

Social Networks, Dreams and Risks:

Ethiopian Irregular Migrants into South Africa

(Draft)

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Abstract

The meaning of personal relationships for Ethiopian migrants to South Africa is shaped by individual connections, by imported social networks that are adapted in the host country, and by the particular conditions of livelihood creation in the informal economy of South Africa. This study focuses on the migration of young adults from southern Ethiopia to South Africa and the role of social networks in perpetuating it. It specifically looks into how the narratives of pioneer Ethiopian migrants, manifested in sent-back-home materials and social media applications, concerning financial and material success in South Africa induce further migration. Currently many if not the majority of the youth and young adults in southern Ethiopia are desperately dreaming about South Africa and constantly looking for loopholes to migrate. For many of them, the latter has become an imaginary place where money is abundant and success is inevitable.

The financial and material success representation of Ethiopian migrants in South Africa – evidenced and documented through remittances, the social media, wedding videos and photographs – is in sharp contrast to the low living standard of the population in rural southern Ethiopia. The effect of this on the sending communities is to paint a rosy picture about South Africa. Hence, in addition to instigating and perpetuating youth migration to South Africa, an unwholesome consequence is that the dream about the south blinds potential migrants of the multitude of risks and daunting challenges they encounter on the journey and in the settlement processes, even when these were told to them. An extension of this is that the male-dominated migration of Ethiopians into South Africa has also induced another type of migration: the migration of would-be-wives females- who shares the same dream and encounter risks of diverse kind despite improvements in their financial and material status.

Once they arrive in South Africa, they experience both separation and reconnection - with relatives, as well as through relationships and networks that constitute social capital in South Africa. The social world of Ethiopian migrants in South Africa becomes even more complex once they arrive in South Africa. Many social connections and dislocations are affected by the life choices in which income generation and economic relations are the primary aim and social relations are necessarily secondary. Others are influenced by the strength of informal social networks that serve the needs of Ethiopian migrants. And, far from ‘here’ and ‘there’ being connected through the use of technology and advanced connectivity, ‘home’ and South Africa are experienced as quite separate and different places.

Key Words

Social Networks, Dream, Risks, Migration, Ethiopia, South Africa

I. Introduction

Ethiopia: Land of Extremes

While Ethiopia is rich in history, culture and civilization (Gill, 2010) and is a demographic giant with a population of more than 90 million, it is also one of the poorest countries in Africa in per capita terms (The African Wealth Report, 2015). 83 percent of the population lives in rural areas in grinding poverty on dwindling landholdings with deteriorating soil fertility (CSA, 2010; Yordanos et al, 2011). Yet Ethiopia has one of the fastest growing economies in Africa, registering double-digit growth over the past decade and a half with a very high urbanization rate (MoFED, 2014).

Population density is most pronounced in southern Ethiopia (Teller and Hailemariam, 2011). The country is at an incipient stage of a demographic transition with a bulging youth population, which has implications for migration. There are also other internal and external forces contributing to the migration. Many Ethiopians, particularly the youth, are leaving the country both legally and illegally in pursuit of better opportunities (Kanko et al., 2013). However, there are many Ethiopians unable to leave because of the high cost of migration, stricter immigration and border controls in destination countries as well as the rise of xenophobia.

South Africa: Migration Pulls and Drivers

South Africa is another land of extremes. It is Africa's economic powerhouse, boasting the global financial city of Johannesburg on the one hand and shanty townships on the other. It is the wealthiest country in Africa with a per capita income of US\$11,310 in 2015, more than 40 times higher than Ethiopia's US\$260 (African Wealth Report, 2015). On the other hand, South Africa is the most unequal country in the world with a Gini coefficient of 65 in the year 2011 – compared to Ethiopia's 32 (World Bank, 2014). The legacy of apartheid created endemically high levels of unemployment and one of the highest levels of inequality in the world. These factors have combined with a culture of protest and violence that have fed an epidemic of violent crime in the country (Meredith, 2005). Bribery and corruption are endemic too, which intensifies criminality.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated, that in 2013 South Africa hosted 67,500 recognized international refugees and 233,100 asylum-seekers, making it the country with the largest single concentration of urban (non-camp) refugees and asylum-seekers in Southern Africa (UNHCR 2014). Most migrants in South Africa are from southern African countries, but there are also large numbers of migrants from East Africa, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia (IOM 2013). However, it is difficult to know how many Ethiopians, Somalis and Kenyans journey to South Africa through irregular

means each year, as information on smuggling is not collated (IOM 2009, 7).

While much of the immigration from Ethiopia is undocumented and irregular (Kanko, Bailey, and Teller 2013), thus far at least three migration drivers have been identified. Three years before the end of apartheid and the rise of democracy in South Africa, there was a regime change in Ethiopia. The year 1991 marked the end of the military Dergue regime that controlled and regulated mobility within and outside Ethiopia. Until 1991 Ethiopians only acquired a travel or exit visa after protracted official investigations (Asnake and Zerihun, 2015). Internally, too, they could only travel with a 'pass' to move from one district to another (Teller et al., 2012). With the fall of the Dergue regime, Ethiopian citizens were free to travel.

