

# **POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DIVORCE IN ASMARA**

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## **KEYWORDS**

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## ABSTRACT

This research project seeks to account for some of the causes of divorce in Asmara, Eritrea. The existing law in this country recognizes adultery, desertion and cruelty as serious grounds for divorce. However, this research, which is based on a sample of forty divorced respondents from both genders, reveals a wider spectrum of reasons for divorce.

According to these findings, marital conflict related to money matters was the most frequently cited reason for divorce within the sample. This was followed by in-law difficulties, infidelity, spousal violence and lack of love, respectively. The next most frequently cited reason for divorce was behaviour incompatibility and a lack of effective communication amongst conflicting couples. On the other hand, the sexual side of marriage was the least cited marital problem resulting in divorce, followed by childlessness and heavy drinking. In between ranked behaviour incompatibility and lack of effective communication between conflicting couple.

Essentially this study adopts a subjective perspective. It reflects respondents' versions of why their marriages failed. It does however attempt to position the subjective experiences of the respondents within the context in which they lived. The latter includes economic hardship due to the recurrent war and the prevalence of traditional double standards and dominations that favour males. Because of these, gender was a significant social category in the study, which has resulted in differences in reporting patterns. Women respondents were mainly concerned with the issue of money matters, in-law trouble, infidelity, the use and abuse of alcohol and violence by husbands. Men on the other hand were interested in authority, sex and love matters in their marriages.

These findings more or less parallel Levinger's (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) research findings. However, there were in some cases marked differences in the reporting pattern along gender lines, and in the over all picture. What was found to be the most significant reason for divorce in the eyes of the women who took part in the present study (such as in-law problems) was among the least of marital complaints in the above quoted literature.

In summation, this thesis shows divorce as a significant sociological category in Asmara. In this locally unexplored area of study, it reveals not only some of the major areas of marital conflict that lead to divorce, but also the trend of divorce in the city.

## DECLARATION

I declare that *Possible Causes of Divorce in Asmara* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other University, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Nuredin Bushra Beshir

July 2003

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Key words	i
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
<hr/>	
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<hr/>	
1.1 Context of the study	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	4
1.3 Objectives	5
1.4 Significance of the study	6
1.5 Limitations	6
1.6 Organization of the study	7
<hr/>	
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>8</b>
<hr/>	
2.1 The institution of marriage and the family	9
2.2 Factors contributing toward divorce	12
2.2.1 Political factors (war)	12
2.2.2 Economic factors	14
2.2.3 Socio-cultural factors	16
2.2.3.1 The Sex Ratio	16
2.2.3.2 The notion of a "dual society" in Eritrea	17
2.2.3.3 Causes (interaction-based) of divorce	19
2.2.3.3.1 In-law trouble	20
2.2.3.3.2 Infidelity	21
2.2.3.3.3 Violence	22
2.2.3.3.4 Lack of love	24
2.2.3.3.5 Heavy drinking	25
2.2.3.3.6 Behavioural incompatibility	26
2.2.3.3.7 Lack of communication	28
2.2.3.3.8 Sexual incompatibility	29
2.2.3.3.9 Loss of virginity	30
2.2.3.3.10 Childlessness	31
2.2.3.4. Summary	32
<hr/>	



**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

34

3.1 Analytical approach	34
3.2 The research method	35
3.3 The research instrument	37
3.3.1 The interview	38
3.3.2 Secondary data	39
3.4 The sample and sampling procedure	39
3.4.1 Divorcees	40
3.4.2 The study area	41
3.5. Data collection and analysis	42
3.5.1 Interview schedule	42
3.5.2 Data collection	43
3.5.3 Ethical statement	43
3.5.4 Data analysis	44
3.5.4.1 Statistical method	44
3.5.4.2 Grounded theory method	45
3.6 Constraints	47
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>49</b>
4.1 Divorce trends in Asmara	49
4.2 Demographic characteristics of the sample	52
4.3 Causes of divorce in Asmara	54
4.3.1 Economic problems / financial difficulties	55
4.3.2 Socio-cultural problem	59
4.3.2.1 In-law difficulties	60
4.3.2.2 Infidelity	65
4.3.2.3 Violence	68
4.3.2.4 Lack of love	71
4.3.2.5 Behaviour incompatibility	73
4.3.2.6 Lack of communication	75
4.3.2.7 Childlessness	76
4.3.2.8 Heavy drinking	77
4.3.2.9 Loss of virginity and Sexual incompatibility	79
4.3.3 Summary	81

<b>CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>82</b>
5.1 Findings	82
5.2 Conclusion	88
<b>References</b>	<b>90</b>
Appendix: Interview schedule	96





# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the political, economic and socio-cultural context of the study. It also defines the research problem, objective, and significance of the study. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

## 1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This research is set in the newly independent nation of Eritrea, which is strategically located in the horn of Africa along the Red Sea Coast. It is surrounded in the northwest by the Sudan, in the south by Ethiopia, and in the southeast by Djibouti. The population of Eritrea is estimated between 2.5 and 3.5 million (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995:2). It is diverse in both cultural and linguistic terms. There are nine ethnic groups, each with its own language, but Tigrina and Arabic are the two most widely used as a medium of communication among the different groups. In terms of religion, the population is almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims. The former are predominantly adherents of the Orthodox Church, although there are Evangelists, Catholics and traditional believers as well (The Europa World Year Book, 1999:1315). The overall condition of this country as highlighted below has not been conducive for stable family life.

### The Political Dimension: Wars

The history of Eritrea is a history of colonization and war. Because of the geopolitical significance of the Red Sea, Eritrea was governed by successive colonial powers until its independence in 1991. This was followed by a 'truce' of seven years after which the border conflict erupted in 1998, lasting for three years until 2000. The politically motivated war has affected the Eritrean society in general, and has affected families in particular in a number of ways. The persistent military operations have resulted in the loss of human lives and the disruption of social life. Several thousands of Eritreans lost their lives (see 2.2.1); and many citizens have migrated to escape from the insecure situation (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995:2). Participation in the armed struggle was also another form of separation that contributed to a

breakdown in social relationships, and the decline of normative values (Elliott and Merrill, 1961).

The issue of war is not raised to emphasize its direct association with the causes of divorce, but rather to point out its more indirect influences like the disruption of the population's sex ratio in the study area through death and migration; and the undermining of societal mores with regard to marriage and divorce, due to the development of new behaviour patterns that challenge old ones. More importantly, the war has created stress and strains in marriages by affecting the economy. The latter as well as the sociocultural climate are presented as follows.

### **Economy**

The new government of Eritrea inherited a backward economy. Because of this, the country is among the world's poorest nations with a per capita income less than USD 200 (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995:2). The revenue is highly dependent on custom duties and taxes (Alcitude LLC, 2002), and the overall income and expenditure balance has shown a negative trend. According to an unpublished report by the Ministry of Finance, the 1999 expenditure, for instance, was twice as much as the revenue of that same year.

In general, the economy was weakened by the 30-year war for independence. The post independence rehabilitation effort has also been severely affected causing a sharp rise in the consumer price inflation (see 2.2.2). The cost of living has become unbearable to most families especially in the study area, Asmara. Under such conditions, many marriages have to endure the stress and strain that results from such financial constraints.

### **Socio-cultural aspects of the family**

Broadly speaking, the form and organization of a typical family in Eritrea favours men and is therefore patriarchal. It is based on the extended family system which is hierarchically organized with authority resting with the eldest male of the household (Phillips, 1992). Such a system is most often accompanied by patrilocal residence

(Lerner, 1986). In this arrangement the newly married husband and wife take up residence with the bridegroom's family. The daughter-in-law is expected to take a subordinate role in her husband's family. She is expected to be subservient to her in-laws, particularly her mother-in-law. This is expected to be a source of much marital strain. Although there seems to be a tendency in some urban areas like Asmara for newlyweds to set up a neolocal residence, where they set up their own residence apart from their parents, the extended family system is still maintained in a modified form through regular visiting arrangements. Hence in-law relationships are still strong as a social practice, and its negative effects have not been weakened. In addition, the wife is not free from her husband's domination and the sometimes-abusive relationship, since power and authority is traditionally vested in him as the head of a household. In other words, she is living in a world of patriarchy (Wilson, 1991). This is also reinforced by the religious norms of both Christianity and Islam, which demand passiveness and obedience from the wives (Goys, 1996:8).

In the past few decades, social changes have taken place that challenge the patriarchal status quo. For instance, the participation of women in the liberation struggle has, on the one hand, raised their consciousness, and, on the other hand, substantially changed public attitudes toward women's roles (Zemedehrhan, 1996:20). These have encouraged women to participate more in the labour market (Elfu, 1998:11), which, in turn, provides a means to independence. Women have access to the 1994 land proclamation of the country, which grants women (including divorcees) the right of access to land for the first time. This directly contradicts the principle of patriarchy. Furthermore, with regard to the legal status of a husband, this has been reduced from "head of the family" to "guide to family affairs" (Government of Eritrea, Transitional Civil Law, 1991). In general, the traditional patriarchal social system has been confronted by the democratic and egalitarian traditions that are part of the fruits of the liberation movement (Firebrace and Holland, 1984:36). Thus, problems that are related to the extended family system and patriarchy, such as in-law trouble and the physical and verbal abuse of women in marital relationships, and which were at one time considered normal, are nowadays less tolerated, and more likely to become a potential source of marital conflict.

The other important cultural consideration is the existence of dual forms of marriage. The Christian tradition is strictly monogamous and the involvement of a spouse simultaneously in a second marriage is considered to be a criminal act. Such infidelity is sufficient ground for some families to break up and end in divorce. On the other hand, Muslims are administered by *Sharia* law where polygamy is allowed. Polygamy is, however, neither a common phenomenon, nor is it reflected in this study.

As a result of the war and its consequent population migration, the sex ratio is strikingly low, especially at childbearing age (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995:9). The relative shortage of men in relation to the abundance of women could cause marital instability because it is most often associated with men's infidelity and less commitment in their marriages (Guttentag and Second, 1983). As indicated earlier, infidelity does exist in Asmara as long as the practice of concubinage exists, and it remains a threat to the moral order.

To sum up, the political (war), economic and sociocultural realities of Eritrea are factors that influence the families in this study area, and they will serve as the foundations in the analysis of divorce in Asmara.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Divorce is one of the most overlooked social problems in Eritrea (MLHW, 1997). In spite of the extensive international literature available on divorce, it has hardly been the subject of investigation in Eritrea. The fact that this country has emerged from decades of war has meant that most of its local research projects have been directed towards war-related social problems that are easily visible and perceived to be of greater concern.

However, some scant statistical evidence indicates that the incidence of divorce in Eritrea has shown an upward trend.<sup>1</sup> According to an unpublished document by the

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<sup>1</sup> Divorce statistics are hardly available in Eritrea. This study attempts to generate some data (see chapter 4) on the subject.

Marriage and Divorce Unit 2 of the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare, the rate of divorce among ex-fighters, rose from one in every eight marriages in 1985 up until 1987, to one in every three marriages in 1990 and 1991. The rate became one in every six marriages in subsequent years up until 1996. It is commonly believed that civilian marriages have also experienced more marital failures. The appearance of cartoons highlighting divorce in the country's media (Efrem, Hadas Eritrea, Vol.4 Issue 4) demonstrates the growing incidence of divorce as well as the concern of the public. In terms of this, the central issue that causes many marriages to fail in Eritrea remains unanswered. The literature on divorce indicates that there are multiple causes for divorce. The major factors responsible for incidences of divorce in Eritrea, and particularly in Asmara, necessitates a social inquiry such as that undertaken in this study.

### 1.3 **OBJECTIVE**

As indicated above, divorce is an unexplored area of research in Eritrea where relevant literature, including statistical data, on the incidence of divorce is rare. It is the purpose of this study to investigate this important issue. More specifically, the study has the following objectives:

- To document people's accounts of why their marriages failed;
- To examine the interplay of the different factors that give rise to divorce;
- To determine the rate of divorce in Asmara and, to contribute to the availability of divorce statistics;
- To demonstrate that divorce is a significant sociological category.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Berhe Asfaha, ex-Head of the Unit, the latter was established by the Liberation Movement to deal with the matrimonial case of the fighters. After independence, in 1991, it was integrated within the existing structure of the Ministry, and continued serving only the fighters and ex-fighters until it was officially closed in 1996.



## 1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has both practical and theoretical value. The findings may serve as a foundation for the development of a social policy and intervention programme on divorce. Although this refers to any organization in Eritrea, which is engaged in family projects, of particular importance, is the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare - a government body responsible for the welfare of Eritrean families. This study parallels the five-year (1998-2002) strategic plan of the Ministry, which included an investigation into the causes of divorce in major towns in Eritrea but which, unfortunately, failed due to the border conflict. In the wake of the crisis, the findings of this study are of great importance. The theoretical value of the study lies in the fact that it contributes to the limited body of knowledge on the causes and incidence of divorce in Eritrea. The findings may also encourage other researchers to undertake further investigation in the area.

## 1.5 LIMITATIONS

Whilst Eritrea is classified into six administrative regions, this study only focuses on Asmara. The latter is the capital city of Eritrea. The overwhelming majority of its residents are from the *Tigrina* ethnic group, and belong to the two dominant religions in the country: Orthodox Christian and the Islamic Faith. Thus, this study has a limited scope as far as geographic distribution, ethnic and religious diversity are concerned.

On the other hand, this study includes both genders, although men are fewer. Moreover, very few of the respondents had prior military experience (ex-fighters). Lastly, the study is concerned with the causes of divorce. As a study with more of a qualitative orientation, the emphasis is to capture the richness of the data. In other words, the findings cannot be generalized.

## 1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the political and socio-economic climate of Eritrea in relation to divorce. In addition, a statement of the problem, the stated objectives, significance, as well as the scope of the study are highlighted. The outline for the remaining four chapters is as follows:

In chapter two, the relevant national and international literature is reviewed under two main sections. The first section introduces the concept of marriage and the family in relation to a society. The other section focuses on the factors that have contributed to the rise in the divorce rate. These factors are discussed under three main sub-sections.

The third chapter deals with the methodology employed in this study. This includes the analytical approach to divorce, research design, such as the research instrument and sampling procedures that will be discussed.

The fourth chapter deals with the analysis. It attempts to give statistical data to indicate the divorce trend in the study area. This is followed by the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the reasons why their marriages failed. The final chapter (five) is devoted to findings and conclusive remarks.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the study intends to account for the incidence of divorce rate in Asmara. In reviewing what the literature says about the causes of divorce, this chapter responds to the following questions:

Firstly, what is the significance of marriage and the family in society? This is crucial because there is no divorce without marriage. Section one of this chapter elaborates on the concepts, the universal functions of marriage and the family, and society's influence on them.

The second series of questions refers to the determinants of divorce. To this end, What is the effect of politics, in particular total war, on the stability of a family? The review indicates an increase in the divorce rate during wartime due to the spread of hasty marriages, separation and post-war strain. More importantly, the indirect effects of a war include a discrepancy in the sex ratio of a population and economic hardship. As a social variable, the sex ratio is organized under the socio-cultural factors (see 2.2.3), and the economic factors are reviewed independently (see 2.2.2). In relation to the latter, the question that is asked is:

Do economic conditions, especially the income of a family, influence the incidence of divorce? The economics of divorce is the subject of much sociological literature, and different arguments are presented.

In addition, questions related to the socio-cultural reality of a society as well as the family constitute part of the second series of questions. These include:

What is the effect of a sex ratio imbalance on divorce? Guttentag and Second's (1983) findings demonstrate the implications of a low sex ratio to divorce.

What is the influence of EPLF's<sup>3</sup> socio-cultural programmes on the empowerment of women as well as on divorce? Alayli (1995) argues from the point of view of a "dual society" and cultural conflict.

Last but not least, is a question concerned with the dynamic relationship between husband and wife: how do divorced persons explain the failure of their marriages? Or, what has gone wrong within the marriage relationship? This chapter closes by discussing Levinger's (1966) often-quoted findings, which include the major marital complaints of husbands and wives. His findings will be considered in the analysis of the Eritrean experience.

In summation, the political condition, particularly the war, and the prevailing economic conditions are critical in this study. Moreover, in the socio-cultural dimension, Guttentag and Second's (1983) sex ratio hypothesis and Alayli's (1995) notion of a "dual society" have notable analytical values. More importantly, Levinger (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) contributes to the conceptual framework of this study by emphasizing the family process.

## 2.1 THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Marriage is a social institution known only to human kind. It cannot be defined in terms of the mere mating of a man and a woman, since this phenomenon is biological and is shared with animals (Henslin, 1985). While mating even on human level may be quite impersonal, random, temporary and largely instinctive, marriage is a social and legal union (Chistensen, 1964). It is social in a sense that it is publicly recognized and regulated by civil or religious authorities in virtually every culture. In order to be married in Eritrea, for example, a license must be obtained and a state-recognized marriage officer (generally a religious or community leader) and a witness need to be present (MLHW, 1997). Thus, marriage is not a private affair.

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<sup>3</sup> It stands for the Eritrean People Liberation Front; it was a political and military organization that led the Eritrean people during the struggle for independence.

Marriage, as a social institution, refers not to the married couples themselves, but to the intricate cultural elements that govern the relationship between husband and wife, and provides for the creation of a family (Leslie and Korman, 1989). It specifies the appropriate way of forming a relationship, and in this way, attempts to control sex and fixes responsibility for adult sexual mating.

