

Gender and Migration to the Gulf States: An Anthropological Insight into Gendered Patterns of Migration in North Wollo Zone of Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to explore and analyze the nexus between gender and migration to the Gulf States from an anthropological perspective with specific reference to Rayya Qobbo Woreda of North Wollo Zone, Amhara Region of Ethiopia. To attain this objective, the study employed both secondary and primary data sources. The primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case studies. Secondary data were obtained through a critical review of related literature and documents. Both primary and secondary data were organized thematically and analyzed through systematic interpretation and triangulation of various sources. The study found that the patterns of migration from North Wollo to the Gulf States (mainly to Saudi Arabia) are gender-specific in terms of patterns of migration, cultural conceptions of migration, social expectations, patterns of labour market demand in host countries, and remittance sent by migrants. The study also found that the decision to migrate was influenced by social values, family norms, gender ideology, and power relation. Furthermore, the findings revealed that migration to the Gulf States is considered as a wealth ranking mechanism and a rite of passage prescribing social status. As a result, it has become part of the culture of the people in the study area.

Keywords: Gender, Migration, North Wollo, Gulf States

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Introduction

Migration, as the movement of people from one place to another within a country or from one country to another for different reasons (ILO, 2011: vii), has increasingly become a concern of the international community. The movement can be internal (domestic) or international (trans-national). As to international movement, according to ILO's (2006) report, there were around 175 million migrants, 3.5% of the global population. Meanwhile, in 2010, "214 million people were living outside their countries of birth" (Castaldo *et al.*, 2012:8).

Affecting thousands of people in all corners of the country, annually 20,000 to 25,000 Ethiopians are estimated to migrate to various countries, mainly to the Gulf States (ILO, 2011). Such migration to the Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) dates back to the early 1970s related to the oil boom, which, in turn, changed lifestyle in the Gulf Region (Mesfin, 2011:4). The 1970s oil boom dramatically expanded inter-Arab and Asian-Gulf migrations. Although initially these migrants were mostly male workers, there was an increased feminization of the migrant labour force in the 1980s and early 1990s. Initially, young unmarried women from rural areas, Palestinian women from Lebanon's refugee camps, Kurdish refugees, and women from neighbouring Arab countries (such as Syria and Egypt) made up the domestic labour force. Since the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, Arab maids were slowly replaced by women of African and Asian origin (Jureidini, 2009, in Pande, 2012). These women were not only less expensive but also considered more submissive than their Arab counterparts (Moukarbel, 2009, in Pande, 2012). In the post-war environment, there was an even more rapid internationalization of the domestic labour force (Pande, 2012). Pande (2012) further noted that the number of migrant domestic workers is difficult to accurately estimate as many workers do not come through official labour schemes or they stay past their visas and work illegally. The largest numbers of these migrant domestic workers are from Ethiopia, followed by the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (Jureidini, 2009, in Pande, 2012).

As one of the major current global problems, migration (particularly to the Gulf States) has been a source of concern for Ethiopia. Fuelled by better

social and economic opportunities, from 1980s onward, Ethiopia has become one of the largest contributors of migrants and refugees (Bariagaber, 1999). One that has come about as a recent phenomenon, Fernandez (2011) claimed that the history of Ethiopian migrations to the Gulf States could be traced as far back as slave trade and the establishment of commerce between the two regions. Along the historical timeline, while the coming to power of the *Derg*¹ regime put international migration at a standstill, the restriction was lifted by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) after 1991 (Fernandez, 2011). Since then, therefore, the percentage of migrants has been rising rapidly over the past 50 years, to the extent that the country became the largest "refugee-producing area" in the world (Bariagaber, 1999). Such surge in the number of migrants can also be manifested in the emigration rate of Ethiopia, which has been 0.6% in 2005 (Fransen and Katie, 2009).

In the past ten years, the Gulf States have become common destinations for Ethiopian women in search of a better future.² In the Gulf States, according to Alemtsehay (2013), migrants account for a higher share of the labour force. For instance, 63% in Qatar, 56% in the UAE and 47% in Kuwait are migrants. According to MoLSA³'s (2013) report (in Alemtsehay, 2013), among the 373,160 Ethiopians employed abroad in the period 2003-2005, majority of the migrants 353,457 (94.7%) were females. In the period 2004-2006, the number of Ethiopian work migrants who left the country for the Middle East through legal channels was 57,084. Of this figure, women constituted 98.6% (Fernandez, 2009, in Mesfin, 2011). In 2008-2009, MoLSA processed and approved the overseas employment contracts of 21,256 Ethiopians, of whom 17,382 (81.8%) were women and 3,874 (18.2%) were men (Ibid). The number of Ethiopian migrant workers to the Gulf States has showed a drastic increase after 2011. Accordingly, from July 8/2012 to July 7/2013 this number reached 182,696, of which 175,430 (96.02%) were female migrants (MoLSA, 2013, in Tesfaye, 2013). However, it should be noted that this number excludes work migrants who travelled through illegal employment agencies.

The trend of labour migration from Ethiopia to the Gulf States also shows that the number of male migrants has been increasing even though men

have not been conceptualized as gendered beings in the locally available empirical studies⁴ which deal with the magnitude of women migrants or the risks women face in the process of migration. By focusing merely on women and shying away from the way migration operates in gender-differentiated ways, the reviewed local studies did not investigate the gender ideology and power relation embodied in the notion of migration in general and men's experiences and challenges in particular. This calls the need for conducting research on the gender-differentiated patterns of migration to the Gulf States from the study area. Hence, by using gender as an analytical tool, this study attempts to reveal the manifold and complex gendered nature of migration to the Gulf States, which is the primary host country for young Ethiopians. This study, therefore, attempts to fill the research gap in the locally available studies by exploring the gendered patterns of migration to the Gulf States with specific reference to Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* of North Wollo Zone, Amhara Region of Ethiopia, where the researchers have conducted ethnographic fieldwork on the issue under investigation.

In order to explore and analyze the nexus between gender and migration within the society under focus, this article attempted to address the following research questions: (1) How can gender be attested in migration to the Gulf States with regard to routes, labour market demand, and remittance sent by migrants? (2) What influence does gender ideology and power relation have in making decisions to migrate to the Gulf States? (3) In terms of gender interplay, what are the changes and prospects of migration to the Gulf States? (4) What is the place of migration within the society's cultural values and norms?

Conceptual Framework and Review of Related Empirical Studies

Unpacking Migration in a Gendered Perceptual Lens

Different scholars (e.g., Keith, 1979; Newell, 1988; Ghosh, 2009) conceptualized 'migration' from different perspectives. Keith (1979) considered 'migration' as "a good example of relocation diffusion." Meanwhile, Newell (1988:82) regarded 'migration' as "one of the important components of population change", relating it to demographic features.

According to Ghosh (2009:1), 'migration' is "a multidimensional phenomenon [which] has a complex and multi-layered relationship with human development." In all these definitions and many more, 'migration' has been mainly viewed from economic, demographic, and political standpoint.

Migration is, therefore, a complex web of human movement interwoven in a range of economic, political, and socio-cultural factors. Frank Thistlethwaite also noted that "migration is central to the general human pattern, essential for the functioning of families, and crucial to the operation of the labour market." In the 21st Century, characterized as the age of migration (Dinneen, 2010; Liang, 2007), it is imperative to become aware of the different dimensions of migration, particularly from a gender perspective since the narratives, processes, flows, and conceptions of migration are gendered. As Taran and Geronimi (in Piper, 2005) alluded, this perspective awakened scholars and policy-makers to recognize 'migration as a gender-differentiated movement of people with a complex gendered outcome.' As Piper (2005) further noted, "migration is not only a spatial relocation, but a far-reaching gendered experience."

