

## **‘Sell Me the Oranges’: Change in Migrants’ Worth across the Ethiopia-Sudan Border**

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### **Abstract**

The people in Metema Yohannes, a small town along the Ethiopia-Sudan border, used to refer migrants as oranges, implying a fruitful business for all. Migrants, for long, have been a source of income as well as conflict in this area located on western part of the Ethiopian border. In 2015 alone, an estimate of 14,000 to 32,400 migrants crossed to the Sudan or further to Libya and Egypt using this border town. With no accurate statistics of migrants who use this route, the migration industry along this route is estimated to be worth 203 million USD annually.

To the argument of many, despite government efforts to tackle irregular migration, different factors and change in context strengthened irregular migration routes that put migrants’ life at risk on a different level. Selling of migrants as merchandize, poaching of migrants, organ trafficking have become a common phenomenon. Following the strict border control, the cost of migration has also increased. This paper thus looks into such changes in migrants’ value and safety brought by state actions and inter-state relations.

**Key words:** *Ethio-Sudan border, mobility, migration industry*

### **Introduction**

In 2015 the Ethiopian government established anti-human trafficking and smuggling taskforce secretariat headed by the Federal Attorney General to deal with the increasing human migration out of the country. Under the 2015 anti-trafficking Proclamation, No.909/2015 a taskforce was established replacing the previously existing national coordinating body, which was not backed by a legislative measure. The taskforce is supported by the secretariat and coordinates concerned government and non-government institutions to strengthen the effort and put an end to human trafficking and smuggling across the country.

At national level, the task force has as its member ministries and other national government structures. Similar taskforces are also established at regional and lower levels. Other initiatives taken by the government such as legal and policy changes on migration have also impacted the movement in and out of the country. Regardless, the youth continued to move out of Ethiopia through the different migration routes for different reasons. One of the destination countries for these migrants has been the Sudan through the western border point of Metema Yohannes. According to United Nations Population Division (UN DESA) 2017 report, there were 71,631 Ethiopian migrants in the Sudan<sup>12</sup>. Earlier report in 2014 by Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) indicated between 18,000 and 100,000 migrants leave to Sudan through Metema each year, the majority taking the irregular route.

For such crossing of the border, migrants are expected to pay a significant amount of money depending on their place of origin. The price required by brokers and other migration 'facilitators' also varies based on the season and any other arrangements made. Better state control of the borders and strict regulations against human trafficking forced migrants to use routes which are more dangerous; with the increased risk brokers take, price for migration also increases. It further put the safety of migrants open to danger. Regulations by the government pushed the migration industry in Metema Yohannes underground; what was then an open business is now done in secrecy. The once used hotels which openly gave shelter to human smugglers and their clients have now changed into private homes used as warehouse. Brokers are heavily armed to protect themselves and migrants, whom they see as merchandize, from security forces and other brokers. Residents are now involved in 'selling' migrants for and among the different broker networks.

Further in the Sudan, police forces and detention centers have tapped into this economic source by requiring 2000 US Dollar (USD) from detained 'illegal' migrants for their deportation. In 2018, however, this has changed following the political change in the

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers are restricted to documented migrants. The actual number, including irregular migrants, is believed to be more than the official statistics indicated.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>

country and other external factors. With the coming to power of the new Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia, the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea and economic turmoil in Sudan, migration to the Sudan has shown decline. Following these changes, other new actors emerged with human smuggling being openly practiced once again. This paper thus attempts to look into how migrants' value and the migration industry adjust to the changing state actions and relations between countries. The data presented in this paper was collected in 2017 (August-September) and 2018 (March), as part of a PhD research project in progress. In order to explore and analyze the issues at hand, interviews were conducted with potential migrants, returnees, ex-brokers, Metema Yohannes residents, IOM officers, and government officials at different levels. Informal interviews were also conducted with intermediary brokers and Sudanese residents in the border town of Gallabat.

### **The Study Area**

Metema Yohannes is, one of the three major migration outlets in Ethiopia<sup>3</sup>, used mainly by migrants to cross into the Sudan<sup>4</sup>. This area is located bordering Sudan at 36°17' E and 12°39' N' under the west Gondar administrative zone of Amhara National Regional State. Until 2015, Metema Yohannes used to be a *kebele*<sup>5</sup> and since then a town administration with its own municipality.

