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'FAITHING' MASCULINITIES IN CONFLICT

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Introduction

Stepping into a morning sermon in a church in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Jean (one of the authors) walked in to see a woman addressing the assembly. Speaking with confidence, she underscored the importance of ending violence against women and girls in the congregation. When she finished speaking, she was followed by the pastor. Supporting her words, he affirmed that: "we have lifted the veil on [violence against women and girls] in our community, so that we can talk about it, and so that it can be stopped."

Jean observed this scene during an unannounced visit he routinely paid to faith communities participating in the 'Addressing Harmful Social and Gender Norms in Humanitarian Settings: Engaging Faith Leaders and Communities (EFLC)' pilot intervention he oversaw. In line with growing global efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict settings by engaging men to promote gender-transformative change (Jewkes et al., 2015), the EFLC pilot was designed to address harmful social and gender norms through a faith-based approach. Interventions engaging men and boys to reduce and ultimately prevent sexual and gender-based violence can take multiple forms. Underpinned by their own theories of change, most share core components, including working with men directly, often through discussion groups following a curriculum over several weeks, and encouraging men to critically reflect on what it means to be a man in their households and communities. Where such interventions can differ, however, lies in the specific approaches taken, with some emphasising social and gender norms (Pierotti et al., 2018), some emphasising a faith-based and theological lens (Boyer et al., 2022; Masta & Garasu, this volume), and others adopting trauma-informed psycho-social models (Slegh et al., this volume). Over the last decade, a growing body of research has developed around this work, offering an increasingly nuanced picture of their potential and limits in preventing SGBV and promoting more gender-equitable norms and practices (Cuneo et al., 2023; Peacock et al., this volume).

Reflecting on the evaluation of the EFLC pilot conducted by the authors, this chapter explores the opportunities, tensions, and limits of faith-based gender-transformative programming in conflict settings. For a host of well-founded reasons, the notion of 'faith' has a contentious place in feminist and postcolonial politics (Baden & Goetz, 1997; Tamale, 2014). Recognising the complex relationship between faith and feminism, this chapter affirms the potential value of faith-based approaches to gender-transformative programming, particularly in contexts where socio-religious norms significantly shape gender roles, relations, and gender violence. That said, it does so by surfacing some of the paradoxes, tensions, and limits of such approaches to be attentive to when designing, implementing, evaluating, or theorising faith-based gender programming. In particular, it highlights some of the tensions that can arise when working with men and women of faith – as community actors implementing programme activities and participants – for whom faith shapes their identities, their understandings of gender roles, relations, and gender violence. We recognise that faith-based approaches to feminist and gender-focused work encompass a wider range of thorny questions. These include the complex and frequently fraught relationship between religious institutions and persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SO-GIESC) (e.g. Van Klinken et al., 2023) as well as women's sexual and reproductive rights (Nihorowa, 2019; Tamale, 2014). These are profoundly important issues that warrant close attention. As these were not addressed by EFLC, they are not given due consideration here.

With this backdrop in mind, the chapter first situates the discussion in existing literature on gender, masculinities, and faith in conflict. The second section provides a brief overview of faith, gender, and conflict in eastern DRC and introduces the EFLC model and evaluation. The third section critically examines three dimensions of the EFLC pilot: 'faithing'[2] sexual and gender-based violence, 'faithing' masculinities, and 'faithing' femininities. Ultimately and through the case study of the EFLC pilot, this chapter illustrates some of the ways faith can contribute to, conceal, and counter SGBV in conflict settings. Drawing attention to the opportunities, tensions, and limits of this work, we affirm the salience of adopting a faith-informed lens in efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV, especially in settings wherein faith palpably shapes the social, gendered, and intimate lives of communities.

What's faith got to do with it? Religion, gender, and violence prevention in conflict

The relationship between religion, gender, and violence is a complex one. In a multi-faith training manual on *Women of Faith Transforming Conflict*, the coalition Religions for Peace acceded that "the combination of religion, women and conflict often invokes the images of oppression, brutality, and misogyny" (cited in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2017: 137). Across conflict and non-conflict contexts, one does not need to look far for evidence of appeals to religious beliefs to legitimate the repudiation of women's rights and of people with diverse SOGIESC (Stewart, 2022; Westwood, 2022). Yet religion remains an influential force globally, including in conflict-affected settings. According to the Pew Research Centre's *Global Religious Landscape* report, over 8 in 10 people identify with a religious group (2012: 9). In parts of eastern DRC specifically, this figure increases to almost 96% (Le Roux et al., 2020: 13), with Christianity in particular "occupying a major place in Congolese socio-political life" (Alfani, 2019: 6). The influential, potentially constructive, and sometimes contradictory roles of faith leaders and communities in peacebuilding, as well as in the promotion of non-violence and gender equality, is increasingly recognised (Alfani, 2019; Le Roux & Pertek, 2022).

