

**Reframing Hegemonic and Fragmented Identities through Subjective In-  
betweenness: A Postcolonial Political Theology of Care and Praxis in Ethiopia's Era  
of Identity Politics**

by

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## Scope, Thesis, and Theories

Since the 1970s, Ethiopians have struggled to claim their subjectivity by resisting the singular and hegemonic identity created by the centralized, modern government of the feudal emperors. Two political systems rose in resistance: first, the Marxist government called *Derge* (1974-1991), then, the current Ethiopian government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). However, the communist ideology of *Derge* and the identity politics of the EPRDF are two sides of the same coin; they are imposed ideologies that eliminate the in-between spaces that integrate religious, political, spiritual, and material in the religious, social, and political lives of Ethiopians. At the same time, imposed ideologies suppress in-between consciousness making Ethiopians “docile bodies”<sup>1</sup> rather than subjective agents.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is not exempt from the Ethiopian struggle for subjective identity, responding with its model of holistic theology.<sup>2</sup> While holistic theology empowered the EECMY to resist the Western pietistic approach to spirituality and theology, a hegemonic identity of feudalism, and the materialist and atheistic approach of communism, it has not enabled the church to resist the neoliberal governmentality and identity politics that continues to create ethnic conflict and fragmentation in Ethiopia. Therefore, in the neoliberal era, the EECMY needs a political pastoral theological approach. A political pastoral theology through embodied

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books: New York).

<sup>2</sup> The holistic ministry of the EECMY was fashioned by Gudina Tumsa and the church officers. Tumsa was the EECMY General Secretary until he was assassinated by the communist government on July 28, 1979.

theology, care, and praxis may restore in-between spaces and the subjective identities of Ethiopians.

Theodros A. Teklu, in his book, *The Politics of Metanoia*, argues that the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Amhara feudal emperors created an Amhara fictive ethnicity to develop a modern and centralized Ethiopian government. According to Teklu, Amhara fictive ethnic identity is an ideology constructed by those who have power against those who do not have power including native Amharic speakers.<sup>3</sup> The feudal emperors hegemonized Ethiopian identity by fusing religion in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Amharic language and setting them up as the markers of Greater Ethiopia. In the 1974 revolution tenants, peasants, and high school and university students revolted against the imposed feudal and fictive identity through Marxist ideology, which created a fictive genealogy or hereditary *ethno politics* or *homo ethnicus*.<sup>4</sup> Teklu's claim affirms my argument that neither *Derge* nor the EPRDF fixed the problem of imposed singular identities. Instead, they fashioned their own hereditary ethnic politics, exposing Ethiopians to the competitive political system, which led to the death of thousands; the displacement of millions; the lack of peace; and the political, economic, and social instability in the country. While Teklu constructed a Russian Orthodox theology of *metanoia* to resist ethnic politics, I, instead, employ a political intercultural pastoral theology and care model to create in-between spaces and in-between consciousness for Ethiopians to see beyond fixed and hegemonic identities.

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<sup>3</sup> Theodros Assefa Teklu, *Politics of Metanoia: Towards a Post-Nationalistic Political Theology in Ethiopia* (Europäische Hochschulschriften: European University Studies / Publications Universitaires Européennes, 2014), 92-98.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Mohammad Girma in *Understanding Religion and Social Change in Ethiopia* argues that Ethiopians' modern identity cannot be separated from the covenant-thinking, religious teachings, practices, and wisdom traditions of Judaism and Christianity. Both the *Derge* and the EPRDF resisted covenant-thinking because covenant-thinking was understood in connection with the feudal emperors (a Solomonic dynasty). According to Girma, because of their attempts to exclude religion from Ethiopian thought and society, neither of these governmentalities addressed the ontological struggles of Ethiopians. Girma claims that covenant-thinking needs to be conceptualized through political theology in order to show that Ethiopians can create public spaces by integrating religion and politics.<sup>5</sup> In my dissertation, I will use Girma's concept to articulate how covenant-thinking can create in-between spaces and consciousness through harmonious religious and political systems. However, my methodology is different from Girma, who used the hermeneutics of "covenant" to restore public spaces. I will use embodied care and praxis to restore in-between spaces and consciousness in the Ethiopian context. In addition, while Girma addresses the relationship between religion and social change, I will focus on the relationship between religion and subjectivity, or the agency formation of Ethiopians.

