extent* to which practice is involved in social reproduction has to be differentiated. As William H. Sewell, Jr. notes, '[i]n the world of human struggles and stratagems, plenty of thoughts, perceptions, and actions consistent with the reproduction of existing social patterns fail to occur, and inconsistent ones occur all the time' (Sewell 1992: 15). The problem, in Sewell's opinion, is Bourdieu's 'unrealistically unified and totalized concept of habitus' (ibid: 16). It is from a similar perspective that Michel de Certeau (1984) calls habitus a 'dogmatic place' where dogma is taken to mean 'the affirmation of a "reality" which discourse needs in order to be totalizing' (Certeau 1984: 59). Likewise, Beverly Skeggs claims that Bourdieu ignores what does not 'fit' and, thus, is in fact excluding a significant amount of social life from his theory (Skeggs 2004: 29). It is also important to note here that my discussion above has not been concerned with refuting that the generative principle of *habitus* can explain the most deeply embedded and 'hard-lived' aspects of social reproduction, such as the female modesty ideal in the Tigrayan context, by being attentive to which practices pass unquestioned and the misrecognition of power involved. My discussion is concerned with emphasising that social reproduction through practices that pass unquestioned can be less taken-for-granted than Bourdieu presumes in his theory of practice. As my ethnographic examples from Tigray throughout this thesis show, it cannot be taken-for-granted that people would always act according to the practical sense that *habitus* generates, and if they do, that they are not reflexive about what they do. It is also in this manner that what people do in practice regains a consequential thrust in processes of both social reproduction and change – in a structural sense.

Appropriation and creativity

The fact that practice would hardly be repeatable in exactly the same way each time points, in my opinion, to an inherent unruliness of lived life – a 'noise', to use James Ferguson's (1999) conception – that would make the project of social reproduction less certain and where agency to a larger extent can be made to thrive. Taking on board the notion of appropriation in relation to 'duplication' and 'copying' of practice, Arnd Schneider mentions the Latin base for appropriation that is *appropriare*, 'to make one's own', derived from *proprius*, 'one's own' (Schneider 2006a: 21). Following Schneider, this implies that the person who duplicates or copies constitutes a different context for interpretation than the one it was originally taken from and, hence, that transformations take place (see also Schneider 2006b). Instead of unconscious internalisation of the material environment through the learning of practices by way of mimesis that Bourdieu suggests in his theory of practice, changes in meaning will, from the perspective of appropriation, be an integral part of this practical process (ibid.). Schneider's argument transferred to everyday practices would mean that, while practices are situated in specific temporal and spatial contexts, there would be continuous processes of actors' practical involvement where the meaning of the practice itself changes in the process. While Bourdieu would have continued to insist that this shows the inventive improvisations generated by *habitus*, Schneider asserts that,

appropriation in its formal sense means a taking out of one context and putting into another, yet the extended meaning I have been advocating sees it as a hermeneutic procedure that, consequently, implies not only that cultural elements [or practices] are invested with new signification but also that those who appropriate are transformed, and ultimately construct and assume new identities (Schneider 2006a: 29).

The reason why I think this perspective is promising, in my attempt to modify Bourdieu's *habitus* concept, is that both understanding and learning can be brought together in the appropriation process as a dialectical relationship between reflexivity and practice, incorporating differing degrees of conscious deliberations and reflexivity as an integral part of practice, as in Freire's 'action-reflection' (Freire 1972: 76), where theory and practice together are at the base of transformation processes (see also Glass 2001). Learning practice from the perspective of appropriation means going beyond *mimesis* to acknowledging that not only *mediation* is at play in the process but that practice itself can initiate understanding and transformation. The translation at play in appropriation, where the person too is transformed in Schneider's perspective, is also a reminder of the hybridity implied in translation processes in Bhabha's 'third space', where translation gives rise to something different, something new

and unrecognisable (Bhabha & Rutherford 1990: 211) and, as Routledge suggests, implies that neither site, role, nor representation holds sway, as one continually subverts the meaning of the other (Routledge 1996: 400). From the perspective of appropriation, not only is agency restored to the person but what one does in practice makes a difference as to whether the action implies social reproduction or change.

McNay (2000) bases her generative theoretical framework of agency on a futureoriented imaginative dimension of practice. Since uncertainty and temporality inform the incorporation process of embodiment and its realisation in lived life, it is precisely the contradictions in this process that become generative for imaginative and creative agency in McNay's perspective. Karin Knorr Cetina also emphasises that when situated in non-routine problems, creative and constructive practice implies a *dissociation* between the self and the object of work that would insert moments of interruption and reflection into practice (Cetina 2001: 175). Starting to do something other than routine is, in Cetina's perspective, driven by relational resources (our ability to take on the perspectives/roles of other persons) and an affective dynamic (as in desire) to know, which enable practice to extend itself into the future in both creative and disruptive ways (ibid: 187), not unlike the creative forward-moving thrust of knowledge production that Ingold (2011b) envisions (see also Ravetz 2011). Cetina's point also resonates with Barthes' (1993) understanding of the *punctum* in a photograph, as a disruption of the ordinary and indifferent where the arousal of personal distress, or desire, directs imagination beyond the frame of the actual image. Hence, the premise that critical thinking and consciousness is a prerequisite for change, as discussed in relation to education in the previous chapter, can be supplemented with the desire to know as a forward-moving process that would ascribe to Tigrayan girls' determination in their pursuit for education a disruptive weight in a structural sense. This forward-moving thrust of wanting to know is also implied in Charmaine Pereira's perspective:

More than any apparently external *frontier*, it is the capacity to go beyond what is given, to fantasise, to create new possibilities that link what is desired with what is known, that will shape the content of knowledge production and its potential uses (Pereira 2002: 1; italics added).

From this perspective imagination is not only positioned at the frontiers of knowledge production and learning but places the desire to know at the frontiers of change. In the above perspectives, the possibility to venture beyond the structuring dispositions of *habitus* would be a more continuous potential in everyday practices than Bourdieu allows in his theory of

practice, where the requirement for change is dependent on crisis, in terms of a disjuncture between the 'field' and *habitus* outside the person's control. It is also important to have in mind, as Hans Joas (1996) emphasises, that the creativity of action can either enable the reestablishment of status quo when this is interrupted, or the emergence of new practices. In Benjamin Dalton's discussion of Joas' theory of creativity he uses the *habitus* concept to avoid a bifurcation of creative and non-creative actions, and asserts that "*all* action requires the innovative adjustment to particular circumstances (...) in *all* moments of action" (Dalton 2004: 615; italics added).

Incorporating compliance as an aspect of agency (e.g. Connell 1987; Moore 1994, 2007) also implies that social reproduction might not only take place through taken-forgranted practices but also because continuity is considered more desirable than change. As Archer likewise notes, lack of change is not by necessity lack of power to effectuate change but that transformation is not wanted (Archer 1982: 465). If, contrary to Bourdieu's theory of practice, more continuous *dissociation* from taken-for-granted self-evidence in practice is allowed for, and the desire to know can be projected beyond loving one's destiny (*amor fati*) to other imagined futures, it enables, as in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) analytical perspective on agency, a reconfiguration of repetitive aspects of practice, which restores to practice and the agentive person a more consequential role in processes of both social reproduction and change.

Concluding remarks

My critical engagement with Bourdieu's theory of practice has been enabled, not because the theory always fits, but because it does not necessarily fit with socio-cultural dynamics and the processes of change taking place in Tigray, utilising, as in McNay's (2000) perspective above, *contradictions* as generative for imaginative and creative agency also in an academic sense. It is when based on a more consistent dialectical principle which allows reflexivity and conscious deliberations into practice, and when including imagination and the desire to know as containing a potential to go beyond structural dispositions that, actors can disrupt the practical sense that *habitus* generates. It is also from this perspective and based on the challenge to authority entailed in layered socio-cultural dynamics in the highland context of Ethiopia that, what the Tigrayan women and girls who have participated in this research project do in practice, even when under-communicating what they do, can be structurally consequential. The complex and layered aspects of communication and socio-cultural practices in the Tigrayan context have much in common with Bourdieu's ethnographic

