

Rural-to-Urban Migration as an Escape from “Harmful Traditional Practices”?: A Study of the Life Stories of Female Household Servants in Addis Ababa

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ABSTRACT

Most of the young women and girls in Addis Ababa who work as household servants, construction workers or prostitutes are migrants from the Amhara region and other parts of North Ethiopia. They have fled from so-called harmful traditional practices, e.g. early marriage, abduction and rape. This article presents the life stories of young women and girls who have escaped to Addis Ababa, where they try to make a living as female household servants. Their struggle for survival in Ethiopia's capital is documented, but also their will to take control of their own destiny. These life stories illustrate that their decision to leave their family and migrate to Addis Ababa is a subversive act against structural violence and the above mentioned practices. The discussion of these practices makes it clear that early marriage is a reaction of the Amhara region and other parts of North Ethiopia to economic pressures to which this society in turn responds in a cultural specific way. This interplay of economic and socio-cultural elements has triggered a dynamic with unprecedented consequences not only for the female part of the population but for the society as a whole.

There is a growing interest in the marginalised, invisible, subaltern voices of our globalizing world. Amongst the most ignored have been those of migrant domestic workers, the vast proportion of whom are women.¹

There is a growing public awareness in Ethiopia about female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage, abduction, and rape. These practices have become the topic of numerous anthropological studies and the target of countless NGOs. Even the Ethiopian government banned them as “harmful traditional practices.”² Despite the growing awareness about the miserable situation of the female population in many parts of the country, there is little knowledge about women and girls who resist these practices and escape to urban centers. This article deals with young women and girls who have migrated to Addis Ababa to escape early marriage and to start a new life away from their parents, husbands, and sometimes even their children. The focus is on women and girls who try to make a living by working as household servants in the Ethiopian capital. In fact, a considerable number of women and girls escaped violence in their villages only to become victims of violence in the city. Due to these problems, for many of them Addis Ababa is only a stopover on their way to Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, and other countries in the Gulf region where they hope for a better life.³

The Life Stories of Young Female Migrants in Addis Ababa

One of the central features of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the increasing mobility of capital and labor. In particular, labor is forced to follow capital, and among the growing number of labor migrants are more and more women.⁴ According to the literature on rural-to-urban migration, economic factors are responsible for this global drift.⁵ In this article, we use a different approach. We are not denying the fatal consequences of poverty as a result of economic exploitation, climate change, and environment destruction, and consider them major forces behind involuntary migration. However, as a result of our research project, we stress that regarding the migration of young women and girls from rural areas to urban centers, sociocultural factors are strongly underrated.

In what follows, we try to answer the following questions: What leads young women and girls from rural areas in northern Ethiopia to migrate to Addis Ababa? What challenges do they face in their new urban environment? How do they manage to survive in the city, and what are their perspectives in life?

In dealing with these questions, we have largely avoided numbers and statistics out of a general skepticism towards quantitative approaches. What it means to be threatened by so-called “harmful traditional practices” no statistics can tell. Therefore, we have attempted to let the girls and young women speak for themselves. To give them a voice and to listen to their stories provides not only the opportunity to learn about their motivations for leaving their rural homeland and starting a new life in Addis Ababa, but also to recognize their agency and to see them as actors resisting particular local practices.⁶ The following story of Tigist is characteristic of the accounts we were able to collect:

My name is Tigist. I came from Attaye, a place in North Shoa, Amhara region. My age is 17. I came here four years ago. Before I came to Addis Ababa, I was a grade four student. One day on my way home from school, which was quite a long way, a group of men abducted me. Later I came to know that my parents had consented for marriage with a family and had signed a marriage contract.

I was lucky enough to escape the first night after my abduction from the room where I was confined. This night I went back to my parents' house. After this event, my parents promised the family of my future husband to undertake the marriage one year later. It was at this time that I escaped from home and went to my uncle. He brought me to Addis Ababa, because one of my aunts was here. I lived three months with her and later get employed as a household servant in another home. But the situation was not good for me. So, I left this home and came to the broker's office. Now I am working on a shifting base and spend the night with my aunt. I am grade seven in the evening program now.

My older sister was also abducted; she left the area and lives now in Shewarobit [a town in North Shoa]. My younger sister was also abducted and raped at the age of 13. This practice is common in my area. I know

why my father wanted us to get married through abduction. It was not because he hated us, but he wanted us to live close to him, to inherit his land and to build on it.⁷

The life stories we collected from young female migrants in Addis Ababa point to the frequency of violence to which the female part of the population in the rural parts of northern Ethiopia is exposed. Even though the poverty in this part of the country is depressing, the reasons why girls and young women migrate to urban centers like Addis Ababa not only emerge from the economic but also the sociocultural context. These two spheres are, of course, difficult to separate, as the notion “culture of poverty” already suggests.⁸ However, the life stories that were told to us by young female migrants from northern Ethiopia clearly indicate that early marriage, abduction, and rape rank among the main factors to leave home.⁹ Against this background, we consider these sociocultural factors to be underrated in the literature on rural-to-urban migration in Ethiopia. Therefore, this article aims at presenting these life stories to the interested public, determining the reasons for migration of young women and girls to Addis Ababa and directing broader academic attention to them.

Almost all the life stories we were able to collect convey the message that sociocultural factors are crucial regarding female migration from rural parts of Ethiopia to urban centers like Addis Ababa. This is confirmed also by Abebu, who gave us the following account of her life:

My name is Abebu, I am 17 years old. I came to Addis one year ago. I am an orthodox Christian and came from Debre Berhan, North Shoa, Amhara region.

When I still lived with my parents, I was attending school in Debre Berhan. But the school was far from our home, and every day I had to walk for almost two hours. But this was not the major challenge. The main problem was abduction and rape which were common in my locality. So, repeated attempts were made on me, but, thanks to God, my friends and I always went to school together, and we helped each other in times of difficulties.

Especially when the parents of a girl refuse a marriage request from

a man or if a man considers that his request will not be accepted by either the girl or her parents, he immediately chooses abduction as his strategy. This is a common trend in the rural side and my home locality. I don't want to tell about my case, the only thing you have to know is, I escaped from being abducted.

When this attempt was made again and again, I stopped my education and simply spent one year without going to school. In my home locality, there is also the perception that those girls, who don't attend school, are better for marriage. And those who go to school are perceived as if they were not skillful and could not work. Therefore, different individuals asked my father to give his consent for marriage. And when I went to the market place such people molested me.

Finally, I could not stand these things any longer and asked my father to let me go to Addis. My father accepted my request, and with his help and the help of our neighbors, who had relatives in Addis, I came here. Now I am living with them doing the domestic chores for a salary of 80 Birr per month. At present, I don't have any problems. The work load is not too heavy, and I am able to continue with my education as a grade seven student.¹⁰

From the interviews we learned that most of these young women and girls who migrated to Addis Ababa came from the Amhara region, a rural area located in the northwest part of the country. Almost all of them were orthodox Christians, and most of them escaped from early marriage, abduction, and rape.¹¹ We consider their decision to break away from their home area and leave everything behind a subversive act against structural violence to women in rural parts of northern Ethiopia—a decision they make, sometimes with the help of family members or close friends but sometimes entirely on their own, even when the consequences of this migration move were unforeseeable for them. Their attempt to make decisions about their own lives is impressively documented in the following life story told by Tsion:

My name is Tsion, and I am 20 years old. I was born and grew up in Northern Shoa, Amhara region. I came by myself to Addis Ababa six years

ago. When I still lived in my village, I had been informed about Addis as a city of opportunities and where jobs could be found without difficulties. But I couldn't find Addis as was told to me. I found everything in Addis directly contrary with what I was informed when I was still in my village.

