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**Author:** Wako, L.M.

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## Chapter 4

### An outline of women trafficking from Arsi Zone to the Middle East

This chapter describes and analyses the process of women trafficking in Arsi. It explores three main issues: 1) Arsi-specific recruiters and agents involved in the women trafficking process such as extended family members, relatives, friends and neighbors. 2) The role of Arsi-based recruiters and their relationship to the trafficked women and agents (official and non-officials). 3) Addis Ababa-based agents and their classification and roles as mediators between the trafficked women and their “owners”, supposedly employers, in the receiving country.<sup>53</sup>

As shown in Chapter One, the phenomenon of HT in Ethiopia is not new. Its history also dates back centuries, often linked to war and the expansive conquests which created modern Ethiopia since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54</sup> The very ethnic mix of today’s Ethiopia is a result of these migration which occurred either peacefully as people search for better cultivable land or forcibly through the expansion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Consider for example, the migration from the central highlands to the lowlands (adding Afar, Somalia, Oromo, the Southern Nations and Nationalities, Gambela, Benishangul and Gumuz) which followed.<sup>55</sup> However, it is important to recognize the differences between early forced migration and present-day HT, bondage labour and modern-day slavery, as highlighted earlier.

Today, women trafficking occurs across Ethiopia’s national borders as well as within the country, from rural parts to large cities and towns. Although Ethiopian women are trafficked internationally every year, with as the main destinations are the Gulf States, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Djibouti, to work as housemaids and, less typically, as commercial sex

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<sup>53</sup> The materials used in this chapter were collected from Arsi zone over several field visits benefiting from commonly applied human trafficking methodologies and classification of agents, supplemented with data collected from. The latest field visit was conducted upon return from a write-up and study visit to the African Studies Centre of Leiden University, 19–25 May 2019.

<sup>54</sup> For more details refer to Tefera (2019: 97), who reported that, “the Great Ethnic Migrations” occurred starting from the first half of the sixteenth century to mid-seventeenth century that involved diverse tribal and ethnic groups”. A counter-migration to the South began in the 19th century, mostly in the wake of the southward expansion by Emperor Menelik (see for example, Pankhurst 2001, Bahru 2002).

<sup>55</sup> For example, Donham and James 1986, Marcus 1994, and Hassan 1990.

workers (see Yoseph *et al.* 2006). Other migrants, mostly male, go to South Africa<sup>56</sup> after its liberation from the Apartheid regime in 1994. According to Zenebe *et al.* (2016: 55), “South Africa provides a greater economic opportunity particularly for unskilled labor so that it becomes preferable traditional destination point for migrants from Ethiopia”. Some Arab countries such as Libya, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia are increasingly used as transit countries for migrants smuggling to Europe. While Yemen (despite the civil war) is used by Human traffickers as a transit country to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.<sup>57</sup> Pankhurst (1985), has documented the history of famine and its contribution to forced migration due to environmental crises prompted by droughts, floods and locus. In respect to the Middle East, Ethiopia serves as a cradle for traffickers pursuing profit and stimulated by Middle East nationals seeking cheap labor. Those trafficked are mostly engaged in domestic services and prostitution are the two major reasons for which Ethiopian women are trafficked to the Middle East. From those who make their way to the Middle East, only few women take the legal channels. In other words, most women who migrate to these Arab countries have in one way or the other used the traffickers or illegal agents (See ILO 2011 and Aronowitz 2009).

#### 4.1 The Human Trafficking Process

Human trafficking process can be defined as the interplay between trafficked persons, recruiters, agents and benefactors and the socio-economic and cultural context within which trafficking takes place. Expressed in the perception of the Ethiopians, the process of trafficking comprises three elements: recruitment, transportation, and exploitation. All three elements are evident in the trafficking process of women from Ethiopia to the Middle Eastern countries and the Arabian Peninsula in particular, which has a deep cultural and religious resonance. It is tantamount to how Massey *et al.* (1993) described the culture of migration in terms of the culmination of ideas, practices and cultural artifacts that reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants. In the case of Arsi Zone, as in other parts of Ethiopia, migration to the Arabian Peninsula is rooted in Ethiopian history. It is historically linked due to the large number of Ethiopian Muslims who travel to Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia, for the Muslim pilgrimage. Islamic dogma has it that pilgrimage is a duty that every financially capable Muslim man or women should perform at least once during his or

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<sup>56</sup> For a study of Ethiopian labour migrants to South Africa and the Gulf, see the report by Asnake Kefale and Zerihun Mohammed (2015).

