

The Ethiopian Youth and the *Khat* Quandary

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Abstract

“Khat” (Catha edulis) is an evergreen shrub with a psychoactive substance capable of stimulating the human central nervous system. It is widely grown and consumed in Ethiopia and Yemen from where it is said to have spread to other parts of Eastern Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, and other countries of Southern Africa. A lot has been said by academic and non-academic writers about its psychological, physiological and economic effects. These studies articulated that the youth has been a major social group immersed in the fast-growing khat-chewing culture and victimised by its harmful effects. However, barely little has been said that this same group does take the greater proportion of the share of economic benefits derived from the khat industry. Khat has created employment opportunities, and is a means of livelihood for a good number of the youth in the zones of its production. This study sought to examine some of the gains some section of the youth in Sidama Zone (one of the major areas of khat production) of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region procured from khat trade and provide fresh insights into the ongoing khat debate. It is argued in this paper that khat trade in Sidama is a business organised and run predominantly by the youth and khat is viewed as less of a harbinger of health hazard and other adverse effects than a means of employment in such a way that it defies most generalisations. A qualitative research method was employed in the study and the main actors in the vibrant khat business in northern Sidama, such as “Farmer-Traders,” brokers, drivers and their assistants, sellers of enset (false banana) leaves, and “Wokil-Negades” (Resident –Agents) were interviewed at the time of field work in Wondo-Genet and Tula khat markets in 2012. Interview guides, focus group discussions and observation were used as means of data generation.

Keywords: *khat*, Sidama youth, “*khat* workshops”, *khat*-chewing culture

1. Introduction

Khat is an evergreen shrub widely grown and consumed in Ethiopia, Yemen, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Madagascar and Zambia, to name just a few countries. It is a mild stimulant classified under

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the genus *Catha*, species *edulis*; hence, it is known among the scientific community as *Catha edulis*. Sometimes, it is also known as *Catha edulis* Forssk, in memory of the Swedish botanist Peter Forsskal who first reported *khat*'s botanical description and classification in his work *Flora Aegyptio-Arabica* back in the 18th century. The pharmacology of *khat* reveals that the leaves of this plant contain psychoactive substances capable of stimulating the human central nervous system and creating temporary euphoria. Among others, the most active ingredients (alkaloids) in *khat* are *cathinone*, *cathine* (also known as *norpseudoephedrine*) and *norephedrine* (Kennedy 1987: 176–177; Anderson *et al.* 2007: 3–5).

The Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) is one among the nine regional states of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Sidama Zone, which is the geographical focus of this study, is one of the 13 administrative zones in the Region. The Zone is further divided into 19 *Weredas* (an Amharic term for district), according to the latest administrative restructuring adopted in 2006. According to the 2007 census, the population of Sidama Zone was 2,966,652. Five years later, in the year 2012, the population of the zone was estimated to have reached 3,232, 308. This makes it one of the most populous zones in the SNNPR. Population density in Sidama Zone is 425 persons per km² (Sidama Zone Bahel, Tourism 2003 E.C.: 2).

The main objective of this research was to analyse the pros and cons of the expansion of *khat* consumption and production from the vantage point of the youth, which constitute about 43% of the Ethiopian population (Census 2007). Despite the various definitions and age ranges given to youth, the author of this article has adopted the age range set by the National Youth Policy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia issued in March 2004. Accordingly, any mention of 'youth' in this paper refers to "... part of the society who are 15–29 years" (Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture 2004: 4). There is every reason to bring the youth into the limelight. Most of all, it is a moving force in the *khat* world as a producer, trader and consumer. Besides, the fact that Ethiopia has become a youthful nation, with young people (10–29 years of age) constituting 43% of the total population (CSA 2008), has to be reckoned with.. The subject that the Ethiopian youth

has become the principal casualty of *khat*'s harmful effects has received a reasonable coverage in the *khat* literature thus far. But, the issue that this same group garners the greater proportion of whatever benefits accrued in the course of *khat* transaction is under-reported. Using available data, this article argued that the *khat* business is the business of the youth more than it is of any other group.

2. Methodology

The qualitative research approach was used in this cross-sectional study . In addition to secondary sources, firsthand information was gathered through a brief fieldwork at Wondo-Genet (Tafara market) and Tula *khat* market during the early months of 2012. Research participants were carefully selected to represent the different work processes relevant to the questions raised by this research . These groups include major actors in the structure of *khat* marketing, as it is functional at the Tafara and Tula *khat* markets, such as farmer-traders, the middlemen, *wokil-negade* (resident-agents) “*Kontractors*,” drivers, their assistants, and sellers of *enset* (false banana) leaves and *tisho* (*enset* fiber used as rope).

