State Mediation of Qāt Consumption in Yemen: The Political Socialization of the National Polity

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Abstract: Yemen is probably unique in the world, as it is a country in which the consumption of a commodity (qāt) – that is considered a drug, and an illegal one, elsewhere – structures the functioning of its social order, and regulates the quotidian existence of its population. This article explains how a plant became the singular object of commodity fetishism on a national scale, and how its mode of consumption came to instantiate a state-enabled social panopticon. It presents a comprehensive narrative that situates the endemic cultural practice of qāt consumption in Yemen within a historical continuum that spans nearly a century of qāt mediated state-society relations. In adopting a historically embedded explanation of this practice, the article provides a corrective to the intrinsically mistaken nature of the ahistorical interpretive framework of metropolitan travelling theories used by most social scientists – especially anthropologists – studying the qāt phenomenon in Yemen. Accordingly, the article retraces the historical trajectory of the gradual sedimentation of the qāt chewing practice into an inexorable state-qāt-society nexus as the constitutive matrix of Yemen's national polity. The article elucidates how qāt consumption was used by the Yemeni state in the political socialization of citizens as part of its polity formation strategy. This is done through a reconstructed genealogy of the state mediation of qāt consumption informed simultaneously by a historical anthropology, a cultural sociology and a political economy of the multiple factors and ensemble of processes that contributed to the societal hegemony of this practice. The article offers a panoramic analysis that integrates the social, cultural, political, economic and institutional ramifications of qāt fetishism through a narrative of four historical conjunctures which illustrate the shifts in state policy vis-à-vis qāt and the capillary effects throughout Yemeni society. The article concludes with a summation of the current configuration of state-society relations in which qāt emblematizes a national social currency, and offers a brief menu of the challenges to be confronted in addressing the multiple dilemmas of Yemen's endemic qāt chewing culture.

Keywords: Commodity fetishism, Cultural mediation, Cultural nationalization, Drug, Panopticon, Political socialization, Polity formation, Qāt, State building, Yemen.

INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIETAL HEGEMONY OF QĀT

> [Commodities] play a major role as a system of order essential for the inculcation of habitus [1].

Qāt refers to the plant *Catha Edulis* whose mildly narcotic leaves contain an amphetamine-like stimulant which induces a state of euphoria when chewed. Qāt exemplifies what Appadurai has called a "commodity ecumene", which encompasses a symbiotic spectrum of socially and historically embedded activities that constitute its social life as a commodity, and which articulates a "transcultural network of relationships linking [its] producers, distributors, and consumers" [2]. In this commodity ecumene the state has consistently played a mediating role through the adoption of an alternating set of policies that ranged from the antagonistic to the complicitous toward the production, distribution and consumption of qāt. One of Yemen's pioneer social reformers, the late Muḥammad al-Zubayrī, captures the ecumenical sway of qāt consumption over Yemeni society, when he ominously and prophetically declared in the 1950s that "Qāt is the first ruler of Yemen" [3]. Chewing qāt has since become the national pastime during which the overwhelming majority of adult (especially male and less so for female) Yemenis spend at least a quarter of their waking hours nearly every day on an ostensibly aimless collective conviviality. Indeed, qāt consumption dictates the metabolic processes of the national polity, and thus determines the functioning tempo of the national society. This is a truism lamented by Yemenis themselves: "Today life [in Yemen] is to a large extent planned by, and adapted to the use of qāt. The consumption of the plant controls all social functions" [4]. It is this capacity to regulate the metabolism of the nation's body politic that makes its consumption a "Trojan horse of value shift" when it spreads to a new cultural context or among new consumers [2]. This is, in fact, what happened when there occurred a shift in the scope of qāt consumption from an "enclave" commodity consumed by an exclusive "original nexus" of consumers made up initially of a minority in tradition-bound provincial towns, which constituted the local class of notables (adherents of Sufism, poets and wealthy merchants and landowners) among whom qāt consumption was an exclusive cultural practice

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governed by ritualized etiquette, to a "mobile" commodity consumed by a wider range of consumers, which encompassed all social categories within the national polity motivated by a hedonistic ethos. This shift occurred gradually in the post-revolution period of Yemen's modernization when qāt's provincial "customary circuits" of production, distribution and consumption that was driven by a subsistence ethos mutated into a commercial enterprise of national scope.

In effect, the gradual generalization of qāt consumption and its mutation into a mass cultural practice made it a propitious tool for the state's political socialization of the national polity. Moreover, it has perdurably leashed Yemen's urban society to the cultural ambit of a traditional rural world regimented by the political power of tribes. The politico-cultural geography of Yemen is configured around the primary regions of qāt production. This geography is demarcated by the political and cultural hegemony of one socio-geographic zone over another, which takes the form of a chronic regional power imbalance between qāt producing zones in the northern tribal highlands and qāt consuming zones in the southern lowlands and coastal regions. Hence, there persists a symbiosis between the qāt economy and the cultural primacy of rural ways of life and the political hegemony of tribal power: Out of the 22 provinces of Yemen, qāt is grown in the rural areas of 18 of them. However, seven provinces account for 81 per cent of the total national qāt production, and all of these provinces are located in Yemen's tribal highlands. These provinces' proportion of rural population averages over 85 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 71 per cent.[1] This concentration of production generated a transfer not only of financial resources, but also of political power, from the urban to the rural areas. Consequently, it consolidated the political and economic power of rural/tribal forces over urban civil society. Ṣan'ā' province, which includes the seat of the capital, is an exemplary case as it is the most tribalized of all of the country's provinces. [2] Moreover, it is first among the qāt producing provinces of Yemen, and accounts for nearly a quarter of the country's annual production. Also, it produces more qāt than the total production of ten provinces combined [5]. This makes the province of Yemen's capital the national hub for qāt production, which serves as a symbolic reminder of the proximity of tribal economic interests to the seat of power. This proximity not only exercises a constraining effect on the state's policy vis-à-vis qāt, but also conditions the political stability of the regime on not antagonizing tribal economic interests.

The resulting preponderance of qāt in the rural economy and urban society has consolidated the endemic political power imbalance between the state and highland tribal regions, which is an exacerbating factor in the chronic precariousness of Yemen's political stability and its dysfunctional governance. Moreover, this has led to the saturation of urban culture with rural recreational practices, as all forms of social, political and cultural interactions both in the private or public spheres now take place through the medium of qāt chewing sessions. In effect, qāt chewing has become such an all encompassing practice that it constitutes the sole venue for social intercourse throughout Yemen's rural villages, provincial towns, and main urban centers. Indeed, qāt meets all the five characteristics associated with the societal hegemony of a commodity[3]:

- "Ubiquitous": qāt has the most extensive and effective supply chain of all other commodities, which blankets the entire country;
- "Omnipresent": it regiments the entire spectrum of activities associated with the polity's daily life;
- "Addictive": it is the indispensable enabler of the nation's private conviviality and public sociability;
- "Self-replicating": a new generation of consumers is being continuously initiated from early adolescence;

[1] The seven provinces are: Ṣan'ā', al-Baydhā', 'Amrān, Hajjah, Ibb, Dhamār, and Ta'iz.

[2] Worthy of note is the fact that Ṣan'ā' province has the highest number of registered tribal shaykhs (373) per capita (one shaykh for every 2,757 persons) than all other governorates. The tabular presentation of the distribution of tribal shaykhs for all of Yemen's provinces is in a 2006 World Bank report [6]. Moreover, the city of Ṣan'ā' is Yemen's largest and most lucrative qāt market with its estimated 13,000 qāt sellers generating annual sales revenue of $380 million [7].

[3] These five characteristics are taken from Barber [8] who was referring to the phenomenon of "market totalism" as a political, cultural and economic panopticon in Western societies, and which approximates the role of the qāt chewing session in Yemeni society.

- "Omnilegitimate": its long history has bequeathed a cultural inertia buttressed by the support of the clerical class (*'ulamā'*) that precludes its moral condemnation.[4]

Qāt's embodiment of these characteristics on a national scale signifies an extreme case of commodity fetishism given its mediation of all interactions within Yemen's polity. In view of this collective cultural capitulation to the qāt consumption habitus, the qāt chewing session has now mutated into a social panopticon with the national polity as its voluntary inmates under the shared supervision of the state and tribal qātlords. As such, the qāt gathering is the reigning meta-substitute for – and not, as the myth among some scholars has it, a crucial means for the realization of – all the activities associated with urban cultural enlightenment. Henceforth, the urban milieu's entire repertoire of sociocultural activities is circumscribed to the qāt chewing session with regressive effects on urban cultural modernity. Accordingly, on a daily basis from early afternoon to late evening Yemen's urban social space splinters into a myriad of micro enclaves of urban villagers mimicking the entertainment-poor lifestyle of rural hamlets. In effect, qāt chewing has facilitated the transplantation of a rural lifestyle and induced an accommodative disposition toward tribal influence in Yemen's urban centers, which has engendered the hegemony of a cultural provincialism in its cities. Consequently, this has atrophied the development of an urbane modernity; and thus perdurably ruralized its urban culture as well as tribalized its political culture. Furthermore, this has generated a widely shared perception among Yemenis that their society is caught in what I call a post-traditional trap, which is an arrested societal transition that indefinitely straddles the rural and the urban and is accompanied by stagnation in its cultural, institutional and human development. As a result, Yemen is currently caught within a sociocultural pendulum swing between an atavistic primordialism and a vernacular modernity. This incomplete integration into modernity is aptly captured in Peterson's description of Yemen in the early 1980s, which remains valid today: "There are few strata in Yemeni society that remain untouched by 'modernization'; but… there are equally few strata that have been completely modernized" [9].[5] The World Bank recently attested to the country's partial institutional modernization: "Yemen's political culture is a blend of ancient tribal cultures and modern political institutions, including informal parties and formal institutions of government… [T]he structure of the modern nation state has only marginally touched rural areas" [6].

In Yemen, qāt chewing is a cultural practice that has a history of over half a millennium, which has conferred upon it a high symbolic value, and thus made it susceptible to being recruited as a means for the reproduction of social and political systems as well as a means for reproducing relations between persons [10]. Accordingly, qāt consumption was always mediated by the historical shifts in the state's political priorities and economic exigencies. This mediating role, in effect, amounted to a state-managed politics of consumption, which extended "state authority over the social organization of leisure" as a means of pursuing its polity formation objectives [2]. The role of the state, however, was always opportunistic, indeed parasitic, as it sought to appropriate and canalize qāt's cultural symbolism, and not deterministic as it could not control its economic operations. Moreover, qāt has become an indispensable commodity that mediates the political economy of state legitimation. Indeed, the Yemeni state's perennial quest to shore up its chronic legitimacy deficit and precarious political stability have made it a policy imperative to appropriate the symbolic capital of the qāt chewing ritual as a legitimizing resource in regime maintenance. In explaining how the practice of qāt consumption was recruited by the state as a cultural means to its polity regimentation objectives I adopt a political economy approach [11]. Such an approach foregrounds the realm of economy

[4] An apt exemplification is that this *'ulamā'* would never invoke the word *ḥarām* (prohibited) vis-à-vis qāt in spite of all the widely recognized derelictions it has engendered throughout Yemeni society. Moreover, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Guidance, headed by a member of this *'ulamā'*, provides no moral guidance in the qāt debate, and seems to have refrained from any symbolic gesture (e.g., uprooting qāt trees from its estates) that would suggest a modicum of sympathy with the public perception of qāt as a social problem.

[5] There is a saying among urban Yemenis that captures the tribal subsumption of urban culture: *jīnā nubanṭuluhum 'assabūnā*: "we came to make them wear pants, they made us wear *'asib*." The latter is the dagger and belt ensemble, which is a requisite sartorial complement to the tribesmen persona, besides the Kalashnikov rifle in addition to the Toyota Landcruiser, at least for the tribal shaykh.

and politics within a diachronic framework spanning a century long historical continuum in order to elucidate the societal consequences of the practice of qāt consumption. These consequences are contingent on an evolving set of factors, such as the policy imperatives of the state according to its fiscal exigencies and its preferred administrative modus operandi, the political and economic interests of dominant sociocultural groups, and the local ramifications of regional and international events and actors.

