Social Embeddedness of Human Smuggling in East Africa: Brokering Ethiopian Migration to Sudan

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Abstract

This article discusses the migration processes and brokering practices that link Ethiopia and Sudan by taking into account the social, economic, political and cultural underpinnings of human smuggling in the region. The analysis is based on three months of fieldwork using a conventional qualitative research methodology. Respondents were selected from actors such as smugglers, migrants and government personnel involved in the migration process, facilitation and control activities. Since the 1990s, significant irregular overland labour migration has emerged from Ethiopian towns and villages to Khartoum, Sudan via the border towns of Metema on the Ethiopian side and Galabat on the Sudanese side. However, how various actors engage in shaping this migration process and how human smuggling sustains despite increasing control efforts by the state is less understood. This paper demonstrates that this mobility is facilitated mainly by smugglers who are involved in transnational social relations, material practice and migration knowledge production, including informal money transfer practices, transport and communication infrastructures. This challenges the view reflected in popular discourses that such smuggling is organised by independent criminal organisations. Smugglers and their connectors in Metema facilitate Ethiopian migrants' clandestine border crossings via the town of Metema by mobilising support and resources from local communities along the border, bribing border guards and capitalising on their ethnic, religious and economic connections along Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands. The study concludes that human smuggling and brokering migration partly thrives in the border areas since the actors extend benefits of

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smuggling to the economically disadvantaged local community and in return generate social and community support for smuggling activities.

Keywords Smuggling, migration infrastructure, borders, knowledge, migration control.

Introduction

In recent decades, Ethiopia has simultaneously become one of the major sending and transit countries of migrants and asylum seekers in the Horn of Africa (Ayalew, 2017; Zewdu, 2018). In the face of challenging socioeconomic and political conditions in the country, which are compounded by very limited options for legal international migration, a large number of Ethiopian young men and women undertake long and dangerous overland journeys across deserts and seas to reach destination countries in Europe, the Middle East and southern parts of Africa. The mobility of migrants is organised by the engagement and interactions of multiple actors and the entanglement of social and smuggling networks that link migration origin, transit and destination places (ILO, 2011; Ayalew, 2017; Fernandez, 2017). The focus of this paper is socio-political and cultural dimensions of smuggling of Ethiopian migrants to Sudan along the north-western route, which links villages and towns in Ethiopia to Khartoum, via the town of Metema, which is located along the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. This route leads to Europe via the eastern Sahara Desert, Libya and the Mediterranean Sea.

Migration through this route to Sudan and further north is not a recent phenomenon. The mass flow of people through the town of Metema was observed during the Dergue regime due to famine, civil war and the repressive political rule in Ethiopia (Terrazas, 2007; Faiz, 2013; Hailemichael, 2014; Grabska, 2016). However, since the 1990s, after the current Ethiopian regime took power and the emergence of a booming oil economy in Sudan, Ethiopian labour migration to Sudan has shown a marked increase. Most of these border crossings are clandestine and thousands of young men and women cross the Ethiopian-Sudanese border every month (Triulzi & Mckenzie, 2013; Zeyneba, 2017; Ayalew, 2017). In Khartoum, women migrants face sexual, physical and labour abuses by employers and significant other actors. Many new arrivals often use Khartoum as a steppingstone and proceed towards European countries that are assumed to be welcoming of refugees and migrants (Triulzi, 2013).

After the Ethiopian government recently intensified control infrastructures and introduced tough anti-human smuggling regulations to control clandestine migration, the actors and practices of facilitating overland migration and clandestine crossing of international borders have become more complex than before. In this paper, we will trace the role of state, private and community actors in facilitating the smuggling of Ethiopian migrants to Sudan. The existing studies focus on how criminal organisations, such as human traffickers and armed gangs, stationed along this migration route deceive migrants and how professional smugglers independently organise clandestine migratory journeys and border crossings (Abebaw, 2013; Triulzi & Mckenzie, 2013; Treiber, 2013b; Hailemichael, 2014; Habte, 2015; Collyer, 2015). Migrants, mainly women, are also portrayed as silent victims of various types of sexual, labour and physical abuses by trafficking rings and smuggling operations (Fernandez, 2010; Guday & Kiya, 2013; Asnake & Zerihun, 2015; Grabska, 2016; Zeyneba, 2017).

Of course, there are interesting emerging studies on the conditions of migration in Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, Dinbabo and Nyasulu (2015) explored macroeconomic determinants of pull factors of international migration to South Africa and Dinbabo and Carciotto (2015) dealt with the necessity of a rights-based approach in international migration studies. However, less understood is the manner in which smuggling becomes a community enterprise – as it involves ordinary individuals, state actors and business people – and is embedded in cross-border informal trade and social relations in borderland areas. Furthermore, little is known about how migration facilitation actors sustain clandestine migration by dynamically and creatively responding and adapting to the intensification of irregular migration control and states' regulatory structures. Thus, this paper tries to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the intersection of social and smuggling networks in organising clandestine migratory exits and journeys; socio-cultural dimensions of brokerage and smuggling organisations.