I came to Addis to escape abduction. In my rural area abduction is a common practice which made it too difficult for me to live there any longer.

I used to be an athlete, and every morning and evening I was regularly training. One day when I was training at a place which is found a few kilometers away from my home, two men whom I never saw before, were hiding in the grown-up farm plots bidding their time to abduct me. Suspecting what they were maneuvering to do, I run away fast to my home. The men did not leave me alone, and one of them even run fast to get to me. But I escaped from this trap as I reached my home before they put their hands on me.

Though I got away from this attempted abduction, I was since then unable to freely roam to any places and to do my training, because I feared that they would try to abduct me again. I began to lead a life full of fear and suspicion. I felt like being imprisoned and for many days I had wondered what I had to do to get myself relieved from this precarious situation. Eventually I decided to bring myself out from such dreadful conditions. Thus, I came to Addis because I felt that if I stayed home, I would be abducted, raped, and finally forced to marry the abductor.

After I came to Addis Ababa, I began to work as a wage laborer in one of the construction sites found in the town. But later I found a job as a household servant. Like my fellow housemaids, I have faced various challenges. I am too unsettled and enraged still feeling the pain I had gone through. Fortunately, I had come out stronger from such kind of challenges and these had made me be emboldened in my life.

I still dream to be an athlete if the situation allows me regularly to attend athletics training activities. But for now, I am looking for a job as baby sitter on a permanent base. I want this job for I feel that it would minimize job insecurity and other related life risks. It would even allow me to save some money as the employers afford me with the basic necessities in life such as food and shelter.¹²

In some interviews, not only are pushing factors like early marriage, abduction, and rape mentioned, but pulling factors like the supposed advantages and attractions of urban life as well. Our conversation partners had heard about job offers and education possibilities in the city, and because they saw no other chance to escape from early marriage, they broke away to urban centers like Addis Ababa. However, their hopes and aspirations for a fast and easy change were regularly frustrated by harsh working conditions, and when hopes and dreams to continue education were also frustrated, they faced serious personal crises. Some of these hopes and aspirations were mentioned by Sisaynesh:

My name is Sisaynesh, I am 23 years old. I came from the Amhara region, Wollo area. I came to Addis eight years ago. I came here because of forced marital engagement. My parents did it and blocked me from going to school anymore. At this time, I was a grade two student. Finally, it was my neighbor who gave me the courage and strength to escape this early age marital engagement. At this time, this neighbor already used to live in Addis and came only to my village to visit her parents. She told me that I can work, learn and change my life in Addis better than being married here and lead a destitute life. Her advice contributed more than any other thing that I came to Addis.

After my arrival in Addis, I got employed through my friend on permanent base in a certain house, but I can't forget all the miseries and sufferings I encountered there. My employers treated me like an animal, did not show any respect and forced me to work day and night. I had no contact with the outside world, not even enough food and clothes were provided, and the monthly salary was not paid regular on the agreed base. They forced me to work like a slave. When things went beyond my capacity, I cried much in front of their relatives. By this time, they called my friend to pick me up, and they send me away with little money.

Immediately after leaving this house, I joined construction work as daily laborer and worked in this job for eight months, but it was also tiresome and therefore I gave up and continued as a household servant on a shifting base in three different houses. When I worked on permanent

base, as I did before, I had no time for education or visiting friends, for rest and privacy and to become confidential with urban life. But now, I am a grade six student in the evening class, even when I am not well in my education. But I am sure, I will get something better in my life through education. I want to become a business man. At the end, I will return to my locality with some money and wish to be called by my father's name and no more by the name of my employers.¹³

We were impressed by the significance that our young conversation partners gave to education. The denial of access to school, enforced for example as part of their preparation for early marriage, is a strong pushing factor in rural areas just as the prospect of continuing education is a strong pulling factor for migration to urban centers. We can't exclude the possibility that more emphasis was given to education by the girls and young women as we revealed our academic background by referring to our connection with Addis Ababa University. However, in conversations with teachers at the evening schools that were frequented by young migrants, our impression was confirmed that access to education is a crucial factor in rural-to-urban migration because the girls and young women are well aware that without having completed their school education, it will be almost impossible for them to find a way out of their miserable situation.¹⁴

The last life story we want to introduce here comes from Asnakech. This story summarizes elements of rural-to-urban migration by girls and young women from the Amhara region, but adds a final point that is of significance in this context, and that is sexual harassment or accusation of illicit sexual relations by male and female employers.

My name is Asnakech, and I am 20 years old. I came from North Shoa, Amhara region, when I was 16. I came to Addis Ababa with nobody's support or help. When I was in my rural village, I had been informed good things about Addis. But after I arrived here, I found all things that I had been informed when I was in my village are false.

At my first arrival in Addis, I did not know where to spend the night. A person kind-heartedly showed me a church and advised me that I should spend the night there in the church compound. The next morning

another person showed me where the broker house is found, and I met with a female broker to find me a job as a housemaid.

The reason which forced me to come to Addis Ababa was early marriage. My family planned to marry me to someone I did not know before. Once I came to realize that my parents had arranged a marriage ceremony without informing me, I decided that I had to escape and run away to Addis Ababa where I could get away from the dreadful marriage life and to work as a household servant.

However, beginning from my first arrival in Addis, I have faced various difficulties and problems. Once when I was employed in a married couple's home, the madam without any reason suspected me that I had a sexual relationship with her husband. She took me to a clinic for medical examination to find out whether I was pregnant from her husband or not. Since then she always was petulant and capricious to me. She insulted and morally abused, beat and hit me for a minor fault I committed. Finally, I left their home.

I work now on a shifting base, because it allows some freedom. But working on a shifting base has also some disadvantages especially in these days as house rent and other living costs have been sky rocketing. These costly living conditions have made me unable to afford all my living expenses with the money that I receive by working on a shifting base.

I am on the way now to go to one of the Arab countries, because here in Addis I could not find anything which would change my life for the future. I found here trauma and oppression, and I suffered a lot from working as a household servant. So, I need to go there, and I need to see my last chance and destiny in life.¹⁵

In conclusion, the interviews display the following patterns of rural-to-urban migration: the girls, confronted with arranged marriage, abduction, and rape, escape—sometimes with the help of other family members or a close friend but often entirely on their own—to Addis Ababa, where they contact a professional broker in search of a job. In many cases they end up working as female household servants because this is one of the few job opportunities they have in an urban environment like Addis Ababa. Because most of the girls have neither skills nor family networks, and some of them do not even

have friends in the urban environment, and because they are completely inexperienced (and must therefore to be called naïve in many respects), they easily become the victims of economic exploitation and sexual abuse.¹⁶ Confronted with these hardships, some of them see no other possibility than migrating to Arab countries. What waits for them there is widely known to the public, but completely ignored by them.

