

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION: THE CASE OF MIGRANTS FROM SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA TO SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

A closer look at irregular migration reveals that it involves different actors and institutions. It is also mainly triggered by - and is a response to - growing socioeconomic inequalities within and between different regions of the world and is embedded within increasing forces of globalization, which are creating disruptions and dislocations in impoverished countries leading to the creation of mobile populations who are prone to migrate. Juxtaposed against these are strict border and deportation regimes, utilitarian immigration policies and growing xenophobia against irregular migrants. These factors conspire with myriads of push factors, prevalent in impoverished countries, prompting irregular migrants to dwell on transnational networks and depend on the services of human smugglers as well as succumb to the requirements of human traffickers.

The convectional migration narratives position smugglers and human traffickers as prime culprits for migration related problems. However, findings from this study indicate that smugglers are just one strand of the multidimensional and omnipotent actors in a complex web of transnational social networks. The network is vertically extended and horizontally stretched with spatial, temporal and structural dimensions embedded in it. More importantly, smugglers are responding to demands advanced from migrants that are partly created by market forces, which in turn are instigated by lopsided global political and economic order.

Key Words: Irregular Migration, Transnational Networks, Smugglers, Migration Control, Globalization