The data was collected through observation of the different work processes, interviews and focus group discussions with various participants along the different work processes. Semi-structured interviews, with the help of guiding questions, were used and field notes taken. A typical FGD type of interaction the researcher had was the one held on 26/12/2011 with five members of the “*Khat* Un-loaders’ Cooperative” of the Tafara market, for about an hour, a little before they start their job of the day. Data regarding the ages of some of the major actors engaged in the business of *khat* trade in the study area was generated from the researcher’s field note and used for the qualitative analysis. Narrative analysis approach was followed to analyse the data and make meaning out of the results.

3. Results

3.1. *Khat* from the Perspective of the Youth: The Literature

Khat chewing is not a new practice in Ethiopia. Leaving aside several speculations and conflicting tales of origin, it has been on the records in Ethiopia from as far back as the days of Emperor Amda Syon (r.1314–44) in

the fourteenth century (Ezekiel 2004:3). What is rather new and phenomenal is its unprecedented prominence both as a major crop in the field and being an important commodity on the market, especially over the last quarter of the preceding century. Such an increasing prominence of *khat* both in markets and on farmers' plots has been the result of a rising demand for the shrub.

At present, people from different social, religious, and age groups chew the leaves and tender twigs of *khat* for different reasons. Some claim that *khat* has the potency to fend off sleep and fatigue and increase alertness. Apparently, this has to do with the psychoactive ingredients, cathinone and cathine it contains. Others chew *khat* for pleasure and recreation that is to enjoy the temporary euphoria which *khat* chewing creates. Still others believe that it is an herbal medicine against common cold and dysentery/ to name just two. Some Muslims claim that they chew *khat* for religious purposes (Eshetu and H/Mariam 2001:96; Sebsebe 1984:7; Varisco 2004:103; Anderson *et al.* 2007: 5).

Like most other substances, what one may get from *khat* chewing is also conditioned by the context and setting in which it is chewed. After chewing, users usually enter into a state they are habituated to and get what they expect from it. For example, among farmers in some *khat* producing areas, *khat* chewing is believed to generate extra energy that would enhance better performance in agricultural activities and ease the hardship of farm labour. Truck drivers, university students and guards have a commonly shared perception that *khat* keeps them awake and alert. Nowadays, the socialising effects of *khat* sessions are contributing to its increasing popularity. No matter which element/s in *khat* induce/s this kind of effect, *khat* is said to suppress aggressive behaviour. Rather, friendliness is the most common hallmark of *khat* chewing sessions. Usually, *khat* chewing takes place in a group. Therefore, it is believed that *khat* chewing sessions play a considerable social role by fostering amity and stimulating sociability among the *khat* chewing community (Eshetu and H/Mariam 2001: 104; Varisco 2004 : 109; Anderson *et al.* 2007: 5).

Nevertheless, the dominant theme in the *khat* discourse has, for a considerable time, been the real or imagined physical, physiological and

psychological harm *khat* chewing is supposed to induce. Although sometimes conflicting with one another in their findings, as will be shown later, there are a good number of research works with pages of accounts about the deleterious consequences of *khat*. *Khat* researchers within the medical community are in the driving seat, either out of personal conviction or out of professional commitment, in articulating the harmful effects of *khat* on human health. Among the range of diseases and bodily dysfunctions that *khat* is reported to have been a cause for are: gastritis, increased blood pressure, increased respiratory rate, constipation, cancer of the mouth and stomach, loss of teeth, hallucination, illusion, and impotence (Dechassa 2001: 96; Varisco 2004: 104; Amare and Krikorian 1973: 375).

The psychological and socio-economic effects are not less alarming. Studies on the impacts of *khat* use on mental health are still ongoing and it may be premature draw some kind of valid conclusion. Back in 1980, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified *khat* as a drug that is capable of producing mild – moderate psychological dependence (Ezekiel 2008:796; Ward and Gatter 2000: 40). At any rate, despite some differences among researchers about the addictive potential of *khat*, there seems to be a general consensus that several years of *khat* chewing may lead to some of the following disorders: loss of appetite, mood swings, feeling of anxiety, problems with sleeping, irritability, and depression. There are also reports of some kind of association between *khat* use and “paranoid psychosis (Anderson *et al.* 2007: 6–7).

A micro-economic (household level) analysis of the socio-economic impacts of *khat* in Ethiopia has so far been hard to come by. But studies in Yemen and Somalia listed down the same accusations, blaming *khat* as a cause for social evils. The most objective of these accusations is that *khat* chewing drains the bulk of the resources, money and time, of families and, thus, ruins family life. The analogous remark of one researcher is more expressive and worth quoting here. “*Khat* does take the food out of children’s mouths and the clothes off women’s backs” (Green 1999: 41). In addition to this visible burden on the household budget, socially, habitual *khat* chewers are blamed for a flagrant neglect of family responsibilities. Especially staying away from home perpetually, while their children are longing for their love and

care at home, imposes a strain on family stability (Varisco 2004: 115; Cassanelli 1986: 251; Anderson *et al.* 2007: 177).

