



Free *qat* handouts secure a high voter turnout in Yemen's elections

For Imam Yahya, one of Yemen's last kings, *qat* was a delight that he praised in poems. For his adversary, the revolutionary al-Zubayri, the plant was the "devil in the shape of a tree".

Still today the views on *qat* greatly diverge. For some, *qat* farming is the *perpetuum mobile* of Yemen's rural economy and *qat* chewing an age-old social pursuit that has helped to preserve Yemeni identity in a rapidly changing world. For others, *qat* is the main inhibitor of human and economic development in Yemen and is to blame for poverty and corruption, the depletion of Yemen's water resources and the country's sloppy approach to fighting Islamist terror.

While some believe that *qat* chewing was the very motor of Yemen's "Arab Spring", others hold it responsible for Yemen's muddled revolution with its high blood toll. In internet blogs even *al-Qaeda*, its affiliates, and sympathizers discuss the pros and cons of the drug, and a number of Yemeni suicide bombers have met their fate with *qat*-filled cheeks. A final decision of *al-Qaeda* on what stance to adopt towards the drug has seemingly been postponed. The Jihadists want to avoid alienating Yemen's population with a premature ban of the popular stimulant before having gained firm control over the country. *Al-Qaeda* has learned from the mistakes of its Islamist sister organization, the al-Shabab militia in war-torn Somalia.

With Yemen's 2011 "Youth Revolution", a decade of half-hearted *qat* policies and missed opportunities has come to an end – a decade, however, that has succeeded in lifting the veil of silence that was cast over *qat* in media and politics after President Ali Abdullah Salih came to power in 1978. This whitewash had been part of a ruling bargain between the Salih regime and the unruly tribes that had imparted highland Yemen several decades of relative stability and Salih a 33-year rule.

With the forecast depletion of Yemen's oil and gas reserves within the next decade, the economic importance of *qat* will further increase and will bring about an important shift in the balance of power from the central government towards the *qat* producing highland tribes. The challenge of addressing the *qat* problem is thus tremendous for Yemen's policy makers. While the transitional government is hesitant about its future *qat* course and anxious not to open a "war" on yet another front, Yemen's anti-*qat* activists have seized the current, favorable climate of change. Emboldened by Yemen's revolution and the ouster of President Salih they have recently launched a series of campaigns against the drug, dubbed a "revolution on one's self".

# Politics of Qat

The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

Peer Gatter



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Band 20.1

Peer Gatter

Politics of Qat

The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

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Front cover: A *qāt* merchant in the highland village  
of al-Jabīn in Rayma governorate.

Back cover: Free *qāt* handouts secured a high voter turnout  
in Yemen's first direct presidential elections in 1999.

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### E. Zaydī Insurgency – The Role of *Qāt* in Ṣa‘da Warfare

In 2004, civil strife broke out in Ṣa‘da, Yemen’s northernmost governorate. Until today this conflict is unresolved, rekindling in periodic rounds of fighting that Yemen’s press has dubbed the ‘*Ṣa‘da Wars*’. Early on, *qāt* has played a key role in this struggle, in both strategic and economic terms.

At the root of the Ṣa‘da conflict was a rather diverse Zaydī revivalist movement, rallying to overcome the lethargy that had befallen the sect after its displacement from political power in Yemen’s 1962 revolution.<sup>319</sup> Zaydī Imāms – claiming descent from Prophet Muḥammad – had ruled over North Yemen for more than a thousand years. Today, a third of Yemen’s population is believed to adhere to the Zaydī school of thought – a dogma that since the 1990s has been increasingly stigmatized as apostate by Salafī extremists.

The revivalist movement took up the cause of defending Zaydī values and protecting Zaydī identity from the dilution and subversion with Sunnī ideas. It also aimed at overcoming the long-standing and systematic government neglect of Ṣa‘da, the Zaydī heartland. By depriving the governorate of development projects until the late 1980s, Yemen’s republican leaders had punished the royalist stronghold for its allegiance with Imām Aḥmad bin Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn well after his fall from power.<sup>320</sup>

One of the movement’s leaders was Shaykh Ḥusayn Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥawthī, a former Member of Parliament of the Ḥizb al-Ḥaqq (Truth Party).<sup>321</sup> During the 1990s al-Ḥawthī had received substantial government support to strengthen the Zaydī community in an attempt to contain the growing influence of the Islamic Iṣlāḥ faction and to push back Saudi Wahhābī currents in the northern province of Ṣa‘da. Al-Ḥawthī used these funds to establish a network of associations and religious schools – a network that came to be known as *al-Shabāb al-Mu‘minīn* (*Believing Youth*).<sup>322</sup> In addition to spiritual guidance, thousands of his young followers have purportedly also received military training and have been indoctrinated with propaganda materials of the Lebanese Ḥizb Allāh.<sup>323</sup>

When US-troops invaded Iraq in 2003, al-Ḥawthī staged protests and began to stir up anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment in mosques around Yemen.<sup>324</sup> Embarrassed by his increasingly violent political rhetoric, the Ṣāliḥ regime, that had become part of the US-led coalition against terror, arrested scores of his followers. When in June 2004 the Yemeni army killed and wounded several protesters at the gates of the US Embassy in Ṣan‘ā’, the rift between al-Ḥawthī and the government deepened. Violent confrontations between Zaydī activists and security forces in the ancient al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr of Ṣan‘ā’ ensued, after banners had been displayed in televised Friday prayers with the Iranian-style slogan “*Death to America, Death to Israel*”.<sup>325</sup> As reconciliation attempts between President Ṣāliḥ and al-Ḥawthī failed, the government sought to arrest the Zaydī leader in his native Ṣa‘da stronghold, accusing him of having proclaimed himself Imām of Yemen<sup>326</sup> and of wanting to overthrow the government.<sup>327</sup> A reward of YR 10 million (US\$ 55,000) was offered for his capture.<sup>328</sup> Al-Ḥawthī denied the allegations and asserted in an open letter his loyalty to both President Ṣāliḥ and the Republic, claiming that his differences with the regime stemmed solely from the government’s pro-US stance and its toleration of Saudi incursions into northern Yemen.<sup>329</sup>

#### The Rebels Target *Qāt* Markets During the First ‘Wars’

Military operations against al-Ḥawthī and his *Believing Youth* led to an uprising against the government. As SALMONI (2010) points out, dispatching military forces into traditionally autonomous tribal lands was an uncharacteristically aggressive action that violated local cultural norms in a society where “*mediation and violent rhetoric had traditionally served as a means to preempt violent action.*” This led to a further radicalization of the Ṣāliḥ critics and the activation of a wider opposition to the regime that comprised a number of Ṣa‘da’s Zaydī tribes now calling themselves Ḥawthīs.<sup>330</sup> The rebellion that took its start in the Marān mountains (north-western Ḥayḍān district, Ṣa‘da) soon

became known as the first of so far six consecutive Ṣa‘da ‘wars’.<sup>331</sup> Before long, the skirmishes reached the city of Ṣa‘da and its surrounding countryside, where the insurgents repeatedly targeted soldiers carelessly leaving their military strongholds in order to buy *qāt*. A first grenade attack took place in the city’s *qāt* market on July 17, 2004, just a few paces away from the army garrison. Three further explosions were reported during August that year in the *qāt* markets of Sūq al-Ṭalḥ and Sūq al-‘Anad, both located to the northwest of Ṣa‘da City. According to *qāt* traders from the governorate these assaults left over 20 soldiers dead and dozens wounded.<sup>332</sup>



Picture 267: Graves of Zaydī jurists outside the northern gates of Ṣa‘da city.

After succeeding to kill Ḥusayn al-Ḥawthī on September 10, 2004 and putting his father, the venerable cleric Badr al-Dīn ibn Amīr al-Ḥawthī, under house arrest in Ṣan‘ā’, the government announced a unilateral end to the rebellion. Most issues remained however unresolved and both parties continued to hold prisoners.<sup>333</sup> According to official sources some 600 government troops, insurgents and civilians, had been killed during the 2004 combats.<sup>334</sup> Yemen’s press – quoting unnamed Ṣa‘da medical sources – reported up to 4,000 dead, 6,000 displaced families and 18,000 imprisoned insurgents and sympathizers.<sup>335</sup>

After a number of small-scale attacks on army posts in northern Yemen that the government attributed to the *Believing Youth*, hostilities went into a second round in March 2005. In retaliation for the killing of several insurgents by the military in Ṣa‘da, rebels attacked a police patrol in Sūq al-‘Anad on March 28 killing seven.<sup>336</sup> Yet again, the scene of the assault was a popular *qāt* market, where police officers had seemingly made a stop to buy *qāt* at bargain prices.<sup>337</sup> President Ṣāliḥ now openly accused the rebels of terrorism and claimed they were plotting to kidnap foreign ambassadors. The government also blamed Yemen’s two Zaydī-based opposition parties al-Ḥaqq and Ittiḥād al-Qiwā al-Sha‘biyya (Union of Popular Forces) of siding with the insurgents.<sup>338</sup> ‘Abd Allāh al-Ruzāmi – a former Parliament member of al-Ḥaqq and confidant of Ḥusayn al-Ḥawthī – put himself at the

head of the insurgency, declaring that authorities had not kept their promises concerning the release of some 1,000 dissidents and claiming that the *Believing Youth* were still being hunted by the military. A month earlier, the 86 year old Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥawthī had fled Ṣan‘ā’ and was declared spiritual leader of the rebellion.<sup>339</sup>

In April 2005, President Ṣāliḥ claimed victory and announced once again a unilateral end to fighting. But the rebels rejected a presidential pardon as their conditions for surrender were refused. The struggle had by then reportedly cost Yemen more than US\$ 270 million.<sup>340</sup> Following a tribally brokered deal in June 2005, the rebellion’s military leader al-Ruzāmī surrendered to authorities, but minor clashes continued well into early 2006.<sup>341</sup> In late September 2005, President Ṣāliḥ announced an amnesty for al-Ḥawthī’s followers on the basis of which some 1,000 alleged rebels and supporters were released between February and December of the following year.<sup>342</sup> During the latter part of 2005, tribes loyal to the President (namely the Hamdān tribe) became involved in the confrontations, turning the conflict increasingly into a tribal war of revenge with growingly inscrutable motives. The hostilities of late 2005 that became known as the “Third Ṣa‘da War” (December 2005 - February 2006) also saw the emergence of the brothers of the slain Ḥusayn al-Ḥawthī, Yaḥyā and ‘Abd al-Malik, as field commanders of the insurgency.<sup>343</sup>