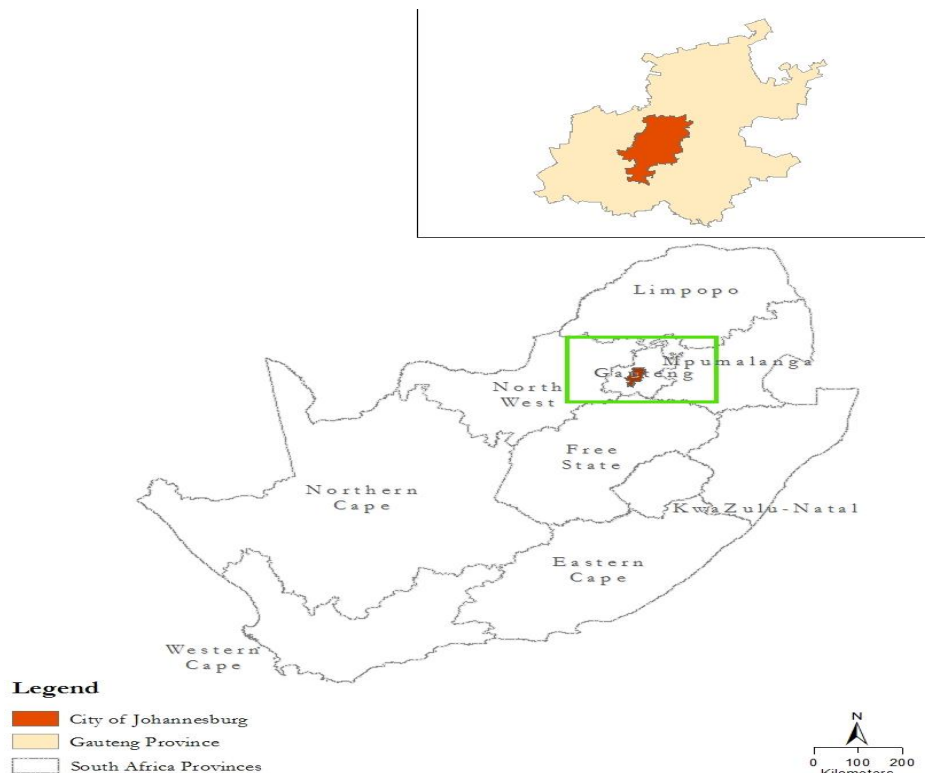
With the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the democratic government introduced asylum laws that allowed for temporary residence or asylum permits. The permits also provided the right to work and study. This liberal approach arose from the experience of the exiled South African liberation movements, including the African National Congress (Wehmhoerner, 2015), which acquired political asylum and support, including from Ethiopia. Thus, coincidence in regime changes and subsequent mobility rights in Ethiopia and South Africa contributed to the migration of former into the latter in the 1990s.

However, the fact that two ethnic groups from southern Ethiopia dominate the migration to South Africa starting the year 2000 begs further explanation. There is evidence indicating that a former Ethiopian ambassador to South Africa created job opportunities for some youth from his birthplace in the early 2000s (Kanko, Bailey and Teller 2013). These youth found job opportunities around major South African cities such as Johannesburg and Pretoria, worked there for some years and sent remittances as well as returned home. Their apparent success has motivated other youths in the area, thus creating a feedback loop among former migrants, return migrants, and potential migrants as is stipulated in the social networks theory of migration (Massey et al. 1998).

Human smugglers are also a key factor in expediting migration into South Africa (Estifanos 2016). A further wave of migration was evident following major events in Ethiopia and South Africa. The politically unstable period in Ethiopia leading up to and following the 2005 national election led some Ethiopians to South Africa (Kanko, Bailey, and Teller 2013), while the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa attracted others. Many of the young Ethiopians who came to Johannesburg in these waves of migration and who continue to enter the city, find themselves in the Gauteng province of South Africa, which attract migrants from across African countries.

II. Research Method

Qualitative research method is employed and the research design verges on ethnography that took place in Ethiopia and South Africa. The main research tool employed is semi-structured questionnaire for Key Informants Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Field notes, formal and informal discussions, participant observation, document research, and desk review of literature also informed the research.



Source: ArcGIS

The respondents are selected from different walks of life including, among others, potential migrants, step-migrants, return migrants, deported migrants, recent and pioneer migrants, brokers and smugglers, a smuggler-turned-migrant, migration experts, politicians, and government officials. In South Africa, twenty interviewees were reached through gatekeepers and personal contacts between July and October 2014. After analyzing findings from fieldwork in South Africa and identifying gaps, further fieldwork was conducted in Ethiopia in April and May 2015 where fifteen key informants were approached for in-depth interview. As in South Africa, respondents in Ethiopia are reached through snowball technique, where interviewees from South Africa provided contacts back home. The researcher also contacted the respondents through former researchers.

Most of the Ethiopian immigrants originate from southern part of the country, from the towns and rural areas of Hosanna and Durame. Human smugglers heavily involve in the migration and settlement processes (Kanko et al. 2013). At the receiving end, most

Ethiopian immigrants settle in selected financial cities of Gauteng Province in South Africa.



