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MIGRATION WITHIN THE HORN OF AFRICA

New trends

Alice Corbet and Jan Záhorský

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Edited by Jean-Nicolas Bach, Jon Abbink, Stéphane Ancel, Azza Ahmed Abdel Aziz, Emanuele Fantini, Patrick Ferras, Hassan Mwakimako, Clélie Nallet, Aleksí Ylönen, Jan Záhorský ; 2022, London : Routledge, pages 547 – 556. DOI: 10.4324/9780429426957-51

Introduction

The Horn of Africa is one of the most fragile and vulnerable regions in Africa, if not in the whole world. All countries involved have had experience with some form of civil war, internal political turbulences, cross-border violence, weak institutions, economic decline, and subsequent waves of migration. Therefore, it is not surprising that the region has become one of the hot spots for migration in the eyes of the European Union and other relevant actors and organizations. However, due to both internal changes and international and global pressures, we can observe new trends in migration within the Horn of Africa.

Mobility as a concept in the Western media is almost automatically associated with the migration of people from the Middle East and Africa to Europe, in what is usually labeled as the ‘migration crisis’. However, mobility is a much broader and multi-dimensional phenomenon, one that is as old as the history of mankind. First of all, mobility inside Africa by far exceeds movement of people from Africa to Europe. Second, mobility needs to be also seen in a broader historical perspective as a phenomenon that changes, transforms, and evolves depending on both internal and external contexts.

The effects of mobility can be framed as being twofold. First, mobility is caused by multiple

factors: the environment, labor opportunities, political reasons, the search for education opportunities, family reconciliation, etc. Second, the mobility of people reshapes the whole society and even cross-border relations between states and administrative regions / units. Even if the latter is twofold because of the way in which states and institutions affect societies has an obvious impact on mobility as well, for instance, due to economic policies, oppression, etc. Indeed, some states try to limit migration, either by offering alternative solutions to populations, especially economic ones, or by preventing displacement, often in an authoritarian and policed manner.

The twofold direction of mobility (the in-flow and out-flow of goods, knowledge, people, and information) can also be studied from a variety of other perspectives, being closely linked to the issue of sustainable development with its ecological, social, and economic aspects,¹ remittances,² governance,³ adaptive strategies,⁴ restricted knowledge and maneuvers,⁵ the impact of modernization and technology on the societies being discussed.⁶ This chapter will illustrate how the main nexus of migration routes from the Horn of Africa manifest in three ways: (1) migration from the Horn of Africa to Europe via Libya and the Mediterranean; (2) migration to the Middle East; (3) and migration within the Horn of Africa. These modes of migration cannot be analyzed separately but rather as a complex network, in which one does not exclude others. People have many strategies and many different push factors that may change their decision to use one or the other route.⁷

Furthermore, this chapter presents and analyzes migration trends and patterns within and from the Horn of Africa and their evolving character since the end of the Cold War. The Cold War era posed a great challenge to all states within the Horn of Africa due to numerous conflicts, environmental challenges, famines, and the existence of authoritarian regimes in Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. According to numerous indexes,⁸ these Horn of Africa states are among the poorest countries in the world.⁹

The main interlinking issues that are closely connected with mobility and globalization are the processes of cross-border cooperation, urbanization, and the search for education and more specifically higher education. Generally, higher education institutions have a universal appeal, and globalization, primarily via technology, has made the transfer and mobility of knowledge and information easier. Urban spaces are important to figure out the trends as they can be seen either as **islands of privilege or as concentrations of massive deprivation.**¹⁰ Big cities, for example, Khartoum, Addis Ababa, and Nairobi, certainly have better access to wealth and the advantages of globalization, such as the international labor market, technologies, and infrastructure. However, at the same time, the urban poor live in extremely miserable conditions in overcrowded shanty towns or precarious districts with high prices charged for basic commodities such as food and housing.¹¹ Nonetheless, these trends are changing due to the connections that are being established between

local institutional responses and global opportunities. When it comes to cross-border connectivity, we can see historically changing borders (more than in any other region in Africa of a comparable size) and different patterns of cooperation or hostility. As we focus here on regional (Horn of Africa) border connections, Ethiopia serves as a good example, since it shares borders with all other states within the wider Horn of Africa region. Other countries of origin of refugees, whether as a result of civil wars or droughts evolving in intensity over time, are Somalia, Southern Sudan and Darfur, Eritrea, making the Horn of Africa an area of restricted mobility. Despite the official closure of borders by governmental institutions, such as between Eritrea and Ethiopia, local-level cross-border connectivity continues uninterrupted, as can be seen in the constant migration of people from Eritrea to Ethiopia and back.¹²

