


MARRIAGE AND EMPIRE: CONSOLIDATION IN POST-LIBERATION ETHIOPIA (1941–74)

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Abstract

This article deals with marriage as mobilized by the Ethiopian Empire as part of its consolidation processes after 1941. It particularly concentrates on post-liberation anxiety and how the Ethiopian Empire envisioned tackling this disquiet by reforming marriage. Within the context of (re)building the empire, policies, laws, and discourses around monogamous marriage instilled normative ideas to produce the imperial subjects — procreative and productive — that a modernizing empire required. Sex was articulated within the confines of a heterosexual union, not only as a legitimate act but also as a responsibility of couples who were accountable for the consolidation of the empire. Sexual relations out of marriage were condemned as a source of degeneracy and the ensuing danger that confronted the empire. New laws were introduced to legislate sex to tackle the unease the empire felt about non-normative sex and associated pleasure(s). What started out as a battle against the Italian legacy continued more forcefully in the 1950s and 1960s with the rise of ‘new problems’ that educated young women and men posed. The article relies on a range of sources such as policy, legal, religious, and travel documents; newspapers; and novels, as well as self-help books produced between the 1940s and 1960s.

Key Words

Ethiopia, East Africa, marriage, local history, anthropology, kingdoms and states.

INTRODUCTION: MARRIAGE AND (RE)BUILDING EMPIRE

Italy’s five-year occupation of Ethiopia came to an end in 1941. The decades after liberation could be characterized as a period of imperial anxiety owing to the interruption of the processes of consolidation and modernization under Emperor Haile Selassie I, who ruled from 1930–74. Confronted with the task of rebuilding government structures and reinstating central authority, the emperor began to mobilize resources at his disposal. However, a perceived socio-cultural and moral decadence, which seemingly posed a threat to the wellbeing and sustenance of imperial Ethiopia, was a significant source of moral panic. Public discourses were permeated with frustration with what was perceived as an Italian legacy that upset Ethiopian values and norms. Such sentiment was captured, for instance, in a 1943 (1936 Ethiopian calendar) *Addis Zāmān* editorial which reads, ‘our enemy did not leave any stone unturned to make our country childless. The enemy killed

hundreds and thousands and those who survived were taught bad manners'.¹ The state of childlessness captured not only the killings but also the way in which the remaining youth were 'spoiled' due to bad habits learnt from the enemy. Due to this, the five years of occupation were regarded as a debasement of the empire's integrity, a shameful pain that imperial Ethiopia endured.² Some of the manifestations of this socio-cultural decadence were the expansion of prostitution and 'unconventional' sexual practices that came with the increased number of bars and brothels during the occupation.³ These developments disconcerted Ethiopians, prompting them to seek corrective measures to overcome the moral panic caused by what were perceived as received indulgences. They sparked a certain consciousness linked to 'restoring order' and thereby curing the 'social ills' the Italians had caused. This was the socio-cultural and political context in which Ethiopia embarked on the project of post-liberation empire (re)building. The idea of a strong, prosperous, and stable empire was predicated on strengthening existing institutions and establishing new ones that were geared towards the grand project of overcoming imperial anxiety and consolidating the empire. Monogamous marriage was one of the institutions that were brought to the fore in the production of disciplined, responsible, and capable subjects that empire (re)building required. Located within the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian tradition, marriage was presented as a sacred institution through which not only building but also prolonging the empire was envisaged.

As Lynn Thomas cautions, 'African political history must encompass the study of households, initiation, and marriage as well as overseas trade, imperialism, and international aid'.⁴ Similarly, Emily Osborn highlights that a productive approach to understanding political processes is one that engages the private (through the prism of households) and the political as mutually constitutive processes and products of history.⁵ It is in this sense that I locate marriage — and its centrality not only in biological but also social reproduction — in the politics of empire (re)building in post-liberation Ethiopia. This article draws from and expands on the growing literature on the intricate links between marriage and state

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- 1 Editorial, 'Lagär lej edegät yätämäsärätä mälekam hasab', *Addis Zämän* (Addis Ababa), 6 Mäskäräm 1936 E.C. [1943]. All translations from Amharic to English are mine. Where I use Amharic sources like newspapers, I cite the original publication date which was recorded according to the Ethiopian calendar. I indicate the year as E.C. to mean Ethiopian calendar and use square brackets to indicate the equivalent in Gregorian calendar.
 - 2 For example, novelists like Asafa Gebremariam held Italians accountable for the 'bad manners' Ethiopian men and women succumbed to. Drawing on the life of a rural housewife who fled to the city after her husband left home to fight against the Italians, Asafa narrates the decadence that was characteristic of Addis Ababa under the Italian occupation. In his historical novel *Endäwätach q'äräch* (Addis Ababa, 1946 E.C. [1953]), Asafa stated his disappointment at how debauchery, promiscuity, licentiousness, and the ensuing negligence of marriage became the new normal. A. Gebremariam, *Endäwätach q'äräch* (Addis Ababa, 1946 E.C. [1953]). See also A. J. Baker, *Rape of Ethiopia, 1936* (New York, 1971).
 - 3 According to Richard Pankhurst, prostitution had already reached 'unprecedented' proportions in Addis Ababa before the occupation to the extent that it became alarming to some who called for action. However, during the occupation, prostitution became the most accessible way for sexual release for low-ranking officials and soldiers, thus contributing to its pervasiveness. R. Pankhurst, 'History of prostitution in Ethiopia', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 12:2 (1974), 159–78.
 - 4 L. M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley, 2003), 4.
 - 5 E. L. Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here: Households, Gender, and Politics in a West African State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule* (Athens, OH, 2011).

formation in Africa. As such, it aims to contribute to historiographical debates on marriage with emphasis on a non-Western imperial context.

