

Gender, mobility and livelihoods in an ethiopian pre-revolutionary town¹

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Abstract:

This paper explores the interrelationship between gender, ethnicity, migration/mobility and livelihood opportunities in the urban area of Shashemene in Southern Ethiopia in the period immediately prior to the end of the Ethiopian Empire in 1974. The major finding is that gender is a determining social factor in the mobility and livelihood opportunities of individuals. A striking result from the study is that livelihood alternatives were “urban” to a relatively small extent. Most persons found a living in activities that are to be found in rural as well as in urban areas. For men, ethnicity provides a mediating factor whereas the mobility and livelihood patterns for women are less differentiated by ethnic identity. Individual mobility is characterised both by urban-urban and rural-urban movements. In a study carried out in 1973, women had spent less number of years migrating when they arrived at Shashemene compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, the average number of new places, where they resided for at least one year, was fewer for women than for men. Our results also indicate differences in the migration/mobility rates of women and men across ages. Women’s migration seems to drop abruptly after the age 25. In general, the mobile period of life was shorter for women than for men.

Key-words:

Migration. Gender. Ethnicity. Rural area. Urban area. Ethiopia.

Resumo:

Este artigo explora as inter-relações entre gênero, etnia, migração / mobilidades e oportunidades de subsistência na área urbana de Shashemene no sul da Etiópia, logo no período anterior ao fim do Império da Etiópia, em 1974. A principal constatação é que o gênero é um fator social determinante para a mobilidade e oportunidades de subsistência dos indivíduos. Um resultado surpreendente do estudo é que as alternativas de sobrevivência foram, em grau relativamente pequeno, “urbanas”. A maioria das pessoas que se encontravam em atividades estavam na zona rural, bem como em áreas urbanas. Para os homens, a etnia representa

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1. 1973 A.D

um fator de mediação, enquanto os padrões de mobilidade e meios de subsistência para as mulheres são menos diferenciados pela identidade étnica. A mobilidade individual é caracterizada tanto por movimentos "urbano-urbano" e "rural-urbano". Em um estudo realizado em 1973, constatou-se que as mulheres passaram um menor número de anos migrando quando chegaram em Shashemene em comparação aos seus homólogos masculinos. Da mesma forma, o número médio de novos lugares onde residiram durante pelo menos um ano, foi menor para as mulheres. Nossos resultados também indicam diferenças entre as taxas de homens e mulheres em todas as idades de migração / mobilidade. A migração das mulheres parece cair abruptamente depois dos 25 anos de idade. Em geral, seu período móvel de vida é mais curto do que para os homens.

— Palavras-chave:

Migração. Gênero. Etnia. Meio rural. Meio urbano. Etiópia.

Ethiopian urbanization in an African context

Ethiopia is situated on the Horn of Africa, north-east on the continent. Neighbouring countries are Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, the Somalias, and Kenya. Ethiopia is the second most populous country on the African continent with an estimated 84 million inhabitants. It is also one of the least urbanized, with roughly 16% of the population living in agglomerations with more than 2,000 inhabitants (2010). The sub-Saharan average is 40% (2010).

Ethiopian history is unique in Africa. The area covered by present day Ethiopia was never colonized by European powers. The modern state was nevertheless created by conquest when the kingdom of original Abyssinia in the north gradually extended its political dominance over polities to the south and east. This origin of the Ethiopian state explains its plural character, encompassing peoples speaking many different languages. The formation of the Ethiopian empire was completed at the end of the 19th century, at the same time as the European colonial empires were consolidated.²

Although there were towns and cities in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa, the urban structure of African countries as we know it today was by and large a creation by processes set in motion during colonial times. In Ethiopia, urbanization proceeded in a different fashion. Ethiopia, in historical times known as Abyssinia, has a known history of a millennium or more. In ancient times there were important urban centres but during the formation of the modern state urban

2. MARKAKIS, J. *Ethiopia: The last two frontiers*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2011, p.89-107.

development was late and slow.³ The contemporary capital, Addis Abeba, was founded in 1886. Other towns grew slowly during the following decades.

