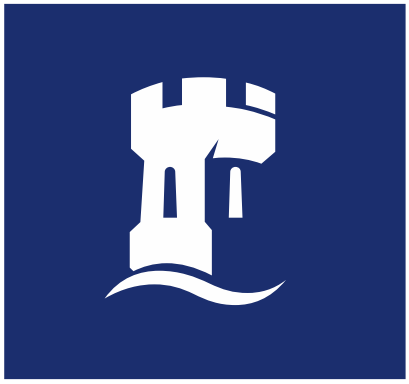


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Gender Discourses and Shifting Subjectivities: Examining Women's Responses to Intimate Partner Violence in Mombasa and Nairobi, Kenya

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Lawrence Musyoki Isika and Jane Achola Isika,

for always believing in me.

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains the most predominant form of violence experienced by women on a global scale. Nationally representative statistics reveal telling rates in Kenya, but relatively little empirical attention has been devoted to exploring the phenomenon qualitatively in this context. This thesis narrows this gap in the academic literature by investigating the experiences of IPV among 28 women from Mombasa and Nairobi, with particular focus on their responses and coping mechanisms within marital or cohabiting relationships. It applies primarily post-structural feminist insights on discourses and subjectivities to investigate how women's responses to IPV conformed to, or deviated from, dominant representations of femininity in Kenya. Post-structural feminism has been minimally employed to frame our understanding of the experiences of IPV among women in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the integration of these conceptual elements into the study addresses the limited theoretical application with special focus on Kenya. In addition, insights from Black and African feminism are incorporated to evaluate critically how gender is interlinked with other axes of disadvantage to inform women's behaviours in an atmosphere of IPV. The thematic and discourse analytical approaches found diverse and contradictory feminine portrayals, most of which stood in contrast with mainstream representations of African women as being demure, accepting and quiescent recipients of male abuse and mistreatment. Therefore, this thesis highlights Kenyan women's efforts in mitigating the effects of IPV by exploring how their resourcefulness was concealed behind docile and deferential behaviour. In addition to investigating these strategically passive femininities, this study also draws attention to women's overt subversion of the traditional gender script that was evident in their unruly, outspoken, defiant and aggressive conduct in conjugal settings. Throughout these revealing narratives of unorthodox behaviour, the thesis attempts to identify Kenyan women's subtle and explicit processes of revising oppressive regimes that have historically validated their subsidiary position to men in domestic and intimate environments. Ultimately, the research offers insights into understanding women's subjectivities as being protean in the unpredictable IPV milieu. This understanding is instrumental in informing policy and programmes to prevent IPV in Kenya and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

GBP – Great British Pound

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IPV – Intimate Partner Violence

KDHS – Kenya Demographic Health Survey

KSH – Kenya Shillings

LMICs - Low and Middle-Income Countries

PADV - Protection Against Domestic Violence Act 2015

SGBV – Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

SSA – Sub-Saharan Africa

STI – Sexually Transmitted Infection

WHO – World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women is a major human rights violation that has received global attention since the 1970s. It is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours" (WHO, 2010: 11). IPV against women by men is a deeply complex phenomenon that cuts across various social demographics (such as race, socio-economic status, age, religion) and finds its roots in cultural, social, economic and political factors. Globally, women are disproportionately affected by it with far-reaching implications for their physical, mental, emotional and financial well-being (Krug *et al.,* 2002; Garcia-Moreno *et al.,* 2005). Although IPV research in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is relatively sparse compared to the Northern Hemisphere (Gillum *et al.,* 2016), a high prevalence in the region has been reported in the existing studies (Djamba & Kimuna, 2008; Emenike *et al.,* 2008; Odero *et al.,* 2014). In Kenya, the nationally representative data of the most recent Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) showed that 37% of women experienced physical IPV at the hands of a husband or male partner, 13% experienced sexual IPV and 32% reported emotional IPV (KDHS, 2015). The data of the 2014 KDHS on women's exposure to controlling behaviour ranged from jealousy when interacting with other men (53%), monitoring of movements (41%), accusations of infidelity (23%) and restricting social interactions with friends (21%). While these national statistics are telling, more qualitative studies are required to explore adequately the lived or living experiences of affected women in the country (Gillum *et al.,* 2016).

My aim is to expand knowledge of IPV against women by men in Kenya by examining the experiences of 28 women from the two main capitals: Nairobi and Mombasa. Of primary concern is the gender discourses evident in their responses to IPV. I expound on my research aims later in this chapter. The study's conceptual structure is primarily informed by Chris Weedon's feminist post-structuralism (a term I use interchangeably with "post-structural feminism") and particularly, her conceptualising of discourse as socio-culturally embedded "common-sense" language that is foundational in validating male ascendancy over women (Weedon, 1997). Feminist post-structuralism has been applied minimally in the field of IPV (Wendt & Zannettino, 2014) and in SSA in particular. Except for a small number of studies in

South Africa (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2004; De la Harpe, 2010; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016), its adoption in my research is, to the best of my knowledge, the first of its kind in Kenya. I explain the core theoretical principles compatible with my research later in this chapter, after which I outline my application of insights from Black feminist scholarship from Africa and beyond as supplementary conceptual tools essential to understanding the nuanced experiences of Kenyan women (of Black ethnicity) affected by IPV. Prior to this, however, it is essential to recount briefly how these theoretical approaches and research interests were informed by my professional experiences which began almost six years ago.

1.1. GENESIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My interest in this area of study was rooted in my career as an IPV researcher in Rwanda between the years of 2015 and 2017. Rwanda is a country whose name is familiar to many in Africa and beyond mainly as a result of the horrific genocidal events that led to the mass slaughter of more than half a million Tutsis between the months of April and July 1994. This notwithstanding, Rwanda has in recent years distinguished itself from the predominantly patriarchal SSA nations, following its remarkable efforts to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, the results of which have captured the attention of many on a global scale. The longer I immersed myself in the Rwandan culture, the quicker I became aware that the country's vested interest in promoting the rights of women and girls was far from being merely rhetorical.

Intellectually, the focus of my Master's research on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, from 2011 to 2012, deepened my understanding of Rwanda's commitment to mainstreaming gender across matters pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women. When I relocated to the country in 2015 to work for a leading international organisation, the strong political will I witnessed in my interactions with various government officials was impressive. However, it was the genuine dedication of the influential women and men at the grassroots that made a lasting impression on me. Some of these professional relationships quickly became personal and I could sense the authenticity of the passion that my Rwandan "mothers", "fathers", "sisters" and "brothers" felt to improve the lives of disadvantaged womenfolk affected by the various manifestations of SGBV.

At the heart of the project in which I was involved was the goal to progressively transform the prevailing cultural narratives in which male IPV against women was legitimised, through an

ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) that was targeted especially at families and communities on one hand, as well as leaders at the grassroots level and policy-makers on the other. This was not a project in which men were side-lined from so-called "women's issues" but, in agreement with the government and local partners, one in which it was acknowledged how integral male allies were in combating the oppression of women in domestic settings. Implicit in the message conveyed by campaigns for behaviour change launched across communities, was the awareness that "language" and "talk" are active ingredients in establishing gendered truth claims, most of which originate from traditional African ideals and social practices.

Discursive alternatives were introduced, for instance, through creative edutainment approaches designed for the Rwandan context, to end or prevent the oppression of women by male intimate partners in domestic settings. Simply put, the aim of these initiatives was to bring gender equality discourses to the fore, which are commonly marginalised in the male dominated SSA region. I did not see this five-year long project to completion, but later I began to wonder whether the circumstances of the couples and communities affected by IPV changed for the better as a result of their exposure to non-salient ideals of governing relational practices between men and women. I particularly thought of the women, and the extent to which their subjectivities or ways of being a woman deviated from pervading assumptions that rendered them subservient to men.

Although I had no knowledge of communities exposed to similar projects in Kenya at the time, I became increasingly interested in exploring the mainstream gender discourses permeating the country and whether women in IPV contexts subvert or negotiate them in one way or another. I was of the view that investigating the centrality of "common-sense" notions in shaping the experiences of women would be essential to advancing programmes and policies such as those in Rwanda and, thus, a crucial academic undertaking in an area where the wealth of IPV knowledge was yet to be explored extensively (Gillum *et al.*, 2016). The more I revisited the limited feminist post-structuralism publications about IPV in SSA, (most of which, if not all, were from South Africa - as mentioned earlier), the more I also became concerned about the need to address the theoretical gap. I highlight these publications and related papers in detail in the literature review section of the thesis (see Chapter Three). But briefly, these studies investigate South African women's narratives of IPV and how prevailing gender discourses were central to shaping their negative experiences. Adopting feminist post-structuralism

insights, the scholars identified specific gender discourses elicited in the accounts of their participants and how their samples conformed to or challenged hegemonic gender narratives.

Upon reading a thought-provoking academic article that I came across during my time in Rwanda, titled "Women's responses to intimate partner violence in Rwanda: Rethinking agency in constrained social contexts" by Mannell *et al.* (2015), I became particularly interested in using women's responses and behaviours towards IPV as a basis of analysing how hegemonic gender discourses operate in Kenya. As I continued immersing myself in this vast and complex literature on women's behaviours, I soon found it necessary to narrow my analytical scope to their personal responses to IPV. By "personal", I mean that I decided to focus my attention less on women's help-seeking behaviours and more on privatised approaches to the phenomenon. Even as I settled for this path however, I did acknowledge that both aspects warrant equal analytical attention to address the knowledge gap in Kenya. Yet, I conceded that compromising the help-seeking strategies/inter-personal responses enabled my investment in the personal, a decision that was also facilitated by logistical and financial challenges that restricted my efforts to return to the field to interview (in)formal sources of support for victims of IPV in Kenya.

My first impression of the study conducted in Rwanda by Mannell et al. mentioned earlier was its presentation of an unconventional reading of IPV-affected women in developing country settings such as SSA, where the phenomenon is normalised, and therefore makes leaving the relationship and/or seeking formal help unviable owing to socio-cultural, as well as economic and other structural limitations[1]. Instead of viewing such women as being "trapped" in their predicament, I found that these scholars appealed for a less restrictive conceptualising of women's "agency" or "empowerment". This is because women in SSA and other least developed countries are often subjected to demeaning labels (such as "vulnerable" or "powerless") when they fail to subscribe to Western conceptions of empowerment, often pre-determined by a woman's ability to seek formal support or leave the perpetrator. I realised further that Mannell *et al.* argued that such narrow perspectives of women not only: i) ignore

[1] Some of the key barriers to formal IPV support highlighted by Mannell *et al.* (2015) include mistrust of law enforcement, fear of potential community stigmatisation, limited knowledge and awareness of available options, tolerance of abusive conditions, fear of retaliatory abuse, economic dependence and emotional attachment to the perpetrator.

the socio-cultural, economic and historical hindrances to textbook prescriptions but also ii) undermine the fact that those who choose to stay with the male perpetrator *do not* passively await their fate but navigate the abusive environment in creative ways determined by their personal circumstances. I was briefly concerned that conceptualising women in this sense might result in under-stating the impact of IPV on their physical, emotional or financial well-being. However, having worked in international development for more than half a decade, I could not help but wonder whether adopting this non-traditional analysis of Kenyan women would make invaluable contributions to the predominantly Western-funded IPV, or women's empowerment programmes already infiltrating the continent.

It is against this backdrop that I was of the opinion that feminist perspectives by African and Black scholars from the West would further enhance the quality of my analysis of the women recruited to participate in my study. During these early stages of developing my research interests, I was concerned about the potential inadequacies that Euro-American feminist paradigms presented in understanding the realities of Kenyan women. However, I found that amalgamating different dimensions of feminism would be of possible benefit to my research because:

> It is a major challenge to contemporary feminism to reconcile the pressures for diversity and difference with those for integration and communality. We need to have a home in which everyone has a room of her own, but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation. (Kolawole, 1997: 13).

I will return to these discussions later (see Section 1.2.1), but I highlight this point at this stage to show that, throughout this thesis, the reader will find that besides Chris Weedon's post-structural feminism, I also apply insights from bell hooks [sic], Patricia Hill Collins, Awa Thiam, Mary Modupe Kolawole and others.

A summary of my study objectives and research questions would perhaps be expected at this juncture. However, I decided that these would be best articulated after presenting my theoretical frameworks. Thus, I now turn to explain post-structural feminism in detail and then demonstrate how its core principles correlate with the Black feminist insights compatible with my study.

1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POST-STRUCTURAL FEMINISM

The foundation of post-structuralism was developed from the theoretical influences of Ferdinand de Saussure, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, among others. The common denominator of the various tenets of the theory is the conceptualising of language as constitutive of meaning (Weedon, 1997). In this context, "meaning" denotes how people view their subjectivity, which is defined as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997: 32). Yet, not all post-structuralists agree on *how* meaning is produced:

> Psycho-analytic forms of poststructuralism look to a fixed psycho-sexual order; deconstruction looks to the relationship between texts; and Foucauldian theory which is arguably of most interest to feminists, looks to historically specific discursive relations and social practices. (Weedon, 1997: 22).

Underpinning my research is the latter element of the production of meaning, which Chris Weedon, in her ground-breaking book, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* developed and called "feminist poststructuralism" (1997:20). From a gender perspective, according to the theory, subjectivity, or a person's sense of femininity or masculinity, is regarded as being socially produced by the discourses available in a social context at a particular time. Discourses are referred to as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 54). They are embedded in social institutions, exist in written and oral forms and manifest in our daily social practices (Weedon, 1997). According to the theory, power relations are inscribed within discourses and it is through dominant discourses of male power over women that a woman, for instance, might acquire an understanding of how to behave in a socially acceptable manner. It is through these discourses that she might learn that it is "right" to acquiesce to male power and "wrong" to assert her views to her husband or male partner. The dominant discourses in this instance become what Weedon refers to as "common-sense knowledge" in that its social power stems from its claim to be "natural, obvious and therefore true" (1997:74) that women are subordinate to men. Prevailing discourses therefore endorse single explanatory frameworks and offer limited space

for power inequalities to be contested. The implications for women's perception of IPV are adverse, as Weedon articulates:

> The way in which a woman experiences and responds to domestic violence will depend on the ways of understanding it…. This will involve her…conceptions of femininity and her beliefs about masculinity and family life. If she sees men as naturally violent or herself as provoking violence, then she is unlikely to see it as an unacceptable exercise of illegitimate power which cannot be tolerated. If she sees masculinity and femininity as natural, fixed and not open to change, then domestic violence will be a personal issue which is not a question of politics at all. (1997:74).

Fortunately, however, feminist poststructuralism challenges the view that a woman's subjectivity is monolithic. This is because of the existence of *competing* discourses which might offer discursive positions that reproduce or contest prevailing gender power inequalities, given the social and historical context (Weedon, 1997). Taking the above quote into consideration, post-structural feminism would thus be interested in examining how the woman's "traditional" femininity is discursively validated and also how she might contest the purported naturalness of her relegated position in the relationship. In this sense, the theory "opens [her] up to political change" (Weedon, 1997: 79). Viewing her gender subjectivity in its plurality, incoherence and proneness to reconstitution accommodates the possibility of examining her conformity to alternative mode(s) of femininity that break with conventional gender ideals. This is articulated in the following statement:

> Analysing subjectivity as positions in discourse allows for the person to be conceptualised historically, as changing over time and in different contexts. It also advances the idea of people having multiple subjectivities; since various subject positions are available to a given individual at any given moment, she or he may adopt different positions simultaneously, and display contradictions as a result of this. (Mama, 1995: 99).

That discourses compete implies that not all discourses in a given historical, social and cultural context are equal in weight and influence. They are "constantly vying for status and power [where] the site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual [who] is an active but not [a] sovereign protagonist" (Weedon, 1997: 40). Hence, while the domestically abused

woman in Weedon's assertion might be a by-product and not the "sovereign protagonist" behind the constitution of her subjectivity, in feminist poststructuralism, she is viewed as being "active" or capable of (dis)affiliating herself with dominant discourses of male power over women. In other words, the woman "does not control the overall direction of the history but is able to choose among the discourses and practices available to [her] and to use them creatively" (Jones, 2004: 23-24). Feminist post-structuralism, while keen on observing how dominant discourses regulate the woman's sense of self, is thus also interested in the way she exercises some level of agency in (re)forming her subjectivity. Yet, her accessibility to, and subsequent uptake of discourses that are antithetical to male hegemony (that is, feminist discourses) might not be as simple or straightforward. This is because her conformity to counter-ideals might be perceived by her spouse/partner (or others subscribing to the gender status quo) as a threat to prevailing regimes of truth. Even when a woman's choice to conform to another version of femininity is limited, Weedon (1997) argues that resistance in this sense is still possible as long as she is aware of existing marginal discourses and the fluidity of her feminine subjectivity.

It is also postulated in the theory that individual resistance to dominant discourses does not imply societal transformation because collective effort in challenging oppressive practices embedded in social structures (such as the familial, religious and legal entities) is required for patriarchal influences to be subverted or challenged effectively on a wider scale (Weedon, 1997). Recalling that an individual is not a "sovereign protagonist", a woman's isolated efforts in subverting normative standards therefore do not have an impact on social change significantly *per se*. This is because "social institutions … are the site of discursive conflict over how [her] subjectivit[y] and social relations should be constituted" (Weedon, 1997: 107). In other words, if a feminist discourse is considered to be marginal in a certain context, it is likely to increasingly garner social popularity when there is collaborative effort among parties interested in destabilising the balance of power.

In my research, I draw mildly on how some institutional sources (such as local women's empowerment groups) regulate or alter women's sense of selves in an IPV context. Of central concern to this thesis, however, is to examine their subversion (and reproduction of) dominant gender discourses at the *individual* and not the collective level. This is because, according to Weedon, interrogating discourses at the individual level is a crucial starting point:

> Resistance to the dominant [discourses] at the level of the individual subject is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge, or, where such alternatives already exist, of winning individuals over to these discourses and gradually increasing their social power. (1997:108).

1.2.1. The Black Feminist Insights Applied to this study and their Convergence with Feminist Post-Structuralism

In agreement with Weedon's last statement in the previous sub-section, African-American feminist, Patricia Hill Collins, suggests that action occurring in the "private [and] personal spaces of an individual woman's consciousness … is also personally empowering" (2009: 129) and warrants analytical attention. She examines the subordination of women at the margins of society, cautioning that the over-emphasis of their tragedies and neglect of the ways in which they negotiate oppression only accentuates their powerlessness and controlled positions. With reference to Black women in America, Hill Collins explains that:

> … while identifying patterns of victimization remains important, because it strips African American women of agency, focusing on victimization can function as a mechanism of control (1998: 928).

Referring to Black women in SSA, Nigerian scholar, Mary Modupe Kolawole, categorically expresses the need to "probe the unexplored areas of the African woman's audibility and visibility to assess the limits of her voicelessness" (1997: 3). Kolawole builds on the work of other SSA academics, such as Ogundipe-Leslie, to associate this scholarly research gap with the proliferation of simplistic images of African women by mainstream Western feminism. A similar argument was made earlier in the 1980s by Senegalese feminist, Awa Thiam (1986), who asserted that the time had come for the realities of African women to be exhumed and myths about their defencelessness to be dispelled.

Indeed, researchers on the African continent (see, for instance, Thiam, 1986; Kolawole, 1997; Green, 1999; Kanogo, 2005; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016) have found that women's (c)overt processes of challenging patriarchal oppression pre-date colonialism, a point which challenges prevailing assumptions that African women were devoid of any agency until the concept of feminism was introduced by the West. With respect to Kenya, historical analysis conducted by Kenyan scholar, Tabitha Kanogo (2005), shows that women's self-assertions and subversions

of oppression, such as those witnessed in their struggle for decolonisation, were not derived from the West. Kolawole similarly contends in reminiscence of her grandmother:

> For too long, the African women's reality has been inscribed from the West or by men. Yet, African women did not learn about self-assertion from the West. My maternal grandmother was a very strong personality, firm, strict and feared by both men and women. She took no nonsense from anybody, male or female …. She was the first symbol of firm self-assertion that I grew up to know …. [She] never heard about feminism … until her death" (1997: 10).

One way of avoiding the "mechanism of controls" (to quote Hill Collins above), which reinforce disempowering representations of women such as those of SSA descent experiencing abuse, is by acknowledging varied cultural definitions of IPV (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This is because IPV is interpreted differently across settings, and counter-reactions by women should always be observed against this backdrop to dilute pervading assumptions. This assertion, however, is not without the acknowledgment of the intersecting influences of power structures as Sokoloff and Dupont explain below:

> Although culture is crucial to understanding and combating [IPV], we cannot rest on simplistic notions of culture [but] address how different communities' cultural experiences of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, heterosexism, and the like (2005: 45).

bell hooks (1989) was one of the first to criticise the failure of White, middle-class, first-wave feminists to recognise the multi-faceted subordination encountered by Black women. Challenging the homogenising of women's experiences and denouncing the primacy of gender in explaining violence against women, hooks cautioned that "racism abounds in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries" (1989: 3). In response to this, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term "intersectionality" to challenge mainstream feminists' regard of race and gender as "mutually exclusive terrains" rather than as interlocking dimensions of power that structure the lives of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242).

While the exclusion of race was the propellant for developing intersectional analysis, feminist scholars, over the years, have considered other overlapping power vectors (namely, class, age,

sexuality, religion and so forth) in their evaluation of Black women's experiences of subordination. Hill Collins asserts that insights grounded on hooks' and Crenshaw's work has transnational applicability and should not always be snubbed by African feminists as "White feminism in black face" while, of course, acknowledging that intersecting points of oppression are differentially prioritised across geographical contexts (2009: 252). With the exception of pre- and post-apartheid South Africa, race for example, might not necessarily be considered a salient indicator of subordination in some SSA countries such as Kenya. That racial discrimination is less conspicuous in most of Africa is explained by Nigerian-British feminist, Amina Mama below:

> Few Africans spend much time consciously 'being black', not so much out of naivety but because this is redundant when they live in a world in which everyone[2] is black. When black people from the Americas go about proclaiming their blackness (or African-ness) on their pilgrimages to the continent, they tend to arouse bafflement or puzzlement among their African brothers and sisters. (1995: 134).

African feminist scholars appear to be concerned about the transnational relevance of Black feminism according to an extensive review conducted by Kolawole (1997). Kolawole draws from previous work to critique Western feminism in general (which includes insights from Western Black scholars) arguing its incompatibility with Africa in that it is too anti-men and anti-family for a context where women predominantly value wifehood and motherhood and do not necessarily view these or domesticity as a liability. A significant part of Kolawole's analysis is circumspect of theories that are open to non-traditional family structures, problematising that alternative arrangements are largely responsible for social vices in contemporary society. She refers to Ama Ata Aidoo for instance, to elaborate:

> Feminism. You know how we feel about that embarrassing western philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African homes (Aidoo, 1989: n.p., cited in Kolawole, 1997: 11).

[2] As most know it however, not everyone in Africa is Black.

Additionally, Kolawole references the work of other critics, such as Chikwenye Okonjo (1985), to highlight their opposition to integrating Western feminist insights into African women's issues and their call for an "unadulterated" theory, specific to African women's oppressions, self-assertions and self-consciousness, which still acknowledges overlapping influences of disadvantage (gender, race, class and so on). It appears from Kolawole's review that this set of scholars call somewhat for intersectionality in Black African face. Their cautious adoption of the term "feminism" or "Black feminism", by virtue of its Western origin, is also not surprising (Kolawole, 1997). Preferring the concept of "Stiwanism", Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), for example, joins a series of African women scholars who are developing terminologies (for instance, "Womanism", "Africana Womanism" and so forth) that specifically denote African women's struggles, self-consciousness and self-determinism in positive cultural ways.

Kolawole (1997) has provided an extensive analysis of the need for an alternative terminology and theory that is adequately representative of women of African descent but engaging in the above debates is beyond the scope of my work. However, I do emphasise, that my study is a "black woman-centred piece of work" (Mama, 1995: 7) in which I apply insights from Black African *and* Black Western feminist scholars, where relevant. I agree with Thiam that a Black woman's struggle, "whether she is from the West Indies, America or Africa … is of a different nature from that of her White sister" (1986: 53-54). The veracity of these claims has been substantiated over decades and, while Black Western scholars, such as Hill Collins, bell hooks, Mama and others, markedly speak from an African American or Black British perspective in their work, I argue that isolating their insights in their totality is potentially more of a liability than an asset to my study. In reference to Amina Mama's (1995) path-finding contributions in *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity* for example, Southern African scholars De la Rey and Mugabane note that:

> [Mama's work] represents a critical intellectual intervention in that it generates its theory of the lived experience of black women from a variety of different locations …. Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity brings to the fore the issues of black women … that exist across geographical, ethnic, and national boundaries. Although much of her work is concerned with black British women, the theoretical concerns which come out of the work have direct relevance to women from a variety of different social locations (1997: 18).

I argue further that the insights by Black and African feminists presented in this chapter challenge the very reductive "common-sense" knowledge or rigid outlook on women that post-structural feminism censures. For example, I have shown that Hill Collins cautions against the over-representing of Black women in disadvantaged situations as victims, as this "can function as a mechanism of control" (1998: 928). I have also presented Kolawole's call for analyses that "probe the unexplored areas of the African woman's audibility and visibility to assess the limits of her voicelessness" (1997: 3). In a similar manner, feminist post-structuralism is a suitable conceptual proposition in that its adherents also appeal against single explanatory frameworks to viewing women. Weedon's understanding of female subjectivity as being fluid and not fixed guarantees that "the range of ways of being a woman … is extremely wide" (1997: 83) and thereby theoretically accommodates the exploration of variegated and contradictory manifestations of women's behaviours in the capricious IPV climate. Weedon's theory, however, is White-centric and, while she acknowledges the importance of examining how gender discourses interact with race, class and other axes of difference, she does not provide much theoretical insight in relation to Black women (and other women of colour) in Africa and beyond.

However, in her book, *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity*, Mama (1995) addresses this gap by combining feminist post-structuralism and intersectional analysis to interrogate the discursive (re)construction of Black British women's subjectivities. To narrow this schism further, Mama recounts that the vehement opposition of a unitary Black female subject by activists and intellectuals in the early 1990s was "not just as a result of black and non-western feminist interventions but also [as a result of] an influence of post-structural thought" (1995: 13). For clarity, Mama does deploy other analytical tools, such as psycho-dynamic theory, but more relevant to my research, is that her conceptualising of subjectivity and discourse is largely informed by Weedon.

To African scholars such as De la Rey and Mugabane, Mama's amalgamated approach contributes to the body of literature in which unbalanced arguments "bemoaning the fate of black women as oppressed objects" are dismissed, as it permits the simultaneous interrogation of discourses, subjectivity, gender and race (1997: 19). In focusing on Black identity politics in the context of historical and personal experiences of racism, Mama's analysis, by implication, was more interested in identifying how *racial discourses* of conformity and resistance were manifested in Black British women's narratives. She primarily identifies two

types of racial discourses, namely, "colonialist integrationist" and "black radical" discourses – which she associates with adherence and subversion to grand racial narratives respectively. Notwithstanding, she encourages that "a similar analysis could be carried out on other discourses and subjectivities, for example on *gendered discourses on femininity or masculinity* [my emphasis]" (Mama 1995: 133-134). Therefore, in my study, I follow this recommendation and, while race features less prominently (by virtue of the geographical context as stated earlier), other intersecting components, such as class, religion and age, are sites of interest with respect to how women respond to IPV.

There is evidence of a growing body of research in Kenya that ground-breakingly demonstrates how socially and culturally gendered discourses reproduce well-known stereotypes on one hand, and how these taken-for-granted assumptions are distorted by contemporary feminine representations on the other. Yet, work that is specific to IPV appears to be lacking. Spronk (2012), for instance, explores sexual practices among young middle-class Kenyans as a context in which to observe their (dis)conformity to common-sense scripts of masculinity and femininity. Ligaga (2020: 6) on the other hand, uses digital media as a basis for investigating Kenyan women's ability to "weave into and out of discourses of acceptable and desired femininities". Ligaga's analysis is also invaluable because it signals the influence of hegemonic discourses of male power over women in normalising violence against women in Kenya. In my research, I build on this growing evidence by basing its work specifically on narratives centred on women's responses to IPV.

With my research motivations and conceptual frameworks richly laid out, I now provide an overview of the study objectives and research questions in the following section.

1.3. SUMMARY OF THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The first aim of this research is to explore how Kenyan women respond to IPV and the ways in which these behaviours reproduce or challenge gender inequalities in the household. By responses, I remind the reader that my thesis seeks to predominately focus on women's personal avenues of managing IPV and thus, less so on their help-seeking behaviours for reasons stated previously in Section 1.1. However, the reader will find that I refer to the latter in some areas in order to support the content in my data chapters.

The second research goal is inter-linked with the first in that my aim is to use post-structural feminist theory to identify the types of dominant gender discourses informing responses that subscribe to traditional femininity on one hand, and on the other, challenge the authenticity of male hegemony in the household. My goal to identify and make distinctions between the gender discourses informing women's accounts of IPV is comparable with the manner in which Mama (1995) identified the "colonialist integrationist" and "black radical" discourses to understand better how black femininities were discursively formulated at the intersection of race and gender. I argue that identifying and understanding how specific gender discourses operate would go a long way in equipping researchers and practitioners with additional resources to tackle deep-rooted values engrained in common-sense narratives. This is especially crucial in Kenya where a dearth of qualitative IPV research is evident (Gillum *et al.*, 2016) on one hand, and studies on the role of socio-cultural discourses in influencing women's experiences of IPV are wanting on another.

Bograd (1999: 276) argues that attending to intersecting components of oppression:

> … color the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequence are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained.

Thus, constituting the third aim of my study is my interest in observing how overlapping axes of disadvantage potentially influence women's reactions to IPV. I engage both post-structural and Black/African feminism insights outlined in the previous section in observing the interplay between women's socio-economic status, age hierarchies and other facets of subordination. By deploying both perspectives, I intend to interrogate monolithic assumptions about women facing IPV that have been often propagated in mainstream literature.

The specific research questions, therefore, are as follows:

1. How do Kenyan women respond to IPV and to what extent do their responses sustain or challenge gender power dynamics in the household?
2. What types of dominant gender discourses are elicited in these narratives and in what ways are they subverted?
3. How do overlapping axes of disadvantage contribute to women's behaviours in an IPV context?

1.4. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMINOLOGIES USED IN THIS STUDY

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Various terminologies have been used to define violence against women at home. These include but are not limited to "domestic violence", "domestic abuse", "violence against women", "wife battering", "gender-based violence". The term "domestic violence" in Kenya legally encompasses forms of violence against any member of the family in accordance with the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act 2015 (see Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2015). Colloquially, the term is predominantly drawn upon by the populace to refer to violence (mostly physical) between heterosexual couples. However, I will be guided in my study by the specificity and multi-faceted connotations of the term "intimate partner violence" (IPV). I rely on the definition of IPV by the WHO as:

> … behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. (2010: 11).

The WHO defines physical, sexual, psychological harm and controlling behaviours as follows:

- Examples of acts of **physical IPV** according to the organisation include "slapping, hitting, kicking and beating" (2012: 1).
- **Sexual IPV** is defined as "forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion" (2012: 1). I use this term interchangeably with "marital rape" where relevant.
- **Emotional or psychological forms of IPV** are exemplified by acts such as "insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation" (2012: 1). I also draw on the term "verbal IPV" where applicable.
- **Controlling behaviours** mean "isolating person from family and friends, monitoring their movements, and restricting financial resources, employment, education or medical care" (2012: 1). I apply the term "economic IPV" to refer to any form of financial control or restriction on household revenue by a partner/husband.

For convenience, sometimes I use the terms "violence" or "abuse" interchangeably with "IPV" throughout this thesis to refer to the above holistic definition.

Marriage: In my study, I rely on the 2014 Marriage Act of Kenya's definition of the term as a monogamous or polygamous, voluntary union between a man and a woman registered in accord with the rites of a religious or customary ceremony as well as a civil marriage (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2014).

Cohabit: In line with the 2014 Marriage Act of Kenya, this term means "to live in an arrangement in which an unmarried couple lives together in a long-term relationship that resembles a marriage" (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2014: 36). As such, I use "cohabit" interchangeably with the term "marriage-like" relationships where relevant.

Husband/spouse: I use these terms to refer to a man who is legally married to a woman according to the definition of marriage in the 2014 Marriage Act.

(Male) partner: I use this term to refer to a man who is cohabiting with a woman.

Responses to IPV: I apply the umbrella term "responses" in this thesis to mean women's (re)actions, attitudes, behaviours or coping strategies in an IPV context, where "coping strategies" are not simplistically understood to be women's ways of accommodating mistreatment, as Green (1999:195) explains:

> [Women's coping responses to IPV] are actions taken to avoid or control distress. [They] are active, constructive adaptations to experiences of abuse. The responses of any particular woman will depend on how she defines her experience, the context within which it occurs and the resources which are available to her at the time and subsequently.

Feminist/m: I acknowledge that the term is highly controversial to some gender scholars in Africa. I have already outlined that some identify as "Womanists" or "Africana Womanists" rather than "Black Feminists" or "Feminists" (see Kolawole, 1997). For purposes of convenience, I use the terms "Black Feminists in Africa" or "Black Feminists in the West" or simply, "Black/African Feminists/-ism" to make distinctions between scholars from Africa or beyond.

Discourse: In my research, I regard discourse to be the vehicle by which concepts of masculinity and femininity are (re)produced or thwarted in everyday talk, language, narratives or conversations (Weedon, 1997). According to Deshong (2010), conceptualising gender as discourse is not mutually exclusive to other feminist perspectives on gender as a social

construct (Barriteau, 2001) or gender as performative (Butler, 2000; 2004) and these three perspectives correlate in their over-arching critique of biological determinism. The terms "dominant", "hegemonic", "prevailing" or "salient" are the umbrella terms I often use to denote the easily accessible gender discourses that promote male super-ordination and female subordination in conjugal relationships. Conversely, the less popular gender discourses are in most cases characterised by the phrases "marginalised", "non-dominant" or "feminist" as they challenge, subvert or threaten the authenticity of male power over women.

Patriarchy: This concept has been made problematic and, according to Kalunta-Crumpton, "has lost its popularity in contemporary feminist writings due to the critique that it insinuates a false universalism" (2017: 7). In my study, I draw on Hunnicutt's (2009) conception of "varieties of patriarchy" to acknowledge the variegated structural and ideological manifestations of male domination and female domination across space, time and material contexts. Hunnicutt also conceptualises patriarchy as an ideology that is "so pervasive it is hard to "see" unless the lens is calibrated to gauge it" (2009: 556). This aspect is harmonious with a study such as the current one in which the "commonsensical", "natural", subconscious and, hence, invisible forms that gendered discourses take are appreciated.

Lastly, the compatibility of Hunnicutt's concept with the principles of post-structural feminism and Black/African feminism adopted in my study should not be under-stated. As repeated in this thesis so far, insights from both frameworks strive to deviate from essentialised and rigid concepts of women in oppressive conditions. Likewise, Hunnicutt insists that "there are labyrinths of power dynamics in patriarchal systems" and, because of this, "violence against women cannot be understood as a simple formula of "oppressor and oppressed" since "both men and women wield *varying* [my emphasis] types and amounts of power" (2009: 555).

Sub-Saharan Africa – I use this term interchangeably with "Africa".

1.5. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In this first chapter of this thesis, I have outlined the motivations and aims of my study as well as the theoretical perspectives from which women's narratives of IPV will be examined. In **Chapter Two**, I outline the historical and cultural processes through which modern-day gender relations in Kenya within marriage and marriage-like settings have been informed. I do this by reviewing the pre-colonial and colonial influences on the constructions of femininities

which is pertinent to understanding women's undervalued position in relation to men in contemporary Kenya. In other words, I show how the patriarchal order stretching from indigenous to colonial and post-colonial societies still prevail and how modern-day women who fight against the oppressive system continue to do so with as much difficulty as was the case with their historical counterparts. The discussions presented in this chapter also demonstrate how macro-level perceptions of women in Kenya have a bearing on unbalanced relational dynamics in micro/domestic spaces.

Chapter Three comprises of two main sections, in the first of which I review the post-structural feminism literature that explores women's understanding of their experiences of IPV in relation to the particular hegemonic gender discourses available in their settings. In other words, the empirical studies I present in this section predominately examine how women's behaviours are configured by "common-sense" ways of being a woman in a turbulent relationship, notions of which have implications for IPV exposure. In contrast, in the second section of this chapter, I examine the available literature that disputes with mainstream notions about women, and critically evaluates the (c)overt mechanisms that women deploy to alleviate IPV. In **Chapter Four**, I discuss the feminist methodological principles compatible with my work, the steps I took to access the field, the sampling procedures I implemented, the ethical considerations that guided my research, my reflexivity and positionality in relation to that of the participants and the processes I conducted to analyse my data.

In Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, I present the key findings drawn from the fieldwork. In **Chapter Five** and **Six,** I focus on women's conformity to dominant discourses and how these actions simultaneously exposed them to, and insulated them from, further IPV. I investigate these narratives in relation to the multi-linked difficulties that caused them to behave the way they did in spite of their turbulent relationships. In **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**, I explore women's disconformity to dominant discourses. In the discussions presented in these chapters, I demonstrate how these reactions dispel essentialist notions about SSA women as being passive recipients of IPV. However, I endeavour to present how behaviours antagonistic to the status quo were detrimental to women's physical, sexual, financial and emotional well-being. I provide a summary of the key findings and contributions of the thesis in **Chapter Nine** and conclude the chapter with my recommendations for future research, policy and programmatic work on IPV in Kenya and SSA.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF GENDER RELATIONS IN KENYA FROM PRE-COLONIAL TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Gender relations are articulated differently in different contexts. The manner in which men and women treat, or are expected to treat one another, in one society might not be replicated in another. Conceptualising gender relations this way frees the researcher from essentialist and restricted ways of thinking; an aspect that is particularly crucial when engaging in discussions about a context as diverse as Africa, which is often subject to sweeping homogenisation. Although past and present gendered commonalities exist between Kenya, its East African neighbours and other SSA nations, avoiding a totalising, homogenising or essentialist perspective is crucial for rigorous and localised analysis.

For this reason, the content of this chapter is largely specific to the Kenyan context, and presenting it chronologically facilitates an exploration of the gender configurations in indigenous, colonial and post-colonial societies. Women's experiences of gender violence cannot be understood in a vacuum and this chapter serves to examine how their interactions with men in contemporary society have been significantly influenced by historical elements. The past, therefore, must be probed to understand the present. In tracing the macro and micro-level patterns of the phenomenon in historical and contemporary eras, the chapter explores the modes in which the gender status quo has been preserved in publicised and privatised spaces so that Kenyan women's domination by men continues to be largely construed as "natural, obvious and therefore true" (Weedon, 1997: 74). The intent of the historical, political, anecdotal and media literature presented here is to illustrate how gender violence in Kenya – irrespective of past and present legal policies against gender inequality – continues to thrive on account of the widely sanctioned knowledge frames that are heavily skewed in favour of men. The chapter later narrows its lens by making specific references to the sparsely available contemporary data on IPV in Kenya, and even here, women's disproportionate exposure to abuse by intimate partners confirms the nation's continued popularisation of so-called "commonsensical" discourses. Pockets of data evidencing women's growing resistance to hegemonic discourses in conjugal settings are also presented - an exercise that is equally

integral to engaging participants' narratives of (dis)association to the prevailing gendered script in later chapters (5,6,7 and 8).

Crucial to mention at this point, however, is that the scholarship presented here largely presents globalised rather than nuanced ethnic manifestations of gendered violence in Kenya. Ethnicity continues to be a highly debated subject in Kenya even years after the widely publicised 2007 post-election upheavals, which saw thousands killed and displaced along tribal lines. In addition to the ongoing sensitivities around this issue, investigating the intricacies of cultural practices surrounding male power over women within each of the 44 existing tribes presents an added layer of complexity that is beyond the scope of my research. In reference to IPV research in particular, even Kimuna *et al.* (2018) concur that understanding ethnic differences alongside this phenomenon is both a challenging and controversial enterprise. Even so, this type of research should not be discouraged because exploring IPV experiences of Kenyan women within ethnic boundaries is still necessary for the stimulation of ethnic-sensitive interventions and policies among identified high-risk groups.

2.2. GENDER RELATIONS IN THE PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL PERIODS IN KENYA

The indigenous family structure in Kenya was deeply gendered and characterised by a distinct division of roles. Subsistence farming was the mainstay of the pre-colonial economy where men stewarded communal land, grew crops for economic purposes and advised on how surplus agricultural produce would be used in the home (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2014). Women's societal status, on the other hand, was mainly tied to childbearing and crop production for family consumption (Njue *et al.*, 2014). Marital unions were considered to be contractual agreements between the kinship groups of the prospective couples once the full or partial bride-wealth was settled by the man's extended family (Were, 1967, cited in Kimuna & Djamba, 2008; Kanogo, 2005). Men had the liberty to be monogamous or polygamous (Gage-Brandon *et al.*, 1994, cited in Njue *et al.*, 2014) and as the heads of households and potential heads of clans, they ensured effective oversight of customary provisions by enacting punitive measures against those (mostly women) who transgressed normative boundaries (see Kanogo, 2005). Men's ascendant position in traditional Kenyan communities was emphasised from childhood, as male children were seen to be preservers of the family line (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2007). In some indigenous communities for example, the

announcement of a new-born male child was marked by five ululations while that of a baby girl was limited to four (Ochwada, 1997).

Girls were recognised for their childbearing capabilities and wealth generation through bride-wealth when they came of marital age (Njue *et al.*, 2007). While one of the primary functions of bride-wealth payment was to compensate the bride's family for the loss of household labour, some have argued that its transactional undertones relegated the girl-child to being an investment or "much like a stock or bond that will pay for itself when it reaches maturity" (Njue *et al.*, 2007: 57). It was through this customary practice that girls were eventually devalued to male property status as wives (Kimuna & Djamba, 2008; Njue *et al.*, 2014). Kimuna and Djamba (2008) suggest that the payment of bride-wealth justified men's unconditional access to wives' bodies for sexual and reproductive purposes. In one community, a groom's sexual prowess was measured against his ability to cause pain to the new bride during intercourse which was evaluated by the latter's gait in the morning after the wedding night (Green, 1999). The following quote from an early study carries undertones of the social legitimisation of marital rape in indigenous Kenyan communities, as men who missed the perceived mark in intimate matters were mercilessly taunted by the public:

> You are not strong, you can't do anything to our daughter. When you slept with her you didn't do it like a man. You have a small penis which can do nothing. You should grab our daughter and she should be hurt and scream – then you're a man. (Green, 1999: 35).

Apart from aggressive sexual contests, the payment of bride-wealth further accentuated men's ownership of women as it conferred on them the right to "discipline" the latter physically for perceived infractions (such as failure to render respect to the husband, speaking back at or disobeying him), but not to the extent where she was incapacitated and unable to perform domestic duties (Green, 1999; Kameri-Mbote, 2000; Cornwall, 2001; Lovett, 2001). If the man contravened these mores, a woman had the right to return to her natal home or settle the conflict at the community level, although the prevailing trend was for elders to arbitrate spousal discord to avoid marital dissolution at all costs (Kameri-Mbote, 2000). As a pre-emptive measure, women were trained by female elders to be "good" wives as soon as they were pubescent. Kenyan historian, Tabitha Kanogo, highlights the role of older women (*pim*) within the Luo community in initiating Kenyan girls to essentialist womanhood as follows:

> The *pim* instructed girls concerning their sexuality. *Pim* taught the girls to be tolerant of their future spouses and in-laws during domestic problems. She taught them about responsibilities of the adult woman, and she taught them about the respect due husbands in the marriage. *Pim* instructed the girls to refrain from sexual relations outside marriage. A successful union was perceived as being marked from the very beginning when a young woman was found to be a virgin. (2005: 207).

Young indigenous women were thus conditioned from an early age to acquiesce to male authority, preserve their chastity, and remain tolerant of an abusive marital climate. In the event that the marriage did not work, the woman's family was required to return the bride-wealth except for the value required to sustain the children's well-being (Ellsberg *et al.,* 2001, cited in Kimuna & Djamba, 2008). Implicit in the women's return of the bride-wealth was her culpability for the failed marriage. Reinforcing women's blameworthiness in marital dissolution, Kanogo remarks about the social stigma that was attached to divorcées below:

> The divorced woman remained a social embarrassment to her family. At death, she would be buried away from other relatives, at the periphery of the family property (2005:52).

This indicates the extent to which marital life was venerated in traditional society, as spinsters were similarly marginalised, and their societal devaluation was marked by the establishment of their houses outside the natal homestead (Kanogo, 2005). Kanogo explains that the practice of pawning or pledging women and girls to more affluent neighbouring tribes, in times of famine in exchange for sustenance and livestock, was commonplace in the pre-colonial Kenyan setting. The hope was that these girls and women would be returned to their original homesteads upon cessation of the natural calamity. While such quasi-marital arrangements ensured the survival of impoverished communities pending economic recovery, Kanogo asserts that the practice was another vehicle for male unilateral control over female bodies. This is because the head of the adoptive household had the liberty to copulate with, or even marry, women under his protection. In the absence of familiar social networks on foreign territory, pawned women and girls had limited power to object to their patron's wishes. As in the case of non-pawned wives who also had limited sexual power, as explained above, this example also illustrates the traditional Kenyan society's subscription to the concept of the male sexual drive. Other means for controlling indigenous women's corporeality and sexuality included

early marriages, polygamy, widow (dis)inheritance, and clitoridectomy, among others. It is beyond the scope of my study to discuss these practices at length but, as shown so far, women in most, if not all, matters of life throughout traditional society were constantly under the control of men.

Based on the discussions so far, it is evident that the patriarchal ideology was already institutionalised before the British invasion in 1895. Ochwada, in his review of pre-colonial gender relations in Kenya, cautions that mainstream assumptions should be regarded circumspectly, for although "colonialism might have exacerbated bias in gender relations … it certainly, did not create the inequalities" (1997: 127). Arguably, the same applies to the rest of colonised Africa, according to Lewis:

> Neither gender oppression nor sexual taboos were invented by colonialism, and pre-colonial African societies exhibited numerous examples of repressive and coercive constructions of bodies and sexuality. (2011: 215).

In Kenya, Britain capitalised on the gender imbalances in the pre-colonial milieu to maximise gains through social, economic and political policies which had implications for reinforcing the patriarchal ideology (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2014). The ratification of male headship over women by the British common law (Kameri-Mbote, 2000; Njue *et al.*, 2014) meant that traditional rites concerning women's bodies were perpetuated, which had implications for sustaining their male property image. Male conjugal rights were legalised under colonialism, which disadvantaged women further in the failure to acknowledge marital rape as well as all forms of violence against women within and outside the household (Kameri-Mbote, 2000). Customary, Muslim, Hindu and Civil laws were recognised in the colonial legal system, but it was Christianity that mostly governed the ethos of the colonised population (Ochwada, 1997). Christian values interacted with urbanisation and the commercialisation of cash-crop production to disadvantage women greatly (Kilbride & Kilbride, 1990, cited in Njue *et al.*, 2014). The resulting privatisation of spousal affairs, stemming from the disintegration of community ties, augmented women's vulnerability to IPV (Kameri-Mbote, 2000). Colonial courts arbitrated matrimonial conflict, while others have argued that the traditional avenues of mediation were still active at this stage (Green, 1999; Kanogo, 2005).

In the colonial economic structure, women's access to land was tenuous and they were confined to rural living and subsistence farming while men worked on White settler farms to produce

cash-crops, as well as in the wider industrial economy (Ochwada, 1997; Kameri-Mbote, 2000; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Simiyu, 2018). The engagement of the men's workforce was attributed to their easy access to colonial education (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Simiyu, 2018). The education of girls was met with great opposition by community members, based on the argument that formal learning carried the risk of "'spoiling' good girls" (Truth, Justice & Reconciliation Commission, 2013: 39). The trending belief among locals was that the foreign education system socialised young women and girls into "deviant" femininities such as commercial sex work and disrespect for patriarchs and future husbands (Kanogo, 2005). Locals also feared that educating girls would reduce labour time at home, assimilate them into European culture and delay marriage and bride-wealth acquisition (Kanogo, 2005). British colonisers and missionaries leveraged these gender biases and urged African parents to send their sons rather than their daughters to schools (Ochwada, 1997).