I also use Western neoliberal and political theologians who articulate the integration of neoliberalism, identity politics, and linguistic formation in Western societies in the postindustrial and postmodern era. Carl Raschke, in his new book, *Neoliberalism and Political Theology: From Kant to Identity Politics*, approaches

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Girma, *Understanding Religion and Social Change in Ethiopia: Toward a Hermeneutic of Covenant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xvi-xxi.

neoliberalism through identity politics or the politics of “representation.” Raschke argues that in the era of neoliberalism the main struggle of the postindustrial, neoliberal societies is representation.<sup>6</sup> Raschke’s claim supports my analysis. While he shows how neoliberal identity politics work in Western society, I will show how neoliberalism creates colonization and systemic oppression in the postcolonial Ethiopian context.

Ethiopians claim that they have never been colonized; however, in this dissertation, I will analyze the image-based, ideological, and political colonization of Ethiopians by comparing hegemonic identities of Ethiopians and imposed fragmented identity politics. Postcolonial thinkers help me to articulate how in-between spaces are distorted and how they can be restored through hybridity, in-betweenness, and negotiation. Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of the Culture*, addresses identity as the central theme to articulate the struggle of postcolonial people. For Bhabha, identity is an art that people shape through their embodied—social, political, and historical—relationships. Postcolonial identities are “in-between” lives in which both individuals and communities meet to negotiate their hybrid identities. Bhabha writes, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”<sup>7</sup> In-between spaces empower postcolonial people to be subjective agents, negotiating and claiming their in-between identities, so that they may resist imposed universal and hegemonic identities.

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<sup>6</sup> Carl Raschke, *Neoliberalism and Political Theology: From Kant to Identity Politics* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

Another way to explore the idea of in-between spaces is through the work of Gloria A. Anzaldúa. In *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Anzaldúa defines borderland identity as the double consciousness in which the borderland people learn to live with multilingual and multicultural political, social, and religious identities.<sup>8</sup> The borderland identity resists linear either/or identities, and it shapes and creates a third space in which the borderland people can claim their in-between subjectivities. Similarly, Luis D. León, in *La Llorona's Children*, argues that the borderland religion is a poetics and performance in the in-between spaces. In the in-betweenness, “betwixt,” and “between,” Mexican Americans perform embodied religion in their relationship with the new country, their ancestors—living and dead, and the colonial religion. This in-between embodied religion enables them to connect not only to their humanity, but to their memory, time, space, and history.

The in-between spaces in Ethiopia are different from the in-between spaces described by Bhabha, León, and Anzaldúa. First, some scholars, like Girma, claim that in Ethiopia in-between spaces were created by the political and theological existence of Judaism and Christianity in Ethiopia until the rise of communism. Second, Ethiopia has never been colonized geographically by the Western colonial powers, raising the question: “How can postcolonial theory be applied in the Ethiopian context?” Third, the borderlands’ consciousness and in-betweenness that León and Anzaldúa articulate exists along the geographical lines of the U.S and Mexico border, but in Ethiopia the in-between spaces exist in the same geographical space among diverse ethnic, religious, and

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<sup>8</sup> Gloria A Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007). 6-7.

political groups. Therefore, my dissertation will prove the application of postcolonial theory in the Ethiopian context.

In this dissertation, I will define in-between space in two ways. First, an in-between space could be a material or geographical space that potentially enables Ethiopians to claim their in-between subjectivities and resist singular and hegemonic identities. Second, an in-between space could be a hybrid consciousness that enables Ethiopians to negotiate ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, and political identities. In the in-between spaces, identities cannot be hegemonic or singular; instead, they become diverse and hybrid. In the lives of Ethiopians, the exclusivist, secularist, and colonialist imposition of politics, religion, and theologies has enforced singular and hegemonic religious and ethnic identities. These imposed religious and political ideologies eliminate the in-between spaces and subjectivities from the lives of Ethiopians.

My dissertation aims to engage the Ethiopian quest for subjective identity through creating a religious and theological discourse and an interdisciplinary theory that employs postcolonial theory, a critique of neoliberalism, postcolonial studies of borderland religion, and pastoral and practical theologies. My interdisciplinary approach exposes totalitarian systems and structures that eliminate in-between spaces in the Ethiopian context. I construct an in-between theology of care and praxis, employing the work of political, feminist, postcolonial, intercultural pastoral and practical theologians; scripture; and Ethiopians' contextual theologies in order to restore in-between spaces and identities by caring for oppressed bodies in order that Ethiopians might be the source of their own liberation.