From the outset of the uprising, Yemen’s government had blamed Iran and certain “*Shiite figures and businessmen in neighboring Saudi Arabia and Bahrain*” of directing and financing the insurgents.<sup>344</sup> Yemen’s Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Security Affairs, Rashād al-‘Alīmī, accused the rebels of receiving military training in Iran.<sup>345</sup> In October 2009, the government even claimed it had intercepted an Iranian ship in the Red Sea with a cargo of anti-tank shells, destined for the Ṣa‘da rebels. Repeated reports spoke furthermore of Iranian “instructors” active in the Ṣa‘da area.<sup>346</sup> Also the picture drawn of ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥawthī by Yemeni media appears to be a well calculated one. It links Yemen’s Zaydiyya increasingly with the Twelver Shiites of Iran, portrays it as Iranian vanguard and attempts thereby to blur the fundamental dogmatic differences:

*“... the rebel commander [is] sitting cross-legged on the dirt in talks with Yemeni officials, a few miles from the Saudi border. Teenage bodyguards in green uniforms stand behind him. Abdul Houthi’s dark hair is combed flat to the side, and he wears a dark suit with a dark open-neck shirt and no tie, in the fashion adopted by many Iranian men. The bulge in his cheek, from khat, the leaves that Yemenis chew as a mild stimulant, is the only sign that Houthi is Yemeni instead of Iranian.”<sup>347</sup>*

Neither allegations, that Ṣa‘da’s conflict is in fact a Saudi-Iranian proxy war, nor that there were indeed flows of weapons, funds and intelligence from abroad, could ever be satisfactorily proven by Yemen’s government.<sup>348</sup>

### Insurgents Gain Control Over Cross-Border Trade

For funding their struggle, al-Ḥawthī’s followers did not depend on outside support as they had considerable domestic revenue sources at their command: During 2006 and initially mostly unrecognized by the government, the rebels brought the illegal cross-border *qāt* and weapons trade with Saudi Arabia under their control.<sup>349</sup> By early 2007, the insurgents held the districts of Shadā’, Rāziḥ, Ghamir, Majz, Munabbih, Qiṭābir, and Bāqim, and thus virtually Ṣa‘da’s entire western high mountain and escarpment zone along Saudi Arabia’s largely unguarded border.<sup>350</sup> While smugglers native to these prime *qāt* growing areas were forced to pay “income taxes” to the insurgents, smugglers from other parts of Yemen were expelled and replaced by loyal tribesmen.<sup>351</sup> The volume of the illicit *qāt* trade cannot be underestimated. It is believed that annually some US\$ 225 million worth of *qāt* (Yemeni farm gate price) are smuggled into Saudi Arabia and sold there by Yemen’s contrabandists at 4-5 times that amount to their Saudi accomplices (see chapter VIII. F). Also the illicit weapons trade destabilizing Saudi Arabia is thought to be a multi-million dollar business (Saudi authorities believe that weapons and explosives from Yemen were used in the 2003 Riyāḍ bombings).

VIII. *Qāṭ*, Governance and Political Stability



Pictures 268 & 269: Top: A juvenile ammunitions dealer in Ṣa'da's old city (2005 picture). Still today, weapons and ammunition can be bought without restrictions in Yemen's north. Bottom: Ṣa'da's northern city wall with the citadel, an army stronghold that soon became a target of insurgent attacks (1999 picture).

Until its 2007 closure by the government, Ṣa‘da’s Sūq al-Ṭalḥ was Yemen’s most important weapons market and Fāris Mannā‘, member of a prominent family of Ṣa‘da shaykhs, Yemen’s biggest arms trader. Mannā‘, whom Yemen’s pro-regime press portrays as the world’s third largest weapons dealer, was declared governor of Ṣa‘da by the Ḥawthī’s in March 2011 (see below).<sup>352</sup>

A true war economy has started to develop in Yemen’s northern governorates, which has since ensured the perpetuation of this conflict. In economic terms, both the rebels and a number of allied tribes, as well as certain military commanders and their clients have been benefitting from this war. Controlling much of the highland border, the rebels are thought to receive a substantial share of the dividends of both the *qāt* and the weapons trade. These proceeds gave the insurgency a boost, triggering in February 2007 the fourth and until today fiercest round of fighting.<sup>353</sup> While previous engagements between Ḥawthī forces and the army did not exceed a few weeks or months, the battles of the fourth war lasted for an entire year. The Yemeni press reported that Ḥawthī forces had tripled since the first uprising, numbering now up to 6,000 men.<sup>354</sup> By April 2007, the government had amassed more than 60,000 soldiers for a decisive battle, supported by fighter planes and tanks. The Ministry of Defense published and circulated *fatwās* issued by a number of Sunnī authorities that called for the use of deadly force against the “*Believing Youth*” and which declared a *jihād* on the Shiite group. Allegedly, Salafī combatants from Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Somalia fought alongside the government since 2007, leading to a significant loss of command and control capacity on the side of Yemen’s regular army.<sup>355</sup> There were also persistent reports accusing the military of having used chlorine gas against insurgents and civilians during the 2007 campaign.<sup>356</sup>

In May 2007, Deputy Prime Minister Rashād al-‘Alīmī, declared at a press conference that ties between the rebel movement in Ṣa‘da and drug traffickers had been uncovered and that part of the proceeds from this illicit trade flowed directly into funding the insurgency. Purportedly, smuggling of drugs had increased during the preceding months as the rebels controlled the border with Saudi Arabia. Al-‘Alīmī also claimed that Yemeni security agencies have gained knowledge that the Ṣa‘da rebels were using drugs during their battles with the governmental forces. He told reporters that in order to limit the access of the insurgents to weaponry, the government had started to close weapon markets nationwide and had launched a project to confiscate weapons with assistance of the some Gulf States (see also chapter VII. B).<sup>357</sup>

As propaganda videos of the Ḥawthīs suggest, much of the rebel’s ammunitions and weaponry, including armored vehicles and heavy artillery, was captured from the army during raids on military strongholds and convoys.<sup>358</sup> What al-‘Alīmī did also not tell the press, was the open secret that Yemen’s army was part of the problem. Chronically underpaid, ill equipped and malnourished soldiers developed the bad habit of ‘losing’ weapons: “*We constantly see soldiers, even high ranking officers, coming to the markets and villages of Ṣa‘da, al-Ḥarḥ or Ḥaraḍ selling bullets, grenades, guns or even landmines for a few riyāls in order to get the necessary cash to buy food, cigarettes and above all qāt. Some of this is directly sold to people whom we believe to be Ḥawthīs*”, says a relief worker of the Yemen Red Crescent, speaking on condition of anonymity.<sup>359</sup>

### The Role of *Qāt* in Ṣa‘da’s Agriculture

*Qāt* has been grown in Ṣa‘da’s western escarpment in rain- and *ghayl*-fed farming from time immemorial. In the arid central plateau and basin zone draining to the east, commercial *qāt* agriculture was only been introduced after Yemen’s revolution. Until then the dominant agricultural system in this region was subsistence farming with cereals. Since the 1970s, tubewell technology has permitted intensive agriculture in these areas, where aside from *qāt*, fruit cultivation also rapidly spread. Both were favored by a diesel subsidy making irrigation highly profitable and by the improvement of the transport network that provided and facilitated access of local products to new markets (the Ṣa‘da - Ṣan‘ā’ road was paved in 1979).<sup>360</sup> Yemen’s 1984 ban on fruit and vegetable imports gave further incentives for Ṣa‘da’s agricultural production and for the development of irrigation systems (see also

chapter V. C).<sup>361</sup> Until the Ṣa‘da war, the governorate had become one of Yemen’s most important areas of fruit cultivation. By 2004, 70.0% of the country’s pomegranates and 42.1% of its apples were produced here (15,259 and 4,560 metric tons respectively). Also in terms of orange and mandarin production, Ṣa‘da was among the lead governorates in 2004, surpassed only by Mārib and al-Jawf.<sup>362</sup>



Picture 270: The city of Ṣa‘da with its agricultural environs seen from the east (1999).

In 2003, 30.9% of Ṣa‘da’s land holders owned irrigation pumps (the national average being just 10.3%). Also, the percentage of farmers owning spray motors for pesticide application was, at 3.5%, one of the highest in the country (national average 0.7%).<sup>363</sup> Despite its intensive and highly productive agriculture, Ṣa‘da governorate is an area with rather fragmented agricultural landholdership. 17% of the population does not own any farmland at all – a figure double as high as in other parts of Yemen’s highlands. Smallholders make up the bulk of Ṣa‘da’s farmers with 43.9% possessing less than half a hectare of land and 18.5% owning just up to one hectare. Only a fifth of Ṣa‘da farmers can be qualified as larger landowners: 18.8% own up to five hectares and merely 1.8% of farmers hold estates of above 5 hectares in size.<sup>364</sup>

Agricultural income – including that of *qāt* – is thus spread among a large portion of the governorate’s population. In 2003, *qāt* was grown by 39.7% of landholding families across the governorate, representing nearly 190,000 persons or 27.3 % of Ṣa‘da’s population (see table 44).<sup>365</sup> Yemen’s 2003 agricultural census put the area cultivated with *qāt* at 6,154 hectares with 15.9 million trees, representing 20.3% of Ṣa‘da’s total cultivated area. In some districts the share of *qāt* in agricultural area was found to be exceptionally high. Among these are Ḥaydān with 50.1% of cultivated land, Rāziḥ and Sāqayn with 32.9% and 32.6% respectively, and Ghamir with 25.9%. Particularly in the two rebel-held districts of Ghamir and Rāziḥ – firmly under al-Ḥawthī control since 2006/2007 – the percentage of landholders growing *qāt* was found highest with 76.5% and 72.5% respectively (see table 44). Both are among the most intensive *qāt* growing areas of Yemen.

