Gender, Gender (In)Equality, and Smallholder farming in Northern Ethiopia

Discourses and Practices

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Abstract

This research unravels the ways in which gender is understood, articulated, and enters into small holder farming in Ethiopia and how these conceptions, understandings, and articulations create and re-create a system of exclusionary practices that maintain a particular articulation of what the farmer is and who can be one. To do this, the study employs qualitative data from multiple methods including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with farmers, observations and field notes, daily activity logs filled by young boys and girls in farming households, key informant and expert interviews with policy makers and implementers, as well as a discursive analysis of policy documents dealing with gender and agriculture in Ethiopia. Conceptually, the study adopts Butler's notion of gender performativity which frames gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time".

The findings show that gender identity in farming communities is conceived in terms of and expressed through the performance of gender appropriate agricultural tasks and knowledge. Agricultural skills and knowledge are segregated along gender lines with men and women learning gender appropriate knowledge and skills starting from an early age through a lengthy process of situated learning that resembles an extended apprenticeship. In symbolism and language, 'the farmer' is constructed as male. Access to key agricultural knowledge and skills is mediated through the plough. The exclusive association of the plough with men and the exclusion of women from its use pushes women in to the fringes of farming and casts them in supportive positions; one of helpers as opposed to farmers. In addition, the study shows that there is a need to problematize the concept of gender equality. Equality as a concept is heavily layered and its descriptive as well as normative contents are either loosely defined or highly contested. In this regard, the findings of this study reveal that there are multiple articulations of what it means for men and women to be equal and/or unequal; but these seemingly different, sometimes divergent, articulations have not led to a meaningful articulation or contestation of the concept itself or pose any meaningful challenges to the existing gender regime.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Since the early 2000's, the issue of gender in agriculture in the Global South has been a principal subject of interest among researchers, various actors in the international development aid industry, and policy makers alike. A lot of this attention has been mainly dedicated to illustrating the existence of an immense "gender gap in agriculture", the costs to productivity of this gender gap, and how this gap should be best addressed. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for example, dedicated its 2011 annual flagship report entirely to this topic by issuing a report entitled "Women In Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development". The report points to the existence of a 'gender gap' in the agricultural sectors of many countries in the Global South, and highlights the need to and benefits to development of addressing this gap.

> "[t]he agriculture sector is underperforming in many developing countries, and one of the key reasons is that women do not have equal access to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. We must promote gender equality and empower women in agriculture to win, sustainably, the fight against hunger and extreme poverty" (FAO, 2011, p. vi).

There are numerous empirical studies that sufficiently highlight the existence of this gender gap in agriculture (Quisumbing et al., 2014). From the vast literature dealing with the issue of gender and small holder farming in the sub Saharan African region, it has been more or less established that women farmers have more limited access to land rights and agricultural services as compared to men (Akanji, 2013; Daley, Dore-Weeks, & Umuhoza, 2010; Doss, 2001; Holden, Deininger, & Ghebru, 2011; Jackson, 2003; Kevane & Gray, 1999; Gebru, 2011; Razavi, 2003; Yngstrom, 2002). The existence of differences in productivity, technology adoption, and access to services between

women and men farmers has also been sufficiently documented (Ajani & Igbokwe, 2013; Buchy & Basaznew, 2005; Carr, 2008; Croppenstedt, Goldstein, & Rosas, 2013; Doss, 2001, 2002; Doss & Morris, 2000; Kebede, 2009; Mogues et al., 2009; Peterman, Quisumbing, Behrman, & Nkonya, 2011; Tiruneh, Tesfaye, Mwangi, & Verkuijl, 2001). Despite these proven difficulties and challenges, a number of studies have also shown that women farmers make essential contributions to improving food security (Gawaya, 2008; Ibnouf, 2013; Kebede, 2009; Scanlan, 2004). It is argued that addressing this "gender gap" is essential not only because women make up a substantial portion of the farming population in all developing country regions and make essential contributions to agriculture and rural economic activities; but also because this gender gap negatively impacts the productivity of women farmers and agricultural productivity as a whole. The consensus, therefore, is that closing the gender gap in agriculture is important not only because women, as citizens, should have an equal claim with men on the protections, opportunities and services provided by their governments and the international community but also because the potential gains that could be achieved by doing so can increase agricultural production, food security and bring about broader aspects of economic and social welfare.

While the existence of a gender gap in agriculture has been shown over and over again, and the need for this gap to be addressed is widely agreed upon, not as much has been done in terms of understanding how this gender gap comes into being in the first place. How gendered differences and inequalities are constructed, legitimized and why and how they continue to persist, often despite tremendous social and economic changes in many societies, still remains understudied and poorly understood. How gender enters in to play in everyday agricultural life, the embodied nature of agricultural activities, the positioning of men and women in relation to farming activities and implements, understandings of gender itself and gender equality within agricultural life, and how all these relate to, shape, and affect policy and gender equality interventions have thus far attracted little attention as topics of

research. Instead of studying the nuanced ways gender enters in to play and affects agricultural life and the way agricultural life can in turn serve to reinforce, reify even, existing notions of gender; blame is often and too quickly placed on "societal" or "cultural" norms in their entirety.

Both "gender" and "equality" as concepts are rarely problematized and are, instead, taken to be self-evident. The whats and hows of gender equality, either in general or as it relates to agriculture, are rarely explicated and the extremely diverse nature of gender relations among different societies and even within the same society is all too often ignored. We rarely ever ask, it seems, what exactly is the end goal of gender equality and how does one get there? With the ascension of the issue of gender equality in to the international development discourse as a top priority agenda, this tendency to take gender equality as is, without deconstructing and debating what it is, has become even more of a trend in the last decade and a half as the diverse actors involved in the international development and aid industry rally to take up the concept and integrate it into their programming.

1.2. Problem statement

Despite the large body of academic work that has appeared in the last 30 years which has deconstructed and destabilized the traditional sex/gender dichotomy, a lot of the current research which deals with 'gender in agriculture' or 'gender and agriculture' is still built on this sex/gender and nature/culture dualism. Quisumbing et al. (2014) for example comment that the concepts of "sex" and "gender" can be confusing to researchers and practitioners "because they are often used inconsistently and interchangeably when, in fact, they refer to two distinct concepts" and proceed to provide a working definition of both which states:

> "Sex refers to the innate biological categories of male or female and is thus a fixed category rooted in biological differences. On the other hand, gender refers to the social roles and identities associated with

> what it means to be a man or a woman in a given society or context" (Quisumbing et al., 2014, p. 6).

This dualistic framing of gender that ties sex to the biological and gender to the social/cultural is by and large the norm in much of the literature which deals with gender and agriculture. The sex/gender dichotomy arose in the 1970s out of the then pragmatic need to detach gender-based discriminations and social inequalities from their "biological" justifications. And there is no doubt that the sex/gender paradigm and the decoupling of the social from the presumed to be biological was extremely useful in questioning women's positioning in society. In that regard, it was, and to some extent still continues to be, an important tool for political mobilization. However, this paradigm has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism in the last three decades.

The sex/gender paradigm has been criticized for conflating two different conceptual traditions and modes of distinction (Heinamaa, 2012); for being too simplistic and reductionist in its dualism (Butler, 1993; Fausto-Sterling, 2000); for reproducing the same problematic dualistic thinking that undermines feminist aims by replicating androcentric oppositions that have been used to justify women's oppression; such as between mind vs body, culture vs nature and reason vs emotion, among other binaries (Butler, 1990; Grosz, 2020; Prokhovnik, 2012). It has also been increasingly becoming clear that the sex-gender distinction makes little sense as there are no tenable distinctions between the nature/culture, biology/construction differentiations upon which the whole sex/gender dichotomy is founded upon (Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 2018; Grosz, 2020; Prokhovnik, 2012; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987). The sex/gender dichotomy has also been criticized for further complicating mobilization and action by casting men and women as always opposite to one another through its dualistic, oppositional framing of the two. It reifies women and men and leads to all kinds of gender essentialisms as it presupposes, or results in, the assertion that all women differ from all men in some respect; and that all women are like all

other women; that there is some biological "essence" or "essences" that are constitutive of being a woman or a man (Heinamaa, 2012).

Recent feminist work has also documented how the sex/gender binary has not only been assumed but also actively enforced (Butler, 1990, 2004; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). The normativity of the sex/gender paradigm is such that it actively shapes both our bodies and behaviors rather than passively classifying them. The validity of the purported "sexual difference" upon which the category "sex" is built on has come under increasing scrutiny by feminists; leading some to assert that the category "sex" is no less socially constructed than "gender" is. The more we look for a simple physical basis for "sex," the more it becomes clear that "sex" is not a pure physical category. In this regard, Butler has famously argued that "sex" is "gender" since all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004); and Fausto-Sterling (2000, p. 4) has similarly argued that the biological aspect of sex is no less socially constructed than gender is since "the bodily signals and functions we define as male or female come already entangled in our ideas about gender".

Despite these criticisms of the sex/gender paradigm, research on the topic of gender in/and agriculture continues to adopt this problematic dichotomy and has failed to problematize the "gender" in gender in/and agriculture. Not only that, it continues to treat gender as the principal, even at times only, "causal variable" in the gender and agriculture equation and has largely failed to see or has ignored the inter-implication[1] between the two. As much as gender affects and shapes agriculture, agriculture also affects and shapes gender and gender relations. Gender is, as Butler (1990) has famously pointed out, something we do rather than something we are. And, farming is a way of life, not just an occupation or a means of income, especially in traditional agrarian communities in the Global South, including Ethiopia. It provides a way of being and becoming; it affixes meaning and purpose to one's way of life and

[1] I borrow the term "inter-implication" from Jagger (2015) who uses it in relation to the ways the material and the symbolic are inter related and one cannot be understood in separation from the other.

the things that people do. In this respect, agriculture provides the overall context in which people live out their gendered lives; as men and women, doing what men and women do, in the manners that men and women do them. If we understand gender to be performative in the way that Butler (2004) suggests; that it, as not only consisting of but consisted by the repetitive, iterative, ritualized acts; this then suggests that gender itself is constituted by agriculture and agricultural work. In this regard, I argue that gender conceived in this manner allows for an investigation of not just how gender enters into and shapes farming but also how farming shapes gender itself. Gender conceived as a repletion of stylized acts has the potential to unravel how different agricultural activities come to constitute, reinforce, and reaffirm one's gender.

In addition to problematizing the "gender" in gender and agriculture, I also argue that there is a need to problematize the concept of equality that is invariably raised whenever there is discussion of gender; be it in relation to agriculture or elsewhere. Gender as a concept is invariably and inextricably tied with power. As such, we are talking about gendered forms of inequalities whenever we are discussing gender. Equality, however, is a heavily layered concept with enormous interpretative potential and its descriptive as well as normative meanings are either loosely defined, highly contested, or as is often the case, a mix of both. Equality, in this context gender equality, is difficult to define and articulate largely owing to the fact that there is no clear agreement over what it entails. Krook and True (2012, p. 105) for example, contend that universal norms such as equality diffuse precisely because they encompass different meanings to fit in with a variety of contexts. They argue that "norms diffuse precisely because — rather than despite the fact that — they may encompass different meanings, fit in with a variety of contexts, and be subject to framing by diverse actors".

The question of addressing the gender inequalities that exist in agriculture necessarily presumes that we not only understand the nature of these inequalities but

also that we can rally support to the cause of making agriculture more gender equal. It is in the process of doing so that we encounter the multiple layers of meanings that gender equality has, at all levels extending from the international to the local, involving a variety of actors at the various levels. In the process of deconstructing the various meanings of equality, and the processes by which equality comes to assume these meanings, it is not at all unlikely that we will encounter articulations of equality that are far removed or even counter to the ideal of equality at large or the particular end goals of the gender equality we seek in relation to agriculture. It is therefore important to interrogate the various meanings that this ideal of equality comes to assume at the different levels of articulation, ranging from the political and policy level to the grassroots and the local, through a process of "fixing, shrinking, stretching and or bending" depending on the local context (Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2009).

1.3. Overview of the research's purpose and research questions

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, it aims to investigate and understand the ways gender enters into, shapes, influences, or structures small scale family farming in Ethiopia. While on the same subject, the study also aims to investigate the ways in which small scale family farming discursively constructs gender. To do this, I investigate not only local understandings of gender and gendered identity but also how these are sculpted by farming and farming activities. Second, the research also investigates understandings of equality and inequality as they relate to gender and farming both in the national (policy) discourse and at local community levels. I investigate the different ways in which gender equality and inequality are articulated, represented as, and contested by different actors at different levels of the political structure.

Research Questions

Within the above aims, the study aims to answer the following research questions.

i. How does gender enter into and shape small scale family farming in Ethiopia?

i.1. How does gender come in to play in everyday farming practices and activities? In what (differing) ways do men and women experience life as farmers?

i.2. What are the positions of men and women in relation to different farming activities, and how do men and women come to occupy these positions?

ii. How does family farming shape the construction of gender and gender identity?

ii.1. How is gender and gendered identity understood and articulated in relation to farming in general and specific farming activities and tasks?

ii.2. What specific activities, tasks, knowledges, tools, and spaces constitute identity as a man or a woman in relation to farming?

ii.3. To what extent can the performance of specific farming activities and tasks be seen as the reaffirmation, celebration, or contestation/rejection of one's gendered position in farming?

iii. How are understandings of gender and gender (in)equality formulated, presented, contested or reproduced at different levels?

iii.1. How are gender differences and gender equality understood, articulated, justified, and acted upon at different levels?

iii.2. Are there aspects or dimensions of equality or inequality that are considered problematic? By whom? Why?

iii.3. Are there differences, divergences, and/or contestations between understandings and articulations on gendered difference and gender equality at the various levels?

iii.4. What implications do these have for current policy and interventions in the area of gender equality in agriculture?

1.4. Methodology

Given the purpose of the study and the research questions, I adopt a qualitative methodology informed by post-structuralist theory. I come from and subscribe to the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm of social enquiry and my methodology in this research is aimed at enabling me to explore, to deconstruct, and to understand – with the possibility of enabling action that promotes greater justice and inclusion. I have chosen a methodology that combines critical ethnography with the insights of poststructuralism and postcolonial, posthumanist thought. Unlike traditional, realist ethnography, critical ethnography combines social enquiry with a strong element of advocacy in an attempt to bring to the front, and advocate for the emancipation of, groups marginalized by systems of power, prestige, privilege, and authority (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 147).

This research unravels the ways in which gender is understood, articulated, and enters into small holder farming in Ethiopia and how these conceptions, understandings, and articulations create and re-create a system of exclusionary practices that maintain a particular articulation of what the farmer is and who can be one. To do this, I have used a wide variety of qualitative methods including interviews and focus group discussions with farmers (both men and women), field notes of my interactions with farmers, daily activity logs filled by young boys and girls in farming households, key informant interviews with policy makers and implementers, as well as a discursive analysis of policy documents dealing with gender and agriculture in Ethiopia. The choice to focus in the Amhara region of Ethiopia was made due to the fact that I had previously examined, albeit superficially, the importance of the ox plough, both as a technological tool and a cultural symbol, in small holder farming in the region[2]. In fact this research project was inspired by and is a continuation of my

[2] https://www.future-agricultures.org/publications/working-papers-document/becoming-a-young-farmer-in-ethiopia-processes-and-challenges/

previous exploratory work on the subject. In addition, I chose to focus in the region since Amharic is my native language; and I was intimately familiar with the culture, traditions, and more importantly, the farming practiced in the region having spent my childhood in various rural parts of the Amhara region. This was an asset I wanted to capitalize on.

In total, I conducted six focus group discussions and 15 individual in-depth interviews with farmers in Chertekel. The focus groups comprised of two sets (one with men and another with women) featuring three categories of farmers - young, middle aged, and old. The 12 individual interviews were held with seven men and five women farmers aged between 26 and 60. Out of these, two men and two women lived without a partner having been divorced or separated. The rest represented typical rural families at various stages of the family cycle – from young families with infant children to families spanning three generations. All focus groups and individual interviews were held in well secluded locations that provided appropriate privacy to participants and were recorded with a digital audio recorder. The purpose of the audio recording and its future use, including who will have access to the recording, was explained and verbal consent obtained at the beginning of the interviews/discussions. Although I record personally identifying information such as the first names, ages, and social statuses of participants in field notes and diaries, these were kept separately from other digital records including audio recordings and photographs. Pseudo names were substituted in place of the real names of participants after the transcription of interviews.

Key informant interviews were held with personnel who occupy key positions in the government structure; starting from the lowest level of the political structure, the *kebele*, and extending all the way up to the federal. A total of 25 key informant interviews were conducted (seven at the Chertekel *kebele* level, six at the Gozamen *wereda*[3] and East Gojjam zone administrative levels in Debre Markos, four at the

[3] A *wereda* (district) is the third-level administrative division in Ethiopia.

Amhara regional government level in the city of Bahir Dar, and eight at the federal level in Addis Ababa). The purpose of the key informant interviews was to capture the ways gender and gender equality discourses are understood, narrated, and acted upon at each level of the structure. Participants were selected purposively with the main criteria being occupying a position within the state structure which in one way or another deals with agriculture and/or gender issues.

In order to get a picture of the different on farm and off farm activities that children and young boys/ girls take part in, I selected (with the help of teachers) a group of 10 boys and 10 girls between the ages of 14 and 18 from the local high school and asked them to keep a log their daily tasks. I developed a simple table with four columns where they could write down what tasks and activities they were engaged in during a particular day, where the task was carried out, how long it took and who else, if any, took part in that specific task.

Audio recordings from the individual interviews and focus groups were first transcribed in their original Amharic verbatim and later translated in to English. The translation was made in a manner that preserved the structure, content, and contextual meaning of the original Amharic transcriptions with the corresponding block of Amharic text appearing alongside the English when I felt the English translation did not adequately reflect the original. These interview texts, together with the textual data described above constitute the main data that this thesis is built on. The data analysis is done following the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) whereby I investigated the text (both policy narrative texts and interview texts) to investigate (1) the ways in which gender, gendered identity, and gender (in)equality within the context of small holder farming are constructed, reproduced, and/or naturalized at various levels of the social – political nexus, from the local to the national; and (2) how agricultural work and performance constitutes and is constituted by the discursive construction of gendered identity. With the first, the focus is on the "discursive reproduction of dominance" (van Dijk, 2003, p. 87) and

with the later on the discursive formation of gendered identity through performance and performativity.

To organize the data at the textual level, I identified three interrelated orders of discourse surrounding (1) gender and gendered identity, (2) farming and who or what the farmer is, and (3) what it means for men and women to be equal. Within and between these three orders of discourses, I used lexical analysis – looking at both lexical fields, as well as lexical choices. What does the vocabulary of a text say? What kind of words are used and what kind are avoided? Is there a predominance of particular kinds of words, and why have these particular kinds of words become more acceptable/palatable than others? In other words, querying what kind of identities, values, performances, ways of being are being signified in the lexical fields as well as lexical choices – in a way, seeking the implicit or indirect meanings in the text (Van Dijk, 2015). In relation to the latter two, I also looked for instances of overlexification and suppression (lexical absence) with regards to how they are presented as; instances of structural opposition between classes of concepts; the use of rhetorical devices such as imagery and representations; and salience and suppression in the construction of what it means to be a male/female farmer and what it means for men and women to be equal.

1.5. Limitations of the study

In the views of some, this study may lack the rigor that is normally expected of a typical discourse analysis when it comes to the linguistic aspects of the method. But where it lacks in rigor, I believe it excels in detail and context curtesy of the ethnography. To the extent that the text is interrogated with the tools of CDA, analyzed, and interpreted, it is being done so not in isolation from the context and the author but within the rich context that ethnography provides. As Gee (2011) notes, discourse analysis is "the study of language-in-use" and context is an important element of that. In recognition of the important place of history in not only shaping

discourse but also in understanding why certain discourses are dominant, I have also incorporated an element of historicity to the discourses – tracing when and why certain discourses emerged and why they continue to be dominant. This combination of a historically grounded ethnography with the tools of CDA, I believe, makes my analysis and interpretation robust.

I also do not adhere to any one specific method or school of thought. Throughout this thesis, I have opted for utility and potency of theory and method over theoretical and methodological orthodoxy. I do not believe my work is unique in this regard, and my intention here is not to highlight this but rather to own up to the unorthodoxy of my method and to concede to the possible criticism that may be levied against me in this regard.

1.6. Organization of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, I present a detailed discussion of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that have informed this study in Chapter 2. I trace the sex/gender dichotomy to its origins and discuss its past and present utility vis-à-vis the numerous criticisms it has been put under, especially in the last four decades. I then present Butler's conception of gender as performative and discuss the implications such a conception has including the problematic aspects it entails. Chapter 2 ends with my justifications for adopting the Butlerian conception of gender performativity for this study. In Chapter 3, I discuss the various ontological and epistemological stands which have relevance to this study and clarify my own ontological and epistemological standpoints.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodological choices I made in the research process and the justifications for these choices; as well as the particular methods used in the study, and the manner in which the data was obtained, organized and analyzed. The chapter presents the fieldwork process in detail and the decisions and choices I made at each turn of the process. It ends with a critical reflection on my own positions as the

researcher, both as a cultural insider and outsider, and as a man; and how these may have impacted the fieldwork and the data analysis.

Chapter 5 presents the historical background and context to the study and I discuss the historicity of gender and gender relations in Ethiopia from a historical point of view. This chapter is more of an original work rather than a literature review in so far as I attempt to address not only the historicity of gender in Ethiopia but also trace the origins of the gender (in)equality debate in Ethiopia. Continuing from Chapter 5, Chapter 6 picks up the question of how gender and gender equality came to be a concern in the political discourse and discusses how the question of gender (in)equality has been framed both in the broader policy sphere as well as in relation to gender and agriculture. Chapter 6 also discusses the reasons behind the various discourses around gender and gender equality and concludes with my reflections on what purposes and whose interests these policy discourses serve.

Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the nature of gender in agricultural work and the various ways gender equality as it relates to agriculture is understood and articulated at the grassroots level. Chapter 7 focuses on the organization of agricultural work and the centrality of the ox-plough in agriculture, both as a technological tool and a discursive construct. It discusses the symbolic construction of the farmer and the positioning of men and women in this discursive construction. It also discusses how farming knowledge and skills are acquired in a process of "situated learning" and how boys and girls come to acquire different and separate knowledge and skill sets and the implication this has on who can be a farmer, both in practical terms as well as symbolism.

Chapter 8 discusses the various ways equality as it relates to gender and agriculture is understood and the manner in which these understandings are articulated at the local level. The chapter also discusses the purposes these articulations serve in so far as they allow for certain actions while ruling out others and the implication this has on gender equality in agriculture. Chapter 9 then concludes the thesis with a summary

of the main points that emerge from this study and their implications for further research, policy, and action.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

2.1. Gender equality: an unquestioned axiom or an empty signifier?

Promoting gender equality and empowering women was one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the UN in the year 2000. These goals were later superseded by the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN and its member states in 2015. The goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women from the MDGs was carried over to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as SDG5. While similar to MDG3, the previous gender related goal of the MDG, the gender equality related goal of the SDG aspired to go even further. Whereas MDG3 aimed to "[p]romote gender equality and empower women", SDG5 sets the goalpost at nothing short of "[achieving] gender equality and [empowering] all women and girls" as well as putting to an end "all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere"[4]. Notwithstanding the welcome shift from the arguably modest goal of "promoting" gender equality to the more ambitious commitment of "achieving" it; SDG5, much like SDG3, chose not to dwell on the key question of what actually constitutes gender equality.

So, let us pose a few seemingly naïve questions here: what exactly is gender equality? And how does one go about either promoting or achieving it – depending on whichever phrasing one prefers to use. In its description of SDG5, the Division for Sustainable Development (UNDSD)[5], the UN's body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the SDGs, treats the matter quite straightforwardly. It simply states; "[g]ender inequality persists worldwide", and that it deprives "women and

[4] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5 accessed on 09/05/2018

[5] In its mission statement the UNDSD states that it "seeks to provide leadership and catalyse action in promoting and coordinating implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/about.html - accessed on 09/05/2018

girls of their basic rights and opportunities". "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", the UNDSD tells us, "will require more vigorous efforts, including legal frameworks, to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination that often results from patriarchal attitudes and related social norms"[6].

We can discern the following three articulations from the above text regarding gender and gender (in)equality. First is the statement that gender inequality persists worldwide. Of particular importance here is the use of the word *persists* which has the dictionary definition "to go on resolutely or stubbornly in spite of opposition, importunity, or warning"[7]. Hence, we can take this statement to mean that gender inequality continues to exist in spite of our (best) efforts to make the situation otherwise. But what do we mean by gender inequality? And perhaps more importantly, why does it persist? The statements that come next gives us a few clues about this and constitutes the second part of the articulation; gender inequality is seen as and defined in terms of deprivations of basic rights and opportunities. The key term here is deprivation – "the state of being kept from possessing, enjoying, or using something"[8] – which in this case is basic rights and opportunities. At this point, it would be pertinent to ask what these basic rights and opportunities are? The UNDSD does not elaborate on these further but it is safe to assume that this is a reference to the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; as well as the various other international and regional conventions and protocols adopted since then - such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)[9]. Of note here is the fact that there is no single, universally agreed upon list of these fundamental rights, and even less so for what constitutes fundamental opportunities.

[6] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5 accessed on 09/05/2018
[7] Merriam Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/persist
[8] Merriam Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deprivation
[9] http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/women/ accessed on 09/05/2018

As a third and final point in the articulation by the UNDSD, "patriarchal attitudes and related social norms" are said to be the reason for the persistence of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination. Furthermore, these attitudes and social norms are described as "deeply rooted", and as requiring "more vigorous efforts, including legal frameworks" in order to counter. There is little to say on this except, perhaps, to point out the exceptionally vague language used. One can note, from the foregoing text, the UN's articulation does not really say much about what gender equality is, and says even less on what gender itself is. This manner of speaking about gender and gender equality is not unique to the UN, it holds true for most texts across the development aid industry. Beneath the seemingly self-evident importance of the goal of gender equality, and the unanimity with which it is voiced by all involved across the development world, there is immense confusion about what is meant by gender, gender equality, or women's empowerment, as these terms are rarely articulated clearly.

Rather than being the self-evident, unanimously accepted, clear and consistent concept that it is presented to be, gender equality is, at best, an ambiguous, loosely defined, and deeply contested concept (Arnfred, 2011; Cornwall, 2003; Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2004, 2007; Harcourt, 2016; Kabeer, 2015; McEwan, 2001). Sometimes, these ambiguities arise from tensions between the global and the local when norms that are seemingly universal traverse boundaries. Such norms are transformed when they cross cultural and political boundaries and find local articulations that may differ from the universal in significant ways (Østebø & Haukanes, 2016; Østebø, 2015). But more often than not, the ambiguity starts at the conceptual level, on how gender itself is understood, and ideological debates over why gender equality matters in the first place (Moore, 1994). Despite these contestations and the many critical debates on the issue, one particular articulation of what gender is and what gender equality ought to mean has gained tremendous traction among actors in the development aid industry over the last 50 years. And

while it may not be explicitly acknowledged, and in fact it rarely is, gender equality as presented by the UN which we saw earlier and by many other actors in the development aid industry is based on this particular understanding of gender; one based on a sex/gender dichotomy that conceives of sex as biological layer upon which gender as a social role is built. How and under what circumstances this distinction emerged, why and how it came to enjoy a particularly hegemonic status in a field that is known for its fluidity of concepts and theories, and the extent to which this approach is sound and useful – theoretically, methodologically, and politically are issues I address in the remainder of this chapter.

2.2. Where it all began: the sex/gender dichotomy

At the heart of virtually all discussions about gender in the field of development – be it conceptual, theoretical, methodological, or interventionist - is a distinction between sex and gender. Sex in this distinction is defined as the "natural" features of the body, that of being male or female, while gender is understood to be the social roles and norms governing how a body with certain sexual features (male or female) ought to actor or behave (Connell, 2009). In much of their use, the two concepts are also defined in oppositional terms to one another; i.e., gender is what sex is not. Sex is seen as natural, biological, immutable, socially and politically insignificant; while gender is seen as having the opposite of these attributes. Sex is seen as something we have or are, while gender is seen to be something we do. This dualistic and oppositional differentiation between sex and gender is deeply rooted in the Cartesian legacy that formulated a distinction between the mind and body; and, by extension, between the natural and the social (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1987; Delphy, 1993; Edwards, 1989; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Grosz, 2020; Heinamaa, 2012; Heinämaa, 2011; McEwan, 2001; Mohanty, 1988; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987).

Although the use of gender as a conceptual construct to denote differences between the sexes that were thought to have their origins outside of nature or biology

first emerged in the early 1930s, it did not mature until the 1950s when it was popularized by the works of American Psychologist John Money (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). But this emergence was itself a product of another development which predates it by at least a century; the appearance in the 19th century of a new dimorphic conception of sex which articulated two clear-cut and oppositionally framed bodies – that of the male and the female. The human body was not always understood in binary and oppositional terms as it has been in the last two centuries. For much of the history of European thought, sexual difference was seen as a set of relatively unimportant differences within what Laqueur (1992) calls "the one-sex body." Female sexual organs, for example, were seen to be perfectly homologous to male ones, only inside out.

This model did not imply equality; woman was still a lesser man, "just not a thing wholly different in kind". Since the Enlightenment, however, males and females came to be seen as different in kind, with this leading to many social and political consequences. This new 'two-sex model' of the human body was key in providing the elements for the sex/gender conceptualisation which emerged in the mid-20th century. First, it firmly established the concept of two distinct, naturally and biologically shaped, immutable and oppositional sexes. This in turn provided the ground up on which gender as a concept emerged, separate but closely tied to sex, originally in the form of a normative 'sex role'.

The concept of a 'social role' - a socially provided script for individual behaviour, first learned and then enacted – had already been popularized by the 1930s and 40s through the works of Charles Cooley and Talcott Parsons. The standard Parsonian view saw roles as structures within a social system - as "sets of normative expectations specifying the attitudes and actions that are appropriate for actors in each role category or position (Secord, 1982, p. 33). This provided the perfect ground for the conceptualization of gender as a social role. By the 1940s, the terms 'sex role', 'male role' and 'female role' were in common use among American sociologists (Connell,

1987, p. 30). The sex/gender dichotomy soon became standard from the 1950s onwards, largely owing to the influence of works by John Money, Margaret Mead, and Bronislaw Malinowski (Heinamaa, 2012). Mead, for example, argued that most societies divide the universe of human characteristics into two, and attribute one half to men, and the other to women (Delphy, 1993). Although Mead observed this division to be quite arbitrary, she did not discuss its implications on the different statuses of men and women. She neither commended nor condemned it – only alluding to what she believed were its advantages for society, culture, and civilisation (Delphy, 1993).

Both Malinowski and Mead, through their respective works in the 1920s and 30s, showcased the range of ways in which different cultures dealt with sex and gender. Their work, by bringing home the exotic, was important in in dramatizing the idea of social scripting for western readers and imaginations (Connell, 1987, p. 31). There were others who popularised the sex/gender distinction. Edwards (1989) credits American psychiatrist Robert Stoller as having introduced the distinction between sex and gender which he understood as the biological and cultural aspects of the differences between men and women in his research on transsexualism in the 1960s and 70s. For Stroller, gender even had primacy over sex in the formation of individuals' identity as masculine or feminine persons. But the sex/gender distinction and the study of gender as sex roles largely remained confined to academia, in the words of Connell (1987, p. 32) "an academic backwater", until it was picked up and repurposed by the feminist movements of the early 1960s.

2.3. Feminist appropriation of the sex/gender dichotomy

For the feminist movement of the 1960s, the sex/gender dichotomy and the conceptualisation of gender as a social role provided the means by which women's apparent low status in society could be decoupled from their nature and be attributed to societal norms and the social structure. Separating the two enabled questioning and

critically examining the later. Accordingly, Connell (1987) argues that while De Beauvoir had already framed the issue of gender around the subordination of women as far back as 1949 in her ground-breaking book "The Second Sex", it was not until the arrival of the new feminism at the end of the 1960s that this framing gained traction and replaced the relatively unproblematic and politically inert Parsonian conception of gender as sex roles. But even with this new framing, the oppositional constitution of the sex/gender dichotomy still continued; and with it the privileging of what was seen to be the biological – and therefore natural - over the social.

Connell (1987) remarks that arguments about gender were plagued by an assumption that what is biological or 'natural' was somehow more real than what is 'social'. The later was seen to be artificial since it was socially created - whoever or whatever may be behind this creation – family, media, schools etc. This, obviously, was not quite what feminism wants but had to live with since it provided a particularly sound argument for the amendment of the social, artificial part of the dichotomy – if it is socially created, there is no reason that it cannot be amended[10]. And it is exactly this political utility of the sex/gender paradigm and gender conceived as sex roles which made it popular. It led to a great deal of research and theorizing on what gender is, how biologically determined, socially insignificant sex gave rise to socially significant gender. A broad spectrum of theories, which can best be collectively referred to as "theories of learning" as Heinamaa (2012) calls them, have proposed to explain how gender emerges as the learned and adopted way of construing and executing sex characteristics. In these theories, gender is claimed to result from conditioning - learning gender appropriate behaviour through reinforcement, encouragement, discouragement, imitation, discipline, and coercion. Institution such as the family, the media and schools are seen as having vital importance in carrying out this process of gender conditioning.

[10] This continues to be an important rallying point for feminism, albeit in slightly different articulations; for example see Andrea Cornwall's arguments for strategic essentialism in Cornwall (2003)

Aligned with this group of theories came a particular brand of feminism which has often been labelled as "liberal feminism". This brand of feminism attributes women's apparent disadvantaged position in society to stereotyped customary expectations held by men and internalized by women. These stereotypes are seen to be promoted and internalized through families, schools, mass media and other 'agencies' of socialisation (Connell, 1987, p. 34). The solution then is breaking down the stereotypes: for instance, by giving girls better training and more varied role models, by introducing equal opportunity programs and anti-discriminatory legislation, or by freeing labour markets. As Connell points out, a large volume of literature has appeared in this vein, much of it academic but a good deal of it also focused on introducing policy measures and interventions intended to advance the cause of equality and women's empowerment.

Most articulations of this brand of feminism assert that being a man or a woman means enacting a gender role definitive of one's sex – the sex role. As Connell (1987, pp. 48-49) explains, this way of talking about gender was, and still continues to be, attractive in a number of ways. It made it possible to decentre biological assumptions and explanations as to why men and women act differently. It proposed this to be a result of the way men and women are held to and respond to different social expectations. It also provided a link between social structure and the formation of personality. It offered a relatively straight forward framework for describing the insertion of individuals into social relations through role learning, and more broadly, through socialization. In this sense, masculine and feminine character are nothing more than internalisations of socialization into male and female roles. This led to an explosion of interest in the people and institutions responsible for this learning and internalisation intent on not only understanding this link but also proposing a theory of action for political reform. It was reasoned that if the subordination of women is largely a result of role expectations, the obvious path forward then is to change these expectations. This, it was proposed, can be done through a variety of formalised

interventions such as the introduction of counter-sexist curricula in schools, anti-gender discrimination laws, equal opportunity policies, and 'affirmative action' measures (Connell, 1987, p. 49).

Despite these appeals, sex roles theory also brought with it some serious conceptual difficulties. The seemingly deterministic nature of the role expectations framework is one of its most glaring shortcomings but it is far from the only one. Among several other conceptual quagmires it run into, it failed to adequately explain why occupants of counter positions apply sanctions and rewards for role appropriate and inappropriate performances in the first place. As Connell (1987) points out, it is tricky to explain this by reference to their own role expectations or one would descend into an "infinite regress" of this exact explanation. It would be equally tricky to attribute this to individual will and voluntarism since that would lead one to question whether roles theory is a social theory at all if that was the case. As Connell puts it, roles theory "comes right up to the problem [of] the relationship between personal agency and social structure [and] evades it by dissolving structure in to agency" (Connell, 1987, p. 50).

Another significant shortcoming of roles theory lies in its inability to deal with what lies behind the presumed differences between males and females by taking the differentiation as a given. Gender taken as sex role naturalises gender to such an extent that it completely hides power inequalities. Connell (1987, p. 50), for example, points this out by observing we do not speak of 'race roles' or 'class roles' as we do with sex roles and gender roles but rather treat the former as forms of inequalities. Gender taken as sex roles naturalizes the inherent power inequalities that lie underneath the differentiation. By taking what is common as normative, sex roles theory legitimizes the status quo. It completely misses what gender is about in this regard and fails to see what is 'normative' is only a definition of what the holders of social power wish to have accepted as the norm (Connell, 1987, p. 52).

2.4. Problematizing the sex/gender dichotomy

There is no doubt that the sex/gender paradigm and the decoupling of the social from the biological was extremely useful in questioning and then challenging women's position in society. It was and still continues to be an important tool for political mobilisation. As I have shown at the beginning of this chapter, it also continues to occupy a privileged position in much of the current thinking about gender and gender inequality in the development aid industry. But this political expediency has come at a price. The very validity of the sex/gender dichotomy, as well as the way it severely limits our thinking about the nature of gender and gender inequality have been pointed out since, at least, the 1990s.

At the conceptual level, the critique of the sex/gender dichotomy has come from several angles and the objections raised to it are diverse. The differentiation between sex and gender conflates two ideas which are logically distinct. Heinamaa (2012) labels these as 'the substantial and criterial' modes of distinction between sex and gender. While both present a clear conceptual distinction between two sexes and two genders, they do so in different ways and following two modes of differentiation. The substantial method follows the traditions of the classic distinction between body and mind, soma and psyche, the physical and mental. The criterial method, on the other hand, follows another classical tradition of differentiation between the natural and the cultural, between what is permanent versus what is changing, what is natural versus artificial, what is given versus made, and what is real versus fictitious. Accordingly, the first sees sex as the bodily setting of a gendered soul; the later sees sex as the raw material that nature provides for the cultural production of gendered artefacts, constructs and fabrications. While these distinctions may appear frivolous, they do have important implications on the ways in which we understand both the sex-gender distinction and, more importantly, our construction of gender as a concept.

Following the mind-body distinction, the substantial tradition places sex in the realm of differences in the biology/physiology of men and women; and gender in the realm of their mental and behavioural functionings. The criterial distinction follows the nature/culture differentiation and looks at the underlying causes of differences first; and places all differences between men and women that are thought to have originated in nature in the realm of sex and those that are considered a result of social and cultural norms and practices in the realm of gender. As such, the features of men and women are distinguished and classified solely on the basis of their causal origin or genesis. Consequently, whereas the substantial definition specifies the contents of the two categories sex and gender, the criterial definition leaves the contents of each category for empirical and critical inquiries to decide. Heinamaa (2012) illustrates for example, if it turns out that some hormonal or cerebral difference between men and women turns out to be the result of complex interactions between biological and socio-cultural factors, these differences would by definition be sex differences according to the substantial differentiation and gender differences according to the criterial differentiation. As such, the two categories of sex and gender do not always correspond with one another in both modes of differentiation. Heinamaa (2012) further notes that the two categorizations are often conflated in use, which further problematizes the matter[11].

In addition to the above discussed conflation of two different conceptual traditions and modes of distinction, a lot of authors have questioned the very validity of the sex-gender differentiation. The main arguments made here, and there are several, are that the differentiation is simplistic, not valid, and that it leads to a number of quite problematic outcomes. The sex aspect of the distinction, for example, is simplistic in so far as the female and male bodies are seen to fall in to two neatly demarcated categories, which they have been shown not to (Butler, 1993; Fausto-

[11] In way of a demonstration, Heinaämaa provides a particular definition of gender by Anthony Giddens where gender qualities are defined in reference to two qualifiers; first as being of a non-bodily, non-biological origin, and second as originating from social interactions; thereby combining both traditions.

Sterling, 2000). The dualistic nature of the dichotomy is also criticised for being a mere reproduction of the politically problematic dualistic thinking that undermines feminist aims.

The sex/gender distinction is criticised for reflecting and replicating androcentric oppositions that have been used to justify women's oppression; such as between mind vs body, culture vs nature and reason vs emotion (Butler, 1990; Grosz, 2018, 2020; Prokhovnik, 2012). It has also been argued that the sex-gender distinction makes little sense as there are no tenable distinctions between the nature/culture, biology/construction differentiations upon which the whole sex/gender divide is founded upon (Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 2020; Prokhovnik, 2012). Scheper-Hughes & Lock (1987) also questioned this simplistic dichotomy and the mind/body, social/natural dualities upon which this binary division was founded. They offered three ways of conceptualising the body based on three different theoretical approaches and epistemologies: phenomenology (individual body, the lived self), structuralism and symbolism (the social body), and poststructuralism (the body politic). At the heart of their work was a critique of what they call the Cartesian legacy and the manner in which western science presupposed, and projected a fundamental opposition between spirit and matter, mind and body, and what is considered real and unreal. They note that this mind/body dualism, and often opposition, does not exist alone in western epistemology; it exists along with and is closely related to other conceptual oppositions such as those between culture and nature, passion and reason, individual and society. They argue that this oppositional epistemology is but one among many systems of knowledge regarding the relationship between mind, body, culture, nature, and society; and provide several examples of other, non-western, civilizations that held epistemologies where by these entities are believed to exist in harmony with one another and feed in to each other. In these alternative epistemologies, they note, these entities are seen in monistic rather than in dualistic terms.

In addition to making the sex/gender dichotomy conceptually problematic, this dualistic, oppositional framing further complicates mobilisation and action by casting men and women as always opposite to one another. As Heinamaa (2012) notes, commonalities between women and men as human beings are thrown out of the equation when gender identities are cast in such oppositional terms. The framing of an oppositional power relationship between men-in-general and women-in-general limits the analytical power of the concept of patriarchy by making it impossible to make sense of the oppression of men as well as women.

The sex/gender paradigm also reifies women and men and leads to all kinds of gender essentialisms. The implications of adopting such a rigid sex/gender paradigm is that it presupposes, or perhaps results in, the assertion that all women are different from all men in some respect – that there are aspects of gendered identity and gendered experience that are constitutive of being a woman or a man. This disregards the particular ways women and men of various ages, colours, cultures, classes, and sexual orientations experience gendered identity and establish a particular experience as normative. This later point was made particularly clear in Chandra Mohanty's scathing critique of the manner in which European and north American feminists universalised their experiences (Mohanty, 1988) and Young's equally critical take on the same topic a few years later (Young, 1994). As Young observes, "much feminist theorizing has exhibited privileged points of view by unwittingly taking the experience of white middle-class heterosexual women as representative for all women" because it was assumed that women formed a single group with common experiences, attributes, or oppressions (Young, 1994, p. 715).

Post-colonial theories of gender, as well as black and "other" feminisms rose out of this criticism and have thrived in the decades since. But traces of the same problem can be found even in these new feminisms. Arguments against the universalising tendencies of western, euro-centric feminism are found along with overly generalising remarks about, for example, all African women from the

experiences of a few, or the gender configurations of a particular African society. A good example here is Oyěwùmí (1997) who asserts that the "woman question" is a Western one, and not a proper lens for viewing African society. In the same vein, Lugones (2010) has argued that European gender structures were imposed on the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and "gender" in this sense is a product of the colonial experience. While these critiques have value, their universalising tendencies about all African women, all African or Indigenous societies is as unfortunate as that of the western feminisms and feminists that they set out to critique.

One more important point needs to be made regarding the normativity of the sex/gender paradigm. Recent feminist work has documented how the sex/gender binary has not only been assumed, but also enforced (Butler, 1990, 2004; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). The normativity of the sex/gender paradigm is such that it actively shapes both our bodies and behaviours rather than passively classifying them. As Fausto-Sterling puts it "our bodies are too complex to provide clear-cut answers about sexual difference. The more we look for a simple physical basis for "sex," the more it becomes clear that "sex" is not a pure physical category. What bodily signals and functions we define as male or female come already entangled in our ideas about gender" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 4). There is ample evidence on how gender norms shape our bodies in important ways. One of the most interesting ways in which Foucauldian power analysis has been employed in the field of gender studies can be found in the analysis of the way societies regulate, or even sculpt, the bodies of men (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987; Young, 1980, 2005).

Thinking about gender in a manner that is entirely detached from bodily, biological existence is therefore likely to be problematic since part of what it means to be a woman or a man is to be recognized to have a certain kind of body (Witt, 2011). But at the same time, those biological processes or sexual and reproductive functions are complex and culturally mediated. As Connell (1987, p. 64) notes, "the relationship between the body and social practice is a crucial issue for the theory of gender". It is

unwise to relegate the body to an unimportant second place in conceptualising gender. So, where does this leave the sex/gender dichotomy? It is clear that we can no longer fruitfully use it. But can we get rid of it all together? I explore one alternative which rejects the sex/gender divide altogether that I explore in the next section.

2.5. Moving beyond the sex/gender binary: Butler and gender as performative

One of the earliest critics of the sex/gender dichotomy, Delphy (1993) questioned the theoretical need as well as soundness of the sex/gender dichotomy which she felt was simply presupposed and never examined. For her, most work on gender, including most feminist work, has been working on the basis of an unexamined presupposition - that sex presupposed gender. She concedes that this presupposition had enabled, or at the very least facilitated, the gains which feminism has made. However, she adds, this presupposition is "historically explicable, theoretically unjustifiable, and […] its continued existence is preventing us from rethinking gender in an open and unbiased way" (Delphy, 1993, p. 1).

Perhaps unbeknownst to Delphy, Butler had already published her ground-breaking book "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity" in 1990 which thoroughly examined the conceptual soundness as well as the political utility of the sex/gender dichotomy. Heavily drawing from the works of Jacques Lacan (1901 – 1981), Michael Foucault (1926 – 1984), and Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004); and borrowing from John Austin's concept of speech as "performative utterances" (Austin, 1962; 1970) Butler (1990) argues that there was simply no sex that has already not been gender all along; and that what we take as sex can be shown to have been gender itself since, as Hood-Williams and Harrison (1998) put it, "sex was no less a discursive construction than gender". For Butler, gender then is the discursive means by which sexed nature is produced and established as pre-discursive; prior to culture, as if it were a politically neutral surface on which culture acts (Butler, 1990, p. 11). She

asserts gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex, but must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established.

While Butler was not the first to question the sex/gender binary, it is fair to say that her work did far more damage to its continued existence than that of any other. Even before Butler came in to the scene, "the sexed body" was no longer considered as a natural given. But the fact that there was a body upon which society inscribed its norms was more or less accepted, only the nature and manner of gender embodiment was debated. A lot of post 1970 feminist work, heavily influenced by the Foucauldian conception of power, has for example emphasised the manner in which societies discipline male and particularly female bodies through self-policing. The existence of male and female bodies, both in the physical individual and social ideal type types, was not questioned. The assumption that there must be a something that precedes these constructs and passes as their raw material was still there (Heinamaa, 2012). Butler turned this on its head and pointed out that these body disciplining practices are in fact the very processes by which sexed and gendered subjects come into existence in the first place.

Butler argued that since all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence, and since there is no existence that is not social, "there is no such thing as a natural pre-discursive body that pre-exists its cultural inscription" (Salih, 2002). This then leads to another assertion which lies at the centre of her concept of gender performativity – that gender, rather than being what someone is or has, is instead something that one does. Put quite simply, her theory of gender performativity takes gender to be a doing rather than a (state of) being, an act; or more precisely, a sequence of acts; a verb rather than a noun; a "doing" rather than a "being" (Butler, 1990).

Butler also, quite problematically for most feminists, went further than dissolving the sex/gender dichotomy. She questioned the very notion of a gendered identity and the very subject matter of feminism. "There is no gender identity behind

the expressions of gender" she boldly stated. The identity is, according to her, "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p. 34). Butler, like Foucault, sees discourses as productive of the identities they appear to be describing. The classic example of this she gives is the announcement of a new born baby. When the midwife picks up a new born and announces that it is a boy or a girl, she is not simply reporting an already determinate state of affairs; but rather taking part in a practice which constitutes that state of affairs. Butler's thinking here is inspired by and borrows heavily from - as she herself notes - Jacques Derrida's reading of Kafka's parable "Before the Law,"[12]. "There", she notes in the preface to the second edition of her book,

> "the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labour under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates"(Butler, 1999, pp. xiv - xv).

In this way, Butler comes to the realisation that sex is gender, and gender is performative in the sense that it produces the very phenomena that it anticipates. The category of biological sex does not exist, cannot exist, outside of the category of gender. She argues early in her book that "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'pre-discursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (Butler, 1999, p. 11). Gender, rather than being an expression of some inner core, is something that constitutes the core it appears to express in its performances. It would therefore make no sense, as far as Butler is concerned, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, since sex itself is a gendered category. "Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural

[12] In Udoff (1987). Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary Readings. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex; gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" (Butler, 1999, p. 11).

