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The Gate of Weeping:

Ethiopian Women Returning from Domestic Work

in the

Arab States of the Persian Gulf

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

by

Eva Rose Melstrom

2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Gate of Weeping:

Ethiopian Women Returning from Domestic Work

in the

Arab States of the Persian Gulf

by

Eva Rose Melstrom

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Christopher J. Throop, Co-Chair

Douglas W. Hollan, Co-Chair

Dreams of the bounties born by distant lands are both fabled and fact, immanence and transcendence. Such fantastical imaginings can coax an individual toward an audacious life decision, and it is this enticing entelechy that lies at the core of this study. This project examines how the tangible possibility for a 'better' life articulates with the ascendence of female domestic labor migration from Ethiopia to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. I explore how powerful desires of becoming a sovereign caretaker reveal the ethical projects undertaken by women in contemporary Ethiopia. In asking how such desires and failed aspirations for the good life map

on to the psycho-affective realm, my work situates experiences of mental and emotional unwellness as a place of social and psychic mediation—that is, episodes of “sickness” reflect the precarious globalized processes of human labor exchange between regions of the Global South. I consider individual women’s narratives regarding their migration journeys, domestic work, and corresponding “sickness” as distinctive modalities of desire.

I maintain that the mental illness and associated treatment discourses surrounding returned Ethiopian domestic workers are unique to a distinct social, cultural, and economic, ordering of contemporary Ethiopia. I argue that such broad generalizations based on western notions of classification flatten the lived reality of mental and emotional unwellness particular to migrant domestic workers. By valuing individually narrativized experiences of mental and emotional unwellness, my work reveals that “mental illness” is instead described by my interlocutors as “sickness,” and is specifically tied to experiences of ambivalent and ambiguous self-understanding and self-formation. By untangling the ambiguities and individual subjectivities present in the diagnosis and personal experiences of mental and emotional unwellness, this study illuminates how individual women recognize and sense what causes, constitutes, and cures a “sick” self.

This project gives particular attention to the structures of social relationships, highlighting how individual and national precarity is embodied and prescribed at the individual and societal level of the female body. In my adherence to feminist theory, I advance the notion that their migration is a form of quiet revolution, and their “sickness” follows experiences of unanticipated oppression. This impoverished subjectivity follows new and unfamiliar encounters with forms of subjugation and domination perpetuated by their employers. I, therefore, consider “sickness” as a mode of expressing unwellness in relation to micro and macro forms of

domination in articulation with desire and a unique form of self-confident understanding. In questioning why and how this particular group of women develop and express these forms of unwellness, and why psychiatric-based care providers interpret and treat these women's subjective expressions as mental illness, this research makes visible the realities of complex mental and emotional unwellness. In a broad sense, this examination of individual and intersubjective understandings of unwell returned Ethiopian domestic workers likewise offers an anthropological evaluation of the relationship between mental and emotional unwellness and migration, in relation to growing power imbalances and human rights issues operating within Ethiopia and between Ethiopia and the Arab States of the Persian Gulf.

The dissertation of Eva Rose Melstrom is approved.

Aomar Boum

Cheryl Mattingly

Christopher J. Throop, Committee Co-Chair

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University of California, Los Angeles

2021

To Mom and Dad,

for everything.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Arab States of the Persian Gulf (ASPG)

Diagnostic Statistical Manuel (DSM)

International Labor Organization (ILO)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE)

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA)

Non-governmental organization (NGO)

Private employment agency (PEA)

Serious Mental Illness (SMI)

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC)

Victim of Trafficking (VOT)

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To the people, and in particular, women, of Ethiopia who kindly let me into their lives, thank you for accepting me and my curiosities. Thank you for sharing your life experiences in Ethiopia and abroad. Your individual and collective strength, determination, and care are unmatched, and with great effort I endeavored to convey the resilience and intellect I witnessed within each of you. To one individual, whom I call Taytu, thank you for taking me beyond the walls of Tesfa and into your familial home. That experience imparted an entirely different understanding regarding individual circumstances and decisions to migrate for domestic work. It also, once again, revealed the complexity and diversity of life in Ethiopia.

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I am also very thankful to the several staff members at Tesfa and Mekelakel. For reasons of confidentiality, I cannot name the individuals who helped initiate this project and opened further avenues of inquiry related to the care of returned domestic workers in Addis Ababa. Thank you for your candor and embrace.

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude for funding granted through the Department of Anthropology, Graduate Division, International Institute, and the Center for the Study of Women at UCLA. I am honored that my home institution supported and recognized the importance of this work. I am also grateful to the Society for Psychological Anthropology-Lemelson Fellowship, which allowed me to set the foundation for dissertation fieldwork.

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greatest, most magnificent sister ever, Amber. Most importantly, I am beyond thankful and overwhelmed by the love and support of my parents. I will never have the words to express my love and appreciation for you both. Everything I accomplish, everything I have in this world, is because of your unconditional love.

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Introduction

In March 2018 I sat in the courtyard of Mekelakel, a non-governmental organization that provides rehabilitation, reunification, and reintegration services to Ethiopian women returning from domestic work in one of the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. I had been hanging around the shelter for the last eight months and at this point my presence was unremarkable.

I joined several other women on the tiled patio to enjoy the peaceful, clear, brilliant, Addis Ababa sunshine. I wrote in my green fieldnote book while watching the others around me crochet pastel-colored scarves and hats. Remembering that I brought my Polaroid camera, I asked if anyone wanted their picture taken. I tugged it out of my jacket pocket and proceeded with their requests. I snapped a few photos, handing them off to the group as the film pumped through. My research assistant, Abinet, eventually placed all the photos along the shaded windowsill of the nurse's office. He explained to all of us that he wanted to keep the photos out of the direct sunlight, just as a precaution.

Our moment of play was interrupted by the nurse's, Sister[1] Saba, ringing mobile.

Abinet turned to me, "There is a woman at the airport."

After a minute Sister Saba ended the call. I asked if it was from Solomon, one of her contacts at Bole International Airport; he often connected returned domestic workers with Mekelakel.

"No. Airport nurses," she replied.

[1] The title or form of address "Sister" refers to a (senior) female nurse. It is not affiliated with a member of a religious order or congregation of women.

Upon hearing her response, I was eager to join. I had waited all fieldwork for this exact moment. I asked her if I could tag along and watch the process of registering a new returnee. She nodded in agreement.

A flight of movement transpired thereafter. Saba, the liaison officer, and the driver hurried into the compact black Toyota. The guard lifted the gate bolt from its cement holding and swung the doors wide open. The women crocheting quickly hopped up and pulled their chairs to the side of the courtyard, giving the car plenty of room to maneuver.

"*Neh! Neh!*" ("Come! Come!"), shouted the guard at the resident dog, the only one not in a rush. The Mekelakel car pulled out of the shelter enclosure and Abinet and I followed. With only one traffic jam, our twenty-kilometer journey took an impressive thirty-five minutes.

Both cars parked near Terminal Two, the International Terminal—Abinet's in a designated parking spot and the Mekelakel car along the curved driveway. We walked to the steps leading from the parking lot to the little road that separated us from the airport entry doors. It was the closest anyone without a ticket could go. A federal police officer stood at the top of the steps, marking the prohibited area. We waited at the bottom and chatted amongst ourselves. After roughly five minutes, we saw two nurses, wearing matching light-blue coats, emerge from the airport's sliding doors. They walked on either side of a very thin woman, the returnee. All three made their way toward us with the returnee pushing a luggage cart topped with one large, over-stuffed, black suitcase.

Saba slowly made her way up the steps; we followed behind her. She sat down in the chair previously occupied by the looming federal police officer. He stood, looking on, chewing his nail. I approached the top of the stairs cautiously, as I was always nervous about the casual

way officers held their AK-47s, an almost palpable air of indifference. I tried to remain conscious of the barrel's direction and stood well out of its sight line.

Saba started filling out a referral form while one of the airport nurses handed her the passport of the returnee. The young woman now sat on the edge of a flowerbed, is a dazed state, with her big black suitcase beside her. The other nurse and a female airport security guard attempted to converse with the young woman. There was no response.

While Saba completed the paperwork, the Mekelakel liaison officer opened the young woman's suitcase and proceeded to riffle through her things. I felt uncomfortable watching him do this; it felt unnecessarily invasive. I asked Abinet what he thought the man was doing.

"They are looking at her stuff. Look! She has clothes for children," Abinet replied.

I did not make my question clear, *"Why* are they going through her items?" I thought maybe he might relay my question to Saba. He did not, and instead provided an answer similar to his first. I moved closer and asked my question directly. I also asked one nurse where the young woman arrived from? Beirut.

The airport nurses and the security guard congregated around the returnee. They asked her as to whether she had any money. The young woman pulled a crumpled wad of *birr* from her pocket. One nurse counted it out loud, three 10-*birr* notes and two 5-*birr* notes. Forty *birr*. That was it. Not enough to buy a meal, maybe a water or coffee and a *sambusa.*[2]

The airport nurse gave the forty *birr* to Saba. I did not understand why she confiscated her money. I started speaking again with the airport nurse, who tells me her name is Aden. I asked about the returnee's name. It is Hyatt. I asked her if she, personally, found Hyatt in the airport.

---

[2] Ethiopian version of a samosa, often filled with lentils or potatoes.

“Yes. She was confused in the terminal,” Aden replied.

Aden explained that technically someone who worked in the airport saw Hyatt and they called the nurse’s station. After which, she went and found Hyatt, and brought her back to the nurse’s office located inside the airport. Initially, Aden said, Hyatt did not know where she was, but now, she knows.

Aden continued to remark on Hyatt’s distressed and confused state, noting that when she found Hyatt, and even now, she was afraid. As Aden spoke, the other nurse, security guard, Saba, and the liaison office, moved Hyatt down the stairs toward the Mekelakel car. They explained to Hyatt that she must go down the stairs and get in the car. Saba described where they were taking her—Mekelakel. Hyatt absolutely refused. She did not want to go. She was dead weight in their arms, planting her feat in the ground as much as her gaunt figure allowed.

“She doesn’t trust anyone,” Aden said as we watched. I shared with Aden that my fieldwork also suggested that many women who returned from domestic work abroad are initially afraid. She nodded in confirmation, “They are afraid, they are confused, and they don’t trust anyone.” Aden thought they were like this because, “bad things have happened to them.” As I listened, I watched the others continue to force Hyatt down the steps. Hyatt stood beside the car as more joined in their efforts to put her *in* the car—two construction workers and two federal police officers.

Hyatt shouted in Amharic, “I’m not going! They will kill me! I don’t want to go there. I want to stay here…No, I don’t want to go. I want to go to jail!” She quieted her voice and attempted to reason with those surrounding her.

One of the federal police officers responded, “Ok, if you want to go to jail, I am the solider, I will take you to jail, get in the car.”

She refused again. The team of seven opened the car door, held her securely, and forced her into the car. Hyatt screamed. She kicked the individuals around her. The liaison officer went around to the other side of the car and joined Hyatt in the back seat. He held her hands down and tried to calm her. Saba squished into the back seat as well, on the other side of Hyatt. Hyatt hit the liaison officer. He held her squirming arms down again, attempting to prevent another strike. The back doors shut, and the driver zipped away. The small crowd dispersed. It was quiet and calm, and the atmosphere returned to total normality. It felt as if none of what I witnessed, happened. Abinet and I walked back to his car, placed our notebooks on the hood, and assessed the situation—it was a potent moment. We decided to return to Mekelakel the next morning to check on Hyatt.

Principal Investigation

Five years earlier, in October 2013, following reports of cruel and unfair working conditions, the Ethiopian government temporarily banned its citizens from traveling to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf[3] for domestic work and unskilled labor. During this same period in 2013 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia repatriated more than 160,000 Ethiopians in just four months (de Regt and Tafesse 2016), further highlighting the precarious nature of Ethiopian migrant work in geographically proximate nations. This confluence of factors, however, did not (and presently does not) deter primarily young Ethiopian women from migrating to the Arab States for domestic work. In fact, unofficial estimates suggest that as many as 60,000 women leave Ethiopia each year for domestic work alone, a significant increase from just a decade ago.[4]

Lured by dreams of economic prosperity, and often burdened by the necessity to facilitate and maintain economic survival strategies for kinship networks, Ethiopian women continue to enter the Arab States through both legal and irregular migration patterns. Legally, as of late 2019, women may use the assistance of a private employment agency (PEA), more often, however, women find work and travel abroad by way of a *delala*—a local, unlicensed broker or agent. One of the most interesting and unexpected findings of this research was that both men and women, in proximate degrees, work as *delala's*, a profession often associated strictly with men.

While in pursuit of this better life, moored to gilded fortune of benevolent change, many Ethiopian women instead encounter episodes of disorder and violence during their time as

[3] Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
[4] Fernandez and de Regt (2014) report that nearly 30,000 women leave Ethiopia each year for domestic work abroad. However, this estimate is based on legal migration and accurate numbers are likely double. Current studies on the matter acknowledge the difficulty in tracking down exact numbers (Demissie 2017).

domestic workers. Such experiences include incidents of social isolation, the withholding of passports, compensation, and food, as well as physical, psychical, and sexual assault. As these women return to Ethiopia many are fraught with underlying emotional and mental unwellness and complex embodiments of subjugation—the primary concern of this dissertation.

I undertook this research with two Addis Ababa-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—Tesfa and Mekelakel—who promote their work as that which addresses the complex amalgamation of mental and emotional unwellness, as well as social and economic disenfranchisement, affecting many domestic worker returnees. In lieu of government response and assistance, both organizations focus on rehabilitating and reintegrating former domestic workers back into Ethiopian society through mental health care and, particularly at Mekelakel, vocational training. It is an ambitious, noble, and necessary enterprise.

To more thoroughly understand the experiences of returned female Ethiopian domestic workers living in Tesfa and Mekelakel, I approached this work from a feminist and person-centered theoretical assemblage, both of which utilize an applied philosophical framework that places the individual at the center of inquiry and human understanding. This research focuses on women with emotional and mental unwellness associated with both latent and dramatic symptomology—that is, a spectrum of symptoms from muteness to disordered thought and speech, delusions, hallucinations, violent behavior toward others, memory loss, and severe changes in eating and sleeping habits.

Individual episodes of unwellness often began in their place of work abroad and continued from a few days to some weeks after their return to Ethiopia.[5] Local mental health

[5] There are also case of less acute and transient psychosis, such as schizophrenia and bipolar. The nosological and etiological allocation of mental illness in Ethiopia is tremendously complex and a thorough exploration of the convolution is beyond the scope of this writing.

professionals largely understood these experiences of unwellness as forms of psychosis, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. These diagnoses often lead to a particular type of care, rehabilitation, and reintegration. My work, alternatively, examines the drives behind an individual's involvement in transnational domestic work, what causes and constitutes the emotional and mental unwellness that shadows their experiences, and how it was best cared for within the shelter space. My detailed study of such experiences is principally based in the narratives presented by individual woman; I was determined to study the relationship between female migration and mental and emotional unwellness in the context of Ethiopia through the words and comportments of those who endured it.

To better understand the prevalence of the relationship between migrant domestic work and mental and emotional unwellness within the context of Ethiopia, I considered how individual sensations and observations figured into larger conversations about desire, labor demands, subjugation, inequality, and care. I examine the ways in which female Ethiopian returned domestic workers embody forms of mental and emotional unwellness. What experiences did they tether to such unwellness? How did their individual biographies figure into their decisions to go abroad and their self-understandings? I wanted to grasp and elevate a first-person perspective on a situation that was largely spoken about in generalities. I wanted to bring out the individual within the figure of the domestic worker; to illuminate the ways in which precarious transnational domestic work figured into the emotional and mental unwellness as told by individual women.

My research is guided by a few central questions, including what constitutes a "mental illness" diagnosis in the context of returned domestic workers, and who is responsible for diagnosing women living in the shelters of Tesfa and Mekelakel? Could diagnoses affect

avenues of care for this group of women? How might an anthropological analysis account for individual experiences of mental and emotional unwellness in relation to local and global discussions of precarious human labor dynamics concerning Ethiopia? I wanted to understand how women, who found themselves at the center of numerous global conversations about labor, human rights, mental health, the Global South, comprehended and articulated their own related experiences.

This project, and the feminist, person-centered commitments it makes, is not about giving a voice to the voiceless—which is too often said about disenfranchised groups in the Global South. Rather, this project is about moving the anthropologist-researcher (me) out of the way and elevating a platform, access, and raw truth telling through individual stories and experiences. Like my previous research on cases of suicide amongst members of the Ethiopian community in Boston, community attendance gave rise to the scaffolding of this project. I listened to individuals in Ethiopia and diaspora communities. What matter to them and what they sought from me is the foundation of this work. This commitment is also threaded throughout my work through my detailed inclusion of my research assistant, Abinet. While this work certainly has imperfections and unintentional oversights, I endeavored to portray the words of my interlocutors and their positions, Abinet's words and position, my words and position, as authentically as possible (even during difficult moments and in consideration of difficult topics), all to offer straightforward material on a complex situation.

Anthropology of Mental and Emotional Unwellness

There is a long history of anthropological inquiries investigating dichotomies of normal versus abnormal expressions of emotion, feeling, and distress, which often merge with

psychiatric discourses. This anthropological fusion tended to produce discourses about the ways in which certain forms of mental and emotional unwellness intersect with larger global forces of transformation and inequality (Desjarlais et al. 1996; Good 1992, 1997; Kirmayer et al. 2015; Kleinman and Becker 1998; Nitcher 1981; Ortner 2005). For example, discussions about dissociation or psychosis largely considered the individuals under observation, mostly women, as embodying forms of protest and resistance against relations of dominance and subordination (Boddy 1988; Castillo 1994; Crapanzano and Garrison 1977; Ong 1988; Stoller 1995). Literature investigating dissociation in "non-western" contexts habitually examined instances of spirit possession or trance—something that remains within a range of culturally acceptable behavior (Boddy 1988; Obeyesekere 1981, 1990; Ong 1988). However, some anthropologists interrogate this distinction, calling into question the categorical fallacy of dissociation (Hollan 2000; Seligman and Kirmayer 2008). This project similarly questions this separation, responding to Nichter's criticisms (1981, 2010) that both anthropologists and (transcultural) psychiatrists pay too much attention to "whatness" and too little attention to "why this?" While this dissertation resonates, responds, and builds on this scholarship, it does so by working to unsettle earlier discussions about embodied forms of protest and resistance. This dissertation offers experience-near insight into what causes and constitutes embodied responses to subjugation and social disharmony (Fanon [1961] 2004; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987), while also examining how such embodied responses related to process of ethical becoming and virtuous personhood. My work seeks to emphasize the interplay of sensorial, social, and cultural processes underpinning the variant emotional and mental unwellness experienced by this group of women and how their own individual understandings can offer insights about the human condition.

Domestic Labor Migration to the Arabian Gulf

Anthropologists examining patterns of migration to the Arabian Peninsula have primarily focused on the era following the 1973 oil-boom, when the sparsely populated region required additional human labor to accomplish the vast number of planned development projects (Jureidini 2003). The Arab States of the Persian Gulf (ASPG) were not only poorly equipped in terms of sheer number of persons needed for an adequate workforce, but also lacked vocational and education institutions required to cultivate, build, and staff the anticipated ventures.

Throughout the next two decades the region sought most of its labor from South and Southeast Asia, including India, Pakistan, Philippines, Bangladesh, South Korea, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, representing what is likely the largest increase in labor migration in the world (Eelens et al. 1992; Kathiravelu 2016). While men principally worked in the areas of construction and the tertiary sector of industry, migrant women assumed responsibilities within the domestic sphere. Likewise, as Arab women moved into the formal work sector during this period, the continued prosperity of the region and corresponding rise in status, lead to a dramatic increase in hiring domestic workers. This further resulted in Arab women increasingly avoiding and shunning menial household tasks, and, as well as for women who remained home, employing domestic workers became synonymous with success (Eelens et al. 1992).

By the 1980s the number of unskilled laborers in the Gulf region greatly outweighed skilled workers, and the rapid intensification of a female migrant labor, often deemed the "feminization of migration," spoke to the forceful nature of gendered work (Herrera 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Ong 1991; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Predominant discourses within these frameworks argue that the female domestic labor movement between the Global South and the Arabian Peninsula is largely tied to constellations of family

economic survival strategies, characterized as 'compulsion by necessity,' and as a ready opportunity to participate in the commodification of intimate care work—all circumstances that are frequently precipitated by conditions of poverty in the Global South (Barrientos, Kothari, and Phillips 2013; de Regt 2007, 2010, 2014; Fernandez 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014; Fernandez and de Regt 2014; Gardner 2010, 2012, 2015; Khalaf 1992; Mahdavi 2013, 2014; Pessoa et al. 2014; Silvey 2006).

An occasionally discussed, and arguably more theoretically interesting corpus of scholarship on the femininization of migration, situates gender's dynamism as central (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999) and decenters modernization theory's ahistorical tendency of positioning migrants as "rational actors" attuned to a cost-benefit calculation of their migratory choices (Kearney 1986; Silverstein 2005). Instead, the social construction of gender, gender and gender relations are taken firstly as dynamic, and secondly, never separated from class, race, ethnicity, or nationality (Jackson and Penrose 1993). Such inquiries thus ask in what ways is "women's work" perceived and orchestrated by nation-states and historically embedded cultural ideologies? How are the social constructions of gender affecting the work available and undertaken by women? And, as this work asks, how are the constructions of gender and gendered work shaping mental and emotional unwellness? These questions reveal how decisions to undertake domestic work abroad speak to the powerful articulations between the social constructions of gender and responsive gendering.

In other words, "women's" work should be examined in terms of individual, local, and global patterning's of the domestic sphere and studied as enactments of individual, local, and global requirements for sustaining a functioning world. This logic applied in my work, for example, reveals how notions of "women's work" skillfully navigates the contours of a rather

rigid patriarchal, and yet arguably indifferent, social world in order to foster personal hope. Ethiopian women, who some literature suggests, may be regarded as irrelevant or of small importance (Hussein 2009), build opportunities for themselves to gain control over their own lives. "Women's work," I argue, is capable of (and does) wield power over intimate and global relations. Therefore, we must continue to explore all forms of "women's work" phenomenologically in order to expand knowledge about the fascinating ways in which "women's work" generates quiet revolutions toward increased participation in the global economic order. Such examinations will equally offer more thorough understandings about how imagined and enacted forms of self are moored to ethical particularities as well as intersubjective forms of ethical being constituted by social and familial life within Ethiopia.

As noted by several of my informants, their gender or gendered positioning within the family and larger culture of Ethiopia influenced their decision to migrate, corresponding with classic articulation theory's focuses on the community (Horevitz 2009). Articulation theory rejects dependency theory's claim about a unitary global capitalist system, positioning instead peripheral community modes of production (and economies) as qualitatively different from capitalist and core communities—each community reproduced distinct forms of capital in accordance with their own structural imperatives (Kearney 1986, 342). Additionally, articulationist suggested that women's labor was an important element in analyzing households in pre-capitalist and non-capitalist societies. This imbalance of responsibility, of the mother or eldest female child, resonates with long-established Ethiopian cultural traditions that stipulate women as primarily responsible for the maintenance of the household. It is therefore not surprising that an increasing number of Ethiopian women, motivated by entrenched understandings about familial care, migrate abroad to find suitable work.

However, this trend, and my work, also underscore the dynamic power of gender roles even amongst seemingly rigid cultural norms—that is, that the constructs of Ethiopian womanhood are dynamic. Hence, while the latest scholarship on Ethiopian migration may situate the movement as a coping mechanism, a strategy for dealing with the ongoing economic crisis and environmental disasters (de Regt 2007; Fernandez 2010), and the decision to migrate is viewed as a collective decision rather than an individual one (Tasse 2007), this dissertation reveals that the reasons for migration are not so straightforwardly tied to a single world capitalist system or even community-based need. Women had individual motivations for going aboard for domestic work.

Ethiopian women[6] are part of a new wave of African women participating in the well-established coordination of foreign domestic labor to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. Despite a rapidly growing Ethiopian economy, women, and in particular rural women, face limited opportunities to benefit from this internationally recognized economic growth. There is a continued absence of or stalled opportunities to participate in the formal wage economy through gainful employment in the larger cities (Addis Ababa, Gondar, Bahir Dar, and Dire Dawa), and the deep-rooted unequal status and patriarchal structure of Ethiopian society itself, has continued to reduce women to forms of cheap and unprotected labor within Ethiopia (Ketema 2014[7]). This condition was confirmed through my own research, as three of the women with whom I conducted person-centered interviews stated that they had previously worked as domestic

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[6] Fernandez and de Regt (2014) demonstrate, in general, that Ethiopian domestic workers, one of the central migrants leaving Ethiopia (up to 30,000 a year), are primarily from rural families and are tasked with being the primary provider of economic capital for the family.

[7] Ketema's (2014) unpublished master's thesis provides the only comprehensive overview of the experiences of returned Ethiopian domestic workers. Ketema details how many of these young women are subjected to gossip, which labels them as unsuccessful in their endeavors to provide for their family. Some women note that if one returns home early, there is a sense that one must have a "disease" and is subsequently marked as undesirable.

workers in Addis Ababa. They each expressed that the treatment and wages were deplorable; it made more sense to go abroad to the Arab States, which held the potential of providing significantly higher wages.

From this perspective, the decision to migrate for work is moored to simple understandings of economic necessity. However, what my analysis unsettles is, despite domestic work's broad agenda to lock, quite literally, women into the domestic sphere, this migration pattern is an enactment of female entelechy—an entity, whether inborn or learned, which seeks to prolong the existence of a woman's today and desire for tomorrow (Beauvoir [1948] 2018). This perspective and re-orientation toward gender's dynamic atmospheric forces lays bare the complex ethical, virtuous, and transcendental nature of female labor migration.

In highlighting an individual woman's capability to transition from realizing her potential to actioning her potential, it is not my intention to overlook the increased vulnerability and exploitation that follows migrant work. The subservient roles many of Ethiopian domestic workers are subjected to is complexly tied to historically situated obligations and desires to care for one's family, and deep individual desire to change their lives. How do we best examine this expressed action-as-independent-women in relation to their subsequent encounter with restricted social agency[8] and vulnerability? I suggest that while "intersectionality looks at interlocking systems of oppression as constitutive of migration systems" (Herrera 2013, 472), such an approach should also consider the complexities and particularities of individual women participating in transnational domestic work. It is too easy, for example, to emphasize the macro-level indices of structural violence most evident in processes of (domestic) labor migration and

[8] Fernandez and de Regt (2014) edited volume dedicated to showcasing the how migrant domestic workers in the Middle East carve out spaces of agentive action even during unfair and harsh working conditions.

yet fail to see Ethiopian domestic workers as changemakers—pushing their selves to the limits while responding to the precariousness imparted by their historically, geographically, culturally, socially, economically, environmentally situatedness.

Kafala

In response to the increased demand of migrant labor, many Persian Gulf countries introduced migrant recruitment agencies, which coordinate contractual relationships between the employer and the employee. In efforts to systematize the governing and regulation of migrant workers across the Arab States, nations such as the Kuwait, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates,[9] and Saudi Arabia instituted a legally binding relationship between the migrant worker and the employer, *kafala*[10] (Gardner 2014). This system is arguably a way in which individual governments can decentralize and privatize employment (predominantly domestic and construction labor), leading to the increased vulnerability of contract workers.

Through the *kafala* system migrant workers often find themselves in debt to the employer and employment agency (e.g., the employer might pay the migrant worker's plane ticket and visa application), and frequently lack the necessary legal documentation needed for going out in public alone, due to the illegal confiscation of migrant worker's identification papers (Longva 1999). The rigid *kafala* system has also led to the production of an illegal workforce, contributing to human trafficking, and the perpetuation of unfair and cruel living conditions (Beydoun 2006; Mahdavi 2013; Fernandez 2010, 2013). Congruently, the growth in

[9] The UAE requires workers to obtain a work permit from the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) (UAE Government, 2021).
[10] The *kafala* system has been repeatedly criticized by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

noncontracted domestic workers in the Gulf region, in union with the *kafala* system, has intensified domestic worker abuse.[11]

In the late 1990s, the nations of Pakistan, India, Philippines, and Bangladesh legally prohibited the recruitment of female domestic workers to the Arab States. However, many migrant workers from these countries continued to travel to the Gulf region for unskilled labor through irregular migration patterns. Corresponding to these multiple, country specific bans, employers throughout the Gulf region continued to look for the cheapest source of unskilled domestic labor (Kathiravelu 2016) primarily from the African continent. Thus, while domestic workers from South and Southeast Asia ascended to more respected positions in the domestic sphere, such as nanny or family cook, Sub-Saharan African women replaced their prior roles as housemaids. Despite the allegedly protection of the *kafala* system, harsh exploitative practices continued, if not worsened as, "culturally held ideas and constraints concerning class, gender, and ethnicity" continued to affect migrants' work and life experiences in the region (Gardner 2014, 5).

In response to the continued abuse and unregulated employment of domestic workers in the ASPG, the International Labor Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention no. 189, adopted in 2011, offered a crucial and favorable step in the process of positioning and acknowledging domestic work as "real work" (Fernandez and de Regt 2014) and thus subject to formal regulations and worker-protection strategies. However, while acknowledging the importance of protecting domestic workers, several governments in the ASPG have yet to ratify the Convention, and future endorsement "seems unlikely" (Fernandez and de Regt 2014, 11).

[11] Dannecker (2005) reports that the Bangladesh government banned women from international migrant work to protect women's honor—crossing borders without male guardians was forbidden (657). Thus, there is some evidence to suggest that such bans were not enacted solely due to the abuse of domestic workers, but as an effort to protect the honor of migrant worker families.

Domestic work in the ASPG is constituted, in part, then by a vast community of Ethiopian women undertaking a form of work that is generally unregulated and potentiates marginalization, harm, and disappearance.[12]

Can We Categorize the Domestic Worker?

It is women at the heart of this study that offer detailed insights into the frequency and unregulated nature of domestic work, and episodes of discrimination, harm, and abuse that follow. They recount their experiences in a sophisticate manner that is inherently critical—their experiences attend to the organizations of social relationships, ethics, personhood, desire, power, and inequality. Their understandings, identification, and care of mental and emotional unwellness precipitated by their participation in domestic work in the Arab States is paramount for unshackling the limitations imposed by categories often bestowed upon them, from labels concerning psychiatric diagnoses to victims of trafficking. Women featured throughout this dissertation uphold their own way in the world through individual understandings of self and experience.

In pairing feminist phenomenology with person-centered methods, this study pushes against the tendency to homogenize experiences of those from a particular geographical region confronting similar issues (Fanon [1952] 2008; Willen 2007). Instead, my examination advocates for an appreciation of the idiosyncratic ways in which Ethiopian women individually adopt, modify, resist, cope with, and challenge global and personal inequality and subjugation (Biehl 2013; Biehl et al. 2007; Das 2008; DelVecchio-Good et al. 2008; Farmer 1992; Jenkins 2014; Kleinman 2006; Kleinman & Cohen 1997; Ong 1988, 1991; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Through an

[12] In April 2020 Timour Azhari and in June 2021 Zacharias Zelalem both published stories on the death and disappearance of Ethiopian domestic workers in Lebanon.

engagement with intersubjectivity and constructions of self (Good 2012; Hollan 2001, 2005; Levy and Hollan 2014), this work illustrates the complexity of mental and emotional unwellness, and how such ambiguity and ambivalence found within reveals the dynamic nature of ethical self-formation in the context of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers.

An astute reader will surely notice throughout this dissertation my distance from the terms "human trafficking" and "migrant smuggling." While the two terms are engaged across multiple academic disciplines and international aid, development, and governmental institutions, I find the delineations of these categories unfitting for this work.

According to the United Nations:

> Human Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud, or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women, and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims.

While migrant smuggling is considered:

> The facilitation, for financial or other material gain, of irregular entry into a country where the migrant is not a national or resident. The criminals behind this highly profitable business seize the opportunity created by the need or desire of people to escape not just poverty and lack of employment opportunities but also natural disaster, conflict or persecution.

My hesitancy to embrace these categorical renditions of migrant domestic workers is largely a result of my interlocutors' own rejections of such descriptions of their experiences. I am also cautious of such official terminology as my work's primary concern is with illustrating the complexity of the human condition and the dynamic existential states moored to processes of becoming, processes which transcend categorization.

During fieldwork, after listening to the basics of my project, government and humanitarian administrators often attached one or the other term to my work, to which I politely opposed. I explained that my work resisted these categories because they did not accurately capture the experiences of the women at the core of my work. These categories flattened their histories, agency, truths; they covered over the individual person, their biography, and the idiosyncrasies of their day-to-day in Ethiopia or in their country of employment. I further explained that my work did not find evidence that women, with whom I specifically spoke, felt forced by another individual to undertake work in the Arab States. Deception, perhaps, was operative in a few cases (unfulfilled promises of wages), but by and large, most women found their way to one of the Arab countries on their own volition, motivated by their own imagined futures. Women I spoke with, I reminded my listener, did not describe themselves as forced or tricked by traffickers; it was a much more complex situation. Suggestions that they were somehow simply uninformed or foolish were therefore both demeaning and inaccurate. Similarly, while migrant smuggling may seem like a better fit for classifying interlocutors, it remains incongruous due to its omittance of individual choice and agency—the determination, knowhow, and desire embodied by most women within this study, thus works against both categories.

Alternatively, the parameters set by the analytic of "care ethics" are much more fitting, as they better reveal an individual's situatedness in a social world. Understanding and emphasizing the deep responsibility, relationships, and the circumstantiality of self-formation, ethics, and activity (Tronto 1993) may even suggest that the category of "domestic worker" traffics in discursive objectification (i.e., "domestic worker" suggests some sort of sameness and shared understanding. It can become an ideological mechanism for describing a certain person or

phenomenon, ultimately disrupting the sense of the term (Dominguez 1992)). Once again, the feminist foundation of care ethics upholds the possibility that there may be an innovative arrangement for assessing and discussing the experiences of individuals participating in migrant domestic work.

Much like my reasoning for avoiding the discursive objectifiers "victim of human trafficking" and "smuggled migrant" within this dissertation, I also hesitate to (re)produce some sort of comprehensive narrative about domestic workers' experiences.[13] [14] Throughout this project I deliberated whether there was (and is) a way to speak about and contain the commonalities amongst the women I met, which did not flatten their singularity. Was there a category that captured their backgrounds, desires, and virtues encapsulated by their decision to migrate to the ASPG specifically for domestic work? Was there a way to succinctly explain the designed and calculated entelechy that motivated them to leave home and work abroad? Or do the particularities of each woman resist categorization? And if so, how might necessary global change come about if we cannot capture something of this pervasive global experience? How can relevant international human rights legislation ensure the safety and wellbeing of individuals if the categories of persons and phenomena are unbounded? These questions remain open, and intend to stimulate broad and continuous engagement with the phenomenon of domestic labor

[13] I am writing from a perspective based on specific encounters, in a particular time, at a particular place. Notwithstanding, there are obviously cases of domestic labor migrants whose agency and decision-making capabilities have been compromised, and there is ongoing work in Addis Ababa addressing issues of human trafficking.

[14] At this time there is limited public data produced by aid organizations specifically on this issue in Ethiopia, though it is emerging. During my fieldwork, IOM workers distributed questionnaires to the nurses at one of my field sites, instructing the nurse to fill out a Victim of Trafficking (VOT) report for each newcomer and to report any cases of human trafficking. Additionally, there are IOM workers, as part of the Migration Management Unit, at the Bole International Airport who attempt to gather data on returned Ethiopian migrants. However, conversations with some of the data collection liaisons suggest that the data is unreliable given the collection site and method (electronic questionnaire in Bole International Airport immediately following their departure from the airplane).

exchange between regions of the Global South. Unquestionably, for real change to stem from such globally situated anthropological inquires, there must also be multiple actors from multiple institutions committed to caring-for the individuals central to this work.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation is broadly divided into two sections. The first section, Chapter One through Chapter Four, addresses the theoretical undertones of my work. I give substantial attention to the role of my research assistant, Abinet, and his influence on the research. Transparency about his engagement is necessary for grasping the details about how I collected and comprehended most of my interlocutor's narratives. The second half this dissertation, Chapter Five through Chapter Eight, bare the experiences of my interlocutors and the larger phenomenon of migrant domestic work from Ethiopia to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf.

Chapter One defines and justifies the theories that shape my analyses. I detail relevant aspects of feminist philosophy and phenomenology that guide my examinations and arguments about categories of self, ethics, and unwellness. I contextualize my interlocuters within a web of relationships, institutions, and projects of virtuous becoming to better understand why certain comportments are rendered sickness or mental unwellness. Finally, I claim that person-centered ethnography is fundamentally feminist and accordingly compliments the theoretical projects of feminist philosophy and phenomenology via the centering of individual narratives and intersubjective particularities.

Chapter Two commences with my initial meeting of Abinet. I introduce the parameters of my research, including background information on the two non-governmental organization (NGO)— Tesfa or Mekelakel— where this research occurred. I offer a brief historical and

present-day overview of Tesfa and Mekelakel's host city, Addis Ababa, to situate the reader within their multifaceted cosmopolitan space. I present further information about the demographics pertaining to my interlocutors, as well as background information pertaining to informants from multiple humanitarian and governmental spaces.

Chapter Three delves methodically into Abinet's background, personal history, his role in our research, and how he influenced data collected and my analytical discernments. I detail the ways our work together supports my commitment to collaborative ethnographic work (resonating with feminist philosophy, while also advancing the utility of anthropological phenomenology) and how our collaboration unsettles presumptions about mental and emotional unwellness. I also address issues of race and processes of racializing specific to Ethiopia. My analysis is guided by the insights of Abinet and my interlocutors; I offer a local understanding about the ways in which processes of racialization occurred in the context of this study. Such an evaluation raises fascinating questions about the gendered relationship between Arabness and whiteness. Chapter Four presents an examination of my positionality and Abinet's. I thoroughly discuss issues of gender and language in the context of this study and interrogate the fluctuating relevance and subsequent influence of both elements on fieldwork and data collection.

Chapter Five begins the second half of this dissertation, which focuses on the experiences of returned domestic workers living and receiving mental health treatment in either Tesfa or Mekelakel. I introduce a key interlocutor, Kiya, and situate her desires for the good life within an ethics of care and the dilemma of risk-taking. Her courage to change her own life and those she loves most is placed in conversation with notions of desires. I emphasize how ambiguity and ambivalent selfhood resonate throughout the experience of my interlocutors. Through an

examination of Kiya's desires and risk-taking we can better understand processes of ethical becoming in a situation of multiple precarity.

Chapter Six addresses the reasoning and process of going abroad to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. The airport arrival, employer's house, and the fright and shock that follows are central to my examination. I scrutinize these "sticky" encounters in an effort to better comprehend how such memories relate to the painful moments of failed risk-taking and subsequent unwellness. Chapter Seven continues to examine the moments abroad that are situated as precipitating factors of mental and emotional unwellness. Through the narratives of five key interlocutors, I offer a phenomenological investigation into crying, a vital emotion. Each interlocuter conceptualizes their crying as indicative of sickness—they can no longer endure the *chiniket* (stress) of their work—and their tears reveal this to the world and to their selves.

Chapter Eight tracks several interlocutors forced or unexpectedly returned to Ethiopia. Initial arrivals are marked by varying forms of dramatic symptomology, including, for example, persistent silence or, on the other hand, chaotic speech. The shelter's unique form of care palliates and perhaps cures individual unwellness through a cultivated empathic sociality. While many women are eager to leave the shelters, there are equally as many who are hesitant. I propose that this hesitation is representative of a unique moment in their lives where they are permitted a space to reckon the next best good, while cultivating a new and unexpected form of virtuous becoming.

Chapter One

Theoretics

Phenomenological Anthropology

My work complements recent studies in phenomenological anthropology that champion a biographical and narrative self as the analytical center; a narrative perspective that brings attention to the intersubjective and relational features of self-formation (Grøn 2017; Mattingly 2003, 2010, 2014). Following these threads, my work also maintains a connection with classic psychological anthropological arguments that the self is always in relation and undergoing a dynamic ever-evolving process of becoming (Biehl 2005; Edgerton 1969, 1974; Ewing 1990; Hallowell 1955; Hollan 2004, 2012, 2014; Lock 1993). I further reason that a self is ambiguous and with that "coherent." An individual's ambiguity rests in its disparate understandings about what it means to "know oneself;" it is about the subjunctive qualities of self and the ways in which narrative reveals one's unfolding multiplicity. By stipulating that a self is always fractured and continuously reconstituting into new "selves" in response to stimuli,[15] any such supposition of a static or clear, definite, or unquestionable self is based on an illusion that is largely influenced by the universalization of experience and personhood, and fails to grasp the lived reality of being.

[15] There is an undertone here of William James ([1890] 2017) and Alfred Schutz's (1970) discussions about the stream of consciousness, *duree*, and the ways in which consciousness is always changing and is structured by attention.

By specifically examining experience at the level of the individual, I maintain that the structure of self, as narrativized by an individual in either "good" mental health or a "psychotic", "sick", or "unwell" state can enlighten our understanding about the ways in which a self is always in negotiation with its social environment (Hallowell 1955) and intrapersonal world—what Hollan (2012) describes as an individual's own unique history of embodied relations and memories—and, thus, can reveal how structures of care at both the micro (individual) and macro (e.g., state-society) levels are fused to a fluid ethicality and profoundly influence an individual's enactments of becoming. More precisely, my work addresses how the embodied unwellness of Ethiopia women, formerly employed as domestic workers abroad, lays bare the ways in which ethics of care can change that human component responsible for presenting a "coherent" (i.e., unambiguous) self or, as one nurse at Mekelakel put it, the capacity of "knowing oneself".

Similar to work undertaken by Mattingly and Hollan, this project offers insight into how "biographical specificities" (Mattingly 2012, 2014) and "historically specific individuals," mark and infuse the lives of our interlocutors (Hollan 2012). By placing my work in relation to Mattingly and Hollan's discussions of the analytical category of the self and the experiential, or everyday events of an individual, I likewise contextualize the self within a web of relationships, institutions, and geopolitical endeavors as well as individual understandings of self-reflection. I also introduce the concept of a "scissile self" in the interest of providing a more meticulous dissection of the central catalyst behind a mental illness diagnosis (which, in the context of this research, tends not to attune to the historically specific individual and their everyday experiences).

I use the adjective "scissile" to describe a state of self that has broken from its stable or "normal" state of being—that of "knowing oneself." The scissile self is a helpful analytic

because it specifically attunes to and scrutinizes the complicated web of relations wound around individual projects of ethicality and becoming tied to an *imagined* otherwise. It brings attention to past dreams and desires, the anticipated yield, and the consequences of its forestalling.

An examination of a scissile self is concerned with locating the "break" or "scission" of the material form of the person, as well as the catalyst of the break (much like examinations into dissociation). I find the term "scissile" to be theoretically productive concerning discussions of self-formation as it relates to the conditions of several women who hold central positions in this study. Scissile, rather than dissociation or dissociative state (which holds a primary position in the anthropological literature[16]) better captures the essence of understanding a person, not just their curious aberrations. It directly responds to phenomenological calls for experience-near understandings of the everyday human condition, be it ordinary or extra-ordinary. By examining episodes of "psychosis," for example, as expressions of a scissile self (i.e., questioning who's, what, why, and how individual ethics of becoming otherwise are flux) can stir anthropological insights "beyond entrenched ideas" and unsettle epistemological claims about the human condition (Jackson 2013).

An examination into a scissile self also recognizes and gives attention to the bond inherent in a material which makes it possible, in the first place, to be capable of "splitting". The material that makes something capable of being split is a bond, and in this case, the bond is understood as the biographical and narrative self—i.e., "knowing oneself." And when this bond is broken, a person is determined to be unaware of who they "really" are, as often assumed under the diagnosis of dissociative state, and consequently any sort of narrative concerning the

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[16] Concerning a set of behaviors and experiences involving alterations of memory, perception, identity, and psychophysiological processes predominately in the context of religious and spiritual practices (Seligman and Kirmayer 2008) or as continuum of idioms of distress (Hollan 2004) or psychoanalytic claims of the "defensive denial or repression of loss and mourning" (Hollan 2000).

biographical “I” is deemed untrue. If we examine this “splitting” of the “bond”, as a “scissile self” (a coherent entity), then we can continue to understand any sort of “ambiguity of self” as still secured to the material form of the person—that is, the biographical specificities of the historically situated person remain. Rather than associating this split with dissociation, wherein the individual is often categorized as experiencing depersonalization and derealization and thus without any sort of “bond,” a scissile self never truly dis-bonds; the scissile self still maintains the same material forms—the biographical specificities and historical situatedness—albeit this form is expressed differently.

While the category of dissociation is marked by a detachment in the self and from the world, and a perception that the external world is deemed not real, implying a sort of “alienness” to the person, the scissile self, on other hand, maintains a fundamental humanness present in the “split” material form. In other words, their experiences, their biographical specificities, their historical situatedness, informs their delusions and hallucinations, which can inform our understanding of their being-in-the-world. Understood this way, the scissile self, rather than a dissociative state, offers the opportunity to look at the individual and take seriously the biographical “I” no matter the form. It is a way in which to present a picture of what “the world looks like and feels like from the actor’s point of view” (Hollan 2014, 177), what phenomenological anthropologists are ever-chasing. The valuing of past experiences for understanding current situations of unwellness resonates with Hollan’s argument about the persistent nature of psycho-bodily signatures individuals carry with them. Such signatures are “sensitive register[s] of social experience”—consciously and unconsciously—and can influence individual life trajectories, exacerbate forms of suffering or alleviate distress (2004, 74). The fact

that the scissile self retains a biographical and narrative first-person perspective is precisely what is important for expanding our experience-near understanding of historical specific individuals.

The analytical lens of a scissile self may also resonate with the growing literature on critical phenomenology, but at present I am hesitant to embrace this partition. I am not yet convinced that *critical* phenomenology is a necessary modifier to distinguish the various ways in which individuals see and make sense of the world, in a way that is not already innate to the phenomenological method particularly engaged by Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, [1948] 2018) and Fanon ([1952] 2008, [1963] 2004). While earlier anthropological engagements with critical phenomenology attuned to the structures of power and the sociopolitical conditions (Desjarlais 1996, 1997; Willen 2007), which resonate with much earlier discussions on the "recognition" of certain "condition" and labeling theory (Edgerton 1969). Most recently, there has been a shift toward a more feminist inspired phenomenology—concept critique via experience (Mattingly 2019). Philosopher Lisa Guenther defines critical phenomenology as better able to advance theories for understanding human experience, stating that, "classic phenomenology remains insufficiently critical [in] failing to give an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience… in what we might call a quasi-transcendental way" (2019, 12). She, like Willen (2007), appears to also emphasize a Foucauldian notion of power relations and the ability for theorist to offer socio-political critique.

Similarly, but less concerned with locating "power" in preexisting practices or moral codes, Mattingly (2019) offers a critical phenomenology that can help unsettle dominate assumptions about people and categories. By attuning to, in particular, ethically charged concepts via ethnographic particularities, theorist can call into question even the notion of sociopolitical concepts through the agentive qualities and particularities of our interlocutors.

Namely, when examining our ways of seeing and making sense of the world researchers must attune to the historical situatedness of both the person and the social structures they are embedded within, which will ultimately advance our thinking about the human condition (Guenther 2020; Mattingly 2019).

Recent appeals in psychological anthropology call for a novel approached in examining the experiences of our interlocutors. Yet, more than fifty years ago, Simone de Beauvoir and Franz Fanon engagement with phenomenology did precisely that, they both critically examine how individuals were historically situated in their environment, including the social structures and affective arrangements. Beauvoir and Fanon advanced Husserl's theory by demonstrating the malleable and open way of *doing* phenomenology.[17] It was not viewed as a static methodological framework, but rather an unfinished process for delineating the human circumstance, which included a critical enterprise. Additionally, for anthropologists who have retained both the methods of phenomenology and person-centered ethnography, there is a clear commitment to elevating the first-person vantage point, which embraces the excessiveness of an ordinary lived life that decenters established claims about individual experiences (Hollan 2014; Mattingly 2019; Mattingly and Throop 2018; Merleau-Ponty 2014, 21). This theoretical intersection is where I located my work, I engage phenomenology and feminist philosophy in conjunction with person-centered ethnography to illuminate more truthfully the complicated, ambiguous, coherent, yet craggy entanglements of an individual. My work attempts to make sense of a particular type of suffering and ethicality as social experiences in the context of particular historical, social, culture, economic, political, and environment situations.

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[17] This debate about the usefulness of critical phenomenology is recent and there are very exciting and thought-provoking conversations emerging between anthropologists and philosophers about the "otherwise" possibilities afford through critical phenomenology.

Fanon and Beauvoir undertook such critical investigations when they asked particular questions about particular situations, about situations of race, gender, nationality, war, medicine, literature, and science. In asking and analyzing the precipitants of individual absorption of the other- and environment-constructed personhood vis-à-vis individual abreactions, Fanon and Beauvoir pushed phenomenology into the anthropological realm. Beauvoir is perhaps the most successful in enfolding feminist theory into phenomenology, yet it is the articulation of Beauvoir with Fanon that offers a kind of theoretical deliverance most promising for novel insights into questions concerning the mental and emotional unwellness of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers. Beauvoir and Fanon's explicitly emphasis on the relationality of care, ethics, unwellness work to unsettle normative conceptions about human experience and human conditions.

Phenomenological Anthropology & Feminist Philosophy

While there is no single feminist point of view, what feminist philosophy offers is a convergence upon gender-specific phenomena, putting women, women's experience, and women's knowledge at the core of its questioning. This is absolutely necessary for this project, and more generally; for as long as processes of genderization exist, then the category of woman matters for inquiries into human experience.

Bonnie Mann (2018) argues that it is the "sexed embodied me" that can disclose the meaning and value of the origin of experience. In this study, an examination into the origins of meaningful and valuable experience amongst Ethiopian domestic workers, living with mental and emotional unwellness, is advantageous for expanding our knowledge about the ways in which life (and in particular, ethical life) is lived in a gendered way. I engage feminist

philosophy precisely because it bolsters the phenomenological and postcolonial enterprises concerned with women's experiences of mental and emotional unwellness. While important and arguably the strongest theory for understanding the nuances of migrant labor between regions of the Global South, postcolonial theory does, at times, universalize experiences and neglects to adequately place women at the core of theoretical insights (Alcoff and Kittay 2008). Phenomenology, on the other hand, while able to examine the unique source, cause, foundation, standard, ethics, tenets, and costs of what it means for individual women to participate in a specific geographically and historically situated phenomenon, when complemented by feminist philosophy, further attends to the multiple situatedness of *women's* experience. Moreover, my own theoretical discernments regarding individual evaluations of self-formation and self-understanding (in relation to micro- and macro-structures) find further strength through incorporating a central feminist philosophical canon: the human condition is to be ambiguous, never fixed, and it is our duty to manage the uncertainty in our existence, not to banish it (Bakewell 2016, 266; Beauvoir [1948] 2018).

My work therefore combines feminist theory *and* methodology. It is through an emphasis on the relational and the use of first-person narrative that my work offers a vision of an individual that decenters the traditional androcentric viewpoint (Ahmed 2006, 2017; Code 1991; Guenther 2019; Held 1995, 2006; Weiss et al. 2020). Feminist philosophy, in my mode of engagement, is best understood as feminist phenomenology driven by a person-centered methodology, which utilizes a form of interviewing and observation that enables a "fine-grained way" of investigating the complex relationships between individuals and their social, material, and symbolic contexts" (Levy and Hollan 2014, 313). It remains phenomenological while emphasizing the question and concerns of gender; it unsettles androcentric theories about mental

illness, domestic labor migration, and Ethiopian "culture" by upholding the first-person narrative as apex of experience. I advance a "different understanding of how philosophy is connected, and responsible, to everyday life and to the silenced experiences of women" (Alcoff and Kittay 2007, 12). Emphasizing the feminist foci within phenomenology and person-centered ethnography reveals a necessity of both approaches: listening carefully. This work, then, is anchored in responsibility knowing other people through careful listening (Code 2007).

Feminist philosophy also demonstrates that the notion of "reason", which is situated as a normative and independent thing or entity that people simply come across in the world, is instead a discourse shaped by dominant ideals of masculinity (Code 2007, 213). Aligned with objectivity and epistemic claims about the "real", reason is constructed along certain lines of practice, conventions, and customs associated with the male experience, as opposed to emotion, subjectivity, and formlessness associated with femaleness. Feminist philosophy challenges this false dichotomy by disrupting entrenched notions about who gets to make what claims about what knowledge. Feminist philosophy facilitates democratic knowing and situated knowledges by considering the particularities of how and where knowledge is produced, expanding our knowledge about how a place should be known in all its idiosyncrasies (Haraway 1991, 187, 190).

Haraway and Code's appeals to unsettle an androcentric theorizing, born out of 20th century Western philosophers, is taken up by anthropological phenomenology and person-centered analysis through their shared attunement to the individual as a site of experience (Hallowell 1955; Hollan 2012; Mattingly 2014, 2018). In examining individual Ethiopian domestic workers experiences of mental and emotional unwellness, I honor this appeal by valuing the specificities of an individual's unique inhabitants of a specific environment

(Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013) and the ways in which she embodies her dynamically situated and at times ambiguous beingness (Hollan 2004). What this theorization allows for is an examination into the embodiment of an experience of subjugation, within a particular context, and an examination into self-understanding. As this dissertation demonstrates, the individual embodiment of felt subjugation can reform one's sense of possibility and reframe one's commitments to ethical projects. The self-narrations presented in this study reveal how such reform and reframing can provide insight into the biographical specificities that guide her ethical commitments in relation to what happened, presently occurs, and is to come—that is, women at the core of this work understand their selves as limited and compelled by circumstances, and yet continue to purse projects of the "best-good" in order to sustain a life (and lives) worth living.

Doing Feminist Philosophy: Person-Centered Ethnography

The phenomenological and feminist philosophies are not just about armchair theorizing but seek to *do* philosophy (Mattingly 2018)—that is, they each advance an enterprise that avoids a reduction of dynamism. In supporting this practice, my research follows person-centered techniques, because of its commitment to preserving individual variations and particularities.[18]

A common thread amongst these theories and methodologies is an understanding that life is lived in a deeply relational way. My work reinforces this stance by exposing specifically how relationality undergirds ethics, care, unwellness, and gender. Person centered ethnography—interviewing and observation—uniquely explores this relationality by examining "the spaces, condensation, unities, divisions, transformations, tensions, and coercion" encompassing each individual (Levy and Hollan 2014, 338). It puts the individual in context, in the dual position of

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[18] Doug Hollan, in discussion with the author, September 14, 2020.

informant-respondent. It is inherently phenomenological and feminist through its commitment to standardizing the equitable treatment of unique, historically situated, individually evaluated, experiences of people.

The architects of person-centered ethnography, Robert Levy and Doug Hollan, write that, "it is a work in progress toward the slow empirical and conceptual illustration of the interplay of social and personal forces" (2014, 339). They and their methodology recognize that anthropology is a science and with that comes an invitation to experiment with our methods in effort to best understand people, places, and phenomena. Person-centered ethnography embraces the very ethos of feminist thought, as the method itself is open to critique, testing, revision, and modification; it endeavors to push ethnography and qualitative data capture beyond generalized declarations. Through its style of careful and thoughtful interviewing and observation, it asks not only what constitutes the ethical, the unwell, the obligation, the good, and the social, but questions *whose* ethical, unwell, obligation, good, and social.

In discussing the intersection between feminist philosophy, phenomenology, and person-centered ethnography, Hollan suggests that these theories, and his advancement of person-centered interviewing (2014), do not deny the existence of prevailing structures that effect individuals (e.g., that women at the core of my work are somehow protected from the well-known precipitants of living through and existing within a low-income country), but rather person-centered ethnography demonstrates that whatever these structuring structures may be, they are not wholly deterministic.[19] In other words, person-centered methodology expands an texturing of the human, it embraces the Beauvoirian concept that the human does not rest in absolutes, and to exist is to "cast oneself into the world" ([1948] 2018, 45).

[19] Doug Hollan, in discussion with the author, September 14, 2020.

Person-centered techniques are also intra-relational—its methodology requires an astute proprietor not only in terms of implementation, but also in terms of one's ability to self-consciously, critically, evaluate the strengths and limits of its ability to understand a particular person in a particular context. It harmonizes with feminist discourses through its respect for the limits of knowledge, and through the valuing of the messy, craggy, or indefinable. It is about capturing the essence of an individual and their being-in-the-world. It does not seek to assimilate or obliterate, but rather awaken the otherwise. It does this by moving beyond the classic anthropological ethos of interviewee-as-expert witness and extends the notion of expertise into the novel and particular. Those of us who engage person-centered techniques consider that the vitality of understanding individuals and their social worlds is based in experiences and histories within which phenomena are born; it is found within and amongst individuals.

I took this framework and sensibility as a method ideal for elevating the diversity of women's reason, particularity that of women whose voices, experiences, and behaviors are too often marked as inconsequential or ignored. The techniques of person-centered interviewing and observation, in connection with phenomenological and feminist theories, enabled me to make sense of a type of suffering and social experience, within a distinct social, cultural, economic, political, and historical context. The complementary avenues of epistemic critique operating within and amongst these fields of observation and understanding bring forth crucial interpretations and explanations about human life. The transcendental aspects of a domestic worker, of a specific human being with specific, unique experiences, is made possible through the elevation of democratic knowing, and the responsible evaluation of an individual's "faithful accounts of a 'real' world" (Haraway 1991).

Co-Attention

The production of partial truths is not solely grounded in untranslatable language and behavior or the unspoken, but it is also rooted in modes of attention—how and what an individual attunes to yields particular information (Heidegger [1926] 2010; Husserl 1990; Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013). Historically and contemporaneously psychological anthropologists have engaged such philosophical theories to examine that which is concealed through habituation (Csordas 1993; Throop 2005, 2009, 2010). Recent works, for example, investigate the everyday modes in which individuals attune to sensations, feelings, memories, and history that reveal implicit elements of moral life (Lutz 1988; Stewart 2007; Throop 2010). Incorporating the role of attention into my discussion, however, is grounded in not only conversations about how anthropology can bring into relief the taken for granted ways of thinking and being, but how anthropologists can also produce reflexive accounts about ethnographic transparency—that is, who, what, why, when, and how particular individuals and their narratives are deemed central to our theories concerning the human condition and social life.