In their recent volume *On the Significance of Religion in Violence Against Women and Girls*, Le Roux and Pertek (2022) offer a compelling, rich, and nuanced assessment of the place of faith in contributing to and countering violence against women and girls in fragile settings with high religiosity. Drawing on extensive empirical research and accounting for the "double-edged nature of religion" (2022: 6), the authors convincingly contend that gender norms are "maintained and mediated by religious ideas, expressed as faith-based gender 'schemas' and 'ideals'" (Manji cited in Le Roux and Pertek, 2022: 79). They argue that neglecting to take religion into account in efforts to address violence against women and girls (VAWG) means "avoiding a dimension of both individual and communal life that plays a fundamental role in [shaping] how the majority of the global population perceive gender equality, VAWG, and what should be done about these" (2022: 148).

A growing number of violence-prevention and response initiatives adopt faith-based approaches. The growing evidence base around such interventions points to some promising outcomes. A recent impact evaluation of the 'Becoming One' programme – implemented by World Vision and the International Rescue Committee in Uganda – found that by participating in the programme, religious leaders can motivate men to share power and reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) by 5 percentage points (Boyer et al., 2022: 1). In eastern DRC, a community survey-based evaluation of a Tearfund project, 'Engaging with Faith Groups to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-Affected Communities,' revealed more promising results still, with the endline indicating that reports of IPV more than halved (Le Roux et al., 2020: 13). Such results led the authors to conclude that "engaging with faith leaders and faith communities can thus be a strategic intervention strategy" while also noting that the "link between IPV reduction and faith engagement and project exposure needs more research" (Le Roux et al., 2020: 1). This last intervention was the precursor to the EFLC pilot addressed here. As detailed in what follows, the findings of the evaluation of EFLC were less encouraging than those recorded by its predecessor in terms of violence reduction. Nevertheless, the study generated important insights into the relationship between masculinities, SGBV prevention, and faith engagement in conflict settings. Before turning to these findings, we first introduce EFLC.

Introducing the EFLC pilot intervention

Funded by the Dutch Relief Alliance Innovation Fund (DIF), Tearfund led a consortium of organisations to implement the Addressing Harmful and Social Gender Norms in Humanitarian Settings: Engaging Faith Leaders and Communities (EFLC) pilot intervention in eastern DRC. The EFLC pilot was designed to prevent SGBV against women and girls in humanitarian settings by targeting social and gender norms through a faith-based, transformational, and community-driven model. Developed by Tearfund, the approach is premised on the influence of socio-religious norms on gender roles, relations, and practices. By training faith leaders and engaging faith-communities, EFLC is designed to (1) engage faith leaders to publicly speak out against SGBV and model gender equality, (2) address negative concepts of masculinities and harmful social norms among both men and women to promote effective sustainable large-scale transformation at the community level, (3) equip communities as first responders to SGBV through its bottom-up approach, and (4) tackle root causes of SGBV by challenging harmful social and gender norms as part of the programme design.

Eastern DRC has long been affected by cycles of conflict and insecurity. These have taken a vast toll on civilian lives. Since the onset of the conflicts in the early 1990s, over 5 million people

have died, and almost 7 million are displaced within the country, 5.6 million of whom are in the east of the country (IOM, 2023). The high levels of sexual violence documented in DRC have rendered gendered violence a particularly prominent feature of the conflicts (Lewis, 2022). In this context, conflict and displacement are correlated with increased risks of intimate partner violence (Kelly et al., 2021), as well as impacting gender norms, including men's capacities to fulfil traditionally ascribed expectations of masculinities (Hollander, 2014).

