

International Migration: The Case of Ethiopian Female Migrants in Austria*

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ABSTRACT This article assesses the migration, adaptation and the integration process of the Ethiopian female migrants in Austria. The research was conducted in Vienna for ten months in 2003, by employing the two most important anthropological tools of data collection: observation and interview. It is found out that the most pressing problem for most of Ethiopian women migrants is getting legal residence. The long period of time migrants are forced to wait to get legal residence makes them always live in a constant fear of deportation. Moreover, this research has revealed that for them getting the legal residence is the key for every thing. These include: employment, good income, social interaction, proper health insurance, and in the long run for their smooth integration.

INTRODUCTION

As Buechler (1975: 285) commented, anthropological interest in the study of migration is rather recent, but advanced enough to enable us gain knowledge on questions such as the nature of culture, social change, family, ethnicity and so on. In the last decade, anthropologists have given considerable emphasis on population movements (Kearney 1995; Hannerz 1996; Clifford 1992, 1994). They have investigated various aspects and manners of migration namely: causes and patterns of migration, its impact on communities of origin and destination, the migrants characteristics, the economic and psychological aspects of their adaptation and so on.

Lee (1968: 184) defines migration as "a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence." However, in his definition no restriction is placed up on the distance of the movement or up on the voluntary and involuntary forms of the act. Human migration is also defined as "the changing of the place or abode permanently or, when temporarily, for an appreciable duration as for example in the case of seasonal workers. It is used symbolically in the transactions from one surrounding to another in the course of human life" (Weinberg 1975: 3).

Generally speaking, a migrant is viewed as a person who has moved from his place of birth to

another place with the idea of settling more or less permanently (Upreti 1981: 5).

A refugee is any person who, owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted or reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself to the protection of that country (UN 1951).

Coleman (1994) defines integration as "arrangements, which enable immigrants and minorities to participate in all aspects of the host societies, social, economic, and eventually political"

After the Second World War, migration pattern in Western Europe has got unique features than pre-war period (Wanner 2002: 3; Roberts 2000: 3; Houle 1999: 1-3). The post war period witnessed globalisation, effective communication, transportation and these facilitated migration to Europe from various developing countries (Wahlbeck 1998). Recently, Various researchers have started investigating the migrant population of Europe, particularly those who came from developing countries and settled in Europe. These include, for instance: Biffi's (2003) work on the role of migrants in Austria; Hamde's (2004) study on Eritrean immigrants in Sweden; Dahya's (1973) work on Pakistanis in

Britain; Hoadley's (2003) comparison of immigration in Germany and Australia; Helweg's (1979) study on Sikhs in England; Jeffrey's (1976) investigation on Muslim and Christian Pakistani families in Bristol; Kelly's (2000) study on Bosnian refugees in Britain; Kofman's (2000) analysis of migrants in three European states-UK, France and Italy; Cesari's (1998) study on the Maghrebis in France; Wihtol de Wenden's (1998) investigation of the Maghrebians in France; Wahlbeck's (1998) work on Kurdish migrants in Germany; and Werbner's (1990) work on Pakistanis in Britain.

The globalisation impacts such as effective transportation and communication have increased not only the quantity of migrants, but also their diversity.

As Roberts (2000) noted, in principle, most of asylum seekers and refugees are forced to leave their homes and their countries due to conflicts and political persecutions. They flee to save their lives mostly leaving their loved ones behind and in the process witnessed atrocities, deaths of their family members, neighbours, relatives and some times all in one.

In a new country where they start living they maintain their connection with their country of origin. They participate in political, social and economic activities of their country of origin. Therefore, even in their new countries they might show divisions in reflection to what is going on in their country of origin (Bousquet 1991; Gold 1992; Steen 1992; McDowell 1996; Valtonen 1997).

As Pressar (1986) pointed out, critical examination reveals that earlier studies on migration focussed almost exclusively on male migrants. In these studies, the role of female migrants was limited to being companions of male migrants. This trend continued, to a certain extent, in the 1970s, and in the 1980s.

However, in this period (1970s and 1980s) female migration also got a momentum as examined in the work of Ong (1993).

RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The data were collected through observation, interview and questionnaire.

A case study was also included to clarify some of the abstract concepts.

The questionnaire was prepared in English and was distributed only to those whose English language knowledge was dependable. The interview was conducted mostly in Amharic, and some times in English.