Despite all these negative characteristics of *khat*, the second half of the 20th century came with new opportunities for the rapid commodification of *khat*. Before the 1950s, *khat* consumption in Ethiopia was confined to few social and religious groups. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed some degree of growth in the production and consumption of *khat*; but it was not so conspicuous. Some authors have pointed to the *derg* period (the period from 1974 to 1991 during which the military junta ruled the country) as a landmark in the phenomenal expansion of the culture of *khat* chewing and the commodification of the substance thereof. In addition to this, some possible factors accountable for this transformation are suggested and will be discussed later. During this period, social stigma towards chewing and chewers faded away and there was a radical shift in people's attitude towards *khat* chewing. Producers were increasingly attracted towards *khat* farming. This brought about a profound impact on the farming system and crop choice. Traders found that *khat* trade is a profitable business as well. The net effect of all these was a vigorous expansion of the *khat* industry in the years ahead (Ezekiel 2004: 13; Anderson *et al.* 2004: 66–67). By some coincidence, not because of common fuelling factors, the author of this article would say, *khat* chewing culture underwent a similar phenomenal expansion during the 1970s in Yemen too (Varisco 2004: 110).

What interests us here is the role of the youth in this historical process, and to what extent the youth are affected by this state of affairs. The youth, which constitutes a significant proportion of the Ethiopian population (Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture 2006: 1) is the centrepiece of the story of this dramatic expansion of *khat* culture. *Khat*-related studies give a solid confirmation that the most vulnerable and the most affected segment of Ethiopian society by the spread of *khat* culture is the youth. As the general deleterious effects of *khat* chewing have been briefly outlined in the preceding discussions, what is worthwhile here is to focus on the pervasive influence of the *khat* chewing culture among the youth.

In his assessment of possible reasons for the dramatic expansion of *khat* chewing in Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s, Ezekiel cites the *Zemecha*

(“Campaign for Development through Cooperation, 1975–77) as a seminal moment. His thesis is that this campaign is to blame for the phenomenal expansion of *khat* chewing among the urban youth in the decades that followed. At the bottom of the argument is the fact that all high school and college students were forced to go to rural areas en masse, totally disencumbered from parental supervision and restraint. This put them at liberty to consume *khat* along with cigarettes and alcohol. To Ezekiel, it was then that the curtain started to go up for a progressively expanding “*khatism*” among the Ethiopian youth and the proliferation of *khat* selling shops in towns and countryside alike (Ezekiel 2004: 13).

A good number of recent studies have revealed that, of all other segments of the society, it is the youth that has fallen prey to the fast growing *khat* culture. Although the habit of *khat* chewing is indiscriminately expanding irrespective of age, gender, ethnic and religious barriers, the youth have become the most vulnerable victims. The fact that a significant proportion of the young *khat* consumers are unemployed is no longer a worrying signal of an impending danger but the danger itself unmasked. The idea is that this section of the youth, who consider *khat* chewing as their choicest leisure activity, but bereft of the means to get *khat* as much as they need on a daily basis, would inevitably resort to crime and violence (Dechassa 2001: 3; Taye and Aune 2003: 189; Eshetu and H/Mariam 2001: 104). Still more worrisome as a community and a nation are the recent epidemiological findings of neuroscience research that suggest the adolescent brain is more vulnerable to the effects of addictive substances than the brain of adults (Lubman *et al* 2007: 792).

One will also be stunned by the findings of other more focused case studies and surveys among high school and college students. Most of these research works show a very high prevalence of *khat* chewing among high school and college students. Studies such as the one conducted on students of Agaro Secondary School in 1994 show that two-thirds of the students between the ages of 15 and 22 are “frequent” users of *khat*. Similar studies conducted in Gelemso Secondary School, Jimma University, and high school students in Addis Ababa and Butajjira towns, all testify to a very high prevalence of *khat* chewing among the youth (Ezekiel 2008: 785). On a BBC documentary

broadcasted in August 2002, Nita Bhalla reported that *khat* has become a threat to the young people [in Ethiopia]. She adds that “the number of users is increasing particularly among the youth....many students and lecturers at schools and colleges chew *khat* because they say it increases their concentration” (Bhalla 2002).