Studying Shashemene

In 1972-73 one of the authors, Bjerén, collected data for a study of migration to and from the town of Shashemene, 250 km south of Ethiopia's capital Addis Abeba. 40 years after the data were collected the Shashemene study provides a series of historical snapshots of livelihood structures and gendered rural-urban and urban-urban migration in one urban area during the late times of imperial Ethiopia. Until the eruption of the revolution in 1974, Ethiopia was governed as an Imperial state, headed by Haile Selassie. In 1974 nearly 90% of the population was dependent on agriculture and living in rural areas. As opposed to the period after the revolution, the pre-revolution period had a *relatively* calm political atmosphere and little exposure to global cultural and economic processes.

During the period of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1974-1991), Ethiopia experienced turbulent political processes, prolonged civil war, forced settlement and massive mobilization of people for government projects such as collective farming, cooperatives, military and other services. The revolution brought land reforms and tenure changes that affected every household in the country. Following the defeat of the so-called socialist government in 1991, Ethiopia returned to civilian rule but there was no general restoration to the situation existing pre-1974.

After the fall of the military regime in 1991, an attempt to resolve the tensions between the major ethnic polities was made by creating a new federal structure where nine ethnically defined regions and two self-governing administrations were set up to meet demands for autonomy by the constituent peoples of Ethiopia. This entity constitutes The Federal Republic of Ethiopia. The restructuring has had consequent impact on migration among the various ethnic groups in the nation. Other recent processes (such as the spread of the AIDS pandemic and new opportunities to emigrate from the country) have also affected migration.

In recent literature, the dramatic changes outlined above are given

3. GAMST, F. C. Peasantries and elites without urbanism: The civilization of Ethiopia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12(04), 372-392, 1970; HORVATH, R. J. The wandering capitals of Ethiopia. *The Journal of African History*, 10(2), pp. 205-219, 1969.

as the reason why Ethiopia now is identified as one of the countries in Africa with the highest rates of internal migration and population redistribution. However, long before the revolution Ethiopia showed high rates of internal migration, primarily directed *between* rural areas and *between* urban areas. Poor population statistics and erroneous assumptions about migratory dynamics give few possibilities to make comparisons over time. It is therefore impossible to assess the magnitude of recent migration streams in relation to the migration processes that were going on in the decades before 1974. There is a risk of overemphasizing migration caused by spectacular events as compared to migration processes that are fuelled by the dynamics of the social structure itself and by historical events preceding the most recent dramas. In our current research project, we make use of the opportunity presented by the systematic collection of migration data from one town in 1972-73 to compare migration processes then and later and to assess the effect on migration of the historical events of the last decades. This article is part of a base-line study of livelihoods, gender and migration in the town of Shashemene based on data from 1965, 1970 and 1973. We have available comparative data from 1994, 2007 and 2008 to do an in-depth study the evolution of migration patterns around Shashemene. Comparison between the data sets from different points in time will provide a unique opportunity to see how life – and therefore mobility – has changed during the last three decades. Here we chose to focus on what is now history.

The case of Shashemene is unique. But the dynamics generating migration is not. What goes on in Shashemene can therefore give vital insights into migration processes elsewhere.

Gender, livelihoods, and migration

It is only during the last few decades that the migration of women has been given serious attention. The reason for this fatal neglect has been thoroughly discussed by now.⁴ Unfortunately, the field of “women and migration” has developed separately from the field of “general” (that is gender insensitive) migration studies. This situation is scientifically untenable, first because female migration overall is as large in volume as male migration, and second because the migration behaviour of the two genders are different but interrelated. Migration is a gendered process stemming from social processes that are themselves

4. BJERÉN, G. Migration and reproduction. In T. Hammar et al. (eds.). *International migration, immobility and Development. Multidisciplinary perspective*. London: Berg Publishers, 1997.

gendered. The findings from the early Shashemene study were that migration is a highly dependent process. Other social processes have migration as a consequence. The most important of these "other" social processes were found to be the demands made by different ways of making a living and the demands made by the system of social relations underpinning the reproductive processes.