The post-Cold War period also witnessed the enormous rise of new opportunities for workers from the region, who in large numbers began to seek out job opportunities in the rich Gulf States, Europe, Asia, and the United States.¹³ Different types of migration can evolve according to the political situation and the presence of economic opportunities: seasonal (related to the Sudanese ‘gold rush’, for example, or Ethiopian farmers working in Eastern Sudan around Gedareff), the numerous types of economic and political migration that press Ethiopians and Eritreans to come and work in Sudan, or again the thousands of female Ethiopian workers who leave to take up employment in the Gulf States¹⁴ – calling to mind the incredible airlift set up by the Saudi authorities in 2013 to return some 200,000 undocumented Ethiopian workers to Ethiopia within a matter of weeks.¹⁵

On the issue of return, we can observe another dimension of the ‘reshaping’ of the Horn of Africa because, most often, the emphasis has been placed on mobility as a one-way process that starts at one point and ends at another. But the idea of mobility, in a very broad sense,

i.e. the circulation of people or knowledge, information, images, ideas, as well as capital and resources, has not been researched extensively. We focus on mobility as a two-sided process that leads to losses and at the same time to gains. In doing so, we remember that mobility trajectories are not always linear: the journey can stop at some point, in order to work and get money, or if plans change with a shelter, a wedding, etc. Thus, the migratory project an itinerary can change or be modified along the road and mobility is always an undetermined route. The movement of people is closely related to education and research exchange, i.e. student and academic mobility. Historically, a number of people leaving a region (and in some cases returning home) occurred not only due to the internal socio-political issues in those particular countries, but also due to the changing nature of international affairs, trends in globalization, and shifting centers of power and education. While before 1991 large numbers of students from Ethiopia went to study in the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and other countries of the socialist bloc and were coming back as

agents of change,¹⁶ in the last two decades, an obvious shift has been visible due to the **rise of India and China**

as the two major powers cooperating with all of the regional states.¹⁷

The flow of students from the region to India and China, as well as their return, has contributed not only to a shifting socio-economic landscape but also to new perspectives on development, as well as the **circulation of new forms of knowledge** that is contributing to the reshaping of the region in general, although with varied levels of intensity in the studied countries. Moreover, the post-Cold War era has opened up new opportunities for foreign academics, including those from India, who have until recently been a dominant force in most of the countries in the Horn of Africa.¹⁸ Intellectual migration, such as students coming from around the world who come to study Islamic teachings at the International University of Africa in Khartoum, is surely another dimension that requires attention.¹⁹

Complex networks of migration and their dynamics

During the Cold War (primarily since the 1950s to 1991), thousands of people left the Horn of Africa due to ongoing civil wars and environmental disasters. The Ethiopian community in the United States was growing and so was the Somali community in Great Britain. After the end of the Cold War, with the collapse of Somalia and hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia, waves of migrants continued to leave the region but in a more diversified way, finding new opportunities not only in Europe and North America, but also in the Middle East, primarily Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the UAE, and Qatar.²⁰

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Report on Migration from 2017, certain stereotypes persist in regard to African migration. In Europe, the ‘migration crisis’ is presented as stemming from Africa and is usually negatively depicted as an ‘exodus’ of millions of people.²¹ In reality, most Africans move within the continent, most Africans move for work, study, and family, and most of the Africans living in Western countries are not part of the most economically underprivileged in their societies of origin. Moreover, unauthorized migration forms a minority and only a small part of it can be classified as ‘trafficking’.²²

Three main reasons behind migration and/or displacement of people in the region are the following: (1) ongoing civil conflict in Somalia that since 1991 displaced or forced to leave the country millions of people either to neighboring countries, or to the Gulf States and Europe; (2) civil war in South Sudan since the end of 2013, that caused an enormous humanitarian crisis with more than a million

people moving in bordering countries (either to Uganda, or Sudan, Ethiopia, or Kenya); (3) political crisis in Eritrea, which has forced hundreds of thousands of people to leave the country in search of better socio-economic conditions and to escape the authoritarian regime and compulsory military service, and are going either to neighboring Ethiopia and Sudan or to Southern Africa and Europe.²³

Ultimately, the Gulf States as well as the European Union (particularly Germany and Sweden) became the main targets for migration. Therefore, the European Union decided to intervene especially in regard to smuggling²⁴ or trafficking²⁵ activities which became an enormous business for many local trading networks in last two decades. This is particularly true in relation to the route leading through northeastern Sudan to Libya and Egypt where people become easy victims of gangs of traffickers.²⁶ As smuggling remains the main challenge to the migration policies, the EU initiated training law enforcement on how to handle migrant smuggling and trafficking.

