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Women trafficking in Ethiopia and its mitigation; The case of Arsi Zone, Oromiya

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Human trafficking is a world-wide phenomenon, experienced in all continents. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2004), human trafficking is:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”. I take this definition as a starting point to indicate the organized exploitation of dependent, irregular migrants in search of jobs outside their home area/country, a phenomenon that has taken criminal shape.

Human trafficking in this sense is recognized as a growing problem and has become so endemic so that the United Nations has promulgated a Special Protocol to deal specifically with the trafficking of women and children.¹ Human trafficking is transnational but is propelled by specific socio-economic factors and actors in various countries that traverse the local, regional and national boundaries. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that in recent years there are about 12.3 million people in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor, and sexual servitude at any given time. The US Department of State (USDS) approximates that 600,000-800,000 people are annually trafficked across national borders, which does not include millions trafficked within their own countries. Trafficking is the third most lucrative illicit business in the world after arms and drug trafficking and is thus a major source of organized crime revenue. The initial ‘sale’ of trafficked persons generates an

¹ *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (UN 2000c); this belongs to a much broader *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. This broad and all-encompassing definition is legal and therefore requires legal and regulatory instruments to prevent, suppress and punish those practicing or harboring human trafficking.

estimated US\$ 7 to \$12 billion annually, with subsequent sales generating an additional US\$ 32 billion a year (Gekht 2007: 11-27).

As part of international organized crime, human trafficking involves globally distributed criminal networks, and its victims are drawn from local, national and regional sources. Similarly, human trafficking traverses age (its victims are children, youths and adults) and gender (both men and women fall prey to organized traffickers). On the gender-age spectrum, recent literature has shown that most victims of human trafficking are women and children. Globally, trend analysis shows that in 2016 about 40% more victims of human trafficking were detected compared to 2011. In the same year, it is reported that 21% of the persons trafficked are men, 49% women, 23% girls and 7% boys.² In other words, during this period, women and girls comprised 72% of the total number of persons trafficked globally.

As recent as 2018 it was reported that: "... most of the victims detected across the world are females; mainly adult women, but also increasingly girls. Most of the detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are females, and 35 per cent of the victims trafficked for forced labor are also females, both women and girls. At the same time, more than half of the victims of trafficking for forced labor are men".³

In Africa, over the past few years, there has been an increase in all kinds of human trafficking to and from, as well as within the continent.⁴ Yet, a lack of public awareness about the problems of human trafficking and the extent to which organized criminal groups are involved is common in Africa.

The insight into the phenomenon came not from statistical data but from the alarms raised by activists, the media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria, Togo, and Benin in the late 1990s.⁵ Indeed, in Africa in recent years, trafficking of women and children, as commercial sex workers or as exploited domestic servants, has assumed such an alarming proportion that African leaders are breaking the normal culture of silence to address the issue with the urgency it deserves.

Over the past decade, the number of trafficked Africans has increased both internally (within the continent) and externally (to other parts of the world), particularly the Middle East and Europe (Thipanyane 2015). In 2016, it was estimated that child victims accounted for the

² UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018: 25.

³ *Ibid.*: 9.

⁴ Thipanyane 2015, online journal, no pagination.

⁵ See details in A. Adepoju (2005), 'Review of research and data on human trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa', in: F. Laczko and E. Gozdzia (eds), *Data and Research on Human Trafficking: A Global Survey*. Geneva: I.O.M.

majority (about 55 per cent) and were detected in sub-Saharan Africa, with girls and boys almost equally distributed.⁶

Having noted that human trafficking is transnational and traverses several regions and countries, Ethiopia is not an exception in that many Ethiopians have fallen victim to human trafficking. Ethiopian women working in domestic service in the Middle East were trafficked and are often subjected to severe abuse, including physical and sexual assault, denial of salary, sleep deprivation, passport confiscation, and confinement. Ethiopian women who migrate for work or flee abusive employers in the Middle East are also vulnerable to sex trafficking. Ethiopian men and boys migrate to the Gulf states and other African nations, where some are subjected to forced labor. Ethiopian women and children bear the brunt of many negative physical abuse outcomes. In a study of women trafficked to the Sweden and the Netherlands, it was observed that 95% of victims had been “violently assaulted or coerced into a sexual act,” and over 60% of victims reported “fatigue, neurological symptoms, back pain, vaginal discharges, and gynecological infections.”⁷ Women and girls are vulnerable to reproductive and other gender-specific health problems because they often have little or no access to reproductive healthcare. According to Hughes (2000), the consequences of trafficking also include lack of access to birth control, rape, forced abortions and contraceptive use, , and other health issues. It has also been observed that female trafficking victims in domestic servitude are frequently subjected to rape and other physical abuse, while trafficking victims in forced prostitution⁸ suffer increased risk of sexually transmitted infections.