Having a long established historical tie with the corresponding Sudanese border town of Galabat, Metema Yohannes had economic, political, social, and cultural significance in the history of the country. The battle of Metema (9-10 March 1889) between Emperor Yohannes IV and the Dervishes made the area well known among the Ethiopian public as a historical landmark. Metema also served

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<sup>3</sup> The other routes include of the eastern route through Djibouti and Somalia and the southern route through Moyale. Majority of migrants using these routes make their destination at the Middle East and the Republic of South Africa

<sup>4</sup> What is known as the Metema route includes different towns and crossing points in Metema *woreda* and its surrounding *woredas*. From among these routes, Metema Yohannes town has for long being used as the main exit route for many migrants. In this paper, therefore, the author focused on Metema Yohannes town from among the different Metema routes.

<sup>5</sup> *Kebele* is the smallest administrative structure in the Ethiopian government next to *woreda* (district)

historically as an outlet for the long distance trade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and still continue to be used as an inland port for export and import trade from Port Sudan.

Characterized by continuous conflict and at the same time harmonious relations, the two communities on both sides of the border sustained the relationship. Economic relation, based on trade and agriculture, however, comes out strong which allows local residents to cross the border on daily basis. In this cross border interaction, contraband trade and smuggling of firearms is also taken as a livelihood by the youth. Meanwhile, the service sector in hotels and tea shops are dominated by women, particularly migrants who came from other parts of the country. Other internal migrants, mainly men, also come to this town to work on large-scale agricultural plantations located in the different industry zones within the *woreda*. And as a result of the uninterrupted flow and movement of people from and to the town, the total population has been highly irregular and unpredictable. Regardless, according to *woreda* offices, in the year 2015/16, Metema Yohannes had a total population of 25,008 of which 12,657 are male and 12,350 females.

### **The Migration Trend**

The significance of what is called “the western route” to the Sudan among migrants has been notable. The number of Ethiopian migrants using this route to the Sudan and Europe remarkably increased since 2014 regardless of the danger and human right violations experienced en route (Carter and Brigitte 2016).

However, migration through this route to the Sudan and further is not a recent phenomenon. Mass flow of people through Metema Yohannes was observed during the DERG<sup>6</sup> regime because of famine, civil war, political instability and the repressive political rule (Faiz 2013; Hailemichael 2014; Grabska 2016). By 1990, 942,295 Ethiopian migrants lived in the Sudan (UN DESA 2017). Later, after the downfall of the DERG, the repatriation program of Ethiopian political refugees from Sudan to Metema and other nearby *woredas* bordering the Sudan further made the route familiar as a gate out of

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<sup>6</sup> Also known as the Provisional Military Government, DERG came to power in 1974 after the overthrow of the last monarchy, Emperor Haile Selassie I and ruled the country until 1991.

the country. According to Bariagaber (1997), political conflict and war with Eritrea led for the displacement of thousands, particularly Eritreans, who migrated to the Sudan through Metema Yohannes. These migrants of the 1980s and 1990s, according to Grabska (2016), are refugees unlike the present predominantly economic migrants. As a pull factor, Faiz (2013) stated the existence of petroleum in the 1990s and the economic boom afterwards attracted many economic migrants to the Sudan, including Ethiopians.

In addition to the longstanding migration trend, the cultural similarity between Ethiopia and Sudan and geographical proximity encouraged migrants to travel to the Sudan. Others consider the Sudan as a transit to reach Europe or Israel. In 2011, ILO reported the number of Ethiopian migrants travelling to Libya through Sudan to be around 75,000-100,000 per year (Anteneh 2011, 48). In 2014, the number of migrants using the western route was reported to be between 18,000 and 37,000 per year (Frouws 2014). Zeyneba (2017) puts this estimate at 14, 4000 to 32,400 migrants annually in the year 2015.

