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Migration barriers and migration momentum: Ethiopian irregular migrants in the Ethiopia-South Africa migration corridor

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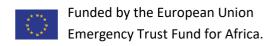Research Team Leader:
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Abstract

This paper considers the key factors driving a persistent aspiration among Ethiopians from Hosaena and Durame towns, in southern Ethiopia, to migrate to South Africa (mainly to Johannesburg), despite intensifying restrictions and hostility. It focuses on the motivations of people who have migrated to South Africa and established a foothold in the informal trading sector. This irregular migration persists, despite the apparent deterrents of intensified securitisation and labour barriers erected against irregular migration, rising smuggling fees, high risks en route and of xenophobic hostility within the host country. It persists, despite the enhanced dependency of irregular migrants on enablers, including smugglers. The migration of Ethiopians to South Africa emerges out of combinations of migration drivers. Its momentum is sustained by several factors at both the receiving and the sending ends. Important forces within the array of drivers are the actual disparities in opportunities between the informal sectors in Ethiopia and South Africa and the allure of success and prosperity. The latter is a compelling spectre presented by established migrants and returnees, as well as by the fruits of their migration success evidenced in Hosaena and Durame towns.

Keywords

Irregular migration, migration drivers, informal economy, smuggling, migration control, migration culture, social networks

Contents

1 Background

This paper examines the sustained momentum of migration and settlement of irregular migrants from southern Ethiopia to South Africa, despite increasing efforts to stem the migration and despite hostility towards migrants in South Africa, and particularly those who seek a livelihood in its informal economy. Unlike the migration of Ethiopians to Europe, North America and the Middle East, the migration of Ethiopians to South Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon, which emerged in the mid-1990s (Estifanos & Zack, 2019). This migration stream is rooted in the coincidence of regime changes in both the sending and host countries. After the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) led government instituted progressive asylum laws that permitted migrants and asylum seekers to claim temporary status or asylum with the right to work and study (Wehmhoerner, 2015).

The end of the Derg's military regime in Ethiopia in 1991 brought with it a change in policy that regulated internal and international mobility, and that has contributed to outward migration (Teller & Hailemariam, 2011; Estifanos, 2016). After the 1991 transition, the EPRDF government introduced a number of political and economic liberties, including a shift towards a market-oriented economy. It also lifted the requirement for citizens to secure a 'pass' when they moved from one part of the country to another (Teller & Hailemariam, 2011). Moreover, the government eased international mobility by allowing citizens to have access to passports and travel documents (Kefale & Mohammed, 2015).

Ethiopians were among the first African immigrants in post-apartheid South African metropolitan areas and small towns. Today, tens of thousands of Ethiopians live and work in South Africa. Many come from southern Ethiopia (Estifanos & Zack, 2019). While the initial migration trend of Ethiopians to South Africa was inspired by regime changes, its perpetuation is driven by a combination of absolute and relative deprivation (Stark & Taylor, 1989; Czaika & de Haas, 2011); increasing aspiration and capability among emigrants (Estifanos & Zack, 2019); and by the power of established smuggling networks (Kanko et al, 2013; Estifanos, 2015; Adugna et al, 2019).

1.1 Southern Ethiopia: migrant origin

Contemporary Ethiopian migration to South Africa has been boosted by a number of significant events, some of which have specifically spurred the movement of people from the south of the country to the tip of Africa. An early 1990s migration stream involved the onward migration of men who had migrated during the civil war (between the former Derg military government and opposition groups including the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which ultimately emerged as the ruling power), and had sought refuge in Kenya (Estifanos, 2020). One of the main reasons for the second stream of migration (2000 – 2010) was coincidence in the appointment of Ethiopia's ambassador to South Africa, Mr Tesfaye Habiso in 2000–01, and post-

election (2000) violence in Ethiopia that particularly targeted the Hadiya and Kambata ethnic groups
in the south (Estifanos, 2015). The former ambassador is from Durame town and has a Kambata
ethnic ancestry. He also lived and worked in Hosaena town – a neighbouring town dominated by the
Hadiya ethnic group. The former ambassador arranged job opportunities in South Africa for a
handful of migrants from the two towns (Teshome, 2010; Estifanos, 2015).

Consequently, many migrants from Hosaena and Durame towns and their satellite rural areas
migrated to South Africa during this period. Our informants, including the former ambassador
himself, noted that his assignment in 2000–01 inspired confidence among emigrants who were
running away from the post-election violence. In other words, the emigrants from these areas felt
psychologically secure, since the former ambassador was from their place of origin. Smugglers also
used his presence as a foil to recruit migrants from southern Ethiopia for the journey to South Africa
(Estifanos, 2016; Estifanos & Zack, 2019).

A third migration stream was linked to the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa. Would-be
entrepreneurs migrated in the hope of taking short- or medium-term advantage of the trade
opportunities, which were expected to arise from consumption associated with the tournament
(Estifanos, 2015; Estifanos & Zack, 2019). Afterwards, the migration of Ethiopians to South Africa
increased and consolidated into a pattern of greater diversity in terms of gender, age,
socioeconomic status and geographic and ethnic origin.

While the initial migration from southern Ethiopia to South Africa was instigated by regime changes
and subsequent economic and political transitions, transnational social and smuggling networks
played a significant role in its perpetuation (see section 5.3).