<sup>57</sup> For more on the patterns of trafficking to the Middle East see, for example, Fasil Demessie ed. 2017, Fernandez 2011, and Jureidini 2004.

her lifetime. Notes that as a historical practice, pilgrimage contributes to the emergence of cultural values and practices that favor migration to the Middle East. As stated by Massey *et al.* (1993: 448): “This long historical link with Arabia also facilitated the emergence of migrant networks, involving 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 a similar vein, these cultural practices have been revered in societies where poverty exerts immense social pressure for migration, whether legal or illegal, to escape poverty and improve people’s wellbeing, according to Asfaw (2018: 330). The prominence of these religious factors should not be understood to exclude other factors mentioned by other authors, such as Zenebe *et al.* (2016), who observed that youths view migration not only as a poverty exit mechanism but also as a thoroughfare to improve their socio-cultural status. For instance, Asfaw (2018: 131), laments that, “youths with better economic backgrounds also migrates to improve their socio-cultural status, feel a sense of pride and self-respect”.

However, the outcomes of the pressure to migrate and attain the possibility of becoming “Migrant Hero”, as proposed by Zenebe *et al.* (2016: 55) is not always the case. The urge and desperation to migrate often push youth the arms of traffickers and recruiters, in the hope that they can escape poverty and become part of the actors in the human trafficking process.

These sentiments about the cultural and religious aspects of migration are prevalent in Arsi Zone. Unfortunately, despite warnings of the trappings of human trafficking and illegal migrations, as the data presented in the following chapter shows, the numbers of those to be victims of human trafficking is rising. The data also reveals that even returnees have decided to return to where they were trafficked or migrated to fulfil an unfulfilled promise of becoming a “migrant hero”.

Evidently, the linkages between the religious and cultural aspects of migrating or trafficked to the holy lands of Islam must have the added value to normalizing the trafficking process which invites the involvement of the closest of relatives and social relations as will be revealed in the following section.

#### 4.1.1 Recruitment of Migrants and Victims of Trafficking in Arsi Zone

Recruitment is obviously the early phase of the trafficking process. The actors (traffickers) in the recruitment process and the specific techniques they use vary. The findings are drawn

from primary information provided by trafficking victims, families of the victims, the wider community in the research area and some key informants from institutional stakeholders.

Different categories of respondents have stated that recruitment of victims may be started and facilitated by relatives and their friends, neighbors, local brokers, returnees and visitors from destination countries; i.e., suggesting a measure of willingness and cooperation.

Table 4.1: The number of women trafficking recruiters

No.	Agents (recruiters)	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Relatives/friends from destination countries	9	22.5
2	Friends	15	37.5
3	Private Employment Agencies (PEAs)	5	12.5
4	Brokers	11	27.5
Total		40	100

Source: Human Trafficking Prevention Unit, Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (Addis Ababa), 2018

From the above table, it is possible to observe that most of the victims were recruited by Friends while the least are by PEAs. When recruiters are friends, apparently it is easy for the potential victims to trust them, thereby making the recruitment process very simple. Perhaps, the brokers use intimate friends of potential victims so that they can easily be convinced. Although PEAs should have been the primary recruiters, the responses show that they are the least frequent primary actors in recruiting process. Typical of most those interviewed or responded to the questionnaire (see Chapter 6 for more information on interviews and questionnaires, as well as on the focus group discussions), Nafissa said:

An agent in Asella (I do not wish to mention the name in fear of retribution),

approached me on the way to sell vegetables under the shade near our house. He greeted me politely and asked me, would I go abroad and seek a better life where I earn hundreds rather than ten or twenty Birr or stay in the current miserable condition. I said, of course, I want a better life than the one I endure. In fact, I have no life, I said. He asked me to meet him tomorrow in a secluded place and he will arrange for me to go to Saudi Arabia and added but this cost money. I asked how much? He said, 100,000 Ethiopian *Birr*, but because he knew my relative, he would ask the broker to give me a discount. I got a discount of 10,000 Birr and paid 90,000 Birr which I borrowed from friends and family. After giving the agent part of the money, I thought that the rest of the process will go as smooth as the agent told me, but that was the beginning. I spent at least five weeks before he contacted me and asked me to meet him at Addis Ababa, bus station near Meskel where he will take me to the office of external employment agent.

*When we asked whether she knew the name of the employment agent he said:*

I did not know; because I trusted the agent who is after all known to the family. Unfortunately, I lost my money because the agent disappeared, and I got stuck in Addis Ababa only to join the “bad girls” (prostitution through old school friends), where I was able to make some money. After several tries, my attempt to go to Saudi Arabia was not successful and I returned to Asella after making money from shame (i.e., prostitution).