Marriage is commonly conceived of as a precondition of a family. Whereas marriage refers to the relationship between the spouses, families emerge out of marriage. According to Henslin (1985), the term family usually refers to children and consanguinal relationships in contrast to the conjugal ties, which are constituted through marriage. The family is a basic institution of a society. Leslie and Korman (1989:11) argue that the family has a unique and superior quality:

It is always a conspicuous feature of social organization. The family is always easy to locate, is in constant awareness of people, and deeply involved in performing the functional requisites.

No society has ever been without marriage and the family. Their significance is so vital in all societies that they are considered universal social institutions (Henslin, 1985). Societies differ regarding details of their cultural practices, but at all times and places some sort of family life is a norm. Institutions are formed, promoted and perpetuated for the purpose of specific functions they can perform in a society. In the light of this, it is important to note the place of a family in a society. For the latter to sustain itself over a long period of time, there must be an orderly way of replacing the old generation. Not only reproduction, but also the long period of dependency of the human infant requires adequate protection and rearing until the age of self-reliance (Murdock, 1960; Henslin, 1985). The new member cannot assume full responsibility without provision of the necessary skill, value orientation, and other cultural heritage of that society. In other words, the transformation of the new member from “biological to social being” is crucial (Henslin, 1985:21). No less significant is the need for the society to regulate the sexual behaviour of its adult members in order to avoid potential chaos (Chistensen, 1964). It is the family, our oldest institution, which continues to sustain societies and perpetuate cultures (Kephart and Jedlicka, 1991). It is the family, through marriage, that fulfills sexual gratification with full social sanction. In his most extensive, original and influential work on the family, Murdock

(1960:43) makes the following interesting statement that summarizes the role of the family:

In the nuclear family or its constituent relationships, we thus see assembled four functions fundamental to human social life - the sexual, the economic, the reproductive, and the educational. Without provision of the first and third, society would become extinct; for the second, life itself would cease; for the fourth, culture would come to an end.

It is true that other institutions or relationships outside a family have taken over or share in satisfying any of these requisites, but they have never substituted it, and it is highly unlikely for any society to succeed in the future (Jergensen, 1986). In fact, as a result of industrialization and modernization, the conjugal family is assuming roles that are less important in the past. As Miller (1985) notes, the family group is expected to meet the psychological and emotional needs of its members.

As far as marriage and the family are concerned, they do not occur in a sociological vacuum. They are highly influenced by the social context in which they exist (Henslin, 1985). The relationship of the two sexes is controlled by the society in the interest of children as well as on moral ground (Foster, 1960). The eligibility for marriage, who and when should marry, where they should reside, and the like are decided by the society. Thus, we need to realize that society has certain sanctions and restrictions it has set up.

People marry not to divorce but assume a life long commitment. Being a public concern, the marriage contract between two persons cannot be broken without the knowledge of the society or the state (Leslie and Korman, 1989). Most religious doctrines also reinforce this union. Lamanna and Riedmann (1988) believe that the expectation for permanence is due to the fact that marriage has been a practical social institution; the economic security and responsible child rearing require marriages to be permanent. Even in contemporary societies, intimate marriages are usually held together more by values and norms than mutual affection. It is for this reason that marriages generally last long when compared with other intimate relationships (Ibid,

1988). It follows, logically, that an unfavourable social environment will have negative influence on the stability of families.

The above discussion highlighted two points: the crucial functional role of a family, and society's interest in and influence upon the institution of the family. This is essential as it helps to see if there are crucial functional failures in a family and to look in what ways the marriage relationship has been affected.

## **2.2 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TOWARD DIVORCE**

Divorce is the final denouncement of family disorganization. It is an official recognition that a particular marriage is beyond reconciliation and, therefore, leads to termination (Leslie and Korman, 1989; Coleman, 1988). Divorce is one of the complex social problems in modern societies. The remaining section considers the literature on the factors held responsible for leading to divorce.

### **2.2.1 Political factors (war)**

This part emphasizes the effect of politically motivated war on society, and particularly on the institution of marriage and the family. The war in this context refers to the large-scale military confrontation or total war. The latter can be defined as a form of warfare... involving the maximum mobilization of social and economic resources of a country for armed conflict, usually entailing the exposure of the civilian population and economy to enemy attack (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology, 1998:670)

Modern war alters major spheres of people's lives where the most important human value, life, is the primary target (Elliott and Merrill, 1961). While death is common under any circumstance, war has the multiplying effect and for many nations, their recorded maximum swift death toll is a result of their involvement in major wars (Merrill, 1968). Countries that were involved in World War and, for instance, lost their people in thousands, even some of them in millions (Elliott and Merrill, 1961:740-1).



The full effect of the war, however, is not only measured in quantitative terms alone, that is, in its widespread destruction of life. As Elliott and Merrill, (1961:740) note, the death of every individual also means the destruction or weakening of every group of which he or she was a member. Marriage groups are destroyed by the death of a spouse, and family groups are shattered by the death of parents or siblings.

Elliott and Merrill (1961:740) further note that norms are challenged by the new war situations to which the individual must adapt him/herself, meaning that the moral sanctions binding groups together are broken and family relationships are weakened by separation and mobility.

Studies confirm the correlation between war and the disorganization of families. In their analysis of the impact of World War II on the instability of the family, Leslie and Korman (1989:501) note: "The years of 1945 and 1946 had higher divorce rates than any year before that time and higher rates than the next 30 years after that time." Elliott and Merrill (1961:747) also reach a similar conclusion after noting similar trends in many Western nations: "Suffice to say that divorce reached an all-time high as a direct consequence of the war and wartime marriages." Leslie and Korman (1989:502-3) justify the relationship between war and divorce in terms of quick fixing of marriages, the development of new behaviour as a result of separation, as well as the strain of post-war reunion.

Society is, indeed, dynamic but what is special about modern war is its ability to facilitate social change. As Merrill (1968) notes, the cultural traits that are introduced into modern society at normal times are accelerated at a greater pace during the total war. It is true, according to Alayli (1995), that war brings about, to some extent, group solidarity by directing people's effort to a common enemy. However, the forces that generate bonds are offset many times by the destructive forces launched by the war (Elliott and Merrill, 1961; Pavalok and Elder, 1990). The disorganization of group relations is also intensified. Merrill (1968:2-3) summarizes the sociological implication of war as follows:

War time social change represents population migration, social mobility; ... the increased number of broken families, some broken permanently by death or desertion, others temporarily by the absence in the armed forces...

Eritrea has also been a war-torn country in Africa. The 30-year armed struggle for independence that culminated victoriously in 1991 has continued after independence in the form of a border dispute. The two phases of war have had a massive impact on the country's human population resources. The first phase of the war alone accounted for the death of some 50,000 fighters, while 65,000 were disabled (Government of Eritrea, 1993:39). In addition, over 100,000 civilians were displaced (Ibid: 39), and between 700,000 to 1,000,000 migrated (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995:2). Although the immediate and detailed effect of the war on Eritrean families has not been documented, it should be noted that many marriage vows were broken with the length of separation, even with the actual desertions (Phillips, 1992:19). The fact that 45 percent of households in Eritrea are headed by women indicates the negative impact of the war on the social structure of the families (Ministry of Local Government, 2000).

To sum up, death, migration, separation and displacement are the 'fruits' of a war, which are responsible for a demographic disruption or weakening of marital bonds. The other indirect impact of a war on the family is through the influence of the economic and socio-cultural life of a family, which is discussed below.

### 2.2.2 **Economic factors**

Leslie and Korman (1989:503) argue that economic problems are positively correlated with a divorce rate. In their analysis of divorce in the U.S. during the 1930s depression period, they established that the rate lowered from 7.9 divorces per 1000 marriages to 6.1. Leslie and Korman (1989) explain the association in terms of the cost of divorce. Divorce incurs great expenses in order to obtain legal approval (i.e., court process), and post-divorce arrangements, such as property division, child maintenance and the like are often unaffordable during times of financial hardship (Ibid, 1989: 503-4).



Lauer (1989:461), on the other hand, contends that income is one of the best predictors of family stability. Financial problems tend to create enormous strain in marital relationships, and hence can lead to divorce. Similarly, Aghajanian (1986:751) argues that the relative increase in the divorce rate in Iran since early in the eighties has been partly attributed to the economic hardship: ... with deterioration of economic conditions - increased unemployment, raising costs of living, and black market prices as the imposed war with Iraq continues - daily life in Iran has become more conducive to divorce.

Jergensen (1986:225) argues from a different angle despite the correlation of financial problems with divorce. He notes many instances of lower income marriages that are stable and satisfying to both partners. There are also divorce cases among higher income families. This fact has led Jergensen (1986) to the conclusion that a number of factors have to be considered besides the level of income. He stressed two points: firstly, no matter what the level of income, couples are more likely to obtain marital happiness if the income meets their expectations. The other more important factor is the ability to effectively use the available money. Jergensen (1986:225) argues that unwise utilization is a source of friction, and "management of financial resources, whether they are plentiful, moderate or meagre, is a key to translating income in to satisfying marriage and family relations."

The economy of Eritrea was in a state of continuous deterioration and devastation until independence, i.e., 1991 (Government of the State of Eritrea, 1994). In addition to poverty, recurrent drought and famine, the pre-liberation war had weakened the economic structure of the country. Furthermore, the post-independence rehabilitation process has been severely crippled by the border conflict. As Elliott and Merrill (1961:742) note, total wars are known in history not only by their destruction of the socio-economic infrastructure of a country, but also by the large amount of war time expenditures that go into non-productive military items, and most often have a debilitating effect on the standard of life of the people. This has caused a sharp rise in consumer price inflation in Eritrea. According to the Ministry of Finance (2002), the inflation for Asmara increased from 35.9 percent in 1997 (pre-war) to 107.07 percent in 2000

On the whole, Jergensen's (1986) approach to money matters is comprehensive as the emphasis is on how a couple manage their resources and set their need expectations in relation to the income. The financial pressure as a result of the overall economic conditions can be seen as complementary to Jergensen's view.

### 2.2.3 **Socio-cultural factors**

This sub-section focuses on two major issues: the sex ratio imbalance and the emergence of a "dual society" (modern versus traditional patriarchy). The literature shows how they are linked to divorce.

#### 2.2.3.1 **Sex Ratio**

While the term "sex ratio" is common among demographers, only sociologists have attempted to explain its implication on a society, and particularly on marriage relationships (Guttentag and Second, 1983). It shows the proportion of males to females. Gillin and his associates (1962:116) attempt to elaborate the far-reaching consequence of low sex ratio on women as follows:

Many...women of childbearing age must... face the alternative of remaining unmarried and childless, or marrying less desirable men that they would otherwise consider. Not only does such a situation have unfavorable biological implications, but also it creates new dangers of unhappiness and maladjustment within the marital relationship.

In their famous thesis, "Too many Women?" Guttentag and Second, (1983:19) also argue that if the sex ratio deviates considerably from its ideal state at marriageable age, it will have a social consequence on the institution of family and society at large: in societies with high sex ratio (i.e., with a relatively under supply of women), women will be highly valued, especially for their roles as wives and mothers. As a result of the scarcity, men will be eager to seek a partner and enter into a long-term commitment to the marriage. The culture of a high sex ratio society, too, emphasizes the male commitment to single partnership. Trend and South (1989:393), on their part, note that men tend to use the available institutional mechanisms, such as

restricting the legal grounds for divorce and strong stigma to divorce, in order to limit women's opportunity to dissolve marriages. A reverse trend is apparent in societies with a low sex ratio. Young men tend to postpone marriage because of the excess availability of women and if they marry, they are more apt to divorce due to a lack of commitment within their existing marriage (Guttentag and Second, 1983:20). The possibility for re-marriage is much higher for divorced men than women. Instead, Guttentag and Second, (1983) further argue that mother-headed families increase markedly; women are more likely to be viewed as sex objects, and the sharing of a man or adultery would be less offending culturally. At the same time, men have the relative freedom and tolerance from the society to establish multiple relationships with women.

There is a gap in the sex ratio of childbearing age groups within cities in different countries. If we look at, for instance, the sex ratio of the Kagamega district of Kenya, and Baguio city of the Philippines, it was 91 (Kenya, 2000) and 107.9 (National Statistics Office, 2002), respectively. Also, what Japan considers its greatest sex ratio is in the Kagoshimo district, where the ratio is 88.4 (Statistics Bureau and Statistics Center, 2002).

In the case of Eritrea, the 1995 Demographic and Health Survey indicates a total sex ratio of 83 for the urban population. The ratio is much lower in age groups between 30-34 and 35-39, which is 56.7 and 41.2, respectively (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995:10). This is attributed mainly to the selective death and migration in the course of the prolonged war for liberation (Ibid, 1995: 10). The demographic disruption is expected to have an influence on the marriage relationships.

#### **2.2.3.2 The notion of a "dual society" in Eritrea**

The typical form of social organization in Eritrea has been that of patriarchy, in which the male head of a household assumes the role of a breadwinner, and exercises absolute power over his dependent female and male family members (Wilson, 1991;Phillips, 1992). In this type of arrangement, a woman most often stays at home to raise and nurture children and to look after the domestic chores. The head of a

family, the patriarch, has the final authority in matters of finance, and other spheres of family life. This institutional structure of marriage is supported by custom, belief, religion and traditional laws (Bernard, 1982; Walby, 1990). Leslie and Korman (1989:53) argue that patriarchy is associated with a double standard of sexual morality, masculine privilege in divorce, arrangement of children's marriage by adults, and low status of women.

Meanwhile, the EPLF has introduced socio-cultural programmes in the previously liberated part of Eritrea (Houtart, 1980; Wilson, 1991). Women were encouraged to participate in all fields of activity: administrative, technical, even in combat units (Silkin, 1983:911). For the first time in the history of this country, women in the previously liberated area, including single mothers, are entitled to land ownership (Wilson, 1991). Moreover, the Marriage and Divorce Law, which was promulgated in 1977, affected the customary practice. Parental arrangement of marriage was replaced by mutual consent of the marrying party. The involvement of local community in the marriage ceremony and dowry system was banned and marriage partners were granted the right to dissolve their marriages unilaterally. Houtart (1980:108) describes the changes "totally contrary to the laws and tradition of the patriarchal society."

On the other hand, Alayli (1995:28) argues that although the radical socio-cultural programme was progressive, it has become a source of tension after independence. The country has experienced what Alayli (1995:28) calls a "dual society" - those who were influenced by the reform and those under the colonial regime. According to Firebrace and Holland (1984:41), the attempt to bring a similar change among the latter has not only shown a slow pace, but actually encountered resistance. An interesting study conducted by the German Development Institute (1995:25) on the re-integration of the demobilized fighters confirms the presence of this dichotomy, where the traditional patriarchal social system is confronted by the democratic and egalitarian way of life of the former liberated area as experienced by the ex-combatants. The study also reveals a relatively high incidence of divorce among the ex-combatants (Ibid, 1995:36). Alayli (1995:30) explains the cause of this phenomenon in terms of cultural conflict:



... this may not simply be a result of the emancipation of former EPLF fighters. A number of the women ex-fighters interviewed spoke of the way in which, following liberation, some male comrades' families had pressured them into divorcing their ex-fighter wives and remarrying younger, more conventional, civilian women.

In sum, although the socio-cultural transformation refers to the part of Eritrean society who lived in the formerly liberated area, the influence has been more apparent among men and women fighters. This concept is, therefore, appropriate in the light of the ex-fighters.

### **2.2.3.3 Causes (interaction-based) of Divorce**

In many societies, which practice the adversarial system, divorce is granted on explicit grounds, and most often, we find adultery, desertion, and cruelty as the common grounds (Montero and Dowell, 1986; Government of Eritrea, Transitional Civil Code, 1991; Gatland, 1997). However, the explicit grounds tell us little about what really breaks apart a marriage, because it is not uncommon among disputing marriage partners to use those grounds as pretext for getting approval from a court. Instead, the grounds reflect the attitude of a society towards adultery, desertion and cruelty. On the other hand, the causes comprise "those tensions and irritations which make it impossible for a man and a woman to 'get along' within the bonds of matrimony" (Elliott and Merrill, 1961:393). The search for the real causes must go beyond the legal records, into the minds and hearts of the spouses.

In his analysis of counseling records of 600 couples seeking divorce, Levinger (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) finds out a broader spectrum of reasons for marital failure. (see table 2.1). According to his findings, wives had frequently complained more about physical and verbal abuse, their husbands' drinking, and neglect of family, and financial problems. Husbands, on the other hand, reported more complaints than the wives did about in-law difficulties and sexual incompatibility. Levinger's (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) findings will be considered in the light of the Eritrean experience to establish what features more prominently in this context.