EFLC emerged out of Tearfund's existing work on *Transforming Masculinities* (Le Roux et al., 2020). Building on its success, ELFC adapted components of *Transforming Masculinities*, designed to promote non-violent and more gender-equitable norms among men. Maintaining these objectives, EFLC was tailored to crisis-affected communities with significant internally displaced populations, fragmented community structures, and strained social cohesion. EFLC was implemented with fifteen faith communities in Kitchanga, North Kivu, and Miti-Murhesa, South Kivu, including a range of Christian congregations, Catholic and Evangelical, as well as Muslim communities. Communities were selected based on their influence in target zones and their willingness to participate in the programme. EFLC was implemented by a small consortium, including HEAL Africa, Help a Child, BEATIL, and EyeOpenerWorks. The consortium also included a Research and Learning component, led and conducted by the authors. The core objectives of the research were (1) to examine the adaptability of the EFLC model to crisis- and displacement-affected contexts, (2) to explore community dynamics and responses to EFLC, and (3) to embed community-driven learning into the pilot implementation.[3]

A note on the study

This chapter draws on the findings of the evaluation study of the EFLC pilot implemented in 2020–2021. The evaluation study consisted of three phases: baseline (pre-implementation), longitudinal (during implementation), and endline (post-implementation). The study received ethics approval from the Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs (ULPGL) in Goma. The evaluation combined qualitative and quantitative methods and engaged with a gender-balanced range of participants, including community members (host and displaced), faith leaders, key influencers, community leaders, and a small number of survivors across fifteen faith communities in Kitchanga, North Kivu, and Miti-Murhesa, South Kivu. Overall, the evaluation study comprised a total of 1,580 survey responses and 291 interviews and focus groups as well as insights gleaned throughout the longitudinal phase.[4]

Critically reflecting on EFLC: three key findings and their implications for transforming masculinities

This section critically reflects on three overarching clusters of findings emerging out of the EFLC evaluation and considers their implications for transforming masculinities interventions. The first cluster of findings centres on 'faithing' SGBV, outlining the relationship between faith, gender, and violence in EFLC communities. The second cluster foregrounds findings relating to masculinities, faith, and gender violence. The third cluster flips the gender gaze to explore femininities, faith, and gender violence to underscore the importance of adopting a relational perspective when conceptualising, implementing, and evaluating interventions focusing on engaging men. Reflecting its centrality in the data, the following analysis focuses principally on men's intimate violence against women.

'Faithing' sexual and gender-based violence: confronting a normative schism

Gender norms have strong socio-religious underpinnings in eastern DRC that strictly delineate men's and women's roles. For men, being the 'head of household' and 'responsible provider' were identified as core touchstones of manhood and masculinity in the target zones. In turn, being a 'respectful' and 'submissive' wife was identified as core expectations of womanhood and femininity for women. Grounded in interpretations of religious scriptures, faith leaders significantly shape attitudes, beliefs, and practices around gender norms and intra-marital relations. Here, 94% of respondents surveyed affirmed that religion is 'important' or 'very important' in their lives, and 62% of whom reported participating in couples counselling and seminaries in their places of worship during and in preparation for their marriage.

Emerging from these teachings is a core belief that men are the heads of the household whose wives should serve and support their husbands. The majority of respondents surveyed at baseline, including men and women, upheld gender inequitable norms, including that a wife must obey her husband even when she does not agree. In the survey, 75.1% of respondents in South Kivu and 63.9% of respondents in North Kivu affirmed that scriptural commands that wives should submit to their husbands represent an act of love. As explained by a Catholic woman faith leader: "The church also recognises that man is the head of the household, he is the head of the woman, it's only man who can have good reasoning." A Muslim woman similarly explained that "our faith urges us to respect our husbands because they are our leaders and that is our benediction." The qualitative data indicated that this gender ethos underlies the counsel given by faith leaders to couples experiencing conflict.

The evaluation study affirmed that men's violence against women was prevalent across participating faith communities. While revealing some changes in reporting patterns of SGBV in target communities, the evaluation indicated that women reported being at significant risk of experiencing violence by intimate and non-intimate partners at baseline and at endline. At baseline, 89% of women surveyed reported having experienced or witnessed violence within the previous five years, of whom 74% reported that these incidents took place in the previous twelve months. This overall picture was not too dissimilar at endline, with 72% of women reporting experiencing or witnessing violence, including sexual violence, in the previous twelve months. Reflecting the context of generalised violence in eastern DRC, it is important to note that men also reported experiencing high levels of violence. In both Kitchanga and Miti-Murhesa, over 80% of male participants in the survey reported experiencing violence, primarily at the hands of a family member. While this might, at first glance, point to EFLC achieving limited success in promoting non-violence, particularly against women, a closer analysis of the endline data reveals a more complex, nuanced, and ultimately more encouraging assessment.