What is taken for granted by me and what is taken for granted by my research assistant, Abinet, are often incongruent, and a wonderful consequence of our disparate readings is that anything which stood out from the ordinary—the "problematic", "unfamiliar" "unexcepted"—was brought into attention through our mutual reflective orientations regarding our natural attitudes. In working together, Abinet and I "defrosted" (Mattingly 2019) our usual way of thinking. We reverse the direction of our habitual thoughts (Zaner 1975, 129) and brought to the foreground a sense-explication of the world (Husserl 1960, 86), which worked together to produce something meaningful and unexpected to us both. This process of working together was a respectful concession to that which might be otherwise, it was a methodologically unique way

in which phenomenological enterprises could be undertaken with a research assistant in a language foreign to the researcher. Our co-attention worked to produce a type of ethnographic epoché—"a phenomenologically informed analysis of the specific form of bracketing that arises in ethnographic encounters" (Throop 2018, 197) —that revealed distinct understandings about the world, which could later undergo analysis and aid in my re/thinking of a situation, person, or phenomenon.

It is through this type of phenomenological project that Abinet and I were able to bring assumptions about migrant domestic work and mental and emotional unwellness under closer examination. We "listened" differently—that is, we co-listened. This process was an experimental method designed to confront the "problem" of how to listen in a way that disrupted our own received ways of thinking, and consequently destabilized established anthropological styles of representation and theory building (Mattingly et al. 2018, 16). Abinet and I endeavored to make sense of a particular type of person and unwellness in a particular setting, marked by distinct social, cultural, economic, and political orders. In doing this, we disrupted existing discourses about Ethiopian migrant domestic work and the associated personal suffering and injustices. My choice to listen differently (to co-listen) was implemented in order to make a difference. What transpired was a project of listening and understanding that noticeably departed from prior research concerning both the larger context of Ethiopia and the more specific context of emotional and mental unwellness among former migrant domestic workers.

Abinet and I turned characteristic muteness, "psychotic outburst", hallucinations and delusions into openings; they were preludes toward understanding the situatedness of an individual. I strove to attune to the "returned Ethiopian domestic worker" as a singular woman, with a singular experience. I examined what it meant for her to undertake this contemporary

"culturally expected" responsibility and how she understood the precipitated unwellness. In the broader context, I examined whether my data corresponded with what the Federal Ministries and international aid organizations reported about the conditions prompting Ethiopian women to migrate for domestic work. Sometimes our data matched, other times not.

This dissertation's findings about the situation of Ethiopian labor migration to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf speaks to the benefit of person-centered ethnography even in an environment that may seem unfitting (which I explore in detail below). For example, this work exemplifies how theoretical discussions of reflective attention should not just be reserved for mediations on our interlocutors and ourselves, but should also include how we co-produce knowledge with our research assistants; how an ethnographic epoché emerges *in situ*. This critical assessment of a phenomenologically oriented person-centered ethnography is important for work undertaken in a language and country marginally represented in anthropological literature,[20] because it offers transparency about both data collection and understanding. I strove to be transparent about what "pulled" and guided my orientation to certain objects of experience because for me, in collaboration with a dedicated research assistant, I felt like I was constantly encountering the new, the uncanny, or the unexpected. I make clear how Abinet influence my data in order to show how fieldwork constraints as well as freedoms, in and of themselves, produce information about a situation and a person.

I also offer a discussion about the ways in which Abinet's personhood functions in the development and enrichment of knowledge relevant to both the methods of anthropology as well as theoretical insights into the experiences of returned Ethiopian domestic workers. The addition

[20] Yet, it is not only the researcher in Ethiopia who should be clear about the use of a research assistant, but the researcher assistant should also be transparent about their abilities to transliterate.

of Abinet into the equation of fieldwork allowed for a certain type of epistemological access, which if I alone undertook this work would likely not exist.

Throughout this project our asymmetrical and symmetrical readings of a situation were based on vocal utterances and language, as well as the nonverbal. As a non-fluent Amharic speaker, I often focused on our interlocutors' somatic forms, speech cadence, and emotions while Abinet primarily attended to the question and answer at hand. That is not to say that he was unaware of the emotions circulating within the individual who sat before us, but rather it was not his primary focus. Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2013) writes that when a value-characteristic presents itself, it is a spark that provides an answer to a question, and Abinet embodied this understanding. He knew that whatever answer we garnered it would decide the direction of my subsequent question; how he translated and interpreted an interlocutor's responses, ruminations, and reactions moved the research. Abinet, then, was deeply conscious of verbal replies, as to him, in the context of this research and understanding the conditions of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers, their answers were of utmost value.

Our intersubjectively defined process of knowledge acquisition was based on Abinet's interpretation of what our interlocutor attended to in that moment, what thoughts occupied her mind in relation to the questions I posed. Our interlocutor and Abinet performed, what Merleau-Ponty identifies as an awakening and localization of a new consciousness where, "attention first of all presupposes a transformation of the mental field, a new way for consciousness to be present to its objects" (([1945] 2013), 29). Our tripartite episteme formed the nature of the research and called attention to a particular object. It revealed a certain truth about the world, and provided insight into individual experiences of, for example, emotional and mental unwellness. What Abinet and interlocutors introduced was a process where a unity of experience was

manifested in a consciousness tied to my questioning, his presence, and my observation. The woman, with Abinet's help, synthesized not only her prior experiences into just a narrative, but a narrative that revealed her own and his understanding of what they both perceived to be of importance to me and the larger researcher project. This secondary attention (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013) interlocked with my prolonged engagement with my fieldsites—that is, I was constantly reminding the women living in the shelters what it was that interested me and why I was there.

Such horizons of indeterminate actuality became localized and knowably structured when our interlocutor "haul[ed] something out" for us (Husserl 1990, 52). For some women, those who had been there for several weeks or months, the process of retelling a certain experience correlated with their sustained interactions with me. In such instances, bringing something out for us was dependent on a deeper understand of me, Abinet, my work, and my intentions. What was knowably structured tied into to an intersubjective cadence, an engagement that precipitated a degree of trust necessary for sharing a certain set of knowledge.

Both Abinet and I recognized various signifiers of reality, objects, subjects, temporarily, and potentialities which aligned with our understanding of what constituted not only experience, but also what constituted a narrative indicative of an experience based in a shared or singular reality. When we were unable to make a "connection" between what we witnessed from our interlocutor and our understanding of reality, we offered an evaluation of alternative consciousness (i.e., a consciousness about a reality that did not exist for Abinet nor I in the same way it did for an interlocutor) that provided alternative details about a individuals situatedness. For example, as mentioned, one young woman, Zala (who had an official diagnoses of schizophrenia), insisted we can her Hannah and claimed to be "Lucy" reincarnated. She was not

actually “Lucy”, the 3.2-million-year-old *Australopithecus afarensis* discovered by French paleoanthropologist Maurice Taieb during a 1974 field expedition in the Afar region of Ethiopia, but, for her and now for us, she was-in-the-world, *as* Lucy. While this did not align with Abinet nor my understanding of her being-in-the-world, we did not foreclose or reject this consciousness vis-à-vis a disengagement or denial of this Lucy *à la* Hannah. Instead, we followed and listened to Hannah’s narrative at length. We called her Hannah and asked about her experiences as Lucy reincarnated. It was through this process of listening and watching individuals like Hannah that we could determine the degree to which their narratives were based in an understanding of the world that corresponded to a particular social environment, past and/or present.

We did not find it necessary to dismiss or correct an individual’s delusions unless it precipitated some sort of violent confrontation or tragic viewpoint about their life. For example, when a woman thought I was her former employer and grabbed my shirt collar and pen, Abinet stepped in and explained to her that I was not her former employer. Similarly, one young woman was insistent that the staff of Tesfa were lying to her about the travel restrictions, which prevented her from returning to her home region. She did not believe Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared a state of emergency. This caused her to be very upset and she refused to eat. To prove to her that we were not lying about her inability to travel across the country, Tesfa administrators brought her to the central bus station in Addis Ababa and encouraged her to see for herself that travel was barred. The administrators allowed her to speak with other people at the bus depot and to question whether a travel restriction existed. When others confirmed this ban, she returned to Tesfa calm.

Abinet also excelled as a research assistant and interpreter in his willingness to interpret “incoherent” speech. Even as others, or even initially himself, dismissed it as nonsense, when I

asked him to please interpret, he did. In recording such incoherent or disordered speech, I sought to maintain attention on this diversity of thought as not just a commitment to feminist philosophy and phenomenology, but to also demonstrate how examining alternative realties can go beyond making generalized statements about madness. While several interlocutors may have had similar symptomology, delusions of grandeur or persecution for example, it was in speaking to individual women and listening carefully to their delusions or narratives about their "sickness", in combination with their narratives about childhood, familial life, migration, and domestic work that this study is able to move away from presupposition abouts an inherently complex phenomenon—mental illness—and instead elevate how deeply intertwined self-making and self-preservation is with formations and enactments of ethical life and care.

For over two decades psychological anthropologist have been critical of the tendency of anthropological literature to conceptualize experience as a unitary, unchanging, environmental disconnected domain (Desjarlais 1994, 1997; Mattingly 1998; Throop 2003) Likewise, and in following Simone de Beauvoir, my work also claims that wholeness, unity, or exactness is an unnecessary *giveness* of experience, which suppress the inherent incoherence of being-in-the-world. Beauvoir's concept of the inherent contradictions of an experiencing-being aligns with phenomenological discussions of experience as that which can be transcendent, escapable, exceeding articulations, and transformative (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Fanon [1963] 2004; Husserl 1990; Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013).[21] For example, Husserl articulates this sentiment about the

[21] Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were contemporaries of Simone de Beauvoir's and evidence of their decades-long engagement with each other is observable in their discussions of the body, perceptions, and consciousness, as evidenced in *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Likewise, Fanon's close relations with Sartre and Beauvoir is recognizable throughout *Black Skin, White Mask* and, even more so, in *The Wretched of the Earth*. I suggest that Beauvoir's rejection of "unity" as givenness of experience is motived by Fanon's psychoanalytic renditions of subjugated beingness. This is all to say that, in Beauvoir's argument situates unity in abeyance and instead advocates for a phenomenological evaluation of experience that independent of coherence.

diversity of *giveness* in his discussion of "being as consciousness and being as reality" (1990, 90), but consciousness and reality of alternative modes, I demonstrate, should be uncompressed to better understand that value-characteristics present in a *reality* that is real for her. I did not want my examination of the person and situation to flatten this diversity. While Abinet was motivated to engage the "incoherent" conversation of our informants to ensure a rich study (something I asked from him), I was motivated to reconcile such poetic unloading as more than just nonsense. Instead of saying "this is not true," I asked what *is* true about her narrative? Why is this narrative true for her? What am I knowledge is she sharing in a form unfamiliar to me?

Ambiguity's Substance and Style

Abinet was also responsible for translating my English questions into Amharic and often my translation (based on online resources and dictionaries), did not match with his transliteration, which were based on an understanding of the emotion and feeling words I was attempting to use. Given the complex nature of translating Amharic to English, when I do employ an Amharic word in this dissertation, I do so only after consulting a second and third translator in Ethiopia. Therefore, the decision to provide an Amharic word and its English equivalent is done after careful discussions about the most appropriate rendition.

Similar to Crapanzano's (1973) distillation of Arabic in *The Hamadsha,* I too rendered certain Amharic words and phrases in the simplest manner, and such elementary translations will be recognizable to any Amharic speaker. Amharic words in my work have been translated into the Latin script from the Fidel (ፊደል) writing system. This was not always a straightforward task as there is no agreed upon way of Romanizing Amharic into Latin script. At present the Ethiopic syllabary consists of thirty-three basic shapes, which can be altered by one of seven vowels.

Therefore, there are at least 231 possible characters in the Fidel writing system. On more than one occasion this led to a divergence between me and Abinet about how to transliterate portions of our interviews.[22] Yet, had I fluency in Amharic, there was still no guarantee that he and I would take apart and put together the heard narrative into the exact form.[23] How Abinet interprets a statement is based on his judgment—of the situation, the problem at hand, the individual woman sitting before us, his own life experiences, and the progression of our work (Riessman 2000). Hence, in a study concerning Ethiopian domestic labor migration and the corresponding mental and emotional unwellness, I find it necessary to situate Abinet so centrally. His lifeworld structures the transliteration and interpretations of my central concerns and questions. Our intersection constitutes a particular social nature and social experience regarding the type of data garnered for this dissertation.

As our work together progressed and my knowledge of Amharic grew, I was able to recognize certain words of relevance and became more attuned to and perceptive of sounds that seemed to reverberate somatically in the speaker. I would discuss with Abinet the meaning of those words and it was rarely straight forward, which I found frustrating. Likewise, the asymmetries between our understanding of what constitutes a negative or positive emotion often

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[22] Amharic is a sematic language that grew out of the Ge'ez script, which is presently only engaged as a liturgical language. Ge'ez is a segmental writing system, dating back to the 9th century BC, in which consonant-vowel sequences are written as a unit. This type of writing system is known as an *abugida*. Interestingly, this word is derived from the Ethiopian name for the Ge'ez script. In modern day Fidel, like Ge'ez, diacritics have been fused to the consonants and are considered modifications to the form of letters. The letters are modified depending on the sound and depending on status of subject. Additionally, the Amharic language distinguishes gender and status. For example, if I am looking at an adorable pack of dogs, and I say to Abinet, "bring me that dog" ["Abinet, ya wesha āmitalegn" (አብነት, ያን ውሻ አምጣልኝ)] or if he said, "Eva, bring me that dog" ["Eva, yachin wesha āmchilegn (ኢቫ, ያቺን ውሻ አምጭልኝ)], the difference is presented in the "ቺ" and "ጭ" symbols, which indicate feminine.
Additionally, some consonantal letters are reserved for royalty, like Haile Selassie I (ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ), where ኃይለ translates to Haile and the ኃ is reserved for the "ha" consonant-vowel sequences of his majesty, otherwise this same sound may be represented by ሃ or ሐ.

[23] To ensure that portions of the interview are correct, I worked with another fluent Amharic-English speaker in Ethiopia who confirmed and adjusted some of Abinet's interpretations and translations.

sparked interesting conversations that offered insight in the cultural processes of which emotional states are deemed relevant to diagnoses of mental illness.

I might find the word “vulnerable”, for example, valuable to understanding an interlocuters state of being during domestic work, but Abinet, on the other hand, may not attune to it, as it is not something he determines as useful for understanding emotional or mental unwellness. This multi-layered patterning of attention produces a truth about a cultural significant phenomenon and individuals experience of living through it. What Abinet states to me, in interpreting another’s narrative, gives birth to an ontological and epistemological reality that may have been different from my own had I interpreted the Amharic-language stories or spoke only with individuals who spoke English as a second language. What we offer, then, is an understanding into the individual lives of Ethiopian women which is uniquely situated.

Anthropology, but less so phenomenological anthropology, tends to favor spoken language—language is the primary medium through which the basic structure of experience is articulated and the ways in which the ties between the individual and the world are illuminated. In privileging spoken language anthropologists have unintentionally relegated the ambiguity of the unintelligible and nonverbal to the shadowy margins of our discipline. Yet, as Abinet reminded me on numerous occasions, “communication is not just about words spoken”. For him, apprehending the first-person perspective did not exclusively rely on comprehending the speaker’s language, but also included comprehending the essence of the language spoken and the accompanied non-verbal elements. His point mirrored that of phenomenology in that he assumed much more to communication than language as we are always also oriented in an embodied ways to one another and the surrounding world; he thus encouraged me to go “beyond the words” of our interlocutors (Wikan 1992, 466). This pushed us, as observers, to expand the range of

communicative experiences that inform possible meanings behind signs, such as those that might lead us to distinguish between a wink, a blink, or a twitch (Geertz 1973). If we interpret our interlocutors' experiences as that which includes embodied gestures, emotive comportment, movement and inertia, in addition to sensed linguistic meaning, then a more nuanced understanding of what and how an individual perceives the world around them becomes possible, and thus a more "whole" understanding of her situatedness.[24]

It is through an acceptance and analyses of this type of complex ambiguity of the human condition that we can advance the meaning of blurred edges and vagueness (Wittgenstein [1953] 2009), maintain a meaningful refusal to set up absolutes and fixed meaning (Beauvoir [1948] 2018), and embrace the imprecision of lived experiences (Mattingly 2019, 10). Intertwining person-centered ethnography with phenomenology goes beyond mere interviewing, critical discourses analysis, grounded theory development, but also includes an attunement to the senses as reflected on by the respondent (Csordas 1990, 1994; Hollan 2001) as well as a recognition of the witnessed embodiment perceived by the interviewer(s). This embrace of human complexity is both a theoretical and an ethical choice—it is a way of reading the human condition that maintains a sensibility that both experience and meaning can be incoherent, craggy, disjointed, or immeasurable, all of which should be considered in relationship to individual levels of perceptual environment.

It is in my explicit engagement with Abinet and his responsibility within this work that I continue the project of dismantling, decentering, and "defrosting" (Mattingly 2019) concepts in effort to not only describe phenomena and messier variants of the human condition but to rework

[24] For a thorough discussion regarding the Geertzian critique of phenomenology, and yet his feasible compatibility with phenomenology see Throop (2009) "Interpretation and the Limits of Interpretability: On Rethinking Clifford Geertz's Semiotics of Religious Experience." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14 (3–4): 369–84.

and usefully amend conceptualizations about mental and emotional unwellness. Several attempts to prompted narratives about experience were met with a shrug, tears, or a whisper. In listening and watching this process, I might, for example, be absorbed by what I assume is a deep sadness as the woman cries and bends in her chair. "Oh no," I think. I have upset her with my questioning. I turn to Abinet, feeling shameful, "We should stop." Abinet's interrupts, "No, no. She is happy." Immediately, he reverses the direction of the process by which I habitually think (Zaner 1975, 129), and it was precisely in moments like these where our interaction pushed me to assess something like silence differently—not as a negation or an emptiness, but as disclosing the otherwise inarticulable. Abinet aided me in bracketing my natural attitude; he helped reinforce an essential phenomenological method, that of dislodging "ingrained commitments to seeing only particular aspects of [the everyday world of experience]" (Throop 2009; 2015, 75).

Abinet, in his interpretation, was trying his best to present to me a certain truth. And I, in interpreting his interpretation, worked to analyze his interpretation in conjunction with my witnessing of an individual woman's comportment and emotive liquidity. The "factuality" of a particular truth was not simply the insights Abinet and I gained about an individual's state of being, but was also about what the three of us co-constructed about the nature of, for example, Ethiopian labor migration, economic precarity, ethical becomings, and social and familial relations.

Beauvoir notes that silence is an activity wherein there is a judgement from both side; it is a "look," a call, or appeal to not just perform an action as a subject, but to also invite the Other's judgment of me (as an object); and to view the Other not just as a piece of my world, but as a being capable of responding to my appeal (as a subject) (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). The subject of the silent ambiguity holds a central role in my research. It is both relevant for discussing the

main symptoms associated with returned Ethiopian domestic workers (and thus a diagnostic criterion often highlighted as indicative of their mental illness), as well as an interesting inlet into examining the ways in which silence, in the case of the women in this study, is a possible embodiment of inequality and processes of ethical becoming. This silenced-formation is conceptually rich and provides an excellent entry point into discussions concerning the dynamics of mental and emotional unwellness experienced by Ethiopian migrant domestic workers *and* the complexities of care, ethical modalities, and self-understanding.

Chapter Two

Circumstance

Abinet arrived in the late morning of a cold and grey July day. It was Ethiopia's rainy season and the heavy clouds carrying the torrential afternoon rains loomed. I stood outside, hunched and chilled from the unrelenting dampness. The compound guard opened the large metal gates, permitting Abinet's baby blue Corolla to park inside. It was a welcomed contrast to the melancholia of the day. Abinet emerged from his car and I shuffled toward him. He was fashionably dressed in a pristine white t-shirt, dark green bomber jacket, slim cut khakis, and new sneakers.

"Hello," I offered.

"Hello."

He was pleasant looking, unassuming in comportment and seemingly as nervous as myself.

"This is very far out," he commented. He remained gentle in speech and stride as he approached me, yet I felt I had somehow already caused offense.

"Yes, sorry," I apologetically agreed. I had no real understanding about the proximity of my current lodgings to his home, or the city center, but I would soon discover how right he was. I was alone in a big, empty, deteriorating house on the outskirts of the city. I felt forebodingly marooned, and I remained unaware that a several miles up the road ran the chaotic and

enchanting rhythms of Addis Ababa. I was eager to start fieldwork, to have a conversation, and to end the confinement that my naive trepidation imposed on my movements.

During my second week in Ethiopia, I tried to reach Abinet through various phone numbers and email addresses provided to me by a colleague. After several days I made contact and immediately asked for his assistance with driving me to various international organizations, non-governmental and governmental offices scattered throughout the city. He agreed. The following day he arrived at my house. Now, he stood before me as my only connection to the energetic Addis Ababa; his retreat from our potential collaboration hung in balance.

"Much further than Dr. Christina," he continued.

"I know. I'm sorry," I felt self-conscious.

Dr. Christina was an American researcher who provided me with his contact information. He drove her to and from her centrally located hotel to Black Lion Hospital, where she collaborated with other mental health researchers. She assured me that Abinet was a good guy, and that I could "trust him with my life." She was right. Over the next three years Abinet became more than a driver. He became my research assistant, my therapist, my closest friend and confidant within 7,000 miles, and at times, a guardian.

This ethnography is, at certain moments, a synthesis of ideas and formulations—of Abinet and my analytical reflections, daily conversations, and dialogues about the emergence and perpetuation of domestic labor movement from Ethiopia to the Gulf States; and how this phenomenon relates to mental and emotional unwellness, care, familial life, ethical arrangements and becomings, and everyday life in Ethiopia. I give space to Abinet's opinion and assessment on certain issues, interviews, and individuals. His interludes offer raw, unfiltered, and personal perspectives on a situation, a person, and the problem in question. He gives an analysis beyond

that of commonplace conversation. His ability to reflect on situations and put phenomena in both a particular as well as broader context is exceptional. He cared deeply about this work, about the women we spent time with, and whether we might somehow affect the situation of labor migration from Ethiopia to the Arab States.

Fieldsite and Study Population

The ethnographic research on which this dissertation is based occurred over the course of fourteen months in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.[25] I conducted two, one-month pilot studies in August of 2015 and 2016 respectively. During those field visits I focused on understanding the nature of the "problem" of mental illness amongst women who had returned from domestic work abroad—primarily returning from the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, as well as Lebanon and Jordan. I also located and established relationships with two Addis Ababa-based NGOs—Tesfa and Mekelakel[26]—focused exclusively on rehabilitating returned Ethiopian domestic workers who exhibited identifiable symptoms of mental illness or, though most often in union, were unable to locate or contact family members upon their return to Ethiopia.

From August 2017 to May 2018, I spent ten months conducting an expanded study, based on my pilot research. I focused on experiences of mental and emotional unwellness amongst returned Ethiopian domestic workers who lived in either Tesfa or Mekelakel. This primarily involved participant observation and person-centered interviewing. I spent most of my days hanging out with women and nurses in each shelter. I would also occasionally spend time speaking with administrators in their respective offices but found that my time was best spent getting to know and simply sitting with women at Tesfa and Mekelakel. On a few occasions, I

[25] Hence forth I will use the terms Addis Ababa and Addis interchangeably.
[26] Pseudonyms.

accompanied a nurse from Tesfa to Amanuel Mental Health Specialized Hospital and one time to an in-patient psychiatric ward located inside a recently open hospital on the outskirts of Addis. I also attended workshops offered to shelter residents from larger donor organizations as well as vocational courses attended by "rehabilitated" women from Mekelakel. In addition to the NGOs, a generous amount of my time was spent at government offices, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Addis Ababa City Administration Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Bole International Airport.

Further ethnographic research took place from October to December 2019. During this period, I focused on the processes of government-authorized domestic worker migration between Ethiopia and approved Arab States (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates).[27] I spent a significant amount of time at MOLSA trying to understand the process of acquiring the rights to legally migrate to the ASPG for domestic work employment. After acquiring a list of private employment agencies (PEA) registered with the Ethiopian government that facilitated the movement of Ethiopian men and women for work abroad, I visited two such facilities to inquire further into their individual processes of sending women abroad and the implementation and maintenance of their worker's rights. This data offered a more thorough understanding about the ways in which Ethiopians can (or cannot) participate in legal labor migration, specifically to the Arab States. I also visited the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) to speak with key personnel who supposedly had insight into the recent developments regarding domestic workers rights. The two lawyers whom I spoke from the UNODC where helpful, whereas the ILO office was similar

[27] In November 2019 the bilateral agreement between Ethiopia and Kuwait regarding domestic workers rights was "in process" according to the director of a Private Employment Agency I visited.

to other international organization, like the IOM, in that they were not forthcoming with information or keen to meet with me and discuss relevant actions in the home country.

During these two months, I also contacted, located, and visited a key interlocutor—Taytu. She was home with her mother and six siblings in a medium size city, a few hours south from Addis Ababa. Taytu came from a background often associated with Ethiopian domestic workers, and a visit to her home helped me contextualize her history and the experiences she shared with me the year prior. When I saw a glimpse into her life, her desires, decision to go abroad, and the subsequent disappointment that followed the foreclosed possibility to achieve an imagined otherwise, made sense.

Cityscape

Addis Ababa was officially established as a city by Emperor Menelik II and Empress Taytu between 1886 and 1891 (Pankhurst 1961; Brioni and Gulema 2018).[28] Menelik, of Amhara birth, claimed this place, on Oromo land, as the new capital of Ethiopia. Finnfinn ('natural spring' in Oromyifa) or Finwoha ('Hot water' in Amharic) was now, he declared, Addis Ababa (New Flower), the city where the Ethiopian Empire would reestablish its significance. Menelik divided the land amongst his chiefs, generals, and retinue, and the construction of permanent dwellings followed. Soon the population of Addis Ababa reached 50,000, an impressive size for both the Empire and greater East Africa. Obstacles concerning the acquisition of food and timber quickly presented a challenge to development, but Menelik innovatively sought a solution—importing eucalyptus trees from Australia in 1904 and utilizing Italian

[28] Historians note that Menelik chose this site after discovering the ruins of an ancient city reported to be the former city constructed by Emperor Dawit (1382-1410). It was, Menelik reasoned, a divinely guided unearthing and it was his duty to resurrect the city once again (Pankhurst 1961).

prisoners to construct roadways and bridges in 1906 and 1907. Within the decade the strategic afforestation satisfied the populace, while the proximate farmers likewise sustain the growing city with ample sustenance.

Addis Ababa still relies on the bridges constructed by Menelik's empire, and the necessitated endurance of the eucalyptus trees is evidenced by their predominance in home construction and as a main fire source—these fragrant forests thrive across Mount Entoto and within the fractures of the city's craggy landscape.

Addis Ababa continues to exemplify Menelik's ambition of rebuilding Ethiopia as a great nation through its persistent industrial, economic, and population expansion. It is presently one of the largest metropolitan regions in East Africa and holds an exceptional position in global politics and international relations. Addis is home to several principal medical, governmental, non-governmental, and international institutions, many of which are integral to supporting women returning from domestic work abroad. Such networks include the United Nations-Ethiopia, the Delegation of the European Union to Ethiopia, the World Health Organization-Ethiopia, International Organization for Migration-Ethiopia, International Labour Organization-Ethiopia, the Federal Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Amanuel Mental Specialized Hospital—the only public mental health hospital in Ethiopia.

Addis Ababa also supports 115 diplomatic missions as well as the African Union. The city is constantly undertaking preparations for visits from high-ranking international officials and governmental leaders. Abinet often remarked on the amount of wasted money embassies spent to display their country's flag down the center of Bole Road—the main throughfare of Addis Ababa—which marked the arrival of a Prime Ministry, President, or Royalty. He was right. It was and is a waste of money when, as Abinet emphasizes, embassies could spend that money on

health care, education, social services, food, clean water, and anything useful to the millions of people in Addis Ababa currently living in precarious circumstances.

There are tens of thousands of diplomates, international humanitarian workers, global economist, entrepreneurs, Chinese-based workers, refugees, and Internally Displaced People (IDP)[29] living and working in Addis, adding to the millions of local Ethiopians. Modest population estimates suggest there are between four and five million inhabitants, yet it is generally understood that this is a gross underestimate, and that the population of Addis is likely closer to seven million.[30]

As a chartered city, Addis Ababa is considered its own administrative region, one of two cities in Ethiopia to hold this designation along with ten regionals states.[31] Together they make up a total twelve administrative zones in the country. Regional states in Ethiopia are theoretically based on ethno-linguistic categories, however, the official city limits of Addis Ababa have increasing moved beyond official Amhara land and has (arguably illegally) encroached on the surrounding Oromo land via violent and destructive land grabbing initiatives.[32] The urbanization of Ethiopia and the ever-expanding capital city of Addis Ababa is a complex issue.

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[29] As of December 2019, Ethiopia had a total of 1.4 million IDP (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center 2020).

[30] In personal conversations with diplomates from various embassies in Addis Ababa, as well as local businesspersons, there is a consensus that "official" population estimates are modest. These individuals provided estimates for the population of Addis Ababa between seven and ten million, and around 115 to 120 million for total country population. The country of Ethiopia has only had three census counts in its history—1984, 1994, and 2007—and the fourth census was announced by Prime Minister Abiy to take place in 2017-2018, but Ethiopia's parliament has postponed the census, so far, three times, and it has yet to take place as of October 2020 (*The Economist* 2019). It is also suggested that the low estimates are perpetuated with a purpose of influence "per capita" rates of health, wealth, and other general well-being indexes. Similarly, there is general feeling amongst individuals with whom I spoke that the postponement of the census count is also politically motivated.

[31] Addis Ababa (city), Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa (city), Gambela, Harari, Oromia, Sidama, Somali, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's, Tigray.

[32] In recent years the city of Addis Ababa and the surrounding areas have witnessed increased conflict between people from the Oromia region and security/military personnel. As a consequence, hundreds of lives have been lost and even more have been unjustly imprisoned under false accusations of domestic

The effects of Addis' urbanization were felt by both NGOs where I worked. Rent prices for each shelter increased and during my last week of fieldwork, Tesfa was forced to move from its central and easily locatable site to a more distant, smaller house, situated on a back street of the Piassa neighborhood.

While Addis Ababa was initially comprised of mostly Amhara people, contemporary Addis Ababa is populated with individuals from numerous ethno-linguistic groups and clans from within Ethiopian, as well as dozens of nationalities from European, North, Central, and South American, Middle Eastern, Asian, and African countries. Amharic is the working language of the federal government of Ethiopia and the language I encountered most often during my time in Addis Ababa, but I also often heard Oromo and Tigrinya. While English was the most widely spoken foreign language.

While the official demographics of Addis Ababa are unavailable, unofficial estimates suggest 34% of Ethiopians speak Oromia as there first language, while 29% speak Amharic, 6 % speak Tigrinya and roughly 6% speak Somali. Ethiopia is also remarkable for the historically positive and peaceful relationship between Orthodox Christians and Muslims.[33] This multi-ethnic constitution of Addis Ababa is a point of pride, as Ethiopians have generally, as Donald Levine highlights, "cherish[ed] the historic reality of Ethiopia as a genuinely multiethnic society (2000, *xx*). Unfortunately, this has changed dramatically in the most recent decade.

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terrorism or charges related to protests and dissent (See a 2014 report, "'Because I am Oromo' Sweeping repression in the Oromia region of Ethiopia from Amnesty International for a more detailed description of this relationship).

[33] Again, this relationship has fractured in the last few years. Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, there has been an increase of attacks on churches in parts of the country where Orthodox Christians are the minority—in the Oromo and Somoli regions, where Islam is the majority religion (Abatt 2020). Likewise, mosque in the Amhara region have also been under siege (Jelan 2019).

The diversity of Addis Ababa also manifests through personal residences. Three-floor villas belonging to current and former high-ranking government officials, ambassadors, Ethiopian, Arab, and Chinese businesspersons line the throughfares of the Bole and Olympia neighborhoods. Often there is a khaki-clad armed guard sitting outside the twelve-foot concrete walls enclosing the estates of government officials, while the more casual guards sit and stand outside the gates of their employers. The corrugated metal and concrete dwellings of regular city folk border these massive structures, sometimes squeezed in between newly build hotels.

The commonplace post and tarp structures, protecting teenage boys from the equatorial sun, dot the sidewalks of the vast Addis neighborhoods. Young men sit in groups of two or three, selling their goods to each passerby, "Shoeshine? Telephone card?" they inquire. Sometimes I nod, asking for a telephone card, and even more rarely, and always with Abinet, we accept the offer of a shoeshine. I only agreed to this service in his neighborhood, where we give our 10 *birr* to his acquaintances. It was an entertaining experience for all of us. I tried to learn the correct rhythm of switching one's foot on and off the shoeshine box each time the young man knocked his bristle brush against the side. He would smile at my efforts, straighten my big, *forenji* foot, and chat with Abinet. Abinet would direct me on how to position my foot, and after my shoes were clean, he would remark on how much more put together I looked. He was right.

Addis in the early morning, is at her finest. During the cold nights, the hazy-yellow pollution settles into the damp ground. The dawning hours feel cool and clear. The city is mostly tranquil. If I listen carefully from my porch, I can hear the competing chants of Medhane Alem Orthodox Church and Anwar Mosque segment the air. I cherish these cold moments in the summer season, knowing full well that by mid-afternoon I will be desperate to shelter myself from the burning sun. On rare occasions, when I had the motivation to venture out for a run or a

hike, I periodically encountered both professional and hopeful distant runners finishing up their training sessions along Mount Entoto or Gulele Botanical Gardens. It was such an awe-inspiring moment that reminded me of the uniqueness of Addis; it contained some of the greatest thinkers, humanitarians, athletes, diplomates, and entrepreneurs in the world.

Non-Governmental Organization Research Sites

Tesfa

Tesfa was the first NGO I contacted during my second field visit to Addis Ababa in 2016. A unit director from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs gave me the organization's phone number. Abinet promptly called the organization and a woman answered. He explained to her that, I, whom he called his "cousin," was working on her PhD research and, if permitted, would like to meet. The woman agreed. The following week we drove to Tesfa's administrative office, located along the steep road leading to Mount Entoto.

The air temperature dropped precipitously as our little car chugged farther and farther away from the warm city basin. I shivered. I was both cold and nervous. I put my jacket on, zipped up, and continued to look out the window onto a crowded and unfamiliar neighborhood. The office is in one of the oldest neighborhoods, a place named after the carroty-colored, clay earth on which it rests. The dwellings are simple and there is a noticeable absence of villas, hotels, and new construction. The structures are primarily amalgamations of bent eucalypts branches, woven grass and mud, or cinderblocks and metal. There are several small shops selling *gabis, netelas,* and *kemis*—the traditional hand-made shawls, scarves, and dresses worn by Ethiopian women.

After nearly fifteen minutes of a slow ascent, we turned left onto a bumpy path. Abinet jerks the steering wheel quickly, either left or right, to avoid running over large rocks that dot the throughfare. We parked and stepped into the drizzle; we walk cautiously with our shoes slapping against the slippery, gooey earth. I hoped not to slip and fall. We approached a weather worn and gloomy structure. It looked exactly like I felt. The old wooden frame appeared waterlogged—how could it not be with the constant winter rains—and the plastic green translucent siding was cracked and broken. Wires strode along the walls and ceilings, heavy with several coats of white paint. Along the corridor hung large collections of framed photographs; young women in headscarves reunited with family members, the ritual cutting of the *himaesha*, an enormous, circular loaf of bread served in ceremonial settings (this time it appeared to be, donors from one of the Nordic embassies). There were pictures of the director holding the hands of a returnee sitting in a wheelchair, and another one of her handing over a white, long-hair goat to a girl surrounded by her family.

Abinet and I entered the Director's office, it was even colder than outside. We greeted the Director, the woman Abinet spoke with on the phone, Weyizero[34]Almez. Abinet and I bowed our heads slightly, shook hands, and introduced ourselves in a deferential manner—a common courtesy. Almez, like myself, was bundled in her winter coat and scarf, which amplified her towering figure. The roots of her hair were tinted red, while the rest of it was died a light brown color. She pulled a large Michael Kors tote bag off her shoulder and placed it on her desk. She invited us to have a seat and share a coffee. We accepted. A petite woman entered the office. She appeared to be in her late 20s, wore tight blue jeans and a pink, long-sleeve shirt.

"*Bunna*?" She asked.

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[34] Weyizero is Amharic for Missus ("Mrs.").

"*Ow*. Yes." We all nodded

It was quickly apparent that this was not Almez's first encountered with an outside researcher. Abinet explained to her, in Amharic, who I was, where I came from, and what type of work I hoped to do. She listened carefully. I presented her a letter from my university confirming Abinet's explanation. Almez seemed pleased. She turned to me, smiled and said she would be happy to have me, but she would also like it if I could help her. She explained that she needed help writing grants application for additional funding for the center. I agreed to help in any way I could. We sipped coffee and talked over the next hour. She explained that the shelter was in another part of the city, about one kilometer away, and we could go for a visit.

When we finished our three cups of coffee we headed out for the shelter. Almez did not have her own car, so she road with me and Abinet. This was a nice moment for the two of them to sit together and chat. I sat in the backseat, listening, observing, and, of course, note taking. Within ten minutes we arrived at the shelter space, a two-story house belonging to an Ethiopian man who resided in Canada. There was a huge Canadian maple leaf painted on the concrete wall next to the front entrance.

Almez knocked loudly on the metal gates. A key rattled from the other side and the labored dragging of the heavy latch followed. The gate cracked opened. A tiny old man peeked his head around the door. His eyes lightened, he threw his hand up, nodded his head, "Salem no! Salem no!" He seemed very pleased to see us. Abinet and I were introduced to him, Zelalem, the guard. He was, to use Abinet's expression, a "typical grandfather." His wrinkled face, slightly hunched shoulders, shuffled steps, yet proud and confident demeanor were paternal and familiar. I liked him immediately.

Weyizero Almez continued her greetings across the courtyard. She called for Sintiyu.

"*Wahyay*?! (Yes?!)" a voice called back.

"*Neh*! (Come!) Almez responded.

Almez introduced us to Sintiyu. She was a permanent resident of the shelter. Sintiyu originally arrived to Tesfa as a returned domestic worker and had some "mental issues," Almez explained. Sintiyu shook my hand and kissed both cheeks faintly.

The sliding glass door on the first floor of the house was open. Inside, there were a few women sitting in white plastic chairs, watching a small TV placed in the corner. Almez approached the group and spoke briefly. Abinet and I watched. She turned around and told us that one of woman had just arrived from Dubai. We nodded in recognition. Almez instructed us to follow her; we continued into the house and up the stairs to the second floor. We saw the nurse's office, another bedroom space, and an administration office. There was a middle-aged man behind the desk, speaking on the phone. His name is Ato[35] Taddesse and he was the "case worker of sorts," he explained in English. He was warm and welcoming. He looked to be in his middle forties, wore a baseball cap, leather jacket and jeans. He said he had worked at Tesfa since 2002, "a very long time". I later discovered that he began his work with Tesfa as a driver for the organization, then guard, and now, a case manager. His primary duty was to locate and facilitate reunifications between women in the shelter and their families. He also occasionally accompanied women on the journeys home to their families. He showed me a few pictures confirming this responsibility. Once there, he said, he would purchase a goat or a cow for the woman and her family. Behind me, leaning against the wall of his office, was a six-foot-high poster board covered in photographs of these reunifications.

[35] Ato is the Amharic word for Mister ("Mr.").

Almez continued ushering us through the shelter, presenting each room with pride. There was an unoccupied second bedroom with only two beds. She told me this is more of an overflow room or, if there was a woman who needed specialized care, she would sleep here. We made our way back downstairs, into the courtyard, behind the shelter and toward the kitchens. There was a concrete structure made up of three separate rooms. One room housed the injera maker, another Sintiyu's room, and the last was the bathing facility—a spout and sink. The tour of the shelter finished, and it felt like exactly that—a tour Weyizero Almez had given a hundred times before. It was eleven months before I saw Weyizero Almez, Ato Tadesse, and the guard again. When I returned, my (surprised) receiving gave the impression that they did not think I would keep my promise of returning the following year.

Mekelakel

The second NGO I visited during my field trip in 2016 was located much farther outside the city; depending on traffic was anywhere from a thirty to sixty-minute drive to the organization. The neighborhood was very different from Tesfa's—almost no foot traffic, no shops, or churches. I never saw a traditional dwelling, as the neighborhood was predominantly large empty homes built by the regularly returning diaspora. I knew there must be more modest abodes nearby because there was always an older man riding around on his mule-pulled cart. He tended to his makeshift vegetable garden planted in a huge pile of dirt excavated from one of lots belonging to a diaspora home.

The first person I met from Mekelakel was Berihun. We communicated on the phone after I saw Mekelakel's contact information in a report I read at the IOM library in downtown Addis. Berihun's office was located on the third floor of the shelter. Unlike Tesfa, the

administrative offices and the shelter resided in the same location—a three story house with a large courtyard, an enormous generator, and equally big water tank. It was a well-organized and well-funded establishment.

Berihun meet us at the front gate and greeted us with a smile. He was soft spoken and gentle in his movements. He invited us up to his office and along the way he showed us the living space for the shelter residence. The first floor contained the nurses' station, a dining room with an enormous wood table, a television, and a few cozy leather chairs. On the second floor there was an elongated bedroom with at least twenty sets of bunkbeds, a large bathroom with multiple showers and sinks. The Director's office was tucked in a corner on the second floor. The third floor consisted of two offices, one for a visiting psychologist from India and the second for Berihun and two of his colleagues.

I presented Berihun with a letter from my department, and Abinet gave his pitch about my work. Berihun listened carefully and asked detailed questions. He expressed that Mekelakel had had researchers in the past and he hoped that I might provide the outcomes of my work to him, and if I had any advice, that I might provide it to him. I was surprised at his request. I tried to explain to him that it was not my intent to come into Mekelakel and evaluate the organization and provide feedback. But I told him that I would, of course, provide my dissertation to him and if I thought I had any insight into beneficial care practices that I would be happy to share. He seemed satisfied. I presented Berihun will a small token of my appreciation. I told him I would be in touch. Unlike Almez, Berihun had an email address, and I was able to keep him informed about my research and the nuances of my fieldwork.

Research Activities Beyond the NGO

Outside of Tesfa and Mekelakel, I made multiple visits to the Amanuel Specialized Mental Hospital, Bole International Airport, and several international aid organizations, governmental offices, and local bureaucrats all involved with the "safeguarding" of Ethiopian domestic workers. I spent many hours at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) trying to gather data related to the ban placed on emigration for domestic and unskilled labor. I tried to locate official documentation and paperwork related to upholding and implementing Proclamations No. 909 and No. 923, ILO Convention No. 189, and the agreements between Ethiopia and various Arab States of the Persian Gulf regarding the employment of Ethiopian workers. These pieces of material culture, while outside the formal parameters of my study, hold key information important for understanding the discourses operating in the public sector of Ethiopia, regarding the status and wellbeing of migrant domestic workers. In attending to these documents and interviewing certain members of both governmental and international humanitarian organization, I gained a sensibility regarding the national and transnational understanding of and commitment to this group of Ethiopian women.

Entry to government institutions was granted upon providing my passport (which was then held at the entrances of both the MOFA and the United Nations compound) and a letter of recognition from my university. However, after a few visits, additional documentation was required, including, letters of support from the NGOs with whom I worked, and the American Embassy in Addis Ababa. Eventually, our main contact person at MOFA was no longer available to meet.

Participants, Interlocutors, and Respondents

Recruitment for this study principally took place from July 2017 to April 2018. Approximately 100 individuals contributed, from across all sites, including the NGOs, government ministries, international or intergovernmental organizations, and hospitals in which I conducted research.

Of the 100 participants three were psychiatric care nurses, two from Mekelakel and one from Tesfa. I spent substantial time with the psychiatric nurse from Tesfa in the shelter, and spent several hours with her, during her shift, at Amanuel Mental Specialized Hospital (the government-owned psychiatric facility in Addis Ababa). I spoke with a total of five administrators from both NGOs including both directors, case managers, and office managers.

I also spoke with five individuals from the MOFA and MOLSA. Our conversations focused on understanding the ongoing domestic labor rights negotiations between Ethiopia and the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. Likewise, I spoke with three members of the IOM, and two lawyers from the UNODC to better understand the current and future legislation designed to protect the rights of Ethiopian domestic workers abroad.

Eighty-six women comprise the main data of this project. All were recruited from either Tesfa or Mekelakel. Conversations focused primarily on their migration and domestic work experiences, reasons they returned home, personal evaluations about their current state of being, and aspects of life back in their communities. Discussions could be brief, a one-time interaction and informal in nature, or our conversations could be varied, combining informal exchanges with more semi-structured interviews that took place over several visits.

One of the most difficult aspects of this project was maintaining long-term relationships with women in the shelters given the high turnover. Sometimes I arrived at Tesfa or Mekelakel

prepared to continue a conversation with a particular woman and upon my return two days later, she was gone. The majority of the time, especially with Tesfa, there was no warning of an impending departure. Occasionally, family members would arrive, having traveled a very long distance with their last few *birr,* and insist on taking their daughter/mother/sister home. This tended to happen with women who did not show observable signs of mental or emotional unwellness, or alternatively, and very rarely, if the family thought her treatment could be continued at home and supplement or complemented by holy water.[36]

I had ongoing conversations with approximately twenty to twenty-five women who were long-term residents of the shelters. Most of my long-term interlocutors were women from Mekelakel, due to the shelters commitment to providing a longer course of treatment and rehabilitation. I draw on these data to make rough generalizations about some of the conditions of Ethiopian domestic workers in the ASPG. While I value the singular, I also acknowledge that there are patterns within this group of women which serve as openings into shared experiences; in Chapter Three I draw on the mathematical notion of fractal to helpful highlight the emergent symmetry amongst the women with whom I spoke.

The individual cases I highlight within this dissertation offer insights into the excessive singularity of a person and of a problem; the cases present forms of self-making that is diverse, responsive, ambiguous, and perceptive. I draw on certain individuals and their situated affectivity because I find their stories, their conditions of relations, the porousness, historical particularities, interplay of their self-making (i.e., their messiness) as necessary for our

[36] The use of holy water to treat mental or emotional unwellness is not exclusively practice in the case of such conditions among rural persons. During a site visit to the psychiatric care facility outside Addis, psychiatrics explained that they worked with local priests to ensure the complementary use of holy water with psychiatric medications. Likewise, individuals I knew would use holy water to treat and prevent a range of ailments. Holy water, then, is a rather normal course of treatment across both urban and rural communities for mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical conditions.

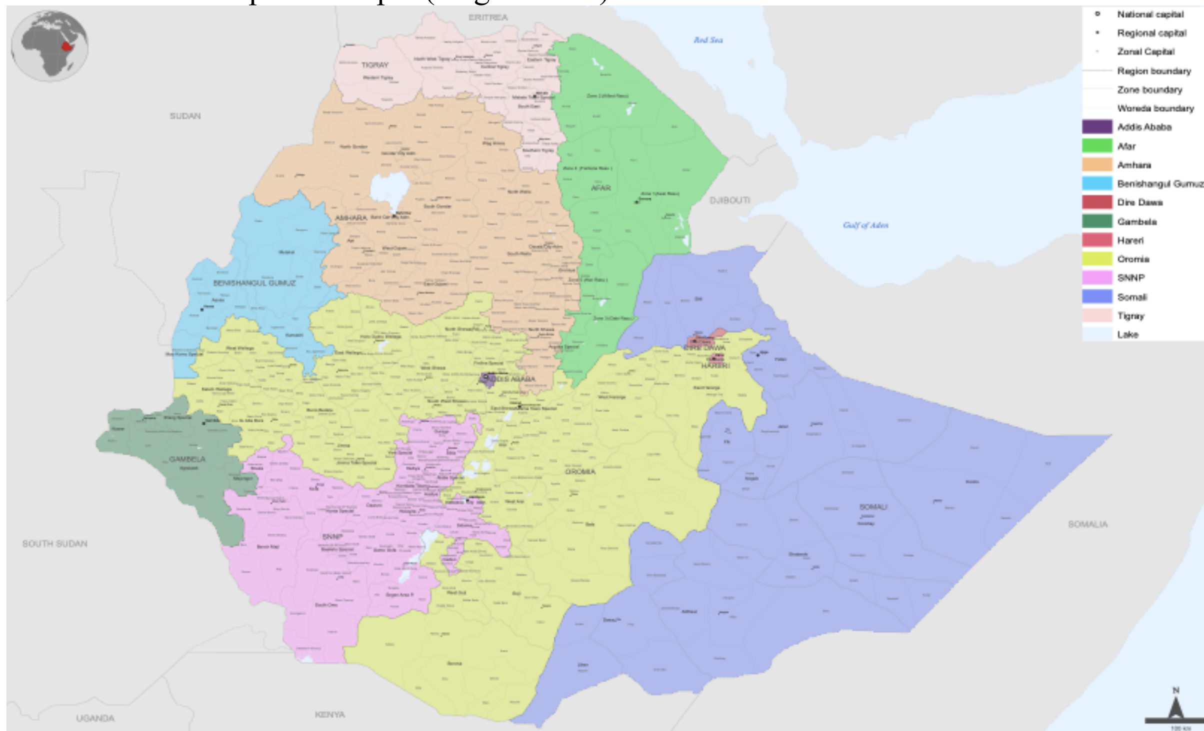
understandings about mental and emotional unwellness, migrant domestic labor, care ethics, personhood, psychiatry, and Ethiopian culture.

Of the eighty-six women returned from domestic work abroad, seven undertook person-centered interviews. These respondents resided in the shelters long-term; they were there when I arrived, and a few remained after I left. I spent a considerable amount of time with each one. Our initial relationships were built around several weeks of hanging out, conversing, eating, and questioning each other. After a month or two of getting to know someone, I would ask if they had any interest in sitting together for more deep conversations. I said I was interested in who they were, their childhood, school years, family life, personalities, work abroad, and any reflections they had about their mental and emotional unwellness and the care they received from the shelter and from Amanuel Hospital. I told each of women that I wanted to understand, in their own words and through their own experiences, why and how they became involved with migrant domestic work and how they understood their "sickness" ("hemem" or "tanimi"/ ታመ), "mental illness" (ayimiroyen amoghyi metahu/ አእምሮ ህመምተኛ), or "stress" (chiniket/ ጭንቀት).[37]

Most of the women I spoke with came from the North and South Wollo Zones (Gile Tumga, Dawa Chifa, Habru, Kobom Wore Babu) of the Amhara Region, as well as the Eastern Hararghe, Arsi, Wollega, and Jimma Zones of the Oromia Region. Very few women came from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Harari Region, and Tigray Region. Only one woman came from the Somali Region, while none came from the Gambella, Afar, Sidama, or Benishangul-Gumuz Regions.

[37] Abinet would interpret these Amharic words and phrases into the English word "sick". Eventually he would interpret "chiniket" into "stress" once he understood that I was interested in particularities. From my conversations with another interpreter, "hemem" is used in the case of grave illness, e.g. "This illness is going to kill me!"

Administrative Map of Ethiopia (August 2017).[38]



Amharic and Oromo were the primarily languages spoken, while two women spoke Hadiyya, two spoke Harari, and at least two spoke Tigrinya/Tigrigna, and one spoke an unidentifiable language.[39]

I did not discern a noticeable difference between practicing Christians and Muslims, which would correspond with the religious makeup of the largest two represented regions—Amhara and Oromia. There is a layperson stereotype that most women going to the Arab States of the Persian Gulf for domestic work are Muslim or convert to Islam prior to their departure. However, my data does not support this (although that data point was not the focus of my study).

[38] Courtesy of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
[39] No one in Tesfa (residents or staff) could identify her language. They assumed she came from the "South".

Not one woman reported that she converted to Islam, but one woman said she converted to Protestantism (she was raised Muslim) because her employer was Protestant.

Most women across both shelters returned from either Lebanon or Saudi Arabia, while a considerable amount returned from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The remaining women, a small minority, returned from either Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, or Oman. Unfortunately, I cannot confirm whether my study is representative of the larger demographics related to destination countries for all Ethiopian migrant domestic workers.[40] There may be equally as many Ethiopian domestic workers in the UAE as Saudi Arabia, however Saudi Arabia implements "repatriation" missions every few years, which results in huge swaths of returnees at one time. While, in the case of this dissertation, those returning from the UAE were sent individually, not as part of a government extradition program.

Readers should also bear in mind that there is a large subset of the returnee population with whom I am not working. The data in this dissertation is specific to women who returned to Ethiopia under duress and were placed under the care of either Tesfa or Mekelakel. Therefore, I am not speaking with women who returned and immediately reunited with their families, or women who may have experienced mental and emotional unwellness and went unnoticed by airport staff and nurses (those responsible for contacting Tesfa and Mekelakel), nor am I interviewing women who went directly to Amanuel Mental Specialized Hospital and later discharged home.

[40] I received a handout from an Ethiopian government agency that stated that Saudi Arabia was the number one destination country for "regular labor migrants from Ethiopia 2008/2009-2013/14", with an estimated 355,359 females departing during that time. However, it placed Kuwait as the second highest with 96,156 and UAE third with 1,086. Considering my data, I believe this is a gross underestimate for the UAE.

The ages of shelter residence ranged from sixteen to middle to late thirties. Most women I met were in the twenties and single. Three of the women I spoke with had children with them in the shelter, and at least two others had children waiting for them in their home villages.

Most women travel by way of a *delala*—a local, unlicensed broker or agent. Only a few reported facilitating their journey and traveling on their own. I did not speak to anyone who use a professional employment agency (PEA), given the ban on traveling to the ASPG for the purposes of domestic work and unskilled labor employment. Women typically paid a *delala* between 4,000 and 20,000birr (roughly100 and 520 USD) to facilitate the domestic work employment process. This was an enormous sum of money for all the women.

I have not included in my count my more informal interactions with people in Addis who engaged me on the details of my project. This included the guards from both NGOs, diplomates from the U.S., Australian, Norwegian, and Danish embassies, taxi drivers, Abinet's family and friends, and visiting businessperson from global consulting firms, just to name a few. Each person I explained my project to had something to say about the matter, whether this related to them knowing someone currently or formerly engaged in domestic work abroad, or some other insider information concerning the geopolitical relations between Ethiopia, and say for example, Saudi Arabia; or in one instance, a couple, visiting from Abu Dhabi, who themselves employed a Ethiopian domestic worker with "no problem" from a legal employment agency (despite the current ban on domestic labor migration to the UAE).

Social Organization & Nature of Relationships

There are questions concerning my positionality in undertaking this work, as well as Abinet's. Abinet is a young, Ethiopian, college-educated, man from Addis Ababa with Tigray

ancestry. I am a young, college-educated, American woman, from the rural Midwest, with mixed-European ancestry. We are a unique pairing with our disparate backgrounds. Nevertheless, during fieldwork we spent nearly every day together, learning and accepting each other's idiosyncrasies, virtues, and vices. We would question each other about what it meant to be Midwestern, Tigrinya, unmarried, and childless. As we grew closer, we became more honest and more uninhibited with each other. We did not refrain from bickering or disagreement; we served each other food, tea, and coffee; fixed each other's hair or readjusted a crooked shirt collar. We learned to attend to each other with fairness, kindness, and care, even while irritated. Our dynamic entertained those around us, as they sensed our appreciation for each other. The shelter staff and residents, our friends and neighbors, and of course, Abinet's family were charmed by our pairing. Our social networks often joked as to whether we were more like a brother and sister duo or husband and wife. I later discovered that several of Abinet's friends—those who lived abroad—thought that we were married, since nearly every time they called Abinet, he would say, "I am with Eva right now."

We also grew adept at reading each other's emotional states. While Abinet kept his emotions more clandestine than I, he was not, what I would describe, stoic or opaque. He and I both knew when the other was sad, annoyed, angry, frustrated, elated, tired, or forlorn. Sometimes fieldwork was canceled for the day or delayed due to my or his emotional state; our work exhausted us both. Abinet would come over to my house and we would talk and drink tea. After an hour or so he would tell me to rest and that he would check on me later. Often, he would not contact me until the next morning. This performance indicated to me that he too needed a respite. No matter how tired Abinet may have felt, however, he always did his best to bring my spirits up in a moment of weakness.

He did not let me dwell on a situation where I felt unsuccessful, misunderstood, frustrated, or upset. Maybe I was too impatient during an interview or failed to meet an obligation to a friend or family member.

"Leave it", he would say emphatically, flicking his hand outward.

"This is life Eva, don't worry. Ok?" became his trope.

"*Eshi*, (Okay), but I will worry," became mine.

Our familiarity benefited us beyond an entertainment value for our compatriots. It also figured into a mutual presentation of relations that allowed us to undertake rich fieldwork. On occasion Abinet told certain administrative officials that I was his cousin; other times I introduced him as my research assistant. Deciding when and where to put these descriptions into operation was a privilege, and it granted us access to places and people that might have otherwise been foreclosed to one or both of us. Being alongside an Ethiopian man granted me access to certain sites that might have otherwise been closed. Likewise, Abinet's association with me allowed him access to certain places that might have otherwise *felt* or been closed to him. Indeed, Pierre (2013) remarks on this freedom of access in her discussion on "white merit and power" in postcolonial Ghana. It is through whiteness, she argues, that economic and social status is indexed and, never in question, structures opportunity and access for the white body (2013, 95). Such privilege filtered sporadically throughout Addis Ababa.

My economic and social status did not automatically grant me access to people and places in Addis Ababa. I often required Abinet's social status and cultural prowess to gain admittance. Additionally, while I had access to most places, I was also denied access to other spaces—sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly. For example, a nurse who did not want us at the shelter one evening furiously kicked me (and Abinet) out. He scolded us in Amharic and English

and I remember thinking this was my first scolding as a thirty-year-old! I was also never granted access to Bole International Airport despite my acquisition of all the required and requested documents. The airport nurses were told not speak to me by their supervisor, and particularly problematic was the IOM office. The Communications Officer (and the project manager) refused to meet with me or respond to my emails. Afterwards, Abinet and I decided on another tactic: he called and arranged a meeting with a local employee at the IOM office. The Communications Director caught wind of this scheduled meeting. He figured out that the meeting was with Abinet *and* the American researcher. He prohibited the employee from speaking with us. She called on our way to the meeting, and informed me that she was "not allowed" to speak to me. Her director told her that the data gathered by the IOM was "private" and could not be shared.