In the context of development theory and practice, 'gender' was raised as an issue in the 1970s during the United Nations Decade for Women (Chant, 2000). At first, it was developed under 'Women in Development' (WID), which focused on women alone (Bjerén, 1997). Since then a subsequent shift had been made to 'Women and Development' (WAD) and later in the 1980s, to 'Gender and Development' (GAD). However, as Engle (2004) explained, "this has largely been a move from 'women per se' to 'women in relation to men'. Only recently came a balanced approach to masculinities and femininities in migration and development (Chant, 2000). 'Women in Forced Migration' (WIFM) and 'Gender and Forced Migration' (GAFM) theories in the mid-1980s also brought to focus on female refugees and gendered approach to emergency programming, respectively. With this, while Boyd's (1989) claim that traditional migration theory is largely gender-blind has been thrown away, publications such as 'Gender and Migration' by Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe in 1992 focused on gender

as social relations that affect and influence migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cynthia, 2006).

Social issues, including gender, however, have not been on the agenda of migration till the 1970s where women migrants were given fair share in the literatures. Scholars such as Pessar (2005) indicated the need to take women as primary subjects of inquiry in migration. Boyd (1989); Chant and Radcliffe (1992); Böcker (1994) and Kofman (1999) noted that women were largely seen as dependent migrants, following spouses or as wives coming to join their husbands. But with the increasing commercialized migration of women either for domestic work (maid trade) or for sex industry, some concerted efforts have been made to incorporate women into migration studies though the notion of gender as a social process has not been brought centrally into the literature. Much of the scholarship dictated on an "add and stir" approach, in which "women are added as a variable to be inserted and measured" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cynthia, 2006). In other words, 'gender' as a social relation organizing migration experiences was entirely ignored.

If we agree on migration as a social process, then, the interplay between the sexes should not be omitted. Hence, integrating 'gender' into the notion of 'migration' and explaining 'gendered patterns of international migration' requires focusing on individual migrants as members of a larger social structure to avoid what Fawcett and Arnold (1987) perceived as 'atomistic' and illuminate on the dynamic processes of migration. Giving priority to the questions of gender-specific migration experiences (Jolly and Hazel, 2005), gendered analysis of the processes of migration strives to "remedy many decades during which migration scholarship paid little attention to gender." Similar to the swift towards gender, what is comparatively recent in the study of migration is the involvement of anthropologists by the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a discipline, "anthropology was a latecomer to the study of migration as a social and cultural process" (Dinneen, 2010). Taking interest in the *meso* (societal) approach, anthropologists have looked at migration from the social relations aspect where household is considered as a unit of analysis (Dinneen, 2010).

Discarding myths: From female consciousness to gender cognizance

As mentioned earlier, scholars have attempted to compensate the years where women have been far from the eyes of researchers. However, this has marked the 'feminization' of migration. Given the fact that nearly half of all migrants are women (Carling 2002), migration has witnessed an increasing number of women, which sprung from the demand for domestic workers and other services. In explaining the term 'feminization' of migration together with the upsurge of migrant women, the IOM's (2003) Report attested that 'feminization' is "sometimes characterized by an over-representation of women migrants in extremely vulnerable positions," which was once considered to be dominated by men. According to Adepoju (2008:5), women are more involved nowadays in migration "as a means of meeting their own economic needs rather than migrating to join a husband and family."

Nonetheless, unlike Kofman's (1999) argument that literatures on migration have been missing the presence of women, over the last few decades, it became a fact that women are no longer invisible in migration research (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cynthia, 2006). In line with this, researches on migration observed a shift from women-centred research to gender analysis. According to Piper (2005:1), this shift can be pinned down into two points: (1) Scholars have succeeded in bringing female migration out of the shadows in many disciplines; and (2) Migration is now viewed as a gendered phenomenon that requires more sophisticated theoretical and analytical tools than sex as a dichotomous variable.

Thomas-Hope (1994) and Tyner (1997) (in Carling, 2005) noted that, recently, it is few studies, which are critically examining the social construction of gender in relation to migration. A transition from a "female consciousness" (Kaplan, 1982) to a "gendered consciousness" has been evident for the last decade. Nowadays, a growing number of scholars and policy-makers understand migration as fully gendered. Then again, this is not discarding 'women's study' and bringing the matter of gender (Boyd, 1989). Rather, it is conceptualizing gender into the notion of migration. It is inclining towards 'gender' rather than 'women', revolving around gender as a social relation. This also means that men should be incorporated because

'gender' deals with relations between individuals, social constructions, assumptions, expectations and obligations of men and women.

Conceptualizing gender

As Hawkesworth (in Alsop *et al.*, 2012:5) noted, 'gender' has a 'multiplicity of meaning'. According to Scott (1986, in Truong *et al.*, 2014:3), 'gender' can be conceptualized as "(1) a constitutive element of social relations built on the perceived differences between the sexes, and (2) a signifier of power in a relationship –often operating in conjunction with other types of power relations." Orloff (2009:1, in Holmes and Jones, 2013) also defined gender as a "social relationship, historically varying, and encompassing elements of labour, power, emotion and language; it crosses individual subjectivities, institutions, culture and language." It can be further conceptualized as a "socially constructed concept, referring to women's and men's different roles and responsibilities determined by social, economic, political and cultural factors" (Pearson *et al.*, 1984; Razavi & Miller, 1995; in Holmes and Jones, 2013:17).

From anthropological perspective, gender can be conceptualized as a socio-cultural construct and power relation. As a socio-cultural construct, gender is understood as a "culturally constructed" meaning attached to sexes, which determine the relationship between men and women (Coplan 1996, in Genet and Haftu, 2012). It is the means through which an individual is viewed as 'masculine' or 'feminine.' People, beginning from their childhood, learn what is regarded in their cultural context as appropriate for their sex (Coplan 1996, in Genet and Haftu, 2012). Hence, 'gender' as a socio-cultural construct refers to the meaning that a particular society gives to members of a society to provide them with ideas about how to act, what to believe, and how to make sense of their experiences (Marcia-Lees and Black, 2000). With regard to gender as a *power relation*, gender can be conceptualized as a relationship between humans, which is based on power. According to this view, societies found it useful to allocate certain values or characteristics to men and others to women. Such allocation establishes and reinforces the dominant position of men by creating the condition known as "patriarchy" (the social organization based on men's control of power) and "masculinism" (an ideology justifying, promoting or advocating male

dominance). This, therefore, creates and perpetuates deep-rooted gender inequality in a society (D'Amico and Beckman, 1994; Goldstein, 2000; in Guday and Eskinder, 2013).

The nexus between gender and migration, therefore, can be viewed both at the experiential and normative levels. According to Sen (1990, in Truong *et al.*, 2014), "explaining the differentiated motivation of migration between men and women requires understanding the gendering of the household as a site of power." In this context, gender is approached as a power relationship operating as a set of relationships that have organized the social and cultural reproduction of society (Truong *et al.*, 2014).

In general, in this study, 'gender' is conceptualized as a socio-cultural construct and power relation that organizes human behaviour and thought.⁵ Such organizations and classifications, in turn, influence migratory experiences.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

In this sub-section, locally available studies on the gender dimensions of migration from Ethiopia to the Gulf countries (e.g., Alemtsehay, 2013; Mesfin, 2011; Fernandez, 2011) have been briefly reviewed as follows.

Alemtsehay (2013), in her MA thesis, investigated "factors affecting women's migration to the Middle East and its consequences," with specific reference to young Ethiopian women legal migrants to the Middle East. Based on secondary sources and primary data gathered from Addis Ababa, she identified the "major push (poverty) and pull (high salary in destination countries) factors" and migration's positive impacts or benefits to young Ethiopian women legal migrants, their families as well as their country's development.