Delving deeper into the nature of the violence reported, the endline survey indicated that women were overall 6% less likely to report experiencing severe or extreme intimate partner violence at endline than at baseline across target zones. This aligns with findings of a similar (secular) programme implemented in eastern DRC and affirms the importance of paying close attention to the potentially heterogeneous effects of violence-prevention programmes working with men in conflict-affected settings (Cuneo et al., 2023). In addition, the study indicated that EFLC encouraged more critical reflection around gender norms and gender violence among women and men and went some way to challenging violence-supportive norms. Interview data indicated that this was especially evident among women and men who had participated in EFLC community dialogues who were able to articulate both a broader and deeper understanding of what constitutes violence against women than interview participants who had not. Moreover, the survey data point

to an overall 40% decrease in respondents' propensity to agree with the statement "It is important for a man to show that he is head of the household, including with recourse to violence." Similarly, 92% of endline respondents (women and men) across the two target zones disagreed with the statement that "The strength of a man is demonstrated through violence, severity, and intransigence," with men being more likely to disagree with this statement than women.

While encouraging, these findings begin to reveal a striking schism between professed attitudes and beliefs towards violence against women and women's reported experiences of violence. The endline study found that some troubling narratives surrounding men's violence against women – and IPV in particular – persisted over the course of EFLC. These narratives had palpable socio-religious groundings relating to gendered ideals of what it means to be a 'good husband' and a 'good man of faith' as well as what it means to be a 'good wife' and 'good woman of faith.' Understanding these ideals goes some way to explaining this schism between men's professed attitudes towards SGBV and the elevated rates of men's violence recorded.

Men, faith, and thresholds of 'acceptable' violence

Interview participants were asked to describe characteristics that they associate with being a 'real man' in their community. Across communities, ideas of what it means to be a 'real man' typically centred on being responsible, providing for their family, and being respected as the head of household in their family. While respondents noted that both customs and faith shape ideas of gender and masculinities, it was common for participants to reference biblical figures and religious scriptures when describing what it means to be a 'real man.' For example, a displaced man of an Adventist congregation described a 'real man' as being "the king, like Adam." Similar references were made to scriptures to describe expectations of marital relations. Illustratively, and affirming the centrality of ideas of 'respect,' a male respondent from a Pentecostal community explained that "according to the Bible, a man has to love his wife and a woman has to respect her husband."

Remarkably, violence was not presented as a marker of 'ideal' manhood or of being a 'real man' – either in the household or in the community. This challenges prevalent positioning of violence as synonymous with or a defining tenet of 'hegemonic' forms of masculinity, especially in (African) conflict settings (Myrttinen et al., 2017; Ratele, 2014). Instead, male participants clearly articulated that 'real' or 'good' men – and 'good men of faith' in particular – were non-conflictual and non-violent. For example, when asked to define a 'real man' in his community, an influential member of a Pentecostal congregation stated:

> Even if we refer to the Bible, Romans – chapter 8, verse 13 – it is written that when someone has a good character, he can't harm others. So, [he is] someone who has love. And a good character means avoiding bad groups, not arguing with others, and to be on good terms with the whole family, and to participate in assisting the community.

This sentiment was echoed by a male gender champion recruited by EFLC in the Adventist church in Kitchanga, who emphasised that a man's use of violence is counter to what it means to be a 'man' and a 'good Christian man' in particular. He explained that

> besides, according to Adventist norms and principles, we are prohibited from resorting to violence against our wives and if a man hits his wife, we say that he is incompetent or is someone who doesn't fulfil the role of being a man – and those who commit such acts [violence against their wives], they are supposedly not Christian.

While the study captured some variation in the extent to which such ideas were expressed, it was evident that for many men participating in the study, physical violence – including against women – was not ascribed as a marker of a 'real' or 'good' man in their communities of faith.

Yet as evidenced previously, reported rates of men's violence against women were elevated in EFLC communities. This revealed a schism in professed attitudes towards men's violence against women and reported practices. A closer analysis of men's narratives around violence revealed that the disjuncture between attitudes towards and practices of violence against women can be explained in three ways: (1) while IPV was generally not approved by faith leaders and communities, nor was it viewed as an aspirational marker of masculinity, it was found to be 'acceptable' or 'justified' under certain circumstances; (2) male participants were found to ascribe responsibility for violence against women – particularly 'unacceptable' violence – onto 'other,' usually non-religious or less educated men in the community; and (3) some men described the destabilising effects wrought by conflict and displacement on gender roles as contributing to violence in households.