descriptions from Kabylia, but our conclusions as to what peoples' inventive practices mean, are different. I am in agreement with Bourdieu that *habitus* generates a continuity in peoples' lives and provides us with an important practical sense. I also agree with Bourdieu that the most 'hard-lived' structural dispositions can continue to be reproduced because they pass unquestioned, and because the power relations implied are misrecognised. However, our interpretations, of the abundant occurrence of practices that diverge from what is defined by people as the norm, differ. Since *habitus* is generating *all* practices, including what it is possible to imagine, diverging practices in Bourdieu's theory of practice only point to the intentionless inventiveness of *habitus* that agents are made to act by, and are not, as I contend, set in motion by actors that *can* refuse the impulses from *habitus* and do something else in practice beyond what habitus makes one feel makes sense to do. The modification of Bourdieu's *habitus* concept that I have suggested in this chapter is, firstly, based on *breaking* the thrust of causal circularity in his theoretical framework – that tends, in my opinion, towards social reproduction in a deterministic sense – by emphasising his own definition of *habitus* as a dialectic principle. Feminist understandings of embodiment, as opposed to the dialectic of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality at the base of Bourdieu's understanding of the embodied generative principle of *habitus*, bring these processes back to the person. Basing these internalisation and externalisation processes on temporality that, presupposes mediation as well as uncertainty in incorporation and realisation processes (McNay 2000), reflexive actors and partial internalisation are allowed for (Sayer 2005) – alongside taken-for-grantedness. The second break with Bourdieu's perspective on the *habitus* concept that I have proposed, is to restore to practice and the agentive person the possibility of making a difference in processes of both social reproduction and change when involved in conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional acts. These perspectives also incorporates the potential reconfiguration of structure that imagination allows for (e.g. Emirbayer & Mische 1998), and that in Maimire's perspective is harboured in the critical spirit of the 'gold' in the wax-and-gold trope of the *qiné* dynamic in the highland context of Ethiopia. Made visible in the photographic self-representations as students, this selfimaginary projection towards the future – based on a commitment and desire for becoming an educated woman - moves Tigrayan girls' to the 'frontiers' of change without denying that, when making their forthrightness invisible to retain female modesty and avoid going 'male', social reproduction of gendered power relations also follows in these female students' pursuit.

POSTSCRIPT:

On a visit to the Tigray Region Women's Affairs Bureau in the regional capital Mekelle during one of my fieldtrips, I become aware of a framed picture in one former fighterwoman's office. The image was made up of two women's portraits with a curved text at the top binding the two photographs together, saying in Tigriña: 'equality through struggle' (*maərnet bïqalsi*). It was explained to me that it was the two Martas: the first one had participated in the students' movement during the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I and taken part in a hijacking operation of a plane in 1972, where she was killed; the second was the first woman (Kahsu) to join the struggle in November 1975, given the fieldname 'Marta' in memory of the first one. Killed and 'martyred' in battle in 1980, the second Marta has become legendary in Tigray for her bravery, and continues to be a symbol of women's heroic contributions during the liberation struggle (e.g. Hammond 1999; Tsegay 1999). In fact, stories about these fighter women's heroism seem to assume a mythic character, like the ones the peasant woman Meharit (44) tells when I ask her about the fighter women:

Women in the past ... yes (...) those women who fought in the armed struggle in the past, that's it, who joined the army, who took to weapons for their rights, they said, and buckled their ammunition belts, that's it, like the [fighter] women [from Mayshek] that now has died [of illness] in the market town. However, what is said about her is that, when her comrade was shot and wounded in a battle she threw away his weapon, she threw away her own weapon, and that wounded comrade, she carried her wounded comrade [to safety]. There are stories like that. She was a heroine fighter. There are many fighter women who fought like her, fighters like Marta. (...)

-That famous woman?

Yes, the famous one, the woman called Marta. In a battle (...) it's said that a serpent took her, that to save her comrades, she let herself be taken by the serpent with her weapon and all, and the serpent swallowed her. To avoid firing a shot that the enemy would hear, she let herself be swallowed by the serpent together with her weapon. That way they were victorious, the fighters were victorious and the enemy was surrounded, it's said.¹

What strikes me in the above stories about these heroic fighter woman, who risked their lives for their fellow comrades and a larger cause during the Tigrayan struggle, is not whether these stories are true about what actually happened but the extent to which these stories involve a (re)definition of these women's forthrightness and bravery in terms of the female virtue of care and setting others before oneself, as in the case of 'breastfeeding tigers' whose *care* involves legitimate killing to defend her offspring (addressed in Chapter 6).

¹ Recorded interview 15 November 2008/*<u>H</u>ïdar* 6, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 15 in Tigriña).

It is, in my opinion, useful to situate the general opposition in Tigray (and Ethiopia in general), to what is perceived as the more extreme strategies of Western feminism, in this context. This opposition, which concurs with postcolonial feminist, non-Western feminist and women's social movements' perspectives, is concerned with, (1) gender as always situated in socio-cultural, political and economically-informed contexts that can imply varying degrees of oppression in terms of racism, neo-liberal and neo-colonial imperialist mechanisms in relation to globalisation (concerns women also share with their menfolk), and (2) dealing with women's issues not as oppositional to men but as relational and interdependent. While the Tigrayan women's pursuit for equal rights and equitable gender relations resonates with Nnaemeka's (2004) 'negofeminism', the feminism of negotiation – a 'no ego' feminism (Nnaemeka 2004: 360-1) posing its challenge to power relations through negotiation and compromise rather than through confrontation and disruption (see also Nnaemeka 1998, 2005) – Tigrayan women working with women's issues nevertheless perceive themselves as having to continue to *fight* for equal rights in every arena, as women had *fought* during the struggle for equality with men.² What surfaced in the interviews with Roman and the chairperson of Women's Association of Tigray, both fighters – in spite of their insistence that women's issues are sought to be handled not in *opposition* to men – was also the notion that Tigrayan women cannot rely on anyone to just give them equality:

Women ... we must struggle ourselves to bring equality. No one will give [it to] us. Even when we were participating in the struggle, and now, no one is giving [it to] us. We are bringing it ourselves.³

What the government is not giving us; equality can never come as a gift. We must organise ourselves, we must identify our problems, because of the past situation and the culture and the different religions that create some 'cracks' in our attitude, even in ourselves [as women]... obviously [the problem] is also men's attitudes. (...) So, equality is never a gift from any leadership, even the better leaders cannot give it as a gift. That is what we learned from our practical [involvement], because of that we organised.⁴

When Roman assures me at the end of our interview: '*We will make it; we'll make it*'⁵, I still wonder whether these Tigrayan women – who in the past and in the present have taken on the task of changing the situation for women in a holistic and inclusionary manner – will not, at least sometimes, find themselves negotiating their pursuit at the 'frontiers' of male-dominated

² Recorded interview with the chairperson of WAT, Tirfu Kidanemariam, 21 December 2008/*Tahsas* 12, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 40 in English).

³ Recorded interview with the leader of Tigray Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau, Roman Gebreselassie, 19 December 2008/*Tahsas* 10, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 39 in English).

⁴ Recorded interview with the chairperson of Women's Association of Tigray, Tirfu Kidanemariam, 21 December 2008/*Tahsas* 12, 2001 E.C. (Interview number 40 in English).

⁵ Recorded interview with the leader of Tigray Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau, Roman Gebreselassie, 19 December 2008/*Tahsas* 10, 2002 E.C. (Interview number 39 in English).

power structures. Even when considering that age and status/position make the impact of gendered power relations situation-specific, Tigrayan (and Ethiopian) women continue to be dependent on men being willing to include *them* when the issue of power is at stake.

My use of the concept of 'frontiers', with its struggle connotations, in this thesis also finds resonance within the present development context of the Tigray region, where the 'struggle' continues as a struggle for development, and where the 'army for development' (*lematawi serawit*) is based on (again) mobilising both men and women in this pursuit. It is important, however, to stay alert to which gendered power relations might be *misrecognised* (Bourdieu 1977: 163) when the political struggle for equal rights slides into the pursuit of development and the fight against poverty. For example, what Lewis defines as a problem in relation to Western perspectives on women is not feminism as such but, more specifically, the liberal feminist links to developmental and modernist discourses – consolidated during the UN decade for women – providing the foundation for 'definitive technologies of gender' (Lewis 2002b: 5). These links involve economic, institutional and political backing for an industry directed at development, and that has come to dominate the way gender research is thought about. It is this neo-liberally-informed development machinery, and the extent to which Western feminism operates along the same lines, which Lewis sees as the main challenge to African feminism (see also Lewis 2009). The widely-disseminated and influential technically-informed concepts and analytical tools forwarded through WID (Women in Development), WAD (Women and Development) and GAD (Gender and Development) frameworks, Lewis asserts, risk eroding emergent nuanced, theoretically rigorous and critical models of thought as well as sidelining other more radical and contextually-rooted models (Lewis 2002b: 5-6; see also Msimang 2002; Afonje 2005). Arnfred notes that the term 'gender' in prevailing development discourse, rather than being illuminating, is in itself obscuring gendered power relations as these link up with neo-liberal market forces that are not gender neutral (Arnfred 2002b: 75-6). With the shift in focus to women's empowerment and the de-politicised top-down mainstreaming of women's issues (ibid: 78-9, see also Arnfred 2004), as opposed to being driven by women themselves, the problem is not feminism as such but that feminism, as a critical tool to scrutinise gendered power relations, has been lost.