In his MPhil thesis entitled "The Challenges and Prospects of Female Labour Migration to the Arab Middle East: A Case Study of Women Returnees in the Town of Girana, North Wollo, Ethiopia," Mesfin's (2011) study focused on Muslim women returnees residing in Girana Town of Habru *Woreda* in North Wollo. Aiming at exploring the reasons, challenges and prospects of Ethiopian women's work migration to the Arab Middle

East, Mesfin (2011) addressed issues related to how Muslim women returnees experience and perceive labour migration and the positive as well as negative consequences encountered by the migrants and their families based on secondary sources and primary data generated through semi-structured and life history interviews, focus group discussions and observation. According to his findings, the major push factors for women's work migration are poverty and unemployment, while the pull factors are found to be network of relationships with people at home or abroad. He also found that many of the returnee women were vulnerable to labour exploitation and abuses, cultural isolation and denigration of identity, which made them "easy prey to the racial and xenophobic practices of their employers." Further, he found that, "only five out of twelve women succeeded in improving their living standard when they returned home by building houses, running small businesses and a local restaurant, and engaging in the local transport sector in a joint venture."

Furthermore, Fernandez (2011) carried out a qualitative field research in Addis Ababa and Kuwait for eight weeks focusing on Ethiopian women domestic workers' labour migration to the Gulf countries. In this article entitled "Household Help? Ethiopian Women Domestic Workers' Labour Migration to the Gulf Countries", Fernandez focused on the political economy of women migrants and social reproduction in both origin and host countries. Though the article claimed to analyze "the gendered production of migration trajectory of Ethiopian women domestic workers to the Gulf countries" (Fernandez, 2011:433), its focus drifted towards women, excluding men.

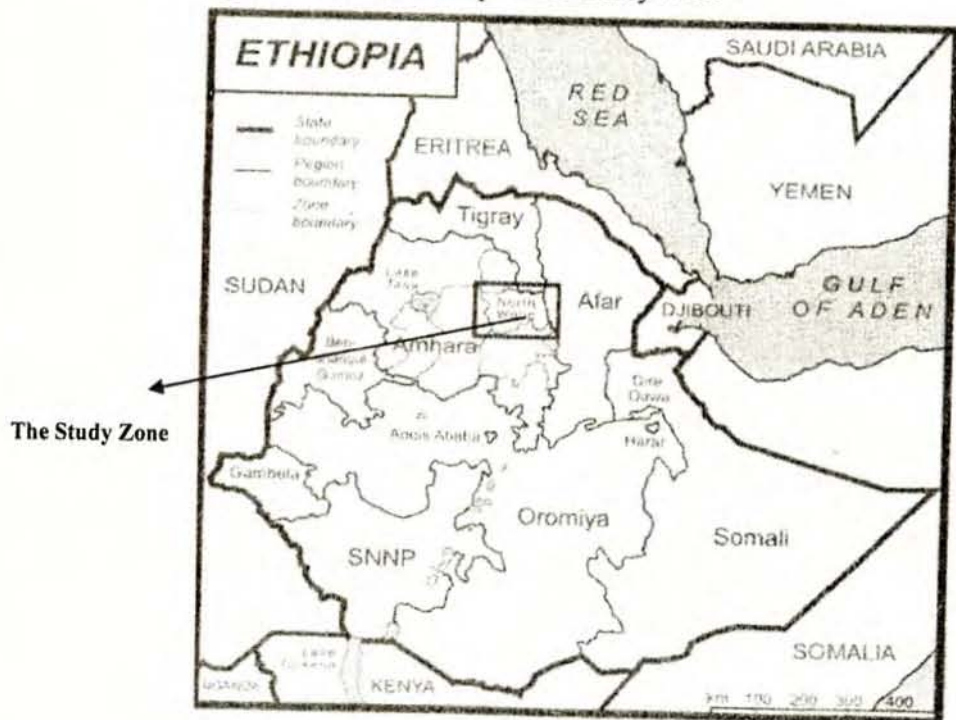
In general, the major focus of the reviewed studies was on identifying the push (poverty and unemployment) and pull (better salary) factors for Ethiopian women's migration to the Gulf States and their challenges and prospects. In addressing these factors in line with economic concerns, social issues such as marriage and cultural ideologies have been missing from the reviewed studies. Thus, this study attempts to explore and analyze the social aspect of the gendered patterns of migration to the Gulf States. Furthermore, as to the knowledge of the researchers, there is no anthropological study on the gendered patterns of migration to the Gulf Countries from Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* of North Wollo, Amhara Region of Ethiopia. This study, therefore,

The Study Area and Research Methods

Description of the Study Area

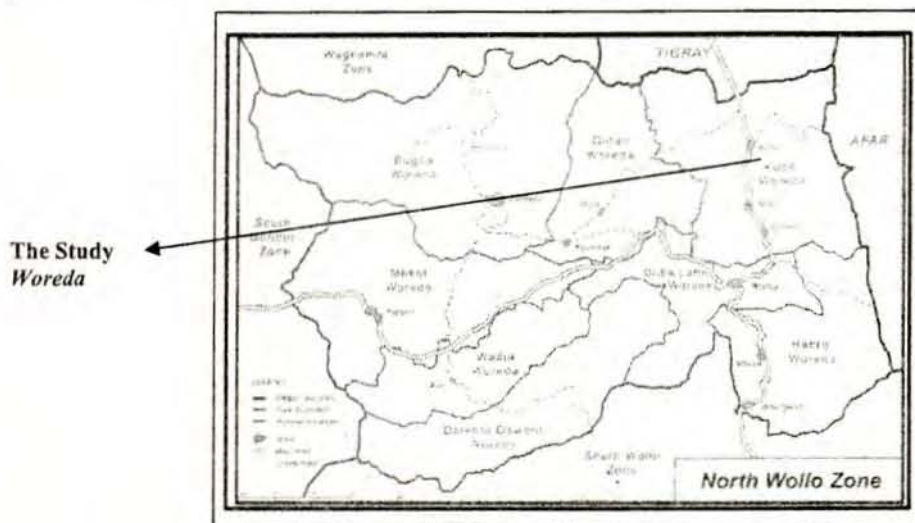
This study was conducted in Rayya Qobbo *Woreda*⁶, which is located in North Wollo Administrative Zone⁷ (hereafter North Wollo) of the Amhara National Regional State (hereafter Amhara Region), Ethiopia (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

Figure 1: Location Map of the Study Area



Source: Sørensen & Selome, 2009

Figure 2: Map of North Wollo Zone



Source: Sørensen & Selome, 2009

North Wollo Zone, according to CSA (2008:63), embraces eleven *woredas*⁸. In 2007, the Zone had a total population of 1,503, 283, of which 754, 354 (50.18%) are males, whereas 748,929 (49.82%) are females. In the same year, Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* had a total population of 221, 894, of which 111,571 (50.28%) are males, whereas 110,323 (49.72%) are females. The majority (85.07%) of the *woreda*'s population live in rural areas (Ibid). The *woreda* consists of thirty four rural and six urban *kebeles*⁹ (Haimanot, 2007).

This study was mainly conducted in Qobbo Town, the capital of Rayya Qobbo *Woreda*. In addition, primary data were gathered from two rural *kebeles* (Qalim and Werqayit) and one urban *kebele* (Robit) in the study *woreda*. These research sites were selected due to the highest prevalence of population migration to the Gulf States (mainly Saudi Arabia). The research site selection was made in consultation with experts from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA) in North Wollo Zone of Amhara Region.

Research Methods

To explore and analyze the nexus between gender and migration to the Gulf States from an anthropological perspective with specific reference to Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* of North Wollo Zone in Amhara Region of Ethiopia, this study is mainly based on qualitative data generated from primary and secondary sources. To solicit theoretical as well as conceptual discourses on gender and migration, an effort has been made to gather pertinent information by using dependable and relevant documents. By consulting both published and unpublished related literatures, the study attempted to provide a critical insight to conceptual frameworks and empirical studies.