Urban livelihoods

In 1973 Ethiopia was a country with a small proportion of the population living in towns. Accepting the official statistical definition of a town as being a place with more than 2,000 inhabitants (and contiguous housing and at least one hotel) 7% lived in towns in 1970.⁵ The town of Shashemene was chosen for study because of its rapid growth despite its lack of obvious migrant attractions, such as industries, plantations, development projects. In 1965, 25% of the adult population had lived in the town less than 5 years. The town included 8,000 inhabitants; in 1970 this number had increased to 12,000.⁶

Markakis, who analyzed the data from the early urban surveys carried out in Ethiopia, divided the Ethiopian towns, into two broad categories, namely, those exceeding 5,000 in population and those with less than 5,000 inhabitants. The towns in the first category he considered as having an "urban character" with at least the beginning of an economy not directly based on agriculture, good communications with the capital in the form of all-weather roads and often airfields, and an array of government activities, such as schools above primary level, field stations for various state institutions and a flourishing commercial life.⁷ However, apart from small-scale manufacturing of the "cottage" type, only a few of these towns had any industrial basis and these were primarily the towns along parts of the Addis Abeba-Djibouti railroad.

By Markakis analysis, Shashemene fell in the category of towns having an "urban character". However, when the 1973 urban survey was made in Shashemene it was found that 40% of the respondents with

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5. CSO. Results of urban survey, 2nd round, part .Central Statistical Office of the Imperial Ethiopian Government, 1972.
 6. CSO. Survey of major towns in ethiopia. (Statistical Report No. Statistical Bulletin 1). Addis Abeba: Central Statistical Office of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, 1968; CSO. Results of urban survey, 2nd round, part .Central Statistical Office of the Imperial Ethiopian Government, 1972.
 7. MARKAKIS, J. Ethiopia : Anatomy of a traditional polity. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, p.164.

a stated occupation characterized themselves as merchants/traders (20%) or farmers (19%), two occupations that often are combined. 80% of the livelihoods were not exclusively urban in character.

Looking at the 1970 CSO sample which was much larger, and limiting ourselves to heads of household, we can make the following division into a) “interstitial occupations” – that link rural and urban areas,⁸ b) “traditional urban occupations” – that are typical of market towns,⁹ and c) “other urban” that point towards a more diversified economy.¹⁰ In the 1970 sample it was found that the “interstitial occupations” accounted for 60% of all heads of household with stated occupations, the “traditional urban” was 10% and the “other urban” 30%. The total number of respondents was then 927. Reported here were *all* heads of households, men as well as women. But the opportunities available to women and men were not the same.

Livelihoods and gender

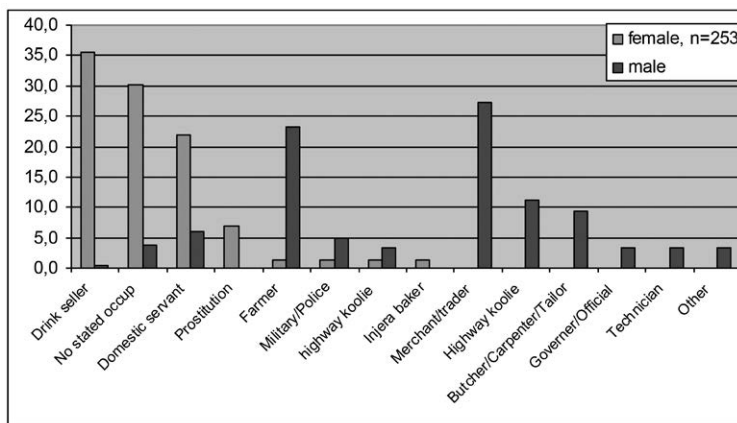


FIGURE 1. Gender segregation of livelihood opportunities, % of each gender (1965, CSO)

Source: Survey of major towns in Ethiopia. (Statistical Report No. Statistical Bulletin 1). Addis Abeba: Central Statistical Office of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, 1968.