But not all women face harsh repercussions like these. Regarding the specific focus of this thesis on women involuntarily trafficked, beyond their will, or losing any control of the process, I note that there is an ambivalent line between those trafficked this sense and those that initiate or submit to the process for purposes of (unregulated and risky) labour migration, where women initially exercise choice and agency. The trajectories of such women are often better described as being involved in ‘irregular migration’ (More on the terms in Chapter 3). Women who become entangled in trafficking often had initial agency and ‘chose’ to move for purposes of gaining employment outside their country of origin. Some succeed and brave the adverse conditions they meet; almost all are confronted with deep challenges and problems. But the point to emphasize is that not all women everywhere in vulnerable labour conditions are by definition ‘trafficked victims’, and I will give examples of this in the thesis. The main

⁶ UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking 2018: 25.

⁷ See Davidson; Perry and Roby 2010.

⁸ For a Thailand case study, see Taylor 2005.

focus here, however, is on the problem of trafficked (Ethiopian) women who lose control over their migration process and become mired in problems and serious abuse; thus being victimized by criminal agents and exploited (See for instance Nisrane *et al.* 2020 on this category of women).

Due to the secrecy that shrouds a criminal activity such as human trafficking, the real magnitude of internally and externally trafficked persons is based on estimates rather than actual, reliable figures. However, there are indications of the **alarming** number of persons trafficked worldwide. In 2016, the government of Ethiopia intercepted more than 30,000 individuals vulnerable to trafficking and convicted 640 traffickers, an increase from 69 convicted in 2015.⁹ For 2018, it was estimated that the Ethiopian government intercepted more than 10,000 individuals vulnerable to trafficking and convicted more than 180 traffickers.¹⁰ Saudi Arabia remains the primary destination for irregular migrants; reportedly over 500,000 Ethiopians were residing there in 2019. In 2018 the Ethiopian government lifted its October 2013 ban on Ethiopian domestic worker employment in the Gulf states, acknowledging that the ban had contributed to irregular migration and trafficking. In 2017 Saudi Arabia deported more than 100,000 Ethiopians back to Ethiopia, which created considerable hardships to those deported, particularly those who claimed to have lost all their life-time savings.¹¹

Besides various negative physical consequences¹² it can be noted that survivors of trafficking frequently suffer from social and physical damage caused by captivity and fear of reprisals if escape is contemplated, and brainwashing. Survivors may also suffer from anxiety, panic disorder, and major depression, intense feelings of shame, substance abuse, and eating disorders. Many survivors also suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as in the case of the Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia (van Reisen 2017). These include following symptoms: intrusive re-experiencing of trauma (such as flashbacks and nightmares); avoidance or numbing of trauma-related or trauma-triggering stimuli; and hyper-arousal (heightened startle response and inability to concentrate). Among the recent publications in publications For adults and children, PTSD is typically chronic and debilitating when left unchecked (See Feeney, Foa, Treadwell and March 2005).

⁹ United States Department of State, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, Ethiopia.

¹⁰ United States Department of State, 2017. Trafficking in Persons Report, Ethiopia.

¹¹ See United States Department of State 2017, De Regt and Tafesse 2017, and Kubai 2016.

¹² See Peter Landesman, 'The girls next door,' *New York Times*, 25 January 2004 (Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/25/magazine/25SEXTRAFFIC.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed 5 February 2019).

Generally, the literature on women trafficking has addressed at least six major thematic debates: first, domestic workers' experiences, focusing on labour rights and sexual abuse and bondage labour, among others (Fernandez, 2001 and 2011; de Regt, 2010; Anteneh, 2011; Abbebe 2012; Asefach, 2017; Asefaw, 2018; Boris 2018, Lim 1998). Second, the theme of female-specific vulnerability, relating to gender roles and Middle Eastern societies' negative image on domestic work, which is in some cases associated with ownership of the labour and labour providers. Third, the trafficking of adolescent girls (Grabska, de Regt and del Franco, 2019; Fernandez, 2019), where migration is considered part of the transition to adulthood or for sex trafficking. This aspect is relatively well-studied for Asian countries but not yet for Northeast Africa. Fourth, experiences of returnee women and their integration into the sending communities (Minaye, 2012a, 2012b; Gezie *et al.* 2019a; Gezie *et al.* 2019b). Fifth, physical and psychological suffering (Sanchez 2011, van Reisen 2017, Gerassi *et al.* 2018). Sixth, human trafficking as a mode of 'modern slavery' (Nevison 1906, Taran and Geronimi, 2003, Tomich 2004, James, 2005, Obokota 2006, Parrenas *et al.* 2012, Bales, 2012, Chibba 2014 and van Reisen and Rijken 2015; Winterdyk and Reichel 2010) and its critics (Agustin, 2005; Aronowitz 2009; Bales, Trodd and Kent 2009, Davidson; 2010; Winterdyk and Reichel, 2010; Jansson, 2015; Brace and Davidson, 2018), which like other themes and debates dealt with in this thesis with varying degree of details.