## Methodology

My methodology employs political pastoral theology at the intersection of postcolonial, feminist, intercultural, pastoral, and practical theological methods. LaMothe's method of political pastoral theology addresses the political and public struggles of human beings through care, faith, power, and community. According to LaMothe, home is a place of survival and flourishing, and "our common home is a political reality."<sup>9</sup> LaMothe argues that political homes or "spaces of appearances" are distorted by totalitarian, colonial, and neoliberal powers of racism, sexism, and classism. He employs a political pastoral theological analysis in order to envision a political home that provides care, faith, and community so that all will survive and flourish at the local, national, and international levels.<sup>10</sup>

Using political pastoral theology as a hermeneutical lens, my proposal will have four main moves: descriptive, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic.<sup>11</sup> According to Elaine Graham, even though mainline liberal practical theologians employ lived human experiences and cultural contexts as the source of theological reflection, they do not critically address the cultural context with which they correlate.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dissertation will critique the universal claim of liberal practical theologians by emphasizing the importance of hybridity, embodiment, belonging, and subjectivity.

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<sup>9</sup> Ryan LaMothe, *Pastoral Reflections on Global Citizenship: Framing the Political in Terms of Care, Faith, and Community* (New York: Lexington Books, 2018), xiv.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 91.



In a descriptive move, my dissertation will analyze the complex lived, contextual, and political experiences of Ethiopians. I will describe how imposed political, religious, and economic ideologies eliminate in-between spaces and in-between consciousness from the lives of Ethiopians. Kathrine Turpin argues, “The task of practical theology is descriptive because in practical theology our reflections arise from and return to the concrete particularities of lived human experiences and religious practice.”<sup>13</sup> According to Turpin, practical theologians need to address “layers of complexity”<sup>14</sup> in intrapersonal, interpersonal, communal, and political contexts. At the same time, Elaine Graham’s embodied practical theology approaches bodies as a point of intersection for the theoretical and practical understating of culture, religion, agency, and identity.<sup>15</sup> When I engage political pastoral theology in the Ethiopian context, I am presented with a primary research struggle: am I importing these practices? How can I apply Western materials to the Ethiopian context? According to Robert Orsi, religious theorists are not outsiders to the researched community; rather, they participate in the web of relationships with the researched. For Orsi, the new way of doing research has

an in-between orientation, located at the intersection of self and other, the boundary between one’s own moral universe and the moral world of the other. And it entails disciplining one’s mind and heart to stay in this in-between place, in a posture of disciplined attentiveness, especially to difference.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Katherine Turpin, “The Complexity of Local Knowledge,” in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, eds. Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Joyce Mercer (Boston: Brill, 2016), 251.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>15</sup> Elaine Graham, “Towards a Practical Theology of Embodiment,” in *Globalization and Difference: Practical Theology in a World Context* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 198.

The in-between way of doing research is not static; instead, it is a vulnerable, risky, and embodied engagement of religious theorists with research in the web of relationships.

I will also interpret, interrogate, and analyze the reason Ethiopians struggle to claim their subjectivity using critiques of neoliberalism, political theology, and the work of postcolonial theorists. According to Carrie Doehring, pastoral and practical theologians provide care ministry in diverse and pluralistic contexts using the lived experiences of human beings to question historically constructed understandings about faith, truth, and God. Doehring's intercultural care employs lived experiences of individuals, religious traditions, and sacred texts to provide analysis and to identify life-giving and life-limiting religious and theological practices.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Emmanuel Y. Lartey's *In Living Color* addresses the practical and conceptual definition of culture in the postmodern, postcolonial, intercultural world.<sup>18</sup> According to Lartey, culture is changing; it is not static. Therefore, he employs an intercultural pastoral care approach to capture the complex lived experience of postcolonial people. Intercultural pastoral care acknowledges and addresses the hybridity of culture in the given context, and it gives power to different voices from different contexts in their own way of knowing and being. Due to its complex approach to human beings' lived experiences, intercultural pastoral care resists reductionism and stereotypes, which are created by Eurocentric hegemonic and monocultural categories.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, revised and expanded ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, revised second (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003), 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90.

My interpretive questions will address: what are the simple binaries and universal categories and claims that make Ethiopians only *homo-economicus* and *homo-ethnicus*?<sup>20</sup> I will ask: who is telling the stories of Ethiopians' colonization or freedom? What images are posted, and what is their significance? What do Ethiopians mean when they claim that Ethiopia has never been colonized by Western political powers? Does Ethiopian colonization include body, image, and ideology? How does neoliberalism work as identity politics in Ethiopia? How can I apply poststructuralist claims of subjectivity in the Ethiopian context? Could the Ethiopian struggle for subjectivity be answered by defining subjectivity through hybridity and postcolonial in-betweenness?

