

I. Introduction

1.1 Background

There is no singular explanation for Ethiopia's underdevelopment. Impediments on its progress are innumerable and multifaceted. These include: negative natural/physical factors such as its unfavorable location, land-lockedness, rugged terrain, erratic rainfall, chronic drought, and land-degradation; its long lasting institutional lacunae that include the well-known ambiguous property rights and tenure insecurity; its age-old political instability that often culminated in civil wars; the high growth rate of its population; its unfavorable balance of trade and overall economic backwardness; the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In addition to these impediments to development and wellbeing, a few negative social phenomena of relatively recent origin have begun eroding its human resource base and overstressing its limited social services. Such is the case with the galloping addiction to, and abuse of, substances, of which the most prominent are *č'at* and home-distilled alcohol; the spread of pornographic dens and gambling hangouts.

Yet, Ethiopian society, like many others in the developing world, has ignored the issue of substance abuse. Instead of addressing the issue, the Government, for instance, has passively encouraged the cultivation, marketing and consumption of *č'at*, because of its importance as a source of cash income to many farmers and its significance as a major foreign currency earner to the nation.

Aräqe, the subject of this study, is a ubiquitous feature of present day Ethiopian society – with the exception of the predominantly Muslim communities. Its production, marketing, and consumption are so widespread and so entrenched that the issue of illicitness is almost never raised. Throughout the fieldwork informing this study, its legality was not questioned even once – by ordinary folks, police officers and local administrators alike.

Aräqe is more than the alcoholic drink of choice for people living in rural and small towns of Ethiopia, and its popularity is on the rise even in the big towns and cities. Thanks to its qualities of divisibility, long shelf-life, portability, and high unit value, it is also an important commodity that is produced by, traded between, and consumed in most of the rural and urban areas of the country. Its negative effects notwithstanding, it is a major object of exchange that ties cities to their rural hinterlands and with one another, thus becoming an important component of the social fabric of the society. Thus, it is an important social fact that cannot be dismissed as a fringe phenomenon.

In spite of the substantial amount of *aräqe* that is distilled, traded, and consumed within the informal sector, and the important place it holds in the socioeconomic fabric of the society, no comprehensive study has to date been

undertaken on its interrelated aspects and at a national level. The few studies that have been made so far are all on one or another aspect of *aräqe* and also focused on single areas. The three MA theses (Endalew 2008; Nejibe 2008; and Wolde 1999) are, respectively, on the socioeconomic impacts of *aräqe* production and consumption in Arsi Nägälle *Wäräda*, on impact of *aräqe* production on the degradation of woodland vegetation and emission of CO and percolated matter during distillation in Arsi Nägälle *Wäräda*, and on the contribution of *aräqe* production to urban informal sector employment and income in Assäla Town. Thus, not only are the studies limited in their scope, but also geographically restricted to only two *wärädas* of Oromia Regional State that are located close to each other and surrounded by rural areas with predominantly Muslim population.

1.2 Alcoholic Drinks: Origin, Classification and Nomenclature

Man's experience with alcoholic drinks goes at least as far back as the emergence of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent and China. For much of their history which is associated with agricultural surplus production and the concomitant emergence of a ruling elite, as well as their intoxicating power, alcoholic beverages have been treated with deference as special articles the consumption of which was restricted to particular categories of people and on special occasions (Room et al. 2002, 22).

Beverages made by fermenting cereals, fruits, and honey were the earliest alcoholic drinks known to man and the type that had already spread around the globe – save Australia, Oceania, and parts of North America – before contact with Europe was made some 500 years back. Distillation of alcohol, on the other hand, is of much recent origin having made its way to Europe through the Middle East around the 11th Century from its place of invention in China, and was introduced all over the world together with European imperial domination (Room et al. 2002, 21-22).

Both fermented and distilled beverages are respectively distinguished by their source: homebrewed versus industrially produced ones. Homebrewed beverages are also dubbed “traditional” even if they have been introduced from abroad and indigenized only a few decades back. The literature on alcoholic drinks distinguishes between two types, namely, fermented beverages such as beer, wine, and mead, on the one hand, and distilled beverages, on the other (Room et al. 2002, 21-22).