Moreover, these debates are neither Ethiopia-specific nor exhaustive, due to the global nature of women/human trafficking and the huge volume of global literature on human trafficking. Still, they reflect some of the issues grappled with in this thesis, which focuses on Arsi Zone and not on the whole of Ethiopia. There are several regional differences, e.g., between South-eastern, North-western and Central Ethiopia, according to religious and cultural divergence, the nature of labour markets and employment structures, and reach of government authority. The contribution of an Arsi Region-directed study is to reflect on the specific local economy and local culture in south central Ethiopia, and area with widespread poverty but not as marginalized in comparison with, say, the Gambela, Somali, or Beni Shangul Regions. A case study here can also throw light on some of the causes of human outflow in a largely Oromo peasant/small trader society where the medium-sized towns cannot absorb young people (male and female) in the labour market, and where the outflow of youths abroad is largely going in one direction: towards the Red Sea coast and to richer Arab/Middle Eastern countries across

it.¹³ Ethiopia-specific literature has been consulted, noting that similarities or differences of research-based findings make an important contribution to the comparative study of the trafficking problem in the country, and so far relatively little is known on the Arsi Zone area.

However, Ethiopia-specific research on irregular migration and human trafficking has also attempted to elucidate the continuum between the processes of trafficking in countries of origin and host countries. Such studies on trafficked women abroad were conducted by Beydoun (2006), Mesfin (2011), Asefach (2012), Hailemichael (2014 and 2017), Elias (2016), Fernandez (2013 and 2019) and Tefera (2019), Gezie *et al.* (2019a); focusing on the problems that Ethiopian domestic workers face in the destination countries. Some few researchers focused on in-country human trafficking, like Temesgen (2010), Fojo (2018), Anteneh (2011), Muluken *et al.* (2014), Hagose 2014, Gudetu (2014), Hailu (2015), Reda (2017), Mehari (2017) and Kebede (2018), Lemma (2019), Shewit (2013) and Tekalign (2018).

In Ethiopia, the research conducted on the continuum between country of origin and host country, often associated with the study of human trafficking and smuggling networks, is largely dominated by international and inter-governmental organizations, such as IOM and IGAD (2015), SAHAN and IGAD 2016; OECD (2016), ILO (2015), UNHCR (2019), Human Rights Watch (2011, 2014), and others. This could be explained in respect to the broad nature of policy research and where the transnational mandates and huge human and financial resources of the multilateral organizations offer better opportunities to access the full-range of the human trafficking cycle from the sending to the host country and return.

The above brief overview of the literature shows that the subject of trafficking of Ethiopian women to the Middle East is becoming prominent both in academic work and in multilateral organizations' activities. The high prevalence of literature on women is explainable due to the large numbers of trafficked women in general, and specifically for Ethiopia on the growing numbers of those moving within the country as well as from there moving to the Middle East in particular, as will be elaborated in subsequent chapters. However, studies focusing on the continuum between internal and external as well as on returnees are rather scarce. One of the aims of this study, therefore, is to bridge this gap.

Despite anticipated physical and psychological suffering, many people are enticed every year by the hope for a better life, and decide, plan, prepare to move from Ethiopia to the Middle East, Sudan, South Africa and elsewhere, via traffickers or brokers. Relatives,

¹³ Other areas in Ethiopia show different patterns, e.g., in Gondar (northwest Ethiopia) the outflow goes to Sudan and the Mediterranean, and in Hadiya-Kambata (Southern Region), most migrants go to Kenya hoping to reach South Africa.

neighbors, friends and families even facilitate the process by selling their property to pay for the fees required for the brokers, as heard from public discussions made at different times about the issue (Beck *et al.* 2016). As this thesis was completed just as the COVID-19 pandemic reached Africa's shores, the effects of it could not be studied. It is reasonable to expect a significant slowing down of outmigration due to travel restrictions, reduced flights, quarantine rules, and an economic slow-down reducing demand for (domestic) labour. In addition it can be noted that (trafficked) Ethiopian women and other foreigners presently working in the Middle East have entered into an even more vulnerable situation, with reports emerging in media and via international organizations that many domestic servants and workers are dismissed or 'dumped' by their employers¹⁴ due to lack of funds because of rapidly rising unemployment in the wake of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, or because of fear of infection.

As noted above, to the best of my knowledge, the literature reveals that human trafficking and its risk factors in Arsi, Oromiya National Regional State,¹⁵ have not been much studied. This was a motivating factor to further examine the specific situation in two zones of this region in central Ethiopia, where the problem is serious. Reliable official data on trafficking and women trafficking particularly from the Oromiya Region is hard to obtain, which also determined the need for conducting elaborate questionnaires.