Indeed, according to the interviews with victims it has become clear that in many cases the trafficked people do not even know the names of PEAs that did send them to their destination. They only know the primary recruiters and the local brokers who often come on the scene via the primary (first) recruiters. Agents who made promises for better working and living conditions in the destination countries at recruitment may also inflict harm on the trafficked workers.<sup>58</sup> Although in varying degrees, brokers/agents, female employers (housewives), and other family members of the employer are responsible for many of the reported harms. The case we narrated is typical of people who wish to be ‘trafficked’ but failed. There are examples of people who were successful but not without enduring difficulties, such as the ones described in these cases. The case could also be one of victims

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with expert 4, held in Addis Ababa at MoLSA, February 2019.

of trafficking held in ransom, and being so dependent on the brokers, that without their intervention no one could get out of the problems (see cases on ransom in the case of Eritrean refugees, for example, van Reisen, 2017: 4).

A case where ‘trafficking’ is a problematic label is that of Hussein (35), a university graduate and from a well to do family. He spoke good English and had had six years of experience when he worked as an accountant in Amigna *wereda* of Arsi administrative zone. He said that he was fortunate to find a good agent. The agent accompanied him to Addis Ababa, introduced him to the employment agent where he paid the necessary fees, signed a contract and within a week travelled to Dubai. At Dubai airport he was met with an old friend who also accompanied him to where he was supposed to work as a junior accountant. Hussein’s eyes glittered as he was happy to say that his Dubai salary was several times higher than that in Ethiopia. He added that he paid his debt to relatives and friends who enabled him to leave Arsi within six months and made enough money to build a house and support his two brothers and sister’s education.

Hussein’s case is that of a “migrant hero”, who was served well by his good education (BA in accounting and knowledge of Arabic languages, and friend in Dubai who groomed him to know how to make good a reasonable income from being trafficked by consent. The two cases presented here are real life cases: a case of trafficking went horribly wrong (Nafissa) and a successful case (Hussein), that is more of voluntary irregular migration although with the help of an ‘agent’. He would also not describe himself as ‘trafficked’.

Three conclusions can be teased out of these two cases: 1) not all human trafficking cases are clear failures or success. A few women are somehow able to find better job opportunities and return home with resources that they can use to improve their lot. Others return empty handed and yet others return with a heavy debt burden. However, this statement should not be understood to justify human trafficking whether it is by consent or coercion, as it sometimes occurs. 2) The trafficked persons level of education and the extent to which his or her skills are in demand in the trafficking destination is an important factor in determining success. Where the trafficked persons education and work experience deemed important in the host country, he or she stands better chances of success. 3) The trafficked persons social network in the host country can play an important role in supporting and become a buffer zone and an information resource that assists the new arrivals to understand better how to deal with their new employment environment.



#### 4.1.2 Traffickers and Agents' Levels of Operation

The two stories of **Nafissa and Hussein** also provide examples of the levels of HT agents level of operations. **Both have mentioned that they passed through an agent, a broker, employment agent and yet to say something about the receiving employer,** host or in a more dramatic characterization, a slave owner”, which is not the case. These elements of HT lead us to examine it from the prism of the embedded levels of operation.

**The term trafficker has several meanings and distinction between the different levels of traffickers is not common in the literature and more unclear is how to distinguish the roles different types of traffickers play in the trafficking process (IOM 2011).** One serious implication of this lack of clarity is that, it is difficult to know, for example, to identify traffickers because of the collaboration between legal agents and illegal operators or traffickers. **According to interviews made with victims and institutional stakeholders, migrants employment agencies with licenses collaborate with illegal local brokers.**<sup>59</sup>

In this section, as illustrated below, **there are at least five types of traffickers** differentiated according to the administrative levels they are involved in the trafficking process. Therefore, they form a chain of interconnected agents. These are divided into five levels, commencing from the place of origin of the victims of trafficking extending up to the country (national) or countries of destination (international). Thus, a local transnationally networked traffickers can be divided into First (from the village), Second (in Ethiopia but have contacts with agents in foreign countries), Third (unlicensed employment agencies), Fourth (national) and Fifth Level Agent (international). The following explains the role of the traffickers as agents in accordance with their level of operation.