I will never know if Abinet would have had access to the IOM employee and IOM-based information had I not been present, or if he would have felt comfortable connecting with certain places without me. And, while I cannot say for certain if I would have had access to certain spaces and places without him, I do know that without each other, our ethnographic endeavors would have been much more limited. It was through our mutually beneficial relationship that we were able to undertake exceptional fieldwork in Ethiopia, and for that I am grateful.

Throughout fieldwork I fretted about my position and status as an outsider, and as a white, North American. Abinet did his best to make me feel comfortable and as member of his family; he reassured me that I was part of his community and the larger Ethiopian matrix. Nevertheless, I frequently weighed the literature on the politics of race, the enduring legacy of the unethical relationship between early anthropologists and colonial Africa, about the insensitive research, beyond anthropology, that continues to exploit African communities for the

benefit of already privileged outsiders.[41] Attending to the meaning of whiteness, then, in a "postcolonial" Ethiopian context remains a necessary task in situating my work and my personhood.

Considering the discourses concerning the politics of race and gender in Africa, I examine how our (mine and Abinet's) positionalities articulated throughout fieldwork. My "whiteness" and Abinet's "maleness" impacted our fieldwork in various and critical ways, but I also consider how our positionalities offered a rare perspective and garnered a type of knowledge that might have otherwise been foreclosed had we ventured independently, and, at present *is* absent from the literature.

Abinet and I worked with intelligent and clever individuals who viewed us as researchers, insider-outsiders, assets, and acquaintances. They saw us in our multiplicity, which was itself a privilege. They could discern not only the ethics of our project, but also our personal ethics.[42] I

[41] I encountered much of this during my time in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa is home to dozens of principle NGOs, UN organizations, embassies, and the African Union. As a result, there are hundreds of interns and students primarily from Europe, and North America, who move through these channels as part of their undergraduate and master's level degrees. These student-workers are supposed to identify a "research topic" during their 3 to 6 months stay in Ethiopia. Often related to their internship, students will conduct an interview or two, or collect statistics, and transform it into a final paper for "credit" and cultivate little to no relationship with the communities tied to their research topics. There is much to be said on this issue, but it is outside the realm of this dissertation. Jemima Pierre (2013) addresses a similar issue in her experiences in Ghana, addressing the local distinctions made between two expats groups—"Peace Corps whites" and "development whites" (73).

[42] During my fieldwork two other individuals interviewed women at both shelters. In both incidents women at the shelter were not happy about their presence. In general, the women were particularly displeased with the male individual, a journalist from Europe, who wrote for a couple European outlets. His aggressive nature earned him the name "Dictator Thomas." The women whom he spoke with later told Abinet and me that they did not tell him the truth. Additionally, women in both shelters were not fond of the second person who tried to have interviews with them. Women told Abinet and I that they did not like the way this person "looked," and, one of the shelter workers walking by Abinet and I said, "I will never tell her my story!" This anecdote resonates with Hollan's (2008) discussion about empathy and affective attunements in fieldwork, people have good reason for *not* wanting to be understood. Abinet and I also watch these two individuals attempt to interview women at both shelters. It was clear that those being interviewed were uncomfortable. Their body language was closed, and they did not smile or make eye contact. Their answers to questions were also short. There was no real conversation.

was not the first person to step through the compound gates curious about the experiences of former domestic workers; and the aptitude of many of the women living in the shelters to perceive the moral undertones and objectives of those who entered their space was remarkable. It would be erroneous, in my opinion, to suggest that the women residing in the shelters did not understand the politics of research; or that they did not have some intervention in deciding if, when, and what they wanted to converse about.

I continuously discussed with shelter residents why I was there and what I was doing. I strove to maintain a relationship of transparency and fairness. It was their decision as to whether they wanted to have a conversation or a formal interview; if I could audio record, take notes, or simply listen; or if instead they wanted to spend our time together asking me questions. Consent, for my study, was not a one-time deal. I operated under the understanding that at any point an individual could and had every right to change her mind about speaking with me or even my presence at the facility.

I did, however, solely make the decision to not conduct interviews with women who appeared under serious stress or were actively experiencing psychosis, which might lead to a hospitalization or Haldol injection. This is not to say that I refrained from speaking with women who were experiencing a reality separate from my own,[43] but rather I refrained from engaging residents whom I thought might be further upset by any exchanges with me or Abinet.

An awareness of my privilege often precipitated feelings of self-consciousness regarding my relationship to the NGOs. I wondered whether I was doing enough and contributing fairly. I

[43] There were three women, between the two shelters, diagnosed with schizophrenia. One asked me to interview her, and she told me her story. The second resident often spoke to both me and Abinet, and the three had a good relationship. The third resident talked to me and Abinet freely and sweetly, however she was only in the shelter a few weeks before she was moved to the mental health hospital following an incident where she threw vomit onto another shelter resident who was agitating her.

wanted to ensure the staff and residents did not feel imposed on or misused. I asked Abinet and a few other Addis friends for their thoughts on the matter, and if they had any suggestions about my conduct. I was continuously told that I did not need to worry so much. This was perchance just a polite response.

I took it upon myself to periodically bring food, clothing, and toiletries for women and school supplies and toys for children in the shelters. Likewise, if a woman needed something specific, like a jacket or a certain brand of soap, I tried to acquire that item for her. I also provided financial compensation to women who participated in person-centered interviews. I offered each woman an amount of money that Abinet and I decided was fair and non-coercive. The compensation was helpful enough to cover a month of rent or food for her family but was never radically life changing. I also gave pocket money to family members who arrived to take a resident home. There were nearly a dozen occasions when I, while bidding goodbye, reached into my pocket, and slipped whatever crumpled *birr* I had into the hand of a parting friend.

Through these micro-interactions, I tried to communicate that while I was there with an objective, that above all I deeply cared about their individual well-being. I never wanted any of the women to think I was there simply to interview or perform some detached "study." I arrived each day as a curious friend and student, and I did my best to demonstrate that position. This work is ultimately a result of that attitude.

Interlude I

Abinet Gebrekiristos was born in Yekatit 12 Hospital, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. When I met him in the summer of 2015, he told me he was either thirty-four or thirty-five years old.

"Maybe, I don't know!" he replied.

We estimated that he was born between the Gregorian calendar years of 1980 and 1982 in late April. I later asked his mother the exact date, although she never celebrated his birthday, she told me she, "keeps it in [her] heart. April twenty-third."

I stipulate the Gregorian calendar because Ethiopia follows its own celestial rhythm—and at various times is seven or eight years behind the Gregorian calendar, by way of the Julian calendar.[44] For example, Ethiopia's New Year— Enkutatash—is celebrated on September 11th (Gregorian), except for during a leap year, when every fourth year a sixth epagomenal day is added, and accordingly the New Year is celebrated on September 12th (Gregorian), this happened, for instance, in September 2019 (Gregorian calendar year). While this difference may seem reconcilable by a quick arithmetic adjustment, it in fact caused several moments of confusion, misunderstanding, and frustration between me and Abinet.

Throughout fieldwork, I carefully recorded dates to gain an understanding about the evolution of my interlocutors and their social environment. I asked about childhood and teenage memories, both important and ordinary; their decisions to migrate and the temporal implements tethered to arranging travel and appropriate documentation; their first realizations of mental or emotional unwellness and the associated treatment. All these moments constituted a life not just

[44] This calendar, originally proposed by Julius Caesar in 46 BC is still followed by some Eastern Orthodox Churches, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (or Coptic Orthodox Church).

about maturation and marriage, or labor migration and hospitalization, but also about personhood and self-understanding. There was meaning behind someone's decision to marry at eighteen and someone's decisions to divorce at twenty, or someone's decision to leave their small village for an unfamiliar land at forty years of age. Dates were important for understanding a person.

I mistakenly anticipated that constructing a narrative timeline in partnership with my interlocutors would be a simple task. I would ask a young woman when she was born, how old she was, when she departed Ethiopia for work, or when she married her first husband. As two educated individuals, both decent at basic arithmetic, you can imagine the frustration that ensues when you are trying to discuss, in imperfect English and Amharic, that twenty-one plus 1989 does not equal 2017—the year in which I was writing fieldnotes—therefore, some date was incorrect, or someone's math was incorrect. Well, it was incorrect for me living in 2017, but correct for him, living in 2010. The next few minutes were spent discussing dates and simple arithmetic. Scraps of paper were torn, and numbers were jotted down, and on several occasions a timeline was drawn with the input of our interlocutor. In the end we eventually conclude that our interlocutor was giving us years according to the Gregorian calendar—knowing that I followed this time structure—and Abinet assumed she was referencing the Ethiopian calendar. I eventually started asking multiple times for clarification, "Which calendar did this date correspond to, Ethiopian or European?"

I tested Abinet's patience more than I can remember and the same was true with him for me. I am not sure we ever stopped irritating one another,[45] but we nonetheless respected each other deeply.

[45] To absolve the reader of a similar frustration, I will use dates that correspond to the Gregorian calendar dates throughout this dissertation.

As the eldest of five children Abinet's tolerance for enduring another person's constant close companionship surpassed my own. Abinet is close in age to his brothers, Solomon and Zac, his sister, Sunni, is ten years younger, while the youngest sibling, Danny, is fifteen years his junior. After a year or so of our friendship Abinet confessed that his youngest brother is biologically his cousin—the son of his mother's sister. Unsure of how Danny's biological parents passed, Abinet clarified that Danny had been a permanent family member since he was four years old. Abinet's mother, Ethiopia, made it clear to me that Danny was one of her own.

"He is not adopted," she commanded in a way that made me feel ashamed for asking. She continued her lecture. Danny was her child; it did not matter the how he came into the family. I nodded in agreement.

Abinet's parents were born in the Tigray region in Northern Ethiopia. His mother was born around Adawa, and his father was born close to Intecho. Abinet mentioned that they were both birthed in a "special place," about forty kilometers from the Eritrean border. They both moved to Addis Ababa, separately, when they were young children, after both sets of parents passed. His mother came to Addis Ababa when she was nine years old, in 1965, to start school. She lived with her older sister during this time. His father came to Addis Ababa, Abinet assumed, "To change his life. Maybe."

His parents eventually settled together in the Olympia neighborhood of Addis Ababa, the city center at that time.

"As a child, the neighborhood, I remember that at that time this place was not covered by buildings. I remember that this place, that the roads, were cobblestone. We played in front of our home, football in front of the house. Now they've changed the cobblestone road."

For him, the old cobblestone roads of Addis Ababa are symbolic of a former, simpler, time, one marked by leisure and youthful indulgence. While still found in the Piassa neighborhood of Addis Ababa, the cobblestone roads of his childhood have been dismantled and replaced by the grey asphalt indicative of work by the China Communications Construction Company.

> *At that moment, there were a lot of children and now most of them have families and they have moved to another place. We walked around the Bole area at that time; it was not like it is now. There were a lot of peoples around here; it was not big homes or the buildings. Now there are a lot of private buildings. At that moment, there was zafochi, or the trees. But I don't remember the zaf* (tree)*, our older friends they told us before there were a lot of bushes and a lot of trees in my neighborhood.*

As a young child Abinet divided his time between school and playing soccer. He added that he also loved to read, a trait that continues. He described himself as a shy child.

"In our childhood time, I don't explain myself for the other people. I was very quiet. I was talking to my father, my mother, or my families, or my friends. That was my major problem at the time."

His love for his elementary school days was obvious from his convivial stories of walking with his brothers to class every day. He explained how the deep care and attention from his childhood teachers demonstrated to him, and his fellow students, a type of unforgettable affection.

"They influenced us to be good people," he explained. "Still in my memory, I have the elementary [school] memories."

At the age of fourteen, Abinet continued his education at the Bole Senior Secondary School. This transition beset him.

"That school is a very poor school. I hate the school, still. Because that school is, is not similar to the elementary one. [The] teachers aren't as involved because there are so many students in the school."

Abinet shook his head, "Most of [my] friends moved to a better school, a few students moved to the Bole School, but at that moment [their] parents were fighting to change the student to a better school, like Cathedral.[46] The Bole experience is so bad for me." He lowered his voice and poked his pasta Bolognese.

"How were your grades?" I asked.

> *When compared to elementary school it was worse. Because at that moment, I remember at that time, that is the puberty stage, so at that moment you have to follow up at that age, you have to follow up at that time, the teachers especially. The parents don't know anything about you, they don't follow up, most of the time it is the teachers who need to follow up. Because of most of the students are not great at that time, especially compared to the private schools.*

I sensed he may have engaged in some activities he is not proud of, "Do you have any regret?"

"Yes, definitely," he laughed uncomfortably.

I was surprised by his answer. As someone who was quick to move on from the bad, the uncontrollable, and the unfavorable, I knew this topic was not necessarily something he wanted to address. I prepared for his typical, "Leave it. You have to leave it. Don't think about it." This was the command he gave me every time I felt a negative emotion or experienced an upsetting incidence, and I was waiting for him to interject this mantra into our conversation. He did not.

"Why?" I asked.

> *Because my grade is not good compared with the rest of my friends. And um, and I am very—I have some kind of complaint—so my friends [go to] another school. There is a little bit of an effect in your life. Last time, I told you, if you close some*

[46] Lideta Catholic Cathedral School.

> *doors—yeah, you regret for that one. A lot of friends they go another step. The majority goes to the same school, so you will have some inferiority with you. And also, in Bole, the high school is big, so you don't get your elementary friends. So, you can make another friends in the new life, but you don't know the behavior of that boys or that girls. So, you been in [elementary school] eight years, or more than eight years, you have lost for that time and then you can start another friendship and you can start from your age, your age is a very hard age. So, you will start another lifestyle. So, these kinds of things happen for your life.*

High school was unpleasant for Abinet. His old friendships dissolved, and he struggled to form new ones. He no longer earned the high marks as he did during his elementary school years and his relationships with his new teachers remained distant. He felt like no one was "watching out" for him and that no one cared about his well-being.

In sharing his story, which he may not have felt particularly proud of, I found it interesting how he switched from the first-person singular pronouns to second person. I regard this shift as an attempt by him to reorient from personal, painful, experiences to more generalizable experiences. In doing this, Abinet addressed not just the question I posed, but offers a general assessment about the difficulties all people face during their teenage years. In talking about "the peoples" he indirectly implicated himself in a type of familiar coming of age narrative: adolescence is hard. Through linguistic means Abinet conventionally displayed common affect—feelings, moods, dispositions, and attitudes—that often complement "our" high school years. He generalized about the difficulty in making new friends, because you do not know the "behavior" or the character of the students in your new school. He found this unsettling.

Abinet also brought my attention to the temporal component of friendship—his friendships from elementary school existed for at least eight years and when we have long-term friendships like that, we really *know* the behavior of these individuals. He explained that as a

teenager you are not afforded that same temporal generosity. It is with hast that you build teenage friendships, and sometimes it was not with the right people, and consequently “some doors were closed”. In making the second-person narrative his self-narrative I accepted this technique as a process of displacing blame. He did not blame himself for bad grades or poor friendships, it was instead his new teachers who did not pay enough attention, they “didn’t follow up” as they should with “puberty stage” students. Similarly, the size and chaotic environment of Bole High School did not allow him to make the “right” friends, he did not have the proper amount of time or proper setting to know people behavior’s well.

What I found most compelling were his last two statements regarding the difficulty of making friends as a teenager and starting another “lifestyle,” and that “these kinds of things happen.” I read this as an admission that, maybe, he was not proud of some choices he made while in high school—it was in these statements that I detected his previously admitted “regret.” While he did not offer any specific details about activities he may regret (and in all our years of friendship he never spoke of doing anything shameful) I had the sense that he did not uphold a type of behavior that his elementary self would endorse.

I changed the subject to something more cheerful and asked him about his best friend, “How did you meet Moule?”

> *We had played football. You know my childhood time or my puberty time, I was involved in sport, so some of my friends I made from that sport club. Some high school friends I made from class. I am not addicted [addict]….I don’t do khat, or cigarette, so some of my friends, they coming from football, some are my neighbor, some are my classmates.*

I nodded and listened to him again contrast himself with individuals whom he described in a more negative light, the people who chewed khat or smoked cigarettes. He did sports, he

upheld an ethical form of personhood by way of soccer (football); he played sports primarily with his childhood friends and neighbors—good people.

> *Most of my childhood friends are not in Addis, some of them are in America, some are in Canada, some other countries. I don't know where they are. But the majority when I see in Facebook or something, they live in Europe or America. Some friends from high school are in Addis and I meet with them.*

Listening carefully to Abinet I had the impression that when he was younger, he was part of an "elite" group of friends. But as they grew, doors closed for him, and doors opened for others. He reminded me on several occasions that most of his childhood friends were in America or Europe, a sign that they must be successful.[47] He stayed in touch with them regularly.

After high school Abinet attended technical school where he studied general mechanics. After three years he received his diploma.

"How did you decide to study general mechanics?"

> *It is complicated for you I think so. I need to study accounting or marketing, but at that time, at that moment when I go to register for that course, that place is full. There is only, the only options if general mechanics, so I had a friend in that place, still he is my friend now, he is a film producer, and I meet with him in that place and we select GM at that time. That's it. It was not my feeling. Even I need, even though I don't get the place, I need the automatic field, but still I didn't get that opportunity, because it was full. So, I make general mechanics. It was not a difficult program for me. But still I am not eager to spend my time [doing general mechanics].*

Abinet was around twenty-two years old when he graduated technical school and started work installing television and satellite cable. It coincided with the moment when such technologies arrived in Ethiopia.

> *It was a good time for me. We are very busy; we are so busy. When you saw us that month our shop is very busy. We also maintained mobiles [cellular phones], televisions, DVD and VCRs. Also, we started installing cable even for the hotels. Sometimes we are out from our homes early in the morning and then we are back to our home in the middle of the night.*

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[47] The is a general sentiment that the diaspora community are financial and educationally successful and more prosperous than their compatriots who remained in Ethiopia.

"Did you make good money?"

"Yeah, at that time, but we are young peoples", he laughed. "We destroyed the money. We not drinking, but we go in the fancy hotels to eat foods, food with Coke, burger, something like that."

"So, you didn't save it?"

"We didn't save it for that one."

"Do you regret?"

"No."

Abinet continued in this line of work for another five or six years. After which him and his colleagues went their separate ways. One colleague moved to South Africa and later to the United States, another went East toward Dire Dawa, a large city in Eastern Ethiopia, and still another opened his own shop in Addis Ababa. Abinet and one other man remained at the original shop in Addis, but business slowed significantly.

From talking with Abinet, and after spending years with him as my research assistant, I know that the amount of formal work he presently undertakes is not enough to provide for his everyday needs. He mentioned to me how most of his income now comes from his work with me, Dr. Christina, and "people Dr. Christina sends to Ethiopia." Moule started an injera making business, he told me, and he helped him make deliveries around the city.

"How do you imagine your future?" I asked.

"I don't know my future to be honest."

"What is your hope?"

My hope, if it is ok, if it is thinking I need to make some things to be open in my country or places to be helping the next generation, especially the children. I like

the children very much. I don't know what that will be, but some hope for my country. Especially like Taytu, they have the bright life. So, I need to be that, that is my hope or my feeling. If I have it, if I get it, I need to help my peoples. I need also to be married, because marriage is very expected for the people. So, you have to start your life, you can continue to manage for the another life. I need to be married, I need to get babies. Especially two babies.

"So, you do want those things?"

"I don't know maybe, some day."

"Do you want to marry someone who is also Ethiopian?"

Ethiopian, or someone else….it is not important…if there is a common understanding, if you have the common understanding, you can get the things with her. You know, you know what she hates, that's most important. If you know that, indirectly, it means he loves you or she loves you. So, common understanding that is the main thing for marriage. So, if I have the common understanding for someone I need to marry her.

I asked Abinet about one woman from his past, the only woman he ever mentioned in our four years together. They dated briefly about three years ago.

"I don't have the common understanding with her because she always needs to be [about] her feelings. And always she is greedy. I hate the greedy peoples. Definitely."

This is the Abinet I know. He is someone who wants to give to others. He values modest and humility. He loves spending time with children, helping them with their schoolwork and teaching them how to kick the soccer ball. Once, I witnessed him very gently direct a six-year-old girl at Mekelakel, on how to bring me a cup of tea. She calculated every step from him to me. She slowly walked the cup and saucer toward me, without spilling. He gave her positive reinforcement with each step and a big congratulations after she successfully handed me the little glass cup. This was Abinet's true essence. Kind, calm, paternal, encouraging, helpful, and caring.

Chapter Three

Interpretations

Abinet's narrative complements the traditional ethnographic analysis, which can, at times, become unmoored from those we study and those with whom we live. When such detachment occurs, we, as scholars, risk trafficking in nomenclature irrelevant to local desires. While I do not classify my work as activist or action anthropology, I nonetheless started this project in hopes of effecting the situation such that constructive dialogues emerge and eventually count as "really doing something" (Pigg 2013, 132), arguably a telos which underlies feminist thought—that is, by turning to the experience of women how might we better understand situations of injustice, and through that understanding offer an intervention or a disruption to the *status quo* (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Mann 2018).

During and long after fieldwork officially ended Abinet and I maintained discussions regarding the need (or not) to advise, advocate, or proposition institutions and individuals in Addis Ababa. For us, this project was about more than understanding a problem and the individuals trapped within. We wanted to also understand how and if we could effect change, although I understood that that "change" might not necessarily be straightforward. Simply stating that migrant work to the Gulf countries should be banned, for example, was not, and is not, a constructive solution. We knew that we needed to engage our informants and the larger community to better understand what constituted a possible improvement. I continuously discussed with Abinet his reflections regarding our work. I wanted to not only "check" my

perspectives on the research as our worked progressed, but also maintain a sensitivity and mindfulness concerning Abinet's thoughts and experiences with our work—it was his country and compatriots after all.

While this study incorporates philosophical insights that offer understandings into the human condition, it is the articulation of Abinet's values, perspectives, ideas, and life experiences that help liberate an evaluation of the situation, which is all too often positioned parenthetically to the researcher's own. It is our symmetrical, in conjunction with the asymmetrical, reading of a situation, I argue, that brings enrichment to the curious relationship between mental and emotional unwellness and migrant domestic work. This is as much an ethical stance, remaining conscious of value-laden prejudices and staying open to the mystery of the other (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Throop 2014), as it is a methodological practice, wherein communalism of disparate vantage points enlightens philosophical attunements to conditions in an African context (Kiros 2001). Abinet's narratives also allow me to offer an analysis regarding the ways in which the interview process may have been influenced by his own inner workings—where he is coming from? How is he feeling about our work and the women we speak with? What challenges he is facing on that day? How he, a young, Ethiopian man (trapped in his own precarious livelihood) responds to our encounters?

Understanding how Abinet is calibrated and positioned is principle for understanding how he impacts our work (Devereux 1967); there is only a partial representation of our interlocutor's humanity (Throop 2014, 72) through his filtration and mine, and therefore I spend a fair amount of time dissecting Abinet's position in this work. Yet, moving beyond the anthropologist's own reflexivity into a space that does not simply acknowledge Abinet's intellectual and practical contributions, but also renders his own self-consciousness and

biographical specificities as scaffolding particularities that contribute to the building of our understanding of each person. It is he who helped determine which direction my questioning turned, what layers I peeled, what doors I opened, all based on an incomplete understanding of the person before us.

Having clarity about his role in our research together is necessary for understanding not only our engagement with each other, but also how our intersubjectivity articulates with our ethnographic encounters. I want to take the time, then, to discuss how our pairing produces circumstances wherein we were permitted a certain type of knowledge perhaps otherwise inaccessible if we had ventured independently on this project. What was offered to us for understanding was not just of epistemic value, but also indicative of how Abinet and I were viewed by others. I remained cognizant of the ways in which Abinet and I found commonality, how we came up with an agreed upon understanding of information offered to us, what it was that drafted our co-attention, and how our togetherness articulated with our interlocutors.

Abinet and I maintained an awareness that, despite our close relationships with certain women, our knowledge of them, their experiences, and their situations would remain incomplete (Rosaldo [1989] 1993). Yet, amongst these unfinished truths, Abinet and I could still locate and advance valuable epistemic and ontic fractals which presented not only phenomenological renditions of persons, situations, and structures, but also material and practical data about domestic labor migration motives and consequences.

I find the mathematical notion of fractal helpful in understanding the unfolding symmetry amongst the women with whom we spoke, as well as their situation both within their family and work life. This is not to say that I equate or categorically reduce their experiences, but rather seek to demonstrate that there are varying dimensions of symmetrical experiences that may

otherwise be overlooked due to their perceived asymmetry upon first read. I maintain a commitment to valuing the singular, but a fractal rendition of experience is inclusive of particularities and demonstrates how these particularities, in exceeding social categorizing, destabilize social categories and dominant sociopolitical concepts (see Mattingly 2017, 2018, 2019 for instance). In other words, there is an essence to their experiences that is understood as a sameness, and this can serve as a way for women to relate to each other, but also, can ethnographically produce new insights about the experiences of emerging *cultural* phenomena. Another reason I am drawn to the word fractal is that it is defined by a "gestalt" of features, much like the experiences of my interlocutors, and therefore inherently exceeds a concept of wholeness.

My analysis, then, seeks to not simply "accumulate facts and behaviors, but to bring out their meaning" (Fanon 2008, 146). I (and eventually we) valued and took seriously each participatory act, observation, and interview. Abinet and I saw value in stillness, not only the corporeal chaos that resulted in a flight of movement and a Haldol injection. Unresponsive behavior was equally a response. Abinet and I also maintained a bracketing of categorical diagnoses habitually assigned to women in the NGO shelters. While certainly asynchronous in our moments of bracketing, there was a mutual understanding that such conditions were a *possibility*, not a given—we gained understandings through our interactions with individual women.

I sought individual explanations about their experiences with and narrations about mental and emotional unwellness, care, migration, and domestic labor, and I made this objective known to Abinet. He quickly understood my interest was primarily in the exact words of women in the shelter. I sought an uncategorized understanding of a multitude of experiences. I explained

that I wanted an individual woman's description of her unwellness as well as the professional care providers, but within my research they would hold equal value. Abinet also realized that I was open to and wanted his reading of a situation, as I would ask him directly, "What do you think about…?" Abinet was intrigued by this type of openness, and he said he liked "this way of thinking." He was onboard with our own form of dialogical bracketing, a we-understanding of situations and people.

This does not mean that we always read a situation identically or even similarly. Rather, our "we-ness" was an intersubjective comportment that produced dialogues about what we perceived about a situation or a person. Our togetherness, formed through our discussions about a situation we both observed, disclosed a situational knowledge. Our discussions allowed us to breakdown concepts and rethink our observations in a way that level all knowledge.

Abinet and I were not there to contradict the care provider's assessments, but rather sought to give women living in the shelter space to express their own understandings of their unwellness, their treatment, their experiences abroad, and their current situation. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I detail the beneficial empathetic attunement that accompanied Abinet's understanding of our work. He displayed a great degree of patience when he engaged with one interlocutor who the nurse rendered "mentally ill" because she did not, or rather, would not, speak. Abinet, however, asked a simple question to the newly arrived resident and patiently waited for an answer, which eventually emerged. He had learned through our work that first impressions of a returnee could be wrong.

Abinet and I valued observation, sitting-with, being-with, and experiencing-with our interlocutors in a way that seemed largely antithetical to the shelter care providers, albeit we were under no other obligations (i.e., It was not our responsibility to provide care or treatment to

shelter residents). I tried to do as my informants did—hang laundry, watch Ethiopian and Arabic films, paint, exercise, eat, drink coffee, seep in boredom.[48] I wanted to be with them when they felt moved to speak. I wanted to be with them in the shelter; I endeavored to "resonate" with them, a process Uni Wikan defines as a "painstaking engagement on a day-to-day basis in events and routines which are 'theirs' so that we come to share as much as possible in them" (1992, 471). I believe that the women in the shelters noticed my efforts and my willingness to engage in their activities, events, and routines, and this brought forth a respect from most women.

Despite my attempts to share our worlds and build bridges toward understanding, I knew I would never come close to parallel experiences. But what I appreciated about Abinet was his persistent effort to highlight a possible mutuality of feeling between me and interlocutors. He called attention to my feelings and reactions and the ways in which some of those emotions resonated with what we witnessed from the women living at Tesfa and Mekelakel. Specifically, Abinet used fieldwork moments when I cried as opportunities to draw parallels between emotional states. He tried to facilitate a connection between my feelings and our interlocutor's. His technique for drawing emotional parallels resonates with Wikan's (1992) critique pertaining to the sole use of language and discourse-based approaches toward understanding others; such methods are insufficient. While there would always be shades of difference and wonder on either side (Stoller 2009, 4), what Abinet sought to create was a shared understanding of experience, intended to open access to relatable emotional states across seemingly different individuals and situations. It was precisely this type of interaction with and intellect from Abinet that made him so central to this work. He was not just a research assistant (in the sense that he interpreted language), but he strove to interpret and connect experiences between me and my interlocutors. I

[48] When I asked interlocutors how they were doing, occasionally they respond that they were "bored" just sitting in the shelter with nothing to do.

felt this was part of his personal agenda, not just about enhancing my research; he wanted to establish that I was not all that different from the individuals we encountered.

We also participated in shelter events and routines on another level. On several occasions the female nurses, particularly at Tesfa, required Abinet's help to restrain a resident. He would either hold a limb, which would allow the nurse to administer an injection, or bear hug a resident, who was unhappy with my presence, giving me time to run into a safe room or outside the locked compound. He would talk to the resident as he approached her and explain to her what he was doing. Although, I know that Abinet had good intentions, I do not know how specific residents felt about Abinet's efforts, as some had experienced various forms of restraint-centered abuse, such as rape or confinement. It is reasonable, then, that an individual woman may have felt threatened or intimidated by Abinet's hold.

Our everyday participation within the shelters, regardless of the responsibility of each day, also established and maintained a process of "imaginative work," which opened for us the possibility of transforming knowledge into empathetic understanding, from both sides (Hollan 2008). We were able, through our fieldwork, to more fully develop empathetic understandings of that which we observed, and correspondingly, I believe our interlocutors gained a deeper empathic understanding of us and our work from their own observations, fostering a necessary degree of trust and respect for meaningful conversations.

Each of these moments—dull, tedious, or rousing—held equivalent value in our work. The monotonous, or the ordinary, was as important as the extra-ordinary, and those moments that moved from the *once* extraordinary to the *now* ordinary and back again were perhaps the most interesting[49] for theoretical dissection. Fluid conditions provide access into certain essences of

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[49] I follow Janis Jenkins use of the term extraordinary in her work *Extraordinary Conditions,* as a reference to "conditions—illnesses, disorders, syndromes—that are culturally defined as mental illness,

individual experiences which might be recognized—by both the researcher and study informants—as a sameness and thus insightful into cultural models of experience. While I will later remark on what constituted a mental illness diagnosis in the context of the shelter and psychiatry in Ethiopia more generally, for now, it is important to state that both Abinet and myself considered inactivity, hyperactivity, and everything in between with equal curiosity—that is, shouting was not perceived as more or less dysfunctional than muteness, and no trait was dismissed due to its impenetrability.

In my meditations on individuals and situations within the context of the shelter and migrant domestic work, I take seriously Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that, "To say that woman is mystery[50] is to say not that she is silent but that her language is not heard; she is there, but hidden beneath veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances" ([1949] 2011, 269). Beauvoir's sentiment on the myth of the mysterious women is the primary theoretical lens of this dissertation. I considered somatic comportment and the associated self-narratives as veiled "languages" and "uncertain appearances" of *becoming*. The type of *becoming* we witnessed, I argue, is an ethical becoming; a negotiation of figuring out the best good (Mattingly 2012) in response to an unexpectedly not-so-good situation. I did not write off enigmatic ambiguity or incoherency—recognized either by the caretakers or myself—as problematic and unknowable.

A woman's consciousness, embodiment, and self-narrative—particularly a woman ostensibly labeled as "unwell"—are of theoretical importance precisely because she is oriented toward a particular Object of experience that is characteristically "ambiguous." It is by unsettling

[as well as] conditions—warfare and political violence, domestic violence and abuse, or scarcity and neglect of basic human needs—constituted by social situations and forces of adversity" (2015, 1).

[50] Beauvoir's discussion of mystery is alluding to Emmanuel Levinas' conception of alterity. She writes, "When he writes that woman is mystery, he assumes that she is mystery for man. So this apparently objective description is in fact an affirmation of masculine privilege" (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 6 *fn.* 3).

the label of her “ambiguity,” or rather, in recognizing *my own* inability to “know” her that I incorporate into my analysis an existential imperative—as does Beauvoir—that her *beingness* is produced through a multiplicity of intersubjective projects. And that one’s inability to “know” her is partly responsible for the labeling of a “enigmatic subjectivity” (i.e., “mentally ill”). This study, then, remains conscious of not erasing her experiences through the misrecognition of what constitutes “certainty”—and thus a reality worthy of analysis. Thus, I follow Beauvoir’s argument that my rendering of her *beingness* shall never assume a nonessential existence vis-à-vis unfixed symmetries, as the male gaze would attest.[51]

If her phenomenological standpoint, “refuses” as Beauvoir writes, to “set up absolutes” by suppressing instincts, desires, plans, and passions ([1948] 2018, 13), then this refusal should not simply be discussed in terms of an agentive self-reconstruction in relation to subjugation, or of an absolute “mystery,” which consequently precludes her from having real or significant experiences (e.g. what arguably happens in labeling someone “mentally ill”), but should include what contemporary phenomenological anthropologists have described as an attunement to the precipitants of ethical processes of becoming, and how these articulate with individual affective arrangements (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Hollan 2004, 2012, 2014; Mattingly 2012, 2019; Slaby et al. 2019; Throop 2018; Tronto 2003). I am committed to upholding such philosophical imperatives and have reasoned that a person-centered analysis, which is inherently feminist, is methodologically best for this type of work. Women at the core of this study claim their experiences through phenomenological renditions of migrant domestic work, and while situating their individual narratives as feminist implements, this work expands our understanding about not only worldly situations, but also the limits imposed by categories.

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[51] I will argue later, that the hegemonic—masculine—system of psychiatry in Ethiopia enforces this.

Additionally, to not dismiss the "mysteries" of "veiled languages" of my interlocutors, I highlight emergent cultural self-processes, which might be called "cultural symbols" (Obeyesekere 1981) in efforts to demonstrate how unsettling current categorical renderings of the experiences of migrant domestic work and the associated unwellness can lead to a more advantageous understanding of the human condition. In other words, I attend to phenomena best described by my interlocutors, as "part of the culture now". I examine the changing nature of self-sacrificing care and the ensuring consequences of such care to demonstrate how migrant domestic work in the context of this study is an emergent way of being a "best-good" Ethiopian woman. Given this, I argue that these women's associated unwellness should be understood in this context. If we silence them through the labels of a mental illness diagnosis we risk losing a more complete understanding of the felt affects of desire, foreclosed possibility, subjugation, care, empathy, and more.

The ambiguous nature of pathological behavior is ubiquitous in anthropological studies of mental illness (Hollan 2000; Luhrmann 2000; Kleinman 1992; Kleinman et al. 1997; Rosaldo 1993). These works demonstrate the myriad ways relationships of power and knowledge (Foucault [1963] 1994, [1978] 1990), within a particular social world, for example, influence understanding of what constitutes an unwell self. My work complements these conversations by locating emotional and feeling episodes within practical terms, demonstrating how something deemed an "illness" can be (over)extended into what would otherwise be considered normative behavior as a result of indifference, austerity, categorical reductionism, or simple human impatience. As I will demonstrate int Chapter Six, sitting quietly, or as Abinet termed it, deep thinking (a very ordinary behavior within wider Ethiopian culture), is suddenly categorized as a "symptom" of mental illness. Throughout this research, I instead sought to, and encouraged

Abinet, not write off such behaviors as pathological. Instead, I wanted to simply ask individual women how they were feeling or what they were doing. It was through these kinds of truths that emerged the properties of individual sense-making, relational manifestations of ambiguous and uncertain presence and futures, and compulsions to answer to a situation in a best-good way. These multiple truths, and the unsettling of categories they precipitated, were only possible through our feminist, person-centered, project of carefully listening.

The decree of "illness" by shelter caretakers speaks to Beauvoir's ([1949] 2011) claim that the myth of the "mysterious" woman is based in the inability, or refusal, of the (male) subject to understand multiplicity or incompatible manifestations of woman's being. What makes Abinet's presence so interesting throughout this work, is that while he may have been embodied the androcentricity implicated in Beauvoir's critique, he, in fact, consistently did *not* deny women's ambiguous states due to his non-understanding, and this raises interesting questions about the role of culture and gender in determine the responses toward non-understood (ambiguous) behavior.

The uniqueness or particularities of woman's experiences, read in contrast to a hegemonic understanding of rigid categorical "must-be," (e.g., altruistic servitude) allows man—the hegemonic power represented in both local cultural norms as well as transnational implementation of psychiatric understandings of human behavior—to continually deny that the witnessed "inexplicable" is a result of his own ignorance, and he instead claims this mysterious nature is due to the "fragmented" interiority of the woman. This fragmentation transcends an illusion of wholeness and is consequently designated as Other *and* as lacking the vital characteristic of being-for-men and, in lacking being-for-men, one lacks being-in-the-world (Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, 156). More clearly stated, Beauvoir demonstrates that this myth of

mystery is none other than man's inability to read the Other (that which is not man), and it leads him to assert that women's opaqueness is analogous to an impoverished ontology and therefore inessential. Beauvoir explains that the inability to know the Other or at the very least recognize an asymmetry does not preclude knowability or autonomous existence, but rather it is in men's failure to admit their deficiencies in understanding the truth of women and the dynamic processes of becoming, that society keeps women from being recognized as fully human and, ultimately, equal ([1949] 2011, 266-274). The inability for man to understand woman's interiority, because it transcends qualification in being-for-men—i.e., the world as it exists—has taught women to "present him with an immutable smile or an enigmatic impassivity" ([1949] 2011, 271) to maintain some semblance of an autonomous existence. And this autonomous existence is necessary for a woman to have even the slightest semblance of freedom and a recognition of her subjectivity and therefore her indispensability.

What constitutes one and an others recognition of objectivity and subjectivity is an intersubjective process, and the manner through which one undertakes this task—consciously or not—is of significance to this study. What is woman directed *toward*, what is her *intention?* In what ways do her reflections construct an understanding about what it means to become someone essential, equal, fully human? In examining these questions and holding the individual as "a critical site of experience" (Mattingly 2012, 170), I situate the "Other"—i.e., the subject's refusal of predefined categories of experiences—and my encounters with the ambiguous, as opportunities to advance knowledge through the destabilization of concepts.

The contents of each woman's story, emotion, and action are also held as experiences and perspectives that women wanted us—Abinet, me, and an imagined broader audience—to attune to. It was important for them to share certain stories with us. Through this dissertation I try to

make sense of their stories *and* their decision to share particular narrative inlets into their lives. Attending to the nature of my beingness, Abinet's, and my work, was not lost on women involved in this study. They understood I had an objective, and, at times, I understood some of them to have an objective in speaking with me. Additionally, I often set aside time for women and employees at the shelter to ask me questions. I wanted to foster a level playing field as much as I knew how. In particular, the women who participated in person-centered interviewing gained an even finer understanding about my interests as a researcher and their individual roles in advancing knowledge about their situation and the conditions under which they lived, and at times, suffered. Even still, the relationships I formed with these women could not be extended outside of our interview location—the NGOs—into that of everyday life. Similar to Crapanzano's (1980) observation, I believe that such an extension outside of the space of the NGO would have disrupted a privileged domain, a domain that offered rare confidentiality. They were physically and metaphorically sheltered; The NGOs were barriers between these women and an outside world riddled with imagined and real judgment about their experiences and their proclivities following domestic work abroad.

Rethinking the Black-White Dyad in Ethiopia

There were also larger structures at work that shaped relationships and reflected a global racial hierarchy whereby my whiteness held significance inside and outside the NGOs. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation and falls outside the purviews of my explicit research agenda, I want to take a moment to reflect on the ways in which my ethnographic research can contribute to conversations regarding categories of race and ethnicity in Ethiopia.

Anthropologist Jemima Pierre writes that little attention has been given to processes of racialization in postcolonial Africa, and that it is well past time for Africanist anthropologists (and anthropology in general) to reexamine the postcolonial frameworks used to critique the current global order. Such analyses, Pierre (2013) contends, inadequately theorize the "continued existence of racially structured unequal relationships and practices" (2) and without clear examinations into the historical and contemporary practices that shape processes of racialization we will, as scholars, remain unaware of the ways in which slavery and colonialism, for example, continue to articulate on the continent (214-215). By attuning to an institution, like the NGOs central to my study, anthropologists can offer insight into how processes of racialization occur in a particular space and time. While my analysis is specific to Ethiopia, and distinct from Pierre with its focus on the day-to-day particularities of a "small, localized community" (7), my work still offers thought-provoking commentary on the distinct processes of racialization throughout the African continent.

Pierre (2013) acknowledges the problematic ways in which popular and academic discourses skirt debates about racialization and racism within Africa, and through their avoidance carelessly de-position the significance of processes of racialization in the ordering of the modern world. In an increasingly globalized world, then, it is necessary for anthropologists working in Africa to resist this evasion and offer insights into our fieldwork experiences and how they may articulate with questions of race. While such discussions may linger outside the "formal" boundaries of a specific research question (e.g., my own study), or may feel like an uncomfortable or unsuitable task, it is the inherent curiosity and ever-changing nature of the anthropological discipline that lends itself so well to critical explications about our complex world.

I also respect Fanon's conviction that experiences of racialization are collective issues for all to attune to: "I sincerely believe that a subjective experience can be understood by all, and I dislike having to say that the black problem is my problem, and mine alone, and then set out to study it" ([1952] 2008, 67). And yet, while taking a phenomenological stance toward Fanon's ([1952] 2008) call to remain a "[wo]man who questions," in order to locate and advance an understanding of human reality despite our circumstances and differences, I found that Abinet was very reluctant to discuss (and somewhat quarrelsome in asserting his views) our disparate positionalities. As he saw it, my whiteness was irrelevant in relation to social life in Addis Ababa, and even Greater Ethiopia he reasoned. In fact, I seemed to cause offense each time I tried to discuss with him the notion that there might be some sort of (nefarious) racialization operating either here, in Ethiopia, or abroad in the Gulf countries, which may have some relevance for our work. What did he think about this idea, I asked?

"Why do you assume you or I are treated differently? I am Ethiopian, you are white colored, and that is that. This is Ethiopia, Eva. It is not the same as everywhere else. You have to understand, we were never colonized." A longer discussion often followed on the historical individuation of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. While riddled with generalizations, I took what Abinet said seriously. He was articulating a reality to me that was his, and one I frequently heard during fieldwork. For Abinet, and others, he and his country were exceptional, his understanding (both felt and empirical) unsettled categorical renditions of race and processes of racialization, and such local articulations of exceptionality are worth careful consideration.

Abinet's reaction reinforces leading Ethiopian scholar Donald Levine's notion of "creative incorporation" (2000). Levine discusses the historical significance and importance of Greater Ethiopia's tendency to respond to invading alien elements through a mode that upheld

their sense of cultural autonomy, continuity, and creativity (2000, 67-68). “Ethiopians could simultaneously acknowledge what they perceived as the superiority of an alien culture[52] and assert their own indominable sense of superiority” (2000, 104). Levine locates and details this practice of “creative incorporation” in relation to religion, literature, art, and agriculture notions of superiority throughout Greater Ethiopia. And, likewise, the data within this research project further suggests sustained practices of creative incorporation; there remains a strive for cultural autonomy and an “indominable sense of superiority” that encompasses notions of ethnicity and nationality, and by extension, race.

Abinet’s generalized sentiments about Ethiopia and Ethiopians (and himself), and arguments about why race did not play a role in the mistreatment of Ethiopian domestic workers in the Arab States is considered in relation to Levine’s observations. I put aside my own understandings and knowledge about processes of racialization and carefully review the achievements of Ethiopians, which integrates the nations positive achievements rather than repudiate them (Levine 2000) *and* situate Abinet’s words as meaningful and revealing of something significant. Accordingly, both Levine’s work and Abinet’s knowledge unfix the meaning of whiteness, and the experience and construction of “blackness” (Pierre 2013) as hegemonically operative on continental Africa.

This discussion about processes of racialization, racism, and a set black-white dyad is also important for understanding my positionality in undertaking this research. How I was received inside and outside the NGO space is meaningful regarding access to particular sites as well as information offered. Inside the NGO space, my whiteness was mostly a topic of wit. I was teased often, for my shockingly (unpleasant) white legs, to the easiness with which I

[52] Certain historical cultural superiorities were associated with light skin color (Levine 2000, 104).

blushed, another condition for jest. One time, the guard at Mekelakel approached me as I was basking in the sun, he touched my tank-top clade shoulder and playfully remarked, “Oh! You are on fire!”

“I am trying to get a tan!” I replied.

“Like Habasha!” he smiled. “Our skin color is our natural gift; you can’t just get it from the sun.” Everyone in the courtyard laughed.

Ethiopian Exceptionalism

By way of seven years of ethnographic fieldwork in Ethiopia and amongst Ethiopian diaspora communities in the United States I want to take the opportunity to thoughtfully answer the need for anthropologists to attune to processes of racialization in postcolonial Africa. I offer a modest examination into processes of racialization operating specifically within Ethiopia in relation to this project. While my data draws on a particular contemporary moment directly relevant to an increasingly globalized world, my interlocutors unprompted narratives often include past episodes of national superiority and victory[53] as well as present day performances of religious supremacy. It is this amalgamation of historical and contemporary understandings of cultural, political, and religious significance that figures centrally into individual narrative identity, and should be considered in relation to the unanticipated subjugation they encounter during their domestic work abroad.

[53] The political and moral philosopher Teodros Kiros does an excellent job of detailing the antiquated history of Ethiopian philosophical discussions and how deeply intertwined they are with religious understandings, and how these entities contribute to historical and contemporary Ethiopian self-presentation and narratives. For example, in the 14th Century epic account of the Solomonic dynasty, the *Kebra Nagast,* describes how Ethiopia’s power will eclipse that of the Romans, and the Ethiopian people are in fact the “chosen ones” and will assume this spiritual supremacy from the Jews of Israel.

“I am proud because I am Ethiopian. I don’t feel inferior to anyone” Bethlehem remarked after discussing the mistreatment she endured from her employer in Beirut.

> *And we Ethiopians are aggressive [uncompromising] because we are not colonized by the other countries. So, when they are shouting at us, we don’t like this kind of situation. We don’t know this kind of feeling…The Arab people don’t give us respect (ākibiroti yelewimi/አክብሮት የለውም). They know our poorness. Even when they eat bread, they say, ‘Do you eat this?’ and I say to them, “Why don’t you go visit my country and see for yourself?”*

Bethlehem raises her eyebrows and gestures her hand upward.

“Even when we see an Ethiopian we make conversation, the Arabs didn’t want us to do this. Ethiopians make conversation, I have pride for this type of social life. Our bosses didn’t like this kind of thing.”

Bethlehem’s sentiments exemplify a narrative articulated by several women with whom I spoke; mistreatment steamed from the other’s prejudice (i.e., inaccurate information, “Why don’t you see for yourself”, about Ethiopia and/or Ethiopians). After an acknowledgement of such horrid treatment, interlocutors would frequently offer a counter narrative largely laden with notions of Ethiocentrism.

Branded as “Ethiopian exceptionalism,” humanities and social science scholarship note this central axiom is present in both individual and collective narratives. This exceptionalism infuses everything from Ethiopian beauty standards to Amharic-language plays and literature, to national celebrations of past colonial defeat (Hussein and Ademo 2016; Marzagora 2019; Woubshet 2010). My ethnographic work similarly discloses how “Ethiopian exceptionalism” is reinforced through the retelling of individual self-narratives and the illumination of local moral worlds (Kleinman 1992)—it was not uncommon to hear my interlocutors, Abinet, and other Ethiopian colleagues draw distinctions between themselves and other nationalities.

While my work is not necessarily advocating for an "Ethiopian exceptionalism" that denies the existence of processes of racialization or racialized hierarchies within Ethiopia, it is encouraging a critical reflection concerning the categorical generalizations that tend to "gloss over the interior senses that make a place tick" (Gandhi 2019; Woubshet 2010, 200). This raises the question, then, if my interlocutors make a distinction from their inter- and intra-continental compatriots, should our scholarship simply dismiss these narratives as "oppressive and racist" (Hussein and Ademo 2016) or invalidate them due to incongruencies with existing literature on postcolonial racial politics in Africa? What if, instead, our scholarship adhered to and examined how narrative accounts of "Ethiopian exceptionalism" unsettled presuppositions about racial identity and personhood?[54] In so doing, such experience-near renditions of social life could be understood as type of reflective modality that advances a possibility of thinking about an otherwise.

If we give attention, for example, to inter-ethnic dialogues concerning non-black and black identities within an Ethiopian context, we can offer informed discussions about how individuals articulate with history and their social environment which holds important local value. My hope is that such insider interpretations of race, race relations, racial politics, and processes of racialization can complement "outsider" views operating in contemporary discussions. If our scholarship is to truly explain the social world, then should not our interpretations go beyond examinations of generalized notions and promote intersectionality's other core themes of *social context* and *complexity* (Hill Collins 2019)?

[54] It would be a mistake to assume that constructions of race and ethnicity are fixed or consistent in Ethiopia. Likewise, Ethiopian diaspora communities demonstrate disparate identities as it pertains to categories of race including, Habesha, Ethiopian, Black, Brown, Red, and White.

This project illustrates how social context and complexity tethered to notions of gender, nationality, economic precarity, and personal ethics all hold relevance for an analysis of mental and emotional unwellness experienced by returned Ethiopian domestic workers. It interrogates how such themes like, ambiguity, murkiness, slippery, mystery, inconsistent, and multiplicity, are often associated with the feminine and thus, encounter "objective resistance" of constituting "real" knowledge and are instead considered a mirage eclipsing the "actual" condition (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 268). In other words, the un-categorizability of (women's) experience is rendered insignificant and with that, inconsequential towards epistemic claims.

In focusing on the objective resistant specifically concerning ambiguous understandings of mental unwellness in a community of Ethiopian women, this work demonstrates how individual woman assert their own positionality that resist "knowledge" about their subject—racialized—position abroad. It is in my commitment to feminist thinking that I uphold their singularity and give authority to narratives that characterize an identity they hold true, even it is discordant with claims about African or black identity, and postcolonial encounters of subjugation. Should not such incongruencies be regarded as illustrative of the complicated nature of conceptualizing particular people in particular places at a particular time?

Post-Colonial Ethiopia?

This project recognizes that there is a general understanding that postcolonial theories provide a language that allows us, as scholars, to examine a general historical period and condition (Gandhi 2019). In my engagement with these traditions, I continue to use certain terms that allow for a productive exchange, while modifying necessary terms in relation to the historical situatedness of present-day Ethiopia.

A conversation on the articulation of race and the anthropological encounter in Ethiopia should begin with the term "postcolonial." Ethiopia was never formally colonized by a European power[55] and therefore if we appoint this term in the analysis of the social, economic, cultural, political, and psychological consequences of people and places historically subjected by colonizing powers, then "postcolonial" in relation to Ethiopia requires additional clarification (Alcoff 2007; Bulhan 2015).

I suggest that despite Ethiopia's absence from the transatlantic slave trade, their incorporation into the Ottoman Empire slave trade along the coasts of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden[56] established configurations of race and/or racism, whereby "whiteness" and "Arabness" hold meaning crafted by specific cultural and political configurations operating between Ethiopia and the Gulf region. The ongoing transnational domestic worker rights negotiations arguably maintain a long history of exploitation and racialized hierarchies[57] in the region, which can be tied to emerging discussions on metacolonialsm (Bulhan 2015). In other words, the articulation of whiteness and Arabness is a critical element for understanding processes of racialization within the context of Ethiopia, and in the context of this study. For now, however, I will focus on postcolonial theory and its nomenclature in generalized discussions about Ethiopia and her relationship to the larger continent and world order.

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[55] It was occupied, but never colonized. Colonization is understood as economic, political, cultural, and psychological invasion, occupation, and exploitation (Bulhan 2015). Through colonial occupation, Bulhan reminds us, that the "erosion of social bonding, indigenous beliefs, values, identities, and indigenous knowledge" systematically ensues (2015, 243). For further reading on the subject, Shimelis Bonsa Gulema (2018) explores the Italian occupation of Addis Ababa and the legacy and refractions of a failed colonial project of "urban colonization."

[56] During the 19th century Ottoman elite households imported slaves from Ethiopia (in addition to Central Africa, Sudan, and regions of the Caucasus.). The Oromo and Sidamo regions (Ahmad 1988; Toledano and Toledano 1998).

[57] There is a history of slave trade between East Africa and the Gulf States that is overlooked.

Postcolonial in the context of my work should not purely be understood as the politics of knowledge regarding a de-colonized people (Césaire [1955] 2000; Fanon [1963] 2004) or the processes through which formally colonized nations and people engage with and participate in the emerging global order.[58] Instead, I find anthropologist Begoña Aretxaga's definition of "postcolonial" as a state or transnational state that is characterized by way of a "marginal status within the global political and economic order," to be more appropriate for the Ethiopian context (DelVecchio-Good et al. 2008, 44); that being said, it is not my intention to erase the brutal and inhuman killings performed by Italian fascist invading forces.[59]

The postcolonial theoretical apparatus is more aptly related to recent discursive and material records that implicate Ethiopia in a marginal global order. This, unfortunately, has served as an erasure of Ethiopia's significant history of defeating would be colonial powers and even longer history of prosperous and influential empires throughout the last two millennia. Therefore, how Ethiopia responded to its position in a post-1970s expanding economic world order, and the 1980's global responsiveness to its national turmoil, must be considered *in* relation to its history as a noteworthy world power prior to modern history as well as during the historic late 19th and early 20th Century Scramble for Africa, and the subsequent African resistance and independence movements. Such a synthesis offers a much more relevant discussion of postcolonial geo-relations in the Ethiopian context of this study.

In considering local systems of practice and discourse, my work would risk a categorical racialization and essentialization of Ethiopia and Ethiopians, if I established that global

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[58] To claim that Ethiopia and her people underwent disenfranchisement and systematic annihilation by way of colonial force analogous to the other African states, nations, and territories is worth a more thorough discussion. Notably, during occupation the Italian's slaughtered thousands of Ethiopians using mustard gas (Pankhurst 2001).
[59] France and Britain were aware of Mussolini's actions in Ethiopia and yet remained passively uninvolved despite Ethiopia's inclusion in the League of Nations.

structures of race, politics, economics, and culture operating within Ethiopia were analogous to a Western, Central, Northern, or Southern African context. While there are surely dynamic processes of racialization occurring in Ethiopia, the linked category of whiteness/Arabness and its relationship to superlative rights, advantages, and special treatment is one emergent line of inquired that needs thorough examination. Based on antiquity, the modern historical, *and* current re-emergence of Ethiopia as a continental force, an understanding about the processes of racialization and its articulation with the ordering of relations within Ethiopian society should be explored in depth, particularly with a rapidly expanding population of returned diaspora.

At present, current scholarship concerning process of racialization and racialized hierarchies in Ethiopia primarily discuss ethno-religious division, which occurred during Menelik II's reign and subsequently reinforced ethnic hierarchies between Tigrayan, Amharic, Oromo, and other persons from the Southern Regions of Ethiopia (Hussein and Ademo 2016). Scholars for example, argue that the category of "Habasha" is a "racial category that imagines ethnic Amhara and Tigrayan speakers as part of a separate non-black entity, emphasizing a Semitic origin and a mythical and direct descent from the Israeli King Solomon" (Hussein and Ademo 2016, 25). The authors contend that this self-identification is an "oppressive, racist" privileging term used by Amhara and Tigray people of Ethiopia to designate a non-black identity. However, my fieldwork suggests that persons who identify with this category did so to reinforce a collective Ethiopian or *Abyssinian* identity, and to resist a discrete ethnic categorization that the government increasingly cultivated via nationwide policy and action. My work also disclosed that individuals from the Oromo, Gurage, and SNNPR used ethnic identifiers that specified a disparate African identity, that of specifically Ethiopian, which was categorically different from the rest of the continent. This distinction was invoked by

interlocutors when situating their Ethiopian identity in relation to other nationalities within Africa and the Arab States.

During my field research within the NGOs specifically, and in my normal, everyday interactions with shelter residents, there was neither a homologous entrenched understanding of my own whiteness. I offer that a meaningful historical consciousness and corporeal embodiment of subjugation and disenfranchisement precipitated by, "the brutal history of European conquest and domination" does not resonate with my interlocutors, particularly that which would analogize Ethiopia to other postcolonial African nations. Therefore, the meaning and operation of "whiteness" in Ethiopia may not be comparable to nations who suffered from colonization. Thus, the categories of white and black in the context of this study seemed to sit outside the conventional theorizations of postcolonial Africa. Considering such unfixed understandings about race and racialized hierarchies within Ethiopia, this subject matter warrants further serious attention.

In light of my fieldwork, I suggest that "whiteness" and "Arabness" within the space of the shelter, become conflated, and this holds significant for understanding contemporary postcolonial, local, renditions of privilege, power, expendability, and harm. On three occasions, when I entered the shelter compound, unbeknownst to me, a newcomer had arrived the night before, and upon my entrance confronted me. Such confrontations were possibly based on an assumption that my foreignness represented a former employer from the Gulf, and I may have come to harm her (as they shouted my way, they referred to me as "madam," the title used to address their female employers). For example, one time, a young woman jumped out of the first floor, nurses station window, and slowly trotted toward me, telling me to leave (This brought a great deal of entertainment to the other shelter residents). Another time a newcomer sat in the

corner, and eyed me suspiciously, holding a drinking cup and a picture of Jesus in front of her eye, moving it slightly to look at me. After a while, she determined I *must* be some sort of *evil* other. My whiteness, my foreign language, in such situations, seemed to index Arabness. I became tied to an experience that emerged from former experiences, feasibly somewhere along her migration journey.