The EU Trust Fund for Africa covers nine countries which are included in the Horn of Africa: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. These initiatives include the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative under the Khartoum Process (2014),²⁷ which deals with both trafficking and smuggling of migrants in the region with a prospect to end smuggling and to address the root causes of the migration. The EU has been heavily involved in launching counter-smuggling initiatives in East Africa as the region has been increasingly affected by the phenomenon of mixed migration defined as a tendency of people to migrate, either regularly or irregularly, in search for a better life in other parts of the world which usually has a combination of factors.²⁸ Furthermore, the Somalia-Kenya Forced Migrant Rights Initiative (2014–2017) targets migrant smuggling and human trafficking, with the aim of creating safe environment for forced migrants and smuggled migrants.²⁹

Strategies and routes of migrations are difficult to measure and are changing depending on circumstances. Even if the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are slightly slowing down in the last few years, they are still, respectively, according to the estimates by IOM 4.6 million and 13.5 million people hosted in 2018 in the Greater Horn of Africa region (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, Uganda, Central African Republic, Kenya, United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Djibouti, and Eritrea).³⁰

The most significant reasons for migrations, internal, in the bordering countries or abroad, are conflict, climatic upheavals, and economic difficulties. When they are moving for work or study, migrants use private agencies that prepare their paper work and facilitate travel as is the case for many Ethiopians who go to work in Saudi Arabia. When they do not have enough resources and

social capital, they are traveling alone or with small groups and are frequently vulnerable to the activities of networks of human traffickers. These dangers are faced by many Somalis in Sudan or Ethiopians in Djibouti.³¹ The choice of routes is based on personal aspirations, recommendations, rumors, but equally according to the advice offered by ‘brokers’, actors of human trafficking who more often than not seek to enrich themselves rather than providing the service for which they are paid.

Another reason for migration is looking for better access to services, essentially health services.³² The Horn of Africa is specifically characterized by mixed migration flows: people can flee the same country where other people are coming to find refuge, and where others are transiting through. These movements include refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, nomadic groups, and migrants pursuing family reunification, education, or looking for employment. That is why trying to identify who is migrating or who is a refugee is complicated: one can be identified as a ‘refugee’ one day and start a migration process the other day.

Some forced migrants are admitted to refugees’ camps and considered refugees by NGOs or UN agencies, because they are fleeing somewhere to find security. The East and Horn of Africa has always been confronted to conflicts and forced mass displacement, and these movements, accelerated with the environmental problems, are likely to continue for quite some time. The conflicts in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and South Sudan pushed people since 2012 to seek protection in Uganda (first hosting country in Africa with million refugees and asylum seekers in 2018), Ethiopia (second country with 900,000 refugees), and Kenya (third country with 400,000 refugees), and numerous refugees in Sudan and Somalia (but uncounted, because they are very mobile with few administrations to manage them).

Displacement routes within and outside the Horn of Africa

Even if migration trends evolve over time and context, main flows of people leaving the Horn of Africa can be observed. Three main routes are used for migration in and outside the Horn: the East route, the South one, and the North one.³³ Migrations often take place on a recurring basis: the profiles of people encountered during international migration, particularly toward the Eastern route, have often previously made trips to the regional level.

First are the departing movements toward Somaliland and Puntland (Djibouti is less used) to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries on the eastern route: it concerns about 35% of the displacements noticed by IOM. Men and women, who typically migrate alone, are looking in the GCC for work. In general, women have less opportunity to receive education than do men, and to

gain rewarding employment: it is not surprising that the trend of migration among women is higher than that of men. As a result, they are more vulnerable during the migration process, and more inclined to be victims of trafficking networks. It has been shown that the most common occupation for male migrants in the Gulf States is 'driver', employees as factory workers, mechanics, laborers, farmers, guards, and waiters. Women migrants are employed as housemaids or nannies.³⁴

Their (particularly women) goal is to return to their home country once they have earned enough money. Agencies and smugglers often organize this route. For the ones who get enough money, they can travel relatively secure and have a job waiting for them in the country of arrival. However, the journey is very hazardous: they have to go illegally through dangerous places and are subjected to human rights abuses and risk of death in deserts or in the Gulf of Aden crossing (Somalia's coastline is 3,300 km long and under control of illegal and piracy groups). Smugglers are often unscrupulous and are doing a multifaceted business (contraband of goods, drugs and weapons, piracy, human traffic, etc.).