1.2   South Africa: migrant destination and transit

South Africa is now the number one destination for international migrants within the continent
(Landau et al, 2018). As a migrant hosting country it offers the advantages of a non-encampment
policy as well as a policy allowing asylum seekers to work, trade or study pending the outcome of
their application. Just over 10% of all African emigrants in 2017 went to South Africa (Landau et al,
2018). Ethiopians are the largest group of asylum seekers with pending applications in South Africa.[1]
Although there are no data to show exactly how many Ethiopians migrate to South Africa through
irregular means each year, tens of thousands of them have migrated there in this way. The
International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated in 2009 that 65,000 – 70,000 Ethiopians
had migrated to the country (IOM, 2009).[2]

South Africa is primarily a short- or medium-term destination country for many of these migrants.
Many have migrated with the intention of returning home relatively soon, while others have
established themselves for the long term or on a permanent basis. For some who seek better futures

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[1] See the EU Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography website at
https://bluehub.jrc.ec.europa.eu/migration/app/. Accessed: December 19, 2018.
[2] Unofficially, researchers have been told that, of the roughly 60 people who migrate towards South Africa
through the Kenyan town of Moyale each day, 60% are from Hadiya ethnic group.

in Global North countries, South Africa is perceived as a transit country. Indeed, many pioneer Ethiopian migrants headed to South Africa with the intention of using it as a transit point from which to travel onward to European and North America countries, as they anticipated that the processes for seeking asylum in those countries would be easier from South Africa (Estifanos, 2016; Gebre et al, 2010).

Our informants from southern Ethiopia who were interviewed in South Africa indicated that they were tempted to move beyond South Africa once they had built up their financial, social and political capital in the country. They believed they would have better socioeconomic prospects and security in the US or Europe. In terms of the threats facing them in South Africa, they highlighted the risks associated with their work in the informal sector, the irregularity of their migration status and high levels of violent crime.

Against this backdrop, our research looks into the factors driving the migration of Ethiopians from southern Ethiopia to South Africa despite the multiple barriers that are being erected to stem these movements. This is located within a broader context of contemporary migration regimes that restrict mobility, and labour market policies that inhibit integration. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 briefly introduces the field research method and data collection techniques. Section 3 examines the migration barriers and associated risks. Section 4 considers settlement barriers and risks. Section 5 discusses factors that boost the migration momentum. Conclusions are presented in Section 6.

2 Research method

Findings from two studies have informed this article. The first was conducted in 2014 and focused on the examination of smuggling networks in the Ethiopia–South Africa migration corridor. The study was conducted as a partial fulfillment of an MA thesis that was completed in 2015. The second study was conducted in 2018 under the auspices of the Migrating Out of Poverty (MOOP) research programme consortium.[3] It focused on the migration industry that facilitates Ethiopian migration to South Africa.

In the 2014 study ethnographic research was conducted with 20 Ethiopian informants in Johannesburg and a number of its adjacent townships. Further fieldwork was conducted in the same year in Addis Ababa and Hosaena town with 15 informants. The 2018 MOOP study relied on 40 key informant interviews conducted in South Africa (Johannesburg and Durban) and Ethiopia (Addis Ababa and Hosaena). A purposive sampling method was employed to interview 40 key informants. Of these interviews, 33 were conducted in South Africa and seven in Ethiopia; seven were with women. The lower proportion of female informants is consistent with the male-dominated migration to South Africa.

In addition to key informant interviews, field notes, informal and formal discussions, observations, a transect walk and a literature review informed the research in both studies. The paper employed a thematic analysis of data and literature.

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[3] The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) funds the Migrating out of Poverty (MOOP) research programme consortium. It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions – across Asia and Africa. MOOP's main goal is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and wellbeing of impoverished migrants, their communities and their countries through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. For more information, please visit the website, www.migratingoutofpoverty.org.

3 Migration barriers and risks

Globalisation processes have created material and affective linkages between the local and the global, attracting developing countries' citizens to developed ones (Castles, 2003). However, many people from developing countries are excluded from joining the corridors of globalisation (Blij, 2009; Lucht, 2012). Such exclusion deepens as host country governments increase their efforts to restrain and deter irregular migrants through intensification and diversification of migration control strategies (Castles, 2004; Bakewell, 2008; Klein, 2014).

With narrowing opportunities for regular migration, irregular, informal and often clandestine routes and systems have been opened for migrants to travel extra-legally. The use of these channels often depends on the services of human smugglers (De Haas, 2007; Estifanos, 2015). Human smugglers offer a wide range of services for irregular migrants. They provide security and protection; facilitate the migration while serving as gate-openers; arrange physical transportation and illegal crossing of borders; and procure false documents (Heckmann, 2007; Ayalew, 2018; Adugna et al, 2019).

Irregular migrants also depend on their social networks, stretched across transnational space, for support and solidarity. During the migration process, social networks might: reduce the risks and costs of migration; raise capital to finance journeys; and settle ransom payment for migrants stuck in transit countries (Cvajner & Sciortino, 2010; Belloni, 2016; Sanchez & Natividad, 2017). During the settlement processes, irregular migrants may rely on their social networks to sustain their migration through various kinds of assistance, including providing help to repay their debts, to mediate assimilation shocks and to avoid deportation. They may also rely on these networks for emotional support and social connection (Massey et al, 1987; Herman, 2006).

However, unscrupulous or cavalier smugglers are known to put migrants' lives in danger (Frouws et al, 2014; Albahari, 2015). And kin and social acquaintances that facilitate irregular migration may in some instances take advantage of irregular migrants' weak positions to exploit and engage them in criminal activities (Hagan, 1998; Boyd, 1989; Cranford, 2005; Poros, 2011). Furthermore, in the destination space social networks also constrain individual migrants' freedom (Portes & Landolt, 1996). They may also be exclusionary and exploitative during the settlement of migrants in the host space (Poros, 2011).