The overwhelming expansion of *khat* culture, especially among the youth, did not pass unnoticed by local newspapers either. However, both the tone and the message of most of these newspaper articles are the perpetuation of the same old denunciation and severe abomination of *khat*. For example, the Amharic daily *Addis Zemen* wrote in 1999 that universities have become places where the young not only pursue academic studies but also pick up one or the other addiction. The article adds that it has become a trend of the day that young people who join our universities, at graduation, will get not only their degrees but also an addiction to *khat*, or possibly another drug (*Addis Zemen, Nehase* 11/ 1999).

An issue of the *Ethiopian Herald*, in April 2010 holds an article about “Substance Abuse” in Ethiopia. It was a report about an awareness-raising workshop on drug use organised for the youth in Addis Ababa. However, little was said about other illegal abusive drugs. Rather, *khat*, the not yet criminalised shrub in Ethiopia, occupied most of the space and all the three photos on the page depict the process of *khat* transaction (*Ethiopian Herald*, April 29, 2010). This may be because the reporters and the forum itself were more scared by the phenomenal expansion of *khat*-chewing culture among the youth than by the more serious danger other illegal drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and heroin, illicitly circulating in towns, posed on the youth. The general impression we get from this is that, in recent times, the subject of *khat* has come to the fore in Ethiopian public discourse more than any other abusive substances whose level of circulation and growing number of addicts might be not less alarming, albeit not thoroughly studied yet.

At the time when the campaign against *khat* has been intensively propelled, to the extent of a call for a total ban, some members of the academic community have come forward with a balanced assessment of the negative and positive sides of *khat*. A case in point is an article in 2008, “*Scourge of*

Life or an Economic Lifeline? Public Discourse on Khat (Catha edulis) in Ethiopia.” Several research works preceding this mention one or the other positive sides of *khat* to the individual or the country. But, in most of these works, the two contending views are not presented in a balanced way. The positive sides are brought into light only as a sideline rather than a core issue. Otherwise, some of these works have even gone to the extent of informing their readers that *khat* can cure 501 diseases and that it even has a significant amount of Vitamin C (Amare and Krikorian 1973: 370; Cassanelli 1986: 241; Ward and Gatter 2000: 33). Still others had the courage to maintain their view that *khat* is less dangerous and less addictive than most other drugs. Some of these studies have underlined that there is no sufficient ground for an all-out condemnation of *khat* and categorising it as a “harmful drug” (Anderson *et al.* 2007: 177; Green 1999: 38; Fitzgerald 2009: 2; Varisco 2004: 113). This sympathetic perception of *khat* is best summed up by Ralph Kingele who writes; “Its [*khat*’s] negative effects on health and social behavior, when misused, is [are] moderate and generally limited to few individuals. Educative efforts eventually combined with adequate legislation to protect minors, should be sufficient to prevent possible abuses” (Kingele 1998: 18).

The hard facts, that *khat* has already advanced to become one of the leading foreign currency earners for the country, the revenue regional and federal governments are generating from *khat* trade, and employment opportunities the *khat* industry has created, have all got recognition even from the ardent opponents of *khat* and anti-*khat* campaigners. It has become an undisputed reality that the colossal growth of the *khat* industry over the past four decades has brought about rural growth and better living conditions for *khat* farmers. For example, in Hararge, the high cash return has increased the income of farming communities which has allowed them to satisfy their basic needs with much more ease. Moreover, electrification of villages, purchasing of modern appliances such as tape recorders and television sets by *khat* farmers and off-farm activities some enterprising farmers are able to run (Ezekiel 2008; Eshetu and H/Mariam 2001; Kingele 1998: 17; Anderson *et al.* 2007: 85) are undoubtedly indicators of the remarkable transformation some rural communities achieved through *khat* agriculture.

3.2. Findings of the Present Study

When we get back to our unit of analysis, the youth in the production zone, and examine to what extent their lives have been affected by the ever expanding *khat* production and trade, the finding in this article reveals that this social group is not at all a loss-maker. As stated earlier, the youth in many of the Ethiopian towns could be affected by one or the other physiological, psychological or economic adverse effects caused by habitual *khat* chewing. However, the point the author of this paper would like to make here is that a good number of their counterparts in the production zone who are engaged in *khat* production and trade are substantively benefiting from the *khat* industry. To qualify it further, *khat* cultivation in the area the researcher is from is the engagement of all age groups of the farming community. Nevertheless *khat* trade in the regions of production is exclusively dominated by the youth. The purpose here is to show that the same age group we call the youth, as it bears the harms and the injurious effects of *khat*, so does it take the greater proportion of the share of benefits derived from the industry.