While Yemen is dealing with conflicts and humanitarian crises, especially since 2014, it is still a place where desperate people try to find a job – without problem of bureaucracy due to the chaos – or a starting point for a third destination. In 2017, IOM identified 99,000 entries of Ethiopians and Somalis into Yemen (50,000 arrivals in the first half of 2018). At the same time, Yemeni people who can afford it or who have family relations in the Horn are settling in capitals or main cities, where they can capitalize on historical ties with the region, for example, in trade.³⁵ This example illustrates how migration responds to different motivations and evolves according to networks and income: when people from the Horn of Africa try to reach Yemen, then Yemenis try to reach the Horn of Africa.

The two other routes, the South one and the North one, concern, respectively, 8% and 5% of the patterns of mobility according to IOM. South Africa is the goal for many young people who want to find work and safety, but this is also an attractive location for students.

Their number is difficult to ascertain but seems to stabilize around 15,000 Ethiopians and Somalis per year. As on other routes, migrants are sometimes arrested in third countries. They can stay in prison for a long time. This is also very much the case for those who remain years in precarious situation, situation of exploitation, or detention in Libya, when using the Northern Road.³⁶

This North route is the most famous one for the westerners but is not favored by migrants. If they have enough money and the resources to have a visa before departure (as a student or working visas), migrants go to Europe and North America as students or temporary workers and then often claim

asylum status in order to stay. Many of them are unable to afford the heavy expenses or to make use of the legal process: they rely on smugglers and human trafficking networks to join the very risky route going across Sudan (Darfur), Libya, Mediterranean Sea, and Europe.³⁷

The paths of exile are sometimes multiple, and two types of migration can coexist. That which is toward the Arab countries is encouraged by the families, because it's considered safe and yielding money. But with the difficulties of access and returns from the GCC, the Northern route attracts more and more, usually without the consent of the family. Migrants often finance their trip by a system called 'leave now, pay later', which forces them to remain stuck in a country after departure, often in Libya, and keeps them in a position close to slavery until 'reimbursement' of the traffickers. In Somaliland, for example, the term *tahrib* is used to refer to this exile, and has a huge repercussion on families who are weakened when they try to raise money to help their relatives stranded in a third country. Yet, young people continue to leave, while they represent a large part of the population in a country that cannot offer them any opportunities or job prospects.

Displacement within the horn and inside the country of residence

According to IOM, 51% of migrations observed in the region were people migrating within the Horn of Africa itself. Migrants are mainly male adults (48%). Twenty-seven percent are female adults and children were 25% recorded by IOM in 2018 (half-female and -male). An average of 1 million migrant movements is estimated yearly in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

Seasonal migration is very common throughout the Horn of Africa. They are shaped by people looking for some opportunities in another place, sometimes just attracted by adventure and a better life, sometimes pushed by a bad rainy season, other natural hazards, or vicissitudes of economic life. Most of the time, these migrants are constantly linked with their family and are traveling back and forth in a dense network of people who are known to them. Some deep and long migratory movements push areas to evolve either because of climate change, the attraction of cities, or political or economic incentives (as when big company purchases arable land and forces farmers to leave, or when water resources are captured elsewhere).

For those who are leaving their country because of war or political pressure, the refugees camps are places where they sometimes settle for decades, waiting for continuing the road or a prospective return once their places of origin are more stable, or simply camps transforming into urban spaces progressively. For example, Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a landmark declaration of peace and friendship in July 2018, but this has not yet prevented the displacement of Eritreans fleeing their birthplace. In Gambella, at the Sudan-Ethiopian border, more than 320,000 refugees are living in bad life conditions, and this sometimes spans up to two generations.³⁸

In addition to these trends, there are people who are migrating inside their country of origin (IDPs/ internally displaced persons). Such is the case of the 970,000 Ethiopians who were forced to flee in 2018 within South Ethiopia. In Somalia, in June 2018, IDP numbers stood at 2.6 million. This number is incessantly increasing, showing that the country is in a long-term multi-factorial crisis, marking a 30% increase from the previous year. These trends can be quickly reversed should security prevail, but it can also be a first stage of a longer migration process: some IDPs that do not find stability in the country sometimes begin international mobility. Drought pushed 2.6 million IDPs in May 2018. They often perceived departure as potentially definitive: pushed for reasons related to the climate or to the war, they have difficulty to consider returning to live a comfortable life at home. The option of temporary return to one's homeland is mainly considered in the context of economic migration, often to help the family left behind. Ethiopia is hosting many refugees, in particular around its Western border (with Sudan), and it is confronting many environmental upheavals and internal political challenges. Since 2016, the country is facing drought. Political protests in Oromia and Amhara Regional States provoked a state of emergency (2017–2018) and Somali and Oromo groups are in conflict since 2017. By the end of 2020, the civil war in Northern Ethiopia region pushed dozens of thousands of people from Amhara and Tigray regions to cross the Sudanese border as refugees. In this demographically challenging country, rural people move to cities (they represent about 50% of the urban population). In addition, the response capacity of rural societies to cyclical crises is decreasing.³⁹ The Ethiopian state and the people have to adapt, which is often reflected in waves of migrations when the vulnerability is too high.