Butler argues that although gender norms may acquire an apparent naturalness in their iteration, this naturalness is never more than an appearance (Butler, 1993, p. 95). This iterability is what gives gender norms their seemingly natural state and is the key to understanding her notion of performativity. She stresses that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability - a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. Iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event; but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint; under and through the force of prohibition and taboo. Since gender then is a matter of such a repetitive performance, and congeals over time to produce what it appears to describe, she argues, there is no necessary link between gender and a particular bodily type or configuration (Butler, 1999, pp. 43-44). In fact, Butler concludes, sex is and has always been gender.

Having collapsed the sex/gender dichotomy thus and reduced sex to gender, Butler then proceeds to show in great detail how gender is a performative entity that produces what it purports to be. Gender, she argues is performative in so far as it is a collection of performative acts that congeal over time to produce the effect of a coherent internal core where no such core exists. Gender norms are constituted performatively and internalized subsequently to produce the effect of an inner core, without relying on some *a priori* interiority.

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (Butler, 1999, p. 173).

This does not, however, exclude the experience of a stable or determined gender identity. In her book "Undoing Gender" (2004), which came as a follow up to "Gender Trouble" (1990); Butler states "some ... performative accomplishments claim the place of nature or claim the place of symbolic necessity, and they do this only by occluding the ways in which they are performatively established"(Butler, 2004, p. 209). Although Butler has expanded on and clarified her concept of gender performativity in subsequent work since "Gender Trouble", it still remains somewhat ambiguous and contentious. In the preface to the second edition of "Gender Trouble", Butler herself admits that "it is difficult to say precisely what performativity is" since her own views in what "performativity" might mean have changed over time and also because many others have taken it up and given it their own formulations. Despite this, however, she hints the following two things to be central to understanding the performative nature of gender. First is that the performativity of gender revolves around the way in which "the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself". Secondly, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body". Together, these two states produce a situation where what we take to be "an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body". She asserts that her notion of performativity shows that "what we take to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures" (Butler, 1999, pp. xiv - xv).

2.6. The thorn in performativity: the question of individual subjectivity and agency

One of the most illuminating aspects of Butler's notion of performativity is the way in which it unsettles the sex/gender dichotomy and allows us to critically reflect on how this binary is maintained, perpetuated, and naturalised including by the very feminism(s) that set out to challenge it. By opening up the 'natural' as the 'naturalised',

her analysis broadens our understanding of the political. It also resolves essentialist dilemmas that have plagued gender studies and feminism for as long as these have existed. As much as her analysis opens up the natural and unmasks it for the political that it is, gender conceived as performativity offers little in way of activism both at the level of the individual subject and at the collective in the form social movements. This has been one of its enduring weaknesses and one that has attracted an immense amount of criticism, some of it very hostile[13]. In fact, Butler's notion of performativity destroys the very subject of feminism by pointing out that; (1) there is no actor behind the act of gender performativity; and (2) feminist approaches that distinguish between sex and gender fail to recognize how a binary male/female of sexed bodies is produced through discourse in the first place -and thereby end up reproducing the very same discourse that establishes sex as pre-discursive and natural.

It is important to note that Butler treats subjects as effects of discourse in the Foucauldian tradition. Subjects, understood in this manner, are "the resulting effects of rule-bound discourse or a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that manifest through a compulsion to repeat or resignify dominant discourses" (Nelson, 1999, p. 338). But at the same time, Butler maintains that this should not be taken to mean that subjects are determined by discourses. She insists that her conception of performativity, while still constrained by dominant discourses, allows for some semblance of individual subjectivity and agency. If gender involves a repetition of stylised acts and the resignification of gender norms through performance, and if this resignification is itself regulated by dominant discourses; the site for social and political change lies in the displacement of these dominant discourses through a 'slippage' within the process of repetition (Butler, 1990, p. 30; Nelson, 1999, p. 338). The problem here is that according to Butler, the slippage cannot be intentional or conscious. Such intentionality for Butler would imply the subject lies 'outside'

[13] See for example Martha Nussbaum's scathing criticism of Butler in Nussbaum (1999). The professor of parody: The hip defeatism of Judith Butler. https://newrepublic.com/article/150687/professor-parody

power/discourse matrices which wouldn't be possible since there is no pre-discursive identity. In Butlerian gender performativity, it is the stylized repetition of acts (in this case gendered acts) which founds and consolidates the (gendered) subject. As Butler puts it:

> indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame – an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject (Butler, 1999, p. 179).
>
> In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practices by which discourse produces the effects that it names (Butler, 1993, p. 2).

A number of Butler's critics have accused her of 'killing off' the subject and the political passivity and potentially nihilistic tendency of her notion of gender as performative. She is heavily criticised for neglecting the material and political aspects of gender inequality (Salih, 2002, p. 11). Her conception of subjectivity and agency have proven to be quite problematic for most to either understand or accept. Nelson (1999) for example argues that "[a]s Butler theorizes it, performativity forecloses inquiry into why and how particular identities emerge, … and the role of subjects in accommodating or resisting dominant, fixed subject positions" (p.339).

This is an important point to ponder on. The mantelpiece of Butler's deconstruction of the gender/sex dichotomy hinges not only on recognizing that sexed bodies do not exist outside of gendered discourses, but also on the assertion that the notion of a sexed body acting 'to construct' gender ideology is merely another juridical fiction. Butler is adamant in maintaining that "it is not possible to oppose the "normative" forms of gender without at the same time subscribing to a certain normative view of how the gendered world ought to be" (Butler, 1999, pp. xx-xxi). Where then is the space for resistance and change? This seemingly powerless existence of the subject in Butlerain gender performativity is quite hard to digest.

Obviously, the need to reflect on how the gender world ought to be is unavoidable for any exercise that aims to be either emancipatory or objects to gendered forms of inequality and oppression. But one also ought to be interested in, and be able to show, what the gendered world is like and how and why gender matters at all in the first place. It is, I think, in the later area that Butler's theory has greater utility than in the prior. Butler's notion of the performative offers a valuable opening through which we can understand gendered identity as more than just a one-sided process of imposition without, at the same time, lapsing into a voluntarist model of the subject (McNay, 1999). The idea of the performative illuminates both the cultural arbitrariness of 'performed' gender identity as well as its deep inculcation in that every performance serves to re-inscribe it further. By emphasizing the historicity of structure, the concept of the performative highlights how constraint is constitutive but not fully determining of gender subjectivity (McNay, 1999). And here is where one finds, to the extent that there is, some room for agency in the Butlerian view of gender performativity.

The problem remains, however, that performativity – while it does not fully preclude agency, makes it almost impossible to materialise in a conscious, self-reflective manner. As (Nelson, 1999, p. 332) puts it, "performativity ontologically assumes an abstracted subject (i.e. abstracted as a subject position in a given discourse) and thus provides no space for conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the doing of identity". Nelson adds that Butler's notion of performativity actually undermines attempts to imagine a historically and geographically concrete subject that is constituted by dominant discourses, but is potentially able to reflect upon and actively negotiate, appropriate or resist them. She argues that Butler's theory is in dire need of a critical reworking to allow for the conceptualization of "a situated subject, one constituted by discursive processes yet not reducible to them" (Nelson, 1999, p. 332). McNay (1999) similarly notes that while Butler's theory offers a very robust and systematically elaborated way of understanding gender identity as deeply entrenched

but not immutable, the concept of agency that underlies Butler's notion of a politics of the performative remains abstract and lacking in in social specificity.

2.7. Why performativity?

In lieu of concluding this chapter, I want to reflect on the reasons that have made me consider using performativity as the centrepiece in my conceptualisation of gender in this research project. As I have indicated in Chapter 1, one of the reasons that motivated me to do this research is the seemingly immutable nature of gender relations in Ethiopia. This is even more so in the context of the small-scale family farming which not only serves as the main means of livelihood but also shapes the social and cultural life in much of the country. The extent to which gender configurations within this setting have changed is one I will go in to greater detail in Chapter 6, but I can say here with some degree of confidence that any such change that may have happened is far less than what is desired. Considering that Ethiopia has embarked on a gender equality agenda for half a century, why has the particular gender configuration that is the characteristic feature of small-scale family farming proved immune to the change agenda? In attempting to answer this question, I believe it is of the at most importance to understand first the way gender is conceived and enters into play within the context of small-scale family farming in Ethiopia. And it is in unravelling this that I believe Butler's notion of performativity and gender identity conceptualised as "stylized, regulated, repetitive performance" can become extremely useful.

The conceptualization of gender identity as extremely durable but not immutable as offered by Butler's notion of performativity is one that I believe is particularly relevant given the research context and my research questions. First, I believe it will allow for an investigation of how and in what ways the discursive construct of gender is turned into and presented as the pre-discursive, natural state. Second, it allows for an investigation of not just how gender enters into and shapes farming but also how farming shapes gender. Gender conceived as a repletion of

stylized acts has the potential to unravel how different agricultural and non-agricultural activities come to constitute, reinforce, and reaffirm one's gender and in so doing constitute the discursive construction of what it is to be a man or a woman in a particular context. Third, it allows for an exposition of how policy, informed by the sex/gender dichotomy and the gender as sex roles conceptualisation, is not only missing the point entirely but also actively reinforcing the characterisation of the discursive product (sex-gender) as the pre-discursive and given (biological, natural, innate state of being).

The Butlerian view of agency is quite problematic particularly in its conception of subversive agency[14], but I believe it is possible to dislocate Butler's view of gender performativity from her notion of agency. While the two are interlinked and one depends on the other for the theory to make sense, it is important to note that Butler's notion of performativity and its associated views on performative agency are products of a particular discursive construction situated in a particular cultural, political, epistemological, and historical context – that of the west. In using the Butlerian notion of performativity in a non- western context, I can also explore the extent of its applicability. However, it is its potential to shed a new light on the way gendered identity is discursively constructed that I find extremely appealing. I focus in particular on the insights that Butler's notion of gender as performative may offer in shedding light on the relation between the material and symbolic dimensions of gender subjectification. While I do not intend to delve into the Lacanian aspects of Butler's theory, such as the mirror stages and its importance in the infant's self-identification process; I am interested in Butler's adoption of the Lacanian assertion regarding the fictitious nature of the stable self and the centrality of language for the formation of the subject – in this case the gendered subject.

[14] I use the term subversive agency here to refer to "the reversal of established values, or the insertion of other values into them" – Blackwell references online – the encyclopaedia of literary and cultural theory http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405183123_chunk_g978140518312342_ss1-13

I also want to situate Butler's notion of performativity within the context of the embodied self and embodied subjectivity where by performativity does not preclude neither subjective nor collective agency. While Butler's views on the extent to which subjective agency – and that of subversive agency in particular – is possible within the framework of performativity were ambiguously articulated in the early 1990's when "Gender trouble" first came out, she has clarified her position in subsequent publications to make it clear that there is indeed room for subjective agency within her articulation of performativity. Butler still maintains that since performativity is principally a constitutive process in which the performance itself constituted the subject, there cannot be pre-discursive subjects that do gender (Brickell (2005) cited in Morison and Macleod (2013, p. 569)). However, this does not necessarily mean that performativity completely precludes political action or resistance on the part of the subject. Much of the criticism that has been directed at Butler in this regard could be a result of misreading her work owing to her extremely vague and contemplative writing style. As Martha Nussbaum famously remarked "It is difficult to come to grips with Butler's ideas, because it is difficult to figure out what they are" (Nussbaum (1999). But this could also partly be due to missing Butler's argument entirely. Butlerian performativity, while it complicates agency, does not preclude it completely.

I adopt Butler's notion of performativity as an understanding of gender identity whereby it is constituted in the embodied practices of men and women; in their lived experiences, as opposed to as one imposed through patriarchal structures. Butler's assertion on gender performativity in this regard support the adoption of an embodied subject whose practices are historically and culturally situated but not determined entirely by the later. It is because of this temporal nature of performativity that there is room for the instability of gender norms. This instability in turn creates room for the destabilization and subversion of hegemonic gender norms. I believe that emphasising the embodied nature of gendered experience to Butler's notion of performativity will offer an understanding of gender as historical matrix, rather than

a static structure, and that this will in turn offer a more substantive account of agency. I adopt this view following McNay (2000) who argues

> the relationship between symbolic and material practices can begin to be understood more adequately with the shift from a deterministic to a generative account of subjectification and agency. When the formation of subjectivity is understood not in one-sided terms as an exogenously imposed effect but as a result of a lived relationship between embodied potentiality and material relations, then an active concept of agency emerges, understanding agency partly as the capacity to manage actively the often discontinuous, overlapping or conflicting relations of power provides a point from which to examine the connection between the symbolic and material relations that are constitutive of a differentiated social order (p. 16).

I believe that the above articulation of an embodied subject goes hand in hand with and strengthens Butler's notion of performativity since, for Butler, the enactment of gender identity is a "forced reiteration of norms"; an expression of social relations that compels bodies to conform to certain historical ideas in order to perpetuate hegemonic notion of sex and sexuality. As Atkins (2008) argues, this notion of forced reiteration is both active and passive because it involves force, but also the act of reiteration.

2.8. A Note on African Feminism(s)

As a final note to this chapter, I want to briefly reflect on what is often termed as African feminism(s) and how this research positions itself in relation to the assertions that are made across this diverse school of thought. Quite a lot of scholars, most of them of African origin, have called attention to what they believe to be are unwarranted assumption made by western, European feminists about gender in African societies in general and African women in particular (see for example Amadiume, 1987; Arnfred, 2004; EZE, 2006; Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyewumi, 1997, 2004, 2005; Tamale 2020). The objections raised are diverse - ranging from arguments that question the primacy of gender as a socially and politically significant category of

differentiation in African societies, to the universalizing and colonizing tendencies of western feminism, to the essentialisation of the 'African woman', to the way men are cast in the struggle for gender equality in purely adversarial positions. As such, African feminism is best understood as one of resistance to western feminism and as incorporating a variety of critiques and fronts. I take to heart many of these critiques and particularly stand with those who resist the universalising tendencies of western liberal feminism. I particularly find the essentialisation of African women as oppressed, powerless victims of male rule in need of a liberator to be quite problematic. I also find the way African cultures, as diverse as they are, are cast as the problem and the main obstacle to greater gender equality to be highly problematic and even offensive. As Tamale (2020) rightfully points out, the tendency in much of the research literature and international policy dialogue is to pit the rights inherent in the gender equality discourse against Indigenous culture and cultures with the assumption, either explicit or implicit, that these cultures are "devoid of gender justice". This is extremely problematic to say the least.

To say that is, however, not the same as denying that there are indeed aspects to these cultures that do indeed oppress women. It is not. Gender inequality, and more explicitly, the oppression of women and sexual minorities, has been and still is a very universal aspect of humanity and of nearly all human societies past and present. The argument here is not one of denying the existence of gendered discrimination and oppression but that of tying this to indigenous cultures and African societies with the implicit assertion that these cultures and societies are still in need of the civilizing missions of the west. In fact, recent contributions in the area of African feminisms have argued, quite successfully, that gender and gender relations in African societies are entangled with the colonial project and cannot be meaningfully addressed in separation from the later (Tamale, 2020). Part of the problem is that western notions of gendered being and individualized equality are still trying to dictate how gender ought to be understood as and what forms and articulations gender equality ought to

take in all societies while at the same time not pausing to consider the colonizing aspects of such an imposition. Even more surprisingly, these same western articulations of what gender equality is or ought to be are rarely, if ever, cast in the same oppositional manner against "western" culture. Culture becomes "the problem" only when one is talking about the African "other" – the same as it always has been since the colonial project started in the 15th century.

On the other hand, there has been an increasing tendency even among those who advocate one or the other of the strands of African feminisms to call for an African essentialism of sorts which tends to advocate for an erasure of the diversity in African cultures and societies all in the name of a strategic alliance. Tamale (2020) for example argues that "it is extremely important to treat Africa as one historical unit" for the purposes of the decolonization and decolonial projects since the colonial project completely disregarded (and continues to disregard) the nuanced diversities in African societies and treated all of Africa and African cultures as one – as the African "Other". "As such", Tamale continues to argue, "Africa's decolonial and decolonization struggles must also be solidified to act as one ecosystem" (Tamale, 2020, p.11). I find this highly problematic to say the least because it calls for the commission of the same epistemic violence we have been accusing the west of committing. The strategic need for solidarity ought not to come at the cost of cultural and epistemological erasure.

Another objection raised by some strands of African feminisms questions the validity and/or utility of theories of gender that originate outside of Africa. Tamale (2020) is among the most vocal of these critiques and argues that African feminism needs to "carefully and rigourously develop home-grown conceptualizations that capture the specific political-economies and cultural realities encountered" in Africa in order to first incorporate their traditional worldviews, and to successfully challenge their subordination and oppression second. She goes on to add that "given the history of the continent and the lingering legacies of colonialism, imperialism, racism and

neoliberalism, theories and paradigms formulated in the West do not necessarily apply in Africa (Tamale, 2020, p.43-44). I find this assertion odd. If we accept that all theories are partial and situated (Haraway (1988), and that gender identities are culturally and historically specific (Falola & Yacob-Haliso, 2017); theory ceases to be as problematic as it is presented out in Tamale's critiques. The recognition that gender is socially constructed as well as "historically grounded and culturally bound" implies that gender cannot behave the same way across time and space (Falola & Yacob-Haliso, 2017, p. 3). While working under these two premises, I do not see why adopting any theoretical framework would be a problem so long as it is not superimposed in its entirety with complete disregard to historical, cultural, and geo-political differences. I therefore do not accept the assertion that we ought to *ipso facto* preclude the adoption of theories of non-African origins for studying gender in African contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1. Ontological and epistemological stand

Both the nature and purpose of the study, as well as my prior experience with and preference to qualitative methods of data collection and analysis have informed my choice of methodology. My methodology is also informed by a few ontological and epistemological standpoints which I would like to reflect on briefly before I embark on a discussion of the research design used in this study.

As one might already surmise by now, from the preceding theoretical discussion, my ontological and epistemological stand is heavily influenced by post structuralist thought regarding the nature of social reality and knowledge itself. Leaving aside, for a moment, the inconvenient fact that poststructuralism is not a unified school of thought and, therefore, lacks a coherent set of ontological assumptions and epistemological stands - there are at least a few common ontological commitments that most poststructuralists endorse. One such commitment is the problematisation of ontology itself and commitment to what has been called 'the ontological turn' in social theory (Howarth, 2013). Another is the emphasis on language and on the discursive constitution of subjects and power. I will briefly discuss each of them as they have deeply informed my research design, field work, and data analysis.

3.2. Of taking the 'ontological turn' and the relativisation of ontology

Like other so called 'turns' in social and political theory, the 'ontological turn' is rather difficult to describe; mainly so because there is no consensus on what it means and what exactly constitutes 'the turn'. This has partly to do with the fact that ontology itself is a heavily loaded term that means different things to different people. Added on top of this is the ambiguity of the turn. The many whimsical, and sometimes mystique, wordings that are used to describe the turn have added further to the

difficulty of understanding it. At one point in their discussion, Holbraad and Pedersen (2017, p. 11) for example state that to take the ontological turn is "to ask ontological questions without taking ontology as an answer". One is easily at a loss as to what that exactly means. Depending on who is describing it, the ontological turn can mean anything in between the complete destabilization and relativization of ontology itself[15] to a call for the intensification of methodological openness through greater emphasis on methodological reflexivity. Authors who have chosen to focus on the later aspect take the ontological turn to be a commitment to "recalibrate the level at which analysis takes place" (Course, 2010, p. 248) and to imply, above anything else, a theoretically reflexive project which is concerned with not just what insights anthropologists might get but also how they can get their ethnographic descriptions right (Henare et al., 2007; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017). Holbraad and Pedersen (2017, p. 5) for example, describe the ontological turn as being 'a methodological intervention' as opposed to a metaphysical or a philosophical one. In spite of its name, they argue, the ontological turn is not actually concerned with "what the 'really real' nature of the world is". They characterize it as "a methodological project that poses ontological questions to solve epistemological problems". The ontological turn reformulated epistemological worries such as ethnocentrism, solipsism, essentialism, orientalism and a host of other 'isms' as ontological problems. The central question of ontology in such a context then becomes, as Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) put it:

> How do I, as an anthropologist, neutralize or otherwise hold at abeyance or in continuous suspension my assumptions about what the world is, and what could be in it, in order to allow for what is in my ethnography to present itself as what it is, and thus allow for the possibility that what is there may be different from what I may have imagined? (pp. 5-6).

[15] Traditionally, anthropology has maintained the premise that that there is one world (reality) and many worldviews (cultures). An ontological approach on the other hand acknowledges multiple realities and worlds. It is in this sense that the ontological turn can be seen as a commitment to a complete destabilization and relativization of ontology itself. For more on the 'Worldviews' vs 'worlds' distinction see Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007, pp. 9-12); for more on the debate between traditional anthropology and ontologically driven anthropology, see Carrithers, Candea, Sykes, Holbraad, and Venkatesan (2010) – "Ontology Is Just Another Word for Culture: Motion Tabled at the 2008 Meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, University of Manchester".

The ontological turn, they conclude, is not so much a matter of seeing differently", but rather one of "seeing different things". At the center of the ontological turn are greater attention to and intensification of three methodological commitments - reflexivity, conceptualization and experimentation. While all these three have been a feature of much social and anthropological research and thought, what the ontological turn does is bring about a greater recognition of their importance. Holbraad and Pedersen (2017, p. 9) particularly highlight the call for intensifying reflexivity, which they add is one that goes hand in hand with the basic reversal marked by the ontological turn – "that of giving logical priority to the ethnography over its theorization".

Henare et al. (2007, p. 12) suggest that an ontological approach must start from taking difference seriously as the starting for anthropological analysis. They illustrate this by stating "one must accept that when someone tells us, say, that powder is power, the anthropological problem cannot be that of accounting for why he might think that about powder (explaining, interpreting, placing his statement into context), but rather that if that really is the case, then we just do not know what powder he is talking about". The world where powder is power is a different world in which what we take to be powder is actually power. This distinction is important and sets this kind of constructivism apart from what can be considered typical Foucauldian discursive analysis. The argument here is not merely one of discourse ordering reality in different ways according to different regimes of truth but rather one of discourse creating new objects in the very act of enunciating new concepts (p13). This approach advances a more radical version of constructivism that sees no ontological distinction between discourse and reality since it takes concepts and things to be one and the same. In this sense, the ontological turn and the many worlds thesis makes it possible to produce novel analytical concept by drawing from informants own ontological projects and through a strong emphasis on reflexivity regarding what we claim to know and how and through what processes we come to know of this.

The intensification of reflexivity leads to greater awareness and recognition of not only what one is doing and how they are going about doing it but also, and perhaps more importantly, to uncovering what Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) call the "condition of possibility" that made the work possible. These conditions of possibility here are not just the social, cultural, or political contexts of ethnography but also the underlying ontological assumptions one must inevitably make in their attempt to describe them ethnographically. The ontological turns calls for a reversal of relationships between the objects of description and the terms of description.

> Relativizing this relationship is necessary because the terms anthropologists use to describe their data, and the ontological assumptions they inevitably make in doing so, may well turn out to be inappropriate, producing imprecise, inconsistent, incongruous or otherwise inadequate descriptions and analyses. The anthropologists' task, then, must be to shift the contingent ontological assumptions that render their initial ethnographic intuitions and descriptions inadequate, in order to arrive at concepts that will allow them to describe and analyze their ethnographic data more cogently and precisely (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 13-14).

In summary, I follow in the footsteps of many in following the ontological turn in so far as this turn signifies a rejection of the one world, many world views representation and in so far as it calls for an emphasis on the recursive examination of concepts in light of how they come to be rather than merely seeking to explain ethnographic data through concepts. In this sense, I take the ontological turn to be both a methodological tool as well as a philosophical stand point. As a methodological tool, I share its call for greater reflexivity in the way we introduce, engage with, and – in the process - reshape concepts from one world(reality) to another. As a philosophical stand point, I stand with its call for the recognition of native ontologies (in the plural) and the existence of not just multiple conceptions of reality, but of multiple realities. I take my task to be one of not merely attempting to find a way of making sense of one reality through concepts of another but that of striving to understand how these multiple realities come in to play with one another – sometimes clashing, sometimes co existing, and sometimes radically reshaping one another. I have already dealt with this later point

in the previous chapter and I will engage with it even more through the rest of this thesis.

3.3. Of Saussurian linguistics and the primacy of language

One of the common strands across a variety of poststructuralist thought is an emphasis on and interest in language "as a 'site' for the construction and contestation of social meanings" (Baxter, 2003, p. 6). This interest in language is built on the works of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure (1857 – 1913) whose thoughts shaped the origins of structuralism and continue to inform poststructuralism even now[16]. Saussure argued that language should first of all be seen as a system of signs; and that these signs are in the first instance arbitrary and only become conventions through time. In other words, these signs have not taken their specific form because of what they mean. They are simply words - or more appropriately - signs that we use to signify something or an idea of something. For Saussure, there is no logic, outside of convention, that ties or links the signifier (the word or sign) to the signified (the idea or thing that the word represents or invokes). This system, he points out, is quite arbitrary with the only rule being that of differentiation; a particular signifier's only characteristic need only be that it be different from other signifiers (Bertens, 2017).

Having established that there is no logic which ties a specific signifier to what it represents or signifies, Saussure then proceeds to show that the principle of difference is the very reason through which signifiers come to have a meaning. The differential principle not only works to distinguish signs but also simultaneously distinguishes meanings from one another. While meaning is in the first instance

[16] It is almost impossible to understand poststructuralism in isolation from structuralism and structuralism in isolation from Marxism, particularly structural Marxism as articulated by the French intellectual giant Louis Althusser. A diverse set of thinkers who would either self-identify or are identified with the poststructuralist school have engaged and continue to engage with a variety of structural theories including Marxism, and Saussurian linguistics, each in their own way. The complex and broad range of engagement with Marxism has created what Choat (2013, p. 48) calls "a range of imaginative appellations" covering a broad spectrum of positions from the 'flippant quasi-Marxism' of Barthes to the 'hyper-Marxism' of Deleuze. A detailed discussion of this broad spectrum of engagement between poststructuralists and structuralists is not relevant here; but it is important to keep in mind that much of the poststructuralist critique against structuralism was not so much intended to refute it as it was to destabilise it; and by doing so, improve on it.

produced, or at least enabled, by difference; Saussure points out that it is by the structure of a language that meaning is produced at a more fundamental level. Meaning emerges from the relations between the signs that make up a language, or the relations between the elements that together make up a given structure of language. Meaning resides not so much in the individual elements of a language but rather in the relationship between them. And since this structure of language is essentially social and predates each individual act pf endowing something with meaning, Saussure argues that the sign is necessarily social by nature; i.e. it is independent of the individual's will (Ziai, 2016, p. 8)

The central legacy of Saussure's structural linguistics is this focus on the relation between the elements of a structure and it is aspect of Saussure's thought which allowed it to be universalised beyond the horizon of linguistics. The 'linguistic turn' in social theory, as it has come to be known, can basically be seen as the application of Saussure's thinking to other areas and systems of meaning. Its starting point is the assumption that these other systems are (just like language) structured as systems of difference and that they exhibit certain laws or principles. Meaning is produced by the relation of the elements of the structure. In social theory, the application of such structuralist thinking lead to a an interesting positioning of the subject; structuralism sees the subject not as the agent who endows things with meaning, but rather as an effect of these structures.

A further legacy of Saussurian thinking is an emphasis on the primacy of language in the construction of social reality. In Saussurian thinking, a sign's meaning (its signified) is not an object in the real world but rather only an idea or a concept. What, we may ask, happens if we do not have a sign (or in Saussurian terminology - a signifier) for a certain something? Can such a thing be said to exist? Bertens (2017) illustrates this with an example concerning ponies - consider we had the word horse but not the word pony. Would we still see ponies as ponies or world we see them as horses much like other horses since our language would not offer us an alternative?

Can we then argue, Bertens (2017, p. 51) asks, language precedes thought and "constitutes the framework within which thought must necessarily operate"? Saussure as well as many others after him have taken this to be the case and have argued that our reality, or what we take to be reality, is in fact constituted by our language. But this position is only one end, the extreme end, of many in another broad spectrum of positions; and there are plenty who view this position to be far too radical and fault it for turning what is otherwise a very "interesting insight" into an "iron law" (Bertens, 2017, p. 52).

Not many poststructuralists will uphold Saussure's assertion on the primacy of language in its entirety, at least in its original articulation; poststructuralism as a school still places a major emphasis on language and other systems of representation as key to understanding the ways in which meaning is produced and reproduced; and reality is constructed. In summarising the key assertions regarding language that poststructuralism shares across its many flavours, Ziai (2016, p. 9) highlights the following four which also resonate with me and are highly relevant to my own research. First is the assertion that reality can only be perceived through the means by which reality is constructed. This means a focus on language structures and other systems of representation which produce meaning. In this sense, language is not merely an instrument by which reality is described; but rather the means by which it is created. Second is the assertion that while the relation between the signs (signifiers) and the signified is arbitrary and unstable, it is also "temporarily and contextually fixed" and it is this fixing which enables communication. Third, meaning and knowledge are seen as effects produced by differential relations within linguistic structures; and cannot be based on other objective foundations outside of these structures (such as religion, rationality, science, the knowing subject, etc). And fourth is the assertion that the subject is the effect of the structures constituting it. Understood in this manner, our subjectivity is the product of different discourses that shaped it. However, and unlike in structuralism, subjects are not merely determined by these

structures since there are competing discourses; there is room for agency which can express itself in the form of individuals following one discourse instead of another.

3.4. Of power, subjectivity, and agency

A few more words need to be said in way of expanding the last point mentioned above. My own theoretical and ontological stands on these are informed by a diverse set of theories that include Althusserian understandings of Marx's conception of subjectivity, Foucauldian analysis of power and the discursive constitution of subjects and agency. From the Althusserian understanding of Marxism, I only take its conception of the subject. Althusser argues that Marx has no concept of Man in general; and instead posits that each society has its own individuals - historically and socially determined (Althusser 1976, p. 53; cited in Choat, 2013, p. 53). I share this conception. However, I do not find the Marxian concepts of ideology and false consciousness, or its structural determinism helpful for a variety of reasons. Chief among these are the following objections by Foucault on the subject, outlined in Choat (2013, pp. 54-61), which strongly resonate with me.

First is the objection by Foucault that the notion of ideology requires as its opposite a notion of scientific truth; which Foucault - or any other poststructuralist thinker for that matter - finds highly problematic. At its simplest, the concept of ideology or false consciousness implies that class domination cannot be sustained by force alone. It needs to be facilitated and legitimated by certain ideas and practices which, while legitimizing the relation of domination, must remain concealed for the domination to be effective. If one is to then expose this logic of legitimizing for what it really is — one needs a place that is outside of and unaffected by ideology (Choat, 2013, p. 55). Occupying such a place implies that we accept the existence of a position from where an objective, undistorted perspective on social reality can be gained. Only from such a position can social relations become completely transparent to the observer. The problem with this for Foucault and other poststructuralists is of course that no such place exists at all since no position is outside of and remains unaffected

by discourse. Poststructuralism dismisses this "utopian vision of unmediated access to social reality" as simply naïve (Choat, 2013, p. 55)[17]

The second objection by Foucault to the concept of ideology is that it requires a particular notion of the subject that is highly problematic. The assumption here is that there is a given subject whose natural relation to truth is then obscured from without by certain political and economic conditions. For Foucault, this is problematic because the subject is never given but rather produced by discourse. This position is typical of poststructuralism as a whole which takes an anti-humanist stance in its rejection of the idea of the human subject as "a unity possessing certain essential and inherent properties, transparent to itself and in command of itself and its environment" (Choat, 2013, p. 57). The whole theme of alienation – so important to Marx's early work and to the Marxist tradition as a whole – is incompatible with this anti-humanist stance of poststructuralism as it depends on the conception man alienated from his very essence, his essential powers and capacities by the structures of society and the relations between them. Foucault's third and final objection to ideology is closely related to this and brings into attention its deterministic nature. Marx's conception of ideology depends upon the notion of a determinant economic structure that serves as the real foundation on which the legal and political superstructure arise from. As Choat (2013, p. 58) points out, poststructuralism finds this assertion problematic on two levels. First is the "depth-surface model" differentiation that it makes. A distinction is made between what is taken as the real foundation of society (the

[17] It is important to note here that not all Marxists uphold this much criticised view. Althusser's own views are for example unambiguously clear. For Althusser, ideology is a necessary and permanent feature of human existence and the structures of society can never be completely transparent to us (Choat, 2013, p. 55). It is this recognition of the unattainability of full transparency that makes Althusser appealing to a lot of poststructuralist theorists. But even with this recognition, and as Choat (2013) points out, the all too important question of how and from what position one can then recognise and criticise ideology if ideology is ever so present remains unresolved. Althusser's answer is that there is indeed such a place that lies outside of ideology – science. He takes science to be the only field of knowledge that exists outside ideology and sees Marxism as offering the needed scientific tools to unravel the existence and inner operations of ideology. Choat (2013) however describes this "attempt by Althusser to elevate Marxism to the status of a science" as being very troubling and unpalatable to a lot of poststructuralist thinkers since it fails to recognize the discursive construction of what constitutes 'legitimate' scientific knowledge and how science itself can be under the influence of ideology. For Foucault, of course, this is simply no more than an attempt to draw upon the authority that science has claimed over other forms of knowledge and only begs the question of how the truth of science itself is verified. The poststructuralist position here is to question how truth is produced in the first place and with what forms of power relations the production of truth is entwined (Choat, 2013, p. 56).

economic relations) and the rest constituting the realm of ideas, culture, politics, religion, sexuality, subjectivity and so on which are taken to be a reflection of the underlying economic relations. Poststructuralism completely rejects both the distinction in the depth-surface model as well as the primacy given to the economic relations that are taken to lie beneath the surface and shape the later. Poststructuralists instead emphasise the role of ideas, culture, politics, and whatever else is taken as constituting the surface in the Marxist depth-surface model - in structuring reality itself (Choat, 2013, p. 58).

3.5. Summing it all together

How then is my research informed and shaped by the preceding discussion on the ontological turn, structuralism, post-structuralism, and radical social constructivism? Where do I, in this broad and often confusing ontological and theoretical landscape, carve a position to myself? To answer these questions quite simply, I take my research to be informed by the many-worlds assertion of the ontological turn in anthropology and poststructuralism's conception of the subject, power, and the nature of social reality. The influence of the ontological turn on my research is one I believe I have sufficiently addressed already. I will therefore focus on elaborating my position in relation to the later briefly.

In discussing what may be considered as the defining character of a poststructuralist position and how these may reflect in one's poststructuralist informed social enquiry, I take a lot from Ziai (2016, pp. 9-10). Social enquiry informed by poststructuralism can be described as constructivist and anti-essentialist – it regards reality as socially constructed and declines to attribute a specific nature to social actors and phenomena. I particularly take the following elements of poststructuralist thinking to be central in my research and these have informed how the research project has unfolded, from beginning to end. First is the destabilizing aspect of poststructuralist thinking in so far as it rejects the notion of a foundation for social relations and structures which exists beyond any system of representation. Thus, there are no underlying laws

determining the relation between elements of society; there are only unstable relations and the field of the social is one of ambiguity, ambivalence, and contingency. In this environment, the subject is not the originator of social relation, but is constituted by them. The plurality of social structures intersecting in the subject produces a plurality of possible identities or subject positions. The subject can thus be seen as the difference between the possible and the actual positions, the difference between undecidability and decision. In such a paradigm, therefore, truth cannot be conceived as a correspondence between statement and reality, because there is no perception beyond systems of meaning. Truth can only be analysed as produced within a structure, as socially produced, negotiated, and sometimes imposed through power in the Foucauldian meaning of the later.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methods and Methodological Decisions

4.1. Methodological Choices

In light of what has been presented thus far, both in the previous chapter and in the current one, it should be self-evident by now that the methodological choices made in this research are aligned with the qualitative tradition of social enquiry. The particular methods I have employed are discussed in detail later in this chapter. Here, I will briefly discuss the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research and reflect on the overall implications of these on my methodological choices.

The field of qualitative enquiry is extremely broad and encompasses an incredibly rich variety of approaches and methods, each with their own paradigms and traditions, and often at odds with each other. This diversity undoubtedly provides the novice qualitative researcher with a degree of choice far more exceeding that which is offered in many other fields of social enquiry. It however also comes with an enormous challenge as one has to navigate this rich but complex field where one misstep can land them in intellectual hot water. The sheer number and diversity of qualitative approaches can be dizzying and arguments about their appropriate use numerous, making the task of choosing one over the other a daunting task even for experienced researchers who may consider themselves as "insiders" (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014, p. 82). The novice researcher beginning her journey in this complex terrain is left all the more confused. These complexities arise in part owing to different philosophies of science embedded within the varying approaches with differing foundational assumptions about the nature of our world, and our knowledge about it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Spencer et al., 2014). Fortunately, a convergence seems to have happened in the last decade or two as the different perspectives and traditions within the broad field of qualitative enquiry have

increasingly come together under what Denzin and Lincoln (2018) call the "interpretive, performance paradigm".

I have already made my ontological and theoretical stances clear and it goes without saying that the positions I have taken in this regard have had the biggest influence on my choice of methodology as well as the particular methods I have used in this research. But I need to add a few more words on where I position myself in this incredibly complex landscape. While I place myself within the broad space of what may be called as the interpretative tradition, my methodology is also immensely influenced by and benefits from the many strands of feminist, postcolonial, and post-humanist thought that have emerged within this tradition. While I align with the poststructuralist position regarding the primacy of language as the means by which reality is not only described but also constructed, I do not subscribe the view that language is the sole means for this. I lean more towards what Barad (2003, p. 802) calls "[a] performative understanding of discursive practices" that challenges "the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real". Often referred to as "the new materialism" within feminist theory, this movement has developed as a result of the neglect in Butler's theory of performativity, and the linguistic turn in general, to accommodate for the materiality of the body (Jagger, 2015).

This goes hand in hand with the rejection of many of the dualities inherent in western intellectual thought including those between the mind and the body, as well as nature and culture discussed in the previous chapter; and the rejection of the one world many world views paradigm discussed earlier in this chapter. As (Jagger, 2015, p. 322) notes, the new materialism does not seek to negate "the basic insights of feminist poststructuralism concerning the mediated nature of our access to the world" and the "constitutive role of language and meaning". It accepts this but tries to build on it by allowing room for matter – and the materiality of the body – to have a role in our interaction with the world. Understood in this sense, the biological body for example is not a fixed, inert matter awaiting cultural interpretation; it actively enters

in to the scene and has agency. The aim here, as (Jagger, 2015, p. 322) puts it, "is to develop a better understanding of the process of interimplication, of the mutual articulation of nature and culture, matter and discourse". Some recent works however have gone beyond this and has pushed the boundaries of the new materialism(s) even further. Grosz (2018), for example, has put forward an argument that attempts to bring together ontology, ethics, and politics and encourages us to think beyond the 'what is real' and explore what is possible. She argues that only such an approach can enable us to address important questions such as "how to live a good life and a generous and productive collective existence—lives that resist oppression, coercion, and prevailing social constraints—that enhance and produce values, that expand social and collective existence and the lives of nonhuman things" (Grosz, 2018, p. 4).

Closely tied with the new materialism discussed above is another epistemological stance that has informed and influenced my choice of methodology - the emerging critique of the notion of "data". Koro-Ljungberg, MacLure, and Ulmer (2018, p. 805) argue that "there is still a widespread assumption that data are predominantly passive and subservient to the work of analysis and interpretation" despite the emergence of numerous "turns" that have sought to challenge established notions of what reality is and our knowledge of it.

> Data have continued, by and large, to play a relatively modest and circumscribed role. Data typically are considered to be inert, lifeless, and disorganized. They wait to be "collected," "processed," and vivified—awakened to meaning through the ministrations of researchers and their specialist, methodic procedures. The role of data is to provide input to "raw" or "first-order" material for this interpretive, analytical, or pattern-seeking work (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 805).

They continue to argue that this tendency points to "lingering positivism that lurks in many qualitative studies even when these studies are committed in principle to interpretive or poststructuralist theoretical frameworks" which fundamentally challenge such a notion of a "bedrock" beneath the "layers" of social construction" (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 806).

The new materialisms have also turned a critical eye to this conservative notion of data and are slowly unsettling it. Recent works in this regard have put forward a counter notion of "data as problematic"; a view that treats data as matter - active and ever present, ever changing and ever evolving in the complex web of entanglements between data, theories, writing, thinking, research, researchers, participants, past, future, present, and body-mind-material (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 818). The key message here is one of embracing uncertainty and openness. The notion of "data as problematic" actively seeks open-ended questions over conclusions, and prioritizes working against normativity as a goal for social enquiry itself. With such a conception of data, the researcher is no longer "positioned at arm's length from the data, exercising interpretive dominion over them, conferring meaning upon them, and marshaling them as evidence in a greater cause" (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 802). This makes understanding and interpreting data, in the traditional sense, difficult if not impossible. But, at the same time, it makes it possible to think of data in new and radical ways. To challenge orthodoxy and imagine a new role for the researcher, different from the neutral arbitrator of knowledge, as one who shapes and is shaped by her data, as one who seeks not just to understand the world but reshape it. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) argue that this is not anti-science nor anti-evidence as follows:

> Indeed, the interpretive camp is not antiscience per se. We do something different. We believe in multiple forms of science: soft, hard, strong, feminist, interpretive, critical, realist, postrealist, and posthumanist. In a sense, the traditional and postmodern projects are incommensurate. We interpret, we perform, we interrupt, we challenge, and we believe nothing is ever certain. We want performance texts that quote history back to itself, texts that focus on epiphanies; on the intersection of biography, history, culture, and politics; on turning-point moments in people's lives. The critics are correct on this point. We have a political orientation that is radical, democratic, and interventionist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 56).

In summary, I come from and subscribe to the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm of social enquiry and my methodology in this research is aimed at enabling me to explore, to deconstruct, and to understand – with the final goal of enabling action that promotes greater justice and inclusion. But I also tame what I take to be the extreme

edges of this tradition with a healthy dose of skepticism and reflexive doubt inspired by the ontological turn and the new materialisms discussed earlier and above. With this in mind, and given the purpose of the research, I have chosen a methodology that combines critical ethnography with the insights of poststructuralism and postcolonial, posthumanist thought. Unlike traditional, realist ethnography, critical ethnography combines social enquiry with a strong element of advocacy in an attempt to bring to the front, and advocate for the emancipation of, groups marginalized by systems of power, prestige, privilege, and authority (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 147).

The beginning point of critical ethnography is "a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and wellbeing" and it seeks to bring to light "processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain" with the ultimate aim of contributing towards greater freedom and equity (Madison, 2012, p. 5). Issues of power, empowerment, inequality, inequity, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization are frequent themes in critical ethnography (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The critical ethnographer seeks to disrupt the status quo and challenges taken for granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control (Madison, 2012). Quantz (1992) identifies five central aspects of critical ethnography: knowledge, values, society, history, and culture (Quantz, 1992; cited in Bhavnani, Chua, & Collins, 2014, p. 171). In one way or another, my research engages with all of these in an attempt to unravel in what ways gender is conceived of, understood, articulated, and enters into small holder farming in Ethiopia and how these conceptions, understandings, and articulations create and re-create a system of exclusionary practices that maintain a particular articulation of what the farmer is and who can be one. To do this, I have used a wide variety of qualitative methods including interviews with and field notes of my interactions with farmers, focus group discussions, daily activity logs of young boys and girls in farming households, key informant interviews with policy makers and implementers, as well as a discursive analysis of policy documents dealing with gender and agriculture.

These methods are discussed in detail in the next few sections of this chapter after I briefly describe my site selection and entry into the field which I now turn to.

4.2. Site selection and preparations for fieldwork

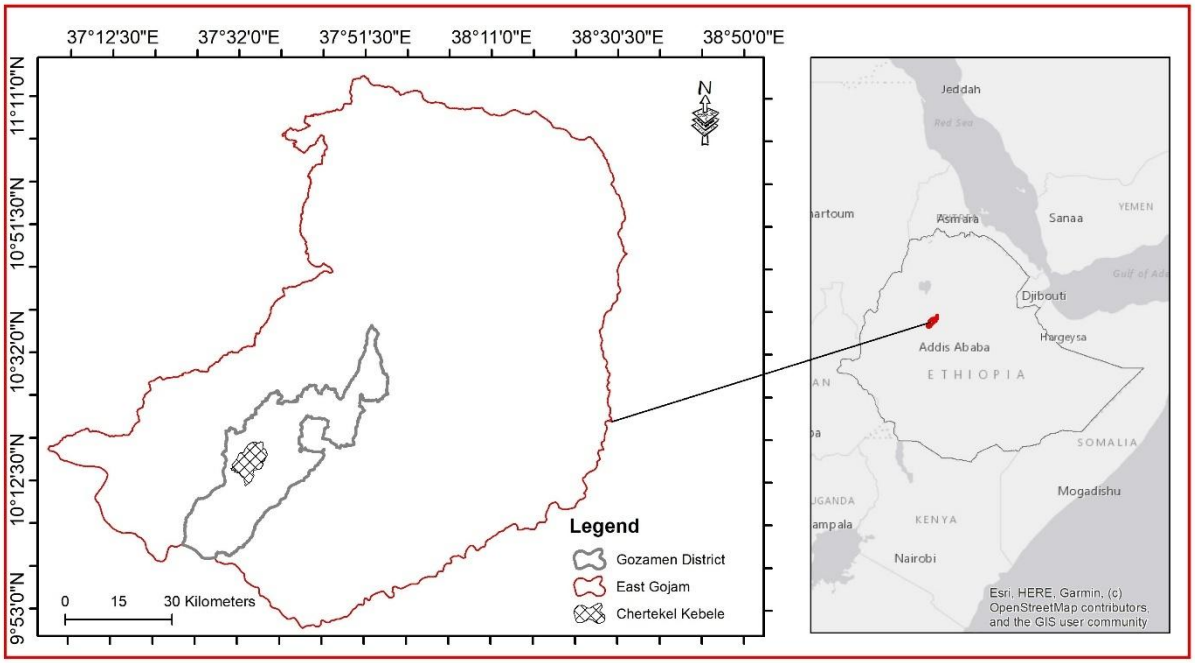
Ethiopia is an extremely diverse country with a multitude of cultures, languages, and climates; and along with this, a variety of farming traditions. Nevertheless, small holder farming is the most dominant agricultural feature, especially in the central, northern and north western parts of the country where it is inseparably fused with and is a defining feature of the lives of Ethiopia's rural population. While there are some marked differences, mainly along different agro-ecological zones, cereal production based on the ox-plough technology mixed with animal husbandry is the most commonly practiced form of farming in these parts of the country.

From early on, I had decided to focus on the Amhara region of Ethiopia. The choice was made for many reasons. First, I had previously examined, albeit superficially, the importance of the ox plough, both as a technological tool and a cultural symbol, in small holder farming in the Amhara region[18]. In fact, this research project was inspired by and is a continuation of my previous exploratory work on the subject. Second, Amharic is my native language; and having grown up in various rural parts of the Amhara region, I am intimately familiar with the culture, traditions, and more importantly, the farming practiced in the region. This was an asset I wanted to capitalize on. Nevertheless, the Amhara region itself is quite large and language, culture and even farming traditions are far from uniform across the region. I had to pick one research site within this large region and this decision was made after a series of conversations with staff in the regional and zonal governmental agricultural bureaus and initial visits of a few potential field work sites.

Based on information obtained from interviews with agriculture offices at the regional, zone, and Wereda levels during the pre-field work stage and on the basis of

[18] https://www.future-agricultures.org/publications/working-papers-document/becoming-a-young-farmer-in-ethiopia-processes-and-challenges/

my prior knowledge of the region, I had initially planned to do my fieldwork in two rural kebeles in the Amhara region. The first of these was Chertekel *kebele*, located in the East Gojjam Zone of the region. Located 17kms off the main road and isolated from any of the major towns in the area, Chertekel was considered by staff at the zone and Wereda agriculture offices to be strongly rural and strongly agrarian. The kebele is one of the most productive in the zone, particularly in wheat production. A strong farming tradition, a high regard for farming as a way of life, and relative isolation from urban influences made Chertekel an ideal field work site.