This study was conducted mainly in the transit town of Metema, which is about 196 kilometres away from Gonder and 975 kilometres from the capital, Addis Ababa. This town is a major node of smuggling and social networks that connect villages and towns in Ethiopia to Khartoum, Sudan. A major source of livelihoods is cross-border trade with the town of Galabat on the Sudanese side of the border. The town's economy is predominantly based on trade and service, which is related to the large numbers of migrants. The rural parts of

the districts on both sides of the border have agricultural investments. Especially on the Sudanese side, there are large-scale plantations that play a major role in attracting labour migrants from Ethiopia. The study was also conducted in three major migrant sending locations in Ethiopia: Addis Ababa, Hadiya Zone in Southern Ethiopia and South Wallo Zone in Northern Ethiopia.

Background/Contextualisation

Ethiopian migration to Sudan is not a new phenomenon. There was significant refugee flow from Ethiopia to Sudan during the Ethiopian military regime (1974–1991) due to military dictatorship, civil wars, poverty and environmental disasters, such as droughts (Terrazas, 2007; Faiz, 2013; Hailemichael, 2014; Grabska, 2016). According to Bariagaber (2006), political conflict and war with Eritrea led to the displacement of thousands who migrated to the Sudan. According to Grabska (2016), these migrants of the 1980s and 1990s were labelled as refugees, unlike the present cohort who are predominantly economic migrants. Faiz (2013) also states that the existence of petroleum since the 1990s and the economic boom afterwards attracted many economic migrants to the country, including Ethiopians. With the downfall of the military regime, the former refugees were repatriated to Ethiopia, and resettled in the border town of Metema. Many of those who remained in Sudan settled in Khartoum and continued to supply information to prospective migrants about ways of clandestine border crossings, meeting the brokers, as well as financial and psychological support for new arrivals via transnational and translocal social and family networks that connect the origin, transit and destination locations in this migration corridor (Treiber, 2013a; Ayalew, 2017).

In addition, the longstanding migration history between the two countries, the cultural similarity and the loose and vast common border encouraged migrants to use the north-west route to the Sudan. However, recently, migration patterns have become complex in terms of who is migrating, how and why. There are different estimations but no exact data on the number of migrants crossing the border clandestinely. For instance, in 2011, the ILO reported that the number of Ethiopian migrants travelling to Libya through Sudan was around 75,000–100,000 per year (Anteneh, 2011). In 2014, the number of migrants using the north-west route was reported to be 18,000–37,000 per year (Frouws, 2014). Based on her source from the Ethiopian Immigration Office in Metema, Zeyneba (2017) puts the annual estimate at 30,000–32,400 migrants. Despite such statistics and the significant flow of

Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali migrants, little is known about migration patterns and process along this route (RMMS, 2014; Ayalew, 2017). Extreme mobility of migrants in the Sudan, Egypt, Libya and further in Europe make it difficult to track the migration flow, processes and map out the routes that take migrants outside of Ethiopia. Destinations are also varied as some stay in Sudan, Libya and Egypt while others continue their journey to Europe (Ayalew, 2017).

Despite reports of abuse and harassment in Sudan, the majority of migrants taking the north-west route are women. According to Zeyneba (2017), between September 2014 and August 2015, 193 migrants were caught trying to cross into the Sudan. Of this, 123 (63.73%) were female migrants. Faiz (2013) further claimed that the number of illegal female migrants to Sudan has increased after the 2013 ban on labour migration to the Middle East by the Ethiopian government. Studies show that Ethiopian women leave the country in search of better livelihoods (Shewit, 2013; Hailemichael, 2014). The Metema route, according to Anteneh (2011) and Jamie (2013), thus mainly served as a route for women migrants to Sudan for the purpose of domestic work. In Sudan, Ethiopian women are engaged in selling tea and coffee on the streets and sometimes in commercial sex work (Anteneh, 2011; Shewit, 2013; Zeyneba, 2017). Female Ethiopian migrants face several problems, including physical and sexual abuse (Faiz, 2013; Shewit, 2013; Addis, 2014; Frouws, 2014; Hailemichael, 2014; Grabska, 2016; Tsega, 2016; Zeyneba, 2017). In many cases, according to Shewit (2013) and Faiz (2013), the women are faced with long working hours, restricted mobility and verbal abuse. They are also stereotyped and wrongly perceived as thieves and prostitutes in Sudan (Shewit, 2013; Ayalew, 2017).

Looking further into the demography of migrants taking the north-west route, it is reported that many of the migrants are young Ethiopians and many male migrants look forward to reaching Europe through Libya and Egypt (Kuschminder & Siegel, 2012; Frouws, 2014; Strachan, 2016). In terms of ethnicity, they are mainly from Oromiya and Southern Nations Nationalities and People Regional States (Faiz, 2013; Zeyneba, 2017). This might be due to geographic proximity and the history of migration to Sudan from these regions.

High-risk border crossings and long journeys of migrants and refugees from Ethiopia must be understood in the local and global context of a socio-political economy. On the sending side, young people in Ethiopia are dissatisfied with

the growing economic inequalities, prolonged conflicts and repressive political conditions (Ayalew, 2017). At the same time, they are lured by remittances and returnees' prosperity and driven by social and familial expectations. Undoubtedly, there is evidence of state persecutions and human right violations, particularly in the last two decades in Ethiopia, that drive an increasing number of refugee flights, mainly from Oromyia National and Regional State of Ethiopia. Many of the migrants use Khartoum as a steppingstone to move to Europe, where they can seek asylum in refugee welcoming countries such as Germany and Sweden (Triulzi, 2013; Campbell, 2014; Ayalew, 2017). However, there are also several other personal factors that drive migrants, such as adventure-seeking dreams, escape from forced marriages in the case of women and failures at school. Moreover, there are intermediaries and smugglers, commonly referred to as delaloch in Ethiopia, and several other actors who engage in organising departure and mobility. The delaloch also arrange debts for poor migrants so that they can travel now but pay later after they get jobs in Sudan. Thus, the combination of complex and dynamic macro (structural), meso (social and smuggling networks) and micro (individual) factors (Faist, 2000) shape the migratory experience in Ethiopia.