**Table 44: *Qāt* Cultivation Per District in Şa‘da Governorate (Results of the 2003 Agricultural Census)<sup>366</sup>**

District	Landholders growing <i>qāt</i> (in %)	Landholders growing <i>qāt</i> (in numbers)	<i>Qāt</i> trees (numbers in 1,000)	<i>Qāt</i> area (in ha)	<i>Qāt</i> area (in % of cultivated area)
Ḥaydān	70.2%	4,100	2,938	1,291	50.1%
Rāziḥ	72.5%	3,950	1,580	317	32.9%
Sāqayn	64.7%	3,789	2,358	947	32.6%
Ghamir	76.5%	1,272	3,298	641	25.9%
al-Ẓāhir	5.8%	132	25	582	22.0%
Majz	29.5%	1,322	1,140	733	21.1%
al-Ḥishwa	4.1%	62	16	6	18.1%
al-Şafra‘	28.2%	1,239	571	242	18.0%
Bāqim	30.6%	629	579	164	16.9%
Munabbih	27.8%	1,179	947	451	14.0%
Qiṭābir	26.0%	713	343	187	11.7%
Şahār	31.7%	4,211	1,698	459	10.9%
al-Kitāf	13.2%	505	307	59	6.2%
Shadā‘	13.2%	113	50	75	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>39.7%</b>	<b>23,216</b>	<b>15,850</b>	<b>6,154</b>	<b>20.3%</b>

### Sabotaging the *Qāt* Sector to Weaken the Rebels

To weaken the rebels and to discourage the population from supporting them, the Şāliḥ regime blocked shipments of food and medication to the Şa‘da region during much of the fourth war. Also diesel deliveries were suspended to prevent farmers from pumping water for *qāt* irrigation and to drain this important source of rebel revenue.<sup>367</sup> Until then, *qāt* shipments from the northern governorate to Şan‘ā‘ had never been interrupted. Even on days no other traffic passed through rebel and army road blocks on the Şa‘da-Şan‘ā‘ highway, cars transporting *qāt* had managed to negotiate their way across checkpoints, bribing both sides with gifts of *qāt*. But this became increasingly difficult during 2007 as the number of checkpoints between Şa‘da and Şan‘ā‘ literally exploded (over 40 by March 2007) making the *qāt* trade less and less lucrative since at each checkpoint bribes were due. Due to time-consuming searches for weapons, *qāt* could often no longer reach the markets before noon and thus not in time to be sold fresh on the same day. Since early 2007, *qāt* merchants were systematically harassed and abused by security forces and *qāt* shipments randomly confiscated, claiming the proceeds would support the insurgents. A number of *qāt* dealers reported that they were refused passage at checkpoints and sent back with their perishable merchandise. Since they could not find other customers in Şa‘da in time before the leaves lost their stimulating properties, they lost their investment.<sup>368</sup> One merchant also reported that soldiers in Ḥarf Sufyān district had deliberately destroyed his *qāt* consignment: “*They pulled me out of my car, spat in my face, beat me with their guns calling me a terrorist. Then they told me to throw my qāt off the car on the street and ordered bypassing cars to roll over the bundles.*”<sup>369</sup> In Şan‘ā‘’s al-Ḥaşaba market – a major sales place for *qāt* from the northern governorates – many retailers of Şa‘da *qāt* (especially the renowned ‘*Amārī*’ type) remained without merchandise during March-July 2007. Many sales places remained closed for several week periods. To the government ban on exporting *qāt* southwards many Şa‘da *qāt* farmers and agents responded by turning north and dispatching greater amounts of Şa‘da *qāt* across the border into Saudi Arabia.<sup>370</sup>

## VIII. *Qāt*, Governance and Political Stability



Pictures 271 & 272: The old city of Ṣa'da with its adobe architecture. Top: The main gate, the Bāb al-Yaman, opening towards the south. Bottom: The city wall and the minaret of the al-Hādī mosque which hosts the grave of Imām al-Hādī and eleven further Zaydī imāms. The mosque was built at the site where Prophet Muḥammad's camel is said to have rested and is the most important religious center of the Zaydī sect.

### *Qāt* to Boost Troop Morale

At the same time, the availability of the cheap *Sawfī qāt* – renowned for making people ‘crazy’ and depriving them of sleep – strongly fluctuated in Ṣan‘ā’ markets. Before each major campaign against the insurgents, military commanders would buy vast quantities of this infamous brand at ‘Amrān’s wholesale market, the Sūq al-Layl. For informants of the Ṣa‘da rebels, the availability of *Sawfī qāt* in ‘Amrān and Ṣan‘ā’ markets soon became a barometer for forthcoming military campaigns and al-Ḥawthī’s men were accordingly warned well ahead of any major operations.<sup>371</sup> Besides increasing the bellicosity of government troops and making them take greater risks in confronting the enemy, another reason for supplying troops with *qāt* was that in the remote mountain areas of Ṣa‘da it proved harder to provide soldiers with regular hot meals than with leaves of the *qāt* plant that are known to suppress hunger.<sup>372</sup> Allegedly, also the incidence of desertion sharply dropped among army ranks when a regular *qāt* supply was guaranteed in this conflict that left thousands dead and disabled. A brigadier who had participated in the 2007 and 2008 military campaigns acknowledged: “*when we had no qāt we had to make our soldiers fear us more than they feared the enemy. We had to threaten them, beat them and lock them up at night so that they would fight the next day. But once the qāt supplies reached us regularly our soldiers would no longer want to run away. With qāt they thought they could fly and believed to be invulnerable. With qāt it was very easy to control them.*”<sup>373</sup>

Faced with the severity of the situation, Qatar offered to mediate between insurgents and Yemen’s government and promised to financially support the reconstruction of Ṣa‘da governorate if the war was ended. On June 16, 2007 a truce was reached. While the rebel leaders agreed to lay down arms and go into exile to Qatar, the government agreed to let Ḥawthī troops keep control of certain areas of the governorate, release rebel prisoners, assist the internally displaced in returning home and help paying for the reconstruction of the province.<sup>374</sup> But for the government the short-lived operational pause was rather a means of assessing its options for regaining control of certain strategic locations in Ṣa‘da than a true commitment to peace. Skirmishes thus continued and in September 2007 ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥawthī accused the army of attacking homes and of looting, calling this behavior a disgrace that will lead to more bloodshed. The army also continued to imprison alleged rebel-sympathizers without trial, among them even children, and there were frequent reports of torture and abuse.<sup>375</sup> In early September 2007, the army involuntarily opened a second front in the Ṣa‘da war. In the al-Malāḥīz area military commanders had instructed their troops to impose “taxes” on *qāt* farmers supposedly supporting the insurgents and to confiscate and sell the *qāt* of whoever was not willing to pay. Soldiers took this as a license to systematically ravage and loot *qāt* farms in the area, claiming this would help weaken support for the enemy. A several day battle between well armed *qāt* farmers and regular troops ensued, leaving more than a dozen people dead and wounded on both sides.<sup>376</sup>

It was only in January 2008, that the fourth phase of the war came to an end and that the Qatari brokered truce led to a fragile and short-lived ceasefire. Once again the government had not achieved its goals of dismantling the rebels’ leadership and of destroying the insurgency’s popular base.<sup>377</sup>

### The War Comes to Ṣan‘ā’

In early May 2008, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥawthī accused Yemen’s military command of once again breaching the ceasefire and threatened to take the war out of the Ṣa‘da area. As government forces continued their attacks on rebel positions, insurgents raided a military camp in al-Jawf and clashed with security forces in ‘Amrān.<sup>378</sup> In the “*fifth war*”, insurgents also occupied several villages and mountaintops along the Mārib road in Banī Ḥushaysh. This district is located on the north-eastern outskirts of the capital, just a few kilometers beyond Ṣan‘ā’ International Airport. During June 2008, heavy artillery fire of the Banī Ḥushaysh clashes could be heard in Ṣan‘ā’. This brought the war from the remote Ṣa‘da governorate to the very centre of public attention in the capital. Ḥawthī insurgents who had arrived in Banī Ḥushaysh in mid May, claiming to be agricultural laborers, used the

extensive vineyards and *qāt* fields of the area to facilitate their movements and as cover for sniper attacks on military personnel. Caught off guard by the events in Banī Ḥushaysh, the government initially commanded local farmers to confront and oust the infiltrators on their own.<sup>379</sup> As this failed and several farmers were killed by the insurgents, the security apparatus reacted with brute force against both, villagers and rebels. Intensive missile strikes and mortar bombardments were launched against the farms in the area. According to farmers, soldiers deliberately bombed houses, water pumps and irrigation pipes in the villages of al-Rajm, Ghadrān and al-Sharya and combed through the vineyards and *qāt* fields with tanks, razing large areas to hinder rebel movement. Even farmers cooperating with the security forces to drive the rebels from the area found their estates destroyed by the military.<sup>380</sup> In its effort to contain the 400 Ḥawthī elements believed to have entrenched themselves in Banī Ḥushaysh, the government collectively starved the resident population of 75,000.<sup>381</sup> Telephone and electricity lines were cut, diesel, food and fodder shipments banned. As also pumps for domestic water supply could no longer be serviced, scores of villagers fled to Ṣan‘ā’. Irrigation came to a complete standstill letting many farms fall dry, depriving locals of their harvest.<sup>382</sup> A government spokesman outlined the military strategy vis-à-vis the population: “*When they begin to starve and their source of income is interrupted, they will eventually hand over the Houthis in their area.*”<sup>383</sup> The perfidious tactics of the security forces also included the use of “*human identifiers*” as the *Yemen Times* reported:

“... security personnel now are employing several local men as “*identifiers*” to assist police in clarifying the affiliation or loyalty of travelers. These human identifiers must have a good knowledge of the area and its locals. They are chosen from areas adjacent to Bani Hushaish, particularly Khawlān, and from the eastern half of the district, where residents are known to be pro-state and not Houthis. Once an identifier vouches for a traveler, the latter pays YR 500 for this “*identification service.*” This is the standard fee, even if the vouching includes the declaration that one or more persons aren’t a threat. One to three identifiers from different regions are stationed at each checkpoint to rule out non-suspects, despite what’s on their ID cards. There are three scenarios in this identification process: either the traveler is discovered not to be from Bani Hushaish or he’s released to safely carry his goods home, wherever that may be. If the traveler is from Bani Hushaish but from the eastern part, he pays YR 500 for the identification service and then moves on, sometimes with his goods, but mostly without. However, if a traveler is discovered to be from the western half where Houthis are, he’s automatically taken into custody.”<sup>384</sup>

Soldiers also hindered locals from selling their produce in neighboring markets. As a consequence Ḥushayshī *qāt* entirely disappeared in Ṣan‘ā’ during June and July 2008.<sup>385</sup> Since a number of farmers in Banī Ḥushaysh have specialized in high quality organic *qāt*, grown without the use of pesticides, this was painfully felt among the capital’s educated class.<sup>386</sup> The summer of 2008 was reportedly also a time to settle old scores among Banī Ḥushaysh and Khawlān tribesmen. As the security forces would bombard and intensively comb through all farms from which bullets were fired at them, it was sufficient for evil-minded tribesmen to fire shots from the fields of a disliked neighbor to bring the army to the scene and destroy the plantations.<sup>387</sup> In early June, the field leader of the insurgents in Banī Ḥushaysh vowed to move fighting into Ṣan‘ā’ and attack vital institutions of the state. Rebels also threatened to target Ṣan‘ā’ International Airport if government forces would not stop attacking their Ṣa‘da kin.<sup>388</sup>

### *Al-Ard al-Maḥrūqa* – Politics of Scorched Earth

To quell the rapidly spreading insurgency, the government announced the recruitment of 50,000 new soldiers in late June 2008. The recruits, many of whom had signed up to escape poverty, were sent straight to the Ṣa‘da battlefield, poorly equipped (lacking even basic gear such as helmets) and with no or only inadequate military training.<sup>389</sup> The Yemeni journalist Ṣaddām al-Ashmūrī reported of countless child soldiers among army ranks, aging barely 14 or 15 years ((see picture 441)) Daily *qāt* rations made them fearless fighters. They were often among the first casualties of war due to their inexperience

VIII. *Qāt*, Governance and Political Stability



Pictures 273 & 274: The vast grape monocultures of Banī Ḥushaysh on the northeastern Ṣan‘ā’ outskirts. In 2008 tanks of Yemen’s army ploughed through the area that was used by Ḥawthī militants as base of operation.

and the lack of military instruction.<sup>390</sup> Despite backing by helicopter gunships, tanks, and Salafi jihādists, the army's offensives failed to take control of the insurgents' supply routes and did not succeed in putting an end to the two-month rebel lockdown of the 117<sup>th</sup> military division in Şa'da's Marān mountains.<sup>391</sup>

After four years of war, Şa'da's economy lay in ruins. The government had interrupted the flow of commodities, foodstuffs, and humanitarian aid. Markets were mostly closed as with the exception of a few smuggled goods there was no longer anything to sell or buy. Agricultural produce of the province no longer reached the customers, neither domestically nor in neighboring Arab states. Prices for a 50 kilo sack of flour had jumped from YR 6,000 to up to 15,000 and cooking gas from YR 550 to 2,000.<sup>392</sup> Countless Şa'da villages had to be abandoned, since the population was "*systematically starved away*" by the military.<sup>393</sup> In many rural areas drinking water could no longer be pumped due to the chronic lack of diesel and wells were with 200-400 meters simply too deep to manually extract water. Tanker trucks that before the conflict had serviced many remote farms without own water source would no longer dare to venture into the unstable countryside.<sup>394</sup> As residents had left, their houses and farms were destroyed and burnt by government forces to prevent the rebels from using them as hideouts. The military high command also issued instructions to systematically destroy wellheads and cut down or mine *qāt* and fruit farms in rebel territory.<sup>395</sup> One of the few Yemeni journalists allowed to visit Şa'da in 2007 wrote full of consternation: "*Everything beautiful had lost its beauty and the region's fruit farms, which used to produce the sweetest fruit, were no exception.*"<sup>396</sup>

With the diesel ban showing effect in Şa'da governorate as of early 2007 and smuggled fuel steadily increasing in price, farmers had initially directed irrigation water away from low value crops towards *qāt* and high value fruit. But as in 2008 even the smuggled diesel no longer reached many parts of the province, plantations started to die.<sup>397</sup> After Hawthī rebels attacked the power station of the governorate capital Şa'da in June 2008, the city and the surrounding villages suffered a complete blackout.<sup>398</sup> Farms of the Şa'da basin that had so far been able to operate their pumps with city electricity were now also deprived of irrigation. In the absence of groundwater extraction and insufficient rainfall for anything else but cereals, agriculture came to a near standstill in many districts. As a consequence thousands of agricultural laborers (ploughers, pesticide sprayers, harvesters, irrigators) were out of work and left the province to find employment elsewhere.<sup>399</sup> With telephone lines cut, also the few Şa'da farmers that had managed to upkeep irrigation for *qāt* cultivation saw their profits decline, as they could no longer inform brokers of the maturity of their crop, negotiate prices or arrange for harvesting crews. In the absence of prior sales arrangements the marketing of the highly perishable drug became increasingly risky for cultivators due to the lack of knowledge of supply and demand in the markets.<sup>400</sup> With the ban on diesel imports also the lucrative cross border trade with *qāt* regressed.<sup>401</sup>

In late June 2008, the export of *qāt* from Şa'da governorate towards the south was banned altogether.<sup>402</sup> Most shops selling northern *qāt* in al-Ḥaṣaba market of Şan'ā' remained closed during July 2008. Three years earlier, Şa'da's famed 'Amrānī *qāt* had been sold by some 60 retailers here and Sufyānī *qāt* from 'Amrān's northern Ḥarf Sufyān district by over a hundred. Only a handful of these merchants managed to keep their businesses open by securing *qāt* shipments from other areas, namely al-Maḥwīt and Ḥajja. Also many *qāt* transporters were out of work, hanging out in the hostels (*lukandas*) of the al-Ḥaṣaba market. They could neither return north due to heavy fighting nor obtain commissions from other *qāt* growing areas.<sup>403</sup>

June and July 2008 were also months with extreme shortages of *Sawfī qāt* in Şan'ā', much to the distress of the capital's day laborers and construction workers, who are the major consumers of this infamous brand. On the few days that *Sawfī qāt* was available in Şan'ā' markets during this summer, prices for a bundle had risen to YR 250 as compared to YR 100 - 150 during May. According to military sources, soldiers fighting the insurgents in Banī Ḥuṣhaysh and servicemen protecting strategic sites in the capital (bridges, major intersections and government offices) were receiving daily rations of *Sawfī qāt* worth YR 300 in order to stay alert during their long night watches.<sup>404</sup>

During 2008, public opinion successively turned against President Ṣāliḥ and the armed forces. Citizens openly voiced their doubt in Ṣan‘ā’ *qāt* chews, whether the military response to the Ḥawthī rebellion was proportionate and justified. Many believed that the Ṣa‘da rebellion could have been brought to an early end by either a determined military campaign or else a viable peace deal. But a settlement of the conflict was purportedly not in the interest of Major General ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar, commander of the first armored battalion and in charge of Yemen’s northwest region (he was by many believed to be President Ṣāliḥ’s half-brother<sup>405</sup>). The war gave him the opportunity to assume control not only over Ṣa‘da, but also over the adjacent governorate of Ḥajja, as well as parts of ‘Amrān, al-Jawf and al-Ḥudayda, and thus over much of northern Yemen. This has allegedly strengthened his position in the broker over President Ṣāliḥ’s succession. He is said to have therefore foiled or broken all ceasefires with the rebels. Rumor has it that al-Aḥmar wants to prevent Ṣāliḥ’s son Aḥmad – with whom he is at odds – from becoming Yemen’s next head of state, in order to position himself or one of his sons.<sup>406</sup> The national press reported that besides exercising military powers over the northern governorates, al-Aḥmar has also begun to assume control over the civil administration of the region and has thus become “*the real ruler of three governorates, namely Hajja, Sa’ada and Hodaidah. The local authority officials cannot adjudicate many issues including the detainees without referring to Ali Muhsein and hearing his viewpoint in this respect*”.<sup>407</sup> To western intelligence, al-Aḥmar has become known due to his links to al-Qā‘ida. He is said to have recruited fighters for Bin Lādin during the 1980s and has helped to resettle ‘Arab-Afghan’ combatants in Yemen at the end of the Afghanistan war.<sup>408</sup> Some analysts describe him as a reputed Salafī, who has deployed these irregular troops in the final battle for Aden during the 1994 civil war and now once again in the Ṣa‘da conflict.<sup>409</sup>



Picture 275: *Qāt* plantations on the eastern edge of the Ṣa‘da basin.