A number of scholars have studied the place of marriage in the history of state formation across precolonial and colonial Africa. Looking at precolonial Asante, Tom McCaskie submits that marriage is an ideological construct through which the pervasive presence of the state in the everyday can be analyzed. McCaskie suggests that scholars can appreciate the complexity of state-society relations and political economy that underlie the interaction of the domestic and the public.⁶ Similarly, Nakanyike Musisi asserts that women, elite polygyny, and marriage were central in the consolidation of the Buganda kingdom just as much as those practices were influenced by the kingdom's practices to consolidate itself.⁷ Judith Byfield points out that marriage has been a key medium of political power in both precolonial and colonial Abeokuta in present day Nigeria.⁸ Focusing on changing marriage laws in colonial Mali, Emily Burrill critically engages with marriage as a site for the exercise of state power. Particularly for the French colonial state, the ability to regulate marriage afforded an additional venue to control the life of colonial subjects.⁹ Other scholars like Barbara Cooper, Rhiannon Stephens, Brett Shadle, Rachel Jean-Baptiste, and Carol Summers stress the indispensability of marriage to our understanding of the social and political history of Africa. They alert us to the historically shifting nature of the marriage institution, its relations with the state, and its centrality to problematizing the domestic-public divide, gender relations, state-making, and the dynamic operation of law.¹⁰

Marriage in Ethiopia has also been subject to significant scholarship. Bairu Tafla has highlighted the political significance of marriage within Menelik's empire as a tool that tied the empire together, created alliances, and thereby stabilized central power while mitigating potential threats or competitors.¹¹ Heran Sereke-Brhan, Alem Eshete, Shiferaw Bekele, and Richard Pankhurst have also shown that political or dynastic marriages have played crucial roles in binding the empire together for many centuries.¹² Using

6 T. C. McCaskie, 'State and society, marriage and adultery: some considerations towards a social history of pre-colonial Asante', *The Journal of African History*, 22:4 (1981), 477-94.

7 N. B. Musisi, 'Women, "elite polygyny", and Buganda state formation', *Women, Family, State, and Economy in Africa*, 14:4 (1991), 757-86.

8 J. Byfield, 'Women, marriage, divorce and the emerging colonial state in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1892-1904', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 30:1 (1996), 32-51.

9 E. S. Burrill, *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali* (Athens, OH, 2015).

10 B. M. Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger, 1900-1989* (Portsmouth, NH, 1997); R. Stephens, "Whether they promised each other some thing is difficult to work out": the complicated history of marriage in Uganda', *African Studies Review*, 59:1 (2016), 127-53; B. L. Shadle, 'Bridewealth and female consent: marriage disputes in African courts, Gusiiland, Kenya', *The Journal of African History*, 44:2 (2003), 241-62; R. Jean-Baptiste, "These laws should be made by us": customary marriage law, codification and political authority in twentieth-century colonial Gabon', *The Journal of African History*, 49:2 (2008), 217-40; C. Summers, 'All the Kabaka's wives: marital claims in Buganda's 1953-5 Kabaka crisis', *The Journal of African History*, 58:1 (2017), 107-27.

11 B. Tafla, 'Marriage as a political device: an appraisal of a socio-political aspect of the Menelik period 1889-1916', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 10:1 (1972), 13-22.

12 H. Sereke-Brhan, 'Building bridges, drying bad blood: elite marriages, politics and ethnicity in 19th and 20th century imperial Ethiopia' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2002); A. Eshete, 'Political marriage and divorce in Ethiopian history (late and early 20th century)' (lecture, Italian Cultural Institute, Addis Ababa, 1984); S. Bekele, 'Reflections on the power elite of the Wara Seh Masafenat (1786-1853)',

what she calls elite marriage in which women had a pivotal role, Sereke-Brhan demonstrates that, apart from annexation and submission, marriage was instrumental for empire building in nineteenth and twentieth-century Ethiopia.¹³ These works indicate that in addition to ‘formal’ institutions of rule, political elites deployed marital bonds to forge alliances with their rivals. Missing in the above works, however, is an investigation of what Osborn calls statecraft as a process that is intertwined with marriage to show the ‘intricate workings and history of power, or the various techniques and strategies that elites used variously to cultivate, accumulate, coerce, manipulate, and mobilize their followers and subjects’.¹⁴ This article pays attention to how the Ethiopian imperial state mobilized marriage to govern the intimate lives of followers and subjects so as to oversee their role in empire (re)building. By offering a critical engagement with marriage, I show that one of the mechanisms the empire adopted was reconfiguring marriage as a pertinent institution through which subjects responsive to authority and its demands were imagined. I further argue that marriage, contingent on the ideal monogamous heterosexual union, was regarded as one of the vital foundations of empire (re)building.

FOREGROUNDING MONOGAMOUS MARRIAGE

In one of the empire’s earliest religious-cum-legal documents called *Fetha Negest*, marriage is introduced as a union between a man and a woman and lasts till death parts the couple. This posits monogamous marriage as the norm which all subjects of the empire were, at some stage, both entitled and obliged to fulfil if they aspired for a worldly life properly lived and the granting of eternal salvation.¹⁵ Marriage was represented as God-given with humans having a lesser role in its construction. Its purpose was procreation, which was a project of not only delivering but also raising well-mannered children who would honor the name and image of the family and empire, and so ensure the continuity of both. In his deliberations on marriage, the legal scholar Abera Jembere extended this idea by asserting marriage as a divinely ordained institution. For Jembere, the sanctity of marriage was confirmed by all mankind across time and space.¹⁶ In his 1955/1948 book, Abera depicted marriage as universal and timeless, something that is beyond human reach and hence unquestionable, an obligation that one has to fulfill, and an institution to which all are destined. Jembere’s publication could be regarded as a self-help book (to use the current language) that was meant to equip the educated with the psychological and biblical knowledge they needed in preparation for marriage.

Annales d’Ethiopie, 15 (1990), 157–79; R. Pankhurst, ‘Dynastic inter-marriage and post-medieval Ethiopia’, in K. Fukui, E. Kurimoto, and M. Shigeta (eds.), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Proceedings of the 13th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Kyoto, 1997); R. Pankhurst, ‘An eighteenth century Ethiopian dynastic marriage contract between Empress Mentewab of Gondar and Ras Mika’el Sehul of Tegré’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 42:3 (1979), 457–66.

13 Sereke-Brhan, ‘Building bridges’.

14 Osborn, *New Husbands*, 2.

15 This document had been functional, in various degrees and manners, in the empire from the sixteenth century until the end of empire in 1974; see S. B. Debele, ‘Of taming carnal desire: imperial roots of legislating sexual practices in contemporary Ethiopia’, *History of the Present*, 10:1 (2020), 84–100.