Source: ArcGIS

The migration of Ethiopians to South Africa is two decades old. Yet, there are no studies conducted to explore its genesis and understand its operation. The available few studies focus either on the causes and consequences from the sending end (Kanko et al. 2013), on the nature of criminal networks (IOM 2009), or on the nature of the social institutions these immigrants import from home (Yimer 2012). Accordingly, this article aims to address the following questions:

- How financial and material success narratives of pioneer Ethiopian migrants in South Africa create migration dream?
- How transnational social networks operate including the role of actors involved in the migration and settlement processes?
- What risks are concealed in the migration dreams: the illusion and realities migrants find themselves once in South Africa
- Whether distance could be managed using communication technology?

III. Utopian South Africa

For many youth and young adults in southern Ethiopia, South Africa is pictured as an imaginary place where money is abundant and success is inevitable. Consequently, many young adults abandoned school and even teachers followed in the footsteps of their students. Others left their jobs, sold their cattle, and rented out their land. Some first sought wage work to finance their migration. Others realized their dream through seeking help from brokers, smugglers, and other actors involved in the migration and settlement processes. Ethiopian immigrants to South Africa are predominantly young men who leave families and loved ones behind. They seldom visit the ones left behind in the early years of their migration because air tickets are very expensive. More important is that they lack the required documents and permits to leave and re-enter South Africa. The bureaucracy and regularization process for undocumented migrants is both time-consuming and often corrupt.

Despite the difficulties for immigrants in South Africa, remittances mean that their families improve their living standards. In rural areas, sending families manage to renovate old huts or even build new modern villas. They are able to send their children to school and improve nutrition and health. Remittances boost agricultural productivity because inputs such as fertilizers, high-yield variety seeds, and other modern farm technology can be purchased.

The positive changes for families of migrants have encouraged surrounding communities to send members of their families to South Africa too. The financial and material improvements lead to greater social status and influence that triggers further migration. Thus the families of those who have emigrated from southern Ethiopia earn honor and respect from the community, particularly from non-migrant families. Considerable social pressure, including abuse, is put on young non-migrant adults to join the outflow. Even repatriated deceased migrants are honored more than jobless youths (Asnake and Zerihun, 2015).



A picture of traditional hut and a modern villa in the outskirts of Hosanna town: southern Ethiopia. (...To be replaced). Photo: Tanya Zack

Migration versus Education

The southern dream is manifested in less value being attached to education. Once considered as security for a rainy day and a mark of social status and privilege among the community, education is no longer the key to upward social mobility for a majority of the youth and young adults in and around Hosanna. Rather, South Africa - and not education - is seen as their destiny. In a random sample of interviews in southern Ethiopia, an adolescent boy acknowledged that his dream was ‘to go to south.’ Asked about his education, the boy sighed: “It is not the educated that are better off here, but migrants and their families. After all, even the educated ones are heading to South Africa.”

This personal opinion mirrors the general perception towards education. In one of the rural high schools visited during this research, the majority of the students – male and female alike – have their passports ready and are looking for loopholes of any kind to sneak through and reach South Africa. Education has become secondary. This prompted the high school management to establish an “anti-emigration club” with the intention of creating awareness among the students about the disadvantages of migration. This proved a futile exercise, as even the teacher in charge of the program was keen to head south.

Wedding Ceremonies and the Southern Dream

The financial success of some immigrants despite difficulties of visiting home, has given rise to another kind of migration: the migration of brides and wives who are smuggled in. These might be former girlfriends or girls whom the male immigrants heard of, knew from before, or saw their photos on social media. The mode of transport for the would-be-wives is comparatively safe as most of them fly to South Africa or neighboring countries such as Mozambique and Swaziland. Travel is lubricated by omnipresent corruption from source, to transit and in South Africa.

Once in South Africa, the hosts prepare extravagantly luxurious ‘welcome’ and ‘wedding’ ceremonies that are partly enmeshed in imported social associations known as *mahiber*. These associations have played a significant role in perpetuating the migration of young adults from southern Ethiopia to South Africa. The wedding ceremonies are rooted in a practice of reciprocal social institutions with quid pro quo business arrangements where every member is socially bound to attend and contribute. During these gatherings every member offers a gift to the bride and bridegroom in cash (and occasionally in kind). As one interviewee explained:

I smuggled in a girl from Hosanna and we made promise in a church and stayed together for a while before we officially got married. Once we sorted things out, we prepared a wedding ceremony. The ceremony alone cost more than R200, 000 including hiring cameraman, limousine, hall, food and clothing. ... On the wedding day, however, I received gifts in cash. The individual gifts fall in the range of R300 to R10, 000 ... I keep record of that for I am expected to pay it back someday. The cash gifts I received more than covered the wedding expenses, leaving me with profit. Cash aside, my brother and my uncle - together with other close relatives - gave me a 2010 model car. We also received another car from the bride’s relatives.