As one of the earliest and major centers of plant domestication, adoption, and development, the Ethiopian highlands must have had a long experience with fermenting alcoholic beverages that goes back to the beginnings of settled agricultural life (Diamond 1997; Reader 1998, 206-8; Acuda 1988 cited in Abebaw, Atalay, and Hanlon 2007). Up until the 20th Century, the traditional

alcoholic drinks of the populace were fermented beverages such as *t'älla*, *koräfe*, and *borde* that are made from cereals and *gešo*; and *t'äj* that is brewed from fermented honey and *gešo* was consumed by members of the upper class. Distilled beverages, on the other hand, appear to be of relatively recent origin, in spite of their current popularity.

Aräqe is a traditional home-distilled beverage that is made from an assortment of cereals such as wheat, sorghum and maize, and has a high level of ethanol. In its original state it is pure spirit with a neutral taste and clear, colorless appearance. Only when laced with flavoring and coloring compounds such as *gibt'o*, *kosso* flower, and honey, before, during, or after distillation, does it acquire a variety of positive tastes.

In order to put *aräqe* within perspective, the typology of *alcohol commodity chains in developing nations* worked out by Jernigan (cited in Room *et al.* 2002, 53-4) can be employed to advantage. On the bases of the kind of network of production and marketing processes that are employed, the model differentiates between the following four *types of commodity chains* for alcohol that arose in history but survive to this day: (1) *Traditional*, that is the tight and simple type as with traditional beer-making using locally grown grain for consumption at the point of production; (2) *Traditional industrial*, that is essentially the same as the traditional one other than that production is in local private or public hands, the commodity is exchanged for cash, and advertising is price and quality oriented; (3) *Peripheral "cosmopolitan" (neo-colonial)*, that is marked by production designs that are passed from colonial powers or trading partners to local hands, by importation of some types of alcoholic drinks, and distribution by colonial authorities or their assignees; and (4) *Globalized "marketing driven"* is the type in which production techniques and recipes are drawn from global or regional transnational producers, local raw materials are supplemented by globally sourced inputs, manufacturing that is local is under control of transnational companies, and distribution is underway by transnationals and their subsidiaries. (See Annex 2 for the complete typology).

It is obvious that the above typology consists of two "pure types" that are at the opposite ends of the spectrum with two "hybrids" in between. Hence, any alcohol production-marketing system in the developing world can be viewed as momentarily occupying a position between any two of the four types, at the same time as it gradually evolves in one or the other direction. On the basis of what has been learnt through this study, it is possible to consider the *aräqe* production-marketing system of today's Ethiopia as falling between the *traditional* and the *traditional industrial* types. Also, it is becoming less of the former and more of the latter type by the day.

It would be necessary to point out that the characterization in the foregoing paragraph is only as regards traditional Ethiopian *aräqe* in light of the typology

of *alcohol commodity chains in developing nations*. However, in today's Ethiopia not just one, but multiple types of alcohol commodity chains are found operating simultaneously. From the *traditional* type such as that of the brewing of *t'älla* for family consumption by a woman who uses grain from her own fields, to that of the *globalized "marketing driven"* kind that includes the importation of fine liquor and wines designed and manufactured by global producers for the consumption of the affluent and the middle-class, operate side by side. Even the third form, the *peripheral "cosmopolitan" (neo-colonial)*, despite its label (that sounds oxymoronic in relation to independent Ethiopia), has operated in the country in spite of the nationalization onslaught it suffered following the outbreak of the Ethiopian Revolution. One can recall the famous brands of Elias Papisinos and Molla Marru, and many smaller ones whose recipe and production designs were passed to them from western colonial interests through middle-men and trading partners.

There are two names by which the home-distilled traditional alcoholic beverage is known in Ethiopia: *katikala* and *aräqe*. Both of these terms are loanwords of south Asian origin (*katikala* and *arrack*) that must have reached the country together with the product and its extraction technique via the Middle East. Although the more complete rendition of the latter term is *yä abäša aräqe*, which distinguishes it clearly from its industrially produced counterpart that goes by the name of *yä färänj aräqe* (literally, Whiteman's *aräqe*), the shorthand form, *aräqe*, is widely used as people understand by it the home-brewed and distilled stuff. On the other hand, while the term *aräqe* and *katikala* are interchangeably used in the country, the study has found the former to be the most dominant one in all of its study areas, and for this reason and this reason alone the term *aräqe* is employed throughout this paper.

1.3 Objectives

This study was originally envisaged as a study of "the socioeconomics of rural *aräqe*". According to this original plan, urban centers were meant to be investigated only to the extent they served as conduits of *aräqe* marketing. As the study progressed, however, it became very clear that urban centers of various sizes and status were inseparably linked to their immediate rural hinterlands and in some cases even to those that are very far away. This linkage pertained to the production, marketing, and consumption of *aräqe* in such a complex manner that it became clear that the study has to be on *aräqe* in the rural areas as well as the small and large urban centers whose hinterlands they form.