The rationale behind using the questionnaire method is that it offers the opportunity to canvas a broad array of perceptions on some of the controversial issues in human trafficking. For instance, it gives much room for asking question about the wider society's attitudes about women irregular migration and trafficking, its legality, perceived causes, and the effect of education and related issue in the process. See Annex 1 and 2 for the range and width of the questions asked and chapter 6, where the data is analyzed and presented. By its very nature, the questionnaire method is less subjective than for example, participant observation for a researcher who belongs to the community he or she studies. Also compared to participant observation, if done well it takes less time both in terms of data collection and analysis. I am also aware of the shortcoming of questionnaire as a method of data collection, such as the inability of some respondents to fully remember past events, hide their true attitudes or feelings or not explaining the context of their answers. Some respondents may deliberately refrain from

¹⁴ See BBC, 'Ethiopian maids dumped outside Beirut embassy', 21 June 2020 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-53031803/ethiopian-maids-dumped-outside-beirut-embassy>, accessed 25 June 2020). See also: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-06-26/lebanon-s-financial-crisis-worsens-migrant-workers-are-being-dumped-streets-trash> (26 June 2020).

¹⁵ Here below: Oromiya, or Oromiya State.

giving answers that may put them in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis family members or government officers responsible for implementing anti-trafficking policies. However, on the whole, as a method of data collection, the questionnaire positive attributes outweigh the negative ones, especially when combined with interviews

The study focus on women trafficking was conceived during preliminary fieldwork, where it became apparent that it was a social problem insufficiently recognized, raising questions on when the phenomenon started, why, what the factors were that contributed to its emergence, and what its consequences were, both for the wider population and for the trafficked and returnee women. For this purpose, it became mandatory that new data were to be collected from trafficked women themselves and from their families in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the consequences of trafficking. Another important aspect of this study is that it investigates the trafficking process, i.e. how those trafficked within Ethiopia and host Middle Eastern countries are recruited and how they travel. The role of the returnees from being trafficked and the information given by their families are significant because they are no longer fearful of reprisals by traffickers in the host countries and therefore would be more disposed to describe their experiences.

As noted, regardless of the growing attention to the problem of human trafficking, its magnitude has been proven hard to estimate. However, there is some material which we attempted to put to good use in this study. A number of reports have documented the difficulty in obtaining accurate statistics on the number of trafficked victims. Certain is that trafficking in persons has increased drastically and is escalating at a fast pace (Avellino 2012: 22; Gekht 2008: 31-32).

Commonly, those trafficked come from marginalized backgrounds - they may be socio-economically disadvantaged, of lower education, and unemployed, often from (ethnic) minorities, and often youngsters and women. Their status as marginalized people places them in a diminished, often dependent state, more vulnerable and less capable or established than the mainstream classes of the employed, property/business owners, let alone social and political elites. In human trafficking, (young) women and adolescents easily make up the largest category proportion. They are most vulnerable.

As the research proceeded it became apparent that the problem of women trafficking in the Arsi area was substantial and undocumented. However, most of the real data of trafficked women could only be obtained if the women themselves or their family reported that they were returnees from the Arab destination countries. The reporting was done only if the returnees or the families felt that they would receive some kind of support from the

government. Consequently, the exact number of the trafficking victims in the area is still hard to obtain.

1.2. Scope

This study focuses on women trafficked from Arsi administrative zone of Ethiopia to the Middle East, with scant references to trafficked women from Ethiopia and elsewhere, and relates the description of the empirical case to national and international anti-trafficking concepts and to legal and administrative instruments. This focus was in part determined by the scarcity of studies on women trafficked from Arsi zone of Oromiya State. Although theoretical issues related to gender-studies are sparsely discussed, in the analysis it becomes clear that women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to a structurally weaker position in African (and Ethiopian) society, but the study focuses on the trafficking phenomenon in general as the primary problem, with women as a case study. The intermediaries and traffickers are almost all men. While I do not follow a systematic gender analysis, there is thus a clear gender dimension in the phenomenon, with females in a less powerful position vis-à-vis males, showing a mixture of initiative or willingness (to move out and find gainful employment) and dependency (relying on male networks of intermediaries and traffickers).

1.3. Purpose of the Research

This study aims to explore the nature, prevalence, several root causes, and societal consequences of (female) human trafficking in the two Arsi zones: 'Arsi' and 'Arsi West', in Oromiya State, and also to assess intervention and prevention measures. The overarching question is why (female) human trafficking persists despite the myriad of legal and policy frameworks and institutions established to mitigate it.