In a desperate move to reassume control over his armed forces and to end the rebellion, President Ṣāliḥ issued in mid July 2008 a directive for forming a “*popular army*” and invited thousands of loyal Ḥāshid tribesmen to take up arms.<sup>410</sup> According to unnamed Yemeni politicians, Ṣāliḥ had also ceased to depend on certain military commanders who, “*were fomenting the fighting and exploiting it for their own interests*”.<sup>411</sup> By then, the conflict had taken the shape of a tribal war, with uncontrolled

burning and looting and both sides launching hit and run attacks.<sup>412</sup> With the help of tribal mediators Ṣāliḥ finally reached a truce with ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥawthī and announced on July 20, 2008 the end of the war. Little has become known on the terms of this truce, but there are indications that the government has pulled out troops and Salafī military leaders from many Ṣa‘da positions, has released and pardoned detained Ḥawthī loyalists and has promised compensations for property lost in the war.<sup>413</sup> Dozens of presumed Ḥawthī supporters however remained imprisoned without charges or a trial or are still unaccounted for.<sup>414</sup>

Electricity returned to Ṣa‘da city in late July 2008, but despite the end of hostilities, diesel prices remained high. A barrel of 200 liters cost YR 22,000 – three times as much as in other parts of the country. Also phone lines were still not operating and the city’s hospital had not been reopened.<sup>415</sup> Fruits and *qāt* from Ṣa‘da and Banī Ḥuṣhaysh reappeared in Ṣan‘ā’ markets after the ceasefire, but after a long period of war-inflicted drought their quality was fairly low. As also pesticide supplies had been disrupted by the war, Ṣa‘da grapes and pomegranates were worm-infested and affected by disease. *Qāt* leaves were hard and chewy due to infrequent and insufficient irrigation and resembled rainfed *qāt* of dry years. Especially vegetables and fruits (namely grapes) suffered tremendously from repeated un- and reloading at more than 50 military checkpoints between Ṣa‘da and Ṣan‘ā’ and the scrupulous search for weapons in the fruit crates.<sup>416</sup>

In 2009, the Ṣa‘da war went into its sixth round, with air raids claiming hundreds of civilian lives.<sup>417</sup> Neither two major offensives that had been launched by Yemen’s army in August 2009 and January 2010 (code-names “*Operation Scorched Earth*” and “*Operation Blow to the Head*”) nor heavy Saudi air strikes that followed a Ḥawthī intrusion into Saudi Arabia, could bring an end to this long-standing conflict. In an attempt to conquer the governorate capital of Ṣa‘da from the insurgents, much of the town’s old quarter was reduced to rubble. The ancient al-Ḥādī mosque, named after the founder of the Zaydī dynasty, al-Ḥādī ilā’l-Ḥaqq Yaḥyā (859-911 A.D.), also suffered considerable damage.<sup>418</sup> In addition to its military onslaught, the Ṣāliḥ regime did not fail to employ psychological warfare. In an attempt to shake the rebel economy to its very foundations Yemen’s propaganda machinery struck at the *qāt* trade with a rather resourceful conspiracy theory. TV and radio broadcasts as well as Yemeni dailies spread the news that rebels in a demonic act had laid hands on Yemen’s favorite pastime, *qāt*. The regime created a general sense of paranoia and spread fears that *qāt* users – whether in Ṣan‘ā’ or Aden, al-Ḥudayda or al-Mukallā – could fall victim to the rebels even in their own homes while chewing in their *maḥraj*: “*Houthi terrorists poison qat trees in citizens’ orchards*”, read a August 2009 headline of *al-Mu’tamar*, the official organ of President Ṣāliḥ’s ruling party, the General People’s Congress (GPC):

*“Local sources in Saada province mentioned Sunday that al-Houthi elements of sabotage and terror have poisoned qat trees in orchards they have controlled with lethal poisons aimed at citizens and armed forces and security soldiers in Saada province and damage the soil. The sources clarified that those poisons cause death and infection with dangerous diseases as a result of taking them through consuming the qat tree leaves. Those conditions were discovered in many of farms in Saada province the Houthi terrorist elements seized them in the past before being cleared by military and security units and returned them to their owners [...]. The ministry of agriculture has therefore formed a team of experts to make field visits to Saada to study those poisons and discover their origin and also to take possible measures to limit their dangers and to keep away the citizens from its lethal effects.”*<sup>419</sup>

As a consequence, the demand for *qāt* from the northern governorates of Ṣa‘da, Ḥajja, and even ‘Amrān sharply dropped in Ṣan‘ā’ and al-Ḥudayda markets during September and October 2009.<sup>420</sup> The plan of the regime to deprive the “*elements of rebellion*” and their alleged allies, Ṣa‘da *qāt* farmers, of the important proceeds of the *qāt* trade seems to have worked at least for a certain time. The “*sixth war*” led also to undesirable effects for chewers of Yemen’s upper class. When fighting spread into Ḥajja governorate, farmers were no longer able to expedite prime *Shāmī qāt* to Ṣan‘ā’ and al-Ḥudayda: Between August and December 2009, Yemen’s most expensive cultivar disappeared from the markets.<sup>421</sup>

## Challenges to the Cross-Border Trade

When in November 2009 Ḥawthī fighters gained control over Jabl al-Dukhān, located on Saudi Arabian territory, the conflict took on an international dimension.<sup>422</sup> Considerable Saudi forces were relocated to this new front and engaged in violent clashes with the rebels. The Saudi military also attacked several Yemeni border villages and destroyed scores of vehicles allegedly carrying rebels and smugglers. Air strikes were launched against caves that had been used for the contraband trade of *qāt* and as stores for weapons and ammunitions by the Ḥawthīs. The lockdown of Ṣa‘da’s northwestern border led to what Saudi *qāt* traders described to *Asharq Al-Awsat* as “the complete disruption of *qāt* smuggling operations” in this area. According to Major General Aḥmad Qazāz, commander of Jāzān police, the intensification of Saudi security patrols also led to a considerable drop in the number of infiltrations.<sup>423</sup> Reportedly, *qāt* and narcotics smuggling decreased by more than 50% during late 2009. It was now concentrated mostly on the wide coastal plain south of Jāzān, rather than on the remote and war-ridden highland zone. While prior to the Saudi counter-strike border patrols had seized between 62 to 67 tons of *qāt* weekly, confiscated quantities dropped to below 30 tons following the offensive. As a consequence *qāt* prices in Saudi Arabia rose by 300%, making the illicit cross border trade in this commodity even more lucrative.<sup>424</sup>

In the longer term, the Ḥawthī incursion into Saudi Arabia had however negative consequences for both the Ṣa‘da rebels and the smugglers operating under their protection. The Saudi army took the opportunity to completely evacuate a number of villages along the border to Yemen. These had always been seen as the major obstacle in tightening border security, as many of them were home to both Saudis and Yemenis (with the border treaty of Jidda signed in 2000, scores of Yemeni citizens found themselves dwelling on Saudi soil, while several thus far Saudi villages belonged all of a sudden to Yemen). In April 2010, a Saudi border commission took up its work surveying border townships on the territory of the kingdom, evacuating and destroying a further 643 homes. When King ‘Abd Allāh bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz visited the fighting zone in 2010, he decreed that 10,000 housing units should be constructed for evacuated villagers, well away from the common border.<sup>425</sup> The depopulation of the frontier region has made smuggling more difficult, as it has deprived the smugglers of many hiding places and considerably increased the distance they had to cover to reach their Saudi middlemen.

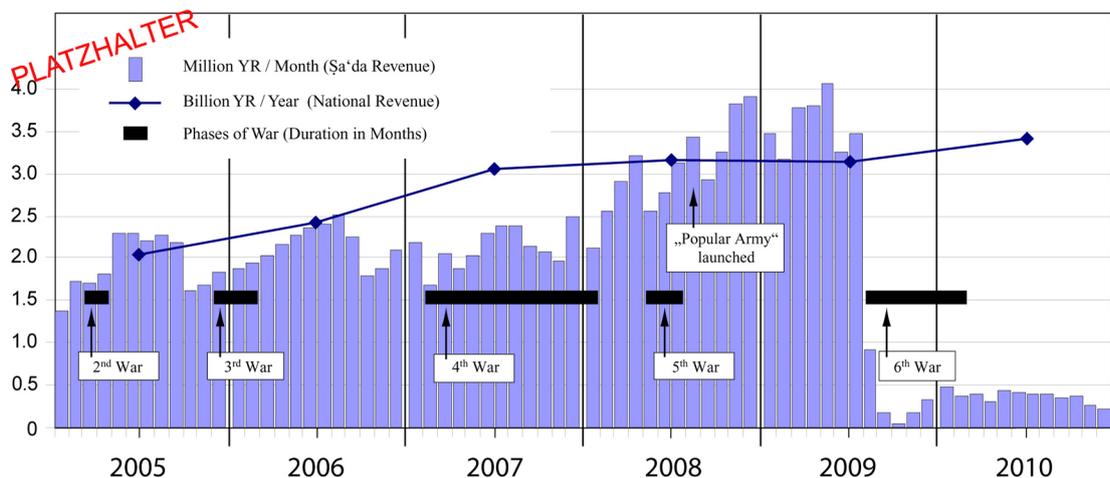
## *Qāt* Taxes as Indicator of Government Control Over Ṣa‘da

Taxes on *qāt* consumption were collected in Ṣa‘da throughout the six ‘wars’ that had afflicted the governorate. The development of revenues took however a distinctly different turn in this region than in other parts of the republic and gives witness of the various degrees of government control Ṣa‘da governorate experienced during the different rounds of fighting and during the interims separating them (see figure 19). In 2003, the year before the start of the Ṣa‘da troubles, the governorate accounted for 5.1% of Yemen’s *qāt* area.<sup>426</sup> However, in the same year only 1.1% of Yemen’s total *qāt* consumption taxes were collected here (YR 17.8 million of a total 1.63 billion).<sup>427</sup> This low collection quota was characteristic for Ṣa‘da during the years preceding and following 2003 and can be attributed to three factors:

- The traditionally low level of governmental control over Ṣa‘da’s tribal lands. Many *qāt* markets had been wittingly set up on tribal territory to bar the government from levying taxes (see e.g. LICHTENTHÄLER 2003, p. 126).
- The fact that *qāt* is grown in Ṣa‘da mostly for export to other parts of Yemen and to Saudi Arabia. The consumption tax is levied in the governorate where *qāt* is consumed. This does not necessarily coincide with the governorate where the leaves are produced (compare e.g. Aden where *qāt* cannot be grown, but where 18.4% of Yemen’s *qāt* taxes were levied in 2003).
- The high incidence of *qāt* smuggling from Ṣa‘da to Saudi Arabia. This *qāt* escapes taxation in Yemen altogether.

Monthly *qāt* consumption tax revenue throughout the republic reflects the seasonality of *qāt* cultivation. Prior to 2007/2008 this was also true for Şa‘da. *Qāt* production is generally low during the dry and cold season (October - March) when there is no or very little precipitation and when irrigation is discontinued due to the fear of nocturnal frost (December - February). With rising temperatures, irrigation sets in again and *qāt* production output steadily increases, reaching its zenith during the hot summer months with their two rainfall peaks in the western escarpment and the highland basins (May - September) (see figure 19).