Accordingly, the general objective of this study is to assess and document the *processes* (origin, introduction and spread), *patterns* (arenas, manners), *trends* (currently evolving forms and future directions), as well as *impacts* (on

environment, economy, social, health and security) of the *production, marketing, and consumption* of the homemade liquor, *aräqe*, with the ultimate aim of indicating how and to what extent these factors contribute to economic development/stagnation and social cohesion/disruption in rural Ethiopia in particular as well as the country at large.

The specific objectives of the study include, but are not limited to, assessing:

- i. Processes through which, the production, marketing and consumption of *aräqe* was **introduced and spread** in the study areas—including factors that favored and impeded the process, possible struggle between contending actors, and the like.
- ii. Arenas, manners, currently evolving forms, significance, as well as the impacts of *aräqe* **production and marketing** on the following:
 - a. Locally available biomass and the environment;
 - b. Household economy (including labor, cash in/out-flow, food security, and asset formation/depletion);
 - c. Local economy (including employment opportunity, and contribution to various economic sectors);
 - d. Women, children, and family.
- iii. Arenas, patterns, currently evolving forms, significance, as well as the impacts of *aräqe* **consumption** with regard to the following:
 - a. Household economy (including labor, cash in/out-flow, food security, asset formation/depletion);
 - b. Women, children, and family;
 - c. Local tradition, community solidarity and harmony, as well as community-based organizations and associations of reciprocity such as parish churches, *sänbäte*, *mahbär*, *idär*, *jüge/däbo*, *iqub* and the like;
 - d. Health status of the population, and possible burden on health service;
 - e. Personal/public security and crime/juvenile delinquency.

1.4 Method

The empirical section of the study is based on fieldwork conducted during the months of September and October 2009 in five sites: four rural *qäbäles* and two market towns and three town *qäbäles* that are geographically, economically and socially linked to them, as well as one urban center that plays a very special role in supplying near and distant areas in central, southern, and south-western

Ethiopia with *aräqe*. The four rural *qäbäles*, two market towns, three urban *qäbäles*, and two towns are found grouped in the five study sites, as follows:

- i. Gorfo *Qäbäle* and Gorfo Market Town¹, and Dubär Town – Sululta *Wäräda*;
- ii. Qäyit *Qäbäle* and Qäyit Market Town, Bassona *Wärana Wäräda*, and *Qäbäle* 02 of Däbrä Bırhan Town;
- iii. Yäšäboč *Qäbäle* and *Qäbäle* 02 of Dämbäč'a Town – Dämbäč'a *Wäräda*
- iv. Yäfeq-T'äräq *Qäbäle* and *Qäbäle* 01 of İmdībır Town – Čäha *Wäräda*; and
- v. Arsi Nägälle Town, which was included in the study due to its special position as a major *aräqe* production center that supplies many areas including some of those covered by this study.

The scope of the initial research design was limited to three distinct but interrelated case studies in three rural areas known for their *aräqe* production and consumption, namely, a *qäbäle* each from Däbrä Bırhan, West-Gojjam, and Sululta-Dubär areas. However, based on the insight gained during the survey in these areas, it was found necessary to extend the study to Arsi Nägälle and Čäha-İmdībır.

Moreover, in accordance with its objectives and following its original design, the study has mainly focused on rural *qäbäles* but without losing sight of those urban centres that serve them as conduits. It ought to be mentioned, however, that the reality of the field has compelled the actual data collection activity to veer more towards the urban centres and their marketplaces than what was anticipated in the original study design as presented in the proposal.

The primary data collection methods employed, were the following:

- a. ***In-depth interview***: (1) with *aräqe* distillers, distiller-sellers, sellers, and their spouses and children, as well as *aräqe* bar-girls, retailers, persons engaged in cross-country wholesale, brokers/tasters, and transporters were mainly geared towards obtaining personal information pertaining to the interviewees' different involvements with *aräqe* and personal and family histories, (2) with key informants such as elders, traditional

¹ The term 'market town' here refers to points of small population agglomeration that have the characteristic features of urban centers in terms of non-agricultural occupation of the residents as well as density of population, but the size of which is below the 2,500 administrative cut-off point and are therefore not officially designated as city, town, or 'emerging town'.