Conceptual Frameworks

Migration Industry

There is growing literature that makes use of term 'migration industry' to describe the globalised phenomena of migration and the various actors that make it possible. Since the late 1990s, the concept was introduced to explain "how migration flows sustained themselves in the face of intensified efforts of states to control movement across territorial boundaries" (Spener, 2009). Following the pioneering work of Salt and Stein (1997), migration scholars have broadened the concept of the 'migration industry' to explain actors and processes involved in border controls and those facilitating contemporary irregular and regular labour and refugee mobility, particularly from the Global South to the Global North (Sørensen & Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2013; Andersson, 2014).

The migration industry comprises of actors, technologies and enterprises that encourage, facilitate, mediate, condition, and control migration, cutting across both the social relations and material economy. These include recruitment and travel agencies, money lenders, formal and informal remittance and courier services, transport companies and operators, legal and advisory firms, visa

facilitation agencies, lawyers, security contractors, smugglers, NGOs and others (Spener, 2009; Hernández-León, 2008; Sørensen & Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2013; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). According to Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen (2013), the migration industry further encompasses human smuggling and trafficking networks, transnational criminal organisations, trafficking rings, and 'control providers', such as private contractors performing immigration checks, operating detention centers and/or carrying out forced returns. According to Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen's (2013) study, the involvement of these different institutions, individuals, and agents in the migration industry is believed to be driven by financial gain, emphasising the "commercialization of migration". This study noted that these various actors maximise and accumulate huge economic gains by capitalising on migrants' desire to move and the states' increasing efforts to manage migratory mobility. In fact, for Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen (2013), it is the state that "actively sustains and funds large parts of the migration industry", which indicates the involvement of not only market actors in the migration industry but also the intersection of market and state.

However, due to the pronounced "business" domain in the concept of the migration industry, scholars centred their points of discussion on the "illegal" end of it, and argue that "human smuggling and trafficking" are salient elements of the migration industry (Salt & Stein, 1997; Castel & Miller, 2003). Later encompassing the social relation in migration networks, the concept of the migration industry was further developed into a business that can also "emerge from mutually-supportive networks of social relations within a migrant community" (Spener, 2009: 26).

From Migration Industry to Migration Infrastructure

Over time, literature on the migration industry has moved away from Salt and Stein's (1997) notion of "migration businesses" towards considering migration infrastructure (Hernández-León, 2008; Sørensen & Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2013; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). These infrastructures, according to Xiang and Lindquist (2014: 124), can be divided into five dimensions evident in every step of the migration process. These are (1) the commercial (recruitment intermediaries), (2) the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training and other purposes), (3) the technological (communication and transport), (4) the humanitarian (NGOs and international organisations) and (5) the social (migrant networks). These dimensions entail that the concept of the migration industry not only deals

with micro and macro structures but rather offers a meso-structure approach to migration.

However, as Hernández-León (2008) argues, the migrant has long been left out of this concept of the migration industry, which pays little attention to migrants' active and passive agency in mobilising migration resources and the diverse and dynamic relationships that emerge between migrants and brokers (Herman, 2006; Sanchez, 2015; Ayalew, 2018). It also lacks the existential and emotional dimensions of migration. To address this shortcoming, Schapendonk (2018: 665) adds to the definition of the migration industry by incorporating relationalities and social negotiation with a focus on how migrants navigate the industry and how their practices "relate to, and are entangled with, a wider web of relations." This emphasises the multi-scalar, relational nature of migration and its embeddedness in the social context.

The literature on the migration industry also fails to incorporate the fundamental gender relations that shape and are reshaped by migration. Ethnic background and age group also determine the migration experience and process. Moreover, how migrants and brokers create and use networks by capitalising on shared nationality, ethnicity, religion and hometowns during organising fragmented and stepwise migratory journeys is overlooked (Ayalew, 2018). It is these missing elements in the migration industry literature that the present paper takes into account.

According to Spener (2009), it has proven difficult to define the scope of the industry, a complex landscape with diverse actors and shifting roles. This point is reiterated by Schapendonk (2018). Furthermore, according to Spener (2009:18), there is a "problem of how we establish the conceptual boundaries of the migration industry" either as an analytical concept or a metaphorical representation. Nevertheless, the concept of the migration industry has proven to be an approach that enhances our understanding of migration as a multi-level process that involves different actors.

Taking this into consideration, this paper is situated partly in line with Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen's (2013) concept of the "migration facilitation industry", focusing on brokerage and the material and social infrastructure that shape migratory mobility, but also recognising that the profits and social trust cannot always be separated (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Brokerage is the process of connecting actors in systems of social, economic or political relations in order to facilitate access to valued resources (Stovel &

Shaw, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012). Brokers often occupy the 'middle space' between migrants, states and employers. They can act as extensions of the state, seeking to outsource border controls and colluding with employers to cheapen and commodify migrant labour (McCollum & Findlay, 2018). Brokers can also work on migrants' behalf, finding ways of circumventing restrictive border control policies and practices.