8. Such as trader, farmer, petty trader and daily labourer.
9. Such as police/military, black-smith, weaver, bar-and shop-owner, prostitute, broker, tailor and gold-smith.
10. Such as driver, clerk and teacher, mechanic, carpenter and miscellaneous.

The results show that the type of livelihood was strongly related to gender. As Figure 1 indicates, men participated in almost all types of livelihood except sex work (prostitution) and injera baking (Ethiopian traditional pan cake). On the other hand, there were more than nine sectors that were exclusively men's sectors. The diversity of livelihoods of women was limited as compared to men.

This can be interpreted as women having smaller range of opportunities in "direct" livelihoods. Figure 1 also indicates that most of the individuals who did not state any occupation consisted of women.

The level of division of gendered livelihood opportunity across formal and informal economy was another topic. About 90% of the livelihoods activities carried out by women were preparing/selling local drinks, household service or prostitution whereas the participation of men in these activities was only about 10%.¹¹ These activities were categorically in the informal sector of the economy. The sectors represent the highest concentration of simple labour and none of the sectors involve any labour that has formal skill. Generally, women who work outside their homes find work in unskilled occupations. Our results indicate that women's opportunities were concentrated on low-status occupations, poor working conditions and low earnings. In contrast to the women's sector, men dominated in regular or visible sectors, such as agriculture and trade. Qualitatively, these sectors have assets, such as natural (land), farming assets, and financial assets. These qualities give those who own them a relatively better livelihood than those who only depend on their labour, such as domestic servants. However, earnings in the male dominated occupations varied widely. Also among men work in the informal economy dominated *but* all persons involved with the formal economy were men.

One can say that women's livelihoods to a large extent were "indirect", namely through their relations with men, either as housewives or catering to men's needs in other fashions. If we move on to the 1973 sample, where data on all heads households (women and men) and wives were collected we find that none of the current wives stated an occupation. However, if we look at women above 30 years of age, the currently married as well as the currently single or divorced often had lived in several unions with men. Many might have had a period between unions when they found their living in the typically female occupations. Lakech Diresse in 1973 characterized the nature of "mar-

11. In the 1965 sample, all individuals with a stated occupation were included, which means that we here find many ways of making a living that would not be compatible with being either a head of household or wife. This is particularly true for domestic servants who on the whole tend to be very young.

riage” in urban Ethiopia as being on a sliding scale from indissoluble church marriages at one end to prostitution (“marriage by hour”)¹² at the other. Her point was that all types of unions, regardless of their formal status, have a high economic content. She later presented a typology of unions based on the number of partners, type of contract, sanctions, domestic arrangement, duration and type of transaction.¹³ The type of transaction goes from “sexual and domestic services in return for a living, home, and status” to “sexual services for pay” with six intermediate types.

Livelihoods and migration

For long time, migration surveys divided responses to the question “Why did you move” into economic and non-economic answers. Men would then have economic reasons, since adult men often replied in terms of search for jobs, and women would have non-economic reasons, since their replies most often related to marriage or divorce. To our mind, the division into economic/non-economic causes make little sense. A supposedly economic move could be generated by the need to fulfil social obligations.¹⁴ A supposedly non-economic move could be generated by an attempt to improve economically through a better marriage. In addition, there are all the instances when the decision to move is made by someone else, for children but also for first-time brides and formal employees (both public and private). The re-distribution of children at times of divorce or economic need can be seen both in terms of fulfilling kinship obligations and in terms of distributing economic burdens between related households.