The causal factors around these risks are not simply personal or driven by individual greed or malice. They cannot be decontextualised from the structural violence of global inequality and the deprivation of migrants' mobility rights (Castles, 2004; Gerard, 2014; Khosravi ,2011). In this regard, the narratives of our informants resonate with claims that the risks and costs of irregular migration are associated with contemporary host-country migration regimes. Contrary to the logic of stemming irregular migration, intensification and diversification of border control and securitisation

measures in recent years has contributed significantly to the increased cost of irregular migration and raised the associated risks and fatalities (Andersson, 2014; Boehm, 2016; Ayalew, 2018). Our informants who had travelled to South Africa in recent years indicated that smugglers demanded additional payments, as they had to avoid the usual migration routes, reschedule journeys from daytime to the hours of darkness after midnight, or make repeated attempts to cross borders.

Smuggling operations have adapted to overcome or avoid increased reinforcements at borders. Increasingly such operations demand the wit of experienced and specialised smugglers and networks of new routes, new agents and new methodologies, which have further inflated the fees and risks associate with being smuggled. Thanks to the growing difficulty of travelling and crossing borders by land, for example, smugglers are increasingly using (often dilapidated and unsafe) boats to smuggle migrants around the Indian Ocean rim. Smugglers have used various sea routes, including travel by boat from Mogadishu and Kismayo in Somalia to Mombasa in Kenya, and then from Mombasa to Pemba or Mocimboa in Mozambique, or to a variety of destinations in Tanzania, including Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Bagamayo (Long & Crisp, 2011). The re-routing and diversification of transportation modes is exposing migrants to a different risk from what is prevalent on the overland migration routes.

But overland routes also pose extreme risk and uncertainty. In addition to re-timing, rerouting and making repeated attempts, to cross strict borders and during roadblocks, smuggglers either hide migrants in unsafe places or bribe officials posted there. Our informants reported on the extreme dangers attached to the transport modes in which they or acquaintances were smuggled across the borders of transit countries. These included being slotted under the carriage of large trucks or being stowed inside crowded containers among goods or cattle.

4 Settlement barriers and risks

Ethiopian migrants in South Africa face several intersecting barriers to integration, and intersecting risks to sustaining or consolidating their migration. For many, South Africa is a place to seek short- or medium-term refuge from economic or political crises. They have migrated with the intention of returning home or moving on to a wealthier country (Gebre et al, 2010; Zack & Estifanos, 2016).

Ethiopians are able to obtain a passport to travel but may not be granted a visa to enter South Africa – because they are suspected of entering with the intention of staying illegally. Indeed, irregular migrants depend on smugglers to safeguard their crossing from Ethiopia to Kenya at the border town of Moyale. Because their mobility is inevitably constructed as a move to South Africa, and because they often lack the necessary language skills, Hadiya migrants at this border crossing are particularly vulnerable to extraction from immigration officers, and are especially dependent on the services of smugglers (Adugna et al, 2019)

Once in South Africa Ethiopians attempt to regularise their status either by submitting formal asylum applications or by concluding corrupt transactions with immigration officials in order to obtain documentation illegally (Kanko et al, 2013; Estifanos, 2015). The key legitimate means to entering South Africa as a low-skilled migrant is to seek political asylum. In reality migration drivers from the Horn of Africa are manifold and migration is 'mixed', motivated by economic, social, environmental and political factors (Lindley & Hammond, 2014; Estifanos & Zack, 2019).

South African law insists that asylum cases be resolved either by rejection or by granting refugee status. This does not by any means imply that all migrants who arrive in South Africa manage to regularise their status. Indeed the country has the highest number of unsettled asylum-seeker claims in the world (Landau & Pampalone, 2018). Applicants may wait for many years for asylum-seeker permits. Many Ethiopian immigrants hold asylum-seeker permits; these are supposed to be temporary documents. The length of time before renewal varies – sometimes it is as short as three months. Our informants lamented that their applications had been stalled for many years. Some of them had spent two decades or more in an uncertain migration status, as their asylum-seeker permits were renewed for short periods (mostly one to six months) over many years.

The closure of Refugee Reception Offices (RROs) in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town in 2011 and 2012, based on unclear and, according to the courts, 'irrational' grounds further adds to the burden of renewing asylum permits, as fewer centres are now available for this service. RRCs are the centres where asylum seekers are required to lodge their application for asylum, in person. They are also where they receive and apply for one- to six-monthly renewals of the documentation that

deems them legal in the country. Because the adjudication of asylum status takes many years, asylum seekers are required to visit the RROs numerous times. The Department of Home Affairs cited reasons such as the difficulty of operating in urban areas, the abuse of the system by economic migrants and the fact that ports of entry are further north in the country. In 2013 and 2015 the courts found these closures to be unlawful and demanded the centres be reopened (Scalabrini Centre, 2018). Their opening was severely delayed and only the Port Elisabeth centres had officially been reopened at the time of writing.

Furthermore, a hostile political discourse that scapegoats immigrants and criminalises their informal businesses makes settlement difficult. Violence against foreign nationals in South Africa has persisted during its post-apartheid history. Mlilo and Misago (2019) indicate that tens of thousands of people have been harassed, attacked or killed because of their status as outsiders or foreign nationals. Their research records 529 xenophobic incidents of violence between 1994 and 2018. These incidents resulted in 309 deaths, 901 physical assaults, 2,193 shops looted and over 100,000 people displaced (Mlilo & Misago, 2019). Such violence flares in a context in which it is not uncommon for politicians and officials to scapegoat foreign nationals for the economic and service delivery crisis within the country. And police harassment and officials' denial of rights to foreign nationals is commonplace (Landau, 2011; Mlilo & Misago, 2019).