During the militarist Derg regime (1974-1991), people fled the dictatorial administration and unlawful prosecution to the Sudan and further to Europe and the States (Asnake and Zerihun 2016). Though many expected the route to be of less important to Ethiopian migrants after the downfall of Derg and the return of political refugees from the Sudan, migration through Metema Yohannes to Sudan has shown no decline. In fact, in spite of the strict border regulations set by both governments, Metema Yohannes still continued to be the chosen route for those who aspire to go to the Sudan and further to Europe. Irrespective of the risk migrants face along the route, which in most cases is anticipated and well prepared for by migrants, people continued to use this route. Nonetheless, the trend has shown dramatic change on different levels adjusting itself to government response to tackle irregular migration and political changes in the different states in the region.

For irregular migrants, according to an assessment by IOM (2017), there are mainly four crossing points identified in the *woreda*, which includes of Metema-Galabat, Delelo-Sennar, Lominat-Fogera, and

Tumet-Mendoka. Of these, the main exit routes for migrants have been identified to be Metema Yohannes, Shinfu, Meqa and Kokit.

From interviews held with stranded migrants, Metema Yohannes is preferred by migrants in terms of convenience and ease in crossing the border, with the main road access from Addis Ababa to Khartoum. Direct transportation facility from Addis Ababa to Khartoum, passing through Metema Yohannes town, makes this route easy and navigable.

For irregular migrants with no visa to enter the Sudan, manoeuvring the given freedom to move within the country, they cross the different check-points along the road claiming their constitutional right to free movement within the national boundary and seek the assistance of brokers to cross the international border. But, depending on situations, the relevance of the border in Metema Yohannes town as a free gate for irregular migrants sometimes changes to neighbouring border towns such as Shinfu, Meqa, Kokit and Humera, where border control is relatively loose. These migration outlets are usually preferred by migrants whose destination is Libya or Egypt and travel across the Sudan without getting into Khartoum. The selection of these routes taken by migrants also differs in accordance with the origin of migrants. Faiz (2013) attested many Ethiopians usually use the Metema-Galabat whereas for majority of Ethiopians from the North, the Humera border is more favoured. Further south, the Damazin border is used mainly by Ethiopians from Benishangul Gumuz. Recently, however, mainly after the 2016 and 2017 state of emergency and the crisis in the Sudanese economy in 2018 and 2019, migration flow to the Sudan has declined.

### **The Franchise**

For migrants to leave to the Sudan using the Metema route, there are three main ways, both regular and irregularly. They can use the option of getting a one-month tourist visa from the embassy of Sudan in Addis Ababa and overstay their visa. The other option available is travelling through the desert to cross the border illegally with the assistance of brokers<sup>7</sup>. Used by the few and rarely

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<sup>7</sup> Here the word brokers refer to both human smugglers and traffickers. Though there is a clear theoretical difference between the two categories, in Metema Yohannes it

acknowledged is the third option of getting a *Tasrih*, a temporary residence visa (ID) provided by the Sudanese government for limited reasons. Though this is used to enter the country legally, the purpose of stay and duration is falsified and extended which makes the migrants irregular. And thus, in all the three routes, it can be argued, regardless of their entry, either regular or irregular, all end up as irregular migrants in Sudan. The entries are legal, formal and regular in the two arrangements, tourist visa and *Tasrih*. All the same, the status of the migrants who entered the country becomes irregular after the expiry of the visa and temporary residence. This shows that migrants will opt to violate the regulatory requirements needed to be complied with to get into Sudan.

Though the desert route was common previously, large numbers of migrants leaving the country at present are 'legal' with temporary tourist visas. To process a visa from the Embassy of the Sudan takes only five days and costs around 980 *Birr* (ETB) [36 USD]. Other costs include passport fee (600ETB~22USD) and transportation cost (1400ETB~52USD) when using direct bus from Addis Ababa to Khartoum and around 500ETB~19USD when they use local buses). On a daily basis, forty to ninety Ethiopian migrants enter the Sudan by using temporary tourist visas (Zeyneba 2017). Of the migrants taking this route using visas, the majority are women (ibid). The Metema route, according to Anteneh (2011) and Jamie (2012), served mainly women for the purpose of domestic work. Ethiopian women are also found in the Sudan engaged in selling tea and coffee on the streets and sometimes in commercial sex work (Anteneh 2011; Shewit 2013; Zeyneba 2017).