Map 1: Map of the research area

Initially I had plans to include a second fieldwork site, located in the West Gojjam Zone Amhara region. This second fieldwork site was meant to give me insights as to how farming traditions may (or may not) have transitioned in connection with the emergence of state sponsored and private owned irrigation based, market oriented commercial farming. From 2002 onwards, an irrigation dam was built on the Koga river as part of a large government- initiated natural resource management and irrigation intensification project (the Koga Irrigation and Watershed Management Project) giving rise to the establishment of a number of privately owned commercial

farms. These commercial farms were in turn supposed to facilitate agricultural change and technological transition in to small holder farming in the area. As such, this second site, I believed, would give me a crucial insight in to the way this supposed transition was unfolding. This, however, never materialized and I had to change my field work plans radically owing to the political and civil unrest that wrenched the country and which coincided with my time in the field.

4.3. Civil unrest, political chaos, and unexpected delays

My field work was complicated owing to a variety of events which materialized starting in the latter half of 2016; most of which I had not anticipated prior to my arrival in Ethiopia in June 2016. Prior to my departure and while I was still in Bonn, I was aware of intermittent anti-government protests that were happening in various parts of the Oromia Region since Nov. 2015. But the rest of the country was relatively calm at the time of my departure. The situation however took a radical turn and things escalated quickly soon after my arrival in Ethiopia. The Amhara Region which was relatively peaceful and calm was thrown into chaos following a series of arrests that took place in the town of Gonder in June 2016. Anti-government protests immediately followed, first in response to the arrests but later expanding to issues beyond this event. By mid-July, the protests had spread to the rest of the Amhara region culminating in a particularly violent and deadly confrontation between protesters and armed police in Bahir Dar, the regional capital, which transpired on 4 August 2016. At least 30[19] people were shot and killed when government security forces opened fire on protesters. This brutal response to the protests in Bahir Dar only served to escalate the civil unrest further and marked a serious turn in the way events unfolded thereafter.

In an effort to contain the spread of information and control the protests, the state cut off all internet connectivity in the Amhara region from the beginning of

[19] According to Amnesty International but other unofficial estimates have put the number of people killed at well over 80.

August onwards. This measure however proved futile and protests continued to spread but adopted a different strategy; civil disobedience and strikes. Bahir Dar, the city I was based in at the time, became a ghost town for nearly two months as a serious of strikes were called and meticulously observed by people. Businesses shut their doors, transportation ground to a halt and all activity ceased as people remained in their homes in defiance of repeated warnings by the government to return to their jobs and open their businesses. In the meantime, protests spread quickly to smaller towns across much of the northwestern parts of the Amhara Region and all public transportation ceased operation. For three months, everyday life seemed suspended and movement across towns became extremely dangerous as protesters often responded violently to anything they deemed as a violation of the stay at home strikes which protesters resorted to in the face of violent suppression of any street protests.

Meanwhile, the intermittent protests that had been going on for nearly two years in the Oromia region also flared up vigorously. The government finally declared a nationwide state of emergency on 8 October; suspended all rights to due process of law; suspended various freedoms enshrined in the constitution including the right to free speech, assembly, and movement; and gave its security forces powers to effectively do whatever they deemed necessary to ensure peace and order. This measure appeared to be effective in at least instilling fear among the general population, and protests gradually subsided. Daily life gradually returned to some semblance of normalcy but internet connectivity remained blocked until the end of October.

The above series of events significantly delayed the start of my field work. But even after things quieted down and I was able to move about with relative ease and security, getting hold of any government officials at any level became nearly impossible. As it has done often in the past, the government admitted that there were serious “good governance issues” that it needs to address and called a nationwide

tehadiso[20] /renewal or revival/ for all government officials at all levels. This tehadiso that went on for several weeks meant that the government effectively shut down as all officials went in to closed door evaluations of their offices and personnel. This meant that I was unable to get hold of officials who were responsible for granting me permission for my field work, which delayed the start of the fieldwork itself even further.

4.4. Entry into the field

After considerable delays owing to the events described above, I started my field work in Chertekel in mid-October 2016. First on my agenda was settling some practical needs such as securing accommodation and obtaining the necessary permits for the field work from the Kebele Administration and the Kebele Community Policing Offices[21]. Settling these practical necessities took the first week of my stay in Chertekel. Having addressed these, I decided to dedicate the next two weeks for what I call the "getting used to" phase; doing no more than simply making my presence known to people of the Kebele. From my previous experiences doing fieldwork, I have always found it immensely useful to allocate some time for people to get used to and be comfortable with my presence. This often takes no more than a week or two during which I simply maintain a passive presence; never actively seeking to initiate conversations but always willing to answer people's inevitable curiosities as to who I am and why I am there. My objective during this "getting used to" phase is not so much learning about people but rather letting people learn about me since I am the jarring presence in their lives and their space.

[20] Tehadiso is a frequent theme encountered in the rhetoric of the ruling party in power at the time. Roughly translating to renewal or revival, this is the default procedure for handling internal and external crisis. It often involves long, closed door deliberations and evaluations of performance of both party officials and offices in an effort to renew/revive the party's commitment to its principles and ideology.

[21] Obtaining a permit for my stay in Chertekel as well as the authorisation of my field work was made all the more important by the nationwide state of emergency which was in effect at that time.

During this time, I often frequented the small *shai bets* (tea houses) and *tella bets*[22] that line the narrow dirt road of the small settlement that serves as the administrative and market center of the *kebele*. I also walked around to the many farms around the settlement happily engaging in but never initiating conversations with farmers - both young and old, children, students, teachers, and government employees. Everywhere I went, I answered anything asked of me as faithfully as I could; including who I was and what it was that brought me there. I explained who I was and what brought me to the kebele but took care to do this only in the most general of terms, often only indicating that I was a student seeking to learn about farming in the kebele but not saying where it was that I studied in, and what exactly about farming that I wanted to learn. I did this to keep the topic of conversations as broad as possible and people's impression of what it was that I wanted to know as vague as possible. This caution was also something I learned from my previous experiences doing fieldwork; too much specificity and detail about the purpose of my research early on tends to severely limit the range of topics people would bring up during conversation since people tend to talk about things they think you are there to hear and learn about.

I also did not want to disclose where it was that I was studying since I did not want the fact that I was studying abroad to come into the picture and make me even more removed from the people and the context I was in. To put it concisely, I did not want to appear more of a stranger and an outsider than I had to if I could help it. The fact that I grew up in various farming communities within the Amhara region, was familiar with rural and agricultural life, and knew the area well enough all helped me present myself as less of an outsider than I would otherwise have been and I made a conscious decision to capitalize on this. This however did not make me an insider, far from it; it merely gave me an opportunity to minimize the extent to which I appeared as an outsider. After this initial getting used to period, most people in Chertekel had

[22] Beer taverns in rural Ethiopia serving local home brewed drinks.

become accustomed to my presence and I had made plenty of acquaintances and a few friends which were immensely useful in the later stages of the field work.

4.5. The fieldwork: methods and selection of participants

Observations and informal conversations

The observations I made and informal conversations I held with people during the first two to three weeks described above helped me to acquire an overall picture of agricultural life in Chertekel and of people's lives within it; in addition to making me a familiar presence in the kebele. My notes from these observations and informal conversations were vital in developing interview and discussion guides for the individual interviews and focus group discussions I held during the second and third round of the field work. But observations and informal conversations continued to be an important method throughout the fieldwork and were a constant background activity in all phases of my fieldwork. While not particularly limited to these and always ever-present, observations as well as informal, unscheduled, unstructured, and off the record conversations proved particularly useful in the following places and contexts.

Field farms and harvest season

The first month of my fieldwork, from mid-November to mid-December 2016, coincided with the busiest time in the annual farming calendar - the main harvest season - *meher*. By the time I arrived in Chertekel, most of the principal crops grown in the area such as *teff* (*Eragrostis tef*), wheat, *gomenzer* (*Brassica carinata*), maize, beans, peas, and *nugg* (Niger seed/*Guizotia abyssinica*) were ready for harvest and farmers were extremely busy with harvest. Harvest for almost all crops is manually done and is extremely time and labour consuming; an average plot often taking three to four days for reaping alone and other post reaping tasks taking a further three to five days.

The only exception to this is wheat for which some farmers who can afford it renting a combined harvester machine.

Picture 1: A man and a young boy working at the awdima – threshing (photo by author; Dec.1, 2016)

Being in Chertekel during this season provided me with ample opportunities to observe firsthand the different activities involved during harvest, what activities were done by whom, what tools were used, and ask questions as to why certain elements of the harvest process were organized in the ways they were. The dynamics of the interaction between individuals of different genders, ages, and positions within the family in the harvest process; both between one another and with the harvest process as a whole; the extent of their involvement in the process were important elements of my observations during this period. Where circumstances allowed it and I found it useful, I asked specific questions about tasks involved, who does what, and

if and in what ways the activities involved in harvesting have changed over the last few decades. Harvest activities were a constant backdrop in the first two months of the field work. They provided me numerous opportunities to converse, exchange views on a variety of topics and of course the often enjoyable but at times inescapable *agumas*[23]. They also gave me insights that were later useful in shaping my interview guides and interpreting or understanding responses to my questions during focus groups and individual interviews.

Picture 2: Two men working at the awdima – wind winnowing after threshing (phot by author; Dec. 5, 2016)

[23] The *agumas* is a small meal, often a piece of *injera* or a loaf of bread served to anyone who happens to pass by the threshing floor (the *awdima* as it is called in Amharic). Sometimes served with a glass of homemade beer, the *agumas* is considered a mandatory meal, an offering that should not be refused.

The market center and the weekly Saturday markets

Chertekel *kebele* consist of some seven *gotts* (small settlements or hamlets) with one market and administrative center located in the middle. In addition to being the primary business center of the kebele, the market center also houses all the various social, educational, health, and administrative services available to people. This include the elementary school, a high school, the *kebele* administration office, the local community policing center, the agricultural extension service office, the veterinary clinic, the health center, and the local branch of the Amhara Savings and Credits Association. The daily bus service to Debremarkos, the zone administrative center and the nearest large town, also arrives to Chertekel and departs from this market center. On most days of the week, this small market center is relatively quiet. Every Saturday, however, this otherwise quiet place springs to life during the weekly market. From about 10:00 am in the morning to 4:00 pm in the afternoon, the market center is abuzz with activity. The weekly Saturday market provides people from all the seven *got*s an opportunity to buy things they need and sell things they have. But it is far from just that; it is a more lively and colorful affair than a mere transaction space. This is where people meet and socialize with friends, relatives, and acquaintances from all around Chertekel. People come to market clad in their most prized clothes, wearing their happiest faces. As such, the weekly market is a social event more than anything else.

This weekly market provided me with an important arena to observe how people of different genders and ages interact. The spatial and social organization of the open air market itself was a puzzle to figure out; who comes first, who arrives late, who sells what crops and where, who buys what – the answers to these questions were quite revealing and unravel the layers of meaning beneath the spatial and social organization of the marketplace itself. The tea houses and *tella bets* that surround the open-air market are also a beehive of activity and relaxed conversation during market days. They provided me an excellent opportunity to meet and converse with a diverse set of people in a relaxed, informal, and boisterous setting.

Picture 3: A woman looks at a shema – a traditionally woven clothing – at the Saturday market in Chertekel (Photo by author; Feb. 7, 2017)

The veterinary clinic

The small veterinary clinic, staffed by just one person and located near the *kebele* administration compound, was another space I frequented, especially during the morning hours of the many saint's days during which most agricultural work was forbidden. Although the vet clinic was open throughout all seven days of the week, it was particularly busy during saint's days. Since most agricultural work is forbidden during these holy days, farmers often used these days to bring their various animals that need being looked after to the clinic. People from all *gotts* in Chertekel and even adjacent *kebeles* brought their animals (usually calves, cows, oxen, sheep, and donkeys) for treatment and vaccination. The vet allowed me to be with him during his work

which enabled me to engage in informal and at times quite revealing conversations with farmers on various topics including the organization of agricultural work, the relationship between genders in the way agricultural work is organized and carried, marriage and the relationships between spouses, gender equality and inequality, politics, religion, morality, taboos, and - at times - sex and sexuality.

Picture 4: A group of men hold down an ox while the local vet administers a treatment (photo by author; Dec. 5, 2016)

As such, the vet clinic was much more important for me as an arena for conversations than for observation although there were some revealing observations I gleaned from this arena. One such observation that struck me early on was the fact that it was almost always men and young boys, rather than women or girls, who brought animals to the vet clinic. The question 'why was this so' was one I raised in a

few of my conversations with farmers, and the answer was quite revealing of how gender is – as it always is – tied with notions of masculinity, femininity,

Interview based methods:

Focus group discussions, along with in-depth individual interviews and key informant interviews were the main methods used in the field work and the principal source of the data upon which this study is built. All participants were purposefully selected depending on context and the available options at the time. To the extent that it was possible, I avoided the use of gate keepers and especially those within the local (state) authorities in the identification, contact, and handling of research participants. I took this decision due mainly to three factors.

First, experience in research in rural Ethiopia has thought me that relying on gate keepers such as personnel from the *kebele* administration or *kebele* agriculture office produces selection bias. Gate keepers have a tendency to suggest and select people who are related or affiliated with them and who they consider "appropriate" for the purpose of the research based on their understanding of what this purpose might be. Second and as equally important is the question of informed consent. Often times when contacted or selected through gate keepers such as the above, participants are often told they are "wanted" or "needed" in the vaguest of terms and asked to show up on a particular date, time and place without them ever being asked if this was convenient for them. While they are not compelled to come, this invitation is rarely, if ever, without consequence if refused. Their compliance with the request, or their lack thereof, will reflect and have consequences on their standing and relationship with the gatekeepers in many ways. As such, such an invitation for participants to come and see me (the researcher) often ends up violating the notion of informed consent as the participant contacted thus is neither well informed nor given a meaningful choice. This obviously was not what I wanted, as I strongly believe in and ardently support the principle of informed consent and the right of participants

to withdraw their participation at any time and without fear of any consequence, real or perceived. Thirdly, the general environment during my fieldwork period was highly volatile and things were highly politically charged; with widespread anti-government feelings and a general mistrust of anything governmental quite prevalent. The state had imposed a nationwide state of emergency that not only restricted movement and assembly but even went as far as restricting what radio and TV channels people can and cannot watch or listen to. Since the government bureaucracy and personnel at the administrative structures of the *kebele* level are often used as instruments of suppression and are far from independent, I did not want to be associated or identified with these structures.

For the above reasons, I kept my dealings with gate keepers and local state authorities to what was absolutely necessary and unavoidable to undertake the fieldwork. This meant informing authorities about my intentions, explaining the purpose of the research, the methods I would use, and obtaining the necessary formal approval. Selection of participants for focus groups, individual in-depth interviews and key informant interviews was purposive to ensure that participants represented a broad spectrum of the farming population. I made an effort to capture the experiences and views of a diverse set of farmers, both men and women, of diverse ages and who were at different stages of their lives; occupying various social and economic statuses (for example married, unmarried, divorced, widowed, young, old, better-off, poor, etc …). Doing so allowed me to capture how gender and gendered differences are articulated and lived under a variety of contexts; and how gender relations come in to play in the lives of people who occupy different subject positions.

Focus group discussions were organized in same sex groups to minimize the impact of power imbalances between men and women; and to minimize the risk of any unfavorable consequences arising as a result of opinions reflected during the discussions. I intended focus groups to explore experiences, views, beliefs, and knowledge and power systems around farming and gender at a broader, community

level; usually focusing on what was the ordinary and mundane rather than the exception, and without going into specific details of family and personal lives. At the individual, lived-experiences level, I used in-depth interviews to capture particular experiences in greater detail; and experiences of life under circumstances that may be considered unusual and exceptional in the community. Examples of the latter case included divorced, separated, and widowed farmers whose lives as farmers are complicated further by their situation. But in-depth interviews were also used to explore some issues in greater detail such as the notion of gendered knowledge systems, power issues, and gender taboos.

In total, I conducted six focus group discussions and 15 individual in-depth interviews with farmers in Chertekel. The focus groups comprised of two sets (one with men and another with women) featuring three categories of farmers - young, middle aged, and old. The 15 individual interviews were held with eight men and seven women farmers aged between 26 and 60. Out of these, two men and two women lived without a partner having either been divorced or separated. The rest represented typical rural families at various stages of the family cycle – from young families with infant children to families spanning three generations. All focus groups and individual interviews were held in well secluded locations that provided appropriate privacy to participants and were recorded with a digital audio recorder. The purpose of the audio recording and its future use, including who will have access to the recording, was explained and verbal consent obtained at the beginning of the interviews/discussions. Although I record personally identifying information such as the first names, ages, and social statuses of participants in field notes and diaries, these were kept separately from other digital records including audio recordings and photographs. Pseudo names were substituted in place of the real names of participants after the transcription of interviews.

Key informant interviews were held with personnel who occupy key positions in the government structure; starting from the *kebele* level and extending all the way

up to the federal. A total of 25 key informant interviews were conducted (seven at the Chertekel *kebele* level , six at the Gozamen *wereda*[24] and East Gojjam zone administrative levels in Debre Markos, four at the Amhara regional government level in the city of Bahir Dar, and eight at the federal level in Addis Ababa). The purpose of the key informant interviews was to capture the ways gender and gender equality discourses are understood, narrated, and acted upon at each level of the structure. Participants were selected purposively with the main criteria being occupying a position within the state structure which in one way or another deals with agriculture and/or gender issues.

Textual and participatory methods

Daily activity logs of young boys and girls

In order to get a picture of the different on farm and off farm activities that children and young boys/ girls take part in, I selected (with the help of teachers) a group of 10 boys and 10 girls between the ages of 14 and 18 from the Chertekel high school and asked them to keep a log their daily tasks. I developed a simple table with four columns where they could write down what tasks and activities they were engaged in during a particular day, where the task was carried out, how long it took and who else, if any, took part in that specific task. I explained in detail the purpose of the research and the specific task I asked of them, and took time to answer any questions they had. After this briefing session, I asked for their consent for participation and proceeded with the distribution of the forms and a detailed instruction on how to complete the forms. To minimize any undue influence their presence may introduce in to the setting, I did not have any personnel from the school at the time of the briefing and the consent request nor at any time after that. I met the students weekly afterwards within the high school compound to collect completed logs, distribute new forms, and discuss any issues they may want to raise. I did not take any roll calls or

[24] A *wereda* (district) is the third-level administrative division in Ethiopia, above the kebelle but below the zone.

any other similar method of ensuring continued participation in the task and reminded the participating students that they can, with no consequence, withdraw from participating in this task if they so choose at each subsequent meeting I had with them. The participating students kept a log of their activities in and around the house as well as in and around their families' farms for a total of four weeks. At the end of the third week, in recognition of the additional burden the task may present to them, and as a token of my appreciation for their continued participation, I gave each participating student 100 Birr (at the time, about 4.5 Euros). I did not raise any rewards for participation, financial or otherwise, at the time the students were asked for their consent to ensure that their consent was not influenced by this. Out of the 20 students, two stopped their participation after the first week. I made no efforts to persuade them to continue with the exercise, nor informed school staff about this out of respect for their choice. They were well within their rights to withdraw themselves from participating in this activity and I did not believe they owed me any explanation regarding why they chose to do so.

Participatory listings of tasks by children

To see if tasks and activities that children were involved in differed along age range, I also undertook two participatory exercises Chertekel elementary school with younger children, between the ages of 8 and 13. I organized three group exercises where a group of 8 – 10 children, each of mixed genders, listed and drew pictorial representations of activities they and other children of their ages were often tasked with.

Textual analysis of policy

In addition to and together with the interview text from the key informant interviews, I used discursive policy analysis (DPA) to see how gender and gender equality/ inequality are framed in the various policy texts that deal with gender in relation to farming. For this purpose, a variety of official Ethiopian policies and strategies dealing

with gender and gender inequality within the agriculture context were collected. These include both national and regional level policies and implementation strategies.

4.6. Data Analysis

Audio recordings from the individual interviews and focus groups were first transcribed in their original Amharic verbatim and later translated in to English. The translation was made in a manner that preserved the structure, content, and contextual meaning of the original Amharic transcriptions with the corresponding block of Amharic text appearing alongside the English when I felt the English translation did not adequately reflect the original. These interview texts, together with the textual data described above constitute the main data that this thesis is built on. The data analysis is done following the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) whereby I interrogated the text (both policy narrative texts and interview texts) to investigate (1) the ways in which gender, gendered identity, and gender (in)equality within the context of small holder farming are constructed, reproduced, and/or naturalized at various levels of the social – political nexus, from the local to the national; and (2) how agricultural work and performance constitutes and is constituted by the discursive construction of gendered identity. With the first, the focus is on the "discursive reproduction of dominance" (van Dijk, 2003, p. 87) and with the later on the discursive formation of gendered identity through performance and performativity.

The framework

In recognition of the many uses and meanings of both what exactly constitutes a "discourse" and what "Critical Discourse Analysis" is, I want to briefly clarify my take on these two. I use the term discourses in this thesis in the Foucauldian sense to refer to "forms of social or ideological practice that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49, cited in Baxter, 2003, p. 7). These discourses are gleaned from blocks of spoken or written text that constitute the bulk of my data as

described above. And I use CDA as an analytical method to unravel "the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). Following Van Dijk (2015, p. 468), I adopt a triangulated theoretical framework that relates discourse, cognition, and society (including history, politics, and culture) as the major dimensions of CDA.

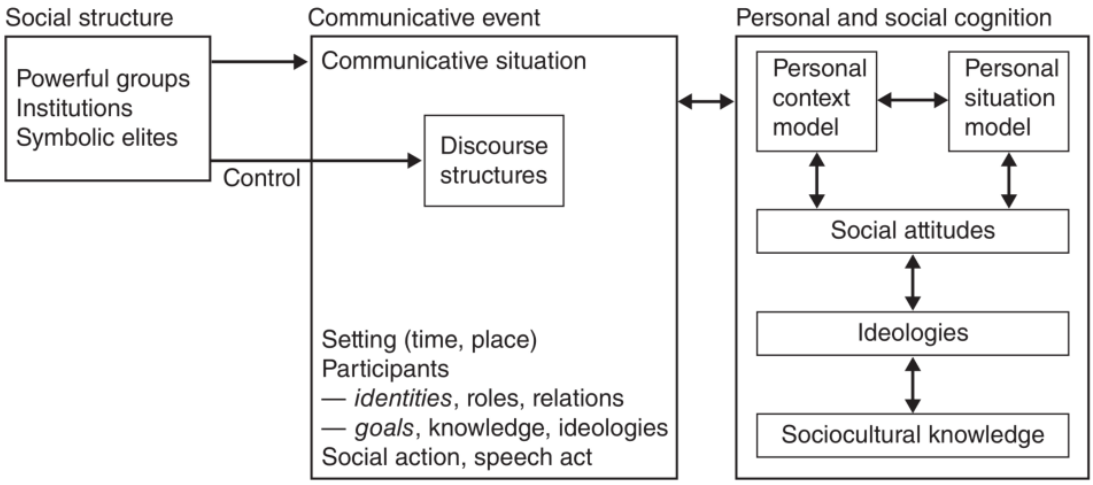


Figure 1: Schema of the discursive reproduction of power - Reproduced from Van Dijk (2015, p. 474)

The above is arguably a broad framework rather than a specific tool of analysis. Such a broad framework is necessary because discourses are "forms of knowledge, systematic ways of making sense of the world". But at the same time, discourses are closely associated with "'discursive practice' – social practices that are produced by/through discourses". And here a narrower tool for analysis is required to glean the many ways in which discourse is constituted by and through everyday practice. For this later aspect, I make use of various methods from the diverse set of tools available in CDA which I outline shortly. But it is important to keep in mind here that there is no one specific methodology that is characteristic of CDA, as Weiss and Wodak (2003, p. 12) rightfully note; and the choices I made here informed by the purpose and nature

of my research. It is also important to note that, from a discourse analysis perspective, there are always plural and competing discourses constituting power relations within any field of knowledge or given context (Baxter, 2008). In my analysis, I have tried to glean as many of these competing discourses from the text as possible giving especial attention to how individuals are positioned in these discourses and how they can be simultaneously as both powerful and powerless in these competing discourses.

The Tools

As Gee (2011) notes, a discourse analysis essentially involves "asking questions about how language, at a given time and place, is used" to build things in the world. He specifically lists seven such things that we build through the use of language – Significance, Practice, Identities, Relationships, Politics, Connections, Sign Systems and Knowledge – and encourages us to direct our inquiry along these seven "building tasks" (Gee, 2011, pp. 17 - 20). This means interrogating texts to glean what things are being made significant or insignificant; what practices and identities are being enacted; what relationships are being enacted or signaled; what values, actions, systems of practice, etc… are being set as the norm; what connections are made relevant and irrelevant between things; and what sign systems and ways of knowing and believing are being privileged or disprivileged. I have followed this line of inquiry in interrogating/analyzing/interpreting the text from both the interview transcripts and the policy and strategy texts. More specifically, I follow his suggestion of looking for situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, discourses, and conversations across a chosen set of his "seven building blocks" (Gee, 2011, pp. 121-122) [25].

[25] Gee (2011, pp. 121-122) provides seven "building tasks" and six "tools of inquiry" which leads us to ask six questions about seven things; thereby giving us a total of 42 questions we can pose in doing a discourse analysis. Here, I have only taken those that I have deemed relevant to my purpose (the purpose of the research) and the nature of my data (interview texts and policy narratives)

1. Significance: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to build relevance or significance for things and people in context?
2. Practices: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to enact a practice or practices in context?
3. Identities: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to enact and depict identities?
4. Politics: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to create, distribute, or withhold social goods; or to construe particular systems and arrangements for the distribution of social goods as "good" or "acceptable" or otherwise
5. Sign Systems and Knowledge: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to privilege or disprivilege different sign systems and ways of knowing?

However, I do not take these five "blocks" to be separate and particularly find his narrow definition of the scope of the "political block" and its separation from the rest of the blocks problematic. For example, politics regulates and controls not just social goods and systems abd their distribution but also actively regulates and shapes bodies as plenty of work on the body politic has shown. It also shapes, constructs, and actively regulates identities, sign systems, and ways of knowing. As such, while I make use of his suggested line of inquiry, I do not do so in the exact manner he outlines it.

To organize the data at the textual level, I identified three interrelated orders of discourse surrounding (1) gender and gendered identity, (2) farming and who or what the farmer is, and (3) what it means for men and women to be equal and/or unequal. Within and between these three orders of discourses, I used lexical analysis – looking

at both lexical fields, as well as lexical choices. What does the vocabulary of a text say? What kind of words are used and what kind are avoided? Is there a predominance of particular kinds of words, and why have these particular kinds of words become more acceptable/palatable than others? In other words, querying what kind of identities, values, performances, ways of being are being signified in the lexical fields as well as lexical choices – in a way, seeking the implicit or indirect meanings in the text (Van Dijk 2001). In relation to the latter two, I also looked for instances of overlexification and suppression (lexical absence) with regards to how they are presented as; instances of structural opposition between classes of concepts; the use of rhetorical devices such as imagery and representations; and salience and suppression in the construction of what it means to be a male/female farmer and what it means for men and women to be equal.

As outlined above, I have made use of some of the tools available in the wide set of methods in the CDA tradition. It is, however, important for me to emphasize here that this is essentially an ethnography that integrates elements of discourse analysis in the critical tradition. As such, this work may not fall in the camp of what a typical CDA is or looks like and it is not intended to be one. I take Gavey (2011)'s distinction between "forms of Foucauldian-inspired inquiry" and "more linguistic forms of discourse analysis" at heart and place mine firmly in the former. Like Gavey (2011, p. 186), my interest is "in the complete enmeshment of experience and culture" and I am interested in discourses and discourse analysis "only insofar as it is a way of understanding the cultural conditions of possibility for being in the world".

As such, this work may lack, in the views of some, the rigor that is normally expected of a typical discourse analysis when it comes to the linguistic aspects of the method. But where it lacks in rigor, it excels in detail and context curtesy of the ethnography. To the extent that the text is interrogated with the tools of CDA, analyzed, and interpreted; it is being done so not in isolation from the context and the author but within the rich context that ethnography provides. As Gee (2011, p. 100)

notes, discourse analysis is "the study of language-in-use" and context is an important element of that. In recognition of the important place of history in not only shaping discourse but also in understanding why certain discourses are dominant, I have also incorporated an element of historicity to discourses – tracing when and why certain discourses emerged and why they continue to be dominant. This combination of a historically grounded ethnography with the tools of CDA, I believe, makes my analysis and interpretation robust. As one may already surmise from the previous chapter on theory and the first half of the current on ontology and epistemology, I do not adhere to any one specific method or school of thought. Throughout this thesis, I have opted for utility and potency of theory and method over theoretical and methodological orthodoxy. I do not believe my work is unique in this regard, and my intention here is not to highlight this but rather to own up to the unorthodoxy of my method and to concede to the possible criticism that may be levied against my work in this regard.

4.7. Issues of positionality and reflexivity

> *the researcher plays such a direct and intimate role in both data collection and analysis. Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation* (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55).

It has now become common practice to reflect critically on how one's social positions shape and place their marks on the entire research process – from the moment they enter into the field to the moment they put the last touches onto what will be their final work. This practice, often described as reflexivity, is more emphasized within the post-structuralist and feminist traditions with which I identify myself and which have greatly shaped the theoretical and methodological stances I have taken. Reflexivity is "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's

positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (Berger, 2015, p. 2). It requires the researcher to turn their gaze inwards and critically reflect on and "take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation".

As I have previously discussed, a focus on reflexivity is one of the defining characteristics of what has come to be termed as the ontological turn. As such, an exercise in reflexivity ought to be weaved into every element of this work if it is to measure up to the standards I have set in discussing my ontological, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological stances. The question here is not one of whether I, as a researcher, have chosen to inject reflexivity in to this work but that of how I have done so. Answering that question, however, is not something that comes easily as it requires me asking myself – "What exactly is in that 'I'" that I spoke of above? Others who have done this exercise and wrote extensively about it have listed a myriad of positional qualifiers including the researcher's gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances as important factors that shape the research encounter and its outcome (Berger, 2015, p. 2).

Which aspects of my identity and my positioning in society should I, the researcher, then choose to place at the center of this inward gaze? My ability to answer this question presupposes I know not only who I am/was but also who I appeared as in the eyes of the others with whom I interacted in this research endeavor since after all, as Howie (2010, p. 109) points out, the idea of subject identity is a dialectical one; one that incorporates both a "psychodynamic model of "identifying with" and a politics of being "identified as x" either by oneself or someone else". It may be possible to critically reflect and write a commentary on one's conscious decisions and choices. I have, for example, entirely left out certain aspects of my identity and blurred other

ones deliberately in my encounters with others during this research; and I can write endlessly about why I chose to do so and how that may have influenced, shaped, or otherwise changed this work. But am I, as a researcher, aware of the unconscious decisions, judgments, reactions, and biases I surely must have made and displayed in this endeavor? I have struggled with these questions throughout the entirety of the research process and I do not suspect I am alone in this experience. Knowing what reflexivity entails is one thing, doing it is quite another. And mine was a continual struggle full of uncertainty and doubt. For someone who takes performativity at heart and believes that identity is performative and constantly in-flux, with no stable core at the center, an exercise in reflexive positionality doesn't come easily. So I will start with who I was not.

Both an insider and an outsider – but never totally one or the other

As someone born and raised in the very region of Ethiopia I did this research, I spoke the same language, had the same religion (even if moderated by years of training in critical thought), had the same cultural affinity and sensitivity with the people I encountered in my field work. What is more, I spent the entirety of my childhood years in three different rural villages of the region that were much like Chertekel and I am intimately familiar with life in a rural, agricultural setting. I am no stranger to way farming is done in Chertekel and what a farmer's life is like. I grew up hearing the same stories and tales, playing the same games, celebrating the same holidays and festivities, learning and enacting the same values and beliefs – regarding one's place in society, about showing respect to elders by standing up when they enter, by never crossing a path before them or walking in front of them; , about the importance of greeting everyone you come across – even passersby you may not know; about being humble before God and others but also being proud and defending your honour and that of your family when you have to; about putting guests above all else and giving them the best of all you have because your house is God's first and yours second; about never refusing an offer of food when you are in someone's house and

complementing them on how good it was no matter what; or even nonsensical stuff about never using your left arm for eating because you will never feel satisfied no matter how much you eat if you do that. I was no outsider to this culture; I did not have to make an effort to blend in, I was one with it. But did that make me an insider? Hardly.

I spoke the same language but I spoke it differently. Years of education, years of formal - institutional employment, as well as years of living in cities have left their mark on how I spoke and carried myself. This was as easy to pick out for anyone of the people I conversed with. I dressed differently, spoke differently, behaved differently, and probably smelled differently too. I was not one of them – this was "as plain as day" to me as well as the people I interacted with. In their eyes, I was a 'keteme' – a man of the city – even before I uttered a single word; and the moment I spoke, I cement that perception. I may have grown up in places much like Chertekel in my past but in the here and now, I did not belong in Chertekel. In fact, the very first thing I was asked was usually "What brings you by [to this place]?". This question came before who I was, where I was from, or even what my name was. Obviously, I was not an insider. But did that make me an outsider? I think not.

It is indeed true that most, if not all, people met me, when they first met me, as an outsider. But I could pick and choose from a wide range of attributes about me to encourage them revise this perception. The fact that I grew up in rural areas of the region much like that of theirs was one. But I had also attended part of my high school education in a small town called Amanuel, a mere 42 kilometers away from Chertekel, and the fact that, at the time of the field work, my parents still lived there was another. In fact, people always asked me where I was originally from once I spoke about what it was that brings me by and this was always a good opportunity to bring this up. "Oh, you are one of ours then!" was the response I usually got. A sense of affinity - I was not such a stranger after all. I never considered Amanuel to be home; as a matter of fact, I never really considered anywhere I have lived to be home. My father was a

primary school teacher for most of his life and we moved a lot. When I was attending high school in Amanuel, my parents lived in a rural village several kilometers away. The town was just where my school was, no more. And when my parents moved into the town in 1996, I had already left the town and was in my first year of undergraduate study at Addis Ababa University. I have visited Amanuel often, at least twice a year, since then but it did not become more of a home to me than when I was attending school there. It merely changed from a town where my school is to where my parents are.

But none of this mattered when it came to creating a sense of affinity with me on the part of the people of Chertekel I conversed with and for whom I divulged this information. They did not see me as one of themselves, I was still far removed from who they were. But they saw me and treated me as one of their own; they treated me as one would treat a close relative who came to visit from afar. The sense of belonging and affinity this geographic proximity created was powerful and one that surprised me. But there are a few examples in the literature that echo my experience. A good example is Ganga and Scott (2006) where one of the authors notes how well a sense of geographic connectedness worked to create a sense of commonality when he was interviewing participants who were in the upper echelons of the social-economic class structure; and whose lunch expenses exceeded his budget for an entire week by several margins. In my case, there were no such extremes in status, class, or privilege. I was merely a postgraduate researcher with an extremely limited budget interviewing farmers who were, mostly, neither poor nor rich. But there was a visible and immediately noticeable difference in social status between me (as the "educated, learned, articulate, and widely travelled professional") and them (as the "simple farmers who know nothing of the world") which placed me in a position far above them. The commonality of sharing a geographical 'home' with them was one I found to be a surprisingly powerful means of creating a sense of closeness, affinity, and oneness.

As such, my position within what is usually referred to as the insider/outsider divide in relation to the people I interacted with and interviewed during my fieldwork was never a fixed one; nor was it always clear being neither one or the other. It was instead a varying and constantly changing mixture of degrees of insiderness and outsiderness depending on context, time, and the topic and setting of each specific interaction and encounter. It was also one I actively constructed, shaped, and performed as the above mentioned example of how I capitalized on the fact that my parents lived nearby shows. I therefore do not find the insider/outsider model helpful when taken as a binary dichotomy. As many others have before me, I find it to be both simplistic and problematic in capturing the dynamics of the researcher's position in the field (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020; Berger, 2015; Dodworth 2021; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Ganga & Scott, 2006; Henry, 2003; Lichterman, 2017; Mayorga-Gallo & Hordge-Freeman, 2017; Naples, 2003; Pillow, 2015; Reyes, 2018).

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) for instance argue that the insider/outsider divide with its connotation of insiders Vs outsiders is both a simple and unhelpful dichotomy for capturing the complexity of a researcher's positionality and suggest that we should instead draw our attention to "the space between". They remark that as researchers, perhaps it is only this space in between that we can ever occupy; not just because of our social and cultural positioning but also because of our very position as the researcher – whose perspective is shaped by the necessary fact of "having read much literature on the research topic" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61). Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2017, p. 391) also challenge the insider/outsider duality as reductionist, and argue that it presents an essentialist and static understandings of positionality neglecting both the dynamics of positionality and the voices of those in between. Similarly, Naples (2003, p. 64) accuses the insider/outsider dichotomy for drawing a false divide between the two and notes that it neglects the "interactive process through which insiderness and outsiderness are constructed".

And yet, there are aspects of the insider/outsider model that are still relevant when discussing positionality; if we take it to be an unstable, fluid nexus rather than a fixed binary. While I may have been an outsider as a relatively privileged, non-agrarian, city-dwelling, career pursuing, western-educated, globe trekking, aspiring academician; I was also "a cultural insider" and that gave me certain distinct advantages. In much the same way that Ganga and Scott (2006) find, being a cultural insider opened up the "spoken and unspoken "language" of the interview" and made it possible for me to recognize "idiosyncratic cultural references". Outside of the interview, it allowed me to recognize and pay attention to cultural symbols and symbolisms as well as the many performative aspects of being a gendered person in the rural, agrarian environment of Chertekel. Why do all men, even young boys of six and seven, carry sticks? Why do women carry baskets? Why do men carry things in their shoulders and women on their backs? These questions and many others like them would either have been totally hidden from me or their answers would have remained a puzzle had it not been for my insider knowledge of the culture. I am doubtful that I would have been party to the many informal conversations I had with people and the I would have gotten the insights and revelations I have had as a result if it was not for my position as a cultural insider. When conversing on the topic of gender equality with a few young and middle-aged male farmers who were at the veterinary clinic, one of the men haphazardly threw a comment that suggested a woman's sexual organ and that of a man's (referring to both in the vulgar) can never be equals and that simply explained why men and women can never be equals too. My in-group status as a man obviously had a factor to play here, but my position as a cultural insider had some role. My status as a cultural insider afforded me cultural intuition and insight; it opened up certain subjects and made it possible for me to realise that I should address certain topics. It enabled me to understand implied content, veiled hints of discomfort, criticism, ridicule - and, at times even cynicism. In such situations, I was able to probe more effectively, diverting the topic of the

conversation if necessary or directing the conversation from the general and impersonal to the real and experiential.

At the same time, however, I was not a cultural insider in all contexts and all interactions during the field work or after. While I grew up rural, I was never a farmer nor even a farmer's son. I was not an insider to farming knowledge and many of the farming practices I enquired about. Here, I adopted the position of what Lofland and Lofland (1995) call "the acceptable incompetent" – the one who knows nothing about the topic at hand but is willing and eager to learn. In addition to being a useful strategy for interviewing when dealing with unfamiliar settings and topics, interviewing from this position is also equally useful in reversing, at least in part, the unequal power relationship between the researcher and participant. As Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2017, p. 385) observe from their experience "the interactions between the acceptable incompetent and participant include explanations and identifications of otherwise unspoken or taken-for-granted practices and attitudes"; thereby "allowing the participant to function as knowledge-holder and producer". Berger (2015) similarly notes that this setting can be a more empowering experience to the participant since the researcher is the 'ignorant' one of the two and the participant is in the expert position. While I agree with these observations, taking the role of the acceptable incompetent was not always a matter of strategic choice in my case but also one of necessity as well. Often times I have found myself in situations and contexts of which I knew little or nothing about despite my cultural insider status and I eagerly took up the role.

On being a man and researching gender

Alcoff (2005, p. 6) describes gender as a social identity that is "fundamental" rather than "peripheral" to the self and as being one of "our penultimate visible identities". The fact of me being a man was one of the two immediately visible identities which I carried in the field - the other being my identity as a keteme which I discussed

previously. While my other social, cultural, and ethnic positionings allowed a degree of performative freedom over which I had some control, my positioning as a man was an immediately visible and immutable aspect of who I was perceived as and related to in all my interactions. I had contemplated the implications of this positioning from the very beginning of the research when I was writing my proposal. I anticipated my being a man will significantly affect who I had access to, where, and what topics I could discuss. From my cultural knowledge and previous experience doing fieldwork in the region, I understood opportunities for interviewing women on a one-on-one basis would be limited; and having informal conversations with women would be a foreclosed matter altogether. At the same time, however, I evaluated the subject matter of the research and the topics of conversation as being "not sensitive" and felt the problem would be one of access only.

Despite mulling over this anticipated problem of access for a long time, I did not have a strategy beyond "I will see what I can do once I am in the field" for addressing it. As Galam (2015) carefully points out, the impact of the researcher's gender on the negotiations of fieldwork relations can be either central or marginal depending on context. Gender also doesn't feature in isolation but affects the research context and process in interaction with other social positions of the researcher. A "situational and contextual appreciation of the role played by gender in fieldwork relations" that takes in to account the dynamics of how gender interacts with other social and cultural categories and factors is therefore necessary to fully appreciate the impact of one's gender in the research process (Galam, 2015).

Once in the field, and after the first two weeks of "getting to know and be known" I had a fair amount of information regarding places for contacting potential research participants, both men and women, and a few networks of quasi-friendship which I could rely upon. As a point of contact with men, I preferred farms since most of them were working there on the harvesting work that needed to be done and the harvest work provided an excellent opportunity as a conversation starter. I needed a

different point of contact for reaching women since they were rarely in the field farms. The Kebele Administration office, the local branch of ACSI, and the one flour mill in the market centre became my main focus as both men and women farmers come to these service points and usually have to wait for a fair amount of time before they get the services they seek. This provided a public, safe environment for contacting and conversing with both men and women. I particularly appreciated these opportunities since I could use this "waiting time" of the participants to make contact and if possible conduct an interview. The physical environment of the flour mill accorded no privacy and meant that I could not conduct interviews there. As such, I decided to focus on the first two. Both offices had relatively large compounds and offered an opportunity to conduct interviews in a visually public but audibly private setting. Away from curious ears but visually public so as to not raise any alarms or suspicions. In addition to these, I also used my quasi-friendship network to identify and contact the one woman who had experience with ploughing I interviewed. Despite these opportunities however, the fact remains that I interviewed more men than women and this thesis is lacking in terms of capturing the diverse experiences and knowledge of women as well as it captures that of men.

Apart from access, my gender also impacted the quality of the interview; but did so in interaction with my other positionings. While I did not always disclose where I was studying, I always introduced myself as a researcher and explained I was doing this research for a PhD. The ethical requirement of "informed consent" would be meaningless if I didn't do so. This, however, immediately put me in a position where I was perceived as "the educated, learned, knowledgeable" one in relation to the people I was interviewing who occupied the position of being "the simple farmer who knew nothing". Adopting the position of the acceptable incompetent does help in minimizing this power imbalance but it does not altogether remove it. Often times, I had to deal with the "what do I know, I am just a simple farmer" response from both men and women but more so in the case of the later. In the former, I was in a position

to counter it better, probing more when necessary, changing direction, emphasising the experiential focus of my questions and so on. With the later, this did not always work.

The fact that I was not only "educated and learned" but a "learned and educated man" put the women I interviewed in a position from which they could only differ anything of uncertainty to me and my judgment. The fact that they as women were further removed from agricultural knowledge and were not meant to know about such things further compounded the problem. I should know and if I didn't I ought to ask the men. In such a context, aggressive probing could easily be perceived as intimidation and bullying further compounding the power imbalance; I held my questioning in check. As a man, I also lacked the sense of shared experience I had with men. I had little to no insights or knowledge in areas that are regarded as women's domain having grown up in a society which maintained strict gender division of tasks. I had no common ground from where I could relate with them. At times, this was made shockingly clear to me – as when very young girls listed "bet metebeq" (house sitting) and "hitsan machawet" (playing with or minding an infant baby) among their daily tasks. These were tasks I did not anticipate at all.

On transcribing, translation, and interpretation - the ethnographer's "leeway"

> *Contemporary ethnographers recognize that even seemingly straight-forward, descriptive writing is fundamentally a process of representation and construction. Fieldnotes, like all descriptions, 'are selective, purposed, angled, voiced, because they are authored'* (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001, p. 358).

The above quotation from Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2001) appears in relation to field notes, but it can apply to the entire process of representing participants' views and voices from transcription, translation, interpretation, to the final research output. Everything from "moment-by-moment writing choices" and the writer's general stylistic preferences affect the transcription, translation, and representation of fieldwork interactions including interviews. The "world-on-the-page" that the writer

creates is not so much a mirror image as it is a version of events and views filtered through the writer's rhetorical choices, styles, theoretical commitments, and analytical tools (Emerson et al., 2001). As Atkinson (1992: 23) rightly points out: "informants cannot "speak" for themselves. The writer recreates voices at every turn, whether "she quotes from field notes, tapes, or film, or if she reconstructs her memory of voices" (Emerson et al., 2001, p. 364).

This research is no exception and the above observations hold true. As I have previously mentioned, the audio records of the individual interviews and focus groups were first transcribed more or less verbatim, some with the help of research assistants I hired later to speed up the process. The transcription was a more or less mechanical, straight forward affair. But even then, and as Kvale (2007) points out, this step still represented a second level abstraction of the interview – the first being the audio recording itself.

> The tape recording of the interview involves a first abstraction from the lived bodily presence of the conversing persons, with a loss of body language as posture and gesture. The transcription of the interview conversation to a written form involves a second abstraction, where the tone of the voice, the intonations and the breathing are lost in short, transcripts are impoverished decontextualized renderings of interview conversations (Kvale, 2007, p. 93).

Although Kvale (2007) doesn't go into it, translation is a third abstraction added on top which fundamentally alters the nature and content of the interview text. In addition to the technical aspects of the difficulty in translating complex, extremely contextualized talk full of culturally specific symbolisms and idiosyncratic expressions in to a language completely foreign and dislocated to the physical and cultural settings of the talk; translation introduces a challenge of authenticity – to what extent does the translated text represent the interviewee?

The writer/translator's style and lexical choices will inevitably and fundamentally shape the form, structure, and content of the interview text after the translation. No matter how carefully done, a translation cannot be a perfect

representation of the original talk or text. Kvale (2007, p. 93) makes the point poignantly clear by quoting a well-known Tuscan proverb about translators in the hermeneutical tradition: "*traduire traittori* – translators are traitors". Kvale is, of course, discussing transcription rather than translation here; but uses the quote to make the point that transcriptions are a form of translation, and translations ultimately involve betrayal. In my case, however, the quote applies literally; I am the literal translator/traitor.

While part of the transcription was done by research assistants, I chose to do all of the translation work. I made this decision for two reasons. First, I simply did not have the budget to sub-contract the translation work to a third party such as a professional translation company. But this is a moot point as I would not have taken this route even if I had the budget. On the one hand, I regard myself as being fluent in both languages – Amharic and English – and was convinced that I was possibly the best person to do the job from a purely technical point of view[26]. But more importantly, I had a deep level of familiarity with the text both as the person who did the interview (and took notes) and as someone who has personal insights and experiences of rurality and farming having grown up in a similar setting. As such I was aware of the immediate context of the interview and can understand what was being said within this context. I was also more likely to better understand what was being said owing to the personal experiences and insights accorded me by my being a cultural insider. In addition to being in a position to better understand, and therefore arguably better translate, the interview text; I was also, as the researcher who can look from the vantage point of theory, better situated to interpret what was being said and why. This later aspect meant that the task of translation was at the same time an element of the analysis and offered an opportunity to start the dialogue between theory and text from an early stage. After all, "[a]ll interpretative work […] requires a theory of the subject"

[26] While I believe I have done a fairly good job of translating the interview text from Amharic to English, I have added the original Amharic verbatim in footnotes wherever I felt this was necessary or the verbatim Amharic had more nuances than could be captured in the translated English text. I encourage the reader to read the am

(Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 59) and mine is no exception. Part of understanding the text was seeing it through the conception of the subject I had laid out in my discussion – the performative subject constituted by discourse.