The central point of argument is the premise that *khat* trade, for all practical purposes, is the business of the youth, who are a vital force in the process of *khat* transaction in the study area. Before going too far, the first important proof of the validity of this premise is obtainable from the available *khat* literature. It revolves around the nature of *khat* being a perishable commodity with a shelf-life of a maximum of 48 hours. *Khat* leaves maintain their potency for up to 48 hours after cut. So being kept unused more than the given time limit means wastage (Kingele 1998: 12). That is why the *khat* business requires long hours of hard work and personal discipline. Traders have to travel day and night and work hard, overcoming fatigue caused by consecutive sleepless nights. This calls for a high level of discipline and consistency among the *khat*-trading community. Moreover, customers in town do not tolerate delays in the daily provision of *khat*. This is a valid argument why *khat* trade has been a risky enterprise that involves reckless driving, accidents, car crashes and breakdowns (Goldsmith 1988:144; Cassanelli 1986: 246).

On the whole, regularity and efficiency are the typical hallmarks of *khat* trade. The researcher's personal observation during a fieldwork in the *khat*-growing areas of northern Sidama further testify that this indeed characterises *khat* trade. A critical observer must have seen some key service providers, such as bakeries closed in the event of occasional security problems, such as the election crisis of 2005. However, it was business as usual for most *khat* selling kiosks of Addis Ababa. They were "faithful" to their customers and remained operational amidst that crisis situation. Supply and distribution of *khat* in towns continued unabated although the gunshots and burning tyres in the streets were Christmas fireworks. It can, therefore, be summed up that the *khat* business requires the courage and determination to work not only under stressful conditions but also scary circumstances. Thus, nothing less than the vigour and the audacity of the youth can adequately satisfy its requirements.

Although the youth are also an integral parts of the work force labouring on *khat* farms (Dechassa 2001), the most important area of operation for this age group is *khat* trade which absorbs a significant proportion of the local youth who participate in different capacities. Even some of the *khat* critics could not totally downplay the advantages of the employment opportunities the *khat* industry has created. The *khat* business needs lots of people who can adjust themselves to the urgency and hassle that characterise *khat* trade and are ready to work under pressure. That is why energetic youth are needed to take up the job of buying, sorting, packing, loading and unloading, transporting, and selling of *khat*.

In pursuance of the stated objective of this paper, it was imperative to focus on the realities as they unfold in northern Sidama, which is one of the major *khat*-producing regions, and locate the place of the youth in the business of *khat* trade. Empirical data that substantiates the argument here were garnered from two major *khat* termini in northern Sidama, which have a proven record of supplying two well-known *khat* brands (*Beleche* and *Wondo*) to Addis and other major urban centres, such as Adama, Mojo, Bishoftu, as well as other towns in Arsi and Bale. These two termini are Tafara, in Wondo-Genet, and Tula, located just 11kms to the south of Hawaasa town.

The next important step was to be able to identify the key work processes that kept the business of *khat* trade functional, and to locate the role of the youth in each of these work processes. The task performed by people called *Ya Gabare-Nagade* (“farmer-trader”) is one of the most fundamental work processes in the *khat* business in the area. Originally, members of this group are farmers, or at least members of a peasant household, hence farmer-traders. Their principal duty is purchasing the *khat* from the peasant cultivators alive on the standing trees and as shrubs in the farms. This is a tedious and demanding responsibility which requires constant mobility (not to mention other requisites such as sufficient capital, connection with feeders of information, and bargaining skills), and cannot be discharged without a youthful energy.

It cannot be much an exaggeration to say that “these guys have no time to breathe.” Their life is characterised by regular travel to and fro the *khat* termini and the farms. They are extremely busy people with too many sleepless nights, often without a standard mealtime. Owing to the time constraint, the researcher neither had the luxury of interviewing many of them nor a full list of this crowd of young men operating at the different *khat* markets and *khat* fields of northern Sidama. Thus, the knowledge and information used in this study about the work and life of farmer traders was obtained from a few of the very kind and considerate informants from this group, such as YE (aged 28 and a father of 3 children), RN (aged 24), and MY (aged 24). YE is a regular supplier of *khat* to the Tula market. RN and MY are suppliers to the Tafara market, regularly shuttling back and forth from the nearby *khat* producing *Weredas* of Manicho and Gorche, respectively. Although quantifiable data about the age of the majority of the farmer-traders is lacking, the qualitative information from the narratives of these informants about their personal lives and the lives of their comrades-in-arms, suggests that this work process is almost the exclusive domain of young men below the age of 29.

On the other corner of the *khat* market is found the *Wokil-Negade* (the “agent-trader.”) Most of the *Wokil-Negades* represent or work for more than two or three client retailers in Addis or other urban centres. They reside in the towns where the *khat* market is situated with or without their families.