Living and Working Conditions of Female Migrants in Addis Ababa

When we summarize the information given in the five life stories presented above and add further information from the 13 additional interviews conducted by us, we come up with the following result regarding the living and working conditions of young female migrants in Addis Ababa:

The girls. Most female migrants in Addis Ababa who contact a broker in search of a job come from Gondar, Gojjam, North Shoa, and Wollo, the four main areas of the Amhara region.¹⁷ This region rates as one of the poorest regions in Ethiopia.¹⁸ It is the homeland of the Amhara, the second largest ethnic group in Ethiopia with more than 20 million people, and characterized by subsistence agriculture (cattle and cereal crop farming) and a basic rural infrastructure. Patriarchal structures and traditions that subordinate girls and women to so-called “harmful traditional practices”¹⁹ like early marriage, abduction, and rape are common in the Amhara region and according to our findings one of the main pushing factors for female migratory movements from this area.²⁰ In fact, almost all girls and young women, who told us their life stories, escaped from structural violence in their rural setting, and only a small minority were sent by their parents to Addis Ababa to contribute to the economic survival of their family.²¹

In contrast to Orthodox Christian girls and young women, the recruitment and intermediation of Muslim household servants follows different patterns. When Muslims in Addis Ababa need a household servant, they do not contact a broker but their relatives in rural areas and let a girl be sent directly to them. In addition, Muslim girls (e.g., Gurage, Silte) prefer other

jobs than working as a household servant or waitress because they are often not allowed to wear the Muslim veil (*Hijab*) in front of their customers. Therefore, they try to survive in the city as street vendors by selling coffee, tea, snacks, or tissues. For these reasons, there are fewer Muslim female household servants available in Addis Ababa. Also, because there are only a few Muslim brokers operating in the capital, it is even more necessary to bring the girls from rural areas to urban centers through family ties and kinship networks.

The age range of female migrants we talked to in Addis Ababa was between 14 and 26 years. They were either unmarried or no longer married, and some had to raise their own child. None of them lived with a boyfriend because a job on permanent base does not allow a sexual relationship.²² However, even when the girl or young woman works on a shifting base, her boyfriend would urge her to find another job, because he knows about the threat of sexual harassment by male employers. The girl would probably give up working as a household servant if the boy agrees to marry her. But in most cases the boy has neither the money nor the desire to enter into marriage, and therefore the relationship ends. Working as a household servant is apparently incompatible with a serious long-term romantic relationship and marriage.

When single girls and young mothers are not successful in their job as a household servant, working as a construction worker, waitress, street vendor or prostitute are the only alternatives for them as unskilled female migrants.²³ Confronted with these alternatives, some prefer to leave Ethiopia and migrate to countries like Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, or Lebanon. In this case, they must see a special broker, who will ask them to pay a minimum of 1,000 ETB for the visa application, which can be refused for unspecified reasons. However, we met no girl or young woman who seriously pursued the idea for escaping to the European Union, due to the risks of an illegal migration without the support of a broker.

The brokers. When the girls and young women arrive in Addis Ababa, some of them only after a long odyssey, most of them have heard already of brokers who will help them find a job.²⁴ They will look for these brokers in inner-city areas and visit their small offices, which are found in remodeled overseas

containers or small huts made of cardboard and sheet metal. When the girls agree to the terms and conditions of the brokers, during the day they stay in their offices where they will wait for customers looking for help at home. The office hours of the brokers are usually from 8:30 A.M. until 7:00 P.M.

The majority of brokers in Addis Ababa are men. However, the girls prefer female brokers, because male brokers are suspected of taking sexual advantage of the girls' situation. The broker with whom we worked in close cooperation—and who became a central figure in our research project—was a woman in her thirties who had studied two semesters chemistry at Dilla University. Her office was in *Kebele* 13 of Arada Sub-City,²⁵ and she was not only very cooperative, but had the confidence of the girls because she showed personal interest and empathy. She came from North Shoa, Amhara region, like most of the girls, and because she was familiar with their cultural and religious backgrounds, she had a special sensitivity for their current situation. She was accepted by the girls like an older sister or mother, and for some of them she apparently served as a substitute for the family they had left.

Our female broker was an Orthodox Christian, like most of the girls and customers who ask for her service. Christian customers prefer Christian girls and go to Christian brokers; Muslim customers prefer Muslim girls and go to Muslim brokers. However, the boundaries between the religions are not so strict. If there is any religiously defined segregation, it is due to the respective food restrictions household servants must observe: they must pay attention to the fasting period of the Orthodox Christians (no protein during the eight weeks before Easter) and Muslims (no food from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan), and that both religious groups eat neither pork nor meat that was not slaughtered as prescribed by their religious beliefs. From the perspective of a Muslim household servant, the household should be *halal* (e.g., no pork, no alcohol), and it should be possible to pray five times every day. However, these prayers give the daily routine a structure that is not always compatible with the duties of a housemaid in a Christian household. Therefore, Muslim girls prefer to work for Muslim families.

The office of our female broker was an open stall, a small steel container painted in a light green color and decorated with posters displaying Christian motifs almost like a shrine. The girls sit in a row on wooden benches in front of the stall at the edge of the road. They wear their best clothes, but the

locals easily recognize them as coming from a rural area. Most girls from the Amhara region (Gondar, Gojjam, North Shoa, Wollo) have tattoos on their faces and arms, and many of them wear skirts instead of trousers, but even when they wear jeans, it is not the type that is currently in fashion in the city. Because most of them are totally unfamiliar with big city life, they appear awkward and clumsy. Because most girls have neither a permanent place to live nor a safe place to stay for the night, they store their poor luggage (e.g., a backpack, plastic bag) in the broker's office, which adds to the impression of young people on the move. The broker also helps when the girls run out of money. She loans them the three to five ETB necessary for a sleeping place in mass accommodations that are often shared by men and women.

When the broker successfully finds a job for a girl, the broker receives a commission. This commission is 50–60 percent of the girl's first month's salary, and the commission is paid in equal parts by the employer and the girl. The broker provides a written contract to be signed by both parties. It includes the amount of the salary and the name of a person who guarantees for the girl in case she causes any damage in the household. If the girl does not know any such person, the broker may serve as a guarantor (*teyayazh*). The salary might be reduced if the girl is allowed to go to the evening school. Whether a girl is given a day off every two weeks, three months, or not at all depends on negotiations.

The job. There are two types of jobs: jobs on a shifting base and on a permanent base. Employment on shifting base implies that the girl comes to the respective household for an agreed period to clean the dishes, prepare the meals, look for the kids, etc.; when the job is done, the girl goes to another household or returns to the place where she lives, which in most cases she shares with some friends for financial reasons. Employment on permanent base implies that the girl lives with the family she is working for; she receives accommodation, meals and shelter in exchange for a lower income and a loss of personal freedom. In 2013, the salary for a job on shifting base was about 150–300 ETB per month, whereas a job on permanent base usually paid 200–500 ETB per month. Five hundred ETB salaries are paid only by well-to-do employers for skilled girls, who are able, for example, to cook traditional and Western food, have special skills in child care, etc. The average income

is between 200 and 250 ETB per month. (In March 2013, the exchange rate for 100 ETB was about €4.20 or US\$5.40.) Even by Ethiopian standards this is an extremely low salary, yet many girls dream of returning home one day with enough money to buy land, build a house, and raise a family.

