

Factors Contributing to Human Trafficking, Contexts of Vulnerability and Patterns of Victimization: the case of stranded victims in *Metema*, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Human trafficking has recently emerged as an exceedingly intricate international crime. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most vulnerable region from which a substantial amount of victims has been recruited for both continental and intercontinental transaction. This also holds true for Ethiopian men, women and children who have been immensely draining out via various channels within assorted trafficking networks. This study assesses factors contributing to human trafficking and victimization and the contexts of vulnerability with reference to stranded victims in Metema, Ethiopia. Employing a cross-sectional qualitative research, primary data were gathered from various groups of purposely selected subjects: stranded victims, traffickers, law enforcing agents and social service providers. In-depth interviews, key-informant interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observation were used as methods of acquiring information which was, finally, analyzed thematically to provide a qualitative account on the problem under study. The study found that victims highly pressured by various social structural factors (for instance, poverty, excessive social stress on economic success, the submission of non-economic institutions to the drives of economic calculations, the targets' bounded economic rationality, the expansion of migration/employment agencies and the effect of migration networks) towards migration which ultimately made them motivated targets of trafficking. Once recruited, they are subjected to abusive and exploitative relationship with the traffickers which exposed them to various difficult situations.

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Introduction

Human trafficking, an international crime, is an age-old phenomenon long-lasting from ancient African slave trade era to the contemporary modern society (Broderick, 2005; Lee, 2007; Cameron and Newman, 2008). Despite its long history, attention has been given by the international community only in 1990 to collectively stand to control and combat it. Yet, the extent and magnitude of human trafficking has been escalating dramatically (Ebbe and Das, 2008; Morehouse, 2009; Peterka-Benton, 2011, Njohand Elizabeth, 2012).

It is generally argued that the major breeding ground for trafficking and exploitation is the economic deprivation of people in poorer regions of the world, pushing susceptible people to emigrate and seek better opportunities outside. In Africa, specifically, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are being trafficked both within and outside the continent and forced into situations of labor and sexual exploitation. Evidently, traffickers recruit people from impoverished African regions and sell them out for exploitation with virtually no risk of being prosecuted (UNICEF, 2005; Adepoju, 2005; The Nigerian Voice, 2014). Being the poorest region in the world, sub-Saharan Africa is the most vulnerable region from which substantial number of victims has been recruited for both continental and intercontinental transaction (Adepoju, 2005; ILO, 2010; Dougnon 2011). This also holds true for Ethiopian men, women and children who have been immensely leaving the country via various channels within assorted trafficking networks. Though, the extent and magnitude of trafficking from Ethiopia has not yet been systematically documented, some official reports revealed that human trafficking has been alarmingly emerging as a serious national challenge. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), for example, roughly estimates that about 75,000- 100,000 people migrate each year into Sudan, Libya and other nearby Arab and European countries (MoFA, 2010), and most of these people cross the border illicitly either by traffickers or smugglers.

As an international crime, human trafficking is facilitating the exploitation of people around the world. It involves a range of crime and abuse in the entire process of the operation that involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbor and receiving (Lee, 2007; Shelley, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2010). Hence, it has lately been drawing excessive

global attention that pressures the international community to collectively struggle to prevent and control the far-reaching ramifications of trafficking in persons. Despite the efforts being exerted, the outcry of the international community has not yet been fruitful in eliminating, if not abolishing, human trafficking (Morehouse, 2009). This is clearly manifested by the ever-growing magnitude and scope of trafficking business throughout the world, given that more than 800,000 people are being trafficked across borders annually (UNODC, 2008; US Department of State, 2011). Though the problem is enormous in Africa, it has only recently been acknowledged by most African governments (Fitzgibbon, 2003) and the research community in the continent. Even within Africa, some parts, notably Western and Southern Africa, appear to be closer to and maintain a degree of human trafficking documents, while cases in Eastern Africa, in which Ethiopia is not exceptional, remains less assessed (Yoseph, Mebratu and Belete, 2006; UNESCO, 2007).

In Ethiopia, of the available research documents (Atsedewoine and Tsehay, 2000; Emebet, 2001; AGRINET, 2003, 2004; Beydoun, 2006; Mahdavi, 2010; Play Therapy Africa, 2011; Selamawit, 2013) the vast majority focuses on women victims who were trafficked to the Middle East and returned home, where most of whom travelled via legal transits¹. These studies while exclusively examining the returnees' subjective accounts on the victimizations in the destination countries, failed to incorporate stranded trafficking victims' experiences as well as their vulnerabilities in the harboring areas. Most of these researches (Atsedewoine and Tsehay, 2000; Emebet, 2001; AGRINET, 2003, 2004) confined to the usual cause-effect inquiry in identifying the causes of trafficking and did not go beyond scrutinizing the already known root causes such as, poverty, unemployment, and gender inequality. Nonetheless, scholars argue that there are often some other "poverty-plus" factors which combine with poverty to make people vulnerable to trafficking expeditions (Makisaka, 2009). Furthermore, most of the existing Ethiopian human trafficking researches seem divorced from theoretical arguments both in conceptualizing and analyzing the problem. Overall, the hitherto existing Ethiopian trafficking literature seems incomplete in indicating the migration decision makings, victimization and the contexts of vulnerability in human trafficking from the country. This study, in this regard, is conducted to bridge the aforementioned gaps by

particularly targeting the experiences of and realities related to stranded trafficking victims in Ethiopia.

In order to specifically address the aforementioned issues, the study has the following specific objectives. It aims at examining social structural factors, such as excessive social stress on economic success, the submission of non-economic institutions to the drives of economic calculations, the targets' bounded economic rationality, the expansion of migration/employment agencies and the effect of migration networks contributing to migration in the process of trafficking. Further, it attempts to describe the vulnerability contexts (pre-departure and post-departure) that explain patterns of victimization in human trafficking. And finally the study intended to explain the patterns of victimization in human trafficking expedition in the trafficking process of the operation that involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbor and receiving.