16 A. Jembere, *Selä gabechachebu* (Addis Ababa, 1948 E.C. [1955]).

However, if we focus on practices of marriage in Ethiopia before the nineteenth century, neither the authorities nor ordinary subjects respected any of these normative provisions. Kings and emperors gave priority to consolidating imperial power through arranged marriages despite Christian teachings about strict adherence to principles of monogamy. Various historical sources unveil that monogamy was not strictly observed in the empire. For instance, travel documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveal the apparent shock with which European explorers regarded the lack of commitment to marriage and the sexual laxity of the people they encountered in the Christian kingdom. In the eyes of some explorers even the ‘Christian like marriages’, as Nathaniel Pearce called them, were not long-lasting. Divorce and concubinage were commonplace. Either party could choose to dissolve their marriage and remarry as many times as they wished given ‘reasonable’ explanation.¹⁷ The shift away from this relaxed attitude towards marriage came in the second half of the nineteenth century when Emperor Tewodros, who ruled from 1855–68, attempted to enforce monogamy. Leading by example, the emperor got married to one woman and remained with her until she died. He also ordered his soldiers to stop concubinage and remain strictly monogamous. Tewodros’ attempt to enforce monogamy is already suggestive of the commitment to unify the Christian empire under his emperors by taking various measures ranging from war with regional lords to imposing monogamy. After Tewodros, Bairu Tafla documents that a rather bold step to endorse monogamy was taken in 1908 when Menelik ‘condemned by decree the matrimonial sacrilege practiced in his realm. He threatened in this decree to punish those who violated sacrosanct marriage’.¹⁸ Yet, until Selassie came back to it more stringently, not many people in the empire took monogamy seriously. In 1918 the then Crown Prince Tafari, later Emperor Haile Selassie, requested the Orthodox Church to ‘bring moral reform to the Christian community, particularly with regard to marriage’.¹⁹

It is obvious that these rulers were preoccupied with ensuring the formation and continuity of a Christian empire. Given that the scramble for Africa was at its height, the emperors deployed socio-political and cultural assets like marriage, in addition to relying on their military and diplomatic might, to build a strong empire that would enable them contain both internal and external threats, including colonial advances. However, Selassie’s determination to foreground monogamy invites a rethinking of how he negotiated the interplay of Western and local traditions. According to Elizabeth Giorgis, Selassie ‘applauded a tradition, which constituted beliefs and values that revolved around the monarchy, as the creator, nurturer, and protector of the nation. At the same time, he reproduced the idea of the State as patron, promoter, and protector of that tradition’.²⁰ Monogamous marriage was one such tradition that he appreciated. He upheld marriage as a carrier of Christian moral values which defined it within a conservative monogamous framework. At the same time,

17 J. C. Hotten (ed.), *Abyssinia and its people or life in the land of Prester John* (London, 1868); J. J. Halls (ed.), *The Life and Adventures of Nathaniel Pearce* (London, 1831), 308.

18 Tafla, ‘Marriage’, 13.

19 *Ibid.* 21.

20 E. Giorgis, ‘The beginning of Ethiopian modernism: a brief synopsis on the inception of Ethiopian visual modernism (1957–1974)’, in E. Giorgis (ed.), *What is “Zemenawinet”? Perspectives on Ethiopian Modernity* (Addis Ababa, 2012), 65.

as Giorgis notes, the emperor's idea of the modern was trapped by Eurocentrism. He hailed Western values that he found commensurate with the monarchy's Christian ideology.²¹ The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the official religion of the empire, promoted monogamy as did Western Europe, after which the emperor sought to model his empire. Thus, instituting monogamy was essential in empire (re)building as something that combined Western and Ethiopian Orthodox Christian values. That seems to be why Selassie said on many occasions that foreign-influenced changes and transformations should not negate locally embedded norms and values like Orthodox morality.²² He was bent on approaching *silitane* (civilization) in a manner that did not dismiss the traditions he deemed useful. Monogamy amalgamated Western and local ways within the framework of *silitane*, making it a site at which the two worldviews met.²³

That the ambivalent position of monogamous marriage interwove Ethiopia's Orthodox Christian norms with 'Western' ways is nowhere as vivid as it is in Heruy Weldesilassie's Amharic novel *Addis alām* (1932/1925). *Addis alām* was a key example of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ethiopian literature, the proliferation of which was due to figures like Weldesilassie himself, one of the astute writers who tried to imagine the possibility of modernizing Ethiopia while at the same time sustaining home-grown *silitane*. His travel experiences (to, for example, Asia, the Middle East, and Northern Europe) afforded him robust knowledge about the outside world. It is also worth mentioning that Weldesilassie's commitment to promote home-grown *silitane* resonated with the ideals of modernizing Ethiopia held by the emperor (with whom he had close affinity).²⁴ In his extensive discussion of the 'guardians of tradition', James DeLorenzi refers to Weldesilassie and his contemporaries' attempts to synthesize local and imported genres as examples of critical adaptation and appropriation.²⁵

Addis alām focused on capturing the story of Western-educated Ethiopian men who returned home with a passion to employ their newly acquired knowledge and skill. For Weldesilassie, the dissemination of such books as *Addis alām* was needed in order to 'correct and improve the wrong and outdated ways and to renew societies'.²⁶ In the novel, Weldesilassie invites us to a debate on countless issues between a Western-educated young man named Awäqä and an old priest. One of the tensions arose when Awäqä's relatives almost forced him to marry a wife they recommended. He militantly refused the arrangement, saying that he wanted to marry someone he knew because this was going to be a lifetime commitment. His relatives ridiculed his reasoning, for lifetime marital commitment was just not part of the imaginary repository of the time. They rather reassured him that he could marry several times and there was no need to be stressed. The debate on monogamy and its centrality went on until he persuaded his relatives as well as the

21 *Ibid.*

22 M. H. Wäldä Q'irqos, *Feré kënafer ze o'damawi Haileeläselä Negusä Nägäst ze Ethiopia: sostegn'a mäts'ihaf* (Addis Ababa, 1947 E.C. [1954]).

23 Sereke-Brhan, 'Building bridges'.

24 H. Weldesilassie, *Addis alām* (Addis Ababa, 1925 E.C. [1932]).

25 J. DeLorenzi, *Guardians of the Tradition: Historians and Historical Writings in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Rochester, NY, 2015).