I will use political, intercultural, and postcolonial pastoral care to respond to the political struggles of Ethiopians in order to create in-between spaces and in-between identities through care and praxis. I will construct a pastoral theology of in-betweenness through reflexivity and conversation with tradition, scripture, and contextual theologies. I will also propose an in-between pastoral care method that will be used in the Ethiopian context and beyond in the era of neoliberalism.

The pragmatic move will demonstrate how in-between spaces and consciousness will be restored through care and praxis in the higher education system and in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Homo ethnicus* is a political ideology and praxis created by the EPRDF's identity politics. *Homo ethnicus* makes Ethiopians only ethnic beings through fixed and hegemonic ethnic identities. *Homo economicus* makes human beings commercialized and economized, financialized, and responsabilized capitals. In the Ethiopian context imposed communist and neoliberal ideologies have made Ethiopian bodies *homo economicus* by eliminating their in-between spaces and subjectivities. (See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* [New York: Zone Books, 2005] and Theodoros Assefa Teklu, *Politics of Metanoia: Towards a Post-Nationalistic Political Theology in Ethiopia* [Europäische Hochschulschriften: European University Studies / Publications Universitaires Européennes, 2014]).

congregational care context in Ethiopia. At the same time, my pragmatic move will approach care and praxis through embodiment, belonging, subjectivity, and hybridity.

1) Embodiment: Elaine Graham argues that bodies are embedded in a context, but bodies are also creators of their habitus through praxis.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, my practical action will employ the embodied experiences of Ethiopians to analyze, construct, reconstruct, and question-imposed ideologies, theologies, and political practices on Ethiopian bodies.

2) Belonging: In *Pastoral Reflection on Global Citizenship* LaMothe addresses the most critical struggle of human beings in today's global world: where is my home? Where do I belong?<sup>22</sup> LaMothe employs Wendy Brown's *homo-politicus*. *Homo-politicus* (the political nature of human beings) is what enables us to participate in caring for our polis. The political home is intended to be the home, or city, of all people with different values, rules, and regulations. However, neoliberal governmentality changed the *homo-political* nature of human beings to one of *homo economicus*. *Homo economicus* does not have subjectivity; people are docile. In such a city all cannot survive and flourish. For this reason, LaMothe calls for political power, care, and theology to restore the spaces of appearance that allow us to survive and flourish together.<sup>23</sup> My pragmatic move will describe a care and practical action plan to resist political, religious, and theological claims and teachings that destroy our home or in-between spaces.

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<sup>21</sup> Elaine Graham, "Towards a Practical Theology of Embodiment."

<sup>22</sup> Ryan LaMothe, *Pastoral Reflections on Global Citizenship: Framing the Political in Terms of Care, Faith, and Community* (New York: Lexington Books, 2018), xii-xiii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-166.

3) Subjectivity: Foucault, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, describes how the human body becomes the object of different ideologies.<sup>24</sup> Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, names that the fundamental definition of gender creates a binary construction of identity.<sup>25</sup> Both Foucault and Butler show how imposed ideologies and theories create docile bodies that do not voice subjectivity. However, these scholars do not tell us about the in-between spaces and in-between subjectivities because their approaches are not postcolonial. My pragmatic move will show how care and praxis could enable Ethiopians to claim their subjectivity through in-betweenness, hybridity, interculturality, and communality.

4) Hybridity: My pragmatic move will demonstrate hybrid ontological experiences of human beings. Lartey demonstrates an intercultural and hybrid anthropology of care by using Kluckhohn and Murray's view, "Every human person is in certain respects: 1) like all others, 2) like some others, 3) like no other."<sup>26</sup> I claim that my political pastoral theology creates postcolonial praxis to empower Ethiopian bodies to be subjects through negotiation and translation in the in-between spaces and subjectivities.

## **Rationale**

My postcolonial political pastoral theology and care praxis contributes a new hermeneutical lens to understanding the challenges that Ethiopians have faced since 1991. My theology also contributes to the Ethiopian theological discourse by moving the

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 31.


<sup>26</sup> Lartey, *In Living Color*, 34.

focus from holistic ministry to political care and praxis to restore in-between consciousness, spaces, and identities in the lives of Ethiopians. The identity quest of Ethiopia as a modern nation is mostly addressed from a historical and political perspective, so addressing the contemporary struggles of Ethiopians from a pastoral care perspective will create new theological insight which will aid theological discourse in the Ethiopian context.