By retracing the evolution of the mediating roles played by the Yemeni state, and thus locating the consumption of qāt within a historical process, I avoid the pitfalls of the dominant culturalist interpretive approach, which has informed most recent discussions of qāt consumption in Yemen [12, 13, 14]. This approach uses a synchronic (ahistorical) descriptive framework that focuses exclusively on the symbolic significations of qāt consumption and the sociocultural benefits to consumers. It betrays a circular explanatory logic, as it focuses on the meanings that objects bear to explain why people consume them. Accordingly, it prioritizes the superstructural domain of culture and meanings divorced from the infrastructural domain of economy and politics, and thus interprets consumption primarily, if not exclusively, as an individually-based practice of choice-making, meaning appropriation and identity assertion, and usually in the absence of a serious engagement with local regime of opinions about, and adequate historical contextualization of, the society's consumption practices. The result is an interpretive ethos that negates the local socio-historical continuum of these practices by decontextualizing their historical condition of possibility and interpreting their signification through the distorting prisms of imported travelling theories [15]. A notable exception is the recently published text by Gatter [7] that not only breaks with the culturalist tradition and its apologetic analysis of the qāt consumption culture, but more importantly thoroughly undermines it by providing a wealth of data; the previous unavailability of which allowed the advocates of the culturalist approach to maintain a skeptical demeanor vis-à-vis qāt's negative societal effects. Moreover, it convincingly demonstrates that qāt is a social problem and not a celebration of identity; and thus invalidates these apologetic scholars' favorite line of defense against any critique of qāt: "Qāt is a symptom not a cause of Yemen's problems." However, the author adopts an analytical perspective that establishes a facile causality between government decisions and donors' whims; thus qāt politics in Yemen is explained exclusively "as an instrument of [external] rent seeking in times of economic and political crisis" [7]. In contrast, I show that qāt politics is primarily internally-driven and only occasionally externally-mediated. This is because the political costs (*e.g.*, regime instability) of the adverse effects on the qāt trade outweigh the temporary, if not comparatively insignificant, economic benefits (*e.g.*, development projects funding) derived from the external rent.

This article presents a historical reconstruction of the dialectical symbiosis between state policy and qāt consumption in Yemen based on a critical review of the historical and qāt-related literature complemented by my experience as a long term resident scholar and occasional participant in the qāt chewing culture. This history-embedded study of qāt consumption in Yemen exemplifies Cassanelli's [16] observation that "Qāt [is] an ideal subject for ethno-historical inquiry: for to study the changing economy of qāt production, trade and consumption is also to study the entire process of cultural transformation." Accordingly, the article first retraces the genealogy of the state-qāt-society nexus through four historical periods, starting from the aftermath of Ottoman Turkey's withdrawal from Yemen, which marks the formal independence of North Yemen and the embryonic construction of a modern state until the first decade of the twenty-first century, which heralds an emerging consciousness about the societal challenges engendered by the widespread production and consumption of qāt. It concludes with a summation of the historical narrative in terms of the current configuration of state-society relations in which qāt figures as an entrenched national social currency.

STATE & QĀT: GENEALOGY OF THE NATIONAL POLITICS OF CONSUMPTION

> All societies tend to restrict, control and channel exchange of commodities… in order to harness them into the reproduction of social and political systems [10].

Ever since the introduction of qāt in Yemen from Ethiopia in the fourteenth century its consumption acquired the stigma of a "social evil" and public authorities were compelled to deliberate over how best to contain its spread [17, 18, 19]. The concerns that animated these public policy deliberations over qāt consumption centered on whether or not its use conformed to Islamic moral standard, had debilitating effects on social behavior, engendered negative health

consequences, or undermined the economic solvency of the polity's households. There was a chronic ambivalence about what to do about qāt partly due to the absence of clear guidance from the primary sources of Islamic law – the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth (the Prophet's sayings) – as qāt was unknown during the Prophet's time. Hence decisions relied on the arbitrary whims of the Islamic jurists [20]. Accordingly, the menu of policies alternated between reluctant tolerance, complicit silence, regulated distribution, and absolute interdiction. The determining consideration in the adoption of one or the other of these policies was whether or not it affected the fiscal health of the state's treasury, or its potential for political instability due to social unrest by unhappy consumers and sellers. The first incidence of state prohibition of qāt took place in the sixteenth century in North Yemen under Imam Yaḥya Sharaf al-Dīn, which inaugurated a long saga of alternating state policies toward qāt [21].

The following four sub-sections give the contours of this policy saga between the Yemeni state and qāt: The first section starts from the second and final withdrawal of the Turks from Yemen and the full relinquishing of the reins of state power to the Imam, and with it the authority to consolidate state formation in which qāt production was a crucial means of fulfilling the fiscal imperative of the Imamate regime. The second section discusses the aftermath of the 1962 Revolution, which marks the demise of the Imamate and the rise of a Republican regime in North Yemen heralding modernist aspirations that were ultimately sacrificed to end the eight year civil war. During this period the domestic political scene was dominated by the power struggle between the minority "modernists" (*al-'asriyyun*) made up of educated professionals and urban residents, and the majority "traditionalists" (*al-taqlīdiyyun)* composed of tribal groups and religious conservatives, over the political and cultural orientation of the new republic in which qāt mediated the state's political stability, if not its legitimacy, and the nation's cultural identity. The third section focuses on the politically and culturally fraught decade following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, which inaugurated democratic multi-party electoral politics. The result of which was another civil war and the hegemony of tribal and Islamist forces of traditionalism. This led to the enthronement of qāt chewing as a national cultural tradition, which was one of the means of subordinating the newly incorporated southern polity through a kind of cultural assimilation within a modernity-averse cultural tradition, and political subjugation within an institutionally informal and tribe-centric authoritarian northern political culture. Finally, the fourth section starts at the dawn of the twenty-first century when there emerged a collective realization that the nation was in thrall to a dysfunctional qāt consumption habit with ominous consequences for the country's future, and the urgent quest for mitigating measures.

These four periods are discussed in terms of a conjunctural analytical strategy, which emphasizes the contingency of historical context and not the inertia of a cultural tradition. This entails a focus on the cultural mediation of the state as driven by its political economy objectives and its alternating recourse to policy levers of constraints and facilitation of qāt production and consumption as a means of generating preferred outcomes in the trajectory of the national polity formation process. Accordingly, the analysis locates the production of the symbolic significations and societal consequences generated by the gradual spread of qāt chewing in Yemen within a temporally demarcated historical continuum that articulates the shifting linkages between the macro political and economic exigencies of the state, the meso institutionalization strategies of its administrative apparatus, and the micro socio-cultural practices of its consumer-citizens.

Pre-Revolution: The Instrumentalization of Qāt

The year 1918 signaled the end of the era of shared sovereignty between the Ottoman Turks and the Imam from the Ḥamīd al-Dīn dynasty with the Turks' withdrawal from North Yemen, and the establishment of an independent Imamate with all of the exigencies associated with state-building: sustaining fiscal solvency, maintaining social order, and ensuring political stability. Achieving fiscal solvency was the most urgent, given that the other two exigencies depended on it. Accordingly, the state launched an aggressive and permanent quest for opportunities to maximize revenue generation from the public through the expansion and consolidation of a fiscal extraction regime. This was all the more crucial as Yemen lost a significant proportion of the revenues it earned from the global coffee trade by the beginning of the twentieth century. Yemen's share of the global coffee trade, which accounted for 100 per cent at the dawn of the eighteenth century, had dwindled to a mere one per cent by the first half of the nineteenth century [22]. In effect, tax revenue generation was the consuming preoccupation of the Imamate, which seemed driven by

a chronic anxiety about fiscal insolvency, and that led to an extreme form of state parasitism: the polity's fiscal exploitation. Indeed, the sole *raison d'être* of the state administrative system was tax collection as evidenced in the fact that over 60 per cent of state employees were responsible for collecting taxes [23]. Moreover, it was the principal tool for exercising state authority, building political alliance, ensuring regime maintenance, reinforcing the social status hierarchy and policing the sectarian division within the polity. The very structure of the taxation system was conducive to all of these functions. The selective distribution of tax farming (*jibāya*) privileges to elite social groups (*i.e*., *Sāda*, *Quḍā*, and major tribal shaykhs); the obligatory collection of the *zakāt*; and the economically ruinous mode of tax collection, *tanfidh*, deployed against recalcitrant tribal taxpayers in which a large delegation of soldiers and tax officials occupy a village or region for an indefinite period at the expense of its inhabitants who were obligated by customs to copiously feed their self-invited "guests." Finally, the tax burden was unequally distributed between the two religious sects: the Zaydī (Shī'a) and the Shāfi'ī (Sunnī). The latter contributed the bulk of the tax income, while the state was more selective vis-à-vis the former.

In sum, the tax system was resented by all, because of the imposition of taxes that had no basis in Islam and the misappropriation of the taxes collected by the Imam for whom there was no distinction between the household budget and the state treasury [24, 25, 23]. Worthy of note is the fact that the tax burden was a primary source of discontent with the Imam's regime, which engendered the exodus of an estimated one fourth of the Imamate's population made up mostly of members from the Shāfi'ī merchant class and dispossessed farmers [26].[6] Moreover, it provided the catalyst for the political mobilization, and induced the revolutionary zeal, of the foot soldiers of the Free Yemeni Movement in the insurrections it organized, and that culminated in the 1962 Revolution [29, 24].[7] This predatory administrative regime vis-à-vis ordinary citizens was complemented by a distributive regime for highlands tribal shaykhs as parasitic stipendiaries of the state in exchange for their political loyalty and service as mercenary forces.[8] In effect, the Imamate, in the post-Turkish era, formalized this stipendiary regime, which was previously an occasional practice. The result was the promotion of these tribal shaykhs into professional war lords who rented out the martial ethos of their tribes to the highest bidder. Subsequently, this custom of paying a regular bribe to, as a protection pact with, the major northern tribal confederations in exchange for not challenging the authority of the state would be consolidated (especially after the civil war of 1962 to 1970) into a permanent institutional feature of the Yemeni state to the present.

This pivotal period of power alternation and the subsequent financial requirements of state-building provided a propitious context for the promotion of qāt cultivation as a lucrative revenue generation crop for the Imamate's treasury, and as a substitute cash crop for coffee. Indeed, the Imam encouraged big landowners who were formerly coffee growers to shift to qāt in order to make up for lost income from declining coffee production [32, 33]. Unlike the global scope of Yemen's coffee trade, the export market for qāt was circumscribed to the Aden Colony of the British Protectorate in South Yemen, or more accurately South Arabia. Qāt from the Imamate enjoyed a supply monopoly until competition from Ethiopia began in 1949. The volume of trade with Aden provides a partial, but representative, illustration of the impact of the Imamate's qāt production policy: In 1935 North Yemen exported 618,988 pounds, by 1949 it had increased to 2,415,248 pounds [34]. The encouragement of qāt production was accompanied by increased taxation on

[6] This period was a catalyst to the emigration movement and the constitution of an extensive Yemeni Diaspora that made up nearly a quarter of the male labor force and by the mid-1970s their remittances accounted for nearly 40 per cent of the GDP of the YAR [27, 28]. These émigrés' remittances funded the rural development movement through the Local Development Associations (LDAs) in the 1960s and provided the disposable income that enabled the spread of the qāt consumption culture in the 1980s.

[7] The depth of the widespread resentment engendered by the Imamate taxation regime and the political opposition that followed is best expressed by one citizen of that period as follows: "now, when there is no Dawlah [Ottoman state], he [the Imam] presses the yoke very hard upon our necks, and makes us give everything to Bait'ul-Mal [state treasury] … They [the *sāda*, the Imamate's aristocracy] treat the people as if they were *qorash* (pack beasts)" [30].

[8] Indeed, the Imam himself was the beneficiary of a monthly stipend form the Turks that amounted to 30,000 Turkish pounds annually until the end of the Ottoman rule in Yemen [31].

other traditional crops. This caused farmers to shift to qāt production, which was already more lucrative than other crops. The effect was to initiate an inexorable process of crop replacement as well as acreage expansion by qāt [35]. This upward trend in qāt production contrasted with a declining trend in coffee production: From 12,000 tons in the 1940s, to 5,000 tons in the 1960s, and down to 2,000 tons in the 1970s. Prior to the 1962 Revolution qāt production had already surpassed coffee production [32]. The increasing economic significance of qāt heralded a number of significant socio-cultural shifts:

- The demise of qāt as a contentious religious issue, as the religious class, who was the cultural arbiter of the regime became not only its habitual consumers but also its staunchest defenders, especially against its labeling as a "drug" (*mukhaddir*). By then the qāt chewing ritual had already displaced, if only partially, coffee drinking as the enabler of the quest for religious or creative rapture, as the euphoria induced by qāt – *kayf*, was more potent than the one induced by coffee – *marqaḥa*. This led to the abandonment of the state's prior preoccupation with whether or not qāt consumption was *ḥalāl* (permissible) or *ḥarām* (prohibited), which required the ambivalent *fatwā* (opinion) of the *fuqaha'* (Islamic jurists).

