interesting strategy used by Amelkin Jacops, whose fascinating abduction case has popped up several times in this study. After withdrawing her initial consent declaration, Amelkin fought for over ten years against her marriage to her abductor, refusing to accept the episcopal judge's decision that it was a valid, consensual union. Amelkin was even imprisoned twice for refusing to live with her husband and acknowledge him as such. Eventually, Amelkin's luck turned. After countless unsuccessful attempts to get rid of her abductor, a tired Amelkin finally joined him in the conjugal home. However, while living there, she must have heard the servants' gossip, as she found out that her abductor-husband and her mother, who was now dead but had earlier helped organise the abduction and was sentenced for her complicity by the Ghent aldermen, had been lovers. Amelkin successfully raised the impediment of affinity by illicit intercourse, and the episcopal judge of Tournai annulled her marriage to her abductor. After this dramatic episode in her life, which lasted over a decade, Amelkin married another man, and together with him, she regained the right to her inheritance, which she had lost after being abducted as a young girl.[120] While we do not know all the factors involved in cases like this, people had the power to navigate as they coped with a situation, and changing circumstances could lead to new opportunities.

Conclusion

Abducted women were certainly not mere pawns, since their consent could make a difference; they acted as legal agents, defending themselves against their abductors and relatives, and negotiated marriages. Nevertheless, the records show a very complex understanding of abducted women's consent in the Middle Ages. She could decide whether an abduction was consensual by saying the words *haers dancks ender haers wille*. However, the records also suggest that the reasons many women made that statement were often family pressure and social expectations regarding honour and property. This is a problem that makes it very difficult to assess the abductee's consent, which was more a passive form of agreement than an expression of free choice or personal will. This chapter has shown that an abducted woman's statement that she either did or did not consent could conceal massive pressure and changes of mind. The statement was often the result of multiple

120 Monique Vleeschouwers-Van Melkebeek has edited all the records on this case in Vleeschouwers-Van Melkebeek, 'Mortificata est'.

considerations, negotiations, and discussions between and within families. Historians must not forget to distinguish between the legal categories of abduction and the litigation stories produced to fit these categories, on the one hand, and the social reality on the other. The complex consent descriptions and interpretations suggest a medieval awareness of a spectrum of consent. Although connecting marriage-making with ideas of free will and active choice, the records reveal that abductions legally labelled as consensual could concern far more passive interpretations of consent. Consent did not equal choice.

This chapter has exposed the dangers of making strong statements about agency, victimhood, and family relations based on brief legal records made in the aftermath of an abduction. Immediately after the abduction, it might be reported and/or recorded as violent or coerced, an abductee might be disinherited by her guardians, or the abductee might formally declare her consent. However, the evidence shows that victims of coerced abductions nevertheless married the perpetrator, that an abductee could restore the rights to her inheritance as Amelkin did, or that an abduction initially registered as consensual could nevertheless end in years of legal battle, or even in annulment or separation. Since an extremely wide range of societal areas, from marriage and sex to honour and property, intersect at abduction, and many individuals and groups of people were involved actively or passively, abductions could be particularly challenging to handle. Abductions and their aftermaths were not isolated singular events, but rather processes with variable outcomes and vulnerable periods of negotiation. The small proportion of cases discussed at the end of this chapter reveals the complexity of the post-abduction situation, most often dealt with behind closed doors. Even when the authorities punished the abductor, he had often already married the abductee clandestinely. An abduction thus had consequences that a court case could not efface, which led many families to feel that they had no choice other than to accept the abductor and abductee's marriage. The only thing they could do to reverse the effect of the disadvantageous marriage contracted by their daughter or niece was to disinherit her 'as if she were dead', a highly exceptional penalty that will be discussed further in the next chapter. Abductions were sensitive affairs that those involved preferred to deal with discretely. Most of the doors behind which these settlements were made were thus closed to contemporaries and remain so for historians trying to research these settlements today. Only when one of the people involved, such as Amelkin Jacops, refused to accept the settlement reached after abduction do we have access to the post-abduction situation and see how delicate and challenging the situation

was that had to be navigated. For many women and their families, marrying the abductor thus seems to have been a way of making the best out of an unwelcome situation.

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