The respondents were selected on the basis of their length of stay in Austria. All in all, eight Ethiopian women agreed and filled out the Questionnaire and participated in the subsequent interviews. Based on their answers in the questionnaire and their willingness, two of them were selected for in-depth interview. Their life history and migration experiences are used in this research as case studies.

The secondary data were collected by consulting literature that include asylum policies of Austria, the Austrian law on refugees, European laws on asylum and refugees, international migration, anthropological and sociological theories and explanation on migration, refugees, asylum seekers and those adaptive mechanism of migrants.

RESULTS

It is found out that Ethiopian women migrants maintained with their families back home in Ethiopia in various ways. These include by making phone calls, writing letters, and some times (after getting legal residence in Austria) by flying back for a visit. For migrants, maintaining family contact is so important and that is why they are ready to waste their hard won money for making calls to Ethiopia. Despite its high cost, they prefer to maintain their contact with their family and relatives and shoulder the expenses. Actually, talking with their families back home gives them a psychological comfort and gives them temporary relief for their worries and depressions.

The data also revealed that the migrants have many problems.

We can categorise the problems of migrants in to three types. These are:

- 1) Economic problems
- 2) Social problems, and
- 3) Psychological problems

1. Economic Problems

The economic problems include money shortages, unemployment, housing problems, lack of food and lack of proper clothing.

The economic position of Ethiopian women migrants depends on their residence status. Those who have got legal residence status can work. But those who do not have cannot work, study or travel from one region to another.

Therefore, they depend on charity from the people, which by itself is very limited.

The asylum seekers also get a small amount of money from the Austrian government.

It is rumoured that illegal migrants some times do jobs, which are called *schwarz arbeit* (illegal jobs or black jobs). The payments usually are very insignificant compared to their long hours work. Their labour is exploited heavily since they do not have legal right to complain for fear of deportation and imprisonment as they do illegal jobs. Their employers force them to do jobs, which are generally unsafe and need heavier labour force.

Although some of the migrants have skills or education their chance of getting employment in line with their fields and qualification is almost nil. Thus, they do manual jobs with a very less payment.

In other words, although some of the migrants are professionals, they do not get office jobs. Moreover, even if migrants get legal status after so protracted problems and pains, they do not get professional jobs. This kind of problem is also reported by Heikkilä and Peltonen (2002) who discussed about immigrants and integration issues in Finland. Therefore, this condition forces them to loose the feeling of self-confidence and self worth.

2. Social Problems

The social problems include the feeling of being discriminated, racism, and social isolation.

It has to be noted that most of the migrants interviewed admitted that they do have very limited social interactions with Austrians. This could be due to language problems and the feeling of being discriminated. However, considerable number of them has established sufficient relationships with Austrians. This is particularly true of those migrants who stayed longer period of time in Austria. Furthermore, those who stayed in Austria for long time have got the chance to improve their languages and thus facilitated their social interaction.

3. Psychological Problems

The economic and social problems have also psychological repercussions. So, we can add this psychological problem as the third major problem of Ethiopian women migrants. In other words, the

combined economic and social problems have created psychological impacts on the migrants. These include depression, frustration, and bitterness.

The other additional problems include language (German) difficulty, and racial segregation. It is very clear that migrants whether they are legal permanent residents or not, whether they are professionals or not, do not get equal job opportunity with other Austrians. Actually foreigners are allowed to take type of jobs that are not readily taken by Austrians.

It is good to mention here that in order to get language training, the legal status of the migrants is critical. Since most of the migrants are not legal migrants and forced to wait a decision for many years, they could not get German language training and this by itself contributed for their failure to have social interaction with the Austrians. Moreover, this in turn inhibited their adjustment and integration process.

It is also important to note that even though there are private language schools that enrol migrants with out enquiring their legal status, still for migrants the situation remains the same since they do not have financial capacity to join these language schools. Their lack of employment opportunity makes the situation worse.

Like any other migrants, most of Ethiopian women have limitations regarding house, employment and shortage of information about various facilities and legal systems.

The research revealed that most of Ethiopian women migrants in Vienna were not happy with their living conditions in Austria. They were not happy with their economic, and social conditions they live in. The data further revealed that most of the time those Ethiopian women migrants who were married to Austrians are living in better condition than the others.

DISCUSSION

Refugees are the results of various crises in the world such as ethnic conflicts, military coup, religious persecutions, political upheavals, war between countries and civil wars and anarchy. Therefore, refugees suffer from physical, social and psychological traumas. The problems of refugees, immigrants and ethnic minorities particularly how they suffer from inequalities and exclusions in the post war period have become a subject of study in the last decade. The most

important works of this kind include: Cross (1993: 116-134), Jones (1993), Mingione (1995: 15-32) and Schierup (1997).