**First level agents:** These are basically known **village-level agents** who are located at the lowest most echelon of the traffickers' chain. These are individual agents who by going around at the community level to identify and recruit potential local victims. As the starting (lowest level) actors, **these individuals are known by community members** as vital agents in providing them with initial information about opportunities abroad and about the trafficking process. **Of course, they attract the potential victims by telling success stories of people they have already sent abroad.** These people use different ways to actively spread information about the opportunities in destination countries, the basic routes they will take, and returns and benefits of migration. These people know where to focus. Particularly, they target the section of the society where rejecting their offer is less likely. In most cases, it is young girls

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<sup>59</sup> Focus Group Discussion, held in Addis Ababa, 15 April 2019.



with dire economic, social, educational, and family problems often fall prey to these village level operators.<sup>60</sup>

The problem here is that even if these agents themselves in most of the cases have no adequate knowledge about the process of migration and the potential material gains for the victims, they do not hesitate to tell the potential victims about the attractive nature of the job that they are going to be offered. This is partly since the agents have made it a means of livelihood. As a result, often, they fill the potential victims or their families with deceptive information about issues like working and living conditions in the destination countries, and the payments and gifts from employers. They approach the clients having all explanations for them, in case they ask clarifications on issues related to their migration.

According to data drawn from the informants, these village level actors are the ones clearly known to the victims and their families (Questionnaire 1, Annex 1). They are found to be the ones responsible for the first stage of recruitment of most victims of trafficking for the purpose of labour from Ethiopia to Middle Eastern countries. As a result, when things go wrong, these are the first people who are held accountable.<sup>61</sup> In this regard, the interview made with the “traffickers” who are behind bars for allegedly participating in illegal trafficking activities shows that the bigger fish are made less accountable mainly because of lack of awareness about the link with the other levels of traffickers in the chain. These immediate<sup>62</sup> recruiters are held responsible in most of the cases.<sup>63</sup> A typical story is that of a trafficker in Asella prison who relayed his personal experience as follows:

Magarsa is a 40 years-old carpenter. After being informed by a friend, who knows a relative who is in the Middle East, that women can easily migrate to the Middle East and improve the lives of their family, he decides to send his wife to one of the countries there. This relative of his gets him in contact with someone facilitating the process. This facilitator leaves in Addis Ababa. Magarsa then calls the facilitator and confirms that it is possible. The facilitator tells him to go to Addis Ababa to facilitate the process. The day he left home for Addis Ababa in order to get a passport for his wife, his wife’s cousin insists to take her with him to the facilitator. In Addis Ababa, the facilitator is

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with expert 1 in Addis Ababa at MoLSA, 20 February 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews traffickers, 4, and 5 held, Shashamenne on 7 February 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with traffickers, 6, 7 and 8, held Shashamenne on 7 February 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with expert 1 in Addis Ababa at MoLSA, 20 February 2019.

introduced to the other girl and promising her that she can travel in a short period of time. **The passport was issued** after some weeks. After two weeks, the facilitator told his wife that the visa from Kuwait has arrived and instructs her to prepare for the travel. She accepted and left for Kuwait. After a while, her cousin with another girl also left for the same destination. However, after months passed without getting in contact with the family back home, **his wife called and told him that they are in Sudan**. He could not believe it. After confirming that they have been left there without help, he facilitated for his wife to come back home. At that time the other girl refused to come back home together with his wife. However, the family of this other girl accused Megersa of human trafficking. A court then sentenced him to 17 years behind bars and a 300,000 ET Birr (approximately over US\$10,000 fine. However, nothing has happened to the so-called facilitator in Addis Ababa. Megersa argued that the girl's family accused him not because was involved in the trafficking activity: "Rather, it was because we came in disagreement with her family on buying a house. Although they wanted to buy the house, I was able to buy it for my sister-in-law who is in Saudi Arabia. This was why they accused me of human trafficking."<sup>64</sup>

This story clearly demonstrates that the traffickers stationed in Addis Ababa often gets away scot-free while the local traffickers can easily be identified convicted and put behind bars. Interviews with trafficking victims revealed that most of them were recruited by these village level actors, whether they are friends, family members, neighbors or illegal brokers. These are the main entry points for the trafficked persons (more details will be presented in chapter five on the analysis of the field data).

**These people are mostly regular residents and recognized by the community.** However, village level recruiters may sometimes come from far away. It is these local village level recruiters who serve as key links in the process of trafficking, migration and routes for other brokers and traffickers within their network. They provide their clients with information about how they must prepare for the journey.