Even when some girls eventually accessed colonial education, the syllabus offered to them was structured to model the stereotypical domestic woman. Mission schools coached young Kenyan girls to become ideal Christian wives for mission boys and while formal education was also provided (mainly reading the Bible and writing letters), the predominant focus was on domestic training courses or "Homecraft", subjects which included "Child Welfare", "Cooking", "Nutrition" and "Housewifery" (Kanogo, 2005: 205). It appeared as if the responsibilities of the older native women (*pim*) who prepared young women for marriage "was usurped by *bibi*, the White female mission[ary] in charge of mission girls" (Kanogo, 2005: 208). Paradoxically, the word "*bibi"* in Swahili means grandmother but the overall agenda of the *bibi*, whether European or African, was the same. The White *bibi*, similar to her Black counterpart, reinforced the female subordination/male super-ordination household dichotomy with the main difference being that the former reconfigured African women's femininities to mirror those of Victorian women. Dina Ligaga (2020), in her historical analysis of Kenyan women's subjectivities, observes that these emerging Victorian femininities marked a distinction between the educated and uneducated so that African mission girls were equipped exclusively to marry "civilised" male professionals who worked as teachers, accountants and clerks in urban centres. This marked another difference between the functions of the White and Black *bibi.*

Accordingly, male colonialists relied heavily on White women to transpose 19th century English notions of respectability onto indigenous women (Stoler, 1989, cited in Ligaga, 2020). Female protégées, for instance, were monitored constantly in mission schools to ensure

conformity to "good" womanhood. Kanogo (2005) explains that physical restrictions were imposed in mission milieus so that African girls were locked in dormitories at night to shield them from "heathen" cultures. Eventually, the evolving acceptance of the Victorian ideology made some African men send their wives to mission schools to study Domestic Science to acquire knowledge about Western domesticity (Kanogo, 2005). While Victorian femininity was a foreign concept, the qualities it underpinned were complementary to traditional African femininity by virtue of its call for female deference to men as Ligaga observes:

> The colonial government envisioned an educated African man who would be prepared for a white-collar job, and whose educated wife would be trained in domestic issues…. The idea of an educated African woman was central to [the colonial] developmental agenda of 'civilising' Africa…. [Victorian] virtues would help the African woman retain her traditional role, but also accommodate her in the new and evolving world in which she found herself. (2020: 57).

Persuading Africans to uphold "civilised" colonial values was not always an easy undertaking (Ligaga, 2020). The drastic social and economic changes (such as taxation, land alienation and urbanisation) introduced by the British were characterised by multi-faceted complexities that did not always yield seamless change in the colonial territories. For instance, not all women were able to access education, leading some to migrate to urban centres for economic gain as well as to escape the control of African patriarchs and colonial masters (White, 1990; Ochwada, 1997; Kanogo, 2005). This was not peculiar to Kenya, as women in other African colonial contexts such as Abeokuta (Nigeria) were similarly in active pursuit of economic independence, an aspect which stood at odds with the patriarchal system (Byfield, 2001). It was commonly said in colonial Buha (Western Tanzania) that a woman who refused to capitulate to the social order was "acting 'like a man'" (Lovett, 2001: 48). Ligaga regards this as a defective mode of subjectivity that contested traditional notions of womanhood or, in her words, "patriarchal femininities" framed within the indigenous and colonial dialectic (2020 :35). In her review, Ligaga observes that African women who embodied these transgressive femininities were economically and sexually independent relative to their rural counterparts with the former sustaining a "good-time girl" image. She views this as urban women's effort to negotiate patriarchal environments in a bid to repudiate reductionistic assumptions of African women in colonial settings.

Yet, Ligaga (2020) concomitantly acknowledges the deleterious impact that these explored versions of womanhood had on African women. Indeed, claiming new identities did not follow automatic erasure of derogatory stereotypes, such as "chattels", "dependent social victims" and "perpetual legal minors", in the sight of the patriarchal majority (Kanogo, 2005: 9). As one example, efforts to operationalise public disciplinary tactics, in some cases, involved the forceful repatriation of "unruly" women by male kin and those who refused to capitulate immediately were publicly beaten and stripped naked to enforce compliance (Kanogo, 2005; Mutongi, 2007, cited in Ligaga, 2020). That women were publicly disciplined in this manner not only accentuated their proprietary status, but also signalled the extent to which proponents of the patriarchal ideology went to limit women's economic freedom. There was seamless collaboration between authorities at the colonial, mission and indigenous levels to monitor women's sexualities and adherence to socio-cultural standards that sanctioned their confinement to domesticity and, hence, subordination to men (Kanogo, 2005).[3]

As I mentioned earlier, the domestic woman in rural environments was idealised by both Kenyans and British colonialists. Kanogo (2005) also documented that the mobility of Kenyan women was constrained, as colonial masters, in agreement with local administrators, restricted travel to urban centres to sell farm produce unless escorted or in possession of written or verbal consent from patriarchs (husbands, fathers, grandfathers or chiefs). The monitoring of women's geographical movements by British and Kenyan men "related to the control of women's productive and reproductive labour, female sexuality, bride-wealth acquisition and distribution, domestic and societal authority structures, gender relations, and social order" (Kanogo, 2005: 9). Kenyan women, similar to their other colonised African female counterparts encountered a double subordination; one subjecting them to White colonised males and another to the colonised African man (Thiam, 1986). Parpart, for example, observes these suppressive racial alliances in The Zambian Copperbelt:

> [Women] were portrayed as docile, obedient wives and daughters, committed to ensuring the wellbeing of their families and rural communities – a discourse propagated

[3] However, after extensive research on Kenya's colonial history, Kanogo (2005) highlights discrepant views showing that White settlers were simultaneously advocates for women's rights manifested in efforts to delegalize clitoridectomy and early child marriages.

> by rural patriarchs and accepted as the norm by colonial officials and missionaries enthralled with the notion of indirect rule….. all women were regarded as particularly susceptible to the corrupting influences of town life. The possibility that urban life would inspire women to throw off the constraints of rural life and enter a life of unbridled "wickedness" haunted the thinking of African and European leaders, particularly men…. To counter this possibility, colonial officials and rural patriarchs tried to limit women's access to town. African women had to get permission to travel from rural leaders, and they were often denied. Road blocks turned back those without the necessary papers. Once in town women were threatened with repatriation if they "misbehaved"… (2001:276).

Verbal forms of abuse were also meted out against African women who had migrated to urban areas. They were often insulted as home-wreckers and held accountable for "confusing" and tempting young male migrants into infidelity (Obbo, 1980, cited in Cornwall, 2002; Ligaga, 2020). These retaliatory measures perhaps explain why the Swahili derogatory term *"malaya"* (meaning whore) emerged in this era as a general reference to Kenyan women who relocated to urban areas (Ochwada, 1997). On the part of the British, the Victorian constructs of sexuality were imparted by reproving the sinful "whore" and venerating "Madonna-like" qualities through education and Judeo-Christian avenues (see Tamale, 2011c). Tamale explains that Christianity (and even Islam) influenced sexual politics to the point where the idealised Victorian sexuality stood in direct contrast to the often perceived primitive and unbridled African sexuality. Ultimately, colonial sexuality politics had implications for corporeal politics such that White female bodies became construed as "paragons of purity and beauty and deserving of love and affection", and Black female bodies as sites of lascivious and libidinous tendencies (Nzegwu, 2011: 255). African proponents of patriarchy inadvertently collaborated with the British to perpetuate these racialised sentiments in their disdain for "wicked" urban women and approval of rural women who, in their sight, epitomised the "Mother Africa" trope (Stratton, 1994: 39, cited in Ligaga, 2020: 29).

2.3. GENDER RELATIONS IN POST-COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY KENYA

Severely affected by British colonial rule, women joined men in the struggle to decolonise Kenya. Men at first were unwilling to share decision-making power during this period as women's involvement in nationalist struggles troubled traditional gender role arrangements (Ochwada, 1997). To counter their attempted exclusion, the first women's association (Mumbi Central Association) was formed and successfully saw women joining men in the battlefield with roles such as supplying weaponry and food to "ferocious and implacable fighters" (Majdalany, 1963: 60, cited in Presley, 1988: 505; Ochwada, 1997; Simiyu, 2018). Wambui Otieno is one notable example of a woman who supported the widely documented Mau Mau rebellion (Ligaga, 2020). Women's engagement in nationalist movements extended beyond the purview of conventional gender requirements and consequently, in some cases, they were marked by the colonialists as either victims or prostitutes. As being physical or psychological victims because of their alleged forcible recruitment into the Mau Mau or as having an "obsession" with a "misdirected hero-worship of nationalists"; and as prostitutes because they used their sexuality to lay "tender traps" for British soldiers to acquire ammunition (Presley, 1988: 505).

However, women's inclusion in the public domain was short-lived soon after Kenya gained independence in 1963 because Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's highly male dominated government paid lip-service to gender equality (Ochwada, 1997; Simiyu, 2018). Men's intentional devaluing of women's participation in the struggle for independence ensured the continuity of the patriarchal ideology in the newly liberated nation (Ochwada, 1997). In 1966 for instance, the Commission on the Law of Marriage and Divorce was established to revise the failure of the British common law to recognise marital rape and other forms of IPV (Ochwada, 1997; Kameri-Mbote, 2000). The Commission proposed a Bill which aimed to criminalise physical IPV against women, but this was rejected by the male-dominated parliamentarians who regarded wife "discipline" as "a traditional right of an African man" and "a matter within the private domain [that did not require] state intervention" (Kameri-Mbote, 2000: 4). The legitimisation of marital rape was also evident during Daniel arap Moi's presidency when Christian and Islamic leaders joined the patriarchal bandwagon to lobby against the public acknowledgement of private matters:

> The Bible is very clear on the issue. The woman's body belongs to her husband and the man's to his wife. In light of this, I fail to see how a husband could be charged with rape of his wife (cited in Green, 1999: 110-111).

An Imam was also quoted as saying that "there can be no rape between a husband and wife if they are lawfully wedded" (cited in Green, 1999: 111). Stella Nyanzi (2011) argues that Foucault's concept of governmentality can be applied to explain African sexualities. Governmentality is defined as a system through which human behaviour is regulated. Governments operationalise this process by formulating governable and co-operative citizenship to ensure adherence to policies and prescribed conduct. One way to reinforce this external regulation is through disciplinary institutions tasked to surveil citizens' conformity. Arguably, governmentality was at play in Jomo Kenyatta and arap Moi's administrations, during which the ideology of sex as a male purview was reinforced with legal and religious institutions serving as disciplinary instruments.

While the application of governmentality by Nyanzi (2011) is key to understanding African sexuality, I argue that this Foucauldian concept can be applied broadly to explain how the State regulates notions of African (wo)manhood outside sexual politics. Ligaga concurs with this holistic application as she views the "nation state as important for the formation of African subjectivities where individuals learn to become proper humans" (2020: 128). A case in point is former President Moi's use of his power and influence to promote notions of masculinity. Moi attributed to himself a title connoting a father image "*baba wa taifa"*, the translation of which being "father of the nation" almost bears similarity to his forerunner's acquisition of the title "*Mzee*" – a term used to convey respect to a man of authority – to regard himself as a father of a feminised nation (Musila, 2005, cited in Ligaga, 2020). This is explained further in the following quote:

> "[Moi's] embracing of a Nyayo philosophy that preached a rhetoric of love, peace and unity, signalled Christianity's permeation into important facets of Kenyan public life…. This, combined with his Kalenjin masculinity, allowed him to present himself as 'a benevolent, women and children-loving father who brooked no opposition to his rule over the nation of the patriarchal family'". (Akech, 2010: 606–608, cited in Ligaga, 2020: 64).

In a public speech, Moi endorsed the traditional African imagery which underpins the belief that "women are expected to be quiet when men speak, respectable by being respectful to men (especially to male leadership), good mothers of the nation and not to challenge authority in general" (Ebila, 2015: 146). Indeed, Moi was known to brook no opposition from anyone and especially women. The incarceration and public shaming of many "wilful" or "errant" female politicians, such as Wangari Maathai and Philomena Mutai who dared to challenge his administration, is documented extensively (Maathai, 2007; Ebila, 2015; Okemwa, 2016, cited in Ligaga, 2020). In this patriarchal society, women, or in local parlance *"akina mama"*, are viewed as preservers of nationhood and peace (Ligaga, 2020: 39) and Moi's remark above can be read as a means of promoting this monolithic female subjectivity that relies "on conventional knowledge and [leaves] little room for diversity and difference" (Ligaga, 2020: 10).

Such state-level surveillance originating from pre-independence institutions persists even in the post-Moi regime, where "deviant" *akina mamas* who push the boundaries of normativity remain punishable today. Examples of female contemporaries in the past decade abound. A case in point is former Nairobi Women representative Rachel Shebesh, who was publicly slapped by the then Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero when she sought an audience with him in support of council workers demanding formal pay (Ligaga, 2020). The viral video sparked a series of public reactions with a significant number conspicuously expressing the opinion that Kidero's action was justified as Shebesh "was a loud woman who needed to know her place" (Ligaga, 2020: 45). Ligaga cites the following media extract:

> Kidero for PRESIDENT…. This stupid bitch talks too much. I hope the slap taught her a lesson. I wish Kidero *angem-malizia na HEDDI* (I wish Kidero had head-butted her to 'finish' her)" (2020: 45).

Indeed, Kenyan women's visibility, marked by their rejection of the static feminine imagery, has its share of challenges as one would expect in a patriarchal society such as this. Over the decades, women in Kenya have struggled perpetually for inclusion in public engagement as similar, macro-level manifestations of patriarchy continue to characterise present-day Kenyan politics. Another case that deserves brief mention is the 2018 Gender Bill in which, in order to level the political playing field, it was proposed that neither gender should occupy more than two thirds of the elective seats in parliament (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2018). Unfortunately, the requisite quota for the Bill to be passed was not met as the male majority

deliberately refused to show up in parliament to cripple legislative efforts to promote the two-thirds gender rule (Kamuru, 2019). Such is the punishment of female political hopefuls who desire to be visible in a male-dominated environment. Implicit behind the systemic marginalisation of women in Kenya is the desire to push them out of decision-making processes and relegate them to domesticity (Simiyu, 2018).

Ligaga (2020) refers to an essay by Wambui Mwangi (2013) about Wangu wa Makeri, a powerful female leader who was ousted from chiefdom by men in 1909 to explain how present-day Kenyan men (like their pre-independence counterparts) still fear that power will "get into women's heads" as it apparently did with wa Makeri who was supposedly authoritarian and once danced naked in an exclusively male warrior dance. In other words, Ligaga and Mwangi are shedding light on the prevailing belief in Kenya that men should be holders of power and prestige and, while the modern-day politicians in the above example did not impregnate all women to weaken wa Makeri's support system (see Ligaga, 2020), their absence in a monumental parliamentary proceeding depicts a similar restrictive pattern. Notwithstanding, Kenyan women have refused to be "invisibilised" – to quote Ligaga (2020: 12) – as their heightened visibility in contemporary public spaces can be regarded as a form of resistance against the grain. Even in the midst of patriarchal backlash, women, such as Shebesh, reject the protection rendered by the "*akina mama*" discourse. In an analysis of alternate female subjectivities in Kenya, Ligaga provides a rich display of contemporary women who embody qualities that considerably violate those advocated by African patriarchs such as Moi.

Kenya is a signatory of several international and regional treaties on women's rights and protection from all forms of gender-based violence (GBV).[4] Yet, the existing chasm between reality and rhetoric implies that the Government is mainly committed to safeguarding the lives of women and girls in theory only (Kameri-Mbote, 2000). Notwithstanding the recent

[4] Some examples include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the African Union Heads of States Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, the African Charter on Human's and People's Rights and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) (Kameri-Mbote, 2000; Ali, 2017).

incorporation of these international instruments into the national legal framework[5], more is yet to be done to uphold the statutory provisions enshrined in these documents, among which is the 2015 Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (PADV). The PADV, by definition, can be used to prosecute all forms of violence against household members (including spouses) and outlaws modes of abuse that have traditionally remained unrecognised in Kenya such as marital rape, economic and emotional/psychological forms of IPV (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2015). Other forms of violence against women such as clitoridectomy/female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriages and wife inheritance can also be prosecuted according to this legal instrument.

Starkly excluded from this list, however, is polygamy, as its legalisation in 2014, following a revision of the Marriage Act, granted men the freedom to marry as they please and without consulting their first wives (The British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014). The controversial amendment of the Marriage Act by President Uhuru Kenyatta's incumbent administration came after the male majority over-powered an initial proposal to grant first wives the right to repeal their husbands' choice of additional heterosexual partnerships (The Guardian, 2014). The public silencing of women has already been shown above. However, that wives do not have a say in their husbands' extra-conjugal unions highlights the macro-level endorsement of women's limited say in private milieus. This only preserves the value system of the male prerogative inherited from the pre-independence period.

That patriarchal discourses continue to dominate the Kenyan context does not imply the absence of counter discourses attempting to re-articulate and re-define femininities that work against the normative order. Ligaga (2020), in her exploration of female subjectivities in Kenya, cites female parliamentarian, Millie Odhiambo, as an example of the growing numbers of women who persistently challenge the prevailing double standard that is skewed towards men. She is particularly known for her provocative statements that often generate different public sentiments. In her analysis of Odhiambo, Ligaga cites the title of the former's article titled "*I'm negotiating with my husband to marry a second and third husband*" (2020:48) to

[5] Some examples include the Sexual Offenses Act (2006), the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Prohibition of FGM Act (2011) and the Counter Trafficking in Persons Act (2010) (Ali, 2017).

show how Kenyan women do not invariably acquiesce to discriminatory customary values. Women have also countered the male sex-drive connotations perpetuated by legislation such as the revised Marriage Act 2014, as suggested by Odhiambo in the following quote:

> As a woman, I love sex, I enjoy sex, I have sex. You shall not use it as a tool to demean me or another woman. We don't have sex with spoons, biro pens, cooking sticks, snakes or tables. We have it like men, like you. If I have it with one or many men, I will answer to God, not you. The way you will answer to God for having sex with one woman or more … (cited in Ligaga, 2020: 47).

While some may view such comments as being "excessive'" in a conservative context such as Kenya, I agree with Ligaga that their circulation is evidence of the existence of a counter discourse that tackles the veracity of dominant regimes of truth. Indeed, modest female sexualities in Kenya are increasingly being supplanted by more progressive tendencies that follow unconventional trends as public sources suggest. Ligaga observes that public accounts of intimate relationships are replete with examples, such as the one below which, similar to Odhiambo's comments, contend against notions that portray women as sexually passive or even asexual:

> *The Nairobian* has uncovered the shocking revelations of women who are now secretly keeping fully furnished plush apartments for escapades away from public scrutiny…. Such apartments have for years been associated with married men.… A married mother of four has apparently rented a plush two-room apartment in Mlolongo to quench her loin thirst…. A source has revealed that the married banker visits the apartment at least once a week with her toy boy … (2020: 82-83).

Contemporary women such as "the married banker", Millie Odhiambo and Rachel Shebesh and their pre-independence counterparts, such as Wangu Wa Makeri, Wambui Otieno and even the urban women in colonial Kenya, have confounded claims that African women invariably defer to men by default. Displays of resistance, as seen through public sources, indeed have the propensity to affect modern-day gender relations in personal contexts. Nonetheless, hegemonic masculine tropes sanctioned by the State still widely inform contemporary interpretations of femininities in privatised settings. The same holds true for family settings resulting in a convergence or co-dependence between the two in reifying dominant knowledge frames:

> The family and the nation are here seen as institutions whose values *mould* and offer inspiration to *good women subjects* [my emphasis] (Ligaga, 2020:127).

Of course, other institutions play a similar role in re-affirming normative scripts as discussed so far with regard to religion. The idea is that there is convergence or co-dependence between the "macro" and "micro" level structures in disseminating hegemonic standpoints. I consider how these structures are reproduced at the expense of women in marital and cohabiting arrangements in the next sub-section.

2.3.1. Gender Relations at the Micro-Level in Kenya

While violated women in Kenya can now seek legal redress through the PADV Act 2015 (explained in the previous sub-section), patriarchal structures inevitably affect modern-day gender relations in the private realm. Many communities still engage in customary practices which violate the PADV Act (Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). For example, widow inheritance, a practice where a woman is married off to her late husband's male relative (in frequent cases, his brother), is still observed by some ethnic groups in the Western part of Kenya. Clitoridectomy/FGM is still regarded as a crucial rite of passage to womanhood by some ethnic communities in the Northern region (Kulea, 2017).

Most pertinent to this thesis, is IPV which, despite being outlawed by the PADV, is still sanctioned by several ethnic communities and even normalised by some women (KDHS, 2015; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). In the latest Kenyan Demographic Health Survey, it was reported that the cultural embeddedness of male power over women explains the justification of physical IPV by more than 50% of women in the national sample (KDHS, 2015). This is indicative of some of the ways in which women in the country unwittingly sustain the very ideology that oppresses them. According to other samples, women internalise such social perceptions to the extent that they carry a distorted view of physical IPV as men's way of expressing love or that women are responsible for provoking male aggression (Green, 1999). Other studies highlight the normalisation of the phenomenon (Amnesty International, 2002; Lawoko, 2008; Simister, 2010; Makayoto *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018), with some participants describing the practice as a "timeless tradition" and "a consistent and unchangeable aspect of local culture" (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013: 7). These attitudes have also fostered a culture of silence among victimised Kenyan women as a result of fear of shame and potential stigmatisation by community members (Gillum *et al.*, 2016) which, in

addition to economic and institutional reasons, impede their seeking support (Odero *et al.*, 2014). Unlike in pre-colonial settings where spousal conflicts were categorically resolved at the community level, the privatisation of the nuclear family since colonialism, continues and has implications for intervention by community members in IPV matters (Gillum *et al.*, 2016).

Fuelling IPV against women in Kenya is the long-standing cultural expectation of female acceptance of male decision-making power (Lawoko *et al.*, 2007; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). Although African families, including Kenyan ones, experience constant change, some gendered ideals derived from traditional societies, still configure contemporary familial relations and practices in a manner that permits male control over women's productive and procreative capacities (Green, 1999). Deducing "the demise of the African marriage" (Green, 1999: 22) in its entirety would be an inaccurate assumption, at least in present-day Kenya where "real" masculinity continues to be measured against men's ability to dominate the home and sustain the breadwinning position (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2007; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). The tragic irony is that the declining economic situation in Kenya, as in most African states, means that men are unable to fulfil the household expectations satisfactorily, leaving women to shoulder the economic burden as a result (Green, 1999).

Adding to this layer of frustration is the conventional expectations of domestication and childcare, as this area of responsibility is still widely construed to be a woman's obligation (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2007; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, women's roles in the prevalently sanctioned patrilineal family system are still associated with childbearing (Njue *et al.*, 2007; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013), an expectation that has implications for their reproductive autonomy and societal acceptance upon failure to have children (Emenike *et al.*, 2008; Kimuna & Djamba, 2008). While the size of the nuclear family continues to dwindle in response to increasing urbanisation and modernisation (Ngige *et al.*, 2005, cited in Njue *et al.*, 2007), women's reproductive roles in contemporary Kenya must be understood against the following backdrop provided by experts in family studies:

> Founding a family is of paramount importance to Kenyan families. A single adult is considered incomplete until he or she establishes a family through marriage and childbearing…. Children are highly valued in Kenyan families and they are considered to be the fulfilment of marriage (Njue *et al.*, 2007:58–59).

Problematically, it almost seems that single African women are often subject to public glare. Remarking on the observations of Kanogo (2005) and Mutongi (2007), Ligaga encapsulates this in the following, with reference to Kenya and the wider African context, which almost mirrors the oppression faced by the young urban women who sought freedom from the patriarchal grip during the colonial era (see Section 2.2):

> While a lot of single women in Africa lead successful, independent lives, particular dated insinuations still exist that psychologically, if not physically, attempt to round up these women, in a way reminiscent of colonial systems of controlling women's bodies. (2020: 71).

On top of the above, norms in modern-day Kenya dictate that a "good" wife is one who is "respectful, obedient and responsible" (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013: 6). Gatwiri and Karanja (2016) argue that Kenyan women are socialised from an early age to respect men by expressing meekness and aversion to confrontational behaviour, and that the word "woman" in several vernacular languages connotes one who conveys respect by remaining silent around men. As such, speaking out is representative of a threat that challenges the politics of male domination. A "good" wife, therefore, is one who respects the man's headship of the household and economic obligation, an attitude which has seen men restricting women from employment and thus, increasing the latter's susceptibility to economic IPV (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). As in pre-colonial and colonial settings, male entitlement continues to be foundational in reinforcing women's subordinated status in the household (Kimuna & Djamba, 2008) so that even physical IPV or "wife beating" still remains permissible when the boundaries of "appropriate" femininity are traversed (Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). Others have argued that women are seemingly viewed by men as children with limited intellectual capacity to provide counsel, as the following sentiment from a Kenyan man suggests: "Women are fools. They must be told what to do, and they must be beaten" (Green, 1999: 23). Put succinctly, a man is not to be told what to do by a woman and the woman should be beaten if she fails to adhere to this requirement.

A woman's threat to the man's breadwinning position, questioning of his financial choices in the home, perceived inability to meet domestic and childcare responsibilities fully, and social interactions with other men constitute some of the main justifications for corporal punishment in Kenya (Lawoko, 2008; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014). As in other African contexts,

punishment is also condoned for "bad" women who engage in, or are suspected to have engaged in adulterous liaisons, refuse to have sexual relations with their husbands, and verbally or physically fight their husbands (Green, 1999). Generally speaking, such cultural "misfits" in Africa are often read as "wicked" women and are subject to a host of other derogations such as, "vagabonds", "prostitutes", "wayward", "unruly", "indecent" and "immoral" as observed by Hodgson and McCurdy (2001: 1). Similar to Ligaga (2020), Hodgson and McCurdy appeal for a more nuanced understanding of such "transgressive" African femininities to avoid sweeping generalisations that are often reproduced in academic material. Examined from another angle, Ligaga suggests that subversive feminine subjectivities can also be regarded as women being agentic in their defiance of a masculinist rhetoric. In her tabloid analysis of "scandalous" and "wicked" women in Kenya for example, Ligaga provides a case of one, low-income, adulterous woman who managed to dupe her husband for an extended time period before she was finally caught:

> She performs her wifely duties by cooking for her husband and making sure that he is distracted. She then lies to him to obtain 'permission' to leave the home to meet her lover. She is the tabloid genre's 'wicked' figure who is loathed and punished. The punishment includes the humiliation of being caught and having to run away naked while a crowd watches…. If one then is to read agency in this, it is to recognize how the wife exists as a trickster figure, defying boundaries of surveillance…. To read it as such is to give it new meaning and the possibility for reinterpretation … her marriage has failed to provide her with the sexual satisfaction she needs, and she strays to get it despite difficult circumstances (2020: 94-95).

Analysing "deviant" femininities alongside male retribution reveals the extent to which double standards exist in the country. In another analysis of a bizarre media article detailing a man who solicited a witch to "trap" his wife and her lover by making it impossible for the latter to retract his genitals from the former, Ligaga explores how this "scandalous" woman was subject to unbalanced scrutiny by the public on account of her gender:

> *Huyu jamaa ametupea suluhisho kwa tatizo ambalo limekuwa likitutatiza. Wanawake wajipange sasa* (The man behind this has given us a solution to a problem that has been tasking our minds for long. Woe unto women who like cheating). (cited in Ligaga, 2020: 95).

That less emphasis is placed on the male lover implies that the comment serves as a cautionary tale to keep women in "check" through humiliation and abuse. Ligaga reviews another article of a woman hacked to death by her male partner following suspicions of infidelity of which the content in favour of the man is quite graphic and upsetting to present. My reason for citing these examples so far is to accentuate how IPV against "non-normative" wives or girlfriends appear to be widely endorsed in Kenya, all in the name of preserving male privilege. A sexual double standard is thus maintained in the country, where women's sexual practices are under constant public scrutiny on the one hand, while men's extra-conjugal liaisons remain widely accepted without question on the other hand (Njue *et al.*, 2014). Women are expected neither to confront men's sexual impropriety nor to voice their concerns about the potential economic and health ramifications that the behaviour bears (Njue *et al.*, 2014). Doing so only risks putting them in harms' way as husbands may exercise their "right" to "discipline" wives who challenge their dominion in any manner (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Gillum *et al.*, 2016). Researchers argue that attitudes validating such a male prerogative are rooted in customs that find their origin in indigenous African societies, such as polygamy, dowry payment, widow inheritance and so forth (Bowman, 2003; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018).

2.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have traced the origins of dominant contemporary gender practices in Kenya to women's historical subordinated status in indigenous notions and practices of domesticity, corporeality and sexuality. These patriarchal structures were leveraged by British colonisers to maximise imperialistic gains. The systemic discrimination against women in Kenya prevails as the post-colonial governments continue to: restrict their political involvement (despite their participation in the pursuit of Kenya's independence); afford minimal attention to gender equality laws at the national and international levels; publicly relegate them to home environments; regard them as male properties; and assent to male sexual prerogative. Also, in this chapter, I have shown that religious institutions have also supported this agenda by lobbying against the criminalisation of marital rape, concurring with the State that such matters are too private for public discussion. These macro-level endorsements of patriarchy have far-reaching implications for promoting a culture of violence against women in contemporary conjugal settings. I have highlighted that most men, just as their forefathers, still feel justified in demanding their conjugal "rights," to take control of household revenue and reprimand "misbehaving", "unruly" or "wicked" wives/girlfriends. Traditional constructs of women

remain, as present-day society predominantly dictates that a “good” woman should maintain her position of silence by acquiescing to male authority, directing her focus to childbearing, child-rearing and home management. As in the public realm, backlash follows women in privatised settings in an effort to keep these “deviant” or “loud-mouthed” personalities in check. As the reader will later see, the discussions that I have presented in this chapter are useful in contextualising the narratives of participants in the ensuing data chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

CHAPTER 3: THE "PERILS" OF EVERYDAY LANGUAGE AND HOW WOMEN NEGOTIATE MALE POWER: A DIALOGUE ACROSS EMPIRICAL LITERATURES ON WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Post-structural feminism is significantly critical to the influences of ordinary narratives about gender in inhibiting women's ability to question their experiences of marginalisation (Weedon, 1997). This is because these salient patriarchal languages offer a limited scope in which women can position themselves differently or call out their experiences of oppression. By virtue of the hegemonic gender narratives in Kenya for example, a woman exposed to physical IPV might normalise her spouse's actions, or even refuse to view herself as a victim of abuse depending on the severity of her injuries. Because other women in her community are likely to read a husband's beatings as a "disciplinary" measure, it might be challenging for her surroundings to accommodate a discursive language that runs counter to the traditional frame of knowledge. In other words, pervading constructions of femininity and masculinity can become so commonplace in a given society to the extent that they are endowed with the capacity to render women's subsidiary position to men as "natural, obvious and therefore true" (1997: 74).

For such grand narratives to be opposed, post-structural feminists argue that IPV policy and programme interventionists should present affected women with counter-hegemonic discourses that offer positions of empowerment (Towns & Adams, 2000). While increasing access to feminist discourses is crucial to challenging male hegemony, I argue that it is first and foremost important to identify the pernicious and pervading discourses that inform women's understanding and experiences of IPV. In the first section of this chapter therefore, I review the limited empirical studies that have used a post-structural feminist perspective to explore how women's understandings of IPV are influenced by the popular gender discourses at their disposal. Most of the studies I review in the first section of the chapter are sourced from Western countries with only a handful from developing settings (mainly South Africa), owing

to the dearth of post-structural feminist IPV literature in non-Western settings in general, and SSA in particular.

In the second section of this chapter, I review empirical studies on women's responses to IPV. Similar to the review of post-structural feminist IPV studies in the first section, the vast majority of the studies in this latter part of the chapter are qualitative in nature and primarily focus on women's privatised responses to IPV and less on interpersonal or help-seeking behaviours by virtue of the goals of my thesis that I outlined in Chapter One. Most of the sample of studies presented in this section comprise non-Western women from developing settings (mostly low-income), as these were related closely to my participants from a geographical, cultural and demographic point of view as I explain further in the methodology (Chapter Four). Nevertheless, I present comparisons with studies from the Northern Hemisphere where possible to show that some approaches to IPV are not unique to non-Western societies. Even so, behaviours exhibited in non-Western contexts should be understood against the backdrop of the structural, cultural and financial constraints in order to ascertain whether women of African descent (as well as those from other developing countries) endeavour to improve their conditions, despite systemic disadvantages, in ways that are appropriate to their circumstances. This helps to repudiate mainstream claims that African women specifically, who stay with abusive men, are passive participants in the IPV arena. The literature presents both covert and overt responses to IPV, both of which I present thematically for the reader's convenience. That said, however, the reader should bear in mind that IPV strategies implemented by women are protean or can be implemented simultaneously to maximise desired outputs.

3.2. THE TYPES OF GENDER DISCOURSES AT PLAY IN WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF IPV: A REVIEW OF THE POST-STRUCTURAL FEMINIST LITERATURE

Wood argues that discourses of male power over women provide cultural "vocabularies" which women who are victims of IPV might unconsciously adopt to interpret their experiences of abuse (2001: 241). Her analysis of discourses of romance among 20 women affected by IPV in the United States shows that channels of discourse transmission (such as media, literature and family) played a significant role in sustaining female subjectivities that reinforce the gender status quo. Western cultural narratives of romance and gender underpin notions of "emphasized

femininity" (Connell, 1987, cited in Jackson, 2001) where the beautiful princess awaits her Prince Charming to sweep her off her feet. The handsome prince valiantly rescues the beautiful princess from perilous encounters, and what follows is a life of absolute happiness guaranteed by the man's protective functions (Jackson, 2001). In Wood's research, these fairy-tale romance discourses informed women's understanding of men's affectionate behaviour in the earlier stages of their relationships. However, a "dark romance" discourse (Wood, 2001: 253) was elicited when narratives that were inconsistent with earlier ones emerged to uncover women's current experiences of IPV. Men's previous entrancing, heroic and attractive personalities were supplanted by darker, aggressive and deviant qualities in these accounts. The dark romance narrative licenses male abuse against women by claiming it to be "normal for men to have 'bad spells' [and] for romantic relationships to be hurtful to women" (Wood, 2001: 253). The discourse promotes damaging notions that increase reluctance on the part of a victimised female to sever ties with the male abuser because society expects her to forgive and remain partnered, or otherwise risk being cast as an "incomplete" woman (see Wood, 2001). Wood's associates the following quotes with the dark romance discourse - "*You have to make [the relationship] work, no matter what*" and "*If something were to happen and I was not with him anymore, I wouldn't know what I would do in my life*" - in which women inadvertently painted themselves as toxically needy of men whenever the fairy tale narrative was unattainable in their accounts (2001: 253).

Other post-structural feminist studies (Towns & Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003, 2004; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016) suggest that women who are victims of IPV draw on more malignant modes of romantic discourses when they fail to sustain the fairy-tale romance narrative. Jackson (2001) makes similar observations in her study of IPV among New Zealand women. She uses the "prince" to "toad" metaphor to explain how the previously constructed Prince Charming, that women found appealing at the start of the courtship, later changed for the worst. Such oppositional male representations promote ideas that only a woman's affection can eventually reveal the "softer side" of a man (Radway, 1991, cited in Towns & Adams, 2000) and, therefore, socialises women not only to normalise IPV, but also to believe in the curative effects of affection in addressing male aggression (Wood, 2001). The application of feminist post-structuralism by Towns and Adams in their study of IPV in New Zealand similarly found that adherence to "perfect-love" discourses (2000: 558) gave women reason to believe that men's tendency to become violent was only temporary and reversible upon demonstrating their affection and dedication to the relationship. The above findings are

not peculiar to the West since, in the handful of existing SSA studies (mainly South African) which deployed a feminist post-structuralist approach, it was seen that women who were victims of IPV adopted similar, Western-oriented, romance discourses to make sense of their mistreatment by men (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003, 2004; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016).

In the above research endeavours, romance discourses are made problematic and it is argued that they encourage women to accommodate IPV through appeasing behaviour, making excuses for men's actions, minimalising the gravity of the abuse, remaining silent about their oppression (Towns & Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003, 2004; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016), and believing that the men would change for the better because "love can conquer any hardship" (Wood, 2001: 50). As a result, these discourses encourage women to embody subjectivities that preserve the status quo of the relationship. Towns and Adams (2000) and Jackson (2001) add that these knowledge frames of romance also enable women to present their abusive husbands/male partners as having a problem rather than portraying them in a negative light. By so doing, women are at a high risk of holding themselves or external factors accountable for men's actions. For instance, South African women adhering to traditional constructions of femininity, conformed to romance discourses by blaming themselves or the men's alcohol or substance misuse instead of holding them responsible for their actions (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003, 2004; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). Consequently, these prevailing romance discourses condition women to believe that their abusive experiences are not reason enough to sever relationship ties, because going against the hegemonic script risks contradicting strongly held beliefs of what should constitute a romantic relationship (Jackson, 2001).

Results from a post-structural feminist study in South Africa (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016) show that the above prevailing discourses of romance entwine with the patriarchal family discourse to retain women in abusive relationships for the sake of their children. The discourse idealises the mother-father nuclear family structure and the presence of a biological father in a child's upbringing, which implies that alternative family structures, such as single parenthood, are perceived to be socially deviant or unfavourable for rearing children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lubbe, 2007, cited in Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). Dekel and Andipatin (2016) explain that the traditional composition of a nuclear family, formed by a male and female couple, as in most African countries, is also common in South Africa and conditioned the seven

women in their sample to feel responsible for maintaining the peace at home, as they believed that the absence of fathers would be detrimental to their children's upbringing. It appears as though the patriarchal family discourse (as other hegemonic discourses) clouded the women's judgment so that preserving an image of a "good" wife or mother superseded their own wellbeing. Paradoxically, conforming to this dominant form of femininity risked exposing these women's children to immediate and long-term harm.

Dominant discourses of love and romance have also contributed to the recurrence of sexual violence in heterosexual relationships. Research has provided insights into how some women have felt pressured to comply with their male partners' sexual demands for fear of losing the relationship (Varga & Makubalo, 1996; Wood *et al.*, 1996, cited in Shefer *et al.*, 2000). This inextricable connection between love and sex serves as a justification for legitimising sexual intimacy as a salient form of expressing love (Jackson, 2001). The permeation of these normative sources of knowledge underwrites male sexual IPV against women because it is presented as "a contorted expression of the hero's love and desire" (Jackson, 2001: 307). Heterosexuality, as a context of the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), is pivotal "in the social mobility of the male from boy to man, to father, to head of household, to decision-maker, to man" (McFadden, 1992: 183, cited in Shefer & Ruiters, 1998: 39). Coined by Hollway (1984), the male sexual drive discourse represents a form of heterosexuality epitomised by men who subscribe to hegemonic masculine models. Shefer and Ruiters (1998) explain that this discourse is an endorsement of a mode of sexual desire which constructs men as being inoperable without sex, as being readily willing to engage in heterosexual interactions, and unable to control their sexual urges as a result of their biological predisposition. These essentialist notions of masculinity stand in direct contrast to the "less sexual (or asexual)" woman whose sexual engagement is, in turn, a manifestation of her love and adorning affection for the man (Shefer & Ruiters, 1998: 41).

In the male sexual drive discourse, women are conceptualised as being objects of men's sexual desires and it has also been drawn upon to rationalise men's infidelity in heterosexual relationships, according to the South African IPV studies conducted by Boonzaier and De la Rey (2003, 2004) and Shefer *et al.* (2000). Complementary to the male sex-drive discourse, the sexual double-standard discourse also informed the experiences of both samples. The latter discourse transmitted ideas ratifying men's unbridled sexuality on one hand yet restrained

women's sexual liberty on the other. In these post-structural feminist studies, women's awareness of male sexual freedom was highlighted, but their limited access to counter discourses made it even more difficult for them to label unwanted intimacy as violent or abusive. In the two salient discourses of hetero-normativity, less room is thus given for alternative discourses of empowerment to emerge as women continually lacked the means to articulate discursively when they did not desire sexual intimacy. As a result, these dominant perceptions of heterosexuality propagated a mode of feminine subjectivity that is deferential, demure and devoid of the ability to confront sexual oppression.

The issue of consensual sex is even more complex and unclear in marriage "where 'I do' has been regarded historically as a permanent consent decree" (Yllo, 1999: 1060). In their feminist post-structuralism study, Boonzaier and De la Rey (2004) observes that the discourse on the conjugal sexual duties of wives operated seamlessly with the male sex-drive and sexual double-standard discourses to rationalise marital rape. In their research, traditional hierarchical models were buttressed further when the male propriety rights discourse was drawn upon to underpin men's entitlement to their wives' bodies which, in effect, validated possessive and controlling forms of behaviours. Adams *et al.* (1995, cited in Wood, 2001) use discourse analytical techniques in their research on violence against women to show how certain phrases used by men in their study served linguistically as a conduit to re-assert their sense of entitlement to women. Basile (1999) argues that socio-cultural expectations of women fulfilling men's conjugal rights fosters acquiescence and further confounds the subject of sexual IPV, especially in the absence of physical aggression. Subtle actions such as "begging, bothering, pressuring or manipulating" and more explicit forms of behaviours, such as threatening violence, and women's resultant fear of abuse, additionally blur the line between what constitutes consensual sex in intimate relationships (Basile, 1999: 1039).

Thus, upholding these dominant regimes of truth permit men to take control in the sexual domain, while women who go against the hegemonic feminine dispensation are rendered as being a social anomaly. This presents yet another double standard in heterosexuality. An analysis of discourses of hetero-normativity in South Africa by Shefer and Ruiters (1998) reveals that in the male sexual drive discourse, women who initiate sex, express sexual domination or desire for sexual intimacy are read as embodying subversive subjectivities. In the dominant scripts on heterosexuality, women are thus restricted within the boundaries of

"moralistic discourses of faithfulness, loyalty, commitment" and are constructed either as *filles de joie* or their fidelity is questioned when they transgress the salient heterosexual script (Shefer and Ruiters, 1998: 42). Shefer and Ruiters (1998) add that the failure of women to take up the role in which they are cast presents a crisis which can only be addressed by hurling pejorative slurs at them or by using aggressive behaviour to re-establish male sexual authority.

Evidence from another feminist post-structural IPV study in South Africa by Boonzaier and De la Rey (2003) shows that women who contravene socio-religious expectations of femininity risked being verbally abused by their men. Referencing Maeckelberghe (1992), Boonzaier and De la Rey explain that in Roman Catholicism, the Virgin Mary has been used symbolically to epitomise feminine sexual purity and other essentialist traits such as caring and nurturing behaviours, all of which are positioned antithetically to the immoral, recalcitrant and sinful Eve in the Biblical story of creation. The term "whore" can therefore be used by men to diminish women's moral image when they seemingly fail to adhere to dominant socio-religious constructs of femininities. The Madonna-whore religious symbolisms have been used to label women embodying sexually moral or immoral femininities respectively (Macdonald, 1995, cited in Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). Studies by Boonzaier and De la Rey (2003, 2004) and Dekel and Andipatin (2016) show how such feminine representations that were propagated by a dominant socio-religious discourse affected female participants who strongly identified with religious values and practices. Imbued within Christian and Muslim religious circles of the participants in their studies was the traditional gender-role discourse where the maintenance of male headship and female subordination was acknowledged, irrespective of women's victimisation by IPV. Results from both studies show that reconciliation, forgiveness and perseverance were encouraged in most cases to maintain men's authority and to preserve the relationship.

The types of gender discourses highlighted in these studies have yielded explanatory frameworks to illustrate how male domination over women is (re)produced discursively in intimate relationships. Identifying the subconscious adoption of "commonsensical" gender narratives is vital in building knowledge of how power inequalities are sustained. Notwithstanding, in some of the above post-structural feminist studies, women's deviation from normative standards were also observed, when they permanently left the relationship or sought support from law enforcement personnel (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Boonzaier & De

la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001). Some of the female participants in research carried out by Dekel and Andipatin (2016) for example, later contested the dominant socio-religious discourse by questioning religious ideals endorsing the sanctity of marriage. Their results mirrored those from the West where religious women similarly developed non-traditional theological perspectives on God's distaste for IPV and acceptance of marital dissolution in exceptional circumstances where their children's safety as well as their own was compromised (Knickmeyer et al., 2003, 2004; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000). These cases demonstrate the ambiguous and unstable nature of female subjectivities - as conceptualised by the post-structural feminist principles outlined in Chapter One - because representations that were intolerant of IPV contradicted earlier acquiescent and unassertive portrayals.

Nonetheless, the studies I have reviewed in this section appear solely to challenge the function of dominant gender discourses in "trapping" women in abuse and, by implication, resistance to normative ideals is primarily conceptualised as leaving the relationship or reporting to authorities. In other words, the findings of the review suggest that theoretical application has drawn less emphasis on women's creativity in manoeuvring IPV. As I argued earlier, a less restrictive approach to observing how women negotiate abuse can mitigate pervading depictions that render them defenceless or hapless victims of IPV. In the first chapter, I alluded to there being room for deeper engagement with post-structural feminist tenets to explore women's resourcefulness when confronted with abuse. In collaboration with the Black/African feminism, I attempt to address this limitation later in this document. First, however, I find it crucial to engage with extant scholarship that examines women's responses to IPV in a less traditional manner.

3.3. NEGOTIATING AT THE MARGINS OF POWER: EXPLORING WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO IPV

With reference to the IPV study conducted by Mannell *et al.* (2015) in Rwanda, I have explained briefly in Chapter One how "unorthodox forms of power" that are routinely exercised by "staying women" are often overlooked (Green, 1999: 152). Fisher and Davis (1993: 6) argue that conventional analyses of women's behaviours are limiting, as they leave "little conceptual or political space for uncovering the subtle and ambivalent ways [they] may be negotiating at the margins of power". Scholars such as Showden (2011) add that focusing on mainstream conceptualisations of "empowerment" bears the risk of undermining women who opt out of

textbook choices (that is, exiting the relationship or seeking formal support) as being powerless, disempowered and devoid of the ability to navigate their experiences of being victims of IPV. These labels are mostly attributed to non-Western women according to the analysis by Mannell *et al.*

Literature on responses to IPV implemented by women in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), including Kenya, is scarce relative to Western countries (Wood *et al.*, 2019, 2021). However, empirical findings from the few available sources suggest that women from these low resourced, mostly patriarchal settings are indeed not passive recipients of IPV but employ different mechanisms to improve their disadvantaged circumstances. In her comprehensive analysis of African women's responses to IPV, Green (1999) found that women applied what she calls "transactional manipulative mechanisms" by leveraging traditional values of female submission to dupe men into thinking that they were in control. Lowering their tone of voice when talking to men was one example in which traditional gender roles were reconstituted rather than contested to secure desired outcomes. Critiquing Western feminist portrayals of non-Western women as being disempowered, in an IPV study among 30 women in Kenya, Gatwiri and Karanja (2016) found that participants insidiously negotiated the patriarchal environment to avoid or mitigate the impact of male oppression. As in Green's study, respondents in Gatwiri's and Karanja's study used silence as a form of "soft power" to enable them to bargain with patriarchy "out of a dire need for basic survival in the absence of any other viable option" (2016: 14).

Indeed, in other studies, it is confirmed that placatory tendencies on the part of women are closely associated with self-preservation. According to an extensive review by Wood *et al.* (2021) of safety strategies implemented by women from 16 LMICs (eight from SSA, seven from Asia and one from Central America), appeasing behaviours demonstrated by participants from Uganda, Rwanda, DRC, Nigeria, India and Bangladesh were characterised by meeting domestic obligations, perseverance, giving in to men's demands over their finances, acquiescing to sex and keeping quiet to avoid reprisals. Other than self-protection, studies in both developing and Western countries also suggest that women's deference to men is closely associated with the desire to minimise psychological, physical and financial damage to their children (Lempert, 1996; Baker, 1997; Abraham, 2000; Kaye *et al.*, 2007; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Ragavan *et al.*, 2015; Deuba *et al.*, 2016; Gatwiri and Karanja, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2019).

Studies in both Western and non-Western settings also show that behaviour modification is another way in which placatory conduct is exhibited by female IPV survivors to either preserve the romance or shield them against (further) IPV (Bowker, 1983; Lempert, 1996; Browne, 1997; Abraham, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001; Wood *et al.*, 2019). In a study conducted in three urban informal settlements in Kenya (Wood *et al.*, 2019), behaviour modification was characterised by returning home early, stopping friendships with individuals of the opposite sex, modest dressing, and communicating marital concerns only when alcoholic husbands/partners were sober. These actions were undertaken only after women critically evaluated the root of the recurring conflict. Evidence from this study shows however, that women gave in to sex to avoid being subjected to neighbourhood gossip, given the highly congested slum setting.

Women in the United States have similarly masked their exposure to IPV to save face (Lempert, 1996; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009). In these studies, the choice not to tell others about their experiences functioned to preserve the reputation of self, husbands and the marriage. In a sample of 32 American women interviewed by Lempert (1996), for example, interviewees who previously sought treatment for mental health disclosed how they went to great lengths, preferring to be labelled schizophrenic than victims of IPV. Religious women from another North American sample similarly concealed their IPV experiences to preserve an image of being the ideal religious woman or couple (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009). Evidence shows that protecting the man's positive religious image was associated with women partnered to men who were actively involved in the religious community (Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003).

Other passive approaches adopted by women are more psychologically orientated by virtue of their focus on improving their mental well-being. In research carried out by Ting (2010) among SSA women, it was found that wishful thinking (such as believing that the man will change for the better) and behavioural distractions (such as keeping themselves busy with domestic and professional responsibilities) helped them to escape mentally from IPV. These findings are not unique to women of African descent, as Lempert (1996) also showed in an IPV study in the United States, that women disengaged from the relationship by immersing themselves in television and avoiding unnecessary conversations with men to create an emotional distance. In a study among Swedish women, Hyden (1999) found emotional detachment from the male perpetrator to be a survival technique and conceptualised this behaviour as a way of

psychologically leaving the relationship. As a result of the psychological impact of IPV, evidence also shows that some women construed fantasies of suicide, spousal murder or poisoning as extreme (and potentially tragic) sources of autonomy and permanent release from the agonising effects of IPV (Lempert, 1996; Green, 1999; Abraham, 2000).