With the topic of brokering migratory exits and sustaining cross-border mobility, the present paper looks into the brokering practice that involves the interplay between different private actors, formal and informal brokers, humanitarian and state actors and institutions, including social networks and technologies that inform, facilitate and condition the migration process, making it self-perpetuating and self-serving (Lin et al. 2017). It also looks into how brokering and smuggling practices thrive from and are sustained by a continuous process of learning about changing conditions along migration routes, including intensification of control and regulatory structures in border areas as well as negotiating power relations between migrants and smugglers at the three stages of migration process. These three states are: (1) recruitment and/or departure; (2) mobility/*en route* and border crossings and (3) settlement at a particular destination (Faist, 2014).

Methodology of the Study

The empirical data was collected through three months of fieldwork in 2016 and 2018 using a conventional qualitative research methodology including in-depth and informal interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, collection of life histories, photographs, extended case studies tracing migratory departures, journey and settlement in destination or return and circulation. Respondents were selected from workers and actors involved in the migration industry. These include five brokers, government officials (two border guards and 16 officials/personnel working in migration related government offices) and six non-government and international organisations, including the IOM and local NGOs engaged in migration management. In addition, 25 aspiring migrants, 30 families/households of migrants, 20 returnees in origin locations (Addis Ababa, Wallo and Hadiya) and 5 migrants *en route* in Metema were interviewed.

Potential migrants, migrants in transit locations, failed migrants as well as returnees were the main targets of this study. This approach helped us to deeply explore the roles of migration facilitation actors at the different stages

of the migration process. Some returnees are aiming to migrate again (either to the same destination or to try new destinations), others want to resettle and still others have managed to become successful business persons. Some were expelled from Sudan while others returned to Ethiopia voluntarily. Both types of returnees were interviewed in Metema and Addis Ababa in order to collect information about their engagements with the migration facilitation industry actors. In addition, stories of migrants' lived experiences helped us to trace the actual process of migratory journeys, border crossings and their experiences in destination locations. As migration decision making (including selection of brokers) engages families/households, the study also targeted households of migrants.

Research in archives or policy document analysis was also conducted to capture socio-political and legal contexts of migration decisions using the services of brokers as well as regulatory infrastructures that shape smuggling organisations. Besides the in-depth interviews, five FGD were held with aspiring migrants and returnees in the study sites. In the following sections, we will explore this further and empirically explain the smuggling operations, process of clandestine migratory departures and journey towards the Sudan.

Results and findings

Smuggling Organisations and Clandestine Journeys

As stated earlier, there is a well-established overland migration route that links Ethiopia and Sudan (Triulzi, 2013: 235). The route begins in Addis Ababa and passes through the towns of Bahir Dar and Gondar and the other major transition towns of Metema and Humera (Himora) at the Ethiopian–Sudanese border, and leads to Khartoum via the towns of Galabat and Gedaref in Sudan. Some people from the Tigray Region and Gondar exit via Humera in the northern part of the Ethiopian–Sudanese border. These migration routes and delaloch networks link villages and towns in Ethiopia with Khartoum.

There are generally two ways of facilitating an overland journey: delaloch gather migrants in Addis Ababa or other bigger cities, such as Jima, Adama and Addis Ababa, for a few days and then arrange transport to Khartoum. The precise number of delaloch engaged in this migratory process is largely unknown. Some sources estimate that more than a thousand migration delaloch live in Addis Ababa alone and hundreds live in transition towns and villages (Abebaw, 2013; IGAD, 2013; Ayalew, 2017). The individuals working with these delaloch, whom migrants call 'the bosses' (that is, lead brokers), sit

in Khartoum, from where they access leqamiwoch (recruiters or collectors), ashagariwoch (transporters), kezaignoch (those who keep migrants in hidden places/houses en route) and teqebayoch (receivers in destination) along the stated routes.

These bosses are former Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants who occasionally work with Sudanese and Libyan smugglers, known as semsari, and have agents in Europe and Saudi Arabia as well. Migrants' testimonies indicate that the bosses sometimes organise overland journeys via Libya to Italy and then Scandinavia or by air directly from Sudan or via Saudi Arabia to Europe with help from Sudanese semsari. The 'bigger bosses' in Khartoum have several nicknames and many of them are from the Eritrean and Ethiopian Tigray ethnic group. Some names frequently mentioned by interlocutors are Kibrom, Ephrem, Wedi German (son of Germany), Wedi Asab (son of Asab) and Yishaq, indicating Tigrigna origin. This is due to the long and established history of clandestine migration facilitations from Eritrea, which the smugglers from these ethnic groups have capitalised on for a long time (Ayalew, 2017).