1.4. Objectives

The specific research objectives of the study are to:

1. identify some of the root causes/determinants that induce individuals to be trafficked, and explore the consequences of human trafficking in the two Arsi zones and explore its gender dimensions;

2. explore the attitudes, perceptions and awareness of the trafficked, traffickers and the community at large towards human trafficking, notably the returnees (often former victims or survivors);
3. examine how the Oromiya State and the Federal Government anti-human trafficking policy framework is articulated and implemented; and
4. scrutinize possible prevention and mitigating strategies to combat female human trafficking by combining the policy oriented and legally codified freedom and emancipation and the material needs or more politically economy oriented responses to human trafficking, in general, and women trafficking in particular.

The empirical findings of the study will be a basis for answering the research questions above, and seek socio-economic explanations of human trafficking rather than to reducing it to being an act of criminality for mere profit, without explaining its causes.

1.5. Research Design and Methodology

One of the issues that became clearer as the research proceeded was the fact that human trafficking research provides unique challenges. As it is principally a concealed enterprise, developing the right research design for accessing the relevant subjects presented an uphill task. Researchers have at best restricted access to the immediate subject matter of their enquiries, namely the 'hidden' populations that include victims, traffickers and criminal networks. Even those who reported to the local authorities that they were victims of human trafficking are less willing to respond to requests from a researcher mainly because they fear the consequences of exposing the (criminal) practices. This means that the size and boundaries of the pool of potential research subjects are unknown, resulting in the lack of a 'sampling frame' (See Goździak and Bump 2008; Laczko 2005), despite the importance of enquiries that either comprise, or rely heavily on, original primary evidence (See Kelly 2002; Tyldum *et al.* 2005). In other words, abstracting victims of trafficking in numbers does not tell much of the real life ordeals they go through and the variety of factors which contributed to them being part of this inhumane practice.

Moreover, researchers on trafficking find themselves writing on an issue that has often been sensationalized, misrepresented, and politicized (see Gregoriou 2018). With the bulk of media treatment only sensationalizing trafficking, especially in stories of sexual exploitation, social scientists must, in contrast, provide carefully researched, on-the-ground accounts of life

in and after trafficking. There are many pressures on trafficked persons to maintain silence about their status (cf. Goździak and Bump 2008, Laczko 2005).

Despite all the difficulties involved, the research is based on data obtained by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Basically, as Berg (1989) noted, no single approach, either qualitative or quantitative, can be perfectly effective, and so the validity of each method can be improved significantly through triangulation of data from various sources (see Flick, 1992; Yin, 2003). Simply put, rather than relying on a single data source, the use of several sources of evidence, such as questionnaire, interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and field notes, helped the researcher construct the study's validity (cf. Yin 2009: 98-99) and to assess their family data, education, work situation, income, etc. but also can reveal attitudes, values, beliefs or opinions (Bouma 2000: 20). House (1994) suggests that questionnaires in quantitative research give a more precise, explicit and predetermined measure and identification of relevant variables regarding the root causes and consequences of human trafficking.

Mixed methods were the best design for this study because the inquiry involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, which reveal both basic facts and subjective knowledge and opinions. So, a concurrent mixed method approach involving a combination of such qualitative data generated from semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings was matched with the data obtained via a five-point Likert-type survey questionnaire.

The interviews were face-to-face carried out by myself, assisted by an experienced informant/assistant, who transcribed the interview questions (prepared in English) into the language of most of the interviewees (in Afan Oromo), under my supervision. Some interviews and questionnaires (Annexes 1 and 2), were translated from English to Amharic, as not all government employees are fluent in English. And, in both cases, the responses of the interviewees were again transcribed back to English for the purpose of writing the thesis.

1.5.1. The Research Site

The main field research was conducted in short intervals between late February and June 2019, commencing with short exploratory visits for piloting the questionnaire. The interview process and the administration of the questionnaire and interviews took place simultaneously between February and June 2019. However, the bulk of the interviews with returnee trafficked women were conducted in April and only five interviews were conducted in June 2019. The writing was made easier because the background chapters (two, three and four) were written before the

data collection which offered some time for reflection and improvements of the data analysis and writing.

The research site is located in the two Arsi administrative zones (Arsi and Arsi West West), two of the twenty administrative zones of the Oromiya State. According to the 2007 census - the last one taken and conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia - Arsi zone had a total population of 2,637,657 (1,323,424 men and 1,314,233 women). In the zone the population is almost entirely rural and in majority Muslim (58.1%) The second largest group of inhabitants are Orthodox Christians (40.1%).¹⁶

Approximately 12% of the zone's population live in urban areas. With a total of 541,959 households reported, there are about 5 persons per household on average. The two largest ethnic groups inhabiting this zone are Oromo and Amhara, accounting for roughly 84% and 14% of the total population.