Closely related to these inwardly focused strategies is the reliance on faith to navigate the emotional effects of IPV. In an extensive analysis of African women, Green (1999) also found that traditional religious practices provided therapeutic benefits and alleviated IPV-induced stress for the women. Additionally, she observed that Eastern, Western and South African women practised divination to attain some level of power over their husbands to relieve domestic tensions, to ensure that men did not forfeit domestic obligations, and to attain divine ancestral protection from IPV. In terms of mainstream religion, Ting (2010), Balogun and John-Akinola (2015), and Njue *et al.* (2014) found that SSA women drew on their Christian or Islamic beliefs by praying, reading scripture for comfort and attending counselling sessions with faith-leaders. Their belief in divine retribution also helped to sustain them mentally.

Similar results on faith-based coping with IPV were found also among North American women of Christian or Islamic faith where, in addition to prayer, scriptural reading and belief in a God of justice, identifying with scriptural characters and stories abated mental distress associated with IPV (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009). In these studies, Christian and Muslim women sought emotional and spiritual support also from their faith community, namely, religious leaders or friends and relatives of similar faith (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009). The research found that women were commonly advised to uphold religious virtues (such as exercising patience and forgiveness) in order to preserve the sanctity of marriage. However, results from these studies showed that these passive attitudes within religious circles promoted a culture of silence among affected women to avoid shame, blame and stigmatisation by the congregants (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009).

Studies in East African settings (Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda) found that avoidance techniques were also employed by women as a shield against threatened or occurring IPV (Kaye *et al.*, 2007; Mannell *et al.*, 2015; Wood *et al.*, 2019). These included extricating themselves from volatile environments, taking some time to "cool off" before reacting to insults, fleeing outside

the household for safety, and temporarily leaving the matrimonial home to live with relatives. In terms of avoiding sexual IPV, it was found after a study conducted in Nepal that women feigned menstruation or sickness, turned on the other side of the bed, wrapped themselves in a separate blanket or brought their child into the bed, knowing that their husbands/partners were unlikely to be sexually violent in the child's presence (Puri *et al.,* 2011). Women who participated in a study conducted in Kenya's urban slums viewed giving in to the male sexual drive as disempowering and cited the importance of standing their ground and being "fierce" when negotiating sex (Wood *et al.,* 2019: 11).

Acknowledging that contraceptive negotiation was not always successful, women from the same Kenyan study by Wood *et al.* used secret family planning (female condoms) as a strategy to reclaim sexual autonomy as well as to offset childcare and financial difficulties. Concerning the former aspect, based on another study in Kenya conducted by Gatwiri and Karanja (2016), it was also found that women used contraceptive devices secretly to avoid succumbing to the patriarchal pressures of bearing additional children. However, the findings of a comprehensive review by Baiden *et al.* (2016) seem to suggest that the secret use of family planning methods among SSA women is generally associated with counteracting financial burden. Rather than outrightly upsetting the patriarchal system, in these studies it was generally found that women could implicitly protest against oppression in contexts where their reproductivity was under the control of men.

Women exposed to economic IPV and impoverished conditions are also determined to improve their financial well-being by seeking employment opportunities as well as by sourcing income from micro-savings and loan associations (such as merry-go-rounds and table-banking) to start businesses in the informal sector and invest on their children's wellbeing (Salazar *et al.,* 2012; Gillum *et al.,* 2016; Wood *et al.,* 2019). In the Kenyan study by Wood *et al.* (2019), it was found that women contributing to household income to alleviate IPV fuelled by financial pressure were only successful when men supported their efforts. As seconded by this and other findings on women from developing countries however (Abraham, 2000; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Salazar *et al.,* 2012; Gillum *et al.,* 2016), improved financial status could put women in double jeopardy, where emasculated men retaliated to re-assert authority. It was shown in these studies that men frustrate women's economic efforts by restricting their movement outside the household, demanding a share of their earnings, leaving them with the primary responsibility of the household and accusing them of infidelity whenever they returned

home late from work. It is against this backdrop that women decided to conceal economic activities from men either to minimise men's control over their income or to secure a means of escaping the relationship (Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2019).

Women have also been overtly defiant towards domestic oppression in different ways. These approaches are potentially self-destructive, but some researchers argue that they are often carefully evaluated against current circumstances (Abraham, 2000; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2019). Research in SSA shows that women, for example, have refused to perform domestic duties, such as cooking or doing men's laundry, to protest against their dehumanising treatment (Green, 1999; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016). Findings also show that women can use verbal and physical aggression as well as threatening behaviours (such as threatening to call the police) as a last resort following long-term exposure to IPV (Green, 1999; Abraham, 2000; Salazar *et al.*, 2012; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2021). While data have been gathered to establish that the use of threatening behaviours is more effective in mitigating IPV (Wood *et al.*, 2021), most researchers agree that using verbal and physical aggression often compromise women's physical safety in spite of attributing some measure of power and control to themselves (Green, 1999; Abraham, 2000; Salazar *et al.*, 2012; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2021). These researchers suggest that women's verbal and physical aggression, in most cases, are defensive in nature or, as shown in an analysis by Gillum *et al.* (2016), derive from growing frustrations stemming from men's financial misuse and hedonistic lifestyles. Results from Western settings similarly show that women can be driven to aggression to defend self and children (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Babcock *et al.*, 2003; Swan & Snow, 2006). However, in some of these studies, it has been shown that women may initiate physical violence or threaten its use because of marital frustrations (such as male infidelity) and anger-management problems (Thomas, 2005; Stuart *et al.*, 2006; Swan & Snow, 2006).

3.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the first section of this chapter, I have reviewed the literature on the popular gender discourses elicited in IPV narratives and showed how these informed women's understanding and encounters with abuse. The post-structural feminist studies (mostly conducted in the West, with a small number in South Africa) that I have presented are a repertoire of dominant discourses including the romance discourse which constitutes fairy-tale-like or "perfect-love" scripts and its derivative, the dark romance narrative. Imbued in these are positive and negative

storybook-type depictions of the men and the relationships respectively. The patriarchal family discourse, on the other hand, stipulates that children are best reared in a heterosexual couple setting, the idea of which encourages abused women to endure IPV to avoid disintegrating the nuclear family structure. The literature that I have examined in this chapter also explored a set of discourses of heteronormativity (the male sex-drive discourse, the sexual double-standard discourse, the conjugal sexual duties of wives discourse, and the male propriety rights discourse) which operate seamlessly to enhance the male sexual prerogative.

I have focused on existing studies on women's responses to IPV in the second section of this chapter. Most of these were conducted in LMICs and, where relevant, I have also highlighted Western research on the same subject area for comparison. The findings of the review dispute mainstream assumptions of African women (and non-Western women in general) as being powerless and inactive in their experiences of intimate conflict. The use of strategies that both implicitly and explicitly contest gender oppression, attest to the fact that such women proactively endeavour to stop or minimise the likelihood of physical, psychological, sexual and financial harm. Based on the review, I have highlighted that women can engage in economic activities to improve their financial well-being, but these actions are more effective if kept secret in some cases to avoid emasculated men from inhibiting women's goal towards financial empowerment. The overt contestations of IPV discussed in the review included the refusal to conform to domesticity, and verbal and physical aggression, all of which can be implemented mostly following long-term exposure to IPV. Based on the analysis, verbal and physical aggression, in particular, are likely to be defensive in nature. However, based on what could be gleaned from studies conducted in the West, physical aggression on the part of women can also be initiated for reasons including increasing frustrations with the relationship, anger-management issues, and desire to regulate male (in)actions. Thus, overt defiance towards male authority is more likely to be detrimental to women's physical safety and well-being relative to the rest of the responses that I have reviewed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND ETHICS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological, ethical and reflexive aspects concerning my field work. I collected data in the cities of Mombasa and Nairobi between May and June 2018, using a feminist methodological approach corresponding with the theoretical framework underpinning my research (see Chapter One). I briefly explore the feminist approach to this study before delving into discussions about the procedures followed in gaining access to participants and gathering data in the field. In the discussions about ethical and reflexive issues, I provide a comprehensive account of the efforts I undertook to diffuse power disparities with the female participants and to render invisible my own biases as a researcher within the interview process and all aspects of this project. In the final part of this chapter, I describe in detail the analytical procedures and tools I used to inform the content of the data chapters in this thesis.

4.2. FEMINIST RESEARCH

The question of whether or not there exists a distinctive feminist methodology has been debated by scholars (Harding, 1987; Oakley, 2000). The innumerable epistemological and ontological pathways taken by feminists, together with the absence of a universal feminism, further complicates these arguments and renders a singular methodological approach impossible (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in these debates and, instead of being pre-occupied with a distinct feminist research methodology, I agree with Sandra Harding that researchers should divert their attention to "more interesting aspects of feminist research processes" (1987:1) to highlight "what is distinctive about the best feminist social inquiry" (1987:2). According to Chatzifotiou (2000), the aim of feminist research is to generate knowledge that makes women's experiences of inequality visible in order to rectify the oppression they encounter in society. Contrary to traditional theories in which minimal emphasis is placed on understanding women's views of the world, feminist research is also distinguished by situating women at the centre of the analysis so that their voices can be heard (Oakley, 1981; Harding, 1987). In other words, "the prioritising of women's experiences and voices remains at the heart of much feminist research and practice" (Kiguwa, 2019: 225). These two aspects resound with my feminist approach to this study. In addressing the deficient

empirical knowledge of IPV against women by men in Kenya, it is my hope that my research would not only increase the awareness of women's oppression in Kenya, but also "rectify" it through suitable policy and programming initiatives. My research also places women's voices at the crux of the analysis by means of qualitative research methods, as evidenced by the extensive excerpts presented throughout the ensuing data chapters. While not understating the usefulness of quantitative research approaches in understanding the lives of women (Maynard, 1994) my reliance on qualitative methods (specifically, in-depth interviews) enables my bringing of women's voices to the fore.

Further, my choice of qualitative research methods is informed by the fact that it "privilege[s] subjective and multiple understandings" (Hesse-Biber, 2017: 4) of women. Feminist research, in its commitment towards women's empowerment, qualifies women as knowers or agents of knowledge by critiquing traditional positivist epistemologies derived from the dominant gender, race and class (in other words, White bourgeois men) which led to a distorted, incomplete and mono-centric view of the world (Harding, 1987; Mama, 1995). While the rejection of grand theories is not peculiar to feminist research, Mama notes that feminists are not always united on this front, as some "have come up with grand theories of their own, premised on a unitary female subject" (1995: 8). Danai S. Mapotsa (2011) similarly challenges this "dangerously universalistic" (p.98) imagery attributed to women in research processes and cautions against this practice by referencing the work of like-minded scholars such as Rosi Braidiotti:

> […] women may have common situations and experiences, but that are not, in any way, the same. In this respect, the idea of the politics of location is very important. This idea, developed into a theory of recognition of multiple differences that exist among women, stresses the importance of rejecting global statements about all women and of attempting instead to be as aware as possible the place from which one is speaking. Attention to the situated as opposed to the universalistic nature of statements is the key idea (1994: 163)

Harding explains that rigid representations or "global statements about all women" in research can be avoided by observing the interacting sources of oppression influencing women's lived/living experiences:

> It is "women's experiences" in the plural which provide the new resources for research. This formulation stresses several ways in which the best feminist analyses differ from traditional ones…. Women come only in different classes, races, and cultures: there is no "woman" and no "woman's experience." Masculine and feminine are always categories within every class, race, and culture in the sense that women's and men's experiences, desires and interests differ within every race, and culture. But so, too, are class, race, and culture always categories within gender … (1987: 7).

My feminist approach to research takes into perspective the interplay of various sources of oppression in relation to women's experiences of IPV. I have explained extensively in Chapter One how intersectionality and additional insights from Black/African feminism can achieve this. Intersectionality in particular, challenges standpoint epistemologies that paint a homogenous imagery of women by creating an avenue in which "women themselves may be differentially positioned within multiple axes of power that in turn influences how they embody gender" (Kiguwa, 2019: 227). Relatedly, my deployment of post-structural feminist tenets also distinguishes my feminist approach to research as one that appeals against fixed or universal versions of femininities and thus, enabling my observation of the multiplicity of subjectivities in my IPV data.

Harding (1987) argues that feminist research should endeavour to dissolve the power imbalances that have traditionally characterised the researcher and participant relationship. Rather than constructing the researcher as being objective or immune to the research process, Harding charges that a researcher's positionality and subjectivity warrant sufficient scrutiny, as such elements are essential to empirical research procedures. Bergen (1993) echoes that a rigorous reflexive method involves the full acknowledgement of values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases on the part of the researcher. Kiguwa (2019: 226) similarly argues that reflexivity as a principle of feminist research stresses "the impossibility of neutrality and objectivity in any research, arguing that by its very nature, the practice of research is political". Therefore, the rejection of textbook assumptions of researcher objectivity implies that the researcher is less of an "invisible, anonymous voice of authority" and more of "a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (Harding, 1987: 9). Later in this chapter, I delve deeply into my reflexive insights by drawing on how certain aspects of my social location, such as my nationality, gender, religious identity and academic attainment, as well as my subjective

experiences of motherhood and IPV shaped my thought process and interactions with the participants.

Also related to diffusing interviewer-interviewee power relations is the ethics of caring conceptualised by Hill Collins, which suggests that "personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (2009: 281-282). This concept also informed my approach to the interviewing process. I show later in this chapter how I provided a safe environment in which the women could express their emotions while narrating their ordeals. I also present how I acknowledged my own emotions throughout the interviewing process to negate further the positivist views which claim the absence of emotions from research (Hill Collins, 2009). It will later become evident in this chapter, how this research practice not only minimised power imbalances but "humanised" my conversations with the women as hooks explains:

> Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of the subject and object. It is humanising speech, one that challenges and resists domination. (2014: 131).

The approaches I have outlined above are in no way exhaustive but encapsulate the central feminist methodological principles that informed the progression of my study. Besides, Cook and Fonow argue that the number of features to which a researcher adheres does not necessarily determine how feminist she is. Rather, what should be held in high regard is how "epistemology is related to research design, methods and analysis" (1986: 14).

4.3. PREPARATION FOR FIELDWORK

I started mapping out a plan for the data collection process between March and June 2018 while I was still in Nottingham. Starting from where I left off was an obvious first step to initiate this process, given my five-year, pre-doctorate experience as a field researcher in the GBV sector. I was still in contact with many of my former associates at the time and relied significantly on these networks to develop a list of potential leads whom I contacted virtually in a bid to find a gatekeeper. I found this task quite anxiety-provoking as the communication was often met with long-winded conversations, frequent technical glitches that are characteristic of internet calls and a series of delayed email responses.

In hindsight, I realise that my anxiety levels and relative impatience were additionally piqued by my academic and personal circumstances. Academically, I was preparing for the first-year annual review of my PhD at the time, a task which coincided with a coursework deadline. Personally, I had just secured a Resident Tutorship position in one of the university's halls of residence in April 2018, a position in which I could only take time off outside the academic calendar. That I only had the summer to complete my fieldwork in Kenya and return to the UK by September meant that a great deal was at stake if activities failed to go according to plan. Postponing an overseas fieldwork trip was not an ideal option for a recipient of a three-year tuition-fee-only scholarship such as myself and, with no monthly stipend at hand, I did not have the financial flexibility to relinquish the subsidised rent and free meals that I received in the Resident Tutor role.

Communication challenges persisted and I suspended efforts to access participants through organisations. Thus, liaising with individual gatekeepers was more effective within my restricted timeline. I had also adopted this approach previously with much success and was therefore more confident in managing my work relationship remotely with the two female gatekeepers whom I eventually recruited (I refer to them as Zalika and Zawadi). Zalika and Zawadi were middle-aged community workers both of whom had extensive experience in women's rights advocacy work in Nairobi and Mombasa respectively. Their occupation and avid grassroots involvement meant that they had an acute awareness of women who had experienced IPV in the low-income localities in which they were working at the time of the field study. The process of recruiting field participants was preceded by several phone calls with both women during the months of May and June 2018. From these conversations, I worked collaboratively with each gatekeeper to sketch out a feasible work plan for my field visits; articulate the essence of maximising the heterogeneity of the sample; iterate the purpose and nature of my study; and emphasise the ethical requirements with regards to IPV research.

There were certain points during these early stages of project development that I considered focusing exclusively on women's aggression in the context of their victimisation, with the hope that this controversial, yet neglected aspect of IPV research (at least in the Kenyan context) would generate invaluable contributions to policy and programming. However, upon reflection during these several weeks of planning, I started questioning whether it would be feasible to obtain an adequate sample size based on a selection criterion that recruited women who admittedly had been aggressive towards their partners. As discussed in Chapter Two, women

constituting this category are considered to be deviant in Kenya, which made me re-think whether this emerging research interest would discourage participation or, even worse, ultimately cause significant attrition rates midway through the data collection process.

Consequently, I reconsidered recruiting women from Nyeri county; a site which I had selected at the time (in addition to Mombasa and Nairobi) by virtue of the level of media attention it has received on the rising use of physical violence by women in intimate settings (Kidula, 2015; Ngao, 2015; King'ori & Bitrus-Ojiambo, 2016; Pala, 2016; Wambugu, 2016). I was concerned that readers of Kenyan origin would perceive my research as being skewed against the Kikuyu ethnic majority who inhabit this region. I was also reminded that the WHO (2001) cautions IPV researchers against publications that would perpetuate negative ethnic stereotypes. I had a heightened awareness of this, having experienced first-hand the ethnically triggered post-elections violence in Kenya during 2007 and eventually settled for Mombasa and Nairobi as primary sites for the study on account of their ethnically diverse populations. It was for these reasons that I also returned to my original scope of research which was broader in the sense that it was not limited to examining women's aggression only but included exploring an array of responses that could be exhibited by women in the realm of IPV. Furthermore, inviting women to discuss their diverse reactions to IPV seemed to be less abrasive and judgmental as it welcomed the opportunity for deeper, reflective and meaningful conversations that would accommodate each participant's unique experience.

I discussed my thought processes at length with Zalika and Zawadi, both of whom confirmed my concerns about selecting Nyeri as a site for studying women's aggression. My frequent brainstorming sessions with both women resulted in a positive working relationship. I was intentional about making them feel involved, valued and respected in a bid to make the process collaborative rather than imperious. My remote location meant that both women acted as my eyes and ears at this stage of my project, the success of which rested on the collegial and cordial atmosphere that I endeavoured to build. I listened to them patiently and considered their suggestions (mostly pertaining to field logistics) and incorporated their ideas within my methodology and work plan as required. I particularly established a good friendship with Zalika when we serendipitously discovered that her daughter and I had collaborated previously in a project in 2013 that marked my career debut in the field of GBV. Subsequently, there were moments when we found ourselves engaging in conversations that evoked nostalgic memories

of my earlier career days in the field, which I found helpful in allaying self-doubt and anxiety in these initial stages of my doctoral fieldwork.

Zalika, Zawadi and I had several conversations about the necessary measures to be taken to minimise harm and distress to prospective participants. I reiterated that participants should not be recruited from the same household to avoid alerting perpetrators of the nature of the research. The WHO guidelines titled: *Putting women first: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women* include the caution that "the mere act of participating in the survey may provoke further violence or place the respondent… at risk" (2001: 10). In adherence to this recommendation, the importance of safeguarding each female participant from any form of retaliatory IPV was a point I recapitulated with care to Zalika and Zawadi throughout the recruitment process. Secondly, IPV research is far from an emotion-free endeavour, as asking women to recount traumatic experiences of abuse might increase the risk of re-victimisation (Burgess-Proctor, 2014). As community workers, Zalika and Zawadi easily understood that conversations about IPV might have an effect on the participants' emotional well-being. Thus, it was agreed between the three of us that a list of referrals for care and support was to be prepared ahead of the fieldwork. Thirdly, I also emphasised the importance of upholding the confidentiality and privacy of each participant. With much ease, Zalika and Zawadi understood my request to conduct the interviews in a private setting that was a pre-booked, invitation-only, meeting room, which was only accessible to, and safe for, the women. Reasonable interview timeslots were predetermined by the two women and me, but I explained to them that this should be observed with some flexibility so that the proposed time was also convenient for each participant. As a lone researcher, I refrained from conducting interviews in the women's households to avoid exposing myself to unexpected encounters with potentially abusive individuals (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). I explained these concerns to Zalika and Zawadi with which they too agreed. In fact, both women offered to accompany me to the interview location and ensured that I finished data collection before dark. They were not present in the interviews, but they would always wait for me outside the interview room, within reasonable distance to avoid breaching participant confidentiality.

I secured a research permit from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya and ethical approval from the University of Nottingham, U.K in June and July 2018 respectively. In addition, it is also an expectation in Kenya that advance notification is provided to area chiefs or other local authorities before the commencement of

any field activity within a community. Zalika, Zawadi and I agreed that they would steer this process ahead of time to cast off any doubts or suspicions that would damage the credibility of my research within the communities we had earmarked. I was reminded of a time during my pre-doctoral fieldwork experience when a chief attempted to solicit a bribe from a colleague and me as a precondition for accessing a community under his jurisdiction for research purposes. Hitherto, we had always found that presenting the requisite ethical documents was sufficient to gain the confidence of local authorities whenever we paid them a courtesy call before proceeding to the field for data collection. We certainly did not yield to the demands of the corrupt chief but learned thereafter always to involve what we used to call "field guides" to mediate this process. These were individuals who had a positive reputation and were well known in the communities, qualities which I could easily attribute to Zalika and Zawadi. Devising such a strategy from the outset was therefore essential to avoid a repeat of untoward incidences. That Zalika and Zawadi also accompanied me on each field visit was an additional advantage in validating my presence in the communities, as I was neither questioned nor summoned by an official to verify the purpose of my visit during the interviewing process. Even so, all interviews were conducted with their knowledge and I always carried the required ethical documentation in full anticipation of any changes.

4.4. SAMPLE SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WOMEN

During the preparatory stages of the fieldwork, I had prepared and shared with Zalika and Zawadi a short invitation script and a recruitment survey (see Appendix 3) to serve as a guide for enrolling women whom I had targeted for my research. These were married or cohabiting women between the ages of 18-60 years who were experiencing IPV with their current husband/partner. I initially felt that recruiting currently partnered women was the best approach to minimise recall bias. I also felt that my interest in investigating creative or innovative ways of negotiating IPV would best be derived from this cohort of women. I also assumed that the inclusion of separated or divorced women would be likely to result in their desire to narrate their "exit stories" and thus, over-shadow the actions that were deployed tactically to manoeuvre within an environment of victimisation.

However, activities did not go entirely according to plan. As can be seen from the profile of the participants presented in Table 4.1, five women in my sample were either separated or divorced (Khulthum, Amina, Brina, Leila and Alice). There had been miscommunication

between the recruiters (Zalika and Zawadi) and the women which we did not notice soon enough to rectify. I only became aware of the oversight while collecting the requisite demographical information before the start of each interview. I gauged whether their willingness to participate had been influenced by the gatekeepers in any way and determined that this was not the case (as it was for the rest of the women too). Still, I contemplated reimbursing their travel costs and politely declining their participation but quickly reconsidered this, given the additional time and ethical implications associated with their replacement. Additionally, the major part of my fieldwork was self-financed, which made their exclusion even less appealing. Thinking *in situ* and relying on previous field research experiences, I was confident that the in-depth interview guide that I had adopted would keep conversations focused within key lines of inquiry (Chatzifotiou, 2000). A total of 28 women were recruited using this purposeful sampling approach, which targets individuals who can best inform a phenomenon in question, based on knowledge and/or experience (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The suitability of this sampling technique for recruiting hard-to-reach populations (Neuman, 2006) also reinforces its relevance to my research.

Relevant details of each woman have been provided in Table 4.1, which I summarise as follows. The average age of the participants was 38 years, with the youngest being 19 years and the oldest being 55 years. Each woman had an average of three children with the highest reported number of children being six and the least being one child. With the exception of four women, the rest still had children under the age of 18 at the time of the interview. Apart from the five separated or divorced participants, 23 women were either married or cohabiting with their male partner at the time of the interview, with 40 years being the longest reported union and three years being the shortest. However, a significant proportion (15 women) were involved in cohabiting partnerships.

In terms of educational attainment, nine women completed primary school, three completed secondary school, three completed tertiary education, and one did not attain her university degree. With the exception of one woman who was uncertain of her ex-partner's academic credentials, all except one man had advanced beyond secondary schooling. Only four women reported that they were more academically advanced than their current/former partners. As was the case for most of their (ex)partners/husbands, 25 women were either employed or self-employed (or both) in the informal economy at the time of the interview, while three were

unemployed. Of the estimated 44 tribes in Kenya, the women were representative of 10[6] ethnic groups affiliated with the larger Bantu (75%), Nilotic (14%) and Cushitic (11%) populations, and 11 of these women were in inter-ethnic unions. In terms of religious affiliation, 20 women in the sample were Christian and eight were Muslim, with only a minority (two women) being involved in inter-religious relationships.

[6] Note that the women who self-identified as Duruma, Pokomo or Digo are all classified under the larger Mijikenda ethnic group.

Table 4.1: Profiles of female participants and their (ex-)husbands/partners

Name	Age	Religion	Ethnicity	Academic Qualification	Empl. Status	Relationship Status	Yrs in Relationship	No. of Children	Age & Sex of Living Children	Location
Jane	36	Christian	Duruma (Mijikenda)	Tertiary Education	Self-emp.	Married	17	2	10(f); 3(f)	Mombasa
Jane's partner	40	Christian	Duruma (Mijikenda)	Tertiary Education	Emp.					
Ilham	33	Muslim	Pokomo (Mijikenda)	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Married	12	4	12(f); 8(f); 6 (m); 4 months (m)	Mombasa
Ilham's partner	40	Muslim	Digo (Mijikenda)	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Emp.					
Khulthum	40	Muslim	Digo (Mijikenda)	Tertiary Education	Self-emp.	Separated	20	4	19(m); 14(m); 9(m); 4(m)	Mombasa
Khulthum's ex-partner	45	Muslim	Digo (Mijikenda)	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Emp.					
Maureen	35	Christian	Luhya	University (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	12	2	12(m); 7(f)	Mombasa
Maureen's partner	47	Muslim	Duruma (Mijikenda)	Sec. School	Emp.					
Grace	55	Christian	Luo	Prim. School	Emp.	Married	40	5	38(m); 33(f); 30(f); 26(f); 21 (f)	Mombasa
Grace's partner	58	Christian	Luo	Prim. School	Self-emp.					
Amina	49	Muslim	Digo (Mijikenda)	Sec. School	Self-emp.	Divorced	6	2	23(m); 19(f)	Mombasa
Amina's ex-partner	57	Muslim	Digo (Mijikenda)	Sec. School	Emp.					
Topi	49	Christian	Taita	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Married	18	3	20(f); 15(m);10(m)	Mombasa
Topi's partner	55	Christian	Taita	Sec. School	Unemp.					
Adhiambo	42	Christian	Luo	Prim. School (incomplete)	Unemp.	Cohabiting	7	2	20(m); 15(f)	Mombasa
Adhiambo's ex-partner	45	Christian	Luo	Prim. School (Incomplete)	Emp.					

Name	Age	Religion	Ethnicity	Academic Qualification	Empl. Status	Relationship Status	Yrs in Relationship	No. of Children	Age & Sex of Living Children	Location
Brina	34	Christian	Kamba	Sec. School	Unemp.	Divorced	4.5	2	10(f); 2 months (m)	Mombasa
Brina's ex-partner	38	Christian	Kamba	Sec. School	Emp.					
Patience	37	Christian	Luhya	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	18	4	17(m); 13(m); 11(m); 8(f)	Mombasa
Patience's partner	40	Christian	Kamba	Sec. School	Emp.					
Naomi	42	Muslim	Luo	Sec. School (Incomplete.)	Self-emp.	Married	23	6	25(m); 23(f); 20(m); 18(m);14 (f);10 (f)	Mombasa
Naomi's partner	50	Muslim	Luo	Prim. School	Self-emp.					
Susan	30	Christian	Luo	Prim. School	Self-emp.	Married	16	3	13(f); 9(f); 3(f)	Mombasa
Susan's partner	34	Christian	Luo	Sec. School	Emp.					
Emily	32	Christian	Luo	Prim. School (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	15	2	11(f); 3 (m)	Mombasa
Emily's partner	41	Christian	Luhya	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Emp.					
Leila	48	Muslim	Digo	Tertiary Education.	Self-emp.	Divorced	DK	3	22(m); 21(f); 15(f)	Mombasa
Leila's ex-partner	42	Muslim	Digo	DK	Empl.					
Halima	25	Muslim	Somali	Prim. School	Emp.	Cohabiting	10	1	2(f)	Nairobi
Halima's partner	30	Muslim	Somali	Sec. School	Unemp.					
Rahma	25	Muslim	Borana	Prim. School	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	4	1	3(m)	Nairobi
Rahma's partner	32	Muslim	Somali	Sec. School	Self-emp.					
Esther	27	Muslim	Somali	Prim. School	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	6	2	1.5(f); 6 months(f)	Nairobi
Esther's partner	33	Muslim	Borana	Sec. School	Emp.					
Hadija	32	Christian	Meru	Prim. School	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	7	3	14(m); 13(f); 10 (f)	Nairobi
Hadija's partner	45	Christian	Taita	Sec. School	Emp.					
Lillian	26	Christian	Luo	Prim. School (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	15	4	9(m); 6(f); 3(m); 1(m)	Nairobi
Lillian's partner	32	Christian	Kamba	Prim. School	Self-emp.					
Lydia	27	Christian	Embu	Prim. School	Emp.	Cohabiting	16	3		Nairobi

Name	Age	Religion	Ethnicity	Academic Qualification	Empl. Status	Relationship Status	Yrs in Relationship	No. of Children	Age & Sex of Living Children	Location
Lydia's partner	36	Christian	Luhya	Sec. School	Emp.				17(m); 9(m); 4(f)	
Margaret	54	Christian	Kikuyu	Prim. School (Incomplete)	Self-emp.	Married	36	5	36(m); 34(m); 32(m); 33(m); 23(m)	Nairobi
Margaret's partner	63	Christian	Kikuyu	Prim. School	Unemp.					
Wanjiku	47	Christian	Kikuyu	Sec. School (Incomplete.)	Emp.	Cohabiting	9	3	23(f); 15(m);7(m)	Nairobi
Wanjiku's partner	39	Christian	Kikuyu	Sec. School	Emp.					
Sambayas	48	Christian	Luhya	Prim. School (Incomplete)	Emp.	Cohabiting	28	4	32(f); 29(f); 27(m); 25(m)	Nairobi
Sambayas' partner	52	Christian	Luhya	Sec. School	Emp.					
Krest	50	Christian	Luo	Sec. School	Emp & Self-emp.	Married	30	5	28 (f); 24(f); 18(m); 14(f); 10(f)	Nairobi
Krest's partner	55	Christian	Luo	Sec. School	Emp.					
Mercy	19	Christian	Luhya	Prim. School	Self-emp.	Cohabiting	3	1	9 months(f)	Nairobi
Mercy's partner	22	Muslim	Luhya	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Emp.					
Jerida	48	Christian	Luhya	Prim. School	Unemp.	Cohabiting	20	2	18(f); 14(f)	Nairobi
Jerida's partner	44	Christian	Luhya	Sec. School (Incomplete)	Emp.					
Liz	34	Christian	Luo	Tertiary Education.	Emp. & Self-emp.	Married	12	3	14(m); 4(m); 6(f)	Nairobi
Liz's partner	38	Christian	Luo	University (Undergrad. degree)	Emp.					
Alice	38	Christian	Luhya	Tertiary Education.	Emp.	Separated	17	2	17(m); 15(f)	Nairobi
Alice's partner	42	Christian	Kalenjin	Sec. School (Incomplete.)	Emp.					

4.5. ETHICAL CONCERNS

4.5.1. Informed Consent

The process of obtaining written consent as a first step is most important for any type of field inquiry. Yet, Miller and Bell (2002) reminds researchers that requesting participants to sign consent forms in IPV research might evoke feelings of unease on the part of the interviewee and therefore affecting their interaction with the interviewer. In keeping with this guideline and using the written consent form as a guide (see Appendix 4), I secured verbal consent as an alternative expression of willingness to ensure that my interactions with the women were not compromised in any manner from the outset.

Even so, the ethical principle of informed consent is not as straightforward in practice as it appears to be (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Feminist researchers have continuously raised concerns about conventional approaches to recruiting and seeking participants' consent, including what the concept really means to research participants. Miller and Bell (2002) argue that the power and control of gatekeepers might make it difficult for prospective interviewees to refuse to participate, and their willingness to participate voluntarily becomes even more questionable when they are less powerful than the gatekeepers. For the participants, this begs the question: Who is actually giving consent? Earlier in this chapter, I made mention of how Zalika and Zawadi eased access into the communities, insulated me against unwanted engagement with local authorities, reassured my identity as a researcher and aided participant recruitment on account of their grassroot involvement in women's empowerment spaces and community health worker status (see previous section). These elements were undeniably beneficial to propelling my field work to success but not without heavy ethical assessment. Firstly, it was difficult for me as a researcher to determine whether each woman's liberty to participate in my study was infringed upon by Zalika's and Zawadi's positionalities in the community. As alluded in earlier statements, both gatekeepers had an aura of respect which likely afforded them some degree of social power in their localities, thus making it difficult for me to establish fully whether a participant had the capacity to freely withdraw from the study if they so wished. It was during such moments that I was reminded of my limited influence over this process as "control over decision-making around access is not always in the hands of the interviewer and

even when this appears to be so, can still be problematic when gate-keepers are used" (Miller & Bell, 2002: 61).

Nevertheless, I did not feel completely "defeated" (for lack of a better formulation) by this predicament. I still had the consent form at hand and carefully reviewing the guidelines with each woman as a first step, was the strategy I implemented against the likely gatekeeper-respondent power influences. It was very important to me that each woman felt safe in this space and because I could not completely rule out whether their voluntariness was in any way compromised, I remained obligated in ensuring that each understood their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason and without repercussion.

Another problematic area as a result of my involvement with gatekeepers was that it was quite impossible for me to determine whether any omissions were made because they either felt that some individuals were incapable of relaying the information that I wanted to hear (Bilger & van Liempt, 2003) or even because of their personal conflicts with or dislike of potential respondents (Singh &Wassenaar, 2016). Other than trusting that Zalika and Zawadi were acting in good faith, I admittedly felt that I had no practical means of redressing this concern at the time of my field work. In retrospect, perhaps recruiting multiple gatekeepers would have helped offset these biases to some degree as Creswick (2017) argues. Feminist researchers have also questioned whether participants genuinely consent to participation, especially when it involves releasing private and intimate details (albeit anonymised) about their lives in the public sphere. O'Connell-Davidson articulates this as follows:

> If researchers are working in a context that requires them to secure the consent of research participants, then they expect to understand that 'No' definitely means 'No' if they meet with refusal. But if someone does give informed consent … that closely interrogates and then publicly dissects the intimate details of her life, experience and emotions, should we accept that 'Yes' means 'Yes'?... Is it possible for anyone to genuinely consent to being objectified through the research process? (2008: 51).

In my presenting of women's subscription to dominant gender discourses in the public realm of this thesis (as well as other future publications), I sometimes wonder whether the inevitable display of their victimisation and vulnerabilities expressed in the intimate accounts of their relationships would concern them, despite identity protection. As a result of this, I sometimes

relate to O'Connell-Davidson's expression of guilt over publishing the life experiences of Desiree (her key respondent) as a commercial sex worker, even though she had fully consented to participate:

> When I wrote up data from my research with Desiree, I turned her into 'a prostitute' on the pages of the academic books and journals to which I contributed. Even though I always attempted to portray her respectfully as a subject and agent, she does not appear in these texts as a whole person, of interest and worth in her own right. She appears as 'a prostitute' or 'a sex worker', a foil against which to discuss and evaluate theories of prostitution (2008:56).

Questioning whether "Yes means Yes'" also meant that I had to examine whether the women's consent was influenced by their perception of the relative power and influence I had on improving their current circumstances. This was particularly so for women who, in my view, were exposed to "severe" forms of IPV. Hadija and Lydia, for example, remarked as follows in the interviews:

> Now what I'm really asking, is for you to help me so that I can get a job and manage to raise my children. (Hadija, 32 years old, Nairobi resident).

> I would just ask that, if you can please start something like a project that can help us [women] by bringing us together for advice, it would be good because you can tell me something I didn't know, and it can address the challenges I'm facing. (Lydia, 27 years old, Nairobi resident).

Such misconceptions were emotionally charged, and I knew I was ill-equipped to meet their desired expectations. Being in no position to help desperate women gave rise to feelings of hopelessness and admittedly, I was not immune to the distress that stemmed from these (and other) emotive comments. As a lone worker, I did not have the privilege of debriefing with team members as was the case in my previous work, but I will remain endlessly grateful to my mother who lent a sympathetic ear that helped me to "de-stress" and persevere with the data collection process. Hadija's and Lydia's comments validated the need for increased economic, social and emotional support for female survivors of IPV in Kenya. In such cases, I repeatedly had to explain gently that my research was purely academic-driven and, while it could not directly or immediately benefit their lives, it was my hope that it would inform IPV interventions and policy in the long term. This experience sharply resembled that of Stevenson while conducting research with refugees:

> I was also asked for practical support – to help secure leave to remain, access health services, find work, enter higher education and so on …. At times this made me feel deeply uncomfortable, not only because these were roles outside the boundaries and limitations of myself as a researcher as well as being ones that I was ill-equipped to play, but also because it heightened my awareness of the lack of support available to many refugees. This made it difficult to be yet another person who was either unwilling or unable to help. (2009: 4).

4.5.2. Safety and Protection from Harm

In the emotionally charged environment of IPV research, it is also crucial for feminist researchers to express empathy and emotion authentically during the interviewing process. Watts (2008) encourages feminist researchers, as listening and feeling agents, to walk in their respondents' shoes to understand their personal experiences of the phenomenon in question. Emotional and empathetic exchanges between the researcher and the participant are also essential in building rapport and creating a comfortable atmosphere for narrative in which the interviewees can convey their experiences. While Watts considers self-disclosure to be pivotal in feminist ethics of care, I generally found it challenging to share my personal experiences of IPV with the women. This was particularly so for participants such as Liz, a 34-year-old woman from Nairobi, who went into great detail to explain how an episode of physical violence triggered premature labour that caused her to deliver her baby on her own. I personally felt that the "gravity" of my experience was incommensurate to hers and that self-disclosure in this case would by no means relieve her emotional pain. I did not want the women to think that I trivialised their experiences and such disqualifying moments were my way of avoiding unwarranted misconceptions.

I felt that listening with compassion was more appropriate in cases such as Liz's. Watts (2008: 8) admitted to relying on verbal and non-verbal forms of expression, such as listening with compassion, maintaining eye contact and "the power of touch to ease emotional distress" while conducting her ethnographic research with cancer patients. I relied on such verbal and non-verbal cues to create a non-judgmental and trusting environment that encouraged the women to confide in me and share the most intimate details of their experiences. As an example, 42-year-old Adhiambo's initial demeanour in the interview setting was characterised by some degree of detachment and reservation but, soon after she sensed the genuine concern and compassion I conveyed, she became increasingly forthcoming in narrating her painful

ordeal of abuse, including the recent discovery of her HIV positive status. Showing empathy and emotion therefore created a protective setting in which the participants felt safe and comfortable to elucidate their personal details with me. Having an audio-recorder running assured my emotional presence in the interview with Adhiambo and the rest of the women, which would have been impossible to achieve if I had adopted a note-taking approach. Taking this less restrictive interviewing approach enabled me to listen attentively "and to follow the direction that the women I speak to take me in" (Mupotsa, 2011: 102).

Evidence suggests that women affected by IPV can benefit immensely from discussing their personal experiences when a pleasant atmosphere is created in the interview setting (Center for Health & Gender Equity, 1996, cited in WHO, 2001). This is mostly because these women have never had the opportunity to discuss their intimate stories with someone who listens sympathetically and uncritically (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). Thus, a feminist approach to conducting IPV research is of benefit to women as it "conveys the message that violence is a topic worthy of investigation, and not a shameful or unimportant issue" (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002: 1602). Therefore, the risks of causing distress to respondents are outweighed by benefits such as "receiving information, using their experiences to help others, reflecting on their past experiences (i.e. consciousness-raising), and finding it helpful to talk to others about their victimization histories" (Burgess-Proctor, 2014: 128). Indeed, most of the women in the interviews I conducted found the interviews somewhat "therapeutic" as indicated in the following excerpts:

> Like right now, you see, I am very happy that I have talked to you because I am removing these things inside me; I am very happy. (Margaret, 54 years old, Nairobi resident).

> Now I have talked to you I feel like some things…at least my heart is at rest…say for example if someone is carrying a heavy load in their heart…that anger subsides after talking to you. (Adhiambo, 42 years old, Mombasa resident).

Such moments affirmed that the interviews uplifted the women's spirits and left them feeling positive despite their circumstances. This challenges the over-protectionist notions associated with mainstream ethical assumptions which discourage IPV research on the grounds of shielding participants from distress (Burgess-Proctor, 2014). This traditional rhetoric has been strongly contested in the evidence where it has been argued that limiting IPV research in the

name of safe-guarding women is more harmful as it limits opportunities to express daunting life events (Campbell *et al.*, 2010; Shorey, Cornelius & Bell, 2011).

To empower the women and build on the positive atmosphere, I asked them to choose their own pseudonyms at the beginning of the interview, an exercise which was delightful to watch as many took up this invitation with much excitement. Following Burgess-Proctor (2014: 130), I argue that this approach gave them agency to "govern their identity in the developing interview narrative" and permitted them to "impart particular meaning to the interview process". I also tried to achieve a safe interview environment by refraining from using trigger phrases, such as "sexual violence", "rape" and "abuse", in order to elicit open responses from the women without them worrying about my judging what they said (Patton, 2015). Thus, I had to be cautious that the interview guide could not be perceived in any way as being "judgemental, blaming or stigmatizing" (WHO, 2001: 22). Such careful considerations bore much fruit in the research process. Markedly, the safe environment I consciously endeavoured to build made the women very open with their stories and never at one point did they relate their intimate experiences in the third person for self-preservation as evidenced in other sensitive research conducted among African women (see Mupotsa, 2011). I designed the interview guide to give the women several opportunities to express their experiences in a non-intrusive manner. I began by asking general questions about gender roles in Kenya and personal thoughts on disagreements in marriage or marriage-like settings, through which private accounts of IPV were progressively revealed (see Appendix 6). Indeed, my in-depth interview approach enabled women to discuss their personal stories willingly with me, which would not have been the case if I had followed a "stiff, hard and one-way interaction that a social survey questionnaire would bring about" (Chatzifotiou, 2000, n.p). The in-depth interview process also made it possible for me to explore deeply the meanings they attached to their experiences, to gently probe their encounters with physical, sexual, emotional and economical IPV, and to investigate unexplored or taboo aspects of their experiences of marital rape/sexual IPV. Chatzifotiou explains the strengths of using in-depth interviews with reference to her IPV research among women in Greece:

> The in-depth interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury and has been the major research method used by feminist researchers to encourage and enable women to tell their own life stories and disclose rich details and information about previously 'hidden truths'. (2000: n.p).

Participants who tearfully recounted their stories were given sufficient time to regain their composure and I reminded them of their right to withdraw from the interview or change the topic. Invariably, I found that women were comfortable to continue with their narratives after I had given them time to collect themselves. Following WHO's (2001) ethical guidelines on IPV research, I also concluded all interviews in a positive manner that placed emphasis on women's strengths. Words of encouragement were imparted not only to end the interview on a hopeful note but also to temper the air of despondency that seemed to have overtaken the lives of some. Power dynamics were also diffused in the final stages of the interview process by giving them the opportunity to provide suggestions on initiatives or interventions they thought would work best to help IPV survivors in their communities. While this presented a platform for women to relay their opinions, I also argue that it promoted some degree of social awareness against IPV.

4.6. REFLEXIVE MOMENTS

This study bears the imprint of my personal values, roles and identity, those of the participants, as well as the context in which the study was carried out. Research is not immune to bias and subjectivity and a reflexive exercise is crucial to conducting ethical research (Sultana, 2007). The commonalities that I shared with the women with respect to gender, nationality and ability to converse in a shared language with a common cultural heritage facilitated conversations on the sensitive subject of IPV. I sometimes wondered whether they would be as candid or as comfortable in detailing their accounts if I were situated outside these social indicators. Following Sultana (2007), however, I was reminded that my positionality as a researcher was subject to ambiguity and contradictions so that moments of "insiderness", "outsiderness", were both and neither expected. A case in point is my conversations with Muslim participants during which I often sought clarity to elicit fuller explanations when narratives of sexual practices and religiosity converged. Khulthum (40 years old) and Amina (49 years old) believed that a person would be unworthy of seeing Allah (in heaven after they died) if they engaged in anal sex and would rather resist such sexual advances or divorce persistent husbands than risk their eternal fate. As a Christian, my "curiosity with the unfamiliar" (Merriam *et al.*, 2001) led to my probing into these sensitive, unexplored and taboo issues to deepen my knowledge of the intersection between religion and sexual IPV. My outsider status in this respect was an asset to the research.

Feelings of affiliation and disaffiliation were also experienced during my interviews with younger and older women respectively. Sharing my personal story of early pregnancy with women in their 20s and 30s established a common ground with relative ease. I naturally drew from my story to motivate and encourage them when conversations elicited hopelessness, despondence and tears. I assumed the position of a "participant/researcher" (Mupotsa, 2011: 96) during these personal exchanges which helped to narrow the chasm between the "knower" and the "subject" as well as enable these younger women "feel comfortable sharing stories that they had perhaps never had the opportunity to discuss" (p.102). While I quickly connected with younger women, it was initially difficult to engage some older women who perhaps saw me as a younger sister or daughter. I found that explaining my professional experience of talking to women with similar experiences helped to diffuse this barrier. Revealing my identity as a mother when related conversations emerged also contributed to building a trusting atmosphere with older women. Suffice to say that motherhood, in their eyes, was a qualifier for engaging in "mature" discussions.

My academic attainment presented additional markers of difference. I was aware that my position as a doctoral researcher afforded me the privilege of selecting a research topic of my choice, designing the study, deciding whom to recruit, what to include or exclude from publications and so forth. I was aware that women were not in every sense devoid of power in that the decision to meet me and the extent of information shared rested solely on their willingness to do so. Yet, I could not help but feel conscious that my "power" outweighed theirs in this sense. Secondly, my positioning as a relatively well-educated doctoral student pursuing a degree in the West accentuated my status of privilege. I was conscious that a significant proportion of these women did not have an opportunity to study beyond secondary school. That most of them were also educated in conditions of socio-economic deprivation made me acutely aware of my private school, academic grounding since childhood. My middle-class upbringing thus widened the socio-economic differences with women whom I could best describe as working class.

I sometimes felt ill-suited to encouraging the younger women who dropped out of school as a result of early pregnancy. They had no choice but to forgo their dreams as a result of the economic burden borne out of raising a child. In contrast, early pregnancy did not impinge on my academic progress as my parents (although disappointed by the turn of events) continued being extremely supportive of my education from a financial aspect and played (and still play)

a fundamental role in supporting my son materially. I was often uncomfortable whenever women marvelled at my Western education. I was wary that this would make them feel devalued at my expense. I sometimes felt guilty when they explained how financial misfortunes barred perceived academic success. In these moments, I developed a tendency of quickly crediting my scholarship award for the opportunity it provided to study abroad instead of allowing them to labour under the assumption that I was a well-to-do Kenyan with the capacity to finance her doctoral studies abroad.

Participants warmed to me as conversations unfolded and it was not unnatural for them to ask where I lived. This was especially the case with fellow Mombasa residents. I was carefully diplomatic whenever they asked this question, knowing very well that revealing my upper middle-class neighbourhood would likely widen the socio-economic divide between us. I refrained from directly answering these questions and often provided vague responses that pointed them to commonly known landmarks in an effort to make the location seem less obvious. Sometimes I said I lived in close proximity to neighbourhoods which were not distinctively affluent. While this form of "outsiderness" made me more conscious of our socio-economic disparities, seeking the assistance of gatekeepers (Zalika and Zawadi) who, from my perspective, were more "authentic" insiders served to diffuse these power dynamics. As participants lived in low-income neighbourhoods, the private pre-booked interview venues in all cases were situated within such contexts for convenience. While my familiarity with working in similar environments helped in my quickly adjusting to these settings, there were moments when I found these surroundings quite unnerving. This was especially the case in Nairobi where muggings in broad daylight were not uncommon. I intentionally dressed modestly to make myself less conspicuous. In addition to wearing the casual top, jeans and trainers, dressing down for me also meant not wearing any type of jewellery on my hands and neck. The small, studded earrings that I often wore were subtle in appearance. I also made an effort to blend in, for instance, by intentionally using an inexpensive Android phone instead of my iPhone.