The exploitation of the potential victims by the first-level agents begins with asking payment for offering "guidance" to the potential victims through the process of the issuance

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with traffickers 1, 2 and 3, held in Asella on 5 April 2019.

of passports. It then continues when they are introducing them to **private employment agencies (PEAs) “facilitate” the process**. After the completion of all the basic requirements, some petty issues like health checkups can also create reasons for further exploitation of the victims by the first-level agents.<sup>65</sup> In other words, village level agents maximize the monetary values of their services by alluding to several requirements such as health certificates, consent of family or permissions to travel abroad from local authorities. Even though some of these self-made requirements could be seen as providing extra security layer for the victims of trafficking, in fact they are in actual fact mean to facilitate extortion, which is in this case, akin to ransom.<sup>66</sup>

**Second level agents:** The second level traffickers have contacts with agents in foreign countries and claim to represent those people who after the completion of all the requirements, facilitate the travel process. They provide some the necessary services required during the preparation for travel period and involved all through transporting, protecting and smuggling after the victims leave the village and their journey commences.<sup>67</sup>

At this level there may or may not be one or more transfer steps (to another agents) depending on whether there is a long chain (trafficked to the Middle East through Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya or any other country) or a short chain (directly from Ethiopia to the Middle East or any other country). **In the case of long chain trafficking, the traffickers receive the victims from first level agents, usually in groups, and are likely to transfer them to another trafficker within the chain and outside the chain before they reach the destination country.**

As the main responsibility of these individuals or groups include the transportation, protecting and smuggling of migrants across borders, **they can put the victims at a risk for getting more payments from victims.** For those who take the land route, such individuals are reported to be positioned on the desert and sea routes, as well as on the route to the Sudan. Most of these are people who have direct contact with people from across the border. They may have friends, family members or contrabandists who are based in the transit and/or destination countries. They could physically be based in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen, or even in destination countries, such as in Saudi Arabia.<sup>68</sup>

If the trafficking victims are taking the land route, the transport occurs in phases. It

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Head of Labour and Social Welfare Office, held in Shashemene on 11 April 2019.

<sup>66</sup> Similar situations of extortion were documented in the case of trafficked Eritreans and minors in Sinai (Rijken, van Reisen, et al. 2019 and Van Reisen and Al-Qasim 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Focus Group Discussion, held in Addis Ababa, 12 February 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with experts 1, 2, 3, and 4, from MoLSA, BoLSA and MoFA, respectively held in Addis Ababa, on 16 February 2019.

starts when the first-level traffickers have transferred an adequate number of migrants to form a manageable group to cross borders. The responsibility of this category of traffickers is to take the irregular migrants through arduous territories and smuggle them through non-patrolled sections of the border. In some cases, irregular migrants are transferred to other brokers responsible for the remaining section(s) of the route. Because of the secret and grueling nature of the journey, the victims are in a vulnerable and dependent position. The traffickers at this level often take advantage of such conditions. This usually involves abuse of the victims under their care to ensure compliance and/or take economic and/or sexual advantages.

*Third level agents:* These are agents who operate as unlicensed employment agencies. This kind of agencies are available both in the origin and destination countries. Such agencies in Ethiopia operate without having a valid license from an appropriate authority. This can happen if a license has expired, if the agency is holding a fake license, or if it is legally banned because of lack of relevant requirements.

Like the domestic ones, the overseas private employment agencies (PEAs) are of two types. Type one agents are those that have a license from the relevant authority to facilitate regular migration and employment of citizens in foreign countries, and the second are those which provide similar services without having the required license. In one way or the other, it is through such agencies that most of the irregular migration is facilitated in Ethiopia.

In addition, local employment agencies licensed to provide employment services for local domestic workers are blamed for also secretly facilitating overseas employment. Informants from MoLSA stated that some agencies which have license for the provision of local but not overseas employment services are found to have been doing the latter. Since these agencies are well-aware what they do is illegal, they take extra precaution not to be caught by the authorities.

One of the major problems in this scenario is the fact that potential victims do not usually make a distinction between unlicensed and licensed agencies or PEAs. Most of the interviewed victims stated that they did not know whether the agencies which sent them abroad were licensed or not. So, in most cases, there is confusion on the nature of the agencies. Usually, if an agent has an office or claims to have one, no one wants to go further to probe it for confirmation. It is only after harm has been done that the victims and parents find out the nature of the agency. According to data obtained from victims and their families, they usually believed that the process was 'legal' until such a condition happened. From among the factors misleading the parents and victims were the agent claiming to have an

office, the promise of travel by air, and issuance of the passport.<sup>69</sup>

*Fourth level agents* (or licensed employment agents): The research results also show that it is not only the unlicensed agencies that participate in the trafficking of women to the Middle East, but the licensed ones themselves often participate in these activities as well.

