

Societal Derivations for the Illegal Gun Trafficking: In Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

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Abstract: Gun is not allowed to buy and own for civilians in Ethiopia. There are national laws, regulations and administrative procedures that allow production, export, import, transit or retransfer of small arms which are limited to state and federal security purposes; while any other, if any, is explained by the anti-terrorists act. The law requires a record of the acquisition, possession and transfer of each privately held firearm be retained in an official register. Nonetheless, both the anti-terrorist act and other firearm regulations, have not been successfully implemented to prevent illicit trafficking of guns and violent crimes associated with illegal gun possession. Peripheral neighborhoods in Addis Ababa prove its existence and people in these neighborhoods are found to be defenseless. Graveyards of church and jungles have been the busiest illegal gun exchange belts. The number of people involved in the different courses of action to procure guns is also considerable. This research assesses the societal apprehension to the illicit gun exchange. Residents in the village where illegal gun trafficking took place have negative impressions to it. The illegal gun exchange created fear in the residents; limited the right of people to movement; and embarrassed in many respects. Trust on police for security purposes is diminishing; because, residents understood policemen, themselves, as part of the illicit trafficking. The midnight time when people are most likely to sleep is the peak time of the gunfire. This compels to prognosticate the impending terrorism; as its opportunity of emergence and development is open.

Keywords: Gun trafficking, emerging terrorists, gun troubles, neighborhood insecurity.

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

The illegal use and exchange of guns is not a singular problem, but is complex, entrenched and poses significant challenges to communities, police and policy makers, (Gavin, Chris and Daniel, 2006). Furthermore, the relationship between illegal firearms and crime is dynamic, and as a consequence ongoing efforts are required to keep abreast of changes to ensure that they are responded to appropriately.

The United Nations 'Plan of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons' proposed a Program of Action that calls on States to take steps to curtail the illicit traffic of Small Arms and Light Weapons. The Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects defines measures that governments of member states should take to control the black market trade in arms, (Ethiopia, 2008). It not only made recommendations on the control of imports, exports and transfers to prevent diversion to illicit use, but also requires member states to: make illicit gun production/possession on a criminal offense; establish a national coordination agency on small arms; identify and destroy stocks of surplus weapons; keep track of officially-held guns; Disarmament, Demobilizations & Re-integration (DDR) of ex-combatants, including collection and destruction of their weapons; Support regional agreements and

encourage moratoria; Mark guns at point of manufacture for identification and tracking; Maintain records of gun manufacture; Engage in more information exchange; Ensure better enforcement of arms embargoes; Include civil society organizations in efforts to prevent small arms proliferation.

According to Alpers and Marcus, 2014, there are several sources for firearms. They may be diverted from legal owners in a country, or they may be purchased overseas (legally or illegally) and smuggled into a country. Diverted weapons come from both private owners and the protective services. Guns and other weapons are also available from disbanded guerrilla troops in post-conflict situations, (BJA¹, 2000). One of the main strategies employed by arms traffickers to procure guns is the use of "straw purchasers"², (Ludwig, 2005).

The other source of firearms for use in criminal activity is the in-country diversion of legally acquired firearms and ammunition to illegal use, (UN, 2005). According to UN 2005, to prevent the re-use of weapons in gun-related crimes, it is critical that guns should be traceable and that weapons seized should be securely stored and properly disposed off. This requires effective procedures for acquisition, marking, licensing, registration, operation and storage.

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¹BJA :Bureau of Justice Assistance

²Straw purchasers: are acquaintances, relatives or persons hired to purchase guns.

All of the guns, procured from the above-mentioned sources and by the various mechanisms, contribute to the stockpile of circulating illicit firearms. However, due to poor forensic investigation of firearm-related crimes and non-existent tracing of firearms, it is not possible to know what contribution each of these sources make to the problem of guns and criminality in communities (IACP³, 2011). One well-known intervention that has been used to withdraw illegal guns from circulation has been that of gun buybacks. Attempted in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, buybacks have met with variable success (IACP, 2011).

In Ethiopia there are national laws, regulations and administrative procedures that allow production, export, import, transit or retransfer of small arms which are limited to state and federal security purposes; while any other, if any, is related and explained by the anti-terrorists act (Ethiopia, 2008). It is strictly prohibited to trade in firearms and with all its aspects of small arms and light weapons. The law requires a record of the acquisition, possession and transfer of each privately held firearm be retained in an official register. State agencies are required on demand to maintain records of the storage and movement of all firearms and ammunition under their control.

However, whether the anti-terrorist act or other firearm regulations, have not been successful in preventing the illicit trafficking of guns and violent crimes associated with illegal handgun possession. The *failure* of the government to control guns and the prevalence of crimes due to civilian's illegal gun possession is the motive of the current research in order to assess the societal responses to the illicit gun exchange or trafficking in neighborhoods.