But the fact that I did the translation myself and am convinced that I was the best possible person to do so doesn't make the translated text any more or less "genuine" than it would have been otherwise. The above is not, and should not be seen as, an argument for the authenticity of the translation. As I have previously pointed out, the translated text is heavily influenced and shaped by my writing style; and informed by my personal insights both as a researcher and cultural insider. I do not make the pretence of ever having pristine, original, or "primary" data unmarked by the blemishes of theory at any stage of the research process; be it field notes, interview audios, or their transcribed and translated texts. My research questions were informed and shaped by theory, as were my observation and interview guides. The audio recordings of the interviews are a co-construct of the world by the researcher and the participant mediated through the interview interaction. As Heyl (2001, p.373) notes, interviews are "first and foremost interaction, a conversation between the researcher and the interviewee"; and the "knowledge that is produced out of this conversation is a product of that interaction". Participants' accounts are shaped by and a product of this interaction; they are, as Heyl (2001) puts it, "contextually and historically specific, mediated versions of experience" which emerge out the interaction between researcher and participant. As such, while the participant is a co-author of the construct, it is guided and mediated by lines of enquiry and questions I chose and posed as the researcher – questions that are deeply informed and shaped by theory. Understood in this sense, the English texts of the interviews are no less "authentic" than the initial Amharic transcriptions. As such a claim of authenticity would be missing the point entirely. But if that is the case and authenticity is not the claim I am making, what is it?

The claim I make is this: while I have made the absolute best of efforts to "preserve" the contextual and cultural meaning of the text during the process of translation, these texts are not the unaltered, unfiltered voice of the participant speaking. I the researcher am the one who speaks in these texts, and not the interviewee. But I speak from a position of deep entanglement and familiarity with the physical, social, cultural, political, historical, and theoretical setting of the voice – a position which I believe gives me authority and legitimacy to speak. This raise two questions. First, am I speaking for or on behalf of the participant? And second, is this then a knowledge claim?

Regarding the first, "the problem of speaking for others" have been well understood ever since Alcoff (1991) laid them bare in an article that bears the very same title and I will not go into an exposition of this here. But I will emphasise that Alcoff does not only provide an exquisite criticism of speaking for others but is equally critical of speaking for/about oneself, or not speaking at all. What her critique cautions against is not speaking for others in its entirety but rather doing so in a manner that constructs or assigns them subject-positions (Alcoff, 1991, p.9). As she points out, the problem of speaking for others does not lie in the content of what is spoken; it "exists in the very structure of discursive practice, no matter its content" (Alcoff, 1991, p. 23). As such, my claimed intimacy with and knowledge of the setting and context of the text will be of no relevance as long as I speak for my participants from a position and in a manner that constructs their subject-positions; as farmers, as women, and as men. Speaking for them in a manner that transforms them from being authors of the text to being mere subjects. I do not intend to do so. My intention is to investigate how these subject-positions are constituted by discourses and what implications this has on the way we understand gender and gender equality in the context of small holder farming. I therefore speak neither for, nor on behalf of participants. I speak of discourses first and foremost. But this should not imply that participants are all together voiceless and absent; they are a part of these discourses and actively partake

in their construction, legitimation. Sometimes constituted by them, and sometimes actively resisting them. Regarding the second, I am indeed making a knowledge claim here but one that is conditioned on the ontological foundations of post-structuralism and the conception of the subject outlined in the previous two chapters which I do not think need to be reiterated again here.

CHAPTER FIVE

Historical Background and Context: Gender and Society in Ethiopia

5.1. Introduction

The universality of gender as a primary organising principle in all societies has been under increasing scrutiny for some time now. While feminists in the early 1970s believed that gender inequality and patriarchy were universal, even self-evident, this view has come under intense criticism from the 1990s onwards. African and other non-western feminists and scholars have particularly contributed to the diversity of gender thought and theory by bringing into attention the diversity in the gender configurations and relations of non-western, non-European societies. What was once thought as "universal" was shown to be no more than a universalization of a particularly western, European way of thinking about gender and gender relations. European thought, including about gender, was imposed on non-European societies through what has come to be known as "epistemic violence". Colonialism and colonisation have produced discourses of knowledge that have effectively led to understandings of gender and gender relations in non-western societies through euro-centric lenses - through "the colonial gaze" as it has come to be known (Hunt and Lessard, 2002).

Hunt and Lessard (2002) describe it as "the lens through which the 'Other' is interpreted and subsequently depicted" - the 'Other' here being the non-white, non-European subject, who is at the same time the object of European inquiry. The criticism here is that European colonialism and colonial rule relied on, or at the very least resulted in, the domination of other non-western forms of cultural representation and knowledge systems. The colonial gaze puts the observed as an object to be studied and defined in terms of the privileged observer's own system of values. "Because

imperialistic nations typically have patriarchal social structures, the fact that women in subject lands often did not conform to the gender constructs of the dominant imperial culture was used to explain the "uncivilized" nature of their society" (Hunt & Lessard, 2002).

Ethiopia on the other hand is one of the few countries in Africa that have escaped the perils of European colonization. It is also one of the oldest civilizations in the world with its own script and a strong tradition of documenting history. This presents a rare opportunity to examine the historicity of gender and gender relations along with how these have changed over the last few centuries and more so since the onset of European colonization and the resulting westernization of knowledge systems. Within this context, this chapter reflects on the extent to which concepts such as "the colonial gaze" can be useful in a historical analysis of gender and gender relations in Ethiopia. Fernyhough and Fernyhough (2002, p. 188) have grappled with this issue at some length. They start by asking "can a country that has never been fully or successfully colonized be the subject of the 'colonial gaze?". Their answer to this is that a similar "colonization" has occurred in Ethiopian women's history "as mid-twentieth-century African scholars attempted to fit Ethiopian history into existing anthropological, sociological, or theoretical models that minimized or misread women's roles" (p.188). However, Fernyhough and Fernyhough (2002) analysis is far from comprehensive and their interpretations of some of the historical text is not entirely convincing. While they talk of the need for restoring women's identity, whether or not Ethiopian women have had an identity that has somehow become lost in the pages of history is not clear from their analysis.

But Fernyhough and Fernyhough (2002) are nevertheless right to stress the importance of a historical analysis and to lament the absence of one. A historical analysis, at the very least, can reveal not only the nature of women's position in the past but also the social and political circumstances or forces that lead to women being in the positions they were in. It can also reveal the process and forces that reconstituted women's identity and altered the nature of gender relations if in fact such a process

has happened as to justify the use of terms such as the colonial gaze. A historical enquiry can also better inform and contextualise current practices and received wisdom. This chapter will therefore look in to the place of gender in Ethiopian society and investigate links between gender, class, and power from a historical point of view.

5.2. Gender and Society in Ethiopian History – contradictions and contestations.

The remark that the role of Ethiopian women in history has largely been overlooked has become somewhat of an adage. Several authors have pointed out that Ethiopian history has been written by men and is consequently about men. Women generally do not feature in the royal chronicles of kings which date as far back as the 15th century; nor do they appear in the numerous paintings that adorn church walls and the pages of various religious and secular manuscripts except rarely[27]. As Fernyhough and Fernyhough (2002, p. 189) succinctly put it, very regrettably, Ethiopian history "has been written largely from a male perspective" and that even when they appear in the texts "women tended almost invariably to be viewed in terms of their relations to men". Crummey (2000), one of the most authoritative writers when it comes to Ethiopian social history, also remarks that Ethiopian women never really appear in texts or pictures that deal with the official workings of Ethiopian society. In discussing the various paintings of the 17th and 18th century depicting social and religious life, he comments that

> "[t]he public scenes are replete with hierarchy and stratification. So far as can be determined, no women appear in these illustrations, although one or two of the banquet servants may be women, as surely they would have been in fact. Sources depicting the life of Ethiopian noble women are altogether rare than those depicting the life of Ethiopian noblemen, but they do exist" (Crummey, 2000, p. 137).

Even in the rare instances where women appear in illustrations, Crummey notes that they are often depicted within "the domestic sphere … particularly with the management of food and water with spinning". He notes that a favoured

[27] Depictions of the Virgin Mary being an exception here.

representation of Mary, for example, "depicts her spinning" and Crummey interprets this as reflecting normative behaviour for Ethiopian noblewomen of the time. This is in sharp contrast to illustrations of noble men which often depict them waging war, hunting, sitting in council, presiding over court, and giving banquets. The absence of women in these depictions of scenes of public function might suggest they were rarely, if ever, present or took part in the official functionings of the state. But at the same time, Ethiopian history also presents us with instances where some women have risen to prominent positions of power and have been able to exert significant influence over politics and society; thereby making the above observation untenable.

Accounts of powerful women date as far back as Ethiopian history itself and begin with the tale of the biblical queen of Sheba – often referred to as Makda in the Ethiopian tradition. Makda, who travelled to see the legendary King Solomom and returned with a child in her loins, is credited for the very founding of the Solomonic dynasty which ruled over Ethiopia for nearly two millennia; producing no less than 226 kings until its downfall in 1974[28]. Nearly a thousand years after Makda and appearing in the 10th century is another extraordinary tale of another extraordinary woman – the rebel Yodit Gudit. Yodit is said to have raised and led a powerful army bringing the powerful Aksumite Empire to its knees. Another 900 years pass before another powerful woman rises again. However, the period between the early 18th and the early 20th centuries brings forward a number of powerful women to the forefront. The 18th and 19th centuries saw the rise to prominence of two powerful empresses, Elleni and Mentewab; each instrumental in forging alliances and each considered makers and breakers of the fates of many powerful nobles of the times. The late 19th and early 20th century witnessed the emergence of another, empress - T'aitu Bitul; who, in addition to founding the city of Addis Ababa (the country's capital) in 1886, was a key player in politics, diplomacy, and war alike commanding her own army of

[28] With a notable interruption during the mid-twelfth to thirteenth century during which the Zagwe dynasty, which is outside of the Solomonic line of ancestry, took over power.

10,000 strong by some accounts. These historical instances of powerful women are few and far in between. And yet, they do illustrate there were women who did a lot more than just "spin cotton". The question is - what does the existence of these women who wielded tremendous power tell us about the place of women in Ethiopian society at large and gender relations from a historical point of view. What can we read from the lives and exploits of these few women which can be relevant to a wider understanding of gender and gender relations in Ethiopian history? Not surprisingly, these questions have proven to be a little divisive.

Some historians and authors such as Pankhurst (1990) and Rosenfeld (1979) have taken these instances to mean that women were not, at the very least, second class citizens and that these examples demonstrate Ethiopian society had a system that women could use to rise to the helms of power. Others, such as Eshete (1997) counter this by arguing that these instances are too few and far in between and therefore do not suggest Ethiopian women were not oppressed. Eshete is particularly dismissive of any claim of there ever being "a golden age" for Ethiopian women in the past history of the country. She argues that as no matter how much historians might want to dwell on the existence of conspicuous women among the nobility who may have played a prominent role in the political, military, and social life of the ruling elite; these few instances are simply unrepresentative of the lives of the great majority of Ethiopian women. She calls for "great caution in interpreting these as evidence of women's power, endowment of strong identity, and inclusion in the political system, which rarely speak of women or gender, is apparent." (Eshete, 1997, p. 570). Eshete notes that the historical "lives and identities of the rural peasant women, who make up a large majority of the Ethiopian population, have not as yet been reconstructed"; hinting such a reconstruction would bring to the front the oppressions women have been subjected to. She concludes by asserting that "the golden age for Ethiopian women" is not one to be found in the past but one that needs to be carved in to the future through the "transformation of the patriarchal perception of gender relations

and the social order that nurtures and perpetuate [women's] oppression and subordination" (Eshete, 1997, p. 571).

While Eshetes arguments are certainly valid, one wonders if she has taken the need for caution too far. Her argument rests on two pillars – on whether these "powerful women" had any meaningful or real power to begin with; and on the fact that they were part of the elite and therefore their histories do not reflect that of women in the general society. On the first, the fact that the few women who did rise to the pinnacles of power at various points in Ethiopia's history did have real power is well documented. As to her other argument that even if these women had real power, it does not matter anyway since they were a minority is rather irrelevant to the purpose at hand. The ruling elite, by the very virtue of being an elite, are always very few, and extending her argument to men of the ruling class would lead us to the same erroneous conclusion. The broader discussion of gender, power and the question of gender inequality from the historical point of view needs more nuanced approaches and arguments than what Eshete provides.

Rosenfeld (1979), who explores the lives of eight influential women of the *zemene mesafint*[29] (the era of the princes), argues that there were many women with spirited personalities who exercised power and influence during this period "despite the patriarchal nature of Ethiopian society, and male esteem for women based on their submissiveness" (p. 63). She adds that the eight women she describes in her article "were culled from a list of more than sixty" indicating that powerful women were not a rarity at least for this period of Ethiopian history. Rosenfeld's work however suffers from her reliance on the written records and accounts of European travellers and the euro-centric and sexist attitudes that invariably creeped in to their work; a shortfall which she duly recognises. Nevertheless, her work makes for a fascinating reading and her narration of the story of Empress Mentewab (1706 – 1771) puts to rest any

[29] The zemene mesafint is a period of Ethiopian history extending from the mid 18th – 19th century during which royal power lost its grandeur and regional lords wrangled with one another for supremacy.

doubts regarding the real power of elite women. Mentewab first entered the political scene as the wife of Emperor Bekkafa (1721-1730) but became Queen regent to her son Iyasu (1730-1757) who ascended to the throne upon Bekkafa's death. Mentewab's influence and power during her son's reign was immense and well documented; but her power and influence became even greater after his death which made her the principal king maker until her death in 1771. Rosenfeld calls Mentewab "the last great empress" before Empress T'aitu (1889-1913) entered the political scene about a hundred years later. Crummey (2000), likewise, calls Mentewab "one of the most remarkable women in Ethiopian history" and dedicates an entire chapter of his ground breaking book on land and society in Imperial Ethiopia to her. Crummey (2000) goes as far as attributing the five decades of peace and order that lie in between 1721 – 1769 to her extraordinary leadership. Mentewab put an end to the fifteen years of sectarian and factional conflicts before 1721; and her removal from power and her death shortly brought forth the entire collapse of royal power after 1769.

In her concluding remarks, Rosenfeld (1979) pays homage to Mary Beard's "woman as force in history" thesis. Beard (1946), in "Woman as Force in History", argued that the feminist conception of women's history is wrong in so far as it starts from a position which takes the subjection of women as a given rather than one that ought to be proven. Drawing from historical records of the Middle Ages, Beard points out "women were often psychically tough, physically muscular, and socially aggressive" and that they were actively involved in the events that have shaped history since then. Women were, she asserts, active shapers and makers of history rather than passive spectators; they were not just mere subjects of men's oppression. Despite this, she argues, women have not been accorded their rightful place in history through acts of omission on the side of historians. As Degler (1974, p. 70) puts it, her argument can be distilled down to a sense of indignation at the injustice of denying women "that sense of participation in the ongoing stream of human experience" by excluding them from history. With this in mind, Rosenfeld asserts that the lives of the

eight women whose lives she studied and whose stories she narrated reinforce the notion that women were a significant force in Ethiopian history and society. She points out that there were more than sixty women who were influential in one way or another for the period she analyses and she takes this as further supporting claim. Rosenfeld, however, also notes many of the women of the *zemene mesafint* who came in to prominence did so through their connections with powerful men of the time. She also recognizes the fact that women were often used as pawns in the political marriages that were arranged and often failed throughout the period. But she argues, convincingly, that many of these women were aware of their importance and learned to use their indispensability to their own advantage. One often used strategy was to initiate divorces themselves as a method of acquiring property through the equal division of assets in the settlements (Rosenfeld, 1979, p. 78). This fact is also noted in the accounts of a certain Portuguese missionary who travelled to Ethiopia in the 16th century who noted both the arrangement of marriages as well as the ease with which they could be dissolved:

> When they make these marriages they enter into contracts, as for instance: If you leave me or I you, that one that causes the separation shall pay such a penalty. And they set the penalty according to the persons, so much gold or silver, or so many mules, or cloths, or cows, or goats, or so many measures of wood. And if either of them separate, that one immediately seeks a cause of separation for such and such reasons, so that few incur the penalty, and so they separate when they please, both the husbands and the wives (Alvarez, 1881, pp. 46-47).

Alvarez goes on to note his surprise with the abundance of women who, in his view, were able to "do as they please" because "in this country, the faults of women are not looked at with much surprise" (Alvarez, 1881, p. 320). It is not difficult to understand why Alvarez takes the ability of women to do as they pleases as a "fault" when he speaks of "the faults of women". Seen from his priestly, European, 16th century view, women are not meant to do as they please.

What then can we glean from history regarding the issue of political power and men's and women's share of it in the case of Ethiopia? Should we take the appearance,

at various points, of women who wielded significant power and influence to indicate that not all women were oppressed, subjugated, or excluded; and then argue from there that the category of "woman" was not a basis for oppression? Or should we take these cases, as Eshete does, to be irrelevant to the discussion of gender relations for society at large? I believe the wiser choice lies in between these two and in investigating what political power depended upon in the first place and in asking whether, and to what extent, women were excluded from this – a task I proceed to in the section below. Owing mainly to the abundance of sources for the period since the 17th century and the significant changes that occurred in the first half of the 20th century in connection with the threat of colonization on the one hand and the perceived need for modernization, I limit my focus to the period between the late 17th and early 20th century and intend to show that gender, by its own, was not a politically meaningful category in Ethiopia until the early 20th century.

5.3. Class, Power, and Gender in Imperial Ethiopia (17th – 19th centuries)

At the symbolic level, the higher echelons of the Ethiopian nobility derived its legitimation from a purported line of direct descent from the Solomonic line through Makda – the biblical queen of Sheba. The origins of this purported link are somewhat of a mystery since the claim of direct descent from Solomon extends as far back as the ancient Axumite Empire of the first century BCE but the very book upon which the claim is based on originated much later during the 14th century. Titled the *Kebra Negst* (ክብረነገስት - the Glory of Kings) this 14th century manuscript written in *Geez* has as its centre piece an account of how the Queen Makda travelled to Jerusalem to visit Solomon, conceived a son from him, gave birth to this son after her return, and how this son (Menelik I) in turn travelled to Israel to visit his father, was blessed by him, came back with the Ark of the Covenant which he abducted, and how the Ark was

taken to Aksum which became the new Zion (Ullendorff, 1968). Ullendorff calls the Kebra Nagast the "chef-d'œuvre of the Ethiopic literature" and characterises it as being "the repository of Ethiopian national and religious feelings." The legitimizing power of descent from the Solomonic line was such that many kings who climbed to the throne through sheer might would claim to be descended from this line in one way or another before their coronation.

But symbolic legitimation alone was rarely sufficient by itself to either ascend to a position of power and influence or maintain one. Political alliances including the support of the clergy and the other nobility, wealth, and control over land and those who worked on it were crucial elements of maintaining power and influence. Consequently, a very elaborate and extensive system of social stratification evolved over time. Principally, this divided Ethiopian society into four classes. The *mesafint*, the *mekuanint*, the *chewa*, and the common folk[30] (Crummey, 2000; Levine, 1974; Tegegne, 2011). The *mesafint* were great lords that ruled over the provinces and paid homage and tithe to the emperor and received it from the *mekuanint*, who could be characterised as nobility. The *chewa*, originally a class of warriors, are not nobility by birth but rather consider themselves to be noble men through service to the empire. Interestingly, however, the status of being a *chewa* later become one that can be inherited by birth rather than one that is acquired through service. The common folk included mainly farmers, but also traders, the clergy, and to some extent artisans although the later were often seen to be even lower than the common folk. Throughout Ethiopia's history, and especially from the 16th century onwards, the *chewa*, the *mekuanint*, and the *mesafint* existed by extracting labour and produce from the common folk and particularly form the peasantry through a system of power and privilege administration that resembles European feudalism (Tegegne, 2011).

[30] Slaves can also be added here as a fifth group as slavery was indeed a part of Ethiopian history but I have chosen not to get in to that as it is inconsequential to my purpose here. It should also be noted here that artisans were particularly considered inferior even to the common peasant and the later even refused to eat together with them let alone inter marriage. This later tradition was still strong when I grew up in the later 1980s and early 90s.

These classes and their privileges were maintained through an elaborate system of land tenure which regulated ownership, use, and inheritance rights; and the institutions that emerged around them. This system established three principal land tenures - *gult*, *rest*, and *rim*. Of these, the first two are universally recognized in the historiography of Ethiopia "as the foundations of Ethiopian society" Tegegne (2011), and are widely discussed in the scholarly literature. The third features less frequently although recent works including that of Crummey (1999) and Tegegne (2011) have shown that it is perhaps more important to understanding the social history of Ethiopia, especially at the lower levels of the stratification system.

According to Tegegne (2011), many prominent historians and anthropologists have drawn a parallel between the Ethiopian system of *gult* and the European institution of fief holding[31]. One often encountered parallel focuses on the political relation between kings and members of the ruling class – which was structured on *gult* rights, which are constituted from grants given by rulers to the nobility, usually from the Emperor to the *mesafinit* and the *mekuanint*. *Gult* holders in return, like medieval European vassals, pledged allegiance to the king and provided military and administrative services to the king. In this respect, *gult* is seen as a fundamentally important institution defining economic and social relations; and not just between the different echelons of the ruling class, but also between the ruling class and the rural peasantry as a whole.

However, unlike that of European fiefdom, Ethiopian lords lacked direct control over the land within their fiefs. Rather, the fief-holding rights of lords were counter-balanced and limited by the *rest* rights of the peasants who farmed the lands. Rest constituted the right a person has to a share of the land – such as a specific field

[31] According to Tegegne (2011, p. 11), the American social anthropologist Allan Hoben was the first to apply the concept of feudalism to Ethiopian society and was influential in establishing the conventional view of *gult* as a fief-holding right. But while Hoben may have indeed popularized this view, he was certainly not the first one to suggest it as Tegegne seems to believe. The assertion that the gult and rest systems of post 17th century Ethiopia closely resembled that of medieval Europe and European feudalism is much older. Writing at the end of the 19th century, Augustus Wylde for example describes the Ethiopia of the time as being "more [like] what England used to be in the worst of the feudal days"(Wylde, 1901, p. 7).

– first held by any of his or her ancestors in any line of descent. Historians generally agree that *rest* rights of farmers in their land were unassailable and their autonomy in production decisions was high. Thus, *gult* grants entitled lords only the right to collect tribute and tax from the farmers under their administration rather than total control on who worked on the land or how it was utilized (Tegegne, 2011).

A more interesting system developed later in the 18th century combining the grant driven rights of *gult* and the inalienable rights of *rest* to make a kind of gult right which became inalienable and could be inherited as a matter of birth right. This new system became predominant in the 19th century and some provinces such as Gojjam and Tigre became reste-*gults* of provincial lords in their entirety. Another innovation which developed around *rest* and *gult* which Crummey (2000) calls "*aläqenät*"[32]. *Alaqanet* cut against the normal rest rules, which dictated an equal division among all children and bestowed a large portion (usually a third) of the family property (in this case land) to one. The property entitlements that come with the *alaqanet* are inalienable, indivisible, and passed from one generation to the next intact. Only one of the descendants inherits the *alaqanet* along with its official duties while the rest of the descendants divide the remainder of the family lands. Crummey argues that *alaqanet* became highly instrumental in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as an important means for land accumulation since it countered the tendency of both *rest* and *gult* to fragment holdings as land was divided among siblings of subsequent generations. *Aleqanet* coexisted with *rest* and *gult* and was primarily used as an instrument for aggregation of wealth through control over land.

One other innovation also appeared around the late 17th and early 18th centuries and became an equally important strategy for a securing a more consolidated control over land and the people who worked on it – *rim* (Tegegne, 2011). Unlike the other

[32] As used by Crummey (2000), "alaqanet", or as he writes it "aläqenät", was a historical institution of property inheritance that lead to the accumulation of land and property in the hands of a few by establishing a system whereby the majority of land and property would be transferred to one person (the alaqa – or the senior) rather than being divided equally among siblings.

forms of land ownership, rim completely dealt away with the *gult* rights of peasants who worked on land and turned the later into a new class of people – the *zega*. They had no inherent rights to work on the land and did so only so long as those who owned the rim land were willing to allow them. The *zega* were free to go wherever they pleased and in this sense were not slaves but they could not lay any claims to land. They were in fact often passed on to new owners along with the land when rim property was transferred to another person either through inheritance or sale. In this sense, the rise of rim property dealt a final blow to the limited right of peasants and constitutes the most consolidated form of control over land and those who worked on it (Tegegne, 2011).

First appearing in the then political centre of the country, Gonder, rim quickly found its way to the rest of the country as its utility became apparent to the ruling class; becoming the dominant form of land ownership in much of the Begemeder, Gojjam, Tegray, and Wello by the 1750s and 69s; and the rest of the country including the south by the early 20th century Tegegne (2011) argues that the predominance of rim property ownership along with the social status of *zega*[33] which came with it was such that it defines Ethiopian agrarian history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is not my intention here to go over the details of these forms of ownership and the rules that governed them. The key to my argument here is that political power and social standing as well as wealth in Ethiopian history largely depended on control over land and over the people who worked on these lands. And owing to the ambilineal descent system exercised throughout the history of Ethiopia, women had equal inheritance rights to these systems of land ownership without exception. Put

[33] According to Tegegne (2011), the term zéga is derived from the root [ዜገ] zégä, meaning —he becomes poor, lacked status, became humiliated or subjected. He likewise defines [ዜግነት] zégenät as the condition of servitude, subjection, and poverty.

quite simply, women and men had the same and equal access to the determinants of power.

Nor is it the case that these systems were only available to the rich and powerful. The ambilineal descent system has always been a feature of not only the nobility but also the common rank and file of Ethiopian society. This ensured that both men and women could lay equal claims on family property and inheritance from both the maternal and paternal lines. Crummey (2000), citing Hoben (1973), makes it clear that Ethiopians observe "a fully ambilineal system of descent as well as inheritance" which in effect means that each person derives, not only property inheritance rights but also inherits social standing and position equally from mother and father.

> In each generation and in each nuclear family this situation is repeated. There is no privileging of the male line to reduce the ramifying of lineages, and there are no family names to act as umbrellas under which kin can gather (Crummey, 2000, p122).

As a result, individuals – be they male or female – could draw upon either one or both of their parental lines for inheritance of property, social standing, or claim to authority. There is ample evidence that women lay equal claims to land; and were successfully able to acquire property, political clout, and social standing as much as men. While Crummey (2000), as well as a few others, have noted that these systems had an inherent male bias, the evidence seems to indicate the contrary. Crummey's claim that "[a]lthough in *rest* theory males and females were fully equal in their property inheritance rights, in general our evidence indicates a male bias in the operation of those rules" is rather at odds with the evidence he himself provides. Through his book, he gives numerous examples of cases where women were equal and at times even favoured partakers in such land ownership and control systems.

Crummey (2000) provides us numerous occasions involving the transfer of *alaqenat* from a man to a woman; including one where the bequeathal of this title was challenged by none other than a male sibling and a subsequent ruling which not only recognized the woman involved as *alaqa*, with 'authority to allocate the land and

cattle', but also specifically added the woman involved should be the one that should campaign in the event of a military expedition – since, as previously mentioned, bestowment of the title comes with its associated duties and obligations including military service to the empire. Crummey (2000) also admits that women feature prominently in the records of bequethals of *alaqanet* he found, much more so than in other records, and wonders why this is so. "How then may we account for the prominence with which women appear in our cases?" he asks.

His answer, while plausible, also unfortunately reflects his own biases and presumptions. He suggests that the prominence of noble women in these cases can perhaps be explained in one or both of two ways. First, he suggests, "noble families" may have resorted to a formal, written proclamation of bequeathal of the *alaqenat* "in the cases where the family's most promising leader in the next generation, or perhaps, more simply, a father's favorite child, was a woman" (p.125). His second explanation is that "women needed extra security to protect their rights, and that a formal declaration of *alaqenat* would meet that need" (Crummey, 2000, p.126).

However, these evidences may simply be a result of a male bias in the reinterpretation of historical records. The fact that he refers back to the one case where the bequethal was challenged by a man and claims "as we have seen, such challenges probably occurred frequently" (Crummey, 2000, pp. 125-126) does not help his case either. The reality could as well have been that particular bequethals were challenged by all involved, both by men and women. He shows us no particular evidence that bequethals to women were more frequently challenged. The fact that the challenge was put down and the bequethal maintained in the particular case he mentions could in fact be taken as evidence of the lack of any male bias in these affairs. Additionally, the fact that Tegegne (Tegegne, 2011) also provides numerous instances whereby women were able to procure significant influence and wealth through the founding of churches and subsequent allocation of *rim* land throughout the 17th to 19th centuries and well in the early 20th century raises further doubts.

It is abundantly clear from the foregoing discussion that women could manipulate political and legal claims as members of a cognatic descent group. There is also plenty of evidence that women did in fact do that at least from the start of the high Gondarian era in the 17th century to well in to the first quarter of the 20th century. The fact that we have ample examples of such cases during this period is largely a reflection of the abundance of written records from that period and by no means indicates that this was not the norm in the periods prior to it. In fact, as far back as the 16th century, Alvarez (1881) narrates the story of how the emperor divided land inherited from his mother upon her death with his sisters and then divided his own share to his daughters:

> Prester John was going this road to make some partition of lands between himself and his sisters […]. And these partitions were of the lands and property which had remained after the death of his mother. Here we remained four days, and in these they sorted the lands which were divided into three parts, which Pero de Covilham said were lands of more than ten days' journey. And the Prester gave to each of his sisters her share, and one part for himself, and he then ordered his part to be divided into two, and he gave them to his two infant daughters ; and cows, mares, sheep, and goats which covered the hills and fields and valleys, all were in the same partition, and they were divided in the same way as the lands (Alvarez, 1881, pp. 303-304).

Rosenfeld's (1979) concluding remarks are right on point in this matter and are worth quoting at length here.

> The relationship between land tenure and power is fundamental in most societies, and critical in Ethiopia, which may be why one Ethiopian savant made the dubious claim in 1838, that the parlous sate empire during the era of the princes could be blamed on the failure to apply Salic law, which allows land to be inherited by men only. In his judgment, the moment women began inheriting land they lost their spirit of submission, and from that stemmed disrespect for marriage, increase of concubinage, bastardry, and undignified and endless litigation. In a perverse way, there is some truth in his analysis, for it was their equal inheritance rights that kept Ethiopian women from some of the subordination endured by women in many other cultures. Ethiopian law did not, as Blackstone's commentaries did, extinguish the separate identity of a woman when she married" (Rosenfeld, 1979, p. 79).

It is also important to note here that this ambilineal system of inheritance and the equal ownership of land between men and women is not limited to the pages of the history books. Ethiopian society has undergone a series of tumultuous and radical changes since the beginning of the 20th century and especially in the second half as we will see later in this chapter. But even in the face of these changes, this system of land ownership has managed to survive and continues to the present day. As we can clearly see in Figure 2 below, Ethiopia stands out among the other countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa region in the proportion of women and men who own land in that this proportion is nearly equal.

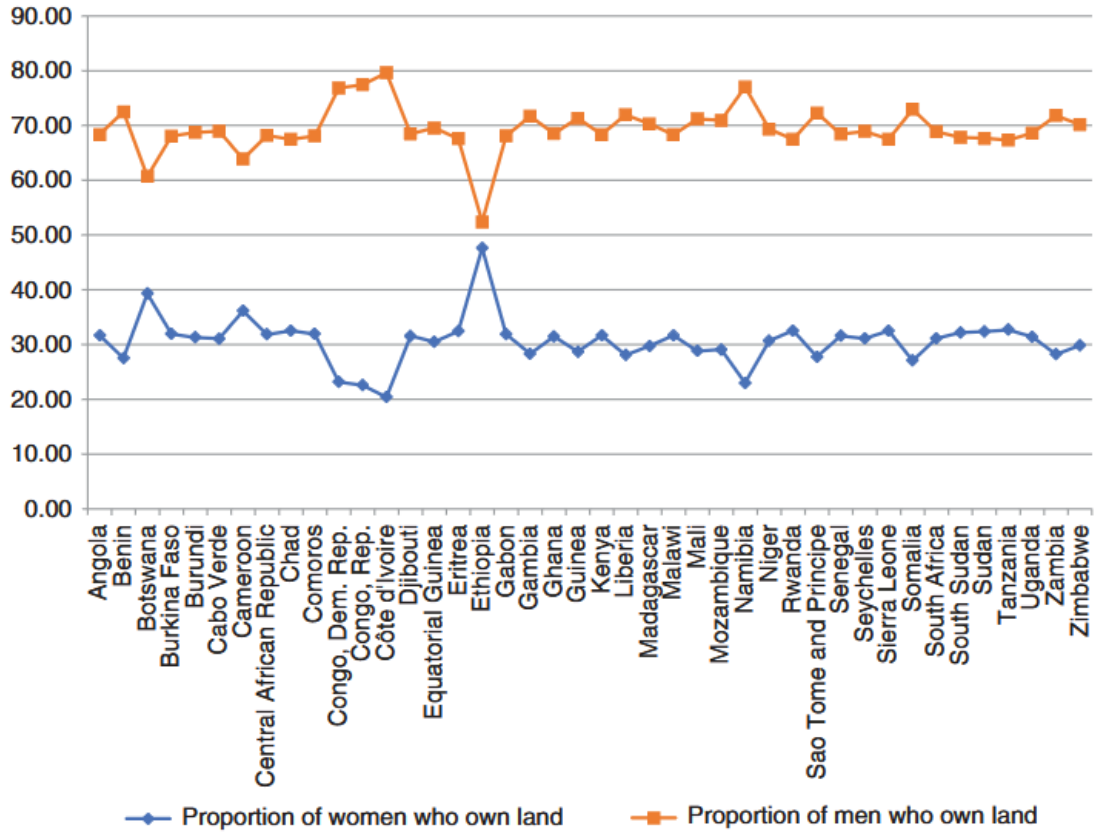


Figure 2: Proportion of men and women who own land in selected SSA countries, 2019; Source: Wamboye (2023, p.32)

5.4. Early 20th century developments: the modernization of the state and the birth of a new political system

The last decade of the 19th century marked the beginning of a new era in Ethiopian history. On the one hand, increasing contacts with the outside world, and especially Europeans, had opened up the country from its relative isolation. On the other, the threat from European colonization, while it had always been a constant background throughout the previous century, became much more pronounced and real from this period onwards. Faced with the growing threat of European colonization, and in an apparent attempt to place itself among the recognized nation states and empires of the time, the Ethiopian empire started testing the waters of modernization.

Interest in modern education and European technology, and especially that of arms manufacturing, had already started earlier during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II (1855 – 1868). But it was not until the coming to power of Menelik II (1889 - 1913) that the task of modernization picked up pace and gained serious momentum. Emperor Menelik II is described to have been an avid admirer of European technology and is said to have keenly sought and acquired all kinds of machinery. He introduced in to the country telephones, cars, steam trains, electric generators, water pumps, cameras, and is said to have even acquiring an electric chair at one point. He established the Ethio-Djibuti rail way company (1897), the country's first bank (1907), the country's first modern hospital (1899) and school (1908). He also established diplomatic relations to a number of European countries and tried to get Ethiopia in to a number of international organizations and associations; succeeding in making the country a member of the International Postal Union in 1908 despite tremendous opposition. These diplomatic relations were intended on the one hand to establish Ethiopia as a recognized state in the eyes of European powers and thereby mitigate the growing threat of colonization.

Despite the victory of Adwa in 1886 which put a decisive halt to Italy's colonial aspirations in relation to Ethiopia, and despite the de facto recognition of the Ethiopian empire and its sovereignty by European powers, it was clear to Menelik that Ethiopia's continued existence as an independent nation needed other means of

legitimation. In a region surrounded by expanding colonial powers, there was little guaranty that any one of them will not attempt what Italy tried and failed. Complicating the matter further, the Italians still continued to occupy territory in present day Eritrea to the north and Somalia to the southeast of the country. This ever present threat of annexation, compounded by the ailing health of the Emperor himself, was probably the most important factor behind what is undoubtedly the most impactful of his reforms; the introduction in 1908 of the ministerial system.

Before the introduction of the ministerial system, the functioning of the empire relied heavily on the authority of the Emperor. The new ministerial system of administration significantly changed that. Writing on the subject of the appointment of ministers, Mahteme-Selassie (1970) reasons that Emperor Menelik II introduced the ministerial system in Ethiopia "realising that the full affairs of an empire cannot rest on the shoulders of one man, no matter how wise he may be", and "out of his passion for introducing the system of government in the European manner". He adds that "In short, seeking a new and better way of administering justice and prospering the nation, Atse Menelik, of his own will and desire, brought from Europe a system of government and divided the affairs of the government in to twelve parts and appointed people of merit on each one of them as ministers" (Mahteme-Selassie, 1970, p. 53).

In introducing the ministerial system at the turn of the century, Emperor Menelik II was attempting to do two things. First and perhaps most important was the goal of making the country appear modern, at least outwardly, and by doing so give it the legitimacy of a sovereign nation in the same standing as that of the European colonial powers that occupied territories all around it. By modernizing the affairs of the state after the European fashion, Menelik II was effectively making a statement of equality with European countries; and in so doing, safeguarding the continued existence of the country as a sovereign nation. The second was to ensure the orderly transition of power from him to his heir-elect, Lijj Iyasu, who at the time

was a minor of only twelve years. The adoption of the ministerial system of government and the appointment of ministers was aimed at steading the boat in the rough waters that were sure to follow - giving the state a chance of continuation until the crown-elect comes of age and assumes full powers.

Menelik died in 1913 but Lijj Iyasu was never crowned and his time in power was marred by one controversy after another. But the ministerial system did work as intended. As many prominent Ethiopian historians have pointed out, Lijj Iyasy was in fact happy to leave the affairs of the state to the ministers who were appointed by Menilik II and their power gradually increased. After a series of controversies and scandals, Lijj Iyasu was finally pushed aside and Menelik's daughter was crowned as Empress Zewditu in 1916. With clever calculations that capitalized on the fact that the new empress did not have any experience in politics, Teferi managed to get himself appointed as regent with the title of Ras. But even now, the ministers appointed by Menelik II continued to function as the centre of government – although the first set of ministers were removed and a new set of ministers were appointed in 1918. The ministerial system still endured even after Ras Teferi ascended to the throne as Emperor Haile Sellassie I, after the sudden death of Empress Zewditu in 1930.

The ministerial system ushered in political bureaucracy and heralded a new era of government employment as a service. In fact, after listing the names of the first ministers appointed on October 25, 1908, Mahteme-Selassie (1970) adds that "from that day on, [government] work ceased to be seen as a burden and instead became an honour to be worn with pride"(p.50). But more than anything else, the new bureaucracy brought with it the need for and birth of a new class, the intellectual and bureaucratic elite who were to transform the country in fundamental ways over the next half a century with significant implications to how gender was conceived in the political sphere as I will show later.

5.5. The rise of a modern bureaucracy and the intellectual class

The introduction of the ministerial system and the gradual modernisation of the state apparatus brought about a need for a new class of trained bureaucrats and government officials. This need became a matter of at most urgency during the first quarter of the 20th century as the state apparatus continued to modernize. This resulted in a tremendous drive in the 1920s and early 30s for expanding modern education within the country as well as sending more and more young Ethiopians for education and training abroad. Zewde (2002) states that some 200 Ethiopians studied abroad, through government or private means, between 1920-1935. Mahteme-Selassie (1970) also lists 140 Ethiopians who were sent abroad for study on government expenses during the same period, out of which at least 10 were women[34]. The 1930s saw the founding of a total of 21 new schools in the country; six in Addis Ababa, and fifteen in various provincial towns (Mahteme-Selassie, 1970, p. 602).

Zewde (2002) comments that most of the Ethiopians who studied abroad were to return home with an acute understanding of how "backward" their country was. They came back to serve their country but were disappointed to find that they were limited to serving as clerks and accountants. Sometimes characterized as the 'Young Ethiopians', these educated men and women found an outlet for the resentment and indignation they felt in their writings, often circulated in underground channels. Zewde comments that "they constituted a passionate, if poorly organised, force for reform" and they gave "eloquent expression to the problem of Ethiopia's backwardness" in their writings. These writings left an enduring mark on the course of Ethiopian history in the second half of the 20th century. They laid the foundation for the radical tradition which took root within the circle of the educated elite and which continued until it was finally amplified by and brought to the mainstream political

[34] At least 10 of the names he lists are unambiguously female names, another four are ambiguous. But the point here is that, although a definite minority, women were among the first Ethiopians who studied abroad.

discourse by the Ethiopian Student Movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Zewde, 2002, p.103-104.) to which I will return later.

The expansion of education and the training of bureaucrats to staff the needs of the growing state machinery continued with renewed vigour in the period after the fiver year occupation of Ethiopia by Italy from 1936 – 1941. There was considerable growth in the expansion of modern education, and by the 1960s, the student population was numbering in the 700,000s (Zewde, 2002). And unlike the pre occupation period, there was considerable growth in the expansion of secondary and territory level education. The University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) was founded in 1950 and by the end of the decade, a number of colleges had been set up in the provincial capitals. Most of these were integrated into what became the Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa in 1961. The student population in these higher education institutions grew from just 71 in 1950 to about 10,000 in 1973 (Zewde, 2002, p. 222). A large number of young Ethiopians continued to be sent abroad, mostly to the US and Europe for further degrees and there were about 700 students studying in the US alone in 1970.

This growth in education and particularly in higher education gave birth to the Ethiopian student movement that began in the early 1960s and fundamentally shaped political discourse in the next decades and continues to shape political discourse to some extent until today. Although the student movement was not the first instance of opposition to the growing autocracy of the imperial regime, in many ways, it was what brought about its collapse in 1974. Opposition to the emperor and his regime had arisen as early as 1943 by the peasant rebellion in Tigray, an attempted coup d'état was foiled in 1960, and there were large scale peasant rebellions in Bale and Gojjam in 1963 and 1968 respectively. But all of these were decisively crushed.

The student movement started gaining momentum in the early 1960s and, for the decade and a half that followed, served as the epitome of growing dissatisfaction with the emperor's government and a call for radical change. Although the history of

the student movement, its causes, it manifestations, and its impact on Ethiopian society and politics are still being contested by the different groups that were involved in the movement, most authors agree on its characterisation as one of steady radicalisation. What had begun in the late 1950s as demands for freedom of expression and assembly within the confines of the Haile Selassie I University had morphed into a militant and radical Marxist movement by the mid-1960s. Most authors have attributed the easy reception Marxist ideas gained among the students to the social and structural inequalities that existed at the time and have argued that the social context was ripe for such liberatory ideologies as were offered by Marxism. Others assert an ipso facto radicalisation thesis and argue that the social and political realities on the ground had very little to do with the adoption of Marxist ideas. Among the later camp, Kebede (2008, p.15) asserts that "what radicalised the movement is not exasperation in the face of the problems [of the country] but prior commitment to a radical ideology" and Zewde (2002) also seems to lend support to the same view and remarks that "ideological authenticity or rectitude" took precedence over historical reality in the student movements of the 60s. According to Kebede (2008), "the major preoccupation of the authors was not so much with what Ethiopia is as with what Marx, Lenin, and Stalin – particularly the last two – said". By looking at the various underground publications of the student movement at the time, Kebede (2008) states that it was customary to reject an argument as wrong "by merely quoting from either Marx, Lenin, or Mao".

> "[A] position is rejected as wrong if one shows that it does not agree with one of Marx's, Lenin's, or Mao's statements, even if it looked factually pertinent. Conformity to the doctrine mattered more than factual analysis and rational scrutiny" (Kebede, 2008, p.15).

It was under such an environment, then, that ideas about gender and gender relations in society were taken from Marxism and liberally applied to the Ethiopian context. The many slogans about women of the self-proclaimed socialist military regime that came to power on the helms of the popular protests of the 1960s and 70s were to have

their origins in the radical student movements of time. Written records of the discourse surrounding gender and women's position in society are difficult to find but there is plenty of evidence that perceived inequality between men and women, or as it was termed at the time – "the women's question" – was a part of the political discourse, even if it often was to be found broader confines of the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist ideology. One manifestation of this was the protest that erupted in March 1968 in connection with a fashion show staged at the *Sidist Killo* campus of the Haile Selassie I University in Central Addis Ababa. Kebede narrates the event as follows:

> "Organised by the university women's club and some Peace Corps volunteers in the main hall of the university, the show staged Ethiopian women students wearing the latest European fashion. Under the instigation of radicals, students protested against the spectacle, which they assimilated to "cultural imperialism" promoted by aristocratic Ethiopian women and American imperialism." Interestingly, the show became the occasion for male students to vent their condescending attitude toward female students. Linking the participation of university women [in such a show] to a lack of the awareness about the detrimental effects of neo-colonial influence, an article in struggle bluntly stated: "Our sisters' heads have been washed by western soap". Complaints about the low level of political conscience of female students intensified. For instance, the radicals attributed the loss of the presidency of the student movement to female votes in favour of the moderate Makonnen (Kebede, 2008, p. 29).

Another glimpse can be found in what is often referred to as Martha's manifesto. Martha Mebrahtu was the daughter of a brigadier-general in the Ethiopian army and a medical student at Haile Selassie I University. A very active member of the student movement, she was an elected president of the university's medical students' association, and was considered one of the most ardent advocates for women's rights; so much so that her peers are reported to have called her the Angela Davis of Ethiopia. She is believed to have picked up her activism in her stay in the US where she attended high school as an exchange student and was witness to the civil rights and feminist movements. In 1972, just months away from graduation, Martha was involved in an attempted hijacking of an Ethiopian Airline's flight and was shot dead along with her co-conspirators by Ethiopian security personnel who were on board. Martha left

behind a hand written note explaining what compelled her to take the actions she did. Part of this note reads

> "We, women of Ethiopia and Eritrea, are not only exploited as members of the working classes and peasants, we are also victims of gender inequality, treated as second class citizens. Therefore, our participation in this struggle must double the efforts of other oppressed groups; we must fight harder, we must be at the forefront. We must equally participate in the struggle for economic and social justice that our brothers have waged. We have a responsibility to become a formidable force in the revolutionary army"[35].

Admittedly, these can only provide a very narrow glimpse into the dominant discourses around what was at time termed as 'the women's question'. There is definitely a lot more material that was produced in the late 1960s and early 70s. Zenebework Tadesse, another of the many young women who were active in the student movement, is reported to have authored a forty six page article on "the woman question" that appeared in the November 1973 issue of "Challenge", a journal of the Ethiopian Students Association in North America (Zewde, 2014, p. 226); the underground publications of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) would have also undoubtedly touched on the topic[36].

Nevertheless, even these brief glimpses clearly demonstrate the origins of the gender inequality discourse in Ethiopia. That gender inequality first arose in Ethiopia within the context of the Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s and 70s and within the confines of a very rigid, radical Marxist ideology is clear. That this ideology, and not the perceived realities of actual gender relations in society, shaped the way gender and the issue of gender inequality came to be formulated and expressed in the later decades can also be established, albeit with plenty of room for further work in this regard given the limited nature of the material I have at hand. The "women as victims

[35] This quote as well as Martha's description is taken from https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/martha-manifesto-ethiopian-womans-dream. While there is no clear evidence of authenticity, I have also no reason to doubt this account as it is in line with other stories about Martha.

[36] Unfortunately, all of these materials are hard to find and I have not been able to get a copy of the reported article by Zenebework or any detailed descriptions of its content. As such, my analysis here is, out of necessity, very limited and the conclusions I draw cannot be definitive.

of double exploitation" that was to become so dominant in the post 1974 socialist era has its origins in the student movements of the 1960s and 70s. The instrumentalistic view of women's participation that sees participation as a means to some higher goal of society that was epitomised by the military-socialist regime's slogan of "the revolution will not achieve its goals without the active participation of women" (ያለሴቶች ተሳትፎ አብዮቱ ግቡን አይመታም) also has its origins in this radical Marxist ideology that arose in the 1960s and 70s.

5.6. Concluding Remarks

Instead of a conclusion for this chapter, I will pose here some questions which the discussion thus far gives rise to. But one further point needs to be made before I proceed to the questions. It has been a point of contention as to whether or not there was an Amharic equivalent for the English term gender. The consensus is that there is not. How best to translate this concept in to Amharic and what terminology to use was in fact the subject of an entire conference of gender experts at one point. The conference sadly did not come to any agreement as various experts suggested various terms. The tendency, however, has been to use the term *tsota* (ጾታ) to denote the biological qualities of maleness and femaleness in the same manner as sex is used in the English language and use siraate-tsota (ስርዓተ ጾታ) - which translates in to English as 'the sex order' - to denote the concept of gender. Putting aside the question over whether or not sex was gender for the moment, since I shall return to this later, the first question is whether the concept of sex was a primary organizing principle in Ethiopian society historically? Related is the question regarding the semantic shift that occurred sometime in the 1930s or 40s in the use of the term *tsota* did not originally denote, at least exclusively, the biological differences of maleness and femaleness, but rather a broad spectrum of classifications and systems of placing individuals in to various social classes and orders; why did this shift occur at this particular time in history and what does it signify?