The interview results show that licensed PEAs are also actors in the trafficking of human women. This fact is confirmed by interviews with several stakeholders, including the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Oromiya Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA), and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). The PEAs mainly participate in such activities in order to make the process of sending the potential victims easier, quicker and less costly.<sup>70</sup> By operating outside the law and cooperating with unlicensed employment agents who recruit people through exploitation suggests that some PEA's primary purpose is to maximize their return regardless of where they are exploited or not.

According to the Ethiopian Overseas Employment Proclamation 923/2016, an overseas agency must have a business registration certificate and obtain a license from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.<sup>71</sup> Some of the other requirements are for the business owner to be an Ethiopian citizen, and the requirement for the owner to deposit a capital of 1 million ETB as collateral for the damages the employee may face, and not be prohibited from operating this kind of business. Also, any business organization interested in this service must clearly set as its only objective the operation of overseas employment exchange service. Until February 2019, 268 PEAs were legally registered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs under the terms of the Ethiopian Overseas Employment Proclamation.<sup>72</sup>

*Fifth level agents* are located at the trafficking victims' overseas destination. This last category of traffickers consists of individuals who use the vulnerability of the victims when they are outside their countries as opportunity to exploit them in destination countries. They put the victims in situations of vulnerability, abuse, and exploitation, using fraud, control, coercion, and threat. These traffickers are residents of the destination countries and have usually formed links with local and unlicensed agents or enticed friends and family members

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with victims and families of victims, Adaba, Robe, Gadab, February 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with expert 7, MoLSA, 20 February 2019.

<sup>71</sup> See:

[https://www.lawethiopia.com/images/federal\\_proclamation/proclamations\\_by\\_number/923.pdf](https://www.lawethiopia.com/images/federal_proclamation/proclamations_by_number/923.pdf). Accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>72</sup> MoLSA website: <http://www.MoLSA.gov.et>, accessed on 21 February 5, 2019.

to handle the local aspect while they handle the process at the destination end.

A sad example of the fifth level operation is that of Zegeye, an Ethiopian domestic worker under Lebanon's kafala sponsorship system, which binds the trafficked women to only one employer. These trafficked women are very dependent on the employer because they cannot contest the work conditions and move to another employer. If they are discovered to be attempting to move to another employer, they can be deported and without salary or compensation. Zegeye was shocked that the Lebanese authorities were not concerned or alarmed about the situation although they knew that physical and verbal abuse of domestic workers has sadly, become a norm. doing anything about it.

These fifth level agents can be divided in different sub-categories. One of the types of such traffickers is Ethiopians who migrated at one point in the past and who turned to trafficking. With strong links with relatives or friends who can facilitate the recruitment of the potential victims, these Ethiopians easily exploit the victims.<sup>73</sup>

The second sub-category is those who sponsor the victims, thinking that they can exploit them once they have arrived in the destination countries. These are usually based in major Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE, and have strong links with a chain of brokers and smugglers in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Yemen, as well as with agents in the countries of destination. These categories of traffickers have regular communication with smugglers throughout their journey and will receive the victims upon arrival in the destination countries. Once they arrive, these traffickers provide them with shelter until they can find employers for them as domestic workers. **The salaries of the victims will then be collected directly by the traffickers based on agreement with an employer thereby subjecting the victims to persistent exploitation. The most common forms of exploitation include prostitution (of all forms), child labour, bonded labour (whereby workers are forced to work to pay off loans often at interest rates which accrue faster than can be repaid), forced labour, and forced marriages.** As a case story of an Ethiopian who turned to become a destination point trafficker, one of the victims interviewed narrated the following:

Rosa, who migrated to Saudi Arabia from Shashemene ten years ago, was married to a Saudi man. She herself migrated to Jeddah when she was 19 through the sponsorship of another trafficker who himself was originally from Ethiopia. After working as a housemaid for some years she married a Saudi

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with victims, February 2019

man who was originally from Yemen. She then started working as a facilitator for other girls from around here to travel to Saudi Arabia and work as housemaids. Still now, she has a strong link with local brokers who orchestrated the migration process from the village level to Saudi Arabia.<sup>74</sup>

Some respondents also stated that traffickers at the destination points do not only benefit from sponsoring migrants, they also benefit from renting rooms to newly arriving migrants and escapees, and from facilitating their employment. For instance, one of the victims interviewed recounted the following:

As we arrived in Saudi Arabia, a man who received us took us to a small room in which we lived together with other victims until he found us employer. He has rooms that can accommodate more than a hundred migrant workers. Then he took certain portion of our salary as a fee for using his room during our stay. The same man operates as an agent for our employment and provides us with transportation to and from the workplace to his place when we seek that service. Other migrant workers also use his rooms to rest and meet with each other. They also use it as accommodation when they are too sick to work and are out of a job.<sup>75</sup>