2. JUSTIFICATION

According to UN 2005, illegal guns are the most common causes for the violent crimes and murder all over the world. Ethiopia is one of the mentioned top countries having illicit gun trafficking which is believed to cause violent crimes and numerous deaths. Many countries in the list of illicit gun trafficking profile of the United Nations are depending on the extent and prevalence of registered firearms at production, export, import and caught at smuggling. However, in Ethiopia, for different reasons, the number of guns (illegal) and

cases of smuggling are hardly known; because, the manner of illegal exchange and procurement of guns is intricate and very difficult to identify.

Gun is not allowed by law to buy and own for civilians in Ethiopia. However, the number of people involved in the different courses of action to procure guns is not few. One among the predominant methods to procure guns is using illegal ways, as it is impermissible for personal consumption. Moreover, jungles in the city periphery of Addis Ababa are the busiest places of illegal gun exchange according to the details of Ethiopia's report draft to its 'Implementation of the United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects' (UN, 2005).

Residents in those jungle-adjacent peripheral villages, repeatedly, reported to local police about their suspicions. However, the police and informed media stayed silent on the issue. This instigated the researcher to assess the role of the police for the security of peripheral residents; and the discernment of illegal gun exchange by vulnerable neighborhood residents. The residents' trust on the policemen, unrealized impacts behind the illicit exchange of guns and concern of the governor are supposed to be crystal clear.

Hence, this study is conducted to show the attitude of peripheral residents to policemen in relation to neighborhood security; and negative impacts of gun shots in the ecological environment.

3. OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this study is to assess the societal derivations⁴ to illegal gun trafficking and associated crimes in *Kechene* area, Addis Ababa. It specifically, Identifies the places and time of illegal gun exchange in the vicinity; explores the roles of police to prevent societal worries related to illicit gun trafficking; and discusses the impressions of the neighborhoods on the illegal gun possession, exchange and potential harms that are more likely to occur.

4. METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

The research used both primary and secondary sources of data. Monograph, reports, books, and

³IACP: International Association of Chiefs of Police

⁴The researcher uses the term 'societal derivations' to affirm that conceptualization of the 'illegal gun trafficking', has a root and a proof in the grass roots level community. He also believes, 'illegality' has to incorporate definition of the people, besides the law.

articles are used to review secondary data. With regard to collection of empirical data, the study involved police officers working in *Gulelle* sub-city⁵ and civil residents. The number of participants was determined based on the time available to the study, and the sufficiency of supplied information for the specified places.

The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants and up on informed consent, they were interviewed for not more than half an hour for every interviewee. Participants were interviewed and their responses were written down in Amharic⁶ and translated into English for the research report. To study the lived experience of interviewees, hermeneutic phenomenology was used. This approach was employed since it enables description and meaningful interpretation of the phenomena as it appears. The research was cross-sectional, since data is collected from the interviewees at one point in time.

The researcher discussed illicit gun trafficking in and around the *Kebeles*⁷ with Police officers to know the attention and concern of police to the issue. In-depth interview is administered to residents in *Kechene*⁸ *Medihaniyalem*⁹ -church area who live between the church's cemetery and the river canyon. These interviewees are selected purposively so that they can give the full picture of what goes on at night in the grave yard compound and the river canyon beside their village.

This research had intrinsic and extrinsic limitations. The intrinsic limitations are associated to the research design; while the extrinsic ones are geospatial. The study is based on qualitatively analyzed data collected at a single point in time. Hence, it does not show longitudinal trends in the development of illicit gun exchange behaviors. For this reason, historical analysis on the pattern of crimes has been hardly possible. As the exchange of illegal guns is undertaken after proving shots, it was difficult to have a physical observation by the researcher. Forwarding recommendations on how to eradicate violent crimes, which are likely to occur due to illegal gun ownership, has been, therefore, a multifactorial dispute.

⁵Gulelle is a sub-city in Addis Ababa- Ethiopia's capital. This sub-city is adjacent and surrounded by jungles from north, North West and north east parts of the city.

⁶Amharic is the first language of informants and national language of the country as well.

⁷Kebele is the least governmental administrative unit in Ethiopia

⁸Kechene is name of the uptown part of Gulelle sub-city which is used as a residential village

⁹Ethiopian Orthodox Church i.e. Holy savior

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected through in-depth interviews and discussions from police officers and local residents are analyzed using thematic approaches. Five themes are generated after careful analysis of responses common to the interviewees; in a way that satisfy the needs of the specified objectives of the research. To avoid the loss of original meaning, the transcribed data were not translated into English until the stage of report writing. To protect the confidentiality of participants Pseudonyms are used.