The issue of development and gender equality in current Ethiopian policies, programmes and plans on education and women, resonates with global education policies where education and development are causally linked with gender equality in the promise for a 'happy ending'. In spite of the fact that juridical and legal backing for women are secured in

349

Ethiopia today, what is perceived as the God-given naturalness of gender relations might, nevertheless, enable a continued reproduction of male-female supra-subordination, as morally inevitable. The women in Roman's (2005) study on Tigrayan women and leadership also emphasised the continued impact of male domination and subordination of women embedded in attitudes of the society. The main reason for women to not reach leadership positions provided by the men in her study – who regarded their assessment and description as 'gender neutral' (Roman 2005: 61) – was the women's lack of education and competence as well as lack of confidence.

The obligation to take care of others, which girls in Ethiopia continue to be socialised into, Emebet (1998) asserts, also continues to impinge on female students' ambitions and the extent to which young girls can give priority to their studies without being classified as uncaring. Even with new constitutional rights in Ethiopia that require the girls' consent in marriage, and with the new family law which has instituted 18 as the legal marriage age for both girls and boys, the rural Tigrayan girls who have participated in this research project still depend on being able to assert themselves in order to negotiate with parents' on the issue of underage marriage, since these judicial/legal provisions, in my area of study, are seldom legally enforced. The fact that the virginity ideal continues to pass unquestioned also sustains the cultural institution of underage marriage to prevent the girls from being 'damaged'. While girls' commitment to education is imperative for their success, they are also dependent on – when forthrightness points to maleness, and female mobility and independence commonly indicate low morals – their assertiveness not falling into the 'male' or 'immoral' categories. When their actions risk being subject to social sanctions in ways that boys' and men's actions do not, women and girls can take advantage of the layered socio-cultural dynamics of the predominantly vertical social order in the highland context of Ethiopia, by undercommunicating what they do in practice. This strategy, which is used by both men and women in their negotiations with authorities, or with persons that have more authority than themselves, can – especially when women or girls are asked to come forward and speak up in meetings or in school – reinforce the female ideal of modesty which requires that women and girls 'hold back'. If this 'holding back' results in lack of confidence in public arenas where men and boys are present, women and girls might continue to keep quiet when outspoken forthrightness to express their concerns or to assert themselves in class, is, at times, required. It is also from this perspective that more attention in future educational research and interventions needs to be paid to the extent to which 'holding back' and displaying modesty impede Tigrayan girls' performance in education.

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APPENDIX 1:

Questionnaire: Ed	ducation	Place	/ቦ <i>ታ</i> :	Date/ዕለት:		
1. Sex	\bigcirc Female: \Box)	♂ Male: □			
85	ጓል አንስተይቲः□	ወዲ ተ	ባዕታይ፡□			
2. Age:						
ዕድመ:	_					
3. Origin of birth:		Rural: 🗆	Urban: 🗆			
ዝተወለድክሉ/ካሉ	ቦታ	ሃኀፈሰብ፡□	ከተማ:□			
4. Marital status:	Single: 🗆 Enga	ged: 🗆	Married:	Divorced:		
ኩነታት ሓዳር፥ ዘይ	ይተመርዐወት/ው⊡ ሸ	ስፅይቲ/ ₽ይ:□	ዝተመርዐወት/ወ፡□	ዝተፋተሐት/ሐ፡□		
5. Do you have any ch	nildren? No: 🗆	Yes: 🗆	If yes, how r	nany?		
ወሊድኪ/ካ ዶ?	አይወለድኩን	ክ፡፡፡፡፡፡ እው፡፡፡	🗋 እንድሕር እ	ወ ክንደይ		
6. Grade now:						
ሐዚ ክንደይ ክፍሊ	ኣለኸ/ኾ?					
7. Did you repeat any	of the grades up till nov	w? No: 🗆 Yes	: Which grad	e(s)?		
ክሳብ ሐዚ ኣብ ዝኾ	ካ ክፍሊ ደጊምኪ/ደጊ ያ	ካ ዶ ትልልጢ/'	ዮ? አይደንምኩን።	🗆 እመ፡🗆		
አብ ክንደይ ክ ፍሊ?						
8. Did you dropout in	any of the grades up til	l now? No: 🗆	Yes: 🗆 In which gra	ade(s)?		
ክሳብ ሐዚ ኣብ ዝኾን	ክፍሊ አቋሪፅኪ/ካ ዶ	ትፈልጢ/ዋ? አየ	՝ ՔՀծኩን։□ እወ			
9. Why did you repeat						
	ወይድማ ዘቋረፅክሉ/ካለ	- ምሽንደት እንታ	ጉይ እዩ?			
	,,	,,	,			
10. How many sibling	s do you have?	Sisters:	Bro	thers:		
ክንደይ አሕዋት አለ	\ወ.ኸ./ኻ?	አሓት/አንሳት	፡ ኣሕ	ዋት/አወዳት፡		
11. How many of you	r siblings go to school?	Sisters	:	Brothers:		
ትምህርቲ ዝተምሃ	ሩ አ ሕዋትኪ ክንደይ እ	ዮም? አጓላት	። ኣወ	ዳት፡		
12. Did your parents g	12. Did your parents go to school? Mother: Yes: No: Father: Yes: No:					
ወለድኸ/ኻ ትምህ	ርቲ ተ ጣ ሂሮም ዶ? አ	ዶ፡ እው፡□ አይብ	፦ምሃ ረ ትን፡□ አቦ	፡ እወ፡□ አይተምሃረን፡□		

ወለድኺ/ኻ ክሳብ ክንደይ ክፍሊ ተማሂሮም?

13. Up to what grade did your parents go to school?

Mother: _____

አዶ፡ _____

Father:

አቦ፡ _____

14. Do you think education is important? Yes: No: Why? ትምህርቲ ጠቓሚ ዶ ይመስለኪ?/ካ? አው፡፡ አይመስለንን፡፡ ንምንታይ?

15. Who motivate you and support your education morally? ናትኪ/ካ ምምሃር ብሞራል ዝደገፎን ዘበረታተዐክን/ካን መን እዩ?

16. With whom do you live when you go to school?

ትምህርቲ እንትትመዛሪ/ር ምስ መን ትነብሪ/ር ኔርኪ/ካ?

17. How do you manage your education financially? Who helps you with school expenses? Who feeds you? Do you work?

ትምህርትኺ/ኻ ከመይ ተመሓድርዮ/ሮ ብገንዘብ ደረጃ? ናይ ትምህርትኺ /ኻ ወፃኢ መን ይሽፍነልኪ/ካ? ስራሕ ኣለኪ/ካ ዶ?

18. If you are able to get a good result on your test do you think it is because of your choice to work hard, or is it because of eddil (chance/fate)? Explain.

ኣብ ፌተና ፅቡች ነዋቢ (ማርኪ) እንተረኺብኪ/ካ ጠንኪርኪ/ካ ንምስራሕ ብምምራፅኪ/ካ ድዩ ወይስ ብዕድል? ግለዒ/ግለፅ

19. Write a short essay about your wishes for the future (education, job, family/marriage, children, etc.)? ንመፃአ. እንታይ ክትገብሪ/ር ከምትደልዪ/ሊ ሓዒር ታሪክ ፀሓፊ/ፍ? (ከተመዛሪ/ር፣ ክትሰርሒ/ሕ፣ ቤተሰብ ክትምስርቲ/ት፣ ሓዳር ክትገብሪ/ር፣ ቆልዑት ክትወልዲ/ድ ወዘተ)

APPENDIX 2:				
Questionnaire: Household	d Pl	Place/ቦナ:		ለት:
1. Head(s) of the household?	♀ Female:□	♂ Male:□	S	hared:
መራሒ ስድራ?	ሰበይቲ:🗆 ሰ1	በአይ:□	ክልቲኦም	(ብሓባር):□
2. Marital status: Single:	Married	d: 🗆	Divorced: 🗆	Widowed: 🗆
ናይ ሓዳር ኩነታት: ዘይተመ	ርዓወት:🗆 በዓልቲ	ሓዳር:🗆 ዝል	ትሐት:□	ሰብአያ ዝሞታ:□
 If you are married, for which እንተዳኣ ተመርዒ ሽ. (ሓዳር Age at first marriage: ናይ መጀመርያ ዝተመርዐኸለ Do you know the legal age fo ንመርዓ ዝተሪ.ቸዴ ሕ.ጋዊ ዕደ ንምንታ.ይ? 	ጌርኪ) ንመበል ክንዴደ ሉ ሪድ መ: r marriage now? Girls	Boys	Is it righ	
6. Level of education: ክፍሊ ትምህርቲ: 7. Children: Girls: _	ሰበይቲ:	ሰብኣይ		
ቆልው: ደቂ አንስትዮ:				
8. Do you know about family pl ብዛሪባ ምጣነ ስድራ ትሬልዋ	anning? Yes: 🗆 No:	: 🗆 Would yo	u consider usir	