**Fig. 19: Development of *Qāt* Consumption Tax Revenue in Şa‘da Governorate as Indicator of Government Control During the Ḥawthī Insurgency (Monthly in Million Riyāl) and Comparison with *Qāt* Consumption Tax Revenue Development at National Level (Annually in Billion Riyāl).**



Source: Tax Authority, annual tables on *qāt* consumption tax revenue by month and governorate (courtesy of the Tax Authority, Department for *Qāt* Taxation, Şan‘ā’). Phases of the Şa‘da war: (1) June-Sept. 2004 (not visualized as no monthly *qāt* tax data available), (2) March-April 2005, (3) Dec. 2005-Feb. 2006, (4) Feb. 2007-Jan. 2008, (5) May-July 2008, (6) Aug. 2009-Feb. 2010.

While confrontations between government troops and Ḥawthī forces during 2005 and 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ‘war’) had no apparent effect on *qāt* tax collection, as early as 2007 irregularities in tax receipts become apparent. While also during 2007 the seasonality of *qāt* production is still reflected in monthly tax revenue, an unusual drop in returns during February and an unusual high during December are observed. February 2007 coincided with the start of the fourth Şa‘da ‘war’, the thus far longest, most intense and deadliest phase of the conflict. Declining revenue during February indicates that tax collection was disrupted by the heavy fighting that ensued after February 16, when President Şāliḥ’s ultimatum to the rebels to disarm and surrender had lapsed unheard.<sup>428</sup> The unusually high tax revenues during December 2007 reflects the calm in Şa‘da and the strengthened government control over intra-regional trade routes in the governorate after hundreds of Şa‘da tribesmen had surrendered in late November and “promised to cease criminal or terrorist acts and go back to being good citizens”, as the *Yemen Observer* innocently reports. Şa‘da’s governor promised in return that “that the names of these rebels will be removed from the wanted list and [that they] will not be subject to any criminal investigation”. Also some YR 22 billion were promised in development projects for the governorate.<sup>429</sup> During late 2007 the government also gained control over a number of the governorate’s strategic markets, such as the Sūq al-‘Anad and had closed down the country’s largest weapons market, the Sūq al-Ṭalḥ.

### VIII. *Qāt*, Governance and Political Stability

Also, the diesel ban imposed on Ṣa‘da during 2007 is believed to have had a noticeable effect on *qāt* production and thus on tax proceeds. The annual growth rate of tax revenues which had been considerable during preceding years (36.3% in 2005 and 11.0% in 2006) converged to zero in 2007 (see figure 19 and table 45).<sup>430</sup> Not reflected in *qāt* consumption tax revenues displayed in the above figure, however, are the *qāt* export bans that have been imposed on Ṣa‘da since 2007, as this tax is applied only to *qāt* consumed within a governorate but not to *qāt* exported to other areas.

An entirely different picture we find in the following year. 2008 witnesses a steady rise in *qāt* revenue – no longer reflecting any seasonality of production – and culminating in December with the collection of YR 3.92 million (about double as much as collected during the same month in 2005 and 2006). 2008 was also the single most successful year in *qāt* tax collection in the history of Ṣa‘da governorate with a revenue of YR 36.6 million. The increase in revenue collection of 43.0% over the preceding year is seen as an indicator of increased government control over strategic locations of Ṣa‘da (among them the major *qāt* wholesale and retail markets) and the iron grip of the regime over the governorate’s most important trade routes. Higher revenue during 2008 may also be an indicator of greater amounts of *qāt* being sold and consumed within the governorate at outside markets broke away due to the export ban. Only the outbreak of the fifth Ṣa‘da ‘war’ led to a short decline in tax earnings during May and June 2008. With the launch of a ‘popular army’ of Ḥāshid tribesmen in July 2008 and the unilateral ceasefire declared by President Ṣāliḥ on July 17, revenues however quickly take a positive turn again.



Picture 276: During the sixth ‘war’, the insurgents captured significant numbers of army personnel. In Ḥawthī propaganda videos the captives were shown chewing *qāt* in a *mafrāj*.

Also during the first six months of 2009, government control of Şa‘da’s main markets and intra-regional trade routes appears to be very high with *qāt* tax revenues increasing by 33.9% compared to those in the same period of the previous year. Nevertheless, with the start of the sixth Şa‘da ‘war’ in August 2009, *qāt* tax revenues collapsed (during the second half of 2009 just YR 5.1 million were collected as compared to YR 20.5 million during the same period in 2008). Since mid 2009, the support base of the Şāliḥ regime in Yemen’s north began to crumble. In July 2009, four MPs from Şa‘da, all long-standing allies of President Şāliḥ, had resigned from the GPC voicing their discontent with the government’s neglect and destruction of Şa‘da. Two of them, belonging to Şāliḥ’s Ḥāshid tribal federation, called on the president to step down, which suggests that even his staunchest supporters were growing weary of his conduct of the conflict.<sup>431</sup> During the sixth Şa‘da ‘war’, the rebels also made important territorial gains, claiming to have conquered no less than 63 military locations. Government sources also reported that in September 2009, Ḥawthī forces employed 70 armored vehicles to attack the presidential palace in the town of Şa‘da.<sup>432</sup> Despite being unsuccessful, the incident shows that by 2009 the rebels had acquired sufficient logistical skills and hardware to launch large scale attacks against well equipped army strongholds. On several occasions during the sixth ‘war’, Ḥawthī forces also succeeded in capturing significant numbers of army personnel, including high ranking officers. *Qāt* was used to show that captured soldiers were in good health and treated as ‘guests’ according to the unwritten Yemeni convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of tribal war. A propaganda film released by the rebels in August 2009 shows a small *mafraj*, crowded with at least 17 captives in uniform. Narrowly seated and looking rather frightened, all of them sit chewing in front of transparent bags full of *qāt* leaves (see picture 276).<sup>433</sup>

**Table 45: Development of *Qāt* Consumption Tax Revenue in Selected Governorates of Northern Yemen (2005-2010) and Share of Şa‘da *Qāt* Taxes in Total *Qāt* Revenue (in Riyāl)**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Şa‘da	23,021,800	25,565,010	25,567,000	36,571,560	26,686,140	4,422,400
Ḥajja	126,579,942	138,802,820	146,139,100	149,558,900	121,888,638	117,608,490
al-Jawf	773,490	656,325	341,000	293,700	392,100	369,200
Şan‘ā’ City	303,371,200	416,021,924	581,901,968	534,813,520	465,153,100	371,059,200
Şan‘ā’ Gov.	2,033,115	2,092,950	2,763,700	4,916,425	1,927,800	102,617,569
‘Amrān	3,568,146	4,089,856	4,796,400	5,394,016	6,510,847	7,510,598
<b>Republic</b>	<b>2,045,700,520</b>	<b>2,420,000,410</b>	<b>3,046,175,403</b>	<b>3,153,939,071</b>	<b>3,142,816,059</b>	<b>3,417,148,462</b>
Şa‘da Share in Total <i>Qāt</i> Tax Revenue	1.13%	1.06%	0.84%	1.16%	0.85%	0.13%

Source: Tax Authority, annual tables on *qāt* consumption tax revenue by governorate

During 2010 the revenue situation in Şa‘da further worsened with just YR 4.4 million in *qāt* consumption taxes collected (representing then only 0.13% of the *qāt* taxes collected in the republic). The low returns of *qāt* tax collection may perhaps not only be an indicator of the dwindling government control over the area, but may in part also be a result of the return to self sufficiency in food crops by many farmers following several embargoes of the governorate (diversion of water rather to essential crops – see below).

Also in Ḥajja and al-Jawf, where government control had decreased during the last years of the conflict, *qāt* tax revenues have steadily declined (e.g., in Ḥajja from YR 149.6 million in 2008 to just 117.6 million in 2010) (see table 45). The Tax Authority reacted to the deteriorating security situation by pulling out tax agents from these governorates and posting them at the increasing number of checkpoints in ‘Amrān and northern Şan‘ā’ governorate. The decline in *qāt* tax revenues in the

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northern border-governorates was accompanied by a better policing of the *qāt* flows from these areas into other governorates. Consequently, in ‘Amrān *qāt* consumption tax revenue increased from YR 5.4 million to 7.5 million between 2008 and 2010 and in Ṣan‘ā’ governorate revenue literally exploded from YR 4.9 million in 2008 to 102.6 million in 2010.<sup>434</sup> Also in the capital Ṣan‘ā’, the effects of the war were noticeable in the levels of consumption tax revenue. Since considerable efforts had been made by the Tax Authority to control and tax the *qāt* flows before reaching the capital secretariat from the north, *qāt* taxes in Ṣan‘ā’ city itself regressed from YR 534.8 million in 2008 to just 371.1 million in 2010.<sup>435</sup>

The poor *qāt* revenue situation in the northern border governorates is likely to prevail for some time. In March 2011, President Ṣāliḥ has pulled out loyal forces from Ṣa‘da and many other governorates to defend his powerbase in Ṣan‘ā’, which had been challenged by a “Youth Revolution” and breakaway troops led by his fellow Sanḥān tribesman, Major General ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar. This has led to a further deterioration of stability in many parts of Yemen. Ṣa‘da’s governor Ṭaha ‘Abd Allāh Ḥājir fled in late March 2011 to Ṣan‘ā’ in a chartered plane, carrying with him sacks of money from the local branch of the central bank. The Ḥawthīs took complete control of the province, concluded a truce with General al-Aḥmar, and appointed in mutual agreement the ill-reputed arms dealer Shaykh Fāris Muḥammad Mannā‘ as Ṣa‘da’s new governor. Due to his arms deals with war-torn Somalia Mannā‘ is blacklisted by the European Union and the United States.<sup>436</sup> Since forces loyal to President Ṣāliḥ have also lost control over many areas of the capital, *qāt* shipments from Ṣa‘da have again reappeared in many Ṣan‘ā’ markets on a regular basis. Since the outbreak of the ‘Youth Revolution’ also well known Ḥawthī figures have been reported to roam freely in Ṣan‘ā’.<sup>437</sup>



Picture 277: Not a water tower or prison watch tower, but the extravagant *mafrāj* for *qāt* chewing of Shaykh Fāris Muḥammad Mannā‘ in the Ḥadda area of Ṣan‘ā’. An elevator brings chewers to the top.