The third category of traffickers at destination point are those who act as representatives of agencies in Ethiopia or those with whom they are working in the destination countries. Many of the victims interviewed revealed that there are Ethiopians, Filipinos and Arabs who receive them upon their arrival and who then establish contact with employers or agencies. These individuals usually tell the victims that they are working with agencies at home and promise to assist them during emergencies. However, as employers rarely allow the victims to contact them, these individuals cannot be reached when needed. And since they have no power, they usually fail to support the victims even when they are contacted. They are more known for advising victims to bear the burden and sufferings involved.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with victim 1, held in Adaba on 18 February, 2019

<sup>75</sup> Interview with victim 2, held in Gadab on 18 February, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with victims 1 & 2, 19 February 2019, Robe, Adaba towns, respectively.



#### 4.1.3. Transportation and Routes

Victims of human trafficking use two routes when they leave Ethiopia. One of these routes is the *air route*. In this case, migrants fly from Bole International Airport to the destination country. This is one which often appears legal to the victims and the observers alike. These victims mostly head directly to Saudi Arabia, UAE or Lebanon. Others often first travel to Kenya to avoid being intercepted at Bole International Airport by immigration officials. From there they travel to Dubai, UAE and then sometimes proceed to Beirut, Lebanon.<sup>77</sup>

Many also migrate through Bole airport by using the pretext of the Muslim pilgrimage, *Hajj* or *Oumra*, to migrate to Saudi Arabia and overstay their visa to seek employment there. In order to do this, non-Muslim women change their names into Muslim names. Those who have not reached the age of 25 years will also have to change their official documents to that effect.

It is important here to note that the traffickers can secure tourist visas from different countries that even the legal employment agencies are unable to do. For instance, many Ethiopian migrant workers who are going to UAE using the services of traffickers opted for them because they were able to secure them a tourist or business visa.<sup>78</sup>

The second option is a *land route* across the border to neighboring countries, or rather using the 'desert route'. Victims may take a bus up to a certain point and proceed on foot to cross part of the route. For those who cross the border, two options emerge. Some may stay in neighbouring countries, such as Sudan and Djibouti, and seek employment, while others proceed to other countries of destination, such as Saudi Arabia. For the traffickers, there are several such land route options from Ethiopia. One is travelling to Arab countries through the port city of Bossaso (in Puntland). Most of the migrants who take this route are young girls who migrate mainly to Saudi Arabia in search of employment as domestic servants. However, there are also some who take Saudi Arabia as a transit to pass to other Arab countries.<sup>79</sup> After crossing the border in Afar, Ethiopian migrants have for many years used Bossaso as a transit port town to migrate to Arab countries. Although many of the people who take this route come from Amhara and Tigray regions, some also come from the southern zones of Bale and Arsi in Oromiya Region. They use this route because it is difficult and costly to secure a visa and fly to Saudi Arabia. As these victims must cross the Gulf of Aden by boat, it is one of the more dangerous routes to take. Most of the victims who take

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<sup>77</sup> MoLSA, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with expert 1, in MoLSA, February, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with expert 2, in MoLSA, February, 2019.

this route state that they heard of Saudi Arabia through family members, friends and neighbors who themselves migrated there and improved their lives and that of their families by sending money back home, and When they come back home, they bring a lot of clothes and jewelry.<sup>80</sup>

Potential migrants from any point of origin first go to Addis Ababa using local *public bus*. Brokers in Addis Ababa would make a deal with the potential victims. They promise them that they can get them to Bossaso and then safely to Saudi Arabia for a nominal fee. **Once the deal is made, the brokers arrange for the transportation from Addis Ababa. Brokers in Addis Ababa transfer their clients to other brokers in Harar, who in turn hand them over to other brokers responsible to transport them the destination.**<sup>81</sup>

Another bus route is *through Afar and Djibouti*. Although most of the ones who take this route also come from Tigray and Amhara regions, and to a lesser extent come from Oromiya and the Southern (SNNPR) region (IOM, 2016). The journey, in most of the cases, is managed by illegal brokers. However, friends and relatives are also involved in helping to connect to these brokers and convincing the victims to take the risk. **In general, the journey by bus via Afar and Djibouti is reported to be terrible and difficult. Among the other things, travelers must travel at night, through the desert and without food and water; their money could also be snatched by illegal brokers; they may also beat or attack them; and women travelers may be sexually abused. Furthermore, illegal brokers may leave the migrants behind in the middle of the desert telling them that they have almost reached their destination.** As commonly seen in the media, they may also overcrowd the boats that go to Yemen from Djibouti - putting the travelers at risk of drowning: they may force them to jump out of the boat in sight of coastguards. **Travelers may also be intercepted by rebel groups and forced into going to Eritrea and may be shot at by border control officials when they attempt to cross. In extreme cases, travelers might die, and wild animals might attack and kill them.**