Moments of disaffiliation were sometimes borne by differences in our mastery of the Swahili language. Although I am fluent in Swahili, there were moments in the interviews where I sensed my use of the language was not as articulate or as rich as that of the participants; especially when they employed certain phrases, colloquialisms and terminologies which were unfamiliar to me. These moments of self-consciousness were more pronounced in the

interviews with the women from Mombasa. In Kenya, the Swahili accent is considered most refined when spoken by Mombasa residents. However, years of studying and working across geographical boundaries has rendered my accent "less polished". This was further affirmed in the interviewing process when some of the respondents expressed surprise when I mentioned I was similarly born and bred in Mombasa. Moreover, my frequent use of *Swanglish* (a colloquialism suggesting an integration of Swahili and English languages), which is less characteristic of Mombasa residents, further distanced me from viewing myself as an insider in this regard. These moments further brought to light why the notion of "an authentic insider" continues to be problematised in academia (Mupotsa, 2011: 101). I also encountered difficulties of being an "insider" when I found it difficult to understand the informal lexicon used by participants from both study sites. My outsider status was reinforced in such moments, as I often relied on probes for clarification (Patton, 2015) to make sense of the dialogues with the participants.

In an effort to come to terms with my sense of self as a researcher (England, 1994), some of the discursive elements that warranted reflexive exploration included: my upbringing in a bi-ethnic, urban, Christian household, my experience of early motherhood, my momentary encounter with an abusive male partner, my evolving epistemological positioning as a post-structural and African feminist scholar, my professional experience in the field of GBV research, and my exposure to both African and Western cultures. Such background activities, some of which seemingly had faded into oblivion, had to be recollected and journaled to unveil how they might have influenced my worldview and perception of self in relation to the research process. Whitson (2017) argues that the malleable nature of a researcher's subjectivity can be brought to light during inter-subjective interactions with participants to enable one to "explore the ways in which new subjectivities emerge through the research process as a result of a changing understanding of the self" (Whitson, 2017: 301). With this perspective, I readied my sense of self to be reinforced, altered, negotiated, or even challenged during the interviewing and entire research process. For instance, I listened respectfully and intently as some of the women remained hopeful that their unfaithful or violent partners would change for the better. Yet, I remained gravely challenged by this way of thinking and there were many times when I wanted to tell the women to forget the men and move on with their lives. My personal IPV experiences might have reinforced this position, which was sometimes challenged by my recollection of stories of individuals whom I knew to have changed for the better.

4.7. PROCESSING THE DATA

The analytical process was an iterative exercise that I can best describe as recursive rather than linear (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data immersion began actively when I started transcribing the 28 interviews in which I had engaged the women, of which, 26 were administered in Swahili (one of two formal languages in Kenya) and for the remaining two discussions, the use of language varied between English, Swahili and *Swanglish*. The interviews lasted an average of one-and-a-half hours, which amounted to approximately 30 hours of audio-recorded data. I transcribed all interviews in their original language between late July 2018 and early November 2018. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 17), the process of transcribing interview data is crucial to informing the early stages of analysis, but there are no established lines of procedure to follow when producing a transcript, with the minimum requirement being "a rigorous and thorough…'verbatim' account of all verbal (and sometimes non-verbal e.g. [coughs]) utterances". Incorporating non-verbal details of a conversation (including intonation and intakes of breaths) into the transcribed material is a task that can take 20 hours for each hour of an audio recording (Gill, 2000) and, with 30 hours of taped conversations in mind, I admittedly was unable to achieve this owing to time limitations. Following Gill, however, I tried as much as possible to produce detailed transcripts by avoiding summarising or polishing them to look more presentable.

I also found transcribing quite laborious and mentally draining but I took breaks whenever needed. It is for this reason that concurrent translation was also avoided during the transcription process to avoid inaccuracies and misinterpretation. Besides, specific phrases and meanings that are unique to the Swahili language would lose their meaning and context especially when quickly paraphrased in the English language. This certainly does not suggest that language equivalents can be derived in all cases. In fact, African researchers, such as Tamale, have generally noted that, in "collect[ing] data in local languages and present[ing] … findings in the foreign language of the academy" there is always the inevitable loss of "rich cultural connotations and ambiguities" (2011a: 13). Nevertheless, my efforts to achieve more accuracy far outweighed the costs, as transcribing the interviews myself and reviewing the data in its original state was crucial for conceptual development and in (re)living my discussions with the women especially when the recordings were replayed repeatedly. This I also found to be instrumental to the reflexive processes described in the previous section.

I employed a thematic analytical approach to examine women's accounts, which involves the process of identifying, examining and formulating patterns or themes derived from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While other analytical methods, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory, thematic decomposition analysis and others similarly seek to identify themes emerging from the qualitative findings, what distinguishes thematic analysis from the rest is that it offers "a more accessible form of analysis since it is not tied to a specific epistemological and theoretical framework" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 9). However, Braun and Clarke acknowledge that "researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments" (2006: 12). My application of thematic analysis was done within an epistemological framework according to which meanings, languages and experiences are conceptualised as being socially (re)produced so that the generated themes are examined in relation to the socio-cultural context in Kenya (described in Chapter Two). I started identifying prevailing patterns in the qualitative dataset by reading and re-reading the transcripts, checking against relevant literature and listening to the audio-recordings multiple times from which notes and ideas for coding were progressively refined throughout the process of analysis. I undertook a manual coding process by writing notes on the texts I examined in a Microsoft Excel workbook, categorising detected patterns in colour and quickly linking these to associated interview excerpts by annotating the name of the participant and page of her transcribed interview. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), I coded as many possible themes as possible, not knowing what might be of interest in later stages of the research.

Evolving themes under consideration were weighed against the research questions and those that were most relevant to the study were retained. In other words, themes that had limited supportive content were either dropped as a whole or, where relevant, were integrated into already fully developed themes. Correlated themes were also condensed and those that were problematic, in the sense that they did not fit into any of the main themes, were discarded. I categorised large themes into sub-themes, which is also important "for demonstrating the hierarchy of meaning within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 22). Eventually, I generated five thematic areas in total and, as illustrated in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, it made most sense to my research to organise them according to the IPV responses elicited in my discussions with the participants, after which I dissected information within these to identify the gender discourses that shaped their behaviours. Discourses were identified from the range of information on gender relations in Kenya and post-structural feminist literature about IPV (see Chapters Two and Three respectively). To that end, and in keeping with Weedon's (1997)

feminist post-structuralism, I additionally deployed discursive analytical techniques to examine the manner in which the accounts of women's responses to IPV were consistent or inconsistent with dominant gender discourses. Merging two analytical approaches is not peculiar to my research as, in their feminist post-structuralism study of IPV in South Africa, Boonzaier and De la Rey (2004) deployed both narrative and discourse analytical methods.

While there is "no single 'discourse analysis'", the common denominator across the many versions is the "rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting and describing the world, and a conviction in the central importance of discourse in constructing life" (Gill, 2000: 172). Gill mentions three of the 57 versions of discourse analytical techniques. The first is critical linguistics, social semiotics or critical language studies. This is strongly linked to the field of linguistics but wedded to structural analysis and semiotics. The second is influenced by ethnomethodology, speech-theory and conservation analysis and is less focused on looking at how accounts relate to the world but, rather, what accounts accomplish, and is focused on details of how social interactions are organised. Commonly associated with post-structuralism, is the third version, in that, primarily, realist ideals of language and the notion of a unitary subject are challenged (Gill, 2000). Palpably, the discourse analytical approach undertaken for my thesis was strongly affiliated with the third version. I specifically followed a discourse analytical technique in which discourse is conceptualised as social practice to enable my observation of how "people *do* [sic] things – to offer blame, to make excuses, to present themselves in a positive light, etc." (Gill, 2000:). Gill adds that, in using this technique, it is acknowledged that people's actions or the way they do things are not constant but vary from context to context. I found that this approach was resourceful in identifying the mutability of female subjectivities - in relation to intersecting axes of disadvantage - embedded in each of the 28 transcripts.

Extracts of responses to IPV associated with the dominant gendered discourses I have reviewed in Chapter Three were captured in the Microsoft Excel document, and the same process was undertaken for those which signalled a departure from the norm. In other words, this process involved checking the features and functions of the discourses reviewed in the existing literature against the data on women's responses to IPV (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, cited in Gill, 2000). Linking discourses to data or the movement between text, context and content was an iterative and time-consuming process which eventually added substance to my five thematic areas. I further accomplished this by avoiding "to ignore the nuance, contradictions and areas of vagueness" and, instead, concerned myself with "the detail of passages of discourse,

however fragmented or contradictory, and with what was actually said [by the women], not some general idea that seems to be intended" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 168, cited in Gill, 2000: 8). At the end of this process, two of five themes were associated with women's commitment to the gender status quo and the rest with how they challenged male hegemony.

The process of writing up the results and findings took about two years in total. I have presented the empirical findings in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight in an analytical rather than a descriptive format to enable the reader to make coherent linkages between the women's accounts, the conceptual frameworks presented in Chapter One, and the literature discussions presented in Chapters Two and Three. This form of data presentation worked best for my study as it constantly served as a guide to presenting my arguments in a critical, comprehensive and engaging manner. Succinctly, I followed the recommendations below, provided by Braun and Clarke:

> It is important that the analysis (the write-up of it, including data extracts) provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes …. Your write-up needs to do *more* [sic] than just provide the data. Extracts need to be embedded within an analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story that you are telling about your data, and your analytic narrative needs to go *beyond* [sic] description of the data, and make an *argument* [sic] in relation to your research question. (2006: 23).

4.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have explained the feminist research approach adopted for this study and detailed the processes I undertook in collecting data in the field. This included gaining access to the field through gatekeepers and devising participant recruitment and data collection strategies with Zalika and Zawadi, in line with ethical standards for IPV research. Within these discussions, I have described the logistical, financial, time and personal limitations that I encountered during the preparatory stages of the field work. I have also detailed the demographic features of the women and their (ex-)husbands/partners, before which I have explained the convenience of using a purposeful sampling technique to locate these hard-to-reach participants on account of their history with IPV. I have outlined the ethical procedures that I followed in conducting sensitive research and, within these discussions, explained some of the issues with which I grappled, such as questioning the degree of autonomy given to women in the informed consent process. Notwithstanding, I have discussed my attempts to

create a safe and empowering interview environment in keeping with the feminist ethics of caring, such as acknowledging the women's, as well as my own, emotions. Discussions of reflexivity were centred on my positionality in relation to the women's, how I pondered and navigated my outsider status, and how my subjectivity as a researcher was also subject to contradictions. I have concluded the chapter by describing the thematic and discourse analytical procedures that I implemented to generate the five themes that I discuss in the next four chapters.

CHAPTER 5: ON BEING A "GOOD" WOMAN: THE ROLE OF DOMINANT GENDER DISCOURSES IN SHAPINGPASSIVE FEMININITIES

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss one of the five key research findings which emerged following thematic and discourse analysis of the data. The five themes cover the following: i) placatory and acquiescent behaviours; ii) responses driven by religion; iii) responses addressing economic IPV; iv) resistance to sexual intimacy; and v) verbally and physically aggressive responses. Thus, this chapter contains an outline of the dominant gender discourses inherent in women's narratives and I investigate their association with the participants' responses to IPV that are encompassed by theme (i). In this chapter, underpinned by the post-structural feminist notion that gender is constructed discursively, I use a careful discursive analysis of women's ordinary "talk" about their (in)actions in less-than-ideal relationship settings to examine the ways in which power inequalities are hidden and, thus, subconsciously normalised. Moreover, in this chapter, I investigate how these "appropriate" feminine subjectivities are modelled by intersecting identity indicators such as class and age.

The first theme is integral to understanding the participants' own conceptualisation of normative femininity in marriage or marriage-like relationships. In the responses relating to this theme, I demonstrate how notions of male domination and female subordination become deeply embedded in the social fabric to the extent that women are inclined to defer to men in most, if not all, matters pertaining to the domestic milieu. In discussions about adherence to dominant gender discourses, I examine how acquiescence to men is rationalised to the detriment of women's self-actualisation, self-determination and self-assertion. Under this theme, I evaluate the extent to which submissive tendencies on the part of the women compromised long-term safety while paradoxically serving as a measure taken against looming physical and verbal IPV as well as economic deprivation. Within these narratives, I apply insights drawn from Black/African feminists to critique assumptions that African women are helpless and defenceless victims of IPV (see Mannell *et al.,* 2015; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016). In this section, I examine especially how gender, socio-economic and cultural factors integrate to structure women's creativity in navigating disadvantaged situations.

5.2. CONSTRUCTING THE "GOOD" WOMAN: PLACATORY AND ACQUIESCENT BEHAVIOURS IN THE RELATIONSHIP

I divide this theme into four sections and examine it according to the socio-cultural expectations of married or cohabiting women based on the participants' understanding of the household division of labour. In the first sub-section, I present how sustaining salient markers of femininity influenced placatory and acquiescent behaviour. Essential to exploring these behaviours further is to present the women's views of men's roles and responsibilities in a marital or cohabiting arrangement. Thus, in the second sub-section, I investigate the women's conception of male household leadership and how these views informed their submissiveness. In the last two sub-sections, I focus on the safeguarding measures women undertook to protect themselves and their children's well-being.

5.2.1. "Treat a Man Well even if He is Bad to you": Women's Perspectives of "Appropriate" Feminine Behaviour in the Context of Abuse

The aim of one of the initial interview questions: "In your own opinion, what are the responsibilities of a woman/wife in her family?" was to generate participants' views on dominant feminine expectations in the household. Responses to this question related to socio-culturally sanctioned expectations of women's primary devotion to their husbands/partners, children, and routine household practices. This demonstrates how the traditional and colonial scripts of domesticity continue to inform contemporary perceptions of femininity in Kenya (see Chapter Two). Participants unanimously described a "good" woman as one who "cooks delicious meals" for her husband and children, "ensures food is ready on time", "washes the children" and "takes care of the housework, the laundry and the utensils" so that the "home looks nice". Complementing these domestic practices was the additional requirement to exhibit affectionate, peace-making and nurturing qualities. Thus, the common perception was that a "good" woman was expected to: "take care of her husband", "attend to his needs", "respect the marriage and her husband", "ensure that there is peace in the household" and to "live peacefully with her husband".

Consistent with other IPV studies investigating discursive constructions of gender (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003, 2004; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016), the narratives showed how the traditional gender-role discourse operated in tandem with the romance discourse to inculcate women's subservience and compliance. According to Grace, a Mombasa resident aged 55, speaking words of endearment to a man after a stressful day at

work was one way of expressing this expectation. Her excerpt below draws on romance discourse notions stipulating the appropriateness of women to "defer and subordinate themselves and their interests" for the benefit of men (Wood, 2001: 247). This view is compatible with most African traditions in which a "proper" woman, in a context such as Kenya, is expected to put her husband's and family's interest before her own (Ebila, 2015):

> A woman is supposed to attend to her husband's needs, to attend to his problems and also to comfort him … if he's stressed because of work, you can comfort him with soothing words. (Grace, 55 years old, Mombasa resident).

The over-arching message behind this socio-cultural standard is that women are expected to demonstrate selflessness, servility and reverence to men at all times. This has significant implications for IPV, as the traditional gender role and romance discourses are entwined to commit women to the "good" wife image, irrespective of the turbulent atmosphere of the relationship. The explanation below by 25-year-old Rahma, a Nairobi resident, carries what bell hooks (2014:29) calls "the scent of oppression":

> When he comes home, he finds his clothes are clean, the house is clean…. He finds that everything a woman is supposed to do in the house has been done. But whenever he comes home drunk, he insults me, and I feel so embarrassed because the neighbours hear everything, but I persevere. [However] you should treat a man well even if he's bad [to you], even when he comes back home, he should find his clothes cleaned … and maybe one day he will regret … and decide to change … and your lives will end up even better than before. (Rahma, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

From Rahma's viewpoint, her devotion would eventually restore her husband's affection better than before. The possibility that her husband might "one day" find his actions regrettable "and decide to change" so that their "lives end up even better than before" demonstrates her efforts to orientate her narrative towards a romantic trajectory. Her rationalising cohered with the dark romance discourse, which construes male-to-female IPV as typical and normal in intimate relationships (Wood, 2001). Wood's study in the United States found similarly that this discourse motivated her female participants' interpretation of incidents of male aggression as "bad spells" (2001: 253) and led them to reason that domestic servility (such as waking up early to cook men's food and doing men's laundry) would eventually instil positive change.

Although there was no strong evidence in my study, it is plausible that all domestic demonstrations of love implied that participants, such as Rahma, held on to the "good times" or occasional moments when men exhibited affection. For instance, Wood (2001) found that women drew on what she termed the "honeymoon period" to sustain their belief in the fairy-tale romance narrative. Towns and Adams (2000) found similarly that separating men's violent personalities from sporadic positive attributes was integral to renewing women's sense of hope in a changed man. The South African women in the samples studied by Boonzaier and De la Rey (2003, 2004) and Dekel and Andipatin (2016) also displayed adherence to the romantic script in a similar fashion.

Weedon argues that dominant gender discourses are reproduced whenever domestically abused women embody "appropriate" femininity:

> Language, in the form of socially and historically specific discourses, cannot have any social and political effectivity except in and through the actions of the individuals who become its bearers by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values which it proposes and acting upon them. (1997: 34).

Weedon's idea of prevailing gender discourses evolving into "common-sense knowledge" (1997: 74) is also apparent in Rahma's quote in which submission is construed as a "natural" response from a woman encountering marital mistreatment. Examining dominant discourses at work enabled me also to connect Rahma's narrative with the history of gender relations in indigenous, colonial and contemporary Kenya, discussed in the literature review section of this thesis (see Chapter Two). Scholars in Kenya and other settings throughout SSA concur that IPV against women "is widely sanctioned as a form of discipline" (Ose, 2009: 3, cited in Ademiluka, 2018: 353) in which women "are regarded as children who can be prone to indiscipline if not 'disciplined'" (Green, 1999; Makayoto *et al.*, 2013; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Ademiluka, 2018: 353). Accordingly, Rahma's narrative (as well as those of other women) confirmed that IPV still remains as a "timeless tradition" in Kenya (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013: 7). According to my interviews with participants such as 48-year-old Leila from Mombasa, these gender concepts seemingly cohered with the dark romance discourse causing women to avoid police reporting:

> Us Kenyans like taking everything to court! If your husband slaps you, you take him to court, mmh? If you go to the police and he gets arrested, it'll build a lot of spite instead of love because you're taking your husband to be beaten by the police,

> sleep [in the cell] and when he leaves, will he still be in love with you? Will there still be love? When he was hitting you, he initially thought, 'I'm disciplining my wife' and not, 'I'm hurting her'. But instead, you take it as, 'How dare he hit me?! I have to teach him a lesson!'… (Leila, 48 years old, Mombasa resident).

Unlike some previous studies in Kenya and other SSA countries where women viewed beatings as symbolic expressions of love (Green, 1999), the discourses elicited in the current research were devoid of evidence that participants explicitly perceived that men behaved this way out of intense affection. Even so, Leila's quote explains how violence against women in male-dominated communities "often becomes a standard … one by which … woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes" (Lorde, 1984: 120) and are viewed instead as a means of "correcting" transgressing women.

As reflected in other SSA contexts (Ilika, 2005; Green, 1999), in Leila's excerpt, emotional attachment and fear of estrangement are regarded as deterrents to police reporting. Questioning whether the man would "still be in love with you" after being released from prison implies that a woman's sense of value would be threatened should she report her partner. In fact, women in a Nigerian study by Ilika (2005: 83) similarly questioned whether the "man will agree to marry you again" should they report their aggressive behaviours to authorities. In fulfilment of the requirements upheld by romance discourse notions, feelings of guilt as a hindrance to using this formal support avenue ("because you're taking him to get beaten by the police") suggests that the men's potentially negative experiences in prison, outweigh women's victimisation as a result of IPV. Comparable with findings from feminist post-structuralist studies of IPV in South Africa (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016) and the West (Towns & Adams, 2000), the romance discourse was drawn upon when women recounted reasons discouraging police recourse. Statements from the South African study, in particular, show that women who sent their spouses/partners to prison were likened to "bad" wives.

Undertones of the romance discourse are also observed in 27-year-old Esther's excerpt below in that preserving the relationship supersedes seeking justice for her partner's criminal offence:

> There is no point of reporting him to the police. What if you end up getting back together? You should only report him to the police if you want to move on with your life. Like see now after he cut my face … if I wanted to leave him for good then I would have reported him. (Esther, 27 years old, Nairobi resident).

As her statement implies, however, Esther's refusal to report to the police should be examined in relation not only to emotional factors ("what if you end up getting back together?"), but also to her socio-economic status. The association between how participants respond to IPV and their class position is explored further in the latter part of this theme, but I highlight it here to show that decisions fostered by romance discourse notions can be connected with women's financial circumstances. There was evidence throughout my conversations with participants of a widespread belief that a woman could easily move on with a life outside a relationship after she has secured enough finances to support herself and her children. Esther, just as most of the other women in this study, had limited schooling and income. Indeed, Kenyan economists have shown that gender disparities in education impinge on women's access to employment outside the informal economy (Wanjala & Were, 2009). Esther had dropped out of primary school after falling pregnant by her partner at 18. Her dreams of pursuing her studies were impeded by motherhood and wifehood on one hand, and financial constraints on the other. Her job prospects were not promising and the meagre earnings from her groundnut peddling business only heightened her financial dependence on her partner, who was the primary breadwinner and owner of a small local butchery. Reporting him risked incarceration or divorce, both of which had adverse implications for her financial well-being and for her two daughters (aged 1.5 years and 6 months). Her location in a patriarchal society where reporting IPV to the police is proscribed and wife beating is prescribed also informed Esther's choices and attitudes toward her partner's actions.

Her affection for her partner could not be dismissed from the situation, given her repeated comments throughout the interview: "He begged for my forgiveness and I forgave him because I love him" and "I still love him even though he mistreats me." In effect, her excerpt above has to be understood against the backdrop of interlinked socio-economic, cultural and emotional factors. However, the likelihood of experiencing long-term IPV was high for women similar to Esther. In fact, Rahma, discussed earlier in this section, attested to this fact. Rahma also had to consider her options carefully. Her primary education was a barrier to accessing Kenya's competitive job market and her casual labour employment was insufficient to sustain herself and her 3-year-old son. Although she filed a police report, her decision against escalating her husband's violent offence to court should be weighed against these factors, as well as her emotional attachment to him. In the excerpt below, Rahma tacitly elicits the romance discourse which underpins notions of forgiveness towards the abuser (Wood, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000). Rahma's hesitancy in completing the reporting cycle evident in the following quote,

was comparable with women in an American study by Baker (1997), who lifted restraining orders or let abusive male partners out of prison following numerous apologies:

> … there is a time he hit my eye and it was really swollen [and then] I reported to the police and came with my OB [number][7] at home and warned him that I'll have him arrested … he begged for my forgiveness and changed for about two months. He apologised and promised never to drink again but, as soon as my eye started healing, he went back to drinking and continued with his [violent] behaviours .... (Rahma, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

5.2.2. "A Woman Should Attend to A Man's Needs": Sexual Compliance as a Marital Obligation

When I asked participants about their personal views on the socio-cultural expectations of women, it became increasingly evident that the connotations of phrases such as "take care of her husband" and "attend to his needs" also suggested women's sexual availability to men. The appropriation of such indirect references signalling women's "duties" in intimate spaces is not peculiar to my research. A case in point is Mupotsa's analysis of conjugality in the Zimbawean context where the metaphorical term "making tea" is applied to elicit similar meanings (2020: 382). My participants in these discussions constructed their sexualities as "hidden, muted and truncated" (Ligaga, 2020: 64), which were somewhat reminiscent of the Christian and Victorian versions of sexual morality taught to African womenfolk in mission schools, as reviewed in the literature in Chapter Two (Kanogo, 2005). While African sexuality was generally read as primitive by colonialists, I have shown in the same chapter how the White female missionary's counterpart; the *pim* or Black *bibi* similarly coached young African women into a "contained" mode of sexuality in bid to preserve the "good" wife imagery (Kanogo, 2005). Ligaga asserts that "this discourse of purity [still] forms a core part of the macro-politics of morality in Kenya" (2020: 69) – a statement from which one could arguably

[7] In Kenya, a statement regarding an alleged abuse must be recorded in an Occurrence Book (OB) at the police station after which the victim obtains a P3 Form (a police medical examination report). The P3 is then completed and signed by medical personnel after which it must be returned to the police department from where the charges are forwarded to the court system as evidence should the victim decide to have the perpetrator prosecuted (Odero *et al.*, 2014; Bannister & Moyi, 2019).

claim a continuity rather than a total cessation of the influences of the *pim* and White mission woman.

Participants also constructed sexual intimacy as being more of a duty than a source of mutual pleasure, which conformed to the conjugal duties of wives discourse (Yllo, 1999; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2004). The recurring sense of responsibility for sexually satisfying their husbands/partners highlighted how they unconsciously objectified themselves. In the following quote, for instance, 54-year-old Margaret from Nairobi includes sexual obligation in the array of domestic responsibilities:

> A wife is responsible for all the housework, for caring for her husband [and] to have sex with him. (Margaret, 54 years old, Nairobi resident).

As I reviewed in Chapter Two, unlimited access to women's bodies was institutionalised in the pre-colonial era and was central to reifying male ownership of women through practices such as bride-wealth payment and polygamy (Ochwada, 1997; Kanogo, 2005; Kimuna & Djamba, 2008; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). However, patriarchal sexism, as a matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2009) still persists in Kenya but has taken different forms since the pre-colonial period. Although these customary practices are no longer strongly upheld by a majority of urban Africans – owing to the over-commercialisation of bride-wealth payment in a declining economy for instance (Kolawole, 1997; Green, 1999) – the lasting effects of the proprietary status over women are still realised in contemporary relational practices.

Indeed, African heterosexual stereotypes persist in modern society where, according to Lewis (2011: 201), the "virile heterosexual warrior" image of the man still holds true to maintain gender (and racial) differences. Women in my study confided that they did not always desire to engage sexually with the men but also felt obliged to do so to regulate the men's licentious behaviours. Typifying participants' views, 55-year-old Topi from Mombasa constructed men's sexuality as unrestrained, by drawing on the male sex-drive discourse which is predicated on the idea that men are biologically predisposed to sexual insatiability and, therefore, are justified in having multiple female sexual partners (Hollway, 1984):

> The most important thing for a man is sex and food…. When he lacks sex and food, he will start sleeping around, and the marriage will be broken. (Topi, 55 years old, Mombasa resident). "

In Kenya, as in most SSA contexts, there is an unspoken claim that male infidelity is justified especially when wives/partners are unable to "take care of their husbands". This is evident in the following quote from a conversation between Ugandan sociologist, Hope Chigudu, and a married Kenyan man:

> I have had a few girlfriends, but only on those occasions when *my wife was not treating me like a man* [my emphasis]. You are an African and I am sure you know that in Africa *if a woman does not take care of her husband* [my emphasis], he will wander in other directions…. If [my wife] allowed me, I would show her the roaring lion in me. (2011: 372).

The male sexual drive and conjugal duties of wives discourses were elicited when participants explained their keenness to satiate their husbands/partners. Sexual servitude as a means of safeguarding the relationship was highlighted especially in narratives of spousal infidelity. The first thing women questioned, when they came to know of men's unfaithfulness, was their ability to gratify them sexually. Brina, a 34-year-old from Mombasa, implicitly blamed herself for her husband's illicit affairs:

> One time I asked him, 'Why do you keep seeing other women? What is it that you don't get in this house? Am I not satisfying you with anything? (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

Weedon (1997) argues that women are prone to feelings of inadequacies and failure in contexts inundated with dominant patriarchal discourses. As a woman immersed in a society that expects her to be a wife who should "take care of her husband", Brina was left feeling sexually incompetent whenever her husband was unfaithful. She expected herself, and not her husband, to perform this role to perfection and held herself accountable for his sexual (un)happiness. Once something went amiss in her marriage, she defaulted to self-blame rather than holding the man responsible for his lack of sexual restraint. Her attitude also conformed to the romance discourse. As long as she held on to the "perfect…happily-ever-after union idea" she could not "rid her psyche of the sense that [she had] failed in some way by not having such [a] relationship" (hooks , 2014: 90).

Jane, a 36-year-old from Mombasa, also drew on the same hetero-normativity and romance discourses when she pleaded with her adulterous husband to reveal where she had fallen short in the sexual domain of the relationship. As Topi inferred in her excerpt ("The most important

thing for a man is sex and food…. When he lacks sex and food, he will start sleeping around, and the marriage will be broken"), Jane cited women's poor culinary skills as an additional cause of male infidelity:

> I used to ask my husband, 'Or am I the one who is causing you to sleep around? Then tell me what I'm doing wrong and … I'll make it right, if I'm not doing it right in bed then tell me what I should do to satisfy you so that you don't go out [to other women]…. I just want to know so that I make things right … or is it my cooking then?' You know, there are women who don't know how to cook. If a woman cooks delicious food, she will maintain her marriage, but if your husband is hungry, he'll go to someone else [meaning to another woman] who will cook nice food for him. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Jane, similar to the other women presented in the chapter thus far, also portrayed herself as one who was serving rather than challenging the prevailing gender status quo (Weedon, 1997).

5.2.3. The Role of Masculine Gender Roles in Reinforcing Women's Submissiveness

Also pertinent to making sense of women's submissive and placatory behaviours was to understand their perceptions of men's responsibilities in the familial context. The responses gleaned from the interview question, "In your own opinion, what are the responsibilities of a man/husband in his family?", showed that men were assigned the primary breadwinning role, with the majority citing that a man must "take care of his wife and children" by "ensuring they have food to eat", "paying the rent" and "paying the children's school fees". These views reflected the mainstream expectation of men in the Kenyan context as found in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2007; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). The reification of this binary opposition was best illustrated by 33-year-old Ilham from Mombasa. Her narrative was positioned in the traditional gender-role discourse where she presented herself as economically dependent on her husband. She embodied a subjectivity that endorses domesticity as "a source of full self-realisation" and reproduces notions implying that "the naturalness of women's responsibility for domestic labour and childcare is balanced by the naturalness of men's involvement in [public] work" (Weedon, 1997: 37):

> A man wouldn't know anything about managing the domestic responsibilities as well as a woman would. The man's main responsibility is to go out and look for money and bring the resources back home so that the woman can take care of everything else. (Ilham, 33 years old, Mombasa resident).

However, slight contradictions were evident when feminist discourses were lightly elicited in some narratives to subvert the male breadwinner/female home-maker dichotomy (I discuss this more broadly in Chapter Six). Highlighting the necessity for women's participation in the workforce to cover potential shortfalls in the household, Amina remarked as follows:

> Life today is hard, and you shouldn't let your husband be responsible for everything; it is necessary for women to change. When he goes to work and comes back home saying, 'I don't have money for vegetables today', because I'm also responsible for my family's wellbeing, I should at least have some money to chip in. (Amina, 49 years old, Mombasa resident).

Amina explained to me that her engagement in the workforce was also empowering. This view concurred with those elicited from female participants in an IPV study by Wood *et al.* (2019) in three of Kenya's urban informal settlements. However, in Chapter Six, I discuss further how participation in paid work was less out of the participants' volition and more out of exposure to economic IPV. This aspect complicates the findings by Wood *et al.*, which suggest poverty in general, and not economic IPV in particular, as being a driver of (self-) employment. Although nearly all the women in my study worked in the informal economy, the over-arching agreement across the interviews was that men were "the great financial supporters of the house". Jane, for example, was of the opinion that women could contribute occasionally to household income, but made it explicit that this was the purview of men:

> Sometimes you can chip in if the man is unable to fulfil his responsibilities … even though it's not your responsibility, you have to take an initiative sometimes. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Similar to Amina and Jane, Topi also held the view that women's monetary contributions were essential to provide a buffer against financial constraints in the household. Notwithstanding, she metaphorically equated a gender role reversal in the financial domain to emasculation:

> A man is the head … and the woman is the neck, if the woman becomes the head today, and the man becomes the neck, will there be any respect in that house? (Topi, 49 years old, Mombasa).

Indeed, researchers have argued that a key marker of being a "good" wife in Kenya is respecting the man in ways such as unchallengingly accepting his financial decision-making status in the household (Ochwada, 1997; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Gillum *et al.*, 2016). In so doing, women bolster the prevailing gender status quo. Jane later explained to me her unfruitful attempts at talking her husband into joint financial planning and transparency. In the following statement, she embodies a subjectivity that conforms to the cultural standards entrenching women's subsidiary position in matters concerning household finances:

> Because the money belongs to him and he worked for it himself … I told myself that, even if I started arguing with him, I would not be doing the right thing. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Kenyan historian, Hannington Ochwada, argues that, in Kenya, "it is common to hear the claim that women should naturally know 'their place'" (1997: 125-126). From the above excerpt, Jane seemingly knew her "natural place" by avoiding asserting herself and respecting male headship in household decision-making processes. She did the "right thing" by refraining from questioning her husband's authority irrespective of his tyrannical grip on finances. Phrases like "the money belongs to him*"* further reinforced the male's financial ownership status and implicitly legitimised the female's dependent status. Jane's additional remark below explains how the prevailing gender-role discourse in Kenya modelled her attitude towards finances:

> You know, there is this element of masculinity; he has this thing in his mind, 'I'm a man and a woman can't tell me anything'. This is true, especially in our culture. There is this thing about being a man … because he is a man, he feels that a woman can't tell him this or that. They teach men that they shouldn't tell women how much they earn, otherwise a woman will become stubborn. Culture causes these things, you see. Maybe sometimes he wants to be open with me, but ever since he was young they told him, 'You shouldn't tell a woman everything; a woman is not to be told everything'. And he also saw the same thing done to his mother … so, it only becomes natural for him to treat me the same way. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Brina's unquestioning exit from the workforce below also illustrates women's submission to men's financial headship in the household:

> I used to work at the Mombasa airport, so when we got married he was like, 'Baby, you know what, there is no need for you to struggle by going to work and we're just the two of us…. Just relax' … (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

While the Kenyan society (similar to other SSA and patriarchal settings) dictates that men are the sole financial contributors in the household, Brina's statement also relates strongly to the Western-centric, fairy-tale romance discourse. With reference to African "talk" about love, Bhana suggests that it is "important to recognize how European discourses on love have been appropriated locally" (2013 :99). Brina ascribed the Prince Charming role to her husband and positioned herself as the damsel waiting to be financially rescued by a man (Towns & Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). The affectionate undertones of her husband's request elicits male chivalric qualities, assuring her to "just relax" and tender her resignation as there was no need to "struggle by going to work". Inadvertently, Brina became a female agent of patriarchy when she allowed herself to be "rescued" by her husband, as Hunnicutt explains:

> Chivalry renders women powerless because accepting protection implies neediness and vulnerability. (2009: 565).

However, Brina's femininity could be interpreted differently and her departure from employment also might have been informed by her understanding of relationships as being transactional. In research on the financial demonstrations of heterosexual love in SSA countries (Cornwall, 2002; Poulin, 2007; Sølbeck, 2010; Bhana, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Ruark *et al.*, 2017), including Kenya (Mojola, 2014), it was found that women in these settings, just as their Western counterparts, did not always perceive love as "an emotive or effective state but rather a set of actions and practices" that demonstrated "tangible evidence such as … material support" (Ruark *et al.*, 2017: 9). Brina's actions plausibly reflected her knowledge of this principle, that is, her belief that her husband's ability to fulfil the end of his bargain by financially sustaining her was evidence of his love. In my interview with Jane especially, this aspect was highlighted when she equated love to male financial commitment:

> I expect my husband to love me. If he loves me, he must ensure that he fulfils his obligations; he must ensure that we (myself and my children) live a comfortable life

> … even if he'll have little income, he should ensure that he's able to sustain his family. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

To complement her husband's financial ability, Jane felt that she had to:

> … show him that I'm here because of him. My presence in the home has to be felt by my husband…. So, my responsibility is to ensure that he knows he has a wife who cares for him. For example, I have to ensure that the food is ready on time.

A correlation between romance and material interests is indeed possible (Sølbeck, 2010), as both Brina and Jane's relationships (as with those of the other participants) were founded on mutual affection. Yet, upholding these ideals conformed heavily to the traditional household division of labour that relegated women to being unwitting reinforcers of power inequalities.

5.2.4. Placatory and Acquiescent IPV Responses for Self, Familial and Marital Preservation

The participants' views on the notion of "respecting the husband and the marriage" correlated with socio-cultural values in SSA settings where women were "expected to be quiet when men speak" and allow men to have the final say in everything (Thiam, 1986; Ebila, 2015: 146). In Chapter Two, I have highlighted that the silencing of Kenyan women at a structural level, inherited from indigenous and colonial societies, still informs contemporary micro-level relations. In such a male-dominated context, women, as the oppressed, are socialised to speak only what the male oppressor wants to hear (hooks , 2014). Thus, the narratives of this study suggested that silence was all that men wanted to "hear" from the participants; a desire which holds true for some men in SSA, as the following quote from an African poem, narrated by a husband to his bride, suggests:

> Always be sensitive, walk prudently and speak slowly. Take care of your manner (and) watch your language for decency is noble …. (For only) a bad wife exhibits her grievance… (cited in Green, 1999: 33).

However, Ebila (2015) stresses the importance of evaluating whether African women's silence is motivated by respect or *fear* of men. The notion of fear was detected in nearly half of the narratives in this study, where 13 of 28 participants routinely drew on the phrase, "keeping quiet", to suggest that this mode of submission had less to do with reverence and more to do with assuaging conflicts. Similar to the studies on women's IPV coping strategies in developed and developing countries reviewed in Chapter Three (see, for example, Lempert, 1996;

Browne, 1997; Abraham, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001; Wood *et al.*, 2019), participants modified their behaviours by avoiding talking back, expressing politeness when addressing men's misbehaviours and apologising without cause. Previous experiences of reprisals following their verbally and physically aggressive conduct motivated these passive approaches in some instances. I consider women's aggressive and violent behaviours further in Chapter Seven but, for now, I quote the following for the purposes of this sub-section:

> There is a time I talked back and told him, 'Stop shouting at me all the time! If you knew you were going to mess up my life you wouldn't have brought me here to mistreat me!' He hit me so hard … so from that time I realised that I'd rather keep quiet whenever he starts yelling at me…. He is the type of person who can end up doing something bad to me. (Rahma, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

> Whenever I used to see those messages (from the mistress) in his phone or if there is something he did that upset me, I always had a question ready for him as soon as he got home … 'Ok tell me, I saw this and that message, who is this woman?!'… and, you know, he'll respond in the same tone, 'What message?!' and then we start yelling at each other … but these days, although it is hard for me, I try to use a gentle approach. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

> If you tell him 'I'm really sorry, I understand' then he calms down …. But if you raise your voice and he also raises his…. He'll keep yelling…. Nowadays, I know that whenever you answer him back, it doesn't end quickly. But if you keep quiet then he calms down. (Patience, 37 years old, Mombasa resident).

The above excerpts show that participants operated within dominant gender discourses to maintain a façade of respect while, in actuality, submissiveness functioned to shield them from IPV. In other words, they became "familiar with language and manners of the oppressors" (Lorde, 1984: 114) and "adjust[ed] their speech to men's mood" (hooks , 2014: 128). Through this, they leveraged their disadvantaged position to bargain with patriarchy. Conceptualised by Kandiyoti (1988: 276), patriarchal bargain depends on women's ability to manoeuvre in the patriarchal environment through the adoption of "different strategies to maximise security and optimise life options". The following quotes illustrate further how patriarchal environments were negotiated:

> So I usually look at him … you know, I'm the type of person who keeps quiet whenever he shouts at me, I don't talk, 'cause we were taught that whenever your

> husband shouts at you, don't shout back; when you shout back it'll bring conflict. (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).
>
> I would rather beg for his forgiveness even when I'm not in the wrong, then we'll resolve things when he's calmer. But when he starts shouting and you also shout there's nothing you'll resolve. (Amina, 49 years old, Mombasa resident).

While "keeping quiet" or apologising without cause provided some measure of protection, manipulating the oppressive power structure only underscored how Kenyan women "buy peace on a daily basis" (Mukabi-Kabira, 1994: 4, cited in Ochwada, 1997: 126). Brina and Rahma, for instance, presented themselves as unassertive and self-sacrificing women who would rather restrain their emotions at the expense of being yelled at. This holds true for most women in Black Africa[8], as explained by Awa Thiam (1986:17), for example, in an anthropological study titled "Black Sisters, Speak Out" that includes details of the case of Yacine, a Senegalese woman who, instead of being confrontational with her abusive husband opted similarly to "swallow insult" to avoid endangering her life. Thus, while exhibiting a passive feminine subjectivity resulted in immediate safe-guarding gains for Yacine, Brina and Rahma, these strategies of coping potentially failed to provide a cushion for them against long-term IPV.

5.2.5. Preserving the Nuclear Family for Children's Emotional Well-Being

"Keeping quiet" was also exercised to mitigate potential adverse effects of IPV exposure on children's emotional and financial welfare, both of which I explore in the subsequent paragraphs. This corroborates findings of previous IPV research in which links have been made between women's calculated passivity and safety and well-being (Lempert, 1996; Baker, 1997; Abraham, 2000; Kaye *et al.*, 2007; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Ragavan *et al.*, 2015; Deuba *et al.*, 2016; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2019). In the excerpts below, two young cohabiting women, Esther (27 years old) and Mercy (19 years old), both of whom had children who were under the age of two, embodied a docile mode of femininity to shield their daughters from verbal and impending exposure to physical IPV:

[8] Awa Thiam (1986) conveniently uses the term "Black Africa" to mark the difference between the SSA region (predominately Black) and North Africa (predominately Arab).

> She [child] starts crying and covers her ears whenever we argue; she doesn't like the noise. As soon as I see her do that, I stop talking and I keep quiet and apologise [to my husband]…. The yelling affects our child. (Esther, 27 years old, mother of two, Nairobi resident).

> I sit down and tell him, 'Let's just drop the matter' or I go outside and let things go. If you're a temperamental person, you'd rather stay away from him and cool down and then come back to avoid putting the child in harm's way … because a child is helpless and if the child ends up getting hurt, you will start blaming yourselves. (Mercy, 19 years old, mother of one, Nairobi resident).

Mercy in particular portrayed herself as a woman who had mastered the art of regulating her anger for the sake of her child's well-being. Previous studies show that women in abusive contexts try to "cool off" to avoid escalating the violence or withdraw temporarily from the situation for immediate safety (Kaye *et al.*, 2007; Mannell, *et al.*, 2015; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2019). Both Mercy's and Esther's initiatives to moderate their behaviour for the sake of their children conformed to the "good" woman depictions of motherhood, nurturing and selflessness mentioned earlier. This implies that the traditional feminine requirement to provide childcare went beyond attending to the children's domestic needs to ensuring that they also resided in a peaceful domicile.

Maintaining a positive home environment also correlated with setting a good example and instilling positive family values in their children. For Susan and Maureen particularly, both of whom had children with an average age of 10 and 12 years respectively, "keeping quiet" was more about this aspect of maintaining a positive home environment. Similar to the Kenyan women in a study by Wood *et al.* (2019) who experienced IPV, Susan tried her best to comfort her three daughters (aged 13, 9 and 3 years) by reassuring them that "mum" and "dad" were fine. Maureen specifically opted out of aggressive behaviour after realising how the verbally abusive environment was detrimental to the upbringing of her son (aged 12 years) and daughter (aged 7 years):

> If we start insulting each other, will I be setting a good example for my children? I would rather keep quiet. I don't want my children to start thinking there is anything wrong between mum and dad, that is why I would rather keep quiet. He can talk all he wants, and I'll only respond to his questions. But exchanging words with him?

> Ah-ah, I don't do that because of my children. (Susan, 30 years old, mother of three, Mombasa resident).

> Initially I used to be … very bitter, I even used to insult him but, as time went by, I realised that this is also putting some pressure on my children … when they see us exchanging words and they would not grow up respecting family values. So, I decided to keep quiet; up to now I don't talk back. (Maureen, 35 years old, mother of two, Mombasa resident).

The maintenance of a healthy family environment was also associated with preserving the nuclear family structure for their children's well-being. Maureen's statement below best illustrates women's apprehension towards severing relationship ties with the men, as the children were in need of "fatherly and motherly love". To her, therefore, a "good" woman was one who kept her family together irrespective of her abusive experiences:

> If you are married, separation is the last thing you should go for, 'cause when you break that family into half … you might say 'Oh, what a relief'. You don't know what that child feels; the child might not tell you [how they feel] …. Unless the child understands very well that really, my dad is like this, or my mother is like this … but a child is a child whether the father is violent, whether the father is rich or poor, they all need their fatherly and motherly love. (Maureen, 35 years old, mother of two, Mombasa resident).

Indeed, just less than a third of the women in this study (8 of 28 participants) stressed the importance of both parents' involvement in the upbringing of their children. This belief was informed by the patriarchal family discourse in which a mother-father nuclear family structure is viewed as being the most conducive to a child's upbringing and well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lubbe, 2007, cited in Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). This discourse is evident in the African context, as Ebila explains:

> A proper African woman is imagined to exist within an ideal African family composed of a real loving husband or father who is usually the head of household, a supporting wife or mother who is expected to mother the children of the household. A proper African woman therefore aspires to be a wife and a mother. A proper African woman does not divorce or if she divorces, she … will be seen to be a bad example. (2015: 158) .

Most African women envision a married life with children, such that a life devoid of a man and offspring is considered to be unfulfilled (Kolawole, 1997; Maathai, 2007; Njue *et al.*, 2007). Lydia's awareness of this dominant discourse, that is also evident in Kenya (Njue *et al.*, 2007), surfaced when she recounted her "desire for marriage" and reasoned that it was better to "persevere and persevere and persevere" than to end her relationship. The notion of perseverance has been echoed in other analyses of women's IPV coping strategies (Ting, 2010; Mannell *et al.*, 2015; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2021). In my study, persevering in a violent marriage to conform to the normative familial standard, was also a means of avoiding potential stigmatisation. Lydia's narrative below reflects also the traditional ideal depicting marriage as the "end goal" for the "proper" African woman (Maathai, 2007: 54):

> I suffered a lot, but it was only that I desired marriage, do you understand what I mean? But you persevere and persevere and persevere through his mistreatment and disrespect but … I used to think of my sister who is also married … and then I asked myself, 'If I left the matrimonial home with my children, what image will I be portraying?' Those are the kinds of questions I used to ask myself, but I really desire to stay in my marriage. (Lydia, 27 years old, mother of three, Nairobi resident).

Having a sister who was also married and who possibly encountered similar marital obstacles ostensibly added on to the pressure of maintaining the relationship. This implied that familial preservation for her children's well-being overlapped with the additional, cultural requirement of sustaining a positive image of her family of origin. Adding to the importance of familial preservation for her daughter's well-being, Mercy also recounted having stayed because "she loved her marriage" and "did not want to portray a bad image of her family." Her statement implies that women in modern society are indirectly held responsible for marital dissolution and is reminiscent of the African traditional society where shame was attributed to the divorced woman and her family, following the return of the bride-wealth (see Chapter Two). In an IPV study conducted in Kenya, Hatcher *et al.* (2013) similarly found that avoiding shaming the family significantly motivated women's subscription to persevering and submissive femininities.

Central to the patriarchal family discourse is also the belief that biological fathers carry the unique ability to provide for their children in ways that mothers are unable to do so (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999, cited in Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). Lydia explained to me how she temporarily left the relationship with her three children (aged 17, 9 and 4 years)

but later made reconciliatory efforts to return to her extremely violent partner as she "felt pity" for her children staying away from their father. Marital and natal family members played a significant role in reinforcing this hegemonic family script that suggested it was wrong for children to stay away from their fathers. Family members advised women to endure IPV either because "challenges in life happen" or because they had also "faced similar challenges" and by so doing, women's oppression in marriages or marriage-like settings was normalised by these external actors. Weedon explains that discourses evolve into common-sense language through expressions, such as "it is well known that", "we all know that" and "everybody knows that", to pressurise people into conforming to central requirements (1997: 74). Susan recounted the advice provided by her parents-in-law:

> His mother tells me to stay with him because of the kids, you see. And his father as well … whenever I go to talk to them, they tell me to stay because everyone goes through challenges in life. (Susan, 30 years old, mother of three, Mombasa resident).

Other informal sources (close friends, village elders and chiefs) also advocated family unification for similar reasons. Maureen, for instance, stated that the local administration and friends believed in "family strengthening" and similarly advised her to "sort it out for the sake of the children". These attitudes signified the cultural legitimisation of IPV in Kenya (see Chapter Two) and played a role in informing women's obsequious behaviours towards their husbands/partners. Some of the few existing IPV studies in Kenya have found similar opinions expressed by informal sources when women seek advice or assistance (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Gillum *et al.*, 2016). Based on a qualitative study conducted in Nairobi, Gillum *et al.* (2016) found that, implicit in this counsel, is that women are responsible for maintaining the family and are blamed if it disintegrates. Similarly, Weedon's analysis identified how the patriarchal family discourse is entrenched by external sources and explains that the intention is never to validate the woman's state of oppression but to encourage her adaptability to the negative environment to her own detriment. In the absence of an alternative culturally sanctioned family framework such as single parenting, no self-determining options are ever presented to women such as Susan, as the advice only offers "one legitimate position, that of a long-suffering Griselda" (Weedon,1997: 39).