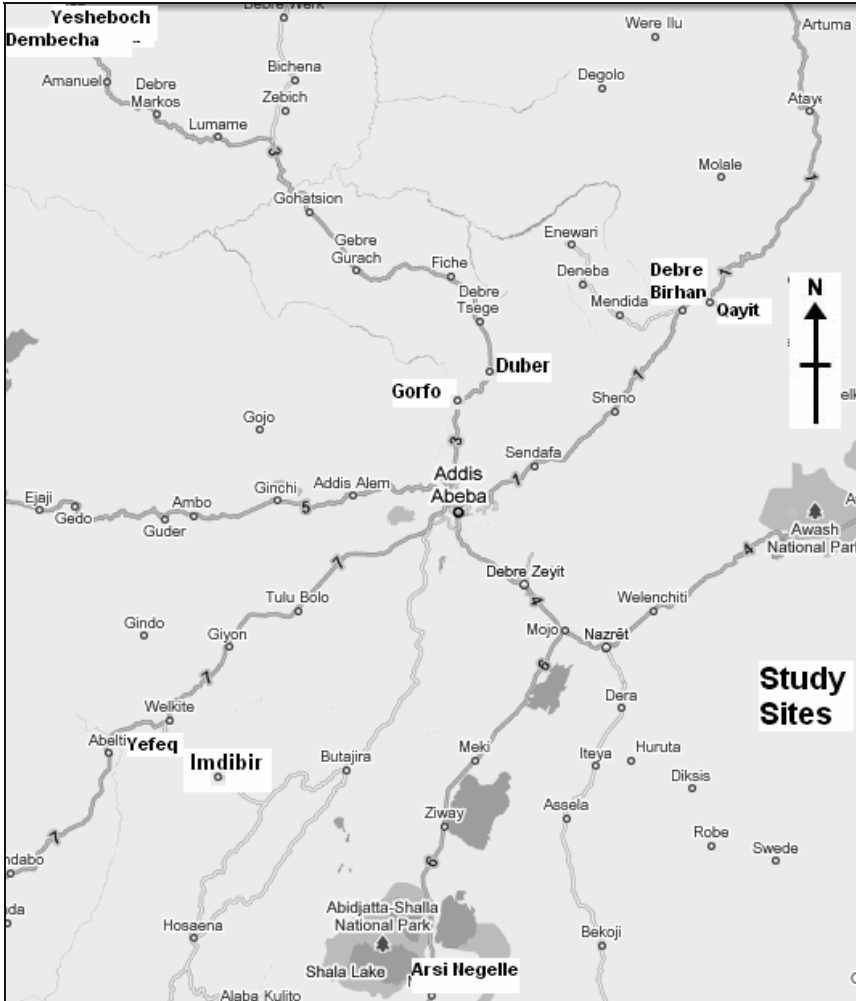
leaders, local administrators, police officers, health workers, and the like, focusing on community-wide events, features and issues.

- b. ***Focus group discussion/interview***: with groups of: (1) women engaged in *aräqe* production and marketing, (2) community leaders, (3) male and female development extension workers, teachers and local NGO beneficiary committee members.

The FGDs were made to focus on, but not limited to, community-wide issues pertaining to *aräqe*, such as historical developments and timelines, old and current patterns, emerging trends, and general magnitudes, site-specific estimates (of *aräqe* production, sales/purchases, and consumption) as well as their impacts.

Annex 3 gives the distribution of a total of 14 FGDs and 59 in-depth interviews that were actually conducted, by study site, urban and rural locations, and type of participants/ interviewees.

Fig. 1: Map of Central Ethiopia Showing the Study Sites



A category of persons that is arguably very important from the perspective of this research, but one that is conspicuous for its absence from the list that follows, is that of *aräqe* drinkers. However, a separate FGD with such a group was unnecessary due to the fact that many *aräqe* drinkers – by their own open

admission – were present in force at most of the FGDs, and were always forthcoming and frank regarding the state and behavior of that category of people.