Another legal option for these migrants is to cross the border with *Tasrih* which costs less but requires of network with Sudanese government officials, employees, police officers, and/or citizens. The *Tasrih* is processed at Immigration office in Galabat, the Sudanese border town. It is issued to Ethiopians who seek to enter the country temporarily for court cases or family reunification. Pastoral border communities who search for their livestock on the other side of the border are also given *Tasrih*. These circumstances

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overlaps making it almost impossible to make distinction between the two. And thus in this paper, shying away from making differentiation, the term broker is used, as referred by migrants, to both traffickers and smugglers.

and opportunities are however explored by migrants to get into the Sudan where the ID enables them to travel freely in the country and seek for a job, though temporarily. The process of getting *Tasrih* can take from a day up to a week and usually involves bribing Sudanese officials. In addition, irregular migration under false documentation disguised as Metema Yohannes resident also exists in the town of Metema Yohannes. According to the cross border agreement, residents of the two border town can cross the border during the day without any documentation required. And so, either by acquiring Metema Yohannes residence ID or changing their dressing to look like residents, migrants cross to Sudan.

For those who lack any kind of documentation, illegal crossing points stretch along the border through the desert of Metema and Sudan. For this purpose, network of brokers is well established in the town and different routes and mechanisms are used to cross the border which makes it difficult to track and control migration flow for concerned government bodies. Looking further into the demography of migrants taking this route, it is reported that many of the migrants are young Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali men looking forward to reach Europe through Libya and Egypt (Kuschminder 2012; Frouws 2014; Strachan 2016). There are also Ethiopians, mainly from Oromiya National Regional State, with their destination being the Sudan. However, the route, cost and network used is different for each type of migrants.

For Ethiopian migrants whose destination is Sudan, visa from the Sudan Embassy is usually processed by migrants themselves, with information provided by brokers. Though arrangements are made prior, the service of brokers is sought after migrants secure their passport and visa. Brokers are then expected to assist migrants into reaching and crossing the border. These brokers require of payment up to 800USD for Ethiopians to enter into the Sudan irregularly through Metema (Frouws 2014; Majidi and Linda 2016). This payment is more expensive for Eritreans and Somalis, who pay from 3,000USD up to 7,000USD, who travel beyond Sudan to Libya (Majidi and Linda 2016; RMMS 2017). The reason is that they are believed to have relatives abroad and are thus able to pay; and so the payment for these migrants is calculated in US dollars.



Though social networks in destination countries is regarded to have sustained migration by providing information and safer route for migrants, the existence of such network and link for Eritrean and Somali migrants make them vulnerable. At the same time, for all migrants, having such networks with a link to a broker guarantees 'relative' safety and protection en route. For instance, they are not put for sale among migrants as this can ruin the reputation of brokers and their business. Besides nationality and existence of social networks, the cost of migration also increases significantly during high seasons of migration, which is from March to June.

Because of the money required, some migrants are reported to stay in Metema Yohannes for a while to earn money and gain knowledge of the route to the Sudan. By staying in Metema Yohannes, they avoid 'full service' of brokers and cross the border themselves after learning about the illicit ways with the help of acquaintances.

They also avoid payments to be made to brokers to come to Metema Yohannes. For such migrants, brokers require from 5000 to 7000ETB ~ 185-259USD to reach to Khartoum. Other payment arrangements are also made where migrants pay brokers after reaching the Sudan or Libya. For women, their salaries are transferred directly to the brokers for the time period agreed. Some are forced to continue working for the broker and make their payment. For migrants travelling to Libya or Egypt to cross to Europe, any kind of payment is expected to be made after arriving at the shores of Libya or Egypt. This enables migrants to extort money from their families or relatives who are forced to pay or otherwise migrants are stranded and abused by brokers until payments are made. Because of such arrangements made with brokers, Ethiopian migrants from different parts of the country fled without the need to secure money for migration.

*No one will be willing to give you money for your travels. They never think you will be brave enough to make the journey. That is why I approached brokers. They do not ask for money up front; it is only when you get to Libya you need to pay. How can I trust and give a broker such amount of money before I travel half way at least. Even if I want to, I do not have any. But when the brokers call*

*back home and threaten your family, then they pay. They have no option* (Ethiopian Somali stranded migrant, Metema Yohannes, March 2018)

This has been given as a reason why migrants prefer the irregular channel though it is expensive than the legal. The 'pay later' arrangement by brokers is more suitable for young migrants who do not have money on their hands to finance their travel legally. Other reason given as to why the legal option to go to Sudan is disregarded by migrants includes lack of knowledge as well as effective marketing of the irregular route by brokers. Leaving out the difficulty and risk involved in taking the desert route, brokers publicize the irregular route as an easy option to take for migrants.