26 Weldesilassie, *Addis alām*, 3.

community about the inappropriateness of their practices. These debates rested on an attempt to reconcile his Christian grounding and Western education, both of which upheld monogamy.²⁷ As such, Awäqä's attempt to change public perceptions about marriage by emphasizing the moral superiority of monogamy mirrored the author's longstanding commitment to the same project. From this statement, it is clear that Weldesilassie was using Western ideas to 'polish' certain practices like arranged marriage and the lack of commitment to monogamy in Ethiopia at the time.

Following Haile Selassie's return from exile in the United Kingdom in 1941, marriage became an even more notorious institution of policing. Together with conditions for its commencement and dissolution, marriage became the subject of new legislations. Concubinage or any sexual act outside of it subjected a person to punishment by law. Such trespasses even led to the termination of the union, according to the Civil Code of 1959/1952.²⁸ By defining the 'Ethiopian family as the source of the maintenance and development of the Empire and the primary basis of education and social harmony ... [put] under special protection of the law', monogamous marriage took center-stage as the only legitimate form of union.²⁹ Unlike other contexts in Africa where monogamy did not necessarily determine sexual access, here the union was defined on the basis of exclusive sexual relations.³⁰ Couples, unless constrained by health-related difficulties, were required to have a regular intercourse for the marriage to be legally binding. Marriages might end if either partner ever engaged in illicit sex. This made sexual intercourse vital as the maker or breaker of the institution. The empire's move towards managing domestic affairs by trying to control notions and practices of marriage and sex signaled a kind of social, cultural, and political crisis on a broader scale. For instance, introducing public health policies to strictly supervise those 'susceptible' to sexually transmitted infections and to police those who indulged in debauchery indicated the preoccupation to alleviate moral panic of a national scale. The policies and regulations publicized in the 1950s clearly indicated that imperial power, using the institution of marriage and sex, entered the everyday life of societies by making monogamy a moral standard for sexual practices.³¹ Foregrounding marriage as a rule to guide forms of sexual relations was a particular way of disavowing other sexual practices and experiences. Pleasure was simply 'subsumed into institutional forms of supposedly benign supervision like marriage'.³² Sex had political, social, and economic ramifications, and was regarded as part and parcel of the collective debt that subjects owed the empire. It was no longer a private affair, but rather a site of empire's fantasy of a particular kind of future that would materialize through controlling

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ 'Yälytopia Negusä Nägäset mänegeset yäfetabehér heg', (Addis Ababa, 1952 E.C. [1959]).

²⁹ Family as defined in article 48 of the 1955 revised constitution. See the 1955 Revised Constitution of Imperial Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, 1955).

³⁰ For more on this see R. Jean-Baptiste, "'The option of the judicial path": disputes over marriage, divorce, and extra-marital sex in colonial courts in Libreville, Gabon (1939–1959)", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 47:187/8 (2007), 643–70.

³¹ 'The public health proclamation no. 91/1947', *Nagarit Gazeta*, 10:3 (Addis Ababa, 1950), 8.

³² E. Freeman, 'Time binds, or, erotohistoriography', *Social Text*, 23:3 (2005), 66.

the sexual desires, practices, and bodies of ordinary citizens.³³ As such, that which was imagined to be a source of degeneracy became, as a condition for procreation, central in rescuing the empire and tackling its anxiety. Sex became ambivalent: a sacred project that God blessed for as long as it served the right purpose would be a sinful act in other constellations. The emperor's role as a God-appointed gatekeeper was central to supervising sex and sexual practices through legal sanctions such as marriage.

In the end, the value of sex was measured based on what it did for the empire as it was reconfigured in relation to the political, social, economic, and cultural life of its subjects. Even though sex was a necessary condition for the perpetuation of the empire, the legal enforcement of monogamy tells us that it was not just biological reproduction that the empire was after. Social reproduction was central to the sustenance of the empire, hence the need to control biological reproduction through a strict adherence to values of monogamous marriage. Here, Michel Foucault's insight is useful. Empire's 'future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex. ... [T]he sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention'.³⁴ Imperial Ethiopia witnessed a move towards a purpose-oriented sex that attended to both biological and social reproduction, as will be discussed below. This eventually led to the decision to administer sex for the 'right' end.

PURPOSE-ORIENTED SEX: BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Although it is difficult to provide accurate evidence on demographic trends given that the first census was held only in 1984, for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Ethiopia had low birthrates and a high mortality rate. According to a 1961 Ethiopian Population and Economic Planning report, the population in 1950 was 17,800,000 with a 1.5 per cent annual growth rate. Out of this total, 57 per cent of the population were between the ages of 15 and 60, which was defined as the productive age.³⁵ It is important to note that these data are sketchy, but despite their imprecision, Mesfin W. Mariam and Richard Pankhurst stated that these data indicated a relatively low growth rate which did not help the labor shortage at the time.³⁶ These concerns related to low population growth were echoed by the emperor himself as gathered from his speeches documented in *Feré Kānafer*. For instance, on a school visit in 1954 (15 Säne 1947), the emperor stressed that the country was rich in everything except population.³⁷ Furthermore, the 1950s debates in the *Addis Zāmān* newspaper reflected these concerns about population and

33 A similar point is made in Danai S. Muposta's work on marriage and wedding rituals in post-apartheid South Africa, where she argues that weddings are public enactments of sex and intimacies. See D. S. Muposta, 'White weddings' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 2014).

34 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York, 1978), 25.

35 'The Ethiopian population and economic planning', *Ethiopian Observer*, 2 (1961), 142–7.

36 The argument that there was a high death rate and a low birth rate in Ethiopia is based on perceptions rather than census evidence. See M. W. Mariam, 'An estimate of the population of Ethiopia', *Ethiopian Observer*, 2 (1961), 135–42.; R. Pankhurst, 'Nineteenth and early twentieth century population guesses', *Ethiopian Observer*, 2 (1961), 147–52.