Emerging from the data was a demarcation between men's violence that is perceived to be 'acceptable' or 'justified' and men's violence that is perceived as 'unacceptable' or 'unjustified' (e.g. Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2009). Reflecting this trend, a male member of a Catholic congregation in South Kivu affirmed that "everyone in my community knows that there are behaviours that women do that incite men to be violent against them. They also know that there are women who endure violence in their households for no valid reason." It was common among men in the qualitative sample – and among a significant number of women – to affirm that a husband's violence towards his wife is legitimate if she disobeys him or is unfaithful. For instance, this same participant explained that

> Yes, there are situations that can force [a man] to be violent. Example, a woman who goes out with other men either because her husband is no longer able to meet the needs of the household or because she just wants to be unfaithful, a man can be violent with reason. If, for example, a woman starts to frequent drinking establishments while other women are working, her husband can apply violence towards her and it's really acceptable.

In contrast, violence was perceived as not justified if a woman has not acted in a way that warrants disciplinary violence. For violence that is *unacceptable,* respondents typically pointed to 'other' – often non-religious and usually associated with alcohol consumption – men as the source of the problem. This designated something of a 'threshold of acceptability' of men's violence against women perceptible across participating faith communities, violence falling within which would be considered justified and beyond which it is not. For violence to fall within the 'threshold of acceptability,' it is committed for 'legitimate' reasons – typically, punitive or disciplinary; it is not associated with or catalysed by alcohol consumption (on the part of the husband); and it is constrained and not *excessively* violent.

The following excerpt from an interview with a displaced man of a Baptist community in Miti-Murhesa aptly captures this threshold. When asked whether a man's violence against his wife is justifiable in some circumstances he replied, "*it depends*." He explained that if he found his wife in bed with another man, she

> should face all severity for this. Not only should she be beaten, but divorce should follow. I don't see any other reasons why [a wife] should be beaten. There can be little errors like

not preparing the food well, but for that she must be excused, unless it's repeated, and she doesn't want to change.

When later asked whether he had ever witnessed a neighbour beating his wife, he stated that, "here in Miti, these cases happen frequently" and recounted a recent incident when a neighbour came home "with a glass of alcohol in his hand and started a fight with his wife." The next morning, the respondent explained that he went over to meet the violent neighbour to tell him that "what he did is not worthy of being a man." In the same interview, the respondent alluded to another violent man in his community who, after losing his first wife, moved to this locality and married another woman there. "You only have to see the violence that this woman endures by her husband, it's really horrible. She is beaten almost every day."

The excerpts from this interview reveal several dynamics that are worthy of attention. First, they illustrate a certain threshold within which violence against women is perceived to be acceptable – even legitimate – and beyond which it is not. Secondly, viewed through a masculinities lens, there is also an apparent and troublesome paradox at play in this logic. In effect, in some circumstances, IPV is articulated as acceptable *because of* a perceived affront to manhood, and other circumstances in which men's use of violence against women is considered so unacceptable *as to be* an affront to manhood. Thirdly, they point to another dynamic that emerged across the study: It was not uncommon for men to ascribe unacceptable violence against women to 'other' men in their community who were described by participants as being either non-religious, associated with alcohol consumption, and less educated. For example, an influential member of a Pentecostal community in Miti-Murhesa stated that:

> some men can't manage their emotions when their wives make mistakes, that is why they resort to violence and say there are circumstances when a woman has to be beaten. That's the case with men whose educational level isn't very high and who drink strong alcohol who are often aggressive towards their wives in our community.

While men who participated in EFLC were less likely to express support for the threshold of acceptable violence, in interviews, there remained a tendency to ascribe responsibility for ongoing IPV to 'other' men in their community. In an endline interview, a Baptist faith leader observed that "way before, there was violence in couples because of drunkenness and especially in non-Christian families." A displaced man who had participated in EFLC community dialogues noted that "men's violence against their wives is acceptable in several situations here in Kitchanga," quickly qualifying that "although this is for a category of people, notably poor families where men consume a lot of alcohol." Similarly, an EFLC male gender champion from an Islamic community explained that

> There are categories of people who consume alcohol and other who don't consume alcohol, the ones who drink alcohol hit their wives for simple reasons, either because he wasn't given food or because his wife came home late, all this is caused by the pressure he has in his head that pushes him to hit his wife.

