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**Prof. Dr. Kiya Gezahegne**

(Assistant Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University)

### **The Gendered Border o Religious Identity**

The border is recognized as a fundamental space that captures the social process of identity construction and deconstruction. Through cross border mobility, different recognition of identities within the different cultural contexts takes place, unfolding through and with the border. One such identity is religion. Situated between two countries that is dominated by two different religions, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, the Metema-Gallabat border is a fertile thinking ground to study religious identity (re)construction. Recognizing the need to study borders and people on the move along and across these borders, this dissertation explores the practicalities of dealing with religious differences between the two countries.

This study mainly tries to investigate religious identity construction and re-construction of Metema Yohannes residents and Ethiopian Christian migrants as they move along the Ethiopia-Sudan border towns of Metema Yohannes and Gallabat and further to other parts of the Sudan (for Ethiopian migrants). The main objective of this study, hence, is to explore the dynamics between gender and religious identities as they play out in the process of migration and borderlands. To this end, with a qualitative approach taken, the study utilized observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document review to gather data. The social network, situational and discourse analysis were used in the study to examine the data gathered.

The study found out religious identification goes beyond its metaphysical value and puts into network social, cultural, economic, political and historical elements. Through social and economic interaction, for the borderland people, religious divide seems to be insignificant compared to the socio-economic interaction across the border. The importance of religion, however, sometimes outweighs other factors. For Christian female migrants, fluid religious identity, fitting to the context, is preferred. This is achieved through conversion, improvisation (role play), and adoption of transcultural religious identity. These processes of identity (re)construction are mostly noticeable among women who are more visible and 'most likely to adapt'. Further, the data gathered shows, for both cases of borderland residents and migrants, religious identity negotiation is not a process that is limited to times of interaction with 'others'. The process continues among their own communities through reintegration of individuals into the religious community in a ritual of cleansing such as baptism. The issue of impurity and recognition resulting from conversion or improvisation of change in religious affiliation is mentioned in this study. What is more important is the religious identity (re)construction process affects and is affected by gender, economic interdependence, generational divide, historical narratives, and state politics, among others.