Arsi West Zone had a total population of 1,964,038 (973,743 men and 990,295 women). A total of 387,143 households were counted in the zone, which results in an average of 5 persons per household. Also, here, the two largest ethnic groups are Oromo and Amhara, accounting almost 89% and 4% of the total population of the zone. Approximately 14% of the population are urban inhabitants. The majority of the inhabitants in Arsi West zone are also Muslim; with 80.34% of the population, while 11.04% of the population professed Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and 7.02% were Protestant.¹⁷

The research was specifically undertaken in four *woredas* (districts) from the two zones (two from each zone), selected on the basis of the relatively higher prevalence of women trafficking reported. These *woredas* are Adabba and Gadab-Asasa from Arsi West zone, and Robe and Sude from Arsi zone.

1.5.2. Rationale

Although considerable studies on human trafficking to the Middle East were published, Arsi zone has not featured as major migration/human trafficking areas (as, for example, Addis Ababa, Amhara and Tigray National Regional States have). During the fieldwork, it became apparent that human trafficking from Arsi Zone is an underestimated and significant social problem .

¹⁶ Central Statistical Authority (2007). These data are old because they were gathered more than a decade ago. Much has changed since then. However, because of any other reliable data, these figures were used.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 2007: 9. Table 2.1.

The rationale behind choosing *women* as a focus of this study is not because men are not trafficked. However, migrant and trafficked women are more visible than men, and are often seen in Addis Ababa's Bole Airport in large numbers, on their way to or returning from the Middle East and other destinations. They also seem more vulnerable. The focus of this study on young women only is mainly because these women are the largest trafficked group in Ethiopia. Second, although the study not specifically takes a theoretical gender perspective, the filed material is reasonably disaggregated according to gender. It also relates to the different socio-economic and cultural factors in the country and region of origin contributing to women and men being trafficked. The questionnaire materials also included valuable information on the perceptions of government officials and non-officials views about women trafficking compared to men.

1.5.3 Research Design

The design employed an explanatory cross-sectional descriptive questionnaire-based 'descripto-explanatory' studies (see Lewis, Saunders & Thornhill 2009). **Descriptive studies are used to examine the existing situation of human trafficking (causes, pervasiveness and consequences) in Arsi and Arsi West zones of Oromiya.** **Explanatory** research is a valuable means of finding out "what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (Robson 2002: 58) **The 'explanatory' approach looks more at causes,** and will be addressed in chapters following data presentation.

1.5.4 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The 'target' populations of this study are the trafficked/migrants, traffickers/brokers, experts working at the Ministry of Labor and Emigration Office, and the community of origin at large. **Though it has limitations, snowball or respondent-driven sampling has been used to study vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations** as diverse as HIV patients, drug users, street-based individuals and sex workers (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004: 194). **Therefore, traffickers and victims are sampled using the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling, also called 'referral sampling',** is a non-probability sampling in which existing study subjects identified the participants (respondents) from among their acquaintances. **This sampling technique was selected because, by its very nature, human trafficking is mostly invisible to outsiders, and can better be understood through referrals by insiders.** As those involved in the activity in one way or the other know each other, potential respondents are better identified by the help of the

preceding respondents. Potential sampling bias is one of the limitations of snowball sampling because the respondents refer only to those whom they know and whom they think to serve the research purpose. As a result, others could be excluded. Besides, representativeness of the sample cannot be fully guaranteed. Nevertheless, compared with other sampling methods, snowball sampling has been selected with all its limitations because of its effectiveness in this kind of research.

Focus-group discussants and key interviewees were selected on the basis of snowballing method, as those involved in the activity in one way or the other know each other, potential respondents are better identified with the help of the other respondents. Two Focus Group Discussions were conducted in each of the four selected woredas. And, the Participants were victims and families of victims. The number of participants range from 8 to 12. In sum, a total of 80 participants were included in the Focus Group Discussions. A total of two focus group discussions were held: with the intermediaries. Focus group discussions were held twice per each group. The number of respondents who participated in each focus group discussion ranged from seven to 12 based on practical situations and availability. Therefore, a total of eight Focus Group Discussions were held.

In this study the key informants were selected on the bases of their knowledge, proximity to the issue, experience and willingness to participate. These key informants were government officials, family members of victims, local knowledgeable persons, victims, and local brokers.

A total of 78 key informants were interviewed, which included representatives of government institutions, law enforcement, victims, traffickers, and victims' families. Next to these key informants, we gathered information from dozens of other persons met in in the field or in offices and other locations in informal conversations.

1.5.5 Data Collection Instruments

Besides the above methods, the study adopted document analysis to determine how well the human trafficking policy addresses and accounted for the different types, causes and combating strategies of trafficking.