Table 2.1 Marital complaints by sex and social position of respondents (600 couples)

WIVES		HUSBANDS	
COMPLAINT	PERCENT	COMPLAINT	PERCENT
Mental cruelty	40	Mental cruelty	30
Neglect	39	Neglect	26
Physical abuse	37	Infidelity	20
Financial problem	37	Sexual incompatibility	20
Drinking	27	In-laws	16
Infidelity	24	Lack of love	14
Verbal abuse	24	Financial problem	9
Lack of love	23	Verbal abuse	8
Sexual incompatibility	14	Drinking	5
In-laws	7	Excessive demands	4
Excessive demands	3	Physical abuse	3

Source: Levinger, G. (1966). Source of marital Dissatisfaction Among Applicants for Divorce. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 36 p.805 Table 1. In. Schulz, D.A. (1982). *The Changing Family: Its Function and Future* p.234 Table 10-1

#### 2.2.3.3.1 In-law trouble

Marital tensions relating to in-laws are part of folklore in virtually all societies. Elliott and Merrill (1961) attribute the problem of in-laws to the failure of couples to emancipate themselves from their families of procreation. Since the emotional attachment is generally stronger between mother and child than between father and child, the mother-in-law is a greater source of tension for the couple. Landis and Landis (1962) further note that the pattern of attachment has to do with the parents' sex role differentiation; while the father is usually more occupied with making the family's living and hence spends a considerable amount of his time outside the home, the mother most often has a special interest in children and domestic chores, and therefore perceived of as a source of pleasure and security. Landis and Landis (1962) believe that the continuation of parental dominance is often intolerable to the other spouse. This is especially true to the wife as she strives to establish herself in her new status.

In her analysis of in-law friction, Duvall (1964:197) finds out not only the most problematic nature of the mother-in-law, but also her exclusive tendency of being “meddlesome, possessiveness, and nagging”. Such behaviour is sometimes called “mother-in-law syndrome”. It should be noted, however, that in-law disagreements are a factor affecting the early years of marriage more than middle and later years, which indicates problems of in-law adjustment (Landis and Landis, 1962). Duvall (1964) also argues that the problem is not felt the same in all societies: in repressive cultures, it is most often tolerated but it is a major problem in communities where socio-economic and cultural changes are rapidly experienced.

In-law problems are pre-eminent in Eritrea, since the extended family along the patriarchal social system is still common (Phillips, 1992). Thus, the contribution of Elliott and Merrill (1961) (i.e., the notion of mother and son attachment), Landis and Landis (1962) (i.e., sex role differentiation), and Duvall's (1964) concept of "mother-in-law-syndrome" have analytical weight.

#### 2.2.3.3.2 **Infidelity**

While in-law problems stem from affinal (through marriage) relations, the involvement of a third person in the marital pair through extra marital relations also poses a serious threat to the marriage. According to Lawson (1988:36), adultery does not merely signify an additional person to the marital dyad, but “ despoils, dilutes, poisons, pollutes or debases the marriage with the addition of ... a person.” Because of this, adultery is a sin to the believer, and a crime for most of the population (Bowman, 1970). Adultery can be classified broadly into two types: an explicit affair such as that with a concubine or mistress, called open or parallel adultery. This is not conceived of as a serious breach of marital relations. The other type, clandestine or traditional adultery, is an implicit one, and greater effort is made to keep it secret, for it is considered a break off of the marriage vow (Lawson, 1988:52-53). Generally, a casual affair without personal commitment, is more likely to be tolerated. In addition, a spouse who has faith in the marriage is less concerned with the act, as long as it is not evidenced (Dicks, 1967).



It is worth noting that while extramarital relations by either spouse is generally condemned by religion and the law, the act is, according to Lawson (1988), entirely women's problem. Firstly, the wife commits double deception by concealing the real father in the case of procreation. In other words, the husband fathers another man's child. Secondly, the husband is less tolerant to the act than his wife is, due to the difference in the frequency of infidelity. Most societies also acknowledge to some extent, the necessity for an affair as an escape valve from marital tension for the male, but not the female.

The instance of sexual double standards is apparent among some sections of the Eritrean Population. In spite of the fact that the Christian tradition is strictly monogamous, the practice of concubinage is especially common among some Christians (Phillips, 1992:13). Such practice is expected to create marital tension.

#### 2.2.3.3.3 **Violence**

Despite the view that a home is a source of security and affection, many marriages are characterized by violence. The latter refers to the physical and/or verbal abuse by one spouse against the other, which is more serious in the world of family violence (Belkin and Goodman, 1980:410). According to Kurz (1995:52), about 10 to 20 percent of women all over the world are beaten each year by a male intimate. In her sample study of 129 divorced women, Kurz (1995:53) further reveals that 70 percent of the women from all walks of life and races were physically abused by their husbands at least once; 50 percent experienced violence at least two to three times; and 19 percent reported that they left their marriages due to the violence.

Belkin and Goodman (1980:411-412) argue that the widespread use of violence within the marriage relationship is the result of two factors: firstly, a woman who is brought up in an abusive family situation is more likely to consider violence as a predictable part of the marital experience. On the other hand, violent behaviour is not only a shocking incidence but also intolerable if a woman has not been socialized to accept such patterns as normal. Secondly, there has been institutional support for such violence. Unlike the violence outside a family, inter-spousal violence has been seen as private, not public. Most often the case is reduced to "domestic quarrel" (Ibid, 1980:

413). A similar bias is also apparent in a society. According to Leslie and Korman (1989:402), "there has been a long standing tradition that the family unit is sacred and that what goes on within the family is the family's business." In fact it has been estimated that between one fourth and one fifth of all American adults consider it normal for a couple "to hit one another under certain circumstances" (Ibid, 1989: 403).

While violence occurs within families of all socio-economic strata, incidences thereof appear to be higher among the lower stratum (Finkelhor, 1980; Straus and Steinmetz, 1980). Generally, violent behaviour is exercised by men who are "underachievers in their worker-earner role"; they have inferior social status to that of their wives, and their achievement potential falls below their wives' expectations (Butler, 1979:368). Men's feelings of inferiority due to the discrepancies in status, or their frustration as a result of perceived failure in meeting their parental responsibility in connection with the "worker-earner role", could culminate in the use of violence against their wives (Ibid, 1979: 368). On the other hand, Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1976:263) argue in a slightly modified way by stressing the adverse role of wives.

In blue-collar marriages, when husbands are inadequate providers, wives tend to be overly sensitive to various faults in their husbands and may blame their failure on these factors. In reaction to such fault finding, a husband may become more anxious about economic inadequacy and may take out his frustrations in drinking, angry outbursts, [or] violence...

According to O'Brien (1971:697), violent behaviour is not necessarily "a sub-cultural disposition"; instead, it is a phenomenon associated with "the father-husband role who did not achieve capacities normally associated with this role." Thus, it could manifest in either social class.

Apart from this, some evidence indicates that violence is also more common in families with a strong patriarchal structure (Gelles, 1974; Leslie and Korman, 1989). The argument is that patriarchy is, according to Lerner (1986:239), "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women..." through the appropriation of power. This type of marriage relationship where "the authority and power

conferred on men by the role of husband (and the dependence conferred on women by the role of wife) actually promotes the likelihood of violence (Dobash, 1980). Differential marital responsibility and authority gives a husband both the perceived right and obligation to control his wife's behaviour, and thus the means to justify beating her (Ibid, 1980). In connection to this, Belkin and Goodman, (1980:412) note that men sometimes use wife beating to demonstrate their authority and domination over their partners. Men in these instances tend to manifest their view of women as merely their property and thus subject to their whims.

While violence is a threat to marital stability, the outcome depends on the nature of the violence and the abused wife (Leslie and Korman, 1989:404). Violence that occurs very often and entails severe consequences, leads to divorce. Moreover, a housewife is more likely to tolerate an abusive marriage than a working wife is, because of the economic dependence of the former on her husband. A study on 251 abused women reveals that those who were prone to divorce were "employed, were involved in the relationship for a shorter period of time...and had tried a greater number of ways to stop the abuse (Ibid, 1989: 404).

In sum, violent behaviour in a marriage relationship could be due to a failure in role performance or the prevalence of an imbalance in the power relationship between a couple. Its outcome depends on the social acceptance of domestic violence and the degree of dependency of a wife on her spouse.

#### 2.2.3.3.4 **Lack of love**

Love is an important ingredient for a happy and stable marriage relationship. According to Butler (1974:52-3), love involves "a strong commitment" and "a strong emotional attachment" in a marital union, and hence divorce is rare among such couples.

Despite the significance of love, not all marriages are established solely on love criteria. Most people have cultural restrictions to choose their mate from the same race, religion, and other common socio-cultural backgrounds (Leslie and Korman, 1989:365-6). In some traditional societies, mate selection is highly influenced by

parents (Ambrose and Perry, 1976; Phillips, 1992;). With regard to falling in love, Butler (1970:55) argues that the criteria for mate selection are different for women and men. Whilst the former tend to focus on a person "who is intelligent and has high status", men are more interested in the "physical attractiveness" of women. Other studies also emphasize the importance of the latter. In his ranking analysis of the factors that attract persons to one another, Byren (1970;cited in Henslin, 1985:191-2) concludes that 90 percent of the male respondents ranked physical attractiveness as most important, but that the same was not true for women. Instead, 92 percent of the women ranked "value and attitudinal similarity" as more significant. The finding supports the notion that "on the whole, women tend to love men for their character, while men tend to love women for their appearance"(Ibid, 1970).

Research has shown that physical attractiveness has important social consequences. Berscheid and Walster (1974) note that as a result of the "physical attractiveness stereotype", attractive wives enhance their husbands' social prestige. By implication, the absence of attractiveness may not only prevent husbands from loving their wives, but also reduce their social prestige. Similarly, Bowman (1974:225-6) argues that while "marrying for love" adds richness to the marital union, its absence could cause instability, and hence divorce.

#### 2.2.3.3.5 **Heavy drinking**

Heavy drinking is, according to Elliott and Merrill (1961:190), a tendency of unhappy persons "to drink to excess", a primary motive for which, is "the elimination or reduction of anxiety." It is argued that such anxiety is associated with joblessness, insecurity or dissatisfaction in the employment world (Newman, 1988; Kurz, 1995). Although it cuts across all socio-economic boundaries, the overwhelming majority are men. In fact, in some societies like the United States, the traditional belief that heavy drinking is more a behaviour of males than females, is virtually disappearing with the increase in the number of female alcohol abusers (Coleman, 1988:352). The worst side of alcohol is that most of the heavy drinkers play an important role within the family, which includes, as Belkin and Goodman (1980: 417 ) note, "parents, head of nuclear families, financial providers, [and] primary caretakers of their children."



Heavy drinking impacts heavily on the family life. In the United States, for instance, it is "the largest single factor cited in the cause of marital failure (Belkin and Goodman, 1980:417). Similarly, Kurz (1995:56) cites out drinking as one of the main reasons given by her sample respondents for ending their marriages.

The association between drink and family disruption seems not too difficult to explain. Elliott and Merrill (1961:199) argue that a heavy drinker is hardly a responsible husband. He barely has time to care for, and money to support his family. Resources are wasted at the expense of his family. Instead, family love is replaced by domestic violence. The latter is confirmed in Kurz (1995:57) findings, where some of the heavy drinkers also used violence against their wives. In general, the adverse effect of drink may be summarized as follows:

Excessive drinking...tends to deteriorate the social role of the user. [The latter] is unable to play his role in the manner which society expects. Conjugal affection, with its network of obligations and expectations, is difficult for the individual whose interest is centered upon the bottle. The [heavy drinker] becomes increasingly selfish, aggressive, and demanding, qualities which are accentuated by the demands of drink. Elliott and Merrill (1961:200).

Because of the above facts, Coleman (1988:352) concludes that the likelihood for divorce among heavily drinking couples is significantly higher than those among non-excessive drinkers.

#### **2.2.3.3.6 Behaviour incompatibility**

Researchers have shown that one of the areas of marital conflict is behaviour incompatibility (Foster, 1960; Elliott and Merrill, 1961; Belkin and Goodman, 1980). From a sociological point of view, behaviour patterns are "methods of response learned by the individual in a particular social setting (Elliott and Merrill, 1961:362). Since marriage involves a pair of individuals "who are unique personalities, each with certain set beliefs, values and expectations", the partners may fail to make the adjustments necessary for a functional marriage relationship (Belkin and Goodman, 1980:377). Furthermore, Elliott and Merrill (1961:362) argue that although behaviour

patterns are learned in the process of socialization, they are not easily amenable to modification once they are embedded in the personality.

The above arguments imply that it is not the occurrence of a problem that makes some marriages unsuccessful, but rather the failure of the marriage partners to adapt to a compatible role situation. Foster (1960:127-8) elaborates the problem of behaviour adjustment as follows:

There are...many adequate and satisfying ways for a couple to handle [their marital issue], it is often the value one places on a certain form or idea, which makes it difficult for him to see the other person's point of view or make a modification of his own belief or behaviour in the interest of harmony. It hurts one's pride to adjust and most people do not like to be hurt. This is one reason many individuals like to have the other person make whatever change there is to be made. Otherwise, one has to accept the other personality or leave the situation by...divorce.

Couples may show variations in behaviour in several aspect of married life. Elliott and Merrill (1961:363) broadly classify them into two categories. On the one hand are "social manners, personal hygiene, and conversational usages." These are known as, in the field of marital tensions, "symbolic factors". They are hardly sufficient reasons in their own right to create marital tensions, but they represent for more complex tensions (Ibid, 1961: 363). A spouse who hates his/her partner's manner or personal habits may resort to divorce, but the hatred may actually be caused by differences in class background. On the other hand, there are behaviour patterns, which refer to "ways of making decisions and the treatment of other persons". They are not only "symbolic", but also "real" sources of marital conflict (Ibid, 1961: 363). According to Elliott and Merrill (1961), the pattern of authority is among the real sources of marital tension. The conception of the authority of each spouse, which is influenced by early family experience, may not be compatible to one another. For example, one may want to dominate, and expect the other to be submissive. If the tension that results from conflicting role expectations in the realm of authority is not resolved through compromise or adjustment, it may lead to divorce (ibid, 1961: 363).

The question of authority and domination is, therefore, an important issue in a family relationship, and will be considered in this study.

#### 2.2.3.3.7 Lack of communication

One of the secrets for an enduring and stable marital relationship is good communication between the couple (Belkin and Goodman, 1980:208). Despite the rapid social changes, some families remain strong by renegotiating each other's role to suit the changing situation. Miller et al (1975; cited in Belkin and Goodman, 1980:208-210) believe that effective communication has essential elements which includes, among other things, the following: the ability to understand one's emotions and thoughts, and that of a partner; awareness of the rules of marriage i.e., what to do, how, when to do and the like, and; the level of openness to speak out about one's feelings and the partner's readiness to accommodate those feelings. Stinnett (1985:310), in his article "Strong Families", describes the features of strong families as follows:

...these families do fight. They get mad at each other, but they get conflict out in the open and they are able to talk it over, to discuss the problem. They share their feeling about alternative ways to deal with the problem and in selecting a solution that is best for everybody.

Despite the significance of communication in eliminating the potential risk of marital failure, Stinnett (1985) adds, not all couples spend adequate time with each other and communicate. Dr. Virginia Statir, as cited in Stinnett (1985:232), notes that the "fragmented" family and those who do not take sufficient time for dialogue can only communicate through rumour. Burr and his associates (1993:232), on their part, note that "when communication is poorer and less effective, others [sic] are unaware of the intentions, feelings, and desires of others [sic]. Thus, the intentions and feelings of a spouse may not be understood properly by the other partner.

In sum, effective communication is key to a stable marital relationship, but a communication barrier may lead to misunderstanding and marital failure. Key



concepts of analytical value are the lack of openness and poor communication that may exist between marriage partners.

#### 2.2.3.3.8 Sexual incompatibility

Sex is an important part of marital life. In many societies, a sexual relationship before marriage is tabooed or hardly approved of, and individuals may also frown upon it for moral reasons (Henslin, 1985:344). But after marriage, adult partners are not only free to have sex, but they are also expected to. In this dominant mode of sexual expression, marriage partners are assumed to obtain sexual gratification. In fact, Belkin and Goodman (1980:390) argue that marital satisfaction is highly influenced by the degree of sexual satisfaction. In a compatible sexual relationship, when a partner is able to satisfy the other, marital satisfaction tends to increase as the frequency of the sexual relationship increases.

On the other hand, dissatisfaction in the sexual aspect of marriage can affect marital life in general (Butler, 1979; Belkin and Goodman, 1980; Coleman, 1988). According to Butler (1979:93), if husband and wife are not compatible with one another sexually, "there will be continual stress and dissatisfaction in the relationship." The problem will not stop there; the unsatisfied party may seek a sexual outlet outside the marriage, which is more likely to cause the relationship to deteriorate (Ibid, 1979). In his analysis of marital problems in the U.S., Coleman (1988:128) notes that "about half of all married couples experience sexual problems severe enough to impair the marriage." The most common marital complaint related to sex is the "unequal level of desire", that is, one has a strong sex drive, and the other a lesser one (Masters and Johnson, 1985; cited in Coleman, 1988:347). The discrepancy can be aggravated by differences in a couple's "knowledge about sexual behaviour..., in their sexual skills and preferences" (Coleman, 1988:347). According to Butler (1979:133), the sexual problem has gender patterns: while husbands most often complain about the fact that their partners are "not interested enough in sex or responsive enough sexually", wives are more concerned about their husbands' strong sexual desire. Levinger (1965) sees the problem from another dimension: his findings reveal that while both husbands and wives reported sexual incompatibility, the former was more concerned than the latter.

Some researchers (Butler, 1979; Coleman, 1988) argue that the sexual behaviour of men and women is mainly influenced by the culture of the society to which they belong. Coleman (1988:130) elaborates what he calls "adversive conditioning" as follows:

Many women, and a lesser number of men, have been subjected to early training in which they are indoctrinated with the idea that sex is dirty and evil - something that they have to put up with or get through quickly. The attitudes and inhibitions established by such early training can lead to a great deal of later conflict and guilt in sexual behaviour, both in and out of marriage.