Theoretical Framework

The research themes were examined from Sociological-Criminological theories. The classical sociological notion of anomie, "assuming human beings as normative beings whose action is determined by shared normative values", has long been a conceptual tool for sociologists to the understanding of relationship between social structure, culture and deviant behavior (Bernburg, 2002: 729). These culturally defined shared values provide normative prescriptions that dictate the expected achievements/goals in the particular social structure with their respective institutionally appropriate means of accomplishment. The disjunction between socially expected ends/goals and the ways/means of achieving those goals leads to the state that Merton (1938) called "anomie". Building upon this central premise, anomic perspective of social action has got various versions that emphasizes on various social facts in explaining social action. Nevertheless, this study utilized only two versions of anomic notions: Merton's Anomic theory and Rosenfeld and Messner's Institutional Anomic theory to explain the normlessness of the means used in migration in general and the victimization patterns in human trafficking in particular.

Merton's Anomic Theory: Means-End Schema: Ebbe (2008) asserted that Robert Merton's anomic theory could be systematically deduced to explain

human trafficking scenarios. Merton, consistent with his functional paradigm, explained deviance in terms of anomic conditions resulting from the disjunction between the cultural emphasis and the structural factors in a given society. In modern capitalist society, a greater deal of pressure is directed towards “prestige-bearing success” which is measured in monetary terms with little relative stress on the means of attaining it (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003; Ebbe, 2008). Specifically, the modern economic situation demands people to dedicatedly direct their efforts towards pecuniary success, while “they are largely denied effective opportunities to do so institutionally” (Merton, 1938: 679). The paradox, here, lies in the aspiration of the society to have everybody financially succeed in the condition where everybody has “differential access to the approved opportunities for legitimate, prestige-bearing pursuit of the cultural goals” (Merton, 1938: 679).

The consequence of this “cultural inconsistency” is desperation among the poor that would possibly lead to illegal conduct i.e., innovating whatsoever exit available. In this juncture, Merton believed, “the-end-justifies-the-means doctrine became a guiding tenet for action” (Merton, in Cullen and Agnew, 2011:171). The point lies, as both human trafficking and illicit border crossing are registered crimes, in answering the question why victims choose illicit conduits of undertaking migration process, in the first place. A plausible explanation in this view is the state of anomie that victims experience due to the relative higher social pressure on economic success and the bottleneck path towards it. In this line, Ethiopian trafficking researchers have never gone beyond the mere explanation of economic deprivation as a core cause of trafficking; again the researchers failed to look deep into the role of the social system in devising vulnerability (anomic state of mind) on its members. Therefore, understanding the structural situation that makes people motivated targets of trafficking appeared to be productive.

Institutional-Anomic Theory: Anomic Ethic: Institutional-anomic theory, the contemporary extension of Anomic Theory, indicates the role of social institutions in shaping vulnerability contexts in human trafficking operations. Incorporating Marxist criminology and crediting Merton’s thoughts, institutional-anomic theory goes further to examine the

deterioration of the role of social institutions in enforcing the normative means of doing things in a given society. This inter-institutional analysis portrayed that the cultural prescriptions and structural requirements of the modern society have allowed the economic institution to dominate the values of other institutions and eventually creates anomie (Rosenfeld and Messner, 2011). Conspicuously, capitalist economy prescribes individualist competition, free market, material success and universalism to enhance the effectiveness of the economy and thereby the competitiveness among individuals (Bernburg, 2002; Maume and Lee, 2003). As a result, Rosenfeld and Messner (2011) describes, the cultural ethos called “The American Dream” has emerged among the American society. The American Dream refers to “a broader cultural ethos that entails a commitment to the goal of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open, individual competition” (Bernburg, 2002:713).

In addition to the apprehension that would be created on people due to this kind of commitment (as Merton’s means-end schema shows), the ethos, Rosenfeld and Messner (2011) stipulated, could further obstruct the conventional cultural role of various social institutions. And, this cultural ethos leads the value-orientations of market economy to be exaggeratedly dominant than the value-orientations of non-economic institutions like family, education and religion of the society (Bernburg, 2002). Thus, the interests of these non-economic institutions including the moral and normative issues could be subjected to economic compromises; non-economic institutions become subjugate of the economic drives of capitalism. In the meantime, the ability of “other institutions to tame the economic imperatives”, Rosenfeld and Messner (2011) argued, become depreciated so that it allows the economy to take rule-over the institutional balance of power and dictate every action in economic calculations.

To this effect, weak institutional control over the extreme economic drives and greater emphasis on the cultural goal- monetary success- compared to the institutionalized means, make the ground open for people to search for detour and permit them to presume inappropriate means to attain pecuniary success the system required from them. As stated earlier, this institutional pressure that the system has been exerting on its members would further make people motivated targets of trafficking expeditions. In this backdrop, the theory could systematically explain patterns of

victimization to human trafficking operations. The study, hence, has enormously benefited from the assumptions of the theories highlighted above in explaining the patterns of trafficking victimization in Ethiopia.

Methods of the Study

The study was conducted in North Gondar Zone Metema *Woreda* (district), Metema Yohannes town in Ethiopia. Metema Yohannes (Metema), 918 kms northwest from Addis Ababa, is an international border town that stands between Ethiopia and Sudan. Metema, being a border town, is one of the international trade routes through which the country's import-export exchange, especially with Sudan, has been carried out. According to the CSA (2008) report, 10171 people are residing in the town. Yet, since the economy of the town is predominantly based on trade and service provision and most of its residents are believed to be outsiders who came from different areas of the country in various times and, thus, the population is highly peripatetic (Bekele, 2009).