On the other hand, the lack of effort to make the 'legal' route accessible also impacted the decision made by migrants to incline into using the irregular route. Recently, however, there have been growing number of migrants who use the short term tourist visa to get to the Sudan, though the assistance of brokers still continued to be significant. Nonetheless, the cost of migration declined significantly to 7000ETB~259USD for some migrants while others pay the same amount to that of the desert route (800USD) if they lack access to information. Brokers role has also been restricted to facilitating transportation and contact in destination. They no longer accompany migrants to the embassy or immigration. The direct transportation from Addis Ababa to Khartoum also made the work of brokers easy. At the same time, there are also migrants who travel to the Sudan without any assistance from brokers or with the facilitation of relatives or friends.

In all these routes and alternatives, the network of brokers operate in an organized manner, stretching from migrants' place of origin up to Metema and further in the Sudan and Libya/Egypt (Faiz 2013; Barasa and Fernandez 2015; Majidi and Linda 2016, Zeyneba 2017). Besides this chain of local brokers, government officials, police/ border security and customs are involved in issuing *kebele* IDs for migrants, giving alert on security checks and assisting an easy pass through the border, undetected. Migrants from Eritrea and Somaliland are provided with Ethiopian residence *kebele* ID to help them navigate freely in the *woreda* and Metema Yohannes town. In 2018, according to residents of Metema Yohannes, the

involvement of security forces in smuggling migrants has been significant. Their direct involvement as brokers have been indicated in many of the interviews held; either by using government owned cars to get migrants to the border or giving blind eye to those who cross illegally and get some payment in return.

Once out of Ethiopia, the *Raishaida*, pastoral ethnic groups living in Eritrea and Sudan, are known for trafficking and smuggling migrants into the Sudan (Trieber 2013; Majidi and Linda 2016). They are also accused of being involved in organ trafficking of migrants. For those crossing the desert, selling of migrants is also another phenomenon along this route. The Amharic word “*meshet*”, which translates to selling, is used by brokers and Metema Yohannes residents. Such transaction is believed to be mainly among main brokers within or outside of their own chain where they engage in buying and selling of migrants for profit besides the fee migrants pay. The fate of migrants in such cases is decided by the brokers.

This is done without the consent or knowledge of migrants; some are sold to organ traffickers others become slaves and property of the final buyer. In some cases, migrants are expected to work for the brokers while in others they are asked to pay large sum of money to get out of servitude and cross to Europe. Those who are sold to organ traffickers undergo medical check-up for HIV/AIDS once they get into the Sudan. If found negative, they are subsequently transferred to a place unknown to many.

Considered as profitable, a single migrant can cost up to 20,000ETB~740USD when sold to traffickers on the Sudanese side. And as a result, either on the road or from safe houses, poaching of migrants has now become more visible among brokers and intermediaries. Brokers are thus forced these days to protect themselves and migrants from other brokers and security forces by carrying gun and heavy arms or bribing residents called *Sheqaba*.

These are young Metema Yohannes residents who act as intermediaries who either look out for migrants on the move for such purpose of blackmailing and poaching or assist directly in the crossing by taking commission from main brokers. Their role sometimes extends to being informants over security situations. Residents of the town, mainly young men, benefit from the

migration industry in such a way where migrants are considered as merchandize.

### **The State and Migrants**

According to Triulzi (2013), migrants know from the start that the journey through Sudan and Libya would be long and difficult. And thus they prepare themselves for the risks anticipated en route and at destination. Though many finish their journey into the Sudan, others return to Ethiopia, unable to continue travelling because of thirst, hunger, sexual abuse, and language barrier, among other factors. Some also get caught by security forces on either side of the border.