Although societies approve marital sex, the learning of sexual values and behaviours, in most cases, is not part of socialization (Ibid, 1988: 130). Instead, individuals rely on their peers and other important groups to fulfil this role (Henslin, 1985:345). In addition to the general unhealthy attitude toward sex, Coleman (1988:131) notes, the "lack of emotional closeness" between the partners can lead to sexual incompatibility. One of the couple may be in love with another, or may find one's partner unattractive. Hence it can be concluded that "sexual behaviour is primarily a culturally conditioned response rather than a result of innate drives", and the inhibitions, fears and other "adversive conditioning" are more likely to affect marriage relationships by creating sexual dissatisfaction between marriage partners (Coleman, 1988).

On the whole, an unhealthy attitude towards sex and a lack of emotional closeness between a couple can be a source of sexual incompatibility which, in turn, may lead to divorce.

#### **2.2.3.3.9 Loss of virginity**

Virginity refers to a state of abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage (Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1976:59). Such a standard is maintained in some societies. In his sample of 250 societies, Murdock (1960;cited in Leslie and Korman, 1989:36) reveals that 44 societies prohibit premarital sex relationships, and 6 others mildly disapprove it. While the obligation to keep virginity ideally refers to both sexes, the reality is different. Reiss (1960a), for instance, argues that there is a so called "double

standard", which insures that the premarital sexual relations of men (but not women) are practically tolerated:

Traditionally the abstinence standard and the double standard have existed side by side, with abstinence being viewed as almost a kind of "official" standard while covertly the double standard [is] widely accepted and put into practice.

There are different explanations for societies' insistence on premarital virginity. Murdock (1960; cited in Leslie and Korman, 1989:36) believes that it has more to do with the prevention of pregnancy than with being a moral issue. The preservation of premarital virginity of females can also be associated with the prospect and stability of marriage. According to Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1976:93), daughters are usually discouraged from premarital sexual relations in order to be entitled to "innocent, pure [and] good girls"; on top of this, they are likely to "win the greater respect and admiration of [men]." Similarly, Rainwater (1969; cited in Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1976:92) notes that the virginity of women is highly valued by men. In some societies, the reward is material. Malinowski (1964; cited in Belkin and Goodman, 1980:15-6), for instance, notes payment of bride price among the Trobrianders of New Guinea as "a reward for guarding her virtue (called the 'price of a virgin')."

On the other hand, the loss of virginity has severe social consequences. Among the Baganda of Central Africa, for instance, "virginity is valued; its absence reflects negatively on the girl's parents and clan (Queen et al., 1961:84). Similarly, in Eritrea, the value attached to premarital virginity of females is very high. A husband has a traditional right to divorce his wife if her virginity is "questioned or risked" (Phillips, 1992:17).

#### 2.2.3.3.10 **Childlessness**

Childlessness is a source of tension for many couples. Since one of the functions of a family is procreation, the role of fertility in influencing marital stability is evident. In other words, childlessness is associated with high divorce rates and a rapid divorce process (White and Edwards, 1986). According to Jacobson (1950; cited in Elliott and Merrill, 1961:425), the first five years of marriage are crucial for childless couples. In

his analysis of divorce statistics of the United States, Jacobson establishes that "the divorce rate for persons married five years or less is nearly three times higher for childless couples than for those with children." On the other hand, the birth of the first child reduces the likelihood of divorce in the year following the birth virtually to nil (Whaite et al., 1985). However, this does not lead to the conclusion that the arrival of every subsequent child prevents the occurrence of divorce in a family. According to White and Edwards (1986), it can be generally said that as children get older, the probability that couples translate marital dissatisfaction into divorce is minimized.

#### 2.2.3.4 Summary

The review of the literature has identified specific areas of marital conflict which can lead to divorce. It has also revealed how relevant changes in the sphere of human life influence the social order of a society in general, and the stability of a family in particular.

While the above-mentioned factors have relevance to the study, it is important to distinguish between those, which have a direct influence on marital relationships, and those indirectly associated with it. The analytical significance of a war is indirect, through influencing the sex ratio and economic lives of a society. Similarly, Guttentag and Second's (1983) approach to divorce (the notion of sex ratio) has analytical weight in relation to the pattern of sexual double standards in a marriage relationship, but, as a structural factor, it features indirectly. Lauer (1989) and Jergensen (1986) identify economy as a significant factor although the former focuses on the level of family income and the latter emphasizes its management and the expectations of the couple. Both approaches will be used where applicable.

On the other hand, Levinger (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) identifies more specific factors that directly affect the marriage relationships (see table 2.1). Since his analysis is based on the counselling records of couples who sought out divorce, the narrative accounts of the couples (their lived experience) could be seen as 'primary sources' of marital tension that have led to divorce. His findings are relevant to this study in terms of a comparative analysis. Other important contributors include Elliott and

Merrill (1961) who note how behaviour incompatibility, especially differences in the pattern of authority, affects the relationship in marriage. Miller et al (1975) and Stinnett (1985), argue that communication barriers within the marriage can adversely affect the marital union.

Such direct factors, which reflect the subjective experiences in marital life and their discussion, have direct bearings on the present study. The analysis of the collected data will be based on this relevant literature. But before doing so, the methodological aspect of the study is presented in the following chapter.





## CHAPTER THREE: **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter deals with the methodology and related issues governing the study. The objective is to give an account of the analytical approach that has been employed in this study, and the detailed research process that has been pursued towards the realization of this research project.

There is a general paucity of literature on divorce in Eritrea. The points of interest to the present study are: the extent of the incidence of divorce, and what causes marriages to fail, with particular reference to the city of Asmara.

This study is deemed to have academic and strategic significance in that it contributes to the limited body of knowledge on the causes of divorce in Eritrea. In addition, it may serve as a basis for the development of relevant social policy, as it is a felt-need by the concerned Ministry (Labour and Human Welfare).

From this general focus, the chapter proceeds to discuss the methodological issues and the process of conducting the study. Methodology is an important component in the field of research in order for the latter to arrive systematically at a conclusion (Haralambos and Holborn, 1990). It refers to "the detail research methods through which data are collected, and the more general philosophies upon which the collection and analysis of data are based" (Ibid, 1990: 689). Therefore, the methodology chapter elaborates the research paradigm, the research method and instruments that have been adopted in the study. It also expands on the sampling procedure and the actual field experience.

### 3.1 **ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

This study is influenced by the grounded theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990: 12), grounded theory refers to "the theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process." This theory opposes the launching of a research project with a preconceived theory in mind;

instead, "data collection, analysis, and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other (Ibid, 1990: 23; see also Strauss and Corbin, 1998). That is, " data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously, and both the processes and products of research are shaped from the data rather than from preconceived logically deduced theoretical frameworks" (Charmaz, 1988: 111). The assumption is that theory that emerges from the data is more likely to depict the 'reality' than theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on the experience or speculation. On the whole, the aim of the grounded theory is, in Glaser (1992: 43) words: "to generate theory, not to verify it."

Although a literature review as a background to an inquiry is important, grounded theorists do not believe in an exhaustive review. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 49) argue against the total review of literature for two reasons. Firstly, it is impossible for an investigator to identify in advance the major problems or to anticipate the emergent conceptual categories. Secondly, a review of the literature can paralyze a researcher analytically, by making him/her stick to it.

It is this approach that guided the data collection and analysis, and most of the literature review was done afterwards. Grounded theory consists of a systematic guideline or coding procedure, upon which the analysis of the data was based (see 3.5.4.2).

### **3.2 THE RESEARCH METHOD**

The selection of research methods is generally not simple. The decision is tied up with what is considered to be the most credible at a particular time, and it is imperative to consider the objective of the study, as well as the character and nature of the subject (Mouton & Marais, 1990). This study is aimed at identifying the incidence and causes for divorce, which may range from simple demographics to more complex and dynamic processes. The latter makes personal interaction highly valued. The nature of the sample is also such that it is difficult to gain automatic cooperation from respondents who have experienced divorce.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches seem to qualify the above requirements although they differ in their degree of significance. This study attempted to benefit from the strengths of each approach.

Quantitative research methodology has a wide range of applicability. It is convenient when the research question is simple to the respondent and free from multiple interpretations (McCracken, 1988). In a representative sample, quantification enables a researcher to make assumptions about the characteristics of a population (Cohen, 1973). Cohen (1973:39) further argues that quantitative research is directed toward a number of goals:

A researcher hopes to test, establish, or to observe relationships among abstract ideas, concepts, variables, and measurements in an effort to understand what regularities underlie observable social reality.

Whilst the testing of relationships between variables and generalization is not compatible with the nature of the sample cases in the present study, a quantitative approach was used in instances where statistical presentation was found to be appropriate. This included the number of incidences of divorce in Asmara and the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age and income level.

On the other hand, use of a qualitative approach is justified in that it creates the space and the opportunity for people to relate their stories through conversation. It encourages respondents to express freely their feelings about the subject. It is flexible and promotes the use of a semi-structured approach by including a number of pre-selected questions (May, 1993).

Feminist researchers also support the use of qualitative methods to enhance an understanding of gender relations (DeVault, 1999). They believe that there is a power relation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Finch, 1984; Opie, 1992). For this reason, Finch (1984) recommends a less

structured research approach, which reduces the hierarchical relationship between the investigator and the investigated.

Qualitative research pursues a holistic approach. It tries to examine and capture the richness of complex social phenomena (Haralambos and Holborn, 1990). As distinct from frequency distribution or a correlation between variables, the emphasis is on identifying the emerging categories and assumptions from given data (McCracken, 1988). In other words, qualitative research is, as McCracken (1988:17) summarizes: "much more of intensive than extensive in its objective."

The relevance of the qualitative approach to the present study seems clear. Firstly, the bulk of the gathered data was narrative accounts of the respondents and their versions of why their marriages failed. In other words, the narrative or descriptive data has little to do with numbers. Secondly, most grounded theory-based research fit into the qualitative tradition, because the emphasis is on what concepts and categories emerge from given data, as opposed to verifying those concepts.

To sum up, this study has mainly adopted the qualitative approach. The use of the quantitative methods was limited to indicating the rate of divorce and some demographic descriptions of the respondents.

### **3.3 THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Data is the raw material of a research project, and the quality of the latter is highly influenced by the former (Bless and Smith, 2000). Whilst it is possible that the same technique of data collection can be used for different types of research, they differ of course in their degree of suitability (Ibid, 2000). This study employed an interview as the main instrument. In addition, an attempt was made to make use of documents or secondary data.

### 3.3.1 The Interview

Face-to-face interviews with divorced women and men constituted the body of the data. An interview is one of the many possible ways of gathering information. It involves direct personal contact with the participant who is asked to answer questions related to the research problem (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985).

An interview with a sample of divorced persons was conducted in structured and unstructured ways, depending on the nature of the questions. Some questions had a high likelihood of truth in a sense that they were relatively unlikely to cause respondents either to withhold information or to give only what they considered to be an acceptable response. These included questions about age at marriage, year of marriage, number of children, and the like. The data required on these items was relatively objective and straightforward, and a structured interview was utilized to obtain such information. The other more important items that demanded exploration, such as the reasons respondents gave for their marital dissolution, were approached in an unstructured manner. The respondents were given opportunities to tell their stories or experiences. Such exploratory questions were accommodated in the interview schedule using an open-ended format with sufficient time for probing,

The rationale for using the interview was based on certain merits. First of all, "it is a good way of accessing people's perceptions, meaning, definitions and constructions of reality" (Punch, 1998:174 -5; see also Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). The fact that interviewing offers a face-to-face relationship makes it a pivotal tool, because the researcher and the respondent can explore the meaning of the questions and answers by implicitly sharing and negotiating the understanding of certain issues (Finch, 1984; Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985). Another advantage of an interview, as Brenner and his associates (1985:3) note, is the opportunity for "rapid and immediate responses."

Although the positive aspects of the interviewing method are persuasive, the researcher also recognized its limitations. The quality of data can be affected if the



interviewer has poor interviewing skills (Singleton, Straits and Straits, 1993), and the face-to-face contact may create an opportunity for bias (Brenner Brown and Canter, 1985). It is also noted that coding and analyzing open-ended responses is a time-consuming task (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982; Cited in Singleton, Straits and Straits, 1993:283; see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967). No less serious is the cost involved in a personal interview, in terms of time and money (Bless and Smith, 2000). This is especially true if the sample size is large and respondents are in scattered settings.

The author has been in the employment world for the last 15 years, and has been involved in research-related activities, including interviewing people. The author, therefore, believe that this experience played a role in reducing the drawbacks of using interview methods of data collection. Moreover, an attempt was made to make use of the established network of women's associations to facilitate the data collection process. This has minimized the cost in terms of time, energy, and money.

### 3.3.2 **Secondary data**

In addition to the data obtained from the direct interviews, the investigator made use of secondary data. The latter included judiciary records about divorced petitioners, and government legal documents. Documents and data archives can be used for triangulation purposes, and they are also ideal for a longitudinal study where a sequence of data is available over a period of time (Robson, 1993). On the whole, Singleton and his associates (1993) argue that secondary data is essential for analyzing and understanding social changes.

### 3.4 **THE SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

The participants of the study were divorced women and men. Below are details of the nature and size of the sample, as well as the selection procedures.

### 3.4.1 Divorcees

In this study of the causes of divorce, divorced persons constitute the unit of analysis. However, it is not simple in Eritrea to identify divorcees from non-divorcees, for marriages can be dissolved with or without the approval of the court decision, through traditional means. The term "divorcee" had to be operationalized in order to identify the potential informants. For the purpose of this study, any person who identified her/himself as a divorced person was considered a divorcee.

Based on this, a sample of 40 cases, 30 women and 10 men, were selected for the study. The disproportionate gender representation in the sample was justified by the fact that there is more of a tendency among women to report more marital complaints than men do (Levinger, 1965, 1976). This pattern of reporting is apparent in Eritrea. According to the archives of *Maakel* Regional Court (Asmara), the number of women petitioners for divorce in 2001 (excluding December) was thrice as much as men (340 women and 111 men; see also Thornes, 1976).

A non-probability sampling technique was used for selecting sample cases. Although the original plan was to use probability sampling using court records as the sampling frame, the records had apparent weaknesses. For example, petitioners' addresses were incomplete, which made tracing the potential respondents unthinkable. Moreover, constructing a sampling frame on the basis of court records was not comprehensive, as it excluded potential respondents who dissolved their marriages through traditional means.

The women were selected using quota sampling. This assumes that a sample reflecting important features of the population is also similar in other aspects of that population (Singleton, Straits and Straits, 1993; Huysamen, 1994). However, some scholars argue that self-selecting of respondents is subject to bias (May, 1997; Bless and Smith, 2000).

Efforts have been made to diversify the sample. In the absence of a sampling frame, the sample, (instead of the population), was first stratified by religion, gender and

locality, which was more or less in line with the socio-economic reality of the research setting. In terms of religion, the sample of 40 divorcees was divided halfway between Christians and Muslims, and the ratio of female to male was calculated to be 3 to 1. Lastly, the sample was distributed equally among the four administrative sub zones. Each stratum in the sample quota was then filled in cooperation with the NUEW<sup>4</sup>, Maakel branch staff members. The relationship between the staff and respective union members was so close that most of them knew each other in person. This has facilitated the process of identifying informants.

The Male divorcees were represented in the sample using a different method. Men have no organizations that the researcher could make use of, and therefore, a modified network sampling was employed. This is a kind of referral sampling in which “respondents initially contacted in screening a probability sample of the larger population are asked to identify members of the target population who are socially linked to the respondent...” (Singleton, Straits and Straits, 1993:164). It was utilized in a modified form in the sense that all initially contacted persons were non-divorcees. They were approached only to assist the author in identifying divorcees who were socially linked to them, such as relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues and the like. In order to reduce the likelihood of an interviewer’s bias, respondents were selected through second or third parties, and through using a number of different referrals.

### 3.4.2 The study area

Asmara is an Italian-built colonial city and is the capital of Eritrea. It was constructed by the Italian Governor, Martini, in 1897. It is the largest city in Eritrea with a population of some 435,000. However, every corner of Asmara can be reached by walking. The city has a relatively well-developed infrastructure. Transport and communication are accessible and link the city with the rest of the country. Most of the industries and major social services are concentrated in Asmara. It can be said that the city is a centre for industry, commerce and politics. Administrative-wise, it is

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<sup>4</sup> Stands for the National Union of Eritrean Women. It is a non-government, indigenous organization which is responsible for advocating the rights of women and promoting gender equality through empowerment.

divided into four sub-zones, namely the north-eastern, north-western, south-eastern and south-western sub-zones.

On the other hand, a closer look at the pattern of settlement generally indicates the life-style of the residents. The northern part is densely populated and the majority appears to be disadvantaged compared to those in the south. This trend is not a new phenomenon, but it has been inherited from a colonial past. The fact that Asmara is the biggest city with the highest perceived divorce rate in the Eritrea makes it ideal for this study.

### 3.5 **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

In this section, the development of interview questions, data collection, ethical statements, and data analysis are described.

#### 3.5.1 **Interview schedule**

Interview questions for the study were originally developed based on the general orientation from the literature. The preliminary question design was revised after a discussion with the author's former supervisor. One of the important inputs was the inclusion of male divorcees in the study. The author also took into account the relevance and feasibility of certain issues. Questions related to sexual relationships, for instance, are unlikely to be responded to, because the people generally regard them as taboos. They were, therefore, omitted.<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that some changes were made after pre-testing the interview questions. The final questions were then organized into three main sections: demographic, economic, and sociocultural categories.