The influence of the patriarchal family discourse was also an obstacle to law enforcement and legal action as it bore some risk of detaining the perpetrator in prison and hence, destabilising

the organisation of the family. Again, relatives significantly discouraged women from taking this course of action. Recalling earlier episodes of physical IPV in her marriage, 50-year-old Nairobian, Krest, recalled her mother fervently cautioning her against police action even after she sustained serious injuries. She recounted an exchange between her parents, where her father, realising the gravity of her injuries, insisted on reporting to the police but was quickly talked out of it by his wife (Krest's mother). In the first part of the excerpt below, the dialogue between Krest's parents represents two conflicting blocs, one informed by a feminist discourse encouraging access to justice by victimised women, and another supportive of the mainstream patriarchal family discourse impeding police and legal intervention. The absence of a counter-argument by Krest's father below arguably reflects the potency of popularised gender discourses in silencing those considered to be not salient (Weedon, 1997):

> My mother said (to my father), 'No! Why are you telling her to go and report him yet they have children together?! What if they get back together tomorrow?' Then she turned to me saying, 'You will go to the hospital and tell them you were attacked by thugs.' And I responded, 'Mum, why should I lie and I'm in so much pain?' Then she said, 'You will do as I say'. I did exactly that, I got treated [at the clinic] and I stayed at my parents' home … with my kids. (Krest, 50 years old, mother of five, Nairobi resident).

In pre-colonial Kenyan society, elders and parents were responsible for settling disputes and governing the behaviour of the young, including those in marital relationships (Njue *et al.*, 2014). Njue *et al.* suggest that urbanisation has resulted in a decline in the influence of the role of elders, but a significant amount of respect is still attributed to them. Owing to their degree of relevance in contemporary society, reporting a husband to authorities might also be construed by older members of the family as a failure on their part to fulfil cultural expectations (Ilika *et al.*, 2002; Fawole *et al.*, 2005). The actions of Krest and her mother in the above excerpt could be understood against this backdrop. Despite her tentative attempt at seeking justice for the violence meted out to her, her filial obedience and her mother's domineering instructions ("You will do as I say") were likely to have been influenced by these cultural factors. Perseverance was the overall message conveyed to Krest by her mother. This particular case affirms the influence and respect afforded to older women in socialising younger women to wifehood during the pre-colonial era (see Chapter Two). This is explained briefly in the following quote from an analysis of traditional Kenya society by Kanogo:

> [The old women] taught the girls to be *tolerant* [my emphasis] of their future spouses … during domestic problems … . (2005: 207).

Similar scenes from the past are also rehearsed in other contemporary African settings in demonstration of the continued influences conferred on older women when tasked to instruct younger ones in the way they should behave to preserve their marriages. While Mupotsa's (2020: 383, 388) study is largely specific to the role of "Auntie Eve" or "Auntie Tiwo" in educating present-day Zimbabwean brides-to-be on how to "make tea for [their] husbands [in order] to sustain a happy marriage", a continuum is signalled by the same level of respect, wisdom and trust afforded to the aunties and their historical equivalents in providing marital counsel.

Conceivably, Krest's desperation for temporary shelter, fear of familial rejection and state of economic vulnerability as an informal-sector worker showed how her socio-economic position shaped her obedience. The age group of Krest's mother afforded her more power, qualifying her case as a classical example of how age hierarchies interacted with culture, gender, and class disadvantage to license female subordination. The same argument applies to Susan and other participants who were advised by their parents in-laws and older individuals such as village elders. Hill Collins remarks as follows concerning the influence of social hierarchies in legitimising oppression against subordinated people, saying that gender, class and age, among other factors:

> … shape any historically constructed group's positioning in power relations and these locations, in turn, frame group participation in systemic violence. Because groups who occupy different positions within hierarchical power relations have varying expressions of power, they participate differently in systemic violence. (1998: 930).

SSA women's high preference for informal channels for dispute settlement (Green, 1999; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Wood *et al.*, 2021) might be associated with the communal arbitration processes in pre-colonial societies (see Chapter Two). Green (1999) adds to this connection by suggesting additionally that the heavy penalties imposed on law-breakers by formal avenues relative to traditional mediatory approaches is also a deterrent for African women. Lydia's penchant for resolving marital conflict through the chief, in spite of her long-term experiences of IPV (economic, physical, verbal and sexual), was also influenced heavily by her subscription to the dominant family discourse:

> It got to the point where I said I would not go to the police because, you know, he can be arrested and locked up … and you can end up regretting because that's the father of your children. I would rather go to the chief and he can talk to us. (Lydia, 27 years old, mother of three, Nairobi resident).

5.2.6. Preserving the Nuclear Family for Children's Economic Well-Being

The controlling images of the persevering and self-sacrificing family woman illustrated how hegemonic concepts of motherhood intersected with gender and class oppressions (Hill Collins, 2009). In effect, participants chose personal violence against themselves over indigence (Bennett, 2011) because submission in tension-filled situations was warranted to safe-guard children's financial security. Rather than depicting them as limiting portrayals, it was suggested in the narratives that women were cognisant of their inability to raise their children independently and made reasoned choices to circumvent constraints. In the following paragraphs, I draw on the experiences of three women mentioned in the previous sub-section (Mercy, Lydia and Susan) to explain this point further.

Raised in poverty by her mother, following her father's death, Mercy for example, was unable to advance beyond primary schooling and could only secure menial jobs in her adulthood. At the time of the interview, she washed clothes for a living in Mukuru kwa Reuben, an urban slum neighbourhood in Nairobi, in which she also resided. Similarly, Lydia's inability to complete her primary education, as a result of her poor upbringing, also restricted her to casual labour employment within an informal settlement in Nairobi's Ruaraka constituency. The quotes below explain how class position informed their placatory behaviours described earlier:

> I cannot let my daughter suffer while her mother and father are still alive …. I would rather persevere (in the relationship) but, once she's older and I have a meaningful job, then I'll be able to raise her on my own … (Mercy, 19 years, old, Nairobi resident, primary school graduate, casual labourer, mother of one aged 9 months)

> Yes, I suffer a lot, but if I leave this man what will I do? Where would I go with these children? (Lydia, 27 years old, Nairobi resident, primary school dropout, casual labourer, mother of 3 children aged 17 years, 9 years and 4 years).

Susan lost both of her parents at a young age and the economic hardships that plagued her childhood affected her academic progression. Her resentment of growing up in shanty

neighbourhoods all her life and raising her three daughters (aged 13, 9 and 3 years) in Mombasa's Maweni slums made her determined to break the familial cycle of poverty. Her unstable earnings from her hawking business also meant that she still depended on her abusive husband for her children's maintenance. At the time of the interview, Susan's 13-year-old daughter was in her final year of primary school, and Susan was particularly fearful that leaving her marriage would impinge on her child's academic progress. Therefore, "keeping quiet" whenever her husband insulted her proved necessary to protect her studious daughter from mental distress as well as to secure prospective academic finances. Though these sacrifices costed Susan her well-being, the ways in which her socio-economic status modelled her strategies of coping were poignantly highlighted in the excerpt below:

> It is only because I don't have a [stable] job. I'm only here because of my child; she's in Standard Eight, and I want her to pass her exams. I don't want to mess up her future…. That is why I'm telling you if only I had a job, I would have left him a long time ago. But if I look at my children's future, their lives will end up like mine if I leave him.… I don't want to mess up their future, that's why I'm in the relationship…. I will never allow my child to go through the same experiences I have had in life. I don't want her to have the same life I have right now…. I don't like my child living in the slums! I want her to end up going to a reputable high school with rich people's children! I want her to go to university because I didn't have that opportunity … and the day I attend her graduation everyone will know that I have a daughter who studied to become a doctor. I don't want her hawking goods under the scorching sun until her skin starts darkening like mine. One day her husband will know that he has married a successful woman and [unlike me] he will not disrespect her by saying to her, 'You're good for nothing!' This is what I don't want for my children. (Susan, 30 years old, mother of three aged 13, 9 and 3, Mombasa resident).

Concurring with Susan's stark rationalising are arguments made by Hill Collins concerning how African American mothers "routinely encourage Black daughters to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions", including believing that "education is a vehicle for advancement" (2009: 198). This common ground lends credibility to possible parallels between the oppressive experiences of Black women in the United States (particularly those of lower-class status living in ghettoed neighbourhoods) and low-income Black women of African descent with Third World citizenship (Hill Collins, 2009). However, commonalities between

Black women from the West and SSA should not be established simplistically, as African scholars of women caution against using Western insights as a benchmark for studying African women (Kolawole, 1997). Implicit in Susan's concluding statement is also the assumption that a woman's high socio-economic status is a protective shield against spousal conflict. In studies within and outside Kenya, it has been found that high education results in a lower risk of IPV, though the correlation between socio-economic and IPV variables are complex and inconclusive (Makayoto *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). A highly educated woman with stable income, for example, might be perceived as "transgressive" or "deviant" and therefore a threat to hierarchal arrangements. IPV could be enacted to re-establish the incumbent structure as a result.

Hill Collins (2009) argues that Black mothering in intersecting systems of oppression (such as gender and class) is particularly challenging for women living in hostile environments. Her analysis, while in reference to African American, is also applicable to this study. On one occasion, Susan travelled to Nairobi to buy supplies for her hawking business but immediately took the night bus back to Mombasa upon realising that her pre-teenage daughters were left unattended by their neglectful father during the night. The immediate need to safeguard her children in a ghettoed environment plagued by sexual predators, limited her efforts to build economic self-sufficiency. Realising her disadvantaged position on the socio-economic ladder, restraining herself from confronting her husband was deemed to be a better approach to protecting her daughters' welfare. These actions exhibited her ability to cope with intersecting oppressions of gender and class, but the potential long-term costs for her and her children should not be overlooked. The same can be said for Mercy, Lydia and the rest of the participants mentioned in this section.

5.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Women's personal insights into what constitutes an ideal woman and man in a marital or cohabiting setting was foundational in understanding their acquiescence to male authority and thus, passive feminine subjectivities. Inscribed within these accounts were a number of hegemonic discourses sustaining power inequalities in their relationships. The romance discourse informed women's narratives of domestic devotion while hetero-normativity discourses (conjugal duties of wives, male proprietary rights over women, male sex-drive and sexual double-standard discourses) were evident in accounts of sexual acquiescence. Participant's amenability to men's financial authority were framed within the traditional

gender-role discourse and it was apparent within these accounts that women were also complicit in reinforcing their subsidiary subject positions. For instance, Brina's unquestioning exit from the workforce demonstrated this fact and, although a counterargument could be made that her actions were informed by an unwritten transactional agreement between heterosexual partners, this also perpetuated notions of dependence on males.

In this chapter, I have highlighted how women's submissive portrayals were also strategic in the sense that they provided protection against IPV. Verbal restraint and apologising without fault precluded reprisals, but these measures are limited in that they do not guarantee long-term protection and well-being. In other words, women cleverly embodied compliant subjectivities to avoid confrontations in order to shield their children from emotional and physical harm, but these tactics only offered interim protection to their offspring. The patriarchal family discourse informed these behaviours as participants feared that provoking male violence had the propensity to dismantle family union. External influences (mainly the family) played a leading role in promoting family unity at the expense of women's negative realities. Indeed, I have presented how ideals bolstering male power over women were entrenched by these informal sources' normalisation of women's mistreatment by men. A case in point was Krest's narrative of her mother preventing her from reporting her violent husband to the police, so as to avoid the risk of breaking her nuclear family. The interaction between motherhood and class position also inadvertently sustained the veracity of the patriarchal family discourse as I have highlighted in Susan's example. Although admittedly unhappy in her marriage, Susan reasoned that preserving her marriage to the perpetrator was her best option in order to secure her studious daughter's future and to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty in her family.

CHAPTER 6: "UNTIL DEATH DO US PART". INTERSECTING RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya is a predominately Christian country with the Islamic religion constituting the second-largest belief system, according to the most recent Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS, 2015). All of the 28 participants in this study identified themselves as either Christian (20) or Muslim (8), with a significant proportion attributing devotion to religion in managing their experiences of IPV. Takyi and Lamptey (2020) observe that studies in which the interplay between religion and IPV are examined are rare in SSA, despite the region being known for its highly religious populace. In keeping with the post-structural feminist framework of this thesis, in the discussions and analysis of the data I present in this second theme of my study, attempt to address this scholarly gap. Moreover, I consider religion as a co-factor that intersects with other markers of difference (such as class, age, ethnicity and heterosexuality) to shape women's experiences, attitudes and behaviours in an atmosphere of relationship discord. I present a blend of religiously informed strategies in the chapter, which foregrounds women's resourcefulness in redressing IPV, but paradoxically accentuates their imageries as victims of prolonged abuse. Concerning the latter, I examine the role of faith-based communities in undergirding patriarchism, with a particular focus on their aversion to confronting IPV directly.

6.2. IPV RESPONSES DRIVEN BY RELIGION

I organise this theme into four sub-sections. Central to the discussions is how women's commitment to religious practices (prayer and scriptural reading) and theological virtues (forgiveness, faith in divine intervention, patience and temperance) were the common ways in which they used faith as a resource for coping with and negotiating IPV. I explore how religion functioned as a mechanism to manage IPV-related emotional and psychological problems in the first part of this theme. I then discuss how the women relied on spiritual intercession to change the men's poor behaviours in the second sub-section, followed by how the religious community instilled these practices and encouraged women to preserve the relationship. In the final part of the theme, I investigate how religion contributed to women's silence in order to save face.

6.2.1. The Role of Religion in Improving Women's Mental Well-Being

Narratives in this study of the men's personalities in the earlier stages of the relationships conformed to romance discourses, but their behaviours changed for the worse soon after women gave birth. According to the women's accounts, the financial responsibilities and lifestyle changes following childbirth were not anticipated by men. The ensuing violence, adulterous liaisons, financial neglect and other forms of tyrannical behaviour on the part of the men (sexual violation and coercive control) contradicted previous charming qualities, as depicted in fairy-tale romance narratives (Towns & Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). Men's ill-treatment consequently impinged on women's psychological well-being, with almost half of the sample (11 of 28 participants) mentioning that they had experienced varying degrees of mental ill health (stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts) and correlated physiological symptoms (headaches, dizziness, fainting, high blood pressure, ulcers and loss of appetite):

> I had depression because I had too many thoughts. And I had a miscarriage when my husband [temporarily] abandoned me…. I was like a crazy person, and I locked myself and the children in the house and thought, 'Should I use this rope to hang myself? (Hadija, 32 years old, Nairobi resident).

> You know, at that point you've had two children already and he starts mistreating and looking down on you…. It got to a point where I had ulcers and lost a lot of weight. (Adhiambo, 42 years old, Mombasa resident).

> I've had a very stressful marriage. Whenever I ask him for money for the children's food, we start fighting…. When I kept him in my mind I was stressed all the time and even developed ulcers. (Sambayas, 48 years old, Nairobi resident).

Only a handful of participants sought mental health support from counselling services, but this avenue for seeking formal help was not sustainable because of their economic circumstances. Evident throughout the narratives was the perception that counselling was unaffordable, with some associating it with the wealthy in the country:

> You know, it is not free to go to a counsellor. The lowest they charge is Ksh 1,000[9] or Ksh 1,500 per session [approximately £7.60 to £11.40 per session], and maybe the session only lasts for 30 minutes or an hour. And you know, our community is poverty-stricken. If it is already difficult for you to meet daily food costs, how will you manage to afford Ksh 1,500 just to talk to somebody? (Jane, 36 years old, Likoni slums resident, Mombasa).
>
> Personally, I think counselling is for those wealthy people from Nyali. I've never heard of anyone in my neighbourhood who's gone for counselling; maybe one in a 100 people. (Susan, 30 years old, Maweni slums resident, Mombasa).
>
> I was really badly off that day. I looked like a crazy person…. I still used to think, 'This man has retired from his job and used up all the [retirement] money without even spending it on any of his children'. I was told [by my friends] to go for counselling. I only went for the first, second and third day, then I felt that I had been spending the whole day there … yet I hadn't worked for a meal. I had to shift my focus to my work. (Margaret, 54 years old, slum resident in Ruaraka constituency, Nairobi).

In an intersectional analysis of violence against women, Hill Collins observed that affluence could sometimes "buy protection from certain forms of violence" (1998: 929). Unlike a female survivor of IPV from Nyali (an elite neighbourhood in Mombasa) who could likely afford private counselling sessions to insulate herself against the emotional/psychological consequences of IPV, my working-class participants found this option to be a luxury, as Susan's statement above depicts especially. Perhaps this explained why most of the women in my study turned to their Christian and Islamic faith to abate emotional distress. Troubling as these religious practices were in potentially entrapping participants in the cycle of IPV, their application demonstrated women's ability to manoeuvre within structural inequalities in less obvious ways. In consonance with the SSA and Western IPV studies I have reviewed in Chapter Three (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009; Ting, 2010; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Balogun & John-Akinola, 2015), participants in this study relied on prayer, scriptural reading and emulating Biblical

[9] £1 = Ksh 131.8
https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=100%2C000&From=KES&To=GBP

figures for spiritual strength, peace and comfort to provide emotional relief. Some women specifically equated their devotional time with God to counselling sessions:

> I counsel myself. I wake up and start praying. I know God is alive. (Adhiambo, 42 years old, Mombasa resident)

> I counsel myself. I wake up to pray. I pray to Allah.[10] (Khulthum, 40 years old, Mombasa resident)

> I used to go to church and pray … I only thought prayer would solve my [marital] problems. How would a human being [implying a professional counsellor] even help me? (Sambayas, 48 years old, Nairobi resident)

> Whenever those [suicidal] feelings come back, I ask God to help me … I ask Him to help me because I can end up doing something [regrettable] … I just ask God to remove all those feelings from me. (Hadija, 32 years old, Nairobi resident)

These spiritually intimate sessions also increased women's faith in a God of justice. The belief in Godly retribution, as a mechanism for coping with IPV, was not unique to this study and has been found among Christian and Muslim of African and Western origin (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Ting, 2010). Participants in the current study believed in a God who would redress their suffering in eternity, if not their current lifetime. Their conception of God as a deity who avenges the righteous was particularly resourceful in instilling hope of a reward in the afterlife, building optimism and waiving off distractive thoughts. Referring to their experiences of spousal infidelity, Jane and Khulthum illustrate below how their belief in the righteousness of God and Allah respectively, served as effective coping mechanisms in this sense:

> We should not [take] revenge because vengeance belongs to God. If someone still mistreats you, even when you remain faithful to him as your husband, then God will find a way … either God will destroy him or will make him realise, 'I've really

[10] All self-identified Muslim and Christian participants used the Swahili word *"Mungu"* to refer to the Islamic or Christian God. For clarity, I have translated the word as "Allah" or "God" in the excerpts to provide quick distinctions respectively.

> messed up, let me re-dedicate my life to God' … (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).
>
> I came to know [of the affair] but I didn't say much about it. I told myself, 'That's his own problem and he'll be answerable to Allah' … I told him, 'Now that's not my problem. When you die, you'll go to your own grave, and I'll go to mine'… (Khulthum, 40 years old, Mombasa)

Unlike the IPV study by Hassounneh-Phillips (2003) among Muslim women, none of my participants drew on recitation from the Quran as a means of emotional coping. Only Christian participants supplemented prayer with scriptural reading for divine encouragement. They found the interpretation of Biblical scriptures and stories of people within these to be useful in managing and making sense of their experiences. Jane for instance, strongly identified with a female Biblical character from an Old Testament passage to draw on emotional and spiritual strength to cope with her husband's infidelity and mistreatment:

> Pray to God, pray to God to give you strength, so that you are as strong as Abigail; that woman in the Book of First Samuel. Abigail was the wife of Nabal. Her husband was very stupid and even insulted King David, but she had a lot of wisdom…. David would have killed their entire family if Abigail hadn't pleaded for his forgiveness. 'Forgive my husband because he's as foolish as his name,' and David forgave him…. They only mentioned this part about Abigail but I'm sure she was mistreated a lot…. I'm sure she was severely mistreated in her marriage, but she persevered, she did not leave [Nabal]. But nowadays, you see women leaving their marriages for trivial reasons – her husband does something small and she's gone. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Jane's Biblical account served two purposes. The first was to emulate Abigail's stoicism in a supposedly abusive marriage to the foolish and unthoughtful Nabal. The Book of First Samuel makes no explicit mention of this aspect. In fact, the entire Bible is devoid of any details concerning Abigail and Nabal's marital relationship, including whether she faced IPV at the hands of her husband. This reasoning, however, helped Jane use her faith as a means to emotionally manage her own marital difficulties and thought process. Christian women in other IPV studies have identified with the trials, oppression and unjust treatment encountered by Biblical protagonists, such as Jesus Christ in His crucifixion to redeem mankind, Job in his recurring test of faith, and Daniel in his near fatal predicament in the lions' den (Knickmeyer

et al., 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009). Nash and Hesterberg found that abused religious women gained some perception of power and control over their circumstances in choosing Biblical narratives that could be related to their oppression to view themselves as "spiritual warriors" (2009: 16). This may have also been true for Jane. Yet, in other parts of her narrative, she positioned herself within the dark romance discourse (Wood, 2001) by drawing on Biblical verses ("I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me") and religious axioms ("This too shall pass") that buttressed her long-suffering image.

The above notwithstanding, Jane implicitly ascribed Godly wisdom and moral uprightness to herself by identifying with Abigail. Conceivably, she drew on this Biblical account to present herself as a righteous woman living a repentant life in fear of the King's (God's) punishment. Doing so underpinned her husband's sexual immorality and equated him with foolish Nabal. She projected this more vividly in an earlier section of the interview where she credited her God-fearing nature for shielding her against sexual temptation and "retaliatory infidelity". Jane's adoption of a "very purist approach to sexuality" (Ligaga, 2020: 69) ostensibly signals a "civilised" version of morality situated in colonial interpretations of "good" women who adhered to Christian values taught by Victorian missionaries discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis (Kanogo, 2005; Tamale, 2011c; Ligaga, 2020). In contrast, her husband's sexual unrestraint was representative of a rather "primitive" or depraved form of sexuality that was often associated with Africans in the same era (Lewis, 2011; Nzegwu, 2011; Tamale, 2011). In the following extract, her piousness stands in contrast against her husband's unbridled sexuality and spiritual recalcitrance:

> To be completely honest with you, I never thought my husband would do something like that to me. I didn't know he would be capable of sending such messages to a woman or to seduce another woman…. I used to think it's just the two of us. Men flirt with me all the time … and I'm talking about wealthy men. High status men! But in my mind I know I have a husband. And even if he doesn't see everything I do, God does. I cannot hide anything from God…. My conscience would bother me a lot [if I had an extra-marital affair]. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Extra-marital relations and wealth are both representative of the metaphorical, forbidden fruit in the Biblical creation story but, unlike Eve who succumbed to temptation, Jane's strong religious convictions insulated her against poor, and perhaps regrettable, consequences.

6.2.2. "These Things Happen, God Will Change Him": Drawing on Religion to Alter Men's Unwanted Behaviours

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, men's affectionate behaviour towards the women in the study, in most cases, dissipated once they gave birth. Socio-religious notions and the romance discourse worked in unison in these instances to illustrate participants' belief in the mediatory effects of prayer when they appealed to God to reverse men's abusive tendencies. As Njue *et al.* (2014) suggest in an analysis of religious coping with IPV among Kenyan women, it is also plausible that participants in the current study hoped for a miraculous intervention to redeem men from moral decadence. In addition to religiosity, the statements below somewhat reflect the prince-toad duality portrayed in Western fairy-tale discourses (Towns & Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001) both of which bolstered women's hope in a transformed man:

> He was really good to me when we first met; he took good care of me and ensured I had a good life. I lacked nothing, but things immediately changed as soon as I gave birth …. I persevere and pray to Allah … maybe one day he will change and go back to how he was before …. I am a persevering woman and I am with him for better or for worse (Rahma, 25 years old, mother of one, Nairobi resident).

> Before, I thought he was a nice guy, someone I could have a nice life with … he told me that he loved me which I believed and moved in with him.… He was a very nice guy, but he started mistreating me as soon as I gave birth. Sometimes he leaves me and our nursing baby hungry … I put God first and ask Him to help us … and to change him so that we can have a good life … (Mercy, 19 years old, mother of one, Nairobi resident).

> Men leave you with so many responsibilities and leave it to you to figure out what your children will eat, how they'll go to school … if I knew this before, I would have only given birth to one or two children instead of many…. Before I got married, I hoped to live a nice life. I thought that a man and woman live a peaceful life when they marry…. I thought married people lived a comfortable life …. So, what I used to do is go to church and pray, 'God you created this man for me, would you please change him?' Then I go back home. All I knew was to how to pray; prayer was all I had. (Sambayas, 48 years old, mother of four, Nairobi resident).

These women presented themselves as having the capacity to change the men through fervent intercessory practices. These behaviours were influenced by religious circles when they instilled beliefs in the supernatural effects of prayer and other faith-filled mediatory avenues. The leadership of 34-year-old Brina's charismatic church, for instance, prayerfully and prophetically intervened to redress marital discord as outlined in the following dialogue during her interview:

> Brina: If she (mistress) didn't use black magic, she wouldn't have won him over, but she used black magic.
>
> Vicky: How did you come to know of that?
>
> Brina: Prayers. Every time I went for prayers (at church), the same thing; every time I went for prayers, the same thing.
>
> Vicky: You felt like … what do you mean by 'the same thing'?
>
> Brina: They always see her, even her name!
>
> Vicky: You see it? God reveals it?
>
> Brina: The man of God sees the lady (mistress), how she did it, everything!
>
> Vicky: Oh, like when you're going to church …. when the church is praying for you? Like, someone prophesies?
>
> Brina: Yeah! The prophetic revelation comes out that she's the one who stole my husband and… 'cause honestly the way that guy changed! There was even a day I was really upset because he slapped me!

Similar to Sambayas, Rahma and Mercy, Brina's commitment to her relationship was sustained mainly by her religious intercessory efforts. The prophetic revelation shored up her reliance on prayer as a "weapon" to free her unfaithful husband from the mistresses' "black magic". According to her final remark, Brina perceived the mistress as an obvious reason behind her husband's use of physical IPV which validated her need even more to draw on spiritual "ammunition" to restore his love and affection. Similarly, women from Emily's church frequented her home to intercede against her husband's concupiscent behaviour:

> They prayed, saying that 'the tree that has not been planted by God will be uprooted … that woman [mistress] will be uprooted'…. (Emily, 32 years old, Mombasa resident)

Similar to Brina's experience, Emily's Christian community also drew on religious adages to augment the mistress's culpability. This situated their narratives within the sexual double-standard discourse in which male sexual permissiveness is licensed but women with comparable behaviour are reprimanded (Shefer *et al.*, 2000; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2004). An analysis by Hill Collins of the Biblical "Jezebel" image commonly used to refer to African American women's sexualities as "unnatural, dirty, sick and sinful' (2009: 139) has some relevance to my participants' accounts of mistresses. That mistresses were held responsible for men's behaviours sustains this racialised epithet which is somewhat akin to the *"malaya"* (Swahili for "whore") label attributed to urban African women in the colonial period on account of their perceived degeneracy (Ochwada, 1997). Conversely, Emily and Brina's religiosity and restrained sexualities qualified them as *"malaikas"* (Swahili for "angel"), "Virgin Marys" or "Madonnas" similar to the Victorian femininities that young African mission women were expected to emulate in the colonial era (Macdonald, 1995; Tamale, 2011c). It could be interpreted that the interplay between race, gender, religion and heterosexuality located these narratives also within what Mama refers to as the "colonialist-integrationist discourse" (1995: 99) in which, succinctly put, supremacy and inferiority are attributed to White and Black races respectively.

Economic and age dimensions were also evident in these narratives when participants painted mistresses as "voracious temptresses in hot pursuit of men and their money" (Cornwall, 2002: 964). Mistresses were often depicted as younger women who resided in the same low-income localities, suggesting that alliances with older men (or "sugar daddies") were financially motivated. However, in a review of transactional relationships in Kenya and Zimbabwe, Ligaga (2020) suggests otherwise where, unlike the prevailing assumption, *economically stable* women also engage in similar relationships to maintain their consumerist lifestyles (see also Masvawure, 2010; Mojola, 2014). Regardless of the economic category, either group of women is representative of an alternative subjectivity that defies pervading assumptions. Interpreted from an agentic perspective, the actions of both groups of women could be viewed as strategic in their attempt to offset economic challenges or to sustain a middle-classed position. Yet, such transgressive femininities in a patriarchal context bear the cost of being shamed as a whore, even by self-identified religious women such as those in my

sample. Of all the 28 women in my sample, only Brina's account alluded to the "sugar mummy" phenomenon when she recounted how she once spied on her cheating ex-husband after being tipped off by a friend:

> Someone phoned me and said, 'Your husband is in such and such hotel … and he is with a woman who looks like this and this and if you don't believe me, go and find out for yourself!' .... It was actually a guesthouse that had a restaurant, so I went and sat at the corner and ordered an Alvarro…. I sat there for two-and-a-half hours … two-and-a-half hours waiting for them before they finally come down the staircase. He had his arms around her waist and when I caught a glimpse of her, I was like, 'This is so disgusting'…. She [mistress] is those types of women who bleach themselves. She is naturally dark-skinned, but she has lightened her skin. I wonder where he [husband] picked her from; she was big, the chest was big, boobs! Big boobs! .... Her sitting allowance [meaning her bottom] was big, she was really fat! She [mistress] was older; she was older than me…. I don't know what demon possessed him…. I still ask myself this even today…. (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

The above description of the mistress, who appears to be of a wealthier class, is reminiscent of an analysis of a tabloid article by Ligaga (2020: 82-83) of affluent married mothers in urban Kenya who engage in clandestine relationships with their "toy boys" in order to "quench their loins' thirst" (see Chapter Two). It is fair to assume that the mistress was a wife and a mother given her "maturity" and her location in a socio-cultural context that subscribes to the patriarchal family discourse (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lubbe, 2007, cited in Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Njue *et al.*, 2007; Ebila, 2015). If this is the case, her affair with a younger man betrays the idealised image of a "good" woman even more. She "disrupts notions of how married women with children should behave" and is also "scandalous, indifferent and disruptive to the domestic ideal and fantasy of the happily-ever-after fairy-tale romance" (Ligaga, 2020: 90). That some degree of public display of affection is apparent in Brina's extract ("He had his arms around her waist") implies that the mistress embraced an alternative sexuality that is markedly morally deviant in a patriarchal, religious context such as Kenya. From the extract, she does not appear to be abashed by her transgressive feminine subjectivity and does not care about the public glare and likely derogatory references that might be made to her "wickedness", "immorality" or "waywardness" (Hodgson & McCurdy, 2001). This interpretation of her erotic politics is evidence of the existence of counter discourses in a male-

dominated and religious society such as Kenya that follows a "very purist approach to sexuality" (Ligaga, 2020: 69). Similar to the vocal female parliamentarian, Millie Odhiambo (see quote reviewed in Chapter Two), the mistress similarly "announces" to the public that she loves sex, enjoys sex, has it with one or multiple men and is answerable to no one but God. Millie Odhiambo and the mistress thus embodied a polyandrous image that stood at odds with a dominant social order that appeals to a conservative female sexuality (Ligaga, 2020). Contrary to faithfilled Brina, infidelity for the mistress was perhaps subjective, and not necessarily conceptualised as being sinful.

While disclaiming monolithic assumptions, such counter-readings of women are still very difficult to accept for most in a patriarchal religious context. In a socio-religious analysis of transactional relationships in South Africa, Masenya (2017) refers to the Book of Proverbs to evaluate how the negative image of a Biblical seductress called "Woman Stranger" could be associated with the "sugar mummy" image. The young man in this Biblical account is cautioned about the adulteress's charm which would lead to his death should he succumb to it. To Masenya, the idea behind this patriarchal-religious notion is that culpability falls squarely on the "Woman Stranger", which Brina in the quote leverages to construct her then husband's innocent victim image. References to his "demon possession" only upholds this hegemonic double-standard discourse which culminates in the notion that sexually "deviant" African/Black women are indeed *"malayas"* or "Jezebels".

Brina's description of the mistress above is rich in meaning and warrants further examination. Not only does it reveal the complex interplay between gender, class, age, heterosexuality and religion but also it contains evidence of racial elements in the physical depiction of the mistress. Brina's extract is in direct opposition to Mama's (1995) analysis of the colonised-integrationist discourse in which hegemonic notions of feminine beauty are upheld as being white/fair-skinned, and dark skin is viewed as less attractive and even ugly. Accordingly, her disproval of the mistress's use of skin-lightening products related to a "Black radical discourse" which Mama describes as one that "conveys a politics of resistance and subversion" to the dominant colonial-integrationist discourse (1995: 100). Among other things, Mama adds that, in this counter discourse, "skin bleaching and other alterations of appearance in the direction of 'whitening'" are strongly condemned and Black people are encouraged "to reject the dominant racial standards of beauty" (1995: 136). As a Black African woman with a dark complexion, Brina could be perceived as being one who rejected notions rooted in colonialism and slavery

that suggest "'good complexion' means light complexion" (Rodney, 1969: 33, cited in Mama, 1995: 103) and, by contesting this prevailing assumption rooted in colonialism and slavery, that she, like the dark-skinned Black British women in Mama's study, implicitly subscribed to a "Black but comely" femininity (Mama, 1995: 103).

Nevertheless, her adoption of this counter discourse served also to express disdain for her "nemesis", which as a result, located her within the dominant colonial narrative. Her negative representation of the mistress's body as being hyper-visible in the comment ("… she was big, the chest was big, boobs! Big boobs! ... her sitting allowance [meaning her bottom] was big, she was really fat!...") was damaging to anti-racist politics and supportive of the colonial-integrationist discourse. While hyper-visibility has served agentic ends for some Black female contemporaries on digital platforms (Ligaga, 2020), it has been cautioned that such representations sustain pathological views on Black female bodies (Mama, 1995; Hill Collins, 2009; Nzegwu, 2011; Tamale, 2011). Brina's disdainful depiction of the mistress's voluptuousness epitomises the "black/African body as grotesque, uncivilized and crudely sexual" at best (Lewis, 2011: 199) and almost concurs with how the Khoikhoi woman, Saartjie Baartman (infamously known as "The Hottentot Venus"), became a public spectacle in Victorian exhibitions on account of her hyper-visible genitalia, hyper-sexuality and "exotic" plus-size image (Mama, 1995; Hill Collins, 2009; Tamale, 2011). Mama explains the racial implications of Baartman's ordeal:

> If white women were supposed to incarnate an asexual purity and beauty, black women were supposed to be pornographically sexual and crudely featured. The fascination that the European public had with women such as Saartje Baartman … was a perverse one, which was part of a dynamic in which black women were endowed with all the taboo fantasies of the sexually repressed European psyche. (1995: 149).

According to Tamale, this "Hottentot Venus" stereotype is still adopted by several African contemporaries and reproduced in mainstream media, popular culture, research and legal avenues to "suppress and regulate women's sexualities following the model of Victorian Europe" (2011b: 609). Similar to Baartman's hyper-visibility, the mistress in Brina's account was framed outside the "toned-down" feminine Victorian image within which petite sized Brina seemingly situated herself, as she later remarked shortly after describing the mistress:

> I was big, it's just that my smart phone is broken but I would have shown you the photos. I was big! 'Cause I was weighing…89…85 kilograms, something like that. There was a time I was weighing 90 but I decided this is too much let me cut down this weight. (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

Mama's (1995) colonial integrationist and Black radical discourses provided a unique angle to analyse the participants' narratives of religion. Moments in which Brina located herself outside the Black radical discourse only buttressed the "Jezebel" derogation common to Black women who do not fit Christian standards of sexual morality.

6.2.3. The Implicit Role of Religion in Fostering IPV

Irrespective of their mistreatment by men, participants held that they were spiritually bound to their partners until death. Jane and Sambayas for instance were devoted to their marital vows irrespective of marital infidelity on one hand, and physical and economical IPV on the other. These Christian women drew on Biblical teachings to assert their views against divorce as the respective quotes from both suggest:

> I had an official marriage before many witnesses. Yes, I go through many marital challenges … but the Bible says, 'until death do us part'…. The word of God must come to pass. I'm in it come rain or come sunshine and I'll not leave!… Marriage doesn't work like any other contract which can be terminated after three years ah-ah…. There is no giving up in marriage. Marriage is forever, until death. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

> You know, even the Bible does not accept it (divorce). I'm a Christian and the Bible doesn't accept this. Those who have been joined together by God should not be separated, you see? (Sambayas, 48 years old, Nairobi resident).

The fact that no participant subscribed to the Biblical justification of divorce on the grounds of marital infidelity indicated that marital preservation was tied also to emotional and cultural factors. For instance, both women position themselves in the dark romance discourse in the above statements. Jane's assertions: "I'm in it come rain or come sunshine" and "marriage is forever, until death" resemble the "for better or for worse" expression that suggests that abused women should make their relationships work no matter the situation (Wood, 2001). The compatibility between religious and patriarchal family ideals also informed these altruistic subjectivities. With respect to Christianity in particular, Weedon states that:

> …there are subject positions [in the religion] which validate and even celebrate particular modes of femininity, for instance, an approach to traditional family life governed by norms of 'selflessness' which imply compliance to and fulfilment of the wishes and the needs of husbands and children. (1997: 92).

While the role of faith-communities in providing material assistance and social support to women experiencing IPV has been shown in some studies (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000), in their accounts, my participants showed mainly how these networks contributed to their exposure to IPV when emotional and spiritual support was sought. The findings of copious analyses corroborate similar negative contributions of faith-based communities to women seeking IPV support, particularly because these networks insist on marital and familial preservation (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2010; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). Rahma, for instance, turned to her devout Muslim sister who advised her to "persevere … pray to Allah and give him time [to change]". This advice on relationship not only discouraged Rahma from separating, but also might have instilled or further motivated her prayerful tendencies to change her husband for the better as illustrated earlier.

Jane on the other hand, disclosed her husband's extramarital affairs to a female, born-again Christian friend for spiritual guidance. Her friend encouraged her to "persevere [because] these things happen" and "have faith in God as He is the one who blessed you with the marriage". Conceivably, the re-assurance provided by a fellow believer is reminiscent of the African Christian women who were entrusted by colonial mission schools to encourage women to maintain the ideal Christian wife image (Kanogo, 2005). Weedon (1997) posits that popular phrases or subliminal "reminders" normalise women's unfair treatment by men. The statement, "these things happen" subscribes to the male sex-drive discourse and, as in Emily and Brina's excerpts in the previous sub-section, again confirms that the sexual double-standard discourse was sanctioned within women's religious circles. The view that a man is a blessing from God vitiated ideas concerning divorce or separation, and sustained salient African notions of a "good" woman as one who views marriage as an end goal and whose personal interests are secondary to those of her husband and children (Ebila, 2015).

According to an IPV study conducted in Kenya by Gillum *et al.* (2016), women were found to be particularly cautious when identifying people to whom to disclose their experiences.

Participants in my study who could not trust their friends or family members turned to faith-based leaders for impartial and confidential counsel based on the teachings of their faith as the following excerpts suggest:

> I normally think that pastors are very important even more than relatives. You know a relative can side with him (husband) and leave you troubled (but) a pastor will advise you according to the Bible and he will not favour anyone. If you have sinned, he will tell you, 'This is wrong' … (Patience, 37 years old, Mombasa resident).

> Whenever I have a problem or cannot find a solution to my marital problems … I go to the Imam because he swore never to disclose anyone's secrets. (Ilham, 33 years old, Mombasa resident).

Religious leaders reprimanded men when marital concerns were reported but did not take direct action that would offer women immediate protection. Islamic leaders, for instance, encouraged men to observe spiritual rituals to remedy misbehaviour. Rahma sought recourse from her Sheikh and other religious elders who then encouraged her husband to partake in an Islamic ritualistic activity (*Tablighi*) to renew his devotion to Allah. Rahma disappointingly admitted that this had no positive effect on her husband's behaviour. As for 40-year-old Khulthum, it was unclear from her narrative whether her then husband's decision to go on Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah was influenced by religious leaders, herself or other individuals of similar faith. However, it was obvious that his resolve kindled within her some sense of hope in changing his sexually immoral character. Yet, as in the case of Rahma's husband, this Islamic practice proved ineffective in altering his behaviour for the better:

> I was really grateful to Allah and said, 'Alhamdullilah! My husband has gone to Makkah and will come back transformed and reborn. We [Muslims] believe that a person is reborn when they return from Makkah. All their sins are absolved, they are completely cleansed and will never go back to their immoral ways. Believe me … the very day he returned from Makkah, his mistress was waiting for him outside [the house] … we believe that a person is closest to Allah when they go to Makkah but he came back and continued doing the same thing. It is like writing a zero, rubbing it out and replacing it with a letter 'O'. There was no difference; he was just the same. (Khulthum, 40 years old, Mombasa resident).

When IPV persisted, religious leaders advised women to continue praying and exhibiting "godly" attributes of forgiveness and forbearance, qualities which bolstered "emphasised"

feminine representations (Connell, 1987, cited in Jackson, 2001). These external actors thus inculcated ideas that male transformation rested on women. Recalling her earlier experiences of spousal infidelity and economic IPV, 48-year-old Leila was encouraged by her Imam to exercise patience. Her religious leaders' response, given below, is yet another implicit example of how men's poor behaviours were widely excusable in the women's faith-based communities:

> The Imam told me 'Many households hide these problems, and everyone perseveres in their own way, so be patient and maybe he will change'…. (Leila, 48-years old, Mombasa resident).

Hill Collins (1998) argues that the definition of violence is determined by those holding positions of power within social institutions. The fact that the Imam legitimised (albeit tacitly) Leila's marital experiences is reflective of the systemic acceptance of male economic and sexual privilege in the country. As a woman with low-income and limited exit options in a patriarchal context, Leila's experience was a site of intersectionality that was mediated by the Islamic religious institution. Similar approaches to discourage divorce or separation were evident also in Christian communities. Both 54-year-old devout Catholic, Margaret, and 37-year-old Protestant, Patience, sought mediatory support from their religious leaders who urged reconciliation with their adulterous husbands:

> There is a time I went to our priest and I told him all about my husband's illicit affairs. Then the priest asked to speak with him. You know, all the church tries to do is reconcile us. 'Stop fighting and live Christ-like lives' … (Margaret, 54 years old, Nairobi resident).

> The pastor came home, and my husband confessed everything [about the infidelity] … The pastor then told me to forgive him; he said, 'You have to forgive one another' …. (Patience, 37 years old, Mombasa resident).

Reflecting attitudes displayed by the extended family (see Chapter Five), it was evident from the narratives in my study, that the patriarchal family discourse (and other dominant discourses) remained secure as long as counter narratives were silenced whenever theological counsel was sought. Otherwise, promoting a marginalised feminist discourse would not only controvert mores advocating marital and nuclear family preservation, but also compromise the veracity of the religious ideologies underpinning female submission and male headship. In a handful of

studies in SSA, in which the intersection between religion and IPV has been examined, a similar role of faith in sanctioning traditional gender arrangements in the household was shown (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003, 2004; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Takyi & Lamptey, 2020).

As shown in earlier quotes, the over-spiritualisation of Margaret's and Patience's experiences of marital infidelity resulted inadvertently in legitimising the male sex-drive and sexual double-standard discourses. In these accounts, the religious agents' passive and tentative approach to both women's mistreatment deterred them from addressing the over-arching effects of men's sexual immorality, namely, economic and physical IPV as well as HIV/STI transmission (I discuss these later in the next chapter). For 30-year-old Susan, the teachings of a popular Kenyan televangelist informed her decision to preserve her marriage irrespective of long-term IPV exposure:

> And that [televangelist] gives me a lot of motivation…I like her teachings a lot! She says that, whenever someone stresses you, keep yourself busy. Why should you carry someone else's burden? I won't carry it and I will never carry it! You see?…. That is why I have told you that I like her teachings. Because if I followed other women's teachings, I wouldn't have been in my marriage …. This is how these other women would advise you, 'Let's go to the witchdoctors to change our men' or 'You should leave a man who treats you that way' …" (Susan, 30 years old, Mombasa resident).

While it is not suggested explicitly in Susan's quote that the televangelist's counsel was directed at marital upheavals, adapting the message as such helped her to cope with the IPV. This paralleled Jane's reframing of the Biblical account of Abigail and Nabal to suit her circumstances. Similar to Jane, Susan reasoned that the overall message behind the teaching was to persevere through her challenging marital situation. Her stance towards marital preservation was affirmed when she contrasted the female televangelist's counsel with those provided by other "ungodly" women who would have advised her otherwise to use "black magic" or exit her marriage. Similar to Brina, disregarding "black magic" practices signalled Susan's preference for Godly intervention in over-turning her circumstances. That divinatory practices in my study were associated only with mistresses, adulteresses and "ungodly" women buttressed participants' religious subjectivities. That none disclosed their reliance on occultism to improve relationship outcomes questions Green's (1999) assumptions on the widespread use of traditional spiritual practices among women experiencing IPV in SSA (see Chapter Three).

Furthermore, as in the case of other participants, Susan's decision to preserve the marriage and the family was not restricted to religiosity, but also was influenced by other interlinking factors such as poverty and cultural determinants discussed in the previous theme (see Chapter Five).

6.2.4. "What will people think of me?" Religiosity and Saving Face

The religious communities' reluctance to address IPV implied that safe-guarding the sacredness of marital vows outweighed women's well-being. Arguably, discouraging divorce or separation suggested that those acting contrary to this dominant discourse risked potential stigmatisation. In their research, Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) show that women who divorced the male perpetrator faced religious ostracization and endured immense spiritual guilt as a result of communal rejection. It remains plausible that my sample conformed to the salient socio-religious script to evade similar ramifications. It has been argued in studies that such attitudes foster a culture of silence towards IPV victimisation within faith-based communities, which then encourages women to prioritise marital and familial preservation to save face (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2010).

For example, Margaret opted out of divorce because she "had already done a Catholic wedding" and, if she had left her husband, people would say that she was "not a church woman". Jane, who was a praise and worship leader at her church, similarly rejected the idea of leaving her marriage because she saw herself as a role model to other women in her religious community. The thought of leaving her marriage made her wonder: "What will the people I lead think of me? You know, if people trust you, they wouldn't believe you would do such a thing [divorce]". In the previous section, I have explained how Susan's perseverance and disdain for divorce was inspired by a charismatic televangelist and I have also linked these actions to her socio-economic position in the previous chapter. However, the extract below suggests that her church and community leadership additionally might have influenced her choice to stay in her marriage and evidently motivated her silence towards sexual IPV, as shown in other IPV studies among religious women (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009):

> He forces himself on me. It's not the first time, it's not the second time, it's something I got used to…. You know, there are many people who look up to me at the church. I'm also a community leader, so they look up to me … there are some individuals [like me] in society who[m] people can look up to. 'We want to be like

> so and so'. Then, what if, one day, they hear, 'Oh, that person did that [meaning divorced her husband]' … that is something … I would like to avoid. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

Maintaining the façade of a perfect relationship belied the extent of her sexual violation. Her statement, "it's not the first time, it's not the second time" evoked an image of her repeated sexual violation and drew from the male sex-drive discourse to illustrate her husband's lack of sexual restraint. In Chapter Two, I have explored how men's unbridled access to women's bodies is licensed in patriarchal Kenya. Neither Susan nor any of the participants mentioned discussing their sexual victimisation with faith-leaders and networks which seem to validate that marital rape is indeed viewed as a private affair in the country, in spite of its criminalisation in the PADV Act 2015 (see Chapter Two). Accordingly, socio-cultural influences might serve as explanations for Susan's silence.

However, Lempert (1996: 275) argues that women experiencing IPV employ face-saving strategies to avoid the victim construct because "what is unnamed is non-existent, and what is rendered invisible to outsiders has no reality". Arguably, Susan remained silent also to avoid being labelled a victim, since disclosing her experiences would be tantamount to naming the IPV, eroding her self-worth and denying that there was any integrity in her relationship. As a religious woman living in a patriarchal society, she neither wanted to "pay the price for breaking the silence and naming the problem" nor risk being seen as a "fallen [woman], who [has] failed in [her] 'feminine' role to sensitise and civilise the beast in the man" (hooks, 2014: 89). There is also the possibility that Susan acquiesced to sex to avoid becoming subject to gossip, given her residential circumstances in a congested slum. Female slum dwellers, in an IPV study in Kenya by Wood *et al.* (2019), similarly submitted to unwanted sex to avoid being the talk of the neighbourhood. Though perceived by Susan as a strategy to mitigate shame, her passive feminine representation is problematic in that it put her long-term reproductive health, emotional and mental well-being in jeopardy.

The behaviours of Muslim participants were driven by face-saving reasons. In the following excerpt, the justifications given by Ilham implied that exiting her marriage risked being depicted as a sexually immoral woman:

> If you leave your marriage, you'll have a bad reputation and people will keep saying, 'Look at that woman who does not know how to stay with one man' ….

> Don't you see how people can taint your reputation? (Ilham, 33 years old, Mombasa resident).

Ilham's above concerns are valid, as analysis by Njue *et al*. (2014) suggest how divorced or separated Kenyan women are subject to derogatory epithets and ostracization by social networks. An extension of Ilham's quote above shows that she equated sexual purity with being with one man for a lifetime:

> Remember that a woman's body is like silver; it is a gift from the Almighty Allah and should be valued. You should not open it up to anybody else, just open it to that one person [your husband] … don't open it up to anybody else because it's very wrong; you will devalue yourself if you open yourself up to everyone, you see? …. If a woman has decided to be married, she should stay married. (Ilham, 33 years old, Mombasa resident).