A sample wedding ceremony picture of Ethiopian immigrants in South Africa that is sent-back-home: Photo Tanya Zack [...There is a short video showing wedding ceremony]

Seldom do bridegrooms not profit from the wedding arrangements. Excluding other non-pecuniary benefits, the financial profit alone is estimated to be between R50, 000 to R200, 000. Partly for this reason, male immigrants from southern Ethiopia do not marry women from other immigrant groups or local women. Rather, once established, almost all of them bring their would-be wives from home. Extravagant wedding ceremonies have become a tradition and are comparable to those of South African high-level officials. These wedding videos are sent back home and stimulate the ones left behind. Local brokers and smugglers use these wedding videos to create a rosy picture about South Africa and entice potential young migrants to dream but about South Africa. The videos amplify the success of Ethiopian immigrants in South Africa, but simultaneously conceal a great deal of risks and daunting challenges of migrants.

From Material and Financial to Social Pressure

The sending of material artifacts such as posturing pictures and wedding videos from South Africa has become commonplace almost for all immigrants from southern Ethiopia. Watching the wedding videos as well as observing the life of Ethiopian immigrants in South Africa, and comparing it with the life in rural southern Ethiopia reveals a glaring disparity in material and financial terms. For those who remain behind, it become difficult to avoid considering migrating to South Africa, as there is unacceptably high level of inequality between the migrants and non-migrants and their respective families.

Therefore, from the sending end, the material artifacts and remittances coupled with lack

of better economic opportunities contribute for the creation of mobile population prone to migration. Furthermore, comparing their physical, economic and material status with that of return migrants, many young adults in southern Ethiopia consider South Africa as heaven: an imaginary place where money is abundant and success is inevitable. Consequently, many young adults abandoned school and some teachers followed the footsteps of their students. Others left their jobs, sold out their cattle, and rent out their land. Some internally migrated to work and finance their migration. Unfortunately, the material artifacts, the return migrants, the smugglers, and the immigrants in South Africa conceal significant amount of the risk, both physical and psychological, involved in the migration and settlement processes. The material and financial successes and the physical transformation Ethiopian migrants and their respective families went through also create a firewall among potential migrants obscuring the risks and blinding potential migrants from the risks, even when presented to them.

Even worse, these financial and material betterments buildup and develop into social status adding their own influence for migration. In addition to their financial and material wellbeing, families in southern Ethiopia who have children or relatives in South Africa earn honor and respect from the community members and non-migrants families. Conspired with the poor living conditions in rural southern Ethiopia, this prompts non-migrants families (and the community in general) to put social pressure on young adults who remain behind.

IV. Transnational Social Networks

Operation of the Transnational Social Networks

According to Boyd and Nowak there are three major types of social networks: family and personal networks; labor networks; and illegal migrant networks (Boyd and Nowak, 2012). However, the nature of the transnational social network in the case of Ethiopian migrants to South Africa is more complex than this simple classification. To start with, there is no exact borderline among the three types of networks. The social networks involved in the migration of Ethiopians to South Africa are rather flexible, non-predictive, uncertain and omnidirectional encompassing diverse constituent parts. There are intra-social networks - personal, familial, religious, ethnic, and criminal - that are part of the broad transnational social networks. There are also unexpected and accidental groups and elements joining in the social networks in time and space.

In their operation, the social networks are horizontally stretched across source, transit and destination countries. They are also vertically extended. At the top, they reach up and bribe or work with different government officials as well as formal public and financial institutions. At the tail, they reach down to draw-in and involve individual migrants and

regular residents in the networks. A return migrant who happened to pass through some of these steps explained:

The chain disperses horizontally and spirals vertically. There is wax and gold in its operation. It is a difficult riddle to solve, and like an onion, you get a new and different layer when you peel more and more. There are groups you normally expect to be against the activities of criminal networks, but strangely find them to be part of it. The weirdest irony, however, is that even as a migrant you suddenly might find yourself working with them.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact entry point in the operation of the transnational social networks, often times, it is potential migrants who contact agents who in turn contact brokers (who work for or with smugglers), to help and guide them reach South Africa. Established immigrants at the receiving end also interact with smugglers to help them smuggle in their would-be wives, siblings, relatives or friends to South Africa. Migrants who are stuck in transit countries waiting for their cases to be processed or those migrants who found themselves to be “permanently temporary” in transit countries, such as Kenya also turn themselves into accidental brokers or opportunist smugglers in their motto of “making money by any means,” eventually joining in existing criminal networks or forming a different one.

At the sending end, “fortunetellers” who pray for potential migrants and advise the sending communities in southern Ethiopia also play a role in the operation of the transnational social network. These fortunetellers put influence on migrants and their families to send their children to South Africa, the latter being the “Promised Land.” Further fieldwork in Hosanna town and its neighborhoods revealed that some fortunetellers work closely with brokers and smugglers. In this regard, a return migrant lamented that he went to South Africa when he was only 17 years old because a “pastor” told him that South Africa is his destiny and convinced his parents as well. After checked by severe challenges and narrowly surviving death in South Africa, another “pastor” in South Africa counseled and persuade him to return home. And so did the boy. After sometime, a third “pastor” approached and told him to consider going back to South Africa, to which the boy strongly declined.

Explaining the experience of his cousin, another interviewee noted that a potential husband in South Africa bribed a “pastor” to convince a girl whom the man wanted to marry to migrate to South Africa. And, after sometime, the potential husband sent a marriage proposal from South Africa. A smuggler-turned-former migrant is straightforward in stating that some “pastors” are making lucrative business, using religion as pretext, while exposing migrants to enormous risks.