These brief interactions further exemplify the complex nature of identity formation. Identities were assigned to me by others, and vice versa, and these identities were far from fixed—they were negotiated and renegotiated throughout time. I could be one person on Monday and another on Tuesday, and my interlocutors could be one person on Monday and another on Tuesday, in both an ordinary and extra-ordinary sense, as in the case of Zala, who insisted Abinet and I call her Hannah—who was *actually* Dinkinesh[60] reincarnated—while only a few weeks later she told us she was once again Zala, a wealthy Tigray woman.

While I was an unsettling presence for at least three of the women in the shelters, overall, my existence seemed to be of little concern or interest for the majority. What these brief examples showcase, however, is that there is a need to untangle the categories of whiteness and Arabness within the context of Ethiopia. Such an examination would constitute a valuable exploration into the nuanced ways in which racism and racialization persist within the African continent.

In my hesitancy to prescribe Euro-hegemonic discourses of racialization operating in the community I study, it does *not* mean that lack of encounters with well-established understands about of racism and racial hierarchies in Ethiopia is nonexistent (Fanon [1952] 2008, xvi). What it means, rather, is that the relationship between blackness, whiteness, and Arabness and the

[60] Dinkinesh is the Amharic name for the 3.2-million-year-old *Australopithecus afarensis* unearthed in Ethiopia in 1974.

cultural processes that reinforce a hierarchical relationship do not refract in Ethiopian society in ways analogous to elsewhere in Africa. Likewise, how whiteness, particularly its association with Arabness, is positioned and understood in Ethiopia is not homogenous throughout the country, as several of my Ethiopian colleagues explained to me, there seems to be a particularly strong rural-urban divide. It has also been noted that in Ethiopia, ethno-cultural hierarchies tend to follow a North-South division (Woubshet 2010), which would reinforce sentiments about an urban-rural divide. Thus, the popularity of migrant domestic work to the Gulf States has feasibly influenced and shifted local processes of racialization.

Again, what I report and remark upon is specific to the context of this study, the ways in which whiteness/Arabness is tied to me as a researcher, as a woman, both inside and outside the NGO; and the ways in which blackness and non-blackness are assumed by interlocutors. What interlocutors, as well as Abinet and Semir—a second research assistant I employed later in the study—express is largely a push against the tendency to reproduce and homogenize "decolonizing struggles", and the subsequent categorical classification of the postcolonial experience. In other words, the narratives I garnered, relative to race relations, contest processes wherein "race and nation are mutually constituted" (Segal 1991) in the formation of a global racial hierarchy. For those with whom I held more theoretical conversations concerning the politics of race in Ethiopia and across the continent of Africa—as well as how Ethiopian ethnicity articulated throughout the Gulf States—there was a hesitancy to agree that an "Ethiopian experience" reflected a larger African experience and vice versa.

It is this sensitivity to difference that will propel epistemological inquiries toward novel understanding of what it means to "know" something and listen thoughtfully and responsibly knowing others (Code 2007). A feminist and phenomenological-based project underscores

exactly this—scholarship concerning the basic structures of experience should transcend categorical containment. In my endeavor to advocate for Abinet and my interlocutor's words to be taken seriously, I am also responding to feminist epistemologies and phenomenological traditions that call on theories of the social world to consider subjectivity. In doings so, our work yields knowledge more responsive to human diversity rather than knowledge derived from presumptions of formal sameness (Code 2007, 217). It is through this kind of methodological and theoretical project that my work speaks to how a first-person perspective of small histories and big histories, of local and foreign atmospheres, of the accidental and purposeful, inflect and effect an individual.

Mutual Recognition in Racial Hierarchies

As mentioned, Abinet did not enjoy discussing the politics of race and ethnicity in relation to Ethiopia or Ethiopians—he did not place value in or see the relevance of such discussions. How did these conversations help, he reasoned? Why did it matter? Some of the girls had "similar color" to me, he argued, and he also reminded me that on several occasions, women at the shelters thought I was Arab. So, what do should I make of that, he questioned? He explained that I was being naive to think my color, his color, or anyone's color influenced our work or relationships. While him and I may disagree about the politics and articulations of race and racialization in Ethiopia and abroad, his point has meaning and value.

Similar to studies within feminist social research, my fieldwork demonstrates that assumptions about status, race, ethnicity, or gender should not be made when it comes to deciding who should do the interviewing or how one identifies their position or the position of another (Phoenix 1994; Rhodes 1994; Twine 1998, 2000). It is too simplistic a view regarding

the individual and the intersubjective, and this was Abinet's point. Each person and each situation are too different to rely on essentialized notions of human life.

I could, on one hand, analyze the domestic worker situation in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf from postcolonial theories of racialized "otherness" and hierarchies of status, and I could also analyze the ways in which my fieldwork decentralizes race as a dominant understanding regarding relations of power and privilege and disenfranchisement and deference. Again, in asking Abinet and women we spoke with if they thought being Ethiopian had any effect on the treatment they experienced, or if being from East Africa and working in the Middle East affected relationship dynamics between employee and employer, I was trying to understand, through their own words, if there was some sort of recognition of "being through others" (Fanon [1952] 2008), which situated them in a subordinate position vis-à-vis their employer's gaze. A resounding "no" was most often offered.

"Why would there be?" was a common follow-up.

If I knew a particular woman well enough, I would ask her more directly about her experiences with discrimination. Did the mistreatment and abuse she encounter have anything to do with being Ethiopian and her employer, for example, being Saudi, Lebanese, or Emirati? Did ethnicity or skin color influence the way individuals in the household treated each other? Did she have any sense that individuals from different countries, who also worked in the house, were treated similarly or different?

A few times, an interlocutors explained to me that the abuse was a reaction to the fact that Ethiopian women are particularly beautiful, and this was seen as threatening to female employers. They suggested that the shouting they experienced or any sort of confinement to a space was done because their female employer was irrationally angry at their recent arrival.

Taytu, a key interlocutor, expressed to me that some of the abuse was precipitated by the fact that Ethiopian women had strong convictions and stood their ground during disagreements. There was also a sentiment that the yelling was more performative than actually abusive (this rationalization was only offered in cases where the employer did not also subject them to any physical abuse or verbal insults). The tendency to yell was explained as a character flaw; it was not viewed as a personal attack, but rather, a part of the employer's weak commitment to cultivating a virtuous personhood.

Most women I engaged came from rural communities and traditional notions of docility and quietness prevailed as the quintessential qualities of a good woman. By positioning the shouting episodes, they endured from their employers, as an absence of *womanness*, it allowed them to reassert their sense of cultural and individual pride and exceptionalism. This may be yet another example of "creative incorporation" (Levine 2000). This was also possibly another instance wherein silence—i.e., the domestic worker does not respond to something unworthy of attention—was an exercise of strength. Not responding demonstrated a finesse for handling a potentially threatening situation.

Such narratives, however, do contradict the formalized institutional explanation of why Ethiopian domestic workers experience high rates of abuse. At MOLSA and Mekelakel, individuals explained to me that Ethiopian domestic workers experienced various forms of abuse across the Arab States because they did not know how to properly clean or use modern household appliances. The men I spoke with reasoned, again, that it did not have anything to do with issues of racism, sexism, forms of labor exploitation, or hierarchies of privilege, but rather with lack of "proper education," as most of the women , they explained to me, who migrated abroad for work, were from the rural areas.

I was surprised by these explanations. I still do not know whether the individuals I spoke with believed there was some sort of racism operating abroad, and did not want to discuss such matters with me, or if they were serious in their analyses. Such a typecasting of rural Ethiopian women would reinforce tradition patriarchal notions of women's ineptitude, all too present in Ethiopian scripture (see page 125). However, what I am certain of, is that their answers held meaning. They wanted me to understand something about the situation. What that was exactly, I do not know, perhaps that it was remediable? That the government could "train" future domestic workers "properly" and thus ensure their safety, continue the transnational labor exchange, and desperately needed remittances?

What do I make of their answers in relation to theories addressing the global racial hierarchy and the racialization of bodies in the context of migrant domestic work throughout the Arab States? Such a situation, viewed from the outside, is so clearly illustrative of Fanon's renowned analysis of encounters with subjugation, the deployment of violence, and the reluctance (or refusal) of the narrow-minded other to recognize the other as person ([1952] 2008, [1963] 2004). Thus, how should we interpret such narrative evidence when we "know" there is racism operating in such spaces? Considering my data, my partial answer to such questions rests in what Mbembe describes as an acceptance of "epistemic diversity" (2017, 37)—a pluralistic understanding of the complex intersubjective assemblages living in the responses of my interlocuters.

Hollan reasons that if we are to consider the individual as a site of experience, we must remember that each person is "marked by a particular set of historically specific interactions with others, and in turn, how historically specific individuals come to mark and infuse, in particular ways, the lives of others" (2012, 42). It is Hollan's words that I remind me of Fanon's use of the

Hegelian dialectic to demonstrate how an individual develops self-consciousness—it is a self understood to itself through its experiences.[61] What both authors suggests is that the particulars of the intersubjective encounter marked by processes of racialization are indispensable for understanding the lived-experiences of individual persons embedded in racial hierarchies, but such considerations do not preclude felt-experiences of equality (or an absence of racism) and this amalgamation of being-in-the-world *is* meaningful for understanding individual selves and their experiences.

The development of self-consciousness requires mutual action—both individuals must "recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other" (Hegel 1949, 230-231 as cited by Fanon [1952] 2008, 192). Yet, if the mutual recognition is refused or misrecognized from one side, then the dialectic is disrupted—there is a fracture in the co-construction of the we-relation. This disruption is what I suggest is taking place in the experiences of my interlocuters, as noted in my conversations with them, Abinet, and NGO and government administrators. The individuals with whom I spoke did not recognize a subjugated racialized self in their encounter with a non-Ethiopian other. Alternatively, I often wondered whether their encounter with novel otherness and the harmful atmosphere they cultivated, made processes of racialization irrelevant or alternatively, if interlocutors experience some sort of "all-of-a-sudden" recognition of a harmful othering that "shocked" them?

Thus, while Fanon engages the phenomenological imperative and argues for a descent into the lived-experiences of "the black [wo]man" so that we might better understand how processes of racialization are enveloped and refracted within the individual, and expand our understandings about the ways in which "the black [wo]man" integrates the recognition of

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[61] Beauvoir similarly incorporates Hegel's master-slave dialectic implicating the existentially different situations of man and woman.

herself through the other's recognition establishes a particular meaning in their life and *weltanschauung*[62] (Fanon [1952] 2008, 75, 191-193), it is Hollan (2012) who recognizes that if we use this type of methodological structure to understand individuals, then we must *also* remain mindful "that things happen to one person, even within the same local world, that do not happen to another" and this will leave its mark on subsequent happenings, interactions, and interpretations in the world (2012, 42-43). It is, then, by taking seriously my interlocutor's understanding of their own recognition and their judgment of their recognition through the eyes of the other that I am given access to a certain givenness of their world, a recognition of a diverse episteme where there is an erasure of a mutually recognized (and agreed up) racial ordering of the world, and this experience discloses a particular set of knowledge regarding the selfhood, as well as their described mental and emotional unwellness precipitated by their domestic work abroad.

This acceptance of their experience (and structuring) of the world maintains a commitment to feminist critiques of knowledge by exposing how individual experiences (thoughts, feelings, emotions) resist a narrowly defined "scope of the we" dominant in the construction of worldly knowledge vis-à-vis Anglo-American 20th century philosophy. This epistemic and ontological token has historically dominated, subordinated, and marginalized women's epistemic authority due to its alleged emotionality (Code 2007). In my commitment to feminist theory, I entertain an understanding that the mental and emotional unwellness experienced by my interlocutors is a possible abreaction precipitated by a misalignment of one's self and the other's view of their self. I explore their conditions as possible representations of a

[62] Worldview.

self-consciousness that is re-formed through brief psychotic episodes when there is a fractured we-relation.

This synthesis is a project of tinkering with co-produced narratives about beingness in the context of larger social and cultural structures, and of destabilizing social categories through the incorporation of the experience-near. I am committed to displacing the "expert" voice of conventional theories such that it does not colonize the often marginalized "other" voice present in theoretical deliberations. This is an attempt to prevent what Escobar (1995) described as an expert "Western" voice marginalizing local groups, and an attempt to answer England's (1994) questions about how scholars can incorporate the voices of "others" without colonizing them in a way that reinforces domination (Momsen 2006).

Like Apentiik's (2002) realization about his own work in his home community, my foreign novelty was by and large regarded as a non-threat or unremarkable. It is possible that the more neutral positioning of my presence undergirds why most women in the shelters accepted my attendance and my project (Hollan 2008). If I could be helpful, through an understanding of their experiences, or simply exist as someone to listen, why *not* talk to me? I was a container, a vault of sorts, bounded by differences that made it unlikely, if not impossible for a situation to arise where I would share their experiences with their neighbors.

Chapter Four

Collective Work

Modest attention has been given to the use of a research assistant in anthropological fieldwork, with relevant scholarship published sporadically throughout the last 80 years. Yet, less attention has been given to the intersubjective dynamics present in intimate forms of fieldwork conducted with research assistants who work not only as "cultural brokers" or translator, but also as interpreters, data analysts, and mediators of local sagacious insights (Crapanzano 1980; Lowie 1940; Phillips 1959; Temple and Young 2004; Turner 2010).[63] In fact, Turner (2010) writes that in reviewing this specific topic she could not find a single piece of scholarship which addressed the voices and opinions of the research assistants themselves. That which does exist, she noted, instead speaks to the researcher's own reflexive accounts of working with a research assistant (Molony and Hammett 2007; Scott et al. 2006). Again, an ego-centric examination of the fieldworker, while good for post-1970s reflexivity, continues to obfuscate the primacy research assistants can hold in our work and knowledge production within the social sciences.

In the context of Ethiopia, in reviewing recent ethnographic writings, there is an insufficient acknowledgement regarding the extent to which a field assistant, interpreter, or research assistant aided in fieldwork. It is certainly possible to proceed without an assistant in

[63] Discussions pertaining to the *use* of field assistants and interpreters are well represented, but these do not address the reflexive aspect of a research assistant and their role in knowledge production and construction of cultural senses.

Ethiopia, I am nevertheless more curious to know how to conduct such fieldwork, particularly in Addis Ababa. The intimate and clandestine networks important to connecting with spaces, facilities, and individuals is challenging, and for these and other ethical reasons, I detail Abinet's role in not only data collection, but also interpretation, analyses, and his influence on the structure and form of our results. As demonstrate in my discussions about his inclusion in my phenomenological approach to field work, he is an agentive, not a passive entity of data collection.

Gender Dynamics in Fieldwork

There are several ways in which gender is central to this study. Gender is ubiquitous in both the local and transnational contexts; it is always there operating as perhaps the most significant ligament of subjectivity for the women at the core of this project. Gender is not only a performance or construct, but it is also a structure, a set of social relations, a social location, a cognitive process, all of which are ongoingly negotiated (Mahler and Pessar 2001).

At the most basic level this project is about women and their experiences. Second, this group of women partake in migrant domestic work between regions of the Global South, which is largely, if not exclusively, "women's work" (i.e., care work) and designated as a central contribution to the feminization of migration (Mahler and Pessar 2006; Ong 1991; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Third, the nefarious treatment and abuse experienced by this group is often discussed on an international platform in terms of gender-based violence, wherein men are frequently positioned as the perpetrators. My work reveals that both men and women engage in abusive behavior in the context of this study, both as employers and as brokers who coordinate an individual's transnational migration. Next, gender ties closely with an ethics of care—when

asking women why they decided to migrate for work, they described well-established claims about the necessary ethical commitments made by women to their families, communities, and even broader culture.

Fifth, regarding the mental health diagnoses prescribed to women central to this research, I attend to the gendered features operating within psychiatric diagnostic categories. This query necessitates discussions grounded in feminist theories and with that an acceptance of multiple ontologies and multiple-selves as neither nefarious nor mal-adaptive to existence. Likewise, by repositioning various forms of mental unwellness as embodied knowledge, I explore the connections between the female body, work, and ethics. This repositioning speaks to the sixth way in which gender articulates throughout this research: gender influences national ideological dynamics pertaining to who, for example, is worth protecting, saving, or sacrificing. Questions related to state-sponsored deception and the commodification of bodies arise while considering Ethiopian national political discourses about migrant domestic work and their individual rights.

Seventh, concerning the methodological entailments of this study, I address questions of gender as it relates specifically to Abinet and myself and our dynamic as a research team. Questions about the validity of research produced in the context of intersecting lines of dominance and subordination, abjection and difference (Code 2007) requires an acknowledgement of the complex gender dynamics operating within a research agenda such as my own. The gender dynamics amongst me and my informants, Abinet and myself, and Abinet and our informants illustrate how gender predominates over race and ethnicity as the marker of respect and privilege—that is, Ethiopian society counties to widely "associate the highest values exclusively with masculinity…and considers women genetically inferior" (Levine ([1974] 2000,

54). The inferiority imparted on women manifests in an inherent assumption that women are less credible, less knowledgeable, and less useful than their male counterparts.

These assumptions are reinforced and perpetuated in both religious and familiar text, which “remorselessly downplay or nullify the value of women in [Ethiopian] society” (Hussein 2009, 202). Popular proverbs, for example, maintain the subordinate position of women through such sayings as, “Women are big, but not great,” “Women in the kitchen/pantry, man in the court,” “Woman without man is like a field without seed,” and “The breasts that contain milk cannot contain intelligence” (Hussein 2009, 97,102,103). Having endured my own experiences living through these social mores, I reason that such essentializations about Ethiopian values do not always play through family dynamics. There were several women with whom I spoke that reported a respected position in both their familial and social milieus. Similarly, just as many female relatives came to retrieve their daughters from the shelters, as did male. These on-the-ground experiences display that certain cultural models, present in the literature, are less rigid in the everyday. Nevertheless, what remained was a general sense that the patriarchal power-structure maintained supremacy over the ordering of things and relations in Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia and as a researcher, I was first a foremost a woman. My gendered subjectivity figured most centrally into my social interactions both inside the shelter and outside in my larger fieldwork arena of Addis Ababa. The currents of male authority flooded nearly every step of my work within the cadre of local bureaucrats. I moved through these channels often enduring the familiar orations of the patriarchy. It felt relentless; and I knew I needed to endure this paternalism with some appearance of calmness. I had to develop a form of patience that allowed me to maintain composure. I needed to listen to what was being said to me and find the value and “data” within, while setting aside my annoyance. I would tell myself to stay rooted in my

commitment to this project, flow with the environment, turn any felt affronts into valuable residues.

I was not always successful in this stance. There were days when I returned to Abinet's car or my home livid from listening to some man explain to me how to go about interviewing women or conduct anthropological fieldwork. However, these moments also helped me bond with the women at the shelters on occasion. A few times I was noticeably subjected to Abinet's lectures on how to do something correctly. During such moments I had an exchange of annoyed glances with some of the other women around me. There was an unspoken, "Is he serious right now?!" It was a look that conveyed more than any verbal language, and helped build a bond amongst us women.

My non-verbal cues allowed residence to know me on a deeper level. They saw me at my most vulnerable, uncomfortable, confused, overwhelmed, excited, tired, happy, relieved, frustrated—the full rainbow of emotions. Many women at the shelters observed me, just as I observed them. And one prominent personal characteristic granted me the opportunity to form another connection with the residences as well as staff and care providers. I blushed without delay and, at times, without good enough reason. This crimson glow evidenced a cherished Ethiopian trait: shyness. I am, for better or worse, shy and often deferential particularly in the presence of unfamiliarity, but in this context, it worked in my favor. My tendency to blush was not only a source of entertainment—let us watch the *forenji* turn bright red and squirm in her little plastic chair—but also revealed a real and relatable form of humility and self-consciousness.

The women and nurses at both shelters would laugh at my poor attempts at Amharic or badly folded *misir* and *injera* morsels—I was embarrassed by my inability to eat like a proper

adult. Sometimes, the nurses would end up feeding me—a practice called *gursha*—at least then I could get a perfectly pocketed bit of injera and sauce.

"Evaye!" ("my dear Eva"), the nurse from Tesfa would chuckle when I failed to do something correctly or implicated myself somehow. Occasionally a new resident would decide to sit beside me and just talk at me in Amharic, which I could not understand, and the other women would laugh lightheartedly and joke with Abinet, who would then translate their jests. I never felt this laughter was malicious (though there were certainly other times that I did not enjoy being teased for my "big feet" or "round face"). Instead, as I understood it, it demonstrated an acceptance or an appreciation for my self-consciousness and awkwardness ("Evaye"), something I think they too felt during their time in the shelter, back home in their communities, or during their work abroad.

It was through these moments of recognizing a self-sameness that we felt an affinity with each other. The extent to which non-verbal language provides an effective tool for interaction and understanding other's intentions or way of life worked to construct a shared world of meaning (Apentiik and Parpart 2006; Temple 1997). Our shared world was one of womanhood, sporadic embarrassment, confusing, humility, curiosity, delayed adulthood and even a resolution to live a certain kind of life. This shared understanding about the human condition, *our* conditions, allowed us to connect and later have open and sincere conversations about our selves.

Abinet's Gender Subjectivity

There is some sort of tacit assumption about who can know what and why. Just as I was first and foremost a woman, Abinet was first and foremost a man. In a patriarchal society, it might be assumed that Abinet's male subjectivity determine what kind of information we had

access to during our interviews. Questions and concerns come to mind regarding his position as an Ethiopian man questioning Ethiopian women about their experiences abroad as domestic workers. As the literature suggests, it is likely that some of the violence experienced by female domestic workers was sexual. If we take the following generalization that Ethiopia is a patriarchal society, coupled with the notion, particularly in the rural communities, that premarital sex is taboo (Molla et al. 2008), then there is an argument to be made that Ethiopian women may have felt uncomfortable revealing to Abinet (and/or myself) any experiences of sexual assault, harassment, or rape.

This begs the question then, if I had had a female research assistant would that have improved the likelihood that an interlocutor would informed us of assault? I do not know. Some of our interlocutors did tell us about a range of sexual assault episodes, including rape, but it is entirely possible that there were case of which we were not informed. I do know that had I hired any other research assistant, it would have produced an account from a different perspective (Temple 1997)—male or female, young or old, Amhara, Oromo, Tigray. As Manderson and colleagues (2006) remind us, individual enactments of self, social roles, and social characteristics (Goffman 1959) are grounded in cultural values and scripts (Turner [1982] 2001) and are embodied in culturally conventional ways (Butler 2011). And the ways these processes are intersubjectively engaged, produce epistemological consequences due to our individual "intellectual autobiographies" (Stanley 1990). In other words, no matter who I hired they would impact this work.

One day, and more than a year into our fieldwork, I asked Abinet about the issue of gender dynamics in our research, "Abinet, you are a man. We interview women, do you think that is a problem?"

He looked at me seriously and contemplated the question.

> *No, because first time when I make for them* [when he meets them]*, to be as a friend. I try to be like* [a] *brother for them, and I talking with them for the first time as like a brother. And we talking, and we make some fun, some jokes with them. <u>I don't try to be abusing for them</u>. So, it was ok. It was very nice discussing with the women. We always talking about the future is bright, so they very fine, they are very nice.*

I pressed the issue, "Do you think they were honest with us about any sexual abuse, or do you think they, they, lied to us because you were a man, and they felt shame?"

> *No, they are very honest. Because when talking with* [the] *women most of them have family, like the women who—Kiya—she has the family, also, she got the four childrens in her country* [region] *and some rest of the women's have more than one children. They made a family. <u>So even I don't flirt for them</u>. We talking about their children always. We talking about their future life. We talking about* Tesfa*, what they giving for them. We don't talk about sexuality for them, so we <u>didn't abuse for them</u>, so they give us the right information.*

Abinet's assessment of why he thinks the women we spoke with were honest with us about any experiences of sexual abuse or violence, is conditioned by the fact that we did not directly ask if the woman had been a victim of sexual abuse. He states in both responses to my questioning, "we didn't abuse," and "I don't try and be abusing" as justifications for *why* we garnered honest answers—despite the gender dynamics. He did not abuse them; he did not even flirt with them; he acted as a brother would—caring, kind, platonic.[64]

In our interviews we indirectly asked about instances of sexual abuse, harassment, or sexual violence. We did this by asking if they were mistreated by an employer or if they experienced any unwanted attention from men in the household. It was an uncomfortable topic for most, and it could be even more uncomfortable or offensive if questions of sexual abuse were

[64] Discussions with interlocutors and Ethiopian friends indicated that it was common to have close relationships with your brothers and sisters. One friend told me, "If you were not close with a sibling, it would be weird, it would mean something was wrong."

asked outrightly. I witnessed such an occurrence during the completion of the IOM "Victim of Trafficking: Screening Interview Form." This form, which was originally completed by IOM staff, who would randomly visit *Tesfa*, was later assigned to the psychiatric nurse as one of her duties. One of the twenty-four questions on the form, embedded within the larger question, "Where any of the following means used to control the individual [during the activity]?" listed "sexual abuse" as a possible answer. While the question itself made little sense to the nurse reading the form or to the woman listening, the nurse would inevitably lower her voice and ask the question in a hushed tone, indicating the sensitive nature of the subject. The reply was often a shake of the head indicating, "No."

Abinet further reasoned that by being "like a brother"—joking, talking about a positive, bright, future, *not* flirting—helped to build a relationship wherein they viewed the presence of him (a man) as a non-threating asset. His masculinity gave him inherent value; he is knowledgeable, credible, useful. He became the male authoritative figure in an otherwise female domain. Yet, by embodying the brother role, rather than husband or father, he undertook the most egalitarian of gender roles in the private (woman) space of the shelter.[65] He did not want to be paternalistic and dictatorial, and his energy and attention toward shelter residents endeavored to bring about a social egalitarianism. He was there to embolden the young women, as only a brother could. He displayed this often after we would hear a portion of a young woman's story, which upset all three of us. He would bend his head down toward hers and he would say, "Ayzosh. Ayzosh."[66] He was not there to judge, condemn, or control, but he was not always

[65] Turner (2010) similarly found that her two research assistants found cross-gender interviewing more comfortable and produced better interview data.
[66] "Stay strong," "hang in there," "It's okay," "It is going to be okay".

successful. At times, he was authoritative in the sense that the inherent value placed upon him (as a man) was flexed through his position as a source of valued insight.

The humor and laughter Abinet brought into the everyday sociality of the shelters performed an important function in establishing a lighthearted brotherly love. He was there *with* them, to learn *from* them, by listening to them absent of sexuality—he did not even "flirt" he remarks to me. Abinet accepts and reinstates himself into the cultural script of masculine authority platonically. By injecting his reflection, "I don't even flirt" he is separating sex, sexuality, and sexual abuse from his encounter with the women at the shelters. As a brother, coupled with the knowledge that many of these women are mothers and makers of families, he is communicating that he did not think about these women in a sexual way. In questioning whether or not women would open up to him, he implies that there is a sexual nature to sexual violence, and in removing that sexuality by establishing himself as the brother figure, Abinet believes that they were more likely to tell us the truth regarding occurrences of sexual abuse or violence. Nevertheless, even when we worked diligently to establish a space where a person could feel the freedom to express whatever story she wished, it did not guarantee unbridled openness.

The Practical, Technical, and Social Negotiation of a Research Assistant

Abinet was intuitive, patient, kind, caring, and sensitive. He would spend every morning and afternoon with me at one of the two NGOs, simply "hanging out" with a group of women. From the beginning, I was impressed with Abinet's remarkable sensitivity to everyone we encountered. He would play with the children at Mekelakel, help fix things at Tesfa. His care for our project, for each shelter, their missions, and women who resided within and his concern for their rehabilitation shown through his everyday compassion. He endured Taytu's adolescent

mockery and immaturity; Hannah and Faduma's delusions of grandeur, persecution, and outbursts. He even tolerated the professions of love and romantic solicitations from one resident who alleged Abinet to be her boyfriend, Teddy. He took it all in stride.

He undertook his own phenomenological project in our work, experiencing a being-in-the-world as being-in-the-shelter. He would give serious attention to the many moods and emotions, words, and behaviors of the women around us—he withheld immediate judgement on non-verbal or body language. I would often ask him, while we witnessed some sort of heightened emotional comportment, if he thought, for example, she was "scared." He would study her, listen carefully to her words, and ask straight forwardly, "Are you scared?" He tried to access a raw sense experience, how was he hearing her, seeing her, perceiving her movements and sounds (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013). He knew it was not simply language that matter for interpretation, but language's relationship with silence, comportment, the environment around us, what appeared before our interlocutors. Abinet did his best to translate an experience, an effect, a cosmological inquiry that spoke to our agenda of meaningfully understanding a particular cultural phenomenon. He understood that I wanted to know what individual women said about their experiences, their mental and emotional un/wellness. We were co-constructing knowledge. He knew this and took the job seriously.

Below I offer two brief anecdotes regarding Abinet. I demonstrate how my engagement with him as a research assistant goes beyond that of interpretation, translation, community building, and the facilitation of relationships. Abinet is his own person, with his own history, feelings, emotions, fears, skills, knowledge, energy, references, and sociality; and each aspect of his personhood must be taken into consideration during our fieldwork. Throughout this work I

remained cognizant of an *Abinet-self,* a self that figured into our work during both the actual fieldwork and in the perspicacity of his ethnographic interpretations.

Abinet in Action

Abinet was a courageous research assistant, almost nothing intimidated him during fieldwork. When I felt fearful, he reassured me; when he witnessed my trepidation, he moved confidently, guiding me with him. In moments when I knew we both felt unsettled, he did his best to maintain a calm and collected composure. I witnessed this remarkable quality during our first visit to the psychiatric hospital in Addis Ababa. Abinet knew I was nervous. It was the first month of fieldwork and I was anxious whenever I had to ask for permission to visit a potential site. We approached the gated compound. Abinet spoke while I showed my paperwork to the khakied clade guards. They waved us through and directed us to park to the left of the throughfare, adjacent to the guardhouse.

I took a deep breath, grabbed my notebook, and stepped out of the car. I shuddered from nervousness, which I masked with the explanation that I was cold and would keep my jacket on. Abinet and I proceeded down the cobblestone footpath toward the back of the open-air psychiatric facility. There were dozens of people milling around—nurses in white coats, doctors too, staff in brown scrubs, patients in white-patterned pajamas, and clusters of visitors sleepily lining the paint-stripped walls as they accompanied their loved ones to their early morning appointments. As we moved through the belly of the facility, trying to find our way, I occasionally caught a glimpse of a multiple bed ward or an outpatient examination room. I noticed patients and their kin squeezed tightly onto old, wooden benches trying to avoid sitting on the cold concrete floor. I saw a small group of male patients playing a game of ping pong in a

room separate from the rest of the hospital. “Those families pay for them to have a private room,” Abinet said to me. We continued through.

Abinet asked a few staff members if they knew where the CEO’s office was, we were there to see him he explained. Each reply directed us one way or another, which resulted in a turning and twisting of this direction and that direction. We made little progress. Our confusion must have been obvious as a patient attempted to direct us by pointing up a flight of stairs and stating that the CEO’s office could be found that way (ultimately, he was correct). Abinet ignored this directive and continued to wander around the ground floor of the main facility. We hurried passed a line of showers filled with male patients rinsing underneath. There was a coolness that lightly washed over us, and I noted how they must be showering in frigid water. Their pajamas lain on the floor, discarded in the open-air hallway, absorbing the streams that rushed from below their feet into the central drain. A nurse stood close by, watching. I felt overwhelmed with everything happening before me; I felt like I was going to panic but reminded myself that I needed to maintain composure. I did my best to uphold an outward appearance of absolute professionalism by pretending that I had been here a dozen times before. There was nothing more I wanted then to disappear into the background.

I knew Abinet felt uneasy as well; I could feel it and see it. He hurried through the labyrinth of corridors, side stepping a patient, a fluid, or a mass of discarded sheets. We headed down a narrow passage and ended up in another multi-bed public ward. We turned around and went back the way we came and tried another direction. It was not just the sights that overwhelmed us, but the sounds and smells—a potent mixture of food cooking and various human wastes, the shout or whistle for our attention, the confusion of not knowing where to turn. I tried to keep my eye on Abinet while also trying to observe everything around us.

I tried to sooth my anxiety with thoughts about the phenomenological method and how it might work in a space and moment like this. How could I perceive something I had never witnessed before—what was the object that grabbed my attention? Was it that which seemed unfamiliar or familiar? What if it was all unfamiliar? Was I performing an ethnocentric gaze and failing to actually bracket my natural attitude? Was the ethnographic epoché (Throop 2010) beyond my reach when I felt so disconcerted? Could I resist the addiction to reflectively analyze the situation at hand? Could I just stop thinking about myself for a moment?

When we are trying to capture a certain dimension of the world, Merleau-Ponty reminds us that we must "grasp the total intention…the unique manner of existing expressed in the properties of the pebble, the glass, or piece of wax…the unique formula of behavior toward others, Nature, time, and death" ([1945] 2013, xxxii). What is the unique manner of existing in this hospital? And am I able to catch it? Is Abinet able to catch it? Does he care? Do I care now that I am amid various forms of suffering? Abinet and I worked to capture and re-construct a particular position of a particular situation and bore this in mind whenever we found ourselves in a place that may have otherwise been excluded in the discussion of the truths of the experiences of Ethiopian domestic workers, but in this moment, a moment that overwhelmed us both, it may have been outside our capacity to theorize.

We walked farther into the depths of the hospital, determine to find the administrative offices. We eventually arrived at a light blue, concrete-hewn impasse, which was breached by a narrow passage evidenced by an iron-rod gate and middle-aged man wearing a green-khaki oversized jacket and matching hat—another guard. I froze. I reached my emotional limit for the day, "Abinet." I tried to keep my voice from breaking and I could feel the tears brimming against my eyelids. It was all men behind the gate. I was not sure I had permission to enter this space. I

felt like we should not go beyond this concrete barrier for reasons related to both our safety and hospital regulations. This group of individuals were cut off from the rest of the hospital for a reason, I rationalized. I just wanted to go home.

“*Neh*! Come on!” Abinet directed.

Like jumping off a cliff, I passed through the entrance. As soon as Abinet and I entered this division, a male patient started running toward us, one arm extended outwards, pointing, “You should not be here! You do not belong here!” he shouted in English. We walked our fastest through the cobblestone courtyard. Soon, however, we were surrounded by a group of patients. One stroked my shoulder, another spoke to Abinet in Amharic and a third spoke to me in English.

“Come here,’ Abinet extended his arm back toward me, wrapping me closer to him, putting himself between me and the other men. His attempt at “shielding” me were futile. Abinet turned over his shoulder and said, “Hurry, go up there,” jerking his head to the left. I obliged. He followed behind me, trying to keep himself between me and the small group. Abinet turned around and reached into his jean pocket. “What is he doing?” I thought. Before he finished fishing out a few *birr*, two of the men snatched it from his hands. “Go away!” Abinet shouted behind him as moved quickly toward me.

One of the patients—the one who spoke flawless English—made it passed Abinet’s outstretched arms and now walked beside me. I was unsure of how to handle the situation, and there were no doctors, nurses, or other staff around to ask for assistance. The young man appeared to be in his early thirties. He was tall, handsome, and regal in his posture. He smoothly swung his hands and arms about as he spoke. I listened. He explained to me that he was a student in Denmark, working on his PhD. He did have a professorial sense about him.

"Where are you from?" he asked, "I want to know where you are from."

"The United States," I answered.

Another man nearby overheard and exclaimed, "Oooooh! The big country!"

The young man before me nodded approvingly. I continued walking with him on my left and Abinet on my right. The rest of the group disappeared into the center of the courtyard, counting the money from Abinet.

We went up a short set of stairs and came across two rooms the size of closets. These spaces seemed to hold the potential of being administrative offices. Abinet peaked in.

"No this is not right," he said. He spun around, seemingly still overwhelmed and confused, and now annoyed with the persistent presence of this young man.

"Administration is here! Administration is here!" the young man said while gesturing upward. He knew what we were looking for without us ever saying. He was pointing toward another set of stairs, set behind another chain link doorway.

"*Neh*," Abinet said. We hurried to the staircase and climbed to the top floor. We were only two flights up and it was quiet and calm. Our curious patient ceased trailing us. There were two doors in front of us. One marked "CEO" with the door shut; the other, with no marking, was open and inside sat a middle-aged woman chatting with a colleague. We entered—Abinet first and me second, sighing with relief.

While this was perhaps the most anxious I saw Abinet there was one other time when I witnessed him visibly scared. During a trip to the administrative offices of a government-run entity, where we hoped to conduct fieldwork, Abinet and I needed permission from an official to enter the premises. As Abinet and I approached the office of this individual I already sensed Abinet's trepidation. I witnessed his confident saunter wane to a glacial stride. We approached a

door marked, “Director”. He gingerly knocked on the frosted glass and cracked open the door. He gave a hushed formal greeting. A looming figure sat behind a large, well-varnished desk. He signaled us in with a flick of his hand. He was dressed in a dark suit, white shirt, and tie—the standard uniform of government bureaucrats in Addis. Abinet nearly pushed me into the office before him. “What is happening?” I thought to myself. The office was old and dingy; the air was dead and hot. There were no windows open. I glanced around to inspect as to whether there were even windows to open. All the windows were covered by some sort of green paint, and an only hint of the bright Addis sunlight shown through.

I held my paperwork outward as I approached his desk. I greeted the gentleman and introduced myself. Abinet approached cautiously behind me. He kept his head bent slightly down and avoided direct eye contact. I was so confused by Abinet’s behavior. I continued to explain my project to the man before us and detailed Abinet’s position as my research assistant. Abinet quietly introduced himself in Amharic. This man hardly looked up from his desk. He shuffled papers and continued with his work. I offered my assortment of institutional paperwork from my university, both NGOs, and the American Embassy. Abinet explained, in Amharic, what each piece of paper in the folder represented. The man remained silent and tossed my paperwork aside. This was not the first time our requests for information was rebuffed, but it was certainly the first time it was done so indelicately. Abinet did not attempt to negotiate an agreement with this man, nor did I. The silence was unnerving. Abinet thanked him and ushered me out.

I could not understand what exactly was going on. Why had Abinet been so timid? As Abinet moved quickly through the parking lot and toward his car, he explained to me that that man was a former high-ranking member of the *Derg*. Abinet recognized him and knew exactly

who he was and what activities he participated in a few decades prior. Moments later we watched this individual enter the backseat of a chauffeured black Mercedes S-class and leave the premises. Abinet and I knew this person had zero intention of helping or granting us access to the facility. Neither of us wanted a second encounter with this man.

While it is rarely addressed, anthropological fieldwork is "a potentially dangerous business" (Howell 1986 as cited by Sluka 1990, 115) and violent, intimidating, and threatening episodes are often ignored or glossed over (Sluka 1990). Yet, episodes of intimidation, like those above, are necessary for understanding the boundaries of fieldwork. The relations that make up our projects transcend formal fieldwork design and structural constraints predicated on institutional governing bodies. By offering the reader access to those everyday moments of the uncomfortable or constrained, anthropologists can expose more than the interpersonal consequences of fieldwork (Briggs 1970; Scheper-Hughes 2000) or the explicit activist component (Hale 2006; Kowal 2015; Tax 1975). These raw, difficult to theorize moments, expose a lack of control, which should be problematized instead of veiled in sweeping generalities about fieldsites and interlocuter-informant-subject positions. These particularities go beyond the current literature regarding the "personal characteristics and working habits of fieldworkers," which mediate fieldwork—a reflection that hardly does justice to those of us working in more precarious environments. Our unscripted deviations disclose something or someone that matters or should matter to everyone (Mann 2018, 48). In other words, discussing the limits of our fieldwork anthropologists brings attention to certain conditions of injustice that might otherwise go unnoticed, and reveal considerable insight about the social environment of our projects and interlocutors. Our work can speak to the political without explicitly politicizing our research projects.

What emerges from these expositions are granular moments of critical emotions (in Abinet's case, fear), that are tethered to historically situated relations, politics, and resources often only accessible through fieldwork activities. Both Abinet and I were aware of the risky nature of our research due to its political sensitivity, and did our best to avoid entering situations that put us or our interlocutors at risk. While it was not my intention to construct a project with political viscosity, the central concerns of this research study were inherently political, both in Ethiopia, and across the ASPG.[67] Thus, when we encountered a person who himself was a risk factor, we understood it was best to retreat. I had to remain conscious of the directions our research led and what we chose to undertake in our more investigatory matters. It was not only my ethical responsibility to protect the identities of those I interviewed, but also the reputation and well-being of Abinet, and by extension, his family. It may seem excessive or erroneous to worry about such *Derg*-era individuals in present-day Ethiopia, but such a dismissal would be a gross oversight in understanding the nuanced social and political dynamics of post-*Derg* Ethiopia. The fall of socialism in Ethiopia may have led to the restructuring of political and social institutions, but the wariness concerning surveillance, disappearances, and unjust imprisoning, remains deeply entrenched in the lifeworlds of people in Ethiopia.

Abinet, Amharic, and Argot

Acknowledging a strong reliance on a research assistant and a failure to adequately grasp the local language(s) is a tough admission. This hesitation and the expected cool reaction from our colleagues have a long history in anthropology. In 1940, Robert Lowie acknowledged this

[67] During the writing of this dissertation, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ethiopian domestic workers in the ASPG became the subject of several newspaper headlines, as their employers, who could no longer afford to employ them, abandon thousands of women in front of Ethiopian consulates and embassies across the Gulf States.

uncomfortable reality. When responding to Margaret Mead's critique of his failure to "use [the] native language" during his fieldwork and rely exclusively on interpreters and thus produce work that she called "highly suspect" (1939, 192),[68] he wrote that as anthropologist, "we use interpreters not because we like to but because we have to," and we "use" language the best we can, but that still does not guarantee access to the exact essence of what is being communicated (1940, 89).

Like Lowie, I "used" Amharic for all I was worth (1940, 85). That did not get me very far. Sometimes I grasped the words, but not the essence; and at other times I grasped the essence of the feeling, emotion, or situation, but not the spoken words. Abinet's interpretations were not perfect either. There was a tendence for Abinet to "filter out" what he felt was unimportant (Bujrd 2006, 176). But, as my Amharic language skills improved, I could discern when he left *something* out of the response. I would ask him straightforwardly if what he conveyed to me was exactly what the young woman said. Might he clarify the little bits and pieces I understood in relation to what he interpreted? Abinet would also, occasionally, add his own interpretation of a situation. For example, if I asked a woman about her experiences as a young woman, Abinet, for example, might translated her response into something like, "I don't remember things…" and, yet, when I had a second translator review the recordings with me, he indicated that the woman's exact words were, "I feel like all my memories (tewesta/ ትውስታ) [are] disappearing". These are rather different renditions of one's experience and hold curiously disparate meanings. I did my best with Abinet and a second translator, Semir, to get at the essence of the communication, giving attention to both the verbal and non-verbal statements presented in the interviews. I knew

[68] Mead does include a footnote stating that if the fieldwork has enough informants to check information against each other, that such information may be properly controlled and thus of importance (1939, 182).

it would not be a perfect person-centered interpretation, but it was still valuable for understanding.

Abinet made judgement calls during our interviews, and for this I do not fault him. I know he made judgements with good intentions and possibly viewed it as a way to exercise some authority over the research (I did after all tell him I wanted to know his opinions). Abinet knew from his experience as my interpreter, and simply from interacting and conversing with countless foreigners, that ideas and concepts from Amharic could not always be translated into, for example, English. This is not a new problem of ethnography or fieldwork. Malinowski faced a similar conundrum when he tried to understand the term *kula* among the Trobriand islanders. It was not just a word with a simple definition, but a word that signified a chain of social relations related to ceremonial exchange and auxiliary interactions (Malinowski 1922).[69] Alas, I found myself dealing with a time-honored anthropological predicament.

What I have tried to demonstrate through my thorough discussion of Abinet and his role in our fieldwork is that this project is imperfect. These imperfections are precisely what secures feminist and phenomenological theories to the actual, messy, ambiguous, *real* human experiences and that is exactly what this research embraces. By engaging phenomenology and other modes of feminist philosophy, this project unsettles the conventional and explores a singular understanding of humanness that opens boundaries. I like to think of this project as an exercise in generative thinking (Steinbock 1998), which academically strengthens the link between philosophy and anthropology and liberates our respective study's preoccupations with larger structural and universal explanations for phenomena, but practically and equally

[69] Malinowski's discussed in painstaking details the translation process and his theory focuses largely on grammar and semantics (Phillips 1960). While my concern here is not of linguistic problems, and procedures, but instead what it *means* to have a research assistant explain, analyze, and interpret for the alongside the fieldworker.

indispensable, this project validates the experiences of a group of individuals who find themselves at the center of a global phenomenon where their voices remain veiled. Why not, then, advance a more constructive eclecticism?[70]

[70] This is not in reference to the French philosopher Victor Cousin, but rather the practice of selecting different systems of thought, without reconciling their contradictions, and prompting a critical thinking particular to that which falls at the intersection of philosophy and anthropology.

Interlude II

Following more than a year of fieldwork together, I asked Abinet why he thought Ethiopian women traveled to the Arab countries for work. At this point we had listened to dozens of stories from women who came from both remote villages and familiar cities throughout Ethiopia. Their upbringings were quite different from his own and their stories disclosed to him firsthand accounts of unfamiliar lifeworlds, ones he abstractly knew, but never intimately encountered.

> *Ummmmm, it is a little bit complicated for me to answer. Maybe for other people, for the Western peoples,* [it is difficult] *to understand. You know what? Our country, we want to go out. And I supporting those who go out and work in Arab countries because our economy is very poor, and the population growth is very high. So, um, those people, they need to feed their own families, they need their own future life in their own community. So, it would be a way to make work because there is not any opportunity in their own country, in proper way, to make money. It is necessary to, it is an opportunity—if they got the opportunity, if they don't have any option, they go. If there is no work here, they will go to the Arab country.*

Abinet knew both personally and from our fieldwork that the economic opportunities available to his fellow countryperson were limited. In stark contrast to the international narrative touting Ethiopia as the fastest growing economy in Africa, the on-the-ground reality of this measurement is of little or no benefit to the average Ethiopian citizen. He knew through his own experience, that the underemployment and unemployment rates for those under thirty years of age is approximately 30 percent, and, as he explained to me, that statistic is only part of the problem. The population is also rapidly growing. He sees and feels this mounting pressure in his

own neighborhood and the larger city of Addis Ababa. Nearly seventy percent of the population is under the age of thirty, and consequently the economy is overly burdened by youth unemployment. Ethiopian women in particular experience joblessness at nearly double the rate as their male counterparts (Broussard and Tekleselassie 2012; SNV 2017; USAID 2018). Abinet supports and understands his compatriot's decision to go abroad to make money, to feed their families, and to have their own future. He repeats a sentiment we heard frequently: there is no opportunity for young women to find work in Ethiopia—the only "proper" option available to them is to go to the Arab country.

> *But in MOLSA I saw a lot of bureaucracy. Because when I was talking with Henry last time we discuss there are a lot of women that don't finish Grade Eight, but they have a lot of experience in Arab country, but they wouldn't get the opportunity* [to go again] *because they don't meet the requirement. So, we both think that should be change, they are in process I think, to put some regulation, to put that kind of people in the Arab countries.*

Abinet and I made frequent visits to MOLSA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in efforts to locate the national and international regulations pertaining to domestic worker rights and labor contracts specific to the Arab States. We attempted to gain an understanding about when and why the labor migration ban was implemented and reversed, and subsequently reinstated—a confusing dance over the last four years. It was often unclear when, if, and which country the government of Ethiopian banned travel to for migrant labor. We also sought the knowledge of individuals across various divisions of MOLSA and MOFA to aid in our understanding of the legal pathways available to potential domestic workers. We likewise attempted to speak to individuals at the local branch of the International Labour Office (ILO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). Unfortunately, almost everyone we wanted to speak to was either out of the office or, if we met them face-to-face, instructed us to call them

and schedule a meeting with them for “next week”—they were subsequently unavailable. There certainly was, as Abinet put it, a lot of bureaucracy. It was a form of gate keeping that kept us from the possibility of knowing whether there were official policies, both national and international, pertaining to the safeguarding of domestic workers. For us to gain any first-hand knowledge about the work of local and international agencies we had to make our way through the back channels, often done through showing up, unannounced, at certain places, and encountering a caring employee, who had more than just a professional commitment to helping domestic workers.

We had some minor successes. We spoke with MOLSA’s Illegal Labour Recruitment Prevention Team Leader on three occasions and the Director of Overseas Employment Agency Licensing. We were also given the contact information for Henry, a young man responsible for organizing the anticipated pre-departure training workshops. These courses were designed to meet the expected duties of future overseas employment. To qualify for these courses, however, Ethiopian women needed to meet all the fourteen designated requirements, one of which was having at least a Grade Eight level of education—a improbability for a significant portion of those seeking to go abroad for domestic work.

Equally elusive was the director and coordinator of the IOM branch responsible for caring and tracking the return of domestic workers. Both individuals refused to meet with me on several occasions, stating that their work was private and could not be discussed. One individual who *did* agree to meet with me was a young man who was originally contracted by the IOM to work at the airport. His job was to communicate with the nurses and security staff at Bole International Airport who encountered Ethiopian women returning from abroad who were either

actively experiencing some form of emotional and mental distress or who remained at the airport, either not talking, or not knowing how to return to her village.

The IOM had not paid or been in contact with him for months, but he remained committed to his post at the airport. Even his own attempts to remain in contact with the IOM office in Addis Ababa were fraught. He could not reach his former boss, who headed a well-financed—multi-million dollar—operation pertaining to the successful return of Ethiopian labor migrants. He said that he felt he could not abandon people who clearly needed his assistance. He kept the phone numbers of the nursing staff at both Tesfa and Mekelakel. He called them when he needed to transfer a woman in need of mental health support or family reunification. He was the only "official" we encountered who was transparent with us about the involvement of international and local organizations committed to supporting former domestic worker's "arrival assistance."

I spoke with another contracted worker from IOM, a local Ethiopian woman, who said she was instructed to only collect data about those returning from Saudi Arabia, and only from those flights arriving to Bole Airport. She indicated that there was another airport, outside of Addis, which managed flights, "full of Ethiopians, in the middle of the night, from Saudi Arabia". Abinet did not want to go to this airstrip. Another local man sent me a picture of hundreds of Ethiopian men crammed into huge cages, being unloaded from a Saudi cargo plane. "You see what they are doing to us!?" he texted.[71]

Many of the meetings I held with officials from the MOLSA, MOFA, as well as the U.S. Embassy resulted in a directive to read Proclamations 909 and 923, two constitutional authorizations that address issues related to trafficking and smuggling of persons and oversees

[71] I was unable to verify the accuracy of this photo.

employment, respectively. At the time of my primary fieldwork, it was illegal for any private employment agency (PEA) to facilitate any form of labor exchange. It was not until 2019 that Abinet and I were able to meet with two different PEAs to discuss the nuances of their operations, when it was legal to facilitate overseas employment.

Abinet was frustrated by his recollections of the bureaucratic labyrinths we navigated for the last few years. He felt upset at the recurrent lack of engagement and/or unwillingness to speak with us. He was still not ok with the "come back next week". He felt he too, as a citizen of Ethiopia, had a right to the information we requested. I tried to keep my frustrations from amplifying his own.

Chapter Five

Entelechy

When I envisage my future, I consider the movement which, prolonging my existence of today, will fulfill my present projects and will surpass them toward new ends: The future is the definite direction of a particular transcendence and it is so closely bound up with the present that it composes with it a single temporal form. [72]

-Simone de Beauvoir

Kiya was born near the Southwestern city of Jimma, the celebrated birthplace of Ethiopia's most recognized export—coffee. When you enter the town, the central roundabout boasts an enormous *jebena*[73] marking the perfect photo opportunity for tourists passing through on their way to see the tribes of the Omo Valley.[74] As a child of Oromo parents, Oromifa (Afaan Oromoo) is Kiya's mother tongue, which she speaks with Sister Hannah, Tesfa's chief nurse. Like nearly half of Oromo people, Kiya is a practicing Muslim and attends mosque weekly—a ritual that was stripped of her while working in Dubai. When I met her, she was as thin and weak as a thread of straw, and while she shrouded this frailness in a black abaya and hijab, the slightness of her wrists and her gaunt face told of her unwell condition.

Kiya arrived to Tesfa in the middle of the night in early August 2017, when the rains remained heavy and frequent and the air, damp and cold. Her appearance was marked by the

[72] The Ethics of Ambiguity 124-125
[73] A traditional Ethiopian coffee pot, handmade from clay and fired to a rich, dark brown color.
[74] Some of the most visited tribes of the Omo Valley include: Hamar, Karo, Kwega, Mursi, and Suri. Tourists tend to predominately visit the Hamar community to see the popular "bull-jumping" initiation rite. Many tribes of the Omo Valley rely on the Omo River for crops and grazing land. Unfortunately, tourist and the Ethiopian government's environmental impact (Gibe III hydroelectric dam) have negatively affected the delicate ecosystem of the Lower Omo Valley.

occupation of a wheelchair. She could not use her legs; she was in too much pain. I met her just a couple of days following her return to Ethiopia, but by this time she could push herself up from the rickety white plastic chair, amble toward me, and offer a slow greeting. Her hands felt like rough leather.

Sister Hannah immediately started to tell me about Kiya and her experiences in Dubai, "Even her story makes me cry." She remarked on the noticeable condition of Kiya's hands, "Her employers did not even give her gloves. This, [*tapping with her ruby-red polished fingernail*] is caused by the chemicals she used to clean. This is burned."

Kiya interrupted Sister Hannah and asked her in Oromifa to please conduct a medical check of her legs.

"You're fine," Sister Hannah replied, turning back to continue our conversation.

Sister Hannah

Sister Hannah is a specialized nurse of psychiatry who, at the time of this meeting, had worked part-time at Tesfa for three months, while spending the other half of her time at Amanuel Mental Specialized Hospital. There was nothing wrong with Kiya's legs, Sister Hannah remarked to me and Abinet. She may have arrived in a wheelchair, but her immediate recovery, marked by her ability walk, suggested there was nothing, organically, wrong.

While Sister Hannah was sympathetic toward Kiya and distraught by the abuse she endured in Dubai, in a moment when Kiya requested her acknowledgement of this prior suffering, Sister Hannah's refusal to examine her legs instead diminished it. She did this in two ways: first, she determined that there was no organic origin to Kiya's pain because she was able to walk immediately following her return to Ethiopia. Second, even while telling me the story of

Kiya's abuse, Sister Hannah did not consider, as far as I could tell, the possibility that the pain of Kiya's legs may be a symptom of the PTSD diagnosis, which she had already bestowed upon her. Outside the focus of Sister Hannah's storytelling, then, is the possible somatization of Kiya's horrific time abroad.

Sister Hannah's professional assessment of what constitutes "real pain"—that is a pain worthy of medical attention—is interesting in light of her in-the-moment retelling of Kiya's sustained verbal abuse, systematic food and sleep deprivation, and physical beatings.

"They hit her repeatedly with a stick. On the arm, back, leg, head," she tells me.

Thoroughly trained as a psychiatric nurse, Sister Hannah did her best to implement the years of schooling and empirical knowledge she gained during her occupational years. I sensed that her intentions were good; she obeyed the structures of psychiatry, and her determination to do "good psychiatry" helped her ascend the ranks of Ethiopia's small department. She was well-respected. I thought, however, it was possible that there may have been residual corporal signatures of Kiya's repeated thrashings, manifesting as leg pain. Yet, I was not sure whether Sister Hannah held such considerations. She was focused on doing the right thing, as outline by her training, and I sensed that such procedural understandings did not detect Kiya's veiled language (Beauvoir [1949] 2011).

A hairline fracture of her tibia or patella caused by a strong blow of her employers' weaponized baton seemed possible. It was also possible that the psycho-bodily signature of her recent experiences abroad (Hollan 2004) manifested as a preoccupation with her legs. Perhaps, Kiya was concerned that her legs were not well or had the potential of not-being-well? After all, for eight months her legs could not do what they were meant to do. Her employers forbade her limbs from using their ability of ambulation, of taking her elsewhere—she was totally confined

to her employer's home. Such possible understandings about Kiya's pain were unfortunately foreclosed by the refusal to respond to Kiya's request.

This disconnect between the institutionalization of knowledge regarding pain and suffering is grounded in psychiatry's birth from biomedicine, wherein the authority bestowed upon practitioners gives them the ability to render a particular disease intelligible (Street 2014)—that is, unambiguous and quantifiable through psychiatric and biomedical technologies. It is not unusual for signs of trauma and forms of silent suffering to misalign with professionalized understandings about mental and emotional unwellness and pain. Professionalized systems of knowledge often require societal shifts via powerful social movements that demand a reformed recognition of what constitutes suffering in its multiplicity. This shift in acceptance often occurs in two stages, the professional circles of psychiatry and psychology and the moral space of contemporary societies (Fassin and Retchman 2009). Kiya's request for an examination also suggested to me the possibility that she did not yet feel safe in her new environment. It is feasible that her request for medical attention was a way for her to test the boundaries of the care and safety purportedly offered inside the stone walls of Tesfa. Still, the possibility that Kiya's horrific experiences had been embodied as a form of somatization did not enter Sister Hannah's taxonomy of causation, which from my perspective, translated into a seeming lack of compassion and attention—the last thing Kiya likely needed in that moment.

Imprecise or technologically undetachable pain can deprive a person of necessary therapeutic attention. Sister Hannah's conclusion that Kiya's leg pain is nonorganic and therefore nonexistent, deprived Kiya of the therapy she needed. Yet, I do not want to fault Sister Hannah's inattention to Kiya's pain as ineptitude or malice. What other options are available to Sister Hannah? Her medical implements are primarily her white coat and nursing certificate. She has

authority and control of the bodies of Tesfa's residents via her degree and regalia, but no access to medical technologies that might be able to detect and treat the physical origin of Kiya's pain. Likewise, her training is tied with what has been characterized as a rigid and distilled version of global psychiatry—where local negotiations mediate practices of psychiatric care coming from the Global North (Pinot 2009) and culture-free universal syndromes reign (Kirmayer and Swartz 2014). As Sister Hannah does her best to care for Kiya in that moment, the inadequacies of prior global mental health ambitious efforts seem to echo around us (Fekadu and Thornicroft 2014)—there is simply no possibility of "task sharing" or institutional "scaling up." She is also not trained in treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy or interpersonal psychotherapy and is consequently unable to provide any formalized method of psycho-social intervention. At most, Sister Hannah has access to a Haloperidol injection and possibly some risperidone tablets, both of which are not appropriate for Kiya's current needs.