Autobiographic accounts of study participants are a basis to analyze the person's whole life history or life story (biography). Both the narrative and the interpretive dimensions are relevant to take into account (cf. Corbally and O'Neill 2014: 34), although I do not use an in-

depth biographical narrative analysis. The autobiographic stories of victims of human trafficking/(in)voluntary migrants before their departure and of those who escaped or returned were recorded so as to better understand the motivations of the migrants, the 'choices' made, the trafficking process, and the experiences in the country of destination.

The questionnaire had three parts. Part one was on demographic characteristics of the respondents, and part two on the pre-and post-migration situation of the migrants in the perspective of themselves and of the community. For instance, how did they travel to the destination country, how did they obtain jobs, what were the living conditions and problems, and to what extent were they satisfied with their jobs abroad. Part three consisted of open-ended questions which allowed respondents to say freely what they perceived and felt. In addition, the survey questionnaire was used to gather data on issues related to attitudes, the awareness/knowledge level as well as the mitigation measures.

The informants who administered the questionnaire and joined me during the interviews were from within and outside the research site. They were administered under my supervision and complemented with interviews with the respondents involved directly or indirectly in the human trafficking process. Obviously, the use of the questionnaire method alone in human trafficking research can be problematic. However, in this study, mix research methods are used as described earlier, with the questionnaire method providing large amounts of information from a large sample of respondents than if an interview-only method is used. It is also true that the questionnaire method involves issues of privacy and the problem of aggregation of diverse voices in a single figure.

As to privacy, the respondents had consented to participate in the research. On the other hand, I made sure that the names of those who participated in the study are kept anonymous, and to protect their identity, the names shown in the trafficked women cases are not their real names. I have elaborated this in the following Section on ethics and research limitations. The aggregated information is cross-checked with information collected through the use of other methods, as explained herein.

1.5.6 Field data analysis

The data is analyzed according to the method used. Below is a short note on how the data is analyzed for each set of data:

Questionnaire: To analyze the quantitative data obtained through questionnaire Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) has been employed. The SPSS software provided

a means by which frequencies of the scales under each theme in the questionnaire was computed. Depending on the output from the software simple descriptive technique (mainly percentages and averages) has been utilized to present the results.

Key Informant Interviews: Thematic content analysis has been used to analyze the Interview data. First, based on the guiding questions for the interviews, the responses of the interviewees were carefully recorded. Then, the responses were reviewed and put into major themes and patterns. Finally, the emerging patterns and their meanings were interpreted and integrated with the results generated from questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions.

Focus Group Discussions: Similar with the Key Informant Interviews, Thematic Content Analysis has been employed in analyzing the data from Focus Group Discussions. As Focus Group Discussion aimed to see responses of the research participants in a group setting, it is different from one-to-one interview mainly due to its focus on generating some of the themes that emerge from interaction of the individuals in the group. The responses to the guiding questions for the discussants were recorded and put into patterns and themes. Finally, the results of FGDs and their meanings were integrated to those generated from questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews.

1.5.6 Limitations and ethical considerations

The main limitations of researching human trafficking in general and women trafficking, are personal and ethical. Personally, the researcher is of Oromo background. The subject of the study is a socially sensitive issue, where self-esteem, cultural values and social considerations often stand between the researcher and victims of trafficking talking about their experiences or ordeals. Being a victim of trafficking is often blamed by outsiders on the victim and not the perpetrators and therefore, carries a stigma or a sense of social shame. A researcher who conducts research among his/her own people is also confronted with dilemmas that foreign researchers may not confront due to what could be describes as relative lack of social proximity and subjectivity.

Another and more crucial limitation on my part was my social and political position in the Oromo society and Ethiopian society and politics. Being a well-known politician and a public figure who held high positions in government unfortunately made access to the victims of trafficking difficult and in some cases, almost impossible. During a significant part of this project my official position in government, the very institution entrusted with combating human trafficking, in some sense could be viewed as an initial barrier. I attempted to overcome

this and other barriers through patience and humility, assuring the respondents and informants of my belief in the principles and practice of ethical research, in listening to their views and experiences, and slowly building trust; and it helped that I did the research work together with an assistant. I followed the standards on researching trafficking published by the UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP 2008: 34):

- “Do no harm”: be compassionate but neutral;
- Prioritize personal safety and security: identify and minimize risks;
- Get informed consent, with no coercion;
- Ensure anonymity and confidentiality to the greatest extent possible;
- Adequately select and prepare interpreters and field teams;
- Prepare referral information, and be prepared for emergency intervention;
- Do not hesitate to help others: put your information to good use.

To be sure and the best of my ability, I think I have complied with these research ethics standards of which I became increasingly aware during the fieldwork, where I attempted to strike a balance between being an active and a passive participant observer at the same time. Active observer because I am an Oromo and passive observer because I contrived to be as objective as possible while I cannot be an outsider. As has rightly been noted by Siegel and De Wildt (2016: 2-3): “In research on human trafficking, contact with pimps or traffickers and even more so with ‘vulnerable victims’ is often viewed as unethical, regardless of the willingness of the victims themselves to participate in the research”.