Turning to the question of equality and inequality, both in historical and contemporary terms, did the rise of the 'women's question' in the late 1960s and early 70s among Marxist student circles represent a mere borrowing of western notions of equality between the sexes and their imposition on a society with no regard to historical and social context? To the extent that a gender order existed, was gender perhaps a mere extension of the very pervasive differentiation among social classes in Ethiopia? To what extent did it have primacy over other means of social stratification such as age, class, wealth, and occupation? A historical analysis of these questions would certainly be illuminating, to say the least.

CHAPTER SIX

Gender and Gender (In)equality in the Policy Discourse in Ethiopia

6.1. Introduction

As I have tried to show in Chapter 2, Questions have been asked of gender equality – how is the problem of gender in/equality presented? What is prescribed as a solution to the problem? Answers to such questions largely depend on how or in what manner the problem is framed, usually in government policies, but also in a host of other policy briefs and strategies that also involve civil society and a host of actors in the multi-lateral development aid industry.

As some have observed, there is little consensus among actors from politicians to civil society leaders, to academicians on what gender equality actually means and what it should mean. Verloo (2007) for example makes the assertion that the concept of gender equality is actually no more than an "an empty signifier that takes as many meanings as the variety of visions and debates on the issue allow it to take". These debates and contestations over what the problem of gender inequality is and what its proposed solution ought to be occur in a wide arena that involves multiple actors including feminist authors, activists, development agencies, multi-lateral organisations, and national governments. As the concept of gender equality traverses these boundaries and travels across time and space, the meanings attached to it shift and change: sometimes expanding, at other times contracting and shrinking. It can become narrowly fixed or stretched and bent in different directions all for a variety of purposes (Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2009). The question here is not only one of finding out what gender equality means and how it is articulated in a particular way in a particular context, but also finding out what purpose this particular fixing, shrinking, stretching and or bending serves.

This chapter attempts to look at the way gender inequality has been problematized in the Ethiopian political scene in the recent past and investigates whether and how the framing of the issue has changed over time. Picking up from the previous chapter, it starts with a brief historical overview of how, when, and why the issue of gender equality entered into the Ethiopian political arena. From there, it proceeds with how the policy discourse on gender equality has developed and changed through the years before discussing the current political discourse especially in relation to the problem of gender inequality in agriculture.

Much of this chapter follows in the direction of Lombardo et al (2009) where the authors "explore the dynamics of a discursive construction of gender equality" in social policy and how "gender equality is fixed in different concepts, is stretched towards wider meanings or reduced to particular ones, according to the actors' intentional or unintentional framing, and is bent to fit a variety of other goals (Lombardo et al., 2009)". I follow the same line of enquiry in this chapter to explore in what manner and for what purpose the question of gender equality and inequalities is articulated in Ethiopia in the social policy arena. More particularly, I make use of their notions of fixing, shrinking, stretching and bending to describe the process by which gender equality is given fluidity and used to mean different things in different policies and at different periods.

I also make use of the "critical frame analysis" suggested by Verloo (2007) in recognising that policy problems, as represented in policy documents, usually include a diagnosis of ('what is/are the problem/s?') and a prognosis (what is/are the solution/s?) for the issue at stake. Within the dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis, there are implicit or explicit representations of who is deemed to face the problem of gender inequality, who caused it, who should solve it, to what extent gender and intersectionality are related to the problem and its solution, and where the problem and its solution are located in the organization of citizenship, labour or intimacy. What characterizes this frame analysis as 'critical' is its identification of who has a voice in

defining problems and solutions in official policy documents, enabling the detection of which actors are included or excluded from the possibility of framing an issue. In doing this, I hope to shed light on implicit and explicit assumptions about the nature of gender equality and inequality that are present in policy documents in the Ethiopian context. I start by tracing the problem of gender inequality to its origins in the Ethiopian political context.

6.2. Framing of Gender (In)Equality as an issue - the pre 2000 years and the legacy of the Marxist movements of the 70s

Gender inequality as an issue of concern appeared in the Ethiopian political scene relatively late. Although raised tangentially, gender inequality was not among the key concerns of the social and political movements of the 1960s and early 70s that culminated in the 1974 revolution. The key issues that preoccupied the movement spearheaded by the Ethiopian student movement were, in no order of importance, questions over the right of the peasantry over land as exemplified by the 'land to the tiller' slogan, questions over the rights of ethnic groups in connection with grievances over cultural oppression; and class oppression and exploitation. Where the question of gender inequality surfaced, and it did so only sporadically, it was framed and entertained within the framework of class oppression and class struggle which was believed to be the ultimate cause of all discriminatory practices and injustices in the country.

With the coming into power of the military socialist regime (the Dergue) in 1974, the country officially adopted socialism as a state ideology, first under the name of 'Ethiopian socialism' and then later under the broader umbrella of 'Marxist-Leninist socialism'[37]. All questions of inequality were consequently understood and articulated

[37] No to Ethiopian Socialism - In December 1974, the Dergue issued "Ethiopian Socialism" by way of meeting half way the clamour of the civilian left for the adoption of the Marxist-Leninist programmes. However, Ethiopian Socialism was rejected by the leftist political organizations on the ground that there is only one kind of socialism, namely Marxism-Leninism, and that, whatever else it might be, Ethiopian Socialism is not such an ideology (Andargachew Tiruneh 1990 pp 367 LSE PhD Research paper).

within the broader framework of class struggle. The Marxist inspired articulations of the women's inequality discourse in the early years after the 1974 revolution were therefore, like most things at the time, quite uni-directional. They started with the premise that class struggle was the ultimate struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors; and women, being part of the former, had the same objective – overthrowing the oppressors.

The Dergue established entities for the mass mobilisation of different segments of the population. These included a nationwide worker's party, peasants' associations in rural areas, and urban dwellers' associations in the cities and towns. Similar channels were laid down for the mass mobilisation of women and youth via the creation of the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA) and the Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA). The REWA, established in July 1980, thus became the first political assembly of women in the country's history[38]. On paper, the REWA represented a substantial number of Ethiopian women with close to five million registered members. It also penetrated all levels of the political structure and had a presence at all levels of the administrative structure starting from the national level and reaching to grass roots levels at the Kebele.

But what contributions, if any at all, the REWA made to women and gender equality remain largely unclear. As was the case with the many other mass mobilisation schemes of the Dergue, the REWA ultimately served the regime and advanced the interests of the Dergue rather than the interests of the women it was set up to represent. REWA was a highly politicised, highly subservient entity that was merely used as a tool by the military socialist regime to force women in to submission to the government's set agenda – whatever these may be. In effect, the organisation

[38] While the first ever women's association in the country would be the Ethiopian Women Welfare Association set up in 1935, this association was essentially a charity organisation that was instituted under the then Empress Itege Menen and brought together women in the higher nobility for purely charitable ends.

had no impact or influence on government policies, laws and regulations (Burgess, 2013).

The REWA, along with the REYA, was also subordinated to the basic peasants' and urban dwellers' associations at the Kebele levels and was under the leadership of the latter two mass organizations. In addition, the grass root level REWAs were subordinate to their own higher bodies which were established at the Wereda, Awraja, provincial and national levels (Andargachew, 1993). Due to these factors, the REWA – despite it being the first ever mass organisation and mobilisation of women in Ethiopia – never amounted to being anything more than a subservient entity that served the interests of a repressive military regime. The whole purpose of the REWA and of the Dergue's plans for it could perhaps be best summarised by one of its most popular slogans – ያለ ሴቶች ተሳትፎ አብዮቱ ግቡን አይመታም - "The Revolution will not achieve its goals without the full participation of women". The problem was, women had no say in what the goals of the revolution were. No one did for that matter, only Mengistu Haile-Mariam – the military despot at the helm of the Dergue – had any say in what the goals of the revolution were as exemplified by yet another revolutionary slogan "ያለ ጓድ መንግስቱ ኃይለማርያም አመራር አብዮቱ ግቡን አይመታም"/ "The revolution will not achieve its goals without the leadership of Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam".

The Dergue was ousted in 1991 by a coalition of rebel forces that called itself the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Upon taking power, the EPRDF setup a transitional government and later instituted a Federal parliamentarian system of government which continues to exist to this day. Along with drafting the country's first ever national policy on women in 1993, the EPRDF-led government also instituted Women's Affairs Offices at the various levels of the government structure; starting from the Prime Minister's Office at the top and extending to regional and sub regional branches of ministries. The Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office later became a ministerial office on its own with

the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2005. Despite the organisation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs as a separate entity, the various women's affairs offices in the other ministries continued to exist and do so to this day.

The 1993 national policy on women identified gender inequality as a priority agenda for government intervention. While the policy has aged poorly, and its wording is rather archaic, it has had a lasting effect on the way the problem of gender equality has come to be framed ever since. There are very striking similarities between the framing of the issue of gender inequality in 1993 and present day policy discourses on gender. The 1993 policy talks of the "the discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in the country which have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labour" and how women have been deprived of equal opportunities and how, as a result, women "are made to lag behind men in all fields of self-advancement".

Continuing with the tradition started by the Dergue of invoking women's participation as key to some national goal, the policy states that "economic development is unthinkable without the participation of women". In the same vein of instrumentalistic thinking, the policy even talks of women's special role as child bearers and influencers of "the next generation of the labour force". Women can, the policy states, "influence their children both positively and negatively, especially during the latter's infancy and childhood". It adds that women are all the more important in this regard because of the role they play as mothers and "their advice more heeded than that of men".

Coming just two years after the fall of the Dergue and the coming to power of the EPRDF, the 1993 policy fondly recalls how women have fought equally along their male counterparts for bringing down the military dictatorship; and notes with anticipation how this has provided the country with a unique opportunity to redress a historic injustice – one that had befallen women. More than ever before, the policy goes on to add, this has created an opportunity to build a society free from any form

of partiality and gender based discrimination. Recalling that the transitional government has proclaimed democratic rights as a foundation of its governing principles, the policy notes that the democratic process can only grow and develop when all people, including women, are given equal opportunities to exercise their democratic rights and freedoms. In this regard, it adds, women can only exercise their democratic rights and freedoms on equal basis with men if what it labels as outdated male chauvinist attitudes are relegated to history. As proof of its commitments, the policy states, the new government has set speeding up equality between men and women to be a priority.

The policy goes on to claim that it is necessary, even essential, to improve women's incomes, improve their health and nutrition, improve their education, and labour force participation in order to facilitate favourable conditions that make it possible for women to participate in the national development effort on equal terms with men. It also envisages the creation of favourable conditions for the formation and strengthening of women's associations to be equally important since women can "solve their own problems" through these associations.

Despite its patronising and often historically misinformed tone about Ethiopian women[39], the policy also incorporated some noticeable departures from previous narratives about women and what was called "the women's question" in Ethiopia. Main among these is its recognition that women were not one monolithic group who had the same interests. "Women should not be restricted to any one association" the policy states at one point; rather "they should be free to form associations of their choice in accordance with their specific needs and professions". This recognition, while it may appear insignificant, cast "the women's question" in a new light.

[39] The policy, for example, claims that, contrary to historical evidence, Ethiopian women have been barred from owning the means of production, and do not enjoy property rights. It adds that they are unable to participate in and unable to perform even in minor public functions. It also adds that most women seem to have been conditioned into holding the same discriminatory views about themselves since they too are a part of the same society which propagates and advances these prejudiced and discriminatory practice.

The EPRDF is a product of the same Marxist movements of the 1970s which saw gender inequality to be an outgrowth of class oppression and were hostile to addressing gendered discrimination in any form other than through the establishment of a classless society where ownership of private property did not exist. The Marxist inspired discourses of the 70s were not even willing to entertain the fact that the needs and interests of rural and urban women could be different[40]. All efforts at framing the oppression of women in such light were dismissed as either misguided or hostile attempts aimed at alienating women from their class base and subverting the revolution. At one point, even the use of the terms such as "double oppression" and the "oppressed of the oppressed" to describe the situation of women were frowned upon based on the reasoning that these did not align with Marxist-Leninist theory in one way or another – for example, the oppressed cannot be oppressors and there cannot be double oppression since the source of women's oppression was private property which was also the cause of all class oppressions[41].

Throughout the 1993 policy's narration of the situation of women and what can and ought to be done about it, the assertion that societal norms and cultural practices are the causes of the situation women are in comes out strongly; which is another new direction for the discourse on women and gender inequality. While tradition and culture were referenced to in the early days of the revolution in the 1970s as important factors in the gender inequality debate, they were put in the perspective of class struggle and "false consciousness". They were not by themselves considered the causes of women's oppression but rather instruments through which the oppression was legitimised. The 1993 policy put customs and tradition front and centre and attributed them as causes for the perceived inequality of women.

[40] Sources here are Marxist publications of the time (mainly Goh magazine which had a dedicated feminist column entitled ለሄዋን which translates to as "For Eve")
[41] Same as footnote #38 above (source is Goh magazine)

This assertion that culture, customs and tradition is at the heart of the perceived inequality between men and women is perhaps the most enduring legacy of the 1993 policy and has had enormous impact on the discourse on gender inequality in the time since then. Even relatively recent policy documents maintain this narrative along with the much older narrative of control over the means of production and productive resources as the causes of women's subjugation.

6.3. From equality to participation: the era of mainstreaming and the death of the transformative agenda

In the decades since the 1993 national policy on women, the discourse has shifted significantly from one of equality and emancipation to one of participation and representation. Alongside this change also came a change in approach, from one of fighting tradition and "bad culture" to one of mainstreaming gender. This change of course came along with and reflected shifts in the international discourse. It is not at all a coincidence that this happened following the adoption of gender mainstreaming "as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality" in the Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995.

A decade after the Beijing conference, the Ethiopian Women's Development and Change Package (2006) was launched "to facilitate the implementation of NAP–GE" - the Ethiopian Government's National Action Plan on Gender - developed in connection with the Beijing Platform for Action. While the NAP-GE recommended for the revision of the 1993 National Policy on Women "in view of the significant changes of existing realities since its formulation" the policy was never revised. Instead, the government seems to have shifted its focus towards more technical approaches to addressing gender inequality – mainly turning to gender mainstreaming as the ultimate solution and deferring to actors in the international development aid industry as the ultimate experts.

In 2005, the Women's Affairs Standing Committee was established as one of the 12 standing committees in the House of people's representatives[42]- as the country's parliament is known. As stipulated in the proclamation, the major objective for the establishment of the Women's Affairs Standing Committee is "to ensure the respect of the rights of women stipulated in the Constitution and to enable them to have the advantage of their rights". Within this broad objective, the standing committee was given powers and duties that included, among others, the power to investigate and amend laws that suppress women and initiate new draft legislations; ensure that gender equality is incorporated in to all proclamations and plans; enable women to equally compete with men in government and private institutions and raise their participation in the political, economic and social fields as well as to "heal the wounds women suffered as a result of inequality and discrimination".

The Committee was also tasked with the duties of ensuring that the rights of women to acquire, administer, control, transfer and benefit from property and inheritance and ensure that the rights of women for equality in employment as well as equal pay and benefits were respected. Other more vague duties included the duty to "liberate women from harmful traditional practices" that harm women physically and mentally. Whether as a direct result of the establishment of this committee or not, a number of laws were amended, chief among them the family law that gave greater rights and protection to women.

National Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines were introduced in September 2010[43] with a marked change in language concerning the nature of gender inequality compared to the 1993 policy. The 1993 policy on women had set itself three objectives. The first one was on "facilitating the necessary condition whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their work

[42] Proclamation no 470/2005 - procedure and members' code of conduct amendment

[43] http://www.mowca.gov.et/documents/20181/21953/NATIONAL+GENDER+MAINSTREAMING+GUIDELINES/961b3007-bd34-4b84-a865-bbfc0094eec3 , accessed 22/01/2019 11:10 am

load". The second was on "eliminating, step by step, prejudices as well as customary and other practices that are based on the idea of male supremacy". And the third on "enabling women to hold public office and to participate in the decision making process at all levels". The gender mainstreaming guideline seemingly merges these in to one objective and does so only partially. It talks of the need for "facilitating the conditions for the speeding of the equality between men and women so that women can participate, on equal terms with men, in the political, social and economic life of their country and ensuring that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour and from enjoying the same rights as men". In the process, gender equality came to mean almost everything and nothing in particular.

Gender equality lost its transformative aspects and became a technical endeavour of "ensuring the outcomes of development are shared equally between men and women". The guideline describes its main purpose as one of serving as a reference and national framework for all government and non-government partners in a manner of illustrating technical approaches for ensuring equal participation and benefit of women with men in all developmental activities of the country. In its foreword, the document makes the following remark.

> "We cannot assume that women will automatically benefit from proposed policies, programs and projects; we cannot also ensure the trickledown effect to benefits all equitably, unless we recognize the different experiences, needs and priorities of men and women when we design policies and strategies. There needs to be a shift in our understanding of the problem and recognize that gender inequality is an integral part of the challenges to the country's achievement of development goals".

In this manner, the question of gender equality came to be inescapably tied with the achievement of the country's development agenda. The question of addressing it also became so technical that it came to be the sole domain of technical experts and policy designers who are now the main actors in the struggle for gender equality. The ordinary man and woman came to be mere enactors of what the policy experts have

deemed necessary and important; and in the process, came to lose any say they may have had, however little that may have been.

6.4. Gender equality in the agricultural policy arena

The issue of gender entered the agricultural policy scene even more recently. The most comprehensive of the agriculture sector polices, the Rural and Agricultural Development Policies and Strategies of the FDRE - adopted in 2001[44], barely mentions gender inequality as an issue relevant for agriculture or agricultural development in Ethiopia. The rural development strategy only raises the issue of gender inequality under part there – "managing the rural development"; in a subsection which discusses the need for popular participation and mass mobilisation for the implementation of the strategies. There, it states that "it is necessary to make special development efforts targeting women so that they may gain the benefits of rural development which they deserve" (p.66).

Much of the section is, however, devoted to explaining the idea that since women constitute half of the rural labour force, their participation is simply indispensable since no strategy that excludes such a significant proportion of the labour force can succeed to bring into fruition the development and transformation that it seeks. As the strategy puts it "trying to undertake rural development without their participation actually means numerically putting out of use some 50 percent of the potential productive capacity of the country. No meaningful rural development can be realized without their participation".

In order to ensure their participation, the strategy continues to reason, it is necessary to increase their productive capacity, and "make special efforts to put them on a par with men in terms of education". The strategy document argues that there are "many long-standing harmful traditions which militate against the participation of women in education" and suggests a campaign should be mounted against their

[44] Note on the importance of this policy vis a vis the ADLI strategy of the government

negative influences. It further adds that the education of women will benefit not only women themselves but also their country since educated women make "a greater contribution to development" than similarly educated men.

Somewhat interestingly, the strategy document cautions against trying to change things too much or too soon and suggests instead to adopt a gradual and progressive strategy to challenge and change what it calls "harmful and outdated cultural outlooks and practices" regarding women and their roles. While it asserts that the domestic work burden of women is the number one challenge that keeps women away from "productive work" and that men should be encouraged to take some share of this burden, it remains pessimistic as to how well this can be done in the short run. It states boldly that "there is a limit to how far the proposition can really be pursued" considering, it asserts, "the country's economic backwardness and the negative cultural influences". It takes it as a simple truth that given the circumstances, "it is inevitable that the brunt of the workload will be shouldered by women". The more practical solution is therefore, according to the strategy document, to make all possible efforts so as to make the work burden on women lighter by, for example, improving water supply services, making the availability of fuel-wood and its utilization more efficient, and by expanding the installation of flour mills in addition to "encouraging the participation of other household members in these tasks" (p.67).

Despite remaining largely pessimistic on the actual practicality of such an approach, the strategy nevertheless asserts that it is necessary to increase the political participation of rural women. It notes that "strategies to increase their participation in Kebele councils and committees should be promoted aggressively" but again cautions that men's attitudes in this respect will be a challenge unless they are "substantially changed". It adds that it will be "difficult to go very far in achieving these tasks simply by using different technical approaches" and makes the case for "attitudinal changes" to enhance the "participation of women in the political, social and economic affairs of the country" (p.68).

The Ministry of Agriculture itself did not develop a gender mainstreaming guideline until 2011. The gender mainstreaming guideline developed by the Women's Affairs Directorate (WAD) within the ministry of agriculture notes that "women and men experience life in different ways, have different needs, and priorities, and are affected differently by policies and development interventions" (p.8). The guideline identifies a host of issues in the way the ministry itself and its various programmes such as the agricultural extension programme are unresponsive to this alleged difference in women's needs and priorities. In relation to the agricultural extension programme for example, the document identifies women's lack of equal access to extension services, the limited number of female extension workers, and the inappropriateness of agricultural technologies to women as being some among a host of other factors.

Perhaps the most comprehensive of the gender related policies of the ministry of agriculture to date is the Agricultural Sector Gender Equality Strategy developed by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2016. In it, the ministry outlines in great detail and at length the rationale for and strategies needed to address gender inequality in Ethiopia's agricultural sector. Developed in close collaboration with and inputs from a host of international and multilateral donor organisations working with the government of Ethiopia, this strategy document can be seen as an attempt at a thorough application of current gender mainstreaming knowledge and practices as set by the international development aid industry.

A New Transformative Agenda or Old Wine in New Wine Skin? The Agricultural Sector Gender Equality Strategy

The Agricultural Sector Gender Equality Strategy document begins with and makes ample use of the usual reference to women as "one half of the population" rhetoric we have seen before. Going past this tired rhetoric, the strategy makes a number of bold claims including one about women being responsible for contributing 70 percent of

the food production in the agricultural sector in Ethiopia[45]. It then proceeds to make the usual commentary about women, despite this contribution, not sharing equally "in the fruits of development due to prevalent gender inequality instituted in attitude and behaviours of individuals, societal norms and values, institutions and market forces". And finally, it sends the message home with the claim that women are disadvantaged not once, or twice, but rather three-fold:

> "as poor people living under harsh conditions like their male counterparts; as women they suffer from cultural biases which undervalue their contribution to development and prevents them from increasing the productivity of their labour, than their male counterparts; and as care givers they carry the full burden of household management for which they get very little support from their husband and family" (Ethiopia Agricultural Sector Gender Equality Strategy p.8)

Having established the disadvantage of women thus, the strategy document proceeds with a twofold justification of why something needs to be done about this state of affairs. First, the strategy document reminds the reader, gender equality is a rights issue and one that needs to be addressed by virtue of it being the right thing to do. But it does not spend much effort in trying to elaborate this any further. Instead, it proceeds to its second justification of why we need to act on gender inequality in agriculture. There are, the document states, persuasive economic reasons for initiating a gender equality strategy for Ethiopia's agriculture sector; and proceeds to explain these thus:

> "Women play an extremely important role in the agricultural sector, in crop and livestock production and value chains, natural resource management activities. According to FAO, women farmers produce between 13 and 25 per cent less than their male counterparts; in Ethiopia women are23 per cent less productive than men. This is because they have less access to land, markets, farming technologies, inputs, fertilizer, credit and agricultural extension and because they have other duties that consume their time. Low yields entail that many households continue to be food and nutrition insecure. Increasing food production to improve household nutrition and meet increased demand because of population

[45] This claim seems to be based on a world bank study of gender in agriculture in Africa – I need to reflect a little on the validity of the claim in the case of Ethiopia given the difference in Ethiopian agriculture here

> growth requires the active engagement of male and female farmers in farming, pastoral and agro-pastoral areas."

The strategy states that gender stereotypes are perpetuated "within the household, the community, as well as decision makers who fail to recognize the (monetary?) value of women's reproductive work and focus on increasing their productivity rather than addressing the root causes of their subordination". The strategy is not clear on what these root causes of women's subordination are, nor does it espouse on it further. Instead, it makes the observation that male-biased perception of who is a farmer has led to the widely held assumption that the farmers are men which in turn has made agricultural inputs and services to be channelled to men farmers. This, it notes, has created a situation where women have considerably less access to agricultural extension services and are considerably less likely to participate in cooperatives. Within the category of women farmers, the document highlights that female heads of households have better access to extension services than married women since the former are targeted by the extension service as heads of households while the later are not.

The strategy document identifies twenty key bottlenecks of gender equality in the agriculture sector, and categorises these under the following five major systemic bottlenecks: insufficient accountability and institutional structures and systems; inadequate capacity to deliver gender responsive services; unequal access to economic activities and opportunities among women and men; limited voice, influence and participation of women and girls in institutions (informal and formal) as compared to men; and poorly developed intra- and inter-sectoral linkage, partnership and collaboration. The document lays down five strategic objectives to address these systemic bottle necks. Of the five, one focuses on policy level interventions and is aimed at creating an enabling condition for removing policy bottlenecks towards gender equality. Two strategic objectives deal with institutional accountability and coordination, focusing on capacity needed to deliver the gender equality strategy. The other two strategic objectives focus on investments that need to be made in order to

deliver gender responsive services to women and men farmers and (agro) pastoralists. It is from these two strategic objectives that a lot of the information regarding the conception of gender and its framing emerges.

The first of the gender related objectives, Objective 3, aims to "strengthen gender responsiveness in the delivery of agricultural services" and lists outputs such as ensuring equitable access to and control of production inputs and resources for men and different categories of women across the various livelihood systems (farmers, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists); ensuring participation of women in higher levels of the value chains, IGA[46]s and commercialisation (marketing) to increase their economic base; and engendering the overall agricultural extension services provision to ensure equal opportunities for participation of men and women in different household categories and livelihood systems. Participation and access are what emerge here strongly.

Objective 4, the other of the two gender related objectives, aims to "develop attitude that perceives equality of men and women in decision making, resource control, participation, voice and influence within the household and, formal and informal agricultural institutions". Within this broader objective, it lists four desired outputs. First is raised community awareness about rights of women and girls as well as the impact of discriminatory and harmful practices. Second is "enhanced" awareness among communities on equitable share of resources, income, food and nutrition and disaster risks, and decision making. Third is increased participation of women and leadership in formal and informal social and economic collectives and associations. Fourth is increased availability and use of affordable energy and time saving "gender appropriate" technologies for equitable sharing of the work burden among women. Awareness about rights, participation and leadership of women, and

[46] IGA here is an acronym that stands for "Income Generating Activities"

availability of gender appropriate technologies that help women are what are desired at the end.

In many ways, the Agricultural Sector Gender Equality Strategy developed by the Ministry of Agriculture has changed the discourse on gender equality in Ethiopia by introducing a number of framings that were not seen before. The first and perhaps most significant of these is the framing of gender as relations that are non-fixed, variable and contextual. As opposed to previous framings that usually framed gender inequality as *gender disadvantage*, the strategy frames the issue of inequality in much more fluid terms. This is obviously a reflection of the influence the international development aid industry has had on the development of the strategy and is clearly seen in the language of the document. The strategy makes it clear that its approach is built on "the understanding that gender inequalities are socially determined attitudes and practices that are embedded in society and its institutions and they can be changed". These changes, it adds, can and should include such things as "the way household members negotiate decisions about work, the division of labour, reproduction and consumption and interact with institutions (formal and informal) and markets". It further notes that "women, like households, are not a homogeneous group. Their needs and roles within the household - as household heads, as wives within male-headed monogamous and polygamous households and as female youths varies". It also states that the strategy will be guided by "gender transformative approach that emphasizes the importance of working with both women and men to understand the causes and consequences of inequalities and to challenge and change power relationships".

All of the above, and especially the later one of the two framings at the end of the previous paragraph are relatively rare in other policy documents in Ethiopia; even to date. However, much of this innovative thinking and new light does not find its way in to the expected outputs set by the document. In the end, numerical dimensions of participation set in terms of percentages reached and percentages taking part in this

and that activity or program are put as the desired outcomes of the implementation of the strategy. Participation defined in its crudest form thus – participation in its purest numerical dimensions – seemingly ends up becoming the whole purpose of implementing the strategy.

Gender and Development: Is gender equality a developmental agenda or a development goal?

It is important to note here that the gender equality agenda in the agricultural sector is framed within the broader objectives of Ethiopia's overall development plan which, at the time of this writing, is the second iteration of the country's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). The GTP II (2015 – 2020) has the overarching objective of realizing Ethiopia's vision of becoming a middle-income country by the year 2025. Within this broader aim, the objective of the agricultural sector is to increase the productivity of the sector so as to enhance the contribution of the sector to the overall economy and build production capacity. The major agricultural and rural transformation targets here are increasing crop and livestock production and productivity, promoting natural resources conservation and utilization, and ensuring food security and disaster prevention and preparedness. It is within the confines of these strategic objectives that gender equality in the agricultural sector is framed and addressed.

The GTP in its current second iteration is what serves as the overarching framework for the various framings we have seen in the preceding pages. The GTP II introduced the practice of gender disaggregated planning and reporting and this has widely been adopted in other more specific policies and strategies. While the promotion of women's empowerment, along with that of the youth, is included in the GTP II as "a strategic pillar"; and ensuring the effective participation of women and youth in the development and democratisation processes and enabling them to equitably benefit from the outcomes of development are listed along with empowerment; the language here is very vague and does not say much as to how

these are to be achieved. Of note here are also the language used – that of enabling women and the youth to equitably benefit from development. In many ways then, what the gender equality in the agricultural sector strategy tries to do is operationalise these broad commitments in to actionable programme components and objectives. And this need is perhaps what explains its technocratic, top down approach to the issue.

Box 1: GTP-II provisions for addressing gender issues in agriculture

- Promote women friendly technologies which reduce the work load of women.
- Targets for coverage by extension are to be disaggregated by sex into male and female-headed households, married women, youth farmers, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.
- Married women in male headed households to be 50% of the total beneficiaries for extension services.
- Extension services will be provided to 100% of FHHs and 10% of extension beneficiaries will be rural youth.
- Disaggregation of targets into MHHs and FHHs (for issuing second level land certificates PSNP, safety net graduates and cash transfer beneficiaries, Households utilising agricultural inputs, artificial insemination services and participation in cooperatives).
- Women and youth membership of co-operatives is to reach 50 and 30 percent respectively.
- Agricultural extension will be implemented to address the needs of women farmers, agro-pastoralists and pastoralists through gender sensitive approaches.
- Training will be delivered at Farmers' Training Centres to enable DAs to provide gender sensitive support to women and rural youth involved in agricultural activities. The management of FTCs will include representatives of women and youth.
- Raise women beneficiaries of agricultural mechanization tools to 30 per cent
- 30% of extension services and trainings to rural women
- 10% of extension services to youths including female youths
- 50 % of coops membership to women and 30% to youths
- More focus to make women benefit from market participation & value addition
- 23% of the poultry package technologies to FHHs women (female household heads)
- 23% of cattle breed improvement package to urban & peri-urban FHHs
- Focus on forage development package to pastoral and agro-pastoral women
- 20% of land use right certificate to FHHs
- 30% of the Land Admin & utilization positions to women experts in all the structures from Federal to Kebele levels
- 30% of participation in water-shed management for women
- 30% of water management & irrigation beneficiaries for women
- 100% of trainings on climate resilient and green economy for FHHs and 50% for women in male headed households
- 50% of supports to women on early warning & climate change coping mechanisms

Source: Gender in Agriculture Sector Strategy Document Published by the FDRE Ministry of Agriculture)

The gender equality in agriculture strategy document itself notes that "the Government's anti-poverty policies and programs in agriculture have all included a commitment to equality" but adds that these however have often failed "to address underlying gender inequalities". The strategy attributes this failure largely to "weak implementation, monitoring and evaluation" and suggests gender mainstreaming as a means to delivering "equality in outcomes". The emphasis on equality of outcomes is noteworthy here and explains why the strategy`s desired outputs have a keen focus on measurable outputs – such as percentage figures and numbers.

It also needs to be said here that the strategy itself is clearly framed from the point of view of achieving the strategic objectives of the agricultural sector through gender equality; not gender equality in and of itself. The end goal is achieving the goals of the agricultural development programme through the increased involvement of women in agriculture. Gender equality is not the goal here; and if it is, it is only a tangential one. In this sense, the strategy shares the most common feature of all gender related social policy in Ethiopia – that of instrumentalistic framing and bending of the meaning of gender for strategic gain. This strategisation is clearly and plainly laid down in the gender equality in the agriculture sector strategy where it states: "the main objective of the gender equality strategy for the agriculture sector is to provide a national framework on how to ensure gender equality ***as a means*** of transforming agriculture and its increasing role in Ethiopia's economic development" (emphasis mine).

Other gender and agriculture related strategy documents

The issue of gender in agriculture is also raised in one way or another in a number of other policy documents including the Agricultural Growth Programme (AGP), the Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP), the Productive Safety Nets Program (PSNP), and the Agricultural Extension Programme Strategy. The framings in these various documents are similarly to what has been discussed above. The Agricultural

Growth Programme (AGP) aims to increase agricultural productivity and commercialisation focusing on high agricultural potential areas. Under implementation since 2011 and currently in its second phase, the AGP also incorporates a few gender related objectives including assurances for gender responsiveness in future agricultural growth, promoting labour and time saving technologies for women to ease their burden, providing relevant information for female farmers, and setting a target of reaching at least 24% female-headed households from the 3.7 million households expected to be reached by the end of the AGP II period. The AGP II also envisages that 46% of the total 20.1 million people to be reached through the programme will be women.

The Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP), under implementation since 2008 in six regions, aims to reverse land degradation and improve land productivity. The SLMP has developed its own Gender Mainstreaming Guideline in 2014.

Box 2: PSNP 4 PIM provisions with regard to gender, social development and nutrition

- Equal and active women's participation in PSNP decision making structure at Kebele level
- Joint client card entitlement for husband and wife
- Transition of pregnant women to temporary direct support after first Antenatal care visit (or in the absence of such a visit the fourth month of pregnancy)
- Continuation of women's participation in Temporary Direct Support until 12 months post-partum
- Encourage women to collect household transfer and control over the resource for household consumption
- Clients should not travel more than 3 hours to collect transfer; food and distribution points to be established in close distances.
- Labour support for eligible labour-scarce households
- Careful consideration of the needs of men & women and other vulnerable groups in annual public works (PW) planning
- PW projects shall reduce women's regular work burden, lighter tasks for women
- Construction of childcare centres at PW sites
- PW team composition should be balanced with men and women; women-only teams for certain projects
- Women as team leaders in PW (Forewoman)
- Women's 50 percent workload reduction in PWs; women's late arrival and early departure to and from public works,
- Travel distance to PW site should not be far from village

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Gender Equality Strategy for Ethiopia's Agriculture Sector

These guidelines were intended to ensure equality between men and women with regards to fair distribution of workloads, access to resource and opportunities, access to and control over resources and benefits, and participation in decision making.

The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), launched in 2005 and currently in its fourth phase, is another of programme that deals with gender and agriculture related issues. The PSNP is aimed at providing a long term strategy for food security and household asset protection during shocks among the most affected of the population. The goal of the program is to enhance resilience to shocks, strengthen livelihoods, and to improve food security and nutrition for rural households that are vulnerable to food insecurity. The PSNP4, the current iteration of the program, states that it strongly considers the needs and work burden of women in its design and implementation. The Project Implementation Manual (PIM) has incorporated various provisions intended to reduce women's work load (by up to 50 percent) while at the same time increasing women's participation in the program's management.

The Agricultural Extension System strategy designed to improve access to quality extension services by smallholder farmers also raises a few gender related concerns. The strategy identifies six systemic bottlenecks: low level of awareness and poor gender mainstreaming in extension programs planning, implementation and monitoring, learning and evaluation (MLE); shortage of financial resources to

Box 3: Proposed strategic interventions of the MoANR extension strategy on gender

- Enhance the level of awareness on gender at all levels
- Strengthen gender mainstreaming actions
- Improve participation of women and youth in agricultural extension
- Capacity Building for extension staff and rural communities
- Improve employment opportunity for women DAs
- Adequate resources to gender related activities
- Put in place an accountability and responsibility mechanism
- Strengthen the link between Women Affairs and Agricultural Extension Directorates and ATA
- Strengthen collaborations and networking among other actors
- Enhance effective monitoring and evaluation

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Gender Equality Strategy for Ethiopia's Agriculture Sector

implement planned activities on gender; lack of accountability and responsibility mechanisms; lack of gender Focal Persons at grassroots levels; lack of gender disaggregated data; and what it collectively calls "socio- cultural constraints". The strategy also includes commitments to address gender disparities in extension services and puts reaching 40% and 50% percent of women and youth respectively in all of its programs and projects. The strategy has proposed ten strategic interventions to address the systemic bottlenecks that contributed to gender inequality in the agricultural extension systems.

Strategic Justifications: why is gender equality a concern?

As is probably clear by now, and as the gender equality strategy for the agriculture sector makes it abundantly clear, gender equality is a concern because it has important contributions to and implications for the success of the overall development goals of the country. But beyond this, the gender equality strategy for the agricultural sector document deals with this question at some length and provides what it considers to be important justification for addressing gender inequality in the agricultural sector. Three justifications are given here – first gender equality is cast as a question of right. Equality between men and women is cast as a legal and constitutional right enshrined in law. Second, the contribution of women in the agricultural labour force are highlighted; and third, opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity are indicated as reasons for addressing perceived inequalities between men and women in the agricultural sector. The strategy states that "[t]here are practical, economic reasons for addressing gender inequality in the agriculture sector". The reasons listed are many and refer to the amount of time women spend in agricultural activities; and the productivity losses and the perceived greater likelihood of women re-investing their income in their family welfare.

The strategy document asserts that women not only make a significant contribution in the agricultural labour force but also that they devote a large amount of their time to agricultural and livestock production as compared to men - often working for a far longer time. It sites various examples of such differences and concludes that, on average, women devote anywhere between 14 – 17 hours a day for agricultural activities as compared to the average of 10 for men. It also makes the assertion that women contribute as much as 70 percent of on farm labour in post-harvest activities for cereals and take on 60 percent of marketing activities. While accepting that there are regional differences, it nevertheless points out that women do make significant labour contributions to both cereal and livestock production in Ethiopia. The extent of these contributions ranges from a low of 34% in SNNPR to a high of 52% in Tigray for cereal production; and a low of 48% in Amhara to 77% in SNNPR for livestock production. If women do make these labour contributions, the issue here seems to be the lack of their recognition and the fact that their labour and their overall contribution to agriculture is not valued as that of men. But the document does not go into details as to why this might be.

Having established the significance of the labour contributions women make to agriculture, the strategy document then proceeds to point out that there are "untapped potentials and opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity and production by addressing gender inequality". The document states that women are estimated to be 23% less productive than men because they have less access and command over a range of productive resources and services as compared to men; and it is this lack of access and command over resources that it tries to fix. The strategy alleges that the multiple roles of women and "cultural barriers" constrain their capacity to use available opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity and restrict them from fully utilising their potential. As a final point, it asserts that research suggests that women are more likely than men to re-invest their income in their family's welfare, education, nutrition and health and contributes to social cohesion

and peace building within the community as well as collective welfare. However, this contribution is rarely recognized at household or in national statistics.

6.5. Fixing, Shrinking, Stretching, or Bending?

Returning to the discussion of the "dynamics of a discursive construction of gender equality" in social policy and how "gender equality is fixed in different concepts, is stretched towards wider meanings or reduced to particular ones", what can be said in this regard about how gender equality is framed within the Ethiopian policy environment? Can we see examples of such fixing, stretching, bending, shrinking? And what purpose do these serve? Before reflecting on these questions however, I want to discuss the dynamics of the discursive construction of gender equality a little further.

According to Lombardo et al. (2009), fixing happens when gender equality loses its contested meanings and becomes affixed to a specific set of terms and conditions. In some situations, the contested nature of the concept is masked by particular articulations of the concept in such a way that it comes to be understood as fixed to certain aspects that cannot be challenged. According to Lombardo et al. (2009), a very good example of such fixed articulations is the numerous documented cases where gender equality has come to be exclusively associated with and defined by the narrow tools and methods that have collectively come to be identified with 'gender mainstreaming'. Another example can be found in what happens when gender equality is enshrined in legislation in the form of participation quotas, and anti-discriminatory laws. In the process of shaping its meaning under such contexts, the created definitions of gender equality can become fixed for some time. But Lombardo et al (2009) are careful to point out that fixing in this context does not remove all contentions over its meaning, it merely freezes the meaning temporarily. According to Lombardo et al (2009) fixing can even be seen as an achievement in the gender struggle in the sense that gender equality has been enshrined in legal or political documents and is no longer a contested goal.

These 'fixed' achievements come to be the dominant, and at times only, ways of defining what gender equality means. Such fixing often serves a purpose and it indeed allows for the creation of a consensus or standards of representing the norm to be followed in making gender equality happen. This is particularly evident in discussions on the meaning of gender equality and the goals to be achieved through it, which are often articulated in relation to the strategy of gender mainstreaming. As much as the process of fixing can be important to practical steps and pragmatic approaches and therefore facilitate action, it can also be counterproductive in so far as gender equality, thus narrowly defined and fixed, loses part of its dynamic when it is frozen to one particular understanding. It loses its reflexive ability and the fact that the definition of gender equality or inequality thus formulated is just a partial understanding can be lost.

Shrinking, on the other hand, is related to fixing but allows for a somewhat greater amount of flexibility in that the meaning of equality or inequality are not fixed and frozen to a certain narrow articulation. This flexibility is taken even further in the case of stretching which involves the articulation of gender equality as a process whereby it comprises *one of many related goals and policy concerns*. In processes of stretching, the goal of gender equality might become one among many, but it is still central. This centrality is lost in the case of bending, which on the contrary, is a process that shapes meaning at the expense of the goal of gender equality. Bending occurs when the concept of gender equality is adjusted to make it fit some other goal (for example, economic development or health promotion) than the achievement of gender equality itself. Bending the concept of gender equality thus can seem counterproductive to the goal of gender equality, however it is articulated. But it can also be very instrumental in so far as it serves the need to strategically frame the issue in order to put it on the political agenda and sell it. This is often encountered in narratives of gender equality that advance gender equality as *smart economics*.

When seen in the above framework, it can be argued, and demonstrated, that to a large extent the manner in which gender equality is articulated in the Ethiopian policy scene is one that predominantly fits with the bending of the concept. Be it as part of the struggle against class based exploitation or the struggle against poverty, gender inequality has been framed not as a problem in and of its own but as part of another much broader problem. Addressing gender inequality is therefore presented not so much as a matter of justice and equality but more as a means to a broader societal and national goal. Framing the problem in such broad terms and placing gender equality as a strategic goal that would lead to the achievement of much broader goals is not a problem on its own. But it does push gender inequality as a concern to the fringes and puts the case for equality front and centre.

The problem here is the case for equality is often made not in terms of justice and fairness but in terms of pushing a broader developmental agenda for the achievement of which women and women's contribution is needed. Again, there is nothing wrong with seeking greater contributions from women for gaining ground on some national agenda such as the lifting the country out of poverty. Women, as citizens, should have, and do have, the right and duty to take part in these efforts and national goals. The problem is that this framing gives them little to no choice in determining the nature of their participation. In fact, they may not be even free to decide whether they want to participate at all. It comes down as a national duty over which they have no say.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gender in Agricultural Life:

The Ox-plough, the Symbolic Construction of the Farmer, and the Gendering of Agricultural Knowledge

7.1. Introduction

If we conceive of gender as a performative construct (as discussed in Chapter 2), the question then becomes one of unravelling how gendered identity is produced, reproduced and reaffirmed through a continuous process of enactments and re-enactments. In the context of this research, this means not only understanding how and in what ways gender enters into agriculture and structures it but also how agricultural work also constitutes a repetitive performative act, a ritual, which produces and reproduces gender. But first, I provide a brief picture of agriculture as it exists in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia and proceed with a more detailed description of agriculture and agricultural work in Chertekel. I then proceed to a detailed account of how and why agricultural activities are organised as they are and what subjective positions men and women are assigned by discursive formations that maintain this distinction between men and women as they relate to farming.

In addition to exploring the ways gender enters into and structures agriculture, this chapter also looks at how gendered lines are created, maintained, and negotiated in agricultural work. It also explores the ways these gender boundaries, once created, organise agricultural knowledge and skills in to male and female domains and the effect of these on the lives of individual men and women. But first, a brief sketch of agricultural life in Chertekel is in order and it is to this that I turn below.

7.2. Rural agrarian life in Chertekel: A short glimpse

Chertekel is, by rural standards, a relatively large Kebele situated along the northern edges of the Abay river gorge in the Gozamen Wereda of the East Gojjam Zone in the Amhara National Regional State. It is connected to the town of Debre Markos, where both the woreda and zone level administrative offices are located, with a 17 km long badly maintained gravel road. The Kebele has a total land area of 6223 hectares on which a total of about 2,817 households live, virtually all of them (99.9%) making a living out of small holder family farming. Most families typically hold between 0.5 – 1 hectares of land over which a variety of crops are cultivated. Principal annual crops include *teff* (Eragrostis tef), wheat, *gomenzer* (Brassica carinata), maize, beans, peas, and *nug* (Niger seed/Guizotia abyssinica). In addition to cultivating these annual crops, most households also maintain small backyard gardens (often called *guaro*) near the house where perennial crops such as *gesho* (Rhamnus prinoides, the shiny-leaf buckthorn), *khat* (Catha edulis), and coffee are grown.

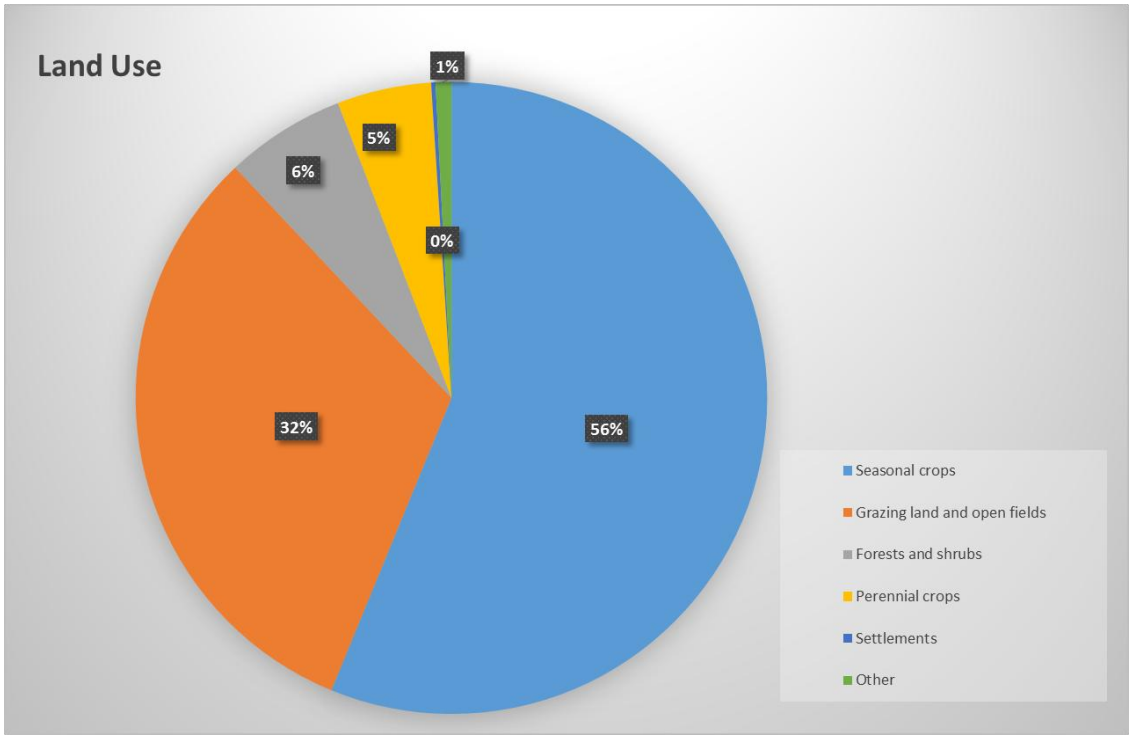


Figure 3: Land use by purpose and proportions of agricultural land, Chertekel Kebele[47]

The land use profile of Chertekel Kebele reflects the general pattern seen everywhere in the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia where mixed agriculture that combines animal husbandry and cereal production is prominent. Slightly more than half of the total land in the Kebele is dedicated to cereal production; and a third of it to animal grazing. As such, close to 90% of the total land cover of the Kebele is dedicated to this mixed farming system. Perennial crops account for 5% of the total land cover of the Kebele. Settlements constitute less than 1% of the total land area of the Kebele.

7.3. The annual cycle of life

As in most other rural villages in the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia, agriculture in Chertekel is seasonal and dependent on the annual rains that begin in late June and last until late September. Farming is built around two seasons the

[47] Data source: Chertekel Kebele Administration Office

planting season and the harvesting season and life itself revolves around these two. This produces the following cycle of events and activities that are typical in a farming household's year which I refer to here as the annual cycle.