The study is predominantly based on primary data gathered through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* from 7th January 2013 to 11th February 2013. The primary data were generated through a combination of qualitative research methods involving face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies. The semi-structured interviews were used to extract detailed information related to gendered patterns of migration, cultural conceptions of migration, gender-specific expectations, and gendered patterns of labour market demand in host countries. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty three informants who were local residents of the area. Semi-structured interviews were also held with eleven key informants.¹⁰ Informants were selected through a stratified sampling technique of a proportional number on the basis of age, sex, social status within the community, knowledge on the issue under investigation, willingness and availability to participate in the interview. The interviews with selected informants were held in Amharic (the local language) based on interview guides. The interviews were recorded using intensive note taking. Some of the interviews were also tape recorded with the consent of the informants. Informal conversational interviews were also used in addition to the semi-structured interview guides.

The study also employed focus group discussions (FGDs) with secondary school students, local residents, returnees, families of migrants, as well as community elders. The FGDs were used to cross-check and validated the data gathered through the in-depth interviews and to capture the common

understanding on the gendered patterns of migration to the Gulf States from the study area. To this effect, FGDs with five different groups consisting of five to seven participants were organized based on sex, age, and role/position in the community. The discussions were conducted in Amharic language through discussion guides. The discussions were also recorded through note taking and tape recording, with the consent of the participants.

Furthermore, primary data were gathered through extended case studies of returnees from the Gulf States (mainly from Saudi Arabia) and those planning to migrate to Saudi Arabia. As a comprehensive description and explanation of cases pertinent to the issue under investigation, individual cases were gathered to further illustrate and strengthen issues raised during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The data gathered through primary and secondary sources were organized and analyzed as follows. First, the qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case studies were transcribed and translated from Amharic into English. Second, the primary data were thematically organized based on the research questions of the study. Third, the primary data were analyzed qualitatively and the data extracted from secondary sources were critically reviewed. Finally, the perspectives and insights from the primary and secondary data sources were analyzed through triangulation to maintain the validity of the findings.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the major findings of the study on the gendered migration process, the rituals of gendered migration involving cultural values and principles, entrenching gender ideologies and power relations as emerging gendered traits in migration and marriage, and the deconstruction of gendered patterns of labour market demand are discussed as follows.

The Gendered Migration Process

In the study area, the gendered migration process can be brought into play through three main phases (pre-departure, departure, and post-departure), which are briefly discussed below.

Pre-departure

The primary data gathered from the field indicate that people from the Rayya Qobbo area are inclined to migrate to the Gulf States mainly due to the following natural and social stimuli.

i. Natural stimuli of migration

Ecological degradation, famine, drought, periodic fluctuation of rainfall, volcanic eruptions, flood, outbreak of disease, among others are found to be the natural factors contributing to the increasing trend of migration to the Gulf States from the study area. The high population pressure on land, in combination with low agricultural productivity, soil erosion, periodic drought and an unreliable rainfall system, have added to the problems of food insecurity in parts of Amhara Region, including North Wollo. Referring to the North Wollo and Wag Hamra Zones of Amhara Region, Holt and Dessalegn (1999, in Sørensen and Selome, 2009:1) stated the problem as follows: "too many people are trying to make a living directly from the land." In North Wollo, this is illustrated by the fact that food aid, whether in the form of free handouts or payment for participation in different forms of food-for-work, is an integral part of rural livelihood systems that complements agricultural income, the major household income (Holt and Dessalegn, 1999).

For a community depending on what Sørensen & Selome (2009:59) termed the 'three Ls' (land, labour, and livestock), labour appears to be the best livelihood strategy to secure the livelihood of a household in a changing environment with a relatively small land-holding, which ranges from 0.25 to 0.75 hectare. Hence, through migration to the Gulf States, where the demand for labour is high, the Rayya Qobbo people, especially men, join in the labour market as a result of the natural stimuli in the study area.

The aforementioned natural causes were frequently mentioned as the major stimuli for migration in the FGDs held with men living in the lowlands. Taking into consideration the fact that lowlands embrace a considerable proportion (56%) of the topographic feature of the study area, adverse climatic conditions and environmental deterrents have been evident during recent times (Haimanot, 2007). Erratic rainfalls and long-standing drought

periods have also posed a problem on the livelihood of the local people, which is predominately dependent on rain-fed agriculture and livestock raising.

Here, therefore, it can be argued that natural causes seem to be the major drivers of migration for men, who are considered the bread-winners of a household, being primarily engaged in farming and animal husbandry. The following quote from a case study explains how climate change causes migration of men to the Gulf States.

Climate change as a stimulus for men's migration

It has not been like it was in previous years. We are now living in a desert. We are farming a barren land. If we are lucky, we can produce once a year. We have begun to buy food for our own household consumption, which we used to produce previously. The environment has changed. So, there is nothing to do here. If you are not farming, then, how can you sustain your family unless you search for a job? The wage here is, at the same time, not enough. So, it is better to go to Saudi. There you can have the freedom and earn twice what you can get here.

(Interview with a male returnee from Saudi Arabia living in Qobbo Town, February 5, 2013)

ii. Social stimuli of migration

Apart from the natural stimuli of migration to the Gulf States, this study found that social factors have prompted more migrations. Reported in various studies¹¹ focusing on migration of Ethiopians to the Gulf States, economic deprivation (extreme poverty), low urbanization, and low employment opportunities come as principal drivers. Some also take into account political issues, such as poor governance, human rights violation, political repression and political violence, as key driving forces (Baker & Tade, 1995). These causes, of course, have a considerable share. However, this study brings into light other social issues which have been more or less far from the analytical frameworks of the reviewed empirical studies.

From the FGDs and in-depth interviews conducted in the study area, social issues seem to overshadow and at the same time be concealed within natural and economic causes of migration. Many have argued that people migrate in search of a better life. Either they are struggling to escape poverty or upgrading their economic status; within these notions, social stimuli come into play. As one community elder in Werqayit reported:

The poor migrate to sustain the household and break away from deprivation. If you do not own something, you are down at the society's echelon. Nobody wants that position. Nobody wants to be looked down on or disdained. So, to have a say within the community, you have to become rich, which prescribes social status. The rich also migrate. For them, however, it is to amass more and improve their status within the society (January 21, 2013).

Here, it should be further noted that beyond inadequate food supply within a house and desire for material gain lies the conception of social status. Another related cause is the life and feasible testimony of improved living condition of returnees and their families. So far, these social stimuli are not gender-specific. Coming to the core of this study, the gender-differentiated experience of migration, as FGDs with female students revealed, gender discriminatory attitudes and practices as well as inequalities in gender roles and relations can be regarded as a principal reason behind the fact that women are leaving their home. The social roles of women restricted to the domestic realm as 'a subordinate being' or what has been noted by feminists as 'second citizens', has contributed for the increasing number of women migrants to the Gulf States. In search of freedom from such social pressure and oppressive family norms or marital relationship, girls and young women prefer to migrate instead of getting married or staying with their spouses. A particular feature in such kind of pressure is the loss of hope in early arranged marriage, which affects girls' formal schooling in the study area. The following case study reveals the issue at hand.

Migration as an escape from early arranged marriage

I am going to finish Grade 10. But that is it. I don't want to continue my education. What all my family wants for me is to marry. I was not engaged until now because of my aunt's pressure. My aunt, who lives in Addis Ababa, warned my father not to marry me. However, I have no future here, where 'you have to marry or go to Arab country'. For me, I rather go abroad. I am staying here until I finish Grade 10. I will be going after that. I already have my passport for that matter. I am not going to marry. My own friend was married to my uncle and I know what kind of life she has now. She is deprived of her freedom. She is under her husband's control. But she cannot complain because our mothers have lived in similar conditions and they expect us to live as such. But I do not want that.