- The domestication of the *maqyal* (qāt chewing session) as a mundane social activity in the Imamate's theocratic polity led to its enshrinement as a customary ritual, and ubiquitous cultural hub for the everyday afternoon gatherings of adults among religious scholars and teachers, literary devotees, judges at their work stations adjudicating cases. Moreover, it led to the gradual dis-enclaving of qāt consumption from its original nexus of elite consumers to non-elite social categories. Indeed, the Imams seem to have recognized the utility of the qāt consumption ritual as a cultural bridgehead for the political socialization of its citizens into a demobilized polity and acquiescent to the inequities of its taxation regime – ultimately a vain expectation (see below).

- The emergence of a secular debate among Yemenis over qāt signaled the opening of a fault line in cultural sensibility that straddled a pre-modern and a modern social imaginary in the form of an attitudinal divide in the poetic and social discourse over the societal effects of qāt. A harbinger of this attitudinal divide is in the thematic shift in the poetic debates (*mufākharāt*) over the respective virtues and/or vices of qāt and coffee that animated the afternoon gatherings of urban elites while chewing qāt and drinking coffee in their dedicated chambers named *mafraj* or *dīwān* that instantiate "vestibules of paradise." As Wagner [36] observes, "Where a pre-modern Yemeni [hyperbolic] partisanship for one or the other was most probably tongue in cheek, in the modern period the debate between coffee and qāt became deadly serious." Henceforth the qāt tree "came to symbolize the tyranny and waste of the *ancient régime*", while the coffee tree induced a nostalgic yearning, and thus was emblematized as "the nation's historic destiny." Indeed, in 1926 the coffee twig and its red berries were enshrined as the national emblem in the center of the coat of arms of the flag of the Imamate, formally known as the Mutawakilite Kingdom of Yemen, and are still featured in the flag of today's Republic of Yemen [7].

This "deadly serious" tenor was to characterize a running dispute over qāt between different sectors of society, and between them and the state that has persisted into the twenty-first century. This tenor marked an epochal shift between the period prior to the twentieth century when the public authorities displayed an aloofness vis-à-vis the recreational drug use of private citizens – hence the public sphere was characterized by a laissez-faire zeitgeist; and the dawn of the twentieth century when the Imamate's officials became active promoters of the qāt chewing practice as a fiscal policy measure and perhaps unwittingly as the polity's social opiate while encouraging stasis in other societal domains. The Imam's intentional underdevelopment of the society provoked the indignation of social reformers animated by shame-producing invidious comparisons to a modernizing Arab world vis-à-vis which Yemen was still a medieval enclave. One contemporary observer described Imamate rule as having three foundations: "sectarian zeal, native pride, and national isolation" [30]. The inaugural event, at least symbolically, that conferred the state's seal of approval on qāt consumption as North Yemen national cultural ritual could be attributed to the legendary poetic duel of 1922 between

Constantine Yanni a Turkish officer who was the traveling companion of Ameen Rihani the Arab-American writer during his 1920s sojourn in Yemen, and Imam Yaḥya who epitomized the absolute primordial sovereign whose words were the law of the land. Constantine's denigrating words are captured in this illustrative stanza: "Qāt gives no benefit at all, / only pain and hardship. / It annihilates the mind / and tires the heart and nerves." Imam Yaḥya responded first by strategically invoking the indirect approval of the Prophet: "Qāt is admirable according to the Friends of the Prophet… / With it weakness fades away… / It is a source of energy. / Thought is sharpened to a fearful and burning brilliance" [17]. Rihani [30] described the public's reaction to this poetic duel in rather hyperbolic terms as follows: "For as soon as San'a knew that he himself [the Imam] had entered into the arena to defend *ghat* [qāt] everyone, even the *saqiah*-boy, began to sharpen his rusty steel. There is a tumult and confusion of rhyming in the city – worse than the confusion and tumult of the Day of Judgment."

The Imam's poetic defense of qāt seemed to have banished any policy ambivalence toward it, if only during the Imamate period. However, Imam Yahya and his successor son Ahmad did not expect that qāt sessions could eventually be used to hatch plots against their regime, as qāt consumption was thought to be conducive to a sedately contemplative, if not an intoxicated, polity and thus politically indifferent to the affairs of state.[9] This double edge nature of qāt, in terms of its unintended consequences, was to plague its use by the Yemeni state as a political socialization tool. The first half of the twentieth century constituted the catalytic period during which all of the initial steps regarding the production, distribution and consumption of qāt that were to become national trends in the future were first taken: Crop replacement, acreage expansion, popularization of its consumption, the rural economy's dependence on its cultivation, and the shift from subsistence to commercial production.

Post-Revolution: Reactive Symbolic Valorization

This was a seminal period in Yemeni history encompassing nearly three decades (1962-90), as it began with a revolution, which would finally, it was hoped, allow Yemen's entry into the modern world. This period was the legacy of a long simmering aspiration for collective social emancipation. This aspiration encouraged the formulation of many grand national covenants (*e.g.*, the "Sacred National Pact" of 1947, and "Our Hopes and Aspirations" of 1955), which in turn motivated a number of failed revolutions to redeem North Yemen from its medieval isolation. It gave birth, however, to the Free Yemeni Movement that would ultimately carry out the Revolution of 1962 [24]. The Revolution inaugurated a modernization experiment whose trajectory can be divided into phases that represent a series of birth pangs of the new state – the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) – that ultimately produced a national institutional structure in which qāt was enshrined as a commoditized social broker. It was an agonistic process that unfolded through three critical phases in state-building and polity formation whose cumulative impact was the consolidation of the economic, cultural and political primacy of qāt in North Yemen's national life.

First Phase (1962-1970): Civil War Unleashed

This period saw the country dragged through the ordeal of an eight year civil war between the new Republican/revolutionary forces and the Royalist/counter-revolutionary forces, which simultaneously enacted a proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia promoting two divergent visions for the Arabian Peninsula: A modernist Pan-Arab future versus a traditionalist Pan-Islamic past. The civil war was a catalyst to the propagation of qāt, which is

[9] Contrary to such expectations, the qāt session could be an incubator of a collective shift in social sensibility, which induced aspirations for societal transformation, as was the case in the early literary salons of the Imamate's social elites who gathered to read clandestinely the literature of the Arab Awakening forbidden by the Imam. Douglas [24] described one such gathering in the 1930s: "Typically these scholars would spend four or five hours a day smoking the *madā'a* (water pipe) and chewing *qāt* while discussing such books by contemporary Arab authors as they could obtain." This kind of subversive gathering animated by qāt was reproduced in the South under British rule [7]. Also, in the immediate aftermath of unification in 1990, the qāt chewing session became the central site for political organizing in preparation for the Parliamentary elections of 1993 (see below). However, by the dawn of the twenty-first century, the qāt session had been drained of its conspiratorial cachet and subversive potential and mutated into a prosaic ritual devoid of any revolutionary symbolic significance. In this light, Wedeen's [13] historically uninformed assertion that today's qāt session is the site of emancipatory politics betrays a romantic interpretation that is patently anachronistic.

illustrated in the following three effects:

First, it monetized the rural economy as never before through the massive influx of cash from external parties supporting different sides of the civil war, which extended the stipendiary regime previously reserved for tribal shaykhs to ordinary tribesmen. The Prime Minister at the time noted that "Yemenis, who prior to the Revolution, had worked their fields and paid their *zakāt*, became accustomed, during the Revolution, not having to work, yet still get paid!" [37]. This cash flow had the effect of stimulating the demand for qāt as well as its supply. Qāt became an indispensable accessory for the tribesmen soldiers, which led to the expansion of its cultivation as well as the intensification of its use among the rural population.

Second, qāt production began to acquire the status of a providential crop, given its pivotal role in the transition from a largely subsistence agriculture to a commercial one. The latter was abetted not only by war subsidies and their enhanced consumption effects, but also by the embryonic development activities (*e.g.*, roads building, agricultural investments, etc) funded by startup Local Development Associations (LDAs) and foreign aid. These initiatives improved access to markets and incentivized qāt production. The result was that by 1969, qāt production made up nearly 16 per cent of the YAR's total GDP [32]. This had the effect of increasing the economic stake in qāt and of consolidating the political clout of the tribal shaykhs in the mountainous highlands where it was cultivated.

Third, the civil war ended in a relative stalemate, which neutralized the modernist aspirations of the revolution. Indeed, "the price for ending the civil war was the official rejection of many of the proclaimed revolutionary goals and means" [38]. As the Saudi Arabia brokered "capitulationist peace" agreement (the Jeddah Pact) of March 1970 guaranteed the representational parity, if not primacy, of the counter-revolutionary forces in all of the institutions of the state [37, 39]. While the agreement affirmed the principle of national unity, it authorized the practice of regional autonomy. In effect, it promoted a minimalist conception of national unity, which institutionalized the regional and military autonomy of the northern tribal formations into the "land of insolence" toward the state, and empowered them to promote a traditionalist vision of state and society relations that privileged primordial socio-political organization (*i.e.*, tribalism) at the expense of urban civil society.

The cumulative end result of the above was a chronic condition of "aborted state-building" [23], as it eventually led to the consecration of tribes as the primary, if not sole, means available to the Yemeni state initially to establish, and subsequently to sustain, the local administration of a polity that was and still is overwhelmingly rural. Consequently, this tribalization imperative circumscribed the revolution to merely a change of political elite at the helm of the state without the structural transformation of society. Moreover, the state policy choices consolidated the traditional social structure to the detriment of the emergence of a new one with the 1970 constitutional ban on the formation of political parties; therefore preventing the mobilization of an urban-based civil society that could counter the hegemony of tribes in the political system during the seminal years of state formation in North Yemen. In effect, state policy privileged primordial affiliations based on tribes and regions, and emphasized the co-optation of their most influential individual representatives, to whom was bestowed the prerogative of controlling and mobilizing their particular constituencies on behalf of the state. Accordingly, tribal shaykhs were delegated responsibility for ensuring their tribes' political loyalty to the state in return for material and other benefits as part of a patronage system that sought to prevent the emergence of challengers to the regime. The subsequent institutionalization of tribes as indispensable national power brokers is partly due to this initial political configuration of state-society relations established during this period, and its distortive effects on the state's political culture are still being felt in the present. Finally, another legacy of this phase was the increasing dependency of these tribal formations' economy on qāt production that was to become as important, if not more so, as their reliance on the state's stipendiary regime. This new dependency would diversify their function as tribal shaykhs in the nation-state: From warlords to power brokers, and subsequently qātlords.

Second Phase (1971-1977): Modernization Re-launched

This phase inaugurated the YAR's opening to the world as well as attracted the world's interest in the country. For the new state's modernizing technocratic leaders – who perceived qāt consumption and tribal politics as developmentally obstructive sociocultural legacies of the Imamate – this moment presented a window of opportunity to re-launch the modernization process that was interrupted by the civil war. This was to be pursued through a normative reorientation of the

state's institutional practices and the nation's political culture: From a pre-modern tradition-bound, rural-centric, tribally configured civic base controlled by tribal shaykhs; to a modernity aspiring project of societal transformation that was urban-led with a civil society-centric constituency managed by a government of technocrats.[10] The economy of that period was based mainly on the influx of two exogenous sources of financial flows: Foreign aid, and labor remittances.

The first source, foreign aid, constituted "the entire current budget of the Yemeni government between 1973 and 1983" [23]. It sponsored a plethora of international agencies and their agents as purveyors of international norms-diffusing "development" regime, which arbitrated the YAR's incorporation into the global economy. They were instrumental in establishing the country's institutional infrastructure for modern statecraft. Among the contingent of expatriate personnel that accompanied these agencies (UN, USAID, etc) was a pioneering group of foreign scholars – mostly anthropologists pursuing doctoral fieldwork – who would succeed the previous cohort of Orientalist travelers. Their intellectual sensibility predisposed them as defenders of traditional cultural practices, which was diametrically opposed not only to their eighteenth and nineteenth century Orientalist predecessors, but also to modernist Yemeni intellectuals and technocrats.[11] The lasting result was the constitution of two opposing community of interpreters with divergent interpretive standpoints: A foreign adulatory predisposition versus a local condemnatory stance vis-à-vis the collective consequences of the qāt chewing habit. This period heralded greater scrutiny of qāt use in Yemen by international agencies through sponsored studies regarding its sociocultural functions, societal effects, developmental ramifications, addictive impact, and whether or not it should be considered a drug to be banned.[12] In contrast, foreign anthropologists assumed the position of enthusiastic defenders of qāt chewing, which one of them described as "one of their own most important cultural practices" [14].

