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Negash, Girma. *The Education of Children Entangled in Khat Trade in Ethiopia: The Case of Two Khat Market Centers*. Publisher: Forum of Social Studies (FSS), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2017. 72 pp. ISBN: 9994450654.

Review By: Tilahun Sineshaw, Ramapo College of New Jersey.

This monograph is an empirically-based study of children involved in *khat* trade at two popular market centers located in the southern and south-eastern regions of Ethiopia. The findings of this case study are well situated following the author's discussion of historical and theoretical background on the topic. However, the mechanics of the study as regards its methodology and data analysis procedures seem to be flawed and leave the reader skeptical about the study's validity and its ethics.

Negash divided this study into four chapters and began with a discussion of the socio-historical roots of *khat* production and consumption. The pharmacological qualities of *khat*, the fast-expanding demand for the substance, and the trade expansions provide informative background to the topic. The first chapter also includes the objectives of the study and its methods are explicitly articulated and thoroughly discussed. The study's primary purpose was to explore the various roles children take up in *khat* trading activities at two market centers. This objective is certainly broader in scope than what the title of the monograph appears to inform readers: *The Education of Children Entangled in Khat Trade in Ethiopia*. There is a mismatch between the title and the identified purpose. The following chapter served to extensively review the literature that informs the debates surrounding the issues of child labor, creating a conceptual and legal framework for the case studies. Negash has concisely articulated the two contrasting views of childhood and child labor, and he has also successfully situated these competing views within their respective socio-historical and socio-cultural settings.

The hallmark of understanding social issues of the kind discussed in this study resides in the attempts made to anchor them in appropriate cultural settings. Negash certainly has made every effort in this regard and succeeded to a considerable degree. Readers are provided with an account of the major findings of the study in the third chapter. The demographic characteristics of the study sample, the children's activities at the two study sites, observed gender issues in the *khat* business and pull and push factors in the *khat* trade are detailed; these provide insight into children's involvement in the industry and its impact on their education. The author additionally mentions the potential physical and psychological threats that the work environment in the *khat* industry may have on children's health and their well-being. These findings are expressed using both visuals and frequency distribution tables along with graphs which clarify the stated interpretations.

In the final chapter, Negash draws more general conclusions from the cases of the study and highlights where there are direct links to children's educational outcomes. The author finally

discusses his proposed recommendations to deal with the problems he has identified. Overall, the author has successfully presented and discussed multiple issues connected to the adverse effects of children's involvement in the *khat* trade system. This contribution, hopefully, will inspire other young researchers to continue along this line of work by exploring related dimensions of the problem beyond those found in this study.

There are quite a few issues that this slim publication seemed to have ignored and in the process parts of the study appeared imprecise and indistinct. Here one expected the author to have clarified the issues. One issue, which was tangentially touched upon in this review's opening paragraph, is the inappropriateness between the book's title and its purpose. The title created an expectation that children's involvement in *khat* trade and its impact on their education would be prominent in the discussions, but the author fell short in accomplishing this. Only a small portion of the book was devoted to comment on this expected central issue. A discussion of attendant and peripheral issues looms larger than the intended focal issue.

The study's second issue relates to methodological concerns. While the research is descriptive in nature, Negash seems to propose a cause and effect linkage; this can be gleaned from the book's section that focused on the "Research Objectives" as well as from the paragraph that followed. Neither the quantitative nor the qualitative tools utilized in the study warranted the proposal to provide an outcome that indicated causation. While the methodological pluralism of the author is to be applauded, there are some concerns that needed elucidation regarding the integration of data collection tools and its sources. The author posits a mixed method research approach as his preferred method of studying the problem; one that is, of course, in contrast with quantitative and qualitative purists' observations in the Ethiopian academic terrain and, perhaps, the whole of the Africana research community, as well.

Readers are kept in the dark about the nature of the study's survey instrument and nowhere in the book was it discussed. The questions that were asked were about the survey's length, the developers and motivations of survey questions, and the language used in its implementation. While a substantial percentage of the results are extrapolations made from the use of the survey instrument, a clear discussion of this vital data collection tool is conspicuously absent; and that alone renders some of the book's claims less trustworthy. Likewise, Negash did not describe the nature of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions that were part of the mixed method approach. The kinds of questions posed and the topics discussed in the focus group were not clearly identified. This raises a fundamental query about the credibility and reliability of the findings. In addition, how observation was used as data source and how data produced through it was recorded are all unclear. Meaning, which has been inductively created through the use of these qualitative tools, is left unexplained. Readers are not informed about the use of interview and observational protocols in analyzing qualitative data, leaving the reader skeptical of the validity of the research's conclusions.

Finally, this being an empirical study that involves children, the last question that this reviewer wants to pose is: how did the author obtain ethical clearance or, worded differently, how he did he deal with ethical issues? This should have been stated somewhere at the beginning of this publication. Since the author included pictures of some of the children the question is: from whom did he get permission to publish these in this text? Researchers should always remember that research that does not observe these basic unethical rules would render their work

worthless. Nonetheless, in spite of the critical comments, the study is still an interesting one for those interested in this sector.

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