37 Wäldä Q'irqos, *Feré kānafer*.

the place of marriage in boosting the number. As one letter to the editor in *Addis Zämän* pondered in 1959/1952:

[W]e always read in the papers about the population size of other countries. We are given statistics. We are provided information about how many people live in a certain country. The question is what is the point of us reading these pieces of information? Is it not wiser to move forward and increase our population so that we are also equal to others whose census we read about?³⁸

Two months later, another contributor to the newspaper remarked:

Increasing our population is pertinent because our new Ethiopia is making a lot of progress towards civilization which requires the establishment of various institutions and industries as we also strengthen the existing ones. We need more young people to work at these places as well as the military and administrative establishments that are flourishing rapidly.³⁹

Promoting monogamous marriage was portrayed as the way to increase both the quantity and quality of children of the empire. For example, in a 1961/1954 letter to the editor in *Addis Zämän* we read:

[T]he Ethiopian population belongs to and is tied as one family called Ethiopia. In order to strengthen this tie, members of the family have to improve their perception of marriage. While being proud of Ethiopia's longstanding and sacred history, we have to make our unreserved effort to make her even more proud by making her a mother of millions.⁴⁰

Only children born within the context of a 'respected' marriage were those on which the empire could rely for developing a healthy nation. Here, respected marriage was understood as a union in which the husband and wife stayed loyal to one another and became examples for aspiring couples. As described in the previous section, the couple's exclusive sexual commitment to one another was the subject of legislation in the civil law of the country, while contributions to newspapers reflected this religio-legal prescription. Referring in 1955/1948 to the 'right arrangement for raising children', one contributor wrote:

[A] child born and raised in a well-grounded marriage [mainly monogamous] is well mannered, physically fit, determined and like a boy scout, is loyal to his country, to the emperor and the society. This is mainly because his parents teach him moral values that enable him to differentiate between the good and bad, the right and wrong, while on the other hand a child that comes from a disorderly marriage becomes a liability rather than being an asset to his country.⁴¹

What was apparent from the propositions in *Addis Zämän* was the urge to multiply and fill the country with enough human-power. In order to appreciate the materials analyzed in this paper, it is pertinent to understand that *Addis Zämän* was a government mouthpiece whose objective was 'to serve as a guide' to the Ethiopian people. *Addis Zämän*, an Amharic daily, was founded by the emperor in 1941/1933 just a month after he returned from exile. According to Meseret Chekol Reta, the name (which translates to 'new era')

38 A. Kidane, 'Tedar min eda näw', *Addis Zämän* (Addis Ababa), 3 Mäskäräm 1952 E.C. [1959].

39 G. Bahita, 'Yägabecha t'äq'emu', *Addis Zämän*, 27 Hedar 1952 E.C. [1959].

40 T. Hailu, 'Gabechana hunétaw', *Addis Zämän*, 21 T'e'eq'emt 1954 E.C. [1961].

41 M. Dori, 'Yägabecha näq'ärsa', *Addis Zämän*, 17 Nähasé 1948 E.C. [1955].

signified the new beginning the country had embarked on after the five years of Italian occupation. The educated urbanites living in Addis and other parts of the country and those who could afford the annual subscription fee of three birr were its targeted readers. It was largely a product of voluntary contributors and neither the editor nor his deputy had any professional journalistic training.⁴² It ‘was launched by the good will of His Imperial Majesty so that it may explain what the people should do to their country, their emperor and to his government so that it may direct them to good deeds’.⁴³ The continuous discussions and debates about the pertinence of monogamous marriage were hence part of educating the people about the good deeds they owed the empire. The goal of sustaining a stable political entity was predicated on the production of children ‘fit for the task’. This was not necessarily unique to imperial Ethiopia. Elsewhere in colonial and postcolonial Africa, procreation and social reproduction have been integral to how states operated. For instance, Lynn Thomas’ *Politics of the Womb* offers an elaborate account of the ‘colonial and postcolonial state’s efforts to cultivate loyal and productive subjects and citizens’ in Kenya. Thomas explores how ‘procreative processes became the subject of political controversy in twentieth-century Kenya and, in turn, how these controversies shaped and were shaped by broader debates over how best to produce families, communities, states, and nations’.⁴⁴

Endorsing monogamous marriage, children born within that arrangement, and parenting echoes what the queer theorist Lee Edelman calls reproductive futurism: a ‘temporal continuity promised through the pairing of the love birds’ who were capable of sustaining the future through reproduction.⁴⁵ In Ethiopia, the temporality of marriage was emphasized — for procreation and social reproduction — as the necessary condition for the continuity of the empire. In this sense, marriage had an explicit invocation of time. As a contributor to *Addis Zāmān* wrote in 1955/1948, ‘marriage is a site of making sense of history, of hope for a better future and a pillar on which freedom and pride are grounded’.⁴⁶ Here, marriage linked different temporalities: it was instrumentalized to undo the wrongs colonizers committed in the past, to deal with the present through the production of docile bodies, as well as to imagine the future through procreation and raising disciplined children. Thus, the manner in which marriage was prescribed as a grand national project went beyond the personal to ensure social reproduction. The monogamous covenant had a functional role in guaranteeing and sustaining the nation’s existence, serving as a core national culture in which (re)productive citizens were implicated. This presupposes that subjects failing to fit into the logic of reproductive futurism via a heterosexual union, as Keguro Macharia stipulates in his discussion of law and family in Kenya, had

42 M. C. Reta, *The Quest for Press Freedom: One Hundred Years of History of the Media in Ethiopia* (Lanham, MD, 2013).

43 *Ibid.* 92.

44 Thomas, *Politics*, 8.

45 Reproductive futurism for Edelman takes the figure of the child and its innocence as vital to social and political order. Any form of resistance against maintaining a heteronormative provision is the medium through which he imagines a queer future, one that destabilizes reproductive futurism that has the ideal couple whose quality is also evaluated by their parenting. See L. Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC, 2004).

46 Dori, ‘Yägabecha’.

nothing to contribute to history.⁴⁷ This in turn exposes the underlying conception of history as a linear project that revolved around maintaining continuity. Such a conception of imperial history resisted anything that would upset the flow of its normative orders. If marriage served imperial continuity (through biological and social reproduction), those who did not subscribe to its logic resisted the moral burden set by empire and thereby disrupted the idea of historical progression.

'LÄMEN AYAGÄBUM' (WHY DON'T THEY MARRY?)