In addition, the government's draft White Paper on International Migration proposal (SERI, 2017) seeks to severely constrain asylum seekers' right to work. There are also draft business policy provisions that seek to constrain the rights of foreigners to trade (Rogerson, 2015). Although immigrants currently have the right to trade in the informal sector and public space in South Africa, it is a sector that is poorly supported and often criminalised by the state. In addition to the state attacks, with police confiscating their goods in regular raids, South African civilians have frequently targeted foreign informal traders, looting their businesses during all too frequent xenophobic flares (Gordon, 2019; Crush et al, 2015).

Without refugee status, the majority of Ethiopian migrants have no access to the formal employment market. Their security is also compromised by the short-term renewals they receive on their asylum-seeking permits. This insecure status makes it impossible for them to open bank accounts or apply for leases or credit. Their only option is to try to support themselves in the informal economy. A combination of irregularity and informality not only negatively affects economic and social integration, but also exposes migrants to various violent and non-violent risks. These extend inside their national communities, as established compatriots may take advantage of their precarity.

5 Migration momentum

The forces that lead to the initiation and perpetuation of migration are known in migration literature as migration drivers. Authors distinguish between the factors that push people from their paces of origin and those that pull them towards destinations, as well as those that exceed these categories (van Hear et al, 2018). This section considers a number of key drivers of migration that motivate persons who find employment in the informal sector in Johannesburg, as evidenced in the accounts of informants in this research. Economic deprivation, as well as disparities between Ethiopia and South Africa are noted. The role of established social and smuggling networks in enabling movement and sustaining the migration momentum is also outlined. And an additional pull factor, of fleeting images of an idyllic migration experience in South Africa, is discussed. None of these drivers is discrete and this section suggests linkages between them.

5.1 Relative deprivation and changing aspirations

Contrary to conventional narratives that posit the role of absolute poverty in driving migration, there is increasing consensus among scholars about the role relative deprivation plays (Castles, 2004; De Haas, 2007; Clemens, 2014). It is also argued that social transformation processes that have increased Africans' capabilities and aspirations to migrate have triggered intra-African migration, towards sites of relative advantage on the continent (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016).

Actual and perceived differences in opportunities between Ethiopia and South Africa, as well as a changing aspiration among the youth in Ethiopia, serve as additional factors in driving the migration from southern Ethiopia to South Africa. The narratives of our informants suggest that young people in deprived rural areas of southern Ethiopia are subjected to a stain of exclusion and even shame if they are not seeking to migrate. Non-migrant youth and non-migrant-sending households feel deprived or inferior when they compare their socioeconomic status with migrant-sending neighbours or with relatives and friends in South Africa. The deprivation of 'left behind' youth (or of those whose dreams have collapsed in their immediate environment) is pronounced when some of the migrants sending households exhibit dramatic turnarounds in their fortunes. Tesfa Tigabu recalls:

> Back in Durame we used to envy a village man who drove a dilapidated Datsun vehicle. We always took him as our inspiration. However, when we saw our friends who migrated to South Africa driving fancy cars, some of which are operated with a remote control, we could not control our temptations. After witnessing the success of our former friends in South Africa, we felt even poorer than we actually were. That's the main reason I migrated to South Africa.

A combination of actual and perceived feelings of relative deprivation, as well as a growing aspiration for social mobility have fomented a feeling of restlessness in young people in the south of

the country. The narratives of our informants indicate that, in their desperation to migrate, some stole money from family members, while others took loans from micro-credit associations. Yet others used inheritance money or stole from government offices to finance their migration.

SintayehuTessema's migration to South Africa shows that relative deprivation may not necessarily be triggered from the host space, but from the sending area. His migration was inspired by that of his immediate friend (and his friend's younger brother), who had run a profitable restaurant in their neighbourhood in Hosaena town. Although Sintayehu too owned a small motor repair garage and was leading a reasonably good life, he became edgy when the two brothers departed – the younger following the footsteps of his elder brother within a year – after selling their medium-size restaurant. Like his friends, Sintayehu sold his motor repair garage to migrate to South Africa. As he prepared for his journey, he discovered that the money he had raised from the sale of his garage would only pay for his journey to Malawi. He was so desperate that he thought of marrying a young woman in his locality with the hidden intention of financing his migration. He targeted the woman when he discovered that she had rich relatives in South Africa who could finance his migration. He explained his tactic:

> My father gathered the family and we discussed about financing my migration, because the money I raised from the sale of my garage would only get me to Malawi. So, my father asked the remaining members of the family to contribute and finance the remaining journey. They said they couldn't afford. That's when a sudden thought of marrying a girl, who has well-to-do relatives in South Africa, occurred to me. I did marry her. And her relatives in South Africa covered the smuggling money from Malawi to South Africa.

5.2 Disparities in opportunity for self-employment

The 2013 *World Migration Report* noted that Ethiopian migrants' movement towards South Africa is driven by factors such as better opportunities, an agreeable environment and relative proximity to home (IOM, 2013). South Africa's per capita wealth of US$11,310 registered more than 40 times higher than Ethiopia's ($260) in 2015.[4] This indicator of potentially better opportunities in the southern country is augmented by other economic disparities that influence migration. In this regard, a key disparity in opportunities between Ethiopia and South Africa lies in access to and choice within the informal economy.