In order to avoid a communication barrier, the interview questions were translated into Tigrina, which is the dominant local language in this research setting. The

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<sup>5</sup> Any discussion on sexual matters in this paper is due to the emergent concepts or categories.

translation was done in cooperation with individuals who teach the language as their profession.

### 3.5.2 **Data collection**

The period between late November 2001 and the end of January 2002 were crucial to the author. He had to travel to the East African Nation, Eritrea, to collect the research data within the above non-extendable period of time.

The first week was devoted to preparation for the actual stage of data collection. Letters of cooperation were obtained from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology of the University of the Western Cape, as well as from Asmara University in order to gain access to the research setting (Singleton, Straits and Straits, 1993). Organizations relevant to the study were identified and approached. Some necessary modification was also made on the plan due to unforeseen problems.

The data collection soon followed based on prior arrangements with the NUEW branch offices in Asmara. This was the most exciting phase, although it required considerable effort (Morse, 1994). The author adopted a flexible approach regarding the place and timing of the interview in order to reduce inconvenience on the part of the respondents. Female respondents were interviewed at their respective NUEW branch offices or homes, during office hours or spare time, weekdays or weekends, depending on their choice. The interview with male respondents was also administered in a similar manner. All interviews were conducted on an individual basis and took an average of one hour. The medium of the interviews was Tigrina, as it is their mother tongue.

### 3.5.3 **Ethical statement**

Research may have a damaging effect on the subject of investigation (Peil and Rimmer, 1982; Bless and Smith, 2000). Taking this into account, an effort was made not to violate the general ethical principles.



Most of the women respondents were selected by the NUEW branch office staff members without providing them with adequate information about the reason for their participation in the study. They were told about the aim of the research and their expected contribution after the investigator had read the consent form to them. Participation was utterly based on free will and only one woman refused to take part in the interview.

Interviews were conducted in a fairly conducive climate. However, interviews at the office offered more privacy than home interviews. In connection to this, almost all the respondents felt uncomfortable when they were asked permission to use a tape-recorder. Despite its role in facilitating communication (McCracken, 1988), many of them had a negative image of it and, therefore, found the prospect of being recorded inhibiting (May, 1993). Because of this, the author resorted to note taking in all the interviews.

Lastly, respondents in the divorce sample were not asked to give their names. Instead, a code number was given to each interviewee in order for them to retain anonymity.

#### **3.5.4 Data analysis**

The method of data analysis depends partly on the nature of the data gathered (Robson, 1993). As indicated earlier, the study comprises codeable words or numbers as well as non-numerical data (see 3.2). The former was approached statistically, whereas for the qualitative data, a grounded theory method was used to interpret the qualitative data.

##### **3.5.4.1 Statistical method**

The analytical method for quantitative data is generally less arguable as it is transparent (Punch, 1998); that is, numerical data such as age, income and education, can be counted objectively by tallying the frequency of responses. Variables with dichotomous responses, such as gender, could also be tallied in a similar manner. This type of data was analyzed using a univariate table.

The reasons that divorced persons gave for ending their marriages were stated in descriptive or narrative form. However, the categories (reasons) that emerged from the data were presented in a pie chart with the intention of providing a quick picture on the nature of the marital conflicts that the respondents experienced. It should be noted that the bulk of such data was qualitative, and the method and procedure of analysis was, as described below, different.

#### **3.5.4.2 Grounded theory method**

Qualitative data is somewhat complex. There seems to be no standardized procedure. In his comparative statement, Robson (1993:370) asserts that "there is no clear and accepted set of conventions for analysis corresponding to those observed with quantitative data." This study adopted the grounded theory approach of data analysis, as put forward by prominent grounded theorists, Strauss and Corbin (1998). The distinct feature of this approach is that conceptual categories must be developed from the analysis of the collected data, and must fit in them, rather than from the investigator's preconceived ideas, experience, logical deduction, rational thinking or speculation (Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). On the other hand, grounded theorists do not deny the need for creative thinking on the part of investigators, because the clarification of concepts and naming of categories from the bulk of unorganized data requires human skill. For this reason, Strauss and Corbin (1998:13) consider an analysis to be "the interplay between researchers and data" at personal level, and "both science and art" at field level. It is a science in the sense that the conceptualization of what is significant in the data demands some sort of objectivity or rigor. It is also an art because investigators play an interpretive role.

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) coding procedure involves four steps. It is presented hereunder along with illustrations showing how it was applied in this study.

1. Conceptualizing - Naming or labelling phenomena (i.e., discrete incident, event, act and the like) that are significant in the study (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:103). Names may come from:

- a) an analyst, after examining the contextual meaning that they evoke or

b) the words of respondents themselves, commonly known as "in vivo codes" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Concepts such as "mother-in-law problem" and "sister-in-law problem" and "drinking problem", for instance, have been taken from respondents themselves.

2. Classifying – “Grouping of concepts according to their common property or characteristics” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:104). In the above example, "mother-in-law problem" and "sister-in-law problem" have been classified as "in-laws problem", for both of them had affinal relationships with the respective respondent in the sample.

3. Digging deeper into analysis - This is the microanalysis stage, which involves "line-by-line analysis" in order to understand and define the concepts and to "develop them more fully in terms of their properties and dimensions (Ibid, 1998: 109). Strauss and Corbin (1998:110) believe that naming actions or events do not always give a full picture of what is going on, unless the relevant properties (i.e., characteristics that give meaning to concepts) are defined.

If we take, for instance, the concept "drinking problem" which was mentioned earlier, it has little explanatory power without defining some of its properties (such as "how often", "to what extent"). Phrases such as “frequent incidence”, and “until intoxicated” were relevant properties of drinking that clarified the seriousness of drinking in the sample.

4. Discovering categories - Refers to the grouping of concepts "under a more abstract higher order concepts, based on its ability to explain what is going on" (Ibid, 1998:113). This has dual purpose: it minimizes the burden of analysis, as the analyst has fewer units (concepts) to deal with and besides, categories as higher order concepts, have more analytic power (Ibid, 1998:113). For instance, "mother-in-law problem" and "sister-in-law problem" as concepts are grouped under a higher order concept called "in-laws difficulty." This procedure not only reduced the two concepts into one, but also helped the analyst to see the common and distinguishing features among in-law members in their affinal relationships.

It is worth noting that not all concepts are subject to grouping. Some of them can be taken as categories if it seems they can stand in their own right (Ibid, 1998:113). The concept "drinking problem", for example, was only re-named as "heavy drinking" after clarifying at step three. As far as naming of a category is concerned, Strauss and Corbin (1998:114) consider literature as a third source (in addition to taking words of the respondents as they are, and the pooling of concepts from data by an analyst) given that the borrowed concept is compatible to the context of a study.

Based on the above coding procedures of grounded theorists Strauss and Corbin, ten conceptual categories have emerged, which are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

### 3.6 **CONSTRAINTS**

The two months data-collecting mission in Asmara has been completed with a reasonable degree of success. The level of cooperation with the relevant government and non-government organizations was exemplary. However, there were some constraints that affected the study in one way or another.

The NUEW, *Maakel* branch didn't respond quickly to cooperation despite repeated requests from the author. The office was supposed to give formal instruction to the four sub-zone offices for the necessary collaboration. A considerable amount of time was wasted before the author established a link with the sub-zones and started interviewing the women.

The retrieval of divorce data from the high court was a laborious task. The reports were not compiled properly. No expert was assigned exclusively to the post at the time of the author visited the court. The author had to go through all the files himself.

Last but not least, there was a paucity of statistical data to support statements related to the causes of divorce. The compiled data was not comprehensive as it included only those who obtained divorce through legal means.

In summation, this chapter has outlined the methodological approach used in this study. This approach was shaped by grounded theory from which the method of data collection and analysis was derived.

The following chapter deals with the actual analysis of data generated.





## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an analysis of the causes of divorce in Asmara. The overall objective centres on investigating possible areas of marital conflict leading to divorce in the study area. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the quantitative data on the incidence of divorce in Asmara, and a univariate table is used. This is intended to demonstrate that divorce is a growing social issue in the city. The second section offers demographic information about the sample, as a background to the main body of analysis that follows. The final part is the qualitative analysis and focuses on the dynamic relationship between the respondents and their respective ex-spouses, with particular reference to the factors leading to the termination of their marriages. It relates the respondents' versions of why their marriages failed, but also attempts to position the subjective experiences and behaviours of the respondents within the broader context.

The organization of the analysis is based on the themes or categories that emerged from the interview data, using the method of analysis developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

### 4.1 DIVORCE TRENDS IN ASMARA

Divorce rate is the term used in a variety of ways to indicate the incidence of divorce in a given population. However, this was not realistic in Asmara for some practical reasons. Firstly, there has not yet been a population census to determine the rate of divorce in the country (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995). Secondly, the government body responsible for compiling information on divorce is not active in this regard. The Municipality of Asmara, Census and Civil Status Department, is supposed to keep such

records. The Department, however, has restricted itself to recording births and marriages.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the Civil Law of Eritrea (1991) allows dual court systems - the ordinary (secular) court and *Sharia* (Islamic) court - to operate in the country, which has made the centralization of the divorce statistics difficult.

Whilst these factors have prevented the production of divorce statistics especially for civil marriages, table 4.1 throws some light on the prevalence and magnitude of divorce in Asmara.



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<sup>6</sup> This was revealed after the author made a visit to the office and held a brief discussion with Berhane Ghebre Yohannes, Registration Follow up staff member, Asmara December 2001.

	YEAR PETITIONS FILED										
	1987	1989	1990	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total		
National	848	634	487	2296	1633	1045	829	1226	7029		
Regional (Asmara)	30	467	342	800	570	470	304	584	2728		
% of the total	6.20	73.66	70.23	34.84	34.91	44.98	36.67	47.63	38.81		

Table 4.1 Divorce petitions filed at national and regional levels <sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The table was not readily available but the work of the author which consumed much of his time (see 3.6).

As the above table indicates, the official divorce cases in Asmara rose from 30 in 1987 to 584 in 2001. The first three years reflect the pre-independence situation, which was characterized by a drastic increase in divorces towards the end of the eighties. After independence (i.e., 1991), the official number of divorce cases exhibited fluctuation. In absolute terms, the highest and lowest records were noted in 1997 and 2000, which were 800 and 304, respectively.

The divorce pattern among the ex-fighters, as indicated in chapter one, also showed a similar pattern. According to the archive of the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare, the rate rose from one for every 8 marriages during the second half of eighties, to one for every 3 marriages in the early nineties, and one for every 6 marriages around mid nineties.

Although the above statistics did not cover all the divorces that occurred in the city, they indicate that this social problem is quite visible.

#### **4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE**

This second section offers a profile of the divorced respondents, and by extension, of respective ex-spouses. It is based on interviews with 30 women and 10 men, who have lived in Asmara. The profile includes age, education and income. It is intended to give background information to the discussion.

##### **Age**

Participants' ages range from 17 to 55 for women, and 20 to 55 for men, with a mean age of 34.16 and 43.83 years, respectively.

### **Educational level**

A relatively higher proportion (35 percent) of the respondents had no formal education. Only 23.08 percent managed to reach secondary level, and two thirds of them are men. The rest attended school up to elementary (20.51) or middle level (17.95). The educational status of ex-spouses was also low, although there was a slight improvement. A relatively higher proportion (31.43) of them had middle level education, while on the other hand, 25.71 percent had no formal education. Among the rest, 20 percent had elementary level education, and 17 percent reached secondary level. On the whole, the educational level of the sample respondents and ex-spouses was low.

### **Occupation**

Among women respondents, 27 percent reported that they had a job before the divorce. They engaged in unskilled jobs, notably factory work (37.50), petty trade (25.00) and clerical duty (25.00). The remaining majority were housewives.

Similarly, male breadwinners, including those ex-husbands who supported the non-working women in the sample, occupied different jobs. More than half (58.33) of them engaged in manual factory work, petty trade (19.44), and technical jobs such as electrical, wood or metal work, with less formal training accounting for 19.44 percent. Other occupations included teacher, tailor, police officer, babysitter, shoemaker, cook, broker, as well as the 8.33 percent of those who worked abroad.

### **Income**

Table 4.2 Numeric distribution of average monthly income

INCOME LEVEL	300	350	499	500	510	700	900	1280	1500	1700	1800	2000	2100	2500	TOTAL
FREQUENCY	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	19



Total value = 40      Missing value = 21      Average income = 1144.16 Nakfa

N.B: Most of the women did not know their ex-husband's salary / income.

As the table indicates, the reported income of the respondents' families before divorce ranged from 300 Nakfa to 2500 Nakfa, with a median income of 1280 Nakfa.

To sum up, the demographic profile indicated that participants of the study belonged to younger as well as older generations, with educational levels generally being low. Most women respondents had no exposure to the employment world during their marital relationships. Instead, they were housewives, economically dependant upon their respective ex-husbands. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of male respondents were the breadwinners of their families, and their earnings varied from 300 to 2500 Nakfa. <sup>8</sup> Bearing this in mind, let us begin the qualitative analysis on the causes of divorce in Asmara.

#### **4.3 CAUSES OF DIVORCE IN ASMARA**

This section provides an understanding of the marital experiences of divorced respondents in relation to their respective ex-spouses. More specifically, it is concerned with the personal account of why their marriages failed.

The analysis has economic as well as socio-cultural dimensions. The argument with regard to money matters is that whilst the general economic hardship put pressure on the respondents' marriages, how to use the available resources was a crucial issue that contributed to the failure of most marriages

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<sup>8</sup> According to the current salary scale of the government, the lowest salary is 450. And 2500 Nakfa is equivalent to a salary of an employee who holds MA plus some years of work experience.

in the sample. The socio-cultural sphere, on the other hand, encompasses a wide range of reasons for marital breakdown among the sample marriages. The emergent categories (reasons) include, in addition to the money matters, the following:

- In-law difficulties
- Infidelity
- Violence
- Lack of love
- Behaviour incompatibility
- Lack of communication
- Childlessness
- Heavy drinking
- Loss of virginity and
- Sexual incompatibility

The analysis, therefore, focuses on the above complaints.

#### 4.3.1 **Economic problems / financial constraints**

Economic problems were one of the most important issues in the respondents' marriages. 20 of the 40 respondents reported that the failure of their marriages was due to financial matters. Financial problems thus comprised 28.17 percent of the reasons for marital failure in the sample. In terms of gender, 60 percent of those who were complainants are women. The respondents described the problem in different ways, but all of them acknowledged that the prevailing economic hardship in Eritrea contributed toward the crisis in their marriages.

A 49-year-old mother of 8 children, reported that the general economic condition had up-rooted her marriage:

I didn't know the income of my ex-husband but he was a petty trader, selling vegetables in the market. He asked me to move to the countryside because the cost of living in Asmara, as you know, has been tough. After I had refused to join him, he didn't take time to decide on divorce and marry another woman.

Similarly, a 40-year-old, a mother of 7 children stated:

I had been married to my ex-husband for 20 years. We lived peacefully in Ethiopia [neighbouring country] until he was deported in connection with the border conflict. The peace in our marriage started to shake after he had failed to secure a job in Eritrea. Most of the time, he was idle. This idleness caused him deep depression. He started to nag at me and virtually hated the marriage. His brother tried to support me financially, but as life became tougher even for him, he quit the assistance. I couldn't resist the situation any more. I broke the already nominal relationship.

Another 35-year-old woman, who had been married for 20 years and repatriated from abroad reported emphatically on the impact of the economic situation on their marital life:

My ex-husband was an electrician. His salary was sufficient for our living when we were abroad. When we came to Eritrea 10 years back, everything was changed gradually, especially the last two years [2000 and 2001] were acute. We felt insecure when his salary became weaker against the growing cost of living.

This period was indeed characterized by a sharp rise in inflation. In the year 2000, for instance, the price of basic items rose by 107.07 percent without a corresponding increase in salaries (Ministry of Finance, 2002).

But the same woman quoted above, blamed her husband, more than the general economy of the country, for being "irresponsible and inconsiderate" with regard to his dependents. She said:

The worst thing came when he started squandering the money by eating outside home and drinking while we were hungry. I couldn't do any thing

because the whole salary [1700 Nakfa] was at his disposal. It was really intolerable...

Many other women echoed the adverse effects of the irresponsible handling of money by their ex-husbands. The women saw financial crisis as an additional pain in their "unhappy marriages" and they decided to breakaway from the marriage relationships only when what they called the "painful marital bond" was further weakened by the financial constraints posed by their ex-husbands. A 35-years-old factory worker, who had been married for twenty years with five children, and another petty trader with six children, had these experiences:

My salary [60 Nakfa] was far from being sufficient to sustain five lives. I tried my best to maintain the relationship. You know, he [ex-husband]<sup>9</sup> has five children out of wedlock; I tolerated for the sake of our marriage. But when he failed to support us, I couldn't react in the same way because it was a question of survival. Despite the hardship we encountered, he dashed out the money elsewhere. I married to him [ex-husband] thinking that we could support each other. On the contrary, he harassed me. I didn't know his salary, but he used to contribute only 120 Nakfa to the marriage. This was hardly enough for our living. We gave up one of the two rooms we rented and started living in a crowded house because he decided that it was beyond our capacity. The kiosk that I established after the death of my first husband bankrupted because of him. I sold it for 2000 Nakfa in order to open other profitable business. But he picked up the money without my permission and lent it to a deceitful person.... It was a crisis, a bitter experience. We could have starved to death had it not been for the relief assistance. I had no reason to stay any more with such irresponsible person.