While aspects of illness control and management may not be obvious in Sister Hannah's response to Kiya, this does not mean that she does not take her work as a psychiatric nurse seriously nor understand the nuances of psychiatric diagnoses. She does. But despite her commitment to her profession, there remains a serious divide between her formal education and that which she witnesses and is responsible for in the shelters. For Sister Hannah, recognizable mental and emotional unwellness must take a more explicit form and fall along the diagnostic patterns discussed amongst the few psychiatrists working at Amanuel *and* those learned in various training seminars put on by, for example, the IOM, which she actively attends.

Sister Hannah continued talking about Kiya. Kiya interjected again, with tearful eyes, she said, "Still, I have pain in my leg."

I listened to the roughness of her calloused hand brush along her right shin. She requested my direct attention. I wondered whether my presence brought about a desire to check her legs. Had I exorcised a haunting pain? Did my unfamiliarity and foreignness represent the abusive other and induce some sort of residual pain? Did her interjection reflect a past experience of subjugation and a reminder to remain vigilant to the disrupting entity of the unfamiliar now sitting before her (Bromberg 1996; Fanon [1963] 2004)? Did the disregard of her presence and her trauma, through the retelling of a story that was not Sister Hannah's, spark some sort of reaction within Kiya? Or was it simply, that Kiya thought I might be another medical professional able to help her. While the pain Kiya felt in her legs may have been a somatization of an unconscious expression of a negative experience (Kleinman 1988), Hollan (2004) reminds us that while our social theories, and my speculative thoughts, can offer further insight into such particularities regarding individual pain as a possible socially meaningful enactment of unwellness, it may, on the other hand, simply be that there are residual pains from the abuse she endured.

Kiya's ability to verbally articulate that she was in pain and the presumption of its ambiguous existence and subsequent dismissal by Sister Hannah as non-sense—a sense not based in the shared here-and-now reality—is precisely the type of pain which Beauvoir (([1949] 2011) would argue that, due to its ambiguity and tethering to a gendered subjectivity, the Other (the medical professional) renders it inconsequential. Since Kiya's localizable pain is deemed inconsequential by the person in position of power (who is her only caretaker) the singular articulations of her experiences are also rendered inconsequential. This inconsequentiality is not only prescribed to her past experiences but also to her current self—i.e., she is incapable, she is

of little consequence in and of herself, which is again, reinforced, even if unintentionally, by Sister Hannah's telling of Kiya's story.

By not attending to Kiya's pain and suffering in that moment, Sister Hannah wittingly or unwillingly remained complicit in perpetuating the dominance of the historically patriarchal enterprise of psychiatry (Busfield 1989). She downplayed Kiya's experiential self, and capacity to narrativize a biographical account of her own experiences. The singular way in which Kiya expressed her history disclosed a possible mediation of self-other and intraself relationships that had real consequences for her real self (Hollan 2014). Sister Hannah's professionally-sculpted rigidity about what constitutes the intersubjective nature of pain—the employer's violence is bounded by time and place —rejected and displaced the "persistent aspects of memory and self-organization" demonstrated by Kiya's attendance to her legs (Hollan 2014, 175). Sister Hannah did not see, or acknowledge, how the haunting memories, prompted by her current situation, may have caused Kiya's pain, and Kiya and her legs needed attendance. Perhaps all Kiya really needed was someone to listen to whatever it was *she* had to say.

Again, I do not want to claim that the nurse's apparent rejection of ambiguous (i.e., indiscernible) corporal pain was of malicious intent. Rather, I view her response as an enactment of a bureaucratic logic, which when applied to experiences of unwellness in a resource limited setting (psychiatry and psychiatric services are both scarce in Ethiopia) is practiced in its most austere form out of necessity. If she was trained to locate either observable indicators of pain or classifiable experiences of mental unwellness through straightforward biomedical and psychiatric symptoms, then something like the embodiment of inequality, refracted issues of agency and determinacy (Hollan 2012; Throop 2012), or the shadowed effects of the lived reality

of hope's fragility remain outside the scope of diagnostic possibility in either of the two shelters dedicated to treating women like Kiya.

What the shelters do contain are practitioners who are charged with determining who and what constitutes "the unwell" and who and what is deserving of the limited treatment available. Sister Hannah's evaluation of what constitutes pain of the (physical) body emulates a Foucauldian medical gaze, which requires her to take up a position of authority over the women who come to the shelter (Foucault 1994). While relationships are always complex, and positionalities shifting, the nursing staff at Tesfa and Mekelakel seemed to maintain diagnostic practices that reinforced asymmetrical power relations between caregivers and the residents at both. This Cartesian dualism[75] is not uncommon amongst the discourse of the nursing staff at both shelters, as the psychiatric treatment provided primarily relies on the logic of the official Diagnostic Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders (DSM) classification of disorders as well as a rejection of a unified psyche-soma experience of pain.

I also do not want to suggest that that the nurse's assessments of pain or unwellness is dependent *exclusively* on the authorization granted by a biomedically-based manual. Nor that their attention to their patients was only ever predicated upon asymmetrical hierarchical power relations. For example, ambiguous aliments located "above the neck," as one local psychiatrist put it, count as accepted idioms of distress (Nitcher 2010). If a woman in the shelter was experiencing a headache, light headedness, a feeling of their head "being in the clouds" or "too much thinking" all were recognized as symptomatic of "chiniket" (ጭንቀት), broadly translated as "stress," and deserving of medical attention and treatment. The amalgamation of biomedical and

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[75] There is, of course, literature suggesting that René Descartes' discussion of mind-body dualism has been oversimplified and critiqued in a most reductionist method (Duncan 2000), but I am employing the term in its definitional sense and not engaging a theoretical debate about holism.

ethnomedical practices—a practice with a long history in the Global South (Kleinman 1981)—are engaged during such illness episodes in the shelters (e.g., antipsychotic treatments or wrapping one's head tightly with a scarf or the use of holy water). These episodes, based in "above the neck" articulations of pain, did decenter the dominant gaze of mind-body dualism. A woman, in experiencing head-pain, becomes an individual body, a social body, a political body—her pain nets that temporally-free atmospheric pressure of her myriad experiences, and it hurts. Others around her, including shelter residents and staff, recognize a constellation of factors that may cause a headache and a therapeutic responsivity follows.

Kiya as Caretaker

I appreciated Sister Hannah's efforts to explain Kiya's history, but I was eager to hear from Kiya herself. I wanted to understand, through her own words, her experiences pertaining to her decision to migrate abroad for domestic work. I had the impression she did not want Sister Hannah to speak for her and she was keen to tell me her own story.

Kiya was around 25 years old at the time I met her, and unlike most women I encountered in the shelters, she looked well beyond her years. Her face was weathered, her hands craggy and overly curled at the joints, and she hunched while in repose. As I came to learn, she is the oldest of six children. Growing up, she was primarily responsible for taking care of the household and watching over her five younger siblings. She did not reminisce affectionately over her childhood years, nor did she say anything explicitly negative about her parents or siblings. She lamented her familial domestic duties—washing clothes, preparing food, fetching water, "Everything. I was responsible for everything," she said.

She recalled her childhood as a time of scarcity. There was never enough of anything for herself or for her siblings. So, at fourteen years of age she left for Addis Ababa, where she found work as a domestic worker. For two years she “worked like a servant” finding it very difficult to endure the demands of her employer. Two years later she returned to Jimma and married an older man whom she had known prior to her departure. She was pregnant within their first year of marriage and she birthed her first child around sixteen-years of age, follow by a second, third, and finally a fourth by the time she was twenty-one.

Following her return to Jimma she worked as a day laborer, harvesting for the renowned coffee farms of Southwestern Ethiopia. She told me it was very hard work. She hand-picked those prized epigynous berries from their bendy branches every day. It was not something she enjoyed. I cannot imagine the stress and strain her petite teenage frame must have felt as her nurturing belly waxed and waned with each of her four pregnancies. She stood for hours on end and finished each long day by carrying pounds of ripe fruit to the distant washing station.

I inquired about her wages, hoping to hear that she was paid a fair, or at the very least, a livable salary. I naively thought, maybe, that the exclusivity and popularity of Ethiopian coffee coveted by North American and European specialty markets and cafés would translate into a fair wage.

“No money. They give me small amount of beans,” she explained while cupping her left hand to indicate the portion size. Not a single *birr* for her efforts. It was her responsibility then, to either sell the raw coffee beans or roast, grind, steep, and serve the prepared coffee to locals around Jimma to earn cash. I asked her about her husband’s work.

"No work. He chews khat[76] all day."

Kiya teared up. She used her loose sleeve to blot the corners of her eyes. Her speech quickens as she described how her husband left her and their four children.

"He has found someone else. A new wife. I feel very sad at that time. I was shouting. I was crying. My brothers, even my bothers want to kick him! I thought about killing myself with the poison. I want to poison myself. He has not any job, always he chewing khat and smoking."

She cried.

"Even after I go to my city, the *delala* [will] ask me to pay him money. No money. I have no money."

She talked more about the *delala* and the debt she owed him, which she cannot pay. Her story lost its mooring to my original question; her principal obsession now directs her narrative. Sister Hannah and I listen and attempt to calm her. I ask about her children. How old are they? Where are they right now?

They are seven, six, five, and four. There are two boys and two girls. Two are with her parents and two are with her husband.

"My husband's new wife has a new baby."

I quickly tried to change the subject again, to avoid bringing up memories of her husband. I felt a tremendous amount of guilt.

I asked her to tell me more about her children. She did. Kiya relaxed and smiled while describing their little personalities and how much she wished to see them again. She dreamt of them.

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[76] Khat, chat, or qat is a plant native to Ethiopia and is a powerful stimulant. While khat chewing has a long history as a social and religious, excessive khat chewing has more recently been association with addiction behavior.

“I dream of my children and my husband, but he is bad in the dream. And I am worrying about my children.”

I managed to rouse tears, again. I failed to change the direction of her thoughts. I told her that I thought it was wonderful that she had four children. She agreed. Gifts from Allah. I agreed.

“Always she crying!” Sister Hannah interjected. She tried to reassure me that I had not done anything wrong in my questioning. It was a kind gesture by Sister Hannah.

I apologized. Sister Hannah and I consoled Kiya. I again said that I was sorry for making Kiya cry.

“Don’t worry,” Sister Hannah explained, “It is her style and crying is good in psychiatry, it’s ventilation. If a person talks his feelings that is good, she gets relief, that is good for her—to get ventilation.”

Sister Hannah again invoked her authoritative knowledge by explaining to me that crying, “In psychiatry is good, it is a release.” Another display of clean, unambiguous emotion is valued. It is not murky; it is well-defined, sharp, readily available for us to observe and understand. According to Sister Hannah, those tears were essential to Kiya and Kiya’s progression toward rehabilitation. Sister Hannah insisted that I not worry about those tears, they were “good in psychiatry.”

Over the next few weeks Kiya gained strength. Her shuffles turned into purposeful strides as she helped prepare food, did the washing and tidied the courtyard. She greeted Abinet and I joyously each time we entered the compound. I was very happy to see her regain her vigor, put on weight, watch television, comfort the recent newcomers, and joke with Sister Hannah, Abinet, and myself. She was graceful and motherly in her movements. I felt comfort in her presence. She was natural in nurturing those around her. I brought little things for her and the other women

every couple of weeks—clothing, delicate smelling soaps from America, a *bombolino*[77] from the *souk,* a deck of cards for us to play. She would tell me how to do my hair, or urge me to eat more during our lunch time. When she finally let me cease eating, she insisted on bringing my little metal plate back to the kitchen. Her maternal attention felt familiar and reassuring.

The Only Option

Kiya said she left Jimma to change her life. There was no other option for her future or for her children's future. She could not be the mother she wanted to be if she stayed in Jimma.

"I don't have any money. Even he [ex-husband] took the house. I don't have any house, no shelter. No work. I have too much problem. Problem of money. Problem of shelter."

She explained to me that she needed to "give care" to her children and going abroad was her only option. Harvesting coffee was not enough to support her children, herself, for a house, for food. She described how she was always thinking "too much" about these problems. She reminded me again that her ex-husband did not work and only chewed khat all day.

The way Kiya explained her decision to migrate resonates with notions of living a dead life, consumed with dead thoughts (Gordon, n.d.). The life she lived in Jimma did not and could not provide life or produce life, that is, conditions for growth, purposeful activity, and change were absent. Her life in Jimma could not yield experiences that, for her, constituted the act of living. There were just "too many difficulties" and with that came too much dead thinking. In order to save life and her children she resurrected her self with thoughts of life abroad.

Her thoughts of living were based in ideas of the future. Living for her became about opening up and pursuing the possibility of experience—building a home, providing food, having

[77] A popular doughnut-like snack found in cafes, bakeries, and as a street food. The Ethiopian version does not have a filling like the original Italian "bombolone".

money, not wanting to kill herself—and about extending that possibility of living to her children. These thoughts brought her back to life. They were dynamic, fantastical, motivational, and resourceful. Those thoughts gave her life the way her thoughts of Jimma brought her death. For Kiya, the lifesaving force—the entelechy—resided in thoughts about the "Arab country".

Kiya's sentiments about the foreclosed possibility for a life worth living were echoed by several of the women with whom I spoke. Taytu, who I profile in greater detail in the following chapters, left Ethiopia to support her family in the only way that seemed promising. Zahara, who also worked in Dubai, told me she became a domestic worker to "change her life." She was, "worried for my family" and needed to take care of them. Fanosh, listening to Zahara, added, "there are no jobs here [Ethiopia]. I wanted to change my life too by going to the Arab countries." Shada agreed with both women, "Even people who have degree have nothing to do—they're drinking, chewing khat, so our option is to go to the Arab country." All five women, then, recognized their precarious positions in Ethiopia and the need to change their seemingly inescapable "death" by putting into play their ideas of life.

This desire to change their lives, in the only way that seemed possible, contradicts much of the international rhetoric regarding transnational domestic workers. They were not coerced or recruited by traffickers, or smuggled across boarders in the dead of night. They themselves located local individuals whom they knew could help them find work abroad. As far as promises of money and stable work? Their ideas of such riches came from their own experiences, watching their fellow countrywomen go abroad and return with vast amounts of material items. That excess stood in stark and inviting contrast to their scarcity. This was their shot at a decent life, and perhaps their only shot.

The worries expressed by each woman revealed an astute awareness of the current sociopolitical environment of Ethiopia. Zahara explained, "Life is very expensive [here] and there is no change. There is no way to improve your life." She invoked Kiya's notions of a dead life as that which is left outside the light of this prospering nation. They felt stuck in the darkness of unchanging scarcity, which felt like a death sentence to these women. They were not wrong, there was no change in terms of their positions and possibilities in a rapidly changing Ethiopia. They were excluded from the conversations about the vivacious life and rebirth of their country. This globally touted revival of Ethiopia's imminent prosperity[78] overlooked millions of young women[79] outside the confines of wealthy diaspora families investing in a burgeoning Addis Ababa. They felt as if their situations and their lives were forgotten and already dead, buried in their far away villages. They knew that they needed to transcend their own individual entelechy and become something new—a domestic worker in one of the "Arab countries". Only then could they change their lives and stay alive.

Delala Dilemma

The *kafala* system is an internationally recognized practice of domestic work employment in the Arab States. As mentioned in the Introduction, the *kafala* system is a legally binding relationship between the migrant worker and the employer. This system is internationally criticized as an arrangement in which individual governments have been able to decentralize and privatize employment (predominantly domestic and construction labor), which

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[78] The World Bank and IMF that Ethiopia is "Africa's fastest growing economy." See here for the World Bank's overview of the situation: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview.

[79] Nearly sixty-five percent of the population under twenty-five years of age, the category the vast majority of my informants occupy, is burdened by youth unemployment rates, and Ethiopian women are unemployed at nearly double the rate as their male counterparts (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018).

leads to the increased vulnerability of contract workers. Although the *kafala* system is widely discussed in academic literature and journalism, it is most often presented in its ideal form, which is incongruent with the experiences of women who took part in this study.

For example, Kiya's participation in the *kafala* system was not so straightforward. The *kafala*, or the UAE work sponsorship system, would, for example, require Kiya to have a work permit obtained from the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE). This federal legislation stipulates that the employer must apply for a work permit under the Ministerial Decree 766 for their new employee. Emirati law further stipulates that the expenses to work in the UAE *must* be covered by the employer, and that all employees must sign a contract and maintain a copy of their job offer, visa, and "other supporting documents" in a "safe place" (Work in the UAE 2021). These procedures and documents are endorsed as safeguards against exploitative practices commonly associated with domestic and unskilled labor. I propose that that these systems of institutionalized work sponsorship are unctuous. They allow the Arab States of the Persian Gulf a fictitious protective structure to govern (unfree)[80] human labor, a slippery arrangement which can respond to human rights-based critiques by "shifting" certain sponsorship practices. Such pivots are then identified as state enactments of state sanctioned "care" for migrant domestic workers and a commitment to improving human rights in the Persian Gulf.[81]

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[80] I situate migrant domestic workers as "unfree" labor participants, a notion Bina Fernandez (2014) attributes to Marx and his discussion of slavery and serfdom—the pressure to sell one's labor is similar across categories of migrant domestic work. Likewise, Fernandez and de Regt (2014) acknowledge that the "voluntary" nature of migrant domestic work should be used in a loose sense, in that there is a continuum in which "unfree" and free labor operates in a capitalist-based economy (Davidson 2010; Doezema 1998 as cited by Fernandez and de Regt 2014:54).

[81] Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have accused Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar of "whitewashing" or "image laundering" their human rights abuses via hosting international cultural, entertainment, and sporting events (Conn and Jenkins 2018; Human Rights Watch 2020a; 2020b).

Kiya is unaware of whether she signed any such documents. Her expenses certainly did not appear to be covered by her employer, as she was financially responsible for her migration abroad. At the time of Kiya's migration journey there was also a moratorium placed by the Ethiopian government, forbidding domestic and unskilled workers from going to the ASPG. Therefore, Kiya could not have used one of the local private employment agencies (PEA), because they were all closed as a result of the ban. Therefore, there were no official procedures facilitating and ensuring the appropriate paperwork or enforcing the decree that a UAE employer must cover Kiya's expenses.[82]

Kiya did just as all the women I spoke with did—she sought the help of a local *delala*. "He was my neighbor and I asked him, 'Please ask your brother. I want to go to the Arab country, any Arab country.'" She begged him to call his brother right there and then. She would wait to hear his answer.

After a short conversation on the phone, the *delala* agreed to send Kiya to Addis; she would need to pay him 3,000birr for this portion of the trip. Once there, he told her, she would stay with his brother—the second *delala*—who would arrange for her visa, passport, employment, and flight to Dubai. His brother required an additional 10,000*birr* (250USD), a sum of money completely out of Kiya's reach.

[82] During my fieldwork all Private Employment Agencies (PEA) were officially closed due to the ban on migrant domestic work, implemented in 2013. There were however various, brief, moments in 2018 that the ban was lifted and then implemented. When the ban was officially lifted on October 7th, 2019, I returned to Ethiopia the following week in order to witness how MOLSA was working with 600 PEA to insure the "legal migration" of domestic workers to the countries of which Ethiopia had signed "bilateral agreements" pertaining to "domestic workers' rights"—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordon, Lebanon and Kuwait and UAE agreements were "in process".

"I did not pay the money. He said, 'You go and work and I will take the money.'" She agreed to this arrangement. She took her small hand luggage—a plastic bag—and boarded a crowded bus for the eight-hour trip North to Addis Ababa.

The second *delala* met her at the central bus station, *Autobus Terra*, near the massive open-air market, the Mercato.[83] From there he took her a short distance to his home, in a neighborhood known to house thousands of Ethiopian women either awaiting departure for work abroad or working illegally in one of the well-known city brothels.[84] She spent the next few weeks living with several other women "like herself," she says. They were all waiting for their appropriate paperwork to arrive and to begin their journeys to one of the Arab countries.

Kiya told me that she was unable to read. She did not apply for her own visa or passport; the *delala* took care of these matters. She also did not know if her status in Dubai was granted by a specific employer, nor did she remember signing any sort of contract pertaining to her employment status and worker rights. She also was not taken to a clinic upon her arrival to Dubai for the compulsory medical evaluation.[85] What she does know is that when her paperwork arrived, the *delala* took her to Bole International Airport along with one other woman. He gave each of them a printed piece of paper containing their ticket information and sent them on their way—no other instructions.

Sister Hannah interjected, "She work eight months in that house, but they insult her, they beat her, always, they don't give food, water, even clothes." Sister Hannah's words are slow and

[83] Addis Mercato is purportedly the largest open-air market in Africa.
[84] Sex work, or prostitution, is legal in Ethiopia. Operating brothels or organizing and procuring benefits from sex workers is illegal (Article 634, Section III, The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2004). However, these laws are rarely enforced. Consequently, Ethiopia has become both a source and a destination for sex trafficking.
[85] The UAE requires domestic workers to show negative test results for HIV, tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, syphilis, and pregnancy.

punctuated, “She [the madam] said your salary was sent to your broker. Every day they beat her, because of this, without any food, anything, she faints. She faints and they slap her and she not conscious, and they took her to one of the Dubai hospitals. She was not conscious at that time. For two months she was in that hospital.”

I listened carefully. Sister Hannah switched between English, Oromifa, and Amharic. She looked upon Kiya sympathetically as she told her story to me, while also re-narrativizing it to Kiya.

“After I go to my village the *delala* is going to ask for the money.” Kiya brought our conversation back to her concerns.

Sister Hannah continued, “She is afraid of the broker because she doesn’t pay the full amount of money.[86] The 10,000*birr*. She is crying because she is afraid of the *delala,* of the broker.”

“Yes, of course,” I reply.

“I want to hide myself from the *delala*. I want to sit here, but I am—I want to see my children.”

“She is in a dilemma,” Sister Hannah remarked.

“She wants to hide herself here. Always she wants to go and see her children. She wants to be there, but she is afraid of the broker. She can’t decide. Always she is crying.”

This was not the first nor the last time that Kiya expressed her fear of returning home to face the *delala.* She did not have the money to repay him nor any imagined prospects to earn the necessary money. This type of “debt-bondage” as it pertains to the *delala* or local brokers

[86] I find it interesting that Kiya does not think her debts are paid to the delala. If her employer was in fact sending her salary to the delala, eight months of salary would have more than covered her 10,000birr (~ 250USD) debt, *if* her employer was sending the reported average monthly salary of AED 1,830 (~ 500USD) (UAElabour.org).

residing in small communities of the sending country is generally absent from the current scholarship on domestic workers from Ethiopia. Debt-bondage is instead primarily associated with the employer or employment agencies, yet in this instance, and in several instances concerning women with whom I spoke, their debts were owed to local and often personally known men and women they initially sought to help facilitate their employment in the Arab States. And if they could not pay them, like Kiya, there was an underlying fear about returning home.

The issue of borrowing money from friends, family, and loan agencies is well-established in studies of migrant domestic work (Constable 2007), and it is the taking of loans from banks or loan agencies which is presented as especially risky to individual women. Such high-stake loans and "recruitment debts" often leaves a person in even greater debt and implicates them in, at times, illegal indebtedness (Constable 2007). While some of the women I spoke with did borrow money from family, there was no talk of indebtedness or illegality of loans. However, I did not directly ask them about such situations and therefore cannot know for certain the conditions of their family-based loans. Generally, my interlocutors expressed sentiments congruent with other forcibly returned Ethiopian domestic workers (Anbesse et al. 2009; Ketema's 2014)—disappointment, anxiety, stress, or fear. It seems that money borrowed from family then had a different relationship to their feelings of un/wellness.

Kiya's fear of the *delala* was amplified beyond that of other interlocutors; she was engrossed with their inevitable encounter. Although she never explained exactly what it was she feared, I assumed she was concerned for her well-being and perhaps even her children's well-being. Assaults on a person can take a variety of forms and I will never know if Kiya imagined a specific harm or if it was a more generalized fear of the unknown harm that this man could

cause, or the unknown harm that a return to life in Jimma could trigger. I do not doubt that her fear was based in very real, very serious consequences, nor do I intend to dismiss the very real, very serious physical assaults she anticipated. My analysis, rather, is guided by what I have access to, and that is her anticipation of the unknown, yet expected.

What Matters to Kiya

Although examinations into structures of power and violence (Foucault [1978] 1990; Gramsci [1971] 1994; Scott 1985), forms of resistance and empowerment (Higginbotham and Romero 1997), and interlocking systems of oppression (Herrera 2013) are useful and necessary for understanding the broad undercurrents shaping social vulnerabilities of domestic workers, there is much more to understand about this form of social work. Herein lies the appeal of a phenomenological logic that is designed to grasp and grow our understandings about the complex human condition, the formations of selves, and ethical subjectivities related to particular events in the lives of particular persons. A feminist phenomenological enterprise further advances conversation about gendered work beyond the macro-level indices of group suffering or resistance. Instead, feminist phenomenology puts Kiya's existence (personhood, self-interpretation, ethical dilemmas, emotions, and body), at the center of our empirical observations. It elevates how a categorization of womanhood and woman's work manifests for Kiya, specifically in relation to her life events (Mann 2018), how desire and desperation, dilemma and determination commenced and unfold for her, unpredictably.

Kiya's existence and ethical projects unsettle distinctions and categorical classifications about our social world (Throop 2015, 72; Mattingly 2019); her subtleties and dynamic view of her being extend conceptualizations about the experiences and choices undergirding

transnational domestic labor. Feminist phenomenology calls attention to the ways in which Kiya locates her self within specific relational arrangements (Hollan 2012). Her project of an individualized being (Wentzer 2011) is taken seriously. If she places before us a problem of womanhood, motherhood, safety, precarity, it is understood as the forms in which *her* being woman articulates with her world (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). We can see this clearly in her dilemma concerning her return home. Her fears, desires, and hesitance are constituted by her amalgamated past, present, and future relations (e.g., the *delala*, the shelter, her children) and we are witnessing how centrally her relational being figures into her personhood and ethics of care.

Through repeated interruption she resists Sister Hannah's third-person perspective concerning her experiences abroad, she does not want to focus on "there." She does not want to focus on the physical abuse she endured. When I asked her questions about her experiences abroad, she did not elaborate on the harm caused by her employers. Kiya re-orientated me to *her* meaningful experiences, which were based on the here and now (Throop 2015). It is the *delala*, her return home, her children that matter; it is not her story of abuse that she wants positioned centrally—her relation to her employer in this moment is irrelevant. Kiya set before me, Abinet, and Sister Hannah a description of her everyday moral deliberations that she experiences now, during her time in Tesfa. Tesfa became her "moral laboratory" where her personhood was centered, *her* ethical arrangements were under personal examination as she contemplated important events (Mattingly 2014)—the inevitable reunion with her children and her *delala*.

Similar to the moral laboratories discussed by Mattingly (2014), Kiya's time in and relationship to Tesfa was marked by her working through her failed attempt to change her life, and the expected reunion with those she loves most—her children—and someone she fears—her *delala*. She ruminated aloud the difficult choice of returning home. Should she stay in Tesfa or

return to Jimma? What was the best good choice? She went abroad to provide for and give life to the most vulnerable persons in her life—her children—but failed. This communal "we"—of her and her children—is absorbed into her deliberations (Mattingly 2014, 117).

Yet, unlike Mattingly's discussion of moral laboratories and individual processes of working through the best good possibilities for the vulnerable "we" in a person's life, I am uncertain as to where Kiya situates hope and optimistic possibilities in her deliberations. If, before leaving for Dubai, life in Jimma plagued her with dead thoughts and stripped her of possibility, how did she feel about her future life there in Jimma? Did she locate hope in her children's potential? Her parents? Herself? Or was there no hope in her imagined future? While I cannot answer these questions, I believe Kiya's deliberations offer further insight into what it means to be a virtuous person.

Philosopher Jonathan Lear writes that a "vulnerable risk-taker" (2006, 123) is a courageous—that is, virtuous—human. Is it possible that Kiya's hope resided in her previously engaged virtuous risk-taking behavior? Was her courage her foundational ethical comportment? Does she keep hope alive through a self-understanding that knows she has been and can continue to be courageous? While the risks she took did not transpire the way she desired or imagined, she could still access that honorable, courageous, virtuous way of being as a part of her, and a part of her that gave her life. This type of ethical courage also resonates with Fanon's ([1952] 2008) discussion on desire, which he calls the "dignity of mind." It is through risk, he argues, that there is an expansion of life, as risk "implies that I go beyond life toward an ideal which is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth" ([1952] 2008, 192-193). Kiya's risk-taking behavior reached out toward a transformative ideal

that would bring light back into life, the objective indisputable benefit of life-changing currency. Her risk-taking behavior *was* actioned hope.

Comparable to Lear's concept of "radical hope," wherein one stives for a life worth living even in the face of anxiety, uncertainty, and fear, Kiya's socially embedded qualities of caring-for (her ethics of care) are modalities of radical hope. Her desire for a changed-life and the hope-full action that followed are both sources of virtue. Kiya already experienced what it meant to take a risk even when she did not know what would come next, and she could do it again. Kiya was committed to a course of action moored to the responsibility of those who were dependent on her. Her virtuous personhood existed in her movement toward something she stood in caring relation to (her children); the movement may be either away from or toward her children and the direction she took was the best good action given her particular circumstances. She tried to move toward goodness, toward virtuous motherhood, which was tied to actionable care. Before it was the best good to go to Dubai, and now she was trying to gauge what was the next best good? Toward or once again, away from her children?

I am intrigued by Kiya's dilemma because it is tragically human, a germane example of the temptations of desire versus the power of fear, and the complicated ways in which the supremacy of either and the consequential act, rules circumstantially. It is human contradiction on full display. Kiya's dilemma is striking because no matter her choice, she will endure the emotion of both in variable and unpredictable degrees. It is striking because this dilemma is uniquely her own, yet familiar to most, in not all, of us.

Within Kiya's fear was also an anxiety about returning home and encountering the *delala*. I want to examine Kiya's emotional response and repeated reactivity of her relationship with the *delala* as the axiom for analysis. What did this repetition represent? Why was she

invoking this "dilemma" repeatedly while I sat before her? What was it that she was working through in her first-person accounts of her specific situation? Who was she in that moment and how was she formulating her next ethical incarnation that might free her from further disappointment and harm? Could I provide some help or guidance on that matter?

Her *delala* dilemma is that of being indebted to someone she feared and not wanting to return home, and yet she also deeply desired the warm presence of her four young children. When Sister Hannah pointed to Kiya's tears and remarks, "she is in a dilemma," she was stressing the emotional distress of Kiya's current mental state and situation. She had to make a difficult choice, either stay in the shelter, protected and unable to see her children, or return to Jimma, vulnerable to the *delala*, but reunited with her those she loves most in this world.

Whether her return is precisely a dilemma is debatable, as it is possible that not ever seeing your children again is much more undesirable than being indebted to a *delala*, who you may ultimately be able to pay back. Notwithstanding, was returning home really the "best good"? Was it "good" to potentially put yourself and your children in danger just because you missed them? Was Kiya assessing her own emotional well-being in consideration of her child's and her own survival? Was there hope for her if she risked returning home? This is the type of dilemma that challenges poststructuralist theories based in shared experiences or pre-existing codes of conduct (Mattingly et al. 2018; Louw 2018)—ethical decisions must be put in context to fully grasp what is at stake.

As I understood Kiya, her ethical decision was embedded in her situational and subjective singularity (Mattingly 2018a). Her particular, uniquely her own, care for her children, and the decision that dictated the timing of their reunion placed care at the foundation of her self-formation and ethical becoming. The decision to act upon the best good was unmoored from

some prior cultural script and instead harnessed to experiences and anticipated futures. The hope that guided her risk-taking and ethical decision making was perhaps embedded in an imagined potentiality of her children, and the *delala* future presence held influence.

Kiya's struggle to decide how to "best" care for her children is a struggle that resonates with Aristotelian notions of a life worth living. This seemingly simple judgment—to return or not to return—is steep in ambivalence precisely because it is so complex. There is no right or wrong answer as the decision is based in a specific individual notion of human flourishing. Which choice will result in flourishing for Kiya and her children? Is it better to mend herself, out of the sight of her children, and try again in Dubai? Maybe next time she would have a kinder employer, who would pay her a fair wage. Kiya made the decision to change her life, her dead life, into a life worth living, and a second attempt at living and nourishing her children's future lives, may be the best good. The *delala* would never even know she returned and received psychiatric treatment at Tesfa.

Alternatively, the best choice may be returning home and reuniting with her children. Once home she could directly care for them and perhaps find a local job, which could at the very least help put food on that table for her children. A return home would likely mean an encounter with the feared *delala*, but perhaps, their meeting would be unremarkable. Or maybe, Kiya was not even afraid of the *delala*, and her tears were less about a "dilemma" and more about returning home empty handed, unable to give the care she risked her life for.

The figure of the *delala* may represent a certain disruptive path she committed herself to—she split her children between her parents and their father, she quit her job at the coffee farm, borrowed money from her broker, and found herself at the malevolent beck and call of a new employer. She disrupted her and her family's rhythm of life and their relational components,

all in the name of desire and hope. Mere hope put her imagined potential into action. Mere hope decided her risky path of ethical becoming.

She wanted to show her love and commitment to her children in a measurable way. She did not see or speak to them for almost a year. She nearly sacrificed her life, left her children to the same elements that brought her an unrelenting hollowness and worry. All these things by her own doing. Are her tears self-implicating? Is her constant reference to the *delala* a repeated acknowledgement of her tragic circumstance, born from her own desire to go abroad? Is Kiya's dilemma evidence of an everyday moral tragedies where a mother's desire eclipsed the immediate needs of her children (Mattingly 2014, 118)?

Desire

The notion of desire that united Kiya's decision to work abroad and the moored affect is worth careful consideration. Within her there are desires to leave, to return, to see her children, to die, to live, to avoid the broker, to change her life. A constellation of desires shaped Kiya. She was motivated by desire; she took risks because of her desires. She was always, it seems, moving toward something based in her desires. While this conception of desires resonates with Freud's ([1910] 1990) discussion about the energy of desire (which can resolve tension, be sublimated into higher, yet associated, goals, or predominate consciousness), I want to halt the tendency to equate desire with lust or concupiscence, which is resolved through sexual activity (Juanola 2020).

I situate desire closer to Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis ([1976] 2019) assessment that Freud's notion of desire is basic and nonvoluntary—in other words, a basic drive (Juanola 2020); a movement or energy that is born from lack and can fuel creative projects. This

understanding of desire aligns closely with Lear's s discussion of human beings as erotic creatures, by which he follows a "basically Platonic conception that, in our finite condition of lack, we reach out to the world in yearning, longing, admiration, and desire for that which (however mistakenly) we take to be valuable, beautiful and good" (2006, 120).[87] It is worth considering whether Kiya felt that her move abroad was nonvoluntary, and, as she explained it, centered around meeting of basic needs (and seeking to avoid further pain caused by her situations of deprivation and hopelessness) (Freud [1910] 1990).

But, more than just a call to a basic need, Lear's notion of our essential erotic nature emphasizes the relationship between something like desire and that which humans seek as, "valuable, beautiful, and good." For the purposes of my examination of Kiya, I follow Lear and Laplanche and Pontalis definitions which situate desire as both an unstable fictum [something that is perceivable and exists as a picture, not which we can actually seize upon; it is an "image as image," an ideal, "a free possibility," and a perception directed to something transcendent. It is at its most basic understanding a phantasy (Husserl 1983, 266; 2001, 286; Lacan et al. 1977, 14)], *and* as a motivational emotion and energetic force that operates within the psychic apparatus (Juanola 2020).[88] More simply put, it is a phantasy that motivates one to act toward the best good.

Given Kiya's concrete existential struggles to persist and survive, her desires must be understood in the context of need; they are entangled and nested within a struggle for being. Her desires recognize that the only way to move toward some sort of well-being is through her own activity (Jackson 2013, 20). Desire as energy and fictum does not have to operate only in

[87] Of course, there is evidence that Kiya's desires predominate her consciousness such as when she tells me that all she dreams about are her children.
[88] Whether or not such a characterization is related to Freud's explanation of desire is debatable, as Freud stipulates that the notion of desire's nonvoluntary context of the psyche is not identified with need.

contexts in which there is the absence of a “real” or tangible object. Ethiopian women do go abroad for domestic work and achieve monetary success, which can bring them and their families out of poverty. Desire for the women I spoke with is about the confluence of “I must” and “I want” in response to those around; it is a desire to be and remain related in an imagined ideal way (Noddings [1984] 2013, 12). It is a desire born from an ethical ideal to attend to one’s relations in a particular way. It is a relation constituted by one’s desire and need to be a “best self” (Noddings [1984] 2013), specifically for the benefit of those with whom you are in deep relation. This is the energetic element that is emerging from both the on-going fictum and the actual action undertaken by the women with whom I spoke. They find their way to the “Arab countries”, and they make their way back home through desire. There is this mix of innate caring-for and “I must” care-for relations, which construct a virtuous becoming, as demonstrated by Kiya.

A final fascinating aspect of desire in the case of this study was the way in which women I spoke to described their desires and entelechy. Their desires—to leave, to return, to reunite with family, to die, to live, to avoid the broker, to change their lives—were located within a multiplicity of situations. And yet, each of the situations reinforced the centrality of care ethics within processes of self-formation and the cultivation of virtuous personhood. Equally fascinating, was that despite the singularity of their stories and their selves, their desire for change remained constant—I did not sense that they were going to settle back into their old way of life. They were always seeking a new horizon of possibility, albeit this seek was likely predicated on a desire for a life worth living.

Their complex desires then, might also be understood as a coping mechanism in situations of lack. What Kiya’s desire illuminated was how her suffering was unfinished and

with that so was her courageous risk-taking. Her desires were married to her dilemmas, which shaped her unwellness (from her pained legs to her crying), her obsession with her eventual encounter with her *delala,* and her yearning to see her four small children. Kiya exemplified the complexity of cultivating a local situated *and* personally particular ethics of care; she embodied a confluence of "I must" and "I want". Her intersubjective, a circumstantial beingness, governed her reasoning (Tronto 1993). She was always in relation to the other and through that she desired, yearned, and moved toward that which was valuable, beautiful, and good.

Kiya paints the indigenous Ethiopian flower *Adey Abeba*, which blooms from September, during the start of the Ethiopian new year, to November.

Interlude III

After hearing several stories of abuse and mistreatment endured by many women from Tesfa and Mekelakel, I wanted to hear Abinet's thoughts on the matter. What was his opinion about why was this happening?

> *Ok, there are so many reasons for that one. One of the reasons are, the women are not more trained for that job in their own country* [region]*, because our tradition and our lifestyle is different from the Arab countries. So, those people are coming from the rural areas, so they, an example is, if they come from the rural area, they don't know how to operate the washing machine, they don't know how to boil the rice, they don't know about the lifestyle of the Gulf countries, because they* [the Gulf countries] *are very modern compared to Ethiopia. So, if they don't get trained, the owners and the bosses, they will be easily be making some misunderstanding with these people, some conflict with them.*
>
> *The other reason is, the major things are, the religion also, most of the women have to go to the Arab country are the Christian. They don't know how to follow the rule of the house so it will be conflict with the boss, the madam.*
>
> *The third one is behavior. The behavior, our peoples working, but those bosses or the madams they need* [make them] *to work with extra time, in the extra home. So, at that time, they will make some conflict with them.*
>
> *So, this kind of examples are conflict with the bosses with the women. So, our government make some research for that one. That's why he* [the government] *makes the training, the schedule, the grade in the class.* [The government] *make for that one to be preparing for that one. And on the other side, the Gulf country people they need to be giving for the privacy for the women. They working like eighteen hours, more than eighteen hours, and they don't pay easily for the payment or their salary. There is these kind of things happen for that peoples, who disagree with the people of that Arab countries. So, these reason the government need to be solving.*
>
> *So,* [the government] *started the training in the COC, in the private school. A lot kind of schedule* [requirement]. *There are the women who working their whole life in the Arab country, but they don't have that kind of papers. So, we talking like that with Henry last time like I told you. Maybe it would be change another regulation someday. But these kind of issues have the conflict.*

Abinet's answer surprised me. Comparable to the explanations we received from administrators at Mekelakel, he situated a significant amount the blame on individual women and their lack of knowledge. He initially emphasized that most women who went abroad did not have the necessary skills (e.g., knowing how to operate a washing machine or boil rice). He also brought my attention to the difference in religious followings, suggesting that most Ethiopian women going to the Arab States are Christian, and thus have a lifestyle markedly different from those in the Arab States, who practice Islam. He did not specify which house rules were different and could cause conflict, but there was a general knowledge that the form and function of the home in Arab countries was different from homes belonging to Christian Ethiopians. Despite Abinet's suggestion that the majority of women we spoke with were Christian, it was, in actuality, nearly an even split between those who identified as Christian and those who identified as Muslim. We also did not encounter anyone who was pressured by the employer to convert to Islam (cf. Fernandez 2014).

Considering our subsequent fieldwork, following the elimination of the migration ban, in 2019, Abinet acknowledges that the government of Ethiopia is cognizant of the mistreatment and abuse of domestic workers abroad, and they are making some effort to try to ameliorate the problem. This is done primarily through legislation that requires Ethiopian women to show proof of enrollment and completion of a training course at the Technical and Vocation Education Training (TVET) center, prior to departure. But Abinet mentions the flaws in these requirements. The legislation fails to recognize the challenges many rural women face in accessing that level of education (Grade Eight), paying for private technical and vocational school, and its disregard of prior experience many women had as domestic workers. He, like Henry, hopes the government

will change this regulation, as it seems to unnecessarily bar women from legally migrating for domestic work.

As Abinet continued his reason, however, the onus of mistreatment and abuse shifted onto the employers. He acknowledged that many women we spoke with were sleep deprived from working eighteen-hour days, forced to work between multiple family homes, and frequently denied their wages. In other words, they were subjected to slave-like conditions. Yet, in his statement, "these kind of things" happen for people who "disagree with the people of the Arab country," he does not simply attend to the behavior of the employers, but he also identifies a strength within Ethiopian women. This recognition of female fortitude and tenacity is repeatedly broadcasted by Abinet. He creatively incorporates an instance of Ethiopian exceptionalism in the face of discrimination and mistreatment.

> *Another conflict starting for the husbands also. The women they try to stay away from the husbands. But the husband they try to be rape the women at that time. But also, the Arab women have the ego. So sometimes those people have the self-ego, because of—In Arab tradition or in Arab religion you can divorce the women and easily get the other women. If he go to another women, he will stay with her. It will be happen, this kind of things. So, they have a lot of ego about this, even some Arab women try to select the ugly face for the* [Ethiopian] *women or they covering the face* [of the Ethiopian domestic worker].

I find Abinet's reference to the generalized Arab woman's ego intriguing. He used the English word "ego" to reference, as I understand it, a behavior akin to arrogance or ego-centric, but his use of "ego" also implicated an insecurity he determines exists within people who have a "big ego." They are so self-interested that they have no regard for another human being. He then attaches this arrogance-insecurity to the mistreatment and abuse of Ethiopian domestic workers. The figure of the "Arab woman" (the more frequent abuser for the women we spoke with) is insecure and potentially jealous of the beautiful, secure, virtuous, Ethiopian woman.

I also understood Abinet's generalizations about "Arab culture" and "Ethiopian culture" as yet another instance of his inclination to emphasize Ethiopian exceptionalism—the unparalleled beauty of Ethiopian women was intimidating or threatening, or perhaps so alluring that her face needs covering. In making this claim he once again detaches the source of violent behavior from the Ethiopian women and attaches it to the employer. As Abinet responded to my inquiry, he was, I believe, also actively working through the stories we heard from our interlocutors. He was figuring out the "reason" for mistreatment and abuse, and that reason was, often, contradictory to what he heard on state television or from state officials.

"What is your opinion on the personalities and characters of the women we met?" I asked him.

> *They are very lovely. I like those women, they are very strong women. I feel they have a strength behind them, and they are so good, and they try to make some influence on their own life, and they tried to improving their own families life. Generally, they are very strong, and they are very good, the nicest womens I have met, in my experience. So, all of the women, they have to make a change their family's life, their own life. First, they are giving of their life to help their family. So, I have a big respect for those womens.*

I also asked him if he thought there were any discernable difference between the "average" Ethiopian woman and women we encountered at Tesfa and Mekelakel. Unlike his previous answer, Abinet indicated that he did not think, "in general" there was a difference. He did, however, generalize, about "Ethiopian women" and their commitment to caring for their families. He witnessed this amongst his own family, and female friends, and perhaps this offered comparable data to the rural, less economically secure women we met in the shelters.

> *I don't, in general, think there is a difference. Ethiopian women have to sacrifice, but <u>those women are giving for their life</u>. To sacrifice to be—up to dead. To be changing the family's life. Kiya, she left her four children in the house with her husband to improve the future of her children life. So, they are very special womens.*

Abinet thought the women we met and spoke with were comparable to the general population of Ethiopian women, even those who did not perform domestic work or migrate abroad. Ethiopian women, he remarked, sacrifice for their families, work hard to improve the lives of their children. They even risk their own lives, and some even sacrifice, "up to dead." Even Kiya, he noted, left behind her four children, whom she missed so much that she cried nearly every day. In Abinet's opinion, this life-giving, self-sacrificing care typifies, in general, Ethiopian women.

Chapter Six

The Arabian Dream, A Broken Promise Land

And insofar as she is unsatisfied and feels like the uncompleted and unlimited girl, her soul will then rush forward on endlessly unwinding roads toward limitless horizons.[89]

-Simone de Beauvoir,

The dreams of the bounties born by a distant land are both fabled and fact, immanence and transcendence. The imagined otherwise is imprisoned within the subjective, and yet grounded in leaky fantasies of the unfamiliar. This inherent ambivalence of the imagined otherwise, other-space, and other-self may provide a luminescent hope to the bone-weary—such as giving Kiya the breath of life she needed. Yet, those mindful visions may also be steeped in an ambivalence that can darken hope's glow—the imagined cruelty from Kiya's unpaid *delala*. The fantastical somewhere else and someone else possess both desire and agony, which arouses individual ruminations about what is possible.

To have such thoughts in waking hours is an intrinsic property of being human, but how one chooses to assemble those dreams into episodic realities speaks to the type of human one is or wishes to become. This is not to claim that one's self is completely constituted by pure agency, but rather that actioned dreams and the precipitated tangible realities speak to the centrality of her situatedness and the elucidative weightiness of her individuality—like the unpredictability of such precipitants, she too is unpredictable. While she and her situation are

[89] The Second Sex, p.657

unpredictable, that striving-for component housed within is largely guided by ethical attention to human relations (Held 2006; Mattingly 2013; Tronto 1995). How she acts is determined by a self situated in the past, present, and future; it is a self in constant negotiation with its environment (Hollan 1990, 2000; Jackson 2013). This augmentation of her situatedness reveals the details of what Beauvoir calls women's whole "character"— "her convictions, values, wisdom, morality, tastes, and behavior" ([1949] 2011, 661), and it is within this "whole character" that we can locate not only theories of care, but how care and caring relations direct the re/construction of her self. This may also include revelations about that which precipitates a scissile self—that is, the unconscious manifestations of specific desires foreclosed by the unexpected, and materialized as a self unfastened from a shared reality, which is reconstructed through self-referential delusions and megalomania. In other words, this dissociated self is one specifically related to the unloading of dreams into a vortex of lost hope.

Beauvoir's definition of women's whole character maps onto long-standing anthropological discourses about self and self-formation, which adhere to phenomenological logics about the ways in which the self is situationally and intersubjectively constituted (Hallowell 1955; Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013). It is through a series of loosely and tightly connected experiences predicated on particular situations at particular times that can further elucidate her self-formation, especially, in the case of this project, as it relates to prior and present imagined fantasies of becoming a sovereign caretaker: one who is capable of directing and changing her own life while providing for those she cares for most. As the end of Chapter Five demonstrated, if we consider desires as situationally and intersubjectively constituted, and if we hold that that constitution involves an orientation to both an imagined and real Other, then individual abreactions and accompanied narrative are more wholly understood.

Comparable to the ways in which our unconscious dreams map intraself and extraself terrains (Hollan 2014), and can traffic in frightening worlds, her wake-time dreams can also become nightmarish realities. When this happens, the systems of knowledge responsible for managing such unexpectedly hellish conditions move to the most readily available strategy accessible to that individual person. And, as I will discuss, when such dreams and desires turn into real life experiences of subjugation, depravity, and violence, both muted and dramatic emotions emerge, which speak to the inner passions, urges, or drives most bonded to her ethical projects and self-formations (Wikan 1990).

These harmonizing theories of self—"women's whole character" and a reflexive, local and global intersubjectively tailored, temporally emergent, continuous self-organizing entity (Hollan 2004, 2014)—also underscore how the imposition of a categorical must-be on Ethiopian women—that as "woman" and as "domestic worker"—figures into their ethical projects and corresponding emotional excesses. Their dreams and subsequent tangible experiences incorporate yet will resist these impositions when, for example, the vulnerability of either category is highlighted through the action of the Other. It is when those categories are weaponized, as mechanisms for subjugation, that the realization and felt failures of dreams lost emerge as disorder and disruption. This "feminine sensitivity" (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 267, 662) is an asset in many ways, as it offers a clear demonstration of the embodied attentiveness of gendered subjectivity. While I am suggesting that we can understand her emotional excesses or abreactions as precipitated by the nefarious mechanism of gendering one's being-in-the-world, I also reason that her "disorders" manifest largely void of cultural scripts—that is, her symptomology remains tethered to her individual self and not enacted as a separate entity (i.e.,

Zar[90] or spirit possession). I suggest that by paying careful attention to "woman's traditional destiny" (Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, 279) anthropologists can better understand how these categories—woman, tradition, and destiny—actually articulate and find meaning within each individual as it relates to their projects of self-formation, tying their biographical specificities to a specific time and place, which is, of course, always changing.

Although tradition implies something customarily stagnant, Beauvoir and anthropology more generally, reminds us that tradition should instead be understood as dialectical—it is always in process, dynamic, and responsive. In so being, woman's "traditional," "categorical-must be," or "culturally overdetermined" selfhood should also be understood as dialectical, and with that, any sort of (gendered) "unwellness" should be similarly conceptualized. In other words, episodes of "dissociation," a scissile self, or "mental illness" should not be considered as culturally scripted, curative, or as a chronic and irrevocable condition (as is often the case with evaluations of spirit possession or trance) (Boddy 1988, 1991). Instead, such "abandonments of [a shared] reality" (Buckley 1988) should be considered in relation to individual projects of fulfilling "traditional destiny." We may better understand that their embodied response is *in response* to their individual position in a dynamic world.

This observation may seem rather obvious, and, with that, idle anthropological thought (especially considering my hesitancy to embrace categorical representations of human experience), but I consider my contribution to stand within my attendance to my interlocutor's explanation that "this" (undertaking domestic work in the Arab States) "is part of the culture

[90] Janice Boddy describes Zar (belonging to the class of *jinn*) as related to questions of identity and selfhood and how culture overdetermines the position of women in Northern Sudan, but I will demonstrate while there is much overlap between her discussion and my own, there are still slight and yet very important differences.

now." Grounded in my interlocutor's words and explanations, my work examines how categories like "tradition," "womanhood," and (a gendered form of) "unwellness" are always emergent.

More specifically, women I met expressed how the ways of being a "best-good" Ethiopian woman (parallel to a "traditional Ethiopian woman") was always in relation to the situation, and thus always unfolding and evolving. It is also in my attendance to "mental illness," that this work advances a situated understanding of unwellness and its entwinement with ethical projects of becoming. To put it more simply, to state that one is suffering from "mental illness" following the abuses committed by her employer, misplaces the problem, the situation, and the experiential ordering of social world. What is relevant for actually understanding "the whole problem" remains concealed within this labeling. Such a narrow interpretation of the whole experience also conceals the profound ethical projects bounded within the hopeful dream of becoming a sovereign caretaker. We might view this as another iteration of how biomedicine via psychiatry is a facet of control and neo-colonial subjugation; and with that, the unwellness of the domestic worker is presented as the primary problem, and its precipitating factor—abuse—is situated as secondary. The experience-near ordering of the situation is ignored (Fanon [1952] 2008; Fassin 2000).

Going Abroad

The idea that things and events will necessarily happen in the future should be assumed as ambiguous. Traditional destiny should not be understood as predetermined, but as oxymoronic. Traditional destiny is, in practice, a contradiction in terms; traditional destiny is not predictive given the inherent unpredictability and ambivalence of "tradition" and "destiny." One might claim that it is the traditional destiny of an Ethiopian woman to take care of her family

through dutiful commitments to her husband and children, and that Ethiopian tradition has already laid before her, her role in the family and in the community, but her destiny is much more nuanced and unpredictable. It is not that certain events or situations will *not* necessarily happen, but rather that there is no guarantee that her future is purely predestined, as there is always the possibility of contamination. I also maintain that within the category of women's traditional destiny, if any "thing" were to be consistent it would be that women's traditional destiny is constituted by an amalgamation of transformation (womxn[91] have always and will continue to unsettle and disrupt the categories ascribed to them).

Women I spoke with paid careful attention to the operative category of "women's traditional destiny" and *knew* they could change their lives within this permeable arrangement.[92] They had an awareness—conscious or not—that the events that would necessarily happen were exactly that: not yet happened, and therefore open to change. There was, as there had always been, space for quiet revolution (Scott 1985). Their dreams of the Arab country held the promise of commencing that changed. It was in undertaking their role as good Ethiopian women through an emergent form of caretaking—migrant domestic work—that they could subtly break the bondage of Ethiopian-women-as-unconditionally altruistic (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 267). In speaking with Derartu one afternoon at Mekelakel, I asked her if she had any thoughts on the conditions for Ethiopian women.

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[91] In the case of this broad and generalizing statement, I use the term "womxn" to be more inclusive and intersectional, disrupting the biased assumption that there are "natural" ways to be a woman. See Mavuso, Chiweshe, and Macleod (2019) for a thorough discussion of the term.

[92] There is a long history of women's influence on the maintenance and development of Ethiopia. The Hebrew Bible, Islamic Tradition, and the Kebra Negast offer renditions about the Queen of Sheba's centrality to King Solomon's reign, Ethiopia's national epic and foundation story. She is upheld culturally as a symbol of national pride. Empress Taytu of the Ethiopian Empire (d. 1918) is spoken about as a critical force in maintaining Ethiopia's independence. And the archeological record of Lucy (Dinkinesh), and her centrality in the National Museum in Addis Ababa, all honor Ethiopian women's significant in world history.

"There is a lot of inequality in Ethiopia. Men don't clean, don't do house things. Women aren't farmers. In Ethiopia women are working a lot of house job—cleaning, food preparation, taking care of the children, but the men only farmers and they go back in the house and she is preparing the dinner. She is taking the water to everything."

"Any ideas about change?"

"At this time, it is improving," Derartu continued, "I think they—the future generation—are encouraging the change."

Derartu was clever, and easily reflected on her experiences both abroad and in Ethiopia. Over our seven months together, I saw her confidence grow and believed she also noticed this change in herself. With this sense of security followed a sense of truth-telling, which I felt was indispensable to understanding the larger cultural situation of domestic migrant work from Ethiopia—that is, a common ground from which singular experiences stemmed (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). To me, Derartu, undoubtedly embodied the dual projects of self-formation young Ethiopian women found themselves within. Derartu's experiences of going abroad and subsequent "sickness" that emerged after eleven months in Beirut, are at the heart of Beauvoir's examination into the ways in which "woman is taught to assume her condition, how she experiences this, what universe she finds herself enclosed in, and what escape mechanisms are permitted her. Only then can we understand what problems women—heirs to a weighty past, striving to forge a new future—are faced with" ([1949] 2011, 279). How does and how can someone like Derartu navigate and understand this categorical must-be of Ethiopian women's weightiness, especially in relation to her desire to become sovereign caretakers? How can she undertake such movement while maintaining a presentation of virtuous personhood in order to

preserve familial and personal status? What happens when the initial excitement expressed in relation to undertaking a form of care and life changing actively is interrupted?

What is particularly interesting about this self-initiated change locatable amongst women I spoke with, is its footing in the expectation that they would return to their families after a set period, typically two years. As my interlocutors explained, it was not about permanently leaving Ethiopia to build a new life in an unknowable distant land, to transform into someone else, somewhere else. There was never a mention of migrating abroad to the Arab States, establishing a profession, home, and adequate finances, to eventually have other family members join them. Rather, it was about temporarily going to a neighboring Arab country, a short distant away, where others, just like themselves had gone before. They set out to gather the imagined wealth provided by steady, foreign, employment. There was, as far as I could tell, always the intention to return home.[93]

Hilma, a twenty-one-year-old from the South Wollo Zone of Amhara Region explained to me that she had a four-year plan to work in the Arab countries.

"I wanted to change myself, to help myself. I have a plan to come back when I finish my job, back to Ethiopia to continue my school." Hilma desired a different life, which she thought might translate into a changed self, a self saved from stagnation. Her wants and desires, the courage to take risks, could perchance transform her into the imagined help-filled self, a Hilma from an otherwise imagined future who would continue school.

She borrowed 7,000*birr* from her sister and asked her uncle to find her a *delala.* Like Kiya, Hilma traveled to Addis to meet her *delala*, as she had already procured her passport from

[93] I find this phenomenon to be quite interesting and worth further exploration. This type of circular migration is distinct from other forms, and I believe plays a central role in the expectations and experiences of Ethiopians going to the Gulf countries (and also including Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon, Jordon, and Israel) for temporary work.

the nearby city of Dessi. She waited only a short time in Addis before departing for Dubai. She explained to me how she was not scared or nervous when she arrived at the airport, just excited to start her journey. Zahara echoed a similar sentiment: she was impatient to accomplish her dream of going to the Arab countries.