In Ethiopia the pace of contemporary urbanisation far exceeds the rate at which basic infrastructure and services are provided. The consequences for the urban poor have been substantial. The inadequacy of urban development efforts over the past three decades has left behind it weak urban governance and management structures, obsolete local tariff and revenue structures, a critical shortage of trained personnel and declining urban infrastructure and services in towns and cities (Fransen & van Dijk, 2008).

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[4] *Africa Wealth Report*, 2015. http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/3196314/the-africa-2015-wealth-report#pos-0. Accessed: 10 October 2015.

Despite the Ethiopian government's recent attempt to creating enabling environments, the informal sector has seen limited growth in productivity and remains dependent upon low-skill work binding its workers to vulnerable employment. The protracted bureaucratic complexity, weak and uncoordinated systems, high levels of corruption, inefficiencies and high tax requirements for participation in Ethiopia's informal economy constrain people's opportunities for livelihood creation in its urban centres (Fenta, 2011). In Addis Ababa the situation is particularly restrictive – meaning the poor resort to informality involuntarily. This exclusionary informality is different from the voluntary informality practised in several countries where businesses and households opt for informality based on a cost–benefit analysis (Fransen & van Dijk, 2008).

On the other hand, the barriers to entry in the South African informal sector are comparatively low. While there are bureaucratic restrictions, and informal traders in particular are susceptible to police harassment and foreign traders are at risk from added hostility among local South Africans through xenophobic attack, there are – for now – legal protections for the rights of migrants to conduct retail trade in the informal sector. This presents apparently promising opportunities for many Ethiopian immigrant entrepreneurs to thrive in economic terms. Our informants noted the presence of strong market opportunities in South Africa, saying that South Africans have higher purchasing power and a stronger desire to consume than Ethiopians. This is even more pronounced when Johannesburg's opportunities are compared with those of the towns and rural areas whence the majority of Ethiopian migrants interviewed in these studies originate.

In their photo-book that centres on Johannesburg's Ethiopian quarter, Zack and Lewis (2018) interviewed Ahmed Geleta, who said that in Ethiopia he had been a member of a political movement that opposed the ruling party and that he was under threat of persecution from state forces. He had fled to South Africa. He said he felt free in South Africa. Asked why he had crossed the continent to arrive in Johannesburg, instead of going to neighboring Kenya, where he would not even require a visa, he replied: "The main thing we need is to be able to do business. There are many Ethiopians doing business in other African countries, but here is the highest concentration. Because in Johannesburg the laws are easy; you can just open a shop … the laws don't chase you" (Zack & Lewis, 2018).

The case of Kassech Adugna, an Ethiopian returnee from Saudi Arabia, offers similar insights. Kassech suffered financial difficulties in Addis Ababa's informal economy, including high tariffs, protracted bureaucracy and the demolition of her small restaurant when the owners redeveloped the site it was located on. She moved to South Africa hoping to work for her brother's friends, whom she had met in Addis Ababa. They welcomed Kassech in Johannesburg and she started working in their shops. Indeed, Kassech used her work as a transition to start her own business. She speaks of her migration to South Africa:

> I didn't have any plan to come to South Africa. I worked in the Arab countries for few years. Then, I returned to Ethiopia to start my own business. But, doing business in Ethiopia was not easy. Even closing it was very hard, as the amount they levied on my business was huge. So, I had finished all the money I saved from working in Arab

countries. There was no job opportunity in Ethiopia either. I become dependent on my
family again. In the meantime, I met people who returned to Ethiopia from South Africa.
I got information about the availability of jobs and the ease of doing business in South
Africa from these people. That's why I came here.

Aside from the bureaucratic ease of opening and operating a business and the huge market
opportunity in South Africa, disparities in terms of a very high tariff levied (in Ethiopia) and
exemption from it (in South Africa) in the informal economies turned out to be a powerful factor
driving migration. Fear of the high tariff that would be levied on informal businesses was offered as a
factor inhibiting many Ethiopian migrant entrepreneurs in South Africa from returning home.

On the other hand, growing pressures on the informal economy in inner city Johannesburg, including
frequent police raids, increased costs as the rand plummeted, and a saturated and overtraded
market of thousands of small shops selling fast fashion (Zack & Govender, 2019), have resulted in
economic opportunities shrinking. For many, profits are marginal. Yet large numbers of Ethiopians
have migrated, and continued to migrate, to South Africa in the hope of taking short- or medium-
term advantage of the trade opportunities in the informal economies.

In response to pressure immigrants have diversified their businesses in terms of geography and type.
Most migrants who originate from southern Ethiopia, particularly from the towns of Hosaena and
Durame and their neighborhoods, do not live or work in Johannesburg or other South African cities.
They have taken advantage of the dearth of retail trade in outlying small towns and in black
townships and informal settlements around the country. Nevertheless, they are connected to
Johannesburg for supplies. They source goods from Chinese wholesale malls or Ethiopian shops in
the city. They trade these items either as mobile hawkers (selling linen and small items) or as shop
owners (selling groceries) in townships and informal settlements. Interviewees indicated that this is
an immense business opportunity that is saturated or almost nonexistent in Ethiopia. The limited
market opportunity in their home country inhibits them from returning.

Disparities in opportunities in the informal economies of Ethiopia and South Africa are further
intensified in message and image exchanges within transnational social relations. These are
transmitted in goods and images sent back home, in evidence of the actual success of returnees and
in their pretension, as well as in remittances. Other factors conspire with these to inculcate a culture
of migration across southern Ethiopian migrant-sending communities. Among others, these include a
tendency to consider migration and remittances as a marker of social status; the decreasing value
attached to education; and the influence of religious preachers (fortune tellers) prophesying South
Africa as the Promised Land for emigrants.