The border town, despite its economic importance, is identified as one of the major trafficking hotspots through which people illegally cross border each year (MoFA, 2010). In 2010/11 alone, 10,276 trafficked people were intercepted in the town by the Ethiopian police while trying to enter into Sudan while other 8,986 people were deported from Sudan for illicitly entering into the country (Addis Guday, 2011). Consequently, the government recognized the area as one of the trafficking-routes via which traffickers transit victims into the destinations. Metema was chosen purposively as a study site to grasp the possible comprehensive picture of the pattern of victimization and context of vulnerability to human trafficking in Ethiopia.

Due to the restricted interest of the study on the examination of vulnerability circumstances which create particular form of victimization in human trafficking expeditions, information were collected about stranded survivors of human trafficking at a point in time. As compiling data about hidden population like victims of trafficking is both technically challenging and potentially costly (Tyldum and Brunovskis, 2005) and since no single research methodology can adequately capture trafficking corollary (Adepoju, 2005), a triangulation of appropriate possible methods and

approaches were employed in this study. In this regard, the study has used methodological, theoretical, and data triangulations in order to gather diverse insights on the problem. The study heavily relies on qualitative approach by which the primary data were gathered and supplemented by the secondary information obtained via rigorous review of secondary sources like reports, journals, magazines, NGOs and other responsible governmental agencies' reports.

Primary data were gathered from the selected subjects through non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, key-informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Twenty stranded trafficking victims (12 females and 8 males) informed by or discovered through social service providers and/or law enforcing agencies, were interviewed. All the interviews were conducted in Metema town where the respondents reside. Based on the prior arrangement and agreement for the interview, as facilitated by the gatekeepers, the interviews were undertaken in victim's living and/or working places and alternatively in cafes and hotels. Six key informants (health expert, *Woreda* administrative official, police officer, trafficker, *Kebele*² security chief of Metema town and an NGO migration expert (in Addis Ababa)) were selected purposively to incorporate their knowledge about human trafficking via Metema trafficking-route. Except the trafficker whose interview was conducted in a hotel room in Gondar town, the other key informants were interviewed in their respective offices. Furthermore, the sensitive and surreptitious nature of the issue under study necessitated the employment of "gatekeepers"³ in the study. The gatekeepers, in this regard, took the role of facilitating the research process by approaching the subjects prior to the case selection. With a view to enriching the information obtained, FGDs were conducted with three different social categories: Metema police officers, *Sheqabas*⁴, and health sector workers each group was composed of 8 individuals.

Vulnerability Contexts to Human Trafficking and the Pattern of Victimization

Structural Factors Contributing to Human Trafficking

Studies on trafficking, globally, (UNODC, 2008; Cullen-DuPont, 2009; Shelley, 2010; Play Therapy Africa, 2011; Selamawit, 2013) asserted that poverty is the most single influential factor that significantly shapes trafficking victimization. However, in this study, we have brought a new direction that trafficking victimization could be viewed in such a way, wherein poverty appears as a broader whole within which various other social (poverty-plus) factors agglomerate and combine to affect the vulnerability contexts of human trafficking. Poverty by itself may not push people into accepting migration as an option, (Makisaka, 2009) rather there exist numerous associated social forces that make potential victims vulnerable to trafficking. Evidences collected in this study, equally, further strengthen the importance of other macro-level factors in shaping the pattern of trafficking victimization in Ethiopia. These factors could be stated as: excessive social stress on economic success, the submission of non-economic institutions to the drives of economic institutions, the bounded economic rationality, the expansion of migration agencies and the effect of migration networks.

Social Pressure and the Means-End Balance

The growing pattern of modern way of life seems surrendering to the requirements of capitalist economic ideology as a dominant way of socio-economic arrangement. Evidently, today, more than ever, economic success has appeared to be the chief goal that people set in life. In other words, the pattern of modern economic situation demands people to deductively direct their efforts towards pecuniary success as key indicator of worldly achievement. Apparently, today in Ethiopia, this priority further enrooted alongside with the mushrooming spread of capitalist ideology and consumption culture that the people have been becoming conscious of competitive market and importance of monetary success than ever.

In fact, the spread of capitalist ideology and consumption culture that demand economic success and monetary achievement are the most desirable

goals in life. This growing public consciousness awakes people to exhaustively focus on changing their economic situation by winning the prevailing competition and market race which, in turn, exert a greater deal of pressure on people to achieve. The paradox, here, lies in the aspiration of the society, as a system, to have everybody financially succeed in the condition where everybody has “differential access to the approved opportunities for legitimate, prestige-bearing pursuit of the goals” (Merton, 1938: 679). To this end, evidence from the subjects of this study significantly indicates that poverty-driven social pressure for economic success on the desperate poor has been making people to develop “the end justifies- the means” conception and try whatsoever means available. According to key-informants, the seemingly profitable option available for most of these strained poor is migration.

A key-informant who is experienced in working with trafficking victims explained “the most frequently stated reasons for illegal migration in this route are extreme desire to change one’s and family’s economic conditions and lack of appropriate option to do so in the country. Most of these people appear too eager to become rich shortly and be proud of their family. In this condition where the required resources are lacking, migration seems a shortcut to achieve their wish.” Similarly, another key-informant further stipulated that “victims know how to get rid of poverty without necessarily migrating to abroad. But, they feel it takes time...and they need urgent way-out, because they need to properly function in the existing system. Understandably, poverty is one factor, but the greater social and family expectation and the aspiration to be like friends, peers, neighbors, and other successful social figures made them to think of migration as a shortcut.”