Ploughing and land preparation (March – May)

The annual cycle begins with preparing the land for planting/sowing in anticipation of the start of the annual rains in June. This is done via repetitive ploughing using the ox drawn ard plough (the maresha) which is the primary instrument of tillage. Ploughing begins in late March and is an extended activity that lasts until early August. During the dry months of April and May, the plot is ploughed repeatedly with the soil being left to soak in the sun for up to a week or more between each round of ploughing. Doing this servers two purposes: first, the sun's rays kills a lot of the roots and/or seeds of weeds and other vegetation that may still be present but dormant in the soil. This significantly reduces the risk of weed infestation later. Second, it also improves the quality of the top soil by aerating it properly and thereby improving its fertility.

Each successive round of ploughing is done differently, at different angles, and at different depths to ensure the planting bed is properly prepared well ahead of the start of the annual rains in mid-June. Depending on the type and quality of the soil, the nature of the plot, and the type of crops to be planted on it, a plot may require anywhere between 4 to 6 rounds of ploughing before it is ready for planting or sowing in addition to one last round of covering ploughing after seeds have been planted. Ploughing is done with an Ethiopian variation of an ox drawn ard plough called the *maresha* which, in its complete configuration, consists of 12 different parts, as shown in figure 4 on page 167. I will return to the *maresha* in greater detail later.

Sowing/planting (June – August)

Once the annual rains start in early June, sowing and planting commences. Barley and maize are the first to be planted with wheat and *teff* coming next. A vigorous pre

planting manual weeding used to be a major task in the prior years. As men ploughed, women and young boys and girls followed along picking the roots of grass and other vegetation and removing them before the sowing to reduce weed infestation. But with the widespread use of chemical methods of weed control that have started to take root in the last 10 years, this pre planting weeding seems to have declined significantly, to the appreciation of many men and women. Sowing is done in two ways; the traditional broadcast seeding and the relatively modern, recently introduced row planting/seeding methods. A decade or so ago, all sowing was done via broadcasting where by the farmer takes out fistful of seeds from a pouch and throws them across the plot in long arching motions to distribute the seeds as evenly as possible. The farmer repeats this section by section, till the whole plot was covered in seeds. This technique was as much an art as a skill and getting the motion right and ensuring that the seeds were evenly distributed across the whole plot was no easy task. Getting it right required years of practice. This form of sowing seems to be giving way to a new method where the farmer makes parallel rows at about 30 – 40 cm apart and seeds are dropped along these rows. Row seeding was introduced by the government's agricultural extension programme in (year) and has been aggressively pushed on to farmers since then. In Chertekel, row planting has supplanted broad-casting for all crops except *teff* and has become particularly popular for wheat planting. Why farmers were keen to abandon broad-casting for wheat while they still use this method for *teff* is somewhat unclear but it is likely that this adoption has a lot to do with the fact that the Kebele is one of the sites that has been selected as commercialisation cluster sites for wheat and has, as a result, been at the receiving end of a lot of agricultural extension programmes aimed at intensifying wheat production and productivity.

Row seeding has also introduced the need for additional labour during planting. While in the past a single farmer with a pair of oxen and the *maresha* could have done the sowing and the covering ploughing by himself, row planting requires

at least three people – one to make the rows for planting using the plough, another to follow along and drop the seeds along the rows, and a third to drop fertilizer's at a set distance from the seeds[48]. Farmers have filled this need for additional labour by taking their wives and/or children with them to their field during planting days. While the men make the rows, the women and children follow on their heels and drop seeds and fertilizer along the row. Sometimes, a makeshift seed dropper is made from a plastic water bottle (usually of the two-litre size) the cap of which is perforated to allow for the escape of a limited number of seeds at a time. By shaking the plastic bottle from side to side, the farmers are able to drop a few seeds in the furrow as they walk. This rudimentary attempt at slightly improving the efficiency of the task aside, the task of row seeding remains time and labour consuming and especially more so if compared to the age-old tradition of broadcast seeding. Getting the seed to fertilizer ratio right and ensuring that not too many seeds fall too close to each other, or the seeds are not too far apart is another challenging task. As result, the time-tested method of broadcast seeding still remains the predominant method of seeding for most crops other than wheat. But for wheat, aggressive push for row seeding on the side of the government, combined with visible yield improvements of row seeding as compared to broadcasting have convinced many farmers to adopt row planting and it is slowly becoming the preferred method of planting wheat.

The order of planting/sowing largely depends on the particularities of the season and the timing and manner of the annual rains in that season. However, barley is usually the first crop to be planted (early June), followed by maize and wheat which are planted in July. With the sowing of teff in late July and early August, the long arduous task of ploughing finally comes to an end and both man and beast can take a well-earned break. Or perhaps only beast as several tasks still await man.

[48] interview with Lijalem, Kebele Agriculture Office, Chertekel

Weeding, weed and pest control, and looking after the crops

Once ploughing and sowing are done and over with, farmers then turn to weeding and weed management. In the not so distant past, weeding was a manual task requiring back breaking work for weeks on end. But with the increasing availability and widespread adoption of chemical means of weed control, the arduous task of manually uprooting weeds and other vegetation from the plot and their subsequent removal from the farm has been replaced with a spraying of chemicals that only takes up half a day of the farmer's time instead of weeks of backbreaking labour. At present, almost all farmers have taken up the use of the chemical agent 2,4-D[49] as their preferred method of weed control. Farmers spray their farms with herbicides between 35 – 40 days after sowing. Due to the fact that men were the ones who had received training on mixing and spraying the chemical, the spraying is done exclusively by men. While men admit that there is no reason that would prevent women from being able to do the spraying, the men took the fact that they are otherwise idle during this season as one more reason as to why they, and not women, should be responsible for applying herbicides.

Looking after the farms will continue until the crops are ready to be harvested. Typically, this would consist of making sure the farm is not trampled upon by cattle and animals, controlling for rodent damage and generally making sure that the farm is in proper condition. A farmer would typically visit his plots three to four times during the week, usually in the early mornings or late in the afternoon.

[49] Add a little note about the chemical agent here

Reaping and harvest (November – January)

With the end of the annual rains in October, the earliest of the year's crops start maturing. Barley, being the first to be planted is also the first to mature and is ready for reaping as early as October, followed by maize which is ready to be harvested in November. But the main harvest season kicks off in December when wheat and then teff, the two most important crops in Chertekel, are ready to be harvested.

Picture 5: heaps of cut teff strewn across a farm filed (photo by author: Dec 2016)/

In comparison to other agricultural activities, harvest is a much more communal and festive activity. Since crops have to be harvested within a relatively short period of time once they are ripe, farmers often enter into labour sharing schemes with one another and take turns to work on each other's crops. Known as either *debo* or *wonfel*[50], these work groups typically consists of up to four farming households coming

[50] Debo and wonfel are traditional systems of pooling labour on a rotational basis where by people work on one activity at a time in large numbers

together to perform the most time sensitive components of the harvest – that of cutting the ripe crops using a harvesting sickle. A group of farmers would take two to three days working on one farm before moving on to another.

Picture 6: a teff Kimir in the making (photo by author; Dec 2016)

Harvest consists of at least four distinct activities each performed after the prior has been completed. The first step is cutting down the ripe crops using a harvesting sickle and is the one where most of the labour is required. Farmers would cut the crops using a harvesting sickle and leave them strewn across the plot in small heaps called *ditchet* (ድጩት), as shown in the previous picture, until they have cut down the entire crop on the plot to be harvested. Once the entire crop on the plot is cut down, these small heaps are then collected in to larger ones before being moved to a central location where several large heaps called *kimir* (ክምር) are made (pictured above right). Since there are likely to be at least three to four holy days in a typical week (including the weekend days of Saturday and Sunday) during which most agricultural work that

involves tools is prohibited, farmers often use these days to collect and move the small heaps in to the central *kimir*. Once all the crops, often several types of crops, have been moved to the central location and the *kimir* have all been completed, a circular threshing floor, called *awdima* (አውድማ) is made on the ground. The top vegetation, typically consisting of residue from the cut crops, is removed using a hoe with a flat blade called *wubar* (ውባር) and the ground made smooth. A mix of cow dung and water is then applied to smooth ground to make the surface even and free of dust and soil.

Once the *awdima* is made, the threshing process called *beray* (በራይ) begins. This begins with the farmer taking down a large portion of the crop on the *kimir* and putting it in heaps on the threshing floor. Cattle are then driven in circles over the heap to loosen the seeds of the crop. Farmers use two pronged wooden pitch forks, called *mensh*(መንሽ), to separate the straw/chaff and to turn over the crop heap till all of the seeds have been separated and have sunk to the floor of the *awdima*. At this point, the straw is removed and a new batch of crops from the *kimir* is added to the *awdima* and the process is repeated until nothing more remains in the *kimir*. Once the *kimir* is finished thus, and the straw has been removed, the remaining chaff in the *awdima* is separated from the grain by wind winnowing. After a process that takes two to three days, the grain is finally ready for collection and it is measured and transported to the home using donkeys as transport.

Picture 7: beray - farmers working at the awdima threshing with cattle (photo by author; Dec. 2016)

Since it takes several rounds of threshing to get through one *kimir* and the same *awdima* is used for threshing several types of crops, the *beray* is an extended process that may take up to two weeks to complete. Although it may take a long time to complete, it however only needs two to three people; one to drive the cattle around the *awdima* and one or two to lift and pitch the crop being threshed using two tined pitchforks made of wood called *mensh*. The whole process of reaping and harvesting as described above usually takes several weeks. In addition to working during the day, someone also spends the night near the *awdima* from the time the *kimir* is made until the grain has been transported home to guard it from any possible mischief.

The festive season

The end of harvest marks the beginning of the festive season during which people take a brief break from work and celebrate life. Weddings are almost always planned to fall during this period and serve as occasions that bring the whole community together in celebration of not only the marriages of men and women but also the fruits of a long, arduous year of farming. Food is plentiful and farmers still have money on their hands. The small market place in the centre of Chertekel is springs to life as the small number of merchants and traders try to cater to ever need and whim of farmers while they still have some money in their hands. Lorries come in droves to transport the produce to all corners of the country and life generally takes a pleasant slow pace. For women however, this festive season is no less busy. They are in charge of all the festivities and that means a lot of work. Even when a house hold is not wedding one of its children, there will invariably a wedding in the village, and wedding feasts are communally prepared. While the families of the wedding parties take the primary responsibility of the feast, everyone will contribute a share, usually by providing a set number of food and drinks to be served in the wedding feast[51].

7.4. The Ox plough complex and gendered knowledge

Agricultural life in much of rural Ethiopia has been something of a constant in the last century in a country that has otherwise gone through a tremendous amount of social and political change. Since the turn of the 20th century, Ethiopia and Ethiopian society has gone through at least three tumultuous periods that have had significant impacts on the social, political, and economic configurations of society. The first of these was the modernisation attempt of the early 20th century which was suddenly stopped by the Italian invasion and subsequent occupation of the country from 1936 – 1941. The second was the 1974 revolution and the subsequent abolition of the centuries old imperial monarchy along with the class of landed gentry. The third is the downfall of

[51] These contributions are often made by pledging a set number of *aqolquays*; an aqolqouay usually consists of food and drinks enough to serve 40 guests. Depending on how close they are to either family, relatives, friends, neighbours will pledge anywhere between 1 to 10 aqolqouays to a wedding feast.

the socialist military regime and restructuring of the country as a federal system along ethnic and language lines since 1991. The first introduced a number of new systems including a modern coin-based currency, a central bank, and a number of centralised institutions including the ministerial system in the country; as well as new communications and transportation networks including the postal and telephone network, road and rail networks. The second abolished the landed gentry, and lead to the nationalisation of all land under the banner "Land to the tiller" (ሙሬት ላራሹ). The third instituted a federal system based along ethnic boundaries and enshrined the concept of group rights in the constitution of the country. All of these periods have had tremendous impact on the course of history in the country and have shaken the very core of society as it stood before their coming.

But throughout these tumultuous and ever changing political and economic environment, rural agricultural life has more or less stayed constant. It is of course true that a lot has changed in the countryside; there are roads, schools, health posts and clinics where there were none before. But rural agricultural life still dependent on two things as it always has been; the annual rains and oxen. The farmer is dependent on one as much as he is on the other and without them, there would be no farming at all. And at the centre of it all is the ox-plough. There is no clear agreement as to when and how ox-plough farming first emerged in Ethiopia. The most prominent and widely shared assertion in the literature is one that assumes plough agriculture was introduced to Ethiopia from south Arabia (for example see (Goe, 1989; McCann, 1995)). There are, however, others who have placed the origin of the plough with in Ethiopia itself. Ehret (1979), for example, completely rejects the assertion of Arabian influence in plough agriculture in Ethiopia and makes the bold claim that such assumptions "can no longer be entertained in any form". Based on mainly linguistic evidences, he argues that agriculture in Ethiopia and the Horn was quite ancient, originating as much as 7,000 or more years ago, and that its development owed nothing to South Arabian inspiration.

Irrespective of these differing claims, there is little doubt that ox-plough farming has very old roots in the Ethiopian highlands. McCann (1995), in his seminal work on the history of Ethiopian agriculture, for example estimates that the plough appears "in its current form" in rock painting dating as far back as 500 AD. And once it took hold, the plough seems to have proved itself to be an extraordinarily resilient and dominant feature of Ethiopian agriculture for the millennia to come, and to even this day. In many ways than one, the plough, more than anything else, continues to be the quintessential feature of agriculture in the Ethiopian highlands even today. The plough also did not develop in in isolation. As McCann puts it, "Ethiopia's highland agriculture did not evolve piecemeal, but rather as a system that has wed a primary tool (the single-tine plough), the mastery of training oxen, and a diverse repertoire of annual crops—grains, legumes, and oil seeds" (McCann, 1995). The need to maintain and train oxen therefore necessitated animal husbandry. This mixed farming that has married animal husbandry with the cultivation of annual crops has always been, and still is another distinctive feature of agriculture in the Ethiopian highlands.

The importance of the position given to the ox drawn plough in Ethiopian agriculture is one that cannot be over emphasised. As a tool, it is the single most important apparatus at the farmer's disposal. As a symbol, it more than anything else defines what a farmer is and does. As already mentioned earlier, the *maresha* has shown remarkable resilience and historical consistency. The earliest documented visual evidence showing it in use is from 1868; an illustration by the Scottish artist William Simpson (1823 – 1899) who accompanied the British contingent in the Meqdella expedition[52].

[52] A military campaign against the then Ethiopian Emperor Tewodros II.

Picture 8: An illustration of a farmer ploughing in Northern Ethiopia, William Davidson, 1868. Source: The Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection at the Brown University Library[53]

Except a few minor differences, such as the substitution of leather straps by plastic ones, the same *maresha* is still being used today in the exact same configuration. A farmer from the 19th century would have no problem operating the *maresha* today if he found himself in the present day by some miracle. Why the *maresha* has remained largely unaffected by the passage of time and survived at least three successive regimes that have attempted to push it to the pages of history is largely unstudied. The reasons why this apparatus has persisted for so long and continues to defy any changes are likely to be many and complex. One reason lies in the fact that the *maresha* is uniquely adapted to and inextricably integrated to Ethiopia's highland agriculture. First, it is essentially fused into the mixed animal crop/cereal production regime that dominated agriculture in virtually all parts of the Ethiopian highlands. Second, weighing at around 12 kilograms, its relative light weight. This combined with the fact that it can easily be taken apart and re-assembled again with relative ease makes it ideal for transportation from the home to the farmers' plot, and from one plot to

[53] Via the World Digital Library https://www.wdl.org/en/item/9641/ (last accessed 30.11.2018 at 19:17hrs)

another. The latter is especially important in in the highlands of Ethiopia where farmers maintain small plots that are sometimes miles apart. As such, the *maresha* is an extremely practical tool. Third is the fact that the *maresha* is made in its entirety from locally available materials and requires little to no maintenance. Except the only two metallic components, the spear shaped plough-share and the metal loop that connects the plough share to the beam, the farmer himself makes all the components of the *maresha*. Even the two metal components are made by local blacksmiths. The *maresha* is therefore self-made and self-maintained, requires little to no servicing, and has parts that are easily replaceable. This together with the ease with the ease of assembly and transportation mentioned above makes the *maresha* a very reliable tool. While it may not be the best means of tilling nor the most efficient, it is not difficult to understand why the *maresha* has stuck for so long and continues to do so even now. The ox drawn plough, in its current configuration, consists of 12 different parts as illustrated in figure 4 below.

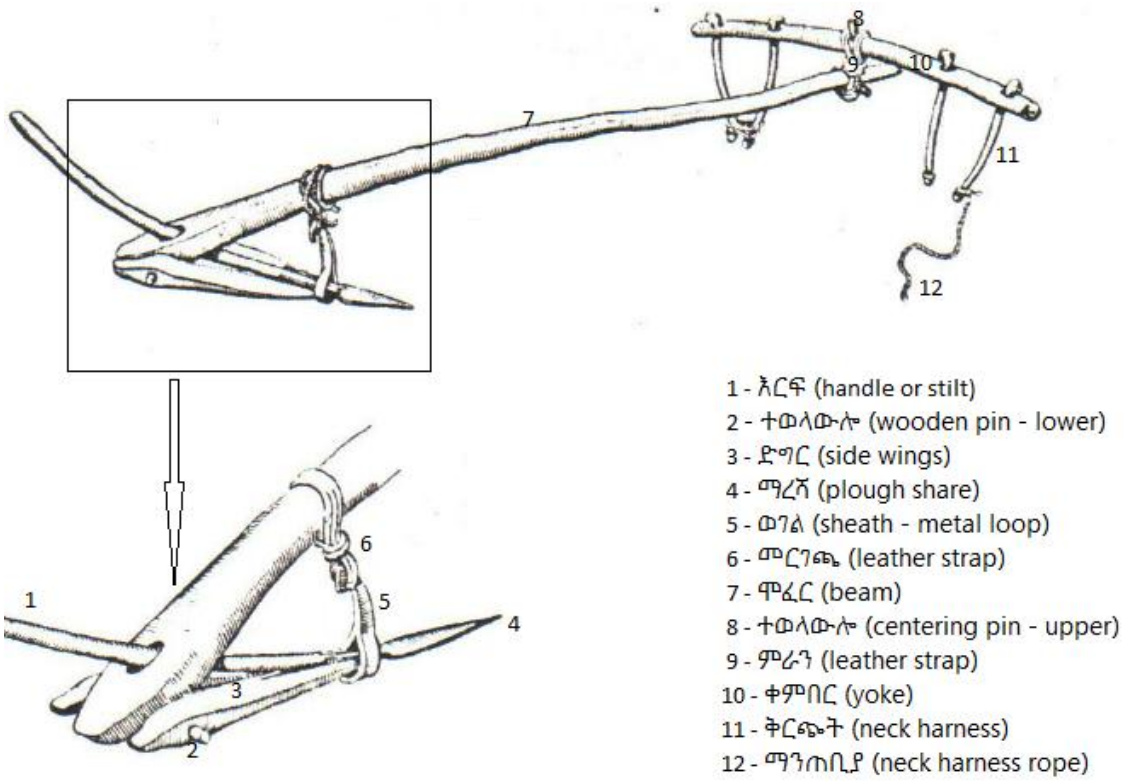


Figure 4: The Ethiopian ard plough – maresha (Diagram Source: Goe, 1989, p. 99)

As the primary tillage implement used in the Ethiopian highlands, the ***maresha*** is immensely important as a tool to the farmer. In my conversations with farmers, it was described as the one thing a farmer cannot do without. A farmer may rent a plot or sharecrop if he has no land. He may borrow, or rent oxen too if he has none of his own. But a farmer without a *maresha*? That was unthinkable. Such a man would not be a farmer at all. The plough, therefore, makes the farmer as much as the farmer makes the plough. No one who doesn't wield the *maresha* can call themselves a farmer.

The *maresha* is used for primary and secondary land preparation. The soil is broken or fractured and then pushed to the sides of a furrow by the two side wings aligned on either side of the plough share. Soil left intact between furrows is broken-up by additional ploughings at different angles across the plot. Up to eight ploughings, including a final seed covering operation, may be required to prepare a plot for planting, depending on its prior use and the type of crop sown" (Goe, 1989, p. 72).

Depending on the type of soil, the layout of the land and its topography, the season (or time of year) of ploughing, and the type of crops to be planted, ploughing could involve one or more of several different techniques. In Chertekel, the following three types of ploughing are commonly used.

Gegir: this technique of ploughing involves deep tillage that follows the slope of a plot. The ruts made by the plough run parallel to the slope. It is, therefore, only suitable for plains and for dry and semi-dry seasons since such ploughing on land that is too steep will tire the oxen too much when ploughing uphill or will erode the top soil severely if done when the rains are too strong.

Sabir: this involves ploughing in crisscrossed patterns and is mostly used to re-plough a plot that has been already ploughed. It is used to turn over the soil and leave it soaking on the sun for a while before final preparations for sowing and to make furrows after sowing.

Agdami/contour ploughing: Ploughing across a slope following the contours of the terrain. Unlike the *gegir* method, the ruts made by the plough here run perpendicular rather than parallel to the slopes. This method is often used for steep plots and for final plowing before or after sowing for most crops irrespective of the layout of the land.

7.5. A tool fit for a man? Learning and mastering the *Maresha*

As mentioned before, the *maresha* is operated by and associated with men. But why is this the case? Why is it that only men plough? The answer lies in the way one learns and masters this tool. Training on the plough starts early and takes several years, as much as up to 8 years to complete and master. There is no clear set age at which boys are expected to start learning about the plough. A boy "who is up and running on his own two feet" was described to me as being old enough to start learning. But this description seems to fit the passive learning that children do by observation rather than one of actively taking part in the task. Hence, the training that starts at this young age is rather simple, and mainly involves accompanying older males (often a father or older brother) to the farm, driving the oxen along as the older male carries the *maresha* on his shoulders. Gradually, a boy will be asked to help in yoking the oxen and slowly learns how to control and command oxen. He picks up knowledge as he tags along, regarding how one harnesses an ox, how the yolk is tied to the beam, how the handle is held, how the whip is turned and swished over the oxen to just threaten them in to moving forward[54]. In addition to learning about the tool, boys also learn how to control, command, and take care of oxen which are the engines of the *maresha*.

The learning process is not structured but rather takes the form of an extended apprenticeship. Boys start from the peripheries, from the most insignificant of tasks

[54] Although a farmer always carries a whip while ploughing and the whip is considered an important part of the maresha, a good farmer rarely, or never, whips his oxen. The art lies in encouraging the oxen to push on, even by singing them praises and when necessary, rotating the whip overhead and threatening but never actually applying the whip.

and work their way in to the central tasks. The following descriptions of the extended apprenticeship process are good examples

> "There is really no minimum age to start learning the plough. Once a boy is old enough to spend the whole day away from home, he starts learning. I would say may be from six years of age onwards, boys start going out with their older brothers and their fathers to the farms and I would say that is when they start learning. They might not do any actual ploughing, or much of anything for that matter, but they see how it is done. It starts from carrying the plough to the farm, they will carry part of the plough may be. And they get to help with putting the yolk on the oxen and harnessing them, and through these small activities they learn the basics first. How to assemble and disassemble the plough itself, how to yolk the oxen and so on. After a while, the boy will start learning how to take on the plough and how to direct the oxen. Once they are about 12 or 13 years old, they will be able to plough by their own (ዕቃ በራሳቸው ይዘው መውጣት ይችላሉ). By the time they are 18 – 20years of age, they would have learned all there is about ploughing and they can be fully independent and inventive (ፈጥረው ያርሳሉ), they would be able to know what kind of ploughing is fit for what kind of land, what kind of crop and so on" (Andualem; in-depth interview, 24 Dec. 2016; Chertekel)

> "they (boys) start learning when they are about 10 or eleven (ከ ፲ ዓመት ጀምረው ይንጠላጠላሉ) but these days they all go to school and they have become lazy. In the past, a boy of 14 years would have been a proper farmer. After they are 16 or 17, they can become proper farmers and they can do the plowing by themselves and they can decide when to plow gegir, when to plow sabir, and when to plow agdami; a boy will learn all this starting from when he is 12, by 20 he can start a family and live life as a farmer on his own" (Almaw; in-depth interview, 18 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

As is the case in all of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia, ploughing in Chertekel is exclusively done by men. As a result, it is only boys who go through this extended period of learning the art and skill of ploughing. Girls never get the chance to learn this skill since, according to participants, they obviously have no need of it. The answers given to me when I asked why it was that women do not plough were the same; they did not plough because they did not have the knowhow; and they did not have the know-how because they do not grow up learning it as boys do, and they did not learn it because they have no need of it since it is men who will do the

ploughing. This seemingly circular reasoning was pervasive. But the focus was always on the learnedness of the skill. The following excerpt from an interview with a female farmer illustrate this clearly

> "They (the men) have been at it (ploughing) from their morning days (to mean starting from an early age). So for them, it comes naturally. If we (the women) tried it, it simply won't obey us"[55] (Yiwabu, in-depth interview, 28 Dec. 2016; Chertekel)

Sadly, the English translation here in no way does justice to the original Amharic. The whole emphasis is on the learned nature of the activity but also on when it is learned. Men are said to have learned it when they were still in their morning days, meaning in their early childhood. The *maresha* is almost given the ability to refuse a woman's grip; to say no to her because, and this is key, she simply has no authority over it since she has no knowledge of it. The *maresha* will, in this sense, defy a woman.

> "If she has the knowhow, a woman most certainly can plough. But for those like us, whose bones are old, it simply won't do; it is of no use to try"[56] (Yenewib, Women's FGD, 26 Dec. 2016; Chertekel)

Again, the focus here is on mastery through practice. The use of bones that are too old and too rigid to pick up new skill is illustrative of the focus on the ability to learn rather than physical difference between men and women. A man or a woman whose bones are still young are presented as being able to learn the skill required to plough whereas a woman whose bones are old, as that of the woman quoted above, is described as unable to learn it. And any attempt at learning the plough in the later case is presented as futile. Such beliefs were not expressed by women alone. The men I talked to invariably described the ability to operate the plough as one that is learned and acquired. Except in a limited case of scenarios where the plough may be quite

[55] እነሱ ተማለዳ የያዙት ነው እኛ ዛሬ እንግባ ብንለው እሺ ይላል?

[56] "ትምርት ታላት ንቃት ታላት ታርስ የለ፤ እንደኛ አጥንቱ የበሰለው አይሆንም, አይለምድም".

challenging "for any man, let alone a woman", any woman was described as capable of learning and mastering the plough if given the opportunity.

> [pointing to the plots nearby] this land for example is quite nice; the soil is loose and wet so you can plough it with a needle if you want to. But where I live, the land is hard and not as easy to plough. It is rocky and the soil is compact. And ploughing such a land requires a lot of physical strength, you have sparks flying everywhere when the ploughshare meets the rock You can't plough such a land with a normal ploughshare, it has to be made of good iron. So women and young boys won't be fit to plough this kind of land, they simply won't have the strength. Even for a man in his prime it is tough. Forget the man, you even need strong oxen for such a land" (Almaw; in-depth interview, 18 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

Other than such exceptions, women were generally understood to have the physical capacity to operate the plough by most men. This is in sharp contrast to how the women themselves saw it. The following excerpts taken from three different women who participated in one Focus Group illustrate their views.

> "How can that be? How can a woman turn in to a man? A man is stronger than a woman. Even if a woman is strong, at the end she is [just] a woman. She will end up just as any other woman"[57]
>
> "How can they(women) be that? They simply can't. They simply can't get manhood/masculinity. It is in their nature, it is in their creation. A man and a woman are made differently, they have different bones"[58]
>
> "We might tussle and hustle alongside them (the men) but in the end, none of that matters if the men aren't there. It is in a man that our toil gets a meaningful conclusion"[59]

As to why women don't learn the plough, the explanations ranged from them not having the chance to learn it, to them not needing to, to them not being able to. The most dominant narrative was one which maintained women never get a chance to

[57] [እንዴት ብሎ? እንደ ወንዱ ሊሆን ነው ሴቱ? በጉልበትም በሁሉም ነገር ቢሆን ወንድ ነው ሚበልጥ. ሴት ምን ጊዜም ቢሆን ያው ሴት ነው, የፈለገው ኃይለኛ ናት ብትባል ያው ሴት አይለች. እንዴውም ዙራ ትረከታለች].

[58] [አይሆኑማ እንጂ, ያንን ተሐት ያገኙታል ወንድነትን ተሐትም አያገኙትማ! ተበላይ አወራረዷ ነው. ምን ጠንካራ ናት ብትባል ዙራ ዙራ ያችው ናት ሴትና ወንድ ታጥንቱ ላይም የተለያየ ነው ታፈጣጠራቸው.]

[59] [እኛ አብረን መልወስወስ ነው እንጂ ሁልግዜም ቢሆን በወንድ ነው የሚያምር; ሁሉ ነገር እነሱ ዘንድ አይል ያለ ወንድ ካልተጨመረበት አይሆንም]

learn the plough at an early age and they simply can't learn it as adults because it was already too late. One of the women in the FGD put it as follows

> "It is all in the learning *gashe*[60] [referring to me]. As soon as a boy is old enough to run on his own two feet, his father will tell him 'come along now my boy, help me with the oxen; you drive them to the farm while I carry the plough'; and the boy will be off with his father. He may cry, he may smile but he will nonetheless tag along and do as he is told. His father will say 'come now, and help men harness these oxen' and he will do so. And soon enough, this boy will start to hold the plough and swing on it even if he is still quite small. Whereas a girl will not get to do any of these things. If it comes to that and her farther demands that she do, she may hold her breath and somehow get the courage to hold an ox while her father harnesses the oxen but once that is done, she is off to her mother; back to the house. She won't get to stay around the farm and learn ploughing as a boy would. But the boy gets to learn, and in time he will be like his father, he will have his father's trade" (Women's FGD, 25 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

As such, both boys and girls are seen to have no choice in the matter when it comes to who grows up learning what. But then again, the plough was sometimes described as being too complex for women to grasp and make sense out of.

> "The plough has 12 parts, how can a woman make sense of it? Give me my *wubar* (a flat bladed digging hoe) any day! It only has two things, a handle on one end and a blade on the other. It is simple and I know what to do with it. But a plough is complicated, I just wouldn't know what to make of it. I think ploughing is a man's job. It is meant to be a man's job"[61] (Women's FGD, 25 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

The men viewed the problem to be one of not knowing how to and not having the necessary skills. "They just won't know how to" one man explained it to me; "forget the plough" he added, "they won't even know how to handle the whip. They would probably end up hurting themselves"[62]. It was often women rather than men who described the plough as complicated. The men I talked to maintained women could

[60] Originally used as a respectful but yet endearing way to address one's older brother, gashe is now used in much of the Aharic speaking rural Ethiopia to address teachers as well as strangers, especially when said strangers look like they are learned town folk. In this case, I was the gashe although I was not older than the woman speaking.

[61] [ሴት ልጅ ፭፪ ዕቃ አሳክታ እንዴት ይሆንላታል? ዉባሪቱ ምን ትለኛለች? ብረቲት አንድ ናት እጄታዋ አንድ ናት. የበሬ ዕቃ አስራ ሁለት ነው. ምኑን ከምን አርጌው? እርሻ ለወንዶች ነው፤ እግዚሃርም ሲያቅደው ለወንዶች ነው።]

[62] "አያውቁበትም ልምድ የላቸውም. ሌላው ቀርቶ በሬ ለመመለስ እንኩአን ጅራፍ ለማዞር ባንገቷ ነው ሚጠመጠምባት"

learn everything about the plough and ploughing within a few weeks at the most and be able to plough as well as any man can. While the amount of time it would take a woman to learn the plough is undoubtedly exaggerated here, given the years that boys take to learn the skill, there was no doubt among the men I talked to regarding the ability of a woman to operate the plough. All it would take is for someone to teach them, I was told repeatedly. I had to ask why, then, was it that no one seems to teach them. I was told why would anyone teach them? There simply is no need, since there was no shortage of men to do the ploughing. In fact, I was told, there isn't even enough land for the men to plough. What is the point of teaching women how to operate the plough in such a situation?

> "No one has any real need to do that at the moment. There are plenty of men around to do all these things so people might not see the point in trying to teach women about it. But if there was a real need, I am sure people wouldn't hesitate to do it (የጨነቀ ለትማ ማን ይተዋል!). As things are now though, there is no shortage of men. Most of the hard labour is during the rainy season and people have their children, their boys to help with the ploughing and the sowing since schools are closed at that time. So if the man needs to be somewhere for a few hours or if there is something that he needs to attend to, he would tell one of his male children to take care of the work (ናማ ያዝና አቆየኝ እንጂ ነይማ ያዥና አቆይኝ አይልም). After that, harvest time is the busiest and even then men work in groups of four or five taking turns on each other's plots. If for some reason, you can't do that, then you can hire daily labourers for harvest. It won't take more than three or four days so even if the daily rates for labour are high these days, it is still manageable". (Key-Infromant interview, Chertekel Agriculture Office, 12 Feb, 2017; Chertekel)

In addition to this perceived lack of need for women to learn about such things, there were also much stronger objections to women learning ploughing and other tasks that are traditionally done by men. What, participants asked, would be the point of teaching girls the skills that boys learn? Wouldn't that mean that the girls would then not learn the skills they need when they become women? And if they don't learn these things, how can the household function? Would a woman learned and skilled in these manly things then marry a man who is also skilled in the same things? How would that then work? Who would do the house work? Or would such a woman look for a

man who is learned and skilled in the trades of a woman? Where would she find such a man? Surely, it is all better if they both learned the trades of their parents; she that of her mother and he that of his father.

> "a boy learns the ways of his father and the trade of his father, and a girl learns that of her mother. By their own, each knows only half of what it takes to form a family and make a life, but when the two come together in marriage, they complete one another, and together between the two of them, they know all there is to know in order to function as a family".
>
> Q: But what if a girl wants to learn farming and be a farmer by her own?
>
> A: How can that be? A woman cannot marry another woman, nor can a man learn the trades of his mother so how can that work[63] (Belay D, In-depth Interview, 28 Dec. 2016; Chertekel)

Both men and women also agreed that it would be difficult to teach girls how to plough because that simply is not the tradition and since people are not that keen on changing what seems to be second nature to men and women. While discussing the issue, I asked every male farmer I interviewed whether he has ever tried or even thought about training one or more of his daughters how to operate the plough. All, including those who did not have sons, admitted to never thinking about it let alone trying. The reasons given was more or less the same, it just simply won't work.

> "It is difficult given the culture here; I can't get up one day and tell my daughter 'you come with me to the farm' and to my son, 'you stay home and help your mom'. Even if I wanted to do it that way, they would not have it; especially/particularly the boys - they will refuse. Boys [by nature[64]] tend to be outdoorsy" (Andualem, In-depth interview, 01 Mar. 2017; Chertekel)

While this argument that boys and girls would find it objectionable if they were somehow presented with a chance to do something that is traditionally considered for the other gender may look feeble, it is indeed what will likely happen. Daily activity logs collected from both boys and girls between the ages of 14 – 18 clearly indicate

[63] (ሴቲቱ ሴት ልታገባ ነው ወይስ ወንዱ የናቱን ስራ ተምሮ ልቆያት ነው? እንደሱማ እንዴት ይሆናል?)
[64] The "by nature" here is implied in the original Amharic rather than explicitly stated – the original Amharic was "ወንድ ወደ እዳሪ ነው እሚያሰቀልል"

how different their day to day lives are[65]. The gendering of everyday activities is stark and unambiguous with girls spending almost all their time with activities in and around the house and boys spending theirs with activities in the farm of in the fields.

A side from the fact that it would likely be extremely difficult to get boys and girls to do the same things, most men also considered it to be completely unnecessary for girls or women to learn how to plough. "It is a bit of a cultural taboo so no one would really be keen to be doing it" one man explained it to me. "But even if it wasn't" he added, "what is the point of teaching them these things? Would we sit idle while they did the ploughing?" he wondered. While farmers themselves, and especially the men might not see it as one, the fact that women never get a chance to learn the plough and everything associated with it puts them at a significant disadvantage as I will show below.

7.6. From boys to farmers – from girls to farmers' wives?

In many ways, the inaccessibility of the *maresha* and the knowledge that is associated with it sets up men and women differently to life as a farmer. A woman, by her own, cannot expect to be a farmer since she cannot wield the *maresha*. As a young unmarried woman, she is unlikely to inherit or be given land and other resources that will get her started as a farmer. While young boys would be given whatever resources a family may afford to get started on their way to being independent farmers, this is not the case for young women. The most they could expect would gifts in the form of bride-wealth at the time of their marriage.

> "If I have a boy and a girl, even if the girl is older and the boy is her younger, it is the boy who will get something from the family. It is always 'let's give the boy something' and never 'let's give the girl something'. For a girl, all she has is her luck. May be she can be good at her education and that might take her somewhere. Or maybe she will be lucky to be promised an ox or whatever when she meets the one she will drink water with[66]. But for a boy, once he is of age, something will be earmarked for him. Whether

[65] Say more on this data later

[66] "... when she meets the one she will drink water with" is an expression used to indicate marriage; in this particular case, it means "when she gets married"

> he uses that wisely and becomes someone is up to him but he will always get something from the family once he comes of age. But for a girl, this is not her fate"[67] (Yitayish, Female farmer, In-depth interview, 14 Feb 2017, Chertekel)

In this regard, participants I interviewed all agreed there was absolutely no chance for a young woman to lead life as a farmer as an unmarried independent farmer. The choice is often between entry into farming through a marriage, or migration to towns and cities in search of another livelihood.

In addition to the small contribution young men get to start life as independent farmers, young men also get opportunities to gradually acquire and accumulate their assets by working for others as hired helping hands[68] or, if they have the resources, by renting land or entering into sharecropping arrangements. While farm land is increasingly scarce and families transferring land to their children is becoming increasingly rare, a young man will still get a piece of land over which he can build his own house if he intends to live in the area.

The situation may be a little better for women who have already been married and find themselves single again either through divorce or the death of their husband. In such cases, women are in possession of resources including land which make it possible for them to derive a livelihood from farming. But even then, such women become entirely dependent on other men for much of the agricultural work and entirely for ploughing. While some agricultural work such as the reaping and harvest may be contracted out to men who are paid daily wages for the duration of the activity, ploughing is not suitable for such arrangements for two reasons. One, ploughing requires maintaining at least two oxen and the entire ploughing implement. Not all single women are likely to have all of this on their own and the

[67] ያው እንግዲህ ተበላይ ያለ ነው ባገራችን ወንዱ ልጅ ጎርሞስ ጣለ ለወንዱ ልጅ ነው አበል ይቆረስለት ለልጇ ይቺን እንስጠው የሚባል እንጅ ለሴቲቱ አበል እንደዚህ የለም. ለሴቲቱ እድሏ ነው እንግዲህ:: ወይም ተማረችም ወይም ውሃ አታጭዋ ሲደርስ ወይ በሬ ይዋሽ ወይንም የሆነ ንብረት ተውስጥ ይዋሽ ትተጋለች እንጂ አበል አይቆረስላትም:: ወንድ ልጅ ተጎረመሰ ተውስጥ አበል እየተከፈለው አጠፋውም ቁምነገር አደረሰውም ባለ አበል ነው:: ለሴት ግን ይሄ አልተገለጠላትም::

[68] There is more on this in the interviews but this is also a topic I have covered in a prior working paper published by IDS – will either incorporate more from the interviews or make a reference to the working paper

men that often work for daily wages will certainly not have these. But even if a single woman somehow maintained a pair of oxen and the *maresha* in its entirety, hiring someone to do the ploughing on a daily wage basis would make no economic sense.

Ploughing is a long activity done over months and one plot requires repeated rounds of ploughing, some times as much as 8 times. The going rate for daily labour for harvest activities, which are considered easier than ploughing was, at the time of this study, around a 150 Birr per day. All farmers, men and women alike, argued that it would be poor investment to try to get ploughing done via such means since it would probably cost more than the return it would bring. As a result, what will often happen in such cases is that a woman would give out her land for share cropping.

A man who has no or not enough land will enter into a share cropping arrangement with such women. If he provides both the oxen and the labour as well as covering the cost of all the inputs (such as fertilizers and seeds), the man will usually take two thirds of the final produce and the woman a third of it. If the woman also covers either all or part of the cost of the inputs and the oxen, the produce at the end of the season will be split equally between the two. The sharecropping arrangements also depend on the type and size of the plot and what is to be produced on it and may range from two shares out of every five to three shares out of five depending on these circumstances. Farmers were in agreement that it made more business sense for a woman to enter into such share cropping arrangements or rent out her plots for a set price rather than trying to either do ploughing herself (assuming she could) or hire labour to the do the ploughing for her on a daily wage[69].

[69] Interestingly, not all farming was done via the ox plough in the nearby Kebele of Amarit. There, most of the land was rough and rugged compared to the rolling plains of Chertekel. Land that is too steep, rugged, rocky and covered with thick brushes is unsuitable for the ox plough and the tillage is primarily done by hand with the use of the flat bladed hoe farmers called the wubar. Here, the women did most of the digging and I was told a woman can be a farmer all by her own since she need not depend neither on men nor on oxen. And there was, I was further informed, indeed such a woman in Amarit who raised her children by her own as well as any other could.

This then leads to the question, are women considered farmers? The answer is mixed. On the one hand, women I interviewed did describe themselves as farmers. And the men I interviewed always maintained that they themselves cannot be farmers without women since they need women to help in virtually every agricultural activity except ploughing. But on the other, when I asked women what kind of agricultural activities they do or take part in, the first response was often that of puzzlement. I was asked to clarify the question more than in one occasion. "Do you mean the things we do in men's farming?"[70] was the question I was asked in one FGD session with women.

As to what women do, both men and women I interviewed were in agreement. Women do almost everything that men do, except the ploughing and a few other things; and there is little in the way of an obvious explanation as to why this is. For men, women were the helpers and assistants without whom they could never do anything. "They ae always with us in everything we do. There is nothing that would be possible without them"[71] was how one man put it in one of the male only FGDs. Another added "It is only in the ploughing that we are alone. In everything else, the women always tagalong and help. In fact, nothing would come to fruition if it did not involve women[72]". Women were similarly inclined and described themselves as indispensable partners in everything the male farmer does, except of course ploughing and a few other activities.

> We wouldn't harness the oxen to the yoke and put the *maresha* together and plough in a straight line. We wouldn't be able to do that; that is for the men to do. And we wouldn't pick up a pitch fork and turn over the crop in the *awdima*. That is also what men do. But in everything else, we are with them. We drop the seeds along the row at the time of planting, we also go with them at the time of harvest when the crops have to be cut. But when it comes to oxen and the plough; that is entirely the men's business. If something is loose or broken in the plough, or if one of the oxen does something to him, that is entirely for him to handle. And at the time of *beray* in the *awdima*, we might drive the cattle but that is about it. We do not

[70] "በወንዶች ግብርና ውስጥ ነው?"

[71] "ያው ከሁአላ ተከታይ ናቸው ሴቶች, አለነሱ ሚሆን የለም"

[72] "እኛ እርሻ ላይ ብቻ ነው እንጂ ሴት ተከታይ ነው ምንጊዜም. ምንም ነገር ቢሆን አለነሱ ፍፃሜነት የለውም".

handle the fork, or harness the oxen. He is all by his own in these things[73].
(Women's FGD, 25 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

The side-lining of women at harvest time and especially at the *awdima* has to do with the shifting of their roles during harvest time. As mentioned earlier, harvest time is a festive season and women shift to their roles as providers of the food and drinks that need to be served during harvest, and especially at the *awdima*. Both women and men described the primary responsibility of the former at this time of the year to be that of taking care of the feast[74].

Outside of cereal production, the role of women in agriculture is even more crucial. Women are largely responsible for looking after the perennial crops that most farmers maintain in their back gardens (home gardens), are responsible for looking after barns and animal shelters, milk processing, poultry, and almost everything else that happens close to the home. The few instances where men took an active role in or around agricultural activity that takes place near the home were beekeeping, and *qhat*[75] production and selling.

But more importantly, the domestic responsibilities and the care and nurturing function of women was considered a vital component of what makes farming possible. Without the women, the men would not be able to do any farming at all. This view of inter-dependence is something that came out strongly in all of my interviews with farmers and one I explore in greater detail in the next chapter when I address the question of equality. But for now, it is important to mention here that the care and nurturing function of women was considered as important as the farming that families do. What is done at home is considered to be as important as what is done at the farm

[73] በሬ ዎ በለን አንጥበን የበሬ እቃውን አሳልተን ጠምደን አንነዳላቸውም, እንዲህ በሬውን ዎ ብለን ገርፈን ፈር ጠብቀን አንነዳውም, ያ የነሱ ነው መንሽም አንጨብጥም, በተቀረው ግን አንለያቸውም. ዘርቱን መጣል ምሳ ማቀበል አትክልተቱን መንከባከብ በዚች በውባሯ መቆፈር ማጉአፈጥ እንዲህ እንዲህ ያለውን እንሰራለን. ስለ በሬ ዙሪያ ግን በቆረጥበት ቢሰበርበት በሬው በወጋው ያ የራሱ ስራ ነው, መንሽም አንጨብጥም, ወንፈልተኛው እንኩአን ቢታመምበትና ቢቀርበት እኛ በሬ አፍነን መንሽ ይዘን የምንረዳው ነገር የለንም ብቻውን ነው በሬ ማዞሩን ግን እናዞራለን.

[74] አውድማ ሲሆን ግን ዋናው ስራችን ድግስ ማጓዝ ነው

[75] Qhat (also written as khat) is a stimulant plant the leaves of which are chewed. It is increasingly becoming an important cash crop for farmers

or in the field. To some extent, there was also recognition that women carried these multiple roles, of both production, reproduction, and care, whereas men had a single role as farmers. And more importantly, these things people do as men and women, as boys and girls, constituted the very essence of their gendered being. A man was a man because he did what a man does; and a woman was a woman because she did the things a woman does.

7.8. Beyond the Plough - Of smoke and thorns, of burnt and scarred bodies, of sticks and baskets

The prior discussion on what men and women do in agriculture leaves one question unanswered, how do women's and men's bodies come into play in everyday life as both discursive and non-discursive constructs? I will briefly reflect on this before proceeding to a discussion of what type of construction of gender emerges from the discussion thus far. A life of farming, and rural life in general, was described as harsh and unforgiving on the body. Both men's and women's bodies were considered to take a heavy toll from life as a farmer. One of the most consistent characterisations of men's and women's bodies was one that emphasised the harm inflicted on them; by smoke and fire on the bodies of women, and by thorns, rocks, and mud on the bodies of men.

Contrary to what I expected, the bodies of women were not described as frail, weak, or fragile in relation to the very physically demanding life that is of the farmer. In fact, a young woman and a young man were often described as equally able bodied. However, pregnancy, child birth, fire, heat and smoke were seen as doing far more damage to a woman's body over time than the labour involved in farming; such that by her middle age, a woman becomes considerably less able bodied than a man of equal age. Interestingly, contraceptives were described as equally harmful to a woman's body and this also often crept up in conversations about how women's bodies are being put under ever increasing pressure to do much more than what they are already doing while at the same time suffering the consequences of the damage to

their bodies resulting from childbirth and/or contraceptive use. All of these, pregnancy and child birth, contraceptive use, and the fire and smoke that women are exposed to everyday of their lives, were often described as "burning away" the bodies of women in a manner a small fire at the top of a candle burns the wax away gradually. In the case of men, the damage to their bodies resulting from the hard life of farming was described in terms of "scaring" rather than burning.

But in general, men's and women's bodies are described as equally capable; although there is also a lot of emphasis placed on protecting women's bodies from harm in the discussion regarding how men's and women's bodies enter into farming work. While operating the plough was considered a matter of learning and skill acquisition, there were still some depictions of this task that portrayed it as potentially dangerous to women's bodies. During the operation of the plough, the stilt of the plough was particularly said to be positioned dangerously close to a woman's womb. Working with oxen, day in and day out, was also often pointed out to be unsafe for a woman. This concern goes beyond ploughing and operating the plough and extends to handling large animals. Women's bodies were considered to be very prone to injury from animals. It was particularly interesting to observe that in the entire time I stayed in Chertekel, in only one occasion did I witness a woman bring in a cow to the local veterinary clinic by herself and even in this occasion she was scolded by both the vet and other farmers for what she did. Bringing cattle to the vet for treatment invariably involves holding them down or restraining them while the vet administered whatever treatment was necessary. I was at first curious as to why it was always men who came with their animals, chiefly donkeys, cows, oxen, calves, sheep, and the occasional a horse or a mule. The act of restraining these animals was crude, and often involved pinning them to the ground with their legs tied and their necks twisted so as to render the animal immobile for sometime. A great deal of scuffling and turmoil was always involved before this can be achieved. This I was told, was not a place for a woman as

she will most likely end up being hurt in very sensitive places. These were invariably either a woman's ovaries or her womb.