Getting married, especially for new graduates, was characterized by their contemporaries as a sign of respect and loyalty to the emperor who had created the possibility for them to go to school. Failure to marry resulted in strong criticism for betraying the cause of nation-building that the emperor was invested in, as the following letter to the editor from 1959/1952 opined:

[H]is imperial majesty is putting his utmost effort working day and night to help the youth to become adults, play their roles in the country, support their relatives, and also carry out God's command of marrying and having children, and with the help of God they will raise their children with the right guidance to enable them reach the highest possible stage; a rank higher than that of their parents. However, despite his majesty's efforts, the new graduates who are serving in different administrative capacities are neglecting the original command that had been given to Adam and Eve. Instead of finding a wife the moment they leave school, they refuse to get married because they believe it is a waste. They spend their time and money in hotels and bars. Their lives are not good examples also for the coming generation.⁴⁸

Therefore, given that marriage was portrayed as an institution in which loyalty and gratefulness were groomed, the unmarried had 'let the emperor down'. They failed to be respectable, productive, and reproducible contrary to his unreserved effort to create conditions for the making of dignified members of a proud empire.

Criticism forwarded against unmarried people becomes even more vivid if we turn to the derogatory remarks made against 'libertines'. Some contributors called for legal action, requesting the emperor to introduce a tax that single people would have to pay. An article titled 'Lämen ayagäbum' (Why don't they marry?) captured the debates that dominated newspaper publications in the period under discussion. In this 1964/1957 editorial we read that

unless women and men who are grown enough to be married step up and start a decent family life, and thereby reproduce, there is no way that the society can grow in numbers. There needs to be a law to monitor this practice. We do not want our women to indulge in laxity nor do we want men to deceive themselves focusing on unsustainable pleasure the moment brings. What we want is to create a perfect society. Following the footsteps of our forefathers, we oppose libertines. If we are truly committed to destroying promiscuity, why are we not encouraging marriage? If none of us has the will, it is a waste of time that we are talking here. If possible, it is better that people

47 K. Macharia, 'Queer Kenya in law and policy', in S. Ekine and H. Abbas (eds.), *Queer African Reader* (Nairobi, 2013), 273–90.

48 M. Afenaw, 'Tedar yikäbär', *Addis Zämän*, 5 Ter 1952 E.C. [1959].

get married without being asked to do so; if they refuse there needs to be some kind of law forcing them. There is no other option.⁴⁹

Thus, to be a legitimate member of a Christian empire meant, or perhaps still means, to subscribe to a ‘national heterosexuality’ that seemed to define a true essence of Ethiopianness while dismissing other ways of being.⁵⁰ As an empire that was organized around hegemonic narratives and practices of heterosexual norms, Ethiopia disallowed diverse inclinations towards erotic joy and sexual pleasure because they threatened public morality. It goes without saying that these trends still inform the present even after the country claimed to have broken ties with its imperial past upon the outbreak of a revolution in 1974. That young men and women were not keen on marrying was disturbing, but it became even more so when teachers failed to marry. School teachers, like parents, were imagined as agents for the cultivation of people fit to be citizens also by living exemplary lives. In a letter to the editor published in 1959/1952, the writer called attention to their role and responsibility:

[T]eachers have to know that those whom they teach are the future of Ethiopia and that teachers exert a great influence on their students’ personality [*sic*]. Thus, in addition to offering them lessons, they have to also teach them through their practices, they have to teach them manners by being role models: in the way they dress, they speak, they eat, they maintain their hygiene. However, there is one problem that we observe with teachers. Most of them lead a single life. Instead of leading a purposeful life, they are being taken advantage of by hotels and they are heard saying that getting married is a hell of a life; but this is not a good example for the children they teach.⁵¹

Although it is hard to establish whether most teachers were single, the perception was enough to inform a feeling of crisis posed by their choice of lifestyle. According to the debates highlighted above, in the context of imperial Ethiopia, the decision to stay single was an act which defied monogamy — a decision that compromised the heteronormative order. Despite marriage being predicated on a ‘discourse of self-improvement’ and practices of ‘self-surveillance’, these did not always succeed in forming submissive subjects, as there were people whose life, practices, and outlooks remained opposed to the institution.⁵²

Foucault’s description of the role of the heterosexual couple in setting the standard for others captures the above anxiety in Ethiopia, where discourses were pivotal in controlling and disciplining unmarried adults. When he wrote about the privatization of sex and sexuality during the Victorian era, Foucault discussed the concessions made for ‘illegitimate sex’: by integrating the brothel within capitalist logic, illegitimate sex was tolerated for the sake of profit. European societies put up with this phenomenon, which offered sexual possibilities outside of marriage.⁵³ By contrast, in the Ethiopia of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s (and in fact up until the present) sex outside of the confines of marriage

49 Editorial, ‘Lämen ayagäbum’, *YäEthiopia Demest* (Addis Ababa), 18 Mäskäräm 1957 E.C. [1964].

50 L. Berlant and M. Warner, ‘Sex in public’, *Critical Inquiry*, 24:2 (1998), 549.

51 Bahita, ‘Yägabecha’.

52 K. Bromber, ‘Improving the physical self: sport body politics and Ethiopian modernity, ca.1920–1974’, in Giorgis, *What is “Zemenawinet”?*, 81.

53 Foucault, *History*.

was one of the most frowned-upon indulgences. Rather than making concessions, the law and public discourses actively worked towards delegitimizing and disparaging the brothel, sex work, and even on some occasions bars and restaurants. Such spaces were banned, subjected to curfew, and made objects of shame as a disruption to the ‘normal’ order of things. In a move to ban sex work, Public Health Proclamation 14 stated:

No person shall organize, keep or manage or act or assist in the organization or management of a brothel or permit or let any premises to be used. For the purpose of this section, a brothel shall mean any house, room or set of rooms or other enclosed premises in which one or more women are employed solely or partly for the purpose of prostitution for the gain of their employer.⁵⁴

The 1930 Penal Code and the change it entertained twenty years later also told of the extent of panic and the measures taken to guard public morality. The bothersome resistance to marriage made the emperor introduce stricter laws related to sexual practices in the 1957 Revised Penal Code. More elaborate and extended provisions emerged in this code within the chapter ‘Offences Against Morals and the Family’.⁵⁵ Here, we find additional provisions against practices which did not fit the heteronormative ideal, such as sodomy and the exploitation of the immorality of others. Thus, the lives of single people or even married but non-reproductive couples have always been surveilled — their choices had consequences because they obviously clashed with the norm.⁵⁶