Presumably the impact of social pressure is shaping the context of trafficking victimization in this society. Social pressure manifests itself in the form of great family and social expectations and thus the aspiration to be like peers, relatives, neighbors, and other successful people in the society - “the desire not to be viewed as losers”. As a result, potential victims become frustrated to survive in the “expecting system”. A stranded female (21) victim remembered the frustration she had experienced: “after I failed my 10th grade national exam, oh! it was just gloomy: things fall apart. My poor family wants me to join university and make them proud. But their

dream became a fairy tale. It was painful...I couldn't even resist the sabotage of the villagers; I used to cry my eyes out not only for losing the exam but also for remaining behind my friends, dimming my parent's hope and for being judged as a jerk by people."Her frustration seems further fueled by the concern and expectation that her villagers had on her success. Thus, she couldn't even have a single spot to look out other mechanisms to reverse her situation. She asked "I lost my education which is conventionally considered as the path to success and being from poor family, of course, it was the only available path... what do you think my options would be?"This dearth in options/means of success coupled with the burly social pressure would create the mindset that Merton (1938) called "anomie"-- strain resulted due to the disjunction between the socially expected goals and the appropriate means/options of achieving them. In this circumstance, the anomic/strain condition is too strong that people would be obliged to take whatsoever option available to get rid of their pain. To this effect, these frustrated poor people appeared more likely to accept migration, in *Zelege's* (the trafficker's) words as "the cheapest means of success."

Evidences unveil a degree of differential experience of social pressure and anomie among men and women potential victims of human trafficking in the study area. In fact, observing the gender dynamics in social pressure and anomie experience of men and women victims is noteworthy. Evidences from stranded victims indicate that men tend to experience more social pressure for material success while women have less access to legitimate options/means of success. Perceptibly, the cultural structure of Ethiopian society, as any patriarchal system, provides higher status and higher social responsibilities for its male members, by virtue of being men. Of these responsibilities and expectations, providing financial support for family and achieving the material requirement to form and lead ones' own family of procreation are proved to be highly stressful for potential victims. Men are under the pressure of not only helping their family of origin but also realizing their "manhood" by achieving the expected material success which is necessary for them to form their own family. To this end, a male (26) stranded victim says "after the death of my father, all the burden of leading the family rested on me. Since I am the elder, though I was 20, it was my responsibility to make sure the sole existence of my family. I have

tried to keep the family alive and even the kids to learn. But, as time goes I realized the difficulty of living in this manner, without any significant change to happen in me and my family's living condition. But people couldn't understand this; as our family began to splinter, people tended to criticize and sabotage me for the failure. Whilst, I had to grapple with my mother's pressure to marry someone, how could I bring a girl to my deprived life? I had to search another possible way to realize my dream of sufficiently assisting my family and marrying a beautiful girl...this is how it first happened."

People have little options to resist the pressure of material acquisition through the limited resource they have access to. Being from poor family, men should struggle with life, to acquire what is expected from them as a man. But, in a situation where all doors of success are closed, people are forced to seek to escape through whatsoever trajectory available, which was migration. Conversely, women victims found relatively less pressured towards material gain which is culturally bounded in men's domain. The gendered social system habitually offers the privilege of competing for prestige-bearing activities and economic status for its male members so that they are expected to win the game, accordingly. Yet, especially following the recent developments of gender considerations, both sexes seem to be besieged by considerable, if not equal, social pressure of material gain and family responsibilities. A stranded female (22) victim's, story would further build up this fact. She depicted, "I have two brothers with whom I compete within the family. Though, my parents seem favoring the boys' education, they still do not want me to marry and dropout of school. Regrettably, both my brother and I failed to score enough to register in the preparatory class. What happened then was so throbbing; while my brother was sent to private college, I was destined to engage in arranged marriage. I understand that they do not afford to teach both of us simultaneously in a private college and equally; I also know that it would be impossible for me to get back to school after marrying the person that I haven't met before. The point is, my family assumed my marriage as a family success because they felt I would lead better life and sufficiently support them."

The above quote brightly implies how differential position of men and women in this society leads differential expectation and degree of pressure on monetary achievement. The question that should arise, here, is that if

social pressure of monetary success is high on men than women, why do women become more vulnerable for human trafficking. The answer lies in the differential access of men and women to resources or legitimate opportunities that could empower them for the intended success.

According to key-informants, poor men have various conventional occupational opportunities in the market ranging from daily-labor to janitor. Conversely, most poor women are mostly destined to engage in domestic activities, predominantly housemaid and waitress. The good news for these is that the same domestic works are said to have high demand with much better salary and incentives which entitle them to have advantages in the Middle East (Selamawit, 2013): economic and psychological. Economically, they are pledged to get better salary and other incentives while, psychologically, it enables them to safely escape from the embarrassment of being a housemaid in one's own community. Let us consider the following quotes, in this regard, from a female (21) and male (23) victims, respectively.

“Habesha is a very curious society; it wants to delve into each detailed aspect of your life. You can't even do whatever you want to do; because next morning you'll be named after some sabotaging label related to your activity. So how could I easily be a housemaid just next-door of my home? The pain overweighs, I think. Thus, let alone the money, the social stereotype attached to such works would drag you into the place where you know no one. After I realized that being a housemaid could be my only option, it wasn't difficult for me to accept the offer of migration as a housemaid abroad.” On the other hand, the male victim says *“once you decided to work, it couldn't be that difficult to get some jobs, at least on temporary basis, for survival. As a man you have to confront challenges and you could engage in various activities out there. So, I can take whatever job available whenever and wherever... what I need is a job-- to change my life. That is why I have gone through three concrete years of daily labor in my own village. But naturally you need a better job to significantly alter your life for the future.”*

Though both of them were ultimately trapped into human trafficking, the form and extent of social pressure they had experienced and the option of the jobs available to them appears different. The man, though highly pressured, thinks as if he has many other options to go through while the

woman automatically accepted housemaid abroad as the only option available. By implication, these differential access and option of opportunities not merely indicate the gender composition in human trafficking but also shape the contexts which made people suitable targets of trafficking.

Institutional Submission in the Economy's Regime

Beyond creating anomic conditions, the growing economic consciousness and competitive market in Ethiopia has appeared to be forming a new form of line-up in the social institutional structure that would directly affect the pattern of trafficking victimization. Evidence collected in this research indicates that the overall social pressure on economic achievement has been further manifested and accelerated by the weakening role of non-economic institutions, especially family, in taming extreme economic drives. Cultural prescriptions and structural requirements of modern Ethiopia, indeed, allow the economic institution to dominate the values of other non-economic institutions and eventually accelerate the creation of anomie in the society. Thereby, it has led a cultural ethos "that entails a commitment to the goal of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open, individual competition" (Bernburg, 2002:713) to massively spread in the society.