The bosses' agents, known as leqamiwoch, move inside villages and neighbourhoods in towns and convince young men and women to take the journey before finally sending them to the ashagari in Addis Ababa. From Addis Ababa, another ashagari collects the migrants and sends them to the border towns, such as Metema or Humera, where the next ashagari assists them to cross the border before he hands them over to a Sudanese transporter, who then takes them to Khartoum. However, not only cross-border delaloch networks but also cross-border kinship obligations and other significant actors located in relevant spaces organise the irregular overland exits and journey towards Sudan. In most cases, potential migrants collect the names and addresses of reliable delala or recruiters in origin locations and border areas from friends and family members in Sudan who might have used the same routes or delala. The recruiter or local delala first collects the lists of potential migrants and then contacts his immediate and 'smaller boss' in Addis Ababa or Metema and Humera. The smaller bosses contact their 'mastermind' in Khartoum, who arranges for agents who can bribe the border guards at various checkpoints and others who can transport people across borders and take them to Khartoum. The 'bosses' also decide the appropriate time, condition and means of transport. According to the accounts of delaloch and migrants collected during our fieldwork, transporters flexibly use a combination of public and private transport services.

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Marishet was a 23-year-old woman from Ethiopia. The researcher met her in Khartoum in May 2016 while she was in transit to Sudan. She described her journey from Addis Ababa to Khartoum and the many people involved in getting them from one point to the next. She travelled with her sister after both of them had decided to migrate to Sudan. They consulted their brother-in-law who put them in touch with a delala named Getachew. Getachew promised to get them to Khartoum for 7,500 birr each (about 300 euros), to which they agreed. They planned to use her sister's savings from an earlier stint in Dubai. She promised to repay her sister after she found a job. They then met Getachew at the bus station and he accompanied them to Metema where he handed them over to two Habeshas [Ethiopians] waiting for them on the outskirts of Metema. From this point onwards, the journey became more clandestine and dangerous. Marishet stated:

> *We passed the checkpoints on two motorcycles, which they rode on the side of the roads. From there, we were handed over to a Sudanese man who collected us from Habeshas and drove us to his place in a Toyota pickup car. He offered us one night of accommodation. For the next two days, he drove us through bushes, dust and dirt roads. Finally, he took us deep into the bushes near Khartoum, where we joined about 120 Ethiopian migrants, who were hiding in the bushes and waiting to be transported to Khartoum [...]. The next day, at midnight, the Sudanese came with three minibuses and loaded about 50 people in the cars. After long hours of nonstop driving, we entered Khartoum at midnight.*

After arriving in Khartoum, those who had friends and relatives were dropped at their houses and others waiting for money to be transferred via hawala by their relatives would be held in accommodation arranged by the Sudanese delaloch until the money was received. Those who wanted to continue their trip to Libya could stay with the delaloch until the next leg of the trip was arranged. But those who did not have money to pay for their journey from Ethiopia to Sudan entered into a debt agreement with the delaloch and were informally introduced to employers in Khartoum or other places in Sudan. They would remain under the surveillance of delaloch until they repaid their entire debt.

The above account exemplifies that irregular migratory exits result from actions and interactions of various actors and entities. On the one hand, feelings of immobility in life, mainly among the young people in current day Ethiopia, have partly motivated overland escape, which is facilitated by

diverse actors, including migrants and non-migrants located in several local and transnational spaces. The facilitating agents of migrants' journeys towards Sudan are smugglers that include *delaloch* and their connectors; technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet; family and friendship networks; and public transport and road networks that link Sudan and Ethiopia. These have become infrastructural moorings of clandestine migratory exits and journeys. The interactions of these actors, institutions, networks and objects, which condition and facilitate overland exits, reflect the entanglement of complex economic and social forms, material and technological practices and smuggling networks. Some of the actors engage for money and others (former migrants en route and in diaspora) do so because of cross-border social obligations and reciprocal relations. However, recently, the Ethiopian government has intensified border controls by introducing strict regulations regarding human smuggling practices. Following this, smuggling operations become more complex as smugglers dynamically adapt new strategies to overcome control structures. The following sections explore this in detail.

Intensification of Government Controls and Smugglers' Reactions

Recently, the Ethiopian government intensified migration control infrastructures and regulations following the increased media coverage of the suffering of Ethiopian migrants en route and deportations of thousands of migrants from various destination locations, mainly Saudi Arabia, which also intensified the ongoing anti-government protests in the country (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015; Ayalew, 2017). This increased regulation is also backed by the EU externalisation of border controls. Via externalisation practices, the EU has begun to persuade African states including Ethiopia to "introduce pre-emptive measures to deter or prevent their citizens from irregularly migrating to Europe, and/or other nationals from doing so by transiting through their countries". In exchange, the EU extends various promises including development aid, trade facilitation, foreign investment, and other advantages (Gaibazzi et al., 2017: 5–10). The government of Ethiopia has intensely engaged in criminalising brokers and portraying migrants as victims of the smuggling practices. To that end, proclamations are adopted swiftly and "anti-human trafficking taskforces" have been established at different layers of the bureaucracy targeting the irregular migration facilitators and brokers.

The Ethiopian government introduced different anti-human smuggling legislations. Some of these include the 11th Criminal Bench within the Federal High Court (2007), Human Trafficking and Narcotics section in Organized

Crime Investigation Unit of the Federal Police (2009) and Anti-Trafficking Task Force (2011), which were established to curb human trafficking and smuggling and combat illegal migration. The anti-human trafficking taskforce has been set up at all levels of the administrative tier. Officials from the deputy Prime Minister to the district administrators are members of the taskforce. To broaden migration control activities, law enforcement, religious leaders and traditional leaders have formed an anti-human trafficking committee. Checkpoints have been set up in the main migration routes. Brokers have been criminalised and subjected to organised campaign. In the last five years, in two districts in Wallo and Hadya provinces, 50 and 62 brokers, respectively, were convicted and are serving long prison sentences.