9. How many members (family and others) are there in the household (including yourself) now?

ክንደይ ኣባላት (ቤተሰብ ወይ ካልኦት) ኣለዉ ኣብዚ ገዛ (ምስ ባዕልኺ)ሐዚ? __

10. Current household members' age and family relation (f. ex. wife, husband, children, sister, uncle, grandmother, servant, etc.):

ሐዚ ዘለዉ ኣባላት እዚ ቤተሰብ ዕድመኦምን ዘለኩም ዝመድናን (ሰበይቲ፣ ሰብኣይ፣ ቆልዑ፣ ኣሕዋት፣ ኣኮ፣ እነሓነ፣ ሰራሕተኛ ወዘተ) ግለፅ:

- 11. What are the household's main sources of income? ናይዚ ገዛ ዋና ፍልፍል እቶት እንታይ እዩ?
- 12. Other sources of income? From family/relatives here or abroad, from seasonal work or aid? ካሊአ ፍልፍል አቶት እንተሃልዩ? ካብ ቤተሰብ? ኣብ ወፃኢ ካብ ዝርከቡ ኣዝማድ? ካብ ጊዜያዊ ስራሕ ወይ ድጋፍ (እርዳአታ)?
- 13. Have you been participating in any "packages" (agriculture, health, WAT)? Yes: No: Which packages? አብ ዝኾን ዓይነት ፓኬጅ ተሳቲፍኪዶ ትሌልጣ. (አብ ሕርሻ፣ ዋዕና፣ ማሕበር ደቂ ኣንስትዮ ወይድማ ካልኦት)? አው፡ አይሬልዋን፡ እንታይ ዓይነት ፓኪጅ?
- 14. Have you taken credit from Dedebit/Maret or others like WAT? Yes: No: For what purpose? ካብ ደደቢት/ማረት ወይ ካብ ማሕበር ደቂ አንስትዮ ልቓሕ ወሲድኪዶ ትራልጢ? እወ፡ ዶ አይፌልዋን፡ ንምንታይ ወሲድኪ?
- 15. Have you been elected to the House of peoples' representatives, the social court or other committees at tabia, wereda or regional level? Yes: No: When and what position(s)? ብደረጃ ጣብደ፣ ወረዳ፣ ክልል ንቤት ምኸሪ ተወከልቲ ህዝቢ፣ ንማሕበራዊ ቤት ፍርዲታት ወይ ንኻልኦት ኮሚቴ ተመሪፅኪዶ ትፊልጪ? አው፡ አይፊልዋን፡ መንዝን እንታይ ዓይነት ሓሳፍነትን ነይሩ?

16. Children's education

							P	ace of edu	cation H-t-	ምሃርክሉ/ካሉ	ቦታ		Job	Residence
Girl 3A	Воу Ф ⁹ .	Age (or died) ه۶:مه +	Marital status ኩንታት ሓዳር	Level of education ክፍሊ ትምህርቲ	Dropout /repetition ምቁራሪ/ምድ ንም	1-4	5-8	9-10	10+1/TVET	10+2/TVET	University ዩኒቨርስ ቲ	Abroad ወፃአ.	ስራሕ	እትነብረሉ <i>ዓዲ</i>

17. Do you think education is important?	Yes: (No: 🗆	Why?
ትምህርቲ ጠቓሚ ዶ ይመስለኪ?/ካ?	እ <i>ው</i> :□	አይመስለንን።	<u></u>	ታይ?

APPENDIX 3:

Holy days, holidays and fasting periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Tigray, according to the Ethiopian Calendar¹:

Holy days (beal):

Holy days every month for saints, angels and other divine entities in Tigray:

- 1st **Bahti** (less-significant marking of the first day of the month)
- 5th Abune **Gebrememfisqidus** (Ethiopian saint)
- 7th Selassie (Holy Trinity)
- 12th Angel Michel (Michael) /Abune Samiel (Ethiopian Saint)
- 14th Abune Aregawi (Ethiopian saint, especially significant in Tigray)
- 16th **Kidanemehret** (Saint Mary)
- 19th Angel Gebriel /Abune Iyezgi (Ethiopian saint)
- 21st **Mariyam** (Saint Mary)
- 23rd Saint Georgis
- 24th **Tekle Haymanot** (Ethiopian monk and saint)
- 27th Medhanialem (Yesus Christos)
- 29th Beal Ezgabiher (God)

Some villages in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda also revere local saints, like Abuna Thomas on the 3rd, Abune Filimina on the 8th, Abune Serekaberhan on the 18th, and others.

Holidays (awdeamet):

Meskerem 1 (September) Qidus Yohannes (Ethiopian New Year)
Meskerem 17 Mesqel (the recovery of the True Cross)
Tahsas 29 (December) Lidet (Christmas)
T'iri 11 (January) Timqet (Epiphany/Yesus' Baptism)
Variable from year to year: Fasika (Easter)
After 40 days Irget (Ascension of Christ)
After 10 days Teraklitis (Pentecost)
<u>Hamle 5</u> (July) Gubahariya (to commemorate execution of the disciples Petros/Peter and Paulos/Paul in Rome)
Nehase 16 (August) Mariyam (commemorates the death and resurrection of Saint Mary)

Fasting periods (tsom):

In addition to the longer fasting periods listed below, **Wednesdays** and **Fridays** are fasting days throughout the year.

Meskerem 26 (September) to <u>H</u>idar 5 (November) **Tsom Qusqwam** (not mandatory). <u>H</u>idar 15 (November) to Tahsas 28 (December) **Tsom Tahsas** or **Tsom Nebiyat**. Starting 14 days before the main fasting before Easter is **Tsom Nenowe** (3 days). **Tsom Arbea** before Easter is extended from 40 to 55 days in the Ethiopian Orthodox context. **Tsom Sene** or **Tsom Hawariyat** starts on the 51 days after Easter and lasts to 5 <u>Hamle</u> (July) (variable length every year depending on when Easter falls). Ne<u>hase 1</u> (August) to Ne<u>hase 15</u>, **Filseta**.

¹ The new year of the Ethiopian Calendar starts *Meskerem* 1 (11 September). The Ethiopian Calendar is seven years, eight months and ten days behind the Gregorian calendar. Every month has 30 days, the 5 remaining days (6 in a leap year), constitutes the 13th month, *P*'agumen.

APPENDIX 4: The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Article 35: Rights of Women

- 1. Women shall, in enjoyment of rights and protections provided for by this Constitution, have equal rights with men.
- 2. Women have equal rights with men in marriage as prescribed by this Constitution.
- 3. The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account, women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions.
- The State shall enforce the right of women to eliminate the influences of harmful customs. Laws, costumes and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited.
- 5. (a) Women have the right to maternity leave with full pay. The duration of maternity leave shall be determined by law taking into account the nature of the work, the health of the mother and the well-being of the child and family.(b) Maternity leave may, in accordance with the provisions of law, include prenatal

leave with full pay.

- 6. Women have the right to full consultation in the formulation of national development policies, the designing and execution of projects, and particularly in the case of projects affecting the interests of women.
- 7. Women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. In particular, they have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land. They shall also enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property.
- 8. Women shall have a right to equality in employment, promotion, pay, and the transfer of pension entitlements.
- To prevent harm arising from pregnancy and childbirth and in order to safeguard their health, women have the right of access to family planning education, information and capacity.