(10th grade female student living in Qalim, February 7, 2013)

The above case shows the gender-specific nature of the social expectations, especially how early arranged marriage is affecting girls' education and leading them to out-migrate to the Gulf States. There is also gender-specific situation, such as escaping for fear of political persecution, forcing young men to out-migrate from their locality. Principally, the prevalence of revenge as a cultural norm accounts for this cause. Considered as the most perilous crime in the Rayya Qobbo area, pre-meditated homicide with an impulsive intention of revenge is the foremost reason why young men escape and eventually migrate to the Gulf States. Moreover, being gender neutral, population pressure and non-peaceful relation with community members are mentioned by local informants as drivers of migration to the Gulf States.

In addition to gender differences in the drivers of migration to the Gulf States, the understanding of decision-making and the role of gender in such process are essential to fully comprehend the migration process of the Rayya Qobbo people to the Gulf States. So far, contexts which influence the decision to migrate, have been indicated as drivers of migration. Further, the presence of the 'culture of migration' and the complex networks providing information and assistance to migration, such as agents and brokers, can also be regarded as stimuli for the decision to migrate. The

initial migration decision can, thereby, be influenced by all these drivers and inter-related causes.

With regard to who makes the decisions on migration, though IOM's reports claim that Ethiopian women going to the Gulf States make decisions to migrate through their own free will, the data from fieldwork show otherwise. According to women FGD participants, not all individuals reach to such a decision by themselves. As a result, the household or family is the principal social unit with the power to exert influence on the decision making process, prescribed by social expectations of gender roles. Even in the case where the final decision-maker is the individual migrant, it is likely that a network of issues related with the household's livelihood strategy and family expectations have an effect on the decision. Particularly for women, such decision might be fuelled by the need as well as the desire to sustain the family. Similar to what Boyd and Grieco (in Jolly & Hazel, 2005) identified among the Filipino migrants, Rayya Qobbo husbands/parents also used to send wives/daughters to gain remittances (economic benefits) for the family.

Another driving force is the existence of complex networks which provide information and assistance. These networks, built around family/kin members or institutions engaged in migration, have considerable influence on the decision to migrate among the Rayya Qobbo people. By reducing the costs of migration, these networks of friends, family members, recruitment agencies, and brokers can initiate and encourage migrants to reach to a decision.

Hence, it can be argued that most decisions to migrate are made in response to a range of economic, social and political pressures and incentives. After evaluating the costs and benefits of migration, Jolly and Hazel (2005) asserted that migration could be the final outcome of such rational decisions. This rational decision-making is also further noted on the routes taken by migrants as discussed below.

The process of departure

Voluntary or involuntary, legal or illegal, regular or irregular (undocumented), seasonal or non-seasonal, the very process of migration starting from the arrangement of the process up to the choice of the route could be gender specific. In Rayya Qobbo, men make all the arrangements by themselves if they are using the services of human traffickers. For such services, they pay *Birr*¹² 3,000 to 6,000 to traffickers for passing the international borders through the overland route. Given that the prospect of men migrating to the Gulf States through the legal means of living permit is costly (according to informants ranging from *Birr* 80,000-100,000), most men in the study area choose what has been considered as the 'desert routes.' These include routes through Bossasso to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and UAE. Another transit port for migrants to the Gulf States is through Djibouti (see Figure 1 above). These two routes are considered by informants as the most common ones through which not only individuals from Rayya Qobbo area but also from different regions of Ethiopia migrate to the Gulf States.

According to returnee male informants, the journeys through these routes are difficult and precarious. Taking more than days of walk on foot and 30 hours of boat trip without food and water, migrants are faced with a range of risks such as famishment, animal attack, physical assault from brokers/smugglers, robbery of money and food, which in turn result in physical injury and/or death. In the case of the voyage across the Gulf of Aden, an overcrowded boat packed full of migrants and maritime traffickers/smugglers can lead to asphyxia and eventually death. Those who make it to the shore expect physical abuse on the Yemen border by brokers soliciting money to be sent by family members back home or in the Gulf States. Though the majority of migrants taking these routes appear to be males, females also set out through these routes, mostly accompanied by male friends or family members. However, there are few females who migrate through the sea unaccompanied. These female migrants also face problems similar with that of males. Yet, being a female, these migrants are also exposed to the risk of sexual abuse/abduction by smugglers or escorts.

Nonetheless, the majority of female migrants use employment agencies, recruitment firms, and individual agents (legal or illegal) to set off to the Gulf States. Informants have described it as a more or less safe journey through the air, where migrants are required to spend no more than *Birr* 2,000. In some instances, without any payment within the period of pre-departure, they promise to send their two months' earnings to the agents. In general, despite the problems faced, according to a survey conducted by Amhara Region BoLSA in March 2010, the number of migrants (both through the sea and the air) are escalating and expanding.

Post-departure

Similar to the pre-departure and departure patterns, gender interplay also weighs in the post-departure stage. Migration poses different experiences, challenges, threats and sacrifices for women and men. One of such cases is the cultural expectation from the host country. Considering the fact that the Gulf States are predominately followers of Islamic religion, the girls and young women migrating from the study area, particularly followers of Ethiopian Orthodox Church, are expected to observe the societal norms and religious values of the host country. Starting from dressing codes up to holding back oneself from approaching men, the Rayya Qobbo girls and young women migrating to the Gulf States have to fall back on to Islamic traditions and values. Nonetheless, boys and men seem to have a considerable freedom with regard to such obligations. Community informants also noted that this cultural and religious divergence is more visible on girls and women. Further arguing on the gendered migration patterns in post-departure period as well as pointing to gender difference on vulnerability, one community elder in the study area noted that,

The psychological and mental problems, the physical assaults, sexual and verbal abuses are all discernible when we come to girls and young women. Our sons are also going there. But we worry for our daughters. It is girls who come with problems. Of course, there are boys who have faced such dangers. But, their number is not as such comparable to that of girls (January 23, 2013).

According to the data obtained from FGDs conducted with women, people ascribe these vulnerabilities to the exposure of girls and young women to cultural norms and religious values of the host countries. However, the entry status of women to the Gulf States also contributes to the experience one faces as being more vulnerable and the type of risk they face. As discussed earlier, girls and women are more likely to fall prey to sexual abuse by traffickers/smugglers and companions when migrating through the sea route. Of course, boys and men also face precarious situations extending from physical injury up to the death of individuals. From an interview with a returnee from Saudi Arabia, who has migrated four times through the Gulf of Aden, one can understand that the risk for girls and women is sexual abuse while boys and men often face physical abuse. In fact, both genders face the risk of robbery and physical exhaustion from the journey undertaken by the sea.

Furthermore, in the post-departure period, the occupation migrants are engaged in, gender ideologies and power relations within the host country, the remittance they send to their families, and ultimately the impact it impinges on can also be explained from gender perspective in the following section.

The rituals of gendered migration: Cultural values and principles

By combining the notions from both anthropological and cultural studies, 'migration' can be attested as popular culture, "the culture of everyday life." Entrenched within the conception of culture as a principal realm where meanings are established and contested, this section discusses the 'culture of migration' and the meanings embodied in it. As Stuart Hall argued, "the field of culture is a major site of ideological struggle: a terrain of 'incorporation' and 'resistance', one of the sites where hegemony is to be won or lost" (in Storey, 2009: xviii). Thereby, the articulation and activation of migration as a popular culture might be debatable. Nonetheless, the data obtained from the Rayya Qobbo area give this impression. In addition, MoLSA's report (in Regt, 2007) alluded that the 'culture of migration' has been evident in areas such as Kombolcha, Kemisse, Dessie and its surrounding owing to the wide Muslim population and the religious pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

The ritual of migration to the Gulf States from Rayya Qobbo, however, lies far from religious pilgrimages. As an evolving trait, the 'culture of migration' has become part of the social structure of the Rayya Qobbo community. Currently, the social norm and context embellish the concept of 'migration' and movement of people across international borders. It initiates and induces individuals, both women and men, to migrate to the Gulf States, which is considered as a 'wealth ranking mechanism' and a 'rite of passage', which are separately discussed below.