The Private Employment Agency Proclamation 104/1998 was later amended to the 2009 Employment Exchange Service Proclamation 632/2009, which holds Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) and employers liable for the welfare of employees and states higher bond requirements for licensing. Further, the proclamation amendment was argued to have caused a decline in licensed PEAs (from 110 in 2009 to 54 in 2010) and pushed some PEAs into the business of illegal brokerage (Fernandez, 2017). The new anti-human smuggling proclamation (proclamation 909/2015) even introduced tougher regulations and punishments on those engaged in human smuggling and trafficking in person. In 2013, the Ethiopian government banned any labour migration to Middle Eastern countries until agreements were reached with respective countries on the protection of migrant workers (De Regt & Taafesse, 2015; Zewdu, 2018). Following this, the north-western route towards Europe via Sudan became popular. Smugglers diversified their migration facilitation strategies and new actors joined the facilitation industry. In other words, as it is elaborated below, intensification of control infrastructures have not stemmed clandestine migratory exits; rather, they have increased costs, risks and the number of migration facilitation actors, as smugglers dynamically and creatively design new routes and strategies to overcome barriers.

Diversification of Exit Routes and Strategies

The Metema-Galabat border has been the main exit route for migrants along the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. However, after the recent intensification of border controls in the area, migrants cross the border and enter into Sudan by using remote desert routes. According to information from government officials and residents of Metema town, there are different desert routes in

Metema, woreda, that have emerged to serve as major gateways to Sudan. Some of the desert routes found in Metema are Doleo, Meka, Shinfa, Korjamos, Workamba, Chilga, Dambia, Ganda and Arbajira. Migrants pay high costs to brokers to enter into Sudan using these desert routes: from 7,000 to 12,000 Ethiopian birr (Zeyneba, 2017). Previously, it cost approximately 2,000 Ethiopian birr (Ayalew, 2017).

Those migrants who are coming from Eritrea and Somaliland often use the Doleo Desert route, which is found to be one of the most dangerous desert routes in the woreda. In this regard, Zeyneba (2017) stated that in 2016, a car holding 24 migrants from Somaliland (18 male and 6 females) were caught while they were trying to cross the border to enter into Sudan through the Doleo Desert. Moreover, in addition to the above stated desert routes, where the government intensified controls, numerous other unknown desert routes are found by smugglers in order to facilitate migrants' clandestine entry into Sudan. In addition, since the Ethiopian government recently tightened border controls in Metema, the route passing through Humera has become a key outlet. The Humera border is used mainly by Eritreans and Ethiopians from the northern parts of Ethiopia (Ayalew, 2017). There is also another route via Damazin along the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. This route is mainly used by Ethiopians from Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromiya national and regional states to enter Sudan. During our recent fieldwork, we were told that migrants were found dead along this route just two months prior due to dehydration in the dessert.

Until 2013, in many migrants sending areas of Ethiopia, brokers openly collected money, recruited, transported and hosted migrants in their own safe houses. Even the security in certain areas considered them to be creators of opportunity. For instance, in one case in Hadiya, a police commissioner assigned a guard for a broker. However, now brokers have moved from the public scene to underground operations in many parts of Ethiopia. They undertake their services via telephone and local representatives. Most of the negotiations between brokers and potential migrants are made telephonically. Systems of transport have also changed; except in the case of the route from Wallo to the Djibouti border where there is no public transportation, transporting migrants en masse to the border in a rented car has been abandoned. Rather, migrants are told to take public transport by themselves until they reach border towns such as Metema. Systems of sheltering have also

changed. Instead of keeping migrants together, brokers let migrants rent rooms by themselves in hotels around the border during journeys.

The above discussion indicates that intercepting migration routes simply increases the costs and risks of migration instead of preventing it. This is mainly because, besides other factors, more officials and law enforcement joined in the facilitation industry. For instance, during long journeys across the desert, migrants (especially female migrants) experience environmental hazards, gang rape, shortage of food and water, theft and robbery by criminals (Ayalew, 2017; Zeyneba, 2017). In addition, as is elaborated below, tightening border controls partly increased actors engaged in the facilitation of migration.

Smuggling Becomes Community Enterprise in Border Areas

According to the informants and researchers' observations, the social and economic lives of Metema town thrives because of migration and contraband trade. The town is predominantly populated by returnees, newly arrived potential migrants and seasonal labour migrants coming to the large-scale commercial sesame farms in the area. Urban dwellers and organisations – such as shop owners, hawala agents, tea and coffee vendors, hotels, shoeshines, youth economic associations such as shanta mahber (luggage association) and private transport services (buses, Bajaj, tractors and minibuses) – benefit from and support brokering practices and clandestine migration. This is because all of these social groups generate financial gains by hosting, feeding, guiding and transporting migrants, as well as brokering border crossings.