On the whole, women respondents who occupied different economic statuses believed that the family income was not properly utilized. The misuse of resources by their ex-husbands put them in a situation where they could no longer maintain the marriage relationship. Gergensen (1986:225) also notes that unwise utilization of the available financial resources is a source of marital friction and eventual divorce.

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<sup>9</sup> During the interview, some women respondents avoided using the word "ex-husband", they preferred, instead, the pronoun "he". This could be due to the hatred for the ex-husband as a person or the word itself was embarrassing for them.

Male respondents who comprised 40 percent of the financial complaints, on their part, had different accusations against respective ex-wives. They resorted to divorce because they felt that the demands and expectations of their ex-marriage partners exceeded the family earnings. The case of a 33-year-old father of one child, who engaged in a clerical job, is a typical example.

We lived together [with ex-wife] for three years in a single, small rented house. We used to pay 160 Nakfa for the rent. My salary at that time was very low, only 499 Nakfa. Yet I made every effort to satisfy her needs and make our marriage relationship joyful. Despite this, she demanded something, which I could not afford; she told me she could no longer resist living in such housing condition, and asked me to search for a better one. I accepted her demand in principle because I had also a similar ambition. But she failed to take into consideration the cost of living and my financial limitation. After all, I was busy at that time searching for a better-paid job, but she lacked the patience. I could not force her to stay in marriage as she indirectly asked me to spend the whole salary on housing rent.

Another 42-year-old metal worker and father of one child also described how the discrepancy between his level of income and his ex-wife's excessive demands led him to a decision for divorce.

I thought her desire for something expensive was due to the fact that she didn't know the amount of income I earned. I told her frankly it was 500 Nakfa, but I didn't see a change in her demands for quality furniture, quality dress and the like, which I could not think of, let alone afford them. Perhaps what I could say to you [author] is that she married to a wrong man. So I divorced her in order to get the right [rich] man.



The above case demonstrates that low levels of income have contributed to the crises in their marriages (Merton and Nisbet, 1976; Lauer, 1989). On the other hand, the unrealistic expectations or ambitions of the ex-spouses played a decisive role in the termination of their marriages through divorce (Jergensen, 1986:225).

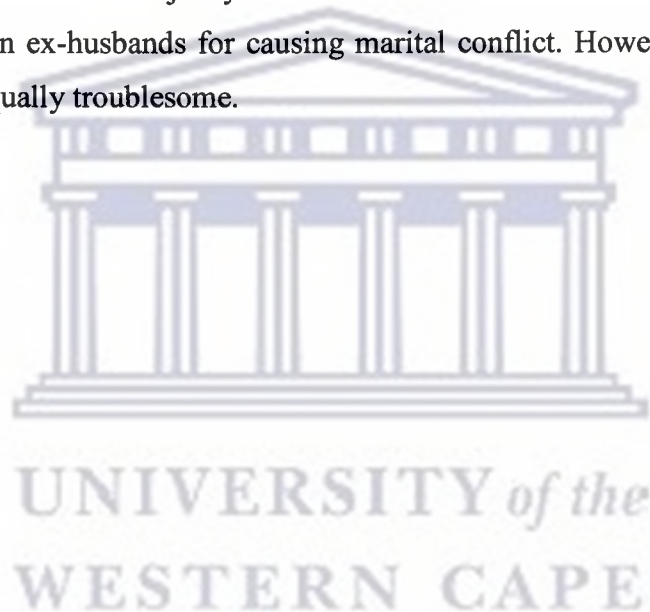
To sum up, all respondents who cited money matters as a cause of their marital conflict stated that the prevailing economic conditions in Eritrea had a negative impact on their marriage relationships. Whether the respondents were well established in Asmara, recently repatriated or deported, the high cost of living, as manifested by the sharp rise in the consumer inflation (Ministry of Finance, 2002) put pressure on their marriages. In addition to this, while women respondents blamed their ex-husbands for causing the divorce by mis-handling the income of the family, men respondents attributed the failure of their marriages to the tendency of their ex-wives to expect more out of a little income. As Jergensen (1986:225) argues, both the mismanagement of family income and the failure of the latter (income) to meet the expectations of a couple led to the failure of these marriages.

#### 4.3.2 **Socio-cultural problem**

Most of the reasons that respondents gave for ending their marriages fell under the socio-cultural spheres of family life. This sub section provides an analysis of the socio-cultural factors for the divorce, based on the marital experience of the respondents.

#### 4.3.2.1 In-law difficulties

Out of 40 respondents, 12 (30 percent) <sup>10</sup>reported that they had difficult relationships with their in-laws, which accounted for 16.90 percent of the reasons for marital failure in the sample. If we look at them along gender lines, women constituted 33.33 percent of the total female respondents, whereas men made up 20 percent of the male informants. In reality, in-law difficulties refer to the women, because the men didn't report about themselves but rather about the conflict that existed between their respective ex-wives and mothers. The majority of the informants blamed relatives by marriage other than ex-husbands for causing marital conflict. However, not all in-laws were equally troublesome.



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<sup>10</sup> Due to multiple responses, the percentage of respondents who reported a specific reason and the percentage of that reason out of the total reasons is different. The former was calculated out of 40 while the latter, out of 71.

Table 4.3 Numeric and percentage distribution of in-law problems displayed in the in-law family.

DISTRIBUTION	IN-LAW PROBLEMS					
	Mother-in-law	Sister-in-law	Mother and sister-in-laws	Father-in-law	All in-laws	Total
Numeric	5	2	3	1	1	12
Percentage	41.67	16.67	25.00	8.33	8.33	100.0

As indicated in the above table, 41.67 percent of the reported in-law conflicts was related to mothers, and exclusively mothers of ex-husbands. The cases of these divorced women can be seen in terms of the nature of the problems they faced. Some of them, like this ex-fighter woman, blamed their mother-in-laws for interfering in their marriage relationships.

In the eye of my mother-in-law, I was not the type of a wife she wished to her son [ex-husband]. She labeled me as non-traditional and non-conformist simply because I treated my ex-husband on equal basis. She made every effort to see our marriage dissolved. The conflict worsened when I protested against the use of firewood for cooking because it caused my eyes terrible irritation. Instead of sympathizing, she exploited my weakness in order to convince her son to divorce me. She succeeded indeed. He ended our relationship.

A small number of women respondents also found their mother-in-laws nagging and old-fashioned. A young mother of two, who had been married for five years, had this personal experience:

My mother-in-law never wished me happiness. Instead, she used to nag at me frequently without acceptable reason. If she saw me dressing nicely or taking care of myself that was sufficient ground for her to become uncongenial. I couldn't live in peace because of her behaviour. I attempted desertion twice in order to get rid of her. Unfortunately, I didn't succeed. But thanks God I got my freedom [after divorce].

On the whole, these informants had bad experiences with their mother-in-laws. The latter were problematic to the informants' marriages due to their interference and nagging behaviour, a tendency sometimes called "mother-in-law syndrome" (Duvall, 1964:197). Two other female informants reported that the dissolution of their marriages was the result of the interference of their respective sister-in-laws. One of them said:

Women worry about mother-in-law. But my real threat was my sister-in-law. She used to meddle in my marriage and my ex-husband humiliated me because of her meddlesome behaviour. It was unfortunate that I didn't enjoy my married life. That was why I departed from the marital union.

On the other hand, a 36-year-old Muslim mother and worker was divorcee by her husband but she blamed her sister-in-law.

I decided to join the employment world [worked as cleaner] in order to assist my ex-husband [who was a tailor] and raise our income. But my sister-in-law was a narrow-minded woman. She opposed my role as a co-breadwinner because she believed that the right place of a woman was a home. She started nagging at me and insisted that I should quit the job and concentrate on the

domestic chores. She insisted until she convinced him [ex-husband]. Because I resisted her pressure, I was divorced.

There were also incidences where both the mother and sister of the ex-husbands were involved in the conflict, which accounted for 25 percent of the in-laws conflict (see table 4.3). As mother of three children who had been married for six years stated:

You know they [mother and sister-in-laws] were like a devil! They destroyed love and harmony of our marriage by sowing seeds of hatred. Gossiping, lying and exaggerations were their everyday duties."

Thus, like the mother-in-law, the sister-in-law too was found to be problematic in the sample. She was ranked second to her mother among the family of in-laws. In terms of causing problems in marriage, this didn't simply happen, but is due to her social closeness to her mother (Ibid: 1964).

Whilst most of the in-law problems were reported by women, two male respondents acknowledged that the conflict between their mothers and ex-wives was the reason for the termination of their marital relationships. However, they accused their respective ex-wives for their lack of desire to live with the in-laws. As one respondent stated: "seeking for independent life, as my ex-wife did, is a cause of conflict in its own right."

On the other hand, female respondents had a different picture of their ex-husbands. They perceived them as being neutral persons at the initial stage of the in-laws conflict, but taking sides afterwards due to the influences of their respective mothers and / or sisters. This housewife who had been married for six years, described the above tendency in relation to her ex-husband as follows:



Although at first he [ex-husband] didn't lend them [mother and sister-in-law] his ear, they eventually succeeded in controlling his mind. He abandoned his conjugal family. He left me alone and stayed with them as if we hadn't married legally.

The involvement of male members of a family in the in-law conflict was very low in the sample. Only one housewife with two children who had been married for 8 years, reported the interference of her father-in-law, which caused the dissolution of her marriage. She described his behaviour as "too controlling." This was in connection with the money she used to receive from her ex-husband who lived and worked abroad. "He [the father-in-law] wanted to know how I spent the money for our [herself and the kids] daily living," said the informant angrily. The low level of male interference in the in-laws conflict correlated with their social role in their families (Landis and Landis, 1962). The fathers were breadwinners and spent most of their time outside their homes. On the other hand, the mother-in-laws were housewives, spending considerable amounts of their time at home. The latter partly created favourable ground for the closeness and eventual conflict with the daughter-in-laws (Ibid: 1962). Unlike the latter, no male respondent in the sample encountered difficulties from his in-laws.

The gendered nature of the in-law conflict also needs to be understood in terms of the wider cultural context of the Eritrean families. The form and organization of these families has been typically patriarchal with an extended family system (Phillips, 1992; Wilson, 1992). That is, male members of a family are normally breadwinners and highly respected, whereas female members remain at home and play a subordinate role (Lerner, 1986). In addition to the sex role differentiation, the physical closeness between mothers and their daughter-in-laws was reinforced by a patrilocal type of arrangement. Two thirds of the female respondents took up residence with their respective ex-husband's family or shared the same premises. This was possible due to the fact that patriarchy and the extended family system

entailed a patrilocal type of residence (Ibid, 1986). Even those female respondents who managed to set up independent residence (neolocal type) could not escape from the in-law conflict. This conflict showed the prevalence of the extended family system in a modified form through visiting arrangements.

Lastly, the in-law conflict had exhibited a negative influence on the duration of the respondents' marriages. Two thirds of the female respondents who found themselves in conflict with their in-laws, stayed in marital relationships for less than six years. This means that most of them had fewer years of marital experience. As Landis and Landis (1962) note, this was an indication that the few years in marital life (lack of marital experience) contributed to the adjustment problem in the relationship with their in-laws.

#### 4.3.2.2 **Infidelity**

Infidelity was the third most frequently cited reason for ending marriages in the sample. Eight out of forty respondents reported that their ex-husbands were involved with other women. This accounted for 11.27 percent of the total reasons for divorce cited in the sample. All those who complained about infidelity were women. They can be divided into two groups, depending on the severity of the impact of reporting infidelity as a reason for ending their marriages. The first group of women cited infidelity as the sole reason for their marital crisis. A 28-year-old mother of two who had been married for twelve years, said:

He totally forgot the marriage vow and engaged in adulterous relationship. I couldn't decide instantly to cut the relationship hoping that one day he would come to his sense. However, this was a mere dream. He turned from bad to worst. I started to question his insanity after discovering that he had extra marital relations with three women, which resulted in the birth of six more

children. I went into a depression. I had to stay away from him in order to stop the misery.

This act was not restricted to younger marriages. A 55-year-old mother of two also gave a similar report. The adulterous relationship of her spouse ended her forty-year marriage. The cases of the above women were distinct in the sense that their ex-husbands were engaged in clandestine or traditional adultery (Lawson, 1988:52-53). It was traditional because the act was implicit as opposed to being an explicit relationship. Both the adulterers and their wives perceived the act as a serious breach of their marriage vows, and thus the men tried to maintain secrecy around their affairs. The discovery of the act by their wives resulted in the breakdown of their marital relationships. It was this sense of a serious breach of vows, especially on the part of the wives, that brought about divorce among the sample of marriages in which husbands became involved in extraneous relationships (Ibid: 1988). The decision of this group of women for marital dissolution was also reinforced by the non-casual nature of the marital affairs (Dicks, 1967). The latter were maintained for a lengthy duration, as evidenced by the birth of children out of the wedlock.

The other group of women who complained about the adulterous behaviour of their ex-husbands were not only aware of the affairs, but also tolerated them to some extent. They resorted to divorce only when this act was coupled with other marital problems. These women had diverse experiences. For instance, a 36-year-old mother, who was re-married three times to the same ex-fighter husband, ended her marriage in divorce in spite of having six children during the marriage. Adultery along with conflict over the use of money were given as reasons for the dissolution of her marriage.

We married in 1989 but he left me a year later and joined the liberation movement. After he returned victoriously, he became just a different person. He didn't show respect to the marriage; he was totally out of control.

Because of this, the relationship was not stable. Marriage, birth of a child and divorce became part of my life cycle. He had five more children out of wedlock. This was really a disaster you know!

The above mother's problem did not stop there. The third person that shared the husband did not only pollute the legally established marriage, but also shared the resources of the family. As the mother put it:

he [the ex-husband] used to spend most of the family income on his concubines. He couldn't administer all of as. That was why I accepted divorce.

Another woman who stayed in her marriage for three years had also a similar story. She accused her husband of having an affair with his former wife, and claimed that his unfaithfulness was accompanied by dishonesty.

The family income was divided between us [including the concubine] and he didn't want to tell me how much his earning was. So he had to choose either the legal or illegal relationship. But he refused to do so and I broke the marital union.

Unlike the first group, these women had knowledge of their husbands' unfaithfulness. They knew with whom they had had an affair. In other words, it was an open or parallel adultery because it was explicit and more or less stable (Lawson, 1988:52-53). Although the tolerance of the wives was an indication that the parallel (open) adultery was conceived of as a less serious breach of the marriage vows than the clandestine or traditional adultery, the wives were still sensitive to the extra marital affairs. This group of women also relayed the interplay of additional problems in their marriages, but claimed that the marital tension and divorce was rooted in the adulterous behaviour of their husbands.

The fact that those informants who complained about marital infidelity were all women indicated that it was entirely a female problem. By implication, the husbands had relative freedom to become involved in extramarital relationships. This shows the existence of sexual double standards (Ibid: 1988).

The reason behind such a practice of double standards has to be seen from different angles. According to Lawson (1988), there is generally more pressure on women for marital fidelity because the issue of fathering is more complex if wives get pregnant in the course of their affairs. On the part of men, because of their role as breadwinners and heads of the family (as was the case in the sample), their extra marital affairs are somehow tolerated because the act is perceived by the society as an escape valve from marital tensions. This may seem contradictory because the extra marital affair is carried out mostly with the opposite sex. However, it should be noted that the subject matter is about married persons. A married man can have an affair, for instance, with a single, divorced or even with a prostitute woman.

#### 4.3.2.3 Violence

Violence was another marital problem identified within the sample, 7 of the 40 respondents reported incidences of violence in their marriages. Violence was the fourth main reason cited for marital disruption in the sample. All those who suffered from abuse were women. However, they had different experiences:

- one woman reported verbal abuse,
- three others mentioned problems of physical abuse and
- the remaining three women reported to have suffered from both physical and verbal abuse.

In spite of the above differences, they all stated that they experienced repeated violence in their marriages. As this housewife who married for 30 years described, it was part and parcel of their lives.



Every time he (husband) came in and out of home, he used to insult me and beat me up. This was his way of 'greeting'. His violent behaviour was not a new phenomenon but as old as our marriage itself. I managed to stop his madness only through divorce. Most of these women had many years of marital experience: 40 years (one woman), 30 years (one woman) or mid-twenties (two women). The rest stayed in their marriages for less than a decade. The lowest period of marital duration, reported by only one woman who had experienced violence, was two years. Thus the dissolution of their marriages was not a surprise to them, but was seen as the outcome of the frequent use of violence by their husbands (Leslie and Korman, 1989:404). Not all women had suffered an equal degree of violence. This 45-year-old co-breadwinner who was married to an ex-fighter felt that her life could have been in danger.

I was not able to enjoy the long years of marital life because of the abusive relationship. Beating and scolding were our ways of life. I got a relief when he left home and joined the liberation movement.... We resumed normal marital life after independence. But he became more violent. Especially one night he hit me so harshly at my neck that I sustained a physical injury. I was nearly paralyzed. He was told to leave home for some time. But because he threatened my life, I was really scared. I decided to get rid of him once and for all [by divorce].

Therefore, the above respondent left her marriage not only because she felt her husband had crossed the tolerance limit, but also because his violent behaviour threatened her life (Ibid, 1989:404).