Using Ethiopia's political and social context as a case study, I will contribute to the pastoral and practical theology discourses by creating an in-between care model that can enable churches, communities, and organizations to resist neoliberalism and identity politics. The current borderland religion theorists address religion in the borderland of the United States and Mexico. I will add to the discourse by emphasizing the function of religion in a different ethnically diverse context. Current postcolonial discourse addresses the stories of British and Spanish colonialism. I will create a postcolonial conversation or tell the untold story of Ethiopia's image, body, and ideological colonization. While neoliberalists address the postindustrial and postmodern context, my discourse will show the function of neoliberalism as an identity political rationality that creates ethnic violence and conflict.

## **Chapters and Their Description**

**Chapter One: Theories and Methods** Using a political pastoral theological approach that is grounded in lived human experiences, I will begin with my family's and my lived and embodied experiences that shape my research to create in-betweenness, in-between theology, in-between spaces and politics in the Ethiopian context.

 Introduction and Rode's story

- ✚ Interdisciplinary theoretical approach to address the ethno-political and social context of Ethiopia
- ✚ Methodology: postcolonial political pastoral theology through care and praxis

## **Chapter Two: Lived Experiences of Ethiopians: How Religion, Politics, and Theology Shape the Identity of Ethiopians as a Modern Nation**

- ✚ The short history of Ethiopia as a modern nation
- ✚ The social and political context of contemporary Ethiopia
- ✚ In-betweenness in Ethiopian cultures, religions, and theologies

## **Chapter Three: From Hegemonic and Homo-Ethnicus Identities to In-between Subjectivities**

Though Ethiopia has never been colonized geographically, I argue that Ethiopians' bodies are colonized by internal feudal systemic oppression and imported Marxist and neoliberal governmentalities.

- ✚ Postcolonial discourse and its application in the Ethiopian context
- ✚ Neoliberal governmentality and identity politics
- ✚ The neoliberal governmentality of *homo-ethnicus* in contemporary Ethiopia
- ✚ Post-structuralists and postcolonial subjectivities and my turn to in-between subjectivities

## **Chapter Four: Constructing a Theology of In-betweenness**

The holistic ministry that the EECMY employed to resist the feudal systemic oppression and anti-religious Marxist ideology did not enable the church to resist identity politics. Therefore, I argue that the EECMY and Ethiopians need a theology that empowers them to resist the neoliberal governmentality that eliminates in-between-spaces.

- ✚ Gudina Tumsa's holistic ministry
- ✚ Could borderland religion function in the Ethiopian context?
- ✚ Mediation, intercession, and incarnation
- ✚ Hybrid bodies as in-between bodies and the body of Christ

## **Chapter Five: A Pastoral Care and Praxis of In-betweenness**

Care as a hermeneutical praxis restores in-between spaces in Ethiopia. I will address the political and social struggles of Ethiopians through political, intercultural and postcolonial pastoral care and theological approaches.

- ✚ Intercultural pastoral theology and care: in-between spaces as intercultural spaces that enable Ethiopians to live in unity and diversity.

- ✚ Political pastoral theology and care: in-betweenness and in-between spaces as political and public spaces that integrate politics and religion, material and spiritual, and sacred and profane.
- ✚ Postcolonial pastoral care: in-between spaces and in-between consciousness that create intersubjectivity, enabling care givers and care receivers to meet in the in-between spaces.

### **Chapter Six: A Pragmatic Move to Implement a Pastoral Theology of In-betweenness**

Praxis that comes from embodied experiences of Ethiopians sustains and restores the in-between spaces. Practical ministries and care approaches can heal colonized, traumatized, gendered, and docile Ethiopian bodies.

- ✚ Higher Education: Universities could be in-between spaces wherein students could be nurtured with the in-between ideologies.
- ✚ Congregational Care: EECMY (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus) congregations could be in-between healing centers that create care and counseling in their pluralistic context.

**Chapter Seven: Conclusion, Limitations, Further Direction** An in-between pastoral care approach is my contribution to the field of theological and religious studies.



## Bibliography

I will use the ATLA Database from the Iliff School of Theology mostly to find resources on practical and pastoral theologies.

I will use the JASTOR and EBSCOhost databases to find resources on the political, historical, and social context of Ethiopia.

I will use both World Cat and the e-books at the Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver to find particular resources such as dissertations or e-books and other relevant resources.

Search Terms: practical theology, pastoral theology, pastoral care, Ethiopia, postcolonial, neoliberalism, globalization, embodied praxis, EECMY, political theology, political pastoral theology, postcolonial pastoral theology, intercultural pastoral theology, holistic theology.

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