For the purpose of systematically obtaining comparable information from the various study sites, the following 11 in-depth interviews and focus-group discussion guides were employed:

- i. Guide for focus group discussion with distillers and distiller-sellers
- ii. Guide for focus group discussion with CBO leaders, spiritual leaders, teachers, local businessmen and businesswomen
- iii. Guide for in-depth interview with distillers and distiller-sellers
- iv. Guide for in-depth interview with husbands of distillers
- v. Guide for in-depth interview with children of distillers or distiller-sellers
- vi. Guide for in-depth interview with people that are engaged mainly in long-distance and/or local/fixed, wholesale and/or retail *aräqe* trading
- vii. Guide for in-depth interview with elders
- viii. Guide for focus group discussion with agriculture extension workers, health extension workers, microfinance extension workers, teachers, and NGO project staff and/or beneficiary's committee members
- ix. Guide for in-depth interview with local health workers
- x. Guide for in-depth interview with the local police
- xi. Guide for in-depth interview with *wäräda* and *qäbäle* officials.

In addition to the above, available secondary data relevant to the study were gathered and analyzed. The major sources of the secondary data were the few official records obtained from the various government agencies in the study areas such as police stations, health centers, and *qäbäle* and *wäräda* administrations. Also, other studies such as the few fieldwork-based MA theses and other published materials have informed the study to some extent.

The field data by the two authors themselves who traveled to the sites and conducted all the FGDs and in-depth interviews together. Only for the purpose of facilitating our entrance into the fields and to help out with translation in those very few cases where Oromiffä and Amharic translation was required, were other persons used.

It is worth noting that the study was preceded by, and benefited from, exploratory queries that were undertaken in the early 1990s by the first author of this work. Taking advantage of a number of fieldworks that he conducted in the various parts of the Ethiopian highlands in conjunction with other social investigations, this researcher was able to collect information and gain insight

into the magnitude and the nature of the problem which helped shape the conduct of the final study the findings of which are being reported here.

A word or two on how the postscript came to be added to this report is necessary here. After completion of the field work, the findings were first presented at a dissemination workshop in January 2010. By coincidence, Proclamation No. 661/2009 to Provide for Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration and Control was passed on 13 January 2010. Furthermore, 193 Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted the Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol on 20 May 2010, creating an international convention on alcohol that will guide the policies and actions of individual countries for the first time ever. In Ethiopia, this was followed by the replacement of the old Drug Administration and Control Authority (DACA) by the Food, Medicine, Health Care Administration and Control Authority (FMHACA) on 9 July 2010. Cognizant of the changes in the legislative and institutional environment brought about by these recent developments, and taking advantage of the possibility of updating the study in order to bring its findings and recommendations into line with the changed circumstances, additional field- and desk-work was undertaken. This involved examining the relevant UN, WHO and FMHACA documents as well as conducting extended face-to-face and telephone interviews with the Deputy Director General of FMHACA, Ato Dawit Dikasso. The results of this latest effort are given in Section 7.2 and form the basis for the revision of Section 8.2.

1.5 Scope

Subject-wise, the scope of the study was limited to the generation of data aimed at creating a better understanding of the production, marketing, consumption patterns and trends of home-distilled *aräqe* as well as their significance and impacts at the household and community levels. Thus, the goal of the study was the identification, sketching, and understanding of patterns and trends. When it came to assessing the magnitude of the amounts of home-distilled *aräqe* that is produced, marketed, or consumed at any level, as well as that of the extent and seriousness of their effects, the study has only treaded carefully on the issue by soliciting informed estimates as their actual measurement was beyond its scope.

In many developing countries such as Ethiopia, ethno-religious variations account for differences in drinking norms and habits. In this regard, we ought to point out the fact that the geographical coverage of the study is limited to the mainly Christian central parts of the country and one more multi-ethnic and mainly Christian urban center in the South. This was done on purpose as the information that the study aimed at documenting and understanding could only

be obtained and learnt from in areas where the practice of *aräqe* production and consumption is widespread.

We need to emphasize that this study is by and large about the livelihood of women and the conditions of women. As shown in the study, all of the *aräqe* that is produced in this country is distilled by women. Its production operation is also managed by women. Likewise, women are in charge of virtually the whole of the retail trade and most of the wholesale trade in *aräqe*; the only *aräqe*-related jobs that were found to be the special preserves of men were those of the professional taster and loader-broker, apparently due to the hazards that both of these occupations involve. For many poor women, and women of cash-poor areas, hitching themselves onto the *aräqe* business is usually the only course of action open to them.

Then, oddly enough, women who do not figure prominently in its consumption again appear as victims of its excessive drinking by men. The study does not include any special section on “gender aspects” or “gender matters” precisely because the study is in a sense almost all about gender relations as they relate to the *aräqe* phenomenon – a perspective that emerged naturally in the course of our attempts at documenting and understanding this important social fact and not so much by design.