Pertinently, characteristics associated with these 'other' men are counter to ideas of what it means to be a 'responsible' and 'good' man of faith and are more likely to be associated with men's experiences of displacement, poverty, and conflict.

For many, disrupted gender roles in crisis and conflict have not translated into disrupting gender norms but are perceived to have contributed to men's violence against women. As a

result of widespread unemployment and socio-economic challenges, women are increasingly contributing to generating household income. This trend was more palpable in Kitchanga, where almost a third of women provide close to half of the household income, compared to 17% in Miti-Murhesa. Illustratively, when asked if he had seen or experienced any situations in his or his community's life which made the fulfilment of men's roles difficult, a male faith leader in Kitchanga responded that

> We notice that some men don't have the means, women do everything: they take care of everything by transporting materials, doing commerce, they make money, and they take care of the household, of cooking. This leads women not to respect their husbands here in Kitchanga and that creates conflicts in households.

Despite these changes in practices, respondents generally maintained that normatively, men remain the primary breadwinners. Men described continued pressure from their wives to provide for their families and explained that their wives no longer respect them when they are unable to do so.

In addition to losses of land and livelihoods, almost 90% of men surveyed had themselves experienced violence. While a focus on women's experiences of men's violence in SGBV prevention is understandable and needed, it can be easy to forget that men are not spared violence and related trauma in conflict settings. Remaining sensitive to men's experiences of violence, powerlessness, and trauma is likely to be consequential to the successful outcomes of such programmes (see also Vale and Riley; and Slegh and Barker in this volume). While EFLC was adapted to humanitarian settings, it was harder for displaced persons to commit to participating in programme activities than for their host counterparts. As observed by members of a community action group (CAG) in Kitchanga, displaced participants "have a lot of psychological instability because of the challenges in their lives."

These findings have at least three implications for efforts to transform masculinities through a faith-based framework. First, the finding that men do not necessarily consider violence as a marker of aspirational manhood or of being a 'real' or 'good man' may give programme architects pause to reconsider the framing of such interventions and their messaging around the relationship between masculinity and violence. Second, ideas around thresholds of acceptable violence and the propensity of religious men to place responsibility for existing violence almost exclusively on 'other' men runs the risk of limiting their self-reflection on their own potential practices and complicities in gender violence. Third, recognising the impacts of men's potential experiences of violence and trauma – as well as of structural forces such as poverty, displacement, and protracted insecurity on their lives, identities, and relationships – will likely require programmes such as EFLC to account for and address drivers of men's violence against women beyond socio-religious gender norms alone (see Peacock et al., this volume).

Faithing femininities: on being a 'good wife' and the importance of relationality

Like its predecessor, *Transforming Masculinities*, the focus of the EFLC pilot was primarily on engaging men. That said, the programme worked with women, including by recruiting women as EFLC actors and participants. Women's engagement in EFLC supports its objectives of promoting women's participation in household decision-making and women's leadership in faith communities. The evaluation indicated that EFLC contributed to some positive outcomes across these objectives.

The study also revealed two tendencies relating to women and femininities that are deserving of closer attention in gender-transformative interventions. The roles of women in upholding gender norms are often overlooked in the literature on engaging men. This omits a relational perspective and the significant role that women can play in upholding unequal and sometimes harmful gender norms (Mertens & Myrttinen, 2019). This was manifest in the study findings in several ways. First, the data revealed that women expressed support for gender-unequal norms, which were often framed around religious scriptures. When interviewed at endline, a female gender champion of a Baptist congregation explained that 'real women' and 'good wives' are expected to "accommodate her husband [and to] obey and respect her husband in line with biblical texts." Women also expressed support for the idea that men's violence against women is acceptable in certain circumstances. For instance, a woman who participated in the community dialogues in a Catholic congregation stated that

> There are women who don't respect themselves. They look for other men outside of their household or they get up in the morning and spend a lot of time drinking alcohol to inebriate themselves and forgetting their responsibility to their children. These two things can destabilise the husband and, in this case, a man can sanction [his wife]. A husband can hit his wife, but only not in front of the children.