Ilham's gender, religion and heterosexuality intersected to inform her conceptualising of a woman's sexual integrity to her husband. Her presentation of her body as a valuable gift from Allah suggested that having sex with another man, other than her husband, would be tantamount to tainting Allah's holy temple. Hence, the metaphor, "opening one's body up", implied a loss of a woman's sexual purity should she re-marry or fail to demonstrate sexual loyalty. As in the case of mistresses that I have reviewed in this theme, the patriarchal surveillance of women's sexualities exercised by religious (as well as the state, familial, and other) institutional values and beliefs ensures that those who exhibit "unbridled erotic force" are tagged as whores or *malayas* (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011: 8). Bakare-Yusuf's remarks corresponded with Ilham's outlook on female sexual conduct in that women who "shamelessly flaunt their bodies show their disregard for the body's sacredness" which should be reserved "for the intimate gaze of their husbands" (2011: 123). That Ilham places emphasis on women's and not men's sexual restraint in her quote supports the sexual double-standard discourse.

6.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have explored how religious beliefs and practices informed women's coping strategies, attitudes and understanding of their experiences of IPV. I began by discussing the role of religion in helping women manage the emotional effects of IPV. Prayer, scriptural reading and gaining kinship with Biblical characters were sources of divine strength, comfort and encouragement. Women also relied on the intercessory benefits of prayer, hoping that God

or Allah would reverse the effects of abusive tendencies that emerged after they gave birth. Personal and inter-personal prayerful practices suggested that women had placed some element of burden on themselves to over-turn men's behaviours. I argued that participants' accounts of these spirit-filled activities were influenced by the romance discourse which heightens women's sense of responsibility towards deviant men. Moreover, spiritual warfare waged against men's mistresses inadvertently reinforced the male sexual prerogative on one hand, and the oppositional Madonna-whore/*malaika-malaya* imageries on the other. Narratives about mistresses were particularly peculiar in demonstrating the interaction between religion, class, age, heterosexuality and ethnicity to inform religious women's experiences and understanding of marital infidelity. Brina's reading of her then husband's relationship with his "transgressive", "sugar-mummy" mistress is a case in point. The sexual double-standard and male sex-drive discourses were also evident when religious friends, relatives and leaders attended minimally to their victimisation (economic IPV induced by infidelity) and, instead, encouraged them to exhibit emphasized femininity through religious virtues of forbearance, forgiveness and patience. The religious community's passive attitudes toward the women's predicament promoted women's silence towards IPV. Consequently, women concealed their victimisation at all costs to avoid stigma and shame, as seen especially in the narratives of Jane and Susan, who were leaders in their church and community. The infusion of gender and socio-religious discourses within the religious community, therefore, had a large influence in maintaining the status quo and by extension, validating passive feminine representations.

CHAPTER 7: GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN: REFORMULATING GENDER RELATIONS IN ECONOMICALLY ABUSIVE ENCOUNTERS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Many women in Kenya have received national, continental and global attention for their fight against colonialism, GBV and various forms of social injustices. However, the time has come to identify the (c)overt actions of ordinary Kenyan women against gender-based oppression at the micro-level, as this contributes to the body of knowledge that brings into question long-standing myths in which African women are cast as voiceless, powerless and innate recipients of abusive conditions. To that end, in this chapter and the next, I focus primarily on the strategies that participants employed to counter IPV perpetrated against them. The special focus of the present chapter is women's responses to economic oppression. By using a feminist post-structuralist approach to distinguish narratives of conformity to, and deviation from dominant gender discourses, I underscore the fluidity and protean nature of female subjectivities. I also integrate insights from Black/African feminist scholars with Weedon's theory to lend credence to the notion that "Black women are indeed not static entities" (Kolawole, 1997: 52).

The narratives I present in this chapter are contrary to those presented in the preceding data chapters (Chapters Five and Six) in varying degrees, where participants portrayed themselves in accord with the dominant gender script of male authority and female subservience. I begin by examining circumstances that led up to women's encounters with economic IPV and detail how living in a prolonged state of penury motivated their actions to address financial frustrations. I also explore the influence of intersecting oppressions in (re)configuring these responses and coping strategies.

7.2. RESPONSES ADDRESSING ECONOMIC IPV AND CONTESTING MALE FINANCIAL CONTROL

Current research endeavours in the field of IPV focused predominantly on physical, sexual and emotional modes of abuse (Hatcher *et al.*, 2013). However, in my study, I have identified different manifestations of economic IPV in the narratives, with the most significant being financial neglect, income control and restricted mobility for financial gain. Women's accounts of economic IPV emerged in response to the interview question: "Do you think your

husband/partner has fulfilled your expectations? If not, how so?". All participants responded unanimously in the negative and narrated men's failure to subscribe to the *sine qua non* of "successful" masculinity – being the sole breadwinner. This aspect is evident in the selected excerpts below:

> According to me, he has not met my expectations…. When he earns money, he goes out [to spend time other women]. Whenever he earns money, he uses it for himself.... His main responsibility was to take care of the family by working hard and ensuring that he sustains us. What does he expect me to do if he spends all the money on other people…? All I expected of him was to look for money and take care of his family's needs. So, he has not met any of my expectations. (Ilham, 33 years old, Mombasa resident).

> I want him to be available at home, to be a husband, not a tourist…. He is a long-distance driver [and] he can finish even a whole month away from home…. And that whole month he is not providing anything. So, when he comes home, he always doesn't have money, so where does the money go?... He is always saying, 'I don't have money blah blah blah' … (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

> When he comes home, he finds his clothes are clean, the house is clean … he finds that everything a woman is supposed to do in the house has been done. But whenever he comes home drunk he insults me, and I feel so embarrassed because all the neighbours hear everything, but I persevere…. So, he has not fulfilled my expectations at all, because he used to treat me well when we started living together. He never used to drink; he used to work and leave money for food. But as soon as I gave birth, he stopped giving me money for food. Whenever I ask him for money, hell breaks loose and, sometimes, he only gives me Ksh 200 [approximately £1.50][11] for breakfast until evening, [yet] milk goes for Ksh 50 [approximately £0.40], and the baby also needs Pampers… (Rahma, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

[11] (£1 = Ksh 131.8)
https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=100%2C000&From=KES&To=GBP

Apparent in the above quotes is that men's non-adherence to the protective masculine role misaligned starkly with the romantic script (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). Moreover, Rahma's disappointment in her husband's inability to accomplish his side of the bargain gives credence to studies in which love was conceptualised as being transactional (Cornwall, 2002; Poulin, 2007; Sølbeck, 2010; Bhana, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Mojola, 2014; Ruark *et al.*, 2017). Rahma was seemingly confounded by his inability to reciprocate her devotion to him, as soon as she gave birth to their first child. In the narratives, it was evident that childbirth and extra-marital spending commonly triggered economic violation. Addictive behaviours (alcoholism, substance-abuse and gambling) were cited as secondary reasons as shown below:

> As soon as he wakes up, all he thinks about is alcohol … so you see, alcohol is his priority; even when he gets money, he only buys himself clothes, he never remembers his child … (Halima, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

> As soon as he starts taking miraa[12], that is it, he will come home and say, 'I have no money' … (Mercy, 19 years old, Nairobi resident).

> Men like my husband … play … these illegal card games…. He usually thinks he will get more money every time he gambles but he ends up losing it all! (Emily, 32 years old, Mombasa resident).

Thiam argues that, in patriarchal societies:

> A man himself is alienated, so he is not free either. The sex which oppresses the other is not a free sex. (1986: 121).

Perhaps the frustrations of living in ghettoed neighbourhoods beset by poverty and high rates of unemployment/underemployment generated men's feelings of hopelessness resulting in addiction, financial recklessness, and infidelity to compensate for suppressed masculinity. More evident in the narratives, however, was that men's tendencies were motivated by deep-seated beliefs in their control over household revenue. Drawing on the traditional gender-role discourse, Rahma's quote illustrates the way in which men primarily asserted their monetary power by restricting financial provision and remaining inattentive to women's concerns about

[12] *Miraa* is a stimulant plant, whose stems and leaves are ingested by chewing. Elsewhere in East Africa, it is commonly known as khat (Somalia), chat (Ethiopia) or qat (Arabic) (Carrier, 2006).

limited resources. Some women's attempts to negotiate these experiences were exemplified by nudging their partners towards joint financial planning and monetary transparency. Even so, men were not amenable to these proposals as they threatened their tyrannical grip on household finances. In the narratives of economic IPV, women's questioning of the male financial ownership construct was revealed, which was contrary to earlier adherences to mainstream gender-role discourses. Below, Jane's and Ilham's quotes which I presented in Chapter Five are repeated for clarity:

Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident:

> Earlier:
>
> … because the money belongs to him and he worked for it himself … I told myself that even if I started arguing with him, I would not be doing the right thing.
>
> Later:
>
> I don't want to lie to you, I don't know how much he earns. And that was a problem because … all the time I asked …. He hides it from me.
>
> Ilham, 33 years old, Mombasa resident:
>
> Earlier:
>
> … a man wouldn't know anything about managing the domestic responsibilities as well as a woman would. The man's main responsibility is to go out and look for money and bring the resources back home so that the woman can take care of everything else.
>
> Later:
>
> When you tell him, 'Now the kids are grown let's financially plan for ABCD … he doesn't want to....

Jane and Ilham position themselves within the dominant gender discourse in the first set of extracts but then step out of it in the latter set. Thus, alternative positions were available to the women in my sample, which displayed a mode of femininity that did not desire complete detachment from financial aspects of the household. Weedon (1997: 83) explains:

> When we resist a particular subject position and the mode of subjectivity which it brings with it, we do so from the position of an alternative social definition of femininity.

Participants' involvement in consciousness-raising circles exposed them to "alternative ways of constituting the meaning of [their] experience" in which collective discussions of domestic struggles, previously thought to be caused by personal inadequacies or external factors, were gradually viewed as socially reproduced practices that reinforced their vulnerabilities (Mama, 1995; Weedon, 1997: 33). Interactions with feminist networks informed alternate social definitions of femininity to redress economic IPV, as the following quotes suggest:

> My friend told me, 'They have just started a women's group here and you will meet others who have gone through the same [abusive] experiences. When you hear what other women go through, your mind will wake up and you will stop financially relying on your husband. (Krest, 50 years old, Nairobi resident).

> Ever since I joined these women's groups, I feel empowered and sometimes ask myself why I waited all this time. They educate you and I now consider myself smart and it is up to me to work hard and move on with life. (Amina, 49 years old, Mombasa resident).

The infusion of women's socio-economic empowerment groups within the communities attracted membership from financially abused participants. These groups provided a secure outlet for discussing IPV victimisation and it was within these settings that ideas about economic empowerment emerged. According to hooks (2014), the process of self-awareness among women at ethnical, socio-economic and cultural margins begins when they recount their struggles to each other and, more so, to those who have undergone experiences similar to theirs. hooks further explains that this initiates a process of (re)examination which creates pathways of critical consciousness and self-awareness by which to take action against oppressive conditions. Indeed, participants accredited their evolving sense of self-efficacy to these female-only, informal associations, and the exposure to empowerment discourses shaped their subjectivity in two major ways. Firstly, and as shown in Krest's case, women increasingly lessened their financial dependability on their husbands/partners and viewed themselves as being capable of directly addressing their economic challenges. Secondly, in her excerpt, Amina suggests that these women's circles have the capacity to challenge or dispel ideas that immobilise women from the workforce. The resulting effect was a growing sense of confidence

in managing their circumstances. Similar to the Black British women in a study by Mama, these grassroots women's groups were environments in which participants engaged in redefining themselves and reconstructing new subjectivities which "reject[ed] the disempowering legacies of centuries" (1995: 6).

Attitudes antithetical to normative femininity were also closely associated with membership of local women's savings and investment groups, popularly known in Swahili as *"chamas"*, sometimes used inter-changeably with the term "merry-go-rounds". Regular financial contributions are expected from each *chama* member and the funds are disbursed rotationally until everyone in the group has received a pay-out (Wairire & Muiruri, 2016). The narratives suggested that *chamas* were sources of new discursive developments which offered re-defined meanings of being a Kenyan woman in an economically abusive relationship. These platforms motivated participants' adoption of non-salient discourses which critiqued ideals suggesting that women are naturally suited for the home space and that they are solely to be sustained by men. In the following statements, *chama* members, Emily and Grace, occupy breadwinning subject positions as a result of their husbands' failures to accomplish socio-cultural masculine expectations:

> "I expected to be married to a man who would make me live a comfortable life with no problems…. I expected him to take care of me as his wife … but I find myself having to provide for some of these things…. So I joined a *chama* because he wasn't meeting my expectations …. What I want from him I cannot get, that is why I said … let me try to show him that I can also do it even though he doesn't. Yes, it is his obligation but, you know, in life nowadays, you can't only rely on your husband to meet your needs. Maybe he comes home today and says, 'I don't have any money'. Will you stay hungry?... I am determined to look for money. Even when I see clothes [in the market] ... I tell myself 'let me also get those for my children!'…. I can't stay idle because I care for my children's well-being. If I keep depending on him yet he gambles all the money away, what will the children eat? (Emily, 32 years old, mother of two children, Mombasa resident).

> I tried in every way to participate in *chamas* … these merry-go-rounds and engage myself in small businesses so that I can buy food like milk and meat to feed my children…. At first I used to be very hurt! Why is he this way? But I got used to it after a while. I stood up as a woman to take charge of my home. I struggled with

> my small businesses to educate my children until they were grown. I had to take charge as a woman. (Grace, 55 years old, mother of five children[13], Mombasa resident).

The redefined economic position of both women also distanced their narratives from the dark romance discourse which encumbers women with the responsibility of changing men, blaming themselves and/or external sources for men's undesirable behaviours (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). In Emily's quote, for example, she gravitates against her earlier employment of intercessory practices to transform her husband by means of spiritually "uprooting" the mistress (see Chapter Five). In this narrative excerpt, she directly attributes her economic oppression to her husband and not his mistress. In concurrence with an IPV study conducted in Kenya (Wood *et al.,* 2019), it appeared as though participants in some cases also leveraged their economic undertakings to prove to the men that they were not in need of their money as best exemplified by Emily's statement: "… let me try to show him I can also do it even though he doesn't."

Further to women's empowerment groups and *chamas*, egalitarian-minded friends and relatives also shaped these self-determined attitudes. Recalling her earlier experiences of economic IPV, 49-year-old Topi narrated how her aunts and friends nudged her towards financial attainment:

> My aunts told me, 'Focus on your business so that you can raise your children but don't keep that man in your mind…' and there was also another friend of mine; I talked to her and she said, 'Mama Topi, let me tell you something, what will help you is what is in your own pocket so that you will know how to plan for the cent you earn, otherwise if you keep focusing on him you will die! Because your husband has money, but he refuses to give you anything.' (Topi, 49 years old, Mombasa resident).

According to the above advice, financial agency was contingent on Topi's emotional detachment from her husband. This links the opening statement ("Focus on your business…") with an empowerment discourse. Similar behavioural distractions have been employed in previous analyses of women's IPV coping strategies (Lempert, 1996; Hyden, 1999) and, in a

[13] All of Grace's and Topi's (see next excerpts) children were adults at the time of the interviews. Here, they recount earlier experiences of navigating economic IPV.

study by Ting (2010) among SSA women in particular, labour force engagement was identified as a means of mentally escaping the relationship. The driving force behind Topi's actions was the need to provide for her neglected children. In the previous statements, Emily's and Grace's pursuit of a source of income was similarly motivated by their children's well-being. An element of pride can be detected in women's ability to fend for their children in the following statements:

> I started a business. I opened a boutique and sold clothes and cosmetics … I said I would rather open a business so that I can feed my child. (Brina, 34 years old, mother of two, Mombasa resident).

> I work really hard so that my children don't idle around the house the whole day…. That is what really motivates me to work hard. When I get Ksh 200 [approximately £1.50], I tell their teacher, 'Hold onto this money' … I just don't want to see my children kicked out of school … (Lydia, 27 years old, mother of three, Nairobi resident).

> I cannot let my children starve or sleep hungry because their dad isn't around…. It is up to me to look for Ksh 50 or Ksh 100 [approximately £0.40 and £0.75 respectively] to buy some *ugali*[14] flour. (Jane, 36 years old, mother of two, Mombasa resident).

> Once he leaves [the house], you never see him until evening! My children cannot stay hungry the whole day. Why should they sleep hungry and I'm here? (Susan, 30 years old, mother of three, Mombasa resident).

Participants' reasonings behind their economic self-reliance in the above extracts was "the antithesis of the docility and dependency publicly expected of them" (Lovett, 2001: 51). In Lovett's (2001) analysis, economically struggling Tanzanian women with absentee husbands also made significant efforts to provide for their children. Notwithstanding, Lovett observed that these women were read as "behaving like men" in their uptake of responsibilities that were incumbent on the latter. While gender roles in contemporary Kenya (and other settings in SSA) are continually shifting with more women engaging in the labour force since the colonial era, household responsibilities remain demarcated making it common for them to

[14] *Ugali* is a staple food in Kenya commonly prepared with maize flour and hot water to achieve a dough-like consistency. It is often served with vegetables and meat.

experience backlashes when roles perceived to be traditionally male are assumed. In the next sub-section, I discuss how economic resourcefulness on the part of participants often resulted in male antagonisms.

7.2.1. Employed Women's Encounters with the Patriarchal Backlash

Women's engagement in the workforce challenged patriarchal standards, but their new subject positions did not translate automatically into immediate financial independence. Indeed, participants stated that they did not enjoy the same level of economic freedom rendered to men, as paid work often had to be balanced with domestic responsibilities. For instance, 32-year-old Emily had to limit her paid-working hours to manage her domestic chores, part of which included catering to the very man who subjected her to financial oppression. These actions simultaneously positioned her within and outside the dominant discourse (Mama, 1995; De La Rey *et al.*, 1997). Her quote below is representative of moments when women challenged the traditional gender-role discourse while still "complying to the letter with what [was] expected" of them (Weedon, 1997: 83):

> With my potato business, for example, I have to wake up early to sell in the market then come back home quickly to wash the pile of dirty dishes waiting for me, and on top of all of this I also have to prepare his lunch. (Emily, 32 years old, Mombasa resident).

In the patriarchal ideology in Kenya, financial power and decision-making processes were attributed to men (Ochwada, 1997; Njue *et al.*, 2007; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018), which explained why women's engagement in the workforce exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, their circumstances. These experiences were located within a discursive frame that I refer to as the economic backlash discourse. In addition to the above, Emily's husband controlled her income to feed his gambling addiction:

> Yes! He keeps gambling! He wins and loses the money; he wins and loses the money; sometimes he loses everything and comes home saying, 'I want you to give me some money' and dare you refuse! If you refuse, there will be no peace in that house …. When he has lost all the money, he will come back home and let's say I have left for the market or gone out to fetch water. By the time I come back, he has taken all the money in my purse and, when you ask, 'Where is my money? I need to go and buy the stock for tomorrow's market sale,' he will start

> yelling at you! Because he has gambled all the money away. (Emily, 32 years old, Mombasa resident).

Similar to Emily, 35-year-old Maureen's narrative was also framed within the economic backlash discourse when she told me about her limited autonomy over her revenues:

> I never ask him for [bus] fare to go to work [because] he refuses whenever you ask him. But whenever I'm back home from work, he asks me the next morning to give him bus fare. And [yet] he has [his own] money! … He has seen me with money, right? He looks into my purse at night when I'm asleep and knows how much I have, and then he borrows me money … yet he has his own. (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

In Chapter Two, I have explored how women in colonial Kenya were expected not to travel to urban regions to sell farm produce without being accompanied by, or receiving consent from, patriarchs (Kanogo, 2005; Mutongi, 2007 cited in Ligaga, 2020). I have also reviewed in the same chapter how women who ventured into the urban centres for financial gain were derogated in that era (Obbo, 1980 cited in Cornwall, 2002; White, 1990; Ochwada, 1997; Kanogo, 2005). My interviews with working participants suggested that relatively similar forms of surveillance and defamation persisted in present society. Lewis expresses the same link in her analysis of Africa's colonial and modern-day perceptions of female employment in the following remark:

> Consequently, colonial definitions of women's urban work as peripheral and unlawful, together with the stereotypes surrounding their presence in towns, frequently persist in the post-colonial period. (2011: 206).

Based on my conversations with the participants, however, the policing of African women had been re-defined and took new forms. Neither male accompaniment nor consents were required but men dictated the type of paid work women did, forbade employment activities outside their neighbourhoods and, most commonly, constrained their economic mobility by imposing curfews. It has been shown in IPV studies that men react this way because they feel threatened by women's growing sense of financial independence (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Wood *et al.*, 2019). Participants narrated being subjected to insults and accusations of infidelity whenever they returned home outside the restricted timeframe. Others, such as Maureen were locked out of the house, as the following dialogues illustrates:

> Maureen: Sometimes he will tell me, 'You are a *malaya*! You go around with men'…. I wasn't self-employed at that time … I was working in a hotel in town. We used to leave work at 9 [pm], and sometimes the customers would be ordering food then … and I end up finishing by 11 [pm]. We used to live near Ukunda then and, by the time I take the ferry [to cross over to South Coast], it is midnight already. When I arrive home it is very late and he has locked the door and I end up sleeping at the neighbour's house.
>
> Vicky: Every time you come late as a result of your job, he used to either lock you out –
>
> Maureen: He locks you out, or when you get in the house, he starts insulting you …
>
> Vicky: What does he say to you?
>
> Maureen: He says, 'You don't come home early because you sleep around with men', [he says] so many things.

Schroeder's (2001: 98) analysis of Gambian women's attempt at economic independence illustrates the use of marital metaphors on the part of men in equating gainful employment with "a second husband". To these men, wives who engaged in the labour force were the inverse of the "good" woman and marked as recalcitrant and unruly companions who neglected their marital responsibilities as the statement below highlights:

> Some men, when they are asked about their wives, they will say, 'She is no longer my wife; she has a new husband.'" The phrase, "She's gone to her husband's" …used by men to indicate that their wives were not at home, but working…instead, became a shorthand expression marking women's neglect of marital responsibilities. (2001:98).

Similar to the Gambian men, Maureen's husband was also socialised within a specific "system of meanings and values" that has limited room for an egalitarian discourse (Weedon, 1997: 33). However, his insecurities appear to be channelled towards his loss of control over Maureen's movements rather than a new husband in an allegorical sense. Just as the women who refused to comply with the social order in colonial Buha, Western Tanzania and Abeokuta, Nigeria (see Chapter Two), Maureen in his eyes failed to behave like a "proper" woman and was instead "acting 'like a man'" in her inability to capitulate to his instructions (Byfield, 2001; Lovett, 2001: 48). I have discussed in Chapter Two how men in Kenya are

entitled to "correct" misbehaving wives/partners who do not respect their authority (Amnesty International, 2002; Lawoko, 2008; Simister, 2010; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Makayoto *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al.*, 2018). This is drawn from the discourse of male proprietary rights over women in which men are entitled to treat female "properties" as they please (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Although Maureen was not subjected to corporal punishment, restricted household access and verbal abuse equally served as disciplinary measures.

The term *malaya* (meaning "whore" in Swahili) equated working women such as Maureen with prostitutes and relates to the Madonna-whore dichotomy. In Chapter Two, I have traced the origins of this term to pre-independent Kenya where it was attributed to women who ventured into the urban economy to mitigate the effects of the harsh colonial economic policies that were skewed heavily in favour of African men (Ochwada, 1997). The *malaya* during the colonial era stood in contrast to the ideal woman or *malaika* (meaning "angel" in Swahili) who conformed to the traditional gender role setup in her rural home (Tamale, 2011c). The cultural and historical significance of the term conceivably maintains the normative feminine ideal in contemporary Kenyan society. Moreover, relegating working women such as Maureen to the status of a *malaya* shows how this controlling image was a site where the convergence of gender, class and heterosexuality occurred to underpin women's disadvantaged position (Hill Collins, 2009).

Fortunately for the women in a study conducted by Schroeder (2001) in Gambia, previously hostile husbands increasingly became accepting of their wives' emerging economic status. They stopped harassing them, "dropped their oppositional rhetoric [and] became more generally cooperative" when they realised the benefits accruing from women's economic engagement (2001: 91). While men's accommodating attitudes had hidden intentions in their efforts to profit from women's industriousness, Schroeder explains that this transformed the marital atmosphere for the better. The Gambian women leveraged their husbands' cooperation and "began a prolonged attempt to win [them] over and generate the goodwill necessary to sustain production on a more secure basis" (2001: 91). Similar opportunities were however not open to the women in my study as men did not relent in their hostility. The tragic irony for most participants was that men hardly contributed to household revenue but remained troubled by the former's pursuit of income. Narratives were more explicitly framed within the economic backlash discourse when women explained how men capitalised on their resilience to

deliberately default on their financial responsibilities. This is encapsulated in the few examples below:

> He will leave me with all the responsibilities as soon as he realises I know how to look for money, and he will continue with the extra-marital affairs. Whenever he is not around, he knows I will take care of everything because I know how to look for money. (Sambayas, 48 years old, Nairobi resident).

> Men with working wives neglect their responsibilities. The wife comes from work in the evening, and ensures the meal is available. My husband takes advantage of this and ignores the fact that he is financially overburdening me because I have to use the little I have earned to spend in the house…. (Jane, 36 years old, Mombasa resident).

> I have to … struggle for almost everything and, if he does something [for us], [it is only because] I have really pestered him to do so…. He has left most of the responsibilities to me … (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

In as much as husbands in Schroeder's study permitted wives some degree of economic freedom, some of the remarks by his female respondents starkly mirrored the extracts presented above to illustrate men's eschewal of household obligations:

> Our husbands stopped buying soap, oil, rice…We provide all these things…. We do all this work while our husbands lie around home doing nothing… (2001: 97).

In such limiting marital atmospheres, women eventually learn to adopt creative measures to preserve their income. Economic secrecy was centrally practised by the Gambian women in Schroeder's research. They entrusted close friends and relatives with their money for safe-keeping, hid their income and savings, and carried their cash everywhere with them in their "money belts" (2001: 98). Likewise, women in my study did not succumb to their fates in spite of men's behaviours but devised additional strategies of economic survival, some of which mirrored those of the Gambian women. In the following section, I investigate these measures in detail and explore how Kenyan femininities can further be read as resourceful in an effort to reconfigure gender roles in an economically abusive climate.

7.2.2. Women's Deceptive Strategies in Redressing Economic IPV

Twelve of the women, who were employed or self-employed, used deceptive strategies to address economic IPV. These measures included stealing money from the men, concealing business ventures, working in secret, and using birth control without the knowledge of their husbands/partners. As passive as stealing might have seemed, it was apparent from the narratives that this personalised strategy successfully met the needs of the participants. In response to her husband's coercive controlling behaviours and shirking (see previous sub-section), Maureen, for example, relied on theft to subsidise the meagre income earned from her catering job at a local hotel:

> He never contributes any money! [inaudible] so sometimes you have to steal from him. When I steal from him, we are now even. (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

Rahma (25 years old) and Brina (34 years old), who were under-employed and unemployed respectively, had financially irresponsible husbands who similarly curtailed their movements for financial gain. Their narratives revealed that pilfering was exercised with a lot of precaution to avoid retribution by capitalising on the men's inebriated state or forgetfulness, as the following quotes suggest:

> Whenever he is very drunk and he has left some change in his wallet, I steal some money. (Rahma, 25 years old, Mombasa resident).

> There is a day he forgot his ATM [card]. He got into the bedroom, dressed up and left it. I knew there was money in the account, I took it as soon as he left and went to withdraw some cash to start my business. (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa).

In Chapter Five, I have highlighted Rahma's commitment to the "for better or for worse" invocation when she presented herself as a self-sacrificing and devoted, abused woman in the statement: "Treat him well even if he's bad [to you]". However, the act of stealing as a survival technique departs from this narrative. Brina's feminine subjectivity was similarly fluid and open to change. I have discussed in Chapter Five how she left employment at the airport upon her husband's request and promises of financial provision, which arguably depicted her as a credulous woman blinded by love. However, discursive inconsistencies were evident later when she explained to me how she realised that her husband's earlier assurances were only a ploy to control her geographical mobility and restrict her financial autonomy. Thus, his feigned

charm was "like a monster… [that took] on a deceptive appearance to beguile [her]" (Thiam, 1986: 124). Yet, it could be argued that Brina's act of illegitimately obtaining money to finance a business unbeknown to her husband abrogated her earlier gullibility.

Brina explained to me that she was careful not to use the stolen money immediately. She colluded with a trusted friend after withdrawing the money, which demonstrated the practice of *chinjira*, whereby, according to a special bond between non-kin women from complementary economic backgrounds, they cover for each other when faced with household adversities (Green, 1999). *Chinjira* is often associated with material provision between households during times of financial distress but its application in stealing below indicates some measure of contradiction of orthodox meanings:

> I withdrew Ksh 30,000 (approximately £225), 25 for the business [and] 5 for myself. I put the ATM [card] where I found it as soon as I withdrew the cash and acted as if nothing happened. There is a friend of mine and we trust each other. I took the cash and told her, 'Keep this money'… then I told her, 'If by any chance he asks you if I gave you any cash, you know nothing about it'. And we used to save each other that way, 'cause she was married [and] she had gone through the same thing…. So I gave her the Ksh 25,000 and told her, 'Keep that money far away until I tell you when I need it'. 'Cause I had to wait and see if he will blow up and how he will react, that is why I didn't want to use it immediately … (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

Brina recounted her husband confronting her as soon as he found out about the missing money, but she concocted lies to avoid retaliation and obtain more money from him:

> He asked me, 'Did you withdraw money from the KCB account the other day?'…. Then I answered, 'Yes, I withdrew the money'. 'Where did you take the money? What was it for?' I said, 'There was an emergency back in my natal home and they needed money, but you didn't have time to talk, so I decided to take the ATM [card], withdraw and send the cash'…. [Then he asked], 'What is the problem back home? Why didn't you tell me? Was it sorted out?' [and I replied], 'Not really, there is still a deficit.' [He asked], 'Like how much?' [and I replied], 'Ksh 20,000' [approximately £150]. [He said], 'Ok, I will withdraw some money for you tomorrow'…. I had to act fast! .... I said to myself, 'Thank you, Jesus!' because I

was expecting a couple of slaps but that was it …" (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

Brina then informed her mother of the ruse before her husband investigated the veracity of the claims concerning a financial emergency in her natal home:

> Brina: I went to my mum [and] I gave her a hint. "It's like, this. When he comes, just accept the cash," I told her. "Mum, money is never refused! When he comes, just take it!"
>
> Vicky: And he went?
>
> Brina: Yes, he took it [the money] to her! Then she gave it to me!

The above account shows that Brina's strategy materialised as a result of her ability to think on her feet. She was not a passive observer of economic IPV and devised a context and time-specific strategy that worked for her and her circumstances. The economically abused women in my sample also conspired with other informal actors to steal indirectly from the men. Among these participants were Hadija (32 years old) and Wanjiku (47 years old) who, after being exploited for their economic resilience, colluded with their landlord and a schoolteacher respectively to ensure compensation for rent and school fee payments. Patience's husband also capitalised on her industriousness and limited his financial contribution as a result, as shown in her excerpt below:

> There is a time he used to take advantage of me because he knew that even if he doesn't bring any money, I will keep providing …" (Patience, 37 years old, Mombasa resident).

During these experiences, however, Patience similarly devised her own means of overcoming financial pressures. She mirthfully recounted instances where she bought and prepared food for herself and her children, quickly washed the dishes before her husband's return and asked the children to lie that they had not eaten. She would then pocket and save a portion of the money provided by her oblivious husband for the day's use. This was her means of replenishing her limited income. She confided that these compensatory tactics were best executed whenever her husband relocated to a different city for employment. In Kenya and most of SSA, men's participation in migratory labour leaves women over-burdened with caregiving, breadwinning and decision-making responsibilities (Green, 1999; Njue *et al.*, 2007). Patience, as the interim head of the household, relied on her soap-making business to sustain her four children, but

juggling paid work and domesticity negatively affected her income. Creativity on her part was imperative in a context where gender, socio-economic position and motherhood were intersecting markers of oppression. She explained to me that she always paid rent on time to avoid financial penalties and eviction but ensured compensation by pestering her husband to remit the fee, knowing well that he was unable to corroborate her ability to meet this need. In other words, it was easier for Patience to lie and manipulate her husband when he was working away from Mombasa. In the short excerpt below, she explains how this strategy alleviated her financial burden:

> Now that he is in Kisumu, I feel great because I can get money from him. I can ensure that the rent is paid on time to avoid getting fined for late payments. I tell him, 'The rent is late, have you not paid the landlord yet?' When he sends the rent and late payment fee [then] I take the late fee payment for myself. (Patience, 37 years old, Mombasa resident).

Similar to the findings of another IPV study in Kenya (Gillum *et al.*, 2016), participants were also secretive about their employment status, savings and financial investments out of fear that men would stop supporting their families completely and/or take advantage of their income. Maureen's secret *chama* membership, for example, enabled her to conceal a business venture successfully for several years:

> Like the [investment] project ….in fact, he doesn't even know whether it exists … and it has existed for the last seven years … I have never ever shared [this information] with him and he doesn't know … (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

Membership of these women's groups also meant that women, such as Maureen, could invest collectively and enhance their financial skillsets. Plausibly, mentorship from more experienced businesswomen potentially informed Maureen's economic self-determination which affirmed that *chamas* were transformative environments which further challenged pervading assumptions of the ever needy and financially dependent African woman. In the narratives from my study, it was evident that female contemporaries, such as Maureen, were taking charge of their financial well-being in more profound ways than earlier womenfolk and, by implication, these evolving subjectivities were bound to reconfigure *chama* spaces as suggested in the following past and present depictions:

> Initially, *chamas* … were the preserve of rural women who gathered in each other's houses once a month to socialize over tea and snacks and buy spoons, cups and pans for each other. With time, however, the meetings … rose in stature. Women began buying livestock, building water tanks, buying pieces of land, paying school fees, investing shares on the stock market and even building houses, courtesy of the merry-go-rounds (cited in Ligaga, 2020: 96).

While men, such as Maureen's husband, allowed some degree of economic participation (in that he did not explicitly refuse her from working at the hotel, but imposed a curfew to restrict her mobility – see previous sub-section), others completely forbade their wives from engaging in the workforce. Some of these men were oblivious to current market prices and often insisted that the little money they provided for the household was sufficient to sustain their families for a stated time period. This is best exemplified by Rahma's earlier quote:

> …he only gives me Ksh 200 [approximately £1.50] for breakfast until evening, [yet] milk goes for Ksh 50 [approximately £0.40], and the baby also needs Pampers … (Rahma, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

Rahma's husband was extremely conservative and her engagement in the labour market plausibly exposed her to riskier forms of retaliatory abuse than Maureen. Rahma was afraid of seeking employment outside her vicinity out of fear of reprisals, but she cleverly entrusted her neighbours' support in concealing her laundry services. She would wash for pay at the same time she did her families' laundry, as it was easier to hide other people's clothes under her stack this way. Her neighbours never disclosed her disobedience as they were well aware of the extent of her husband's mistreatment. Rahma's "individual act of resistance [to male authority] suggest[ed] that a distinctive, collective … women's consciousness" potentially existed in her community (Hill Collins, 2009: 108). In fact, Weedon (1997) argues that a discourse, whether hegemonic or resistant, could have some measure of social impact only if in circulation. That Rahma's discreetness was implicitly supported arguably attests to this conclusion.

The manner in which Rahma negotiated her husband's policing to redress her indigence exhibited originality and initiative. Yet, unlike Maureen's, whose secretive financial strategy had an element of sturdiness and long-term protection, Rahma's survival tactic was more desperate and its success rested on the co-operation of others. Both women faced a similar form of economic victimisation, but the measures each undertook were differentiated by virtue of

their husbands' personalities. Indeed, scholars have argued that extreme threats and fear of IPV impedes low-income women's access to the job market and resigns them to menial jobs that entrap them in the cycle of poverty (Kimuna *et al*., 2018). Similar to Rahma, Ilham was enclosed in an environment of extreme fear and intimidation. Her traditional husband never allowed her to seek employment and his restricted provision often left her, a mother of four, in desperate need of supplementary income. As with Rahma, however, an element of resourcefulness was warranted to overcome her circumstances. In the dialogue excerpt below, Ilham portrays herself as a "strong-willed resister" and "not as a defenceless victim" of economic oppression (Hill Collins, 2009: 108):

> Ilham: I never used to know how to braid hair before, until I taught myself! I ask around to see if I can find someone to braid, yeah like that! .... I never used to know how to tattoo [henna], but I taught myself …
>
> Vicky: But…does he know about your work?
>
> Ilham: Me? I hide it from him! Yeah, I hide it from him! You know, he usually leaves me home … and I will do the job quickly and get back home quickly, you see?
>
> Vicky: Before he is back?
>
> Ilham: Before he is back. When he is back, he has found that I have already cooked … and if he is late, he will find the children are already in bed, you see?

Ilham's initiative and self-determination were evident in her self-taught income-generating skills. Yet, she demonstrated both resistance and compliance to traditional femininity to operationalise her strategy. Behind her shifting subjectivity was a pragmatic and implicit form of agency. On one hand, she took up most of the breadwinning responsibilities through secretive employment and, on the other hand, she arrived home in time to put on a strategic performance of the devoted wife. Her defiance to restricted mobility, though in a more covert fashion, particularly challenged discourses objectifying her as a man's property. Yet, that these actions were done in secret meant that her need for economic and physical freedom could not be contested without exposing her to the risk of retaliatory aggression. Notwithstanding, her narrative is somewhat reminiscent of Ligaga's (2020: 94) interpretation of the unfaithful "trickster" woman who fulfilled her wifely duties to perfection, to cover her tracks and minimise her husband's suspicions (see Chapter Two). Though Ilham's actions were not

exercised in an adulterous context, one could argue that her "trickster" tendencies qualified her as a "change agent … not only with the power to defy oppressive social norms but also the *creative power* [my emphasis] to reimagine new concepts of self-hood [and] gender relationships" (Cai, 2008: 276, cited in Ligaga, 2020: 94).

Family planning methods were also used without men's knowledge, in order to reduce the burden of rearing children. This action challenged traditional values, according to which child-bearing was associated with ideal womanhood, "successful" masculinity and marital fulfilment, all of which are still upheld in Kenya today to a large extent (Njue *et al.,* 2014; Ademiluka, 2018; Kawarazuka *et al.,* 2019). Most participants corroborated the prevalence of these cultural mores, but a paradox was presented when narratives of economic IPV revealed men's negligence towards the very children they sired. The excerpt below from my interview with Brina best captures how women were sometimes caught in a bind. Brina, who already had a child from a previous relationship, explained to me that she was not yet ready to have another child with her second husband but ultimately succumbed to patriarchal pressures:

> But the funniest thing [is that] he was dying to have a child then, when I got pregnant, he was like, 'I'm not ready to have a child, I'm not even sure if it's mine'…. I said to him, 'OK, you say it's not yours? Let's go for a DNA test then'. He said, 'I can't waste my money on that!' He can be very rude. We never used to fight before I got pregnant…. I kept asking myself, 'What did I do [wrong]? He wanted a child, he wanted me pregnant, which I did after he begged for it. I would have been pregnant on the first week we got married, but I wanted to focus on my studies. But after a year together … January last year, he pleaded, 'Let's try and have at least one baby', and this made sense to me… (Brina, 34 years old, Mombasa resident).

Hill Collins (2009) argues that women who become mothers under intersecting oppressions of gender, class and ethnicity, bear children whom they do not want in the first place. This is because values in these contexts foster negative controlling images of the good Black or African woman who strongly desires to bear children. Unlike Brina, however, women such as Hadija were not married to men who "pleaded" for children but to those who coercively dominated the sexual and reproductive realms of their lives. Hadija endured multiple sexual abuses and narrated her financially neglectful husband's "forceful attempts to impregnate" her. There has been minimal research on the association between IPV and reproductive health in

Africa (Emenike *et al.*, 2008), but in two IPV studies in Kenya (Fonck *et al.*, 2005) and Tanzania (Maman *et al.*, 2002), an increased risk for unintended pregnancies was found among partnered women who had a limited say in their sexual lives. Hadija recounted her struggles in raising the three children - whom she bore against her will - with the meagre income from her groundnut peddling business after her husband temporarily abandoned them for his mistress. Motherhood was a site of disempowerment for Hadija, but it also provided a base on which processes of self-definition emerged when negative experiences increased her determination to reclaim her rights to reproductive privacy and economic security. She covertly contested the male proprietary rights discourse when she implanted a contraceptive device without her husband's knowledge:

> Hadija: He wants another child, and I don't want to give birth again, I have already had too many [financial] challenges with these other three children.
>
> Vicky: How do you try preventing having children?
>
> Hadija: I use this (shows me her underarm).
>
> Vicky: Norplant?
>
> Hadija: Yes, Norplant, that is what I use.
>
> Vicky: And does he know you use Norplant?
>
> Hadija: No, he doesn't.

The above dialogue about women's covert use of contraception is similar to those of other low-income women in Kenya (Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016; Wood, 2020) and other male-dominated settings in SSA (Baiden *et al.*, 2016). Gatwiri and Karanja (2016) explain that the practice of secret family planning in patriarchal societies, such as Kenya, reflect women's "silent" efforts in claiming ownership over their reproductive choices. In their sample of Kenyan women living with virginal fistula and experiencing IPV, the practice also served to protect women from further traumatic reproductive experiences. Having already endured one miscarriage, avoiding a repeat of this event was also arguably the case for Hadija.

In a society that places high value on children, Hadija risked stigmatisation and reprisals should her husband have discovered her use of contraceptives (Kimuna & Djamba, 2008). Moreover, failure to become pregnant, as patriarchal society dictates, had the potential to jeopardise her marriage (Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016). However, these risks were outweighed by her willingness

to overcome the financial burden and additional patriarchal pressures. Hadija's exposure to feminist networks seemed to have shaped her alternative femininity. A mother-figure, or in the words of Hill Collins (2009: 208), a "community other-mother", encouraged her use of contraceptives to minimise the economic burden. It has often been argued that age hierarchies nested within dimensions of power contribute to women's oppression (Hill Collins, 2009) but, unlike Krest's mother whose instructions deterred her injured daughter from reporting to the police (see Chapter Five), the advice of Hadija's community other-mother did not serve patriarchal interests. Thus, age differences in this instance worked positively to address gender and economic oppression.

Hadija's involvement in a *chama* and women's associations also fostered ideas of reproductive and financial empowerment. hooks (2014) argues that small group settings are instrumental in communicating feminist consciousness-raising in a manner that is easily understood because high literacy is not a pre-requisite for membership. For primary school educated Hadija, therefore, these women's circles might have been "arenas for education for critical consciousness" (hooks, 2014: 24) that straightforwardly conveyed the importance of family planning in mitigating gender and class disadvantages in a marital setting.

My further conversations with Krest, however, revealed that her mother did not always subscribe to traditional scripts when advising her daughter. She had witnessed Krest's struggles in raising five children in an unsupportive marital environment and, at one point, encouraged her use of birth control and employment seeking as shown below:

> My mum told me, 'You have to fight for your marriage and stop running away from your problems! One day neither your father nor I will be around, who will you run to? You have to stand on your own two feet because it is a woman who holds everything together in the house, whether or not she has a job! Now you need to stop having more children and look for a casual job'. I then asked her, 'Mum, how will I find a job and I didn't even go to college?' She said, 'Look for a job then take yourself to college! The rest will fall in place'… (Krest, 50 years old, Nairobi resident).

As in Hadija's case, the above advice challenges the "male property" image which proffers a potent rationale for men's control over women's sexuality and reproductivity without considering the economic implications for those in financially abusive contexts. At the same

time however, her mother's encouragement to "fight for her marriage" and "hold everything in the house" is framed within the patriarchal family discourse. Krest was reminded that the injustices meted out to her should not result in her not staying true to her marriage and family, because women in Kenya – as in most of SSA – are largely responsible for maintaining their marital and nuclear family arrangements (see Chapter Five).

7.2.3. External Support for Economic IPV

In as much as seeking support was not the primary focus of my study (see Chapter One), I find it necessary to present the narratives that naturally emerged from women's stories of financial abuse, as it also narrows the knowledge gap in the underexplored area of economic IPV. Based on the narratives, seeking formal support was an area explored by less than a third of the women (6 participants) experiencing economic IPV. However, this was done without much success as bureaucratic challenges, deficient referral systems, limited awareness of existing services and legal malpractice acted as barriers. Scholars have shown that women's access to formal IPV services are determined by their socio-economic characteristics. In an IPV study in Kenya by Njue *et al*. (2014), for example, highly educated women with a stable income gained quick access to information and were financially capable of securing legal services. In other words, Njue *et al.* suggest that women with a higher socio-economic status might have a greater sense of self-determination and competence when it comes to seeking professional resources. If this assumption is true, then 27-year-old Lydia's inability to navigate the bureaucratic system can be plausibly attributed to her under-employed status as a casual labourer and her limited schooling:

> Yeah, I went to Organisation [X], but I couldn't handle the long process and gave up half-way … but nowadays I think maybe I should have pushed through the end, because it would have helped me even now. But even if I think about going there [now], I don't even know where I would start. [Lydia, 27 years old, Nairobi resident).

Unlike abused women from rich neighbourhoods, Njue *et al.* (2014) found that the urban poor in Kenya encounter more difficulties in accessing IPV resources because of low awareness. Lydia's socio-economic status and residence in an informal settlement in Nairobi's Ruaraka Constituency perhaps explained her frustrations in initiating the process ("I don't even know where I would start"). Maureen who lived in a low-income dwelling in Mombasa's Mvita Constituency corroborated that only a handful of IPV-affected women within her community

were aware of legal service provision: “I can say [that] 30% of women in these slums know about organisation [X]”.

Closely related to women’s poor access to formal services was their deficient understanding of Kenyan IPV laws. This again might have been linked to limited academic achievement. Krest, who had not pursued education beyond high school, assumed that her customary marital status disqualified her from accessing legal rights and child protection services. Yet, customary unions are equally acknowledged in the Marriage Act, 2014 (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2014) and protection against all forms of domestic abuse against women and children (including financial abuse) is covered by the 2015 PADV Act (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2015). Consequently, Krest’s insufficient knowledge of the legalities addressing her victimisation resulted in her being subjected to spousal threats and intimidation whenever she threatened to report her husband for financial negligence. His exploitation of her legal illiteracy is evident in the dialogue below:

> Vicky: Have you ever thought of going to … a legal rights agency?
>
> Krest: I have tried many things, but I said …
>
> Vicky: Like what?
>
> Krest: I was about to report him to the children’s department, and he told me, ‘Even if you decide to report me, there is nothing you will achieve because I will bribe them’ and I therefore said to myself that this would be a waste of time, in fact, I don’t even have a marriage certificate because we did a traditional wedding. I had nothing on him, so I said to hell with that idea!

In Kenya, a certificate of marriage is issued to couples after the marriage ceremony (customary, religious or civil) has been officiated (Kenya National Gazette Supplement, 2014). Krest’s husband was extremely domineering and it is plausible that the document was in his possession. This presented an additional obstacle for Krest who also lacked a copy of the legal document to prove her marital status should she have wanted to seek legal support in the future. Her ingenuity in this area was perhaps lacking relative to other Kenyan women, in a study by Wood (2019), who secured digital copies of their important personal certificates as a strategy against male control. The threat of Krest’s husband to cheat his way through the criminal justice system presented an additional barrier to Krest’s legal recourse. As much as legal structures were recognised as a potential resource, there was a prevailing sense that these avenues were

corrupt and involved people who would accept bribes from men. The purported collusion or fear of collusion between perpetrators and criminal justice officials was a recurring theme throughout the narratives, as in another IPV study conducted in urban Kenya (Gillum *et al.*, 2016). These and the institutional challenges mentioned earlier made the majority of victims averse to formal trajectories, with many resorting to informal resources for financial and material support.

Assistance from relatives, neighbours and friends featured prominently in the narratives (17 of 28 participants). A handful (five participants) also relied on landlords and teachers for support, which was a unique strategy, as publications on seeking help from these sources are scarce to the best of my knowledge. Lydia's landlord, for instance, sympathised with her condition and allowed her and her three children to live rent free for a month after she disclosed her financial ordeal. Thus, Lydia's challenges in accessing legal services did not limit her resolve to redress her struggles in the interim. The same could be said for Maureen who leveraged her positive relationship with a schoolteacher to negotiate an extension of the payment of her children's school fees:

> Sometimes she [the teacher] tells you, 'I give you two weeks [to pay the] school fees. I won't chase you today'. And most of the times she tells the head teacher, 'You know so and so's mum has a problem, let's give her this month'. You know, the teachers are playing a really big role in that. (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

Immediate family members, specifically, provided participants with gifts or loans in case or in kind and paid their children's school fees. In-laws were rarely relied upon with only one participant mentioning her brother-in-law's assistance in providing capital to start a small business. The findings of IPV studies in SSA and other developing countries corroborate that women often rely on natal family rather than in-law support when faced with a marital crisis (Kaye *et al.*, 2007; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Ragavan *et al*., 2015). Neighbours and friends, on the other hand, provided food and clothing items both to women and children whenever they experienced a shortage of funds. Two participants (Hadija and Halima) who had unreliable and deceased relatives respectively, relied on neighbours and friends for support. Hadija (32-year-old mother of three) was forbidden by her unsupportive brothers ever to return to the natal homestead with her children. Yet, abandoning her children was inconceivable, leaving her with no choice but to rely on the support of neighbours and close friends. Orphaned at a young age

and with no trusted relatives, Halima (25-year-old, mother of one), on the other hand, relied on non-familial sources for assistance, as shown below:

> The people who normally help me the most aren't my relatives. My grandmother died and left me her house, but my aunties took it from me. So, the people who usually help me are my friends. They bring my daughter clothes and we don't even have any blood relation. They used to be my neighbours and they have always helped me since my mother died. (Halima 25-year-old, mother of one).