Refugees have suffered a lot in their past lives in the process of migration.

In order to properly understand the lives of Ethiopian women migrants in Austria, first and foremost, it is important to examine the country's (Austria) immigration policy, and its rules and regulations concerning immigrants and refugees. Therefore, in the subsequent paragraphs, we would like to give a brief account of the migration process by using the country's immigration policy as a background.

Migrants come to Austria in various forms. These include as refugees, students, for family reunion, for business, as displaced persons and so on. They enter Austria legally or illegally. According to Austrian Federal Law¹, only the needy of asylum seekers are entitled to get federal care until their case (application for asylum) is reviewed and concluded. The decision could be either positive (favourable) or negative (unfavourable). This federal care is given through the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The federal care includes food, accommodation, medical care, pocket money and other necessary measures of assistance. Though the criteria and evaluation is very strict, children asylum seekers are exempted from these strict procedures, and are entitled to get federal care. Sometimes, even those asylum seekers who are not granted the federal care may get public relief help in line with the laws of social aid. However, these laws of social aid are different from one province to another. For instance, Vienna does not give this kind of assistance at all, whereas other federal provinces give this kind of assistance. Moreover, those asylum seekers who failed to get the federal care and the provincial assistance, and even those asylum seekers whose application was rejected or their case is negatively terminated (who can not be deported) rely on charity of private individuals, religious organisations or charity organisations. The asylum seekers who have not yet entitled to get federal care (normally, they receive federal care after having an interview with federal asylum officer), get accommodation and provisional care from the Ministry of Interior. This is the period between the asylum seekers arrival, and their interview with federal asylum officer. During this period, the newly arrived asylum seekers stay in refugee camps, pensions or hostels.

Asylum seekers get permanent resident permit of Austria when they are granted asylum status.

Temporary resident permit is also granted on humanitarian grounds for those who are exposed to danger or inhuman treatment or punishment, persecution and death penalty due to their race, nationality, political opinion, religion and membership of a particular social group. Furthermore, those who left their country due to armed conflict can be granted 3 months temporary resident permit and can be renewed until the conflict is over.

Many immigrants in Austria have formed community associations in order to protect and increase the position of their community members. The Austrian social policy also encourages the formation of such kind of community associations, in order to facilitate the integration of refugees. Like the other emigrants, Ethiopian immigrants have established various community associations. These are:

1. *Äthiopisch - Österreichische Frauen Solidarität* (Austrian-Ethiopian Women Solidarity)
2. *Österreichisch – Äthiopische Gesellschaft* (Austrian-Ethiopian Friendship Society)
3. *Äthiopischer Verein für Kultur und Integration* (Ethiopian Association for Culture and Integration)
4. *Verein zur Unterstützung der Selbsthilfe in Äthiopien* (Association for Support and Self help in Ethiopia)
5. *Äthiopische Gemeinde in Österreich* (Ethiopian Community in Austria)
6. *Äthiopische Gemeinde für Integration und Kulturaustausch in Österreich* (Ethiopian Community for integration and culture exchange in Austria).
7. The Ethiopian Student Association in Austria
8. The Ethiopian (Orthodox) Church in Vienna

The only Ethiopian community association in Austria that was formed primarily to keep and promote the interest of female Ethiopian migrants in Austria was *Äthiopisch - Österreichische Frauen Solidarität* (Austrian-Ethiopian Women Solidarity).

Various social scientists (Joly 1996; Salians and Pritchard 1987) have studied the role of community associations in the settlement of immigrants and the incorporation of ethnic minorities. For instance, according to Rex and D. Joly (1987) community associations have four important functions. These are: defending the

interests of the community, providing material assistance to community members, overcoming isolations, and finally promoting the community's culture. For Salinas and Pritchard (1987), community associations help to reconstruct a sense of self-help and solidarity for those whose lives have been disrupted by exile.

In the following section, the life history of two Ethiopian female migrants is narrated as a case study:

Case Study

Respondent no. 1

Respondent no. 1 was born in Harrar, Ethiopia. She has six brothers and sisters. Her father and mother are dead.

She is in the late 30s. She has studied a college level education. Her native language is Amharic. She was never married and currently she is single, and lives alone. She is Ethiopian Orthodox Church follower. She has lived in Austria for more than ten years. By citizenship, she is an Austrian.