The role of religion is more notable at the receiving end. Because of a stressful and dangerous business environment Ethiopian immigrants are operating in South Africa’s

informal economy, they need emotional and spiritual support to find relief for their stress, fears and risks. Some “pastors” provide these services, but also enormously benefit from the scheme. This, among others, is revealed by the overabundance of “pastors”, some of who are pastor-turned-former-delinquents or born-again opportunists. The proliferation of ministries named after “pastors” who continuously split a church to establish a new one is another indicator. Hence, some “pastors” who hide behind religious curtains form one strand of the multilayered actors in the operation of the transnational social networks.

From above, officials at different structures of governments across source, transit, and destination countries also directly involve in the transnational social networks. This is evident in the presence of irregular migrants who directly fly from Ethiopia to South Africa; or to neighboring countries of South Africa; or fly directly to Kenya- with no need for VISA- and transit through Kenya to continue to South Africa afterwards. These migrants pass through protracted checkups and formal bureaucracies in source, transit, and destination countries’ airports. Regarding this, an expert explained the presence of corruption, but reiterated that the money involved in the smuggling networks from Ethiopia to South Africa is not big enough to tempt and draw-in high-level government officials. Hence, it is low and mid-level government officials who hold key administrative and bureaucratic positions who are working with brokers and smugglers.

A return migrant who directly flew to Kenya and bribed an officer in Kenyan Airport and transit to Mozambique afterwards explained the situation, he and two other females migrants from southern Ethiopia, went through as follows:

We plastered a VISA sticker we received from a broker in Addis Ababa. The broker also appointed me as an accidental team leader and gave me a mobile SIM-card to communicate with smugglers in transit countries and beyond. While waiting for our transit flight in Kenyan Airport, an officer approached and questioned what we were up to. With a friendly chat and a firm handshake together with 50 USD, he relented ... When we landed in Mozambique; an officer at the airlines slipped our passports on a machine and stopped us. However, after a brief phone conversation with a chief smuggler in South Africa he let us pass. Afterwards, we avoided the formal ‘exit gate’- as we were ordered to - and directly went to meet two guys who were waiting for us. They received and drove us to a hut located in a remote jungle. There, another Mozambican smuggler welcomed us ... Later on the same day, after walking through the jungle for more than three hours in complete darkness - with terror, disillusion and trance - we crossed the South African border.

The transnational social networks also draw-in regular residents who live in different countries. These are random people who otherwise are not part of the transnational social networks but come in to plug the loopholes created by a rather uncertain and unpredictable transnational networks. Many of the interviewees mentioned the help they received from regular residents in key transit countries when the smuggling networks were cut off and

the migrants found themselves in the middle of nowhere. Some of these regular residents are not aware of their involvement but provide invaluable support through provision of information and linking migrants with brokers or smugglers; supplying food, shelter or hiding places; provision of transport facilities in crossing strict borders; or facilitating money transfers from abroad from migrants' relatives as many of the migrants do not have valid documents to use formal banking services. They do it either on a remuneration basis or out of altruism becoming the "Good Samaritan" for disorientated strangers in strange environments.

In addition to chief smugglers located in key transit cities like Nairobi (Kenya) and Maputo (Mozambique), there are people with dual citizenship who live on either side of borders in transit countries who facilitate the migration and make business out of it. Their dual citizenship status and subsequent mobility right across borders provide the privilege to create connection with immigration officers and border police as well as the knowhow of alternative routes to pass strict borders.

The transnational social networks are also superimposed with the business environment and corrupt system. Even immediate friends or close relatives who finance and/or host newly arriving immigrants, at times, involve in the smuggling network. They do this not just to minimize the cost of migration or reduce risks migrants encounter in the migration and settlement processes [as is claimed in the social networks theory] but also driven by profit motive. By closely working with chief smugglers, they receive commission per immigrant arriving in South Africa.