5.3 Power of established networks

Social networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former
migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin. In so doing, they provide a web of social
capital stretched across migrant space. This web facilitates the likelihood of international movement
by providing information that lowers the costs and risks of migration (Massey et al, 1998; Estifanos,

2015).

Our findings indicate that migrants' families, relatives and friends in the host space actively participate in facilitating their movement. Moreover, the social and smuggling networks are interrelated and encompass social circles (including parents, family members, close friends and kinships, hosts, migrants en route and prospective migrants), government officials, law enforcement officers, financial institutions such as banks, local and distant brokers, and smugglers. The findings also show that it is often migrants or their hosts who approach smugglers to facilitate migration.

Smuggling: a response to border control

The irregularity of multiple migration journeys is occurring within the context of dwindling legal channels of migration within the prevailing skewed global economic and political orders (Hoerder, 2002; Castles, 2003; Klein, 2014). The lack of legal routes for travelling to a perceived greater opportunity prompts aspiring migrants to depend on the facilitation role of smugglers (De Haas, 2013; Brachet, 2018). In recent years the models of border reinforcement that had existed primarily in the Global North are increasingly being adopted everywhere, making distinctions between practices in the Global North and Global South difficult to determine (Nawyn, 2016). Gaibazzi et al argue that European external borders have virtually become African borders (Gaibazzi et al, 2017).

The regulation of movement operates through social sorting that involves sexual, gender, racial and class inequalities (Khosravi, 2011). For non-professional labour migrants, like Ethiopian emigrants heading towards South Africa, only very few visa categories are available and those that do exist are typically short-term (Piper & Ball, 2001). Ironically, despite the fact that Ethiopia and Kenya have a bilateral agreement on the free movement of people between them, emigrants from southern Ethiopia (Hadiya and Kambata ethnic groups) are currently being denied entry to Kenya (Long & Crisp, 2011; Adugna et al, 2019. Such government restrictions have reinforced the need for "clandestine migration services," contributing to an increase in smuggling business (De Haas, 2013; Brachet, 2018; Estifanos & Zack, 2019).

In addition to smuggling services, migrants use their transnational social networks to actualise their migration dreams. Narratives from our informants indicate that the lines between social networks and smuggling networks are blurred. In fact, smugglers form an important strand within broad transnational facilitation networks. The majority of our informants noted that, contrary to the case of trafficked persons, who suffer from deception, coercion and exploitation by human traffickers,[5] it is often aspiring migrants and/or their hosts in South Africa who approach smugglers to facilitate the migration. The narratives also indicate that the widening rift between the desire to migrate and the restrictions on irregular migration have created a fertile ground for smuggling businesses to flourish.

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[5] The IOM Glossary on Migration (2004) defines *Trafficking in Persons* as follows: "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

Over the past two decades, powerful market forces (attributed to growing border control measures and the increasing desire to migrate), have intensified the smuggling business and attracted multiple actors and institutions, including formal ones. Mekasha Bekele, a migrant-turned-smuggler interviewed in Hosaena, explained the linkages between formal financing and the smuggling business whereby bank, police and airline officers in source, transit and destination countries cooperate with chief smugglers to lubricate smuggling. Tadele Melaku complemented Mekasha's point and noted that the smuggling industry bridges the formal and informal economies. He told how migrants, smugglers, hosts and financial institutions work together within a transnational space, either to facilitate the migration or to reactivate cut-off networks or enable settlement. He said:

> An Ethiopian smuggler in Malawi sent me a bank account to my phone. The name of the account was registered under a Somali person. Using Absa Bank in Johannesburg, I transferred the money to that account. I also sent the confirmation code that I got from the bank to my brother, who was stuck in Malawi. We managed to reactivate the broken smuggling network and the new smuggler we hired sent my brother straight to Johannesburg.

Nevertheless, smugglers operate within a capitalist economy, with profit making being their prime concern. In such circumstances a combination of market forces, border controls, corruption and a strong desire for migration are stimulating the establishment of a community enterprise around the smuggling networks. This enterprise is particularly strong at border towns such as Moyale (at the Ethiopia and Kenya border) and Musina (at the Zimbabwe and South Africa border), or in refugee camps across multiple transit countries (such as Dzalleka – a refugee camp in Lilongwe) and important capital cities in transit countries where violent chief smugglers are based (such as Maputo in Mozambique and Harare in Zimbabwe).

Social networks during settlement

The role of social networks in the settlement of new arrivals into the socioeconomic, cultural and political spaces of destination countries is particularly robust. The settlement and integration processes are influenced by kin and friendship ties, village-based networks and customs, membership of ethnic associations and shared cultural and ethnic origins. These networks provide food, shelter, job information and contacts, recreation and emotional support in host countries (Boyd, 1989).

In the case of immigrants from southern Ethiopia, entry into livelihood opportunities is often prearranged within ethnically based networks in South Africa. The new arrival (or so called 'border') may be guaranteed a job with a host (or so-called 'boss'), or the host may enable the new arrival's start-up in the informal economy by providing initial capital, working space, access to business networks and emotional support. Interviewees suggest that 'borders' from southern Ethiopia are typically related to their bosses through blood, kinship, friendship, religion, etc.

Our informants noted that the relationship between bosses and borders in the host space was primarily economic. There are indications of an element of profit making and exploitation of borders

by the bosses. Nevertheless, the borders use the job opportunities provided by the bosses as a transition period and apprenticeship to establishing their own businesses. In terms of sharing business acumen bosses might withhold competitive business information, because borders are considered to be potential business competitors once they are established.