An exception to this rule is the recent trend among some members of this group operating at the Tula *khat* market who have made Hawaasa their residence and shuttle from there only to arrive at market hours. Chief among the job specifications of the *Wokil-Negades* is purchasing *khat* from the market and preparing standard *zurbas* (small-sized *khat* wraps enclosed with *enset* leaves) through the process of combining and recombining very large *khat* bundles.

A good number of the communities of *Wokil-Negades* operating at Tafara and, to a lesser extent, at Tula market are Sidama youth. In a region well known for scarcity of arable land, no wonder that most of the youth have already taken this business as their profession; whereas, the rest of the Sidama youth who are in the business of *Wokil-Negade* could be said part-timers who still operate in the business without abandoning their tiny plot of land in their home areas. Age data of 48 *Wokil-Negades* operating at the Tafara market was collected and, as expected, all of them were young men below the age of 30, in fact between 20 and 30 years. . The mean age of the entire group was 25.8 years, which implies that this work process is almost entirely the domain of the youth. Moreover, 39 of these young men were married, most of them had begotten children, shouldering family responsibilities on top of their managerial duties in the *khat* business.

Wokil-Negades also have a crew of assistants helping them in the course of *khat* purchasing at the market place and in the *khatie tantaminies* (“*khat* workshops”). These assistants need to be versatile because their assignments are diverse. Their services are required both at the market place and in the *khatie tantaminies*. At the market place, they help the *Wokil-Negade* in the selection of a better quality *khat* and make preliminary deals meant to sway the seller before other competitors intervene. Despite a slight numerical difference which stems from the varying amount of purchases made by the individual *Wokil-Negades*, it is an absolute necessity for a *Wokil-Negade* to get the service of 5–8 persons.

As far as the Sidama *khat* trade is concerned, *khatie tantaminies* hold a crucial place. The name “workshop” makes sense when one considers the wide range of important activities performed in those workshops. They are theatres where the most decisive operations of “aggregation”, “re-

aggregation” , “combination”, and “recombination” of different varieties, and amputation of the stalks of *khat*, with all their implications on the price, take place. There are 250–300 of them at Tafara, and about 100 of them at Tula. They are situated close to the *khat* terminus itself.

The whole crew of young men doing their job in those workshops with an amazing speed and tenacity are entirely youth in their teens. Those young workers busily engaged in this process every evening in the “*khat* workshops,” often under the supervision of their employer, the *Wokil-Negade*, are skilful in compensating lack of quality by quantity and vice versa. More fascinating is the precision and sense of responsibility of those workers, which can only be paralleled by the very few highly experienced “Meat Doctors” in some meat-selling houses of Addis who rarely use a measuring device. This whole enterprise is accomplished in those small-sized rooms in about three hours at Tafara, and up to four hours at Tula. Who else, other than those young persons, could handle such a duty in a setting where everyone is in a race against time?

The other very important work process in the *khat* value chain of the study area is the one led by the *Dälala*, sometimes referred to as, with a prefix, *Balämädäb Dälala*. These are just middlemen facilitating the contact and the deal between farmer-traders and the *khat* buying traders. *Balämädäb*, because they “own” (actually they have a usufruct right over) their respective stalls (*mädäbs*) both at Tafara and Tula markets. Their recognised duty, for which they are paid a commission by the supplier, is persuading and insisting the suppliers to accept the offered prices. Their principal asset instrumental in this process is their knowledge of the local (Sidama) language.

Dälalas (middlemen) operating at the two leading *khat* termini of northern Sidama are organised into associations. Four hundred of them are currently members of the *Dälala* Association of the Tafara market, which is widely known as the “Axion,” while the Tula Association has about 100 members. Out of these four hundred middlemen at Tafara, 360 have *mädäbs* (stalls). Membership is granted upon payment of a registration fee of 1,100 birr. Members are also required to pay 3 birr per day (21 birr per week) both as a membership fee and in lieu of rent for the *mädäb* they are given within the

confines of the Tafara market. In 2012, 10 birr per day was the rent Tula's middlemen were supposed to pay to the town's administration.

Membership to each of these associations of middlemen is a compulsory requirement to own a stall in those *khat* markets, which appears to be instrumental in distancing outsiders from this privilege. It is evident that as it stands today, this particular niche in the *khat* business, both at Tafara and at Tula, is the exclusive domain of the local people. Although a record of the age distribution of the middlemen is hard to come by, empirical observation is a testimony that the youths are equally active, if not more, in this particular activity as well.