After coming to Austria she has attended German language classes for about less than six months. It was a part time class. She got the information about the availability of the German language courses from a religious /charitable organisation. According to her, it was good for her of attending the language class but failure of not having enough interaction with native Deutsche-speakers has undermined her language knowledge. Now, she speaks Deutsche moderately well. Her language difficulty has created a barrier for getting job.

Other than Deutsche, she speaks English and Amharic.

When she came to Austria, she wanted to get more education or employment training.

She entered Austria as a refugee. She got a permission to work in Austria shortly after her arrival and hoped to work in her field when she came to Austria. She expected a clerical or sales work. Her problem was that she did not get any information from friends about finding work in Austria. She was not aware of any Ethiopian or immigrant women's agencies offering information and services about job training. Actually, she did not get more education or employment training in Austria.

Though she had been looking for a job in Austria and made repeated interviews, she was never offered a job.

After arriving in Austria, it took her two years to get her first job. She worked as office secretary for more than five years. Her job included neither health nor unemployment insurance. That was her first and last job so far.

She lost her job because of the abuse of one of the organization's official. Currently she is unemployed. She said that jobs are not available due to recession and this condition prevented her from finding a job in the area of her training. In order to get a job she contacted the Austrian employment centre and to improve her chance of finding a work, she was given language training. She felt that acquiring additional language and skills training would help her in solving her unemployment problem. After becoming unemployed she has been getting help from friends and relatives. She said that she is unwilling to take a job that pays less than government welfare assistance. According to her, Ethiopian women do suffer from job problems equally as the Ethiopian women do.

Despite her problems, she is optimistic and believes that through time her chance for getting job will be improved.

She has changed her flat three times, and had no contact with her neighbours, but she has never met bad experience from her neighbours.

The apartment, where she now lives in, is owned by a private person.

She likes the Austrian political system. She never had foreigner friends in Ethiopia. She said that she never feel lonely and has contacts with other foreigners in Austria. According to her, the attitude of Austrians towards her is good, and never experienced racial discrimination. She admitted that she prefers Africans for interaction in comparison with Europeans, Asians and Arabs. But as neighbours she prefers Europeans, and as marriage partner she prefers Africans. But as a workmate, she doesn't care whether they are Europeans, Africans, Asians or Arabs. Furthermore, she said that as a classmate and roommate, she doesn't have any preference. When she was asked whom does she prefer as a regular friend, she answered anyone irrespective of ethnic, race or nationality.

For her, going to church was good and religion is very important to her family in Ethiopia. She keeps in contact with her family once in a month, by phone. She goes to parties every three months and listens music and particularly Amharic music. Every week she watches a movie and she likes a

romantic movie. She also watches Austrian movie and listens Austrian songs. Her favourite Austrians radio station is U3. She meets her country fellows in coffeehouses. Her favourite spot in Vienna is the first district. She goes to Ethiopia every 4 years.

Respondent 2

Her age is in the late 30s. She has five brothers and two sisters. Her father is a civil servant and her mother is a housewife. She came to Austria for a study, when her brother invited her. She is, currently, an Austrian citizen. She has been living in Austria for more than ten years. She is not married, but she is living with her boyfriend, and son. She is an Orthodox Church follower

She has attended a German language class since coming to Austria. Her language classes lasted between six months to one year. Her language classes were part time. Her brother covered the expenses for her language classes, and she felt that the language classes were useful to her. She speaks very good Deutsche, and she did not have a language problem that hindered her from getting a job. All in all, she speaks three languages namely, Amharic, English and German. She has got more education or employment in Austria.

The educational training she has received is academic training (University). She got an advice concerning the training from an Austrian counsellor.

She did not have a work permit when she first came to Austria. She expected a high paying job when she came here. She expects to get a professional job in line with her specialisation at present. In the process of coming to Austria, she did not get any information concerning the difficulty of getting a job. She wanted to get more education or employment training when she came to Austria. She was not aware of any Ethiopian or immigrant women's agencies offering information about job training. She feels that the job training she has received meets her employment needs. It took her over two years to get her first job. She got her first job after reading newspaper advertisement. She worked as a baby sitter. Her first job did not include health and unemployment insurance.

She was paid in cash, and stayed in her first job between 6 months to 1 year. So far since coming to Austria she worked as baby sitter,

cashier or sales woman and computer programmer. She performed all her jobs legally. In her job career, once she had resigned from a job in order to go to school, and in another time she had lost a job when business was slack. She had experienced work-related discrimination. At present, she is not working in order to take care of her child.