Of Sticks and basket cases

In Chertekel, as in much of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia, men carry sticks. The stick is considered an extension of a man's body, both physically and symbolically. The stick is, more often than not, self-made by the man himself although some types of sticks such as canes can be bought. But even when it is bought, it is always given a few personal touches; a metal ring at the end, a burned mark, a few leather straps or a particular feature is always placed on the stick to make it personal. In this regard, no two sticks are alike as no two men are alike. A man carries his stick everywhere he goes and uses it as an extension of his hand. He can lean on it when he stands, he can use it to clear a dense outgrowth of vegetation, he can use it to balance the weight as he carries something on his shoulder, he can use it to point at something, and he can use it as a formidable weapon for self-defence or attack. In fact, the only time a man would willingly separate from his stick while away from home is when he enters someone else's house, a church, an office, or a *shai-bet*[76] in town. In such occasions, the stick is left at the entrance as a statement of good will; "I wish you no ill will" or "I come in peace" being the message.

As much as the stick is considered an extension of a man's body, a woman's basket is also seen as part of her. But unlike the stick that men carry, the basket has only one purpose – it is a carrying case for anything and everything that a woman may need to carry. A woman often has at least two or three such basket cases of differing sizes fit for different purposes. A small one is carried to when the woman expects to handle little to no load (such as when she is working in the field) and a bigger one is needed when she goes to market. Unlike the stick, the carrying basket is

[76] A shai-bet, literal translation a tea house, is a small establishment that serves tea and the name. But these houses also typically serve food and beverages including home brewed beer (tela) and liquor (areqe).

rarely, if ever, personalised or decorated. But as an accessory, it defines a woman as much as a stick would define a man.

Last but not least, the capacity for violence was another important distinction made between men and women. Men were described as possessing the innate capacity for violence whereas this was never used in reference to describing women's bodies and womanhood in general. In fact, women were positioned as being in the receiving end of this capacity for violence and living in fear of this ever-present danger. All in all, boys and girls, men and women live, work and experience farming and life itself differently. This difference envelopes the whole expanse of their lives both within and outside of farming.

7.9. Conclusion

How then does gender enter into agriculture and how does agriculture and agricultural work in turn shape how gender is enacted? From the prior discussion emerge two things. First, gender is an important dimension of agricultural work. Despite some overlaps, what men do and what women do is clearly demarcated. Although both men and women do take part in all phases of agricultural production, starting from land preparation all the way to harvest and transportation of the final produce, they do so in different ways. These differences in turn position men and women differently in relation to agricultural knowledge. By virtue of learning and mastering the plough, which is the single most important tool at the farmer's disposal, men are positioned at the centre of farming and become the sole bearers of agricultural knowledge. Women, while their importance for farming is recognised and valued, are however positioned at the peripheries as helpers and caretakers. They are not given opportunities to learn and master the plough, and along with it most of the traditional knowledge that is readily available for learning by boys and young men. Furthermore, their exclusion from acquiring key agricultural knowledge is cast as unproblematic, even desirable at times. As such, it is remains unchallenged despite placing women at a significant disadvantage.

Second, the performance of agricultural work constitutes a performance of one's gender and maintains the gender regime. Farmers do not simply carryout agricultural work as people, but as men and women. This performance constitutes their identities as gendered bodies and their identity as men and women is as dependent on the performance of these tasks as it is on the shape and constitution of their bodies. Each time a farmer picks up his plough or drives his oxen to the farm and harnesses them to the yolk, he does more than just accomplish these tasks. These tasks come to define him as a man. The same goes to a woman who drops seeds in to furrows, or spends the day weeding or taking cooking lunch and taking it to the farm. These activities constitute her as a woman.

But this does not mean that women are considered irrelevant or unimportant to farming and agricultural work; quite the opposite. Women are portrayed as essential as men to farming and no farming was considered possible without their participation. However, their importance was often framed in terms of their role as care takers, providers, and helpers rather than actual farmers. In both symbolism and language, the farmer is constructed as a male. Along with the ox drawn plough, this construction of the farmer remains the single most consistent feature of farming in the central highlands of Ethiopia and perhaps its most challenging feature when it comes to gender equality.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Equality of What and Equal How? Articulations of gender equality at the local level

8.1. Introduction

Gender equality, despite its seemingly universal appeal as a developmental goal, is rarely clearly articulated nor uniformly understood. It is a highly contested concept and part of that contention stems from the fact that it ties two separate concepts – gender and equality - which are themselves understood quite differently (Lombardo et al., 2009). As I have shown in Chapter 2, there is a multiplicity of ways in which gender as a concept is articulated and understood. The notion of equality is no less elastic and displays extreme fluidity in the way it is understood and articulated by various actors at various levels extending from the international to the local. It is therefore not surprising that these two concepts, when combined together, would prove highly contested and ambiguous, to the point of being meaningless at times. This ambiguity also allows for a tremendous amount of interpretative leeway in how gender equality is understood, articulated, framed, and acted upon. As Lombardo et al. (2009, p. 2) put it:

> "Moreover, gender equality actually consists of two concepts – gender and equality – that have acquired meaning related to aspects of gender (for instance, division of labour, sexual difference, reproductive relations), but also related to aspects of equality (for example, class, race/ethnicity). In this sense, gender equality is a concept that is part of the multidimensional reality of equality, a term that is open to contestation of its meaning as much as gender is".

This contested nature of gender equality is however often obscured owing largely to its frequent appearance as a harmonious concept and a universally shared ideal. This is in part due to a tendency among scholars as well as political and development aid actors to homogenize the diversity of meaning that gender equality has accrued in favour of what is often described as a "strategic framing" of the concept (Verloo, 2007).

The debates and contestations over the meaning of gender equality occur in a wide arena that involves multiple actors including feminist authors, activists, development agencies, multi-lateral organisations, national governments, and at the local level, communities and grass roots level actors. As the concept of gender equality traverses these boundaries and travels across time and space, the meanings attached to it shift and change: sometimes expanding, at other times contracting and shrinking (Lombardo et al., 2009). The question here is not only one of finding out what gender equality means and how it is articulated in a particular way in a particular context, but also one of questioning what purpose(s) such articulations serve.

This chapter, therefore, looks at the way gender equality is understood, articulated, framed, and acted upon at the different levels in the Ethiopian context with particular attention to gender equality as it relates to small holder family farming. Much of this chapter follows in the direction of Lombardo et al (2009) where the authors "explore the dynamics of a discursive construction of gender equality" in social policy and how "gender equality is fixed in different concepts, is stretched towards wider meanings or reduced to particular ones, according to the actors' intentional or unintentional framing, and is bent to fit a variety of other goals (Lombardo et al., 2009)". I make use of these notions of fixing, shrinking, stretching and bending to describe the process by which gender equality is given fluidity and used to mean different things in different contexts. But before I proceed to the discussion on how gender equality is understood, articulated, and acted upon at the local level, I consider it pertinent to first present a brief discussion on the concept of equality itself since a number of very valid and extremely pertinent objections have been raised over the very usefulness of the concept itself. I believe these objections need to be understood before one can discuss on the usefulness of the concept of gender equality as a political and developmental goal.

8.2. Equality – a universal ideal or am empty promise?

A product of the American and French revolutions in the 18th century, equality, along with liberty, has since become a universal ideal and the call sign for revolutionary movements and social movements of all shades all over the world. At the surface, there indeed seems to be no nobler purpose than the struggle for equality. Problems arise, however, when we look at the assumptions this ideal is built on and start interrogating the various articulations it has been given. Some critiques have gone to the extent of questioning the validity of the equality ideal arguing the concept of equality is built on flawed assumptions. Kittay (2013) for example makes the point that the ideal of equality that is at the heart of democratic liberal nations today views society as an association of free and independent people who are, or are deemed to be, equals. She challenge this understanding by pointing out that all people are, at some point or another, dependents; and that many, and women particularly, also have to attend to the needs of dependents. "The notion that we all function, at least ideally, as free and equal citizens is not only belied by empirical reality, it is conceptually not commodious enough to encompass all. I call this challenge the dependency critique of equality" she explains (Kittay, 2013, p. 4). She cautions that equality will continue to elude us until we take seriously the fact of human dependency and the role of women in tending to dependent persons. This is a contentious idea to say the least, and she herself concedes that this emphasis on dependency is somewhat unpalatable to those who have been "fed an ideological diet of freedom, self-sufficiency, and equality".

In some of her recent work, Butler has also posed what can be considered similar arguments against the individualised notion of equality. In a 2019 Agnes Cuming lecture[77], Butler poses the question of how we relate with one another and what that entails to our sense of belongingness, responsibility, interdependence, and dependence. Relationality of dependence, when taken to its radical ends, will have us realise that we are all bound up with the lives of one another, she argues. "Only then

[77] https://www.ucd.ie/philosophy/newsandevents/agnescuminglectureseries/2019/

will we be able to conceive of an approach of non-individual equality" she asserts[78]. But what does she mean by this approach of non-individual equality? It is not communitarianism that Butler argues for here, but rather a critique of Hobbesian individualism – the Hobbesian man who has never been fed, never been a child, never been dependent up on kinship; the man who exists merely as an always already upright, capable, adult without relations. "No one is born an individual, no one can escape radical dependency, no one stands on their own" is the central tenet of her argument. What she calls for is not an end to dependency, as that would seem to be futile, but rather a rethinking of equality that incorporates the relational aspect of human existence.

The concept of equality has both a descriptive and a normative dimension. In its normative dimension, it describes what ought to be rather than what is and sets forth moral ideals which then guide action. And as with other normative concepts, the interpretation and diffusion of the normative aspect of gender equality is open to change and dynamics. Krook and True (2012, p. 104) discuss at length what happens when seemingly universal norms such as equality diffuse across transnational boundaries and organisations. They observe that "norms that spread across the international system tend to be vague, enabling their content to be filled in many ways and thereby to be appropriated for a variety of different purposes". They view such norms not so much as fixed notions but rather as processes and call for an approach that sees norms as 'processes', as works-in-progress, rather than as finished products. This ongoing process of contestation gives rise to opportunities for "co-optation, drift, accretion and reversal of a norm — including disputes over whether itis a norm at all" (Krook & True, 2012, p. 104). Krook and True in fact contend that norms diffuse precisely because they encompass different meanings to fit in with a variety of contexts. "Our contention is that norms diffuse precisely because — rather

[78] http://new-pretender.com/2019/02/17/judith-butler-and-the-ethics-politics-of-non-violence-hasret-cetinkaya/

than despite the fact that — they may encompass different meanings, fit in with a variety of contexts, and be subject to framing by diverse actors" (Krook & True, 2012, p. 105). Hence, the fact that the meaning of a norm such as equality is not fixed but is rather open to contestation and interpretation may not necessarily be a shortfall. Often times, its flexibility and fluidity can be the reason it spreads and gains traction in a variety of contexts. I will return to this point again at the end of this chapter after I present the empirical evidence. I would however want to bring in to attention a further critique of the concept of equality, this time from the perspective of feminism.

Kittay (2013) argues that "the question of equality" upon closes examination fragments in to what she calls "questions of equalities". Equality for whom? Equality by what measure? Equality of what? Equality to what? Equal to whom? and so on. In the case of gender equality, these questions of equalities have produced a variety of answers as well as some fiery critique. As we have previously seen, the language of 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' was important as a rhetorical device to reduce these questions of equalities in to simpler forms and mobilised the women's movements in the 1980s and 1990s; it served an important role as a way of getting women's rights onto the international development agenda. There can be little doubt in saying it has served this purpose well. The international development industry has fully embraced these terms. From international NGOs to donor governments to multilateral agencies the language of gender equality and women's empowerment is a pervasive presence and takes pride of place among their major development priorities (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). But even now equality remains elusive in large parts of the world partly because equality is difficult to attain, but also because equality is very difficult to define.

According to Kittay (2013), what makes defining the concept difficult is the apparent simplicity of the idea on the one hand and the numerous and sometimes conflicting suppositions buried in each evocation of the concept (p7). To say persons are equal is simply to say that they are identical in relevant ways, justice then seems

to demand that if persons are identical in relevant ways; irrelevant consideration must not enter into their treatment. The problem here of course is that what is considered to be relevant and irrelevant here is open for contestation. Criteria can be set to relevance that simply either wittingly or unwittingly, perpetuate hierarchy and existing inequality.

8.3. An Ethiopian conception of equality?

That the meaning of equality is not self-evident is rather apparent by now. Let me turn now to the Ethiopian case and ask is equality, and especially that of gender equality an ideal? And if so, how is it articulated and expressed? To begin with, I present the semantic aspect of equality – its Amharic equivalent – እኩልነት /ikulnet/ and its derivatives. In Amharic, እኩል or *ikul* is an adjective that indicates separation in to two equal halves. The verb is *akele*/አከለ – which can mean either one or more of the following (Kane, 1990)

- To be equal to, or to equal
- To be like or similar to, to amount to
- To be worth or be the same in value, in rank or in size
- To grow in size or stature so as to be bigger or smaller than before

From these emerges the word *ikuya*/እኩያ[79](Tekle-Wold, 1970) – ones equal or peer – a noun that indicates two things that are par with one another with regards to some quality they both possess . Expressed in the later sense, and applied to persons, an equal is someone who is like another in some qualifying aspect such as age, height, strength, income, knowledge, class, and so forth (Tekle-Wold, 1970). A key aspect of the definition here is its relational nature. Something, or someone, is equal to another only in relation to some qualifying aspect. In this regard, the concept of absolute and

[79] እኩያ - ባልንጀራ ጓደኛ አምሳያ ቢጤ ዐብሮ አደግ በድሜ በቁመት በኃይል በጉልበት በገንዘብ በሥራ በሙያ በማንኛቸውም የተካከለ የተጣዘነ የፈረስ ዙሮ፤ አቻ ግጥሚያ
Source: Desta Teklewold p.98

unconditional equality does not exist in Amharic. This relational dimension of equality is not unique to Amharic of course as nothing standing alone can be either equal or unequal. An important distinction of the Amharic definition is the emphasis it places on equivalence, symmetry, parity and uniformity. Equality in this sense does not signify being of equal value or worth in all respects outside of the parameter used to qualify the sameness. A further aspect of the descriptive aspect of equality in Amharic is the absence of a parallel descriptive word for inequality. Inequality is considered the norm, it is pervasive. Unless a statement of equality is explicitlyy made, inequality is presumed.

Going beyond the descriptive to the normative aspect of equality, we do not, and cannot possibly expect to, find clearly laid definitions and criteria for equality. Normative equality does not merely describe the presence or absence of equality – it prescribes what ought to be. In this later sense, normative equality sets the ideal and is open for interpretation. In the Ethiopian case, normative clauses regarding gender equality are found in the constitution, in the revised family law, and in a number of other anti-discriminatory clauses elsewhere. In both the legal and political front, gender equality related clauses and provisions are deeply intertwined with ideas of fairness and justice. Fairness in opportunities, fairness in the distribution of duties, privileges and responsibilities, and fairness in the distribution of outcomes and benefits are the focus of the political and legal discourse.

8.4. Local understandings and articulations of gender equality in relation to farming

Gender equality, not surprisingly, was a difficult concept to articulate for most farmers, both men and women, young and old. While almost all farmers I interviewed were keen to communicate that they saw men and women to be each other's equals, they had immense difficulty answering the question – "but what does it mean for men and women to be equal". In a context such as Chertekel, where life largely revolves around the three seasons described in the previous chapter and where key agricultural

knowledge and skills are regimented along gender lines; what does equality between men and women mean? What follows is a brief glimpse of the answers to these questions and the difficulties farmers and grass roots actors often had when grappling with the concept of gender equality; both in its descriptive – articulating what equality is – and normative – what sort of equality was considered desirable – dimensions.

Different but equal – equality of value

The most commonly articulated understanding of gender equality among farmers was one that saw men and women as different in essence and ability but equal in value and worth. This articulation of equality often makes reference to either nature and creation, or custom and tradition (and often times, mixes both) as having bestowed men and women with different essences and abilities and portrays men and women as two separate but complimentary pieces of what it takes to carve out a living in an agrarian society like the one in Chertekel. The source of the purported difference between men and women is neither totally nature nor totally tradition and culture but rather understood to be a blend of the two.

These purported differences between men and women are actively appreciated and encouraged while at the same time upholding the ideal of equality of worth and value between the two. Consequently, any articulation of equality that attempts to negate this purported difference in essence and alleges similarity or sameness between men and women is strongly rejected. "It is as a man and a woman that we met first, and thus shall we live" one male farmer surmised during a men's FGD. According to this articulation of equality, part of the difference in essence between a man and a woman; in fact a defining aspect of it, is what women and men do within the household.

> "We were created as a man and a woman by nature, and it is as a man and a woman that we came together (in marriage). So she has her part and I have mine and we each do our own tasks as it is custom and as we know these things (as we have learned them from childhood). There is nothing wrong with each one of us doing their own part and doing their own

> (separate) things to raise a family and carve out a living. We are both doing our share, and as long as one is not living off the sweat of another, what it the problem". (Men's FGD; 19 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the distinction between what men do and women do is pervasive and ubiquitous in Chertekel. Both boys and girls are trained in to doing these tasks from an early age so that when they reach the pre-adolescent stage, they have a firm grasp of their respective *muya*[80] - their respective crafts. But once learned, these crafts and skills also become a defining aspect of femininity and masculinity and become part of the difference that men and women are supposed to have in their essence. In a way, the *muya* is therefore both an expression of and an outgrowth of the different essence and blessings that men and women are believed to have been bestowed with - both by the manner of their creation and their upbringing.

It is in this sense then that gender equality in this articulation is described as one of "being of equal worth and value while doing different things". As I have previously mentioned, this particular articulation of gender equality is pervasive and once I encountered in most of the interviews and focus groups I had with farmers, both men and women; as well as local level government staff.

> "In my view, to be equal means to be valued equally. There is this young man who works next door in the wood workshop for instance, and then there is me here in this office. We both do two different things, but we are equal. We both work and earn our living - that is what matters and what needs to be at the centre when we talk of equality. So even if women spend a majority of their time at home, they spend it working. And the man may spend a majority of his time working in the field, but he spends it working too. For me, there is no difference between the two, they both work tirelessly to make their life better, to raise their children, and more than that they work tirelessly to feed the nation. The fact that one works in the field and the other at home does not matter, it is irrelevant. It will not make one superior or inferior to the other". (Lijalem, Key-informant interview, Kebelle Agriculture Office, 27 Dec. 2017; Chertekel).

An unequal situation is then described as one where the contributions and labour of men and women are not equally valued. Similar to the understandings of gender

[80] ሙያ feat, field, craft, deed, Calling, skill, sphere, profession, professional duties

equality previously described by farmers, here the gender division of labour and the gendering of agricultural knowledge and skills is considered irrelevant to the issue of equality between men and women.

> "If someone thinks that because the woman spends the day in the house, she does nothing or nothing of value, that is the problem. If we switched roles for just a single day and men were to do women's job and women that of men, I am certain that we men would not do half of the things women manage to do in a single day. I am absolutely certain about that. Speaking from just my own perspective, it will take me half a day to do the things my wife would do in a few minutes (Belay K., Key-informant Interview, local MFI; 25 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

It is interesting to see how religion and tradition both can be drawn upon to articulate this particular narrative of equality between men and women as the following extended quote from an in-depth interview shows.

> The fact that we [men and women] are good at different things is a reflection of our different blessings[81]. The blessings given to [the Archangel] Gabriel have not been bestowed on Michael. For St. Gabriel was given the blessing of the annunciation, but not for Michael. And yet, we do not put Gabriel above Michael. We get different blessing from the manner of our creation [as men and women]. The holly book says I have given you her so that she can be your helper and companion. What we have to teach is not that men and women are one and the same or that they can do the same things. What we have to realise for ourselves and teach to others is that we, as men and women are equal in value and that we labour equally in the things that we do to make our lives and families better. A woman still labours even if she stays at home most of the day, we have to recognise and value that. I have to recognise that my wife labours as much as I do, perhaps even more than I do. I have to value what she does. (Belay K., Key-informant Interview, local MFI; 25 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

In this manner, the fact that men and women are good at different things and therefore should stick to their traditionally defined roles is maintained while at the same time accepting and promoting the view that equality between men and women should be one of value and worth – separated from what men and women do. Participants who take this positon see the traditional division of labour and the segmentation as well as segregation of skills and knowledge along gender lines as unproblematic to gender

[81] (ያኛው የስራ መስኩ እንትን [መለያየት] የተሰጠን ፀጋ ነው. ማመን ካለብን እሱን ነው ማመን ያለብን)

equality; at times even as entirely irrelevant to the discussion of equality. Even in cases where it was considered problematic, the alternative, i.e., that of allowing boys and girls to learn the skills they want irrespective of their gender, was considered unrealistic given the internal dynamics of the family as a unit and the nature of agricultural work.

> "But what is the alternative? If both boys and girls learn the trades of their father, who will do the job of the mother? Who will take care of the family? Someone has to do that too, if both a man and a woman are out there in the field doing the farming, how would their *tidar*[82] function? How would they live as a family?" (Nigussie; in-depth interview, 15 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

> "If a girl grew up learning to plough, what would she do as an adult? Would she then marry another woman or would she find a man who grew up learning how to do the things that women do? Where would she find such a man?" (Melaku; in-depth interview, 22 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

> "If both boys and girls grew up learning just about farming, that would do them more harm than good. Who would do the house work? Ok, let's say that they both spend the day in the farm doing all that a farmer does. They have to come back to the house at the end of the day and they have to eat. Who will do these things? But if she takes up after the trade of her mother and he takes up after the trade of his father and they come together and form a family they can function as a family. Of course one should always help with the work of the other in as much as they can, there is nothing wrong with that – if anything it is commendable" (Belay D; In-depth interview, 28 Dec. 2016, Chertekel)

Because this position was prominent and widely articulated, I often had to press hard to get people to even talk about the possibility that the division of labour could be problematic for equality and could in fact be used to justify existing inequalities. For as long as the division persists and for as long as different things have different values attached to them, it would make one to be seen as more important than the other; I reasoned with participants. This line of questioning had mixed results. While agricultural workers, experts of one type or another, and gender experts at all levels saw the division of labour as either a manifestation of the unequal relationship between men and women or as a means of perpetuating this inequality, farmers

[82] Tidar is usually translated as marriage but here refers to one's livelihood or life as a family unit - ኑሮ ንብረት ፤ ጐዞና ጉልቻ

themselves were unequivocal in their rejection of such a view. Even if men and women did different things, why, they ask, should what a woman does be of any less value than what a man does? My responses to such questions were phrased along the lines of - may be perhaps because farming is the single most important aspect of their lives and men have control over that aspect of their lives. If it is the men who have control over the one thing upon which their life is built around, that would make them the more powerful of the two, wouldn't it?. This surely has to be obvious? I continued to press. But farmers, both men and women, reject such a view and assert that what women do is in fact as important or even more important to farming as what men do. A man, I was told - over and over again, would simply be unable to function as a farmer, or even survive, without a woman.

> "She cooks breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She looks after the house, she prepares all the feast (digis)[83]; while the man may have control over how and when he ploughs and sows his field and when to harvest and such but she has control over these things; she is the superior in these (ይሄ የሷ የበላይ ስራዋ ነው). And each of them is equal in this; they are both equally important and one cannot live without the other, he can't do the things she does, neither can she do the things that he does. Since he can't do the things she does, he can't say to her, I am your superior (እበልጥሻለሁ ልላት አይችልም) nor can she since she can't do the things he does. If and when they want to go their separate ways, they split their assets in half because neither was more important than the other" (Wale, In-depth interview, 23 Dec. 2016, Chertekel).

Women also maintained, while they felt it was not always properly appreciated and acknowledged, what they do was as vital and as important to what men do to the welfare and wellbeing of their family. In fact, a lot more important because men would simply be unable to function without them. Women stressed the number of hard decisions they have to make and things they have to balance to keep the family functioning. In this regard, they pointed out, men have it easy.

> "What do men know about running a family? They know nothing! A man gets up in the morning, picks up his stick (*shimel*) and goes out without a

[83] A digis is any feast in this context; whether it be a maber, a senbete, the annual tabot's day, a marriage, a christening, or even the humble awdima feast. All are digises.

> care in the world. He knows none of my troubles and none of my concerns. Even when we are unsure about something and we seek advice from them, asking them is it was better to do this or that, they would just say "ok, do what you think is best"[84] (Women's FGD, 27 Dec. 2016; Chertekel)

In my many discussions with farmers on what it means for men and women to be equal, one of my participants turned the question back at me and asked if I could do the things he does as a farmer and whether he could do the things I do as, as he put it, a learned man; and whether that would make us less equal.

> "I do believe men and women are indeed equal. The fact that they do different things and have different trades (ሙያ) doesn't make them unequal. You are learned, educated, you have a pen and a note book in your hands. But I am not as learned as you are, I know nothing about writing and reading. Can I take up your place and do the things that you do? No I can't, does that make me lesser than you, no! Because neither can you do the things that I can. If I told you to put a harness on the oxen and plough that plot, you probably won't be able to, you will likely fall even. So the fact that men and women do different things doesn't make them less equal" (Almaw, In-depth interview, 19 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

It is important here to point out however that while farmers saw the gender division of labour and the specialisation of men and women as simply irrelevant to discussions of equality, the question of why it is so strongly defended remains puzzling. Beneath the seemingly justifiable need for specialisation lies the markers of an unequal relationship that creep up here and there when people justify the existence and continued relevance of this division. That this division is merely a division of skills is a rhetorical tool employed to justify its persistence and to talk about equality in non-problematic ways.

> Yes, in the past there was no equality between men and women; in the past women used to work all day in the farm, especially during the planting season. the man would do the ploughing and the women would do *gulgualo* (manual weeding before sowing) and they would spend the entire day working in the field but when they get back home, the woman will start cooking while the man would sit around and wait for his dinner, and he would even have her wash his feet. But it is no like this anymore. Now,

[84] ባስተዳደርም ቢሆን ሴቱ ነው ሚበልጥ እንጂ ወንድ ልጅ ምን ያውቃል? ምንም አያውቅ. ሽመሉን ያዘ ሄደ በቃ. ምኑ ምን እንደሆነ ምን አውቆት. ለማማከር ብለን እንኩአን እንዲህ ቢሆን እንዲህ ቢሆን ብንል እሺ, ይሁን, እንደሱ አርጊው ነው እንጂ ሌላ ምን ይላል.

> what we have is men and women doing different things, but they are no longer superior and inferior, no man asks his wife to wash his feet, there is no *gulgualo*. And among the younger generation, men help with the house work too, if she is putting the pot on the fire to cook, he might do the roasting of the coffee, or he may help with handling the children. But this has only started in recent years among the young. We are right about the border line, the ones above us (older than us) don't want to have anything to do with housework and even if they wanted to help, they simply wouldn't know what to do, they can't even light a fire. But the ones who are younger than us help their wives in almost everything (Men's FGD, 18 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

But there were also very strong and passionately expressed objections to men and women doing the same things. Some saw it as unnatural, others as misguided and unhelpful at best, and others as outright repulsive. In one occasion, a male interview participant told me that no matter how people would try to present it, at the end of the day, a woman's parts and a man's parts are no equals – that the later was created to submit to the former. There were several such instances with my encounters with men, both formal and informal, where it comes out clearly that talk of gender equality is inextricably intertwined with sexuality and sexual domination. In another occasion two women in two separate interviews were unambiguously ambivalent about the notion that men and women were equals arguing instead that there were differences endowed on them by nature that made men superior and claims of equality untenable.

While accepting that women can do what men do reasonably well given time and opportunity to learn the skills necessary, most participants were nevertheless keen to point out that men will still be far superior to women in some areas and women superior to men in others. That they could do what the other does was not meant to negate that they had differences. As the following quotes from two individual interview with female farmer aged 40 and 60 show:

> "Yes, perhaps women can do what men do if they are given the chance to learn it. But that would not make them equals to men, how could that be? A woman cannot be a man nor can a man be a woman. In things like physical strength and courage, men will always be better than women. A woman, no matter how powerful and strong, will still be a woman in the

> end. She may be stronger than other women, but she can't be stronger than a man"[85] (Isteziya, Individual Interview; 30 Dec. 2016; Chertekel)
>
> "How can a woman become a man? Where would she get manhood from? She can't be what she is not. Men and women are made differently, they have different bones" [86] (Siraye, Individual Interview, 26 Dec. 2016, Chertekel)

According to this later view, a woman can try to do what a man does and she can do it to some degree given enough time to learn the skills required. But ultimately, a man can still do it better and therein lies the proof for the unequal nature of men and women. "Men are the ultimate solution. A woman can try but whatever she does will not be as good as that of a man. It is in men that things get their proper ending"[87] added Isteziya.

Inferences to the superiority of men were also present in the FGDs with women. In one of the FGDs, a middle aged woman half wittingly stated that there would be no falsehood if someone claimed women were above and beyond men since men can't do half the things that women do. "Would he (referring to her husband) do half the things I do? I would like to see him try"[88] she jested, to the appreciative laughter of most present. But some of the women present took a slight bit of offence at this remark and one objected that women should never claim to be above their husbands. "It is just not right", one of the participants asserted; adding, "I really wouldn't say I am above my husband; that just isn't something I would ever say. But I wouldn't say I am beneath him either"[89] - to which another woman responded with an agreement. "One (a woman) can never say a woman is beyond or above a man no matter what" she

[85] ስራውን ያው ብማር ይማረዋል እሰራዋል ነው እንጂ እኩልነትማ ከየት መጥቶ:: እንዴት ብሎ? እንደ ወንዱ ሊሆን ነው ሴቱ? በጉልበትም በሁሉም ነገር ቢሆን ወንድ ነው ሚበልጥ. ሴት ምን ጊዜም ቢሆን ያው ሴት ነው, የፈለገው ታይለኛ ናት ብትባል ያው ሴት አይለች. እንዴውም ዙራ ትረኮታለች.

[86] አይሆኑማ እንጂ, ያንን ተሐት ያገኙታል ወንድነትን ተሐትም አያገኙትማ! ተበላይ አወራረዷ ነው. ምን ጠንካራ ናት ብትባል ዙራ ዙራ ያችው ናት

[87] ወንድ ሳይጨመርበት እንዴት አርጎ! ወንድ ታልዞረበት ሞያውም ቢሆን ምን መፍትሄ አለው? እኛ አብረን መልወስወስ ነው እንጂ ሁልግዜም ቢሆን በወንድ ነው የሚያምር; ሁሉ ነገር እነሱ ዘንድ አይል ያለ ወንድ ካልተጨመረበት አይሆንም

[88] ትበልጣለች ቢባልስ ምን ውሸት አይሆን, አሁን እሱ የኔን ስራ ስርቶት ነው!

[89] አይ እኔ እበልጠዋለሁ ባሌን ብል አይከብድም አሁን. አንሳለሁ ደሞ አልልም እኔ በበኩሌ. እኩል ነን ማለት ይሻላል እንጂ

ascertained. “In fact, it is better to say the men are; since that sounds just about right”[90]. The objections expressed here are of course indicative of the cultural inappropriateness of the claim that a woman can or should claim more importance than her husband, nor express such sentiments in public. As much as one can draw inferences to equality here, one can also draw inferences on the culturally prescribed position of a woman to occupy the secondary position in the household. In keeping with tradition, it seems, we also encounter the term “female headed households” only in instances where there is no male household head in a lot of policy and programs aimed at gender equality seemingly hinting that women cannot be household heads when there are men around.

Empathetic Equality – equality as empathy and mutual respect

The second articulation of equality between men and women is what I have labelled, for the lack of a better term, “empathetic equality”. This articulation of equality either completely avoids or sidesteps the issues of sameness and deference between the sexes that are central to the first articulation I discussed above and focuses instead on equal treatment and mutual respect. Care, empathy, respect, and camaraderie are taken to be the manifestations of an equal relationship between men and women. While not as widespread as the first articulation of equality discussed above, this articulation of equality is also prominently present. Andualem, a 38 year old male farmer with three young children, describes equality between men and women as something that is expressed by concern and care for one another. “I guess it means for men and women, for husbands and wives, to help one another and to be considerate to one another” he stated. “It is for the man to be considerate to his wife and the wife to him. That is how I understand it” he concluded. Emebet, a participant in one of the FGDs with women, also understands equality to mean that women and men are appreciative of what the other does, especially more so when it comes to appreciating what women do.

[90] የሆነስ ቢሆን እንዲያው ወንድ ይበልጣል ይባል እንጂ ሴት ይበልጣልሥ አይባልም.

> "they need to recognise and appreciate what the other is doing, all the hard work that each of them put in. Men especially need to see what women have to go through to put food on the mesob (table), raise their children, and keep their families intact. If a woman goes out with a man in the morning and they spend the entire day in the farms, if she still has to do all the house work by herself when they get back home, how would that be equality?" (Emebet – Women's FGD, 20 Feb. 2017, Chertekel).

While it does not always come out explicitly, this articulation of equality is built on the belief that there is a difference in the social value of what men and women do; and that the current state of affairs is unfair to women. So the empathy and respect that is often a key element if this particular articulation of equality is one that is sought from men by women.

> "Us women do a lot more of the work. It doesn't matter if we are pregnant or nursing, we still have to go to the farm with the men, and work with them all day. And when we get back home, we have to make dinner and serve it. What do the men do (in the house)? They sit and wait for their food"[91] (Emebet – Women's FGD, 20 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

This "empathetic" articulation of equality does not concern itself with the nature of masculinity and femininity; or whether nature or culture has bestowed men and women with the same assets and abilities. It only concerns itself with the perceived fairness of the gendered arrangement and comes to the conclusion that women are overburdened and over worked; and, even worse, that their burden goes unrecognised and their sacrifices unappreciated. But this does not mean that it takes inequality as a given or as an acceptable norm. In one of the FGDs with women, I asked if the women thought they were equals to the men and the answer was as clear as it could have possibly been. "Why else would we be living with them in marriage if we felt otherwise?[92], I was told, in no uncertain terms. Having heard that answer, I

[91] ስለ ስራ ሴቱ ነው ሚበልጥ. ታቀፍናል አርግዘናል የለም ምንም ብንሆን ከነሱ ጋር ነው አብረን ወጥተን የምንሄድ. ሜዳ አንድ ላይ ስንደፋ ብንውል ማታ ተመልሰን ቤት ስንገባ ቤት ደሞ ምንወራጭ እኛ ነን. እነሱ ስራቸውን ፈፀሙ ተዚያ መጡ ጉልች ነው =. አብረን በስራ ስንደፋ ውለን ብንመጣ ቤት ስንደርስ እኔ ነምበስ ቀና ስል ተቀምጦ ነው የሚያየኝ እንጂ ሌላ ምን ያረግልኛል.

[92] እኩል ነን ብለንማ ነው የተቀምጠን"

then asked why it was then that, the government and so many non-government organizations, spend so much time talking about promoting gender equality and women's empowerment – if indeed women and men were already equal. With a perplexed tone that seemed to imply where I had left my faculties on that morning, I was told that this was of course necessary because women, although they are equal to men, still carried a lot of burden and are generally unappreciated for what they do. And of course because men, if not reined in, will do all sorts of things – like abusing their wives. Otherwise, I was told, the government did not say women were less than men or that they should be above men; all they are saying is she is an equal and she should be treated as such[93].

Often expressed along with this articulation of equality is an admission that there is some inequality between men and women as things stand. Andualem, who I quoted earlier, having expressed what it means for men and women to be equal was highly ambivalent when asked whether he thought he and his wife were equals as the following excerpt from the interview captures.

> Q: would you say you and your wife are equals then?
>
> A: [hesitates], I don't know. I would say may be not. Like I mentioned, I am free to go and come as I want to, she is not. If we both left home together at dawn, and came back after sundown, who would prepare the food we will eat? So for this reason alone, she has to stay at home late into the morning and get back home early – so that she can prepare food and make the house orderly while I am free of these burdens. It would have been better if we did these things together and helped one another, I could put the *dist* (clay pot) on the fire and make the stew while she bakes the *injera*. It would be nice if I did these things but I don't because it is not considered

[93] "ይበደላሉ ብሎ ነዋ እኛን ለመደገፍ. ወንድ እኮ ሃይ ታልተባለ ለሴቱ አያዝንም. ተለቀቅነው በቃው, ሄደ በቃ! እና መንግስት ለዝያ ነው እንጂ ሴት ተወንድ ታንሳለችም አላለ ሴት ትብለጥም አላለ, እኩል ናት ነው ያለ".

> normal for men to do such things. So I would say we are not equals, I have advantages over her as a man. (In-depth interview, 24 Dec. 2016, Chertekel)

One last point needs to be made about this articulation of equality; while it does not explicitly dwell on difference as the "the equal but different" narrative, it still assumes that men are men and women are women; and one can't be the other. It instead focuses on making the lives of women better, or at least "more bearable", and is built on the premise that women have a very hard, demanding, and unappreciated life. This was rarely expressed in detail during normal conversation but came out strongly whenever I asked if one had ever wished they were a man or a woman instead. Admittedly, this was a very provocative question and a later addition to my interview guides as I was beginning to think I was getting very stale, politically and socially correct answers to my other questions on equality. This question was, as I expected it to be, very disruptive in that it was always received with either some level of shock or amusement and the answers to it were quite revealing; as the following quotes. The question, always posed at the end of an interview session, was "have there ever been an occasion where you wished you were a man/woman instead?" followed by probes asking why and how people felt the way they did.

> "[laughs] no, never (ኧረ የለም)! I have heard women saying how they wished they were a man but never have I heard a man wishing he was a woman [keeps laughing]. There is no way a man would ever wish to be a woman"[94] (Andualem, In-depth interview, 24 Dec. 2016, Chertekel).

> "Let alone wishing I was a woman I actually pity a woman. I feel an immense amount of pity for them because they have to put up with a lot; a woman has to suffer through pregnancy and birth, and she is burnt by smoke and fire everyday of her life. I was not old enough to feel sorry for my mother when she passed away but I do feel sorry for what my wife has to put up with all her life. I thank God for not making me a woman or an ox. Had I been created an ox, I would have spent my days at the mercy of a farmers whip, and had I been created a woman, I would have spent my days going through everything a woman has to put up with. So I cannot say I have ever wished to have been created a woman. And I don't think any man would say that he ever has – unless he is not much of a man

[94] (ኧረ! እኔ እንጃ: ወንድ ሴት ልሁን አይልም!)"

(unless he has issues with being a man in bed). Otherwise, why would any man wish he was a woman? But for a woman to wish she was a man, that would be understandable" (Belay D., In-depth interview; 28 Dec. 2016, Chertekel).

"[laughs] - that is only natural (ያማ ግድ ነው ተበላይ) and yes, there have been occasions where I have wished I was a man. When I had my child and I then divorced my husband, he went his merry way like he wasn't ever married at all. No responsibilities no ties to keep him down. But I was stuck with a child, I can't go wherever I please for example, I have to care for my child. If I was a man, I wouldn't be tied down like this. A man walks into a marriage with nothing but his sticks and can walk away from it as easily (ወንድ እኮ ሽመሉን ይዞ እንደገባ ስህመሉን ይዞ ነው ሚሄድ). But it is not that easy for a woman. Being a man is enviable (እንዲያስ ወንድ ነው ሸጋ)" (Emebet, Female, 20, In-depth Interview, 15 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)..

"yes, all the time. I lament God as to why he created me a woman in a world where men have it all. But what is done is done, there is simply no way of undoing my nature now. He has made me the way he did and there is nothing I can do about it. If he had made into a man, I would have reached for anything; I would have dreamt big. But he did not make me a man, he said yours is womanhood so I live out my life as a woman should. But I surely have said to him 'why oh God did you make me a woman!' I am sure every woman has said that at one point or another[95]" (Esteziya, F, 40, In-depth Interview; 11 Feb. 2017, Chertekel)

"Of course I have. Why do you think men fare better? They work outdoors so they get strong. They don't have to suffer through fire and smoke and pregnancy and birth. A woman has no rest, day and night she works. When she is my age, she has no strength left[96]." (Siraye, F, 60; In-depth Interview; 25 Feb. 2016; Chertekel).

"Yes of course. However I am not sad that I am a woman. A woman has her place [in the world] too. How do countries grow and become prosperous? How does a people become numerous? It is through what a woman does. She gives life, she raises children and nurtures them into adulthood. Men are better in strength and any man is a better farmer than any woman can ever be. But it is women who raise a nation.[97]" (Mestayit, F, 46; In-depth interview; 22 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

[95] (ማለዳ ያበላሸውን አሁን እንዴት ያረገኛል? አሁን ምን ለማረግ ይችላል? ወይ ሀ ሲል ተጥንት ወንድ ቢያረገኝ ነሮ ያው እንደጉአደኞቼ ዘልዬ ሁሉን እደርሰው አይል? ግን አልሆነማ. አይ አንቺ ደረጃሽ ሴት ነሽ አለ, በሰትነት ዋልሁ እንግዲህ. እንጂ ብታረገኚማ ይባላል እንጂ)

[96] ወንድ እኮ እንግዲህ ጥንካሬም የሰጠው እዳር ስለዋለ እሳት ስላልገረፈው, ስላልተቅመደመደ ነው. ሴት ተቅመድማጅ ናት, ሌት ተቀን አታርፍም. ያው ቅድ አይሞላላትምና ጉልበት የላትም ነው እንጂ (በስራማ ትበልጣለች)

[97] ሴት ደሞ አላማዋም ትልቅ ነው. አገር የተባዛ በሴት አደል? ያው ደሞ በጉልበት በጥንካሬ በአርሶአደርነት ይበልጣል ነው እንጂ በዚ ደሞ እኮ ሴት ትበልጣለች. በሀገር ልማትና በህዝብ ደሞ ሲሄድ ሴት ናት ምትበልጥ

This articulation of equality, or perhaps more specifically – inequality, is related to but differs from the previous one in a number of important ways. First, it does not concern itself with ideals of femininity and masculinity; nor with the respective place of men and women in the rural agrarian life-world of Chertekel. It takes these things either for granted and immutable, or irrelevant to the discussion of equality. Second, it emphasises fairness and justice as the centrepiece of equality. From there, and this is third, it takes the position that the current state of affairs is extremely unfair to women and something ought to be done to make women's lives more bearable. But the contents of what this "something" that needs to be done are rarely clearly articulated however, except remarks regarding reducing the burden on women by getting men more involved in women's work, and by advocating for solutions that reduce the burden and suffering of women through either technical or communal solutions.

This articulation of equality, therefore, does not touch upon issues of power, nor on issues of the segregation of knowledge and skills along gender lines and the subsequent division of labour. It more or less is an appeal to people's sense of fairness and justice. At that level, it is extremely potent in eliciting support for the cause of equality, or more specifically, the kind of equality that it articulates. Along with the previous articulation of equality that maintains equality along with difference, it is widely palatable to people; mainly because it does not challenge the status quo and does not disrupt existing power relations. More importantly, it does not challenge men's privileges and tries instead to rally their support for the cause of making women's lives better without threatening existing notions of masculinity and manhood. But more relevant to our discussion here is the fact that both of these articulations do not touch upon the problems of gender in agriculture that we saw in the previous chapter. The gendering of key agricultural knowledge, the side-lining of women to peripheral and supportive roles, the symbolic construction of the farmer as the male, none of these are a matter of concern for these two articulations of equality.

Equality as Equal Power - equal participation and equal decision making

A third articulation of the equality between men and women similarly emerges out of a tacit acceptance of inequality – this time in decision making and representation. Like the second articulation discussed above, it emphasises mutual concern and joint responsibility but expands the criteria of equality further to include decision making, participation, and representation in the public sphere. This articulation is most commonly expressed by grass roots level government and non-government actors who work, in one way or another, with farmers. Members of the Kebele administration, staff of the Keble agriculture office, staff at the local MFI, health extension workers all expressed this view of equality where equality is mainly equated with equal decision making power and equal participation and representation in all activities. This focus on women's participation comes in many flavours some of which I will present below.

The Chertekel branch of the Amhara Credits and Savings Institution (ACSI) – a quasi-governmental micro finance institution[98] mainly provides small loans to farmers alongside business skills development training to its clientele and has set a policy of ensuring that at least 75% of its clients are women. The reason for this is twofold and not solely related to promoting gender equality or women's empowerment. On the one side, ACSI believes that women, and especially rural women, have been excluded from household decisions and wants to counter that tradition. It believes that putting women at the centre of its micro-finance services will go a long way to counter the established tradition of men being the household heads and making all the decisions by themselves – often without out so much as informing their wives.

> "When customers come to us looking for a loan, we tell them they can only get a loan if the loan is taken out by the wife. Men would be forced to not only consult their wife but also bring her and let her discuss the terms and conditions of the loan on equal terms with their husbands. This also brings many women in to the public sphere and challenges the established

[98] While setup as a share company, ACSI had strong relations with the regional government which owns 25% of its shares.

> tradition that sees women as belonging in their kitchens" (Belay K.; Key-Informant Interview; 28 Dec., 2016; Chertekel)

But that is not entirely why ACSI targets women, in fact it is not even the most important reason. Like most microfinance institutions around the world, ACSI also firmly believes that lending to women is good for business since women are believed to be far more risk averse and responsible with the loans they take than men which improves repayment rates and the overall business health of microfinance institutions.

> "Women are a lot more careful with the loans they take, they are very cautious and they are very fearful of defaulting so they take an extra care to ensure that the loan is used well and the debt is paid back. That is what we have learned from our experience. Women are more responsible, targeting women is therefore good for our business, and good for our customers since women tend to use the loans well" (Belay K.; Key-Informant Interview; 28 Dec., 2016; Chertekel)

These two objectives are of course not mutually exclusive nor contradictory. ACSI believes that targeting women is good for its business as well as women's empowerment in addition to maximising the positive impact of loans on the lives and livelihoods of its clientele.

> If given the opportunity, women are strong and assertive, they would not allow their husbands to risk the family's wellbeing by taking out a large loan; they would say this is as much as we can borrow and we will not add a single cent above that; that we can pay this amount back even in the worst of cases from our produce, but if we take too much and we find that we can't pay it back, we lose our assets, we lose our land, we will starve our children. So the men can only take whatever amount their women approve of. The men have to plead and implore with their women, the women don't even have to speak, and the men can see it in their face[99]. We give them enough time to discuss this and arrive at a joint decision, we do not rush them to decide. Once they agree on a figure, we let them proceed with filling out the loan forms. So when it comes to deciding on the loan at least, we feel that the woman has as much power as the man and often times even more because it is the men who in the end settle for what the women consider to be a reasonable amount (Belay K.; Key-Informant Interview; 28 Dec., 2016; Chertekel)

[99] [ወንዱ የሷን ዓይንና ግምባር አይቶ ሚወስንበት ሁኔታ አለ ብዙ ጊዜ]

As such, ASCI believes that it can empower women by providing them with opportunities where they can be equal decision makers with their husband. But how does ACSI understand women's empowerment and more specifically gender equality within an agrarian, farming community? From the interview, two understandings of gender equality come out strongly. First equality is understood as equality in value – gender equality is then articulated as equal recognition and valuing of men and women.

Greater recognition of women's labour and contributions, greater involvement of women in household decisions and greater public participation and involvement of women in the public sphere are seen as the areas where gender equality intervention should focus. It is important here to note that ACSI does not directly work on or have programs that are directly tied to gender equality awareness and training. It treats gender equality training as incidental and its customer relations officers and loan officers do their best to discuss gender equality issues with clients when they inevitably arise during business skills development trainings that are often arranged for clients before they take out loans. These trainings cover a variety of topics starting from how and why the institution was established to its rules and regulations, to the terms and conditions of the loans given. These are all intended to give customers a clear understanding of the institution and how it operates so that they know what they are getting in to. But along the way, discussion that touch on the issue of gender equality creep in, and mainly in relation to why the institution has set a 75% target for women. Here, customs and traditions that are understood as restricting women to the home are raised and discussed. Staff say that they come across men who feel that women have no place outside of the home, that the job of a woman is to cook and feed her family rather than dealing with hard decisions that affect the household; and that such decisions are best left to men. In countering these kinds of attitudes, staff say they often resort to reasoning and persuasion than antagonism.