The second and most important source, labor remittances, coincided with the oil boom in Saudi Arabia, which attracted over one-third of Yemen's labor force [23]. Their remittances became the pillar of the rural economy as they ushered in an era of "second hand prosperity" in Yemen. This led to changes in socio-organizational structures, and in agricultural practices: First, the spread of LDAs and their self-reliant development schemes in social infrastructure

[10] The struggle to implement this project, which was ultimately unsuccessful, is insightfully chronicled in the memoir of Muḥsin Al-'Aynī [37] who occupied the post of Prime Minister three times during this period.

[11] The cumulative impact of their scholarly efforts has bequeathed a tradition of social science discourse that is entrapped in an essentializing interpretive matrix, which asserts that Yemen is irremediably caught within an immutable historical process. This is due, according to these scholars, to the endemic constraints of a landscape in thrall to a geographic determinism and the inexorable pulls of the past [40, 41]. Consequently, historical contingencies are either not considered or misconstrued through the use of anachronistic theories such as segmentary theory that posits tribalism as an ontological fatality for the Middle East as a whole (see [42]). The persistence of this interpretive disposition has vitiated the scholarly understanding of the historical and contemporary dynamics of Yemeni society. This is exemplified in the consensual view that tribalism is a millennia old institution that is endemic to Yemeni society and which continues to operate not only in its original form (i.e., guided by customary law), but also to maintain its autonomy from the state. In fact, its continued existence is due to the politically engineered absence of the state from the rural hinterland through the series of historical conjunctures driven by externally imposed and/or internally generated political exigencies as discussed above.

[12] Worthy of note, is that the Arab League of Nations through its specialized organ the International Arab Narcotics Bureau (IANB) has been trying to wean Yemen from its qāt habit since the 1950s. This led the Arab League to designate qāt as a narcotic in November 1956. In the same year the Muftī of Saudi Arabia promulgated a *fatwā* prohibiting the cultivation, trade, and consumption of qāt. The fatwā was the first attempt to uproot qāt in the two ethnically Yemeni provinces of 'Asīr and Najrān in the southwest of Saudi Arabia, which it annexed in the 1930s. Subsequently, in August of 1971, the fatwā was affirmed by a Royal Decree making the ban on all qāt-related activities the law of the land. The menu of punishment was excessively severe, but not successfully dissuasive, as qāt is still available in Saudi Arabia today: seventy-nine lashes (one less than adultery), five years of imprisonment, a fine of SR13,500 ($3,000), and permanent expulsion from the country after the prison term [44]. The timing was not accidental, as the ban was declared after the civil war ended; thus qāt was no longer needed to sustain the martial fervor of the Royalist tribal army they were supporting. More importantly, the influx of Yemeni migrants was becoming an important component of Saudi Arabia's labor force, and it did not want any politico-cultural contamination of its polity.

construction (*e.g*., access roads, water supply) in the rural sector was the prime vector of socio-organizational change, as they substituted the state as development agency as well as marginalized the tribal shaykh as mediator between state and community. By 1977 the development budget of the LDAs was $113 million compared to the central government budget of $194 million [27]. Second, these remittances afforded the mechanization of agricultural production through the purchase of equipment for drilling wells and the procurement of diesel pumps for irrigation. The impact on qāt production was to transform it from a rain-dependent seasonal harvesting to a water pump-irrigated perennial production, and the impact on consumption was its mutation from a regionally restricted and socially occasional indulgence to a countrywide and habitual consumption practice. By 1974, the production of qāt contributed 34 per cent to the country's total GDP, which was double the figure of five years ago [32].

While the increasing production of qāt may have been good for the north's national economy, it was presenting a challenge to Yemen's modernization from the perspective of the government at the time. Accordingly, on May 20, 1972 the Yemeni government took its first comprehensive public policy initiative against qāt in the post-civil war period. The timing of the decision seemed to have been coincidental, as it was inspired by the positive response of the audience to an impromptu talk given by the modernist Prime Minister, Muḥsin al-'Aynī, during the closing session of a conference on administrative reform. The decree that was announced subsequently called for the following actions: (a) "Government employees and the armed forces are prohibited from chewing qat"; (b) "Qat shall not be cultivated on government and Endowment property"; (c) "Assistance will be withheld from regions continuing to cultivate qat"; and (d) "Public awareness campaigns shall be carried out to urge the public… to stop chewing qat, particularly in public places" [37]. The official daily newspaper *Al-Thawra* [43] praised the decision as a "blessed and courageous step to heal the [nation's] wound by eliminating this malicious plant that has become a disaster for the Yemeni people… and has been the main reason for the terrible backwardness we are suffering from." The Prime Minister's own assessment of the impact of the decree was upbeat: "The favorable response by the general public to the anti-qat measures exceeded our expectations… the qat-swelled cheeks disappeared from the streets and public places." However the effect was short-lived, as he explained: "the government that succeeded ours didn't give the subject any attention… it even encouraged people to return to qat." There were oppositions to this decree, as al-'Aynī reported that "a number of big qat farmers" met with him to raise their concerns about the decree undermining their business and reputation, and requested him "not to suggest in the media that chewing qat is religiously prohibited" [37]. Nevertheless, the religious establishment was incensed at the decision and manifested its anger by symbolically destroying a lorry-load of bottles of alcoholic beverage, and thus forcing the government to terminate, if only temporarily, its importation [20].

This policy decision, which seemed to have been taken on the spur of the moment, has given rise to a cottage industry among post facto interpreters of the incident as epitomizing Yemen's modernist leaders' depth of cultural alienation and social disconnectedness, and especially their intellectual subservience to external donors' policy dictates. The still prevalent assumption of these interpretations is that al-'Aynī's removal from office was due to the anti-qāt decree, which is based on a plausibility-challenged historical reconstruction by some scholars as self-appointed defenders of local customs, and who seemed intent on gratuitously impugning these leaders' motivation as crass opportunism. In doing so, they betray their condescending view of Yemenis as not being ready for modernity-aspiring leaders. One of these scholars erroneously asserted: "his measures were vigorously opposed by political leaders in producing areas, which contributed to his fall from power in 1972" [14]. Another called the decision an "opportunistic crusade" that resulted in a "political debacle", as the Prime Minister "was turned out of office three months after beginning his anti-qat efforts" [17]. More than a generation later al-'Aynī's decision is dusted off from the archives to substantiate a theory ("rentier state") that misconstrues the political economy of qāt. This theory hypothesizes that the Yemeni state's qāt politics was always driven by opportunistic rent-seeking from external donors. Accordingly, he is critiqued in an accusatory language: "al-'Aynī had no genuine interest for reform regarding qāt and that his campaign was rather a short-term crisis management aiming at raising Arab funding than a domestic long-term strategy intending to rid Yemen of the drug" [7]. These mistaken views aside, the real reason for al-'Aynī's resignation from office, however, was due to "the rabid campaigns against the Unity Agreement"

with South Yemen, which he negotiated in Cairo in October 1972, under the pretext that the accord mentioned the role of non-governmental organizations. The latter was viewed by the military and tribal shaykhs as a source of "political partisanship" – a euphemism for their implacable opposition to civil society participation in politics – which was prohibited in the 1970 constitution.[13]

After the resignation of al-'Aynī there was a relative abandonment of negative public pronouncements on qāt. Instead, his successors resorted to the tactical use of qāt in pursuit of their political objectives. This phase ended with a last-ditch attempt to rekindle the dying embers of the modernist promises of the Revolution, which prioritized policies that were aimed at sundering the intrinsic qāt-tribalism nexus in order to engineer the demise of the political hegemony of tribes over the state and society. This recuperative attempt was initiated through the June 1974 coup d'état by populist army officer Ībrāhīm al-Ḥamdī, who was, and still is, considered by many Yemenis as the Atatürk manqué of Yemen, given his credentials as "a strong nationalist with modernist views" with a zealous commitment to state building and socioeconomic development [45]. Indeed, "al-Ḥamdī made the first and final attempt to establish the central state as an independent force in the Yemen Arab Republic", by endeavoring "to centralize power, to strengthen the formal army, and to mobilize workers, peasants, and farmers against the tribal confederations" [23]. Al-Ḥamdī sought to capitalize on the LDAs' provision of basic rural services as a means of establishing the state's institutional hegemony and its political legitimacy [25]. This goal was to be accomplished through three policy initiatives enacted in 1975: (a) the authorization of LDAs to collect and use local taxes on community development, thus by-passing traditional local authority structures; (b) the allocation of the proceeds from the sales tax on qāt as additional revenue source to enhance the work of the LDAs, while simultaneously bestowing recognition on qāt's contribution to rural development and indirectly encouraging its cultivation; and (c) the suspension of tribal subsidies as a means of freeing the state from the financial parasitism of the northern tribes and shifting its resources to the development of a non-tribal civil society as a counter-availing power base [23, 25].

This modernization experiment was aborted with the assassination of al-Ḥamdī in October 1977, which brought to an end the precarious balancing act between modernists' genuine desire to present Yemen as a modernizing country onto the international stage, while trying to appease traditionalists' interests [9]. The end result was the lasting demise of the modernization project, and the inexorable traditionalization of society through the opportunistic use of qāt and the expedient pandering to tribes as epitomized in the next phase. This mode of use was illustrated by al-Ḥamdī's immediate successor, Āḥmad al-Ghashmī a qātlord himself, who in spite of his brief tenure of eight months as President managed to establish a legacy as the inventor of the *qaṭal*, which is a plastic bag of plucked qāt leaves that replaced the cumbersome meter-long bunch of branches with qāt leaves, and as the originator of the practice of free distribution of these *qaṭal* to soldiers to co-opt their allegiance [7]. The latter practice was followed by his successor who extended the distribution to the civilian population as a social currency to induce and reward government allegiance [46].

Third Phase (1978-1990): Traditionalization Ascendant

These twelve years led to the irreversible mainstreaming of qāt in Yemen's economy and society. The political leader of that period, 'Alī 'Abdāllaḥ Ṣāliḥ (1978-2012), seemed to have learned one political lesson from his predecessors' fate (*i.e.*, coup d'état and exile, or assassination) that was to ensure his near dynastic hold on power: "If a regime… is to survive, the

[13] To set the record straight the Prime Minister (PM) resigned in the last week of December 1972, a full seven months after the anti-qāt decree, and was back again as PM in June 1974 under President al-Hamdī. Chapter seven of his memoir gives a detailed account of the context of his decision on qāt, and of the events leading to his resignation. Also, Stookey [26] had already cited the same reason for al-'Aynī's resignation. However, al-'Aynī does have a history of being forced out of office for having taken unpopular decisions. A noteworthy incident was his forced resignation within three weeks of the decision to discontinue the tribal stipendiary regime taken in February 2, 1971 [37]. He balked at the imperious demands of the tribal shaykhs, which not only included the reinstatement of the stipends but also the extension of their authority over the government (see the shaykhs' memorandum on page 208 [37]). "Any Imam, a thousand years ago, would have rejected such demands", he exclaimed upon submitting his resignation. At the time tribal stipends exceeded the tax receipts of the government: nearly 40 million riyals were allocated to tribes, while the government collected taxes (*zakāt*) were less than 11 million riyals [26]. Tribal stipends were one of the principal sources of the YAR's chronic budget deficit.

values of each significant element in the society must be at least partially consistent with the values and aims of the leader" [26]. The governance ramification of this lesson was to lead to the sedimentation of "inertial forces" that would relegate the country into a post-traditional trap, which was pursued as follows: "Rather than force a transformation of the [traditionalist] periphery to conform to the modernist centre, the outlook of the centre… [was made] to encompass many of the goals and values of the periphery" [38]. This period was a determining one in Yemen's history, as it consolidated a mode of governance, where the periphery captured the center, which was called "Republican tribalism" [39]. This governance modality was the cumulative effects of policy decisions necessitated by the political exigencies in the aftermath of the revolution, which empowered the tribes as the state's primary constituency, as discussed in the previous phases. Accordingly, tribes were promoted as self-organizing communities in a kind of selective decentralization of power through the establishment of a vertical relationship between the state and regional tribal fiefdoms. Moreover, the regular payment of bribes (*i.e.*, the stipendiary regime) to the powerful heads of these tribal fiefdoms became a sacrosanct institution. These practices have limited the state's accountability to elite corporate groups, circumscribed its territorial managerial responsibility, and ultimately transformed the country into a libertarian dystopia.[14] In such a context qāt provided the cohesive element as social currency in a geographically dispersed, regionally diverse, and minimally integrated polity.