### The Cost of the War to Yemen's Agricultural Sector

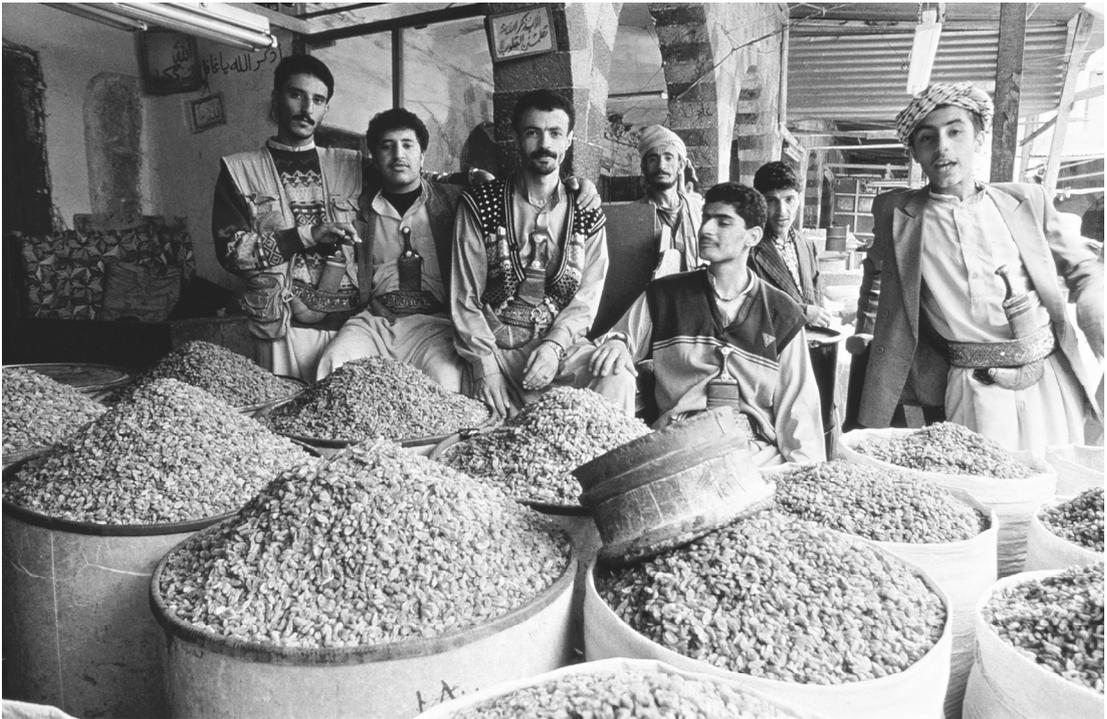
In September 2009, the United Nations has put the number of internally displaced persons at 150,000, of whom only some 22% were registered and received assistance in camps.<sup>438</sup> Most of these refugees had lived off agriculture before the war, originating mainly from Ṣa'da's rural areas where around a fifth of the population had been directly touched by the war.<sup>439</sup> The rebuilding of agriculture in Yemen's far north is likely to take many years. Ruined wells, generators and pumps need to be rehabilitated or replaced. Fruit and *qāt* plantations that succumbed to drought or were purposely destroyed by government forces need to be replanted. Villages and farmland have to be demined and houses rebuilt. Unless a comprehensive reconstruction program is put in place, many villagers now dwelling in camps will have little prospect to return home and rebuild their lives. In November 2008, the Ṣa'da Rehabilitation Committee had put the cost of the war's destruction at YR 35 billion (US\$ 176 million – certainly a gross underestimate), but thus far the reconstruction of Ṣa'da has not even started.<sup>440</sup> Without government or donor assistance many of Ṣa'da's farmers who once owned thriving fruit plantations will – wherever precipitation levels permit – have to return to the rainfed subsistence farming their ancestors had practiced, or else have to make a living as agricultural day laborers.

While *qāt* trees mostly survived the diesel-ban inflicted droughts of 2007 and 2008 and started to bud again after a few irrigations, uncounted fruit trees died, turning some areas into veritable *qāt* monocultures. Due to this experience, many Ṣa'da farmers have re-cultivate their fruit fields with less crisis-prone *qāt* after the relative calm that followed the sixth Ṣa'da war.<sup>441</sup> The drug is perhaps also the only crop generating sufficient profits in the short and medium term to enable farmers to rehabilitate wells and pumps and repay credits.

But the conflict with the Zaydī insurgents had consequences for Yemen's agricultural sector well beyond the war-torn regions of the north. As of 2008, the most important areas of grape cultivation in Ṣan'ā' had been severely affected by fighting, Yemen's grape production fell considerably short of expectations.<sup>442</sup> Banī Ḥushaysh grape farmers estimated their war inflicted production losses at 50-100%.<sup>443</sup> As a result, grape prices tripled within just a few weeks and reached YR 500 per kilo in July 2008.<sup>444</sup> Profiteers of the explosion of grape prices were importers and sellers of smuggled Iranian and Chinese raisins. While in October 2008 a kilo of Yemeni raisins cost between YR 1,800 and 2,500, imported types were sold at just YR 700 to 1,000.<sup>445</sup> Officially, raisin imports are banned in Yemen in order to protect domestic production from competition and pests, but little is done by authorities to enforce legislation.<sup>446</sup> Raisins are cherished by Yemenis especially during the 'Īd celebration that concludes the month of Ramaḍān and 'Īd sales have thus become the peak seasons for Yemen's grape farmers and raisin producers.<sup>447</sup> Over the past years, the share of imported Iranian and Chinese raisins has been steadily increasing. Besides being cheaper than Yemeni raisins, they are also bigger and more attractive in shape. Yet, whoever can afford it, buys local highland raisins, even if this means buying smaller quantities.<sup>448</sup> Yemenis take great pride in their raisins and there is a national consensus, that in terms of taste nothing can compete with local produce. With the phenomenal price increases during 2008, Yemeni raisins nonetheless lost their market dominating position. Ṣan'ā' raisin dealers reported that the demand for imported raisins had tripled between 2007 and 2008.<sup>449</sup> As a result, many Yemeni raisin producers could not find buyers for their merchandise. Faced with losses of 60 to 70% during the 2008 'Īd season, raisin producers threatened the government to replace vines with *qāt* plants if authorities were not to take action to prevent raisin smuggling. As one farmer explained, these losses were particularly painful, "*as there is only one season in which to grow grapes, unlike qat which is grown throughout the year.*"<sup>450</sup>

In October 2008, the Yemeni Centre of Studies and Economic Media addressed an open letter to the Ministry of Trade & Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture & Irrigation, calling for government action to contain the crisis and for efforts to protect and support local raisin production.

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Pictures 278 & 279: The government’s politics of “Scorched Earth” resulted in rising prices of grapes and raisins. Especially during Ramaḍān and ‘Id of 2008 – the major time of raisin consumption – this was painfully felt by consumers. Here the Samsarat al-Zabīb, the ancient raisin market in the old city of Şan‘ā’.

The centre warned that unless smuggling was strictly monitored and those involved punished, Yemeni farmers would soon abandon grape farming and turn to *qāt* cultivation: “*We demand the government to carry on its national responsibility, to make clear policies and strategies that encourage farmers, and to develop raisin production mechanisms through modern techniques with high quality and reasonable prices so that Yemeni raisins do not disappear from the markets as was the case with other crops like coffee and cotton.*”<sup>451</sup> The Ṣan‘ā’ based think tank also called for harsh punishment of those traders mixing Yemeni raisins with imported varieties of inferior quality and selling them locally or in neighboring countries as a Yemeni quality product. Such practices, the centre warned, would negatively affect the reputation of Yemeni raisins abroad and could lead in the future to even greater losses for Yemen’s grape farmers. In order to exert greater control over raisin quality and to prevent smuggling, the centre recommended the re-introduction of a “*raisin customs*” (the Jumruk al-Zabīb was an official body located in the old days in raisin markets such as in the Sūq al-Milḥ of old Ṣan‘ā’ where raisins were inspected and taxed). Today such an institution should once again monitor the raisin trade to ensure that only Yemeni raisins can enter the market.<sup>452</sup> Confronted with threats by raisin farmers to plant their fields with *qāt*, the Ministry of Agriculture & Irrigation was quick to declare that it had not given any trader an import license for foreign raisins and that the ministry’s plant quarantine office checked all incoming or outgoing plant products. Dr. Muḥammad Yaḥyā al-Ghashm, Deputy Minister of Agriculture & Irrigation, affirmed that the government was taking all necessary legal action against raisin smugglers and pointed out that his Ministry had intercepted and destroyed two tons of raisins arriving in the port of Aden from China in February 2008.<sup>453</sup> As however neither customs controls were stepped up, nor permanent market inspections put in place to protect Yemeni grape producers, the steady shift from fruit to *qāt* cultivation continues unabated, recalling indeed the sudden shift from coffee to *qāt* farming in the late 1980s, when world market prices for coffee beans had plummeted.

But as on the one hand *qāt* farming is increasingly replacing once lucrative fruit cultivation in areas around the capital Ṣan‘ā’ and in the Ṣa‘da basin, in many remote *qāt* areas of Ṣa‘da governorate a quite different trend was observed during recent years. With food security of many Ṣa‘da communities severely threatened during different phases of the insurgency, there has been a growing need and desire among farmers to become self-sufficient in terms of food production. Scores of Ṣa‘da farmers reportedly returned to subsistence farming in legumes, vegetables and cereals since the escalation of the war in 2008. Many rangelands that had been neglected since imports of foreign-produced cereals had ruined Yemen’s commercial cereal farming in the 1970s were re-cultivated with wheat and barley during the past few years. As smuggling routes from Saudi Arabia were monitored more closely after the 2009 border skirmishes, the illicit cross-border trade in foodstuffs had become more challenging and prices for smuggled goods increased considerably (e.g. prices for smuggled Saudi barley nearly tripled during 2010). This gave additional incentives to Ṣa‘da cereal farming.