Places of Gun Exchange: Church Graveyard and City Jungle

Interviewees of the research explained that the grave yards of *Kechene Medahniyalem*-church and the river canyon between *Shiromeda*¹⁰ and *Kechene* that is covered by juniper and eucalyptus jungle were centers of illegal gun exchange. Because, respondents briefed that the graveyard of the church was very 'scary' and no civilian went to it at night. Hence, it was *safe* to traffickers to exchange and test the functionality of the gun by free-shooting. According to their information, though the gunfire is audible from far away neither police officers nor a resident dared to go and ask what happened.

Besides, the jungle that is located strategically had double advantage to illegal traffickers. First, it is out of the reach of people, and second, it absorbs the sound pollution of the gunfire. The illegal exchange and possession of guns is obviously, not an easy task. It required 'safe' places to exchange the guns and test the functional status of the gun. Places that people do not easily reach out, most preferably jungles that soak up the voices of the gunfire have been ideal for illegal gun exchanging.

Times of Gun Exchange: The Midnight

Respondents explicitly identified the midnight to be the start of all the topsy-turvies. When everyone is at home, most probably asleep, is very comfortable for the illegal exchange of guns. Because, even if, people of the neighborhood happen to see illicit gun traffickers exchanging or shooting; the actors can hardly be identified in the darkness. As they explained, such sound of the *night kind* has never been heard during

¹⁰A condensed residential and commercial village that is adjacent to Kechene from northeast.

day times in the age of resident interviewees, unless it is the car-tire burst/explosion.

Undoubtedly, it is for the reason that actors of illegal gun exchange can be more obscured at night than the day time that they exchange at night, for the sake of the darkness. The time that respondents usually hear the gunfire is neither a time when civilians move around, nor the policemen had a standby watch to the area. Because, the policemen usually disappear from those places when it is close to midnight.

The Roles of Police to Prevent Illicit Gun Trafficking

The interviewed police officers explained to the researcher that the area had been under a strong control of local police by the coordination of *Menen*¹¹ area police station. Informants told details about the importance of community policing to prevent crime by whistle blowing for the suspects of crime in their neighborhood.

According to the police officers crimes related to spouse abuse, assault, abduction and rape have very strong control by the villagers themselves. But, crimes that the community had not been conscious about, at least until then, like the illicit gun trafficking, were not reported; and police officers were admitting that it existed. Police officers and a station commander anticipated that not all gun fires heard in the jungle were illegal. They presumed most of them to be the legally arranged trainings of the Addis Ababa police and federal police forces. Nonetheless, their information had no substantial evidences other than their personal guesses. They were also not voluntary to give detailed information about the nature of their mandate and control of the site. They were instead, obsessed by defending questions of the researcher about visible and audible issues.

Even though, police officers reported that they had been working to maintain peace and order as much as their resources permit, resident interviewees explained that there were lenient reactions by the police to the illegal gun traffickers. One interviewee spoke it as;

"I think polices are the right people to identify whether the sound is a fired bullet.

And I am sure they hear it from where they are, as their camp is near. It rather seems, either the illegal gun exchange is not their security agenda and they do not have attention to it, or the policemen fear to approach the jungle and graveyards at night. Otherwise, the policemen themselves must be part of the illegal gun exchange."

Respondents briefed that the pollution of gunfire was covertly audible to them and policemen themselves were the professionals to know that was a fired bullet. But, policemen did not have the delving attention. This implies the role of police to prevent illicit gun trafficking in *Kechene* area had been minimum, if not involved them in the business. On the other hand, the government regulations state the security concern of people to be in the due care of the police. Meaning, residents were always fearful of the deadly gunfire a few yards away from their homes. Even though, there had not been a death report of human beings in the neighborhoods due to gun traffickers so far, it cannot be an assurance for not to occur the next day.

Therefore, strong control of police to the area by the cooperation of residents will be indispensable to eradicate illicit gun trafficking. It also needs the expansion of fundamental infrastructure, especially, electric lights to the jungle and graveyards so that the darkness cannot conceal illegal traffickers; and appropriate roads to easily reach the places, for successful prevention of the crime and assure the prevalence of peace in the villages.

Impressions of the Neighborhood

It has not been uncommon for firewood collectors to find dead hyenas in the jungle as the respondents' informed the researcher. The respondents believed that not all those deaths of hyenas were certainly caused by the natural processes. It was rather the ruthless reaction of illegal gun traffickers doing it at night, in the time for hyenas to move across the jungle.

Meseret stated the situation as,

"I do not doubt the gun sellers and buyers would kill me, if they find me roaming around the jungle while they are testing and exchanging the gun. Because, in my opinion, they use hyenas as testing pads by shooting at them to prove the gun

¹¹A residential village in north Addis Ababa was named 'Menen' in memory of the *Etege Menen*- the wife of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, the last king of Ethiopia.

works. Plus the sellers and buyers in our village are illegal; and they fear police. So, if they see any person anonymous to them, they think they are surrendered. For this reason, the fate of hyenas is inevitable to be for human beings as well."