During this period, the predominance of the periphery in the government's policy focus was due not only to the demographic majority of the rural population and their shaykhs' political clout, but also to the economically disproportionate importance of the continuing influx of remittances from rural émigrés. In 1982, these remittances amounted to $1,018 billion, which partially financed the import of goods valued at $1,096 billion, with the customs duty on these imports constituting the government's principal revenue source. In contrast, export of locally produced goods amounted to a paltry $5 million [47]. Relatedly, the labor shortage engendered by the continued exodus of migrants from the rural sector led to a collapse of agricultural production, which occasioned substantial crop substitution from labor intensive and minimally remunerative cereal crops to qāt as a commercially lucrative crop with low labor requirement. Consequently, the area under grain cultivation declined by 68 per cent: From 1,197 million hectares in 1975 to 812 thousand hectares in 1980 [48]; while qāt cultivation grew by 52 per cent: From 43,000 hectares in 1972 to over 83,000 hectares in 1981 [17]. Henceforth, qāt production became the pillar of the rural economy as the value of its production in 1982 was estimated at $1,100 billion, and constituted 52 per cent of the added value of the agricultural sector [49]. As a result, by the end of the 1980s qāt had become a mass consumption phenomenon, and thus was inextricably anchored as a cultural practice in the daily lives of the population; henceforth qāt consumption mutated from a leisure activity to a social necessity. Also, the mass influx of remittances engendered the financial autonomy of the nation's overwhelmingly rural population from the state. This further consolidated the political sovereignty, and institutional independence, of the community development movement (the LDAs), which indirectly challenged the state's political legitimacy, as attempts to co-opt it under the al-Ḥamdī regime failed. This is the background to the emergence of Ṣāliḥ's regime maintenance and state legitimization strategy, which had three pillars:

The first pillar was the legal mainstreaming of qāt through the adoption of a series protection and promotion policy measures during the 1980s: The enactment of Law No. 14 in 1980, which (a) reduced the tax rate on qāt from 30 to 10 per cent as a political peace offering to tribal/rural interests; (b) officialized the status of the qāt seller (*muqawwit*) with a permit that recognized a previously denigrated occupation as a respectable profession symbolizing its retroactive rehabilitation into Yemen's millennial occupational structure; and (c) sought to organize the anarchic trading of qāt in urban centers by establishing qāt markets outside city centers with controlled prices policed by market supervisors and tax collectors. More

[14] The legacy of this period was the permanent integration of tribes within a state sponsored territorial administration system that approximates the workings of a libertarian anarchy: The state concedes authority to tribal shaykhs over regional fiefdoms while it foments competition between them. In this way, these potential political contenders for state power are too preoccupied with ensuring the security of their tribal fiefdoms to challenge the center. However, when the center can no longer contain the periphery as happened in the aftermath of Yemen's Arab Spring in 2011, the result is the takeover of the state by a regional tribal militia, which occurred in 2014.

significant was the enactment of Law No. 40 in 1981, the "Plant Quarantine Law", which was an indirect ban on the importation of qāt from East Africa, especially Ethiopia, and thus the protection of Yemeni qāt producers against foreign competition. Tellingly, coffee never received such protection. These legal measures were complemented by the aggressive implementation of an undeclared information policy which enforced the state complicit silence on qāt in collusion with its major producers. Consequently, state media outlets were prohibited from negative reporting on qāt; state officials engaged in a systematic defense of qāt vis-à-vis external critiques through a reflexive denial of any negative impact on society; and state agencies engaged in haphazard collection of statistics on qāt that were inadequately reported in Yemen's statistical yearbooks.[15]

The second was the institutionalization of state control through the organizational cooptation of the non-tribal population's political autonomy and incorporating them as the regime's popular civic base. Three major political initiatives were launched by the government as part of an intensive mass political mobilization offensive that would ensure the regime's political stability: The formulation of the "National Pact" in 1980 as an extra constitutional framework within which a "National Dialogue" was pursued in quest of a regime-friendly consensus among the entire spectrum of political orientations. This was followed by the establishment of the "General People's Congress" (GPC) in 1982 as a state-sponsored party-like political organization that denied the label (because of the constitution's ban on party formation), but whose aim was to formally incorporate the interests and "values of each significant element of the society." Finally, and more crucially, the government enacted a series of laws and decrees in 1985 that co-opted the "civic activism" of the LDAs by merging them with local administration into "Local Council for Cooperative Development." In effect, this transformed an autonomous community cooperative movement into a "corporatist project of the state" [15]. While these initiatives resulted in the entrapment of the body politic, they could not harness the general will. The latter was to be achieved through the state's promotion of the culture of qāt consumption, as it deemed the qāt chewing ritual the cement of national cohesion. Therefore, the collective participation of the polity in a common ritual activity would inexorably lead to a symbiotic identification between state and nation, which was the focus of the third pillar.

The third, and most important, pillar was the deployment of a politics of cultural authentification through the construction of a post-revolution national self-conception that would link qāt consumption with national identity, regime sustainability and state legitimacy. The 1980s signaled the full domestication of qāt consumption as a tool of national politics in North Yemen. During this period the qāt consumption ritual was institutionalized as a cultural imperative, which engendered a symbiosis between national identity and traditional identity. The end result was the consolidation of a national identity that was rooted in a provincial traditionalism in thrall to tribal customs, social conservatism, and a preference for a religious discourse over a secular one in education, which obviated the need, if not curtailed the desire, to participate in modernity, at least, by the rural population. The latter appropriated the material comfort modernity afforded, but not the socio-cultural transformations it entailed.[16] According to one Yemeni scholar the promotion of the qāt chewing ritual was, in effect, the continuation of the Imamate's policy of national cultural isolation from modernity; as he puts it, "the culture of qāt consumption tends to reproduce the model of traditional society. Those who associate qāt with national identity solely want to defend traditional identity" [51]. In the urban centers, this tendency resulted in the cultural domination of the qāt chewing session as the hegemonic institution of leisure and the

[15] It is only in the late 1990s that the Central Statistical Organization began to systematically collect statistics on qāt regarding acreage, production and yield, which were made available in the annual statistical yearbooks. However, since 1970 data were available but reported in "bundles", which made it impossible to accurately evaluate total production [51]. Nevertheless, the method currently used to update annual statistics on qāt remains a mystery, as it seems to be based on a statistical formula and not on field data collection.

[16] Rushby [50] captures, anecdotally, a paradoxical truth about qāt through an exemplification of its conservative effect in the rural sector: "The qat had brought sufficient wealth to ensure complete stasis: girls would never be educated because farmers' wives do not need education. They married at twelve years and were grandmothers before thirty… Here qat kept the land alive, the terraces in repair and the villages full."

"focal point of life", and its substitution effects stymied the development of modern social sensibilities and atrophied the repertoire of urbane cultural activities.

The most symbolically significant event in the state's politics of cultural authentification was the inauguration by the Presidential Office in the early 1980s of "Ramadhan Nights" (*umsiyat ramadhaniyya*) as a mass ceremony of qāt chewing. The government's rationale was that it would portray a nation with "a strong democratic tradition of free and open communication between the top and the base", which the neighboring monarchies lacked and envied. These ceremonial "nights" brought together the political leadership and the people at all levels of government, starting with the President and cabinet members meeting in Ṣan'ā' with representatives of public institutions, civil society organizations, among others, to discuss issues of public concern in qāt chewing sessions. This was replicated in all other governorates and districts led by governors and district directors and where qāt was distributed free of charge to the participating public [46]. The launching of this "tradition" was in reaction to the patent cultural hostility of Yemen's neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula, which induced a collective feeling of a national identity under siege. This hostility was epitomized in Saudi Arabia's machinations to have the Islamic *umma* confirm that qāt was a prohibited drug through a decision by the "Conference of Foreign Ministers of Islamic Countries" held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in March 1982 [46].[17] This attempt represented an escalation in the Saudi state's continuing "culture war" against Yemen's qāt habit, as it followed the 1956 regional ban by the members of the Arab League, with an international ban by all Muslim majority countries.

The Yemeni government response to this latest slap by its chronic meddler of a neighbor was to engage in a reactive symbolic valorization of qāt consumption as a patriotic practice and thus to defend it as emblematic of a distinctive Yemeni identity and enlisted the public to show its support. In contrast to some foreign scholars' claim that the adoption of qāt chewing as a national cultural identity-asserting ritual was a culturally preservationist reaction to Western-induced rapid social change or to Western-inspired local elite's anti-qāt policy [12, 14], al-Saqqāf attributed the principal cause to the cultural antagonism of a regional neighbor: "Saudi Arabia, in prohibiting qāt consumption… helped propagate the idea that qāt was an element of national identity" [52]. The state found a willing partner in a population awash with disposable income from remittances, and eager to engage in the ostentatious consumption of qāt as a vicarious enactment of the returning émigré's prodigal complex. This state-sponsored national identity branding campaign achieved a measure of national cultural self-determination vis-à-vis its neighbors through a consumption ritual that bonded state and society. This modus operandum of the state in which qāt chewing was a symbol of the north's national identity and a means of political mobilization was deployed as an incorporation strategy vis-à-vis the south.

Unification: Cultural Nationalization

The decade of the 1990s brought major upheavals in Yemeni history and society. The long quest for the unification of the country was finally achieved on 22 May 1990; but inauspicious international events complemented by local ones were to quickly mar this promising event. The first salvo that would embroil the newly constituted Republic of Yemen in a diplomatic crisis with multiple ramifications occurred within a week of its unification: on May 28, Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates of "economic warfare" against Iraq because they raised their oil production quota. This pretext eventually led to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2. Yemen, which happened to be a rotating member of the UN Security Council at the time, adopted a posture of chronic abstention vis-à-vis the resolutions seeking to have Iraq withdraw from Kuwait. This posture enraged the Gulf countries, which led them to expel an estimated 800,000 Yemenis migrants mostly from Saudi Arabia, and the termination of all economic assistance to Yemen [53]. Beside the tragedy of this forced repatriation of dispossessed Yemenis to a country that could not accommodate them, one of the consequences was the immediate cessation of the

[17] Yemen's religious establishment rose to qāt's defense in a letter dated 8 June 1982 to the Saudi government signed by the Muftī of the Republic along with eleven other religious leaders questioning the basis of their decision. The letter stated in part: "Claims against qāt have gone west and east until they have captivated some minds leading them into prohibiting qāt… without communicating with Yemeni scholars to take the truth from its source as those scholars are the ones who lived with qāt since its entry into Yemen… Therefore, we as religious leaders responsible for commanding the right and forbidding the wrong and clarifying the truth we decide and issue a ruling that qāt is permissible (*ḥalāl*)" [44].

influx of remittances, which made up 39 per cent of the average income of a rural farm family [27]. Making up this shortfall explains, at least in part, the pro-qāt policy regime that was pursued during this decade, which sought to extend qāt farming partly as an employment generation scheme for the returnees, given its pull effects on the agricultural, trade, and transportation sectors. Some of the qāt-related national ramifications of these events are highlighted below:

First, the adoption of pro-qāt agricultural policies, which led to the government's enactment of the following measures: (a) lifting the total ban on qāt cultivation and the partial ban on qāt consumption in the south that was imposed by the former southern state, which led to the intensification of qāt farming in formerly minor growing regions of the south (*e.g.*, Laḥij, Shabwa, and Abyan) as well as to the diffusion of the qāt chewing habit to formerly non-consuming population (*e.g.*, Ḥadhramawt, al-Mahra, and Soqotra) [54]; (b) subsidizing diesel fuel, which disproportionately benefitted qāt farmers as it minimized the cost of irrigation; (c) providing tax exemptions for the import, and subsidized loans for the purchase, of well drilling and water pumping equipment in order to incentivize the expansion and intensification of qāt cultivation throughout the national territory; (d) maintaining an import ban on qāt from Ethiopia, which is cheaper than Yemeni varieties; (e) practicing a chronic bias in agricultural extension services toward irrigated areas, which is where qāt farms are concentrated; and (f) allocating import concessions for fertilizers and pesticides, which are indispensable for commercial qāt production [51, 7]. The end result was the transformation of the agricultural sector into a qāt-led, if not a qāt-dependent, economy. This is evident in the significant contribution of qāt production to the national economy from 1990 to 2000: It employed nearly 25 per cent of the agricultural labor force, and made up 14 per cent of the total employment in the national economy; it contributed 33 per cent of the agricultural GDP, and 7 per cent of the national GDP; it averaged 54 per cent of the contribution of oil production to the economy during the decade; and it occupied 9 per cent of the total land area under cultivation [51]. The intensification of qāt production was partly an attempt to substitute for the loss of remittances and to create employment opportunities for the returnees.