Different forms of livelihood have different relations to geographic mobility. If we look closely at the occupations represented in Shashemene, and in other urban areas in Ethiopia, it appears that for many, geographical mobility is inherent in the practice of the occupation itself. It is easy to perceive that a pastoral nomad has to be on

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12. LAKECH, Diresse. Survival techniques of female migrants in ethiopian urban centres. Proceedings of Third International Conference of Africanists, Addis Abeba, December 9-19, 1973.
 13. LAKECH, Diresse. The socio-economic position of women in AddisAbeba: The case of prostitution. Unpublished PhD, Boston University, Boston, 1978. Modified in BJERÉN, G. Migration to Shashemene. ethnicity, gender, and occupation in urban Ethiopia. Uppsala: Nordic Institute of African Studies, 1985, p. 158.
 14. The classic discussion of this instance is MITCHELL, C. J. Structural plurality, urbanization, and labour circulation in southern Rhodesia. In J. A. Jackson (Ed.), Migration (pp. 156-180). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

the move to survive in his economic activity; it may be less easy to see that the same holds true for traders, and more difficult still to see that it is also so for soldiers, teachers, craftsmen, prostitutes, bureaucrats and others.

In some instances the relation between the practice of an occupation and mobility may be similar to commuting (short-distance trader for instance). In other, the readiness to move is a prerequisite for the occupation (military, teachers). In other instances yet, the extreme uncertainty of the livelihood and the poverty of the person make people move easily at the promise of better opportunities elsewhere. Most of the residents in a town like Shashemene lived near to subsistence level in the beginning of the 1970's. All they owned could easily be packed in a wooden or tin box and loaded on a bus. Their one-room dwellings were rented and identical ones could be found in other towns. The chance of a better living somewhere else would induce a move. With little or nothing to lose, information about opportunities imparted by an incidental acquaintance could easily bring about the move for someone who was already afloat in the urban stream.

Since we have already stated that the livelihood opportunities were segregated by gender it follows from the above that men and women would have different migration patterns as the occupations and survival strategies open to them entailed different mobility careers.

We measured mobility paths by looking at 1) the number of years individuals spent between leaving their place of origin and arriving at Shashemene, and 2) the number of moves they made from one place to another (after staying at least one year). Table 2 shows that all in-moving heads of households and wives in the 1973 sample had spent 5,8 years on average in places outside their place of origin before their arrival at Shashemene. These patterns were, as could be expected, different for women and men. Women spent less time between leaving their birth-place and arriving in Shashemene - 4.4 years as compared to 7,3 years for men. Similarly, the number of moves was fewer for women than for men (Table 1).

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number of Years (Mean)</i>	<i>Number of moves (Mean)</i>
Male, n=102	7	2,3
Female, n=116	4	1,7
Total Mean, N=218	6	2

TABLE 1. *Number of years and places between leaving place of origin and arrival at Shashemane (heads of households and wives, 1973)*

Despite such differences, the number of women migrants was as high as that of men migrants. Of all heads of households and wives, 90% were born outside Shashemene.

Age of the migrant at the time leaving their place of origin was also an important dimension that showed differences between men and women. As Figure 2 shows, while the distribution for male assumes a normal distribution curve, the distribution for women is skewed to the left. This shows that women tend to migrate from their original place when they are younger than the men who leave. What is also interesting to note is that the number of women migrant seems to abruptly fall after the age of 25. This is related to the common rule of patrilocal residence at first marriage union combined with young ages at first marriage, meaning that young women are moved to stay with their husbands or their in-laws at marriage. There may also be a gender bias towards sending young children away to live with relatives and patrons. This also points to the fact that the absolute majority of first moves were initiated by someone other than the migrant her/himself.