Numerous studies (UNESCO, 2007; Aronowitz, 2009; Shelley, 2010) have indicated the role of family in exposing people to trafficking expeditions through straight or circuitous involvement. Nonetheless, the case in Ethiopia has not yet been fully comprehended in a systemic manner by considering the role of social institutions in the current social order. In this study we have found a pattern of relationship between human trafficking and institutional submission. Information collected from key-informants show mounting deterioration in the conventional role of non-economic institutions, typically family and education, and an increasing domination of the economic institution in determining the interest of other institutions.

Being functioning in the aforementioned system of societal pressure and anomie, family is indirectly becoming a stakeholder in trafficking business that creates motivated potential victims. According to key-informants' explanation, most trafficking operations are found to be

assisted, directly or indirectly, by the families of the victims but blindly without knowing what trafficking really entails. *Zelege*, the trafficker, a key-informant, for example, underscored that most families of victims are cooperative and interested in sending their daughters/sons to work abroad; *we work closely with poor desperate families who either merely push their daughters/sons to work abroad and/or facilitate the overall process of the trip including financing the process*. The role of family, in this regard, can be viewed from two different angles-direct involvement and indirect pressure. First, family could directly participate in drawing migration as the only poverty-exit and motivating its members to engage in it in whatever channel available. In this regard, the seemingly labor migration can be facilitated by the direct involvement of the family by approaching the traffickers (who are considered as agents by the family) and financing the trip. *Zelege* unveiled“...it is not that we are always dealing with the emigrants [victims]; the families approach and even beg us to help their people in sending abroad. At home, they often initiate and pressure their kids and prepare them for migration as a shortcut for immediate success. I have sent people who don't have any idea about the outside world but whose family wants them to leave. Typically, these kinds of families tend to cover all the costs that the migration is supposed to cost...mostly selling their assets like livestock and even borrowing.”

Likewise a stranded male (22) victim strengthens the above quote by attributing his victimization to the curiosity of his family. He stipulated “...I didn't await myself in this condition. The idea was raised by my uncle who knows about the success of other immigrants in our area. I was in 10th grade preparing for the national exam. Originally, my uncle's idea was just to make me feel unwind in the exam tension; ...he said 'do not worry, just try your best; if you didn't make it I will send you abroad where you would make much more money. As he said I lost the exam and then he facilitated my way to Sudan.”

Second, family can indirectly exert significant level of pressure on its members towards migratory decisions, i.e., extreme family expectations coupled with the poverty situation in which most victims' family live maintains considerable pressure on peoples' migration decision. Similarly, police officers accuse those families for being blindly lured by the seemingly prospering upshot of working abroad. They asserted in the FGD

that “as witnessed by trapped victims’ confession most families simply calculate the economic advantage of their own by sending their offspring into the rich countries.”

Speaking of another submission, it seems that, the educational institution has been overshadowed by economic calculations that could make students to be ambivalent in educational achievements. Since the socio-economic condition in which the contemporary educational system has been functioning is dominated by economy as leading force, students’ focus has been slightly shifting from scholarly achievement which obviously takes much longer time and effort to financial achievement which would be attained via shortcuts like working abroad.

Conventionally, in Ethiopia, education was considered as a source of higher social prestige and poverty-exit than any other way. But, these days, evidences have been indicating that education as an institution has been conquered by the values and norms in the economy and primarily affected by the monetary calculations it would bring. As per the key-informants’ assertion, education has been gradually proved to no longer be efficient means of economic success. A key-informant noted “... people have realized the fact that education is not the most efficient way to acquire monetary success shortly. They compare the monthly income of a B. A. degree holder in Ethiopia with that of a housemaid in Dubai. Being a housemaid in Dubai without any further complex academic prerequisite is much better than being a respected B. A. degree holder in Ethiopia. Thus, students begin to fantasize about migration early in school.”

Similarly a female (21) stranded victim fortifies the claim by saying *temiro habtam yehone yelem* (literally: no one has gotten rich through education). She explained “in fact, I was motivated to migrate since I was in grade 9. Then, I became convinced that the amount of income that I would earn after graduation from college seems insufficient for the kind of life I wish to have. Envisage the salary of a teacher in Ethiopia and a housemaid in Saudi or Bahrain. So, whatever sacrifices it would demand, searching job abroad is more economic and wise than spending many years in school.” The notion “*temiro habtam yehone yelem*” is the outlook of most victims as well as FGD participants. The FGD conducted with *Sheqabas* came up with the understanding that most potential victims “favor

migration than education to attain their economic quest within a short period of time.”

Victim’s Agency in Human Trafficking: The Bounded Rationality

Human trafficking, by definition, is a process that entails deception and exploitation of victims by those who are deemed to be traffickers. This definition, however, seems ignorant about the role that the victims themselves would have in creating conducive settings for traffickers. Similarly, most of the studies in the area seem tilted towards blaming the traffickers, exclusively, as the only force of the trafficking business. Nevertheless, evidences in this study indicate that human trafficking is not only driven by traffickers but also other social forces including the victims’ prior inspiration; as ICSW (2007:8) disclosed “trafficking operates within the context of many people’s desire to migrate for work...”

As evidently noted earlier, the responses of the stranded victims imply the existence of some sorts of prior motivation from their own side towards migration. To recall, given the poverty circle in which human trafficking has been operating, anomic conditions are more likely to prevail mostly among the desperate poor in the society. This condition would further be facilitated and accelerated by the submission of the non-economic institutions to the economic imperatives dictating the order of the system and social behavior. In this juncture, naturally, people would like to break the poverty circle they have been trapped in. This seemingly natural propensity tends to be processed in mind through rational economic calculation (hedonistic rationality) that weighs the pain and the gain of the possible exits available. Evidences from stranded victims depict that human trafficking is not solely undertaken by the trafficker’s drive rather it also involves the deliberate agency of the victims who make themselves accessible at the shore of the ocean to be effortlessly ensnared. However, it seems instinctively done due to the confined and wrong information about the expected benefits of migration.