It is already in the literature that the income local governments generate from *khat* trade, chiefly from *khat* tax, including the rent for the *mädäbs* as in this case, is substantial. Local authorities are also content with the "association" arrangement, as members themselves take care of the security and smooth functioning of the markets. But above all, given the Region's chronic land scarcity, such *khat*-borne job opportunities considerably mitigate the problem of landlessness and joblessness among the youth. One *Wereda* official in the study area aptly referred to it as "our cobblestone," by way of drawing analogy with cobblestone projects in many Ethiopian urban centres, which have partially eased a growing social problem by absorbing a sizable part of the unemployed youth.

The other very crucial position in the trading structure is the one occupied by the "*Kontractor*." The principal task of the "*Kontractor*" is to provide a dependable transport service on regular basis. His second important duty is tax payment at custom gates, representing the body of traders. It is hard to claim that this work process is dominated by the youth like all other crucial boxes in the marketing structure are. Although the key interviewee among the "*Kontractors*", Zarfū Saqalo, was a person in his youth, it cannot be claimed that the generality of the "*Kontractors*" at Tafara were young persons. It is also not surprising that this is the case because one needs big capital and other resources to join that business, and these are assets which are not always easy and achievable at young age.

Tisho and *hokkitto* suppliers are the other key actors in the *khat* business at the two markets. *Tisho*, a rope-like substance made from the fibres of the

outer layers of *enset* trunk, is used as a rope when the packaging/repackaging is done; whereas, the *hokkitto*, a local name for the *enset* leaves used for wrapping the larger bundles as well as the several smaller units wrapped within the larger ones, are of critical significance for packaging and wrapping of *khat*, processes which have to be completed before *khat* bundles are loaded for the long journey ahead. The task of supplying the two items for the market at Tafara has a gender bias. All of the sellers of *tisho* and *hokkitto* at Tafara are women. The selling and buying of the two items occupy the space on the north-western fringes of the Tafara market. Of paramount relevance to our discussion is that, with the exception of, some three of the *tisho*- and *hokkitto*-sellers, whose age count may go a little over thirty, the rest were young women in their twenties and some even in their teens. In the fieldwork conducted around the beginning of 2012, the researcher made a registry and kept the record of the ages of both *tisho*- and *hokkitto*- sellers at Tafara market. Out of a total of 33 ladies in the registry, 17 were specialising on *tisho* trading, while the remaining 16 were *hokkitto* sellers. With the exception of one who was 40 that time, their age was within the range of 14–35 years. The average age of the participants in this business, which was 19.21, reinforces the argument that *khat* trade provides employment opportunities to local youth, in this specific case for young women.

In contrast, all *tisho*- and *hokkitto*-suppliers engaged in this business at the Tula *khat* market are predominately young men below the age of 23. Out of the six individuals in this business, there was only one exception to the rule, a young woman who has sneaked into this business. Of course, their suppliers at the place of production are women. Until very recently, the *tisho*- and *hokkitto*-traders of the Tula market had to travel to rural areas where they can fetch the materials they needed from women of different households, or local women clients, who make the *tisho* and *enset* available and ready for sale. In recent times, however, women traders have started to bring the *tisho* and *enset* to Tula town, but they never meet those traders who need the material directly. Their clients who consistently receive the material are those young *tisho*- and *enset*-traders of Tula town.

The other positions where the youth were found to be the dominant force in the *khat* business are those of the truck drivers, their assistants, and the load-unload workers. The driver is a permanent companion of the “*Kontractor*”, shuttling back and forth between the *khat*-termini and Addis Ababa, as well as other destinations on a daily basis. Prior to the renovation of the Addis-Shashamane road, completed in 2001, the driver was the nerve centre of the operation as speed and early arrival at destinations were audacious achievements sought by all traders. Nowadays, however, the role of a *khat*-loaded Isuzu driver is no different from other ordinary Isuzu truck drivers. The business has become more and more institutionalised with fixed times for departure and arrival. It is a given that one truck has one driver and one assistant. Their employer, to whom they are answerable, is the “*Kontractor*.” In addition to this, there are 5–8 persons on the payroll of the “*Kontractor*” for loading and unloading *khat* bundles. At least two of them are part of the shuttling crew to do the unloading at different destinations all the way to the final point. The registry the researcher had at the Tafara market in 2012 comprises the names of 8 drivers and 8 assistants with their respective ages. This list warrants a similar conclusion that the youth is the most active force in this work process as well. The age range of the drivers was between 24 and 35 and the mean age of this group was 28.13. Their assistants were between the ages of 20 and 27, and their mean age was 23.38.