APPENDIX 5: Notes on transcription

To keep the confidentiality that I had promised, the transcription and translation process was moved from my study area in Asgede Tsimbla Wereda to the regional capital Mekelle and to the capital city Addis Ababa where there would be no obvious connections between the transcribers/translators and the women interviewed. The taped interviews were transcribed in Tigriña before translated into English. In cases where the transcribers did not hear/understand what was said, this has been marked with (...). If there were grammatical mistakes that could make meaning ambiguous, suggestions for a more correct word or inflection was suggested in square brackets [like this]. If there were long silences, people entering the room or children crying this was also written in brackets (child cries). Otherwise, I have followed Bourdieu's pragmatic attitude to academic transcription, where his focus on the communicative aspects of the taped interview allows for omitting what he calls linguistic tics since it can create confusion and obscure the transcription (Bourdieu 1999: 623). Since, as Bourdieu notes, most speakers 'do not speak like books' (ibid: 624), I have kept some language tics in the transcriptions/translations, in order to keep an oral touch to the texts. In the Tigrayan context beqa (actually Amharic) meaning 'that's it', or 'enough', malet iyu, which translates into 'meaning', 'it means' or 'that means', and haqey meaning 'am I right' or 'right' are the most usual ones. The inclination most people, possibly everywhere, have to use 'eh' 'ehr' 'mm' and the like when pondering in the act of speaking, or when searching for the right words have, however, been indicated with the use of ellipses, like this Bourdieu's interpretive attitude towards the transcription as a rewriting does also make sense, since the interview situation is not transcribable in its entirety unless one or more cameras are used. Likewise, the translators involved in this research project have noted that the interviewees do not always use correct grammar, and that not all the reasoning is consistent. In the case of grammatical errors, I have seen no gain in repeating these in the final English translation. Five of the interviews were conducted in English and, in line with the pragmatics above, grammatical errors have been corrected

l. Simplified Ethiosemitic Transliteration System	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	2. Transliteration system for Ethiosemitic languages with special letters and diacritics, with their unicode references.
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Appendix 6: A simplified Ethiosemitic Transliteration System¹

¹ <u>http://ices18.org/site/panels/transliteration/</u>

Doctoral Theses at The Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen

1980	Allen, H.M., Dr. philos.	Parent-offspring interactions in willow grouse (Lagopus L. Lagopus).
1981	Myhrer, T., Dr. philos.	Behavioral Studies after selective disruption of hippocampal inputs in albino rats.
1982	Svebak, S., Dr. philos.	The significance of motivation for task-induced tonic physiological changes.
1983	Myhre, G., Dr. philos.	The Biopsychology of behavior in captive Willow ptarmigan.
	Eide, R., Dr. philos.	PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AND INDICES OF HEALTH RISKS. The relationship of psychosocial conditions to subjective complaints, arterial blood pressure, serum cholesterol, serum triglycerides and urinary catecholamines in middle aged populations in Western Norway.
	Værnes, R.J., Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological effects of diving.
1984	Kolstad, A., Dr. philos.	Til diskusjonen om sammenhengen mellom sosiale forhold og psykiske strukturer. En epidemiologisk undersøkelse blant barn og unge.
	Løberg, T., Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological assessment in alcohol dependence.
1985	Hellesnes, T., Dr. philos.	Læring og problemløsning. En studie av den perseptuelle analysens betydning for verbal læring.
	Håland, W., Dr. philos.	Psykoterapi: relasjon, utviklingsprosess og effekt.
1986	Hagtvet, K.A., Dr. philos.	The construct of test anxiety: Conceptual and methodological issues.
	Jellestad, F.K., Dr. philos.	Effects of neuron specific amygdala lesions on fear- motivated behavior in rats.
1987	Aarø, L.E., Dr. philos.	Health behaviour and sosioeconomic Status. A survey among the adult population in Norway.
	Underlid, K., Dr. philos.	Arbeidsløyse i psykososialt perspektiv.
	Laberg, J.C., Dr. philos.	Expectancy and classical conditioning in alcoholics' craving.
	Vollmer, F.C., Dr. philos.	Essays on explanation in psychology.
	Ellertsen, B., Dr. philos.	Migraine and tension headache: Psychophysiology, personality and therapy.
1988	Kaufmann, A., Dr. philos.	Antisosial atferd hos ungdom. En studie av psykologiske determinanter.

	Mykletun, R.J., Dr. philos.	Teacher stress: personality, work-load and health.
	Havik, O.E., Dr. philos.	After the myocardial infarction: A medical and psychological study with special emphasis on perceived illness.
1989	Bråten, S., Dr. philos.	Menneskedyaden. En teoretisk tese om sinnets dialogiske natur med informasjons- og utviklingspsykologiske implikasjoner sammenholdt med utvalgte spedbarnsstudier.
	Wold, B., Dr. psychol.	Lifestyles and physical activity. A theoretical and empirical analysis of socialization among children and adolescents.
1990	Flaten, M.A., Dr. psychol.	The role of habituation and learning in reflex modification.
1991	Alsaker, F.D., Dr. philos.	Global negative self-evaluations in early adolescence.
	Kraft, P., Dr. philos.	AIDS prevention in Norway. Empirical studies on diffusion of knowledge, public opinion, and sexual behaviour.
	Endresen, I.M., Dr. philos.	Psychoimmuniological stress markers in working life.
	Faleide, A.O., Dr. philos.	Asthma and allergy in childhood. Psychosocial and psychotherapeutic problems.
1992	Dalen, K., Dr. philos.	Hemispheric asymmetry and the Dual-Task Paradigm: An experimental approach.
	Bø, I.B., Dr. philos.	Ungdoms sosiale økologi. En undersøkelse av 14-16 åringers sosiale nettverk.
	Nivison, M.E., Dr. philos.	The relationship between noise as an experimental and environmental stressor, physiological changes and psychological factors.
	Torgersen, A.M., Dr. philos.	Genetic and environmental influence on temperamental behaviour. A longitudinal study of twins from infancy to adolescence.
1993	Larsen, S., Dr. philos.	Cultural background and problem drinking.
	Nordhus, I.H., Dr. philos.	Family caregiving. A community psychological study with special emphasis on clinical interventions.
	Thuen, F., Dr. psychol.	Accident-related behaviour among children and young adolescents: Prediction and prevention.
	Solheim, R., Dr. philos.	Spesifikke lærevansker. Diskrepanskriteriet anvendt i seleksjonsmetodikk.
	Johnsen, B.H., Dr. psychol.	Brain assymetry and facial emotional expressions: Conditioning experiments.
1994	Tønnessen, F.E., Dr. philos.	The etiology of Dyslexia.
	Kvale, G., Dr. psychol.	Psychological factors in anticipatory nausea and vomiting in cancer chemotherapy.

	Asbjørnsen, A.E., Dr. psychol.	Structural and dynamic factors in dichotic listening: An interactional model.
	Bru, E., Dr. philos.	The role of psychological factors in neck, shoulder and low back pain among female hospitale staff.
	Braathen, E.T., Dr. psychol.	Prediction of exellence and discontinuation in different types of sport: The significance of motivation and EMG.
	Johannessen, B.F., Dr. philos.	Det flytende kjønnet. Om lederskap, politikk og identitet.
1995	Sam, D.L., Dr. psychol.	Acculturation of young immigrants in Norway: A psychological and socio-cultural adaptation.
	Bjaalid, IK., Dr. philos	Component processes in word recognition.
	Martinsen, Ø., Dr. philos.	Cognitive style and insight.
	Nordby, H., Dr. philos.	Processing of auditory deviant events: Mismatch negativity of event-related brain potentials.
	Raaheim, A., Dr. philos.	Health perception and health behaviour, theoretical considerations, empirical studies, and practical implications.
	Seltzer, W.J., Dr.philos.	Studies of Psychocultural Approach to Families in Therapy.
	Brun, W., Dr.philos.	Subjective conceptions of uncertainty and risk.
	Aas, H.N., Dr. psychol.	Alcohol expectancies and socialization: Adolescents learning to drink.
	Bjørkly, S., Dr. psychol.	Diagnosis and prediction of intra-institutional aggressive behaviour in psychotic patients
1996	Anderssen, N., Dr. psychol.	Physical activity of young people in a health perspective: Stability, change and social influences.
	Sandal, Gro Mjeldheim, Dr. psychol.	Coping in extreme environments: The role of personality.
	Strumse, Einar, Dr. philos.	The psychology of aesthetics: explaining visual preferences for agrarian landscapes in Western Norway.
	Hestad, Knut, Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological deficits in HIV-1 infection.
	Lugoe, L.Wycliffe, Dr. philos.	Prediction of Tanzanian students' HIV risk and preventive behaviours
	Sandvik, B. Gunnhild, Dr. philos.	Fra distriktsjordmor til institusjonsjordmor. Fremveksten av en profesjon og en profesjonsutdanning
	Lie, Gro Therese, Dr. psychol.	The disease that dares not speak its name: Studies on factors of importance for coping with HIV/AIDS in Northern Tanzania
	Øygard, Lisbet, Dr. philos.	Health behaviors among young adults. A psychological and sociological approach
	Stormark, Kjell Morten, Dr. psychol.	Emotional modulation of selective attention: Experimental and clinical evidence.