Relatedly, it was evident that women upheld the idea that the causes of and solutions to intrahousehold conflict lie disproportionately, if not primarily, with women (see also Le Roux & Pertek, 2022: 82). This was evident among women faith leaders and women recruited to lead EFLC activities. The idea that women should submit to, be patient with, endure, and forgive their husbands' demands and misgivings was prevalent across the qualitative data, including at endline. When asked to describe the advice she gives women who come to her when they are experiencing conflict in their marriage, a woman faith leader of an Adventist community explained that: "I advise women especially to create strategies that will help them restore a climate of dialogue in their household. . . . In particular, I insist on the behaviour of the wife, she has to be patient, proper and receptive."

Such ideas were also reflected in interviews with women who had participated in the EFLC community dialogues. In an endline interview, a female respondent from the Catholic congregation recounted a time in which her neighbour came to her for advice after finding her husband drinking with another woman at his side. She explained that when her neighbour later questioned her husband about this, he hit her. The participant noted that "I saw that it's her husband who was in the wrong, but I told her to humble herself and to not get in the habit of going to look for her husband there as she can't be hurt by what she doesn't see." When the participant was then asked what advice she would give to a woman in a similar situation now, she responded: "I would give them the same advice . . . these are strategies and advice that we receive in the women's teachings at the church. We are shown that in all circumstance, a wife must be docile to be successful in her household." This underscores the importance of adopting a relational perspective when implementing and evaluating masculinities focused interventions. It also indicates that a concerted effort might be required to ensure that the tendency for women to carry the disproportionate burden of responsibility for change is not reinforced by actors implementing such programmes, even if unintentionally.

Conclusion

Interventions engaging men to promote gender equality, promote non-violence, and ultimately transform masculinities in conflict settings are increasingly common. This chapter critically examined

opportunities, tensions, and limits of a faith-based approach to transforming masculinities worthy of closer consideration in the conceptualisation, implementation, and evaluation of future iterations of such programmes. Grounded in the findings of the evaluation study of the EFLC pilot in DRC, the chapter affirmed the significant and influential role of faith leaders and socio-religious norms in shaping ideas and expectations of gender roles and relations, as well as of gender violence. The data made clear that participants across faith communities grounded their understandings and aspirations of what it means to be a 'real' or 'good' man, husband, woman, and wife in interpretations of religious scriptures. Prevailing gender ideals centred on men being the head of household and responsible providers for their families and on women being 'respectful' and 'submissive' wives. While the findings indicated that violence against women remained a prevalent protection concern across the EFLC pilot zones, participants did not altogether express violence-supportive norms. Strikingly, participants did not associate violence with being an aspirational marker of manhood and of faithed manhood in particular in the household or in the community. This is perhaps especially remarkable in a context like DRC, almost exclusively defined by violence, and men's violence against women especially. This also revealed something of a schism between men's professed attitudes towards violence against women and women's reported experiences of violence.

Men's narratives of violence indicated that this schism was explained in three ways: first, while men's violence against women was not necessarily supported, participants articulated a 'threshold of acceptability' of violence, within which IPV is considered 'legitimate' or 'justified.' Second, men typically ascribed responsibility for 'unacceptable' violence to 'other' men in their locality, notably to men who are non-religious, less educated, and/or who are associated with alcohol consumption. It was also common for participants to reference the impacts of chronic insecurity and poverty on catalysing men's violence against women. Overall, this indicates the importance of contextual analysis of the relationship between masculinities and violence in conflict settings, both including and beyond socio-religious gender norms.

Turning to faith and femininities, the chapter evidenced women's roles in upholding unequal and sometimes harmful gender norms. This included by supporting the idea that men's violence against women is acceptable under certain circumstances. Troublingly, such ideas were articulated by some women who had participated in and led EFLC activities. Relatedly, some women perceived themselves as both the cause of and the solution to men's violence. While the propensity for women to self-blame for men's violence may not be uncommon, this makes clear that without concerted awareness of this tendency, programme actors may unwittingly reinforce – rather than challenge – harmful gender norms, as well as the disproportionate sense of responsibility for change women carry. Overall, given the influential place of faith in the social and intimate lives of communities in eastern DRC, addressing gender violence through a faith-informed framework offers opportunities to prevent violence. Doing so, it is important to remain attentive to the tensions of such work that may restrict rather than propel its potential to promote more gender-equitable and non-violent masculinities in conflict settings.

Notes

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2 We borrow this term 'faithing' from Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (2017).
3 The podcast can be accessed here: https://share.transistor.fm/s/a38673c2.
4 For more information, see Lewis et al. (2021).

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