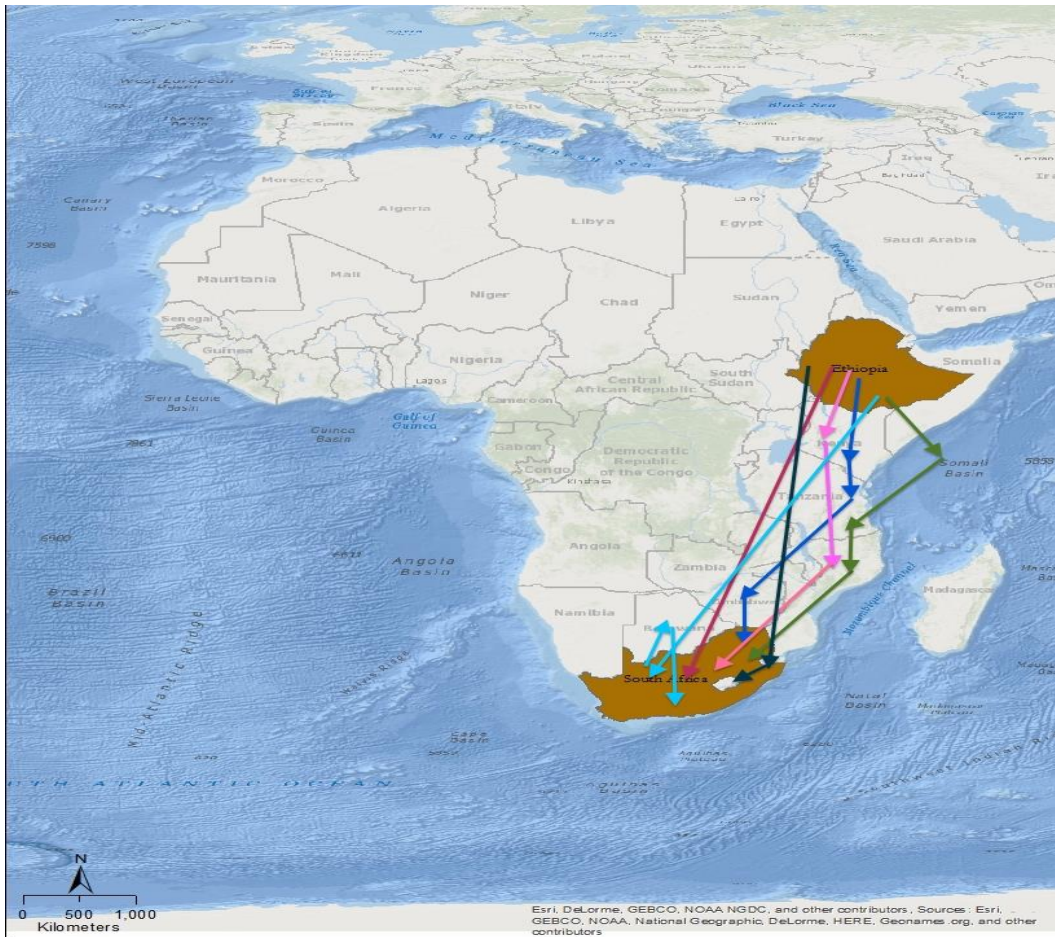
Furthermore, there are cases where brokers' and migrants' parents and formal financial institutions involve in the transnational social networks. To reduce the risk of being deceived by smugglers, migrants (or their families) pay the money either by installment or after the migrant reached South Africa. Either local brokers or families of migrants carry out the transaction. In case of the latter, there is no direct involvement of formal financial institutions. Regarding the former, however, brokers facilitate these transactions by working with formal financial institutions.

Therefore, the transnational social networks are by and large informal networks with members and elements being drawn in from other networks such as religious, financial, public and other actors dispersed across source, transit and destination countries. The smugglers work together, but not with a structure in which one works for the other. They work independently leading to avoiding responsibility as well as putting migrants to risky and uncertain fate. This plays a role in souring the relationship and injecting friction between relatives and intimate friends contributing to augmenting the risks migrants encounter in the informal economy of South Africa.

V. Migration Risks

After the long stage of decision-making and preparation for migration, the actual journey to South Africa follows different routes involving different modes of transport: air, water, and land. This variation includes a direct flight from Addis Ababa to Johannesburg or combining bus and foot to cross transit countries. In between are other combinations of flight: boat, car and foot; flight and car; and car, boat and foot. These routes fluctuate depending on the physical and legal barriers migrants encounter.

Financial capacity as well as the level and depth of connection smugglers might have with border police, immigration officers and public officials, means that one migrant can easily fly to Kenya and then transit to Mozambique or Swaziland or other neighboring countries before arriving in South Africa. Another might cross the Ethiopian-Kenyan border on foot, and continue the journey to South Africa bribing border police as well as immigration and public officials en route. Yet others fly directly to South Africa and then transit back to Mozambique to cross into South Africa by land. Some even take boats along the Indian Ocean rim to avoid being caught in difficult transit countries, such as Kenya and Tanzania. A few even fly to Dubai en route to South Africa.



Source: ArcGIS. Equal area map depicting the different migration routes Ethiopian migrants follows to reach South Africa.

Smugglers without connections to officialdom often chose dangerous routes and bad timing (usually past midnights) to cross borders. They hide migrants in containers and unhealthy, congested ‘concentration’ camps in transit countries. A returnee spoke of the ordeal that he went through:

We were a group of about 120 Ethiopians travelling on the Indian Ocean rim for two weeks. The shaky boat we boarded on suddenly started to wobble and a furious shark emerged from under the water and nearly overturned it. As if he is throwing a stone, the captain throw away my friend to the shark, and the boat immediately calmed down. I was terrorized! When we approached the coast, the captain said ‘you Ethiopians are lucky; we usually sacrifice around ten people to survive the sharks.’ ... Afterwards, 35 people boarded on a Land Cruiser, jammed like potato, and started to head to Mozambique. To avoid giving money for bandits hiding in a jungle, the Somali driver drove the car non-stop while being ordered to do so. The bandits fired and killed two people who sat next me. Later on, we buried them and continued our journey. As we were about to cross the Tanzanian border, the driver picked up speed the headed forward. However, iron nails erected across asphalt road by Tanzanian border police pierced through the four tires of the car. The Land Cruiser

came to an emergency stop. The police put us in prison, for illegally entering Tanzania. ... After one year, they deported back some of us to Ethiopia. The rest are still languishing in prison, for they are sentenced for two years.