Apart from physical danger, a single use of physical violence was conceived of as a serious incidence by another 54-year-old breadwinner and mother of six children. She reported that while emotional abuse took place almost throughout her life, the final abuse was physical, and was a critical factor leading to the end of her 40-year marriage.

He slapped me in front of my sister who came from abroad after 30 years. He slapped me like a child simply because I didn't come home before the sunset. We [including her sister] had to visit our relative who was seriously sick. Shame on him! How dare he did so? I was so angry by then that I went back immediately and stayed with my

relative until the court ordered him to leave the home.... That incidence marked the end of our marriage.

The woman in question was distinct from the other respondents who tolerated physical violence for several years. She had not been socialized to accept this type of violence as a normal pattern of married life (Belkin and Goodman, 1980:411-412). Instead, she saw the act as a shocking and intolerable incident.

Most of the respondents who experienced violence at the hands of their male partners did not know why their husbands became violent. If we probe into the background of these men, all but one had jobs. More than half (57.14 percent) were engaged in technical fields although the same percentage had no formal education. Their level of income was unknown to the ex-wives. However, a breadwinner and an ex-wife of the jobless husband (in the sample) reported that her husband actually hated having a job. Whenever she raised the issue of joblessness, he became upset.

Bread winning was supposed to be the responsibility of a man. But he hated a job. In spite of the fact that he was in a good health condition, he sat idle for the last ten years. He didn't even think of assisting me ever since I opened this shop [a grocery located within her dwelling] five years back. If I asked him to try something, he became wild and insulted me all the daylong.

In the above case, there was a sense of failure in meeting parental responsibility and inferior social status on the part of the husband. This feeling of inferiority due to the discrepancy in the status, and his frustration as a result of his failure in the father-husband role could have induced the violence against his wife (Butler, 1979; Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1979; O'Brien, 1971). Such violence, therefore, served as a mechanism for releasing stress.

Aside from this, some female respondents believed that it was their husbands' non-violent behaviour, which was rather strange. Since women spent most of their marital life subjected to domestic violence, the violent behaviour of male partners was perceived to be normal. A 20-year-old housewife and mother of one child for instance, spoke of her husband's change in behaviour after the honeymoon:

At first, he identified himself as a loving and caring person. But he revealed his true identity shortly after he had thought I was under his control.

In contrast to his former behaviour, “beating up, slapping, scolding...became his inherent characteristics, ”said the woman respondent emphatically. These men exercised such violence because it gave them a sense of control over their wives (Belkin and Goodman, 1980:411). In other words, it reflected their negative view of their wives - as property and hence subject to their whims.

It is also important to look into the marital responsibility and authority of the men and women who were in violent marital relationships. Four of the seven husbands were sole breadwinners, two others co-breadwinners, and one man was unemployed. In contrast, four women were housewives and three others were co-breadwinners. Irrespective of this, only the men were heads of the family. Thus, the differential marital authority and responsibility gave these men not only the perceived right and obligation to control their wives, but also the means to justify the violence toward them (Dobash et al, 1980).

In sum, the men in the sample used violence against their wives due to the discrepancy in the father-husband role failure or it gave them a sense of control or because of the existence of unbalanced marital authority and power structure within the couple.

#### **4.3.2.4 Lack of love**

Six respondents reported that their marriages were dissolved due to a lack of love and intimacy with their marriage partners. Two thirds of these marriages were arranged on the couples' own initiative, and without the influence of their parents. Yet, they complained about the lack of marital commitment and emotional attachment on the part of a spouse, or that they never loved their spouses. This was the most frequently cited reason in the sample by male respondents - four men versus two women. A 30-year-old youth, for instance, was divorced by his wife, and he believed that his marriage was not based on reciprocity.

We stayed together for two years. But our marital problems started from the inception of the marriage. Even though we didn't know each other before our marriage, I did love her when I decided to marry her. When she went back home after the honeymoon, to visit them according to the custom, she decided not to see me again simply because she disliked me. She had no other reason because I treated her very well. The two-month separation ended after intense negotiation and words of advice from her relatives. However, the same story was repeated three times until we had two children. At last, I tired of her and we ended our marriage relationship. That was her ambition from the very beginning.

In contrast to the above respondent, the other men took the initiative for divorce because they lost interest in their wives. They were not in love with them. The case of a young man who remarried twice and fathered one child was a typical example. He hated his wife soon after the wedding day. He said:

she had nothing attractive to me. I married her because of the influence of my mother. It was not my intention to stay with her for so long years (four years). But, you know, I had divorced before.

Another 33-year-old male respondent had a special reason for not marrying out of love:

My wife was older than myself and unattractive to me. I wouldn't have married to her had it not been for the pre-marital pregnancy during our short period of friendship before the marriage.

The two female respondents also expressed the behaviour of their respective husbands in a similar tone. "He married to me not because he loved me but to benefit from my business," said a 55-year-old grocery owner. The other respondent was a 41-year-old ex-fighter who had sustained a physical injury in the liberation struggle after she had been married to an ex-fighter. She said that the marriage relationship was at first based on reciprocity and egalitarian principles. But everything changed after Eritrea's independence in 1991. "He is now in city. He can marry another. I'm no more important to him because I'm a person with disability...."

The above narration suggested the significance of physical attractiveness in influencing the stability of marriages in the sample (Bowman, 1974; Berscheid and Walster, 1974). The number of men who complained about the lack of physical attractiveness of a marriage partner was twice as much as the number of women, because it was valued more by men than women (Butler, 1970; Byren, 1970; cited in Henslin, 1985:191-2). It affected the social prestige of the men (Berscheid and Walster, 1974; cited in Belkin and Goodman, 1980:110). That was why they resorted to divorce.

#### 4.3.2.5 Behaviour incompatibility

A total of five respondents (four men and one woman) reported that behaviour incompatibility was a critical factor in the ending of their marriage relationships. It accounted for 7.04 percent of the total reasons for divorce. Respondents in this category can be regrouped into two depending on the type of behaviour pattern. A 33-year-old ex-fighter and father of three children blamed the personal habits of his wife which were contradictory to his own.

We were just two different persons, as if we were not married to each other. I wanted her to prepare a good meal, to have a tidy habit in terms of keeping the household and kids and home management in general. But it was unfortunate that these were not part of her personality. Also she didn't care about herself. If I bought her something like a shoe or dress, she didn't wear it for the second time lest to make me happy. I hate lazy and irresponsible woman.

The above couple engaged in conflict because the husband wanted his partner to change her behaviour without considering her point of view or modifying his own behaviour in the interest of harmony. He did so because he felt that his personality and habits were the standard and any adjustment of behaviour on his part could affect his pride (Foster, 1960). This was a symbolic factor and it could not be a serious cause in its own right (Elliott and Merrill, 1961). As the respondent confessed below, there were also differences in social background between the couple: "...I had no prior



knowledge that she belonged to 'Anseba' people<sup>11</sup>. I married to a wrong woman. Neither myself nor her parents were happy with the marriage. ” Thus, his feelings were actually caused by a normative difference and hatred due to the old stereotype of ethnicity.

The other four respondents were more concerned with the uncontrollable behaviour of their spouses, specifically the wives. Most of these respondents reported that their wives didn't listen to them. They did what they wished to without the knowledge of their husbands. A 43-year-old police officer echoed such a view: “I sometimes asked myself if I was really her husband. I didn't know what was going on in the household.” A 55-year-old male respondent, who had been married to a 25-year-old woman, also divorced his wife two weeks after the wedding day on a similar charge. He described his wife's behaviour as “childish and unconventional.” The above men were sole breadwinners. On top of this, being a husband had special meaning to them, by virtue of which, they believed that they had the right to dominate their wives. On the other hand, a 20-year-old housewife protested against her husband's, what she called, “odd behaviour.” She said:

he didn't treat me like adult. I had to ask his permission even to visit my mother. It was a terrible life. That was why our marriage relationship lasted a year only. The woman in question was the only female respondent who had left her marriage because of differences in behaviour patterns.

The above conflict was generally a real factor (Elliott and Merrill, 1961). The men had patriarchal sentiment and they wanted their wives to be submissive to them. Since it was a question of domination, any adjustment in behaviour patterns on their part was found to be difficult (Ibid, 1961). Because the men were unwilling to resolve their marital tension by modifying their behaviour patterns, they resorted to divorce.

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<sup>11</sup> In the old days, there was a negative stereotype against the people of *Anseba* (geographical area) origin. They were perceived of by some people as “uncivilized” .

#### 4.3.2.6 Lack of communication

Five of the forty respondents didn't know exactly why their marriages had failed. All of them were women. They reported that they didn't get a chance to know why their respective husbands didn't want to talk to them openly if there was a marriage dispute serious enough to lead to divorce. The case of this 24-year-old Muslim woman and mother of two, for instance, reflected the situation:

My husband lived and worked in Saudi Arabia. We had a regular contact through mail. He also sent money and clothes to the kids regularly. But at one time he stopped every thing. I wondered why such a thing happened. I really had no idea. It was a puzzle for me. Some people told me it was the work of my father-in-law. But I was not in a position to know it. What was certainly known was that he stopped supporting us. I couldn't tolerate the situation for a long time. So I asked for divorce.

Similarly, a young woman who had been married for two years to a man who lived abroad for long periods, described the circumstances under which her husband divorced her:

I sent him a message saying that I was terribly sick. But he never attempted to do something to help me. By the time he was repatriated, my health condition was so deteriorated that I was admitted to hospital. For your surprise, he didn't pay me a visit. Instead, he took a formal action to end our marriage relationship.

The above stories imply that there was no sharing of feelings and understanding between the conflicting couples. The women didn't have opportunities to deal with the marital problems they encountered because of the unwillingness of the husbands concerned to do so. Whilst conflict is normal in any family environment, the husbands in question were unable to get the conflict out in the open and talk it over with their wives for the best possible solution (Stinnett, 1985). The special characteristic of the respondents in this category was that three of the five husbands were living abroad. Therefore, the physical distance posed communication barrier between the couples. They communicated with each other through a hearsay or a third party and hence

lacked effective communication, which is one of the essential qualities of a strong family and marriage (Ibid, 1985).

It is also important to consider the educational and age gap between the couples that lacked effective communication. Three women had formal education that was relatively higher than their respective husbands did – grade 8, 12 and 7 versus grade 6 illiterate and 3 respectively. Conversely, the age of each woman in the category was almost half that of her husband – 17, 20, 22, 24 and 34 versus 40, 42, 45, 40 and 43 respectively. Thus physical separation between the couple along with the lack of homogeneity in terms of age and education, contributed to poor communication with each other. It inhibited the disputing couples from working out their differences in order to save their marriages.

#### 4.3.2.7 Childlessness

A total of three respondents (two women and one man) reported that they ended their marriages in divorce due to childlessness. The female respondents were aged 31 and 40 while the man was 43 years old. On the other hand, the ages of their spouses were 41, 75 and 28 respectively. The marital duration of these childless couples ranged from four years to ten years.

It is common knowledge that infertility occurs in a family due to problems related to either one of the married couple. However, husbands in this sample blamed their wives only for childlessness. A 40-year-old female respondent expressed her problem as follows:

We married and lived together for ten years, eight of which happily. However, he beat and insulted me the last two years for not having a child during our marriage relationship. He lost his patience.

Another 31-year-old female respondent was divorced on similar charges, although her problem was quite different. She was married to a man who had divorced his former wife as a result of a miscarriage. She suffered the same fate during her short marriage to this man.

I had experienced miscarriage twice. Yet I didn't give up. I had a commitment to stay in the marriage because I had a belief that there was an eventual success [birth of a child]. But since he [the husband] experienced similar problem from his previous marriage, he went mad. He decided unilaterally to end our four-year-old marriage relationship.

To the above husbands, the marriage relationship would have been maintained if it had only resulted in children. A similar view was also echoed by the male respondent who divorced his wife on a charge of infertility: "I stayed with her for eight years without having children. This was more than enough." In the mind of these men, therefore, the marriage relationship was not simply a matter of vows, but something that depended on the presence of children in the marriage. Indeed, having children was desired by both husbands and wives in the sample since one of the functional requisites of any family is reproduction (White and Edwards, 1986). It was the absence of this vital role that caused the breakdown of the above marriages (Ibid, 1986). The men tended to take the initiative for divorce because they had a better chance for remarriage (Guttentag and Second, 1983). At the time of this interview, two of the above ex-husbands were already remarried. It was the availability of alternative women that made the men not to tolerate and retain childless families.

#### 4.3.2.8 **Heavy drinking**

Three other respondents experienced trouble from their respective spouses as a result of heavy drinking. All of them were women and young wives, in

their twenties and thirties with the oldest being exactly forty years old. They stayed in their marriages for seven, twenty and twenty-four years respectively before they decided to break away from their relationships. They took the initiative for divorce in order to get rid of their alcohol dependent partners. In a representative comment, this forty-year old respondent and mother of eight children described the behaviour of her ex-husband as follows:

At first, he would drink so rarely that I would stay up all night worrying about him. But then he became more and more frequent. He was almost alcoholic. He used to come home in a heavy dark and scared the children and our neighbours.

These women saw heavy drinking as a major contributor to the crises in their marriages because the heavy drinkers were the heads of their families and the sole or main financial providers (Belkin and Goodman, 1980). They were hardly responsible husbands, and were accused of drinking at the expense of their families. “ I didn’t know his salary but he often spent all of it in alcohol,” said the above quoted woman. Similarly, another woman who was married to an electrician said: “ it was futile exercise to expect my husband to look after us [his family] as long as he had a friendship with a bottle [alcohol].” The income of heavy drinking partners was not known to their wives except in the case of an electrician who earned 1700 Nakfa. However, the other two worked as a cook and a mason, which were more common under the category of low-paid jobs. Irrespective of differences in their levels of income, both the relatively high and low-earner husbands were accused by their wives of not fulfilling their financial obligations. It was, therefore, a behaviour common to these male workers in spite of the differences in their socio-economic levels. It also had to do with job-related frustration (Newman, 1988).



No less significant was the use of violence by the alcohol abusers. The women reported that heavy drinking was most often accompanied by violence. "Throwing things and scolding were common during intoxication," said one of the respondents. "He needed no pretext for beating me up when he drank heavily," added the other respondent. Thus, it was evident that these men used violence not only to eliminate their anxiety or as an excuse for not being responsible husbands, but also to attack their families (Elliott and Merrill, 1961). Under such circumstances, it was difficult for the men to play their parental role and the other family members to live a secured life. That was why the female respondents escaped the situation through divorce, which was described by one of them as "a relief."

#### 4.3.2.9 Loss of virginity & Sexual incompatibility

The sexual side of marriage as a source of dissatisfaction and divorce was reported by a 31-year-old male respondent. This young man who complained about the loss of premarital virginity of his wife, divorced for the second time for the same reason, and saw himself as unfortunate person.

...my deepest sorrow during my marriage experience was the wedding night when I discovered that my wife in the second marriage hadn't kept her honour [virginity]. I was dissatisfied. For your surprise, I had the same experience with my first wife. This was my fate.

He made no mention of the need for sexual abstinence for men before marriage. This shows the existence of double standards in his mentality (Reiss, 1960a). Elaborating on his insistence for premarital virginity of women, he said: "it is difficult to trust your wife if, in the first place, she is unable to keep her virginity until marriage. She is unlikely to be faithful and trustworthy." Thus, female virginity was associated with the innocence and purity of girls (Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1976). It was the high value attached

to it that caused the respondent anxiety and frustration. He believed that his marriage was in deep crisis and he had himself perceived having the right to terminate it by divorce (Phillips, 1992).

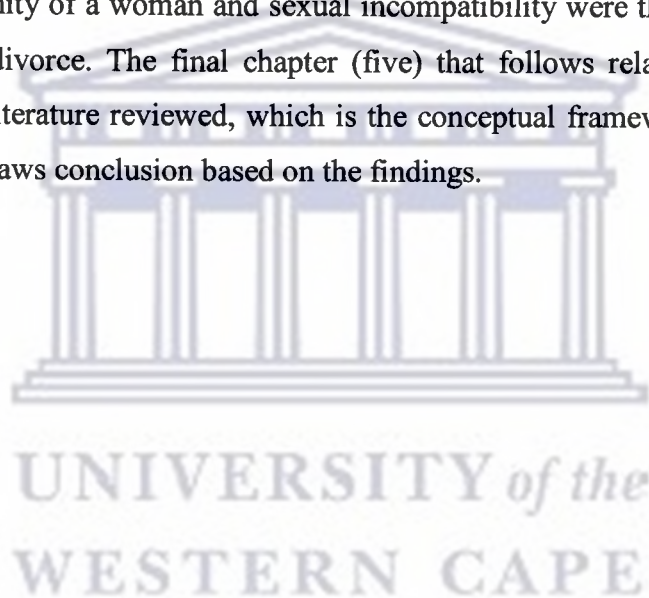
In addition, the above respondent reported that he was not compatible with his wife regarding sex. He confessed that there was an unequal level of desire: he had a strong sex drive whilst wife was unresponsive. According to Masters and Johnson (1974; cited in Coleman, 1988), this was one of the most common complaints and it was severe enough to impair his marriage. He described the seriousness of the case indirectly by saying: “daytime domestic quarrel can be resolved at night in bed [sexual relation]. But conflict in bed [sexual incompatibility] cannot be resolved by daytime activity.”