While immediate family members also provided provisional accommodation, neighbours were exceptionally helpful to women in immediate need of refuge. After Emily's husband temporarily abandoned his family for his mistress, the meagre earnings yielded from Emily's peanut peddling business at the local market failed to secure housing. The eventual eviction from her household left her with no choice but to rely on her neighbour to shelter her and her two children for a period of eight consecutive months:

> Emily: He kicked me out of the house, then I went to look for a place to stay.
>
> Vicky: He kicked you and the children out?
>
> Emily: Yes, the landlord. I moved our things to the neighbour's house … then one woman informed me about a job opportunity. I did that job while I was still staying with my neighbour.
>
> Vicky: And the children?
>
> Emily: Yes, the children also stayed there. That is how life was for about eight months.

Emily's lengthy refuge reinforced her vulnerable image. Determined to extricate herself and her children from dependence, however, her resolute character was demonstrated by her ability to secure additional income as shown in the statement: "Then one woman informed me about a job opportunity. I did that job while I was still staying with my neighbour". She later reconciled with her husband, perhaps as a result of the interrelated socio-cultural, socio-economic and religious pressures undergirded by the patriarchal family discourse (see Chapter Five).

7.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have highlighted that experiences of economic IPV led to women's departure from dominant expectations that confined them to domesticity. Men's negligence stirred women's involvement in feminist networks, which motivated their participation in the workforce and instilled within them the desire for economic independence. These narratives starkly contrasted with earlier representations associated with prevailing gender discourses (see Chapters Five and Six). However, working women were not immune to patriarchal backlashes which were often marked by: the expectation to still uphold domesticity; loss of autonomy over earnings; restricted economic mobility; verbal IPV and accusations of infidelity upon their late return from work; and men shirking responsibility as a result of the women's workforce participation. Yet, women proactively devised personalised techniques to overcome economic oppression. Stealing money, financial compensatory devises, sequestering of funds and secretive employment, in most ways, implicitly challenged discourses entitling men's financial autonomy and their rights over women's economic productivity. By so doing, the women in my study projected a mode of femininity that was calculative and resourceful, and thus troubling to mainstream gender arrangements.

I have discussed how fore-planning and the strategic co-operation of others were required in some cases to implement these deceptive strategies. One of the clearest examples I have provided to elaborate this point is Brina's account of stealing from her then husband's bank account. Secretive family planning was practised also by participants, such as Hadija, to counter economic and patriarchal pressures and it was her exposure to egalitarian networks that redefined her subjectivity to one which challenged norms entitling male control over women's reproductivity. External economic support also featured as a supplementary approach, but women relied to a larger extent on informal recourse as a result of the structural limitations presented by professional avenues. Notwithstanding, the narratives that I have presented indicate that seeking recourse from either source evidenced that these Kenyan women were not passive recipients of financial abuse but proactively sought measures at their disposal to mitigate experiences of oppression.

CHAPTER 8: "I WILL NOT KEEP QUIET AND I AM NOT YOUR SLAVE!" ON RESISTING SEXUAL OBLIGATION AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

8.1. INTRODUCTION

Complementary to the preceding chapter in which I have endeavoured to portray the women in my sample in a manner contrary to mainstream representations, in this chapter, as the title implies, I focus primarily on their self-assertive depictions in the realms of sexual and physical violation. Respectively, these constitute the final two themes of my study. The feminine representations that I explore in this context similarly reinforce the argument about the dynamic nature of subjectivities in an IPV-ridden environment and particularly so in a context such as Kenya, where little empirical research on the phenomenon has been conducted. I deploy post-structural and Black/African feminist perspectives to illustrate how the women in my study subverted the very socio-cultural forces of power that subjugated them.

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on women's resistance to sexual IPV. I follow the same pattern as at the outset of the previous theme on economic IPV (in Chapter Seven) by briefly juxtaposing narratives of conformity to heterosexuality discourses against those contesting the male sexual prerogative. I present both explicit and implicit forms of negotiating sexual IPV and explore how these might be informed by overlapping facets of subordination. While the femininities explored in this chapter belie essentialist representations of African women, the narratives I present dramatically illustrate the deleterious impact of women's resistant behaviours on their well-being.

In the next section of the chapter, I focus on women's verbal expressions of frustrations which often triggered physical altercations. I also illustrate how physical aggression directed at men, in most cases, was defensive in nature but with an obviously disproportionate outcome for the women's physical well-being. However, I also present rare cases in which some women in these risky confrontations managed to overpower their husbands/male partners physically, giving credence to post-structuralist feminist and Black (African) feminist notions that suppression in this sense is not a respecter of persons, as men too can "lose power" in the context of physical IPV. Far from condoning women's reliance on violence, in this section, I query whether these actions truly empowered women or challenged gender-based power imbalances.

8.2. TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES IN THE SEXUAL DOMAIN OF THE RELATIONSHIP

At the beginning of Chapter Five, I have discussed sexual availability as being one of the expected roles of women in conjugal relationships. I have explained that women's sexual servitude functioned to appease men and provide sexual gratification to prevent infidelity. However, narratives detailing women's perpetual experiences of involuntary sexual intimacy, economic IPV, and infidelity were positioned outside the framework of prevailing gender discourses. Participants used their sexual unavailability to communicate disapproval, as evident in the following quotes from 35-years-old Maureen and 48-years-old Sambayas:

> I am a supportive wife, but I have been let down several times. So, sometimes I try also to shy away … to shrink away from the wife thing …. At times I don't even want to have sex with him. As for now I can tell you it has now been a year [since I had sex with him]. I don't even want him to touch me …. He has left most of the responsibilities to me. (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident).

> Sometimes you are so upset because the children don't have enough to eat and he demands for the same food when he comes home. And when it is bedtime, he wants to have sex with you and I used to tell him, 'Isn't a man meant to feed his woman first before sleeping with her?' A man has to feed his wife first before sleeping with her. How can he keep asking a hungry woman to do this and that in bed?! That's ridiculous. (Sambayas, 48 years old, Nairobi resident).

Maureen and Sambayas, as most of the women in my study, were embittered by their husbands' financial negligence, which more often than not, was motivated by extra-marital affairs. Hence, their refusal to engage sexually with their husbands was not only an indication of disapproval of the former, but also the latter. Their reactions to men's infidelity however, contrasts with findings from an anthology of Black African women's resistance by Thiam (1986), in which one Nigerian woman (Ekanem), while refusing to sleep with her adulterous spouse, openly took a male lover who happened to be her spouse's best friend, to apparently discourage his continuing unfaithfulness. Ekanem; a UK-educated, middle-class mother of five, with a steady income, was presumably less fearful of the financial consequences of possible marital dissolution. Her means of navigating the male sexual prerogative was arguably riskier than those undertaken by Maureen and Sambayas who, by virtue of their socio-economic status could not fend independently for their children should their negligent, unfaithful husbands

decide on divorce for emasculating them in such a manner. Unlike Ekanem who embodied a "fairly liberal" subjectivity (Thiam, 1986: 46), religious and personal convictions also rendered "retaliatory infidelity" repugnant to Maureen and Sambayas (and all other participants in my study) when I inquired whether this was practised upon discovering men's unfaithfulness. The comparison between the two sets of participants arguably demonstrates that sexual resistance among African women can be determined by correlated factors of gender, class, religion and culture.

More apparent in the above quotes from Maureen and Sambayas, is that conjugal relationships were constructed as bartered arrangements that ceased to operate when one party failed to fulfil their end of the bargain. This corroborates studies investigating gender-based transactional practices in marital and cohabiting relationships in SSA (Mojola, 2014; Ruark *et al.*, 2017). Both participants were embittered by men who left them with most of the financial responsibilities in the home. Arguably, this kind of rationale only reduced their husbands "to a measure of their financial worth" which, in turn, "re-inscribe[d] controlling images of themselves" as financial dependants (Hill Collins, 2009: 169). Sambayas, particularly, portrayed her husband as a culturally deviant man unworthy of her sexual availability. Her retaliatory behaviour functioned as a means of protesting economic oppression and, through this, she gained some measure of power and control over her life, at least in the sexual domain. Thus, sexual resistance in both instances "crafted identities designed to empower" (Hill Collins, 2009: 108) and contested claims that an African woman:

> …has no real power, only pseudo-power … can act, insofar as she causes no embarrassment to her husband … can exist, insofar as she does not upset the capitalist system. (Thiam, 1986: 15).

From the above quotes, neither Maureen nor Sambayas appear to have "pseudo-power", at least in matters pertaining to their sexual autonomy. Neither of them saved their husbands' reputations by acting this way. In fact, the opposite is quite true considering Kenya's patriarchal context. The refusal by Sambayas and Maureen to acquiesce to sexual intimacy also challenged the romance discourse in which women are entreated to transform men through affectionate gestures (Jackson, 2001). As *chama* members and active participants in women's empowerment groups, their self-assertiveness was potentially informed by their association with these feminist circles. In 40-year-old Khulthum's narrative, it was more evident that

exposure to feminist networks generated newly informed ideas on consensual sex, which eventually redefined her femininity. Weedon argues that the:

> …process of sharing experience with other women [in consciousness-raising circles] leads to the recognition that the terms in which we understand things [in a patriarchal context] are not fixed. (1997: 81).

In Khulthum's case, these feminist circles created a climate of resistance which "expose[d] the false reality" underpinned by the prevailing discourses to "reclaim and recover" some measure of power for herself (hooks, 2014: 3). Khultum learned that female sexual domination by men is a by-product of patriarchal forces, and she subverted discourses legitimising women's sexual readiness (conjugal duties of wives discourse) and proprietary status (male proprietary rights over women discourse) as shown in the following dialogue:

> Khulthum: Before, I used to go in line with what my [Islamic] religion told me … that I should always submit to my husband's sexual demands, but I started questioning this. Aren't we both meant to enjoy each other? Why is he forcing me? He used to command and control me in bed like a soldier!
>
> Vicky: What made you resist being treated this way?
>
> Khulthum: I think it was because of my involvement in women's groups. They empower you whenever you attend their meetings. They discourage women from accepting oppressive ideologies.

Palpably, the emergence of feminist ideologies within Khulthum's local empowerment group developed her process of learning to speak as a liberated subject and not an oppressed object accepting of male sexual privilege (hooks, 2014). Her "liberated voice" confronted the patriarchal forces governing conjugal sexual practices and, in so doing, identified religion as a co-factor in the normalisation of women's sexual submission. Based on the quote, "Before I used to go in line with what my religion told me … that I should always submit to my husband's sexual demands, but I started questioning this", it is possible that her group membership influenced the progressive dismissal of radical religious dogma that endorses women's sexual submissiveness in marriage. In effect, she contests a mode of femininity that is sexually acquiescent by challenging the male (master) and female (slave) binary in which women are subjected to being "commanded and controlled in bed". Similarly, in previous studies examining the link between IPV and religion, it was shown that women's adoption of

alternative theological concepts promoting gender equality in conjugal relations has been effective in safeguarding them against IPV (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003). Heterosexuality and religion interlaced to inform Khulthum's process of resisting demeaning portrayals of women in the sexual domain. According to Hill Collin's conceptualisation of Black women's resistance, Khulthum is a classic case of "the emergent Black woman" who "carves out new definitions of Black womanhood" by opposing derogating, hegemonic, feminine images (2009: 104).

For others, the "emergent woman thesis" (Hill Collins, 2009: 104) was closely associated with the fear of contracting STIs or HIV from promiscuous men. Participants expressing these views had varied degrees of association with community health work, women's empowerment groups and women's rights activism at the grassroots level. Having worked closely with HIV survivors, Liz, a 34-year-old community health volunteer, was experientially knowledgeable about the virus and thus, unprotected sex with her adulterous husband was non-negotiable. The excerpt below from my interview with her illustrates how she challenged the veracity of the conjugal duties of wives and the male proprietary rights over women discourses:

> Liz: I told him … 'If we must have sex, you have to protect me', yeah. I told him because I have worked with AIDS victims and I saw innocent people suffering … so I thought of myself and my kids, and I said no …
>
> Vicky: What happened when you said that?
>
> Liz: He argued [and] he argued for a bit …
>
> Vicky: So, from then on you insisted on using condoms?
>
> Liz: Yes.

Liz's actions positioned her in a marginalised empowerment discourse calling for women's right to safe sex; an ideal which contested her husband's unlimited access to her body. While the conditions she imposed were met with some degree of resistance ("He argued [and] he argued for a bit"), she maintained her position, which demonstrated her ability to negotiate a situation in which women's sexual autonomy was restricted. Alice, a 38-year-old community health volunteer, also insisted on the use of condoms and, similarly, contested male sexual privilege. In her concluding quote below, she draws on the male sex-drive and sexual double-standard discourses to frame her husband's sexual urges as being unguarded and permissive as opposed to her own. Her statement, moreover, is also positioned within a feminist discourse

advocating women's rights to protected sex. Having mentioned her contraction of an STI from her husband in the earlier stages of her interview, these self-preserving efforts were informed by her profession, which facilitated her free access to condoms:

> I told him this, 'I will no longer have unsafe sex with you from now on!' And I used to get the condoms myself and tell him, 'No condoms, no sex!' That is the condition I gave him. And if he wanted to have sex without protection, he could go outside and get it from someone else for all I cared. Because I knew he is the kind of man who doesn't stick with one woman anyway. (Alice, 38 years old, Nairobi resident).

Researchers have shown that women who insist on the use of condoms face a high risk of IPV (Wingood & DiClemente, 1997; Gaillard *et al.*, 2002, cited in Fonck *et al.*, 2005). Conceivably, Liz and Alice bypassed feelings of trepidation to safeguard their sexual and reproductive health. Conversely, it could be argued that both participants did not blindly assert their demands and knew their husbands' personalities well enough to exercise this mode of resistance (the same could be argued for the participants mentioned earlier in this section). Similar to women in the IPV studies that I have reviewed in Chapter Two (see, for example, Abraham, 2000; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016), gains and losses were evaluated with caution prior to implementing certain coping strategies.

Margaret (54 years old) contradicted an earlier quote in which she conformed to the traditional division of labour in a marriage, according to which "A wife is responsible … for having sex with her husband" (see Chapter Five), by refraining from having sex with her unfaithful husband for almost a decade. Similar to Liz and Alice, she was more interested in self-protection than satiating her husband. In the following dialogue, it is evident that her profession as a community health volunteer informed her abstinence:

> Margaret: I asked him, 'I heard your mistress is infected with HIV. Is it that you want to infect me too?' I completely refused to sleep with him. Up to now I haven't had sex with him.
>
> Vicky: How many years or months has it been?
>
> Margaret: It's almost been ten years.
>
> Vicky: That you haven't slept with him?

> Margaret: I was completely scared! As a community health volunteer, I know all about HIV … I see what infected women go through. A woman can tell you, 'I was infected by my husband' and in most cases the women end up dying before the men. They didn't expect something like that could happen to them, so they die, you see. That is why I refused to sleep with him and because of that he was even the more unfaithful.

Exhibiting a celibate sexual image (Hill Collins, 2009: 142), Margaret was resolute in her determination to avoid HIV transmission and, in so doing, formulated a "new language ... [an] oppositional discourse [and] a liberatory voice" (hooks, 2014: 29) that rejected the sexual object construct. However, the fact that she would rather preserve a marriage devoid of sexual intimacy possibly indicated the intersection of religious, socio-economic and cultural influences (see Chapter Five). Naomi (42 years old) would only have sex with her promiscuous husband on condition that they were tested jointly for HIV. The prerequisites she set were in contradiction to studies showing women's limited autonomy in HIV testing in SSA countries (Painter *et al.*, 2004; Turan *et al.*, 2011; Rujumba *et al.*, 2012, cited in Hatcher *et al.*, 2013). Two of these studies were undertaken in Kenya and showed how men required wives to consult them before making any significant health decisions, including knowing their HIV status (Turan *et al.*, 201,1 cited in Hatcher *et al.*, 2013). Women in these studies complied out of fear of retaliatiory IPV but Naomi represents a subversive femininity in the quote below. While the risk of IPV cannot be ignored in her case, it is possible (as it was in the case of Liz, Alice and the rest reviewed in this section) that she too weighed her options before imposing her demands. Her *chama* membership also might have influenced her opposition to normative femininity:

> I would rather sleep on my own. He preferred her [his mistress] right? I'd rather I sleep on my own then. He sleeps on the sofa [and] he came to realise I would never sleep with him [until] he gets tested first. He told me, 'I got tested'…Then I replied, 'You're lying, I want us to get tested together' …" (Naomi, 42 years old, Mombasa resident).

While the above participants exhibited overt sexual resistance, subtle rebellion and deviations were deemed more effective than open confrontations by others. Corresponding with findings in a sexual IPV study by Puri *et al.* (2011) among Nepalese women, covert forms of sexual resistance served to protect participants from reprisals and were typified by retiring to bed early

before the men's return, feigning exhaustion and sleeping on the opposite side of the bed. Children were also involved when women placed them in the middle of the bed or slept in their bedrooms to avoid sexual contact with men. For example, Halima (25 years old), implicitly challenged discourses of heterosexuality in an adulterous marriage:

> I don't have the desire to sleep with him. I normally put the child in between us or I would rather go with my child to spend the night at the neighbour's house and leave him inside the house …. Most of the time I refuse to sleep with him because I don't know where he spends his time … it has almost been a year since I slept with him. I heard he has so many girls out there and when he is home, I hear him talking to them on the phone, you see. I would rather bring HIV to myself than have someone bring it to me! Furthermore, he doesn't even feed me! (Halima, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

8.2.1. The Implications of Sexual Resistance for Women's Well-Being

Discourses in which the dominant gender status quo are invalidated "are likely to be dismissed by the hegemonic system of meanings and practices as irrelevant or bad" (Weedon, 1997: 35). This explained why women's overt and covert resistance to the male sexual prerogative were met in some cases with verbal and physical reprisals. Women's refusal to have sex challenged male sexual entitlement and that which was threatening had to be "necessarily wiped out, annihilated and silenced" through coercive measures (hooks, 2014: 8). Mercy (19 years old), for example, was insulted after declining her partner's sexual advances but tactfully avoided confrontation by "keeping quiet" to shield herself and her child from impending violence:

> Mercy: It reaches a time he forces you [to have sex with him] and when you tell him you're not in the mood he gets upset and leaves …
>
> Vicky: What does he tell you?
>
> Mercy: 'You never want to sleep with me; all you do is sleep around with other men like a *malaya*!' So, when he talks like that you just keep quiet and tell him 'It's OK'.
>
> Vicky: And then he carries on?

Mercy: No, he doesn't! I normally take the baby and sleep in the other room and leave him.

Vicky: Oh, you leave him alone?

Mercy: Yeah, I leave him on his own because I don't want anything to do with it. What do you do if you are not in the mood?

There is evidence in studies of accusations of infidelity made against women who deny men their sexual "rights" (Hatcher *et al.,* 2013). As in Mercy's case, the verbal IPV exercised by Hadija's husband intended to discredit her attempts to re-define gender roles:

> And when you refuse to sleep with him, he says that you are having affairs and he starts insulting you; no one will sleep in that house that day! He says, 'Look at you, *malaya*! You old *malaya*! You lie that you are going out to sell groundnuts and all you do is sell your body instead! … and when you come back in the evening, the food you cook for us is bought with your filthy prostitution money!"

Emily was accused similarly of cheating when she did not consent to sexual intimacy. Her husband also hurled insults in an attempt to re-institute her "good" woman *malaika* image which, to him, was one that acquiesced to his sexual terms and conditions. Her outcome was not the same as that of Mercy and Hadija. She recounted her brush with death following her actions:

Emily: Yes it [paid-work and domestic responsibilities] is tiring. And then at night he tells you, 'My wife, I want you today' and when he touches you, you throw his hand away. That is when the conflict starts. 'Whenever I want you, you say [inaudible], so it means that, whenever you tell me you are going to look for firewood [or] you are going to [inaudible], you are actually spending time with other men and when you come back, you are tired to sleep with me?!' I tell him, 'No it's not like that, I'm just tired' … he pulled out a knife!

Vicky: Because of that?

Emily: Only because of that!

Vicky: And what did you do?

Emily: I ran away! I ran away! ... then he chased after me! [But] I hid behind a kiosk!

Emily was still expected by her husband to perform domestically and sexually despite working in the laborious Kenyan informal economy (Wanjala & Were, 2009). Based on an intersectional analysis of gender, class and race in African women's taxing, non-paid, domestic labour engagement, Thiam argues that:

> African women do not have at their disposal the domestic appliances available to consumer society which could relieve them of some of the burden of their endless, arduous tasks … collecting firewood, preparing meals, doing the household washing…. The average Black African woman has no cooker, no refrigerator, no electric mixer or grinder or any other household gadget, such as are available in European countries, even to working-class women. (1986:14)

Emily and her family lived in Mombasa's Mnazi Mmoja slums and, in such an environment, it is not surprising to find homes lacking what middle- and high-class households in Nyali (mentioned in the previous chapter) and the West would consider basic and convenient. Thus, the physical burden for Emily was more strenuous compared with women of a wealthier class, as her need to collect firewood attested. Her supressed libido could be understood from this viewpoint, but her refusal of intimacy violated norms and symbolised an allegedly deviant female heterosexuality. Since the right to decline or approve sexual interactions is conferred on men only in patrilineal societies, her actions in this instance seemingly "masculinised" her and threatened her husband's hyper-sexuality. Similar to Khulthum, whom I have discussed in the previous sub-section, Emily's statement is implicitly framed within a feminist discourse in which consensual sexual relations between men and women is advocated. Yet, her sexual non-compliance put her at a high risk of fatal abuse. Escaping at night compromised her security and disrupted normal life patterns as she returned home days after her husband's anger had subsided. Her account later revealed that she had sought refuge at a relative's house during this period.

Perceived transgression of normative feminine standards costed women their safety, and male aggression served to institutionalise female sexual submission as "common-sense knowledge" (see Weedon, 1997). Crippled with fear, some participants facing lethal retaliation vowed never to provoke men to anger and acquiesced to sexual IPV for physical protection. The following excerpt illustrates how Rahma complied with marital rape to protect herself from further IPV by her husband:

> One time I refused to have sex with him, and he tore all my clothes! He even poured water on me and took a knife! Since then, I have never denied him sex. I sleep with him whenever he wants to until he is satisfied … He tore all my clothes! And said, 'You are my wife and I have given you a house to live in, yet you refuse to sleep with me? Are you sleeping with another man?!... I slept with him since then and said to myself that I would rather have sex with him. If he can tear my clothes he can do something even worse. (Rahma, 25-years old, Mombasa resident)

Based on a study using discourse analysis in South Africa, Shefer *et al.* (2000) similarly demonstrate how sexual and physical coercion in heterosexual relationships was fostered by the male proprietary rights over women discourse. Rahma's submissive actions put her at less risk to physical harm, but the same could not be said for her sexual and reproductive health, as well as her emotional and mental wellbeing, given her inability to negotiate safe sex. Her husband's ownership over her was made clear ("You are my wife and I have given you a house to live in") and served as some sort of sadistic reinforcement of her objectified image.

8.3. WOMEN'S VERBAL AND PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

This fifth and final theme of my study focuses on participants' verbally and physically aggressive responses to IPV, which were commonly associated with prolonged economic, physical and verbal IPV coupled with men's coercive controlling behaviours and extra-marital affairs. The correlation between women's aggression and the IPV they endured has also been observed elsewhere in SSA and in the West (Green, 1999; Abraham, 2000; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Babcock, Miller & Siard, 2003; Swan & Snow, 2006; Salazar *et al.*, 2012; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2021). In terms of a lack of verbal restraint, more than two-thirds of the participants (21 women) exhibited this behaviour by talking back to, or insulting, their spouses/male partners. Women's participation in verbal altercations conveyed their increasing frustrations concerning men who shirked responsibility as a result of their extra-marital unions and self-indulgent behaviours. Women's reactions in these instances broke with normative feminine standards as the following comments from Adhiambo (42 years old) and Maureen (35 years old) illustrate:

> … or he sleeps out and comes home drunk ... he knows he did not leave any money and you have all slept hungry. He comes with one kilogram of *ugali* flour [and]

> *sukuma wiki*[15] at midnight and tells you to wake up and cook for him.... I was so mad that day, I threw those things at him and said, 'I will not cook! ... how can you bring food at this time of the night when the children are asleep?! I'm not cooking!' And I did not cook the food!... I told him, 'Don't even try to sleep in this bed! When he tried getting in [the bed] I kicked him and told him, 'Go and sleep where you came from!... Don't come near us because you are heartless!" (Adhiambo, 42 years old, mother of two, unemployed/underemployed, Mombasa resident).
>
> Like the day … the day he came and demanded for *ugali* and *sukuma wiki* … I got so pissed off … I carried everything in the cooking pot and put it on the table [and said], 'There! Here is your meat! If you don't eat what is in the cooking pot that is your own problem now! I'm not going to serve you! (Maureen, 35 years old, mother of two, casual labourer, Mombasa resident).

The above quotes were contrary to earlier accounts that correlated with the "good" woman script and indicated that women's subjectivities and observance of mainstream discourses was not always consistent, given their circumstances (Weedon, 1997):

> Earlier:
>
> "A woman … must respect her marriage and respect her husband …" (Adhiambo, 42 years old, Mombasa resident)
>
> "The wife's role is to take care of the family, and … taking care of the housework" (Maureen, 35 years old, Mombasa resident)

Verbal aggression, combined with the outright refusal to cook or serve food as reactions, were inconsistent with the image of the ever-respectful, caring and subservient wife. Adhiambo and Maureen used rebellion to reveal their frustrations in order to negotiate better living conditions. Women in other studies have also exhibited overt refusal to comply with domestic expectations to protest against their mistreatment by men for extended periods of time (Green, 1999; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016). Similarly, the actions of Maureen and Adhiambo detracted from distorted views of non-Western or non-White women as being accepting of their IPV victimisation (see Mannell *et al.,* 2015). Both women had suppressed feelings of unjust treatment for months or possibly years, and talking back in a context requiring women to remain silent and respectful to men without question (Bowman, 2003; Ebila, 2015; Gatwiri & Karanja, 2016), could be read

[15] Swahili term for collard greens.

as empowering. In other words, Maureen and Adhiambo's subversive feminine representations ran contrary to prevailing notions that normalise the speechlessness, voicelessness and powerlessness of women. With reference to women of colour in oppressive conditions, bell hooks conceptualises speaking out as a form of liberating process:

> Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can [women] speak. As objects, [women] remain voiceless – [their] beings defined and interpreted by others (2014: 12).

Taking hooks's insights into consideration, Adhiambo's and Maureen's vociferous behaviours marked their transition to subject status which must also be understood against their socio-economic position and their motherhood. Adhiambo only completed four of eight years of primary schooling and was either unemployed or underemployed during most of her marriage life at the time of the interview. While Maureen had a more promising academic profile, her uncompleted university education was an obstacle to securing stable income in the competitive Kenyan economy. Both households lived below the poverty line and every shilling earned by them and/or their husbands counted. Each woman had two children and I have already shown in the previous chapter how working women bore most of the child-rearing responsibilities, especially when the men had knowledge of their employment status. Both husbands' illicit liaisons also distracted them further from their financial obligations, leaving Adhiambo and Maureen to shoulder most of the economic burden. In other words, class and motherhood were sites of oppression which triggered both women's eruptive reactions. The same results were obtained by Hatcher *et al.* (2013) from an IPV study in Kenya, where women's anger was associated with the suffering of their children as a result of men's financial negligence.

However, Hatcher *et al.* found that women talking back in contexts where men reneged on the sole breadwinner role often escalated into physical IPV and placed women in harm's way. While this was not the case with Adhiambo and Maureen, experiences of reprisals were reported by other women in my study. This was because talking back challenged gender-based power dynamics and was construed by men as "speaking as an equal to an authority figure" (hooks, 2014: 5). In contradiction to traditional femininity, speaking out against marital oppression in a patriarchal society could be read as "a courageous act … of risk and daring" (hooks, 2014: 5) according to some of the narratives in my study. The frustrations of Rahma (25 years old) and Margaret (54 years old), described below, should be observed in relation to

their class and gender position. However, their gender position in this instance was reinforced by male retaliation, as shown below:

> One time we were quarrelling, and I talked back, 'You need to stop yelling at me! If you knew you were going to mess up my life … you wouldn't have brought me here to live miserably like this!' He beat me up until my eye was swollen for almost three months. (Rahma, 25 years old, mother of one, casual labourer, Nairobi resident).

> You can hear him calling me, 'You *malaya*!'…. He says that I sleep around with other men whenever I go searching for jobs. I refused to keep quiet that day, I said he would rather kill me. I asked him, 'How dare you insult me?! You don't buy us food, you don't help us [and] yet you have a job!' …. It was as if he was waiting for me to say something. He grabbed and pinned me down on the floor and strangled me [and] even pulled my hair out that day. (Margaret, 54 years old, mother of five, casual labourer, Nairobi resident).

Rahma's remark, "If you knew you were going to mess up my life … you wouldn't have brought me here to live miserably like this!", illustrates that her present reality did not relate to that scripted according to the fairy-tale romance narrative. Earlier in her account, she emphasised the importance of "treating a man well even when he is bad [to you]" in the hope that this "good" woman/wife attribute would remedy her husband's behaviour (see Chapter Four). However, her location within this dark romance discourse was disputed by her temerity to challenge her husband for leaving her (and their three-year-old son) in a state of almost destitution. Yet, her verbal outbursts were met with beatings to reinforce silence as the "right speech of womanhood" (hooks, 2014: 6) in this patriarchal environment.

In her analysis of gender relations in Ado-Odo, South West Nigeria, Cornwall (2001: 68) observed that women with shirking husbands projected their frustrations, almost accusing men of "being no good to them, "useless"" due to their failure to fulfil their socially expected obligations. Similar to the remarks in Cornwall's study, a majority of the women in my study explained that neglect by their husbands/partners was not entirely about "simply being unable to provide [but also] about unwillingness to take responsibility" (2001: 75). Unlike Cornwall's study where men's funds were directed towards polygamous relations, my participants largely attributed male neglect to extra-marital liaisons which I have discussed in the previous chapter. One can sense Margaret's increasing frustrations with shouldering most of the financial

responsibilities at home. Yet, in these marital climates where men's contributions were either sporadic or lacking in entirety, participants who were economically abused such as her were caught in a double bind. On one hand, opting out of the workforce risked not having fundamental requirements for the survival of themselves and their children. On the other hand, participation in the labour market exposed them to men's derogatory remarks (such as *"malaya"*) to undermine their economic efforts (see Chapter Five). Lack of verbal restraint arguably might have served to defend women's moral self-image. Margaret, a self-identified Catholic, plausibly behaved in this manner to preserve an image likened to that of the Virgin Mary, Madonna or *malaika* (meaning "angel" in Swahili) (Macdonald, 1995; Tamale, 2011c). Yet, her outspokenness came at a cost of incurring serious injuries and most certainly contradicted feminine qualities promoted by dominant gender and socio-religious discourses (patience, forgiveness, selflessness and forbearance); qualifying her as a wayward, transgressive or wicked woman (Hodgson & McCurdy, 2001).

It could be gleaned from some narratives that verbal aggression engendered the participants' use of physical violence. As illustrated in previous empirical studies (Green, 1999; Abraham, 2000; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Babcock *et al.*, 2003; Swan & Snow, 2006; Salazar *et al.*, 2012; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2021), women's lack of physical restraint was mostly defensive in nature and in response to occurring IPV. Their disproportionate use of physical aggression for purposes of self-defence gave credence to the feminist school's argument against the gender symmetry thesis perpetuated by family violence theorists (see Dobash *et al.*, 1992; Johnson, 2006; Dekeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007). Defensive violence was exhibited by nine participants and was characterised by biting, slapping and hitting with objects (furniture, stones, kitchen utensils, pipes and bottles). Margaret continued with her account to explain to me how fighting back saved her life:

> It was as if he was waiting for me to talk that day. He grabbed and pinned me down on the floor and strangled me. He even pulled my hair out that day…. As he was strangling me and pulling my hair, I bit him, and it was only after this that he retreated…. Do you think he would have left me if I didn't bite him? He would have killed me. (Margaret, 54 years old, Nairobi resident).

Defensive violence by Hadija (32 years old) similarly originated from her husband's reaction to a response that he perceived to be impolite. Her reaction to her husband's irascibility was unequivocally uncharacteristic of normative femininity. As shown in the following

conversation, throwing a glass at her husband was her way of standing up against her his constant beatings. However, as much as she arguably attempted to "craft an identity designed to empower" herself (Hill Collins, 2009: 108), the dialogue below shows that "the transformation of silence into … action [was] fraught with danger" (Lorde, 1984: 42):

> Hadija: I threw a glass at him and it cut his face open.
>
> Vicky: What happened?
>
> Hadija: Because he slapped me!... He said I was rude to him when he asked me something, and that wasn't the case at all. And he just slapped me. I was frustrated that day and I just threw the glass and it broke on his face. Once he saw blood spilling from his face, he grabbed me and broke my tooth. He gave me one big punch and my tooth loosened and started bleeding. That is when the children fled from the house and screamed for help. Once my tooth came out, he hit me here [points to her back] I still feel…
>
> Vicky: On your back?
>
> Hadija: Yeah, on my back! He was about to hit me with a metal rod, but it missed [my head] and hit my back and I was bleeding all over. Then he said, 'You will tell me whether you are the man of this house! Did you marry me, or did I marry you?!"

Weedon argues that "where existing power relations are under threat … initially consensual forms of discourse often employ coercion to govern the subjects in question, should consent fail" (1997: 97). The male proprietary rights discourse offers "obvious" or "natural" suggestions for men to discipline non-compliant women (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). However, Hadija's reaction threatened the hegemonic gender narrative and coercive measures on the part of her husband served to restore his sense of lost masculinity. His counter-attacks and statement, "You will tell me whether you are the man of the house! Did you marry me, or did I marry you?!" categorically served to re-position Hadija as his rightful and exclusive property. He might have not "purchased" his wife in a literal sense, as his fore-fathers likely did through the process of bride-wealth/dowry payment, but he certainly internalised long-existing paternalistic concepts according to which absolute power and control over women's bodies are conferred upon men. In the process of being "disciplined", Hadija narrowly escaped a blow to her head that could have been fatal but, nevertheless, sustained injuries that were disproportionate to her husband's. The findings of studies in which injurious outcomes in an

IPV context were investigated also corroborate that women suffer significantly more harm than men (Dobash *et al.*, 1998; Swan *et al.*, 2008).

As shown in Hadija's account, children were reliable sources of assistance to their mothers when they were over-powered by their fathers. Children's modes of intervention included crying, screaming or pleading with their fathers to stop the abuse, opening the door to facilitate their mothers' escape, encircling themselves around their mothers to shield them from further abuse and, in the case of teenage sons, directly intervening to defend their mothers. Women in the IPV study conducted by Wood *et al.* (2019) in Kenya also reported their older children's attempt at fighting or confronting their fathers in order to protect their mothers from further harm. In my study, children's most effective action in rescuing their violated mothers was to run to their neighbours for support. Neighbours thereafter intervened directly to provide hospital transportation for seriously injured women and/or stop the physical IPV being meted out by the men. The seamless co-ordination between children and neighbours was reflected in Hadija's narrative:

> Hadija: Even when I start screaming [for help], he says, 'You can scream all you want'. He says he has to break my leg first … and when he gets crazy, the children run outside and start screaming.
>
> Vicky: To the neighbours?
>
> Hadija: Yes, 'Neighbours! Neighbours! Dad is hitting mum!' and they come [to rescue me].

While Hadija's neighbours took her to hospital, some women exhibiting violent behaviour were at a risk of not receiving support from their neighbours. Sambayas (48 years old) recounted her neighbours berating her for fighting with her husband and criticising her for disowning her "wifely duties" when she left to stay with her brother following the dispute. This public backlash against her use of defensive violence was mainly a result of the extent of the injuries she inflicted on her husband:

> When he came home, he asked … because I used to work so hard to provide for the family, and he always found food available for him to eat…. That day he came home [and] asked, 'Aren't we eating in this house today?' I told him, 'Give me the money to buy paraffin for the cooking stove and I will prepare the food'. He said, 'Since when don't we have any food to eat in this house?!', then I responded, 'Since

> today'. He was ready to hit me because I was rude to him…. He slapped me [then], when he slapped me the second time, I said, 'You will not hit me today'. I was very angry, and I locked the door after chasing the children out of the house …. I hit him very hard … I used anything I could find in the house, like bottles and stuff like that. You know, he had never seen me reacting that way. Every time he slapped me, I used to keep quiet! I think it really surprised him! Because I beat him so badly! Very, very badly! And I left him in the house and went with my children to my brother's house …

The lack of scrutiny on the part of Sambayas' neighbours implied that the numerous beatings she encountered at the hands of her husband were excusable. It was possible that her neighbours were privy to her husband's abuse, considering the relatively non-private housing structures in Kenya's working class neighbourhoods. Yet, potentially similar aggressive actions were treated differently, based on the gender of the one who inflicted the injury. This signified what I refer to as a violence double-standard discourse in which male IPV (particularly physical) and its injurious effects on women are permissible in patriarchal contexts while the same cannot be said for women.

Sambayas faced public reprisals for embodying a type of femininity that defied norms. The influence of pervading gender discourses made it appear as though she had to undergo a series of tests to validate her IPV victim status (Renzetti, 1994). Neighbours in this instance monitored her compliance to hegemonic values and, at one point, said that "it is not good for a woman to beat her husband". This exemplified the way in which "forms of subjectivity which challenge the power of the dominant discourses" were "carefully policed" by outsiders so that those violating normative patterns were considered to be mad, abhorrent or criminal (Weedon, 1997: 87). In Kenya, derogatory attributes (such as "misunderstood", "dangerous", "aggrieved", "un-marriable" and "uncontrollable") are often ascribed to women who exhibit aggressive conduct in marital and cohabiting contexts (Kidula, 2015; King'ori & Bitrus-Ojiambo, 2016; Pala, 2016; Wambugu, 2016). This explains why, in the eyes of her neighbours, Sambayas qualified as a "wicked" and "unruly" woman because her behaviour stood in contrast to "the ways things ought to be" in Africa (Hodgson & McCurdy, 2001: 1).

Fear of societal backlash was a plausible explanation for why 42-year-old Naomi relied on alternative support (rather than neighbours) following a physical dispute with her unfaithful and neglectful husband:

> Naomi: You know, he never paid the rent [and] the children's school fees, so it was up to me to struggle with everything. I told him, 'Pack all your things and go to that woman's [mistress] house!' I carried his suitcase and threw it outside the house…. It was a big fight!... He wanted to bring his things back in the house, and he doesn't even pay the rent! You know, he never paid the rent at all?! It was up to me to pay, I used to participate in different *chamas* in the community in order to source finances. And I used to loan money and it got so overwhelming.
>
> Vicky: Then you started fighting when he tried to get his things back in the house?
>
> Naomi: Yes…. He grabbed my arm and twisted it. I think at that point he knew he had broken my arm, but he didn't let go. I told him, 'Let go of my arm', but he didn't want to let go of it…. Then I went to Hospital [X] … a doctor I knew picked me up and took me to the hospital.

Naomi supplemented the income from her *mandazi* (Swahili for "doughnut") business with *chama* membership and loan acquisition to educate [and feed] her six children and meet the monthly rent deadlines. Proactive as she was in addressing economic IPV, juggling a multitude of household responsibilities created a great deal of stress, frustration and anger towards her husband who spent most of the returns from his carpentry business on his mistresses. Similar to other women I have reviewed in this chapter, class and motherhood were the sites of oppression which informed Naomi's violence. Plausibly, her uptake of the breadwinning role made her interpret her husband as being "less of a man" and worthy of eviction from *her* house and, in so doing, rejected ideals according to which women were presented as male properties. Nevertheless, the measure of force she exerted over her husband exposed her to serious harm.

8.3.1. "You will not hit me today": Women Over-Powering Men during Physical Altercations

Only two of nine women in my study (Sambayas and Maureen) who exercised physical aggression over-powered their husbands. Similar to participants in an IPV study in Kenya conducted by Gillum *et al.* (2019: 17), the participants in my study somewhat described their use of violence "as an empowered response". Weedon (1997) refers to Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of the dynamic nature of power between men and women, which helped to interpret Sambayas and Maureen as being equally capable of suppressing men. Indeed, Hill Collins (1998: 935) argues that in contexts where intersecting aspects of oppression operate (gender and class in this case), "there are no absolute oppressors or victims". Sustainable

employment is problematic in Kenya, especially for women with limited educational qualifications, such as Sambayas, whose incomplete primary schooling rendered her under-employed for most of her adult life. Sambayas still worked hard to provide for her four children even when her husband capitalised on her diligence to neglect his financial obligations. However, similar to Naomi, she had reached a point where the economic weight she shouldered became unbearable. Her excerpt which I have presented in Section 8.2.1 illustrates how she traded "keeping quiet" with physical aggression, an indication that she, just as other Black women around the globe subjected to intersecting challenges, was not solely an "unfortunate recipient" of male IPV (Hill Collins, 2009: 306).

Maureen, who was verbally insulted by her husband after her late arrival from her waitressing job at a local hotel (see Chapter Five), similarly resorted to physical aggression as a result of experiencing a recurring a form of male control that inhibited her economic advancement, as shown in the following dialogue:

> Maureen: He tells you, 'You come back late because you spend time with other men' and then he slaps me. I said to myself, 'He will keep treating me this way if I don't do something'
>
> Vicky: And when he does that, when he beats you … slaps you, what would you do at that particular time?
>
> Maureen: The first time, I just cried, and I went to sleep. The second time, I kept quiet and asked myself, 'What is wrong with this man?'…. I shared [my experiences] with my friend and [I] requested his aunt to come and talk to him…. I even asked his brother to talk to him, but he still kept treating me the same way … so, I went to the village elder and explained it to him and he said he will talk to him … but he still continued [hitting me] …. So, that day he hit me, there was a stool nearby and I hit him so hard until he fell to the floor.
>
> Vicky: So, he hit you first then you …
>
> Maureen: Yeah! He thought that … I used to run to the kitchen every time he hits me, so he thought I would react the same way …. This time I hit him. And there

was blood all over! And I told him, 'That is your own problem, look for a *bodaboda*[16] and take yourself to hospital …

Vicky: What did he do? When you hit him?

Maureen: He took a *bodaboda* and went to hospital, it was that bad!… He didn't hit me back, and I was standing with the stool again! And told him, 'If you hit me, I will hit you [again]! I will not keep quiet [and] I am not your slave! 'Cause I come with the money, you hit me and it is the money I use to budget for the kids' upkeep.

Maureen's violent reactions were contrary to Kenyan norms according to which men are permitted to chastise disobedient wives physically (Amnesty International, 2002; Lawoko, 2008; Simister, 2010; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Makayoto *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Odero *et al.*, 2014; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Kimuna *et al*., 2018). On this occasion, she perceived being beaten as a "violation of her body space" (hooks, 2014: 90) and her violent refusal to be "corrected" or "disciplined" by an entitled man was the best means of safeguarding this space. Her reaction was positioned outside the male proprietary rights discourse but was quite problematical as it likely fostered an aggressive marital climate. The end of her patience could be sensed in her sequential recounting of each failed personal and mediatory strategy. Events preceding her physically violent behaviour showed how the informal actors were more interested in family union than in addressing her experiences of IPV. The patriarchal family discourse informed these perceptions as highlighted in the following dialogue:

Vicky: My next question is whether you have ever told anyone about the disagreements at home? You have told me that, you know … you go to neighbours whenever he has locked the house, you have talked to friends … close friends?

Maureen: Just close friends.

Vicky: Or relatives?

Maureen: Close relatives and close friends. The friends who have known us from the beginning [of the relationship] up to where we are now.

Vicky: And how do you normally feel when you go to them? [What is] the kind of advice they give you?

[16] A colloquial term for motorbike or bicycle taxis.

Maureen: Mmmh, most of them say that we should try work [things out] and stay together for the sake of the children. They don't allow separation. They say, 'Persevere, we will talk to him' …

Vicky: What about when you go to the chief or village elder, what do they say to you?

Maureen: They say [that we should] sort it out for the sake of the children. They believe in family strengthening most of them.

The statement, "They say, 'Persevere, we will talk to him'", bears overtones of censuring male power over women on one hand but, on the other, the advice to persevere depicts IPV against women as the *sine qua non* of heterosexual relationship experiences. While Maureen did not challenge the patriarchal family discourse, owing to cultural and financial reasons (see Chapter Five), her eventual aggressive measures went against the hegemonic feminine standard. Indeed, it was evident that the ineffective personal and mediatory strategies were ostensibly a precursor to her violent reactions. Nevertheless, Maureen's aggressive representation failed to problematise coercion as a means of control that disempower other women such as herself in marital or cohabiting arrangements.

Researchers (Thomas, 2005; Stuart *et al.*, 2006; Swan & Snow, 2006) have found that women increasingly rely on aggressive measures once they start being violent toward their husbands/partners. The following is a narration of an event that proceeded the incident in which Maureen injured her husband with a stool (mentioned above). Her husband's non-retaliation in the earlier episode might have emboldened her subsequent use of coercion to achieve desired ends:

Maureen: The second time [that I was aggressive] was when he left home for a whole month without money and [when] he came back home, I told him to give me some money for breakfast [but] he said he doesn't even have a shilling!

Vicky: And this was … he was away for a month doing his work, [long-distance] driving and –

Maureen: Yeah! 'Cause when he goes and comes back, he earns around Ksh 100,000! (approximately £760) …. Yeah! From Kenya to Sudan or to Zaire [DRC], that's a lot of money and he tells me he doesn't have a shilling?! I just tore his trousers and everything and the passport (too).

Vicky: And what did he … how did he react?

Maureen: He stood up and wanted to beat me up! And I told him, 'If you beat me up, I will call the police' …

Vicky: And so he … what did he do after you told him you will call the police?

Maureen: He said, 'Alright then, I will go out and see if I can find you Ksh 10,000 (approximately £76).

Vicky: And did he give you the [Ksh] 10,000?

Maureen: He gave it to me later because I also told him, 'If you don't do as I say I will burn all your clothes or even burn the house'.

Although Margaret featured among the majority who sustained serious injuries following verbal and physical aggression, she later recounted having supplemented intimidatory tactics with weaponry violence, which seemingly had a desirable effect, as in Maureen's case:

> I threw the knife at him; I was very angry because we didn't have any food [since then] he never dared to come near the [kitchen] sink whenever he saw me with a knife. (Margaret, 54 years old, Nairobi resident).

Maureen and Margaret's behaviours enforced some degree of power over the men and demonstrated women's capacities to act in ways that destabilised prevailing power differences in the home. Such actions challenged absolute assumptions of women as being hapless victims of IPV and, instead, made it possible to view them as being equally capable of behaving in ways that "oppress, dominate and wound" (hooks, 2014: 21). However, observing the consequences of the participants' exertion of violence brought to light their overt role in perpetuating, rather than suppressing gender inequalities. Further, as with Maureen, Margaret's actions cultivated the violent atmosphere and increased her exposure to retaliatory forms of IPV.

In Maureen's case, mainstream views about women were also challenged when her husband ultimately capitulated to her threatening demands, implying that he did not trivialise her threats. However, unlike in other studies (Green, 1999; Abraham, 2000; Salazar *et al.*, 2012; Gillum *et al.*, 2016; Wood *et al.*, 2021), threatening intervention by law enforcement did not feature significantly in the narratives of my study. As suggested in Chapter Five in Leila's, Esther's and Rahma's narratives, reporting to the police, generally, was not a preferred choice for most

women, and socio-cultural perceptions of physical IPV appeared to have been a significant barrier. Participants' understanding of what constituted minor or serious forms of IPV signalled the ways in which they evaluated whether or not to engage law enforcement officials as shown in the following quotes:

> You only go to the police if you have been beaten [or] if you have been hurt. That is when someone is supposed to go to the police, but why should you take your husband to the police if you haven't been beaten? It is not the police's job to settle differences between you and your husband. You only go to the police unless he has beaten or hurt you. (Amina, 49 years old, Mombasa resident).

> The kind of women who go to the police are those who have been beaten and injured by their husbands ... you know, you can be living with someone who beats you all the time! All the time he beats you! In that case, you have to go and report him to the police … (Patience, 37 years old, Mombasa resident).