Destination: Informal Labor Market

For majority of Ethiopian migrants arrival in South Africa is only the end of the beginning of their suffering. South Africa has had continuous problems of unemployment for unskilled youth and there is enormous competition for jobs. Since most of the young male immigrants from Ethiopia and elsewhere are unqualified, they are forced to enter the informal sector. Not only is there enormous competition from other immigrants, they also face considerable resentment from small-scale informal businesses and jobless black South Africans in townships and elsewhere. Thus intense rivalry between immigrants, even from the same region and town, is pronounced and causes rifts and even violence. Mutual respect dissipates in this environment.

Accumulation of wealth and capital becomes the primary objective. Consequently, money becomes a good servant, but more importantly, it overwhelms all other positive, traditional, moral and social values that immigrants used to abide by, respect being the main one. The lack of mutual respect and abnormal business competition fuels infighting and physical assaults among Ethiopian immigrants themselves.

The low social status of Ethiopian immigrants exposes them to a range of risks, one consequence of which is the infringement of their individual rights. Since many immigrants from Ethiopia are unable to speak English or other South African languages, especially during the initial years of their arrival, they are unable to mediate their relations with officialdom easily. This means that they depend on money to 'talk' on their behalf. Indeed, the conventional and popular motto in the South African informal economy is "money talks". Hence, bribing becomes a means of survival. If an immigrant has a car but not a driving license or adequate driving skills, he 'makes-a-plan' with traffic police and drives freely. This kind of reckless disregard for their own lives and those of others has led to accidents and to the deaths of many. An interviewee in South Africa said:

Some of them cannot even read the road signs. Nor do they have driving skill. What makes it worse is that they have to regularly drive back and forth between big cities like Johannesburg and different townships. The traffic is heavy in the highways and the cars run at exceedingly high speed. Because of this, many immigrants from rural southern Ethiopia have died or lost parts of their body. I have two friends from my village who died of car accident; it is not even two months since we sent the dead bodies back home.

Conflict, Crime and Xenophobia

Conflict with black South Africans is another risk factor. Many migrants from Hosanna joined the tuck-shop business after the 2010 World Cup. These tuck-shops are predominantly found in the townships, and historically were mainly run by immigrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Somalia along with a few black South African-owned businesses. The South African shop-owners openly accuse immigrants of price cutting and unfair competition. This accusation holds water as many of the respondents acknowledge that the products they sell in their shops are cheaper than the prices in mom-and-pop shops. This magnifies long existing and expanding xenophobic attitudes simmering among many black South Africans. Even a leading politician in KwaZulu Natal has made xenophobic remarks (NPR, 26 April 2015). Lauren Landau has argued that the South African government scapegoats immigrants to mask its delicate internal problems (Landau, 2011).

South Africa faces significant internal socioeconomic and political problems arising from both the legacy of spatial segregation and high rates of unemployment. Protests against lack of services and corruption are widespread too. These factors have combined to create conditions where immigrants are at particular risk from xenophobia and violence. Xenophobia is superimposed upon problems arising from increasing criminality and the apartheid past. It manifests itself in both violent and non-violent attacks and verbal abuse of immigrants. And as one migrant indicated, “Whenever something goes wrong in South Africa, all eyes are on immigrants”. Landau (2011) expresses it well:

The simultaneous demonization of mobility and the practical impossibility of controlling it have elevated migration and migrants to an official and popular obsession in which they become a convenient scapegoat for poor service delivery, crime and other social pathology.

Ironically, this xenophobia is revealed not just during protests where masses of angry and disadvantaged youth demand that local councils fulfill their social and infrastructural service obligations, but also during moments of jubilation. Many of the respondents indicated that they repeatedly encountered verbal abuse, insults and threats during and after the 2010 World Cup. Worse still, xenophobia is manifested in the nature of criminality. An interviewee, with deep resentment, lamented:

The xenophobia here is so deep and palpable that you can even experience it during the acts of robbery. When robbers or thieves come to you, they don't say ‘give me YOUR money or YOUR mobile or YOUR car’. They rather say ‘give me MY money or MY mobile or MY car. It is painful to lose your property, but more painful is the way you lose it and the unreasonableness of it at all. ... As if this is not enough, some of the residents abuse you with piercing words, which destroys your inside. While working in townships, I myself have encountered these: some downgraded me below a South African dog; others make fun out of my work; and yet others splashed boiling water onto me.

VI. Dual Presence: Separation and Reconnection

In their move from Ethiopia to South Africa individual migrants experience both separation and reconnection – with relatives, as well as through relationships and networks that constitute social capital. DuFoix (2008) has postulated that migrants use a number of approaches to manage proximity notwithstanding distance through. He intimates that the Internet and other modern communication technologies have created the possibility of making distance independent of time, enabling dual presence: the possibility of achieving ‘here’ and ‘there’ at the same time. However, the experiences of Ethiopian migrants in South Africa challenge such assertion.

Disconnection and reconnection

Several respondents talked of the many years of disconnection from close relatives and friends. The disconnection these immigrants have ranges between one and twenty years. Many lost their family members, divorced their spouses, separated from their children, etc. One migrant summed up the complex experience of loss and longing faced by many living away from their homeland as follows: “migration strengthens your physical endurance, but spiritually, you are feeble.”