Migration as a 'Wealth Ranking Mechanism'

Labour migration mainly of young girls to work as housemaids in Middle Eastern countries, according to Sørensen and Selome (2009), was going on during the first three phases [1998, 2003 and 2007] of the 'Joint Programme' to a very limited extent though the scale of the labour migration increased drastically. "This kind of labour migration, and more importantly the remittances coming back to North Wollo to some extent represents a new trend away from livelihood systems based on a combination of agriculture and food aid" (Sørensen and Selome, 2009).

In previous decades, livestock ownership (particularly mules and camels) served as a wealth ranking mechanism in Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* of North Wollo. However, such wealth ranking mechanism has become rare due to the natural stimuli discussed earlier. Rather, as a device of differentiating and ranking individuals as well as households, labour migration to the Gulf States has become a means to accord privilege. In this connection, Sørensen and Selome (2009) found that,

Labour migration to the Middle East is important, as it most often generates more money than labour migration elsewhere. The economic importance of remittances from relatives (mostly children) in the Middle East was illustrated during the FGD in Chereti. Participants argued that livestock ownership size should not be used as a measure of wealth and suggested an alternative criterion, namely having children in Jeddah (used to refer to the Middle East in general). They went on to define rich people as those 'who have two or more children in Jeddah.' People who

have only one child living and working in this city were described as 'middle', and those who do not as 'poor'.

Accordingly, in the present study area, Rayya Qobbo, the remittance money sent by migrants has become an important aspect of wealth ranking. "All the households who have a daughter or more in Arab countries," an informant argues, "have a better livelihood." In this case, the meaning of 'better' lies in economic betterment, particularly in relation to the shift from thatched roof and conical hut to a house constructed with cement, brick, and concrete. The furniture and utensils within a household are also considered to represent a well-off status. In some parts of the study area, such as Robit, buying vehicles are also considered as economic improvement that came with the remittance sent by migrants from the Gulf States. The following quote from a case study reveals how life has changed through migration.

Life has changed through migration

She is our neighbour's daughter. She went to Dubai three years ago through brokers. Her parents borrowed Birr 3,000 and paid it for the whole process. She sent her salary uninterruptedly for some time. She came here [Robit] last month and bought a house here in the town for her mother. She bought the machine and opened a bakery for her family. They now provide bread to shops, cafeterias, and restaurants. Their life has changed since she has gone overseas. She went to Egypt then after. She is working there now.

(Interview with a returnee woman living in Robit Town, February 2, 2013)

Here, it should be noted that cultural assumptions in most societies expect girls and women to be supportive (Genet and Haftu, 2012). Accordingly, parents in the study area encourage their daughters to migrate to the Gulf States. The social norms and attitude towards sending girls and women (daughters, sisters, or wives) show that they have the responsibility to send back remittance and provide for and maintain the household. Unlike boys and men, such responsibility becomes an imposed duty for girls and women since they are confined within the authority of the household. Meanwhile,

boys and men are accountable and answerable to themselves. They are not persuaded to support or make a contribution to the household. They are only expected to support themselves and bring about change in their own life. They, in general, migrate for amenities and self-indulgence. One informant in Qobbo Town expressed this view in the following way:

All a man thinks is his belly. He does not think of others. But a woman has to be responsible for the household in general. She has to figure out how to manage the money for the family. She has to think how to raise the kids. She has to think how to feed all members of the family. She has to think how to assist her parents. She has to think for all. But men only come home to have their meal and rest. It is also the same for girls. They have to spend their time at home assisting their mothers while their brothers are playing around doing whatever they want. They will say 'he is a man. Let him do what he wants.' So, when they go to Arab countries, they do not think of anything but themselves. There is no a penny that a boy is obliged to send. But a girl has to support her family. She is raised as an investment in the future. You can see this either through marriage or migration (January 15, 2013).

Migration as a 'Rite of Passage'

An emerging 'culture of migration' can also function as a 'rite of passage' to a social network. When Van Gennep coined the term 'rites of passage/rites de passage' (1960), he defined it as "rituals which mark the passing of one stage of life and entry into another, e.g., birth, puberty, marriage, initiation to the priesthood, or death." He also distinguished three stages in this process: *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. In explaining migration as a rite of passage, the separation stage commences with the departure of migrants to the host country. Meanwhile, the transition/liminal phase is characterized by the experience the migrants gain in the host country (cultural norms or economic gain), and a temporary freedom from previous social relations and networks. Lastly comes the incorporation stage where migrants come back home. In this final stage, individuals join the community as a new individual with a status of returnee, a matured and wealthy individual. Particularly, for boys, migration

marks a rite of passage to a status of manhood. As aforementioned, boys are held responsible for themselves. They are expected to become full adults, mature and responsible for their actions. The migration experiences and self-sustenance within the host country exhibit a transformation of the boyhood to a manhood status.

Ostracism of individuals, who have not migrated and are not willing to do so, further chips into the understanding of migration as a cultural trait. Even though such seclusion is not expressed formally, social exclusion and cynicism from family members have a damaging outcome on individual members of the community. It also results in the integration of migrants as part of the social expectations and thus an obligation, especially for the young population of Rayya Qobbo *Woreda*. Therefore, as ILO's (2011) report indicated, "the pressure to migrate is intensified irrespective of the risks involved." The pressure from parents, spouses, friends, and other community members obliges the youth to migrate to the Gulf States.

Another attestation of migration as a rite of passage is the common religious practice of *wadaja*¹³ for migration. Influencing the course of event whereupon people will become more prosperous or more successful; the Rayya Qobbo people call upon specialists performing the religious rituals of *wadaja* for migration (Kiya, 2013). Accordingly, for a better future of an individual, these religious practices are carried out for a person migrating to the Gulf States. Considering the performance of this religious practice mostly in giving birth, weddings, and funerals which are considered as rites of passage, the ground for performing rests on ensuring one's future and marking a transition to a migrant status.

In a nutshell, rather than a necessity or an option, migration in the study area is regarded as a wealth ranking mechanism and a rite of passage prescribing social position, an obligation and eventually part of the culture of the community.

Entrenching gender ideologies and power relations: Emerging gendered traits in marriage and migration

Marriage, Migration, and Household Strategy

Marriage, as “a culturally sanctioned union between two or more people that establishes certain rights and obligations” (Haviland *et al.*, 2007), is conceived to establish community ties and increase or maintain the social status of the family (Alemu, in Fransen and Katie, 2009). This sacred script is also considered as a means of socialization and rite of passage (Schur, 1984). The idea of marital norms and expectations are entrenched in these definitions. The socially constructed notions of ‘gender’ and ‘power relations’ also appear in the conception of marriage in the study area.

During the field visit in Rayya Qobbo *Woreda*, male focus group discussants stated that specific marital norms and roles are prescribed gender wise. Upholding the patriarchal ideology, men are considered as sole bread-winners and heads of the household, whereas women are responsible for domestic duties since they are confined within the household. As cited in different scholarly literatures (such as Pankhurst, in Fransen and Katie, 2009:15) and shying away from the public/domestic dichotomy, our main concern in this study is with the local understanding of marriage as a social institution with a prescribed gender role in the face of migration to the Gulf States.

Accordingly, in Qobbo Town, female focus group discussants noted that the institution of marriage and its sacred feature has been eroded in recent times, mainly due to migration. One participant further argued that, “young girls are now getting married as they wish. They marry whomever and whenever they wanted. They get divorced if there is some disagreement with their spouses.” The flexibility in marriage arrangements and the high prevalence of divorce calls the need for a longitudinal analysis of the cause, which brings migration as one driver. On the other hand, informants have considered migration as an escape clause from unsolicited marriage and thereupon a getaway from the psychological preoccupation of the marital norms.