Ethiopia is also a country where population displacements caused by drought and by the government, in order to adjust the country's demographic regulation toward more productive land, but also to control political opposition, have been well documented, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. They gave rise to major debates on the instrumentalization of the international community among vulnerable populations by their government, and on situations of technocratic displacements of population. Today, migration must still be considered from an angle linking individual and institutional constraints, as in some instances departures are caused by territorial decisions.

Since the end of the twentieth century, most of Uganda (except the North) has been stable, which justifies why it has become the first hosting country for refugees: the country host 1,470,000 refugees in 2018.⁴⁰ Uganda welcomed the refugees and allocated a piece of land for them to stay on and hence become free on dependence on government and NGO-owned land. However, the pressure is very high, with agricultural difficulties for some refugees, huge refugees' camps remaining, and a lot of contestation coming from the hosting community.

Djibouti, already weakened by political and economic instabilities, was the site of many different forms of displacement. It is first the place of Djiboutian or Ethiopian people attracted by cities.⁴¹ It is

also a destination for human trafficking, particularly with children and women ending up in slavery and prostitution. At least, since 2009, it is a transit place for migrants in direction of the Middle East countries.

Kenya is less impacted by huge mass displacement due to conflicts, and displaced people are able to come back in their origin area relatively quickly. Indeed, the government is able to support help and reconstruction for displaced persons. The growing stability of Kenya, even if relative, allows its citizens to have an environment more peaceful than its neighbor- ingstates and to recover quicker after a disaster.

Other states have the capacities, or the will, to control and manage mass displacement, and to control international aid and rules in order to apply their own autonomous processes. The Government of Ethiopia had led its own displacement response after the 2017 drought with support from international organizations, with a USD 117.7 million multi-sector response plan.⁴²

South Sudan is under conflict and food insecurity since the end of 2013. South Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers numbered is continually increasing: over 2.4 million in June 2018, which means a 27% increase from June 2017, added to 1.8 million IDPs. There are still a huge number of South Sudanese refugees in Sudan considered until recently ‘brothers and sisters’, or refugees when they arrived more recently, there are also a high number of South Sudanese in Ethiopia and mostly in Uganda.

Another case of displacements concerns the specific case of pastoralists and semi-nomadic people. These patterns are increasing with the environmental degradation that makes such populations move for farther distances. These groups move according to environmental factors and they cross borders frequently. Since the 2010s and the growing tendency for states to control their sovereignty and reinforce their border, in particular for fighting terrorist groups, the case of semi-nomadic is not yet an international concern, but is a real challenge for the economy and the life of cross-border cultural groups in areas of South and East Ethiopia, North Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda.⁴³

Conclusion

In January 2018, the African Union adopted a Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in Africa and a policy framework for migration in January 2018. For sure, when everything will be put in place (visa liberalization, common biometric passport), the protocol will pave the way for new forms of migration in the next few years. Taking into account political turbulences in Ethiopia, an authoritarian regime in Eritrea, ongoing instability in Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, as well as environmental challenges in the region, migration within the Horn of Africa is not likely to decrease

in the foreseeable future. Political transformation in Ethiopia may have an impact on migration especially for Ethiopians abroad and peaceful settlement may inspire, as it is already inspiring, many people in the diaspora to return to Ethiopia for multiple purposes, mostly for investment.

At the same time, opening of borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2018 allowed thousands of Eritreans to flee the country and move to the Tigray region in Northern Ethiopia, a trend likely to continue as any political transformation in Eritrea has not been seen yet. However, since the opening of war in Tigray which started in November 2020 between the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), there has been a flow of dozens of thousands of refugees across the border in Sudan. The exact numbers (as of December 2020) are still not known as the situation may get worse in the region. The same seems to be true about the border between Ethiopia and South Sudan which is an area of trans-border movement of people characterized also by high level of insecurity.

In light of such patterns, it might be safe to say that mixed migration flows discussed in this chapter will likely to continue due to complex trans-boundary links, security issues, and environmental causes.

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