Briefly, victims generally argued that migration, crudely, is not a good behavior as it takes people away from their family and society. But, they also asserted that it is the best way for economic success that would, in turn, benefit both family and the society. Thus, victims understood and prepared

for the sacrifice that the migration would involve. Yet, they just view it, in a key-informant's term, as "a sacrifice for success". The following quote of a female (24) stranded victim has got a point in this regard: "I know migration is not good; it has got its own pain. But whatsoever you couldn't succeed without sacrificing something...I have heard about the death and abuse of girls in Arab countries, conversely I know people who succeeded by working in those countries. Then, I realized that it is a matter of chance: some fail while some others achieve. Thus, I decided to try my own chance. I was ready to confront all the challenges that might be on my way. It is my choice- may be a bad choice for a good reason."

But, this does not mean that the victims knowingly choose trafficking as an option to travel abroad; they just decided to migrate for better economic gains. Here comes the analysis of victims' understanding of human trafficking. Victims of trafficking, like the broader society, have poor awareness and understanding about human trafficking. Thus, they still state their situation as labor migration and allege the government for trapping them from fulfilling their lifelong dreams. They argued, had the government not intervened, they would have a better future which even would benefit their families and relatives. A female (20) stranded victim, for instance, grumbled that "as far as it is my decision to travel abroad and willing to pay the sacrifices, the government should not be on my way...I blame my own people for blocking me from success." This general understanding basically indicates that traffickers work in the setting which is comfortably prepared by the victims themselves. Though, this seemingly rational hedonist calculation perceptibly justifies what the victims consider "labor migration", its implications, yet, poles apart: it manifests lack of clear understanding about human trafficking and their bounded rationality.

Migrant Networks and the Romanticization of Migration

Massey *et al.* (1993:448) defined migrant networks as "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origins" that would magnify the anticipated net profit of migration. In societies like Ethiopia, where family, kinship and neighborhood structures are strapping and powerful, migrant networks appeared more likely to be maintained and pose influence on migratory decisions. In societies where

economic deprivation and low income structure prevails and where social pressure and institutional system favor migration, migrant networks could sway individual and/or household migration decisions not only by proving the net benefit of migration but also by arranging low risk trip and working situations in the destination countries (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).

Evidences in this study further strengthen this argument by showing the role migrant networks as an important force that craft pattern of trafficking victimization by influencing migratory decisions and involving in trafficking business. *Sheqaba's* discussion, in this regard, best articulates the view that “most of them [the victims] have a favorable attitude to migration due to the success stories of other people to whom they have some connection, in blood or locality. Their wish is to attain the success which is manifested by the remittances sent by previous migrants and the quality of life the returnees have secured.” In the same vein, the stranded victims admitted that migrant networks have inspired them and their family by proving the conception that sketches migration generally rewarding. The interesting point here is that migrant networks shape the pattern of trafficking victimization in three different but overlapping manners: rousing the potential victims, inspiring family and increasing the social pressure, and facilitating and/or conducting trafficking operations.

Migrant networks inspire potential victims directly by painting their living in the destination countries beautifully and creating attractive pulling picture of life in overseas. According to the key-informants' observation, most returnees maintain this influence on their young friends, relatives, and the local people, consciously or instinctively, either through oral presentation of experiences and/or symbolic representation of their lives. They may tell sensational success stories of their own or their friends or just symbolically designate their status as a Diaspora. On the other side, previous migrants inspire non-migrant's family via the remittance that they order for their respective families and significant others. This gives a good reason for non-migrant's family to wish similar assistance from their children at home. In the meantime, this family pressure would also take a broader form which involves the wider society's expectation that demands the young people to expand these fruitful experiences of previous migrants and break their family's poverty chain.

To this effect, potential victims began to be inspired to make their own rational calculation to solve the economic problem that they and their family have been grappling with. The calculation, in this condition, however, is more likely to be affected by the picture that previous migrants have preserved about migration in the society. Being easily tempted by the seemingly prospering virtue of migration, people would become already-motivated-targets whose economic interest would easily be exploited by opportunity-seeking traffickers.

Migration Institutions

Human trafficking, discernibly, as underground business, involves chains of relations between a diversity of groups and individuals, all the way from recruitment to exploitation. Frinckenaure and Schrock articulated that actors of this criminal market range from individual entrepreneurs or “opportunistic amateurs” to complex organized criminal groups specialized in trafficking operations (cited in William, 2008:135). By offering the required amount of “commodity,” traffickers bridge the demand-supply chain in the destination and origin areas, respectively. Apparently, this process creates “a lucrative economic niche for entrepreneurs and institutions dedicated to promoting international movement for profit, yielding a black market in migration” (Massey *et al.*, 1993:450). Human trafficking is a gainful business that would attract people to work in organized manner forming migration institutions.

Notably, the upsurge of migration from Ethiopia has led to the proliferation of Agencies and local brokers⁵ (Delala), both legal and illegal, which assume responsibilities of recruiting migrants and facilitating transportations into the dreamed country. As Play Therapy Africa (2011) indicated, 60.70% of migration from Ethiopia is facilitated by local brokers while 37.30% of it receives services of Agencies. However, there is no comprehensive data that estimate the number of local brokers recently operating in the international migration and/or trafficking business in Ethiopia. Despite lack of statistical figure that indicates the number of people who have been undertaking human trafficking as a business, we can still understand the fact that traffickers are everywhere within the society. For example, the FGD with *Sheqabas* discovered that there are 30-60 *Sheqabas*(co-Delalas) working with more than 10 *Delalas* in Metema town.