Second, the official sanctioning of the use of qāt as a social currency in the public sector occurred during a period of intense political ferment, as the ban on the formation of political parties in effect since 1970 was finally lifted in 1990. This led to intense competition between the nation's mosaic of political parties. As a result, political organizing in public forums was ubiquitous especially in view of the upcoming parliamentary elections of 1993, which were crucial to determining the fate of unification. This context was propitious to the colonizing effect of qāt, as all forms, as well as the timing, of private and public gatherings for political deliberations were transformed into afternoon qāt chewing sessions in both north and south. While this qāt animated political activism was taking place in civil society, the state launched its own integration process of the formerly divided public bureaucracies of North and South Yemen, which entailed mainstreaming the personnel into a work ethic in which qāt was the pillar of the incentive structure, and organizing the work schedule around the afternoon qāt chew. Accordingly, a series of measures were taken to make qāt consumption an integral part of government work: (a) allowing qāt chewing in government offices, which was prohibited back in 1971 (although the prohibition lapsed, it was not officially affirmed); (b) allocating recreational rooms for qāt chewing in government buildings became a standard feature as prayer rooms; and (c) introducing in the public budget a category for qāt expenses, the "sessions' stipend" (*badal jalasāt*), to be paid out for government work carried out in the afternoon, which instituted a pecuniary ethos of incentive-seeking in the civil service with corrupting effect on the work ethic [46] (see below).

Third, the consolidation of qāt-mediated institutional practices that shifted the substantive and strategic work of government outside the premises of public institutions to the afternoon qāt session held in the private homes of high government officials with selective participants and beyond public scrutiny and accountability. These sessions became the actual loci of government decision-making among elite groups, in parallel to the weekly Ministerial cabinet meeting. In effect, the generalized recourse to this practice of privatizing the locus of government decision-making sundered state institutions into uncoordinated private fiefdoms. This practice has informalized the institutional authority of the state and personalized the power of its office holders; thereby de-institutionalizing the state and weakening its regulatory capacity and enforcement

credibility.[18] Moreover, this institutional displacement of government work was complemented by the consolidation of a political culture of clientelist governance through a regime of "opportunistic patronage" (*al-īntahāziyya al-'aṣbawiyya*), which was initiated in the third phase of the previous period but confined to elite groups, was now extended to the general public. The end result was the proliferation of clientelist practices as normal means of accessing public goods based on a supplicant relational protocol, (i.e., favor-seeking and bestowing) between citizens, and bureaucrats in government institutions.

Fourth, the promotion of a culture of qāt consumption among the public administration personnel that inexorably led to a qāt-induced corrupt administrative ethos as an intended policy effect. This corrupt ethos permeated the entire administrative apparatus of the state and was replicated throughout society via the proliferation of venal mechanisms of mediation.[19] In the case of lower rank personnel, the dependency-inducing effect of regular qāt consumption reduced them into a venal corps exacting petty bribes from the public to feed their habit. In the case of high government officials, the holding of rather lavish qāt sessions became an obligatory ritual as a normal part of the networking, decision-making and power-exercising functions of governance. This engendered the practice of casually skimming off a hospitality honorarium from government budgets. In effect, the state's actions created the perception among the public at large that there was an inextricable symbiosis between the culture of qāt consumption and the pervasive culture of corruption, if only of low-end bribe-taking and high-end petty embezzlement, in the public sector; thereby discouraging virtuous behavior among public servants, corroding the moral content of government action, fraying the ethical seams of the nation, and thus contaminating the value framework of the public sphere. Indeed, it is eminently plausible to argue that the spread of this qāt-mediated culture of governance was among the significant catalysts to the civil war in 1994 between the two recently unified states. The leaders of the former southern state seemed to have realized the impossibility of ever bridging the incompatibilities between two divergent administrative traditions: A system of "northern anarchy" (*al-fawḍā al-shimālī*) characterized by a state bureaucracy that is merely a patronage distribution mechanism devoid of any developmental compass, which selectively co-opted the society's elites on a rotating basis contingent on the political urgency of the moment; and a "southern order" (*al-nidhām al-janūbī*) based on formal state institutions, and centralized planning in pursuit of societal order and development, with an ideology-driven and disciplinarian party organization as center of power [55].

Fifth, the deployment of qāt as a socio-cultural engineering tool for the cultural subsumption of the former southern state as part of the north politics of incorporation, if not "annexation" as some scholars have suggested [52, 56]. This led to the conflation of northern cultural practices with the national polity through a dual process of cultural imposition and voluntary adoption in places in the south where qāt cultivation and consumption were unknown. Indeed, in those places in the south where qāt was an imported commodity the practice of qāt chewing was merely a leisure activity that was disassociated from any notion of cultural identity, and was more likely to be perceived as a means of cultural pollution, if not domination [54]. The diffusion of qāt consumption throughout the south may have been initially welcomed, especially in 'Aden,

[18] This chronic weakening of the state's formal administrative institutions that began after the civil war by default has since become by design, and has permanently disabled its administrative capacities. This is confirmed in the 2014 report of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), which ranked Yemen 119 out of 129 countries in terms of the state's managerial capacities. To illustrate the depth of the Yemeni state capacity deficits a few figures will suffice. On a scale of 1 (worst) to 10 (best) Yemen scored on a number of key aspects as follows: Basic administration 3, implementation capacity 3, power to govern 2, social capital 2, and state identity 4. The 2012 report highlighted the presence of parallel governance structures in the observation "that the public distinguishes between 'the government' (al-hukuma) and 'the power' (as-sulta)" (see website: http://www.bti-project.org).

[19] The public sector seems to operate on the basis of the *wāsta* system (colloquially referred to as "*fitamin waw*"), which, in effect, is a meritocracy prevention mechanism. It entails the obligatory intercession of a socio-politically connected third party (a political philanthropist) to enhance the chances, usually unmerited, on behalf of an acquaintance who is petitioning the state for a public good. This is complemented by an endemic *baghshīsh* syndrome among government staff: This refers to a generalized system of petty bribes seeking, taking and giving, in which government service delivery entails a conditional quid pro quo involving cash payments to civil servants to meet their daily qāt requirement [51, 7].

as a symbolic rejection of the former regime's restrictions on individual leisure activities, but in other regions of the south it engendered an animosity-inducing acculturation into a northern tribal identity as a pan-Yemeni identity, erasing regional particularities, and the reification of qāt consumption as the pillar of a national culture. As al-Saqqāf [52] noted, unification was a political opportunity for the "renewal and expansion of traditionalism" throughout the national territory.

However, it was a detumescent traditionalism that was being promoted, as it was corrupted by the system of opportunistic patronage that led to the proliferation of arbitrarily selected shaykhs, who, lacking local legitimacy, exercised authority through the threat of violence. Emblematic of this decayed traditionalism is the demise of Ṣan'ā' as a sanctuary (*hijrah*) since pre-Islamic times, where tribal conflicts were not allowed [20]. Dresch's observation in the early 1990s offers an illustrative anecdote: "Not long ago, Ṣana'ā' was still seen as *makhzan al-ru'ūs*, that is the place one went in order to escape tribal feuding and 'preserve one's head'; now it is seen by many as more dangerous than the country-side" [57]. More importantly, what happened in the south as a whole, but in 'Aden in particular given its cosmopolitan character and culturally liberal environment, was to prefigure the afflictions of the traditionalization of the unified national society after the civil war of 1994: (a) the de-cosmopolitanization of the urban milieu through the prohibition of modern forms of entertainment, as evidenced in the closure of cinemas, bars, and the promotion of qāt chewing as the hegemonic leisure activity; (b) the Islamization of the public sphere through the segregation of the sexes, the enforcement of Islamic dress code for women, and the abrogation of liberal laws concerning women's rights; and (c) the re-tribalization of the southern polity through the re-instatement of the tribal shaykh as the dominant communal authority figure and institution [7].

In sum, the culture of qāt consumption and its multiple venues and functions in the unified polity can be subsumed under two umbrella ideal types of qāt sessions: One is the "conviviality session": in which ordinary citizens engage in a talk fest as part of a quotidian socializing practice that provides a momentary exit from life's chronic disappointments in an opportunity-deficient society, and offers a venue to voice their political grievances and ideals as well as their socio-economic frustrations and aspirations. For the most part, the nature of the social interactions in those sessions is best characterized as "building castles of spit": that is engaging in animated chatter about unrealistic plans inspired by the qāt's euphoric effects that are never pursued beyond the chewing session [58]. The multiplication of this type of sessions throughout the national territory engendered on the one hand, a kind of local cultural disaffiliation among new inductees into the qāt chewing culture, and on the other a kind of regional cultural disaffection among those who rejected it as a cultural invasion. Both instances are evident in places where qāt was previously unknown [54]. The other is the "power session" in which the government leadership and exclusively male elite corporate groups engage in bargaining, or more aptly caballing, toward maximizing their appropriation of the nation's resources and wealth for their enrichment or power aggrandizement. The exclusive nature of this type of session, given its centrality in state decision-making process, has engendered the socio-economic disenfranchisement of non-elite groups and the political marginalization of some regions of the country, especially in the south, given their exclusion from such sessions. Finally, the state-mediated nationalization of the qāt consumption culture has exacerbated the tendency toward the national polity's regional fracturing, and thus the erosion of its national cohesion.

New Millennium: The National Reckoning

By the dawn of the twenty-first century qāt consumption was widely recognized as a national social malaise by habitual consumers and non-consumers alike; given the chronic social dependency on its daily use by the majority of the adult population in spite of its widespread perception as a time-wasting, habit-forming and financially-draining practice. Indeed, by then the qāt chewing ritual had completely shed its tradition-bound sociability to incarnate an unanchored hedonistic conviviality; and had already sedimented into a cultural inertia inextricably entrenched in the daily habits of Yemenis that was beyond suppression or delegitimation [59]. Also, the polity had evolved beyond the state-sponsored national affirmation of qāt chewing as an authentically Yemeni cultural patrimony in reaction to the petro-dollar induced condescending gaze of their Arabian Peninsula neighbors. In effect, Yemen's polity had already surrendered to the ritual of mass temporary hibernation to engage in the compulsive consumption of qāt as a mundane act, and was resigned to endure the daily existential dilemmas of consumers: For example, the constant agonizing

over the allocation of one's income to the family's welfare or to a hedonistic indulgence; the chronic wallowing in an existential incapacity to take control over, and assume responsibility for, one's life choices; or ultimately surrendering to a qāt-induced existential cul-de-sac. Indeed, the qāt chewing session had lost its dual use potential: Its earlier vocation as an assembly of political dissenters engaged in preparatory *lexis* (discussion) that was followed by *praxis* (common action) in the public sphere, had mutated into a venue for the mere pursuit of a "regime of pleasure" that disabled the political agency of ordinary citizen-participants, and circumscribed their political activism, if any, within the walls of the *dīwān*. Indeed, the latter played the role of a social refuge for the verbal release of political frustration, especially among urban youths, with the depredations of the autocratic regime.

This period heralded the dawning of a collective anxiety about the nation's future, given Yemen's relative stagnation vis-à-vis an ever modernizing world. Indeed, the general observation that "Drug use has… historically operated as an impediment to upward mobility", not only in the case of an individual drug abuser, but also in the case of a psychoactive substance-dependent national polity [59], seems applicable to Yemen. Paradoxically, the catalytic event of that period regarding qāt policy was not related to some macro politico-economic exigency compelling the state to action. In fact, by this period the revenue imperative of the state had already shifted from an accrued fiscal dependency on the direct taxation of the population during the Imamate, to a situation of relative fiscal autonomy from the population in the Republican era due initially to the influx of exogenous capital flows – labor remittances and foreign aid – and subsequently to internally generated oil rent due to the discovery of oil in Mārib in 1984 and in Hadhramawt in 1992 (and gas rent as of October 2009 with the first export shipment of natural gas). Instead, and more intriguingly, it was a startling public declaration in May of the last year of the twentieth century made by the former President (ʻAlī ʻAbdāllaḥ Ṣāliḥ) that he was abandoning qāt chewing in favor of more constructive cultural activities, and would from then on engage in the *takhzin* (meaning "storage", which is the word use for qāt chewing) of knowledge as in English learning and computer training as well as taking up sports. Perhaps the timing of the announcement was not a coincidence, as it occurred only four months prior to the first Presidential elections in unified Yemen in September of 1999. In effect, the announcement provided an attractive campaign issue vis-à-vis modernity-aspiring youths and progressives. Moreover, it was an ephemeral but successful gambit – given the national and international media exposure it received – to change the national political conversation, at least for a while, and to generate international attention to Yemen's emerging image as a modern nation. This enabled the former President to claim, deludingly to be sure, the mantle of pioneer of Yemen's modernization.