	Einarsen, Ståle, Dr. psychol.	Bullying and harassment at work: epidemiological and psychosocial aspects.
1997	Knivsberg, Ann-Mari, Dr. philos.	Behavioural abnormalities and childhood psychopathology: Urinary peptide patterns as a potential tool in diagnosis and remediation.
	Eide, Arne H., Dr. philos.	Adolescent drug use in Zimbabwe. Cultural orientation in a global-local perspective and use of psychoactive substances among secondary school students.
	Sørensen, Marit, Dr. philos.	The psychology of initiating and maintaining exercise and diet behaviour.
	Skjæveland, Oddvar, Dr. psychol.	Relationships between spatial-physical neighborhood attributes and social relations among neighbors.
	Zewdie, Teka, Dr. philos.	Mother-child relational patterns in Ethiopia. Issues of developmental theories and intervention programs.
	Wilhelmsen, Britt Unni, Dr. philos.	Development and evaluation of two educational programmes designed to prevent alcohol use among adolescents.
	Manger, Terje, Dr. philos.	Gender differences in mathematical achievement among Norwegian elementary school students.
1998 V	Lindstrøm, Torill Christine, Dr. philos.	«Good Grief»: Adapting to Bereavement.
	Skogstad, Anders, Dr. philos.	Effects of leadership behaviour on job satisfaction, health and efficiency.
	Haldorsen, Ellen M. Håland,	Return to work in low back pain patients.
	Dr. psychol. Besemer, Susan P., Dr. philos.	Creative Product Analysis: The Search for a Valid Model for Understanding Creativity in Products.
Н	Winje, Dagfinn, Dr. psychol.	Psychological adjustment after severe trauma. A longitudinal study of adults' and children's posttraumatic reactions and coping after the bus accident in Måbødalen, Norway 1988.
	Vosburg, Suzanne K., Dr. philos.	The effects of mood on creative problem solving.
	Eriksen, Hege R., Dr. philos.	Stress and coping: Does it really matter for subjective health complaints?
	Jakobsen, Reidar, Dr. psychol.	Empiriske studier av kunnskap og holdninger om hiv/aids og den normative seksuelle utvikling i ungdomsårene.
1999 V	Mikkelsen, Aslaug, Dr. philos.	Effects of learning opportunities and learning climate on occupational health.
	Samdal, Oddrun, Dr. philos.	The school environment as a risk or resource for students' health-related behaviours and subjective well-being.
	Friestad, Christine, Dr. philos.	Social psychological approaches to smoking.

	Ekeland, Tor-Johan, Dr. philos.	Meining som medisin. Ein analyse av placebofenomenet og implikasjoner for terapi og terapeutiske teoriar.
Н	Saban, Sara, Dr. psychol.	Brain Asymmetry and Attention: Classical Conditioning Experiments.
	Carlsten, Carl Thomas, Dr. philos.	God lesing – God læring. En aksjonsrettet studie av undervisning i fagtekstlesing.
	Dundas, Ingrid, Dr. psychol.	Functional and dysfunctional closeness. Family interaction and children's adjustment.
	Engen, Liv, Dr. philos.	Kartlegging av leseferdighet på småskoletrinnet og vurdering av faktorer som kan være av betydning for optimal leseutvikling.
2000 V	Hovland, Ole Johan, Dr. philos.	Transforming a self-preserving "alarm" reaction into a self-defeating emotional response: Toward an integrative approach to anxiety as a human phenomenon.
	Lillejord, Sølvi, Dr. philos.	Handlingsrasjonalitet og spesialundervisning. En analyse av aktørperspektiver.
	Sandell, Ove, Dr. philos.	Den varme kunnskapen.
	Oftedal, Marit Petersen, Dr. philos.	Diagnostisering av ordavkodingsvansker: En prosessanalytisk tilnærmingsmåte.
Н	Sandbak, Tone, Dr. psychol.	Alcohol consumption and preference in the rat: The significance of individual differences and relationships to stress pathology
	Eid, Jarle, Dr. psychol.	Early predictors of PTSD symptom reporting; The significance of contextual and individual factors.
2001 V	Skinstad, Anne Helene, Dr. philos.	Substance dependence and borderline personality disorders.
	Binder, Per-Einar, Dr. psychol.	Individet og den meningsbærende andre. En teoretisk undersøkelse av de mellommenneskelige forutsetningene for psykisk liv og utvikling med utgangspunkt i Donald Winnicotts teori.
	Roald, Ingvild K., Dr. philos.	Building of concepts. A study of Physics concepts of Norwegian deaf students.
Н	Fekadu, Zelalem W., Dr. philos.	Predicting contraceptive use and intention among a sample of adolescent girls. An application of the theory of planned behaviour in Ethiopian context.
	Melesse, Fantu, Dr. philos.	The more intelligent and sensitive child (MISC) mediational intervention in an Ethiopian context: An evaluation study.
	Råheim, Målfrid, Dr. philos.	Kvinners kroppserfaring og livssammenheng. En fenomenologisk – hermeneutisk studie av friske kvinner og kvinner med kroniske muskelsmerter.
	Engelsen, Birthe Kari, Dr. psychol.	Measurement of the eating problem construct.

	Lau, Bjørn, Dr. philos.	Weight and eating concerns in adolescence.
2002 V	Ihlebæk, Camilla, Dr. philos.	Epidemiological studies of subjective health complaints.
	Rosén, Gunnar O. R., Dr. philos.	The phantom limb experience. Models for understanding and treatment of pain with hypnosis.
	Høines, Marit Johnsen, Dr. philos.	Fleksible språkrom. Matematikklæring som tekstutvikling.
	Anthun, Roald Andor, Dr. philos.	School psychology service quality. Consumer appraisal, quality dimensions, and collaborative improvement potential
	Pallesen, Ståle, Dr. psychol.	Insomnia in the elderly. Epidemiology, psychological characteristics and treatment.
	Midthassel, Unni Vere, Dr. philos.	Teacher involvement in school development activity. A study of teachers in Norwegian compulsory schools
	Kallestad, Jan Helge, Dr. philos.	Teachers, schools and implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.
Н	Ofte, Sonja Helgesen, Dr. psychol.	Right-left discrimination in adults and children.
	Netland, Marit, Dr. psychol.	Exposure to political violence. The need to estimate our estimations.
	Diseth, Åge, Dr. psychol.	Approaches to learning: Validity and prediction of academic performance.
	Bjuland, Raymond, Dr. philos.	Problem solving in geometry. Reasoning processes of student teachers working in small groups: A dialogical approach.
2003 ∨	Arefjord, Kjersti, Dr. psychol.	After the myocardial infarction – the wives' view. Short- and long-term adjustment in wives of myocardial infarction patients.
	Ingjaldsson, Jón Þorvaldur, Dr. psychol.	Unconscious Processes and Vagal Activity in Alcohol Dependency.
	Holden, Børge, Dr. philos.	Følger av atferdsanalytiske forklaringer for atferdsanalysens tilnærming til utforming av behandling.
	Holsen, Ingrid, Dr. philos.	Depressed mood from adolescence to 'emerging adulthood'. Course and longitudinal influences of body image and parent-adolescent relationship.
	Hammar, Åsa Karin, Dr. psychol.	Major depression and cognitive dysfunction- An experimental study of the cognitive effort hypothesis.
	Sprugevica, leva, Dr. philos.	The impact of enabling skills on early reading acquisition.
	Gabrielsen, Egil, Dr. philos.	LESE FOR LIVET. Lesekompetansen i den norske voksenbefolkningen sett i lys av visjonen om en enhetsskole.
Н	Hansen, Anita Lill, Dr. psychol.	The influence of heart rate variability in the regulation of attentional and memory processes.

	Dyregrov, Kari, Dr. philos.	The loss of child by suicide, SIDS, and accidents: Consequences, needs and provisions of help.			
2004 V	Torsheim, Torbjørn, Dr. psychol.	Student role strain and subjective health complaints: Individual, contextual, and longitudinal perspectives.			
	Haugland, Bente Storm Mowatt Dr. psychol.	Parental alcohol abuse. Family functioning and child adjustment.			
	Milde, Anne Marita, Dr. psychol.	Ulcerative colitis and the role of stress. Animal studies of psychobiological factors in relationship to experimentally induced colitis.			
	Stornes, Tor, Dr. philos.	Socio-moral behaviour in sport. An investigation of perceptions of sportspersonship in handball related to important factors of socio-moral influence.			
	Mæhle, Magne, Dr. philos.	Re-inventing the child in family therapy: An investigation of the relevance and applicability of theory and research in child development for family therapy involving children.			
	Kobbeltvedt, Therese, Dr. psychol.	Risk and feelings: A field approach.			
2004 H		Localization of attention in the brain.			
	Løberg, Else-Marie, Dr. psychol.	Functional laterality and attention modulation in schizophrenia: Effects of clinical variables.			
	Kyrkjebø, Jane Mikkelsen, Dr. philos.	Learning to improve: Integrating continuous quality improvement learning into nursing education.			
	Laumann, Karin, Dr. psychol.	Restorative and stress-reducing effects of natural environments: Experiencal, behavioural and cardiovascular indices.			
	Holgersen, Helge, PhD	Mellom oss - Essay i relasjonell psykoanalyse.			
2005 ∨	Hetland, Hilde, Dr. psychol.	Leading to the extraordinary? Antecedents and outcomes of transformational leadership.			
	Iversen, Anette Christine, Dr. philos.	Social differences in health behaviour: the motivational role of perceived control and coping.			
2005 H	Mathisen, Gro Ellen, PhD	Climates for creativity and innovation: Definitions, measurement, predictors and consequences.			
	Sævi, Tone, Dr. philos.	Seeing disability pedagogically – The lived experience of disability in the pedagogical encounter.			
	Wiium, Nora, PhD	Intrapersonal factors, family and school norms: combined and interactive influence on adolescent smoking behaviour.			
	Kanagaratnam, Pushpa, PhD	Subjective and objective correlates of Posttraumatic Stress in immigrants/refugees exposed to political violence.			