"I saw my neighbor, my friends, changing their lives, their, their clothes, a lot of things they change when they are back from the Arab country."

She described how angry she was at her parents for not letting her go.

"When I see the people, when they come back from the Arab country, I assume it is a nice place to be and is very comfortable to live in, so I decided to get married and have my husband send me abroad."

Going against her parents' wishes, she actioned her dreams by marrying an older man who agreed to send her to the Arab countries. She filled out applications for several countries, and soon her Kuwait visa arrived. She worked there for fourteen months before returning home.

I was amazed by the enthusiasm and knowhow many women displayed during their recollections of going abroad. First, navigating the Ethiopian emigration bureaucracy is convoluted and can lack consistency and predictability; it was also a huge expense. Second, they had to travel to Addis Ababa, the vast capital city where most of them had never before been. Then, they had to board a plane, which was a new experience for all. Finally, they arrived at a country where they did not speak or read the language or know the customs, and obligated to working in a stranger's home. They committed to being away from their families for years based on trust in persons they never met. To me, they were fearless.[94]

[94] I prefer to describe this group of women as "fearless" at this point, instead of victims of the harmful processes of globalization and the racialized process of finding the cheapest labor from the Global South. Characterizing them as fearless does not free them from the shackles of the problematic phenomenon of

I asked Hilma and Zahara how they felt when the *delala* dropped them at the airport.

"I felt nothing," said Zahara.

"Nothing?" I replied.

"Yeah, just normal."

"You weren't scared or anything?"

"No."

Hilma said she did not feel anything until she arrived in Dubai. Then, when a "Driver" picked her up she felt, "very scared" and "prayed to my Allah."

Not a single interlocutor told me she was scared when she arrived for their departure from Bole International Airport. They either felt, "nothing", "excited", or "happy."

There was one young woman, who I met only briefly, who expressed, what I saw as the ultimate determination to make her dreams a reality. At just eighteen years old[95] Romon made the journey to Saudi Arabia on her own. Looking at her petite frame, surrounded by her navy-blue hijab and flowy bubble-gum pink dress, I was simultaneously in awe of her and stunned by her fearlessness. Abinet and I listened in astonishment.

Romon, like Hilma, also traveled from the South Wollo Zone, but, unlike Hilma, did not use a *delala*.

"I went with a group of women. We went from small city to small city," she explained.

She walked on foot, hopped between buses, vans, and camped her way from central Ethiopia to the northern Afar Region, and then into and through Djibouti. She calmly told her story—this small, tenacious, teenager—as if it was merely a trip to the local market.

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domestic labor migration, but I instead, I want to hold such situatedness in co-existence, not as "either-or" categories.

[95] It was not uncommon for the women I spoke to tell me they were eighteen or twenty-one, but they often looked much younger.

She walked through a part of Ethiopia known for its arid, "inhospitable" land—the majority of Afar inhabitants are pastoralists—and tourists flock to this region to view the famed salt flats and the Erta Ale volcano. It is where the East African Rift Valley is truly rifting, where the earth's crust splits and its insides seethe to the surface. I can only guess which areas she traversed and while she avoided the most barren places[96] she still encountered the hot, dry, and stark lands marking the Eastern tip of Ethiopia and Djibouti.

I was not the only one entranced with Romon's story. Abinet, Sister Hannah, and four other residents gathered loosely around, listening. Taytu, making the requested coffee, eavesdrops from nearby. The old guard came over and grabbed a handful of freshly made popcorn. He leaned against the porch railing.

After she traversed her way through the landscape of Northeastern Ethiopia to Djibouti, she waited and worked in a coastal village. Eventually she earned enough money to pay for a boat trip to Yemen. Romon continued her story about her departure for Yemen, crossing the Red Sea.

"I paid 20,000 Djibouti Francs!" she proudly exclaimed.

"Oooow. She is very clever." Abinet commented to me, remarking on Romon's ability to earn that amount of money in the four to five months she camped in Djibouti.

"Weren't you scared?!" I asked.

She said she was only scared when she boarded the boat, which she thought held about seventy people. She flitted her arms about, animating the story. She was *only* afraid because she

[96] Dallol and the Danakil Depression, which are the lowest points in Ethiopia and some of the lowest points in all of Africa, are continuously undergoing processes of volcanism, which causes hydrothermal fields, some boiling with chemical-filled oily liquids. The Erta Ale volcano is an *active* volcano with a lava lake in the center. Temperatures of the Afar region are consistently between 95-120 degrees Fahrenheit.

could not swim, and the boat was very crowded. However, she explained, she just kept reminding herself that it was, “Only one day of risk for the opportunity to change all the following days.”

“She is right,” Abinet agreed with a head nod.

The boat made the estimated twenty-mile journey across the busy waters of the Red Sea. It took only a few hours to reach the shores of Yemen. After which she immediately set foot for Saudi Arabia.

“One week I was there [Saudi Arabia] and then I was put in jail.”

The police arrested her and placed her in a large holding cell with dozens of other Ethiopian women. She never had the opportunity to change all the following days, at least not this time.

Similar to Romon, Hilma’s excitement was short lived. Four hours after departing Addis Ababa, she arrived in Dubai.

“I was waiting in the airport lobby. I was waiting for my madam or my boss.” Soon she saw a man holding a sign with her name on it. She went over to him, and he told her to follow him to the car. I asked Hilma what language he spoke to her, Arabic, English, Amharic?

“English. I understood most of it.”

“How did you feel at this moment?” I asked.

Speaking in English, Hilma replies, “I am afraid.”

“*Lemini*?” [Why], I respond in Amharic.

“Because I don’t know where I am going. I don’t know where I am. I was thinking, when will I get in the house?”

Hilma arrived, as she describes it, to a "small house" outside of Dubai. She did not have her own room and shared the family bathroom. She slept on the floor at night. After about a month, her employer, her "madam", took her to a clinic for a medical appointment. While there, they had her undress and put on a hospital gown. Hilma did not remember all the details of the appointment, but recalled that they took her fingerprints, measured her blood pressure, and gave her an injection.

"I was very scared."

"Yes, of course," I replied.

Receiving some sort of medical examination upon arriving abroad was a somewhat common practice. However, no interlocutors knew what sort of injections they received. I assume it was a vaccination, but more than trying to figure out what kind of injection she received, what Hilma's experience demonstrates is how little control my interlocutors had over their lives and bodies.

You Have Arrived at Your Destination

When leaving Ethiopia, most women I spoke with were in like company; there were several others traveling abroad for domestic work. My interlocutors said this provided a sense of familiarity and comfort during their short journey abroad,[97] and it was not until meeting their employer, or the second *delala* (or very soon after), that they felt a shift from excitement to fright. In what follows, I offer stories from three interlocutors (Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu) who describe the moment of this affective shift. Although Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu are quite

[97] Anyone who has taken the short flight from Addis Ababa to Dubai will have witnessed such a gathering. Mostly young Ethiopian women, they are often clustered together near the departure gate door, sociably conversing with one another. Most often they each hold a small piece of hand luggage, a plastic bag, and occasionally a little crossbody purse.

different from each other, both in terms of personality and upbrings, there was a thread that linked their own individual understandings about what caused this affective shift.

I met Deseleche and Taytu at Tesfa, and Tiki at Mekelakel. Deseleche and Taytu had lived in Tesfa for only a short time, about two months, while Tiki, having previously lived at Mekelakel, now resided in her own apartment. She completed her rehabilitation at Mekelakel about a year ago and presently worked as a housekeeper—mopping floors, doing laundry, and cleaning the bathrooms. All three reported returning to Ethiopia because they became "sick", and according to Tesfa and Mekelakel nursing staff, all three were treated for "depression".

Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu came from distinctively different parts of Ethiopia. Tiki is originally from Debre Birhan, but grew up in Addis, spending eleven years as a domestic worker for her aunt; Deseleche is Hadiya, coming from a tiny south-central village where her family raises cattle; and Taytu is Oromifa, born and raised in a moderate sized city located in the southern Arsi Region. All three speak a different language, practice a different religion, and have markedly different personalities. Tiki is energetic and gregarious; Deseleche is curious, asking me why I am writing notes all the time; and Taytu is precocious. She has no hesitation in teasing me or talking back to Abinet. While each woman found a *delala* on her own and paid him or her to facilitate their journey and work abroad, they each worked in a different country: Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and United Arab Emirates.

Below I demonstrate that much like their upbringings, at first glance there are differences to their arrivals and experiences abroad, and yet, what I want to illuminate is that despite these differences, the moments they describe as precipitating an affective shift, reveal how fundamental individual expectations figure into self-formation.[98] Those individual expectations

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[98] My masters work (2014) also demonstrates the profound role expectations hold for Ethiopian diversity visa recipients who immigrate to America. When examining individuals within the Ethiopian community

were vital to maintaining a (integrated) self or what the nurses described as a self that knows their self—a self where the conscious parts of ourselves are related to the less conscious parts (Hollan 2014,191) in a way that did not produce a self that was recognized by others as "sick."

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When Tiki arrived in Jeddah, she was immediately placed into a locked room separate from the general airport arrivals. The way in which she described the space made it sound like it was a holding area for arriving domestic workers.[99] She waited in that room, she told me, "All day," but also admitted that she did not have a good concept of time in that moment. During her time in the holding room, the Saudi airport authorities took her passport and her documents.

"I had nothing. No money, no documents, no luggage." She was instructed to wait in the room until her employers arrived.

"I am very afraid because the language is different. I was very afraid…I was scared."

After a few hours an Ethiopian airport worker entered the room with a meal for her. She told Tiki not to worry and that her employers would arrive later. Tiki remained in that room for at least a day, accompanied by other Ethiopian, Somali, and Filipino women.

"Everyone seemed very scared. I was worried, tired, and eventually fell asleep. At that time the employers arrived. They call your name when it is your turn to leave. When the employers arrived, they go and get my luggage and passport, documents. When my name was called, I was very excited."

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of Boston who had died by suicide, "expectations" for a "better life," and the unanticipated failure to achieve an imagined becoming was situated as the central impetus.

[99] Unfortunately, I have no way of either confirming or denying whether such a room like this exist in the Jeddah airport, but I have no reason to believe that Tiki would fabricate or embellish her story.

After leaving the holding room she went to security. She was sent through a metal detector and after which she was permitted to meet her employer. She encountered two men, "When I saw the two men, I was very scared."

They instructed her to follow them, and all three loaded into a car. Tiki reported that the older man was very strict, but the younger one was nice, "He was shy, but very funny." Next, she arrived at the home of an older woman, whom Tiki believed to be the mother of the older man. She instructed Tiki to start cleaning immediately.

Tiki described a roller-coaster of emotions: scared, excited, scared. She felt afraid during her time in the Jeddah airport, unsure of what followed. Next, her name was called, and she again commenced her exciting journey, but upon seeing that it was two men who came for her, she felt scared. On the car ride, she found some relief in the good humor of the younger man. And yet again, her enjoyment waned as she met the older woman who greeted her with instructions to start cleaning immediately.

The next day, Tiki asked her employer, extending her pinky finger and thumb in opposite directions and holding it up to the side of her face, if she could call her aunt. She mimics this gesture for Abinet and I—an internationally recognized signal for phone. The older woman agreed. Calling her aunt, Tiki explained that there was "no rest in the house." She wanted to return to Ethiopia. Her aunt told her that she needed to "accept this challenge" and explained that there were always going to be "these kind of challenges in our life."

After hearing her aunt's words, Tiki said it made, "Some kind of strength in my heart. I'll be strong. This is my duty. To do this work is my duty because I've come to make some kind of money for myself. To improve my life."

She worked for ten months, without pay, never permitted to leave the house, and eventually, she became sick with "*chiniket*" (ጭንቀት/stress).

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Deseleche, a twenty-four-year-old from Southern Ethiopia, flew to Dubai and was subsequently driven to Lebanon. She arrived at a house with several other women, whom she described as, similar to herself. From there, her employer picked her up and drove her to his home. She was instructed to start cleaning. She explained that the employer's house was "very big and scary." She did not understand the language, received no payment, and had very little rest. After two months of work, she says, "*Amemegn*" ("I got sick"):

> I was shouting and I wanted out of the house. They didn't give me any food. I didn't eat any food. I was shouting and I don't know the reason for doing so. When I was shouting, the man yelled at me, and he tried to hit me, and I tried to hit some people around me. He tried to hit me, but he doesn't. He yelled, 'Shut up! Shut up!' He then took me to the office [the *delala's* house], but the office was closed. So, I stayed in the office floor with a woman, and then the man who took my passport and permission papers came back another day with my things and the *delala* sent me back to Addis.
>
> "What do you think caused your sickness?" I asked.
>
> Deseleche did not respond.

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Taytu arrived at the Dubai airport and promptly telephoned her second *delala*, a man, whose number was provided to her by her first *delala* in Ethiopia, a woman. At this point in her trip, she tells me, she still felt, "Good." Shortly after her airport arrival, a driver retrieved her and brought her back to the *delala's* house. When she entered the house, she noticed there were several other Ethiopian women, like herself. She asked one woman, "Is this the madam's house?"

The woman explained to her that this was not the madam's house, but where the madam would come to pick her up. As Taytu recounted this part of her story she disclosed that other things happened inside the *delala's* house, and it was here that her feelings started to shift. The *delala* took her passport.

"My feeling change dramatically. I am not good. The *delala* is stupid. He hitting us, shouting. At this moment, I change my mind."

She stayed in this home for one week before her employer arrived.

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These three brief anecdotes represent moments when each woman recognized an early shift in their emotions and affective relations[100] (Fanon [1952] 2008; Slaby et. al 2019), and with that, a change in their self-awareness—the sense that she knew where she was, and where she expected to be (Hallowell 1955, 93). A change that hastened a dramatic shift in their expectations. Much like the felt failure to achieve happiness (Throop 2015), Taytu, Deseleche, and Tiki's interrupted expectations, concerning the possibility to readily achieve the "good life," felt like a failure of self. Taytu "changed her mind," Deseleche felt some sort of "haunting" from the house, and Tiki felt a lot of "worry." The sense of where she was and where she expected to be in the future shook under the weight of the unfamiliar. There was, what we might describe, a shift in mood. A mood, Throop states is, "the existential expanse within which reflection is deployed…a vague and diffuse orientation toward the world that suffuses our every perception, action, and reaction to it" (2015, 59). It was mooded self-awareness triggered by an unfamiliar

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[100] "For human actors, affects are material and ideational relations that, in the short term, increase or diminish their agentive and existential capacities in relation to their surroundings and all other actors and entities present in a situation. In the longer term, affective relations *constitute* human and non-human actors, insofar as affective relations over time both establish and subsequently modulate – make, unmake, remake – individual capacities and dispositions. In other words, relational affect is a central factor in the process of subject formation" (Slaby et al. 2019, 27).

environment which disrupted their projects of becoming the benevolent sovereign caretaker. It was in these moments that an awareness emerged that beset their ethical commitments of caring for those they loved most, and they could feel that the once imagined good life was not guaranteed.

The Curiousness of Stickiness

What I also find curious about the "arrival story" is that despite the patchy memories of many of my informants, there was little effort to recall their first moments abroad. Whether or not their initial arrivals were ominous was irrelevant; even those who disembarked without issue or experienced a year or two of work without mistreatment still remembered their first encounter with their employer. What is of interest to me is the stickiness of this moment. Why does it stick? How does this stickiness relate to prior, present, and future selves? How can we understand this stickiness in relation to the forgottenness of their return to Ethiopia?

I sensed that there was something significantly affective about their encounter with the unfamiliar environment, which demanded something of the self. I am inclined to identify the stickiness of this experience with the sensation of "getting lost" as defined by Hallowell, "getting lost or becoming spatially disoriented is apt to be an emotionally distressing situation" (1955, 93). Hallowell remarks on the ways in which one's capacity to move freely and intelligently within an environment, as well as the ability to readily return home, are basic to human living. While I prefer to say that these capacities are fundamental to human flourishing, rather than human living, the general point remains similar: the temporal, spatial, and relational orientations of our environment must hold a degree of familiarity for the self to not only feel oriented to a shared world, but to also feel some kind of biographical integrity (Mattingly 2018a). This sense of biographical integrity is directly linked to ethical self-formation, and the persistent haunting of

an unfamiliar environment leads to a fractured self—a scissile self—where the constant "shock" of foreclosed possibilities gradually unfastens the self from a shared reality.

For Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu this basic capacity of orienting one's self to their new environment was lost due to a disorientating effect caused by some sort of "shock" or unexpected social milieu. Along with such environmental and intersubjective disruption followed a disruption to their self-continuity and personal identity. This ontological disruption *is* what makes the arrival memory stick. The ontological disruption is the glue that attaches that last moment where their original expectations and desires met with the reality; it is the viscosity of their entelechy in articulation with the reality of their new environment that produces this stickiness. The memory of their arrival, because it is tied to a disruption in self formation, demonstrates, what Hallowell identifies as the essential "connections between memory processes and the development of a feeling of self-identity":

> This integral relation is one of the necessary conditions required if any sense of self-continuity is to become salient. Human beings maintain awareness of self-continuity and personal identity in time through the recall of past experiences that are identified with the self-image. If I cannot remember, or recall at will, experiences of an hour ago, or yesterday, or last year that I readily identify as *my* experiences, I cannot maintain an awareness of self-continuity in time. (1955, 94)

What is thought-provoking regarding Hallowell's argument in relation to my own work is that several women could *not* remember their return to Ethiopia. If they did remember some aspect of their return, it was largely in relation to their symptoms or regarding their interaction with the airport nurses and their arrival to Tesfa or Mekelakel. For example, Deseleche recounted, "The only thing I remember is that the passengers on the airplane did not want to sit next to me because I was shouting. I do not remember my behavior in the airport. When I came here [Tesfa], the second day they gave me an injection."

For Deseleche what “stuck” were the moments that seemed to attend most closely to her understanding about her beingness—that is, the sticky memories were those experiences where her self-identity was unsettled by the intersubjective encounter. Her compatriots did not want to sit next to her, and those vacant seats marked her pariah status. Likewise, she received an invasive chemical that transformed her shouting into docility, she was silenced.

The arrival stories of Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu also disclose how excitement, when replaced by fear, corresponds to a recognition of novel[101] and unforeseen vulnerability. Tiki calls her aunt, saying she could not accept such strenuous work; Deseleche feels uneasy about the enormity of her place of employment; and Taytu is stunned by the hostility and violence of the Dubai *delala*.

This type of rapid transformation from one emotional state to another beckons a phenomenological approach, which recognizes and examines the individual as continually shifting between orientations. It helps us better understand how individuals respond to ethical demands and how various attitudes and orientations are taken up, revealing how her experiences exceed the categorical renditions of domestic worker abuse (Husserl [1931] 2014; Throop 2003, 2015). By examining this emotional shift, we can identify how each women’s attention was drawn away from the possibility of achieving a good life to the very real possibility of failure. It was no longer excitement and benevolent curiosity fomenting their-being-in-the-world, but a fear of the threating other unbeknownst to them.

[101] I do not know all the biographical specificities of all my interlocuters, but when discussing their backgrounds and upbringings there were no reports of familial abuse. It was, however, common for my interlocuters to experience arguments with their parents, but it never escalated into physical violence. It seemed to be nothing more than common teenage angst colliding with parental control. In general, most of the women I spoke with came from, what they described as, loving families. During fieldwork I was surprised with how many mothers and fathers did *not* want their daughters to go abroad, and the emotional distress I witnessed from parents upon reuniting with their daughters was frequent and poignant.

Sonorous Silence

In light of my interlocutors' limited recollections about their affective shift, the degree and exact form of their dispositions while abroad remain relatively opaque.[102] While I can make (and have) inferences about their conscious understanding of their change in character, feelings, motives, or desires, and likewise, assume that there must have been some sort of shift concerning their projects of becoming, I nonetheless want to stay committed to the theoretical mandates of feminist phenomenology by upholding the value of opaqueness as a fundamental attribute of the human condition. It is part of our complex constellation, and it is as essential as the other more illuminated spheres of narrative and emotion. Therefore, the brevity of the above-mentioned moments, while temporally minor, are essential for understanding how and why the women I spoke with (and perhaps additional Ethiopian domestic workers) experienced their "sickness."

This opaqueness of self-understanding should also not be presumed or deemed "mysterious," a derivative of an androcentrically-estimated objective resistance. In other words, a strange abnormality (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 269). This categorization, as I have demonstrated, can lead to a counterproductive understanding of their personhood as well as an inaccurate course of care, through the decentering of individual experiences and biographical specificities. Rather, we must listen to her silence; appreciate it as her situated *modus operandi*. Behind her silence are feelings, moods, desires, experiences. Such assemblages are in and for herself and are not to be objectified by me, the inquisitive observer.

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[102] Given that this portion of a migrant domestic worker's journey remains absent from the relative literature, I also assume that either this step of the journey was not directly addressed by researchers with former domestic workers, or perhaps, like my own work, research encountered quite a bit of silence or ambiguity regarding this step. Thus, I am inclined to think that researchers, if they did ask about this portion of the journey, avoided examining it due either to its complexity or uncomfortable "fit" with the "traditional" story of migrant domestic workers in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf.

It is perhaps in my asking of a question that had no answer—at least not an answer that could capture the indefinability of that moment—that was the problem. Through my questioning, I attempted to objectify "an experience" that is beyond language, where the absence of linguistic interaction is the only fitting form of (dis)engagement. There is no singular explication that can define who she is or how she felt in that complex moment of coming and going, of becoming and foreclosing. Silence *is* a statement on the variable person she is (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). More simply put, I attempted to garner a categorical, objectifiable, sharable, and articulable piece of information about an experience whose complexity far outweighs my simplistic and unknowing understanding of a situation.

My questioning endeavored to understand a situation that I could only grasp incomplete as a moment that was full of pain, a moment when the individual was filled with discomfort and unpleasant sensations, hurt, displeasure, a generalized or localized source of complex distressing bodily sensations (Merriam-Webster 2021). Drawing on Virginia Woolf's (1967) *On Being Ill,* Elaine Scarry (1985) addresses the ways in which experiences of pain specifically resist and destroy language. Anthropologists have further demonstrated how pain can also often resist objectification (Jackson 1994; Throop 2009), reinforcing the notion that there is an "exceptional character" to pain that is marked by its unsharability. This ultimately differentiates it from other interior states of consciousness (Scarry 1985, 5). In the case of my work, it was not exclusively physical pain that shaped my interlocutor's re-orientations to the world and self-formation. Their narrative accounts did not necessarily emphasize the pain of a strike, rather it was the pain of *being hit by someone*. It was more about the painful event executed by the other, an other who was once desired as the necessary component for their calculation of change. It was the shock that the fundamental component for achieving the good life instead became the threatening other.

The once imagined source for a life worth living was now the narrow-minded person who refused to recognize the domestic workers humanness (Fanon [1963] 2004).

It is the slap of the *delala*, the scream of the employer, the locked unfamiliar room, and the constellation of shattered expectations that produce the unsharability of these painful moments. Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu are limited in their words to describe such complex sensations. What is generalizable—"He is stupid;" "I am afraid;" "I got sick."—are thin lexical units, and yet, they remain the furthest access points into the interiority of the recollected moment of an affective shift. Such initial descriptions echo a type of pain more closely related to Fanon's ([1952] 2008) discussion regarding the ways in which a white man's eyes break up the black man's body in the act of epistemic violence. Equally, the existence of Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu was called into question in their relation to the malevolent other—someone who transformed their individual selves into a mere object, a mere body, for the other to harm and exploit (Bhabha 2004; Fanon [1952] 2008).

This initial epistemic violence and ontological disruption foreshadowed the subsequent exploitation. What was to come was exploitation in its rawest form, where the body exists as a mere object. Through the cruel presence of someone else, who questions the merit and worth of the person before them and refuses to recognize them as human, (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013 as cited by Fanon 2008, 192-200) we find the systematic ontological annihilation captured within the expression, "*Amemegn*" ("I got sick").

Tiki, Deseleche, Taytu, Roman, Hilma, Zahara, Kiya, and dozens of other women I spoke with, harmonized through their encounters with the (at times, unspeakable) exploitative other. They were forced to reckon with what it felt like to be deprived of their dignity and desires by an other, who dismantled a firm sense of self through a multitude of unexpected ways.

Feminist phenomenological insights not only seek to explain how shifting experiences are "constituted and transform by means of the various attitudes and orientations we take up" (Throop 2009, 553), but unsettle the idea that silence is an absence. Instead, this theoretical stance, and ethical commitment, works to "prevent[s] the errors of dogmatism by suspending all affirmation concerning the mode of reality of the external world" (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). It situates a condition or comportment of silence, as a mode of givenness, a basic structure of experience and narrative.

Silence in the instance of this study, and its specific coupling with experiences of abuse, is a sexed embodiment of the constant oscillating motion she makes between the particularities of the domestic work situation for her, her life, *and* the generalities of what it means to be in the world as a woman, and as an Ethiopian woman (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Heinämaa 2003; Mann 2018). It is the sonorousness of silence that reveals how profoundly painful the confrontation of the conditions and possibilities for women's "freedom" is with values and material arrangements circumscribed by men, as well as systems of racialization (Beauvoir [1949] 2011 as discussed by Mann 2018). Silence is constituted by dimensions of experience integrated with the situation and ontological entangle of ethical failure and injustices—it is this type of concerted silence which summons us to look behind and beneath, to ask what more is there in this veiled language of hers? There are of course always things that will remain unknown and kept from us, but, as Beauvoir ([1949] 2011) reminds us, that which we do uncover, and reveal, must be predicated on a search committed to intervening into those power relations that have sedimented the conditions of injustice borne by silence.

While this theoretical examination is important for extending our knowledge about the specific situation of Ethiopian domestic workers and the more general human condition, the

poetic renditions of human life espoused by the intelligentsia are still apt to run aground. It therefore befits me to remark on the various interpretations of silence that may also fit with my interlocutors. Throughout my analysis I am aware that there are dewy residues of the unconscious that seep into the perceptions and experiences of my interlocutors, and yet remain outside my prior-discussed considerations. I do not doubt that those energies worked together to forge a refashioned self. This will happen under any circumstance where the behavioral environment—both local and imagined—is intensely dynamic (Hallowell 1955; Hollan 2016). At both the conscious and unconscious level the ways in which these individual women anticipated their next movements in relation to the ethical projects of becoming is brought into relief in some form—an emotional admittance of the passage from hope to failure, of good to bad. And when questions of their mental and emotional (un)wellness are at stake it is necessary to consider what unconscious particularities are operative.

Given the degree of knowledge I have about most of my interlocutors I am hesitant to apply psychoanalytical concepts, which would offer conjectural estimations about their inner workings (Hollan 2016). I believe, in the instances of Tiki and Deseleche, whose biographical and developmental history are moderately unknown to me, that any attempt to theorize their unconscious and how it articulates with their individual consciousness would be limited and would risk distilling the complexity of their individual personhoods (Gordon 2008 as cited by Hollan 2016). Despite my hesitation to embrace psychoanalytic theories I believe that this brief, yet monumental shift in feeling, is of great importance for holistically understanding the situation of "sickness" that is experienced by my interlocutors during their time as domestic workers.

I also want to recognize a more common sense understanding about why someone may not have an answer to my question: The relative absence of articulated experiences of affective

shift following an unexpected encounter may be the result of misunderstanding my questioning or simply not remembering that moment. I cannot expect my questioning to be comprehensible to all I encounter, nor can I assume that I am forming my questions in a manner that makes sense. I also cannot expect my interlocutors to recall or recount every detail of their experiences, feelings, and emotions, words, and thoughts. My interlocutors are human, and with that comes a propensity to forget—active or not (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013, 164).

Spaces of Liminality

Prior to departure, Tiki, Deseleche, Taytu, as well as Hilma, Zahara, and Romon each assumed they would perform a mode of work familiar to them since childhood. In the conversations we held month after month, I had the impression that each woman thought they *knew* what they were going to encounter abroad—it was a journey predicated on a foreseeable future. Domestic work was predictable work—domestic—performed in a predictable space—the home. When I asked if they had previously heard about any Ethiopian domestic workers abuse in the Gulf countries, they responded that they had, but they assumed it was just "bad luck" or that the Ethiopian woman did not know how to properly perform her domestic duties.

"I knew *I* could do it properly," said Taytu. This form of "victim blaming" always surprised me, but I believe it spoke more to the attitude of my interlocuters that was largely free of negative preconceptions of outsiders. It was this type of unassuming being-in-the-world that I believe further contributed to the great "shock" or "surprise" they felt when they first encountered episodes of abuse and discrimination during their word abroad. It was completely unexpected, both because they assumed that they were undertaking a type of work well-known to them and had ample experience with, and because they did not anticipate this type of inhumane

behavior from another. Interesting, this attitude resonates with my earlier work regarding Ethiopian pride and the concept of "*ke man anish.,*" Transliterated as "who minus who," it is an Amharic saying that encompasses the authoritative nature pride holds in Ethiopian culture. At its most basic, it means "I am no less good than you," or "I am not lower than anyone." It is a phrase used to encapsulate the competitive force, the experience of being driven by pride. In the context of domestic work, this notion relates to Taytu's (an other's) assumption that someone else "failed" at their domestic duties, but she would not do the same, she was not lower than anyone and would not fail at anything. Likewise, this tenet influences understandings concerning racial hierarchies and the expected social encounters.

Undertaking housework abroad was a continuation of their already built social role and self-understanding of a capable (prideful) Ethiopian woman. For them, it was just another iteration of an already familiar way of life. Their dreams assembled upon a predictable horizon and it was secured to an imagined future self, a sovereign caretaker, which was built around a knowledge moored to their experiences in Ethiopia. There was an underlying assumption that when they arrived at their respective Gulf countries, it was a moment where they no longer had to dream about a changed life, but could now live it. They *would* accomplish what they imagined.

Their arrival represented the outcome of putting the potential into action, where they separated from a previous state and arrived at a liminal spatiotemporal container: the airport lobby and the *delala's* house. Evocative of Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner's (1969) discussions of rituals of transformation, this stage of the migration journey places the individual women neither here nor there. They are caught in a sensuous world of what Vincent Crapanzano (2003) likens to dreams, where imaginative possibilities dwell and the boundaries

between individuals and their worlds are muddled and mystic (Hollan 2014); they can become spaces of creative imagination and personal empowerment, as well as worlds of fear and anxiety (Stoller 2009). With bated breath, Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu install themselves into this stage of indeterminate ambiguity.

The airport lobby (as well as the home of the *delala*) also resonates with Mattingly's discussing the ways in which the lobby of institutional care settings occupies a liminal space. It is a space of estrangement and displacement a space where one must pass through and pause while on their way to the imagined "better" or positive potentialities of a good life (2010, 8). It occupies a unique temporal and physical space of un/certainty—as a place where future what-ifs reach toward an optimistic possibility and hold the power to transform (Mattingly 2010, 14).[103] Drawing on the narratives of my interlocutors, the lobby of the airport or "lobby" of the *delala's* home is a place where future what-ifs reach toward a pessimistic possibility and hold the power to foreclose their projects of becoming an imagined other (Hollan 2012; Mattingly 2014). This liminal space is the space between how we imagine the world to be and how we actually experience it (Jackson 2013, 91). The fallout from this 'reality check' resided, for example, in such recollections as Tiki's reconsideration of continuing her work in Saudi Arabia after only one day.

Through the intersubjective encounter (real or imaginary) that transpired in these liminal spaces, we can also see how the attention of Tiki, Deseleche, and Taytu dramatically shifted toward certain events, persons, and objects, that marked suffering, care, or hope in such a way that this space becomes a place of chaos (disjunctive, mere experience) and a place of discomfort

[103] This is similar to Mattingly's discussion of borderlands, citing B. Good (2008, 22), as "spaces of contradiction and disorder, as well as sites of cultural fluidity, identity making, and diverse and marginal forms of citizenship" (2010, 9).

(unfamiliar, incoherent, meaningful). I consider then, the "lobbies" in my work as similar to Mattingly's discussion of the lobby of institutional care settings—it is a space of possibility. However, in my work, as these young women dwell in these spaces (waiting and anticipating their next steps), they seem to be overcome by a sense of looming (Throop n.d.). A sense of an ominous future is central to understanding the "stickiness" of their arrival memories and key to understanding how liminal space contribute to the undoing of becoming.

A Year Later

A year after fieldwork officially ended, I was back in Los Angeles, organizing the hundreds of notes and business cards, handouts and flyers, pamphlets and governmental documents that somehow found their way into my field notebooks. I decided to further delay this organizational task and turned my attention to my favorite piece of paper—an enormous map of East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

I purchased this map from the Ethiopian Mapping Agency. I needed to sign my name in an official government ledger to acquire it; the last time it was updated and published was 1985. On two occasions I brought the map to the shelters to look at it with residents; we tried to locate their villages and cities. I circled and placed little transparent pastel flags over their hometowns and tried to determine whether there was any discernable pattern to their migration. Looking at the cluster of hometowns in the north, I thought about how much I wanted to return to Ethiopia to visit a few of specific individuals. Since 2018 I only managed to return once to visit Abinet, and one interlocutor, Taytu. I thought of her often and many others, particularly those who came from parts of Ethiopia currently in the crossfires of a genocidal war. I thought of Romon and her story of cross-country adventure. Her risky journey still haunted me.

Looking at the map I tried to imagine where she might have traversed. What was the most practical route in terms of road availability? What was the shortest distance regardless of roadways? I traced lines from South Wollo to the Djiboutian towns of Yoboki and Dorra. Maybe she passed through one of these settlements on her way to the coast. But where did she ultimately stop, in the ancient city of Tadjoura? Or perhaps the largest town, Djibouti City? Or was it Moulhuole in the Obock Region? Did she follow the "Eastern Migration Route" popularly attended to by humanitarian organizations?[104] Or did she by-pass this monitored passageway knowing there would be people in place to stop her from migrating?

I wondered where she might have crossed the Red Sea. I assumed the narrowest channel between the two great land masses. I looked at that tiny waterway connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, and in faint blue letters it was marked "Bab-el-Mandeb." I texted a friend, could she translate "Bab-el-Mandeb" ?

She replied, "Gate of Weeping."[105]

How fitting.

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[104] The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports more than 100,000 people migrate to or through Djibouti each year. While this statistic is primarily regarding Ethiopians and Somalians, there are also Yemenis fleeing Yemen for Djibouti and Ethiopia.

[105] Gate of Tears is another common translation. I thank Reem Mehdoui for her help with translating.

DJIBOUTI
Eli Dar
Serdo
AWSA
Doumêra
Perim Island
BAB EL MANDAB
Ras
Siyyan
Khor Angar
Obock
Tadjoura
Illes Musha
Sayallou
Gulf of Tadjoura
DJIBOUTI

Chapter Seven

Gate of Weeping

And this is why woman embodies no set concept; through her the passage from hope to failure, hatred to love, good to bad, bad to good takes place ceaselessly.[106]

-Simone de Beauvoir

Throughout this project crying was ubiquitous. Tears indicated sadness, fright, relief, joy, frustration, despair, stress, hopelessness, anger. Tears came with arrivals, reunions, and departures; tears were tied to recollections, amnesia, imaginations, and sickness. They flowed from those who told their story for the first time and from those who told their story the tenth time; they were part of the narrative of why someone returned and part of the experience of returning. My interlocuters wept, I wept, I even watched Abinet cry one morning at Tesfa, a moment that compelled me to reevaluate whether I put him under too much emotional stress during our work.

Few women we spoke with cried with dramatic intensity, losing themselves in the moment. More often tears flowed steadily and softly. Tears became part of our everyday experiences, such that I lost sight of their remarkability. I only started to notice the degree to which crying permeated my research long after official fieldwork ended. I reviewed hundreds of pages of fieldnotes and interviews repeatedly before I noticed the ubiquity of crying. It occurred at nearly every point within the labor migration process, except their departure from Ethiopia.

[106] The Second Sex, page 163.

Amongst all the ambiguous emotions, crying seemed to offer a through line toward some sort of shared experience.

To cry meant that someone felt something. They, we, all of us, were moved by some object, person, or event. The tears that comprised our individual and collective weeping were an indication that someone was attending to a meaningful experience in such a way that it moved them. This was not just the case in processes of reminiscing about their prior experiences abroad, but this was also the case when interlocutors described to me how they knew they were "sick;" their tears were meaning-full. While tears could be understood as a feeling episode, those feelings could remain relatively opaque. There were times when I misread my interlocutor's crying, thinking they were sad, when in fact, as Abinet corrected me, they were happy. I could not always understand why someone was crying. The same was true for interlocutors; they *knew* they were sick, that their mind was sick *because* they were crying, but they could not explicate further. It is precisely this type of ambiguous feeling episode that my work embraces and seeks to elevate as a reason why we must remain open to other possibilities of reexamining seemingly obvious experiences, emotions, behaviors, and the like. All the feelings entrapped within crying, whether I understood their complete meaning, revealed the incredible human complexity of this uniquely human expression.

The Phenomenology of Crying

Prior to this research I gave little thought to this form of expression (beyond that of the frequency of my own). This "interplay" of a person with their body, is, as phenomenologist

Helmuth Plessner describes, not an "intentional" action[107] ([1941] 1970[108], 14) and with that there comes an inherent ambiguity and curiosity. Conversations about crying did not emerge during my previous fieldwork concerning issues of suicide[109] and mental health among the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States (Melstrom 2014), which moved me to question whether there was something distinctively binding between crying and the experiences of my interlocutors within this study. It was central to their domestic work, their subsequent sickness, and their "involuntary" or spontaneous return to Ethiopia.[110]

It was the interplay of listening to, watching, and reading my informants repeatedly, which presented the significance of crying. This form of expression emerged from other larger and more recognizable forms of expression only after the fact. Crying was revealed as a condition *of* domestic work, a determinant of changing conditions, and a consequence of my interlocutors' actions, or rather a consequence of intersubjective life. But what does it mean for crying to be "significant"? In what ways is crying a determinant of changing conditions and the consequences of my interlocutors' actions? Such questions, guided by Plessner's phenomenological writings, can move the expression of crying beyond an understanding that it is representational of a gendered form of emotional distress. I also demonstrate, in Chapter Eight, how crying precipitated by reunions is another demonstration of how crying is essentially

[107] This is suggestive of Aristotle's "involuntary actions."
[108] Helmuth Plessner's *Laugh and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior* was published in its original German in 1941 and was not translated into English until 1970.
[109] However, given the nature of my research with those who were friends and family of individuals who died by suicide, I did not have direct access to the emotional experiences of those who died by suicide. Rather, I only had access to the emotional state of my interlocutors at that time who drew analogies between their post-migration mental health and that which they assumed to be the experiences of those who died by suicide.
[110] This is a classic example of the splendor of grounded theory, which can uncover the relevant conditions of crying, and also disclose the ways in which my interlocutors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 5).

bonded to the demanding work of ethical self-formation, and the relief that transpires when someone is offered a moment of respite—that is, a recognition of one's own helplessness before an external force, revealed in the case of a benevolent external force, is, Plessner argues, a sudden transition from "an attitude of tension to one of relaxation" that hastens tears.

Plessner's philosophical anthropology and feminist phenomenology

An experience-near examination of crying offers a more in-depth intersubjective and circumstantial connection to this unintentional action. I examine *why* crying was significant to this work and how my interlocutors perceived, felt, and transformed a consciousness of crying into an experience of "sickness," and how this was revealing of on-going or forestalled ethical projects of becoming. Crying, understood in this way, offers an opportunity to examine the experiences of the women in this study, their individual ethics of care and the moored abreactions as part of their constructions of self.

I want to take a moment to address my usage of Helmuth Plessner's work and remind my readers why I continue to apply phenomenology to my research with young Ethiopian women. A student of Husserl's, Plessner wrote during the same era as Husserl's more well-known students (e.g., Scheler, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty), but his writings have remained largely unknown to the English-speaking world.[111] Despite his advancement of philosophical anthropology, Plessner is, of course a twentieth-century male German philosopher and with that, susceptible to feminist and postcolonial criticisms against phenomenology (Witt 1996). And while some scholarship has

[111] Despite having introduced philosophical anthropology as an academic discipline in Germany, much of his work had not been translated into English until very recently. See *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects,* Edited by Jos de Mul (2014). As Mul notes, "Until recently, except for some smaller texts (Plessner 1964; 1969a; 19969b; 1970a; 1970b), no works of Plessner have been translated into English."

discussed the beneficial use of Husserlian phenomenology for feminist theory (Al Saji 2010; Wehrle 2020; Weiss 1999, 2015), an evaluation of the corresponding nature of Plessner's work and feminist theories has not been drawn. I will discuss why his work is advantageous to my own as well as feminist theories and the emerging variants of phenomenology within philosophical anthropology.

On his phenomenological work concerning laughing and crying, Plessner[112] ([1941] 1970) writes that such unintentional actions are uniquely human and yet have evaded philosophical inquest. Both forms are expressions of a breakdown of what the body knows and what it wills; laughing and crying represent a particular type of loss of self-control and disorganization where the "normal" distance to objects collapses. Plessner reasons that crying should be understood in relation—the relation of one to their body and the situations that body is found within. A statement that echoes Hallowell's[113] concept of the behavioral environment, where "human experience occurs in a social milieu" (1955, 81) and should be understood within such contexts.[114] While I dispute the tendency to associate crying with disorganization, I understand Plessner's use of "self-control" in discussing the uninhibited nature of crying, but, I *do* however consider crying as a form of self-control—the self is in control of itself through a

[112] Plessner's phenomenological exploration of laughing and crying is a product of its time: He makes generalized statements about "men" and "women," and "primitive" and "civilized" societies and their disparate predispositions toward crying. While this is problematic, overall, his engagement with the subject matter, and him having been a student of Husserl, is useful for my witnessing of episodes of crying and how I might examine those episodes through a phenomenological logic.
[113] See Hollan (2016) for an excellent discussion of Hallowell's concept of the behavioral environment and psychoanalysis—how ethnography should pay careful attention to local relationship patterns and styles to better understand the dynamic and emergent processes of intersubjectivity.
[114] Plessner's thesis on the role of the environment in constituting the human, via the body (i.e., she is a body and she has a body), like Beauvoir's, is also suggestive of Hallowell's (1955) behavioral environment. The body for all three, is the central analytic to grasping the human condition. We must pay attention to the individual body in a particular situation (culturally, historically, economically, socially, politically, gendering) to grasp the projects of self-formation more fully.

protective or therapeutic response, which allows for, what Plessner calls, the healing release of weeping. What constitutes, healing, then, becomes a further thought-provoking inquiry into the function of crying.

Plessner's phenomenological writings on crying are not just exceptionally useful for my examinations and commitment to elevating a feminist logic inherent in phenomenological and person-centered studies, but his work is also exceptional as a philosophical task. His writings on crying bring attention to the essential phenomenological thesis woven among his insights into those of which I have drawn out from Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. In their writings, all three stress the decentering and always-open power of a phenomenological science for understanding the situation of an individual as read through the body. This form of phenomenological practice is also advantageous for African philosophy and critical social theory (Kiros 2001; Zack 2007) by allowing for a kind of philosophy that attunes to what Teodros Kiros refers to as "deplorable conditions," which are of urgent moral and political matters (2001, 4). While Kiros emphasizes a key aspect of (feminist) phenomenology is its capacity to direct philosophical offerings toward important assessments about conditions of injustice, it is also the methodological suppositions of phenomenology that allow for an understanding of individuals and events *in relation*. This is paramount to inclusive feminist theory. In other words, phenomenology (feminist, queer, critical, or otherwise) remains concerned with existing *and* yet-to-be discussed identities (Zack 2007), and that includes an identification with a being-who-cried/s. Accordingly, my primary interest for utilizing Plessner is based in my commitment to understanding the existing and yet-to-be discussed nature of crying as it exists in *relation* and *within* deplorable conditions.[115]

[115] I later discuss crying as it exists in relation to and within fulfilling conditions. I do not adhere to any logic that presents crying as exclusively associated with the negative.

Plessner stresses the plasticity of human nature and the tendency of both philosophy and (19th and 20th century) anthropology to "fix" human beings in artificial ways (Krüger 2009). He argues that this kind of "fixing," or what Beauvoir calls a "categorical must-be" is detrimental toward our understanding of the human condition via its erasure of singularities and complexities. His central thesis concerning the eccentricity[116] of human intentionality (or eccentric position) stipulates that we *are* a body and we *have* a body (Plessner [1941] 1970). We are neither just a living body nor just a body (Plessner [1941] 1970, 37). Our actions and understandings, which define our individual consciousness, are grounded in the material world of nature. In so being, our sudden or unreflective desires or urges to act are realized in relation to being in a body and having a body. Simply put, we are bordered and have borders and our relational environments determine how these borders open upon and close to the world.

I find that such statements align with foundational theories of feminist phenomenology—mainly that the individual is always oscillating between "the most concrete, particular, and located events and perspectives, to the general features of human experience, and back again" (Mann 2018, 57). She is individual in her body and in her world, and her experiences are hers and hers alone, and yet there exists a kind of enslavement that encloses her, and this resides in the material body—it is her body that determines how her world unfolds and ascends toward the clouded horizons of being and becoming. "The woman's body," Beauvoir writes, "is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world. But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society" ([1949] 2011, 48). And within this there exists a shared familiarity among women.

[116] Mul also notes that some authors adhere to the translation "exzentrische Positionalität" with "excentric positionality." This is done "in order to avoid association with the meaning "deviating from conventional or accepted use or conduct," which is attached to the English word "eccentric"" (2014, 11).

What both Beauvoir and Plessner highlight is that the (female) body is dually existent in the world. This dual nature of woman's lived-experience, specifically highlighted by Beauvoir, echoes Plessner's argument about that pluralistic nature of self—one which is malleable but still fixed in some sort of "playing and gaming social roles." It is conditioned by the particularities of individual social events and biographic specificities and the self is a "categorical subjunctive"—that is, "public judgments of what is better or worse in this or that respect" specifically as it relates to what I discussed earlier as indexed by the category of women's traditional role (Krüger 2009, 200). In other words, justice, ethics, or moral becoming are appropriated to individuals and situations (ibid, 201) and it is the body-conduit that is most illuminative of the ways in which one is always in oscillation and susceptible to the judgement of others. Thus, the expression of crying, involuntary as it may be, is conditioned by the amalgamation of one's own individual selfhood in relation to the ethos and expectations of a particular community.

Any mention of the phenomenological body must also acknowledge Merleau-Ponty's opus on such matters, and some have argued that, in fact, Plessner's work indirectly influenced Merleau-Ponty.[117] In the same vein that feminist phenomenology has looked to Merleau-Ponty for theorizations about the body and embodiment (Oksala 2016), Plessner merits equal attention. It is, as Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2013) writes, the body which is constantly expressing the modalities of existence (164). Our body is "one of the objects of that world" and "becomes a mode of objective space" and yet, "the body, by withdrawing from the objective world, will carry with it the intentional threads that unite it to its surroundings and that, in the end, will

[117] It is known that Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty were not only philosophical contemporaries, but also long-time friends who often met in Paris, and discussed their work. In my own reading of their most prominent works [The Second Sex (1949), The Phenomenology of Perception (1945), and Laughing and Crying (1941), all published within the same decade] I detect deep through lines all three of which incorporate Husserl's phenomenology.

reveal to us the perceiving subject as well as the perceiving world" ([1945] 2013, 74). The body is linked to its situation; it is singularly significant, and still definable by her environment, a sentiment previously put forth by Beauvoir and Plessner.

Merleau-Ponty's body-as-object and body-as-mode-of-objective space is Beauvoir's heroine and flesh. "Her body is a burden," Beauvoir writes, "…it contains threats…[and] close connection between endocrine secretions and nervous and sympathetic systems…it is her most intimate reality…it is her marvelous *double* (emphasis mine). She is surprised to be both that heroine and that flesh" ([1949] 2011, 657). Beauvoir's heroine and living-in-the flesh is Plessner's ([1941] 1970) eccentric position, a constant oscillation between "open" and "closed" intentionality, as *a* body and *in* a body. For Plessner, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir, then, the body is anything but a stable, fixed, clear, finitely knowable entity. It is seeped by and seeping into its surroundings.

My point in highlighting this ligature amongst Plessner, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir is to propose that there is a feminist logic inherent in phenomenological examinations of the body, if that body is understood as an "experiencing" entity in all that that implies. If we are to look at the lived-experiences of a woman, who may be categorically defined by both etic and emic categories of being, we must remain open to a liberated form of understanding their *individually experienced experiences.* We must take seriously how an individual's consciousness is directed toward a particular object of experience, which can, and does, reveal certain conditions of possibility that elucidates particular ties between an individual self and world and the enmeshment of the two.

For me then, Plessner's openness to the processes through which the body is trapped by its own border's is feminist logic; it acknowledges questions of situatedness and subjugation, as

well as questions of liberation and freedom. Crying, like Chapter Six's discussion of silence, is constituted by dimensions of experience integrated with the situation and ontological entangle of ethical failure and injustices intersubjectively formed. Plessner argues that this expression must be put back in its original living context ([1941] 1970, 16) for us to more phenomenologically understand how crying, "provides an answer by giving way to an anonymous automatism…a kind of captivation by the facts in which the 'normal' distance to objects has broken down" ([1941] 1970, 116). In the context of my work, I understand this "breakdown" as the moment wherein a self is placed over and against itself, or comparable to what Hallowell describes as self-awareness. Hallowell writes:

> For a differentiated sense of self-awareness to emerge it must be possible for the individual to react to himself as an empirical object, to identify himself and refer to himself and contradistinction to other selves and things, to represent himself to himself to appraise himself, and so on. Such reflective processes imply a concept in the use of symbolic means of representation and reference. (1955, 82)

While Hallowell is largely discussing consciousness, and Plessner unconsciousness, or involuntary action, their points are analogous—self-awareness requires a person to have an awareness and appraisal of herself as an individual. Crying is an appraisal where one has compartmentalized their self as object such that an involuntary expression (of crying) emerges as a sign of a denial (or forgetting) of the multiplicity of a self. In the context of this study, crying is triggered by a deep thinking that situates the self as a unitary entity in relation to another fixed entity. Crying is an expressed moment wherein the self loses site of its flexible, bending, changing, penetrable nature, often, and in the case of this work, at the hands of a threatening other.[118]

[118] If we again take the case of Kiya and her tears, it was the looming threat of the *delala* that triggered her tears. I also do not conceptualize a "threatening other" as necessarily human or even an objective entity. The threatening other maybe inanimate or it may be phantasy.

Crying

The women I spoke with offered individual insights into singular situations vis-à-vis episodes of crying, an expression that is too often glossed as uncontrolled, out of control, or unrestrained emotion. Such a flattening of experience invites a dissolution of one's authority over their own bodies, self-understanding, and meaningful expressions. Crying is too often reduced to an emotion that needs to be recovered from, a sensation that needs to cease for a person to be "ready" to heal. One is often told that they need to "let it out," "calm down," "gain control," "gather themselves," or "pull themselves together" and only then, thereafter, can they start to make sense of their experience. This type of corporeal gathering routinely relegates the expression of crying to a realm of abnormality and its cessation as normality. Within the present work, the context in which the observation of crying is made figures into the consideration of its "abnormality," but in general crying had a very ordinary presence throughout my fieldwork. Yet, despite the ordinary everydayness of crying, it was still regarded as something to be "cured" (as stated by the nurses) or as something indicative of, what my interlocutors called, "sickness."

In Chapter Five we observed how Sister Hannah regarded certain forms of crying as a "release" and "ventilation." This form of crying often accompanied recollections about experiences abroad or longing for family members during their recovery time in Tesfa and Mekelakel. This expression of crying was broadly situated in relation to an individual's experiences abroad and the associated mistreatment, as well as in relation to their current predicament of returning home empty handed. It was not necessarily symptomatic of "sickness" or mental illness.

Sister Hannah characterized this form of crying upon returning home as "good in psychiatry" because, while it was still connected with trauma, it was trauma-at-a-distance, and

expressed in a calm and composed manner—i.e., Kiya's tears flowed steadily and softly. On the other hand, more dramatic crying appeared to be associated with what nursing staff labeled as, "mental illness." It was in and of itself a separate entity that was triggered by a specific event or person, rather than part of a larger story, and it indicated an unhinged self.

When a women expressed this form of crying in the shelter she was often labeled as "agitated"[119]—a loaded term suggestive of Freud and Breuer's thesis on hysteria, wherein the individual, most often a woman, is exhibiting an unconscious conflict or a defensive against the anticipated reoccurrence of a threat or trauma, a comportment broadly considered a dissociative experience (Bromberg 1996 in discussion of Breuer and Freud 1893-1895).[120] To be called "agitated" by Sister Hannah or one of the other nurses at either Tesfa or Mekelakel was an almost guarantee of an admission to Amanuel Mental Specialized Hospital, and frequently resulted in a Haldol injection to help "calm" the shelter resident in that moment.

While I will later examine the broader category of mental illness amongst this population by drawing on the works of Frantz Fanon and Franca Basaglia, for now I want to focus on the ways in which an individual woman's weeping (which is narrowly categorized as "mental illness" or "sickness") actually illuminates how her self—perceived by an other as the "absolute Other" and therefore exploitable—was experienced as *in* a body and *as* her body.

My interlocutors, largely situated their crying while abroad as an indication that their "mind" was "sick." Given that the recognition and diagnosis of mental illness or "sickness" is context dependent and involves a social transaction of negotiated relevant or meaningful

[119] To my knowledge the psychiatric nurses and general nurses at both NGOs used the English word as if it was a diagnostic category. In the few medical charts I saw this word was also written in English.
[120] Bromberg discusses the break between Breuer and Freud's basis of hysteria as Breuer assertion that hysteria had the power to create amnesia due to the hypnotic state of hysteria, to which Freud disagreed (1996, 59).

symptoms (Edgerton 1969), I examine crying experienced and discussed by my interlocutors as revealing of the ways in which the body knows that it has encountered some sort of "closed" intentionality, which works to dismantle individual projects of virtuous becoming.

Derartu

Derartu, briefly introduced in Chapter Six, was one of the women with whom I conducted person-centered interviews. She was soft spoken and thoughtful. She had a type of self-awareness that surpassed that of almost all the other women I knew across both shelters, and she provided some of the most detailed narratives about domestic work in Beirut, Lebanon. I was always happy to speak with her and she brought a lot of joy during my time at Mekelakel. Though often cautious about my willingness or requests to help with shelter chores (e.g., I was the tallest woman at Mekelakel and residents often needed my long arms to help hang the last bits of laundry), Derartu always let me partake. I suspected she knew how much I appreciated this gesture, as it helped me feel included in the routine activities of Mekelakel, and this knowing led to our positive rapport.

She was also someone who did not make me feel overly self-conscious about not being able to converse in Amharic. She appreciated my efforts and the little that I could speak, and she tried to do the same with her English. I was so grateful for her patience with my inability to communicate in the exact way I desperately wished to, and I believe she knew this. There was an empathetic understanding in our miniscule self-sameness, a recognition that she had perhaps struggled with the same language problem during her time in Lebanon (Hollan 2008; Hollan and Throop 2008).

Derartu often dressed in brightly colored clothes, pairing, for example, a pair of orange sweatpants with a rhinestone-sprinkled shirt and rubbery purple sandals. She always had her hair pulled back in a slick bun, which helped bare her gradual, healthy, weight gain over our seven months together. While the other women embraced crocheting, she preferred to find chores around the shelter. She did not like to sit still. She was also very eager to start her vocational training at a local school where she would learn, as she called it, "food preparation." One day, in early February, I joined her at the Addis Ketema Preparatory School, near Mercado, to observe her cooking class. Her, along with Zahara, donned white chef hats and aprons, and a couple of beaming smiles. They were so happy to be out of the shelter, busying their minds and bodies. There were three recipes written on the chalkboard, which they needed to attempt and later memorize for future employment opportunities.

"There is a difference between *Habesha* food and *ferenji* food," the teacher explained as he walked around the classroom. He began instruction with how to make *tibs*, a staple of *Habesha* cuisine. Derartu absolutely loved the cooking class.

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Derartu is 21 years-old and hails from a moderate sized town just outside of Addis Ababa. She is the first born of six children. She is quite proud to tell me that she is the eldest of her siblings, making a point to raise her index finger and say, in English, "First. Family. Me," she said with a smile.

"Oh, you are number one!" I replied. I asked her a bit about her family and siblings.

She explained that she is closest with her youngest sibling, her brother who is not old enough for school. Her father farms his own little plot of land and raises cattle, while her mother makes and sells butter in their local market.

“My mother, in our family, she is very strong. My father, drinks a lot.”

She explained to me how she provided a lot of support to her mother and siblings due to her father’s drinking, but that growing up this way gave her “strength.”

“I watch the cattle, I clean the house, washing the clothes. I care for a lot of things in the house.”

I asked her how she felt about her father’s drinking.

“I was very upset because of that, because when he is drinking, he disturbs me and the family. At that moment my heart hurts. When he drinks a lot of alcohol, I wouldn’t talk or shout at him because he drank a lot. But in the morning time, he is ok, he is very ok, he is a nice father.”

A week or so after one of our more formal interviews, Derartu revealed that she had a big “disagreement” with her father when she was in the ninth grade. She did not disclose the details of this fight, only saying that afterward she went and applied for her passport from the Department of Immigration in Addis Ababa.

“Then I had a passport. I kept it in the house, I don’t use it…[I] forgot about it.”

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Derartu displays an exceptional degree of agency and self-confidence (and perhaps defiance) for a seventeen or eighteen-year-old. Like Zahara and Romon, she took her life into her own hands, made her own decisions about her mobility and future possibilities. This behavior aligns with my earlier discussions of gender and the gendered positioning within the family and larger culture of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is often portrayed as a patriarchal society, and it certainly maintains male-controlled and dominated spheres, but this does not mean that there is a ubiquitous permanency of male supremacy and female submissiveness. Making such

generalizing statements about the culture(s) of Ethiopia reinforces not only the idea of a stagnant and idle "tradition" that women are caught within, but it also flattens the complicated contents of a gendered and gendering ethics of care and the power within women's ability to navigate complicated and dynamic cultural structures and social life.