> "We try to change these attitudes as best as we can with persuasion and with no friction. For example we try to use the [biblical] creation story that people are all familiar with - that God created Hewan [Eve] out of the rib of Adam. We try to use this story to illustrate that men and women are equal because God did not take a bone from the legs or arms of Adam but instead from his bosom and that this symbolises a woman is a man's equal in all aspects. If God had taken a bone from the ankle of Adam and created eve from that, then men would have said you were made of my ankle bones and your rightful place is beneath my feet. And if He had taken a bone from his head or taken a strand of his hair and created a woman from that, then the woman would have boasted that her place is above the man since she was created from above him. But God created a woman from the bosom of a man, from one of his ribs to symbolise that her place is neither below him at his feet nor above him but rather by his side as his equal and his companion. So we use such symbolism to teach them that men and women are equal and they should have equal say in whatever decisions they take in their households" (Belay K.; Key-Informant Interview; 28 Dec., 2016; Chertekel)

Equal control over family assets and equal or joint decision making are two things ACSI promotes more than any other in their efforts related to women's empowerment. Interestingly, and quite different from other government organisations, ASCI does not believe these are problems that are unique to rural populations or farming households. As the interviewer described it, even local government officials, who should know better and do better, do not treat their wives as equals when it comes to control over assets and decision making.

> It is not that uncommon to find the man, who is the household head, has may be a 100 thousand or even 200 thousand Birr in a bank account that is in his name. But the woman wouldn't have a dime in her hand let alone an account. That money is their joint asset, it is the fruit of their joint labour and should be managed as such. But it is in the husband's name and he can do with it as he pleases. A while ago, we celebrated March 8 and we launched an awareness campaign that promoted savings. When we enquired about the wives of even the administration leaders and the cabinet members, none of the wives of these men had a savings account in their name or a joint account with their husbands. And these are men you would expect better from since they are more educated and more aware of things than your average farmer. It took the Wereda women's affairs bureau threatening them of bad publicity to convince these men to get a savings account created for their wives. (Belay K.; Key-Informant Interview; 28 Dec., 2016; Chertekel)

That men, even men from whom one would expect better, simply do not involve their wives in the decisions they make was a frequently mentioned aspect of inequality that came up repeatedly during other interviews at the local Kebele level with key informants.

> Men usually take decisions that affect the household by themselves without consulting their wives, you see this even in men who you would consider learned and progressive, they simply decide things by their own. Women are not part of the decision making process and changing this will take many years (Selam L.; Key-informant Interview; Kebele administrations office, 11 Feb. 2017; Chertekel)

Men, the claim goes, do not take women seriously because of the wrong but widespread misconception that women are incapable of seeing something to the end and accomplishing things by their own. "Even the saying goes 'No matter how much a woman may be in the know, it takes a man to see something through' [ሴት ምን ብታውቅ በወንድ ያልቅ::] one of the local health extension workers told me. This belief that women were unable to do see something to the end was raised frequently and was given as the reason for the failure of many government initiated programs targeted at raising women's participation in the public sphere. Men were accused of not taking government efforts to promote gender equality seriously; instead seeing these as a waste of time more than anything else. As a result, it is often claimed, men do not allow their wives to go to Kebele meetings, to public works programs (more on this later), microfinance providers, and so forth. This accusation was levied on all men, the common farmer and the kebelle official alike.

> "when we call for meetings and trainings, the wives of the kebele officials don't come to these meetings because their husbands will say to them 'who will run the house if we both spend our days attending meetings'/ so the husbands will show up for the meeting while their wives stay at home. There are also a lot of men who fear that the more their wives attend meetings and trainings, the more they will know about their rights and that in the end, the women will be above them and they will drive them out of their own houses"(Selam L.; Key-informant Interview; Kebele administrations office, 11 Feb. 2017; Chertekel).

This suspicion of women gaining too much power and becoming 'unruly' was something I came across frequently in my informal discussions with men. "It's the time of women, everything is theirs now" was a frequent remark. Some even took it as far as claiming that women were now robbing men blind when divorces happen. The women themselves, however, do not feel that they have much in the way of rights let alone feeling more entitled than men. But even in the case of divorces, while the law may be clear in stating women are entitled to half of the family's assets, getting the letter of the law translated in to action is difficult.

Divorce cases can only be handled at the Kebele level by elders who are always men and tend to side with men and favour tradition and custom over rights and justice. If the woman wants to make a formal legal claim, she has to go to the Wereda court. If for example, land is involved in the dispute, the courts have to order its distribution and who is to take what. The court decision is then communicated to the Wereda land administration office which will inform the Kebele land administration division which will then make the actual redistribution in accordance with the court order. But getting to that stage can be a time and resource draining journey for most women; and it is not uncommon for women to give up their claim out of sheer frustration. Even when they don't give up and persevere to the end, they witness a lot of intimidation and trickery from men, including false testimonies which men are said to have no trouble producing.

Most women do not even access the simplest of services provided by the Kebele administration; that of identity cards. In Ethiopia, the Kebele issues residence cards to people living within its administrative boundaries and these residence cards, in addition to serving as the primary identity card of citizens, are required for accessing a number of government services. But it is men who usually apply for and get these residence cards. While there is no restriction that bars women from applying for and gaining these identity cards, women simply don't apply for them. Out of 2,576 Kebele residence cards issued in the past three years in the Kebele, only less than 100 were

issued to women. Even when a situation arises where by a woman requires a residence card be issued to her, it is usually the husband who comes on her behalf simply because women are thought to be inexperienced in handling such affairs.

> "if a situation arises where by the woman needs to have an id card issued, it is often her husband who will come to my office and ask me to issue his wife's id card and hand it over to him. If I start objecting saying that his wife needs to come in person herself and make the request herself, he wouldn't listen, he will say I am just making things more difficult unnecessarily, that everyone knows who his wife is and that he is her husband. So men don't even want their wives to do these very simple things, they would rather be the ones who handle it. They either think their wives are not capable of getting these simple things done or they don't like it when they come seeking for things by their own" (Selam L.; Key-informant Interview; Kebele administrations office, 11 Feb. 2017; Chertekel).

It may be argued that women, or men for that matter, do not have much need for Kebele ID cards as most people, and especially those in rural areas, can do without them. Kebele IDs are of course indispensable when one travels long distances by bus, or for such things as visiting someone who may have been arrested by the police or sentenced to imprisonment since the police will only allow those with identification into prison compounds. But the fact that the overwhelming majority of those who seek and get Kebele IDs are men, added to the fact that even in the rare occasions where women do need them, it is their husbands who apply for them indicates a side-lining of women.

More specific to farming and agriculture, and decisions made regarding farming, there was a mix of views; at times seemingly contradictory assertions were made. On the one hand, men were said to be responsible for making virtually every decision about farming by themselves, with little to no involvement of women. On the other, the failure of some recently introduced improved methods and practices of farming, such as row seeding, were blamed on the lack of involvement of women in the training and their subsequent refusal to adopt these methods. I will illustrate both in some detail below.

At the Kebele Agriculture Office, staff were convinced that men make all the decisions involved in farming and that the relationship between men and women was completely unequal. The men do the ploughing; once the ploughing is done and the seed bed is ready, it is time to get all the inputs necessary including seeds, chemical fertilizers, and herbicides – it is the men who secure these inputs. Women may be involved in seeding/sowing when this is done with the row seeding method but their involvement was said to be one of passive labour; the women, it was claimed, were simply there because the men need their extra hands. If broadcasting the seeds, the men do it by their own. After sowing comes weed management and control. In the past, this used to be done manually and women were heavily involved in this activity. But with the increasing popularity and widespread adoption of chemical methods of weed control, manual weeding has virtually disappeared. The men secure the chemical as well as the dispenser and do the spraying. Then comes reaping and harvest, an activity that is once again presided by and done by men. The women, it was claimed, simply don't have any deciding role on virtually every decision and activity made during the entire agricultural season – from land preparation to harvest. Staff describe the entire farming practiced in the area as "one done by men with the help of women".

Similar sentiments were expressed by staff at both the Wereda and Zone level Agriculture Offices. Staff pointed out that all the major decisions regarding the purchase of inputs such as seeds and fertilizers are taken by the male household head. The crop calendar outlining what will be planted in which plot, and what activities are to be undertaken when, is prepared by the male household head in collaboration with the local agricultural extension worker. Men are also the ones who decide over how and when large quantities of the agricultural produce will be sold and what the money from this sell will be utilised for. Staff at the local and regional agriculture offices argue that this state of affairs has to change, pointing to the government's agricultural transformation agenda. Such a state cannot continue because it is not only

detrimental to women but also to the objective of transforming agriculture and raising productivity since trying to do that with half the population removed is akin to working with one of your hands tied behind your back.

But staff also point to instances where greater involvement of women in agricultural decision making is key to the objective of transforming agriculture and here is where the seemingly contradictory stances on the influence of women on agricultural decision making emerge. As indicated above, the dominant narrative portrays women as far removed from agricultural decision making and as mere helpers of and providers for the men who make the decisions and do most of the work. But when it comes to changing age old agricultural practices and methods, the role of the women is considered to be vital and their lack of involvement in agricultural training detrimental. A case in point, and one that was narrated to me not just at the kebele level but also at the regional, was the apparent failure of row seeding for teff.

As part of the government's strategy to raise agricultural production and productivity, row seeding was introduced and heavily promoted by the agricultural extension service. It was promoted as being both cost effective (since it would reduce the amount of seeds and fertilisers used per hectare) and bringing more yield per hectare that the broadcast seeding that famers traditionally used. While it was initially met with resistance from farmers, it has now become the primary method of seed planting for wheat because it did deliver on its promises of maximum gain for minimum cost. But for teff, it has largely failed as even those farmers who initially adopted it have abandoned it in subsequent years. In research trials, row planting was shown to increase teff yields by up to three times while lowering seed costs, thereby, making it seemingly a good value proposition for teff farmers according to research done by (Berhe, Gebretsadik, Edwards, & Araya, 2011). So what could explain this apparent lack of interest among farmers?

The answer, according to local level agricultural experts, lies in the failure to involve women in the training.

> If we are set on transforming agriculture as we have set out to, this requires changing people's attitudes, their skills, and their farming knowledge. And for this, we need to provide farmers with trainings. We provide capacity building trainings for both men and women, and we do this separately. The training sessions we organise for male farmers go without a hitch, but those we organise for women usually fail. For a start, they often fail to show up for the training and the problems start there. We provide a variety of trainings on a variety of topics for farmers. It could be about crop or livestock management, natural resources management and conservation, it could be about crop production etc. But if the women fail to even attend the training sessions we organise, the whole training program falls apart right there because even if the men might have attended their training sessions, when they want to put what they have learned from these trainings in to practice, the women who haven't attended the training become a huge obstacle. Let me give you an example, we are still having difficulties in getting farmers to use row planting for teff because of this. Since the women did not get the training, when it finally comes to planting the teff, they will come up with all sorts of excuses ranging from 'why should we do it differently to how we have done it till now', to 'we don't know how to do it', to 'we have no time for this'. And the man can't do it himself since he has to make the furrows/lines and for that he has to do the ploughing. If the woman had received the training, or even one or two of their children, it would have gone a long way to facilitate the adoption. As it is now, even if the man says let's do it this way, there is no one other than him who has received the training. Even that is assuming others in his family do not oppose him, as is often the case, they will in fact raise objections and say why do they have to do it differently and not as they have always done it. They end up in a fight. When we ask the household heads (the male farmers) why they haven't put what they learned into practice, they tell us their family isn't willing to do it and they can't do it by their own. So it is a big challenge, we have had no success with teff till now and we are still fighting with farmers. From what we have seen, women are really important when it comes to changing habits and established traditions, when they are convinced that somethings need to be changed, they will do everything in their power to see to it that that change happens even to the extent of convincing husbands who may not be comfortable with the change. But when they are not, the husbands have little power since the wives will make all sorts of excuses to make sure that it doesn't happen. So we need to convince women if we are to bring about transformation in farming but we can't convince them if they don't even show up for the training sessions. This is the puzzle we are in. (Lijalem, Key-Informant Interview, Kebele Agriculture Office, 27 Dec. 2016, Chertekel)

This same line of reasoning was also repeated to me with other interviews I held with key informants at the Wereda, zone, and regional levels.

> Oddly enough, as hard as women are to reach with training, when we manage to reach them and train them, the chances of success in actual implementation are improved greatly. Anything that we manage to get women included in turns in to great success. Convincing the women is a good way of convincing the [male] house hold heads as well, once women get hold of an idea and accept it, they are resolute. But as I have repeatedly said, their access to agricultural training and their level of agricultural knowledge is far behind that of men. Perhaps this explains why there is also a wide gap in the decision making abilities of men and men as we observe them now. (Embiale, Key-informant Interview, Wereda Agriculture Office - Crop Development Unit; 28 Feb. 2017, Debre Markos)

However, these claims raise several questions that make these accounts problematic. First, it seemingly contradicts the narrative that the men control all aspects of farming and make all the decisions and that women's role is at best supportive. Second, even the informant quoted above states that this has not been a problem for other crops like wheat and maize for which row seeding/planting has been widely adopted. Since the method used and skills required are more or less similar with some minor differences in spacing and the like; the skill set is undoubtedly transferable to planting *teff* as well. This in turn raises the question of why farmers would raise objections for *teff* only, while using these same methods and techniques for other crops. The answer to the later may lie in the fact that *teff*, as a tiny cereal, may be better suited for broadcast seeding than row planting and that farmers are using this as an excuse to not comply with the request of the agriculture office. And the deciding role of women that is narrated as thus is simply a scapegoat used to cover up the unwillingness of farmers to adopt the method and the reluctance of the agricultural extension program to accept failure.

Another area where the equality as participation narrative is prevalent is public mobilisation for natural resource conservation. As part of the agricultural extension program, Kebele level agricultural workers in collaboration with the Kebele administration mobilise farmers for mass natural resources conservation activities once or twice a year. Activities undertaken include, but are not limited to, [add activities described in interview tape here]

> "If we take natural resources management and conservation activities, we conduct these every year starting from Tir and lasting up to Yekatit. These activities are done communally and involve various activities (lists details of activities done as part of soil conservation as an example). But even in such activities, most of the work, and sometimes all of the work in its entirety is carried out by men. The government has taken the position that women should be involved in these activities as part of its efforts to promote women's equality, and we also do our best to encourage women to take part in these activities. But the women simply refuse to show up. It is not entirely their fault since the men are also not that keen on the idea of their involvement. The men will simply ask why the women have to come at all since they can do all that needs to be done by themselves without bothering the women" (Lijalem, Key-Informant Interview, Kebele Agriculture Office, 27 Dec. 2016, Chertekel)

The subject of women's participation in such mass mobilisation activities is one that has gained a lot of attention on the side of the government. So much so that the mass mobilisation program was amended to make it easier for women to participate, first by allowing women to show up late as well as leave early from these public work schemes; and later on by arranging temporary day care shelters where mothers with infants and young children could leave their children under someone else's care while they take part in the activities. While it has gained immense attention at the national and regional levels and subsequent traction, it is not at all clear what the intended purpose of this intense promotion of women's participation in mass mobilisation activities is. However, it is perhaps understandable when seen from the government's objective of producing good data that shows any improvement in women's participation which is often taken as a byword for empowerment. In this regard, ensuring that women take part in these activities can be done relatively easily while it at the same time generating high impact numerical data that can be thrown around as evidence of meaningful change in women's roles in agriculture; while at the same time not changing anything and capitalising on women's labour. At the Zone Agriculture Office, staff were very pleased to quote from their latest figures which showed a participation rate of 78% and 89% for women and men respectively in mass

mobilisation for natural resources conservation activities[100]. Similar figures are quoted both at the regional and national levels as signs of success of women's empowerment.

8.5. Gender equality awareness raising and training at grass roots level

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to say a few words about the state of gender equality related awareness education and training at the grass roots level. The first thing that stands out in this regard is the complete absence of any meaningful awareness education or training at grassroots levels. While there are some trainings given to farmers that touch upon the issue of gender equality or inequality tangentially, these are often primarily concerned with other issues; mainly with what are often termed as harmful traditional/cultural practices such as early marriage and FGM. There is only one NGO (Action for Children) and one micro finance institution (the Amhara Credits and Saving Institution described earlier) working at the kebelle level and they mainly implement programs dealing with livelihood improvement primarily targeting women and mothers. While not specifically gender equality focused, these programs do touch on gender issues – but only as part of what are often called "women's issues". The government health extension program also works with women through the Women's Development Armies but mainly focuses on improving maternal and child health. Gender and gender equality is not itself a component of the trainings and discussions held by the WDA and its component cells. All in all, gender equality is not, on its own, an agenda at the Kebele level nor the focus of any one programs.

The reason frequently given for this complete absence of gender equality awareness programs at the Kebele level is the absence of a government structure and a focal person at the Kebele levels. The structures of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs extend to the Wereda level and stop there. While the other programs such as the agricultural extension program, MFIs, the health extension

[100] Interview with Zone Agriculture Office personnel, 28 Feb. 2017, Debre Markos. Figures are from all adults who are expected to take part in these activities.

program and so on may try to incorporate gender issues in to their programs and activities as best as they can, they neither have the technical capacity nor the mandate to work on gender inequality directly. Furthermore, each of these programs and their implementing personnel have their own set targets and priorities that make working on gender inequality a luxury they cannot afford given the immense pressure they are under to deliver on their specific targets and goals. An example here can be drawn from the work of the Kebele level agriculture office.

> We have set goals and activities needed to attain those goals. If the goal is achieving this or that level of adoption for a certain new method or practice, our focus is on meeting this set goal. At the end of the reporting period, the numbers are what are going to matter. It doesn't matter how or by whom the work was done, what is important is the fact that the work is done and the set goal is met. So no one really cares whether a particular activity is done by men or women or together as long as the focus is on achieving the set goal. What worries us is whether we have achieved our set goals and targets and not whether we have involved women or not. So the whole design of the extension program needs to be revised and refocused. Or at the very least there needs to be one office at the Kebele level that is entirely dedicated to and focused on promoting gender equality and supervising how other programs are implemented to ensure that they are not implemented in a way that completely disregards women. There is an agriculture office at the Keeble level, there is an office for education, one for health, one for land administration, one for the police, one for farmers unions, one for entrepreneurship development and so on. Why there is no separate office that deals with gender equality issues is a puzzle to me. Every sectoral office at the Keeble level is expected to handle gender related work on top of their primary duties. But if gender equality is a priority as the government claims, there needs to be a separate office that deals with this as its primary responsibility. That is where it should begin. There is rumour that this will be done soon and I think it will go a great length to making gender equality a primary concern at the local Keeble level. But until then, the primary concern of each sectoral office at the kebele level will remain how to best meet their set goal and targets and not ensuring gender equality along the process. (Lijalem, Key-Informant Interview, Kebele Agriculture Office, 27 Dec. 2016, Chertekel).

The absence of a gender focal unit or gender experts at the local grassroots level also opens up the interpretative space and enables multiple meanings of gender equality to co-exist at the local level. This is in direct opposition to the national and regional levels where the meaning of gender equality has been effectively shrunk to

participation as the only goal and gender mainstreaming as the only strategy (more on this in the next chapter).

8.6. Conclusion

Returning to the concept of equality and that of gender equality more specifically, it is clear that the concept has in inherent quality of elasticity allowing for it to be interpreted in quite different ways. As a rhetorical device, the concept of equality has been critiqued by some as being an empty one. Westen (1982), for example argues that it is always possible to present rights and entitlements directly without ever having to resort to concepts such as "equal protection". Expanding on this, and taking the case of the right of a person not to be stigmatized, he points out that he adds,

> "…one can pierce the language of equal protection and talk directly about the underlying right to be free from stigmatic classification. The language of equality adds nothing of substance to the right that underlies it. "Equal protection" is a rhetoric device – a formal way of talking about entitlements by reference to the identities they entail. Equal protection does not explain the right to be free from stigmatic classification, and in the context of stigmatic classification, it does not exist as an independent norm. We can preserve the right to be free from racial stigma and yet banish equality as an explanatory norm" (Westen, 1982, p. 663).

His argument is that the concept of equality is an empty signifier devoid of meaning in and of itself and should be treated as such. He concludes by making the bold statement that equality is not only morally and legally an empty[101] concept but also a confusing one and that we are better of abandoning it all together. But the confusion and ambiguity inherent in such concepts as equality is a useful one – although Western does not fully acknowledge the extent of this usefulness. While it is clear that such concepts as equality do not, and cannot, have an inherent meaning in and of

[101] Note that empty here does not mean meaningless – western is careful to note that. Western only means that its contents are derivative and that it possesses no independent normative content. Particular statements of equality are never meaningless, he says, they possess as much meaning as the underlying rights and rules they incorporate by reference. Statements of equality have no additional meaning, however, above and beyond the standards they incorporate by reference, because equality itself has no content apart from those standards. Statements of equality have meaning, but the meaning is entirely derivative.

themselves, they also presents themselves as potent rhetorical devices; precisely because of their ambiguity. Equality as a concept is useful because it conceals, obscures, and confounds. It is in the interpretative space they open up that their meaning is negotiated, shifted, affixed, and sometimes altogether altered.

In this chapter, I have tried to look at the interpretative leeway that the concept of equality, and of gender equality as it relates to farming more specifically, allows at the local level. From the discussion, it is clear that a number of different interpretations of what it means for men and women to be equal exist at the local level. But it is important to note here that these differing interpretations are not arbitrary; they serve a purpose. They are part of broader discursive formations[102] that allow for the possibility of certain actions and rule out others. In the case of gender equality as it relates to smallholder farming in Ethiopia, while the meaning of equality between men and women may have multiple layers and display a façade of diversity, there is remarkable consistency in the type of actions that it allows and rules out as either unnecessary, unhelpful, or outright impossible.

Despite the multiplicity of meanings attached to the concept of gender equality, partly facilitated by the as yet non-technicalisation of the term at the local level, the existing state of affairs in the relationship between men and women and agriculture is never actually challenged or even questioned. The concept of equality is understood along the lines of equity, fairness and *metesaseb*[103] which are all considered important dimensions and/or expressions of equality between man and woman. But either a natural or a cultural, and often times a combination of both, difference between men and women is maintained. This purported difference is then used to justify the

[102] a discursive formation, in the Foucauldian sense, is a constellation of authoritative speech acts that relate to one another in some coherent way

[103] *Metesaseb* – an Amharic word that translates to "caring for one another" or "being considerate of one another". This notion of a husband and a wife caring for one another is also incorporated in to legal instruments governing marriage. Section 2 (Personal Effects of Marriage) Article 49 (Respect, Support and Assistance) of the Family Law states under sub-article (1) "The spouses owe each other respect, support and assistance". "ባልና ሚስት አርስበርሳቸው መከባበር, መተጋገዝና መደጋገፍ አለባቸው" ክፍል ፪ አንቀፅ ፶፱ - ፪ . Revised Family Code of 2000; Proclamation No. 213/2000.

existing compartmentalisation of knowledge in to male and female domains resulting in the concentration of agricultural knowledge and skills in the male domain. Neither one of the many interpretations of equality between men and women considers this to be a problem and thereby removes it from the potential list of actionable items that can be addressed by gender equality programs and even discourses on gender equality. In addition, these multiple meanings at the local level reinforce each other instead of competing with one another. The result is that they further reinforce the iterative performance of feminine and masculine duties and actions which in the end further solidifies existing conceptions of gendered identity. They not only define what it means to be equal, but what it means to be equal while being men and women. In this regard, they solidify rather than challenge gendered identity which is dependent upon the iterative performance of gendered action. In Butlerian terms, it is these iterative performances that produce and reproduce gendered identity, and the later is nothing without the former.

At the practical level, the ambiguity over what is meant by gender equality at the local level makes the concept more appealing. This is apparent in the overwhelming consensus over the need for greater equality between men and women and in the acceptance of the norm. In their discussion of seemingly universal norms such as that of gender equality, (Krook & True, 2012) describe how international norms morph over time and discuss both internal and external sources of dynamism of norms. The internal dynamism emerges from ongoing debates over the definition of a norm while the external encompasses the broader environment of the norms that may themselves also be highly contested (Krook &True, 2012:109). They argue that the internal dynamism of norms emerges from the potential for competing meanings of the norm. This struggle over the meaning of a norm may, at times, lead to what can be describes as more authentic realizations of the norm in question. These contestations have the possibility to give rise to conflicts over definitions leading to revisions of existing norms and in some cases, the emergence of new norms. But these

dynamics can equally move in several directions, including in directions that may not necessarily be in line with the ideal of the norm. As much as they may expand or deepen the norm, they can also reverse or empty the content of the norm. In fact, they point out, norms may be adopted precisely because they mean different things to different actors. While this maximises the potential for consensus, it also complicates the task of determining what specific forms of action constitute the reaffirmation of the norm and what behaviour constitute a violation of it.

Its wide spread appeal and acceptance aside, however, there is no clear articulated vision of what rural agricultural life would look like if there was indeed equality between men and women; nor a strategy to make it happen. The norm of equality has gained traction and is widely accepted precisely because such acceptance is not dependent on or needs to be followed by any form concrete action. In this sense, the widespread acceptance of the norm may signal the beginning of the struggle over its meaning rather than the resolution of a struggle over its exact content and meaning. It is also important to stress here that the dominant narrative is one that maintains interdependence along with equality. In this regard, the application of the liberal concept of equality as it is may not find widespread acceptance at the grass roots level. At the regional and national levels however, the discourse on equality in general and that of gender equality in agriculture in particular missed this notion of interdependence entirely, and is largely driven by the way equality is framed at the international level through the work of the development aid industry.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

As described in Chapter One, the purpose of this research was twofold. First, it aimed to investigate and unravel the ways gender enters into, shapes, influences, or structures small scale family farming in Ethiopia on the one hand; and the ways in which small scale family farming discursively constructs gender on the other. Second, the research also investigated understandings of equality and inequality as they relate to gender and farming – both at the national and at local community levels. I attempted doing both within the broader context of the gender equality discourse by problematizing the two main concerns of the study – gender and equality – as they appear in relation to farming and agriculture. I have also attempted to contextualize gender as well as gender inequality to the broader historic, social and political context of Ethiopia and its unique agricultural system. In this final chapter, I recap this study by presenting and reflecting on the main findings and arguments of this thesis. Starting with a reflection on the historicity of gender as a concept and the discourse on gender equality in Ethiopia gender equality discourse, I then proceed to the interplay between gender and agriculture and what that means for the gender equality in agriculture debate; and finally reflect on the utility of gender conceived of as performative in the Butlerian sense.

9.1. On the historicity of gender and gender relations in Ethiopia

On the historicity of gender inequalities in Ethiopia, this study certainly raises more questions than it answers. While a particular articulation of gender as a concept and a specific configuration of gender relations (patriarchy) has often been considered to be an outgrowth of the colonization of the global south by European powers and the resulting westernization of knowledge systems, the extent to which the same can be argued in the case of Ethiopia remains unclear. One the one hand, Ethiopia's

cultural and political traditions escaped the decimation that was European colonization. And as a result, we have ample evidence of systems of descent and inheritance that were more or less gender neutral. Historically, political power, wealth, and social standing in Ethiopian society largely depended on control over land and the people who worked on these lands. And owing to the ambilineal descent system exercised throughout the history of Ethiopia, women had equal inheritance rights to these systems of land ownership without exception. This would seem to suggest that women and men had the same and equal access to the determinants of power. But this has not led to women having a better social standing as compared to other patriarchal societies where a similar system of inheritance was lacking. Moreover, with the modernization of the Ethiopian state in the first half of the 20st century and the rise of a radical Marxist movement in the latter half of the same, the traditional was discarded in favor of the European and local political discourses increasingly took the shape of the international. Perceived backwardness and the need to adopt European systems of administration and education were the predominant concerns of the intellectual class in the first half of the 20th century while overthrowing a perceived feudal and bourgeois ruling class and building a socialist system of government became the predominant concern in the latter half of the century.

The effect of both has been a kind of a self-initiated and self-inflicted epistemic colonization where the local and traditional in all its forms and flavors came to be associated with backwardness, especially during the student movements of the 1960s and 70s and ever since. In the early 1970s, ideas about gender and gender relations in society were taken from Marxism and liberally applied to the Ethiopian context. With the fall from grace of socialism as an ideology and the collapse of the eastern bloc, we once again witness the same liberal application of another Eurocentric ideology to issues of gender and gender inequality – this time mainly imposed by the development aid industry based on the ideology of a liberal free market economy. In both periods, what we see is not so much an adoption of but rather a mere imposition

of western notions of gender and equality between the sexes on a society with little or no regard given to historical and social context. In this regard, a broader, more nuanced discussion of gender, power and the question of gender inequality in Ethiopia with a historically grounded approach is direly lacking and needs to be undertaken.

9.2. On the policy discourse on gender and gender (in)equality in agriculture in Ethiopia

Switching from the historic to the current, it can be argued that the current policy discourse on gender inequality in Ethiopia is one that instrumentalizes equality as a means to achieving a goal that is outside of gender equality itself. The meaning of gender equality as articulated in the Ethiopian policy scene is one that fits with what Lombardo et al. (2009) call "the bending" of the concept. Be it as part of the struggle against class based exploitation or the struggle against poverty, gender inequality has been framed not as a problem in and of its own but as part of another much broader agenda. Addressing gender inequality is consequently presented not so much as a matter of justice, freedom, and dignity but more as a means to achieving broader societal and national goals. This even more so when we look at the various policy frameworks that address the issue of gender inequality in relation to agriculture and or farming. The end goal here is neither transforming agriculture to make it more gender neutral nor to change existing gender configurations to challenge existing inequalities; but rather, and this is often explicitly stated, to increase agricultural production through greater involvement of women and the strategic use of women's (often unpaid) labour.

Framing the problem in such terms and placing gender equality as a strategic intervention that would lead to the achievement of other developmental goals such as food security is not a problem on its own. The problem here is that the case for equality is often made not in terms of justice and fairness but in terms of pushing a broader developmental agenda for the achievement of which women and women's

contribution is needed. Again, there is nothing wrong with seeking greater contributions from women for gaining ground on some national agenda such as lifting the country out of poverty. Women, as citizens, should have, and do have, the right and duty to take part in these efforts and national goals. The problem is that this framing gives them little to no choice in determining the nature of their participation. In fact, they may not be even free to decide whether they want to participate at all. It comes down as a national duty over which they have little or no say. And it is not unusual for these "additional duties" to be placed on top of the already existing duties of women, making their lives more demanding and more burdensome rather than easier and more rewarding. A good example of this is the increasingly persistent manner in which the state and various state and state actors including non-government organizations seek the participation of women in activities such as mass mobilizations of local communities for natural resources mobilization. The driving force behind this ever increasing trend to forcibly seek women's participation for participation's sake is often no more than just the need to obtain good figures. In a context where a lot of development projects, including the agricultural transformation program itself, are externally funded by multinational donors and non-state actors, obtaining good gender related numbers becomes a far more important goal than achieving equality since the former plays a big role in securing continued donor support and funding. In the process, the broader transformative agenda of gender equality gets forgotten or ignored in favor of a few matrix that quantify the participation of women. In this formula, greater participation (forced as it may even be) and measured in its crudest form, that of percentages of men vs women, comes to equate greater gender equality.

9.3. On the interplay between gender and agriculture

More than anything else, the ox-plough has proven itself to be an extraordinarily resilient and the single most dominant feature of Ethiopian agriculture for at least one and a half millennia and continues to be the quintessential feature of agriculture in the

Ethiopian highlands even today. As a tool, the ox drawn plough is the single most important apparatus at the farmer's disposal. And as a symbol, it, more than anything else, defines who and what a farmer is. And with its remarkable persistence, the ox-plough system of farming has given rise to a highly structured and hegemonic gender regime with enormous consequences to what men and women can and cannot do and how they relate to one another in the production process.

Part of that, in fact the most significant and consequential part of it, is the placement of the maresha – the ox plough – in the masculine domain and the distancing of women from the tool. Since both in symbolism and discourse, the farmer is the one who wields the maresha, women's relegation to the peripheral assistive role in farming starts with this. While operating the maresha was largely described as a matter of learning and skill acquisition, and women could – in principle – operate the maresha, they don't actually get the opportunity to learn then skill set needed for this as learning happens through an extended process of apprenticeship in what resembles a community of practice. Starting from a young age, boys learn the crafts and skills sets of what it takes to be a man from their older brothers and their father while girls learn the crafts and skill sets of what makes them in to a woman from their older sisters and mother.

This learning process is one that starts as early as the ages of four and five and lasts to late adolescence. And since the maresha as well as the craft of ploughing are in the male domain, girls never get a chance to learn the plough and everything associated with it. This puts them at a significant disadvantage from the start but the consequences of the highly regimented knowledge regime do not end there. The association of the farmer with the plough and the discursive positioning of men and women in relation to the maresha puts the centuries old traditional knowledge system that has been passed on to each successive generation outside of the reach of women. The inaccessibility of this knowledge to girls and young women sets them up differently to life as a farmer. A woman, by her own, cannot expect to be a farmer since

she cannot wield the maresha, nor does she know the ins and outs of farming. While young men have the chance to start life as a farmer independently and gradually build their asset base, and they often do, this route is more or less completely closed to young women. For them, the option is limited to entry in to farming through marrying a male farmer or migration to towns and cities in search of another livelihood.

Although both men and women do take part in all phases of agricultural production, starting from land preparation all the way to harvest and transportation of the final produce, they do so in different ways. These differences in turn position men and women differently in relation to agricultural knowledge. By virtue of learning and mastering the plough, which is the single most important tool at the farmer's disposal, men are positioned at the centre of farming and become the sole bearers of agricultural knowledge. Women, while their importance for farming is recognised and valued, are however positioned at the peripheries as helpers and caretakers. They are not given opportunities to learn and master the plough, and along with it most of the traditional knowledge that is readily available for learning by boys and young men. Furthermore, their exclusion from acquiring key agricultural knowledge is cast as unproblematic, even desirable at times. As such, it is remains unchallenged despite placing women at a significant disadvantage.

The association of men with the outdoor and women with the domestic sphere and the assigning of corresponding responsibilities with in each of these spheres positions men as the farmers and women as the helpers. There is no denying the effect this positioning has on the likelihood of women ever becoming independent farmers on their own. But this does not mean that women are considered irrelevant or unimportant to farming and agricultural work; quite the opposite. Women are portrayed as essential as men to farming and farming was considered impossible without their participation. To some extent, there was also recognition that women carried the multiple roles of production, reproduction, and care; whereas men had a single role as farmers – that of production. But despite this apparent realization, there

seems to be little in the way of challenging the gender hegemony nor change the current state of things. The importance of women was often framed in terms of their roles as care takers, providers, and helpers rather than actual farmers. In both symbolism and language, the farmer is constructed as a male. Along with the ox drawn plough, this construction of the farmer remains the single most consistent feature of farming in the central highlands of Ethiopia and perhaps its most challenging feature when it comes to gender equality.

9.4. On local conception of gender equality and inequality in relation to agriculture

Gender equality, despite its seemingly universal appeal as a developmental goal, is rarely clearly articulated nor uniformly understood. It is a highly contested concept and part of that contention stems from the fact that it ties two separate concepts – gender and equality – each of which are open to wide interpretation. It is therefore not surprising that these two concepts, when combined together, would prove highly contested and ambiguous, to the point of being meaningless at times. As Kittay (2013) points out, the question of "equality" upon closes examination often fragments in to what she calls "questions of equalities" such as equality for whom?; equality by what measure?; equality of what?; equality to what?; equal to whom?; and so forth. The multiple possible answers to these questions as well as contestations over the normative contents of equality have made the concept extremely fluid and elastic. This elasticity allows for a tremendous amount of interpretative leeway in how gender equality is understood, articulated, framed, and acted upon. This contestation happens at various levels ranging from the international to the local. We find illustrative cases for this contestation and the ambiguity of the concept itself in this study, especially at the local level. Partly owing to the non-technicalization of the concept at the local level, a number of different interpretations and articulations of what it means for men and women to be equal exist.

The most commonly articulated understanding of gender equality among farmers was one that saw men and women as different in essence and ability but equal in value and worth. This articulation of equality makes reference to either nature and creation, or custom and tradition, or a mix of both, as having bestowed men and women with different essences and abilities and portrays men and women as two separate but complimentary pieces of what it takes to carve out a living in an agrarian society like the one in Chertekel. While this articulation of equality portrays men and women as being of equal value and worth, it actively projects and encourages gender-based differentiation and separation in what men and women are (their essence) and what they do (which is considered to be the outward expression of their essence) appreciated. Consequently, any articulation of equality that attempts to negate this purported difference in essence and alleges similarity or sameness between men and women is strongly rejected. In this articulation, an unequal situation is described as one where the worth and value of men and women or their contributions and labour are not equally valued. This articulation seeks legitimation from both religion (orthodox Christianity) and tradition. By focusing on the moral worth and value of individuals from what men and women do as gendered subjects with in the farming household and in the community, this articulation presents the organization of agricultural activities and the placement of agricultural skills and knowledge in the male domain as unproblematic and irrelevant to the question of equality.

The second articulation of equality between men and women at the local level is what I have labelled "empathetic equality". This "empathetic" articulation of equality does not concern itself with the nature of masculinity and femininity; or whether or not nature or culture has bestowed men and women with the same assets and abilities. It rather concerns itself with the fairness of the existing gendered arrangement and whether there is equal treatment of men and women in this. This articulation starts with a tacit acceptance of there being some inequality in this regard and comes to the conclusion that women are overburdened and over worked; and, even worse, that

their burden goes unrecognised and their sacrifices unappreciated. Care, empathy, respect, and camaraderie are taken to be the manifestations of an equal relationship between men and women. Like the first articulation of equality, this one sidesteps issues of power and does not consider the segregation of knowledge and skills along gender lines itself to be problematic, only its consequences. It is argued that this division of labor and tasks has placed an unequal burden on men and women with women carrying the heavier load. From there, it goes on to appeal to people's sense of fairness and justice in and calls for action to lighten this burden. At that level, it is extremely potent in eliciting support for the cause of equality, or more specifically, the kind of equality that it articulates.

The third articulation of what it means for men and women to be equal similarly starts with a tacit acceptance of current inequalities – this time in control of sources, decision making, and representation. Like the second articulation, it emphasises mutual concern and joint responsibility but expands the criteria of equality further to include control over household resources and assets, decision making, as well as participation and representation in the public sphere. This articulation is most commonly expressed by grass roots level government and non-government actors who work, in one way or another, with farmers. According to this articulation of equality, greater recognition of women's labour contributions, greater involvement of women in household decisions, and greater public participation and involvement of women in the public sphere are seen as the areas where gender equality intervention should focus.

Despite these multiple understandings and articulations of equality however, it is important to note that these differing interpretations are not at all that different from one another. They can in fact be considered to be parts of broader discursive formations that allow for the continuation of the existing hegemonic gender configuration by allowing for the possibility of certain actions while ruling out others. Despite the multiplicity of meanings attached to the concept of gender equality, partly facilitated by the as yet non-technicalisation of the term at the local level, the existing

state of affairs in the relationship between men and women and agriculture is never actually challenged or even questioned. The concept of equality is understood along the lines of equity, fairness and empathy for the other; and these are all considered important dimensions and/or expressions of equality between man and woman. But difference of essence, whether it be justified as having natural or cultural origins, is actively defended this purported difference in essence is then used to justify the existing compartmentalization of knowledge and skills in to male and female domains resulting in the concentration of agricultural knowledge and skills in the male domain.

Neither one of the many interpretations of equality between men and women considers this to be a problem and thereby removes it from the potential list of actionable items that can be addressed by gender equality programs and even discourses on gender equality. In addition, these multiple meanings at the local level reinforce each other instead of competing with one another. The result is that they further reinforce the iterative performance of feminine and masculine duties and actions which in the end further solidifies existing conceptions of gendered identity. They not only define what it means to be equal, but what it means to be equal while being men and women. In this regard, they solidify rather than challenge gendered identity which is dependent upon the iterative performance of gendered action. In Butlerian terms, it is these iterative performances that produce and reproduce gendered identity, and the latter is nothing without the former.

At the local level, while there is a wide spread acceptance of the ideal of equality at all levels, there is no clear articulated vision of what rural agricultural life would look like if there was indeed equality between men and women; nor a strategy to make it happen. The norm of equality has gained traction and is widely accepted precisely because such acceptance is not dependent on or needs to be followed by any form concrete action. In this sense, the widespread acceptance of the norm may signal the beginning of the struggle over its meaning rather than the resolution of a struggle over its exact content and meaning. It is also important to stress here that the dominant

narrative is one that maintains interdependence along with equality. In this regard, the application of the liberal concept of equality as it is may not find widespread acceptance at the grass roots level. At the regional and national levels however, the discourse on equality in general and that of gender equality in agriculture in particular missed this notion of interdependence entirely, and is largely driven by the way equality is framed at the international level through the work of the development aid industry.

9.5. On the utility of gender conceived as "performative"

Finally, turning to the potential theoretical utility of adopting a conceptualization of gender as "performative", I find that this conceptualization has great utility especially in understanding gender in relation to agriculture in rural agrarian contexts such as the one this study focuses on. The things people do as men and women, as boys and girls, constituted the very essence of their gendered being. Performance of agricultural work constituted a performance of one's gender and maintains the hegemony of the gender regime. Farmers do not simply carryout agricultural work as gender neutered people, but as men and women. This performance constitutes their identities as gendered bodies and their identity as men and women is as dependent on the performance of these tasks as it is on the shape and constitution of their bodies. Each time a male farmer picks up his plough or drives his oxen to the farm and harnesses them to the yolk, and sings songs of praise to his oxen, he does more than just accomplish these tasks. These tasks come to define and constitute him as a man. And these in turn further reinforce and reify the gender binaries of man and woman with in this farming community and its regimented knowledge system. And it is in this respect that I think the Butlerian conception of gender as an effect of discourse; and as one produced by repetitive, iterative, ritualized performance, as a doing rather than a being, can be a useful analytical tool. In so far as this particular and unique system of farming has endured eons, the particular configuration of gender discourse and norms that position men and women differently with in this farming system has endured

with it. As Butler argues gender norms congeal over time through repetitive stylized performance to acquire an apparent naturalness in their iteration to produce what they appear to describe. Iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event; but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint; under and through the force of prohibition and taboo. We see this same itterability of performance and the naturalization of the effects of discourse as pre-discursive in the way in which a purported masculine and feminine essence that is based on learned and stylized performance is established as natural and pre-given in order to perpetuate hegemonic notion of what men and women ought to be. I believe Butler's (1999) description of the performativity of gender as "the anticipation of a gendered essence [which] produces what it posits as outside itself" is apt in this regard.

Where Butler's conception of gender in this manner falls short, or at least proves extremely problematic, is when it comes to the ways in which the subjects of this hegemonic discourse, men and women, can challenge and subvert the discourse. If gender involves a repetition of stylised acts and the resignification of gender norms through performance as Butler suggests; and if it is the stylized repetition of acts (in this case gendered acts) which founds and consolidates the gendered subject; change can only come from the displacement of these dominant discourses through a 'slippage' within the process of repetition (Butler, 1990, p. 30; Nelson, 1999, p. 338). The problem here is that according to Butler, the slippage cannot be intentional or conscious. Such intentionality for Butler would imply the subject lies 'outside' power/discourse matrices which wouldn't be possible since there is no pre-discursive identity. As powerful as the concept of performativity is in illuminating how the effect of discourse that is gendered identity comes to be established as pre-discursive, and how this affects the subjects of discourse; its practical applicability for emancipatory action remains unclear.

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ANNEXES

Definitions of Amharic terms

Agumas (አጉማስ) - a small meal, often a piece of *injera* or a bread served to people working at harvest – typically at the site of a threshing floor (awdima). Sometimes served with a glass of homemade beer (*tela*), the agumas is considered a mandatory meal, an offering that should not be refused since it is offered as a symbolic gesture of one sharing their harvest which in turn is believed to make the harvest plentiful.

Alaqanet (አለቃነት) – as used by Crummey (2000) – Alaqanet was a historical institution of property inheritance that lead to the accumulation of land and property in the hands of a few by establishing a system whereby the majority of land and property would be transferred to one person (the alaqa – or the senior) rather than being divided equally among siblings.

Aqolqouay (አቆልቋይ) – a contribution to a weeding or another festive even by relatives, friends and neighbours amounting to food and drinks that's enough to serve 40 guests; often pledged by relatives and friends before the event as a way of sharing the economic and labour burdens of carrying out such large events.

Awdima (አውድማ) – a circular threshing floor made on the ground by clearing the top vegetation, smoothing the ground, and applying a mix of cowdung and water to make the surface even and free of dust and soil. Heaps of cut crops (usually cereals) are then layed out on the treshing floor and cattle are driven over it to loosen the seeds and separate the seeds from the chaf.

Beray (በራይ) – the process of treshing crops by driving cattle over heaps of cut crops strewn over an *awdima*. Depending on the amount of harvest and the crop, it might take one to five days to complete the beray.

Chewa (ጬዋ) - a historical class of nobility in Emperial Ethiopia that was orginally acquired through military service to the empire.

Debo (ደቦ) – a system of rotational labour use whereby a group of people pool their labour together to work on a particular task or farming activity in turns. Often used for labour intensive tasks requiring completion in a short period of time such as harvest.

Dergue (ደርግ) – a socialist military regieme that governened Ethiopia from 1974 – 1991.

Ditchet (ድጬች) – small heaps of cut crops that are laid on the grounds before collection to the final point of the threshing floor

Gott (ጎጥ) – the smallest settlment unit in rural Ethiopia below the kebele (ደቦ)

Guaro(ጓሮ) – one's backyard or small vegitable garden near the home

Gulgualo (ጉልጓሎ) – the task of weeding out roots of grass and other weeds prior to sowing

Gult (ጉልት) – a historical institution of land and property ownerships as well as administration and justice in emeprial Ethiopia that closely resembled the European institutions of fiefdom during the medieval period.

Kebele (ቀበሌ) – The fourth and lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia below the *wereda*

Kebra Nagast (ክብረ ነገሥት) – literally – "The Glory of the Kings" – a 14th-century national epic of Ethiopia written in Geʿez which purports to trace the origins of the Solomonic dynasty to the biblical king Solomon of Judah and Israel

Keteme (ከተማ) - a man or woman of the city, a city dweller unversed in the way of life of the rural.

Kimir (ክምር) – a very large heap of cut crops ready for threshing, often made infront of the treshing floor or *awdima*

Maresha (ማረሻ) – the Ethiopian ox drawn ard plough

Meher (መኽር) – the main harvest season

Mekuanint (መኳንንት) – a historical class of nobility in emeprial Ethiopia who were above the *chewa* but below the *mesafint*

Mensh (መንሽ) – a one or two pronged wooden fork used to separate the hey from the harvest during treshing

Mesafint (መሳፍንት) – the great lords - a historical class of nobility in emeprial Ethiopia who were only next to the king or kings.

Muya (ሙያ/ ሞያ) – one's profession, line of work, skills

Reste-gult (ርስተ ጉልት) – a historical institution of land and property inheritance in emperial Ethiopia that combined elements of rest and gult to create a gult right that could be inherited

Rim (ሪም) – a historical institution of land and property inheritance that completely dealt away with the *gult* rights of peasants who worked on land and turned the later

into a new class of people – the *zega* – a class which no longer had any inherent rights to work on the land and did so only so long as those who owned the rim land were willing to allow them.

Rist/rest (ርስት) – a historical institution of emperial Ethiopia where by peasants maintained a right to work on ancestoral lands

Shai bet (ሻይ ቤት) – literally a tea house - a small establishment that serves tea as well as food and beverages.

Tehadiso - renewal or revival - a political program instituted towards the final years of the EPRDF – the ruling party in Ethiopia from 1991 – 2019. The default procedure for handling internal and external crisis, tehadso often involved long, closed door deliberations and evaluations of performance of both party officials and government offices in an effort to renew/revive the party's commitment to its core principles and ideology.

Tella bet (ጠላ ቤት) – literally a house selling tella - a small establishment that primarily sells home brewed traditional beer in towns.
Tsota (ጾታ) – the Amharic term for sex and gender

Siraate-tsota (ስራዓተ ጾታ) – the sex or gender order

Wereda (ወረዳ) - the third level of the administrative divisions in Ethiopia next to regional state and zone; similar to district

Wonfel (ወንፈል) – similar to debo

Wubar (ጨቦር) – a flat bladed small hoe with a curved handle used for digging

Zega (ዜጋ) – a historical class of pesants in Ethiopia with little to no land and property rights

zemene mesafin (ዘመነ መሳፍንት) - a period of Ethiopian history extending from the mid 18th – 19th century during which royal power lost its grandeur and regional lords wrangled with one another for supremacy