Madianou and Miller (2011) have examined the importance of technology in communication for migration. The means to communicate with relatives and those from whom migrants are separated is pivotal to maintaining interpersonal connections. The smart phone age has made such communications easy and possible, once the initial costs are covered. This is true also for the respondents in this enquiry. Many use such applications and the social media to maintain connection with relatives and friends back home as well as those dispersed in different parts of the world.

Some respondents in South Africa indicated that they had missed out on both happy and sad life events since having left Ethiopia. On the flip side, migrants’ relatives had also missed out on important moments that the migrants had experienced in South Africa. Wedding and funeral ceremonies stand out top, and communication technology plays minor role in easing out the loss and longing in absentia. One of the respondents in South Africa said, “My sister died while I was here and I could only phone home. It’s not a good way to mourn, it rather intensify your pain.” Another regretted the stunted mourning period in Johannesburg that results from the urgency to get back to work. He said, “Back home, you learn a lot while sharing and comforting one another. You share life experiences, beyond comforting and healing. It is real emotional sharing.”

In terms of the notion of dual presence the responses in this research do not support the idea that technology has eased the possibility of being both ‘here’ and ‘there’ at the same

time. While it has undoubtedly enabled connection and degrees of continuity in relationship, technology has not translated into a sense of dual presence. Respondents speak categorically of South Africa and of their source country or neighborhood as distinct places. They convey a strong sense of ‘home’ being irreplaceable. While several express the sense of a longing for Ethiopia the experience is more one of feeling split between two contexts rather than having integrated a co-existence of the ‘here’ and ‘there’. Home is decidedly separate and is the source and host contexts are ‘somewhere else’.

Social Capital in a Work-dominated Environment

There is enormous competition and high economic risk in the saturating informal economy of South Africa. Thousands of small-scale traders are vying for the same goods and the same customers. In this cauldron of near-perfect competition the risks of failure are extreme. There is a transparency of information in this economic cluster where business operates in small highly visible shop fronts. There are few business secrets. And social interaction is constrained by the features of business interaction that include competition and suspicion, which, at times, turn into conflicts among these migrant entrepreneurs. This latter point has been raised in research on migrant entrepreneur in other contexts (nDeon et al. undated).

The move to a more modern context of Johannesburg did not necessarily offer respondents unqualified social freedom. Respondents expressed both the pressure to conform and the freedom not to abide by strictures of Ethiopian society in Johannesburg. High levels of economic, social and personal vigilance amongst fellow Ethiopians were noted and respondents reported widespread suspicion amongst fellow Ethiopians. Mistrust is linked not only to business competition but also to vigilance over displays of wealth and to patriarchal practices toward women.

The context of Johannesburg impacts on social connection. Crime and the threat of xenophobia loom over the lives of migrants. Socially the danger of being mugged, robbed, or killed limits migrants’ movement and socializing as it restricts movement and hours spent in the public domain. Migrants may opt for modest attire in order to lessen the risk of being targeted as successful and so threatened with theft.

VII. Conclusion

The financial and material improvements of Ethiopian migrants in South Africa – evidenced and documented through remittances, wedding videos and photographs – is in sharp contrast to the low living standard of the population in rural southern Ethiopia. The effect is to paint a rosy picture about South Africa. The dream about the south blinds

potential migrants to the multitude of risks and daunting challenges they encounter on the journey and in the settlement processes, even when these were told to them. Consequently, many perish in transit countries before reaching South Africa. Even for many of those who made it to South Africa, it is only the end of the beginning of their sufferings, as the stories told here show.

The narratives presented here demonstrate widely varied and individual experiences of Ethiopian migrants' separation and of connection with relatives and others who they have left behind, as well as of social capital available and social connections forged in the host country of South Africa. While the narratives are not intended to offer generalizations, they do offer insights that highlight features of social disconnection and connection that are particular to the Ethiopian migrant experiences.

The irregular nature of migration to Johannesburg as well as the route to regularization – that of seeking political asylum places heavy restrictions on the probabilities of migrants' returning to or visiting Ethiopia once they have left. Respondents in this study expressed the palpable emotional rupture of loss of contact with home, family, and friends. Several respondents expressed the experience of living physically in South Africa while longing emotionally for home.

This article has also shown that although migrants understand the risks of migration, the poverty at home and the enticement of the possibilities in South Africa act as a gravitational pull. The benefits of migration are exaggerated by visiting migrants and videos, as well as brokers and smugglers. Though apprised of the risks, the youth from sending communities take the view of “We are going to die somewhere, anyway” or put it another way, “One has to die for others to prosper.”

This article further explored the nature and operation of the social networks that exist for Ethiopian migrants whose mainstay in the host city of Johannesburg is making money. The social world of Ethiopian migrants in this entrepreneurial enclave is complex. Many social connections and dislocations are affected by the life choices in which income generation and economic relations are the primary aim and social relations are necessarily secondary. Others are influenced by the strength of formal and informal ethnic social networks that serve the needs of Ethiopian migrants.

IX. References

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