As to how migration to the Gulf States serves the Raya Qobbo people as a getaway, the myth of marriage as inexorable for young girls between 11-15 years old throws light on their choice of migration as an option. This is even more discernible in the highlands where the cultural norms and values related to early marriage for girls are strong regardless of the local government officials' movements and measures taken including adjudication and passing on verdict against parents who arranged marriage for their daughters below the age of 18. One female informant elucidated this issue as follows:

If you have reached the age of eleven, you are considered for marriage. This is a recent phenomenon. They used to marry-off girls at the age of three. Since the local police are arresting parents, they take precaution in the marriage ceremony. They make the ceremony in a hidden manner. Or, if the girl's physiological appearance is somehow mature, they will take her to the *kebele* and verify that she is old enough to get married, regardless of her actual age. What all the local *kebele* officials see is if the girl's breasts have popped up or her hips have projected out. Whether you like it or not, you have to get married. But nobody wants that. If you have an option you take it. Personally, I prefer to go to Woldiya [the capital town of North Wollo] and work as a maid there rather than getting married here. I do not want to go to Arab countries though I know girls who did that (January 19, 2013).

In the study area, migration is also considered as a form of household income diversification for married couples. Focusing on the household as the unit of analysis, Grasmuck and Pessar emphasized on migration as "a household strategy issuing from structural necessity" (in Pedraza, 1991). The data gathered from Qalim and Robit towns in the study area depict similar pattern. In some households, the myth of the sole and primary male bread-winner dictates that the husband is the one who should migrate. On the other hand, rather than being concerned with the expectations of marriage as the appraisal of housework and childbearing responsibilities, wives/daughters seem to migrate in a number of households. This can be accounted for the relatively less difficult migration process for girls and women from the economic point of view. Given the fact that migration is

considered as a household survival strategy in times of paucity, the money needed to migrate to the Gulf States might not be available for boys and men. Nonetheless, the drive of destitution might not necessarily be the root-cause for all cases since married couples also migrate as a household strategy of attaining social status, which is not necessarily a question of survival. In such marriages, both couples might migrate or one of them might stay behind, taking the responsibility of the household. Depending on who is left behind, the obligations, balance of power, and relationship with children differ accordingly.

Left-behind spouses

Given that changes are evident in living arrangements, when the left-behind spouse is the husband/father, he will assume new activities and responsibilities of the household. With the established traditional role of women being responsible for the housework, as noted in an interview with an adult male informant living in Qobbo Town, most husbands with migrant wives adjust to their masculine identities by extending the domestic responsibility to female members of the extended family. He further commented, "It is not manly to wonder around the kitchen. He who does this is a chicken. Women are made for this, not us. First of all, I will never let my wife to go overseas. But if she did, then I will have a maid or bring my sister to live with me." For some male focus group discussants, 'migration of wives to the Gulf States while their husbands are left behind here is akin to death.' Living on a woman's income is, for some, equated with 'selling out one's manhood.' Hence, eventually, the husband opts to migrate. Nonetheless, exceptions were observed, particularly in the towns where well-educated individuals live though they too take part merely in childcare responsibility barring the domestic duties within the household.

On the contrary, when the left-behind spouse is the wife/mother, the traditional gender roles seem to be perpetuated in the study area. In this regard, Pessar (2005) argued that,

The literature that does exist on the stay-at-home wives of migrants reveals a mixed picture. In some communities, [...] women may find themselves residing with their husbands' kin,

carefully monitored by them [...]. In such cases, outmigration may simply reinforce conventional gender ideologies and roles... There are other cases in which women left behind- often as provisional household heads- are called upon to assume roles and tasks previously assigned primarily or only to men... While these new responsibilities increase women's burdens, wives may also become sufficiently empowered to attempt to emigrate themselves, even against their spouses' wishes...

Though there is a wide option of decision-making power conferred to women, which might make them economically independent, women's social responsibilities and domestic duties still persist. Of course, girls and women in the study area seem to accumulate a certain level of autonomy and freedom. However, this comes with a cost of additional work load and responsibility. In some cases, the freedom and power might be restricted until their husbands come back. In other words, when the men return home, the wives go back to their previous status.

Another circumstance is when both couples migrate to the Gulf States, leaving their children for their older siblings, particularly older sisters. In some cases, older sons take the responsibility. Yet, in a number of interviews held with informants, grandparents take the place of parents, in what Judith (1982) considered as a "grandmother syndrome."

Extra-marital relationships and divorce

Apparently, migrants arguably see infidelity as a prospect. Migrant women are accused of engaging in extra-marital relationship with their employers or other Ethiopians living in the destination country. Principally, women who gain a considerable amount of income, which is perhaps exceptional, are accused of committing adultery with male employers. Such accusations also apply to men. In Qalim area, for instance, giving a daughter to a man/boy who has been to the Gulf States or even Addis Ababa is not favoured. The saying that "*ketema ena Arab hager yeqemese arfo ayqemetem*" (literally: A man who has a taste of the city and an Arab country will not settle down) says it all. In addition, some informants have mentioned that left-behind husbands are engaged in extra-marital relationships by expending the remittance sent by their wives. For such relationship, although it seems unorthodox, what anthropologists coin as

'fictive marriage' applies, which is a "marriage by proxy to the symbols of someone not physically present in order to establish a social status" (Haviland *et al.*, 2007).

Coming to the notion of divorce, the aforementioned extra-marital relationship can be accounted for dissolving the marriage by migrants. However, this study focuses on divorce related with securing remittance and economic benefits. In such cases, gender plays a central role. Such kind of divorce is evident among female migrants to the Gulf States where parents seem to manage and take advantage of the remittance sent by their divorced daughters. The following quote elaborates the point under discussion.

Parents breaking down their daughter's marriage as a pre-requisite for migration

If a girl went to Jeddah without getting married, she will send the money to her parents. Then after, when she decides to establish her own family, her parents are the ones who object the most. In cases where married daughters decide to go, their parents force them to get divorced. They will tell you that he [the husband] will not be faithful to you and that long distance relationships are doomed to fail. They just do not want the money sent from Jeddah to go to the husband and his family.

(FGD with female students in Qobbo Town, February 1, 2013)

In general, the cultural meaning of marriage as a rite of passage to womanhood/manhood has been in a state of change and continuity in the Rayya Qobbo community. Marriage is still regarded as part of adulthood expectations. Yet, the prescribed roles and relations ingrained within it have been changed and situated in different contexts, particularly in relation to migration and gender.

Deconstructing the gendered patterns of labour market demand

Coming to the last section of this article, one of the patterns of migration compounded by gender is the labour market demand, which is characterized

with diversification (more skill levels/different occupations) and polarization (between skilled and unskilled migration) (Piper, 2005). The findings of this study, therefore, focus on the diversification of occupation and the gender-segregated job markets in host countries.

After scrutinizing what types of jobs are deemed appropriate for male and female migrants in the Gulf States, we found that the socially ascribed norms and values, specifically the gender division of labour, are also reproduced in the labour market of the Gulf States. The social expectations of women as mothers, homemakers, and paramour are portrayed in the profession of women as nannies/care workers, domestic workers, and commercial sex workers. Hence, women are to be dominantly found in service sectors. Principally, domestic work is considered as the main gateway for Ethiopian female migrants in the Gulf States, while male migrants are mainly sought in occupations such as waste disposal and herding. They also generate income through illicit activities, including dealing of drug and alcohol. This finding was also supported by Mesfin (2011) who argued that Ethiopian migrant women mostly take up domestic work, while men often become waiters, drivers, guards, or construction labourers in the Middle East. The following quotes from case studies depict such gender-specific roles in the labour market.

The role of migrant women

I clean every room in the building and the compound as well. I clean the windows, the floor, and the balcony. I also cook, do the laundry, wash the cars, and take care of the children who are still living in the house. I do similar chores for her [the employer] daughter living next door. This is what I do on a daily basis.