Clearly, the debates held in the newspapers and these legal interventions did not happen in a vacuum. The introduction of more regulations in the 1950s indicated the shift in the site of anxiety from dealing with the post-occupation years to dealing with the perceived problematic behavior of the newly educated and independent youth who refused to conform to the imperial idea of reproductive marriage. The empire fought against the flourishing of certain practices that troubled conventions and defied the ideal image of a society that should be tied by marriage. Popular culture like music and literary productions of and about the time indicate the discontent to which the empire responded in its policies, laws, and discourses. Two examples suffice to demonstrate this. Sibhat Gebregziabher’s novel *Létum aynägalegn* walks its readers through the nightlife of Addis Ababa in the 1960s. Set in what appears to be a red-light district called Wubé Bäräha, Gebregziabher explores the sexual life of the youth through which we also witness other forms of struggles like unemployment. The novel’s graphic depiction of nightlife, sexual practices, and gender asymmetries in 1960s demonstrates the presence of indulgences that defied the idea of Ethiopians’ prudishness. What we gather from *Létum aynägalegn* and Gebregziabher’s other works is that indeed the ‘decadence’ in Addis Ababa would have been disturbing

54 ‘Public health proclamation’, 9.

55 *The Revised Penal Code of the Empire of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1957), 63.

56 Even though I have not come across enough materials to analyze, I have observed that the emperor was not always reliant on punishment. At times, he also rewarded those who led an exemplary life. For instance, in 1955 when the emperor celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his coronation, he praised and handed medals to a select few for their life choices. In his foreword, Abebe commended the emperor’s act as an encouragement for others to hurry towards marriage. See T. Abebe, *Yabechagnenateh Mäfethe* (Addis Ababa, 1953 E.C. [1960]).

for an empire that prided itself on prudery and Christian morality.⁵⁷ The other example is a novella by Seife M. Yeteshawork titled *Sét nat wayes wänd* which sought to highlight threats to heteronormative ideals during the time under discussion. Seife introduces us to the protagonist, Elias, and through him shows us the nightlife in Addis Ababa from the perspective of a male sex worker. As a child, Elias was effeminate, into ‘girly stuff’, and imitated his mother instead of his father — a behavior which she found bothersome. Eventually, Elias ran away from home. His mother decided to look for him in bars and brothels. Because she knew he liked to dance, she thought he would go to such places. After searching in a number of them, she sat in on a brothel where, coincidentally, Elias was performing as a dancer. She saw him in a woman’s attire with full make-up, playing with different men until he settled for one attractive gentleman — the point at which she realized her son was going out with men. She ran out of the bar in anguish and got hit by a car before she even absorbed the shock. The author explained in the preface that he decided to write the novella because of what he was observing in Addis Ababa at that time. For Seife, Elias’s life was wrong and was so because of his mother’s failure to guide him on how to grow to be a proper man.⁵⁸

Given that the country was populated by new university and college graduates who were more excited about exploring life as singles than ‘settling’ in marriages, these youth became an issue of concern. They were distracted from the ‘good life’, which in turn made them dangerous because they could not easily be traced and controlled. The empire’s inability to tame the life of the youth and their ‘vagrancy’ became a source of anxiety. Together with sex workers, single men were regarded as boorish and spreading licentiousness, like George Mosse’s ‘vicious bachelors’.⁵⁹ They were also depicted as people who sought pleasure without heed to the consequences of their behavior. In addition to the deployment of other forms of repression, marriage was used to mitigate the perceived moral degeneracy that single women and men embodied. Thus, apart from looking at coercive institutions, like prisons, or technologies of violence, such as torture, which discipline citizens, it is also necessary to engage with marriage as yet another site of the re/production of docile bodies in the service of the empire. Married life was the main consideration by which individuals were evaluated and judged to decide whether their manner of living should be a source of pride or shame.

OF BODY AND EMPIRE

From the foregoing discussions on marriage, it is clear that the body was valued based on the service it delivered for procreation or judged as ‘wasted’ if it failed to fulfill certain requirements. People had to respect their own bodies and give birth to children who

⁵⁷ S. Gebregziabher, *Létum aynägalegn (endawärädä)* (Addis Ababa, 1999 E.C. [2006]).

⁵⁸ In the preface the author criticized too much freedom for women as the main cause of a decadent family. He not only viewed same-sex preferences as a problem, but he also thought women’s struggle for emancipation was dangerous unless controlled. This novella reveals a lot about the time and begs for a deeper analysis. S. M. Yeteshawork, *Sét nat wäys wänd* (Addis Ababa, n.d., 1970?).

⁵⁹ G. L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1997).

could shoulder the burden of building a strong empire. In his many speeches, Selassie himself spoke of self-restraint, control, and the sacrifice of bodily needs for the sake of a bigger vision which was playing one's part in imperial formations. Selfless commitment to the empire was a measurement of one's worth as an efficient person, as this sentence by the emperor captured: '[I]f one aspires to be a leader, one needs to have the right discipline and commitment to check her/his passions and desires, and [needs to command] the exemplary control of one's bodily needs and drives'. He cautioned the youth, particularly new graduates, to leave aside their luxurious priorities in the interest of fulfilling the assignment the country expected of them.⁶⁰ Katrine Bromber, in her discussion of the formation of subjects in relation to modernity and sports in imperial Ethiopia, stressed that 'the human body was the privileged target when it came to putting in place such powerful "technologies", such as rules, discourses and procedures into operation'.⁶¹ This entailed the mapping of norms on the body, with the ascription and measurement of worth being used to decide which bodies mattered. This simply means that the body was as good as what it did for the empire. In addition to their role in procreation, subjects were expected to give into self-surveillance because it was their responsibility to ensure productivity through their labor. Thus, only certain bodies were fit and acceptable depending on the purpose they fulfilled while others were regarded as a liability to the project of empire (re)building.⁶²

For instance, a person who was not married was generally perceived as a child — not a fully-formed, complete human, which basically meant that s/he was an unreliable and irresponsible person. No matter how and whether or not a person was self-reliant, not being married was regarded as lagging behind on the ladder of growing into full personhood. Upward social mobility was not necessarily achieved by graduating from a university, nor was it only attained through getting a decent job. These were stepping stones on the road to a successful personhood which was judged based on one's commitment to the institution of marriage. Confirming this, in 1959/1952 a frequent commentator in *Addis Zämän* expressed frustration with the younger generation who seemed to be comfortable with leading a 'childish life'. He wrote,

we [the youth] say marriage is nothing but a liability, we run away from it and lead our lives in hotels and bars ... But to marry is first of all to observe God's law; second to have a child who grows up to be a good citizen; third, to protect us from spending our money on alcohol and conducting promiscuity.⁶³