The data collected from informants of this study disclosed that there is a well-established trafficking/smuggling route extending to Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Jeddah) via the Afar Region and Djibouti. This route opens in many locations of the hinterland sharing borders with or leading to Afar Region.<sup>82</sup>

The fourth major route is migration *to the Sudan through Metemma*. This route was

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with expert 2 held in Addis Ababa at the MoLSA, 22 February 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with expert, 2 held in Addis Ababa at MoLSA, 22 February 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with expert 2, *ibid.*, previous note.

used by Ethiopians and Somalis to reach Libya and then proceed to European countries, such as Italy and Malta, by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Due to loose border controls it is estimated that about a hundred thousand Ethiopians illegally cross to Sudan annually. Sometimes victims use a one-month visa as they cross the border to Sudan. Then, through support of the traffickers/smugglers, they pass to Libya or other Arab countries. As they travel through harsh conditions, it is also an extremely dangerous route to take. Indeed, since recently, the same route was used to cross the Ethiopian border for the purpose of seeking employment in Sudan itself. Sudan has also become a destination country for Ethiopian migrant workers since a couple of years now (cf. IOM, 2017).

It has been confirmed that people from Kofele, Gadab, Asasa and Adada in Asella, the Head quarter of Arsi Zone, are commonly using this route. Most of the trafficked people who cross into Sudan are women. Informants have also stated that some of the victims from the area have found themselves in Sudan without their intention and without prior knowledge that they were travelling to this destination.<sup>83</sup>

There is no story that can exemplify the horror through which trafficked persons go through than the case of Ayoub who relied the following in an interview conducted in Shashemene, the capital of Arsi West:

I was deprived of food for seven days and was asked by the traffickers to call my family to send them money to a bank account in Rome, while I was *en route* to Libya were I will be trafficked through the Mediterranean to Europe. When my family sent them US\$ 5,000, they asked for another US\$ 5000 or else they will dump me in the Sahara and will never see them again. My family sent the money, but I was dumped in Libya and had to pay again to be transported back to Ethiopia.

When I asked Ayoub whether he will try again, his answer was yes, but I must ask some of the successful returnees about how to make it next time. Ayoub's case is one of a combination of extortion and ransom, similar to what is experienced in the past couple of years by trafficked people from Eritrea and other countries. It is a relatively new form of trafficking and most prominently described in recent studies on Eritrea van Reisen and Al-

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<sup>83</sup> Interviews with victims, traffickers and families, held in Adabba, Gadad Asasa, and Asella, on 5 to 17 February 2019.

Qasim 2017, and Rijken, an Reisen, et al. 2019). It is expanding and supported by a modus operandi depending on extortion through digital (ICT) means (van Reisen and Rijken 2015). Unfortunately, in the case of Ayoub, none of the extorted money was ever recovered. Victims of this scam and their families are left burdened with debt, and in the case of already poor families get more impoverished.

#### 4.2. Conclusion

Despite the availability of a myriad of instruments and institutions, complex processes mar human trafficking and specially women trafficking continue to allude researchers and policy makers alike. In Arsi Zone, there is often a thin line separating human trafficking and legal migration as some presumably legal agents, knowingly or unknowingly, receive trafficking victims through unofficial agents. In situations where village level agents are part of society and where the victims of trafficking may establish relations of trust (husbands, friends, relatives and neighbours), it is difficult to distinguish between consent and social pressure. The Horn of Africa porous borders makes it difficult to trace all Ethiopians trafficked through her borders by land, with the presence of multiple agents within and between countries. Arsi Zone training programmes to equip prospective migrants with domestic work skills and awareness of legal rights have double edge outcomes. On one hand, it created a better educated and better suited workforce ready for migration, on the other hand, it is difficult to trace whether those trained will join the legal or illegal routes to migrate. In situations of deprivation and poverty, as the interviews show, can also be victims of human trafficking. The successful of stories who were able “to make it”, using the migrant hero metaphor, is stimulus that drives even more men and women to submit themselves to the trafficking industry despite their will. The following chapter describes and analyses the profiles of trafficked Arsi women. It is intended to explain the socio-economic factors and consequences of being a victim of trafficking.