Abdalla was a sheqaba (local broker) in the town of Metema. During the time of interview, in May 2018, he was 35 years old. He had served as a Federal Police officer, but later he quit the position and became a sheqaba in Metema for five years. He narrated the following:

> *Metema town is built by the money from the migrants. Everybody participates. Migrants come with money, people in Metema waits for that money. Thus, nobody resists. You know why the government cannot stop migration? The migrants want to migrate, the people here eagerly wait to support them and obtain money. Everybody waits for that money. This lady [pointing at a lady cooking food] while cooking food in front of her house she may see a strange person walking in the street. Then, she calls someone she knows working as a broker, probably her husband, and tells him about the strange person. He immediately comes and*

> *approaches the stranger. He takes him/her to a place of accommodation. There are many houses in the town mainly built to host migrants. This person gets money at least by taking the migrant to that accommodation place. He puts the migrant in contact with a broker, and gets money again.*

Abdalla also added that a shoeshine does the same. A new arrival sits at a shoeshine or coffee house and tries to observe the environment. The shoeshines and the women who sell coffee report the newcomer to brokers or to a sheqaba. A shop keeper does the same. Abdalla stated, "Have not you seen shopkeepers sitting in empty shops, and barber shops? Their incomes from the formal businesses would not pay the rent. They just sit there and wait for other opportunities". The "other opportunities" Abdalla refers to include migrant smuggling and contraband trade.

Shop owners might deal with more complex issues. Most of them are in the money exchange business. They exchange Ethiopian birr for Sudanese pound, or vice versa. The shop owners also engage in informal money transfers (hawala). According to informants, many of the shop owners in Metema lived in Khartoum. They returned from there. Thus, they know boutique owners in Khartoum and work with them in money transfer. In Khartoum, there are shops named after the hometown of migrants, such as Jimma Boutique, Wallaga Boutique, Gondar Boutique, etc. From Addis Ababa or Jimma, families or brokers send money through Ethiopian banks to Metema. The shop owners in Metema withdraw the money, change it to Sudanese pound and send it from Galabat to Khartoum. There are money transfer shops there. They also use mobile banking; the most well-known being ZEIN banking. Migrants also send money from Khartoum for their families or payment for a broker through these money transfers and brokers use these shop keepers.

Security and police officers make the importance of their tasks visible by intercepting migrants when they are crossing the border clandestinely, detaining and deporting them back to their countries of origin. However, some officers also trade migrants with brokers and open up checkpoints in exchange for bribes. Villagers and peasants also work with brokers and sheqaba. For instance, village militias and farmers protect migrants from security and host, feed and guide them through safe routes via bushes and forests during clandestine crossings. For these services, they demand money from brokers and/or smugglers as well as migrants.

One informant stated: "here we usually say, 'There is no sheikh and kes [priest] in Metema.' Nobody is holy here. This is not a place anybody prefers to inhabit. The weather is harsh… Metema is very hot." Informants claimed that some police spend only nine months in Metema and will be transferred due to the difficulty of the weather. As such, they want to get their share before they are transferred to another place. Smuggling migrants and contraband are the main opportunity for police officers to earn money before leaving.

Abdalla spoke about the engagement of local militias as follows:

> *There is local militia. The militia is armed. People in this lowland border area are armed and are very good in shooting targets. The militia members are recruited from the local people. The militia has no salary. Some of the militia members are former members of the police or army. Some of them live in rented houses. So, what is their source of income? They are the brokers. For the lead brokers also, it is much better to connect to the militia than to the police. The militia members are local people. They know the route much better than the police. Especially recently, when the migrants are coming in a big group, we are using the militia and it has become common. They fight with the police. The police usually run away.*

The Engagement of Unemployed Youth – The Sheqaba

The key actors that facilitate border crossings in the town of Metema are sheqaba. Literally, sheqaba denotes unemployed young men and women. Sheqaba play multiple roles as local brokers in facilitating clandestine migration. Abdalla stated the following:

> *When busses arrive, the sheqaba populate the bus station. Some are sent by lead brokers. The main broker do not come out and make himself visible. He hides in somewhere and work by phone calls or send his agents to collect migrants from bus station. Some other sheqabas are hunting for migrants who have not found broker yet, or whose broker is late to arrive. The sheqaba approach those who have no broker and connect them with a lead broker they know. Then they get share in the income based on their negotiation. In case, the migrants already have a broker, who is late to receive them, either the sheqaba snatch [migrant theft is*

> common] them and pass them to another broker whom they favor or call
> the original broker and negotiate a term of sharing as they are the
> rescuers, and of course they can also threaten him as he is illegal
> broker...We [sheqabas] also monitor the presence of police; the presence
> of security guys. We monitor the border and provide information to the
> lead brokers. We also monitor the smuggling routes. We look for
> migrants who are crossing to the Sudan. We know the routes.

Some sheqabas are formally organised by the government. For instance, the luggage association, which is locally referred in Amharic as shanta mahber, also work as brokers. They are formally registered with the government. The luggage association has 108 members. Their main task is facilitating legal migrants to transit the town. They are organised to support the migrants who come with visas. They pick up migrants who have visas from the bus station, transport them by bajaji with protection from abuse by illegal brokers, guide them to shelters, facilitate currency exchange in the black market, photocopy travel documents for them and take their passports to the immigration office. In a way, their task is to relieve some of the burden from the immigration office. However, some individual members are also main players in migrant smuggling. Most of them compete with sheqabas and work as intermediaries for lead brokers that facilitate clandestine crossings. Hence, the sheqabas call the luggage association the government sheqaba. The luggage association also have a bad public reputation, as they exploit migrants by demanding extra payments.