The advantage of a permanent job is that the girls don't have to pay for lodging and food. The advantage of a job on shifting base, in contrast, is that the girls are more independent and may have a private life. They are free to meet with friends, go to school, and, most important, they can more easily quit a job when problems occur with the employer. One of our interview-partners discussed her preference for a permanent job as well as the risks associated with it:

I want to get employed on a permanent base rather than on a shifting base. Though each job has its own disadvantages, working on a permanent base is much better than working on a shifting base. When I get employed on a permanent base, I could easily get access to daily food, save money and don't have to care for the rent. When we work on a permanent base, however, we often face the challenge of heavy work load beyond our potential, usually employers insult, beat, harm and assault us for very minor faults, and sometimes male employers physically force us to make sexual affiliation with them. If we do not accept their advances, they will insult, strike and smack us, and sometimes they even go so far as refusing to pay our monthly salary without any good reason.²⁶

A job in a family setting, which is preferred by many girls, is often granted only in exchange for heavy workloads, small salaries, and extreme dependence on their employers. However, due to an oversupply of unskilled female labor and the resulting financial affordability, employing a housemaid is common in Addis Ababa. Even university students are among the employers.²⁷

The employers. When employers need a household servant, they come to the broker's office to choose among the available girls and young women. Some of the employers arrive by car and catch the attention of the broker by sounding the horn. Through the opened window they give the criteria the household servant should meet. The broker calls a girl who comes closest

to the required criteria. Then the girl negotiates directly with the customer about the contract. Differing ideas about the salary are in most cases the reason why a contract is not concluded. But sometimes an employer is already known to the girls, and if they had made bad experiences with him, they will warn their colleague.

Some employers want the girls to be tested for HIV before they hire them. If the girls will be engaged in child care this seems reasonable, but the girls fear that this test is done so that the employer may have unprotected sex with them. In contrast, girls who are engaged in nursing fear that the employer will not inform them if a patient is infected with HIV or suffers from AIDS.

In general, the employers complain about a lack of skill and cleanliness and about lazy household servants who sleep too late in the morning. They complain about the embezzlement of household money, and in case they employ household servants on a shifting base, also about the theft of foodstuffs (e.g., oil, sugar), detergents (e.g., washing powder, soap), and unexcused absences from work. Finally, female employers accuse the girls of having sex with their husbands. One of our conversation partners, whose name is Awokech, described the situation as follows: "When I am physically slim and get an illness, the Madam says: 'Oh, she has got AIDS.' But when I gain weight, she says: 'Oh, she has got a pregnancy. May God help us that it is not by my husband.'"

The possibility of an unintentional pregnancy is not without foundation because reports on sexual harassment are common among female household servants. The story of 18-year-old Habtam is only one of many that were told to us:

Once when I worked in the home of a married couple, who both were government employees, the husband always nagged me to have sex with him when his wife was not at home, and sometimes he came at night and knocked at the door when I slept. But I refused to comply with his sexual demand. He did it repeatedly and always nagged me to accept his request by giving me some money without his wife's awareness. But I refused to take his money. I repeatedly warned him that if he did not stop acting weird, I would inform the case to his wife. However, the man continued to nag me leaving aside my warning. Finally, I informed the case to his

wife, who was too aghast and furious on her husband's behavior. But fearing retaliation from the husband, I left their home.²⁸

Habtam's narrative gives a sense of how much female household servants with a job on permanent base rely on their employer: They either give way to the sexual demands of their male employer or report it to "Madam," which can mean losing not only job and income but also accommodation and shelter. Many employers take advantage of this dependency, but sometimes the conditions are more complex: For the girls, a sexual relationship with the employer is a chance to gain an edge over "Madam" and to take over her position at the side of her husband. In particular, when it is a household with the comforts of middle-class life (e.g., apartment, car, television, refrigerator, stove) the girl may want to change sides and turn herself into a well-off person. However, employers' latent suspicions of adultery are fatal as they undermine the girl's capacity to protect herself against sexual offences and domestic violence.

Schools and teachers. Girls on permanent jobs need the permission of their employers to go to the evening school between 5:30 P.M. and 7:30 or 8:00 P.M. This is when employers come home and want to have dinner prepared by the girls. When the girls come home from school it is expected that they will clean the kitchen and dishes. Most of them must get up early in the morning to prepare breakfast. Not enough food and not enough rest is a regular complaint from the girls.

Some girls are not allowed to go to school by their employers. They suspect that the girls may receive information about other jobs and better salaries from their classmates. Therefore, employers prefer an almost complete isolation of the girls in their respective households. This is clearly described by 16-year-old Meseret:

Most employers prefer servants like me who come from the rural side of this country. Since we don't know anything they use our labor force as they want and pay only a small salary. They try to seclude us as much as possible so that we don't have any kind of contact and communication with other people. Some employers even don't allow their servants to go

for shopping. If the situation in a certain house is not good, those servants who come from Addis leave this house, because they know well about the area and where to go. But those who come from the rural areas can't do so. This is why they prefer us.²⁹

Many girls emphasize the importance of school education because they are well aware that they need a school-leaving certificate to improve their situation. Not being allowed to continue their education as a side effect of their early marriage as well as the risk of abduction and rape on their way to school were mentioned by many of the girls as reasons to break with their family and run away.

We visited the Bihere Ethiopian School where some of the girls from the broker's office took classes.³⁰ We could see the classrooms and were able to talk to the director and teachers, who to a surprising degree were not only well-informed about the students, but showed empathy regarding their current situation. We were informed that the school fee is between 10 and 25 ETB per month: 10 ETB for grade one, and fees rise incrementally to 25 ETB for grade eight. Because the school does not provide books, the students must buy them with their own money. The curriculum is restricted to four subjects: Amharic, English, mathematics, and science. It is a condensed version of the day classes, where six or seven subjects are taught.

The girls told us that their classes started at the beginning of the year with 75 students and now, in the middle of March, they were only 62 students. Those who do not show up anymore could either not follow in class or were hired by employers too far from the school. The director confirmed that the dropout rate among household servants was very high due to frequent changes of their place of work.

Because many girls have run away from home they have no school certificates. This is a serious problem for everyone. Even when the girls attended higher grades in their home town, without a certificate they must start from grade one again. The school administration will promote them when they do well, but only up to the fourth grade. The government does not allow attending higher classes without school certificates, even when the teacher recognizes that the girl could follow this class. Without a certificate every girl, no matter how old or talented, must repeat grade

five and above. This of course discourages many girls and keeps them away from school.

The director of the school and the teachers confirmed that sexual harassment is a huge problem for most of the girls working as household servants. Another problem is that some employers don't allow the girls to go to school. According to the teachers, the school has more problems with Christian employers than with Muslim employers regarding accepting education. However, we doubt that there are significant differences between the religions. We rather believe that this is a question of education itself: a well-educated person is more likely to respect the desire of a housemaid to go to school than a person with no or limited education. Because many Muslims are engaged in small businesses, they meet people from all ways of life and therefore know about the importance of foreign languages and other skills like reading, writing, and mathematics. In contrast, the majority of people in the Amhara region are farmers who are convinced that education is unnecessary for girls, and is an obstacle to finding a favorable marriage partner for them. Thus, we consider the level of education to be more important than religious affiliation regarding permission to attend school.

Based on the information from the interviews, we categorize the female household servants we met at the broker's office and at the evening school into four groups. The first group puts great emphasis on education as a way of changing their life. The second group wants to work hard, save money, and return to their home village. The third group plans to migrate to Arab countries.³¹ Finally, there are those girls and young women who have no idea about their future. Overall, most young female migrants working as household servants in Addis Ababa do not want to contact their families because they feel ashamed to come home with empty hands.