Zelege the trafficker explained it as “...you can find *Delalas* almost in every village. They are local youths who maintain some strong working relations with other *Delalas* within the chain to the destination countries or border areas. Most of them are closely linked with formal agencies in Addis Ababa and work as double agents; facilitate both legal and illegal migration based on the demand of the situation.”

The proliferation of migration institutions within a particular poor society, perceptibly, would create tremendously conducive environment for motivated potential victims to safely decide for migration. Consequently, these people could easily be lured and recruited for the long trafficking business. Generally, it appears that migration institutions are playing vital role in shaping the pattern of trafficking victimization by influencing people’s migratory decision by virtue of being facilitators and directors of the convenient channel of the migration- of answering the “how” of the economic calculation.

Vulnerability in Human Trafficking

Recruiting Victims: The Dramaturgy/Realm of traffickers’ Expedition

The Ethiopian trafficking realm basically utilizes two methods- searching interested people in different public places and/or getting people via informal networks of family and/or friends (The Ethiopian Herald, 2014) as prominent and effective way of ensnaring people into the trafficking track. Evidences collected from *Zelege* disclosed that most victims are found in schools, recreational places or through friends, relatives or family. Key-informants also spoke that “instantly traffickers know the perfect spots to frame their targets; they always direct their attention into high schools and open public places where young people tend to be found.”Once traffickers figure their targets, they utilize quite a lot of means to get their targets in their rod. As per UNODC (2008), the conventionally used means ranges from complete coercion through abduction/kidnapping to deception and false economic and employment promises. In so doing, evidences depict that, traffickers exploit social networks like family, friends and ex-migrants/returnees to smoothly communicate with targets.

Yet, in spite of the motivation they already built for migration, this does not mean that victims could easily be lured by the traffickers. Thereby,

traffickers have to set up smart deceptive techniques that would inflame victims' success aspiration. Conventionally, traffickers begin by offering false economic promises and good employment grants to catch the attention of their targets. Key- informants disclosed that traffickers make dramatic efforts to display the extent to which previous migrants became successful in the destination countries. This is made through various mechanisms ranging from physically contacting potential victims with the false returnee (a person who just acts as successfully returned from particular destination country) to the use of photographs and phone conversations. Let us consider a female (21) stranded victim's experience in this regard: "...he (the trafficker) kept contacting and tempting me for at least three months; though I was interested in the process, I had some qualms on the effectiveness... Finally, one day he shows up with a beautiful girl who used to live in Dubai. She told me about her heavenly life and the success opportunities in Dubai and promised to help me if I am ready to leave." Once the traffickers make sure that the victim is ready to join, they specify and justify the route through which the outing is supposed to be conducted- Metema and making the service deal i.e., service fee and payment mechanisms; for instance, advance payment, post trafficking payment, and transportation or journey to Metema.

Harboring: Where the Commoditization gets Intense

Destination countries, actually, may be reached either through harboring areas or directly from the origin country. Yet, the hidden nature of human trafficking often necessitates the transportation stage to involve harboring in various areas all the way to the intended destination in order to insure the security of the operation. Habitually, harboring is carried out in the border areas where victims are to be transferred into other transiting route or destination. For the trafficking expedition headed into Sudan, both as a transit and destination country, Metema is the archetypal harboring place where traffickers set up the border-crossing/entry and reception process.

Understandably, since smuggling victims into Sudan is the toughest job traffickers have to accomplish, they require a considerable break-time to arrange the process in risk-free manner. Thus, the respondents argue that setting up safe accommodation within the nearest diameter of the Ethio-Sudan border is fundamental to complete the mission successfully. This, in

turn, demands them to securely accommodate the victims from a week to months. The traffickers called this time *Megazen*- literally means, storing (storing commodities) - which *Zelege* and the *Sheqabas* deemed as “the most costly, challenging and risky phase of their job.” Evidences gathered from the field in this study indicate that *Megazen* normally involves inhumane (cruel/ brutal) handling of victims that results in a broader vulnerability to which these victims are highly prone. Being inherent to the process, as the term *Megazen* signifies, human trafficking commoditizes human beings to make profit out of it. Traffickers confirmed that the term “*Eqa* [commodity] is normally used in our [traffickers’] communication to refer the emigrants.” Being deemed as commodities, then, victims become irreversibly susceptible to the treatment that even commodities could not deserve and to human right violations.

Nevertheless, traffickers seem less considerate and responsive of the pains that they have been creating on their “commodities,” though “a depreciated stoke” would earn less profit. Rather they appear even more brutal in the face of victims’ soreness to insure obedience. In this regard, one of the female (22) stranded victims shares: “worse enough, the *Delalas* are not willing to even hear your problem. Complaining is not accepted. Any discussion among us or even simple talk with each other is strictly forbidden and keeping shut is the rule- the guiding principle of the house [the store]. This is because they strictly warn us: that would lead the police to be suspicious or get information about our existence. If you deviate, the punishment is more malicious.”

This implies the traffickers become more dictatorial as the process of trafficking goes further (Economist, 2013). On the recruitment phase traffickers act more dramatically, like an angel that arrived to relieve peoples’ burden, to deceive and draw false picture of the process. Furthermore, traffickers are known for being sexually abusing and raping young girl victims in Metema. Participants of Police and Militia FGDs underlined that sexual abuse seems a normal behavior in the trafficking business. All participants- chiefs, *Delalas*, transporters or *Sheqabas*, could engage in such offense at any time in the operation. Yet, most sexual abuse and rape complaints are coming out at harboring stage where traffickers would have much free time with victims in the “stores”. Participants further pointed out that sexual abuse and rape in human trafficking could not

exclusively be committed by traffickers themselves; rather occasionally they could facilitate it for their friends. Consequently, sexual abuse and rape are found to be more committed at further stages of the trafficking process-transportation and harboring.