This quixotic attempt to inspire his fellow citizens to follow his example[20] contained an implicit acknowledgement that qāt was an obstacle both to self enlightenment and to the country's development, which was the first negative assessment by the head of state since the anti-qāt policy of Prime Minister al-ʻAynī in 1972. The former President's change of heart was in effect a profession of culpability for having misled the nation into a qāt-mediated quest for a national identity, which turned the state into an advertising agency for tribal economic interests, by promoting qāt consumption as the social opiate of the national polity. Consequently, the twenty-first century began with a gesture of contrition by the state for having encouraged the polity to abuse qāt.[21] What prompted the former head of state to make such an announcement at this particular moment? One school of thought suggests that it was an act of cynical opportunism induced by the need for, and pending promise of, donor funding. Accordingly, the timing was attributed to the price of oil having plunged to $10 per barrel in 1998, thus forcing

[20] It seems that Ṣāliḥ did not sustain his own pledge, as the former speaker of Yemen's parliament, the late Shaykh ʻAbdāllaḥ al-Āḥmar, declared to a foreign reporter: "The president preaches what he doesn't practice. After all those fine words, he's still chewing khat" [60].

[21] Green [61] has offered a culturally-neutral criterion by which to define "abuse", and which is beyond contestation: "habitual use disproportionate to income." By this measure most Yemeni chewers are abusers, as 24 percent of household income is allocated to qāt expenditures among the 70 per cent of the adult population who chew qāt, which includes a high proportion of the 51 per cent who are below the poverty line [62]. Paradoxically, the latter group spends nearly 40 percent of its income on qāt, while higher income categories spend on average 12 per cent [7]. The average monthly expenditure on qāt consumption is estimated at 30,000 Rials (approx. US$150), which exceeds the average monthly income of a majority of Yemenis.

the government to look for budgetary gap filling external financing. As one scholar explains, "Ṣāliḥ's anti-*qāt* policy was nothing more but a short-lived window dressing for the international community to attract funding" [7].[22] This view ascribes a jejune gullibility on the part of donors and assumes an extreme naïveté on the part of the former President; and more importantly it rests on an implausible premise that a change in government policy on qāt could generate significant external rent to compensate for the policy's adverse political and economic effects.

In contrast, his announcement could more plausibly be viewed as a product of a capricious mode of decision-making and its erratic cycle of openness and closure toward certain issues and groups, which is symptomatic of the "northern anarchy" culture of governance, and its chronic disconnect between adopted policies and their implementation. Hence, the former President's announcement was a piece of Machiavellian political theater since the state having accomplished its political socialization objective could be magnanimous with its mea culpa, and without having to worry about inciting the opposition of qātlords given the population's fatal qāt dependency. More importantly, he was perhaps assured that the endemic structural impediments of the state's bureaucracy – which his regime was instrumental in fostering – would prevent effective action on qāt; given that the primary function of the state administrative apparatus is patronage distribution, and not the implementation of development-promoting policy decisions.

Nevertheless, his declaration represented a breach in the state's duplicitous discourse on qāt, which concealed a chronic policy disjuncture within the government between the political priorities of the executive branch and the policy concerns of the line ministries: While the former was proclaiming to the world that qāt chewing was the most distinctive feature of Yemeni culture and the pillar of its national identity, thus a "cultural heritage" deserving of state protection; the latter was observing qāt's increasing adverse effects on the nation's environmental resources, food security, health status, and socio-economic potential, without being given the green light to address them. Intriguingly, soon after his electoral triumph in September with 96.3 per cent of the votes, he issued a number of executive orders on qāt: (a) prohibiting all armed forces personnel and police from chewing qāt while performing their duties or in official uniforms, which was extended to all government workers and premises in January 2000; and (b) extending official government working hours from 1 to 3 PM, in order to reduce the amount of time available to government staff for chewing qāt, which was accompanied by the establishment of a two-day week-end (Thursday and Friday) to compensate for the longer working hours [46, 7]. One of the unintended effects of the announcement was the lifting of the undeclared ban on the government media from reporting on qāt.

Furthermore, this announcement opened a window of opportunity – that would be closed and re-opened intermittently in subsequent years depending on the political exigency of the moment or Presidential whim – to engage in the long-delayed assessment of the multiple societal consequences of what was officially designated in a politically neutral language, "the qāt phenomenon" (*dhāhirat al-qāt*), and not, more accurately, "the qāt problem." This lexical choice sought to avoid offending the sensibility of the religious establishment or to jeopardize the economic interests of tribal qātlords. This acknowledgement of a qāt phenomenon occasioned a flurry of policy activism by the government's technocrats as they sought to remedy the state's chronic neglect of qāt' societal challenges. Henceforth, qāt was to be included (usually as a social problem and development impediment) in all major policy documents: the UN Millennium Development Goals, the Five Year Plan, and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper [7]. The most significant marker of this policy activism was a Ministerial Decree issued by the Cabinet in July of 1999 instructing the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation to lead the preparations for a "National Conference on Qāt."

Such a conference was not what Ṣāliḥ had envisioned when he made his public abjuration of qāt,

[22] Yet the author's invocation of rent-seeking motives is contradicted by his account of a massive anti-qāt campaign carried out by a local NGO, the "National Association for Confronting the Harms of Qāt", during the months of April and May 1999 prior to the Presidential elections that gained national attention and was widely discussed in the media. As Gatter [7] explains: "The sheer extent of the campaign and the positive resonance it received on the streets and among international donor community in Yemen forced the government to comment and act on it." In this context, the former President's announcement seemed motivated more by vote-seeking than rent-seeking.

given his keen awareness that the regime's stability is contingent on not challenging the primacy of the tribal qātlords within the rural economy, or depriving their dependent multitude of qāt consumers throughout the society. Therefore, the idea of a qāt conference was well beyond his comfort zone, something that Cabinet ministers were fully aware of, hence the litany of reassuring caveats that accompanied its preparation. In the minutes of the first meeting between donors and the Ministry of Planning and Development held in July 1999, the caveat was expressed in the view, "that the approach to qat should not be pro or against. It should be a rational approach to avoid tensions" [63]. This was the defining tenor that would infuse all aspects of the conference. The flurry of activities that followed this meeting involved donor agencies, civil society organizations, and government entities, and was led by the World Bank partly because of government implementation capacity deficit. The first major task was to fill the knowledge gap regarding the multiple impacts from the production and consumption of qāt in all sectors of Yemeni society. This was to be pursued through a number of government-commissioned, and World Bank-funded, field studies that would provide "objective analysis and practical advice… without taking a position on whether qāt is 'good' or 'bad' for Yemen or Yemenis", while acknowledging that "it is impractical to talk of eradicating it or even of reducing consumption significantly, at least in the short term" [64].

The conference was held nearly three years later in April of 2002 "to discuss problems and solutions, and thereby help develop a national policy and action plan on qāt based on the recommendations of the conference." The published proceedings of the conference represent a substantive compendium of information on the "qāt phenomenon" in terms of its impact on health, environment, water, agricultural production, rural economy, culture, and Yemeni society as a whole. The papers were prepared by Yemeni researchers, and thus symbolized a national verdict on the impacts of qāt on Yemen and Yemenis, and their conclusions – despite the prescribed due diligence to the discursive proscriptions noted above – did not engender contrived positive assessments of qāt' societal consequences. [64]. In effect, these Yemeni scholars' fact-based pessimistic perception of the role of qāt in their society confirms the interpretive disjuncture, I discussed earlier, with their foreign scholars' imported sensibility-inspired positive appreciation of the role of qāt in Yemen.[23] In this light, foreign scholars' abandonment of their pro-qāt sensibility seems overdue, as it appears complicit with an Orientalist gaze: that is, foreign observers' preferred exoticist interpretations are substituted for local actors' assessment of the consequences of their own practices. More importantly, this gaze authorizes an interpretive licentiousness that misrepresents a social problem as a cultural celebration and even as a means to political emancipation. This misrepresentation not only violates scholarly standards of intellectual integrity, but also exemplifies an ethically delinquent interpretation.

This necessary digression aside, the recommendations emanating from the qāt conference were transformed into Ministerial Decrees that sought to engender a new social environment that would be conducive to "creativity, work and development." The first decree urged the public bureaucracy to exert all administrative effort to ensure that all of the recommendations issued by the conference are implemented. The nature of the decrees betrays a meticulous attempt at avoiding controversy, and also they reflect a policy impasse given their similar contents to previous decrees that were repeatedly enacted throughout the preceding two decades: Transformation of public parks into sports venues for youths, monitoring the importation of chemical fertilizers, prevention of qāt use in government buildings, media awareness campaign for the public, and educational awareness campaign for students (see list of decrees in [7]). Alas, none of the decrees was implemented. It should be noted, however, that the chronic ineffectiveness of qāt policy is not due to the duplicity of line ministries' officials trying to hoodwink donors into parting with some funds, as one scholar flippantly expressed it: "Qāt politics are generally short-lived and tossed overboard once the revenue situation improves" [65]. Instead, the reality is that the public bureaucracy is functionally incapacitated and politically disabled, and therefore does not have the policy levers to confront the enablers of the "qāt phenomenon",

[23] Alas, this foreign sensibility-induced positive appreciation of qāt persists, as demonstrated by one of the reviewers. While conceding the veracity of my arguments, the reviewer still insists that "the blanket assertions about qāt's current social and political role are very questionable and one could easily argue the opposite."

namely the qātlords lobby.[24] The latter represents the greatest obstacle to any anti-qāt campaign. As a result, the promulgation of decrees to mitigate the negative impacts of qāt amounts to trying to extinguish a volcano with a bucket of water.

Addressing the qāt problem is currently, but not necessarily permanently, beyond the state's reach, as it has become not only politically impossible due to the high stakes of powerful qātlords, but also economically impractical given that qāt production is the engine of employment and revenue generation for the rural economy. As a result, government action betrays a mood of resignation, as it is confined to the perfunctory enactment of prohibitive decrees without the institutional capacity and political leverage to implement them. These deficiencies have engendered a chronic dependency on donors for policy formulation and on funding its implementation [7]. These donors, in turn, have sub-contracted responsibility for implementation of policy initiatives to civil society organizations, at their own risks, as they undertake awareness raising campaigns about the ill effects of qāt in schools among the new generation. In this way the state avoids the veto power of, as well as any direct confrontation with, the qātlords lobby.

CONCLUSION: A POLITY WITHOUT QĀT

Qāt is nice, but there is nothing worse than it [25]

The above narrative of the imbricated evolution of qāt consumption and national polity formation has left an enduring legacy: namely, the metastasis of the qāt chewing ritual into every facet of the Yemeni nation-state and the corollary circumscription of the nation's sense of possibility to abject expectations of the future. This is due to the cumulative impacts of a litany of deleterious effects either caused or exacerbated by qāt: The rural economy's increasing mono-crop dependency, the urban culture's atrophied repertoire, the youths' limited aspirational horizon, the communities' weaponization of conflict resolution over land and water, the national institutions' credibility scarcity, the public sector's ethical deficit, the civil society's dependence on pecuniary incentives, the country's environmental resource depletion, the population's food insecurity, the urban labor force's compromised work ethic, the mutation of the society's political and economic elite into a cabalistic posse, the nation's endemic under-achievement, the people's existential cul-de-sac, and thus Yemen's development impasse and modernization's death knell.[26]

Indeed, it is as if the country had lapsed into a pathological societal condition characterized by an advance state of national apathy (notwithstanding Yemen's Arab Spring) as an ontological fatality. Yemen's Minister of Culture described this situation as a disease: The "problem of qat corrupts the minds of the Yemeni people. It affected our progress… By overcoming this disease we rescue the Yemeni people from shame and deterioration… [and] add national glory to the 21st century, carrying upon our shoulders the motto: No qat, no negativeness" [7]. This litany of qāt-mediated negatives afflicting Yemen's body politic is entirely homemade and not externally imposed. This locally made aspect of the qāt problem complicates the finding of a solution because of the absence of a foreign scapegoat that would galvanize a national response as in the case of the Saudis' ban on qāt. This also explains the schizophrenic attitude of Yemenis

[24] The qātlords' lobby is composed of the following groups with a stake in the qāt economy: urban-based major businessmen, members of Parliament, high government officials, some high-ranking military officers, and the most powerful tribal families. Gatter [7] refers to this group interchangeably as the "qāt lobby", the "qāt oligarchy" constituting a "qāt regime" (*nidhām al-qāt*), and Destremau [32] suggested that they were a "qāt mafia" comparable to Latin America's narcotic cartels. Moreover, they are part of the 9 per cent of landlords who own 65 per cent of Yemen's cultivated land area and produce 64 per cent of the country's total qāt production [7]. For this lobby, qāt is a capitalist venture with significant investments in large estates in the northern highland provinces, and about expanding holdings and maximizing profit margins. In contrast, the average qāt farmer would welcome any alternative crop as long as it is equally remunerative as qāt, and thus allows him to earn his livelihood.