One may claim, for example, that Derartu's relationship with her father and position within her family potentiates a type of subserviency to male authoritative figures. Yet, if we closely examine Derartu's words, she makes it clear that her commitment to the family is done out of a love and admiration for her mother and siblings. Her mother is the strong one, her father the weak.[121] She defied him through an erasure of his authority and even (drunken) existence, "When he drinks, I don't talk [to him]." Instead, she emulated her mother's power through a dedication and care for her family, and that was perhaps best performed through migrant domestic work. Her relational and dependent nature of her moral attention to aspects of life have an undeniable commitment to caring in a way modeled by her mother, and not her father.

I situate Derartu's undertaking of autonomous work abroad as tethered to a reasoning and attendance to a powerful gendered form of care, one that elevates her mother's and well as general women's work and familial positions within Ethiopia. Likewise, Derartu's initial frustration with her father and subsequent passport acquisition underlines her capability to transition from realizing her potential to actioning her potential. Although she did not use her passport for whatever it was she may have intended to, it was nevertheless the action of going, applying, paying, and acquiring this document that demonstrated to herself that she had the

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[121] When I ask her if she has anyone that she admires or views as a role model, she said that she does; she has an uncle who lives in her same town and whom she is close with. He is an electrician and a hard worker she tells me. She admires how he is strong and always helping other people find work. She hopes to do the same one day. I think it is important to mention, then, that she also admires at least one male-figure in her life.

ability to change her life. Derartu's actions again demonstrated how women in contemporary Ethiopia construct projects of resistance and revolution against the outwardly dominant patriarchal society.

What is also noteworthy about Derartu is her remarkable ability to attend school daily and complete up to the tenth grade, while also taking care of her siblings and managing a combative and presumedly exhausting father. She was, by her own modest assessment, an "ok" student, but I think her abilities suggest an exceptional student. Yet, failing the annual tenth grade exam seriously impacted her sense of scholastic confidence and afterward she found a job in a garment factory and subsequently work in Beirut.[122]

"In the future," she remarked, "I will get my diploma and help my family." She continued to explain that she did not think about marrying or having children of her own. For her, it was about providing for her mother and her five siblings.

Derartu embodied dual projects of self-formation, and her tears represented a moment when she could no longer reconcile her desires and her reality. Her tears sprang when she lost sight of her heroine nature and felt only her flesh. She went abroad, emboldened by the idea of a changed life, to help her family, as Abinet suggested, "the primary providers to their family." In doing so, she navigated this always emergent "traditional" understanding of the categorical must-be of Ethiopian womenness. She carried her familial responsibility while trekking toward her desire to become a sovereign caretaker. And she pursued this project concurrently with her

[122] I do not have fieldwork data pertaining to the national tenth grade examinations; however, I spoke with several women who completed school up until this point and then failed (some of them, multiple times) this exam. They were, therefore, not permitted to continue school. The women I spoke with reported positive school experiences, including good grades, and thus I was surprised by their failing. All the women who failed their 10th grade exam came from the Oromia Region, during a time when there was increasing prejudice and violence against their ethnic group. While I cannot draw any conclusions about the 10th grade exam and those who failed it, this pattern does raise questions.

endeavor to make her own way in the world. So, what happened to Derartu during her work abroad such that it brought forth a degree of crying that precipitated her return home? For someone who had already dealt with a combative father, the stress of balancing school and work, and tending to her five siblings, what was the threshold?

When phenomenologically examining dramatic forms of crying, specifically in combination with my interlocutor's introspective evaluations of what constitutes "sickness", we may better understand how crying is not only precipitated by a volatile act of abuse, deception, fear, and other assaults of wellbeing (or a release triggered by a joyous reunion), but also better understand how tears, as a distinctively human property, reveal *why* crying is uniquely human—that is, this "incoherent" object (crying) provides powerful insight into the messy processes of ethical self-formation, a process characterized by the singularity of selves and circumstance (Mattingly 2018, 40). Specifically, a phenomenological examination of crying demonstrates how deeply intertwined the ethics of care and virtuous caretaking are with as my interlocutor's described capability, "to know myself" (erasen awikimi/ እኔ ራሴ አውቃለሁ).

To know one's self is a self that is mutually recognized as being-in-the-world as one has been-in-the-world; a self that is tied to their past through their current situatedness, a continuity of self based in self-awareness.[123] In opening her gates of weeping she revealed both the moment where her desires and dreams were unfastened from a foreclosed becoming. Such foreclosure was based in the "surprising" and "shocking" encounters with the unexpected, where acts of subjugation reigned and enforced a disparate understanding of her self. This was not a mutual understanding of who she was; it was a sole understanding, from the narrow-minded other, who sought to erase her multifaceted, prideful, courageous, self—Derartu.

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[123] This would include how one had imagined their future self, a prior imagination of one's future self is part of this equation.

In light of my curiosity about what it is that gives crying a distinctive place in the experiences of my interlocutors, I want to offer another suggestion as to why this form of expression emerged central to this work. One possible explanation relates to the specific type of migration undertaken by Ethiopian migrant domestic workers: circular migration. Circular migration (as opposed to permanent migration) is predicated on the full intent to return home (Babar and Gardner 2016). The anticipated return home is founded on the conclusion of the work, which is ostensibly related to notions about earned income, and the expectation about earnings, for example, weighed heavily on my interlocutors.

Embedded within this pattern of migration is an imagination of oneself as not only a provider but also a dream maker. As discussed, the dreams many of my interlocutors have are tied to desires for change. Their Arab dreams were about becoming a person who they believed had agency in the world, that they could change their lives and the lives of their family. For them it was a dream about building a future that their own country could not provide to them, and yet despite this impossibility of their home country, they intended to return home to a place and to the people they loved. This form of migration is unique in how it relates to self-understanding.

This intersubjective modality of obtaining a good or decent life propels a type of consciousness that seems particularly sensitive to stress, or as I discuss below, "deep thinking." There appears to be a heightened sense of oscillation between perceived and felt self-understanding, of "hope to failure, hatred to love, good to bad, bad to good" (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 163). This sensitivity to this ambivalent understanding of self may be tied to their individual episodes of crying and the associated unwellness. Perhaps it is the anticipated return home that highlights their gravity of their unforeseen struggle for their imagined better life?

Crying as Sickness

According to several of the women I spoke with, one of the central reasons they were sent back to Ethiopia and subsequently brought to Tesfa or Mekelakel corresponded to their episodes of crying. Their crying was sometimes, though rarely, accompanied by shouting, which could lead to a direct admission to a hospital in one of the Arab States or to Amanuel Hospital upon their arrival to Ethiopia. More often, their crying was accompanied by a refusal to engage with the airport nurses or Tesfa and Mekelakel staff and residents. As described in the Introduction, I witnessed two of these interactions at Bole International Airport in 2018 and several at both NGOs. While there was a tendency for employers or health professionals to situate these feeling episodes as psychotic episodes, my interlocutor's narratives suggested that it was fear of the unknown (concerning Tesfa and Mekelakel and their return to Ethiopia) that triggered their tears in the airport.

Hilma

Hilma, introduced in Chapter Six, arrived at a small house outside Dubai. Her initial excitement was quickly quelled by her interactions with her new employer. The unfamiliar language, the invasive medical examination, and the lack of privacy and sleeping accommodations, upset her. For the next seventeen months she endured the long hours of housework, food preparation, and childcare. It was not particularly difficult work, she explained, and yet, nearly halfway through her planned four-year term, she "got sick."

"What kind of sickness?" I asked.

"I don't know what it is, but I was sick."

"Can you describe the symptoms? How you felt?"

“I was crying. They took me to the hospital. I was crying every day and I want to go back to my country.”

Following her crying, Hilma spent three months in a Dubai hospital. They placed restraints around her legs, and at night, handcuffed her to the bed. Each morning, she said, “they” gave her a pill. When I asked her whether or not she knew the purpose of the pill, she said she did not, nor did anyone explain to her why she was in the hospital. Occasionally, she continued, they would give her an injection at the top of her backside.

“What was that time like for you, do you remember?”

“Yes, I remember. I was calling my family. They did not want me to call my family, but I did.”

“How did you feel then?”

“I don’t have it; I don’t have the feelings. I want to be—I ask a lot of the time to be sent to my country, but they don’t send me.”

She passed the time by talking with other Ethiopian women occupying their large, shared, hospital room.

“There were other women there, like myself,” she told me, “But some had more sickness.”

To have more sickness, Hilma explained, frequently meant that the other patients were yelling nonsensical things. This experience did not bother her, she said. After three months in the Dubai hospital, Hilma was transferred to a local jail. While there, the guards told her that she was “illegally working in Dubai” and that they would send her back to Ethiopia.

“At that moment I did not want to return. I sacrificed a lot of things [to go to Dubai], I did not feel like going to my country.”

As mentioned, Hilma had a four-year plan, and this plan was perhaps her only chance at creating a decent life for herself and her family. So, when she reluctantly arrived in Addis Ababa, standing in Bole International Airport, without a phone, and nobody to receive her, she started to cry. The airport police approached her in the lobby. She told them she needed a taxi.

"'You're fine,' they said. 'You are in Ethiopia. We will find your family. They will come here. Don't worry.'"

The police called the airport nurses, who arrived with their old, white, Land Rover ambulance. They tried to explain to Hilma that she needed to go to the shelter (Tesfa), but she did not want to go. She did not want to leave the airport in case her family showed up.

"At that moment, I felt like dying."

She started kicking and shouting as the police and nurses forced her into the ambulance.

"I was very scared. I was crying."

She arrived at Tesfa, greeted by the guard, and still crying. She felt terrified. The guard and the other women of Tesfa explained to her where she was, that her family would come to the shelter to reunite with her, and that she was safe.

"Was that helpful?" I asked.

"Betam. Betam." ("Very. Very.")

Derartu

I asked Derartu if she remembered how she felt during her time abroad; how she felt when she had to clean the house or take care of the children.

"I don't feel anything, but when the woman, she gives me—when I working a lot of things—the woman she's not kind, she's not good. She doesn't give me any kind of encouraging. I am feeling some kind of things in my heart."

“Can you tell me more about that?”

“I cry.”

I shift our conversation back to her employer, the woman, who did not say “encouraging things.”

I tried again, “The woman, she did not say encouraging things. So, it made you feel… what word did you say?”

“Mekefati” (Sad).

“Can you tell me more about why you were sad?”

“I'm working to make the woman happy, and I will be doing that kind of things for her to be happy. She coming and she making disrespect for this kind of things. I will be losing a lot of my potential.”

“What kind of disrespect?” I asked.

“Shouting.”

“Do you remember what she would say to you?”

“Oh, it is very difficult”, Derartu replied. “When I was cleaning all of the house, maybe I forgot one room, and she sees that room, and she will be asking me to clean all the rooms again.”

I asked Derartu if her employer ever hit her during these exchanges, to which she said no, but her employer would throw things at the husband during their marital disagreements.

“She would throw heavy things!” Derartu exclaimed. I sensed she was not sure whether or not to laugh while recalling this detail.

“Did you witness this? How did you feel?”

Derartu explained that she did witness this behavior, on several occasions, and that she felt, “very scared.”

“I would hide in the baby’s room and at that moment I would take care of the children. They fight with each other, the husband and the madam, then I was…I would just take care of the children.”

She continued speaking about how the husband and wife would often fight, shouting at each other and it roused feelings of fear for Derartu. For her, this was the most difficult aspect about her time in Beirut. She was caught within a violent space, and was never permitted to leave the house during her entire eleven months, “I was like prisoner.”

Later, after listening to the details of her cleaning regimen and the contours of the familial life of her employer, I asked, “Why did you come back to Ethiopia?”

“I am sick.”

“What caused your sickness?” I responded.

“I don’t know. I haven’t figured it out, but there was some kind of sickness in my brain.”

After eleven months, she was taken to a hospital in Beirut. She spent nine days there before being sent back to Ethiopia. She remembers her time in the hospital, but does not remember returning to Ethiopia. Her first week in Ethiopia she did reunite with her family, but her memories from that time are dominated by ruminations about the alleged frequency of which she was the central figure of family and neighborhood gossip.

“They were discussing my sickness. The neighbors know about my sickness. I can hear them discussing.”

Derartu apparently started yelling at her family and her neighbors. She wanted to leave the house, to go get a job, but her mother and brothers forbid it. She told me that she did not remember yelling at her family, but, with laughter, she remarked, they later told her that she was shouting at them.

Scissile Self: Ambiguous Ethics and Ambivalent Selfhood

Hilma and Derartu (and several additional women) situate certain instances of crying as measurement of "sickness." But the question remains, why does this expression suggest something beyond that of a feeling episode (i.e., feeling "sad" or "afraid")? What makes crying during their time as domestic workers pivotal for self-understanding and situational-understanding? Surely this cannot be the first time they have experienced crying.

I maintain that this uniquely human expression reveals the moment or sequence of moments where the ethical project of becoming the sovereign benevolent caretaker is felt as permanently undone or foreclosed. Crying embodies the rift one feels when they can no longer, as Tiki's aunt put it, "accept this challenge." Crying episodes represent the emotional apex of failed domestic work; a breached entelechy marked by some sort of ambiguous depravity and ambivalent selfhood. Their multiplicity is lost.

The preconceived notions of how they would occupy a space and time is disrupted—they are bound to non-kin persons, often confided to a distressing domestic sphere, isolated from the possibility of engaging in a world that reflects and responds to their self as they know it. Their world of things and world of values is disrupted. What is reflected back to them, through the face, voice, and gesture, of their employer, is an intersubjectively produce unrecognizable self and lifeworld.[124] Through an "inescapable" experience of being made to feel a sort of worthlessness, I sensed that women I spoke with lost the illusion of her own worldview (Jackson 2012). Although formerly positioned as a provider and a caretaker in her own family, and imbued with a self-belief and determination to care-for herself and those she loves most, she

[124] An argument could be made here about Agamben's notion of bare life, but drawing on Fassin's critique of Agamben, this would entail a hierarchical conception of human beings. Like Fassin (2010), I think it is important to maintain a focus on the everyday experiences of these women and not postulate about what a life worth living entails and whose hierarchy exists and predominates.

finds herself as part of a "home"[125] where she is met with hostility, aggression, and disrespect previously unknown or anticipated. She is situated as nothing but a domestic worker; a singular identity is forced upon her. She comes undone under too much *chiniket* (ጭንቀት/ stress).

This unfamiliar self may also affect her imagined relationship with her family, as I sought to demonstrate through the case of Kiya in Chapter Five. When living through the speculation of how life might be lived back home, jointly with an unexpected lived-reality of domestic work, a particular self emerges—what, I am calling a scissile self.

A scissile self embodies this ambiguous space between unfulfilled desires and ethically generated inner conflicts. From a psychoanalytic perspective, I understand this embodied ambiguity is the slipperiness between psychosis and dissociation; it is intended to capture the inconsistent, putative, and ill-fitting diagnoses too often bestowed upon this group of women. This in-between state is characterized by a brief remolding of reality and paired with a sliver of self-recognition that one is "sick" (Buckley 1988). A scissile self is constituted by one's current environment and everyday experiences, yet steeped in past experiences; it is conscious and reflective of a certain givenness put before one, while also comporting unconscious manifestations of specific desires that have been foreclosed by a shocking reality of an unanticipated here and now (Hallowell 1955; Zahavi 2003, 2005; Jackson 2012; Hollan 2014). The meeting of the two is an abrasive encounter—resulting in an embodied ambivalence and ambiguity.

An important differentiation between what I am calling a scissile self and that which we might label as dissociation or psychosis, is that there is a self-awareness that one is "sick." In

[125] Bina Fernandez and Marina de Regt writes that migrant domestic workers are frequently "presented by employers as 'one of the family.'" While this may be true for some, "many domestic workers explicitly or covertly resist their employers' representations of them as one of the family" (2014, 11-12).

other words, the ego retains the ability to distinguish between external reality and a particular fantasy in question (Arlow and Brenner 1964; London 1973), *if ever so briefly and minimally.* In the classic sense, when my interlocutors cannot answer my questions about what was wrong, how they got "sick," or what their symptoms were/felt like, I could argue that this is evidence of dissociation or brief psychotic disorder (a situation where the ego felt threatened by anxiety), or that they were experiencing a state of confusion and acute anxiety, which resulted in an acute psychotic episode where "understanding" was not possible. And while this may be experienced by some of my interlocutors, there are those that, even in these situations of where they cannot answer what they "felt" like or what was "wrong", and, even if they were having delusions and hallucinations, the fact that they were self-aware *enough* to recognize that they were "sick" represents a unique type of in-betweenness not captured by discussions of dissociation or brief psychotic disorder.[126]

While some may suggest that these tears of in betweenness represent an "idiom of distress" (Nichter 1981, 2010), I do not see crying as such an "alternative means of expressing distress at specific points in time" (Nichter 2010, 403). Rather, I understand crying as a recognition of the incongruency between a lived reality of an undesirable situation that rejects the prior imagined or hoped for "better life." The tears of a breakdown represent a loss of a complex self, which one can still feel but no longer hold on to amid the unmooring one experiences unexpectedly from their "known self." Crying in this context is not an idiom of distress, as there is nothing "alternate" about this expression. It is not a choice, it is, as Plessner writes, "nonvoluntary." It is that aspect of our *living* body that momentarily cuts herself off from

[126] I am focusing on interlocutors that experienced "psychotic" symptoms, but were not considered or diagnosed with schizophrenia. There was a total of four women with whom I spoke regularly who had a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Their "psychosis" was also chronic, whereas the women I am presently focusing on had very brief "psychosis."

the world which she assumed she knew (Plessner [1941] 1970). It is that part of her living body that *feels* its boundaries and boundedness, which shifted in an unanticipated manner.

Likewise, in talking with and observing this group of women for a year, when someone like Hilma responded that she did not know the cause of her "sickness," only that she was "sick," she had an awareness of the dimensions of the "sick role" offered by Talcott Parsons (1951). She recognized that there was some sort of separation, beyond her control, between herself and her world. She knew that whatever the "sickness" was, it released her from her responsibilities. With that, she recognized that she was released from expected social and moral obligations, a messy amalgamate of unconsciously and conscious inner conflicts.

Hilma stated that she did not know why she became "sick," just that she knew she *was* sick, and that sickness pertained to her mind. She recognized some sort of breakdown precipitated by some sort of conflict, but was unsure what constituted that conflict and why she enveloped it. There was something on the unconscious level that recognized that she could no longer endure the ongoing collision between desired futures and lived reality. She experienced nonvoluntary crying and understood it as "sickness" *because* it extended into her capabilities to undertake expected social and moral obligations. Her self-awareness persisted even in this ambiguous state, and her crying exemplified this.[127]

Sickness

I am also struck by my interlocutor's ambiguous understandings regarding their episodes of crying and crying's relationship to sickness, and sickness' relationship to the brain. When I

[127] I find Jackson's discussion of suffering as "an inescapable concomitant of understanding—the loss of the illusion that one's own particular worldview holds true for everyone, the pain of seeing in the face and gestures of a stranger the invalidation of oneself" (2012,11), as a complementary understanding into this ambiguous space exemplified by scissile self.

asked Derartu what caused her sickness she replied, “I don’t know. I haven’t figured it out, but there was some kind of sickness in my brain.”

Similarly, women who could not tell my what or why they started crying, (their responses included: silence[128] or “I don’t know,”) were still able to evaluate that they were “sick” (Tanimi/ ታመመ), and they knew this because they were crying. For other women, who could extrapolate slightly on what they thought caused their “sickness,” they generally responded that it was caused by “sad” (mekefati/ መከፋት, hāzeni), “afraid/scared” (fera/ ፈራ), and most often some sort of “chiniket”[129] (ጭንቀት/ stress) or “too much stress” (Betam meh chiniket), “too stressed/stressed out” (mechinaneki/ መጨናነቅ), or “a little stress” (tinish chiniket/ ትንሽ ጭንቀት). Broadly conceptualized as stress, “chiniket” can also refer to “worries” or “anxiety”, and sometimes it was used to index “depression”, and, though rarely, it could also suggest some form of psychosis.

Zahara

Zahara, like Derartu, also found herself in a space that stimulated crying. She worked in Saudi Arabia for a husband and wife who were constantly arguing, and she said, the madam was also always shouting at her. Like Derartu, I asked if she remembered how she felt during this time.

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[128] This silence, interestingly, resonates with the notion of “incomplete” narratives during psychoanalysis, where a patient only has limited access to certain self-states, which hold additional memories (Bromberg 1996). Often, my interlocutors could recall an event that preceded their episode of crying, but not necessarily what was happening to them at the moment of crying or shortly thereafter—perhaps a protective amnesia or dissociative state (Bromberg 1995, 1996; Breuer 1895). There was an awareness about a certain situation that caused them to become hyper-cognizant about their relation to a person and a space. Their body and with that, their world, was disturbed in such a way that there was a feeling of their self was now in place against herself.

[129] The notion that “chiniket” is harmful also resonates with my earlier work on suicide cases and mental unwellness within the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States.

“I miss my family. I miss my cousins. That is my feeling. I was crying when I think of them. I had too much stress, (*Betam meh chiniket*).”

“What were you thinking about with your family?”

“Did they die? Are they sick? I am thinking about that a lot.”

“And you got sick in Saudi Arabia?”

“*Ow* (Yes). I came [back] when my mind is sick” (*Ayimiroyen Amogn Metahu*)

“What caused this?”

“Too much stress (*Betam meh chiniket*) and the owner of the house.”

I inquired as to whether she remembered her return to Ethiopia.

“When I came from Saudi Arabia there was a woman with me, another passenger I was with her, and she took me when we arrive to Addis Ababa. She asked me if I had luggage, I said, ‘no.’ I was with her, together, and she took me in a place. That woman and I stayed in that place and then I came to this place, and then they took me [to Amanuel Hospital].”

Zahara stayed in Amanuel Hospital for one day and then returned to Mekelakel.

> The first day they called my family. They make contact with my brother. My brother he came here and my brother, he said, ‘We go together, don’t worry. It is ok.’ At that moment the nurses say, ‘No, no, no. She does not go to her village, she stays here. You have to go and tell the family she is ok.’ At that moment I want to go with him. I don’t know what I am doing; I am crying, and I am shouting at the other people.

Fanosh

Fanosh worked in Beirut for four years with a “good family.” She explained that after her contract finished, her employer asked her to stay on for two more months, but, she said, “I couldn’t stay. Something happened to my body.”

Fanosh said she became, "*tinish chiniket"* ("a little sick"/ "a little stress*"*). "I was disturbing people in the house, shouting 'injera, injera, injera.'"

She described how in that moment, her employers were "scared" of her, and sent her back to Ethiopia. "But" Fanosh clarifies, "I still have an agreement with my employers. When I am better, I can return to my job."

"Do you know what your sickness is?" I asked.

"I have no idea, but there is something inside myself, a feeling." She shrugged her shoulders.

"Something tells/talks to me in my ear, 'Meles[130] is coming. You are dead'. I am dead. In the airplane I am hitting the seat, people were holding me down—the crew and the other women were trying to comfort me."

"Did you hear the voices on the plane too?"

"No."

When Fanosh arrived in Bole Airport she asked the people around her for the [Ethiopian] flag.

"I need my country. I like my country very much. I love my country."

As I understood her, it seemed even after her arrival she still did not believe she was in Ethiopia and wanted evidence. She was not the only woman I spoke with who felt this way. There were several cases where women did not believe that they had returned to Ethiopia or did not believe that their families were on their way to pick them up from Tesfa or Mekelakel. Fanosh told me she that when she asked for the Ethiopian flag, someone in the airport showed it to her, waving outside. The next thing Fanosh remembers, is her arrival to Tesfa.

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[130] Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi Asres, from 1995 until his death in 2012.

"When I came to Tesfa, I needed injera. At that time, I was shouting for the injera. And once they gave it to me, I calmed down."

The next day Sister Hannah took Fanosh to Amanuel Hospital, "I saw a doctor. He asked me what I am feeling and hearing in my ear or body. I was shy. The first time I didn't answer him, but used signed language, but then I answer him, 'the dead man[131] is coming'"

Taytu

Taytu was my most thought-provoking interlocutor. She provided deep introspective reflections about her life experiences both in Ethiopia and Dubai. In Chapter Eight, I delve into her background, personal biography, and her reunion with her mother. For now, I examine her narrative about her work in Dubai and her consequential "sickness."

When I first met Taytu at Tesfa she had just returned from a three-month stint in Dubai. She arrived to Tesfa a week or two earlier and was now settled into her surroundings and the routines of shelter life. She already experienced an early visit to Amanuel Hospital and was prescribed a daily dose of two milligrams of Risperidone—the typical treatment for women living in Tesfa.

Taytu was in the last months of her teenage years, and she was a portrait of exactly that—sarcastic, gregarious, moody, sensitive, strong, complicated, loving. We all adored her honesty and openness; she was markedly different from the rest of the women we encountered and both Abinet and I felt a familial connection with her.

As she moved between the kitchen in the back of the shelter, she scraped her sandaled feet across the floor. She could not possibly be less motivated to prepare the coffee. She must

[131] The dead man to whom she is referring is Meles Zenawi, a former high-ranking member of the TPLF, and later Ethiopia's president from 1991 to 1995 and Prime Minister from 1995 to 2012.

though, given her status as the youngest woman residing in the shelter. One afternoon she even gave me and Abinet a hard time about our predictable late afternoon departure from the shelter. She remarked under her breath, while grinding the coffee, that we probably would not even stay for a third cup of coffee—the polite quantity. Abinet laughed. She looked up at him and speaking in Amharic said, “If the man slaps my left cheek, I turn the right one to him,” pointing to each cheek, smiling. They erupted in laughter at her pert claim that we had already offended her by our likely refusal of the third cup, but that she did not care.

This was Taytu—dutiful and precocious, making the obligatory coffee, but chastising her elders for leaving before it was appropriate. This was part of her charm. She had an easy-come, easy-go smile, and was always the first to start *eskista*[132] whenever an upbeat song came across the television. She was an entertainer, witty and seemingly always in pursuit to please those around her. She was incredibly intelligent, and she knew it. There was just something about her, such that even when she was acting like a teenager, we were all unfazed, because we adored her.

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When Taytu detailed her daily life in Dubai, her story was disjointed and, at times, very difficult to follow. When she spoke, she jumped from her emotions and the behavior of her abusive employer, “the madam,” and it did not always correspond. I struggled to understand whether she was describing her own emotions or the behavior of her employer. I asked her several times to retell various parts of her story. I wanted to get the timeline of events correct.

“Her thoughts jump from one to the next,” Abinet said while interpreting her story. A second and third interpreter, each of whom listened to Taytu’s first and second interviews, also remarked on her disorganized thoughts. He noted, “She talks a lot in slang, she does not say

[132] The traditional Ethiopian shoulder dance

everything in a straightforward way, she speaks in broken and incomplete sentences when she recalls her past experiences."[133] I was not sure how to interpret her style of narrative storytelling. I did not know if her style was a consequence of her background (as the translator suggested), a consequence of her recent experiences, a combination, or something else.

When Taytu arrived in Dubai, her feelings of excitement instantaneously morphed into fear. A driver retrieved her from the airport and then took her to the *delala's* house. She found herself unexpectedly surrounded by a dozen or so women like herself. The *delala* (a woman) shouted at her, slapped her across the face, and hit the others.

"Even the grown-up people [adults] are not strong enough to deal with what I had to deal with."

Taytu continued talking, but now about a different moment, during her time in her place of employment, "I work to make the breakfast in the morning. Until the lunch time, I stay in the upstairs. In the upstairs there is four rooms and toilets. I cleaning. After that, I cook lunch."

Taytu explained that she accepted her work schedule, and constantly reminded herself that she "made a plan" to do hard work to improve her family's life and to improve her own life.

"The husband and children, I like very much." The husband, she explained, is a police officer and sometimes the children reported to him the things their mother said and did to Taytu. In turn, the husband would confront his wife, "the madam."

"He is the policeman, he knows the constitution, the law, and he is responsible for this woman, he shouts at her, because he has a big responsibility for those kinds of things. And he says to her, 'If you abuse her, I am the one blamed. Why are you doing this?'"

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[133] My translator suggested that her broken Amharic was due to two reasons, first, she had a lot that she wanted to say and she was speaking faster than she was thinking; and second, Taytu came from extreme poverty, and my translators believed this influenced the way she spoke Amharic.

I asked Taytu if she could describe the kind of things the "madam" would do.

> That woman wants to kill me every day! *Wallahi, wallahi, wallahi*, every time, every time, this woman comes into the kitchen and asks, 'What do you use to wash your face? What did you make the food with?' She goes around, breaks glass and says, 'you broke this glass!' She breaks it and acts just like I broke it. If I went to another room, until I came back from that room, she waits for me with that broken glass, 'When is this from? It was broken yesterday, and you broke it! How is it not clean?' And I saw it with my own eyes and cleaned it [the room] that morning. I am burnt [angry]! I wake up in the morning, every money, and this woman, 'What did you wash you face with?' Oh my god, this woman. Ok, does she want me to be like her? When the husband leaves, she says, 'You know the thing that Baba slays the goats with?' She says to me, 'I will cut you with this!' Every time the husband leaves, she comes and threatens me with the knife, says, 'I will cut you with this, I will cut you with this!'

"Why do you think she says these things?" I asked.

> You know, me, I'm small, and she is very *roto* (big/fat), when she goes up and down the stairs she moans. Me, I run around doing this and that. She assumes I will take her husband. I don't expect this kind of thing. Like even in the beginning, I didn't expect things like this to happen. You don't know what the lord has for us, but it happened to me, and I endure it, endured it, endured it (*Chalkut, Chalkut, Chalkut*[134]). And at the end she tried to kill me.

Taytu continued to talk, a bit chaotically and it was difficult for Abinet to follow. He was getting upset listening to Taytu.

Abinet turned to me, "She telling me about her—the first—how she sick. She's sick, after three months."

"*Lemini*? [Why]?" I asked.

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[134] There is no direct translation for this word, but it most closely relates to the idea of enduring a burden or handling a burden.

> Me, in the beginning, one thing I have not told you—Can I tell you how I got sick? It was the end of Ramadan, when Ramadan ended. I worked, I worked, I worked, and Ramadan ended. After Ramadan ended, 'Taytu, *ta'al* (come)!' she said. I said, 'Yes?' and I went to her. Then she says, 'Why are you always at the *mutabikh* (kitchen)?' I'm always at the *mutabikh*, because I make breakfast, right? I am all over the house. In the morning she asks, she calls, she says, 'Today there is no husband, no children, and we will stay here in the kitchen cooking and we will eat our breakfast here, and then you will go upstairs and you will clean the windows.' She is saying these things.

After breakfast Taytu entered the Master bedroom to clean the windows, including the skylights. She used a ladder to go from the outside terrace to the skylights above the Master bedroom. During that time the husband came home and allegedly passed through the Master bedroom. At that moment, the wife yelled, "Taytu! What are you here while my husband is here?"

"She then kicks the ladder I was balancing on. And I fell. She kicked me. At that moment, I gave up."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

> *Beka* [Enough]. Dying is normal, I could even die in my own country. What is going to be taken from me if I die at this age? Even my father has died. If you're going to kill me, just kill me. I just lost hope (*yet'efawi tesifa*). I didn't think I was going to live after that…. I lost hope. Enough. Enough (*Beka. Beka*). I wish I had killed myself. Even when she harassed me then, enough (*beka)*. I couldn't find a rope, otherwise I would have hanged myself. Even if I died there, it wouldn't mean anything. I regret not killing myself because all of this happened to me. Even when you didn't kill yourself, when you had planned, and even if you kill yourself now, death is death. *Beka. Beka.* Let her just come and kill me with the knife she was threatening me with. And with this overload of thoughts, I fainted. I don't know where I was. I lost my memory (*tiwisita)*.

Taytu said at that moment the children ran and found their father. He returned and stated yelling at his wife. Taytu laid on the hot terrace tiles, not moving. Her mind was "lost." She only

remembers the husband yelling, "Did you kill her? Did you do this? Why did you do this? I told you many times not to do this."

After this incident her employers took her to a Dubai hospital where she believes she spent three days. She was also given, "some kind of medical treatment, medication." After three days her employers picked her up again and dropped her back at the *delala's* house. She rested there for one week and was then sent back to Ethiopia. When she arrived in Addis Ababa, as the plane landed, she felt overwhelmed with "sadness." She did not remember what happened after her arrival, but recalled four people carrying her into the Tesfa compound.
She started to cry recounting this part of the story. She paused and jerked her head toward a woman nearby, "I was like this woman."

"Quiet?" I responded.

"Yes. Very quiet. I didn't know where I was. Even after the third day, I woke up and asked them, 'Where am I?' I just asked them that, on the third day. I was sleeping. I didn't know myself (*ene rasen alawekem*). I, in my head, I am dead."

She switched topics, "Last time I told you, 'I am head of the family.' I am making some kind of business.'"

"Yes," I acknowledged.

She explained that one of the reasons she "gave up and lost hope" was that she did not make any money. As she explained it, she did not accomplish her plan.

Abinet interjected, "Her feeling is very guilty. She'll be scared [of meeting her family] because her family is homeless (they sold their home to pay for Taytu's *delala* fees) and that is why she making that feeling."

I asked Taytu, "Do you sense any changes in yourself?"

> When I think about before, I feel like I died and I was buried, that is how I feel. Yes, I feel like I died and I feel like I was buried by my father. Now, I go, like this, sometimes like I say, 'Am I here? or am I not? Like where am I?' Like I am losing my mind. I even talk to myself at times…mhhm… I even get surprised. Like I say, 'Am I human? Wait, am I even Taytu? Or am I not?' I ask myself. So, like, I feel like committing suicide, when I think about my old days. When a person sees me, I look happy, but I am not happy. My internal feeling is not good, when I compare with previous Taytu.

Narratives like Taytu's motivate my curiosities about individual process of becoming and self-understanding, about experience of mental and emotional unwellness and its relationship to desire, hope, failure, and family. I am pulled by feminist theory, phenomenology, and care ethics because these philosophies help conceptualize how such conditions of unwellness, or sickness, tears and desires, best fit with my interlocutors singular and shared experiences. A focus on the individual and their situations reveals the concurrent fragility and resilience of human being, and what is at stake in seemingly commonplace phenomenon such as migrant labor.

So, how did Taytu get sick? Where might I locate the impetus for her "sickness"? What even is her sickness? Is it the fainting? The loss of memories? Is it her feeling of wanting to die or her feeling of lost hope? Why and in what ways has she lost her mind? Within this multiplicity of questions lies an even greater multiplicity of answers. Contemplating Taytu's story, particularly after seeing her again a year later, I can still only offer a theoretical assessment to such questions, which are conjectures at best. Nevertheless, given the ways in which I know Taytu and the amount of time I spent with her, listened to her, and observed her at the shelter and in her home village, I attempt to answer these questions with the theoretical aids that offer the most accurate picture.

Taytu located her “sickness,” like Zahara and Fanosh, in her mind. She could not recall every moment leading up to and following her “sickness,” but there was a hazy awareness that something was not right. That “not rightness” resided in her (in)ability to, in the words of Taytu, “know myself.” What does this ability or inability to know oneself reveal about the significance of a first-person perspective regarding singularly significant events? Is it an expression that discloses the ways in which an ethics of care is deeply tied to individual experiences of unwellness?

“When I came back,” Taytu told me, “I did not know myself (*Ene rasen alawekem*).” Reflecting on this mystery of self and her recognition that something inside was not right, I want to consider the different understandings of this idiom. This mysterious or ambiguous narrative identity is often positioned as lacking real or significant experiences, or is too quickly deemed “dissociation,” and invalidated as revelatory about the individual and their situation (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). However, Taytu’s short narrative illuminates the ways in which she understands her own multiplicity—what it is that counts as “self” and what it is that counts as “not self”—and discloses how projects of care and ethical self-formation are tied to self-recognition, and with that un/wellness.

In the above statements, Taytu demonstrates how a self is an ethically formulated, critically reflective, and self-interpreting being (Mattingly 2014); and to not know one’s self, as Taytu phrased it, is a significant statement. She connects the importance of her ability to self-interpret (Mattingly 2014) in relation to how the unconscious may predominate in specific environments (Hollan 2012). If Taytu is losing her thoughts, for example, which she believes is marked by her inability to recognize her surroundings, or her behavior, or even her own thoughts, she is, then, giving space for the unconscious to gain prominence in her everyday

behavior. For Taytu, this meant descending into a space of quiet withdrawal. She "didn't know" herself, and thus, she retreated.

It is through the examination of such statements like, "I didn't know myself," as self-understanding that we bring epistemological light to the felt and affective experiences of an individual who may otherwise position their experiences as outside the realm of meaningful understanding. Paying such attention to these more ambiguous statements and conditions surrounding individual experiences of unwellness expands our understanding of what it means to be one's self at a particular time and in a particular place.

Deep Thinking

I want to attend to the relationship between deep thinking, crying, and sickness to illustrate the intertwining nature of ethical becoming and self-understanding, its articulation with violence and subjugation, and the ontological consequences. First, the function of what Abinet calls "deep thinking" suggests that this process is crucial to individual explications about what causes and constitutes "sickness." Deep thinking captures the experiences described above by my interlocutors, where they confront the reality of their hostile situation and can no longer imagine the possibility of achieving that which they previously envisioned. They are lost in deep thought, constituted by their whole situation—family, mistreatment, abuse, exhaustion, failure, poverty, changeless situations, and an unexpected return home.

I use Abinet's phrase "deep thinking" to capture the moments when interlocutors described certain preoccupations with thoughts that held affective qualities: Like Taytu's reminder that she must, "*Chalkut, chalkut, chalkut" (*"Endure, endure, endure"), or Fanosh's fixation with Ethiopian icons (the flag and injera), or Zahara's tear-inducing worries about her

family's well-being. These various forms of "deep thinking" transformed their once promising ability to action their desires, into immobilizing dead thoughts. [135]

Splayed across the terrace floor, Taytu descended into deep thinking, unaware of most of what is happening around her, she tells herself, "*Beka. Beka* (Enough. Enough)" and discloses, "I wish I had killed myself." She moved from her mantra of "*Chalkut, chalkut, chalkut"* to a cavernous, "*Beka. Beka.*" She no longer runs up and down the stairs of her employer's house, cleaning vigor, but instead lay motionless. Her being-in-the-world was obliterated with the unbearable shouts of her employer and her violent fall from the ladder. Her thoughts consumed her so much so that she could no longer recognize herself.

Zahara's deep thinking was evidenced by her explanation that she had, "too much stress" when thinking about her family, "worrying if they died, if they were sick. I was crying when I think of them." Her thoughts reach an affective depth like Taytu's; they were both consumed by their contemplation of their social ligaments. Their depth of thinking generated a fissure of unwellness built by a harmful excess of thoughts. For Zahara, Fanosh, and Taytu a sinking into their thoughts asphyxiated their imagined becoming, leaving them unable to endure their situation. It is an idiom illuminative of the intertwined strands of desire and hope, care and vulnerability, and the ethical modes of virtuous becoming that were forestalled by a nefarious other.

The nefarious other—employers—was central to my interlocutor's understandings of their individual sicknesses. There was something inside their being that was unwell in relation to their domestic work experiences and specifically in relation to their encounters with their

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[135] Dead thoughts refer to my earlier discussion in Chapter Five about the harmful stagnation my interlocutors perceived about their lives in Ethiopia if they did not go abroad and attempt to change their lives. It also resonates with Taytu's mentioning of wanting to die.

employers. This recognition of an intersubjectively constituted unwellness or sickness is reminiscent of Fanon's ([1952] 2008; [1963] 2004) discussions about the ways in which the self is constituted in relation to the colonizer and post-colonial resistance. While I have already discussed why I am hesitant to equate colonial and post-colonial dynamics outside of Ethiopia to Ethiopia itself, Fanon's analogies between this relation and his argument about colonial and post-colonial forms of violence and exploitation are comparable to the experiences of my interlocutors.

At the core of Fanon's work is an examination of exploitation, which he calls the great evil of this world ([1952] 2008, 69, 204). It is the behaviors of one human toward another that denies one's humanity and dignity. Considering this, I situate sickness, as described by my interlocutors, as a consequence of the dialectic production of disparate understandings of self, precipitated by their encounters with the exploitative other, their employers.

The self, as simultaneously malleable and vulnerable, when encountering an other who reflects back to them a person distinctive from who they understand themselves to be, threatens the "known" self. It is through the threatening "interpretive gaze of the other" that a self negotiates how to comprehend an understanding of their current self (Zahavi 2008 as cited in Ochs 2015, 276). As evidenced by the self-determined "sickness" and the related condition of "not knowing one's self," the psycho-affective realm has the "power to mobilize social meaning and historical effect through an embodied and embedded action as an engagement with a given reality or a performance of agency in the face of the discriminatory gaze of racist recognition" (Bhabha 2004, xix). While I do not necessarily agree with the notion that sickness is a form of embedded agentive action (because such an understanding would more closely align with arguments related to Zar or spirit possession), I do agree that sickness is an embodiment of

socially meaningful and historically operative discriminatory gaze of a largely racist-imbued recognition. Such forms of discrimination work to ontologically dismantle the women I spoke with and thus, their sickness may be understood as a human condition related to oppression (ibid, xxv, xxxvi, 182).

By positioning the employers as the 'colonizers' we can also consider what sort of "take over" they may have had on the consciousness and the self-reflective capabilities of individual domestic workers ("the colonized"). It is possible that many Ethiopian women pursuing migrant domestic work, who come from rural areas, have an already subtle conflict of self—that is, they are relied upon to take care of and provide for the family, but they know how difficult it is to achieve this task *in* Ethiopia. Yet, they permitted themselves to imagine an (better) otherwise, one based in going abroad as a domestic worker. And, as my work has also shown, the women I spoke with, were primarily regarded by themselves and their family members in a rather respectable position[136], thus in their inhuman encounter with their employer (or delala), her "affectivity is kept on edge…and the psyche retracts and finds an outlet…as hysterical" (Fanon 2004 [1963], 19). Fanon's colonial hysteria finds reverberations within this study's discussion of domestic worker sickness.

Fanon's analysis of a "situation" (i.e., the historical terrain) is such that it brings attention to the ways in which "living in an atmosphere of permanent insecurity" can cause such "reactive disorders" (2004, 185). Considering this, sickness, as I demonstrated throughout this work, is a problem of the self, in the sense that it is an embodied confrontation between prior and present self-understandings based on the situation of domestic work. For example, Taytu and Tiki both detailed the constant berating they endured from their employers. A type of abuse based in their

[136] As I have already discussed, there are also important qualities of "Ethiopian exceptionalism" present in narratives from several interlocutors.

employer's discriminatory and exploitive treatment that created a situation of precarity, or of "permanent insecurity."

Such painful and emotional experiences further resonate with Fanon's discussion of the "psychiatric casualties of warfare." The warfare endured by my interlocutors were the hostilities, conflict, and harm caused by their employers, *delala's*, as well as nations of Ethiopia and the Arab States, all of which maintain harmful indifference toward Ethiopian domestic workers. The production of something unfamiliar and uncomfortable now structures the relation between her and the world, and this new position infects her, she belongs to and embodies *this* space and time, her self (her body) is bounded and has boundaries (which have been breached) (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2013, 161; Plessner [1941] 1970). Through this meeting of antagonistic forces (the new Arab household versus the familial Ethiopian household), she must reconstruct herself to guarantee her continued existence in the world, she must remain essential (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Fanon [1961] 2004, 1).

But does the emergence of sickness, in the face of such violence, really ensure their existence (Fanon [1961] 2004, lv)? Yes, there are individual demands to go home, to eat injera, see the Ethiopian flag, but can this sickness be considered liberating in a Fanonian sense? Does it "rid the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude…restoring their self-confidence" (Fanon [1961] 2004, 50-51)? I do not have definite answers to these, but my interlocutors *did* guarantee their continued existence.[137]

If we look at this category of sickness particularly as it relates to crying, we can return to my earlier engagement with Plessner and my dispute against his tendency to associate crying with disorganization (a loss of "self-control"). Instead, I consider crying as a form of self-control

[137] There is, of course, an entire subset of women that never return to Ethiopia for a variety of reasons, including, employer-caused death (Zelalem 2021).

because it is a body's response to control itself—i.e., it is a protective or therapeutic emotion. While crying may be considered evidence of sickness by my interlocutors (and their employers and shelter nurses), it is also a uniquely human response to some sort of un/ethical demand. Crying functioned as some sort of guarantee that they would feel a release from suffering (both literally and emotionally), which supports Plessner's argument that weeping is a healing action. To my interlocutors, their crying disclosed to themselves their own unwellness, and the need to reorient themselves in the world such that they could locate a recognizable, familiar self. They knew they needed to heal. Perhaps, then, Sister Hannah was correct in her assessment that, "crying is good; it is ventilation;" it supplied a life force necessary to Derartu, Fanosh, Zahara, and Taytu continued existence.

Interlude IV

Many months into fieldwork I noticed that it was not unusual for a recently arrived woman to refused to speak. She would often separate herself from the rest of the group, but remain within our ocular landscape, never completely hiding herself away.

"What is your opinion on women who don't speak?" I asked Abinet.

> *As our tradition, most of the time—a little bit, I think—most of the time, they are under domination, so the shelter is very new for them. So, even if I go to a new place, I am very shy, and until I am adapting to that place, my body, I do not speak. Observing and hearing something about people or the condition of the place, I will be, want to be silent. So, it is common for us, most of the people they do that one. It is obvious to me why they doing that.*

"So, you didn't think it was fair to say a woman had mental problems just because she was silent?"

> *No, I don't agree for that one. If she had the mental illness, it is maybe when she is adapting to the house or the atmosphere, there are the symptoms for mental illness. They will take medication, but silence is not one of the symptoms for the mental illness.*

"Did you find that you didn't agree with some of the mental illness diagnoses?"

> *It depends on the profession—if the nurse or doctors—like some women are very shy. So, she has no mental illness. She's shy. Some people their behavior is the silence. So, silence is not the symptom of mental illness. But I don't know what the women have for the pain, or this kind of mental illness.*

Abinet's opinion is incredibly valuable. He offers a cultural point of view, a personal point of view, and experiential knowledge gained from our fieldwork . His approach to engage persons with both latent as well as those with more dramatic symptomology was different than my own, and different from what I witnessed with the nursing staff. He did not feel worried when we encountered someone who was shouting, screaming, threatening to hit or attack. Nor did he assume silence or withdrawn behavior was indicative of larger pathology. For Abinet, as I understood, if an individual was silent, it was because that was her behavior. She was shy; or, more broadly, it was their "tradition."

When Abinet reasoned "they are under domination…the shelter is new" and tied this situated emotion to Ethiopian tradition, he did so by drawing on his own recollected behavior from a similar situation of unfamiliarity. He suggested that they were "dominated" by feelings of newness, discomfort, shyness, or timidness. The shelter was "new" and with that, unknown. In such situations it was their tradition to observe and listen to that which surrounded them. "It is obvious," he declares, why they were silent. They are not mentally ill, but rather following the contours of culture. For Abinet, in reifying culture he rationalized and normalized behavior that the bureaucratic logic of the shelters tended to medicalize.

"What is your opinion about the women who are very mentally ill—the ones who are shouting and intense, or aggressive? For example, there was the woman in the hijab [Faduma], who had just arrived from Saudi, and she was holding the Quran above her head and talking fast, when we were at Tesfa?"

> *Some women, their symptoms change to loud and aggressive. Some women they will be like—symptoms will change to shy and they will be depressed and sit alone. It depends on their nature. I think that.*
> *So, it depends where they coming from, the place, or it depends the family—it changes the people's kind of symptoms.*

> *When we see that woman, she is from the Somali region or the Jijiga area,*[138] *most of the people are the Muslim. So, they came in Addis Ababa, at another social level, and when she coming in the house* [shelter]*, she is not stable for that house* [shelter] *because she don't know anything about that house and she don't know anything about the women—the women in the Tesfa—what they doing, what they working. She doesn't have any knowledge about that place. So, she was very shouting, and she was very aggressive. Maybe, this is my personal opinion, when she is back in her village, when she meet with her families, she will calm down. So, it depends on her social place. She don't know even Addis Ababa. She growing in the Muslim families, she growing with the Muslim population, and she growing in the mosque area. So, the only protection she has is that Quran. She assumes.*

I admire and want to honor Abinet's assessment here, as its depth is striking. His "personal opinion," as he called it, is enlightened and enlightening. On his own accord and life experience, he offered an evaluation of a situation and person that taps into a tenet of ethno-psychiatry: An individual's background matters; an individual's history matters. A person's past sociocultural and environmental contexts must be placed in relation to their current situation to understand what is really going on. Abinet demonstrated that he could, when evaluating an individual's behavior, hold two ideas at once about "the Somali woman" (Faduma): she may be mentally unwell, or just as probable, *not* mentally unwell. We cannot judge, he explained, because we only knew her under circumstances of duress—she was forced in an unfamiliar situation, with unfamiliar persons, and unknown outcomes. She was protecting herself in a manner, which Abinet assumed, made the most sense to her—her Quran. It was her familiar amulet. It was the only thing she could be certain of in an uncertain situation.

I equally valued Abinet's explanation and understanding about women we met, and the symptoms of mental illness we encountered, because he himself oscillated between grand notions of culture ("our tradition") and the incredible diversity of Ethiopia (e.g., he explains that

[138] The capital of the Somali Region of Ethiopia.

persons from Jijiga “do not even know Addis Ababa”). This was not the first and only time Abinet was self-contradictory in his views about an Ethiopia-as-one and Ethiopia-as-disparate.[139] What Abinet ambivalence revealed was the difficulties we as anthropologists, and as individuals, find in presenting sweeping generalities about those with whom we engage. He sensed that a person could be both light and dark. We are indeterminant, categorically ambiguous. We are “good” and “bad,” ephemerally measured and dynamically contextualized. Our moorings are there, but they are sloppy. Whether we are in a favorable or unfavorable condition determines our comportment, those conditions will bring something into relief. It was a gradation of affection and the pressure of what she felt, sensed, and perceived in that moment in Tesfa that formed Faduma’s becoming (Husserl 2001), or as Abinet articulated, she must be considered in her multiplicity.

[139] It is precisely this type of contradiction that I argued very early on that needs to be taken seriously in discussing “Pan-Africanist” discourse, if not, such homogonous narratives about Africa (and even Ethiopia) can lead to, as Zachary Mondesire (2021) further argues, the erasure of the multiplicity of the Global South.

Chapter Eight

A Return to Place and Person

A person can be light and dark at the same time.[140]

-Simone de Beauvoir

Faduma stands at the top of the four steps leading to the entrance of the shelter. She is wearing an all-black hijab and abaya; it accentuates her round face and cloaks her full figure. With her arms stretched high above her head, her hands tightly grasp a black Quran. She speaks rapidly in Arabic and Somali. A Tesfa administrator, doing maintenance around the courtyard, looks over at our little group, gathered around, watching Faduma.

"Fanosh! You used to be like this!" he shouts with a grin. "For one day, and then you started wearing sneakers!" Everyone laughs, including Fanosh. It is true. Not too long ago Fanosh disrupted our peaceful courtyard socialization with an assortment of activities, including repeatedly kicking off her shoes and launching them into the air like little missiles, and tossing large rocks over the compound gate as she pried them away from the raised stone flower beds. Faduma continues to stand at the top of the steps, shouting at all of us.

Tesfa is chaotic today with an energetic intermingling of new arrivals and long-term residents, and, most noticeably, the untimely absence of Sister Hannah. The warmth of this mid-December day beckoned all of us to the sunny courtyard. One of the long-term residents, Saba,

[140] The Second Sex, page 267.

diagnosed with schizophrenia, just returned from her month-long stint at Amanuel Hospital. She rubs her hands along her freshly buzzed hair, smiles, and dances to the music video playing on the television. She is completely unfazed by Faduma's shouting. Saba flows in and out of conversation with us and herself. She is enjoying the sunlight and the buoyant rhythms of her nation's melodies. She is content with us there, close by, engaging with her.

The other residents remark to Abinet and I that they are not so amused in this moment. They describe Faduma's behavior as, "annoying." Abinet agrees.

According to the Tesfa guard, Faduma arrived last night from Kuwait. The Red Cross ambulance[141] dropped her at the front gates around one or two in the morning.

"She has not stopped talking since she arrived," the guard tells us. "No sleep. Five hours nonstop talking. I am very annoyed." Abinet agrees again.

There is a young woman sitting on the ground in front of Faduma. She is bent neck, gazing up toward her. To me, she looks like a girl of only fifteen or sixteen years old. She is bone thin, her teeth appear to have been filed into sharp points, and she will not speak to anyone in the compound. She also arrived yesterday, but from Dubai.[142] She is wearing an embellished

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[141] Throughout fieldwork I noticed that Tesfa tended to have more women expressing dramatic symptoms than those living at Mekelakel. I spent nearly seven months trying to investigate the reasons for this occurrence. Finally, one day, when talking to a nurse stationed at Bole Airport, she explained to me that they would take the "more aggressive" women to Tesfa because it is closer to the airport. They did not want to have to ride in the vehicle with them for longer than necessary. Thus, despite Mekelakel being better equipped and financed for treating women with serious mental illness, they more often arrived at Tesfa due to its proximity to the airport.

[142] This young woman, whom I call Zahara, has a remarkable family reunification story. During her two months in Dubai, she did not have any communication with her family nor upon her arrival did she have any way to contact them. She did not have a phone number for her parents, nor did she know her parents' names. While she was at Amanuel Hospital a man recognized her and approached her and Sister Hannah. He said he knew Zahara's family. He called her family, farmers in the Desi-Wollo area, and within a few days her uncle arrived at Tesfa. She still refused to speak, even to her uncle. Her uncle handed her his cell phone to talk to her female cousins. With that gesture she began to softly speak. Zahara remained at Tesfa for nearly three months while she continued her treatment of Risperidone. By the time she left she was talkative, gained weight, and desired to go back home to see her family.

hijab and a flowery, long-sleeved, aqua dress. She seems nervous, unsure of her surroundings. Faduma demands the young woman to go get her a cup of water. She obliges. The young woman hurries over to the spigot protruding from the concrete wall and fills a metal cup. She presents it to Faduma on bent knees. She takes a sip and continues her rapid chatter.

"See, she only talks to this one because she is also Muslim," Abinet tells me. I have no way to know if he is right or wrong, but she is the only person Faduma will interact with at this moment. Faduma dumps the cup of cool water over her head. She tosses the cup.

The two other newcomers appear to be increasingly upset by Faduma's behavior. Abinet and the guard are increasingly annoyed. I wonder aloud why Sister Hannah is not at the shelter this morning. The guard informs me that Sister Hannah is off today and the other nurse is sick.

"So, there is no one here to take her to Amanuel," Abinet adds. Everyone must wait and endure Faduma until a nurse arrives either tomorrow or Monday and can transport her to Amanuel.

"She doesn't like the Christian people," the guard says with a smile.

"Why? What is she saying?" I inquire.

Abinet tells me it is difficult to understand her as she is speaking a mixture of Arabic and Somali. He asks the other women gathered around if any of them understand Faduma. Zeynab says she mostly understands, but it is difficult because what Faduma is saying does not make a lot of sense. She proceeds to provide Abinet with some rough translations, and then Abinet to me.

Abinet remarks, "Ethiopian Somalis are very hard, strong, committed in their belief. She is speaking Arabic, talking about the Quran in some way. She is saying, 'I am Somali, why did you bring me here?'"

Askirika grabs a seat next to me. We met a few weeks prior by way of a thrown plastic chair. Shortly thereafter she ended up in Amanuel Hospital. She remembers that before she went to Amanuel she was given an injection. Sister Hannah, with the help of a Tesfa administrator, tied her hands behind her back to steady her for the shot. She tells me, sheepishly, that she remembers throwing the chair at me.

"My feeling," she explains, "was telling me to do it. There was a voice." She does not know if it was a man's or a woman's voice, but she says, she had to do it. I tell her it is ok; no one was hurt.

She has been to Amanuel a total of five times over the last month, but she does not really remember her experiences there. She knows that they gave her some pills—she shows me that they are light yellow—and that she must take them over the next few months. She does not want to contact her family until she finishes her treatment. While listening to Askirika I nod my head as a sign of agreement, trying to communicate with her that I understand her feelings about her delayed return home.

This was a common sentiment amongst several women I spoke with at both Tesfa and Mekelakel—the feeling that one did not want to return home until after they felt like their selves again or after they finished treatment. I had the impression that this request of non-return was tied to a feeling that they did not want to reveal their current self-state to their family or community. Likewise, as mentioned previously, the nurses at Mekelakel said they did not consider someone to be healthy, as one nurse phrased it, "until she knows herself."[143] While none of the women I spoke with explicitly stated, "I will not return home until I know myself," their hesitation about returning seemed tied to their current experience of unwellness.

[143] At both shelters the nurses have the sole responsibility for determining when an individual can leave the shelter (i.e., is "healthy" enough to leave).

This sense of not wanting to return home resonates with the literature on the social experiences of rural Ethiopians living with serious mental illness (SMI). These studies suggest that there is a high degree of stigma, particularly toward women (Ghebrehiwet et al. 2020; Shibre et al. 2001). Yet, for several women in this study, who indicated that they did not want to return home, this did not directly map onto whether or not their behavior fell within the biomedical confines of SMI (i.e., major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia). In fact, some who had dramatic symptomology were desperate to return home, while others who were quiet and reserved wanted to remain in the shelters.[144] I propose, then, that there are alternative ways in which to understand this hesitation to return home that are not based on a medicalization of their suffering or unwellness.

First, we might understand this hesitation or delayed return home as related to a self-understanding that recognized some sort of *negative* change, and if they could perceive it, then conceivably others could too. This sensed negative change related to the undesirable attention they experienced either during their time abroad or by the current nursing staff at Tesfa and Mekelakel. Both attentional pulls precipitated an undesired becoming: a return to Ethiopia, a visit to a psychiatric hospital, or administered medication (in general, these three occurrences were seen as forced or unwanted). Second, this self-understanding of a negative change was related to the condition that they, as the self-anointed sovereign caretaker, did not produce *positive* change; there was a failure to meet expectations. Under both conditions the self was

[144] This certainly raises questions about the visibility of one's sickness and the specific environment they anticipate returning home to. In other words, would silence be least or most visible or will delusions and hallucinations draw more attention? It would certainly depend on the individual's history as well as the individual's specific environment. Given the nature of my fieldwork, I cannot categorically determine whether dramatic versus more latent symptoms would be stigmatized more or less.

recognized as cut or split from their entelechy, and once more, the scissile self emerges as a possible concept for understanding their unwellness.