(Interview with female returnee from Kuwait, Qobbo Town, February 3, 2013)

The role of migrant men

Most of the men in Saudi are dealing Areqe (local liquor). You cannot prepare alcoholic beverages in the host country due to Islamic traditions and values. So, they deal it secretly. Otherwise, they might be herders, living in the suburbs. Some of them also work as janitors, which are rare to find, in hospitals and schools.

(Interview with female returnee from Saudi and Egypt, Robit Town, February 4, 2013)

With regard to the gender implication of the labour market demand in the host countries, the domestic/private domain is attuned in the chores taken up by women and men respectively. Furthermore, this can be attested in the gendered labour demand structure, which shows the clear margin of girls'/women's and boys'/men's work. While girls/women are mainly regarded as domestic helpers within the household, boys/men are engaged in out-door works at schools, hospitals, factories, and other spheres which are considered to be part of the public realm. Here, what Fernandez (2011) meant by 'social reproduction' can be brought into play. The cultural values and relationships of girls/women to the domestic and boys/men to the public in the origin country are further reproduced in the host country. Truong et al. (2014:22) also noted that, "the emergence of women's migration across borders as domestic helpers and sexual service providers constitute a transfer of reproductive and sexual labour from one social group and nation to another." Fernandez (2011:452) further stated that "migrant domestic workers perform the '3D' work that national women do not want, but importantly, are a low cost private mechanism of care provisioning." Thus, by providing care labour, Ethiopian women perpetuate the domestic realm in host countries.

Another point worth mentioning is the value accredited to these skills and labours. Economically as well as socially, all the occupations, either domestic help or herding, are not recognized as 'appropriate' jobs, nor are they esteemed or cherished in the Raya Qobbo area as well as in the Gulf States. In-depth interviews with community elders also highlighted the issue at hand. However, migrants secure a high economic and social status within

the host society through remittance. Furthermore, as cases from the study area bear out, migrants with high school diploma or even university degrees seem to lose status and deviate from the socially recognized career paths.

Concluding Remarks

This study attempted to explore and analyze the nexus between gender and migration to the Gulf States from an anthropological perspective with specific reference to Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* of North Wollo Zone in Amhara Region of Ethiopia. Based on the qualitative analysis of the primary data generated through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case studies and secondary data obtained through a critical review of related literature and documents, the study found that (1) the patterns of migration from the study area to the Gulf States are gender-specific in terms of migration routes, labour market demand, and remittance sent by migrants; (2) The decision to migrate to the Gulf States was influenced by social values and family norms in general and gender ideology and power relation in particular; (3) Migration to the Gulf States is considered as a wealth ranking mechanism as well as a rite of passage prescribing social status; and (4) Migration to the Gulf States (particularly to Saudi Arabia) has become part of the culture of the people in the study area.

This study further explored gender differences in the migration process, rituals of migration, culturally entrenched gender ideologies and relations as emerging traits in migration and marriage in the study area, and labour market demand in the host/destination countries. The analyses of the findings indicated that both boys/men and girls/women in the study area used to migrate to the Gulf States due to a combination of natural and social stimuli. While causes related with natural events seem to be the major drivers of migration for boys/men, gender-specific social roles and expectations, especially early arranged marriage practices are the major drivers for girls' and young women's out-migration to the Gulf States. The complex networks of friends, family members, recruitment agencies, and brokers have also considerable influence on the decision to migrate among the Rayya Qobbo people. Hence, it can be argued that most decisions to migrate are made in response to a range of economic and social factors.

Gender interplay also weighs in the post-departure period since migration poses different experiences, challenges, threats and sacrifices for girls/women and boys/men in the Gulf States, which are predominately adherents of Islamic traditions and values. The entry status of migrants from the study area has also contributed to gender specific challenges and risks. As a result, some female migrants are more likely to fall prey to sexual abuse by traffickers/smugglers and companions when migrating through the sea route. Of course, male migrants also face precarious situations extending from physical injury up to the death of individuals. In fact, both genders face the risk of robbery and physical exhaustion due to the harsh journey undertaken by sea.

With regard to the gender implication of the labour market demand in the host countries, the domestic/private domain is attuned in the activities undertaken up by girls/women and boys/men. More specifically, the socially assigned gender-based division of labour in the study area is also found to be reproduced in the labour market demand of the Gulf States, where girls/women are mainly regarded as domestic helps within the household, whereas boys/men are engaged in out-door works at schools, hospitals, factories, and others which are considered to be part of the public sphere.

In general, in the study area, it has become customary to see young girls at the age of 14, and sometimes below, migrating to the Gulf States for domestic work. There are also stories of boys crossing the desert and the Gulf of Aden in search of better livelihood. The ways girls/women and boys/men experience migration, the challenges they face in different phases of migration differ gender wise. After evaluating the costs and benefits of migration, Jolly and Hazel (2005) argued that migration could be the final outcome of such rational decisions, which also applies to the migration routes taken by migrants to the Gulf States from the study area. Accordingly, the majority of migrants taking the illegal routes through the sea are found to be boys/men, whereas the majority of female migrants use employment agencies, recruitment firms, and individual agents (legal or illegal) to move out to the Gulf States by air. Despite the challenges of migration to the Gulf States, the 'culture of migration' has become part of

the social structure of the Rayya Qobbo community due to the natural and social stimuli. As a result, labour migration to the Gulf States (particularly to Saudi Arabia) has been considered as a 'wealth ranking mechanism' as well as a 'rite of passage' prescribing social status in the local community. It is also considered as a form of household income diversification for married couples. In short, as Bineta Diop (in Chant, 2000) noted, "while there is much debate about the benefits and pitfalls of migration, one fact remains clear: migration is here to stay."

In the final analysis, moving beyond figurative statistics disaggregated by sex, this article highlights the socio-cultural dimensions of labour migration from Rayya Qobbo *Woreda* of North Wollo Zone in Amhara Region of Ethiopia to the Gulf States by taking into account gender ideologies and power relations as analytical frameworks. However, the findings of this study might not be applicable beyond the ecological, economic and socio-cultural contexts of the study area. Thus, it calls the need for a comprehensive study on the complex relations between gender and migration in different parts of Ethiopia from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

Endnotes

- ¹ A committee of provisional military administrative council that ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991.
- ² Kebede, 2001; Adnew, 2003; Beyene, 2005 in Alemtsehay, 2013:2.
- ³ Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
- ⁴ Regt, 2007; Fernandez, 2005; Mesfin, 2011; Alemtsehay, 2013; Bahar, 2011; Lalem, 2004.
- ⁵ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Ortner, 1996 in Pessar, 2005.
- ⁶ *Woreda* is an Amharic term which means a formal governmental administrative structure similar to district and is found below the *Zone*.
- ⁷ *Zone* refers to an administrative division found immediately below the region. It is usually responsible for coordination of the activities of the *Woreda* and the regional executive.
- ⁸ Bugna, Kobo, Gidan, Meket, Wadla, Delanta, Gubalafito, Habru, Woldiya, Lasta and Dawant.
- ⁹ *Kebele* is an Amharic term referring to local governmental administrative unit at grass-root level and is found below the *woreda*.
- ¹⁰ Key informants include experts from the Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs in Woldiya (the capital of North Wollo Zone of Amhara Region), officials from *kebele* administrative units and *woreda* administration, leaders of youth and women's associations, and secondary school teachers in Rayya Qobbo *Woreda*.
- ¹¹ See Regt, 2007; Bahar, 2011; Baker & Tade, 1995; ILO, 2011; Alemtsehay, 2013.
- ¹² Ethiopian Currency.
- ¹³ The religious practice of *wadaja* is a communal prayer and blessing where the relationship with the supernatural is bridged (Meron, 2012).

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