	Larsen, Torill M. B. , PhD	Evaluating principals' and teachers' implementation of Second Step. A case study of four Norwegian primary schools.
	Bancila, Delia, PhD	Psychosocial stress and distress among Romanian adolescents and adults.
2006 V	Hillestad, Torgeir Martin, Dr. philos.	Normalitet og avvik. Forutsetninger for et objektivt psykopatologisk avviksbegrep. En psykologisk, sosial, erkjennelsesteoretisk og teorihistorisk framstilling.
	Nordanger, Dag Øystein, Dr. psychol.	Psychosocial discourses and responses to political violence in post-war Tigray, Ethiopia.
	Rimol, Lars Morten, PhD	Behavioral and fMRI studies of auditory laterality and speech sound processing.
	Krumsvik, Rune Johan, Dr. philos.	ICT in the school. ICT-initiated school development in lower secondary school.
	Norman, Elisabeth, Dr. psychol.	Gut feelings and unconscious thought: An exploration of fringe consiousness in implicit cognition.
	Israel, K Pravin, Dr. psychol.	Parent involvement in the mental health care of children and adolescents. Emperical studies from clinical care setting.
	Glasø, Lars, PhD	Affects and emotional regulation in leader-subordinate relationships.
	Knutsen, Ketil, Dr. philos.	HISTORIER UNGDOM LEVER – En studie av hvordan ungdommer bruker historie for å gjøre livet meningsfullt.
	Matthiesen, Stig Berge, PhD	Bullying at work. Antecedents and outcomes.
2006 H	Gramstad, Arne, PhD	Neuropsychological assessment of cognitive and emotional functioning in patients with epilepsy.
	Bendixen, Mons, PhD	Antisocial behaviour in early adolescence: Methodological and substantive issues.
	Mrumbi, Khalifa Maulid, PhD	Parental illness and loss to HIV/AIDS as experienced by AIDS orphans aged between 12-17 years from Temeke District, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: A study of the children's psychosocial health and coping responses.
	Hetland, Jørn, Dr. psychol.	The nature of subjective health complaints in adolescence: Dimensionality, stability, and psychosocial predictors
	Kakoko, Deodatus Conatus Vitalis, PhD	Voluntary HIV counselling and testing service uptake among primary school teachers in Mwanza, Tanzania: assessment of socio-demographic, psychosocial and socio-cognitive aspects
	Mykletun, Arnstein, Dr. psychol.	Mortality and work-related disability as long-term consequences of anxiety and depression: Historical cohort designs based on the HUNT-2 study
	Sivertsen, Børge, PhD	Insomnia in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment.

2007 V	Singhammer, John, Dr. philos.	Social conditions from before birth to early adulthood – the influence on health and health behaviour
	Janvin, Carmen Ani Cristea, PhD	Cognitive impairment in patients with Parkinson's disease: profiles and implications for prognosis
	Braarud, Hanne Cecilie, Dr.psychol.	Infant regulation of distress: A longitudinal study of transactions between mothers and infants
	Tveito, Torill Helene, PhD	Sick Leave and Subjective Health Complaints
	Magnussen, Liv Heide, PhD	Returning disability pensioners with back pain to work
	Thuen, Elin Marie, Dr.philos.	Learning environment, students' coping styles and emotional and behavioural problems. A study of Norwegian secondary school students.
	Solberg, Ole Asbjørn, PhD	Peacekeeping warriors – A longitudinal study of Norwegian peacekeepers in Kosovo
2007 H	Søreide, Gunn Elisabeth, Dr.philos.	Narrative construction of teacher identity
	Svensen, Erling, PhD	WORK & HEALTH. Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress applied in an organisational setting.
	Øverland, Simon Nygaard, PhD	Mental health and impairment in disability benefits. Studies applying linkages between health surveys and administrative registries.
	Eichele, Tom, PhD	Electrophysiological and Hemodynamic Correlates of Expectancy in Target Processing
	Børhaug, Kjetil, Dr.philos.	Oppseding til demokrati. Ein studie av politisk oppseding i norsk skule.
	Eikeland, Thorleif, Dr.philos.	Om å vokse opp på barnehjem og på sykehus. En undersøkelse av barnehjemsbarns opplevelser på barnehjem sammenholdt med sanatoriebarns beskrivelse av langvarige sykehusopphold – og et forsøk på forklaring.
	Wadel, Carl Cato, Dr.philos.	Medarbeidersamhandling og medarbeiderledelse i en lagbasert organisasjon
	Vinje, Hege Forbech, PhD	Thriving despite adversity: Job engagement and self- care among community nurses
	Noort, Maurits van den, PhD	Working memory capacity and foreign language acquisition
2008 V	Breivik, Kyrre, Dr.psychol.	The Adjustment of Children and Adolescents in Different Post-Divorce Family Structures. A Norwegian Study of Risks and Mechanisms.
	Johnsen, Grethe E., PhD	Memory impairment in patients with posttraumatic stress disorder
	Sætrevik, Bjørn, PhD	Cognitive Control in Auditory Processing

Carvalhosa, Susana Fonseca,	Prevention of bullying in schools: an ecological model
PhD	

2008 H	Brønnick, Kolbjørn Selvåg	Attentional dysfunction in dementia associated with Parkinson's disease.
	Posserud, Maj-Britt Rocio	Epidemiology of autism spectrum disorders
	Haug, Ellen	Multilevel correlates of physical activity in the school setting
	Skjerve, Arvid	Assessing mild dementia – a study of brief cognitive tests.
	Kjønniksen, Lise	The association between adolescent experiences in physical activity and leisure time physical activity in adulthood: a ten year longitudinal study
	Gundersen, Hilde	The effects of alcohol and expectancy on brain function
	Omvik, Siri	Insomnia – a night and day problem
2009 V	Molde, Helge	Pathological gambling: prevalence, mechanisms and treatment outcome.
	Foss, Else	Den omsorgsfulle væremåte. En studie av voksnes væremåte i forhold til barn i barnehagen.
	Westrheim, Kariane	Education in a Political Context: A study of Konwledge Processes and Learning Sites in the PKK.
	Wehling, Eike	Cognitive and olfactory changes in aging
	Wangberg, Silje C.	Internet based interventions to support health behaviours: The role of self-efficacy.
	Nielsen, Morten B.	Methodological issues in research on workplace bullying. Operationalisations, measurements and samples.
	Sandu, Anca Larisa	MRI measures of brain volume and cortical complexity in clinical groups and during development.
	Guribye, Eugene	Refugees and mental health interventions
	Sørensen, Lin	Emotional problems in inattentive children – effects on cognitive control functions.
	Tjomsland, Hege E.	Health promotion with teachers. Evaluation of the Norwegian Network of Health Promoting Schools: Quantitative and qualitative analyses of predisposing, reinforcing and enabling conditions related to teacher participation and program sustainability.
	Helleve, Ingrid	Productive interactions in ICT supported communities of learners
2009		
н	Skorpen, Aina Øye, Christine	Dagliglivet i en psykiatrisk institusjon: En analyse av miljøterapeutiske praksiser
	Andreassen, Cecilie Schou	WORKAHOLISM – Antecedents and Outcomes