However, most victims gave the impression that they did not feel the pain of the mistreatment and misery they have experienced until they were intercepted. Victims accept the mistreatment and the abuse as a sacrifice that should be paid for success. Though, they strongly redress the mistreatment, traffickers try to justify their vindictiveness in relation to the success of the mission; “it is the nature of the job... is for the reason of the success we aimed at, both for ourselves and for them [victims].” The earlier phases of trafficking appeared equally exploitative and sore enough to plant everlasting physical and psychological destruction on victims. Understandably, this would leave victims to grave everlasting physiological, reproductive and psychological problems that would extend to HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy.

Interception and Detention

Though most of the trafficking operations in Metema route end successfully, some missions end in failure for being intercepted by the police of either or both countries (Ethiopia and Sudan). The interception would either be done in the *Megazen* (store) before the beginning of the entry-trip or at the march around the border. Key-informants, however, noted that most often trafficking operations are intercepted within the Sudanese border than in Metema. Yet, according to Metema town police, various groups of security forces have been engaged in the anti-trafficking endeavor of Metema. These forces- namely: the Federal Police, Metema’s Militia Sect, and Metema town Police- though from different structural background, have been collaboratively working to curb trafficking in their area. Likewise, there is comparable arrangement in Gallabat (the immediate Sudanese Border town) which stands for the same purpose. Hence, the effort is said to be two-rounded, though the result seems minimal.

As per Metema police’s report, numerous trafficking missions have been intercepted so far both by Ethiopian and Sudanese forces. Sometimes, some victims may also escape on the way from the traffickers or rescued by local people and inform back to the police. Whatsoever, upon rescue or

escape from the tragedies of trafficking, victims would either be received by social service providers or held in custody by local officials. In Metema, where formal rehabilitation by service giving organization- either governmental or non-governmental- is absent, the stranded victims are merely released from arrest and left in the middle of nowhere. Metema police underlined that “since we are mostly responsible to intercept traffickers and continue the prosecution and due to lack of resource, we could not be able to help each victim, but simply rescuing them from the larger evil”. Being new to the town, confused of what is happening and most importantly empty-pocketed, this crucial juncture seems a turning point for stranded victims either to be “really rescued” or once again become victims of another tragedy.

Conclusion

This study has tried to examine the trafficking victimization and the context of vulnerability with reference to stranded victims in Metema. By thoroughly analyzing the information gathered from various stakeholders’ (stranded victims, traffickers, law enforcing agencies, and social service providers) insights and experience we have drawn possible substantial account of the problem in Ethiopia. Unlike most studies who exclusively stressed on poverty as a root factor of trafficking, this inquiry portrayed various structural “poverty-plus” factors (those social-structural factors that play within the poverty circuit creating vulnerabilities) that create a pro-migration mindset which, in turn, fabricates motivated targets for the trafficking venture.

Drawing from and guided by an eclectic theoretical framework, the study conceptualized the structural factors which motivate people to migration as: excessive social pressure for pecuniary success, family expectation, institutional submission to economic drives, the impact of migrant networks, the proliferation of migration institutions/employment agents, and peoples’ bounded economic calculation. Briefly, following the spread of capitalist ideology and consumption culture in Ethiopia, the society’s definition of success has been predominantly determined by the level of monetary achievement one had reached. This, expectedly, demands

people to competitively strive to break the poverty circle. Correspondingly, due to the structural problems in the Ethiopian educational system coupled with the spreading capitalist principle that has been invading the socio-cultural milieu of the society, education has emerged as a less powerful alternative for economic success in the country. The failure of family and education, as important social control instruments, to tame the spreading monetary yearning, thus, further offered favorable setting for economic calculations to guide every choice in life. Eventually, poverty plus the excessive social pressure and family expectation for monetary gain coupled with limited appropriate means of attainment has been dragging people into a state of affairs “Anomie.”

In this juncture, the study depicts migrant networks and migrant institutions or employment agencies appear to “assist” people to fantasize migration as a “cheapest accessory for success”. Migrant networks made up of returnees and Diasporas, and employment agents/agencies including local brokers play a critical role in generating an exceedingly attractive picture of work and life overseas. The collective effect of the aforementioned factors, eventually, make people motivated targets whose economic desire could easily be manipulated by traffickers. By implication, this means, human trafficking in Ethiopia has been mostly undertaken within the broader picture of labor migration where the potential victims have their own “rational choice” to initiate migratory decisions. But, the pain-gain calculation is not rational *per se*; due to the confined and wrong information that the potential victims received, their rationality always is bounded. Yet, it is implied in this study that victims have their own vigorous agency, though bounded, in shaping their victimization to trafficking.

Being victimized by these structural factors and having chosen the wrong gateway, poor children, young men and women have been easily trapped into the trafficking net every day. As soon as the recruitment phase is successfully completed, traffickers begin to transport the victims to Metema. This is the stage where the real physical and health victimization begins to emerge. So far, the victims were viewed as victims of the social structural vulnerability contexts which had exposed them to trafficking expeditions. But, after departure, they face risky situations which would have long-lasting physical, mental and reproductive health crises. Sexual

harassment, rape and physical abuse are the most commonly cited problems that stranded victims have been susceptible to in the transportation phase of trafficking via Metema.

End Notes

1. Enveloping in the name of travel agencies, traffickers legally transport victims into the destination countries by the Ethiopian Airlines. This seemingly legal transit is covered by the name of labor migration that the deceived victims receive legal passport and visa which will be confiscated as soon as they arrive at the destination.
2. Grass-root level of government administrative unit lower than *woreda*. The *kebeles* are accountable to the *woreda*.
3. A technical term that refers to those local people who have the connection and power to facilitate a contact between the researcher and the subjects of interest.
4. A trafficker who is responsible to harbor victims in Metema and smuggle them into Sudan
5. They are not actually engaged in institutionalized migration business like agencies. However, they operate secretly in complex chain and network which assumes a form of hidden organization. Here, by considering the networked and chained interaction of local brokers in trafficking operations, the researchers opted to roughly categorize them under institutions for analytical purpose. Thus, an institution in this study refers to both the work of chained local brokers and migration agencies.

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