[25] This Yemeni proverb (in Arabic: *Al-qāt tayyib, mā akhrah min-hā*), quoted in [20], captures the endemic ambivalence that is intrinsic to the qāt chewing culture.

[26] All of these negative effects were mentioned in the local press as well as in various studies on qāt. There are positive effects to qāt, but they mostly relate to some aspects of the rural economy: For example, it incentivizes the protection of agricultural terraces from erosion and the expansion and maintenance of rural roads network; contributes toward the absorption of the rural labor force through remunerative job opportunities, thereby mitigating the rural-urban rate of migration.

who routinely confess to the veracity of the above litany among themselves, but would categorically deny them to outsiders; to do otherwise would be a public act of self-recrimination – a cultural taboo. If qāt was a foreign import it would have engendered by now a national cultural backlash, as it would be seen as a conspiracy-laden commodity that promotes national subjugation to foreign interests in the manner that the British-sponsored opium trade was seen by Chinese authorities back in the nineteenth century.

The above narrative has shown that the state was a crucial enabler of the spread of the culture of qāt chewing, and that its role was determined by locally engendered imperatives: The pre-revolution period was characterized by a fiscal imperative due to the decline of revenues from the coffee trade and the need for financial resources for state-building, and qāt offered an alternative source of tax revenue generation; the post-revolution period engendered a political legitimacy imperative for the new republic, which was momentarily achieved through the symbolic association of qāt and national identity; the unification period generated a cultural nationalization imperative that facilitated the production, and encouraged the consumption, of qāt as a means of politically incorporating and culturally subjugating the south under northern hegemony; and finally, the dawn of the twenty-first century heralded a consumerist ethos in which the state played a collusive role with the qātlords lobby leading the national polity into a "limbic turn" for whom qāt chewing had become a hedonistic indulgence, thereby encouraging a pleasure-seeking consumer identity with its private concerns at the expense of a civic identity with its public concerns [8]. This articulation of the state's instrumentalization of qāt with its political socialization and polity formation strategy necessitates a reconsideration of the conventional political analysis of the nature of the Yemeni state, and of the dominant cultural analysis of the meaning of qāt chewing.

The nature of the Yemeni state and its role vis-à-vis qāt has only recently been elaborated by Gatter [7] who invokes the conventional idiom associated with states in the Arabian Peninsula, namely "rentier state", to explain the political and economic motives underpinning the state leadership's use of qāt as a "strategic commodity" in sustaining the regime's political stability. The problem with this approach is that the formal definition of a rentier state is when a country relies primarily for its sources of income on predominantly externally derived rent, usually from the export of hydrocarbon and/or mineral resources, and that such a rent accrues exclusively to the state and not to individuals [66]. However, this definition is not applicable to qāt, which is mostly a locally traded commodity, cultivated by private individuals, whom the state does not control, and who in fact constrain the state to prioritize their interests through what I have been calling the qātlords lobby. Accordingly, the rentier state cannot explain the Yemeni state qāt policy. Furthermore, the rent that could be acquired through a quid pro quo with donors could never compensate the qātlords economic losses, or prevent the resulting threat to the regime's stability. This is because qāt neither constitutes a strategic commodity for the outside world, nor poses an existential threat to any other society but Yemen's. Hence the scale of resources that anti-qāt campaigns could ever muster would pale in comparison with the rents that have accrued to the Yemeni state via its self-serving participation in the "war on terror", which the West perceives as an existential risk to its own societies through exportable acts of terror.

Instead what does exist in Yemen is a "rentier *mentalité*" that is partly qāt-induced or qāt-exacerbated. The term refers to a societal condition in which "individuals [including the society's socio-political elite] live without having to commit themselves to any strict 'work ethic', nor does any distinction need to be made between income 'received' and income 'earned'." This is complemented by an "easy come, easy go" attitude that informs both the individual's use of his income and the state's allocation of the public purse [66]. This is the mentalité that underpins state-society relations in Yemen in which qāt is the facilitating social currency. This rentier mentalité is institutionalized within, what I call, a cabalistic state: The latter is organized around informal power networks operating in a para-institutional enclave in which elites – devoid of any commitment to the common good – negotiate deals and take state-related decisions, which systematically override the formal institutional channels of the public bureaucracy. The state's most strategic institutions are controlled by the executive branch through political nepotism, and the society's various influential groups are co-opted by the central government through the practice of economic cronyism. In addition, the state foments a qāt-mediated venal polity as its self-reproduction mechanism through elite exemplification of self-indulgent and irresponsible behavior given their

use of the state as a public means to private ends and thus inducing citizens to appreciate corruption, if not as the preferred means to social mobility, then at least as a means of financing their qāt dependency. This is complemented by a "redistributionist populism" in the form of a generalized patronage distribution system through state institutions that seeks not only to literally purchase the loyalty of all potential political challengers, but also to convert as many citizens-voters as possible into wards of the state.[27] In such a political context, the qāt chewing session is best seen as a sociocultural panopticon in which participants as consumer-citizens wallow in a state of resignation to a societal status quo of endemic opportunity deficits controlled by a cabal.

I turn now to the analysis of the meaning of qāt in Yemeni society, which is the preserve of scholars of the culturalist school who insist on privileging the epiphenomal aspects of the qāt consumption practice. This has misled them into an interpretive impasse in which the culture of qāt chewing is seen primarily through the prism of identity construction and tradition preservation. The fact is that, "patterns of consumption reflect and recreate the structures of social life… and are less a manifestation of individual consumer choices" [11]. Moreover, the structural configuration of social life is contingent on the society's historical evolution, which in turn transforms the purpose and/or signification of the polity's consumption practices. Indeed, qāt epitomizes the notion of a commodity having a "semiotic virtuosity", given its historically contingent "capacity to signal fairly complex social messages" [2]. In the case of qāt consumption in Yemeni society, it has undergone the following "semiotic" transitions since the fourteenth century to the present: Ancient medicinal concoction to restore the balance in the body's humors; an aide to an individual or collective spiritual quest as part of a clerical devotional ritual; a muse to poetic and artistic creativity and enabler of intellectual productivity; a solvent of social taboos regarding status distinction and class hierarchy; a medium of political mobilization; a symbol of national cultural identity; a conduit to a hedonistic conviviality; and currently the social opiate of the national polity. In this light, practitioners of the culturalist school need to abandon their romantic assessment of the qāt chewing practice, which is tantamount to defending the qātlords lobby, and come to the realization that the habitual use of qāt by a majority of the public is, in effect, an act of surrender to the state's fomentation of a politically disengaged citizenry in collusion with the qātlords lobby's reproduction of a psychoactive substance-abusing population. The fact is qāt chewing is a "habit that leaves the [political and economic] status quo alone" [67], as the polity hibernates daily in mini assemblies of discursive conviviality while "building castles of spit."

In the light of the above diagnosis, what is to be done by Yemenis for their society to break out of its post-traditional trap, and for the Yemeni polity to abandon its qāt dependency? This article has focused on the nature of the state and its historical mutation due to changing political and economic exigencies compelling its policies, the constraining influence of the traditional socio-political forces on the state's policy prerogatives, the exacerbating effects on the polity's qāt consumption habit, and the multiple consequences on the society as a whole. Accordingly, I highlight four core infrastructural challenges entailed by the above analysis, which shift the policy focus from addressing symptoms, as in the case of demand reduction, to tackling the causes in terms of supply reduction. They represent the ultimate endpoints of any strategy that seeks to recalibrate the role of qāt in Yemeni society:

Engineering the demise of tribal hegemony:

The renegotiation of the state-tribe covenant that has framed Yemen's governance and dictated the state's operational logic since the end of the civil war in 1970 in North Yemen, which disabled the central government, undermined the emergence of a viable civil society, and has constituted ever since a financial burden on the nation.[28] Breaking the tribes' hegemony

[27] This is partly evident in the fact that "Yemen's civil service… accounts for nearly one-quarter of the government's current expenditure, one of the highest levels in the Middle East and North Africa region" [6]. Moreover, according to local reports, every government ministry is allocated a budgetary category entitled "allowances, grants, and social benefits", which is to be used at the discretion of the minister as "financial transfers to non-government employees."

[28] It is worth noting that the Hūthīs' choice for the de facto head of state of Yemen after their September 2014 coup d'état is a professional qāt seller (*muqawwit*). This selection represents a political olive (or qāt) branch to the qātlords lobby as a guarantee of unhampered production of qāt, and heralds the continuing political and economic dominance of Yemen's traditional forces; thus making a mockery of the stated rationale for their coup, namely the

is a sine qua non to reducing the influence of the qātlords lobby over the state's policy priority, and to putting an end to their military autonomy and protection racketeering vis-à-vis the government [68]. For this step to succeed it must be pursued simultaneously with the detribalization and professionalization of the army. This would remove a major impediment to the overdue process of reconfiguring state-society relations.

Establishing a functioning administration:

The re-configuration of the state's bureaucracy through the formalization of its institutions and the elimination of shadow parallel governance structures; the rationalization of center-periphery administrative relations; the rehabilitation of the bureaucracy's functional relevance to the society as a whole; and the strengthening of its fiscal extraction capability vis-à-vis the qāt economy, which may eventually replace the oil economy, given its diminishing reserves, as the state's principal source of fiscal revenue.

Re-imagining a public ethos:

The secular moralization of the public sphere that has been vacated by the clerical class who not only represents the first line of defense against the critique of qāt consumption, but also constitutes a religious bulwark against the de-traditionalization of Yemeni society. This secular morality could be pursued through the cultivation of a new civic consciousness by the new generation with zero tolerance for the culture of corruption and for the pervasive ethos of mediocrity engendered by the culture of qāt chewing, which has bred a chronic insouciance vis-à-vis the nation's civilizational fate.

Fomenting a new social imaginary:

The promotion and valorization of the nation's varied regional cultural formations in order to diversify the repertoire of cultural activities available to the national polity, and thus mend its regional fissures. This is to be complemented by the fostering of an extroverted cultural curiosity about, and active intellectual engagement with, the larger world – East and West – which the hegemony of the qāt chewing culture's provincialism has discouraged. This would renew the polity's political and cultural emancipatory aspiration as was the case with the Free Yemeni Movement under the Imamate.

These are the ineluctable challenges that must be confronted in order to rekindle the "cultural struggle" against the forces of traditionalism that the pioneers of Yemen's modernization launched nearly a century ago, and thus reclaim the abandoned emancipatory promises of the earlier revolutions; and in the process re-launch Yemen's Arab Spring whose aspiration toward societal transformation was compromised by the opportunistic patronage of the same forces of traditionalism (*i.e.*, the tribes, the army, the Sunnī Islamists, and more recently Shī'a tribal militias) that undermined the modernist aspirations of an earlier generation of revolutionaries.

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completion of the Yemeni youth's Arab Spring revolution. It is most significant that in spite of Yemen's war ravaged landscape and the humanitarian catastrophe that afflicts its people, qāt remains widely available. Finally, this widely derided selection of a practitioner of a traditionally low status occupation as head of state violates the basic guiding principle of the Hūthīs, as members of the *sāda* class, in selecting their political leaders: *īkhtīyār al-āfdhal 'ala al-mafdhūl* ("to choose the best over the better").

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