Social context. The broker's office is a meeting point, a social center that attracts many people. In the evening between 6 and 7 P.M., when daily work is done, people from outside join the girls at the broker's office. In particular, boys are attracted to the girls who sit in the open stall, have nothing to do except wait for an employer, are socially accessible, and have time to chat. However, some male passersby, who see the girls in the stall, address them with clear suggestions: they offer them a place to stay for the night or money

for sex, because it is obvious that the girls need a place to sleep and have serious financial problems.

There are also visits from girls who already found a job through the broker. They come to say hello and keep in touch with the broker or join the other girls, who they might know from previous times. On the last day of our research at the broker's stall, fresh bread (*qitta*) was made and an Ethiopian coffee ceremony was celebrated to say good-bye to us. We had an enjoyable farewell party, when one of the visiting girls engaged in role-playing and acted like a female employer ("Madam"): "Is there a good household servant?" she asked in front of the girls, her hands on her hips. And addressing one of the better-looking ones, she said: "You are much too pretty. I can't hire you. If I hire someone like you, I will finally have to share my husband with you."

We had a lot of respect for the girls we met at the broker's stall, and were impressed by the humor and courage they showed. Even when their situation was miserable they tried to maintain their dignity and support each other. We remember one girl with a small handicap who had been unemployed for more than ten days and was completely broken. But she did not give up her search for a good employer and a fair contract. Finally, she found what she was hoping for: a permanent job with a focus on child care and a salary of 350 ETB per month. We wish her good luck!

Sociocultural and Economic Backgrounds of Rural-to-urban Migration

In the rural areas of northern Ethiopia there are hardly any women above 20 years of age who are not married or had once been married. The national rate of early marriage (i.e., marriage below 18 years) is 54 percent, whereas among specific ethnic groups like Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, and Gurage the rate may be as high as 80 percent.³² What these numbers don't show is that parts of the Amhara region have the lowest age of entry into marriage in Ethiopia. The average age of girls who enter into marriage in Gojjam, Amhara region, according to recent studies is between seven and eight years.³³

As research team, we learned on our field trip to the Amhara region (Gondar and Dabat), from interviews with local experts and from relevant

publications, that arranged marriage in this region is predominant, i.e., marriage does not require the consent of either the girl or the boy.³⁴ It is a two-family negotiation, and sometimes the marriage partners have known each other since early childhood, but sometimes they first meet at their wedding ceremony.

The bride receives a dowry (e.g., some cattle, sheep, or goats, and eventually a small plot of land or money), and after the wedding ceremony she moves to the compound of her parents-in-law. There she performs daily works like fetching water, herding the cattle, collecting firewood, and thus contributes to the survival of her new family. Her parents-in-law gain an advantage not only from her labor force but also from her dowry, which is available to them as long as she is a member of their household. Only when her parents-in-law are convinced that the young bride is strong enough to run her own household and mature enough to have sex, will they allow her to start living with her groom, to whom they must provide a dowry of equal value (*macha*). Sex is performed as soon as the young couple moves in together, and because the Orthodox Christian Church does not allow condoms or other contraceptives the girl will become pregnant very soon.³⁵ Early pregnancy is associated with many risks such as fistula, which is strongly stigmatized in Ethiopian society.³⁶ Because many girls are neither physically nor mentally prepared to shoulder marriage and childcare, they run away and escape to urban centers.³⁷ Confronted with the fate of these young runaways, whose life stories were presented above, it became an urgent question why parents in the Amhara region marry off their daughters when they are still children.

In fact, the economic benefit of early marriage is anything but obvious. The wife—or rather girl—givers don't achieve any profit because in general no bride wealth or bride price is paid.³⁸ To the contrary, they must provide the young bride with dowry, which weakens their economic potential to an extent that is not compensated merely because they now have one less hungry little mouth to feed. Nor do girl takers gain a particular benefit from early marriage, even when the labor force of the young groom and her dowry are at their disposal. Finally, they must provide their son with a dowry of equal value (*macha*), which will be used by the young couple to build their own hut (*gojjo*) close to the parents of the groom. Thus, early

marriage in the Amhara region is prevalent largely for reasons that are not economic.

According to our findings, early marriage, abduction, and rape in the Amhara region are the result of a complex interplay of economic and sociocultural variables like the land holding system, marriage rules, and moral values. This interplay has developed a dynamic with the result that the age of marriage partners is steadily decreasing in the Amhara region. According to a study conducted in East Gojjam, Amhara region, most girls are currently married off between five and nine years of age (78.1%), and most boys between ten and fourteen (65.6%).³⁹ Compared with the Imperial era (1941–74) and the Derg era (1974–87), the average age at marriage has dropped from 12 to 7 years for girls and from 18 to 12 years for boys.⁴⁰ These figures illustrate that the age at marriage in the Amhara area has decreased dramatically in the last four to five decades.

The trend towards an increasingly early age of marriage was confirmed by Guday Emirie, a social anthropologist at Addis Ababa University.⁴¹ According to Guday, who did fieldwork (2001–4) in West Gojjam, Amhara region, the average age of a bride dropped from 11 years to 8 years within one generation.⁴² According to Guday, the reason for this trend towards earlier marriage is due to an increase of life insecurity in this region. This insecurity is due to economic factors in combination with environmental (droughts) and public health (e.g., HIV, malaria) reasons. Young men who want to marry and establish a family can't be sure they will be able to afford marriage in the future, and therefore try to marry as soon as possible. In case they have already lost the economic potential to cover the expenses related to marriage, abduction (which is socially equated with rape) became an option to force a girl into marriage. Confronted with these culture-specific reactions (early marriage, marriage by abduction) and economic crises (impoverishment), a considerable number of girls and young women escape to urban centers.

According to Guday, another factor that encourages early marriage is the land distribution policy in the Amhara region. A young man who reaches the age of 18 years receives a small plot of land (0.25 hectare) from the peasants' association, but only if he is married. Thus, he is pushed by his parents to celebrate his wedding before he has reached this age, and in order to avoid further expenses his younger sisters are likewise married at

this time. According to Guday, the average age of a bride in the West Gojjam region is currently eight years, and some marriages were arranged and even concluded at the baptism of the girl, which takes place 80 days after birth.

Regarding the reasons for the prevalence of girl marriage in the Amhara region, Guday points out that Orthodox Christians have not only to refrain from premarital sex, but attach the greatest importance to the virginity of the bride. Fearing that her daughter might lose her virginity before wedding through abduction and rape, she is married off by her parents at a very early age. This is done by the parents in the supposed interest of their daughter because she would be forced to marry her abductor to avoid the risk of remaining a single for the rest of her life. Thus, early marriage is an effective strategy to secure the virginity and integrity of one's own daughter, not least because the abduction or rape of a *married* girl or women is absolutely taboo as it would lead to a bloody feud between the two families or lineages affected.⁴³

Guday summarizes her arguments referring to the relationship between life insecurity and early marriage in the Amhara region as follows: "In general . . . current economic pressures and life insecurities coupled with sociocultural customs and the gender ideology result in the highest prevalence rate of early marriage for girls. . . . Here it is important to note that the economic motives behind why girls are married off early among the studied agrarian communities are currently covered with sociocultural justifications."⁴⁴

Contrary to Guday, we argue that in the Amhara region people react to economic pressures and life insecurities in a culturally specific way, e.g., by early marriage and abduction, and parents respond to these sociocultural factors by marrying off their daughters even earlier. Confronted with forced or early marriage, a considerable number of daughters run away to urban centers. It is important for us to note that these girls do not escape from economic factors like poverty, a heavy workload, or harsh living conditions in the rural areas, but rather from sociocultural factors like early marriage and marriage by abduction, which are specific reactions of a patriarchal society to economic pressure and life insecurity.⁴⁵ The Ethiopian state prosecutes these practices as "harmful traditional practices." But do these practices have a tradition?