Residents have also acclimated the time to be gathered in to home as early as before 7:00 pm. Because, coming to home later than that means to be vulnerable to whatever dangers by both illegal gunners and the angry hyena. Freedom of movement was strictly limited. This had become customary practice and villagers live silent to what goes around.

The other informant, *Admasu* told to the researcher that the government deliberately made such gaps and tolerated illegal exchange of guns, so that the affording ones can buy to protect themselves and their property. Because, by law, it is not allowed or it is a crime to have any kind of firearm or armament for personal purposes, unless it is registered by customs and police, and have legal license. *Admasu* believed, the problem to get license of hand gun from government was with the registration. Because, once the gun is registered it would be easy for police to 'snatch' whenever necessary.

Moreover, it is impossible to kill a person by a registered pistol. Because, the police can very easily detect which pistol killed the person. There is also a very limited chance to have a license of hand gun for the poor; it is allowed only for the rich. For these reasons many people, in the respondents' opinion prefer to find illegal gun possession. This enables them kill their enemy and stay unidentified. *Admasu* responded as below, had he had been in need of having a gun:

"I would not need the license if I had the way to have the gun. Because, why? It is just a bar of iron unless it is used to shoot."

6. MAJOR FINDINGS

The church grave yards, the jungle and canyon are avowed illicit gun exchange centers. Gun exchange in these places had a multifold concern to residents. First, it is unsafe to persons to move in the area after the early evening. Residents believe, if traffickers see people walking around, they may think of walkers as security agents and could shoot them, as the exchange

is a 'live or die' kind of job. Second, these places are, abode of uncounted wildlife, especially for the hyenas at night. These animals are, usually, found dead in the jungle. Traffickers kill them to prove the status of the gun. In this regard, illegal gun traffickers have been problems, not only for residents, but also to the ecological biodiversity pool.

Public trust of the police in the study site is found to be minimal. Residents did not have a sense of 'security agent' on the policemen. Interviewed residents considered police forces as brokers and technical inspection experts to the exchanged guns. Though it is difficult to claim policemen involved in illicit gun trafficking, it is also problematic to debase the public perception as witness. Policemen might have been part of the illicit gun trafficking. This attitude of residents, to a high degree of acceptance, convinces the involvement of the police, itself. Existence of untrusted police, on top of the geopolitical closeness of Ethiopia to the middle-east, is the notable potential for the occurrence of terrorism in the country.

7. CONCLUSION

The illegal exchange and possession of guns has been an intricate process. It involves selected and 'safe' place and time to exchange the guns; and test the functional status of the gun. Places that lay people do not easily reach out, most preferably jungles that soak up the voices of the gunfire, had been conducive for illegal gun exchanging, as managed to uncover it in the research site. However, the sound pollution from the gunfire had not been possible to conceal by the jungle. This has been covert in the current research context for a long period of time; as informants told their experiences.

The societal responses to sound pollution of illegal gunfire amidst the night in their neighborhood, and the crime of gun trafficking itself, have been tenacious concerns for the local residents in places between *Kechene* and *Shiromeda*. But, this concern has been vaguely surpassed by police officers. Night time, when everyone is at home is found to be 'conductive' for the illegal exchange of guns; for the reason, all of the sudden, if people of the neighborhood happen to see illicit gun traffickers, the actors can hardly be identified in the darkness.

The Church graveyard of *Kechene Medahniyalem* is found to be one of the busiest 'spaces' for gun sellers and buyers to meet. The cultural myths associated to

graveyards prevented individuals for any visit when they heard the sound of gunfire besides intuitive fears, and this in turn fostered the chance of gun traffickers to use the place as a center. The large area of the graveyard enabled shooting handguns to prove their functional statuses.

The residents view the situation as if it was normal. They even think that is the gun market which the government does not want to talk about. Because, the government on one hand, gives some segment of the population the rights to have licensed and registered guns; and on the other hand, it is vague where from to find and buy the gun. In any way, the illegal gun exchange created fearfulness in the residents; limited the right of people to movement; and embarrassed in many respects.

The death of hyenas in everyday night in the jungle and the graveyard is believed to be the gun traffickers' shot. This created fear in people to go to the site and ask what happened. Because, being illegal, the act of gun exchange is deadly in the midnight time with almost null assistance from police.

Generally, the graveyard of *Kechene Medahniyalem* church and the juniper and eucalyptus jungle across the river canyon between *Kechene* and *Shiromeda* are found to be the illegal gun exchange belts. The midnight time when people are most likely to sleep and policemen disappear is the peak time of the gunfire. Residents in the village where illegal gun trafficking took place have negative impressions to it, albeit, they thought the government gave it the least attention.

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