The majority of our informants indicated that their migration and settlement processes were interconnected in many ways: from financing the migration to hiring smugglers and inserting themselves when they arrived in South Africa. Similarly, having arrived in South Africa, their residences and livelihoods are connected. Transnational social and smuggling networks that have diversified, intensified and gained force over the past quarter of a century contribute to the perpetuation of irregular migration from southern Ethiopia to South Africa.

5.4 Fleeting images as a migration driver

Migration knowledge and information, produced and disseminated across transnational space, enables migrants to better understand their migration and settlement processes and options (Faist, 2000; Ayalew et al, 2018). In this regard, internet-based media and communication technology platforms are useful instruments of learning and knowledge sharing for migrants. These platforms assist aspiring migrants and refugees embarking on the journey, or those stranded en route, to stay in touch with families and friends abroad or back in the homeland, as well as improving the likelihood of their success (Leurs, 2014; Ayalew et al, 2018). They do these things by providing relevant information on which routes to take; connecting migrants with alternative smugglers to reactivate smuggling networks if and when existing ones are cut off; advising them on what to say to immigration and border officers or providing the opportunity to raise money from their networks in the diaspora (Zack & Estifanos, 2016; Estifanos, 2015).

However, there are limitations to the messages and images transmitted via internet-based media and communication technology platforms. Often, there is a slippage between the promises that images and messages convey via smartphone and social media applications and the actual economic and material opportunities available to newly arriving migrants. Indeed, the accelerated worldwide diffusion of images, movies, music and ideas from the global to the local are not readily accompanied by a spread in jobs, technology and wealth, resulting in a global disconnect (Ferguson, 2006). In this regard Cohen argues that globalisation connects people in every corner of the world, but only as a promise of wealth, lacking full-scale material and economic integration (Cohen, 2006). Cohen (p 6) further argues :

> The new global economy creates an unprecedented rupture between the expectations to which it gives birth and the reality it brings about. Never before have means of communication – the media – created such a global consciousness; never have the economic forces been so far behind the new awareness. For the majority of the poor inhabitants of our planet, globalization is only a fleeting image. What we often ignore, however, is how strong this image is, how pregnant with promises yet to be fulfilled.

What Cohen calls the "unfulfilled promise" or "fleeting image" turns out to be a strong driver of migration from southern Ethiopia to South Africa. Ethiopian immigrants in South Africa use mobile phone technologies to communicate with friends and relatives back home. They also send smartphones to their relatives and friends. In fact, smartphones are the most sought after and often the first gifts sent back home from South Africa. The majority of our informants were using social media applications to maintain connection with home. And it is in the images sent and the narratives told that overt and subliminal promises of a southern land of fortune were conveyed. The messages and images transmitted home through social media applications often exaggerate the bright sides of migration to a stupendous height. In this regard, the smartphone age has enabled seamlessness in such communications (Madianou & Miller, 2011).

In addition to inspiring and tantalising messages and images sent through smartphones (such as posed pictures), which may provoke envy and a desire to migrate, the recorded videos of welcoming and wedding ceremonies for Ethiopians in South Africa paint an exaggerated and promising picture of the country.[6] The welcoming and wedding ceremonies of Ethiopian migrants in South Africa are embedded in social and cultural institutions imported from home. These social institutions such as *Idir*[7] and *Mahiber* (social clubs) are burdened by the survival needs and economic motives of migrants making a living in South Africa's informal sector. The imported social institutions are thus modified into business arrangements (Amel, 2012; Estifanos, 2020). As these cultural practices are modified to accommodate primarily financial needs, the social capital of Ethiopian immigrants both supports and can be undermined by financial capital (Estifanos, 2015).

The ceremonies are often extravagant affairs. Accordingly, it is possible to gather a considerable sum of money through the one-off gifting that accompanies welcoming and wedding ceremonies concluded in South Africa. The actual – and sometimes heavily doctored – images of wedding ceremonies, which often take place in attractive public parks and are accompanied by large crowds and sleek cars, paint a particularly rosy picture of migrant life in South Africa (Estifanos, 2016).

The documenting and circulating of these ceremonies through videos, portraits and selfies add to the narrative of glamour in the migration experience of Ethiopians in South Africa. The practice of editing these ceremonies by video makers adds intensity to the already fleeting and tantalising images implanted in videos. Video makers insert artificial scenes into already luxurious ceremonies. Asnaku Fisseha describes how video makers modified the images of her wedding ceremony.

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[6] When a bachelor immigrant from southern Ethiopia smuggles a prospective wife from his home village (Hosaena, for example), members of the immigrant social clubs (mainly consisting of siblings, close relatives and intimate friends) welcome and treat the would-be-wife. This is informally called a welcome ceremony, and the arrangement in some cases might include financing the smuggling of prospective wives. Such ceremonies are often accompanied by significant gifts that informants have associated with helping stabilise the financial situation of the would-be-husbands. However, the welcome ceremonies are connected with reciprocal savings and social institutions such as *Mahibers* and *Idirs*, which are imported from Ethiopia and modified to accommodate migrant and entrepreneurial needs in South Africa

[7] A social association people in the same locality create, in order to support one another when members lose family to death, or to hold a significant social occasion like a wedding or graduation party in their house. On some occasions, membership might grow to a hundred plus.

> When the video makers edited my wedding video, they included all the Nine South
> African Provinces including beaches in Durban and Cape Town – places we haven't seen.
> There were also helicopters in the edited video, but there was not any helicopter on my
> wedding ceremony. The problem is when people in Ethiopia watch these wedding
> videos and what is in there, they don't see how hard life is here [South Africa]. They just
> imagine life is like what's in the videos.