That the women contemplated reporting to the police briefly positioned their views within feminist discourses, but the condition attached to this form of action indicated otherwise. The term "beaten" was repeated throughout the women's narratives to denote a form of spousal conflict where injury was sustained, spilling of blood occurred, medical intervention was warranted and/or lethal violence was imminent. It is possible that these cultural perceptions of IPV severity stemmed from indigenous Kenyan society where men were allowed to "discipline" wives physically for infractions but not to the extent where they were injured and unable to carry out domestic obligations (Green, 1999; Kameri-Mbote, 2000; Cornwall, 2001; Lovett, 2001). Ironically, participants who recounted being "beaten" hardly sought police support, as was evident throughout this chapter. Commenting on different forms of violence (including those in intimate situations) among groups positioned at the intersections of racial, gendered and economic subordinations, Hill Collins cautions against universalised descriptions and calls for contextualised understandings of the phenomenon:

> Rather than aiming for one uniform definition of violence, it may be more useful to conceptualize violence as a more dynamic concept whose complexity lies in its socially embedded nature (1998: 921).

Unlike the definition of IPV among women who are racially, socio-economically, or culturally privileged (see Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005), slaps were trivialised by my Kenyan, low-income, female participants. The isolation of slaps from women's primary conceptualisation of

physical assault was best illustrated by Rahma. Below is her extract (which I have presented in part in Chapter Five):

> There is a time he hit my eye and it was really swollen [and then] I reported to the police and came with my OB [number] at home and warned him that I will have him arrested. Since then, he never beats me, maybe some slaps here or there … but he doesn't beat me to the point where my face swells up. (Rahma, 25 years old, Nairobi resident).

The frequency of abusive episodes was also encapsulated in the definition of "beatings", although to a smaller degree, as seen in Patience's statement; "You know, you can be living with someone who beats you all the time! All the time he beats you!". This implies that physical IPV occurring sporadically did not justify police action. Gauging the severity and the frequency of IPV on a socio-cultural scale created leeway for the women to normalise certain forms of violence when episodes missed qualifiers of perceived seriousness. Writing about the SSA context, Green (1999) refers to countries where specific socio-cultural meanings are similarly attached to physical IPV against women. Citing Zimbabwe, Green explains how fatal or habitual beatings by husbands are largely disproved, relative to the occasional "chastising". The Ghanaian women in a study by Ofei-Aboagye (1994 cited in Takyi & Lamptey, 2020) also made similar distinctions between accepted forms of "disciplines" and beatings considered to be deplorable. All of these examples reflected the importance, emphasised by Sokoloff and Dupont (2005), of noting the differences in defining IPV among women from marginalised and ethnically diverse settings.

8.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which participants' overt and covert sexual resistance strategies broke with traditional femininity. Overt avoidance was typified by open refusal to have sex, insistence on condom use and joint HIV testing. Covert sexual avoidance, on the other hand, was characterised by going to bed early, feigning exhaustion, sleeping in a separate room and putting children in the middle of the bed. I have also discussed how women's explicit and implicit strategies served to protest against long-term economic IPV and men's extra-marital affairs. Participants were less adherent to central romance and traditional discourses in these instances and, instead, took a stance against men's entitlement to their sexuality and reproductivity. The narratives highlighted that community health work, *chama* and local empowerment group membership engendered these subversive feminine portrayals.

Unlike Maureen, Sambayas, Liz, Margaret and Naomi however, the desire for sexual autonomy came at a price for Mercy, Hadija, Emily and Rahma, where reprisals of a verbal, physical and sexual nature occurred to reinforce their statuses as being under the proprietary of men.

In the second section of this chapter, I have highlighted how women's verbal and physical aggression were associated closely with extended exposure to IPV and, in most cases, financial abuse stemming from infidelity and coercive controlling behaviour. Based on the narratives, it was evident how these reactions were determined by their low education, under-/unemployment, motherhood and religion (in Margaret's case). Frustrations were vocalised by talking back or lashing out with insults, reactions which were contrary to traditional femininity and resulted in men's counterattacks. Although defensive violence was viewed as an empowered response in some cases, the narratives I have presented in this chapter indicated that fighting/hitting back mostly exposed the women to serious injuries. Hadija's case showed that male retaliation was an instrument for asserting men's exclusive rights and privileges over women. Meanwhile, the few who over-powered their husbands risked facing community sanctions, such as in the case of Sambayas, where a violence double-standard discourse was identified. Conversely, it appeared as though Maureen grew confident in using aggression as a means of maximising gains, but the strategy in itself was only implemented after passive and mediatory attempts had failed. In other words, it might be argued that physical violence (and also verbal aggression) was mainly enacted as a last resort in all cases presented in this chapter, although it also appeared as though Maureen relied on it to control her husband. As much as the narratives about aggression dispelled essentialist claims about African women, in the chapter I have observed that these actions were likely to foster a potent climate of violence, which is detrimental to women and men's safety and lives. Women's behaviours of seeking support were also evident in the narratives of violence where informal help (children, neighbours, relatives and community leaders) was more likely to be pursued than police reporting owing to the socio-cultural interpretations of what constitutes physical IPV. Slaps and infrequent beatings, for instance, were trivialised and considered to be unworthy of reporting, unlike recurrent and extreme acts of violence.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS

9.1. INTRODUCTION

The first goal of my thesis was to explore how Kenyan women respond to IPV and particularly, to determine the ways in which their behaviours reinforced or defied gender imbalances in the household. Inextricably connected with this component was the second aim of the study in which I sought to identify the types of salient gender discourses informing these responses. I have argued that identifying and understanding how specific gender discourses operate would go a long way in equipping researchers and practitioners with additional tools to tackle deep-rooted values engrained in common-sense narratives. I have explained in Chapter One that this is especially crucial in Kenya where a dearth of qualitative IPV research is evident (Gillum *et al.,* 2016) on one hand, and studies on the role of socio-cultural discourses in influencing women's experiences of IPV are wanting on another. By acknowledging the importance of "intersectionalities in color[ing] the meaning and nature of domestic violence" (Bograd, 1999: 276), observing how overlapping vectors of disadvantage structured my participants' responses to IPV constituted the third aim of my study.

In my study, I have deployed perspectives from post-structural feminism and Black/African feminism to investigate women's accounts of IPV. I have explained in detail at the outset of this thesis that both conceptual tools challenge single explanatory frameworks which provide limited space for gender power inequalities to be contested by women. Owing to the existence of competing gender discourses, I have highlighted in Chapter One that post-structural feminism is determined to read a women's subjectivity as dynamic, inconsistent and thus open to political change (Weedon, 1997:97). Far from viewing women as monolithic entities, the theory thus accommodates the possibility of also analysing abused women's adoption of alternative modes of femininities which break with traditional gender ideals. By the same token, I have explained in the same chapter that Black and African feminist scholars also reject simplistic notions of women propagated by mainstream scholarship. They do so by critiquing perspectives that draw much attention to Black/African women's "patterns of victimisation" or their defencelessness and instead, call for the need to "probe the unexplored areas of [their] audibility and visibility to assess the limits of [their] voicelessness" (Thiam, 1986; Kolawole, 1997: 3; Hill Collins, 1998: 928). Simply put, I have explained how these scholars agree with

Weedon that "the range of ways of being a woman…is extremely wide" (1997: 83) and not immutable across time and space.

I revisit the key findings from this study in the following section to elaborate how these theoretical tenets have addressed my research objectives. I also present the main contributions of my research within these discussions, and recommendations for future research, policy and programming in Kenya and the SSA region.

9.2. KEY FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

I have highlighted in the first chapter how post-structural feminism's view of dominant discourses of male power as socio-culturally embedded "common-sense" language reinforces claims that women's subordination to men is "natural, obvious and therefore true" (Weedon, 1997: 74). Indeed, in the first data chapter (Chapter Five), I have presented how women in my sample subscribed to these normative standards when narratives of wifehood and motherhood were identified as primary sites of disempowerment, oppression and vulnerability. Based on these results, I have suggested that, as a consequence of the interaction between popular discourses, namely: the traditional gender role, hetero-normative (such as conjugal duties of wives, male sex drive and male proprietary rights), romance and socio-religious discourses, women in my study eminently portrayed themselves as submissive. Rahma's narrative for instance, was positioned within the romance and socio-religious discourses when she reasoned that her abusive husband would ultimately change for the better as long as she embodied the "good" wife image and continued seeking divine intervention from Allah (see Chapters Five and Six).

Indeed, evidence from my study has expanded knowledge to show that the passive subjectivities of Kenyan women in the context of IPV encompassed trivialising the man's misbehaviour, holding self (or mistress) accountable for the man's unfaithfulness as well as justifying sexual acquiescence, domesticity and male financial power. From the results, it sometimes appeared as though participants such as Rahma subconsciously held themselves accountable for their husbands'/partners' actions by exhibiting domestic and spiritual devoutness – IPV responses of which were positioned within the dark romance script. Rahma's hope of changing her abuser through these avenues also corresponded with the "beast" to "prince" depictions of men in romance discourses. Such accounts evidence that Western classical notions of fairy-tale and dark romance can inform the IPV experiences of SSA women in a fashion relatively similar to those in the Western post-structural feminist studies that I have

reviewed in Chapter Three (see for example, Towns & Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001). While I have concurred with Black/African feminist scholars, such as Awa Thiam (1986: 53-53), that a Black woman "whether she is from the West Indies, America or Africa … is of a different nature from that of her White sister" (see Chapter One), I argue that narratives such as Rahma's support the idea that Western feminist literature also provide a valuable contribution to understanding women's experiences in non-Western contexts such as Kenya where there is a paucity of empirical evidence on IPV (Gillum *et al.,* 2016).

With regards to the sexual domain of the relationship, the findings emerging from my study have shown that the metaphorical meaning behind "taking care" of a man was evidence of how women's justifications for meeting men's intimate needs were informed by prevailing heteronormative discourses, so that accountability fell squarely on them whenever men behaved inappropriately. Jane's and Brina's questioning of their sexual and culinary prowess when recounting experiences of marital infidelity was a case in point (see Chapter Five). Brina's religiosity was particularly instrumental in demonstrating how the "blame-game" shifted between self and mistress (see Chapter Six). Many examples abound but I recap only on these from the analysis to recall how "commonsensical" discourses - in the words of Weedon (1997) – can cloud women's ability to evaluate their oppression critically. The insights above are essential for IPV prevention programming and policy as I discuss in detail later in this chapter.

I have explained at the outset of this thesis how female survivors of IPV in developing countries are often subject to reductionist epithets as a result of their nonconformity to mainline expectations of how they should react to abuse (for instance, reporting the perpetrator to the police and/or exiting the relationship) (Mannell *et al.,* 2015). I have criticised these restrictive research endeavours for allowing very "little conceptual or political space for uncovering the subtle and ambivalent ways [women who retain the relationship] might be negotiating at the margins of power" (Fisher & Davis, 1993: 6). Indeed, I have found that defaulting to face-value analysis risked masking the ulterior motives behind the deferential depictions exhibited by women in my study. While it remained obvious from the findings that the participants served as agents of patriarchy in their conformity to normative standards, a closer look at the data has also revealed how silence, placation and acquiescence paradoxically served as a shield against further oppression. In other words, my analysis has indicated that participants were still able to circumvent IPV through their observance of the gender status quo.

Extrapolations rooted in mainstream notions about non-Western women who stay with the abuser were therefore contested, as it was obvious from the results that the African women in my sample were neither devoid of power nor accepting of their fates. Rather, their ability to devise mechanisms based on their evolving and unpredictable circumstances demonstrated their agility in negotiating IPV. My deployment of a less restrictive approach to investigating women's IPV responses has therefore enhanced our understanding of how women in Kenya on the surface level can strategically embody traditional subjectivities but for defensive purposes. This was especially the case when children were involved. In Chapter Five, I have highlighted how Mercy and Esther, both of whom had daughters under the age of five, "kept quiet" or apologised without cause to protect the physical and emotional well-being of their toddlers. By the same token, "keeping quiet" for Maureen came after the realisation that verbal altercations with her husband were detrimental to her pre-teenage children's social and emotional development.

From my data, I have also observed that yielding to men in this manner was essential to familial preservation, which is a key factor for maintaining socio-cultural dignity in contemporary Kenya where marriage and children remain significantly as indicators of respectability (Njue *et al.*, 2007, 2014). This explained why women like Lydia would rather *"persevere and persevere and persevere"* than leave their abusive husbands (see Chapter Five). These findings have revealed that the popular patriarchal family discourse prominently shaped these narratives within which culture, age hierarchies and socio-economic pressures interacted to legitimise women's submission to mistreatment. I have shown that parents and parents-in-law primarily emphasised notions of perseverance and reconciliation when advice was sought, and the existing age differences cordoned alternative routes that were antithetical to customary expectations. These findings provide additional evidence with respect to the role of older family members in sustaining power hierarchies in the household in a similar manner (Ilika *et al.*, 2002; Fawole *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, the women were re-victimised in these processes, as I have shown in Chapter Five when Krest's mother cautioned against reporting her physically abusive husband to the police. Krest was unemployed with limited education, which meant that class was a co-factor that interacted with age, culture and motherhood to inform her reasons against taking further action. I have also highlighted in the same chapter how Susan's filial obedience to her mother-in-law's insistence on enduring financial negligence was fostered by similar axes of disadvantage.

Indeed, my findings add to a growing body of literature on IPV that illustrate how mainstream definitions of agency and empowerment remain uncritical to the interacting factors that bind women to harmful relationships (Fisher & Davis, 1993; Green, 1999; Showden, 2011; Mannell *et al.,* 2015). With regards to socio-economic position in particular, underlying the recommendation of leaving the perpetrator for example, is the assumption that all women can fend for themselves (Mannell *et al.,* 2015). As with most of my other participants, results from my study suggest Susan's acute awareness of her disadvantaged socio-economic position by virtue of her limited schooling and informal sector proceeds adjusted her behaviour with the intent of securing her daughters' future. Rather than narrowly perceiving women such as Susan as being submissive or powerless, my results have shown that working class abused women in Mombasa and Nairobi who have limited exit options, can make reasoned choices that work best for them at a given time. Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) argue that class as an intersecting ingredient has generally received minimal application in IPV analysis among women of colour, qualifying my findings as invaluable to this growing body of work. However, in this thesis, I do not idealise "keeping quiet" as a means of redressing IPV, and my findings have acknowledged the risks that these strategic, yet traditional subjectivities exhibited by Kenyan women such as Susan pose to the long-term safety of women and children in abusive settings.

Cultural interpretations of IPV abound but I have explained in Chapter Six that its connection to religion has been poorly studied and particularly so in the highly religious SSA region (Takyi & Lamptey, 2020). My results on the interplay between women's religiosity, spirituality and IPV, have however, addressed this empirical chasm. Evidence from my participants' narratives has made further contributions to the limited literature by highlighting how socio-economic disadvantages were significant in shaping resourceful subjectivities when religious practices were implemented to abate the emotional or psychological effects of IPV. Generally speaking, empirical efforts to examine the association between IPV and mental ill health are limited in Kenya (Winter *et al.,* 2020), and the findings across women's religious narratives have narrowed this gap of knowledge. My data has suggested that these working-class women leveraged their spirituality to address mental health issues in situations where professional mental health services were unaffordable to them. Based on my analysis, I have found that these private coping devices – troubling as they might be in terms of entrapping women in perpetual IPV – should not be trivialised, given their propensity to suppress suicidal thoughts as evidenced in Hadija's extract. Hadija, similar to many of the women I have presented in

these discussions, did not simply succumb to mental illness but used measures within her reach to improve her psychological well-being.

My findings have also suggested that the suppression of counter discourses threatening marital, familial and cultural preservation explained why faith-based communities were unhelpful in directly addressing women's exposure to IPV. Indeed, the results presented in Chapter Six have shown that pastors, priests, Sheikhs, Imams and friends of similar faith functioned indirectly as agents of patriarchy in their promotion of sexual double standards. Spiritual warfare tactics seemed to be directed towards the mistresses than the men, proving that religious circles also influenced women to internalise these gendered conceptions. Brina's charismatic church, for example, prophetically "declared" the mistress as responsible for her husband's immorality. This conclusion arguably further affected her own personal analysis of her husband's "sugar-mummy" as Mama's (1995) colonial integrationist and Black radical discourses provided a unique angle to examine her experience. The results of her narrative on this "Jezebel" type, older mistress, is a unique contribution made by my study that demonstrates the intersection between religion, class, age, heterosexuality and ethnicity to inform religious women's experiences of marital infidelity in Kenya.

Over-spiritualising and normalising of the victimisation of women who experienced IPV was commonplace in faith-communities according to the results of my study. Patience, forgiveness and instructions by religious leaders to pray the abuse away were other ways of reinforcing the notion of perseverance. This, in turn, inculcated a passive approach to IPV within faith circles, an aspect of which has been confirmed by previous studies examining the role of religious communities in supporting women affected by domestic abuse (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2003; Nash & Hesterberg, 2009; Knickmeyer *et al.*, 2010; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). My findings have also indicated that the lack of practical assistance for the religious women experiencing IPV fostered a culture of silence in a bid to retain a positive image of the devout religious woman. My analysis of Susan's experience has illustrated her exposure to repeated sexual violation at the hands of her husband, but she dared not to disclose her experiences in order to safeguard her reputation as a respected church leader. While I have interpreted this as Susan's calculated decision to mitigate shame, I have also viewed her action as problematic in the sense that it jeopardised her physical safety, emotional stability and reproductive wellbeing. The traditional requirement of sexually "taking care" of her husband, may have also pressured her to preserve her marriage and family, and also her low socio-economic status likely confounded her experiences of marital rape. Further,

this finding on her recurring experience of sexual IPV has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the implicit role of religion in sustaining gender inequalities in the sexual domain of the relationship. Accounts from women like Susan are additionally indicative of the plausible absence (or minimal availability) of oppositional discourses specifically supportive of women's sexual autonomy within religious spheres in Kenya. This finding is crucial to policy and practice as I explain further in the next section.

The post-structural feminist framework was useful in exposing ambiguities when narratives noticeably shifted between dominant and marginalised gender discourses. In Chapters Seven and Eight, there was evidence of a discursive battle where hegemonic discourses and feminist-oriented discourses were constantly vying for power at certain points in the women's accounts of economic IPV, sexual IPV and their use of verbal and physical aggression. In my study, I have found that these divergent discourses gave rise to conflicting meanings in the interpretation of IPV and made parts of the narratives appear to be inconsistent with others. In Chapter One, I have noted that Weedon's (1997) conceptualising of subjectivities is resourceful in interpreting women as fluid, inconsistent and contradictory, especially when they operate within less popular discourses to challenge the purported naturalness of their relegated position. Indeed, the data derived from the present study has shown that women's accounts cut across all five themes considered in my work, where some, such as Rahma's for example, demonstrated her devoutness and deference to her husband in some parts while, in others, demonstrated her deception and exasperation when stories of prolonged IPV exposure surfaced. Rahma's subjectivity, similar to the rest of her counterparts', was thus protean and not static. She, as the rest of the women exposed to IPV, has multiple subjectivities allowing her to adopt different positions and, at times, simultaneously (Mama, 1995). As I have stated in the introduction, feminist post-structuralism has had minimal application in the field of IPV in general (Wendt & Zannettino, 2014) and in the SSA region in particular. To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in which Weedon's perspective on discourse and subjectivity have been deployed primarily to investigate IPV in the context of Kenya and, specifically, Mombasa and Nairobi. Therefore, these results from Rahma's and other participants' experiences contributes significantly to theory building as they reveal how the notion of subjectivity opens Kenyan women up "to political change" and thus project them as being capable of going against the stereotype at certain points of their experiences of abuse (Weedon, 1997: 79).

My findings on women's exposure to economic IPV have addressed the knowledge gap in an area that has received minimal attention in Kenya (and beyond) relative to research on physical, sexual and emotional IPV (Hatcher *et al*., 2013). I have noted in Chapter Seven that the familiar and easily accessible discourses that limit women's financial bargaining power in the household were challenged to a large degree when my participants experienced long-term financial neglect, income control and restricted economic mobility. The results have revealed that the "for better or for worse" attitudes, that signalled devotion to men, featured less prominently in these accounts, and that conformity to a less accessible feminist discourse was galvanised by the women's involvement in *chamas* and other informal egalitarian networks. Alternative subjectivities were evidenced by the women's insistence on joint financial planning, monetary transparency and gainful employment, all of which contradicted earlier representations associated with the traditional gender-role discourse.

Adding to the knowledge contribution on economic IPV, the results from my study have shown further that the Kenyan women in my sample grew increasingly resilient, confident and financially skilful in providing for their families because of their association with *chamas* and other consciousness-raising feminist circles. The collective and relational reproduction of empowered subjectivities was therefore evident in these instances (Mama, 1995: 98). Yet, as predicted by Weedon's theory, my findings confirmed that women's efforts in re-defining themselves came at a severe cost which came as no surprise, considering the incumbent gender arrangements in Kenya undergirded by patriarchy. Certainly, women's non-adherence to norms was not as simple or straightforward because their conformity to counter ideals were perceived by men as a threat to prevailing regimes of truth. Evidence from my study has suggested that these narratives were framed within the economic backlash discourse, which I have conceptualised, to place emphasis on (self-)employed women's encounters with male reprisals in response to the perceived threat they pose to the gender hierarchy in the household. Indeed, the ways in which women encounter and narrate their experience of IPV is associated with the types of discourses that are socially and culturally available to them (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Thus, distinguishing the economic patriarchal backlash discourse as a salient narrative within the financial domain of the relationship and conceptualising it in line with post-structural feminist theory is yet another contribution that I have made through my study. The accounts of employed women such as Emily and Maureen, for example, were framed within this discourse when they spoke of being over-burdened by financial and domestic responsibilities and losing control of their income and access to the labour market through physical restrictions. These

results have affirmed further that the patriarchal culture in Kenya still celebrates modes of femininity that might be viewed as traditional so that it becomes challenging for women to attain a measure of financial empowerment.

Nonetheless, my results have shown that, in many ways, the women took up positions that openly and stealthily contested stereotypical gender arrangements when personalised strategies were implemented to counteract patriarchal backlashes. Stealing, financial compensatory tactics, secretive (self-)employment and investment measures, and hiding contraceptive use were concrete examples based on my analysis. For instance, Brina's illegitimate access to her husband's bank account and her use of the revenue to open a boutique was not only her means of addressing financial negligence, but also her way of acquiring financial independence. The findings have suggested that, beneath the surface, Kenyan women such as Brina, in their pursuit of economic survival may "actively engage in a process of constructing a more [economically] self-reliant female identity" (Lovett, 2001: 59).

The evidence from my research has further indicated that patriarchal environments were best negotiated when financial strategies were executed covertly. Similar to "keeping quiet", deceptive mechanisms constructed women as calculating and adept at manoeuvring the patriarchal system to avoid reprisals. Based on my study, I have demonstrated that, while some women might have known their conservative husbands/partners well enough not to dare openly challenge their authority, this barrier did not necessarily immobilise their efforts in redressing financial dependence. Ilham's account best depicted this argument. In Chapter Seven, I have shown how she presented herself as a financially abused woman with a strict traditional husband who forbade her employment. Yet, my analysis has revealed her ingenuity in balancing the role of a resilient informal-sector worker by day, and dutiful wife by night. Thus, Ilham's secretive employment strategy implicitly located her within a discourse that counteracted male hegemony but concomitantly, placed her within a dominant one that made her "comply to the letter with what [was] expected" of her (Weedon, 1997: 83). Such approaches to negotiating financial abuse might not be acknowledged formally by observers because of their "invisible" nature and unlikely effect on systemic change. Yet, based on my study, I have argued that they are demonstrative of women's private survival capabilities in constrained settings. Thus, my findings have offered insight into how Kenyan women encountering IPV, such as Ilham, may adhere superficially to hegemonic standards but simultaneously resist them. They may re-define traditional boundaries by blending the old and the new to insulate themselves and therefore work around prevailing gender expectations rather

than with them. Instead of documenting what appears on the surface to be the passive subjectivities of the oppressed, it is important to understand how women who are directly affected by IPV in Kenya are potentially coping with their personal and social vicissitudes, otherwise researchers will be working within a limited analytical frame for knowledge production.

Academic publications on women's financial compensatory strategies appear to be scarce in general, and the results derived from my study have extended our knowledge of this particular aspect among women from Mombasa and Nairobi. In my study, I have found teachers and landlords to have played an instrumental role in aiding women experiencing economic IPV. Both actors ensured the success of these deceptive compensatory tactics and I have discussed how Patience best exemplified her use of this coping device when she capitalised on her husband's geographical distance to recover money she had paid earlier for rent. In addition to this, based on my study, I have also made a noteworthy empirical contribution by discovering more about the association between IPV and reproductive health, an area which has been explored minimally in Africa according to Emenike *et al.* (2008). Hadija's secretive use of contraception was the most obvious finding to emerge from my study to address this gap in research. By adopting perspectives from Black/African feminism, I have sought to evaluate critically how Kenyan women's (dis)conformity to discourses are also potentially influenced by overlapping oppressions, and Hadija's account served as another example from my work that has demonstrated this aspect. Based on my results, I have found that her discreet subversion of hegemonic discourses was exhibited within the context of economic IPV, which has additionally expanded IPV knowledge in Kenya by providing evidence of how women's reclaiming of their reproductive rights can occur within the intersecting dimensions of class and gender. By merging tenets from post-structural and Black/African feminisms, I have joined a small number of academics, such as Amina Mama (1995), who applied both conceptual frameworks to investigate Black British women's resistance to hegemonic racial discourses in relation to other interlocking forces of subordination (see Chapter One). In the case of my study, this convergence has thus advanced theoretical insights on women's responses to IPV, gender discourses, subjectivity and intersectionality with regards to Kenya, where a dearth of qualitative research on IPV is evident (Gillum *et al.,* 2016).

In addition to evidencing the application of both conceptual frameworks in the field of IPV, my findings on women's sexual resistance have similarly expanded discussions that challenge narrow perspectives of SSA women exposed to IPV. In Chapter Eight, I have highlighted

experiences of sexual IPV as another key site of subversion in which defiant feminine subjectivities were displayed when participants attempted to acquire sexual autonomy. These results present a possibility of viewing women in Kenya as having the ability to re-define their relations with men by refusing to be trapped in the inhibitive discursive language that accentuates their sexual inferiority. My findings have further suggested that similar to addressing economic IPV, subjectivities incongruent to the "good" woman representation were embodied by the women in my sample, following recurring or long-term mistreatment by men. For instance, I have explained how Maureen and Sambayas practised sexual abstinence for extended time periods to demonstrate their disapproval of the men's infidelity and negligence. For community health workers, Margaret and Liz, having condoms at hand was the best way to negotiate the male sex drive and to shield themselves from STIs. Naomi stood her ground by refusing sexual contact with her promiscuous husband unless a joint HIV test was administered.

As in redressing economic IPV, these findings have also advanced our knowledge of the strong correlation between non-normative subjectivities in the sexual domain of the relationship and women's involvement in *chamas* and other feminist networks. Khulthum's refusal to be "commanded and controlled in bed like a soldier" signalled even further how feminist avenues in Kenya functioned as sites of critiquing and dissipating "common-sense" knowledge. Nevertheless, based on the results from my study, I have found that some methods of sexual resistance had a measure of success while others did not. Some afforded women a measure of sexual autonomy while others perpetuated subordination. Indeed, in a society that heavily subscribes to the male sexual prerogative, it is not surprising that my study has found that behaviours that controverted traditional femininity, in some cases, were readily supressed by men who considered their wives/partners as chattels. Overt sexual refusal, for instance, put Emily's and Rahma's lives in jeopardy. Subtle sexual avoidance strategies (sleeping in a different room, feigning tiredness and so forth) on the other hand, were useful in minimising the risk of harm but my results have suggested that these reactions did not address the root of the problem – that men expected women to be vassals of sexual satisfaction. Even so, little is empirically known about East African women's sexually resistant mechanisms in IPV contexts and, based on a recent systematic review of women's coping strategies in low and middle-income countries by Wood *et al.* (2021), devices relatively similar to those identified in my research are reported only in Nepal (Puri *et al.*, 2011). Unlike my research however, the

findings from the Nepalese study were limited only to subtle (and not confrontational) sexual refusal.

Little is known academically about the aggression of Kenyan women in IPV settings and I have made important empirical contributions through my qualitative findings by discovering more about the driving forces behind their agitation. From my results, I have observed that women's prolonged experiences of economic IPV, infidelity and coercive control interlocked with ethnicity, low education, under-/unemployment, motherhood and religion to shape their hostility towards the men. In my study, I have found that participants grew weary of men's behaviours and arguably, talking back, as exemplified in the accounts of Maureen and Adhiambo, could be interpreted as an empowered response, following the conceptualisation of "speaking out" as a liberating process by hooks (2014) (see Chapter Eight). In other words, my findings have confirmed the notion that women embodying these non-stereotypical subjectivities were tired of being "invisibilised" (Ligaga, 2020: 12) by normative expectations of silence as the "right speech of womanhood" (hooks, 2014: 6).

Undeniably, evidence from my study has suggested that such forms of "visibility" in an abusive atmosphere might come at a severe cost for women in Kenya. Rahma's and Margaret's narratives in Chapter Eight provided a basis for this argument. Comparable with the manner in which former Women's Representative, Rachael Shebesh, was silenced by former Governor, Evans Kidero (see Chapter Two), I have argued that Rahma and Margaret were viewed by their spouses as "loud women who needed to know [their] place" (Ligaga, 2020: 45). Their narratives therefore build on existing knowledge of how retaliation in patriarchal settings, such as Kenya, signals men's efforts to re-mould women into traditional femininity. These results have further substantiated Weedon's suppositions that coercion or intimidation is often deployed by those in power to foster compliance among the oppressed who rebel against ruling discourses. The comment by Hadija's husband after she threw a glass at him for defensive reasons ("You'll tell me whether you're the man of the house! Did you marry me, or did I marry you?!") also subscribed to this argument.

Indeed, in my study, I have found that aggressive diversions from the norm (whether or not for reasons of self-defence), in most cases, were deleterious to the women who enacted them. I have observed that participants who exhibited aggression were likely to experience societal backlash. Sambayas's neighbours, for example, turned against her when they discovered that she had injured her husband. I have noted earlier in my thesis that public shaming for perceived

social misfits, such as Sambayas, is commonplace in patriarchal Kenya (Ligaga, 2020). In the discussions exploring the historical and cultural processes that shape present-day gender relations in Kenya (see Chapter Two), I have explored public shaming as a method on which the society has often relied to "tame" socially deviant or "manly" women. I have reviewed incidents of societal backlashes by providing examples of contemporary women (for instance, Rachael Shebesh, Millie Odhiambo, Wangari Maathai and Philomena Mutai) and traced these to the pre-independence era by providing examples of domineering women, such as Wangu wa Makeri, and "urban" women (or "good-time girls") who were publicly ousted out of chiefdom, or forcibly returned to villages under humiliating conditions respectively (Kanogo, 2005; Mutongi, 2007, cited in Ligaga, 2020). Boisterous and aggressive conduct have always been read as the property of men, and African women who defy the salient feminine script have historically been labelled as being "wicked" (Hodgson and McCurdy, 2001).

Furthermore, my empirical findings have been noteworthy theoretical in the area of female aggression by conceptualising a violence double-standard discourse to signal the biased treatment of women who use physical IPV. Based on my analysis of Sambayas's interaction with her neighbours, I have shown how the discourse propagated "common-sense" knowledge, according to which women's aggression was interpreted as being aberrant, even before establishing the reasoning behind their actions. Conversely, her husband, as other men in Kenya, was socio-culturally permitted to "discipline" her physically by virtue of the customary knowledge frames rooted in indigenous and colonial societies as explored in the historical discussions that I have reviewed in Chapter Two (see Green, 1999; Kameri-Mbote, 2000; Hatcher *et al.*, 2013; Njue *et al.*, 2014; Gillum *et al.*, 2016). While it remains true that these aggressive subjectivities (especially those displayed by Sambayas and Maureen) challenge limited claims in which abused women are represented as vessels of weakness, I have argued that these behaviours are a threat to advancing gender equality in intimate heterosexual unions. In fact, extolling women's suppression of male power, in the manner exemplified by Sambayas and Maureen, depicted both as agents of patriarchy in the sense that it appeared as though desired ends were only attainable through aggression, power and control. Notwithstanding, linking these antagonistic reactions to their root causes, namely, prolonged IPV victimisation, is still essential for intervention planning and implementation.

In the following section, I conclude the thesis by discussing recommendations for key programmes and policy and provide suggestions for further empirical research to build IPV knowledge in Kenya.

9.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The research on gender discourses has implications for interventions with abused women to prevent IPV. Interventionists aware of the influences of totalising narratives in reinforcing the status quo of male dominance can educate women in Kenya to evaluate critically how common-sense knowledge frames entrap them in relationships with men who use violence against them. By so doing, women exposed to circumstances akin to Rahma's, Brina's and Jane's for example, would quickly identify and not default to positions of culpability engendered by salient scripts (such as hetero-normative and romance discourses). However, as a first step, before engaging with these women, programme and policy specialists should confront their own restricted thinking and understand that women are "complex, multi-layered beings with a capacity to move between positions, create new ones, and constantly negotiate and renegotiate their identities as they struggle to make sense of a world in which fixed categories are constantly subverted and changed" (Mama, 1995: 142). This broader understanding of women would lead to the development of initiatives that accommodate those whom, for various reasons (economic, cultural and the like), desire to preserve their relationships. A dynamic perspective of Kenyan women encountering IPV would thus steer clear of one-sided recommendations (such as leaving the abuser or reporting him to authorities) or other solutions that "address western realities and not African women's peculiar situation" (Kolawole, 1997: 13).

An alternative intervention that would be appropriate in the context of Kenya would be to engage men in the process of advancing gender equality. In neighbouring Uganda, for example, in one IPV prevention programme, called SASA!, approaches have been developed that involve men as allies in the fight against traditional norms that promote gender disparities in the home environment (Abramsky *et al.*, 2012, 2014; Kyegombe *et al.*, 2014). In accord with Thiam (1986:86), I recommend such gender collaborations because women "don't have to break categorically with men but rather work together with them for the liberation of both women and men refusing any kind of imperialism [that is, subjection] that the latter might be tempted to exercise over them". In other words, involving men in these processes would increase accountability by ensuring that the responsibility of challenging male hegemony does not fall entirely on women. According to Kolawole (1997), African women are likely to appreciate concerted efforts akin to these more than those promoted by mainstream Western feminism which, according to her review are either anti-men or less family oriented.

For these joint efforts to work effectively in Kenya, I recommend the adoption of a social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) of IPV prevention so that various stakeholders at the level of individual/couple, relationship (such as extended family members), community (such as neighbours, police, and religious leaders) and at societal levels (such as policymakers and media) are actively engaged in transforming gender relationships. The focus of this thesis included observing women's resistance to oppressive discourses at the individual level. However, recalling that an individual is not a "sovereign protagonist", isolated efforts of resistance are unlikely to have a significant on impact social change (Weedon, 1997: 40). This is because "social institutions … are the site of discursive conflict over how [her] subjectivit[y] and social relations should be constituted" (Weedon, 1997: 107). As such, collective efforts designed around an ecological model have the propensity to generate societal change across both micro and macro spheres. Subsequently, new discourses are likely to gain social traction when people on all tiers of society adopt them increasingly so that "visions become shared" (Mama, 1995: 164-165). Consequently, dominant regimes of truth with time, will hopefully become irrelevant because less people adhere to their principles (Weedon, 1997; Mama, 1995). Growing empirical evidence about ecological frameworks has shown that such multi-level strategies are well-suited to tackle regressive gender norms embedded in discourses compared with strategies that are targeted solely at individuals or communities (Abramsky *et al.,* 2016). In fact, the results of the impact of the SASA! Programme, which follows a social ecological model, are promising insofar that the programme has been scaled up in neighbouring Rwanda (Dunkle *et al.*, 2020). In fact, this was the very Rwandan IPV prevention programme in which I have mentioned being involved in 2015 and subsequently motivated my research (see Chapter One). The geographical viability of this tiered approach in the East African region is revealing and thus presents an area of potential for consideration by practitioners of IPV prevention in Kenya.

Given that the population in Kenya attaches a great deal of value to religion, I recommend that, in keeping with the ecological model, professionals invested in IPV reduction and prevention should forge alliances with Christian and Islamic religious leaders to re-define a "healthy God-image" (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000: 247) to counter harmful orthodox interpretations of marital practices. In other words, religious leaders should be primarily engaged in the process of deconstructing traditional norms (such as those underpinned by the patriarchal family discourse) so that religious platforms also become areas where new discourses emerge to offer women alternative, empowering positions that promote their safety and well-being. Thus, this

process would be instrumental in promoting congregational awareness and zero tolerance for IPV in faith-based communities so that women such as Margaret would prioritise their well-being instead of worrying that people would think they are "not church women" if they contemplated separation or divorce (see Chapter Six). Women such as Susan would also feel safe to speak against repeated sexual assault, qualifying religious communities as environments where marital rape is challenged and not "rationalised as a man taking what is his" (Green, 1999: 34)

Engaging faith-based communities should also promote a culture of trust so that affected women would feel secure enough to seek emotional support. As such, I recommend additionally that faith-based staff in Kenya should be equipped with mental health training so that women like Hadija, for example, do not rely solely on private spiritual avenues (such as prayer and scriptural readings) to suppress suicidal thoughts, but also receive emotional guidance from a counsellor of similar faith. There is an urgent need for interventions and policies focused on GBV prevention in low-income settings in Kenya (Swart, 2012) and faith-based counselling is a cost-effective approach that might also appeal to women exposed to financial quandaries similar to those of Margaret who eventually traded off expensive psychological treatment for daily sustenance (see Chapter Six). Generally speaking, few studies in Kenya have investigated the link between IPV and mental health and while my findings have corroborated the association, more empirical research is required for further policy and programming work (Winter *et al.*, 2020).

Interventions to prevent IPV should be focused also on advancing women's legal literacy to promote knowledge of the rights enshrined in documents such as the Protection against Domestic Violence (PADV) 2015 Act. This would insulate women such as Krest from baseless intimidation by men whenever avenues of legal support are considered (see Chapter Seven). Networks frequented by women, such as churches and *chamas,* can be leveraged to educate women on their constitutional rights as well as legal and other formal pathways of IPV support. However, for such initiatives to be effective, I suggest that extensive research in Kenya on the barriers that inhibit professional help-seeking should be undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of institutional and cultural obstacles faced by women (such as bureaucracy and deficient referral systems as well as socio-cultural definitions of "serious" IPV). Researchers such as Odero *et al.* (2014) have contributed immensely to adding empirical knowledge of barriers inhibiting Kenyan women's access to formal IPV resources, however, I argue that future research should be done from an intersectional perspective to understand how

impediments are likely to be exacerbated by a woman's under-/unemployed status, limited schooling and other overlapping deterrents. I suggest that this research should also include women in rural Kenya whose challenges might be distinct from urban women. Service providers and informal sources of support (such as relatives, village elders and chiefs) should also be considered in these research processes to expand knowledge in this area.

Furthermore, on the subject of help-seeking, in my thesis I have briefly highlighted children's involvement in extricating their mothers from abusive situations. A case in point was Hadija's children calling out to neighbours for help (see Chapter Eight). I have also provided additional examples of how children pleaded with their fathers to stop the abuse, encircled their mothers to protect them, unlocked doors for their mothers to escape and, in the case of older/teenage sons, directly confronting their fathers. Little is understood about the intersection between IPV and child exposure and mistreatment in low-income countries (Devries *et al.*, 2017) and my brief results on this subject area will hopefully stimulate further work to generate empirical evidence in Kenya. I suggest that these future research efforts in Kenya should broaden the definition of child exposure to IPV so that investigations should not only be limited to witnessing, over-hearing, seeing its effects or aiding their mothers, but also explore children's role in implicitly (or explicitly) contributing to their mothers' victimisation (such as reporting their whereabouts to the father). Taking into consideration my results in Chapter Five on IPV affecting children's emotional and economic well-being, I suggest that future work in Kenya should also include investigation of how violence at home affects children's psychological, financial and physical welfare.

In this thesis, I have linked female aggression largely to self-defence, and long-term abuse and mistreatment, and these qualitative contributions pave way for further discussions in an area that is often under-studied (at least in SSA) perhaps because of the prevailing misconception that women are feeble or powerless. To this end, there is sufficient room to build on the work of Adelene Africa (2010) who deployed a post-structural feminist approach to investigate narratives of aggression among South African women. Gathering insights on women's unconventional behaviours can paradoxically inform programmes and policies seeking to promote their safety and well-being. This is not to downplay the victimisation of women experiencing IPV but, to focus on one half of the equation is not sufficient for knowledge production and programme implementation. Besides, my analysis seems to indicate that women's verbal and physical aggression is rooted in their very victimisation. This presents an additional area for further research, programme and policy consideration in Kenya.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - Ethics Approval



University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Sociology & Social Policy
University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD

03/07/2018

Reference: 1718-101-PGR

Dear Victoria,

Your application for ethical approval from the School of Sociology and Social Policy

On behalf of the Research Ethics Sub-Committee, I am pleased to confirm that your project "*Contexts, subjectivities and discourses: How far can a post-structural feminist lens focus into women's use and experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Kenya?*" has been reviewed and approved and you are now welcome to begin your data collection.

If you propose to make any amendments to the approved project or supporting documentation, you must first send details of the amendment along with any supporting documents to the Research Ethics generic email address, LQ-ResearchethicSSP@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk for approval. Please do not use any unapproved or amended documents or procedures before these have been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries during your project, please contact the Research Ethics administration team or your academic supervisor.

Good luck with your project!

Kind regards

Dr Alison Mohr
Research Ethics Sub-Committee Officer

+44 (0)115 951 4860
LQ-researchethicSSP@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk
nottingham.ac.uk/sociology

APPENDIX 2 - NACOSTI Approval



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete
Off Waiyaki Way
P.O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref: No. **NACOSTI/P/18/16234/23029**

Date: **13th June, 2018**

Victoria Kiasyo Isika
University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on ***"Contexts, subjectivities, and discourses: How far can a post-structural feminist lens zoom into women's experience and use of intimate partner violence in Kenya?"*** I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Mombasa, Nairobi and Nyeri Counties** for the period ending **11th June, 2019.**

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioners and the County Directors of Education, Mombasa, Nairobi and Nyeri Counties** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit **a copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

BONIFACE WANYAMA
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
Mombasa County.

The County Director of Education
Mombasa County.

APPENDIX 3 – Samples of the invitation letter for the participants and the recruitment survey

Step 1: Invite the woman for the interview by reading the short script below:

You have been invited by Vicky Isika, a PhD student at the University of Nottingham, U.K. who is conducting interviews with women who are either married or cohabiting with a male partner as part of her research project which aims to understand women's relationship challenges in Kenya. As a woman who has encountered such challenges, you are in an ideal position to provide valuable information from your own perspective. Talking about your challenges will generate a deeper understanding of Kenyan women's experiences in their marital or cohabiting relationships. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

If you are willing to participate in this research project, all the discussions you will have with Vicky will be strictly confidential. Neither your name nor any information which can identify you will be used in the project.

Please let me know what day and time you are available. The discussions will last about 1hr or a maximum of 1hr 30min and will take place in ***[please mention the interview venue to the woman]***. Please ensure you keep time by remaining punctual. A small token of appreciation for your time will be offered at the end of the interview. Thank you.

Step 2: If the woman has agreed to participate, please fill in this table before ending the conversation.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
What is her name?								
How many years has she been married or staying with her current husband/male partner								
Which area of MBA/NBO does she currently live in?								
What is her age?								
What is her religion?								
What is her tribe?								
How many children does she have?								
Is she currently employed or earning a salary/wage?								
Please indicate the date and time she is available for the interview	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:

APPENDIX 4 – Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet
Date:

Title of Study: Understanding women's experiences of intimate relationships in Kenya

Name of Researcher(s): Victoria Kiasyo Isika

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear.

What is the purpose of the study?
The main purpose of this study is to learn more about women's experiences in their relationships with their husbands or male partners in Nyeri, Mombasa and Nairobi counties.

Why have I been invited?
You are being invited to take part because you are a female resident of *[insert county name]* county and is currently married or cohabiting with a male partner. I am inviting 20 participants like you to take part.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form (completion and return of a Questionnaire can be taken as implied consent). If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This would not affect your legal rights.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you agree to take part in this study, I will interview you for about 1 hour. Based on your preference, the interview will be conducted in English or Swahili. This study will take place until September 2021 and you will mainly be required to participate in one sitting. However, I may contact you at a later date to answer a few extra questions if you agree at the time.

Expenses and payments
Participants will not be paid an allowance to participate in the study. Travel expenses will be offered for any visits incurred as a result of participation.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
As we are going to talk about some personal and sensitive issues, some questions may make you feel uncomfortable, upset or sad, but other people who have responded to this type of interview have often found it to be a good opportunity to talk to someone about these topics. Please take your time and relax as there are no right or wrong answers. Following our discussions, I will provide you with a list of references so that you can better understand the legal, medical, and psychosocial services available in or near your community if you need it.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
I cannot promise the study will help you but the information I get from this study may help me further understand women's experiences in their relationships with their husbands or partners.

What if there is a problem?
If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak with me and I will do my best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting the School Research Ethics Officer. All contact details are given at the end of this information sheet.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
I will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence.

If you join the study, the data collected for the study will be looked at by authorised persons from the University of Nottingham who are organising the research. They may also be looked at by authorised people to check that the study is being carried out correctly. All will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and we will do our best to meet this duty.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept **strictly confidential**, stored in a secure and locked office, and on a password protected database. Any information about you which leaves the University will have your name and address removed (anonymised) and a unique code will be used so that you cannot be recognised from it. Anonymised data may also be stored in data archives for future researchers interested in this area.

Your personal data (address, telephone number) will be kept for 3 years after the end of the study so that I am able to contact you about the findings of the study *and possible follow-up studies* (unless you advise us that you do not wish to be contacted). All research data will be kept securely for 7 years. After this time your data will be disposed of securely. During this time all precautions will be taken by all those involved to maintain your confidentiality, only members of the research team will have access to your personal data.

Although what you say in the interview is confidential, should you disclose anything to me which I feel puts you or anyone else at any risk, I may feel it necessary to report this to the appropriate persons.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without your legal rights being affected. If you withdraw then the information collected so far may not be possible to extract and erase after 3 years and this information may still be used in the project analysis.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

This research is part of my PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham. In the event that I publish any results of this research, your anonymity will be guaranteed in these publications as any personal identifying information provided such as your name will never be disclosed.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by the University of Nottingham and is being funded by myself.

Who has reviewed the study?

All research in the University of Nottingham is looked at by a group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details

Researcher:

Victoria Kiasyo Isika
PhD Sociology Candidate
School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Nottingham
Nottingham, United Kingdom, NG7 2RD

Email: victoria.isika@nottingham.ac.uk, Mobile: +254718371593 (Kenya) or +447554961259 (UK)

Supervisor/PI:

Dr Lyndsey Harris, Email: lyndsey.harris@nottingham.ac.uk, Tel: +44 (0)115951 5238

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Research Ethics Officer: Dr Alison Mohr, alison.mohr@nottingham.ac.uk, Tel: 0115 84 68151

APPENDIX 5 – Consent Form (Verbal consent provided)

Date:

Title of Study: Understanding women's experiences of intimate relationships in Kenya

Name of Researcher/s: Victoria Kiasyo Isika

Name of Participant:

	Please initial box
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without my legal rights being affected. I understand that should I withdraw then the information collected so far may not be able to be extracted and erased and that this information may still be used in the project analysis.	☐
3. I understand that relevant sections of data collected in the study may be looked at by authorised individuals from the University of Nottingham, the research group and regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to have access to these records and to collect, store, analyse and publish information obtained from my participation in this study.	☐
4. I understand that the interview will be recorded and that anonymous direct quotes from the interview may be used in the study reports.	☐
5. I understand that confidentiality may be wavered should a serious threat to life be revealed.	☐
6. I understand that the information collected about me may be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers.	☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

2 copies: 1 for the participant, 1 for the project file

APPENDIX 6 – Interview guide

1. In your own opinion, what are the roles or expectations of a wife/woman in an intimate relationship?

2. As a woman, in what ways do you think you meet these expectations? *(Probe: thinking of your relationship, how would you best describe yourself as a wife/partner?)*

3. In your own opinion, what are the roles or expectations of a husband/man in an intimate relationship?

4. What about your husband/male partner, does he meet these expectations? *(Probe: thinking of your relationship, how would you best describe your husband/partner?)*

5. Can you please tell me more about your relationship? *(Probe: how do you feel about your marriage/relationship?)*

6. It is common for arguments and disagreements to occur between couples who live together. Can you please describe to me a time where you and your husband/partner had a disagreement or misunderstanding? *(Probe: When you argued, what caused it? What did he do to you? How did it make you feel? How did you react when/after this happened?)*

    i. Was your husband/partner physically or verbally aggressive towards you? Please tell me more about it.

    ii. Would you say there have been times where you have reacted in an aggressive manner whether physically or verbally in response to his behaviour? If so, please tell me more about it?

7. Would you say there have been times where you have reacted physically or verbally aggressive towards your husband/partner in the absence of his abuse? *[Probe: What triggered it? What happened after? How would your husband/partner respond?]*

That is the end of our discussion. Thank you very much for your time. Do you have any questions for me? And would you have any advice or suggestions to other women based on your experiences.