She felt that her job expectations in Austria were not fulfilled. She feels that over qualification could be a barrier to getting a job in Austria. Because of that she is forced to look for a job, which is different from the work she is qualified for. As to her, looking for a work in Austria is a tiresome process and she reasoned this because of her foreign origin. She also feels that Ethiopian men equally suffer from the absence of job like Ethiopian women in Austria. Therefore, she feels that Ethiopian women in Austria do not have special problem concerning the job market. According to her, Ethiopian women have to get enough information regarding Austrian employment policy and have to train themselves in order to overcome their employment problems. With the aim of overcoming her employment problem, she contacted the Austrian Employment Centre for skills training.

So far she has changed her flat twice because she wanted to get larger rooms. She said that she doesn't have contact with her neighbours but at the same time she did not have bad experience with her neighbours. The house, which she currently lives in is owned by the Government.

She goes to Ethiopia every three years. She doesn't like the political system in Austria. While she was in Ethiopia she had foreigner friends. In her early months in Austria, she had been suffering from loneliness many times. But now only some times she feels homesick. The most important thing that impressed her about Austria is the country's high development. She has Austrian friends and has contacts with other foreigner living in Austria. She has experienced racial discrimination and she felt very bad about it. Even she has experienced discrimination concerning accommodation. She said that among all age groups of Austrians, the youngsters discriminate her and she reasoned that as shortage of proper information about foreigners in general. Her strategy of overcoming this social problem is ignoring the incidents since there are no other solutions. From all social groups namely Europeans, Africans, Asians and Arabs, she prefers to interact with Africans.

Her criterion of establishing friendship is being friendly, and at the same time seriousness. As a marriage partner, she prefers Africans, and as a work mate she prefers Africans, because, she said they are friendly and open. But as roommates and classmate she has no preference because she wanted to learn more from different people. As a regular friend she prefers Africans because she said that they understand each other. She has a good feeling concerning religion.

She contacts her family every month through telephone and post. She goes to parties some times. She listens music particularly Amharic songs. Her favourite movie is a science fiction and detective. She watches Austrian movie and listens Austrian music. She meets fellow Ethiopians in coffee-house and in the town. Her favourite place is the first district. Her citizenship is Austrian.

CONCLUSION

Generally, migrants from developing countries are viewed in disdain in many developed countries. As Searle-Chatterjee (2000: 48) said, "people from colonised regions have been presented as fundamentally different, or worst still, as inferior and less developed. Such images have provided support for the view that non-white people are less fit for self-government, or, today, for political and economic equality or dominance."

Though some times the host community blames migrants of failing to integrate into the society, and unwillingness to learn the language, it is very clear that almost all the female migrants who participated in this research wanted to be integrated and learn the language. However, the absence of encouraging situations and the very slow application process of asylum put the migrants in a dilemma and frustrations, which also kills their eagerness to learn the language even if it is freely available.

Most of the time, migrants do not want to go back to their countries even if they failed to achieve what they wanted in Austria. This is mainly because of the ever-increasing political problems in Ethiopia and second, because the migrants had used all their resources, including family resources, mostly, even selling their properties in order to cover the transportation costs. Therefore, since they do not have any thing left at their disposal, they are not willing to go back to their countries. Going back home with out anything at hand kills

the moral of not only the migrants but also the moral of their family back home.

The wish of most of migrants is to return home when they feel that they are politically and financially secured.

Most of the migrants receive social benefits. Those who are unemployed receive unemployment benefits, and those who are students receive student allowances.

Though the migrants still feel proud to be Africans, they did not deny that living in Europe, as an African is very problematic. Because, their African origin leads them to discrimination and stigmatisation.

The mistrust and fear of asylum seekers held on Austrian authorities is due to their background in Africa, and considerably because of their psychological problems due to the long period of time they are forced to wait until they get response from Asylum authorities of Austria.

The other most important thing that has to be underscored is that most of the migrants do not have political influences in Austria since they do not have votes. Though some of them have attained Austrian citizenship, still their number is very few, and hence Austrian politicians are not eager to get their vote since they are not sizeable like the USA's migrant communities. Had Africans living in Austria have sizeable number, they could have influenced political favours and decisions that in turn would get them concessions.

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NOTE

¹All discussions concerning the Austria immigration rules are based on the following sources:

The Federal Law concerning the Granting of Asylum of 14 July 1997 (BGBl. No. 1997/76), as amended by Federal Law of 8 January 1999 (The Asylum Law); The Federal Law on the Independent Federal Asylum Review Board of 14 July 1997 (BGBl No. 1997/77).

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