I further suggest that this desire to *not* contact one's family—despite having not seen or spoken to them over an extended period—immediately following their return to Ethiopia corresponds to what Beauvoir ([1948] 2018, 33) calls a "bad willing." This perversion is a type of ethics willed by an individual such that the error of their way is seized transiently, just long enough that it allows them to devise a best-good. It is in this "error" of not immediately returning home or contacting family and extending what some might see as the unethical circumstance of leaving one's family in a state of dejection and worry, that the individual makes her self, "a lack of being so that there might be being" ([1948] 2018, 35). It is in the brief momentary silencing of their familial intersubjectivity that they can regain their virtuous subjectivity and reestablish their known self.

It is through this existential playing with nothingness, which Beauvoir suggests gives meaning to the very idea of virtue. Individuals, Beauvoir contends, do not like to feel themselves in danger, and yet, real dangers exist in our world. There are choices we make, in flickering moments, that require us to decide how best to live virtuously, how to *do* the best-good in order to preserve our own being and our desired relationality. Therefore, if we examine Askirika's remarks or Birhun and Taytu's stories detailed below, we can sense an unwillingness or un-wanting to return home as a recognition of a perceived self-nothingness. Their decision is one that allows them to figure out how to return to a self of virtue, a self of something-good, a process that can be undertaken in the confines of this shelter, free from the judgmental gaze of their family. Some women took the time to reconcile their felt nothingness, a lack of being, into a virtuous being—a return to self.

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Faduma continues to shout in the background of our conversations. We fall silent and return our attention to her. She is difficult to ignore as she oscillates the volume of her voice and talks ceaselessly—it is quite a remarkable feat. She yells at Fanosh for wearing pants. Faduma starts to cry. She continues to hold the Quran above her head. She is tiring.

"Open the heavens door!" She shouts.

She points to me with her index find, the other hand maintains the elevated Quran, "The devil is here. Get out of here, get out of here!"

Everyone chuckles.

"What do you think?" I ask Fanosh.

"Before I was there, so I understand her."

"Are you scared?"

"No."

Fanosh was right. During the beginning of her stay at Tesfa she tried to hit the guard and other shelter residents. She threw rocks over the compound wall, tried to snatch the necklace off the cook while she delivered her food. The guard pulled her off. She yelled that she, "killed a person," shouting out a Muslim name. Sister Hannah administered the go-to Haloperidol and Diazepam injection. Within a few minutes, she was asleep in her bunk bed. Now, a week or two later, she cleans the tables after our late afternoon lunch. Calm.

Faduma moves backdown the four steps and toward the water spigot. She hits and spits on the guard along the way. She is angry. The old guard remains composed. Her antics are nothing new to him, but he is annoyed.

Abinet and I turn to one of the other newcomers and ask if she is ok and if she has contacted her family yet. She tells us that she is ok, but that she has not contact her family yet.

"Do you have their contact information?" I ask.

"I have it." She replies.

I follow up, "Do you know what this place is?"

"No. Can you explain?"

Abinet offers his well-versed explication of Tesfa. She understands, but still does not know why she is here or who brought her. Maybe it was a man, she says. We tell her that it is ok, that we will have the Tesfa administrator call her family.

Faduma is now counting out loud in English, "One. Two. Three." She switches back to Arabic. She is shouting that the other women are not real Muslims.

"Three people need to bring me the devil and wash my body."

Zeynab tells us she is tired of listening and translating, she is now also annoyed with Faduma. We thank her and encourage her to go inside to watch television and relax. She does.

Abinet is at his wits end too, he wants to leave. Abinet's annoyance surprises me. Faduma's behavior is not particularly outlandish compared to what we have witnessed prior. However, there is a key difference with Faduma's behavior and its relationship to the social environment of the shelter.

Sociality of Care

Fanosh recognized herself in Faduma. She was not afraid, because, through an embodied understanding, she *knew* what Faduma was experiencing, "Before I was there," she remarked. Faduma's behavior was normalized through a recognition of self-sameness. There was a potent

reflexivity during these moments of unwellness where the degree of difference between their individual sicknesses faded into the background. What was foregrounded instead was a recognition of oneself in the other through the broad medium of mental and emotional unwellness. This recognition transcended deep cultural and social differences between many women. For example, with Faduma, her Somali ethnicity, clan identity, Islamic faith, and linguistic difference did not appear to weigh on Fanosh's recognition of their likeness. Rather, Fanosh recognized that they both acted in a comparable way during their arrivals to Tesfa, and in possessing this understanding, she judged Faduma's behavior to be short-lived, just like her own.

I witnessed a similar embodied understanding when Taytu expressed a type of experiential knowledge and therapeutic sociality while observing one of the newcomers sitting in repose, disengaged, silent. Gesturing toward the young woman, she said to me, "I was like that." Taytu, like Fanosh, recognized a type of unwellness in the other that used to be her own. Within this recognition she offered commentary on the future wellbeing of this woman—the silent, disengaged, newcomer would eventually be well (Hoffman 2000; Slote 2007). Both women in their empathic recognition included a temporal element to understanding the observed unwellness. Their embodied knowledge was past, present, and future oriented. They understood that the individual's unwellness transpired from domestic work, just like their own. They also understood that while the newly arrived women worked through their own traumatic manifestations, indicative of the abhorrent treatment they endured, ultimately, they would come through it and know their self again.

In general, the ability to share in and with each other's past experiences of unwellness contributed positively to the shelter's therapeutic sociality. In examining interlocutors' reactions to newcomers who exhibited mental and emotional unwellness, I suggest that what both shelters

lacked in terms of institutionalized forms of mental health care, they made up for through a healing empathetic openness. Empathy was omnipresent, emerging as a crucial component of care, produced both directly and indirectly. Empathy in the shelter resonated with the broader concept of having the "embodied ability to experientially simulate the experience of another" (Kögler and Stueber 2000 as cited by Hollan and Throop 2008). There was a knowledge gained of the other through the experiences of one's self. It was an also empathy not marked by grand overtures (as commonly witnessed in North American contexts[145]). Instead, it was a care and concern for the other that manifested through steady forms of neutral or nonchalant attitudes that demonstrated an understanding. There were, of course, also direct actions of care operating in the shelter spaces. These included biomedical based forms of psychiatric treatment, as well as narratives of reassurance to newcomers—they were safe now, no harm would come to them, and they would soon be reunited with their families, "Ayzosh." (አይዞሽ / "It is going to be okay").

Through this empathetic openness women in the shelters cultivated care across its four-dimensions; the majority were attentive, reliable, and competent about care-giving, and responsive to the care received (Tronto 1993). Their care for each other resonated with foundational understandings about the ethics of care, which emphasizes trust, mutual responsiveness, and shared consideration for others (Noddings 2013; Held 2006; Slote 2007). What I find most compelling about the ethics of care operating within Tesfa and Mekelakel is the indirect therapeutic healing that formed through the constant reflexivity undertaken by most interlocutors. The reflexivity engaged by most women was an ethical choice to relate in a specific way to a specific individual, such that they could provide a type of care best fit for the situation. It was impressive the ease with which women I met undertook this type of ethical

[145] I was guilty of disciplining care through more "American", ways. As noted, I often brought food, clothing, or toiletries to express my appreciation, care, and concern for shelter residents.

work. Nonetheless, my observations of this therapeutic atmosphere also revealed there was a threshold to empathy's remedial quality. This type of introspection produced a distinct type of therapeutic emplotment (Halpern 2001; Mattingly 1994), which helped nurture individual healing.

For example, Fanosh's "I was like that" and Taytu's "I was there" were confirmations of a self-sameness recognition, which situated the unwell women within a larger context—that is, the unwell woman was understood as undergoing a process of being and becoming, their unwellness was both ambiguous and temporary. Fanosh and Taytu emplot their encounters with an unwell newcomer into a larger unfolding narrative of mental and emotional unwellness in the shelters. They indirectly imply, that *that* unwell women would heal, in time. Such recognitions once again delineate how individuals themselves, and in their understanding of others, escape social categories (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Biehl and Locke 2010). Ambiguity of mental and emotional unwellness was again privileged as the benevolent archetype for understanding the self-presentation of many shelter residents, because it avoided flattening the ontogenetic dynamics of the individual (Slaby et al. 2019). It allowed for the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social features of the individual, which were specifically precipitated by the environment of the shelter, to influence the larger therapeutic sociality.

It was this palpable empathic effort based in a present and future-oriented understanding of residents that produced a healing atmosphere within both Tesfa and Mekelakel. This empathic component of care was propagated by a being-with, it was care based on a collectively constituted recognition of familiar states of being. It revealed that the value of empathy was in its dynamism. The contours of empathy were culturally, as well as, socially, historically, politically,

and economically shaped (Hollan and Throop 2008) by the environment of the shelter, but also by the parameters of what it meant to undertake migrant domestic work.

This spatiotemporal recognition of empathy is comparable to Poser and Willamowski's (2020) discussion of ephemeral communities of care[146] where "shared embodiment and emplacement was a way to set in motion processes that revealed implicit and hidden memories and feelings of non/belonging, which functioned as either stressors or resources" (625). In the case of Tesfa and Mekelakel, these ephemeral communities of care, and the complex empathetic functionalities ambulating within, served primarily as resources for the residents. The embodied knowledge held by those who had come through their own episodes of unwellness allowed for the constant re-establishment and maintenance of emotional communities (Zink 2009).[147] This embodied knowledge is an ethics of care that specifically directs attention to aspects of human life that connect one person to another—it is this felt intersubjective narrative-selves that lays bare the complex relationship between abstract reasoning, ethics, and therapeutic sociality. It exposes the relational and dependent nature of persons and the healing power of atmospherically diffused care produced through empathetic attunement and imagination.[148]

The therapeutic contours of this specific empathic openness of the shelters further suggest that close personal relationships are not necessary for the ethics of care to endure and produce social change. The environments of Tesfa and Mekelakel reinforce Held's (1993) claim that care ethics goes beyond the personal relations and can therefore have fundamental implications for

[146] Such an understanding of care seems to hold some overlap with Stueber's (2006) definition of "reenactive empathy," and Hollan's (2012, 2014) discussion of "complex empathy."
[147] Veronika Zink describes the notion of affective communities as those that "draw attention to processes of producing a temporal solidarization between affected and the affecting social bodies. The creation of ephemeral milieus of communality is characterized by an intense and immersive form of social integration" (2019, 289).
[148] The environment of Tesfa and Mekelakel further supports Hollan's (2014) argument that embodied forms of attunement are critical to human sociality, communication, and "marked" forms of empathy.

social life. In other words, in the shelter, the heterogenous backgrounds of Ethiopians, which are often drawn on to explicate the contentious relations within Ethiopia, as well as the instantaneous living-with that occurs, are set aside in favor of empathic being-with. What matters in the space of the shelter is a communal pursuit of domestic work across the Arab States and their subsequent unwellness. What matters is the shared experience of wanting a different life and their confrontation with a cruelty imposed by the foreign other. Thus, despite the material resource limitations of the shelters, the local configuration and sustained implementation of empathically-rich ethics of care gives Tesfa and Mekelakel their therapeutic value. Tesfa and Mekelakel, then, contribute to a broader understanding about what constitutes a healing environment.[149]

But the question remains, what is the key difference in Faduma's behavior that sends Fanosh away and "annoys" the other women, and is this "annoyance" revealing of the limits of care and therapeutic empathy? I believe that such reactions to Faduma's behavior indicates that there is a threshold to empathy-based therapeutic sociality, or what Throop and Zahavi (2020) describes a continuum. It is temporally contingent in that the emplotment engaged by the other shelter residents (which provides them with a personal knowledge that suggests the subsequent healing of the at-present unwell woman), responds to an embodied knowledge that is limited by the non/response of the distressed other. So, while Fanosh may be able to grasp part of Faduma's experience, she is unable to fully understand why Faduma is behaving in this way (Throop and Zahavi 2020). Faduma's eight hours of incoherent speech did not respond to the palliative attempts of the other shelter residents, Faduma did not respond/heal in a way comparable to

[149] This type of empathy-driven data discloses how feminist methodology and theorizing can delineate an approach to organizing, implementing, and cultivating therapeutic principles. Empathy-driven data takes note of the moral acts not typically comprehended in bureaucratic logic of suffering and unwellness.

Fanosh, and thus Fanosh's empathetic mooring the Faduma is cut. With her nonresponse the other women were unable to implement a dialogue based in mutual recognition (Helpern 2001; Hollan 2008).

When Fanosh was annoyed by Faduma, it was her own emotional state that impeded her from sustained understanding, her annoyance prevailed over empathy. Fanosh, then, in encountering Faduma's sustained foreclosure to letting others "in," found that her own wellbeing came to the foreground, her attention was reoriented to the differences between them and consequence her care and concern thawed into apathetic annoyance. Faduma was in a world of her own that bounded her from the potent empath of the shelter; her symptoms transcended the empathically fostered understanding because she was unresponsive to their efforts and the environment. This further supports Hollan's (2008) suggestion that personal distress may interfere with one's ability to empathize and supports the argument that situational constraints and cultural contexts impedes the ability to cultivate empathy consistently.[150]

Abinet's Empathetic Attunement

Faduma's use of the Quran to ward off evils, like the devil, was not unusual. There were a handful of other women that bore various amulets to stave off evil spirits and malevolent biblical entities. Rahel, for example, held a miniature picture of Jesus Christ in front of her face, whistling each time she moved it slightly to the left or right, to peer at those sitting before her. This only lasted the first few days during her time in Mekelakel, after which she wore it as a necklace. In a similar vein, the delusions and hallucinations many women heard or spoke about

[150] Additionally, at the time of Faduma's insistent talking, Sister Hannah was not present to administer the standard Haldol injection, which would have calmed Faduma, and allowed for more direct care to take place.

were accepted by the other shelter residents as unremarkable. This did not preclude a meaningfulness to what women saw or spoke about, rather their symptoms did not garner a serious reaction from other women living in the shelter. I occasionally asked a resident if they feared another individual currently displaying dramatic symptomology, she would reply no, because there was no real threat. Sometimes they even made light of a particularly dramatic situation, like a young woman attempting to take off her pants as the nurse chased her around with a stick, yelling at her to pull up her pants or she would receive an injection.

The guard joked with a long-term resident about how she once rolled around on the courtyard, eating dirt. She appeared slightly embarrassed as the others laughed, but she smiled and said, "Yes, I did roll on the ground! I wanted out!" There was an understanding that such behaviors were harmless, would eventually pass, and could be recalled in good humor. Beyond witty remarks, there was also a gentle attendance to the perception of those who were sick (Bromberg 1996, 63), which also fostered empathetic sociality—a nod of a head, a casual engagement with nonsensical dialogue, an invitation for a pacing woman to have a seat and knit along with the others.[151]

Abinet and I were indoctrinated into this therapeutic sociality and continued to implement it throughout our fieldwork, across both shelters as well as during our visits to Amanuel Hospital. Considering this acceptance and almost light-hearted engagement with the more dramatic symptomology, I was struck by Sister Hannah's preoccupation with an individual's silence or disengaged behavior. Abinet and I did not understand why a formal psychiatric

[151] This resonates with the Open Dialogue Approach developed in the 1980s by a multidisciplinary team at Keropudas Hospital in Tornio, Finland. It is person-centered model of mental healthcare that involves the consistent social network of the person living with mental health concerns. The practice is committed to forging empathic connections and facilitating a sense of agency with their social network (Alanen et al. 1991; Razzaque and Stockmann 2016).

diagnosis or a trip to Amanuel Hospital (which often brought a great amount of stress to the noncommunicative person) was necessary.

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I met Jamila in September 2017, shortly after I started fieldwork. She stood in the corner of the room and looked like she was crying. I wished that I could speak to her, as I imagined she was upset. I was frustrated with Sister Hannah for not doing anything to engage her. I asked Sister Hannah if Jamila was ok, hoping my question would prompt her speak with Jamila. Instead, Sister Hannah replied, "She is anxious, poor appetite, general body weakness."

I was unhappy with her response.

I turned to Jamila, "Dehna nesh?" ("Are you fine?"), "Sih meh Eva. Sih mesh mah no?" ("My name is Eva. What is your name?")

She quietly replied. She did not know where she was and she was hearing "some voice," but she could not understand what the voice said exactly. The voice commanded her to do something, but she could not understand the command. She said she thinks people are going to harm her and possibly kill her. Abinet and I reassured her that she was safe in Tesfa. We detailed for her where she was, who was present around her, and how Tesfa could help reunite her with family. She listened to Abinet.

Birhan

Abinet and I installed ourselves among the women gathered around the television. We made small talk with the few we had grown close with and introduced ourselves to a newcomer. We asked her if she just arrived and where she came from?

She remained still and silent.

The group informed us that she, Birhan, had arrived the night prior, dropped off by the airport nurses with her documents and a single piece of hand luggage. She did not talk to anyone—apparently a couple women tried all evening to communicate with her in Amharic, Oromifa, and Tigrinya. She remained silent.

Abinet again addressed Birhan, “What country did you come from?”

She hesitated, but still did not respond, and yet he sensed that this hesitation held promise. It was a glimpse of responsivity. He waited a bit longer, and asked again, softly, “Hahgeh rehgh yet no?” (“Where did you come from?”)

She whispered, “Ethiopia.”

He nodded in recognition. However, we all knew he meant what *Arab* country did she arrive from, but he did not correct her or repeat the question considering her answer. For him, it was not important whether she answered correctly, only that she did answer. For him, this interaction was about building a connection and a sense of safety. He knew how important it was to build a relationship of care founded on empathetic attunement.

Sister Hannah, sat in the sun-soaked courtyard, chatting with a friend, and noticed our attempt to speak with Birhan.

She got up and entered the room, “She has some mental problems. She is crying, visual hallucinations. She needs a mental assessment. On Monday I will bring her to the hospital.”

Abinet did not acknowledge Sister Hannah and kept his attention on Birhan.

He explained to her where she was, about the shelter, and what the shelter offered, and that she was back in Ethiopia, her country.

He asked her, “What do you need at this time?”

She slowly and faintly responded, “I need to contact my family, my mom.”

Sister Hannah interjected again, “She cannot remember anything…”

Abinet, cut Sister Hannah off, not with words, but with his refusal to engage with and respond to her presence and declarations about Birhan. I was surprised by this, as such defiance, as soft as it was, was unlike Abinet.

He kept his voice low and gentle. He explained to Birhan that if she remembered any phone number to write it down and we would call. “Chigir yelemi” (No problem/ ችግር የለም). I handed her a pad of paper and pen. We sat together for the next forty-five minutes with very little movement; it was a painstakingly slow process. Birhan wrote down a number or two and then stopped, proceeded to the next line on the paper, and started again. Even her numeral scripting was lethargic.

Nonetheless Abinet fixated on her efforts, showing her that he cared—he embodied empathy. Eventually she provided a full number, ten digits. We called. Wrong number. She attempted again; wrong again. The third attempt, “Hello,” Abinet said, “Do you know Birhan?” There were a few exchanged words. He handed the phone to Birhan. A male voice was on the other end of the receiver.

She started to cry.

“It is her husband,” Abinet informed me.

She told her husband that she needed to speak to her mother, and her husband just so happened to be beside her. Her mother’s voice comes through. Birhan’s whole comportment changed. She blots the corners of her eyes and her cheeks with the edge of her sleeve. She no longer whispered her words into the phone. She readjusted herself in her chair. We heard her mother say that she was coming to Addis, to retrieve her, and she must stay put. She would be there soon. Birhan continued to cry and handed the phone back to Abinet.

Abinet turned to me and proudly proclaimed, "See, she is ok," he said with a flick of his hand.

He was right. I cannot explain exactly what that shift in comportment was or even capture the essence of that moment. I view it as a kind of resurfaced lightness, both in terms of a freed luminosity and a lifted weightiness. It was a release; a letting go marked by the sound of her mother's voice. The tears that transpired invoke the significance of the moment and Plessner's ([1941] 1970) discussion of the healing release of weeping. Those tears were therapeutic, as the "normal" distance between her and her mother (and her felt proximity to fear) collapsed. She was liberated from her silence.

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At the end of the day, Abinet and I grabbed a coffee and reflected on our time with Birhan, "Why did you make the decision to ignore Sister Hannah?" I asked.

> Because when you ask the new girl the question two or three times, she eventually gives me the answer…slowly. For the first time she does not want to discuss, but I ask two or three times and she answers. I treat her like a brother would. First, I tell her about the shelter and what they are doing because she doesn't have any idea about the shelter. And then when I discuss about the shelter and what they do, *then* I ask her what she needs at that time. And she tells me she wants to contact her family, especially her mom. She *didn't* tell me about her husband. At that time when we discuss with her, I decided to ignore Sister Hannah. "It's ok if you want the family, if you want now, it's ok, I'll help you." I say to her.
>
> I didn't listen because my attention is on the woman, because she talks to me properly, so she doesn't say anything [wrong] in her mind [she doesn't say anything incoherent and nonsensical]. I don't want to give Sister Hannah the attention because the woman is discussing with me politely and patiently. So, I gave her a chance of "what do you need?"
>
> We tried two mistake numbers and the third one she wrote in the paper and she got her husband and when she got a hold of him, she asked him, 'I need my mom. She reached her mom on the phone. Her mom said, "Don't worry, we are coming, stay there patiently." And when she hears her mom's voice she is crying, and she is excited.

Abinet understood that it was not only language that mattered for interpretation, but silence, comportment, and the relationship of Birhan to her surroundings. He understood her current state as a veiled language (Beauvoir [1949] 2011); there was something happening beneath the still exterior. This knowledge of Abinet's did not happen instantaneously, but was built from our daily interactions with women from Tesfa and Mekelakel. He, like myself, witnessed the variability of Ethiopian social life, gender dynamics, scarcity, desire, and mental and emotional unwellness all uniquely tied to our interlocutors. He recognized that there were a lot of assumptions being made—by the community, medical practitioners, and politicians—about the group of women with whom we worked. Following his own defrosted conceptions came a greater respect for the women with whom we spoke. He developed an understanding about the complexity of each woman's life, her individual location in her social milieu, Ethiopia, and the world. His growing understanding about the complex human condition helped him develop an empathy that influenced his own therapeutic sociality—one based in careful listening.

With Birhan, he attended to a behavior that was previously deemed a categorical must-be by Sister Hannah's diagnosis, yet he intentionally suspended his own and any other's judgement about Birhan in efforts to better understand her individual beingness. He bracketed unquestioned assumptions to make room for new possibilities, specifically, that muteness was *not* an undisputable symptom of mental illness.

As illustrated in Interlude IV, Abinet knew there were culturally patterned ways of attending to an individual's situation. Faduma, he reminded us, was from the Somali region, and her behavior should therefore be considered in relationship to her individual upbringing. With Birhan, as with Jamila, he understood their current expressions as somatic sensations (Csordas 1990) individual. Their silences were not necessarily indicative of psychiatric unwellness, but

situational unwellness that might be palliated with a form of caring-for distinct from that which was implemented by Sister Hannah's medical expertise. He believed that Birhan's silence communicated complex embodied thoughts (Rosaldo 1984), and it was misinterpreted through biomedical logic. This misinterpretation centered on "mental illness", which viewed her silence as an end in and of itself. Her silence was not held in respect to her experiences or personhood. We took a chance, based on our fieldwork experiences, that if we engaged her, as an individual based on her current and past situatedness, in a way that recentered her [e.g., her desires, needs, chiniket (stress/ ጭንቀትo)], we might be able to gain a more complete understanding of what was "wrong" and how we might help.

Abinet empathic stance toward Birhan was also based on what he described as, "treat[ing] her like a brother would." His responsiveness was entangled with his own consideration of his sister and an image of her under similar circumstances. Thus, while he could not engage the young woman before him from his own standpoint, he attempted to do so through his closest access point, the standpoint of what he imagined to be his young sister's (Tronto 1993, 136). His empathetic attunement to Birhan echoed Basaglia's classic phenomenological critique of psychiatry; his empathy toward Birhan, to her as an individual, allowed for the establishment and building of a therapeutic relationship which could (and did) precipitate healing [Basaglia 1981, Giordano translation (2014, 75)]. This process of working together created our own ephemeral community of care, based in a concession to that which might be otherwise.

The 'Best Good' Return

Birhan's verbal reunification with her mother was not an uncommon occurrence. Both Tesfa and Mekelakel office administrators spent a significant portion of their workday on the

phone, trying to contact various family members of returnees. Most often women who returned had the phone number of their mother, father, or husband. Regularly, however, a woman would not have any contact information for her family, including the name of her hometown. This would prompt investigatory activities by the shelter staff. In order to locate family members, shelter administrators would make announcements on different regional radio stations, describing a particular individual at the shelter. Unfortunately, I do not know the success or failure rate of this method, but from my conversations with administrators at both shelters, it was very rare that an individual did not eventually reunite with their family.

Not uncommon, however, was a delayed return home—in Chapter Five I detailed Kiya's homecoming dilemma and below I detail Taytu's postponed return home. I also describe her eventual reunion with her mother, who assumed Taytu died during her domestic work abroad. She had suddenly stopped calling her mother after three months of work—the time when Taytu was hospitalized, subsequently sent back to Ethiopia, and resided within Tesfa. I believe that this three-month period of noncommunication was based in Taytu's desire to not disillusion her family, who were waiting for the yields of her work abroad. She sought a way to soften the failure of her pursuit to enact her role as the "golden child." Her three months of "playing with nothingness" allowed her to work through some sort of avenue for palliating her un-becoming. She built a stalled home-coming, which was interpreted by Sister Hannah as, "some kind of mental issues" but, as I understand it, this embodied unwellness was based in a self-imposed respite. It was a time that allowed her to work through her failure to achieve her desired prosperity; she was working through the next best good action.

Taytu

It is August. It is drizzly and damp, and it is freezing inside the main living space of Tesfa. I hear the kindling pop and crack next door as the neighbors prepare their mid-morning fire. I wished we had a fire. The smell of burnt eucalyptus saplings mix with notes of over-roasted coffee and the wet clay-earth—it is the scent of Addis. There are nine of us quietly sitting together. We are spread across the room, scattered amongst the bunkbeds, chairs, and the plastic-coated floor. On this cold, overcast day, with the electricity out again, I imagined how Sister Hannah's most frequent diagnosis— "depression"—was an unavoidable state of being.

Then Taytu enters the room, and with that a noticeable change. She carries a kettle of water, to be placed over the glowing coals of the small stone-stove in front of us. Sister Hannah says to me how Taytu has not contacted her family since her return, which was nearly two months ago. She says Taytu is being treated for depression and has, "some kind of mental issues." We continue to watch her.

Taytu was my favorite interlocutor (if we are permitted to say such things). She was brilliant; her self-interpretations, reflections, and honesty were unmatched. When she described her current unwellness to me, as well as her experienced "mental issues" during her time in Dubai, I had an understanding that this continuum of "sickness" was structured by a multiplicity of desires in tension with her lived experiences. This resulted in, what I saw, as a sort of ambiguous state of being, and which Sister Hannah saw as "some kind of mental issues."

What I understood from listening and watching Taytu transcended the categorical diagnosis of depression.[152] Taytu described a recognizable change in herself, which she said

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[152] During fieldwork I asked Sister Hannah to explain to me what led her to diagnose someone with depression. She said, "Crying. Their mood is low, anxious, irritable. They don't want to eat or drink. They refuse to talk and have decreased communication. They become mute, totally they stop talking.

caused her to feel different. It was in contradiction with whom she used to be. However, I did not see her behaviors or explained feelings as abnormal, in the sense that they corresponded to a DSM diagnosis. Taytu was merely feeling her experiences and she did not hide this reality from me or Sister Hannah. When I asked her questions, she let her inconsistencies pour out. She talked and talked and talked. Sometimes she was upset or arrogant, sometimes she laughed or cried. This was what made her special. She was unapologetically herself; she was less guarded than other women and honestly emotional. Her numerous narratives often expressed how she saw herself as a remarkable person and aspired to be even more, but she also admitted that in her pursuit of this "something more" she became someone very different from whom she felt she was, and the person she knew she could be. She delt with a great deal of internal conflict.

Her detailed time abroad as well as our conversations at Tesfa both disclosed her attempts to reconcile these two versions of herself. She was constantly oscillating between her lightness (the golden child) and her darkness (the failed caretaker). It was also clear that her reckoning with returning home was marked by an ethics of care that was not simply anchored in the relational and the pursuit of positive potentialities for her future self and her family[153] (Held 2006, Lambek 2013; McKinnon and Cannell 2013; McLaughlin 1997; Noddings 2013), but that her ethics of care incorporated strategies for dealing with experiences of subjugation. It was a care ethics that involved working out how to care for herself, something I do not think she was previously permitted to do.

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Sleep disturbances, sometimes they are disoriented. If they are treated early, they become good. If they go to family sometimes, they become good even without treatment."

[153] As often discussed by scholars of labor migration.

Two days later I am again sitting with Taytu. She is telling me that before she was born her parents had, “a lot of conflict and would fight.” Her father would ask her mother why she could not produce a girl. Then, she was born—the third child and the first girl. Thereafter, their fighting stopped.

“I was the golden child,” and her name, Taytu, she explained, is that of the former Empress of Ethiopia, an illustration of her own given greatness. She lifts her chin upward, mimicking a comportment of nobility.

She continued to talk about her familial status. Her grandmother called her “Arabia” because of her skin color, which was lighter than her brothers. And her father, he too gave her a nickname.

“He called me Alem (ዓለም),” she said, “and those at school called me this as well.” It means, “world,” she clarified for me, and it was used as a sign of respect and status. She went on and on about how much she was loved by her family, how she was treated differently from her siblings, how she had a special relationship with her father. She received new clothes and school supplies before any of the other children.

“How did that make you feel?” I asked.

“Betam Teru” (በጣም ጥሩ/ Very good), she laughed.

“And your siblings?”

“Jealous!” she exclaimed. This remark roused laughter even from Sister Hannah.

“Betam, betam” (በጣም, በጣም /Very, very), she said between her giggles.

“Even the neighbors’ children are jealous of me!”

We joked amongst the three of us about Taytu's exceptional character. Sister Hannah and I, like her family, were charmed by her. She made us laugh with her gentle egotism and sense of humor.

"So, how did you imagine your future life?" I asked.

"I am the owner of the world!" she replied.

"And now?"

"And now I am broken." Her tone shifted.

"Broken?"

"Yes, my thinking is distorted because of that Arabian country."

She explained that everything has disappeared from her mind, "Now it is difficult for me, I have forgotten everything."

She explained that when she imagined what she was like before going to Dubai and how she must go home now, she thought about, "eris metfet," (እኔ ራሴ ማጥፋት/ to kill myself).

I was surprised and heartbroken by her admission. Both Sister Hannah and I reacted to her with tones and words of comfort. Taytu explained that she knew she appeared happy on the outside, but that she did not feel it on the inside. She was once again both light and dark, happy and sad, the golden child and the failed family caretaker.

Our conversation switched to one of encouragement. Sister Hannah and I tell her how she is smart and capable; Sister Hannah tells her to be strong. It was in this moment that I, and perhaps Sister Hannah, am reminded of her youth and her unfair experiences in this world—here and abroad: scarcity, abuse, trauma, profound disappointment, and the disenchantment that follows.

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This brief anecdote reveals the ambivalence Taytu feels toward building or maintaining some sort of ontological preservation. What does it mean for her to be Taytu right now, in this moment? Does her suicide ideation represent a desired negation of her being that will preserve some sort of self she wants remembered? Is this imagined corporal death something she feels releases her from an imagined social death, which may hold additional malevolent consequence for her entire family (Melstrom 2014)?

She reminded me that her mother sold the family home in order to pay the *delala* and her journey to Dubai. Currently, she does not know where her mother and five siblings sleep. She worries a lot because her mother has a disabled arm and cannot work. She tells me that while living at home, selling vegetables along the street, she earned more money than either of her two older brothers; and her three youngest siblings are much too young to take care of themselves. She knew her family depended on her and she felt it.

This moment reveals the protean nature of Taytu; it illustrates more clearly her processes of becoming, which Sister Hannah's biomedically oriented diagnosis of "depression" flattens. While we might, for example interpret her denial of staff from contacting her mother during her first two months at the shelter as stubbornness or as a symptom of her mental illness [both qualities which were feasibly interpreted by Sister Hannah as "agitation" or "memory loss," and then recorded as symptomatic of her "depression"], or we might, instead, look at this refusal to provide contact information as an enactment of what Mattingly (2010; 2012; 2014) describes as the "best good"—an action which sought to prevent her mother from learning about the abuse she endured as a domestic worker in Dubai, a transnational journey made possible because her she sold the family home. Likewise, this refusal was possibly a decision to spare her mother from learning about her subsequent "mental illness," a stigma Taytu could not bear to impose upon her

mother who already lived with a stigmatized physical disability. Or maybe this was the "best good" decision because it freed her, at least for a period, from telling her mother that she returned to Ethiopia without any compensation for the three months of work she undertook, which left her unable to pay back the *delala* or purchase the expected new family home.

The best good decision of not immediately returning home or contacting family permitted her to temporarily be "a lack of being so that there might be being" (Beauvoir [1948] 2018, 35). This best-good, bad-willing, allowed Taytu to evade further personal and familial shame. In other words, perhaps the best good was letting her mother assume she was dead? Such considerations raise interesting questions about the ethical enactments of a self-imposed "social death" as a possible palliative form of becoming that cares-for both the individual and their social network. It is a decision that considers the consequences of her becoming "something less" (or "nothing") in her quest of "something more" and the suffering imposed from this failure.

Taytu was "the golden child," but is now "broken." She thought she would be "the owner of the world," but now considers "*eris metfet*" ("suicide"). A girl who was the pride of her family and the envy of her siblings became the target of the narrow-minded, alien other's abusive words and violent actions. She was no longer a "clever student," but instead "the domestic worker" who labored eighteen-hours a day for no pay, kicked down off a ladder two-stories high, and sent home with "distorted" thinking. Her narratives reveal her plastic nature—her attention to those and that which surround her in Dubai are incorporated into her self-understanding.[154] This

[154] We might witness an impaired self or a self 'living on the margins" (Hollan 2000, 553). This searching self, constituted by its dynamic environment, history, and experiences may employ social, cultural, and political resources and affordance constituted by the past and current environment. The manifestation of such affordance may take the form of mental and emotional unwellness. We might call this a "pathology of self" (Bateson 1972), or an "idiom of distress" (Nichter 1981, 2010), or a process wherein "the body become relevant through self-reflection"(Csordas 1990).

amalgamation produced some sort of feeling of disposability, and she was sensitive to this false ontological rendition. She struggled to reconcile her disparate experiences of being in the world, and yet persisted.

When Taytu discussed her aspirational as well as actualized forms of becoming she located herself within a web of relations, institutions, and even geopolitical obstacles (Hollan 2012; Mattingly 2012; 2014). Her present environment and everyday experiences marked her self-interpretation and embodied unwellness, yet her reflections were also inclusive of a historically situated self that was equally important for understanding her biographical specificities. She was conscious and reflective of a certain givenness about her, and, as I argue, when this is held in relation to her current situation and experiences as a domestic worker, it produced a disparate understanding of her self (Hallowell 1955; Hollan 2014; Jackson 2012); which she described as "sickness."

Again, the value in preserving and examining ambiguity as an analytic for understanding the human condition emerges. This questioning destabilizes Sister Hannah's "depression" diagnosis that too heavily relies on the longstanding myth of the "mysterious" woman, and reinforces the tendency to ignore or refuse the multiplicity or incompatible manifestations of woman's being (Beauvoir's ([1949] 2011). This vague diagnosis of "depression" silences Taytu's ambiguous "who am I?" Her reflections expose the ways in which an individual's self-evaluation is necessary for understanding their shifting ethical subjectivity and self-presentation and her diagnosis of depression erased this possible understanding.

Taytu also claimed that it was "because of the Arabian country" that her mind was "broken," which left her unable to remember certain things or feel certain emotions. However, if

I examine her narrative carefully, I realize that this brokenness was not based solely in the failure of her employer to recognize her "greatness," or her anxieties around her failure to care for her family, unable to financially provide for them through her work abroad, but her brokenness was also related to her own, self-imposed, (failed) journey toward "owning the world", which perhaps left her questioning, "am I no longer or have I never been exceptional?"

When Taytu further claimed that she had, "forgotten everything," because of this brokenness, I situate this statement in relation to her current environment: Her story was coherent and clear, she had no difficulty providing her life history or answering my questions, some of which were quite complex. I must question then, what was it that she specifically forgot? Her English? The name of her village? Her mother's phone number? These were curious things to forget. Was this "forgetting" an enactment of a "best good"? Was it a response for dealing with and living through subjugation in its many forms? I suggest that her "forgetting" was also indicative of an unfamiliarity with enacting a form of care never before demonstrated—that is, what constituted an ethics of care after her returned from Dubai was murky for her; how to uphold her exceptional personhood was beyond her understanding at this point. Thus, her statement ("I have forgotten everything") and the silence that forgetting permitted, revealed her attempt to cope with unfulfilled imaginations for a better life. Forgetting allowed her to figure out the next "best good" action, a process wherein she could reestablish her (known) self within a particular ethics of care best fit for her current situation.

Taytu's ambiguous embodied unwellness, self-interpretation, and reflections, reveal that during a pursuit of "something more," if met with foreclosed possibilities, an individual must incorporate new strategies for enacting a "best good", which can reconfigure an individual's ethics of care. Taytu was complicated and dynamic—she was textured—and my examination

remains theoretically cognizant and socially responsible to these elements of her condition. This consciousness is feminist philosophy in action. I value and elevate her ambiguity while eschewing the flattening of her selfhood imposed by more rigid biomedical comprehensions of mental and emotional unwellness. This form of examination emphasizes not only women's oppression in its' multiplicity, but also women's independence (self-governance) in its' multiplicity. Taytu's beautiful self-narration is a valuable contribution toward understanding the human condition and more specifically, a valuable recognition of the ways in which an ethics of can guides an individual's potential toward virtuous living.

Peripeteia

Several weeks later, on September 15th, around nine o'clock in the morning, a Tesfa administrator, Ato Tedesse, comes down the stairs and attempts to hand the office phone to Taytu. She refuses. She is upset.

Confused, I ask Abinet, "What is going on?"

"Her mother is here. She is in the other office doing some paperwork. She doesn't believe her mother is here."

I am surprised by her mother's arrival. I did not know that Taytu agreed to let Tesfa contact her mother. Over the next hour we waited and as we waited, Taytu danced around the courtyard. She would come over to me, rest her chin along the porch railing, and say, "Eva-ye, Eva-ye, Eva-ye," She is giddy. She twirls and sashays around, talking to herself, me, Abinet, and Sister Hannah. The awaited knock on the compound metal door rumbles.

“Neh! Neh!” (ነ! ነ! / “Come! Come!”), the guard encourages Taytu with a smile. He wants her to open the door. She hesitates. She walks over to the gate, stands there for a couple seconds, twisting her body back and forth.

Ato Tedesse—responsible for reuniting individuals with their families—hurries down the indoor staircase. He holds a small video recorder and rushes to capture this mother-daughter reunion.

Taytu opens the gate narrowly and immediately closes it.

“Wait. Is her mom here?” I ask Abinet.

What is going on? Taytu comes back up on the porch and stands beside me.

“Yes,” he replies.

“Wait, why didn’t she let her in? Was she just checking to see?” I am confused.

Ato Tedesse continues to prop up the video camera while he approaches and reopens the gate. He steps back and continues to record. Taytu’s mother peeks inside. She steps slowly over the lip of the gate. She looks sullen and small. Taytu walks slowly toward her mother, taking a few steps at a time. Her hands are up, covering her mouth. She is bigger than her mother, and yet approaches like a scolded child—her eyes dart between the ground and her mother. She reaches her mom, keeping her arms wrapped around her own body. Her mother wraps her able arm around Taytu’s shoulder and brings her in tight. “Oh Mama, Oh Mama!” Taytu sobs.

Her mother cries quietly. She continues to hold her so forcefully you wonder if either can breathe. Her mother looks pained. I remembered Taytu saying that she let her mother assume she

was dead. Was this pained look the agony of a mother reuniting with a child she thought was forever gone?

Her mother falls to the ground and Taytu comes down with her.

"Mama, Mama," are the only words I hear. Her mother begins repeatedly hitting her own head with her right hand. Ato Tedesse hoists Taytu's mother up, off the ground, and brings her inside the main living area. The other women inside scramble. Some dash to their beds, others set out chairs for everyone, few stand back to observe the ordeal.

There is a change to her mother's mood, she will no longer look at or touch her daughter. Taytu sits on the floor in front of her mother. On bent knees, she rests her head in her mother's lap. Her mother does not respond. Taytu gets up and sits in an empty chair. Her mother remains seated and begins to cry. Other women begin to speak to her to her in her native Oromifa. They tell her it is okay, that Taytu is okay, she is back from Dubai, she is healthy.

"Ayzosh. Ayzosh."[155]

Taytu approaches her mother again.

I look outside, over my shoulder, and see Abinet on the porch. His arms are crossed in front, resting on his little belly. His right hand reaches up to cover his face—he is crying. I go outside. I lean against the railing beside him. We both watch the scene from the porch. I look again at Abinet. He is still crying. I remain silent and try to comfort him by putting my arm around him. I do not know what to say. We watch Taytu and her mother.

Taytu is back at her mother's feet, "Mama, Mama" she continues to cry. She speaks Oromifa to her, but her mother continues in her silence. I go back inside.

[155] "Stay strong," "hang in there," "It's okay," "It is going to be okay".

A minute or two later, Taytu's mother looks down at her, her head again in her lap, and it is as if she finally recognizes her*, her daughter*. She scrambles to pull all of Taytu into her lap. Her mother rocks her back and forth, back and forth; she is a child again in her mother's arms. This warmth and love release even more of Taytu's tears. It is when such "pressures slacken" and the "growing strength, the increasing scope of our own freedom" releases us from a threat and hostility to our personhood that we weep, Plessner writes. Such sudden changes can hasten tears of joy, and it this shift from tension to relaxation that lifts a burden from Taytu. Her tears are precipitated by her mother's presence, her touch, her words, the curious form of care and love that exists between a mother and daughter. In her mother's presence, Taytu is overcome with emotion, a self-surrendering to the benevolent figure of her mother. It is this submission to an overwhelming emotion that Plessner further proposes emancipates one from hostility or fear, or, in the case of Taytu, her *chiniket*:

> Before the sublimity of a work of art or a landscape, before the quiet power of the powerless simplicity of their being, before the fragile beauty, the touching candor and familiarity of children, we sink inwardly to our knees as before a grandeur that transcends every relation to ourselves. The encounter with them does not place us in situations we can do nothing with (like those that make us laugh, that cut the ground from under our feet by confusing the possibilities of action); they place us in situations where even the attempt to "do something" no longer arises. (1970, 133)

It is in Taytu's reunion with her mother that she feels that she is no longer compelled to "do something." She can rest for a moment in her mother's warm lap. Her mother strokes her hair and forehead, and she soaks it all in. Taytu holds on, wrapping her arms around her mother, engulfing her tiny frame. They remain affectionately contorted for several minutes. After which, Taytu climbs down off her mother's lap, back on to the floor, and leans against her legs. She smiles and giggles while she talks to the others in the room. Her mother's face remains stoic. She

bends her neck to look down and watch Taytu. Taytu talks to her older brother on the phone. Her mother continues to stare. She stares and stares and stares. One of the girls turns to me and remarks, “She cannot believe she is real!” Her mother’s silent, visual examination continues for at least another five minutes. All the while, Taytu chats on the phone, seemingly oblivious to her mother’s unyielding gaze.

The other women approach Taytu’s mother—speaking Oromifa, greeting her, talking to her about Taytu. She looks up and responds to those who surround her. The mood is relaxing, and joy distills throughout our little group. Everything feels back to normal. After a little while Taytu and her mother step outside into the courtyard to have a moment alone. Abinet and I stay inside with the other girls. Kiya seems to be feeling a mix of sadness and happiness. I ask her if she is ok. She says she is thinking of her own children. Abinet and I reassure her that she will be with them soon and that reunion will be just as wonderful.

We decide to leave shortly thereafter. It was long after lunch time and we were starving and exhausted. I suggest to Abinet a visit to our favorite lunch spot, and maybe some cake too. It is well deserved I reason. I hug Taytu and her mother joins. She embraces me with remarkable strength. She frames my face with her hands, and thumps her head against mine. I reiterate to her that Taytu is special, and that she has brought much joy to me during my time at Tesfa. She is grateful. I turn to Taytu and tell her that I will see her tomorrow.

Conclusion

I did not see Taytu the next day. Against the advice of Sister Hannah, her mother took her home the day after their reunion. They left no phone number or home address. Every few weeks I asked staff at Tesfa whether they heard anything from Taytu. They had not.

During my time away from Ethiopia Taytu called Tesfa to request assistance with vocational school enrollment. She wanted shelter staff to follow through on their agreement to fund coursework and support with attaining sustainable employment. She called several times, asking to speak with the director (who had since disappeared to Canada[156]). When I returned in October 2019, I asked Ato Tadesse what Tesfa might do to help Taytu. He informed me that he brought her a calf several months ago, which should help her generate income. I inquired with another newly hired staff member about how they might provide Taytu with the promised vocational schooling. I was told that since she moved back home, away from Addis Ababa, it was not possible. Eventually, I asked Ato Tadesse if I might contact Taytu. He provided the number of the pharmacy adject to her home—it was the pharmacist's mobile she used to call Tesfa.

In November, after several delays due to nation-wide conflicts and political demonstrations, Abinet and I finally made the three-hour journey south to Taytu's hometown. She knew we were coming, and yet upon our arrival, disappeared, and did not return until the

[156] Tesfa staff did not know the details of her departure, only that she had allegedly applied for a Visa to attend a conference in Canada and never returned.

following day. Apparently, she had an argument with her mother and left to stay with her aunt in a nearby village.

After chatting for a bit with the pharmacist, Taytu's mother entered the shop. She enthusiastically embraced us, kissed my cheeks repeatedly, and pulled Abinet and I tightly around her. She invited us to the family home and insisted we wait for Taytu there; it was just a short walk from the pharmacy. We ventured off a main road, onto a well-trodden footpath, and into a stick and wire corral. The solo cow—Ato Tadesse's gift—stood quiet. She could not produce milk, Taytu's mother commented. She thought maybe there was not enough grass for her to eat, or perhaps, Ato Tadesse gave her a bad cow. She was not sure.

We continued toward her home, a simple structure suggestive of the traditional *gojo bet* mud and grass composite. Four fastened wood slats hung on a set of hinges, marking the opening of the dwelling. She pushed open the door, waving me in. I ducked through and entered the warm hut. The straw roof rested a few inches overhead. A woman, her neighbor, sat on a woven plastic mat with three small children fidgeting around her. She was busy plaiting shades of brightly dyed straw stalks, which she then fashioned into small baskets and sold around town.

Shortly, two young men (Taytu's older brothers) appeared in the doorway, leaning in and curiously observing. They were handsome and neatly dressed. I nodded respectfully and they responded in kind. I offered a few food items I purchased for the family in Addis. Taytu's mother dumped the box of cookies onto a plastic dish and offered them around. No coffee was served, which was very unusual, and instead, she presented a plate of soaked red beans. Abinet declined, while I ate a pinch.

Over the next few hours, I sat in the increasingly warm home, and as a novelty I was the center of ocular attention. Similarly, I observed and absorbed all that was unfamiliar and

unexpected around me. I was surprised by the smallness of the home and scarcity of belongings; the seven of them must sleep side-by-side, or maybe the older boys slept somewhere else. I also could not detect a stove or fire nook, no implements of comfort. The decisions Taytu made for herself, for her family, and for a different future took on new meaning—to me and Abinet. Her risk-taking, desires, hesitation to return home, placed within this newfound context, cultivated a more tangible understanding about the appeals of domestic work.

After a couple hours, Taytu still had not returned. Heeding the earlier advice of the pharmacist, Abinet and I decided to depart for our lodging before sundown, and said we would return tomorrow morning. On our walk back to his car, Abinet remarked, "I have never seen any poverty like that. They did not have *injera*. Did you see? They eating beans."

For Abinet, this was unimaginable—to not have *injera*, the staple of Ethiopian cuisine and culture. For him, *injera* was the bare minimum and its absence was the marker of unfamiliar scarcity. He was stunned, as it was the first time he experienced such poverty directly. The next day we purchased two new floor mats for the family home, and pooled all the *birr* we had for Taytu's mother (I also separately offered Taytu an amount to help with school enrollment or any other form of entrepreneurship she desired).

It was an encounter like this that reminded me of Hollan's commentary on the in/frequency with which anthropologists have follow up data that "allows us to confirm the accuracy of own empathic observations of those and of others" (2008, 481). From this encounter—seeing Taytu's city, familial home, siblings, and witnessing her everyday trials—came a deeper, but also simpler understanding of Taytu. Her self, her decisions, desires, expectations, and disappointments entwined throughout her narratives were not lost on me

before, but now, I more wholly understood her resolute pursuit toward a life worth living, a life where *injera* would be generously available to her and her kin.

The all-consuming nature of Kiya's dead thoughts, made sense; Zahara's comment about no change in Ethiopia, made sense; discreet individual revolutions toward becoming a sovereign caretaker, made sense; all the tears, made sense. My empathetic understanding of the present-at-hand social ligaments of care, change, need, resilience, fear, hope, uncertainty, revealed new observational understandings about an interlocutor, whom I believed to know well. Who I could now confirm, I only really knew well-enough—that is, I could intellectualize her pursuit for a better life, but perhaps such intellectualization snarled the nature of need and want? Is it not simply human nature to secure basic needs, such as food and shelter? Is it not simply human nature to strive to survive? Certainly, ethical self-formation figures into these needs, but to what degree? Maybe Taytu and other's reasoning for working abroad was about surviving *in* Ethiopia, and that desire itself is worth further examination.

Through these simpler renditions of Ethiopian women's migrant domestic work, the so-called myth of women's mystery is further resolved, as there is nothing mysterious about fighting to live nor about the emotional and mental unwellness that follows one's failure to achieve the imagined prosperous otherwise. What is an equally fascinating question, and would serve as complementary to this work, is an examination of resilience of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers. How does this group of women endure persistent mistreatment? I offered insight into how and why women in the shelters improved quickly from their mental and emotional unwellness, arguing that the sociality of empathic attunement in the shelter offer unmatched healing. But I am still left wondering what are the thresholds to enduring physical and psychical abuse before one descends into a state of, what my interlocutors called,

"sickness"? Might individual home environments offer insight further insight into the relationship between desire and resilience?

Having the opportunity to appreciate Taytu in her home situation did not simply operate as a technique of confirming observational correctness or accuracy; seeing her in her familial environment, initially only described to me, and now unfolding before me, strengthened my commitment to recognizing, respecting, and revealing both simple and complex knowns and unknowns of individuals—the straightforward as well as the ambiguous remained important to carefully assembling knowledge about a person, a group, and a situation. Meeting Taytu and her family, in her hometown reminded me that she, and her compatriots, would always be incomplete and inexact. They were figures of philosophical weight, but they also transcended any categorical must-be (Beauvoir [1949] 2011).

The Virtues of Female Labor Migration

While this work embraces and advances feminist theory, Beauvoirian phenomenology, and person-centered delineations about the intricacies of a person, it is not exclusively about murkier interpretations of human life. There are several canons of medical anthropology—the questioning of biomedical based categories of illness and political economic influences of caretaking, the curious nature of crying and sickness—and psychological anthropological—theories of self, emotion, and mental health—woven throughout my examinations. Paying homage to classic theoretical frameworks maintains allegiances with the broader field of anthropology and a hopefulness that there is purpose within this dissertation beyond that of academic jockeying.

However, I maintain that the prevailing scholarship on female labor migration, which situates domestic work as an "economic strategy," tends to flatten what it means for women to have, need, and want to migrate for work. Discourses about the cost-effectiveness or supply and demand of transnational systems of human labor exchange, are not invaluable (they certainly call attention to a series of issues relevant to capitalist-driven economies and situations of poverty and precarity), but rather these frameworks do not give sufficient attention to the person—the animate entity at the core of discussions about goods and services or power and meaning. I have shown that migrant domestic labor is not a detached system solely predicated on economic and material gain, exchange, or consumption, but also about being and becoming a particular person in a particular world. Participation in migrant domestic work is about implementing living thoughts and building an opportunity to live a decent life. It encapsulates the motivational qualities of desire, while laying bare the ways in which human desire is responsive to and enfolds one's environment, including, culture, gender, relationships, and ethics.

A person-centered analysis of female migrant domestic labor also discloses how particular modalities of care and desire function toward building a life worth living, one of virtue and pride, particularly in circumstances of privation. Women I spoke with expressed an array of ways in which to transform their individual potential into free and intelligent movement—i.e., human flourishing. Their entelechy was based on a confident self-understanding, which gave them a sense that they could become someone else, the benevolent sovereign caretaker. As I have argued, what becomes tradition, or traditional work, and what is considered and performed as woman's work, is reassembled in consideration of a situation—both local and global—and is performed as a quest for an intersubjectively defined best-good. Migrant domestic work should, therefore, be considered as an embodiment of traditional (virtuous) womanhood, which is

fashioned in response to need vis-à-vis injustices. In response to a multiplicity of injustices the self has also demonstrated its plastic and permeable nature; individual episodes of mental and emotional unwellness are as protean as the precipitating acts of discrimination.

Such indeterminate embodiments of mental and emotional unwellness, I argue, should be of analytic importance and curiosity precisely because they are ambiguous and complex—it's a truer rendition of the human. In valuing the complexity of individuals, I must likewise acknowledge the limits of my theorizing and resolve that I do not hold the answers nor solutions to several questions encompassed within my investigation. I am often asked for conclusive answers pertaining to the mental and emotional unwellness of my interlocutors and the reasons behind domestic worker abuse. I respond that what I witnessed and heard were natural responses to aberrant situations. As far as the abuse? I can offer explanations about histories and processes of racialization, but I also often respond that I do not know why nor understand what and how one human can violently mistreat another human. I am left wondering if there is space for uncertain understandings of complex conditions.

Essential Workers

Through stories of desire and foreclosed possibility the narratives central to this study expose the responsive nature of women's work within ongoing situations of injustice. Individual understandings about how best to flourish are fused to variable enactments of ethically being and becoming an Ethiopian woman under multiple circumstances of precarity. For interlocutors, flourishing related to living and moving freely according to distinct understandings of care ethics *and* virtue ethics, specific to a time and place. While there was a clear emphasis on the relational and dependent nature of their subjectivity, individual narratives and experiences also bared how

women questioned and moved the boundaries of ethics, while considering notions of in/justice. Care ethics, in the case of this project, unites with virtue ethics to enhance understandings about the ways in which ethical realities shape a self in response to, and in fight against, conditions of injustice. In linking the two theories, I suggest migrant domestic labor is performed in an effort to *provide* and *do* the best good for an individual and their family. This perpetually actioned hope and desire, need and want, was not, as Kiya and Taytu visibly demonstrated, a best good in the singular, but instead a temporally situated, intersubjective, best good.

Women's work, and specifically migrant domestic work, is crucial to the survival of society, not simply economically, but this form of labor maintains life through a virtuous sociality of care. The narratives and experiences of women encompassed in this work demonstrated how "her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society" (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 48). It is both the gendered work and the physical movement of women (risk-taking, caring-for, the maintenance of life) that represent a self that is, as one interlocutor described, "part of the culture now," and is consequently situated as essential to the continuation of Ethiopia, (or at least their Ethiopia).

This process of self-formation reinforces the idea that the practice of becoming and being the "best good" Ethiopian woman calls upon an individual to not simply strive for individual flourishing but familial flourishing even in (or perhaps especially within) situations of precarity. This provides further evidence that the categories of "human trafficking" and "migrant smuggling" are inadequate distillations of the lived realities of those participating in the risky arrangement of female labor migration operating between regions of the Global South. Understanding and examining Ethiopian women's work across foreign and unfamiliar lands as distinct guides a finer understanding about how the experiences of women helps us better

understand situations and consequences of injustice, and with that, their words offer an intervention or a disruption to the *status quo* (Beauvoir [1949] 2011; Mann 2018).

Narratives throughout this dissertation also illustrate that while a certain type of violence may be singularly experienced, the shared experience of mistreatment is used as part of a collective imaginary to (deceptively, I believe) answer questions regarding the prevalence of violence against (Ethiopian) migrant domestic workers. As mentioned, individuals I spoke with positioned the cause of the violence onto the domestic worker (Abinet, too, initially responded in this way). They reasoned that a woman's inabilities to "know" how to perform her domestic duties caused conflict, but that this was remedial through government-sponsored training programs. However, women with whom I spoke positioned acts of violence onto the moral failings of their individual employers, and, sometimes onto the moral failings of their employer's "culture." Explanations of their mental and emotional unwellness were often predicated on the stress they felt from their employer or the situation their employer created.

Several women I spoke with also faulted their own country, not the culture, but the government of Ethiopia. The government of Ethiopia was a source of subjugation through its exclusion of rural women in a rapidly changing Ethiopia. What warrants further investigation, then, is the "involvement of affect and emotion in the strategies of governance" (Slaby and Scheve 2019, 3). What might a closer examination of the Ethiopian government's official rhetoric regarding the rights and wellbeing of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers reveal about strategies of indifference? Such an investigation might disclose, for example, if, how, and why the transnational dialogues between Ethiopia and the Arab States of the Persian Gulf maintain "ongoing" negotiations concerning domestic workers' rights. Yet, little direct action has taken place in either region that actually solidifies or ensures their basic human rights. It seems fair to

remark, then, that the transnational and national rhetoric pertaining to the regulation and protection of female migrant domestic workers remains largely hypocritical. It is thus conceivable that women involved in this study are not wrong to understand their selves as regarded by the state of Ethiopia as a necessary but also invariably expendable. They carry this knowledge from Ethiopia to the Gulf, and back again, as the gatekeepers on either side fail to prevent their weeping.

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