Marriage was presented as a space of self-regulation by lending tools and vocabularies of what it meant to be a better person and to aspire for a better life. People were encouraged to be married because it taught them certain disciplines like saving money, looking after themselves, getting home on time, being able to develop certain skills, and above all controlling promiscuity — everything a 'healthy nation' required. The industrializing and modernizing empire needed human power, so subjectivity was shaped by adjusting to the demand that one's worth was measured by how much a person gave, in terms of

⁶⁰ Wäldä Q'irqos, *Féré kánafer*, 1378.

⁶¹ Bromber, 'Improving', 81.

⁶² J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, 1993).

⁶³ Kidane, 'Tedar'.

both production and procreation, while regulating their sexual life. What the youth chose to do was heavily criticized because, as Foucault argued, it did not sit well with the logic of productivity and because their way of being ‘is incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative. At a time when labor capacity was being systematically exploited, how could this capacity be allowed to dissipate itself in pleasurable pursuits, except in those — reduced to a minimum — that enabled it to reproduce itself?’⁶⁴

It should be noted that marriage is central in fostering our understanding of gender relations and how the woman was imagined within the project of empire (re)building. Numerous articles published in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in *Addis Zāmān*, *Addis Reporter*, *Menen*, and other Amharic- and English-language newspapers featured debates about the place of women generally and how they should conduct themselves in both private and public spaces. These debates were symptomatic of the discomfort women’s ‘defiance’ caused on the conventions set by patriarchy. Based on a survey of these publications, it is easy to detect that women were proving difficult to regulate by refusing to behave in line with the expected roles assigned to them. The increasing number of female-owned and managed cabarets were often liberating to women, much as they were sources of unease for the conservative and masculine project of nation building.⁶⁵ On the basis of accusations of engaging in ‘scandalous part-time prostitution’, women, specifically artists, were depicted as sources of problems because, through their part-time engagements, their bodies became ‘impure’ and ‘improper’ as described by Surafel Wondimu. Wondimu further exposed that women, regardless of their centrality in various fields such as the arts, were evaluated as good or bad based on whether they adhered to the ‘heteropatriarchal’ values which imperial Ethiopia hailed.⁶⁶ Moreover, their worth was evaluated based on whether they were married or not, and, if married, in relation to whether or not they had fulfilled social expectations within the institution of marriage.⁶⁷ For contributors to Ethiopia’s national newspapers in this era, women were generally defined in relation to reproduction and sexual restraint, and were crucial in looking after the family as well as bringing up children. This perception of women re-centered motherhood to the domains of empire building, and a woman who lived out of this framework was judged as loose.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

One way of approaching the political history of post-liberation Ethiopia is by looking at elite marriage as a tool of analysis, as suggested by Sereke-Brhan.⁶⁹ Yet this article goes

64 Foucault, *History*, 6.

65 For similar discussions in Kenya, see also L. White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990).

66 S. Wondimu, ‘Decolonial embodied historiography: female performing bodies, revolutions and empires in Ethiopia’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2018).

67 There are similarities with what Stoler describes about wives of colonial officers who moved with their husbands to the colonies; see A. L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002).

68 This section on women is a call for a more rigorous research rather than a claim to have exhausted the issue.

69 Sereke-Brhan, ‘Building bridges’.

beyond previous studies of marriage in imperial Ethiopia, which have looked at elite unions conducted for creating and strengthening alliances between the center and regional lords. I have explored monogamous unions as deployed to mobilize ordinary subjects within the empire to shoulder the responsibility of (re)building through the formation of both productive and procreative subjects. I have also shown that what started out in the 1940s as a measure to restore order disrupted by five years of occupation continued even more forcefully in the 1950 and 1960s to address the continued imperial anxiety provoked by the growing number of youths who had been educated abroad and at home.

Marriage remained crucial in envisioning subjects responsive to the emperor's calls. To this end, sanctifying and upholding monogamous marriage to redeem the empire became one of many actions. As such, marriage was elevated from a mundane aspect of socio-cultural life to a politicized principle and practice imbued with the role of mediating relations between the empire and its subjects. Thus, the discourses and practices situated within the marriage framework could be understood in terms of what Ann Laura Stoler calls 'making empire respectable' by injecting certain forms of sexual morality. The notion of making empire respectable in the case of Ethiopia, however, was about restoring disrupted orders and maintaining historical continuity.⁷⁰ What we see from the insistence on monogamy as the way of organizing one's life is that respectability was to be found through a renewed norm by which people defined themselves.⁷¹ This norm was not sexual prowess nor was it the ability to keep multiple sexual partners; it was rather sexual restraint within monogamous marriage. Since the affirmation of respectability came to rely on curbing sexual excess, marriage became a handy tool to quell the attitudes with which subjects in modernizing Ethiopia regarded sex.

Focusing on strategies, such as marriage, that rulers deploy to govern the intimate lives of subjects exposes the lengths to which the Ethiopian Empire went to manage the details of the private lives of the ruled. Such an approach provides critical perspectives on research paradigms such as territorial expansion, civilization, and modernization, providing alternative avenues for the investigation of nation/empire-building and state-society relations. However, even though my analysis focused on appraising imperial imaginations around governing the intimate lives of subjects, this article has concentrated on the urbanite women and men who lived in the capital Addis Ababa and other cities mainly due to the nature of the sources. I am aware that there are multiple other forms of marriage which have subverted the project of ensuring imperial continuity by unsettling the seeming givenness of monogamy. Future work should seek to capture a representative sample of variations by, for example, region, ethnicity, class, religion, or gender in how marriage and other relationships have been understood and experienced.

70 A. L. Stoler, 'Making empire respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures', *American Ethnologist*, 16:4 (1989), 634–60. It is worth noting that Stoler uses the notion in her analysis of the consolidation of colonial power by imposing on the colonies certain values and norms of the colonialists.

71 Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*.