I also used informants to assist me in collecting data and used my own encounters to cross-check the efficacy of the data I collected, therefore combining my personal research experience with that of the informants. Generally, I submit that my research experience is not unique to social science researchers who are often under scrutiny due to their quest for objectivity in situations where the researcher is part of the community yet should take subjectivity seriously. Obviously, my background as a research originating from Oromia invites questions about positionality.

Like other researchers, whether they research their own society or other, distant ones, positioning oneself includes at least five essential elements: gender, identity, reflexivity, subjectivity and objectivity (see Grbich 2012:71). I was aware of the fact that I'm a Christian man studying a society where the majority are Muslims. However, this challenge was not as acute as I had anticipated. Arsi Muslim women are found in every walk of life, as traders, migrants, workers, office people, tea-sellers, etc. My identity as an Oromo had in this particular case trumped my religious identity. After all, families, relatives and friends were directly or

indirectly involved in facilitating legal migration or trafficking, and it wasn't strange for them that a man not personally known to them would talk to them about their experiences.

Two familiar issues are related to identity and gender: subjectivity and objectivity. In other words, to what extent was I aware of my role as a person (man) who was head of the administration in Arsi Zone? My experience finds resonance in Grbich's (2012: 79), contention that:

"The shift to other positions [*in my case from administrator to researcher*, LMW] is a useful way of changing the previous authority of the researcher's voice but is often a very time-consuming and emotionally complex process involving years of writing and rewriting in order to gain distance from or to get closer to the data".

To the extent that I cherished the opportunity to conduct the research, it was also not easy in the Ethiopian situation, where authority is revered. Positions of power contribute to one's estrangement in societies socialized to centuries of absolute monarchy and military socialism. In Ethiopia, as an example of such societies, the gulf between administrator and citizens is still big and citizens consider it being an anomaly to be approached by senior administrators.

What subjectivity or objectivity biases clarified or blurred my understanding and interpretation of issues such as sexual abuse and rape of trafficked women, involvement in prostitution and other activities that society generally do not approve? Objectively, I tried to understand and interpret objectively and hold open my interpretations to criticism. Subjectively, due to the often dramatic stories told, it is impossible to treat women victims of trafficking as mere subjects of research or just as 'cases'. Trust-building motivated by human interest in such circumstances, as well as their knowledge that I was a high government official, although not without its problems, enhanced the respondents to tell their story in detail.

Reflexivity, defined by Hertz (1997: viii), as "viewing the self and the processes of data collection and interpretation in a critical and detached manner through internal dialogue and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of what I know and how I know it". (see also Williamson-Kefu (2019: 9). I cannot claim that I have been able to satisfy the full remit of reflexivity, but I tried, to a large extent, to be sufficiently critical of the negative impact of the government policies and direct or indirect contributions to human trafficking.

1.4.6 Organization of the Study

This study is organized in eight chapters. The present Chapter 1 is an Introduction, outlining the magnitude of human trafficking, the research rationale, objectives, methods of data collection and the overall organization of the study.

Chapter 2 is about the research setting (Arsi and West Arsi), elucidating the history, geography, population and their socio-economic activities and characteristics, focusing on income and income distribution, poverty and migration. The chapter also offers an overview of the problem of women trafficking in Ethiopia in general and Arsi and Arsi West, in particular.

Chapter 3 is conceptual-theoretical and written with two objectives in mind: First, to explore the evolution of Ethiopia's human trafficking legal instruments within the context of international human trafficking. Second, to critically assess the relevance of human trafficking instruments to the liberal theory of freedom and emancipation. It focusses on whether a discourse on freedom and emancipation without interrogating the structural cases of human trafficking is sufficient solution to understand and address the problems of migration and trafficking

Chapter 4 is about the magnitude and patterns of human trafficking in Ethiopia, focusing on women trafficking to the Middle East. This is an exploratory chapter developed as a background to chapter 5 which deals specifically with human trafficking from Arsi and Arsi West Administrative zones.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the whole array of legal instruments and frameworks in place - partly international and partly Ethiopian – intended to address and combat the problems of human trafficking and irregular migration.

Chapters 6 and 7 are empirical. They present field findings used for examining human trafficking and some of its root causes. Specifically, they go deeper into the nature and consequences of the internal and external trafficking from Arsi and Arsi West. Chapter 8, the final chapter, offers an interpretive synthesis of the thesis and reconsiders issues of people's 'free choice' to migrate and their aspirations to improve their own lives against the background of the socio-economic approach which focusses on the material factors and causes of human trafficking. It also presents the conclusions, policy recommendations and identifies some gaps for future human trafficking research to address.