4. Conclusion

The statistical data presented in the United Nations World Report (2007) clearly demonstrates that the youth is the most vulnerable section of humanity to the dangers posed by unemployment; “Unemployment and underemployment among youth constitute a global problem. All over the world, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to break into the labour market. The youth make up 25 per cent of the global working-age population but account for 43.7 per cent of the unemployed, which means that almost every other jobless person in the world is between the ages of 15 and 24” (UN Youth Report 2007: 238). The Youth Policy document of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states that 44 per cent of the country’s population lives in a condition below absolute poverty, and

rampant unemployment among the youth is a pointer that this section of the society is the most affected. This same document suggests that the informal economy which absorbs a good number of the young is a commendable leverage that helps to mitigate the rate of unemployment among the rural youth who otherwise would resort to migrating to urban areas (Youth Policy 2004: 11–12). This situation has to be seen in light of the chronic scarcity of arable land that typifies the rural economy of the study area.

Given the alarming rate of unemployment both at national and international levels, and the employment opportunities *khat* trade has provided to the Sidama youth (a similar situation is likely to prevail in other *khat*-producing areas too), national policy would find it hard to concede to the harangue made by anti-*khat* campaigners. The paradox lies in that *khat* trade, as has been elaborated in this study, is a lifeline for a sizable segment of the youth in the production zone and at the same time *khat* has several imagined and real harmful effects to the youth on the consuming end. On top of that, there is no clear and unambiguous national policy regarding *khat* cultivation, trade and consumption. In 2014, the Amharic weekly *Reporter* published the response of the then Minister of the Ministry of Trade to a question raised by a member of the Council of Peoples Representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in relation to *khat* revenue. Quoting some lines from this statement of the Minister would be illustrative of the prevailing policy ambivalence:

ጫትን ለማበረታት የምንሠራው የለም። የግብርና ምርታችንን የኤክስፔንሽን ሠራተኞች መድብን እናመርታለን። ማዳበሪያና ሌሎችን ግብአቶችንም እናቀርባለን። ምርጥ ዘርም እናቀርባለን። በጫት ላይ ግን የምንሠራው ምንም ድጋፍ የለም። ግን በራሱ ጉልበት አራሱ እየቀጠለ ነው። በራሱ ጉልበት ሲቀጥል እኛ እንደ ንግድ ሚኒስቴር እየሸጥን ተጠቃሚ መሆን አለብን። እየሸጥንም ነው። ስለዚህ መንግስት አያበረታታም፤ አያዳክምም። ለማዳከምም ብሎ “አትሸጡ” ብሎ ነቅሎ ከማሳ ያቃጠለበትም አጋጣሚ የለም። ስለዚህ በዚህ ጉዳይ ሲቪል ግጥም ነው (መስመር የተጨመረ)። አናበረታታም። የጫት ተጠቃሚ የህብረሰብ ክፍል ስላለ ሽጠን መጠቀም ስላለብን እየሸጥን ነው። ገቢው ቀላል አይደለም። በዓመት እስከ 260 ሚሊዮን የአሜሪካ ዶላር ይገኛል። ትልቅ አቅም ነው፤ እንሸጣለን።

(Reporter : *Ginbot* 24, 2006 E.C , *ection II*, p.10)

[English translation]:

There is nothing we do to encourage *khat* cultivation. We assign extension workers and provide assistance for other agricultural activities. We provide fertilizers and other inputs for farmers. We also supply them with improved seeds. There isn't any kind of support what so ever to boost *khat* cultivation. However, *khat* farming is progressively expanding by its own momentum. As this is the prevalent condition, we as Ministry of Trade have to benefit from the trade. Indeed we are selling it. Therefore, the government neither encourages nor discourages *khat*. At no time the government tried to destroy or burn *khat* farms with the intent of weakening *khat* trade. So, for the time being, we prefer silence [emphasis added] regarding this matter. We do not encourage. In as much as there are *khat* consumers, we have to sell *khat* and benefit from the revenue it generates. The amount of revenue is not petty. We get about 260 million US Dollars per annum. This is a huge capacity; therefore, we keep on selling.]

The existing policy ambivalence greatly affects both the rhetoric and practice at *Wereda* level as well. For example, the stated objectives of the Wondo-Genet *Wereda* Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, which goes as; “ ... to maximize the income of the farmer by providing professional advice; training opportunities and extension services to farmers and investors; by organizing farmers into cooperatives and other associations; by focusing on agricultural produces that enjoy high market demand [emphasis added]...,” (Development Plan 2002 E.C.) is evidently an empty rhetoric that contradicts the reality on the ground, which is a complete apathy and denial of extension services to *khat* farmers. Rather it is like the Ethiopian saying; “One who hides his sickness couldn't get a remedy.” The take-home message from this particular study should therefore be the intensification of the debate about *khat* in such a way that it informs future national policy that should also consider the concerns of the rural youth who have a legitimate stake.

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