Metema Yohannes has thus become a place where stranded and detained migrants either in Ethiopia or in Sudan are brought to. Emergency migration response center has been set up in 2016 by International Organization for Migration (IOM) to assist Ethiopian migrants and deportees. IOM, however, only provides this service to migrants who are willing to go back home; the service is restricted to assisted return. Those who refuse to do so are kept in the police station for a while and then are let go.

The Metema Yohannes community also financially and emotionally supports victims of irregular migration and stranded migrants who come back from the Sudan. IOM and since 2018, a local NGO called *Timret Lehiwot*, provide temporary shelter and meal to stranded migrants. Further, these organizations provide transportation facility to migrants going back to their home towns. However, such assisted return program is taken by some migrants as a safe and 'free' alternative if their attempt to cross the border fails to succeed. Brokers also target these offices in search of potential migrants and clients.

*Yesterday, I had to bring three Somali migrants from the immigration office. I was all alone and so I took a Bajaj to come to the office [response center] with the migrants. There were brokers who were following us on foot at first and in a Bajaj hoping to get the chance that I will get off at some stop. [...] They knew I was from IOM but did not care. I am alone and they were in groups. They saw*

*where we came and I have seen them once or twice since then doing a recon around our compound. They are waiting for the migrants to leave the compound. If they find them alone by any chance, they will take them back to the border (IOM response center worker, March 2018)*

Woreda department of Labor and Social Affairs in collaboration with IOM, police, immigration and customs office are also working to stop irregular migration and trafficking across the border. Awareness creation and sensitization programs are launched to educate people on the risks migrants go through and thus not to be involved, directly or indirectly, in the trafficking of migrants.

They are also using local community structures to expose brokers and smugglers. To assist legal migrants into the Sudan, in 2014, the government established associations, collectively known as *Shanta Maheber*, of individuals who previously used to be *sheqaba*. The associations nowadays receive migrants at the bus station and take them to a temporary shelter near the border and immigration office. They also facilitate the process at the immigration office on behalf of the migrants. They then help them change currency and take them to the bus which comes from or go to the Sudan.

If needs be, they take them to hotel rooms to stay the night in Metema Yohannes. For this, migrants are required to pay for these services. There is, however, no supervision of these associations by the government.

The *Shanta Maheber* is thought to keep migrants safe and away from brokers who are known for their deceit and luring migrants into the irregular channel. However, if closely observed, poaching of migrants between brokers and these 'associations' who claim to provide services of legal agency has become a common scene in this border town. Within the association, some members are accused of being broker and taking advantage of the interaction they have with people coming into the town at the bus station. The *Shanta Maheber* also ask payments from migrants for the services they provide, mostly overcharging them or asking for the same payment twice. The payments required by the association includes of

assisting with luggage and barrel (300-400ETB~11-15USD) and making a copy of their passport (50ETB~2USD) for immigration<sup>8</sup>.

The associations further get income by exchanging currency for migrants. Though by law, the only authority to exchange foreign currency is the Bank, these associations are engaged in such line of work with the exchange rates set by the association itself. Members of the associations, according to residents, have become wealthy from the money they get from migrants. In fact, it has been taken as one of the major job opportunities in the town for the youth.

Such associations rely upon the flow of migrants crossing the border into the Sudan and coming back to Ethiopia throughout the year. In 2017, 77 to 120 legal migrants were believed to have crossed the border per day. Irregular migrants who use the desert route are also large in number, though the statistics is unknown. Recently, however, given the economic turmoil and inflation in the Sudan, the number of legal migrants who cross the border into Sudan has drastically decreased. In turn, Ethiopian returnees coming from the Sudan has increased in the past five months. Large number of Eritrean refugees from Sudan coming into Metema Yohannes town has also become new scenery since the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea was struck on 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2018.