	Stang, Ingun	Being in the same boat: An empowerment intervention in breast cancer self-help groups
	Sequeira, Sarah Dorothee Dos Santos	The effects of background noise on asymmetrical speech perception
	Kleiven, Jo, dr.philos.	The Lillehammer scales: Measuring common motives for vacation and leisure behavior
	Jónsdóttir, Guðrún	Dubito ergo sum? Ni jenter møter naturfaglig kunnskap.
	Hove, Oddbjørn	Mental health disorders in adults with intellectual disabilities - Methods of assessment and prevalence of mental health disorders and problem behaviour
	Wageningen, Heidi Karin van	The role of glutamate on brain function
	Bjørkvik, Jofrid	God nok? Selvaktelse og interpersonlig fungering hos pasienter innen psykisk helsevern: Forholdet til diagnoser, symptomer og behandlingsutbytte
	Andersson, Martin	A study of attention control in children and elderly using a forced-attention dichotic listening paradigm
	Almås, Aslaug Grov	Teachers in the Digital Network Society: Visions and Realities. A study of teachers' experiences with the use of ICT in teaching and learning.
	Ulvik, Marit	Lærerutdanning som danning? Tre stemmer i diskusjonen
2010 V	Skår Randi	l æringsprosesser i sykepleieres profesionsutøvelse
	Skår, Randi	Læringsprosesser i sykepleieres profesjonsutøvelse. En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer.
	Skår, Randi Roald, Knut	
		En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom
	Roald, Knut	En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences,
	Roald, Knut Lunde, Linn-Heidi	En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment. Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported
	Roald, Knut Lunde, Linn-Heidi Danielsen, Anne Grete	En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment. Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported academic initiative and perceived life satisfaction
	Roald, Knut Lunde, Linn-Heidi Danielsen, Anne Grete Hysing, Mari	En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment. Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported academic initiative and perceived life satisfaction Mental health in children with chronic illness Are good leaders moral leaders? The relationship between effective military operational leadership and
	Roald, Knut Lunde, Linn-Heidi Danielsen, Anne Grete Hysing, Mari Olsen, Olav Kjellevold	En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment. Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported academic initiative and perceived life satisfaction Mental health in children with chronic illness Are good leaders moral leaders? The relationship between effective military operational leadership and morals Friendship and learning. Entrepreneurship education
	Roald, Knut Lunde, Linn-Heidi Danielsen, Anne Grete Hysing, Mari Olsen, Olav Kjellevold Riese, Hanne	En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer. Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment. Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported academic initiative and perceived life satisfaction Mental health in children with chronic illness Are good leaders moral leaders? The relationship between effective military operational leadership and morals Friendship and learning. Entrepreneurship education through mini-enterprises. Evaluating the implementation of the Norwegian guidelines for healthy school meals: A case study

Reme, Silje Endresen	Common Complaints – Common Cure? Psychiatric comorbidity and predictors of treatment outcome in low back pain and irritable bowel syndrome
Helland, Wenche Andersen	Communication difficulties in children identified with psychiatric problems
Beneventi, Harald	Neuronal correlates of working memory in dyslexia
Thygesen, Elin	Subjective health and coping in care-dependent old persons living at home
Aanes, Mette Marthinussen	Poor social relationships as a threat to belongingness needs. Interpersonal stress and subjective health complaints: Mediating and moderating factors.
Anker, Morten Gustav	Client directed outcome informed couple therapy
Bull, Torill	Combining employment and child care: The subjective well-being of single women in Scandinavia and in Southern Europe
Viig, Nina Grieg	Tilrettelegging for læreres deltakelse i helsefremmende arbeid. En kvalitativ og kvantitativ analyse av sammenhengen mellom organisatoriske forhold og læreres deltakelse i utvikling og implementering av Europeisk Nettverk av Helsefremmende Skoler i Norge
Wolff, Katharina	To know or not to know? Attitudes towards receiving genetic information among patients and the general public.
Ogden, Terje, dr.philos.	Familiebasert behandling av alvorlige atferdsproblemer blant barn og ungdom. Evaluering og implementering av evidensbaserte behandlingsprogrammer i Norge.
Solberg, Mona Elin	Self-reported bullying and victimisation at school: Prevalence, overlap and psychosocial adjustment.
Bye, Hege Høivik	Self-presentation in job interviews. Individual and cultural differences in applicant self-presentation during job interviews and hiring managers' evaluation
Notelaers, Guy	Workplace bullying. A risk control perspective.
Moltu, Christian	Being a therapist in difficult therapeutic impasses. A hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of skilled psychotherapists' experiences, needs, and strategies in difficult therapies ending well.
Myrseth, Helga	Pathological Gambling - Treatment and Personality Factors
Schanche, Elisabeth	From self-criticism to self-compassion. An empirical investigation of hypothesized change prosesses in the Affect Phobia Treatment Model of short-term dynamic psychotherapy for patients with Cluster C personality disorders.
Våpenstad, Eystein Victor, dr.philos.	Det tempererte nærvær. En teoretisk undersøkelse av psykoterapautens subjektivitet i psykoanalyse og psykoanalytisk psykoterapi.

2011 V

	Haukebø, Kristin	Cognitive, behavioral and neural correlates of dental and intra-oral injection phobia. Results from one treatment and one fMRI study of randomized, controlled design.
	Harris, Anette	Adaptation and health in extreme and isolated environments. From 78°N to 75°S.
	Bjørknes, Ragnhild	Parent Management Training-Oregon Model: intervention effects on maternal practice and child behavior in ethnic minority families
	Mamen, Asgeir	Aspects of using physical training in patients with substance dependence and additional mental distress
	Espevik, Roar	Expert teams: Do shared mental models of team members make a difference
	Haara, Frode Olav	Unveiling teachers' reasons for choosing practical activities in mathematics teaching
2011 H	Hauge, Hans Abraham	How can employee empowerment be made conducive to both employee health and organisation performance? An empirical investigation of a tailor-made approach to organisation learning in a municipal public service organisation.
	Melkevik, Ole Rogstad	Screen-based sedentary behaviours: pastimes for the poor, inactive and overweight? A cross-national survey of children and adolescents in 39 countries.
	Vøllestad, Jon	Mindfulness-based treatment for anxiety disorders. A quantitative review of the evidence, results from a randomized controlled trial, and a qualitative exploration of patient experiences.
	Tolo, Astrid	Hvordan blir lærerkompetanse konstruert? En kvalitativ studie av PPU-studenters kunnskapsutvikling.
	Saus, Evelyn-Rose	Training effectiveness: Situation awareness training in simulators
	Nordgreen, Tine	Internet-based self-help for social anxiety disorder and panic disorder. Factors associated with effect and use of self-help.
	Munkvold, Linda Helen	Oppositional Defiant Disorder: Informant discrepancies, gender differences, co-occuring mental health problems and neurocognitive function.
	Christiansen, Øivin	Når barn plasseres utenfor hjemmet: beslutninger, forløp og relasjoner. Under barnevernets (ved)tak.
	Brunborg, Geir Scott	Conditionability and Reinforcement Sensitivity in Gambling Behaviour
	Hystad, Sigurd William	Measuring Psychological Resiliency: Validation of an Adapted Norwegian Hardiness Scale
2012 V	Roness, Dag	Hvorfor bli lærer? Motivasjon for utdanning og utøving.
	Fjermestad, Krister Westlye	The therapeutic alliance in cognitive behavioural therapy for youth anxiety disorders

	Jenssen, Eirik Sørnes	Tilpasset opplæring i norsk skole: politikeres, skolelederes og læreres handlingsvalg
	Johansen, Venke Frederike	Når det intime blir offentlig. Om kvinners åpenhet om brystkreft og om markedsføring av brystkreftsaken.
	Herheim, Rune	Pupils collaborating in pairs at a computer in mathematics learning: investigating verbal communication patterns and qualities
	Vie, Tina Løkke	Cognitive appraisal, emotions and subjective health complaints among victims of workplace bullying: A stress-theoretical approach
	Jones, Lise Øen	Effects of reading skills, spelling skills and accompanying efficacy beliefs on participation in education. A study in Norwegian prisons.
2012 H	Danielsen, Yngvild Sørebø	Childhood obesity – characteristics and treatment. Psychological perspectives.
	Horverak, Jøri Gytre	Sense or sensibility in hiring processes. Interviewee and interviewer characteristics as antecedents of immigrant applicants' employment probabilities. An experimental approach.
	Jøsendal, Ola	Development and evaluation of BE smokeFREE, a school-based smoking prevention program
	Osnes, Berge	Temporal and Posterior Frontal Involvement in Auditory Speech Perception
	Drageset, Sigrunn	Psychological distress, coping and social support in the diagnostic and preoperative phase of breast cancer
	Aasland, Merethe Schanke	Destructive leadership: Conceptualization, measurement, prevalence and outcomes
	Bakibinga, Pauline	The experience of job engagement and self-care among Ugandan nurses and midwives
	Skogen, Jens Christoffer	Foetal and early origins of old age health. Linkage between birth records and the old age cohort of the Hordaland Health Study (HUSK)
	Leversen, Ingrid	Adolescents' leisure activity participation and their life satisfaction: The role of demographic characteristics and psychological processes
	Hanss, Daniel	Explaining sustainable consumption: Findings from cross-sectional and intervention approaches
	Rød, Per Arne	Barn i klem mellom foreldrekonflikter og samfunnsmessig beskyttelse
2013 V	Mentzoni, Rune Aune	Structural Characteristics in Gambling
	Knudsen, Ann Kristin	Long-term sickness absence and disability pension award as consequences of common mental disorders. Epidemiological studies using a population-based health survey and official ill health benefit registries.

Strand, Mari