Harmful Traditional Practices or Current Economic Strategies

According to our findings, practices like early marriage, abduction, and rape are crucial factors when it comes to female migration from rural parts of northern Ethiopia to urban centers like Addis Ababa. It is obvious that these practices are harming the dignity of girls and young women, and therefore the Ethiopian state takes juridical action against them.

Article 35(4) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, enacted in 1995, states: “The State shall enforce the right of women to eliminate the influences of harmful customs. Laws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited.”⁴⁶ This article triggered a debate in Ethiopia on how to define “harmful customs” and how to take action against them. The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association is a crucial figure in this debate and refers, in cooperation with UNICEF and organizations like the Ethiopian National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia, to the following practices as “harmful traditional practices”: (1) female genital mutilation; (2) early marriage; (3) marriage by abduction; and (4) particular practices around child delivery.⁴⁷

In light of this definition, the Revised Family Code of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, passed in 2000, raised the age for legal marriage and states in Article 215 that 18 years is the minimum age for marriage for both sexes.⁴⁸ In contrast, the New Criminal Code, passed in 2004, has in fact a chapter on harmful traditional practices, but does not mention early marriage in this context. However, Article 648 of the New Criminal Code regards it as an act deserving of punishment under the law.⁴⁹ This article differentiates between victims above or below 13 years of age. In the former case, the punishment is up to three years imprisonment, and in the latter, up to seven years.⁵⁰ In addition, according to the New Criminal Code, Article 587, marriage by abduction is a crime to be punished with seven to ten years imprisonment.⁵¹ However, even when the Ethiopian state takes action against harmful traditional practices and prosecutes early marriage and abduction in this context, they still occur in high numbers in the Amhara region.⁵² Against this background, it remains an open question for us whether the practices under scrutiny should be characterized as traditions at all.

Regarding the question of whether early marriage is a tradition firmly

established in culture and history or a short-term strategy to cope with an economic crisis currently threatening the rural population, local experts hold different opinions. According to Hirut Terefe, director of the Institute of Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University, it is undisputed that early marriage and marriage by abduction are harmful to the girls and young women. However, according to her it is a question if they are *traditional* practices or *current* strategies to cope with economic decline in northern Ethiopia. The average age of girls getting married is constantly going down in the Amhara region, which indicates, according to Hirut, that early marriage is a strategy against increasing impoverishment. This strategy also avoids abduction and secures the virginity of the bride, but in her view early marriage has nothing to do with culture or religion but with education and livelihood.

Most people push early marriage to the Muslims, which is not true, because the people in the northern part of this country are more fanatic orthodox than anybody else in Ethiopia. When you look at that, early marriage can't be tied to any religion. People can take religion as a scape-goat like in the context of FGM [female genital mutilation]. But neither the Koran nor the Bible say anything about early marriage, abduction or any other type of harmful tradition. There are no differences between the religions. But the level of education matters and the level of income is also among the contributing factors. However, the people explain early marriage with their tradition, they say, it is our culture—as if culture is not changeable, as if culture is static.⁵³

This statement is not only compatible with our findings but is also in accordance with our understanding of culture and traditions as a complex formation that reacts not only to economic changes (impoverishment) but also to changes at least in part induced by itself (abduction and rape).⁵⁴ According to our understanding, girl marriage and the steady decline of the entrance age into marriage is a reaction to the threat of abduction and rape that is derived from impoverished young men and their parents who have lost their economic potential to cover the expenses related to conclusion of marriage.⁵⁵ In fact, the Amhara region has suffered from economic decline for many years with the result that young men, who are not able to afford the

financial resources for marriage, resort to abduction in order to tie a partner to themselves and establish a family.⁵⁶ The parents react by marrying off their daughters at a very early age to secure not only their own right to choose the marriage partners of their children, but also to protect their daughters and save them from sexual violence. This combination of economic factors and culture-specific reactions has caused a downward spiral, pushing the average age of marriage lower than ever before at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

We would like to stress that culture and economy are not separate spheres of society. To the contrary, they are interwoven and have deep impacts on each other (as in a dialectic relationship: they respond flexibly to reciprocal challenges), which finally make the distinction between “harmful traditional practices” and “current economic strategies” obsolete.

In fact, juridical prosecution of harmful practices like early marriage, abduction, and rape was unable to fundamentally change the situation for the female population in northern Ethiopia. According to current numbers, 44.8 percent of girls below the age of 18 are still affected by early marriage.⁵⁷ Even girl marriage continues on a large scale, although hidden from public eyes. Therefore, stricter laws and regulations are not a sustainable strategy to combat this harmful practice. The answer will be improving the economy and education in the region.

The Position of the Orthodox Church and the Work of NGOs

Even when the Ethiopian government allows marriage only when both marriage partners are at least 18 years of age, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church traditionally encourages marriage before age 15, declaring that this was the age of the Virgin Mary at the Immaculate Conception.⁵⁸ In fact, Orthodox priests not only continue to perform wedding rituals of underage children, but usually take very young brides for themselves.⁵⁹ When we confronted the priest Abba Lesane Work of the famous Orthodox Church in Gondar, Amhara region, with this illegal conduct, he justified it as combat against promiscuity.⁶⁰ We acknowledge that in 2013, the elected patriarch, His Holiness Abuna Mathias I, tried to influence parish priests who continued

to give their blessing to early marriages. However, apparently neither the patriarch nor the state has the will or the ability to enforce the law against early marriage, the more so as there are no birth certificates in rural areas to which public authorities could refer. Because even the girls were deceived by their parents regarding their real age, early marriage continues to be performed in high numbers in rural northern Ethiopia.

This is the point of departure for many local women's associations and international NGOs to take action against the practice—for example, in Dabat, a small town about 60 kilometers north of Gondar. In Dabat, a representative of the Norwegian-sponsored NGO, Women and Children Affairs/Save the Children, informed us about its recent efforts to enforce government regulations classifying marriages below the age of 18 as illegal. This NGO provides shelter on its own grounds for girls who don't consent to the marriage arranged by their parents. The girls can stay in the shelter and enjoy protection from the organization until the preparations for their wedding are cancelled. At the same time, they are encouraged to continue their education.⁶¹

An employee of the NGO introduced us to a girl whose marriage had just been canceled. This girl had heard from her schoolmates that the wedding ceremony being prepared in her neighborhood was supposed to become her own wedding ceremony. Because she did not want to marry but continue to go to school, she confided in her teacher who encouraged her to contact the above-mentioned NGO.

We met this girl, Mirinda,⁶² who was accompanied by a member of the NGO on her return from school. We asked her a couple of questions, but we received only one-word answers. Her shy and awkward behavior conjured up images of the girls at Addis Ababa's broker offices. We estimated that she was 12 years old.

