The Emergent Generation Gap in Attitudes toward Khat use in Urban Ethiopia

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Field study, May 09

• Introduced to khat topic by Ethiopian colleague
• 3 weeks of interviews, filming
  – Addis Ababa, Gondar
• Key informants: Physicians, psychiatrist, priest, government representatives, khat sellers, laypersons of various ages, students
• Basic fact finding
  – “We’re here to learn about khat”
Ethiopian Christians (Addis Ababa, Gondar)

- Traditional social and religious sanctions against khat use, especially for youth
  - Widely accepted among Muslims & Christians in traditional khat chewing regions
- Change
  - Approximately 15-20 years
  - 1993: Literature refers to new khat use pattern among youth
- Two views
  - Age 30≤ accepts khat use in general
  - Age 50+ strongly opposes khat use by Christians
Video 1

- “Traditional” family = Christian Orthodox
- Small town life
Generation Gap

- Intergenerational conflict due to differences in values & norms
- “De-authoritization”: change from parental influence to peer influence
- Increased attention on young people, greater “voice” of the young
USA 1960s-1970s

- “Baby boomers” – born in the 1940s
- Felt disenfranchised by the traditional “system”
- “Used” for military power by the older generation
- Wholesale change in value structure and priorities
- Fully embraced by “Hippies” and “Flower children” and to varying degrees by others
- American society influenced by this challenge to traditional values
USA 1960s-1970s

• New pattern of drug use
  – Old: Alcohol
  – New: Marijuana
  – New: Hallucinogens
  – Open use, social settings
USA: Context of Social Change

Increased
• National infrastructure (roads, communications)
• Economic growth
• Education and contact among young people
• Modes of personal expression
• Political interest
What is the Ethiopian Context?
Ethiopian Milestones

• Haile Selassie
  – 1916-1930 Regent
  – 1930-1974 Emperor

• DERG

• Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
  – 1991-present

• New Constitution 1994
Since +/-1994

- National infrastructure (roads, communications)
  - Bahir Dar-Gondar: 6 hours vs. 2.5 hours
  - Computers, internet, cell phones
- Economic growth
  - Exports
  - Tourism
  - Investment by members of Ethiopian diaspora
- Education and contact among young people
  - Great emphasis on higher education, building schools
- Modes of personal expression
  - Computers, internet, cell phones
- Availability of khat
Video 2

• Growing college enrollment
  – Increased migration, learning from students from khat-growing regions
• University life = freedom
Video 3

• Many similar points, but:
  – Pressure to perform at University
  – With more people exposed, greater number of vulnerable individuals chance negative consequences of khat, tobacco, and alcohol
Conclusion

• US/Ethiopian generation gap parallel is not a perfect model, but useful for our purposes of comparison and contrast of contributing historical, economic and societal factors