Smuggling is Embedded in Cross-Border Trade

Smuggling operations are embedded within and rely on cross-border informal trade and mobility. For instance, there is a main road that passes through the town of Metema and extends to Khartoum via Galabat on the Sudanese side. Here, there is formal and informal cross-border trade of people and goods. Lorries, buses and minibuses transport goods and people between Ethiopia and Sudan via the town of Metema using this road. This back and forth flow of contraband goods and people is accompanied by a flow information and knowledge about clandestine migratory mobility and transitions. Brokers on both sides of the border use kinship, friendship and religious, ethnic and business ties to facilitate informal money transfers for hosting and transporting migrants as well as for bribing officers to open up check points. Brokers simultaneously use both formal and informal currency exchange and money transfer systems. For instance, hawala agents use formal banks and

mobile banking by means of Ethiopian and Sudanese telephone lines and SIM cards.

For instance, at the Ethiopian-Sudanese border, there is a bridge that separates two border towns (Metema on the Ethiopian side and Galabat on the Sudanese side) that has been serving as a gateway for migrants to enter into Sudan. It is also one of the major routes for Ethiopian migrants who legally enter into Sudan using a short-term visiting visa or the Sudanese ID known as the Tasrih. This route is also open for the residents of Metema and Galabat towns who visit the market centers during the day to exchange goods and services.

Though the Tasrih is used primarily by the residents of both border towns, it is also used by migrants who disguise themselves as residents of either Metema or Galabat to cross the border and enter Sudan. Brokers arrange the Tasrih for Ethiopian migrants from Galabat. With these Sudanese IDs, migrants can meet Sudanese employers at Galabat who help them to move to Khartoum (Zeyneba, 2017).

Some migrants try to cross the main gate and bridge by disguising themselves as residents of Metema, while others wait for a suitable time to cross the bridge, such as at night or during market days in Galabat or in Metema when the guards are not around. These migrants then hide themselves in the huts found in Suk El-Galabat (the market place at Galabat) and travel further into Sudanese territory through the desert on foot or on lorries or other means of transportation. Many female migrants pass the main gate by wearing a tob (veil) commonly worn by Sudanese women. Once they cross the border, they contact the Sudanese broker and travel to Khartoum by car through the forest. Since the border area is covered with dense but uninhabited bushes, it is conducive for the brokers and smugglers to transport migrants into Sudan via these bushes and easily bypass checkpoints (Zeyneba, 2017).

The above discussion exemplifies that in order to continue with clandestine crossings in the face of increasing border controls, the generation and sharing of knowledge about particular transition nodes is necessary. Migrants and smugglers collectively produce information about how to use visibility and invisibility strategies in order to circumvent immobility regimes in the border areas. This indicates that the border areas are not merely sites where the state exercises its sovereign power by way of implementing border control regulations, but it is also a site where translocal and transnational social and

economic relations thrive. This is mainly due to the continuous back and forth flow – both legally and illegally – of people, information and goods across international borders. Consequently, facilitating clandestine migration across the border sustains – despite intensifications of regulations and control structures – since it is embedded within and operates in relation to the stated cross-border mobilities and relations.

Conclusions

The preceding discussions and analysis have demonstrated that human smuggling and brokering of clandestine migratory exits is embedded in and functions within broader translocal and transnational social, cultural and economic relations. This challenges the view reflected in popular discourses that such smuggling is organised by independent criminal organisations. Smugglers and their intermediaries facilitate Ethiopian migrants' clandestine border crossings via the town of Metema by mobilising support and resources from local communities along the border, bribing border guards and capitalising on their ethnic, religious and economic connections in the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands. Thus, human smuggling has become a community enterprise. It is deeply integrated into the economic lives of the lowland poverty-stricken border areas. Brokers have made the migration industry accessible to the local people. The control structure does not carry the same economic incentives. Thus, brokering thrives – amidst the intensification of regulatory and control infrastructures – as it enjoys community approval and support. Migration facilitation actors navigate expectations of the community by creating opportunities for transnational mobility for migrants and by sharing the benefits of smuggling with various sections of the society, mainly in border areas. They also simultaneously navigate regulatory and control structures by designing various strategies to circumvent border controls. Thus, the system of control structures reproduces a dynamic system of migration facilitation infrastructures.

More specifically, brokering migratory exits thrives despite intensifications of control infrastructures because of the production and reproduction of knowledge within the smugglers and migrants' transnational networks. They continuously generate new knowledge and information about ways of recruiting migrants and transporting them via safe routes as well as ways of money transfer and payment strategies. This knowledge is shared with relevant facilitation actors and migrants using mobile phones and online communications. In other words, the entanglement of social and smuggling

networks, communication technology and the production and reproduction of knowledge constitute the backbone of the migration facilitation industry in general and the infrastructure of contemporary clandestine migratory mobility in particular. The production and sharing of this migration knowledge also entail unequal power relations between migrants and smugglers. Those who have knowledge and the means of mobility – the smugglers and local community along the border areas – have more power than migrants. Thus, capitalising on this knowledge, some of them perpetrate violence toward and exploitation of migrants on the move. Therefore, intensifications of border controls do not stop clandestine migration; rather they increase risks, costs and vulnerabilities of migration as more actors join to organise migration and migrants are forced to take longer unsafe routes.

Acknowledgment

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