Final Remarks

The huge need of Ethiopia's 4 million capital Addis Ababa for female household servants is to a wide degree answered by girls and young women from rural areas, in particular from the Amhara region. A considerable number

of these girls and young women escape from so called “harmful traditional practices” like early marriage, abduction, and rape, and we consider their escape to urban centers like Addis Ababa to be a subversive act against patriarchal structures and the repression of women in rural northern Ethiopia. In this article, we have tried to give these girls and young women a voice by presenting their life stories to the interested public. These stories throw light on the causes and consequences of their migration to urban centers and reveal their living and working conditions as female household servants in Addis Ababa.

According to the results of our case study, the above-mentioned so-called “harmful traditional practices” are crucial factors for rural-to-urban migration as far as girls and young women from the Amhara region are concerned. These practices (an ever earlier age of entrance into marriage and marriage by abduction) are a response by Amhara society to economic factors (impoverishment) and other social pressures (life insecurity) to which parts of this society (girls and young women) respond with migration to urban centers. The society is reacting to factors in part induced by itself.

Shifting economic burdens onto the shoulders of women may be a tradition in a patriarchal society like the Amhara society. However, we question that child marriage and marriage by abduction are traditional practices that contribute to the economic stability of rural northern Ethiopia. To the contrary, we consider these practices to be harmful to society as a whole. They reflect sociocultural deformations due to extreme economic decline to which they simultaneously contribute. Therefore, improving education and the economy with the aim of transforming the prevailing patriarchal ideology is the only way to overcome practices that violate the right and dignity of women wherever they occur.

NOTES

We became interested in migration patterns in Ethiopia when Volker Gottowik was a DAAD-guest lecturer at Addis Ababa University in 2008–9 and 2010.

As postgraduate students, we had joined his seminar on research methods in social anthropology, and on completion of our term paper on rural-to-urban migration in Ethiopia, he encouraged us to conduct additional research on this

topic together with him. In 2013, Volker Gottowik returned to Ethiopia with a grant from his university in Frankfurt, and as a research team we conducted interviews with young female migrants, professional brokers, school teachers, and local experts in Addis Ababa. Finally, we undertook a joint fieldtrip to Gondar and Dabat in the Amhara region to become more familiar with the living conditions in this part of the country. But above all, we asked young women and girls in Addis Ababa, who we met at brokers' offices and in evening schools, to tell us their life stories. These stories and their interpretation are the key elements of this article, which was completed when Volker Gottowik returned as a Wenner-Gren guest professor to Addis Ababa in 2016. Volker Gottowik would like to thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation, DAAD and the Gender Equality Office of Frankfurt University for their support.

1. Janet Henshall Momsen, "Maids on the Move," in *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service*, ed. J. H. Momsen (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–20.
2. We critically examine the concept of "harmful traditional practices" in a later section of this article.
3. The growing public awareness about harmful practices like early marriage is documented in a series of publications like Berihun M. Mekonnen and Harald Aspen, "Early Marriage and the Campaign Against it in Ethiopia," *Research in Ethiopian Studies* 72 (2010): 432–43; United Nation's Fund, *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects* (New York: UNICEF, 2014), https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf; Quentin Wodon et al., *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank and International Center for Research on Women, 2017), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/eicm_global_conference_edition_june_27_final.pdf.
4. Caroline B. Brettel and James F. Hollifield, eds., *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Stephan Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Caglar, eds., *Locating Migration: Rescaling Cities and Migrants* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
5. J. Clyde Mitchell, "The Causes of Labour Migration," in *Forced Labour and Migration: Patterns of Movement within Africa*, ed. Abebe Zegeye and Shubi

- Ishemo (London: Zell, 1989), 28–54; Alula Pankhurst and Francois Piquet, eds., *Moving People in Ethiopia: Development, Displacement and the State* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2009); Iman Hashin and Dorte Thorsen, *Child Migration in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 63.
6. The life stories told by young female migrants in Addis Ababa were collected by us in Amharic during December 2008, January 2009, March 2010, and March 2013. They were carefully translated and edited by us, leaving out reoccurring questions about details of their migration to Addis Ababa. The life stories presented were selected out of 18 semi-structured interviews, all tape recorded, and collected by us at broker offices and evening schools. Within this small sample we tried to avoid repetitions in the statements, and instead intended to represent the broad scope of their answers, experiences, and strategies to cope with their present situations.
 7. Interview with Tigist, December 28, 2008, conducted at the broker's office. All annual figures in this article follow the Gregorian calendar and not the Ethiopian calendar.
 8. Oscar Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," in *Anthropological Essays*, ed. Oscar Lewis (New York: Random House, 1970), 67–80.
 9. In rural parts of Ethiopia, rape rarely occurs as an isolated act of sexual violence, but is systematically used in combination with abduction to force girls and young women into (early) marriage. However, because abduction is socially equated with rape the acts are difficult to separate.
 10. Interview with Abebu, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker's office.
 11. That young women and girls from the Amhara region are disproportionately represented in rural-to-urban migration to Addis Ababa is one of the central findings of our research project. Due to the interviews with these female migrants at broker offices in Addis Ababa and a fieldtrip to Gondar and Dabat, Amhara region, together with personal links of most members of our research group to the Amhara region, this region of northwest Ethiopia became the geographic focus of our research. However, even when emphasizing the Amhara region, we are able to make some general references to northern Ethiopia and other parts of the country, which does not mean that our research speaks about rural Ethiopia as a whole.
 12. Interview with Tsion, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker's office.
 13. Interview with Sisaynesh, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker's office.

14. It is important to note in this context that all girls and young women we talked to at the broker offices had already some experience with primary education in their rural locality. They already knew about the significance of education from their teachers before they were forced to leave school. It is due to the contradiction between their awareness of the importance of education and their exclusion from it that these girls escaped to Addis Ababa where many of them attend evening schools.
15. Interview with Asnakech, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker's office.
16. Selamawit Tesfaye and Gelila Dereje, "The Plight of Female Domestic Workers," *Berchi: The Annual Journal of Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association* 7 (2008): 153–74.
17. Female migrants also come from other rural areas in Tigray, Oromia, and SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region), particularly from Wolayita, Hadiya, and Kembata.
18. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, *Ethiopia's Progress towards Eradicating Poverty: An Interim Report on Poverty Analysis Study 2010/II* (Addis Ababa, 2012), http://www.amu.edu.et/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=27&Itemid=36.
19. So-called "harmful traditional practices" are not restricted to the Amhara region but are prevalent in almost all rural areas of Ethiopia. However, according to our case study, the vast majority of girls who escape from these practices to urban centers like Addis Ababa came from the Amhara region and had an Orthodox Christian background.
20. We would like to reemphasize that rape as an isolated act of sexual violence is rare, but is systematically used in combination with abduction to force women into marriage. Against this background we refer to a recent survey, according to which 81 percent of the female respondents said, "that their first sexual experience was physically forced" (cf. Annabel Erulkar et al., *The Experience of Adolescence in Rural Amhara Region Ethiopia* (New York: Population Council, 2004); and Rachel B. Vogelstein, *Ending Child Marriage: How Elevating the Status of Girls Advances U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 2013).
21. Other factors that encourage female migration to urban centers are family disruption and divorce or death of parents, and in some cases unintended pregnancy.