*“We have lost our business, thanks to PM Dr Abiy. They used to cost more than 20,000ETB [~720USD] before. Now they are roaming around freely in the town. We used to joke that we sold migrants when there is money in our hands. Now even the joke has no punch line”* said one of the residents in Metema Yohannes implying to Eritrean refugees who used to cross the border to the Sudan illegally through this border town. With the recent peace deal and the following reopening of the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, together with the economic crisis in the Sudan, large flow of Eritrean refugees has been observed crossing the border back to Ethiopia. For many, the truce between the two countries affected the economy of Metema Yohannes at different levels. According to

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<sup>8</sup> According to the tariffs set by the local government, they can only ask for three to five USD (80-150 ETB) for luggage and barrels. Though not allowed by law, migrants are expected to pay twice when loading and reloading on the bus at Immigration and Customs. The expense for a single copy of passport is one ETB ~ 0.03USD.

brokers, they lost a lucrative business and as they call it a '*good merchandise*'. Such reference of refugees as merchandise and goods also extends to Ethiopian and Somali migrants who use this border town as a transit to the Sudan and further to Europe through Libya and Egypt. However, this connotation of merchandize does not imply migrants whose destination is Sudan.

Further, in addition to Ethiopia-Eritrea relations, state relation between the Sudan and Ethiopia at different times has also affected and continues to affect the migration industry and the migratory route in Metema Yohannes. During the administration of the DERG, the longstanding historical relation between Ethiopia and the Sudan has been characterized by rivalry and animosity. Ideological difference with the Socialist DERG and support of Guerrilla fights on both sides of the border affected the relation between the two countries and as a result restricted movement and interaction across the border (Doop 2013; Regassa 2007; Young 2003).

Regardless, the irregular migration route was common for Ethiopians and Eritreans who sought refuge in the Sudan. Political repression and persecution by the militarist regime forced many Ethiopians to flee the country to the Sudan using the Metema route. The Sudanese government on the other hand provided support and opened its borders to these refugees.

With the coming to power of Ethiopian People Republic Democratic Front (EPRDF), with the support of Sudanese government, the relation was once again restored in 1998, forming strong economic and political alliance (Assal 2007). As a sign of 'friendship' between the two countries, free movement across the border was allowed which extends few kilometres into both countries. Access to visa was eased and people living on both sides of the border were considered to be good neighbours of close cultural identity.

As Assal (2007:12) noted, "since 1999, the Sudanese government eased restrictions on Ethiopians in the Sudan and made it easy for Ethiopians to enter the country. The new arrival of mainly economic migrants gets to enjoy the loose border control and such freedom of movement within the Sudan. Nonetheless, to avoid detention and deportation, irregular Ethiopian migrants provide bribe to security forces en route and in Khartoum. Following the rise of economic migrants, the public perception of all Ethiopian

migrants as 'illegal' among Sudanese population also put pressure on migrants, both regular and irregular, to keep low and avoid confrontations with security forces.

Though the Ethiopian government is implementing strong border control to put an end to human trafficking, the lack of or loose border control on the other side of the border made it difficult to stop irregular movement. This also opened opportunity for brokers and organ traffickers in Sudan. In fact, the discussion of 'selling' migrants starts on the other side of the Ethiopian border.

Recent talks on cross-border coordination mechanisms and border management between the two countries in relation to seasonal migrants might result in a new trend of migration in Metema *woreda*. Internal economic and political problems in the Sudan, nonetheless, were significant in decreasing irregular economic migration to the Sudan. And thus, for many migrants coming to Metema Yohannes, Sudan is no longer a destination country but rather a transit for further migration to Europe.

## **Conclusion**

By briefly showing the engines of migration and the contexts which define the migration industry at border crossing points such as Metema Yohannes town, this article focused on empirical developments in the change of migration industry along the Ethiopia-Sudan border. The arguments in this article put forward that migration industry is influenced by broader social and political considerations besides the macro-economy. It argues regardless of state efforts to tackle irregular migration including migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, migration industry still carried on along the Metema route. With this, also lies the safety of the individual migrants which might be put into danger while using the irregular route.

Many in the migration industry scholarship referred the phenomena as commerce, business, industry, or entrepreneurship. In all, a common understanding that underlies is the framework to look into migration phenomenon as economic activity which constitutes dealings at different levels, and directions among different actors, including the state.



The case in Metema Yohannes shows that enterprises, including brokers and state infrastructures, move between formality and informality depending on the context. The migration trend also might take on forms which are not anticipated by government actions.

In the increasing migration industry, both in scale and scope, better transportation and communication facilities and social networks at destination make movement across the border easy and accessible. These put as a challenge, the state needs to build better migration management along the borders and promote legal channels. In such a way, the state can become part of the industry and benefit from it while providing protection for its citizens.

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