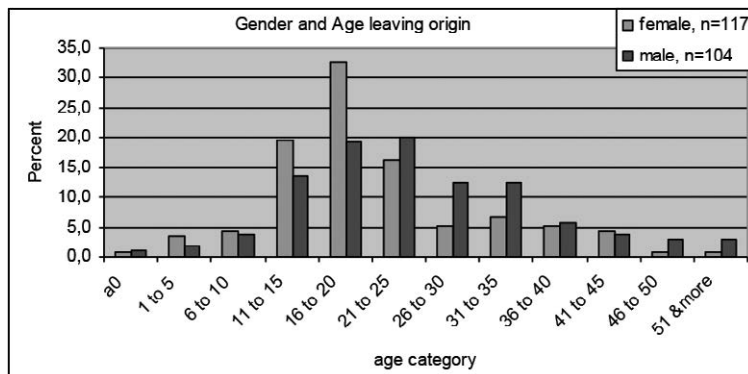


FIGURE 2. Relationship between sex and age at leaving place of origin for migration. Heads of households and wives, Shashemene 1973.

Ethnicity

To complicate matters further, the opportunity structure of southern Ethiopian towns such as Shashemene was segregated along ethnic as well as gender lines. In 1973, Shashemene was a multi-ethnic town with four major groups making up about 85% of the population (Amhara 40%, Oromo 10%, Gurage 20% Welayita 15%). Nearly 90% claimed to belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and 10%

said they were Muslim. In contrast, the surrounding countryside was populated by a Muslim, Oromo population.

On superficial examination there was little to distinguish individuals belonging to one ethnic category from those belonging to another. People on the same socio-economic level led basically similar lives, apart from differences in language spoken among co-ethnics and in food preferences. On a group level, however, differences stemming from the varied political histories of the groups in Shashemene, particularly their different standing in relation to the Ethiopian State, meant that the groups had quite different characteristics. The opportunity structure was ethnically skewed with Amhara persons holding the majority of positions in the formal sector at one end and the Welaiyta the “survival” positions at the other end. This correlated with the Amhara having moved more than once before coming to Shashemene while the Welaiyta, on the other hand, were nearly all direct migrants to Shashemene from their rural area. Even more mobile than the top status group were the traders who mainly were Gurage, Oromo, Tigray, Kembata and Arabs. This was true for men.

For women, the situation was different. Since there was little inter-marriage between ethnic groups, married women shared the living conditions of their co-ethnic husbands. But there was a distinct difference in the ratio between ‘independent women’ (those with a stated occupation) and housewives in the different ethnic groups. Among the Amhara this ratio was 0,72 among the Gurage 0,25, Welaiyta 0,33 and Oromo 0,25. Does this mean that Amhara women were on their own three times as often as the others? No. Examining marriage data we find that the proportion divorced or married twice or more was very similar among women from the different groups. We rather think that Amhara women were able to dominate the prostitution and drink-selling trades in Shashemene through their belonging to a high-status ethnic group. The difference between the Amhara and the others, then, lies probably not in Amhara women divorcing and re-marrying more frequently than the others, but in an ability to stay divorced for longer periods of time than the others and this ability is clearly related to their dominance in the economic niches of prostitution and beer trading. As we can conclude from our previous analyses of gender, migration and age, the older independent women may be more likely to move between husbands than between geographic locations.

Revisiting migration to Shashemene

The overthrow of the Imperial regime was followed by a period of urban decline caused among other reasons by the provisions of the land reform and the severe limitations imposed on inter-regional and inter-urban trade.¹⁵ After 1991, urban growth has picked up speed. Shashemene has more than tripled its population. In 1970, it was estimated to be 15,000 persons and the CSA estimate of 1994 puts the number at 52,000. The latest census in 2007 doubled this number again: 104,000 inhabitants. The town still grows and in a comparative perspective there are any numbers of questions to ask. This is the task of our current research project: *Changing Ethiopia: Urban livelihood, gender, and ethnicity in Shashemene after 35 years. A case study.*

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Map

Ethiopia in Africa

Source: http://www.worldofcultures.org/1024/africa/Ethiopia/c_ethiopia.htm, downloaded October 2012.

Africa



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