22. The distinctions between a job on *permanent* base and a job on *shifting* base are explained below in this section.
23. The term “prostitute” refers here to a person who offers sex in exchange for money. The term is problematic because it is associated with negative moral connotations. However, we prefer the word “prostitute” to the more neutral “commercial sex worker” because the girls and young women from rural areas who sell their bodies as part of their survival strategy in urban environments share the disparaging meaning connected with the word “prostitute.” In other words, as faithful orthodox Christians they have a moral background that does not allow them to conceive the exchange of sex for money as “commercial sex work,” even when they refer to their own engagement in this business. They consider any form of sexual activity before and outside marriage to be a sin.
24. Brokers are also found in small urban towns. Sometimes the girls migrate from smaller centers to bigger centers and finally to Addis in a kind of step migration.
25. A *Kebele* is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa is currently divided into approximately 330 *Kebele*.
26. Interview with Habtam, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker’s office.
27. After completing the empirical part of our research, there have been considerable changes, including salary, which has been increasing and is moving beyond the reach of many families in the city. However, employing a female household servant is still common, and the problems of these young women and girls face remain tremendous.
28. Interview with Habtam, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker’s office.
29. Interview with Meseret, March 7, 2010, conducted at the broker’s office.
30. Bihere Ethiopia School is a primary school providing education service from grade one through grade eight on a regular and evening basis.
31. In the course of our research, migration to the Gulf States increased significantly. A growing number of girls work in Addis Ababa only long enough to earn sufficient money for a visa application and then migrate as fast as possible to Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, Lebanon, etc.
32. Ethiopian Woman Lawyers’ Association, ed., *Harmful Traditional Practices under Ethiopian Laws* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2005).
33. Alemante Amera, *Early Marriage and Reproductive Health Problems in Eastern Gojjam: The Case of Machakel Wereda, Sostu Debir Shellel Peasant Association*

- (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, School of Graduate Studies, 2004); Guday Emirie, *Early Marriage and Its Effects on Girls' Education in Rural Ethiopia: The Case of Mecha Woreda in West Gojjam, North-Western Ethiopia* (PhD diss., University of Göttingen, 2005).
34. Helen Pankhurst, *Gender, Development and Identity: An Ethiopian Study* (London: Zed Books, 1992); Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet, eds., *Children on the Move in Africa: Past and Present Experiences of Migration* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2016).
 35. According to our understanding, neither arranged marriage nor early marriage is the crucial point in this context, but rather the Orthodox Church's ban on the use of contraceptives. If the Church allowed family planning as a way of preventing pregnancy at a very early age, the most urgent problems of these young couples could be avoided.
 36. As we learned from Dr. Genet at the Fistula Clinic and Fistula Training Centre in Gondar, most women who are affected by fistula became pregnant at a very early age. Because no medical aid from scientifically trained and qualified persons is provided for pregnant women in rural areas—and even the Fistula Clinic has no medical equipment to perform Cesarean procedures—puerperal mortality in Ethiopia is very high and fistula widespread, particularly in those areas where child and early marriage are prevalent. In most cases, fistula causes incontinence and is therefore associated with lifelong social isolation.
 37. The high rate of unwanted children in Ethiopia that are transported to Addis Ababa for international adoption is due to the reasons given in this section.
 38. There are differences within the Amhara region such as among the highlands (*dega*), midlands (*winea dega*), and lowlands (*kolla*). In some of these areas, an additional bride wealth or bride price is required, which contributes not only to the parents' interest in marrying off their daughter early, but also to abducting a marriage partner when the bride price seems unaffordable. However, a dowry “on equal matching or strict reciprocity between the marrying families” is the dominant feature in the Amhara region; cf. Emirie, *Early Marriage*, 130.
 39. Alemante Amera, *Early Marriage and Reproductive Health Problems in Eastern Gojjam* (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2004).
 40. Amera, *Early Marriage and Reproductive Health Problems*, 47.
 41. Interview with Dr. Guday Emirie, March 18, 2010, conducted in her office at Addis Ababa University.

42. Emirie, *Early Marriage*, 169.
43. Detailed reasons for early marriage, but not for the trend towards ever earlier marriage, are given, for example, by Haile Gabriel Dagne, "Early Marriage in Northern Ethiopia," *Reproductive Health Matters* 2, no. 4 (1994): 35–38; and Amare Dejene, "Harmful Traditional Practice in Ethiopia," in *Protect Children from Abuse and Neglect* (Proceedings of the National Workshop organized by The Children and Youth Affairs Organization and The Italian Cooperation, Addis Ababa, December 2–4, 1996), 49–66.
44. Emirie, *Early Marriage*, 161.
45. It is difficult to make sharp distinctions between sociocultural and economic factors because they are often inextricably intertwined. However, regarding the trend of ever earlier entry into marriage, we emphasize a particular dynamic that is initially induced by economic factors and accelerated by sociocultural responses. Only such a dynamic approach can explain earlier and earlier marriages in the Amhara region.
46. Ethiopian Woman Lawyers' Association, *Harmful Traditional Practices*, 3.
47. *Ibid.*, 5.
48. Amara, *Early Marriage*, 37; Ethiopian Woman Lawyers' Association, *Harmful Traditional Practices*, 15.
49. Ethiopian Woman Lawyers Association, *Harmful Traditional Practices*, 16.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 14.
52. Vogelstein, *Ending Child Marriage*, 14.
53. Interview with Hirut Terefe, March 24, 2010, conducted in her office at Addis Ababa University.
54. Traditions evolve in time in response to changing situations and circumstances. In this sense, traditions are historically and socially constructed, and they have the potential to legitimate a certain power or ideology (in this case, a patriarchal structure). The question, however, remains how these traditions are sustained and legitimated so that they are accepted as "givens." In this context, limited access to education on the side of the female population in northern Ethiopia is among the crucial factors.
55. Early marriage and the desire of men for very young brides may be a tradition in Amhara society, but to call ever earlier marriage a tradition is a self-contradiction because it would soon reach its natural limits.

56. There are additional sociocultural reasons that encourage young men to abduct girls: some parents refuse to marry off their daughters to men whose family backgrounds are not favorable in social and economic terms, and there is also a tradition of segregating and marginalizing certain occupational groups, e.g., weavers, blacksmiths, potters, and tanners.
57. "Girls not Brides," in *Country Fact Sheet: Ethiopia* (The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, 2015), <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Fact-sheet-Ethiopia-national-strategy-May-2015.pdf>.
58. Paul Salopek, "The bride was 7," *Chicago Tribune*, December 12, 2004, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-0412120360dec12-story.html>.
59. Orthodox priests in Ethiopia are allowed to marry, but according to tradition must wed a virgin. However, to secure the virginity of the bride, the priests prefer wedding partners whose menstruation has not yet started; cf. Salopek, "The bride was 7."
60. This illustrates the lack of correspondence between state laws and customary laws, including those of the Church. Thus, there is a failure or inability by the state to reconcile this legal plurality by imposing a law that is official and national.
61. Cf. Annabel Erulkar, Eunice Muthengi, and Berhane Hewan, *A Pilot Program to Promote Education and Delay Marriage in Rural Ethiopia* (New York: Population Council, 2007).
62. This is not her real name. We referred to her as Mirinda due to the fancy she took for this soft drink when we interviewed her in a cafeteria in Dabat.

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