Like the loss of virginity, we have seen how serious the problem of sexual incompatibility was to the respondent. But what caused the latter is a point of note. Firstly, the respondent and his partner were subjected to “adversive conditioning”(Coleman, 1988:130). Whilst their union and sexual relationship was culturally approved, the sexual value and behaviour was not part of their socialization. For instance, he felt shy talking about sex openly. That was why he resorted to the indirect expression of his feelings, as evidenced in the above citation. Similarly, the lack of sexual responsiveness on the part of his wife could be due to unhealthy socialization about sex. No less significant was the emotional distance between the couple that stemmed from the loss of premarital virginity of his wife (Ibid, 1988). The respondent reported earlier that his heart was broken soon after the wedding day. He found it impossible to heal his psychological wound.

### 4.3.3 Summary

On the whole, the section presented the subjective experiences and personal accounts of 40 respondents regarding their marital failures. Figure 4.1 (below) summarizes the principal reasons for divorce and the percentage of each reason out of the total.

Accordingly, conflict related to finances was found to be the highest single factor for divorce followed by in-law difficulties. On the other hand, the loss of premarital virginity of a woman and sexual incompatibility were the least cited reasons for divorce. The final chapter (five) that follows relates the findings with the literature reviewed, which is the conceptual framework of the study. It also draws conclusion based on the findings.



## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of data comes up with important findings. It demonstrates, by way of longitudinal data, that divorce has been a growing social problem in Asmara. More importantly, the analysis of the sample of divorced respondents reveals eleven main areas of marital conflict. Unlike the narrow grounds for divorce as stipulated in the Eritrean Civil Law namely, adultery, desertion and cruelty (government of Eritrea, 1991), the study establishes a wider spectrum of reasons for marital failure. The findings largely confirm Levinger's (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) research (see figure 4.1 vs. table 2.1). However, there are gender differences in the reporting pattern as well as in the overall ranking of the different complaints.

Generally, the study seeks an explanation for the respondents' behaviour by taking into account the wars and consequent economic hardship as well as the socio-cultural realities in which the respondents have lived. It is these conceptual frameworks which form the basis for the explanation of the marital conflict and divorce in Asmara.

### 5.1 FINDINGS

The economic sphere of family life was the most crucial (28.17 percent) area of marital dispute in the sample. Indeed the study was conducted during a period of economic recession and inflation in Eritrea, particularly in Asmara where the inflation was as high as 107.07 percent by 2000 (Ministry of Finance, 2002). Respondents who reported economic problems were unable to maintain their lifestyle due to the increase in the cost of living, which was induced by the border conflict with Ethiopia. In his analysis of the Iranian situation, Aghajanian (1986) also establishes a correlation between economic conditions that were debilitated by the military confrontation with Iraq, and divorce. However, families with relatively higher income were also involved in financial disputes that resulted in divorce. The men were accused of misusing the family income while the women tended to demand better lifestyles that were beyond the level of the family earnings. In short, they were unable to adjust their needs to the family resources. This shows that divorce was not only a matter of level of income but also, as Jergensen (1986) notes, how to wisely use the available financial resources of

a family. Therefore, this study argues that money was central in the marital dispute within the sample because of the economic crisis in Asmara and the failure of the couples to fit into the existing economic situation.

Among the socio-cultural factors contributing toward divorce, in-laws difficulties rated highest (16.90 percent). All in-laws were accused of being sources of marital conflict and divorce. Mother-in-laws were found to be the most problematic (14.67 percent) of all in-laws. They are accused of interfering, nagging and being old-fashioned. This was consistent with Duvall's (1964:197) findings in which such behaviour is termed as "mother-in-law syndrome". Almost all the respondents who reported in-law problems were women. This shows on the one hand the continued parental (especially mothers) interference in their sons' marriages and, on the other hand, the husbands' failure to emancipate themselves from their parents. Two independent explanations can be given for such phenomena. According to Landis and Landis (1962), the troublesome nature of these mothers-in-law was attributed to the sex role differentiation: unlike the fathers who were breadwinners and engaged mainly outside the home, the mothers had more time to maintain frequent contact with their daughters'-in-law because the traditional division of labour confined them at home. Apart from this, the lack of emancipation of the husbands from their parents suggested the existence of a strong attachment between them, especially between the mothers and their respective sons. Elliott and Merrill (1961) note that emotions between parents and their children are so deeply embedded in the personality that both parties may find it difficult to break the ties. In such situations, sons may find it difficult to shift from the role of a son to that of a husband. Elliott and Merrill (1961) also assert that parents have ambitions and desires for their children's' happiness and often impose their opinions upon them and evaluate the performance of their daughters'-in-law in the domestic realm on the basis of their own standards. If parents perceive that the daughters'-in-law are not suited to their task as mother, the unsought advice of parents could sever the marriage relationship. It was such parental interferences that caused partly the marital tension and divorce in the sample.

As far as in-laws trouble is concerned, the present findings differ to some extent from that of Levinger (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982). Whilst in the latter in-laws trouble is mainly the husbands' concern, the present study shows that it was an overwhelmingly



women's problem. This indicates on the one hand the continued parental (especially mothers) interference in their sons' marriages, and on the other hand, husbands' failure to emancipate themselves from their parents. The former was attributed to sex-role differentiation: mothers had more time to maintain frequent contact with their daughters'-in-law because the traditional division of labour confines them at home (Landis and Landis, 1962). The latter suggested an attachment between mothers and their sons (Elliott and Merrill, 1961). It is also worth noting that two-thirds of the respondents (women) with in-law problems took up residence with their in-laws. Thus the patrilocal type of arrangement also contributed to the mother and daughter-in-law conflicts by placing them closer to one another.

Infidelity was the other marital problem, which ranked third (11.27 percent) as a main reason for divorce in the sample. Both traditional (clandestine) and parallel (open) adultery were apparent in the sample. The women regarded the former as serious and decided to divorce their husbands upon discovering the illegal and illicit relationships. On the other hand, those women whose husbands engaged in adulterous relationship with concubines (parallel adultery) were relatively tolerant. They resorted to divorce when they saw the financial consequences of the explicit adulterous behaviour of the husbands. The findings confirm Lawson (1988) research which argues that traditional adultery is conceived of by a couple as a serious breach of a marriage vow and most often results in a dissolution of a marriage. But there is a lesser sense of the breach of a marriage vow, Lawson (1988) adds, in the case of parallel adultery than in the traditional one. As far as infidelity in general is concerned, this study also confirms Levinger's (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982) findings. However unlike the latter where infidelity is reported by both genders, the present study reveals the presence of double standards. The variation stems more likely from differences in the socio-cultural milieu between the two study areas. Although the Christian tradition in Eritrea is strictly monogamous, infidelity especially with that of a concubine is common among some Christian men (Phillip, 1992:13). As a matter of fact, all the adulterers in the sample were Christian men. In addition, there is an alarmingly low sex ratio especially in urban Eritrea (National Statistics Office & MII, 1995:10). According to Guttentag and Second (1983), this oversupply of women is associated with the men's infidelity and lack of commitment to their marriages.

Some marriages in the sample were characterized by violence, which accounted for 9.86 percent of the total reasons given for divorce. Like in-law difficulties and infidelity, the incidence of spousal violence was reported by women only. Most of the victims suffered for long years, which included one case of severe injury. This is in line with Leslie and Korman's (1989) findings that violence within a family that occurs frequently or entails serious health consequences could lead to divorce. Had it not been for their acceptance of violence as part of the marital experience, these women wouldn't have tolerated it for years. Only one woman saw the use of physical violence by her ex-husband against herself as a shocking incidence and she divorced him instantly. This supports Belkin and Goodman's (1980) findings where marital violence is intolerable if a wife is not socialized to accept it as normal.

Moreover, the analysis shows that the husbands' violent behaviour was induced by one of the following reasons: failure in fulfilling the father-husband role so that violence served as a means to reduce their stress (Butler, 1979; Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1979; O'Brien, 1971) or as a result of the differential marital authority and responsibility which offered them a perceived right and obligation to control the wives through the use of violence (Dobash et al., 1980) or, as Belkin and Goodman (1980) note, that these men's viewed their wives as property, and hence subject to their whims. On the whole, the gendered nature of the violence has been rooted in the social norms that governed the respondents' behaviour. Behind this lies the dominant patriarchal system that shaped the existing social norms.

As distinct from previous complaints, the concern over lack of love and intimacy in marriage was dominated by men – four male versus two female respondents. The former focused on the physical characteristics of wives such as age, disability and general physical appearance, and labelled them as unattractive. This signifies the effect of physical appearance on the marriage relationships of respondents (Bowman, 1974; Berscheid and Walster, 1974). The excess number of men in this regard shows that physical attractiveness as an ingredient for a happy and lasting marriage was valued more by men than women (Butler, 1970; Byren, 1970; cited in Henslin, 1985). According to Berscheid and Walster (1974), men's emphasis on the physical attractiveness of their wives is associated with their social prestige.

It is important to note that lack of love affected even an ex-fighter couple in the sample. Although they married on the basis of mutual attraction and free will as stipulated in the 1977 Marriage and Divorce Law of the Eritrean People Liberation Front (E.P.L.F.), the disability of the wife eroded the previous attraction that existed between them. Above all, her ex-husband had, as Alayli (1995) notes, a wider and better chance of partnership after independence than in the field during the liberation movement. On the whole, the cases contained instances where lack of physical attractiveness and lack of love could cause a disruption in a marriage relationship. The findings parallel that of Levinger's research, as shown in table 2.1. In both cases, more men than women complained about the lack of love.

Difference in behaviour patterns was the other source of marital tensions and divorce especially reported by male respondents. Both the symbolic factor (personal habits) and the real factor (pattern of authority) induced the conflicts. The difference in personal habits between the couple in the sample was reinforced by the negative stereotype of the wife and the ethnic group she belongs to. Only one case was connected with the symbolic factor. This is in line with Elliott and Merrill (1961) findings, which argue that the symbolic factor (such as difference in the personal habits between a couple) is not a serious cause for divorce in its own right unless it is coupled with other dissatisfaction. On the other hand, four marriages were dissolved due to a difference in the pattern of authority. According to Elliott and Merrill (1961), the pattern of authority was a real factor for it was a question of domination. By virtue of being husbands and sole breadwinners, the men believed that they had the right to dominate their wives. They were not ready to compromise on this issue and that was why they left the situation by seeking a divorce.

The destructive effect of the communication barrier between the couple was also apparent (7.04 percent) in the sample. Conflict is normal in a family environment. What was different in the sample cases was the inability of husbands to get the conflict out in the open and to talk it over with their partners. According to Stinnett (1985), a conflicting couple cannot save their marriage without sharing their feelings and developing an understanding between themselves. Thus, they lacked effective communication, which Stinnett (1985) considers one of the features of strong families. The wide educational and age gap between conflicting couples could have

contributed to the poor communication. Moreover, the adverse effect of separation could not be undermined as most of the accused husbands were living abroad.

Apart from the above man-made marital problems, a few respondents lost their marriages due to infertility. The men took the initiative for divorce because they had a feeling that marriage was maintained as long as children were born to it. Since one of the basic functions of a family is reproduction (Murdock, 1960), the men were critical in marriage relationships without children. The result supports White and Edwards' (1986) findings in which childlessness is associated with high divorce rates. It is true that infertility was the concern of the wives too. However, the husbands had a better chance of remarriage especially in Asmara where the sex ratio has been exceptionally low (National Statistics Office and MII, 1995). Guttentag and Second (1983) also establish that in a society with a low sex ratio, men commit less to their marriages because of the excess availability of women. Therefore, it was this easy availability of a marriage partner that made the men less tolerant toward a childless family.

The other social evil that caused three marriages in the sample to dissolve was heavy drinking by a spouse, confirming the work of previous researchers (such as Levinger, 1966; Belkin and Goodman, 1980; Kurz, 1995). The heavy drinkers were sole breadwinners comprising both high as well as low earners. All of them were men who failed to fulfill their financial obligation, which made the effects of their drinking catastrophic to their respective families. Newman (1988) also notes that heavy drinking is a behaviour which male workers at all socio-economic levels exhibit when they feel job (economic)-related frustration. Moreover, the drinking was in most cases accompanied by physical violence. According to Elliott and Merrill (1961), this was an excuse for attacking their families.

Lastly, there was a case of marital failure in connection with the loss of premarital virginity of a female and sexual incompatibility. The former was associated with females' loss of honour and faithfulness, confirming Scanzoni and Scanzoni's (1976) findings. The marriage relationship that was severed by the reported loss of virginity was accentuated by sexual incompatibility. The level of desire between the couple was unbalanced. Like procreation, sexual gratification is also a socially approved exclusively part of a marriage (Murdock, 1960). That was why it caused anxiety and



frustration to the unsatisfied party (Levinger, 1966; cited in Schulz, 1982). However, there is a striking difference in these findings with that of Levinger (1966; cited in Schulz, 1982). Whilst sexual incompatibility ranked in the latter among top marital problems (see table 2.1), the present study shows sexual issues as the least cited reason for divorce (see figure 4.1). There is no established fact for the explanation of disparity in the findings. However, it is difficult to assume the existence of more sexual compatibility in the present sample. It seems rather that there is an underreporting of the problem due to the taboo on sexual matters. Thus the sexual side of marriage was not only difficult to talk about, but was also sensitive to marriage relationships.

With regard to the problem of the loss of premarital virginity of the female, it is not even an issue in Levinger's study as mentioned above. This could probably be due to the cultural differences between the two societies in the study areas. The American culture provides relative sexual freedom before marriage to both males and females. But respondents in the present research came from the traditional patriarchal society, which is characterized by gender discrimination. Premarital sexual relations are tolerated for men but not for women. That was why the loss of premarital virginity of a woman had severe consequences to the marriage in the present research.

## 5.2 **CONCLUSION**

This study explores the complex nature of divorce causation in Asmara. The analysis of divorce statistics and the subjective perspective of the respondents about their past marital relationships and experiences demonstrates that divorce is a growing social problem in the city.

According to the study, gender is a significant social category. Most of the reasons that respondents gave for divorce displayed a gendered pattern. The men were mainly concerned with the issue of sex and love in the marriage relationship. On the other hand, the women left their marriages because of the heavy cost of maintaining the marriage relationship itself. This included, among other things, in-law trouble, adultery, heavy drinking and the use of violence by their husbands.



The study argues that gender is rooted in the socio-cultural context in which the respondents have lived. The sexual double standards in the case of adultery, violence and the loss of premarital virginity is incorporated in the general values and norms of the Eritrean society. Although adultery is a sin the eye of religious denominations and a crime according to the law of Eritrea, the adulterers didn't face the consequences of their act other than the break away of the wives from the marital union. Moreover, the men's tendency to dominate their wives could not be attributed to mere personal behaviour. Rather, it was shaped by the existing social system. As Lerner (1986) notes, in the world of patriarchy, power and authority is vested in males by the role of a husband.

However in the past few decades, Eritrea has witnessed relatively rapid social change. The prolonged war for liberation of the country coupled with the progressive marriage and divorce law and relevant reform measures by the E.P.L.F., has influenced the status quo. The lack of desire of the women respondents to co-exist with their in-laws, their attempts to question the men's authority and use of violence, could be partly manifestations of a change of attitudes that these women have developed for themselves.

On the whole, the study demonstrates that divorce in Asmara is a significant sociological category. It highlights some of the major contributory factors for marital dissolution in the city. It is the hope of this author that the study responds partly to the paucity of local literature in the area of divorce and encourages other researchers toward further investigation.

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## APPENDIX

### A study of the possible causes of divorce in Asmara, Eritrea Interview schedule

#### 1. Demographic data

Code name: \_\_\_\_\_

(1.1) Spouse	(1.2) Age	(1.3) Education	(1.4) Religion	(1.5) Age at first marriage	(1.6) No. of children in the family			
					(1.6.1) From previous marriage/s	(1.6.2) Outside marriage	(1.6.3) Children (of both)	(1.6.4) Total
(1.1.1) Wife)								
(1.1.2) Husband								

1.7 Residence address before divorce:

Sub zone \_\_\_\_\_ Specific locality \_\_\_\_\_

1.8 How long have you lived in Asmara? \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Economic aspect

2.1 Who was breadwinner for the family?

1.Ex-spouse...      2.Self ...      3.Both...      4.Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.1 If the answer is “ex-spouse”,

2.1.1.1 Type of occupation \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.1.2 Average monthly income \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.2 If you have also engaged in a job,

2.1.2.1 Type of occupation \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.2.2 Average monthly income \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.3 Income from other sources (estimated per month) \_\_\_\_\_

2.1.4 Total monthly income \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Socio-cultural aspects**

3.1 How many times did you marry? \_\_\_\_\_

3.2 How was your marriage arranged?

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Decided by parents..... | 3. Decided by relatives..... |
| 2. Own initiative.....     | 4. Other (specify).....      |

3.3 How was your feeling about the arrangement?

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3.4 Duration of last marriage \_\_\_\_\_

3.5 How do you describe in general the marital relationship that you had with your spouse?

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3.6 When did major problems start to appear?

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3.7 Has effort been made to eliminate the possibility of divorce?

1. Yes..... 2. No.....

3.8 If the answer is "no", state the reason

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3.9 What were the reason/s that led to divorce?

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\_\_\_\_\_

3.10 How long did you tolerate the above marital difficulties?

\_\_\_\_\_

3.11 The reasons for shorter or longer tolerance.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3.12 If you were not in economically gain full activity before divorce, how have you managed to survive after divorce?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3.13 Remarks:

A) About respondent

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B) About ex-spouse

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