Many of these videos are sent back home while some are uploaded to social media applications, including Facebook and YouTube. Smugglers may use them as marketing tactics. The welcoming and wedding videos thus play a significant role in buoying the aspiration to migrate to South Africa. Our informants noted that many of their contemporaries who – motivated by the prospect of prosperity in South Africa – abandoned school in order to migrate, and emigrants and the community as a whole, placed more value on migration than on education. Others left their jobs, sold their cattle and rented out their land. Some first sought waged work to finance their migration.

Informants who had been inspired by 'fleeting images' and had migrated to South Africa admitted that they had a completely different picture of the country until they settled there and experienced it firsthand. Some felt that their dreams of success or fortune could not be achieved in their home country. Some said they had suffered a sense of being left out of prosperity when they had seen the wedding ceremonies. These fleeting images, at best, outweigh any contemplation of the risks and dangers emigrants anticipated encountering during their migration and settlement. At worst, the images blind migrants to extreme danger and risks even when they are informed (Estifanos, 2016).

Michael Teffera explains how the success stories of village boys driving model cars and enjoying a city life in Johannesburg gradually gained significant attention in his immediate neighborhood. The stories were reinforced through welcome and wedding ceremony videos sent from South Africa. In these videos, Michael saw his former friends driving sleek cars. He also remembers seeing a boat ride implanted in the video as part of a wedding ceremony. As a result, Michael pictured South Africa as a country where success is inevitable, and that's how he was taken with idea of migrating there. However, his actual experience in South Africa has verged on the complete opposite, with multitudes of ordeals.

The extravagantly luxurious wedding ceremonies, and the additions by video makers, conspire one with another not only to paint a rosy picture of South Africa, but also to inculcate a strong belief that, one day, prospective migrants will also enjoy such a lifestyle and material wealth. Based on her experience, Asnaqu Fisseha noted how fleeting images implanted in wedding ceremony videos create a migration desire among prospective migrants:

> I had sent my wedding VCD to my relatives. Among others, the VCD displays the rolling
> streets of South Africa, the high rising buildings and beautiful and spacious public parks
> of Johannesburg, and a crowd of immaculately dressed people attending the wedding
> ceremony. There are also scenes displaying the spectacular [sights] of South Africa
> including the beauty of Port Elizabeth and beaches in Cape Town. Having watched it, my
> relatives asked me if we covered all these beautiful places within one day. Out of sheer

pride and boastfulness, I told them a big 'Yes' and they were stunned beyond measure. Later on, when I realised that I was sending a wrong and exaggerated message, I tried to explain our real life. But they could not fathom my explanation. Nor could they comprehend the multitudes of troubles we endure, as immigrants, in South Africa. To be honest, once exposed to such messages and images, it is not fair to expect them to stay put at home.

6 Summary and conclusion

There are significant barriers to migration from Ethiopia to South Africa. These are primarily a restrictive migration regime manifested in diversifying and intensifying border control and securitisation measures, as well as tightening labour market policies and growing anti-immigrant state narratives. The barriers also include social factors, such as the threat of violent crime and of xenophobia. In addition, the market is rather saturated and a large established immigrant population that is potentially less inclined to facilitate the successful migration of newcomers is also poised to exploit newly arriving immigrants for their own ends.

Nonetheless, the powerful drivers of migration prevail. These are fundamentally economic and they include conditions of absolute and relative deprivation. This deprivation exists not only in the comparisons between opportunity and income in Ethiopia and South Africa, but also between migrant- and non-migrant-sending households in Ethiopia. The latter form part of a very significant driver of migration. That is *the southern dream* – the anticipation of success in the Promised Land of South Africa. It is a dream that is fuelled and perpetuated by the extravagant images sent home of lifestyles and material goods, and lavish environments in South Africa.

The actual experience of migration in South Africa is mixed, however. On the one hand, it brings extreme threats and hardship for newcomers, from exploitation to the threat of violent and non-violent crime. On the other hand, it offers comparatively low barriers to entry for making a livelihood in the informal sector. In spite of its multiple riks, South Africa's informal economy offers enormous market opportunity for the sale of Chinese goods. Ethiopian migrants have, through their timing and their social networks, managed to secure a major foothold in this market.

In a nutshell, fleeting images of 'success' in South Africa and the collapse of a dream in the immediate environment; religious preaching that lauds South Africa as the Promised Land; the changing aspirations and improving capabilities of prospective migrants; the power of established smuggling and social networks; legal loopholes in mobility rights; a simmering migration culture that ties personal, social and material success with cross-border migration; the role of social and cultural institutions (*Mahibers* and *Idirs*) and business practices around them; a feeling of relative deprivation triggered by perceived and actual differences in opportunities; as well as disparities in other opportunities, conspire one with another to enable the momentum of irregular migration to trump growing barriers erected against migration and settlement. In this way, the individual force of the will to succeed and to pursue one's dreams confronts state forces aiming to control and constrain mobility. In the Ethiopia–South Africa migration corridor these forces will continue to stress and strain migration for the foreseeable future.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of Ethiopian migrants in South Africa are aspiring to travel to better off countries outside that country partly explains the presence of multidimensional socioeconomic inequalities (or the perception of them) not only between Ethiopia and South Africa but also between South Africa and countries in the Global North. Our informants noted that, in their striving for onward migration, Ethiopian migrants in South Africa have used (and are still using) illegal channels to enter Global Northern countries – mainly Canada, the USA and UK.

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