There are even reports that as a lesson from the Ṣa‘da wars, the Ḥawthīs have been encouraging their followers in remote areas of Ṣa‘da and adjacent governorates to increase or restore food self-sufficiency, on which the tribes had depended until the 1970s.<sup>454</sup> Should the turmoil in Ṣa‘da indeed continue and food security in this barren region further erode, this could over time have a strong impact on the fate of *qāt* farming. Today it is practiced in many areas of the northern governorates in monoculture, making the rural economy highly vulnerable and farming communities highly dependent on food purchases. As long as *qāt* could be freely sold to other areas of Yemen or to Saudi Arabia this did not pose problems. But as these markets increasingly break away or become more difficult to reach, cropping patterns and local farming strategies may be subject to profound change.

- <sup>319</sup> The *Zaydīyya* is a Shiite dogma distinct from the Twelver Shia of Iran, Lebanon and Iraq. It is traced back to Zayd ibn ‘Alī (half-brother of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the fifth Imām of the Twelver Shiites, and grandson of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb, the latter grandson of Prophet Muḥammad) who in 740 A.D. was killed in an unsuccessful insurgency against the Umayyad Caliph Hishām in Kūfa (see e.g. *Halm* 1988, p. 244-249).
- <sup>320</sup> *Le Monde Diplomatique* (German edition), Oct. 9, 2009 (“*Verdeckter Krieg im Jemen*”).
- <sup>321</sup> The Haqq Party (*al-ḥaqq* being also an epithet of God) is often falsely described as monarchist (e.g. *GlobalSecurity.org* (2010): al-Shabab al-Mum’en/Shabab al-Moumineen (Believing Youth) <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/shabab-al-moumineen.htm>> (consulted Feb. 27, 2011)). It represents the interests of the Zaydī community in the face of its political marginalization and in what it perceives as a growing Salafī threat.
- <sup>322</sup> *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 6 and *Le Monde Diplomatique* (German edition), Oct. 9, 2009 (“*Verdeckter Krieg im Jemen*”).
- <sup>323</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Aug 21, 2004 (“*Not all Zaidis are psychopaths, but al-Hothi, al-Haq and the PFU are giving us a bad name*”). These learning materials are said to have included lectures by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh and Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh (*Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*, Yemen: The conflict in Saada Governorate - analysis, July 24, 2008). See also *Ulph* 2005b and *France 24*, May 13, 2008 (“*The Houthi insurrection*”).
- <sup>324</sup> *Yemen Observer*, June 24, 2004 (“*Believing Youth holding out in Sa’ada clash...*”).
- <sup>325</sup> See also *Wedeen* 2008, p. 153.
- <sup>326</sup> The al-Ḥawthī family is claiming a Hāshimī/Sayyid origin. Contrary to the dogma of the Twelver Shia, in the Zaydī dogma all descendants of Prophet Muḥammad are eligible to lead the community and can assume the title of Imām (see *Halm* 1988, p. 245). Also President Šālīḥ is a Zaydī, however of a tribal and non-Sayyid background. In the eyes of some Zaydī jurists he is thus not fit to lead the country (for a detailed account of the al-Ḥawthī family and its genealogy see *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 101-107).
- <sup>327</sup> *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 3 and *Yemen Observer*, June 24, 2004 (“*Believing Youth holding out in Sa’ada clash...*”) and *Yemen Times*, Apr. 23, 2007 (“*Yemeni army reinforced in Sa’ada, fighting continues*”).
- <sup>328</sup> *Yemen Observer*, June 24, 2004 (“*President halts Sa’ada offensive: Zaidi mediators give al-Hothi last chance to surrender*”).
- <sup>329</sup> *McGregor* 2004, p. 4-6 and *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 3.
- <sup>330</sup> *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 8.
- <sup>331</sup> In scientific literature and in press reports the duration and even the count of the different ‘wars’ is in part inconsistent. This study follows *Salmoni et al.* 2010 (phase 1 of the ‘war’: June 2004 - Sept. 2004, phase 2: Mar. 2005 - Apr. 2005, phase 3: Dec. 2005 - Feb. 2006, phase 4: Feb. 2007 - Jan. 2008, phase 5: May 2008 - July 2008, phase 6: Aug. 2009 - Feb. 2010).
- <sup>332</sup> Author’s interviews with Dr. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-‘Ansī of Ša’da Hospital (‘Amrān, Aug. 28, 2004) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mutarrib and Muḥammad al-Ḥamādī, both Ša’da *qāt* agents (al-Ḥaṣaba market, Šan‘ā’, Sept. 2, 2004).
- <sup>333</sup> *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 3.
- <sup>334</sup> *Ulph* 2005b.
- <sup>335</sup> These figures require extreme caution. During the past years, Yemen’s non-governmental press had the tendency to blow up the figures on casualties. *Al-Tajammu’* spoke of 4,000 victims (Sept. 20, 2004, “*4000 killed in recent military attacks in Sa’da*”). Other newspapers even reported 20,000 dead (*Yemen Times*, Sept. 13, 2004, “*Government announces al-Houthis’s death after heavy military clashes*”).
- <sup>336</sup> *Ulph* 2005a.
- <sup>337</sup> Author’s interviews with *qāt* agents in the al-Ḥarf, northern ‘Amrān governorate (Apr. 21, 2008). As in Sūq al-‘Anad *qāt* is not taxed, it is distinctly cheaper there than in Ša’da town. The market thus attracts many residents of the city, including security forces from the of Ša’da garrison and nearby camps. *Lichtenthäler* (2003, p. 126) gives a detailed account of the Sūq al-‘Anad and its history: “...*Suq al Anad is located only five kilometers north of Sa’dah town within the tribal territory of the Bani Mu’adh [...]. Qat buyers even come from Sa’dah town to avoid paying the tax levied on the shrub by the government. An incident that occurred in the Civil War in 1994 shifted control over qat sales from Sa’dah town to what is now Suq al-Anad. An army officer quarreled with a qat dealer over the price, refusing to pay the tax. As a result shaykh Husayn al-Surabi of Bani Mu’adh set up Suq al-Anad in his own territory and beyond the control of the taxman. The naming of the qat market is significant [...Lichtenthäler gives two explanations]. Secondly, al-Anat is Arabic for stubbornness and resistance and the naming of Bani Mu’adh’s new qat market is locally interpreted as symbolic for the ability of Sa’dah’s tribal population [...] to outwit and resist government control.*”
- <sup>338</sup> *Al-Wasaṭ* (Šan‘ā’ weekly), Mar. 9, 2005 and *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 3.

- <sup>339</sup> *Yemen Times*, Mar. 31, 2005 (“*Battles resume between al-Houthi followers and army*”). According to other sources al-Ḥawthī was 86 years old when he died in 2010. He would thus have been around 81 years old in 2005 (*Yemen Observer*, Dec. 2, 2010 - “*US condemns attacks in Northern Yemen, AQAP claims credit*”).
- <sup>340</sup> *Al-Ahram Weekly*, May 25, 2005 (“*Rebellion continues*”) and *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 137-138.
- <sup>341</sup> Personal communications with Yemeni journalist Ṣaddām al-Ashmūrī, Nov. 17, 2006 and *GlobalSecurity.org* (2010): al-Shabab al-Mum’en/Shabab al-Moumineen (Believing Youth) <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/shabab-al-moumineen.htm>> (consulted Feb. 27, 2011).
- <sup>342</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Oct. 1, 2005 (“*What’s behind the presidential amnesty?*”). See also *Yemen Observer*, Dec. 16, 2006 (“*300 al-Houthi supporters released*”) and Mar. 4, 2006 (“*Houthi supporters freed for Saada peace*”).
- <sup>343</sup> *The Guardian*, Mar. 6, 2006, (“*Chewing the qāt*”) and *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 3.
- <sup>344</sup> *Al-Tajammu’*, Sep. 20, 2004 (“*4000 killed in recent military attacks in Sa’da*”) and *Terrorism Focus*, Feb. 20, 2007 (“*Yemen accuses Iran of meddling in its internal affairs*”).
- <sup>345</sup> *Al-Ḥayāt*, Mar. 26, 2009 (quoted in *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 17) and *Yemen Online*, June 13, 2008 (“*Yemen accuses Iran of training al-Houthi rebels*”).
- <sup>346</sup> *BBC News*, Oct. 27, 2009 (“*Yemenis intercept Iranian ship*”) and *McGregor* (2004): Shi’ite insurgency in Yemen: Iranian intervention or mountain revolt? *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 16 (Aug. 2004), and *The Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 11, 2009 (“*Does Iran play a role in Yemen conflict?*”).
- <sup>347</sup> *Mareb Press*, June 7, 2008 (“*In Yemen, a mostly concealed sectarian fight endures*”).
- <sup>348</sup> *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 13, 2009 (“*This week at war: The upside of the proxy war in Yemen*”) and *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 17-18.
- <sup>349</sup> Author’s interviews with five *qāt* smugglers on the Saudi border at Ḥaraḍ, Apr. 27, 2006.
- <sup>350</sup> *Yemen Times*, Apr. 23, 2007 (“*Yemeni army reinforced in Sa’ada, fighting continues*”).
- <sup>351</sup> Author’s interview with three former Ṣa’da *qāt* smugglers in ‘Amrān (Apr. 19, 2006) and with a *qāt* smuggler who had been expelled from Ṣa’da governorate in April 2006 by Ḥawthī followers (Ta’izz May 1, 2006).
- <sup>352</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Aug. 9, 2010 (“*World’s third largest weapon dealer establishes National Peace Conference*”) and *National Yemen*, Mar. 29, 2011 (“*Houthis control Sa’ada, help appoint governor*”).
- <sup>353</sup> See e.g. *BBC News*, Jan. 28, 2007 (“*Shia gunmen’ kill Yemeni troops*”) and *Arab News*, Feb. 15, 2007 (“*95 killed in Yemen clashes*”).
- <sup>354</sup> *Yemen Times*, Apr. 23, 2007 (“*Yemeni army reinforced in Sa’ada, fighting continues*”); *Arab News*, Feb. 15, 2007 (“*95 killed in Yemen clashes*”) and *France 24*, May 13 2008 (“*The Houthis insurrection*”).
- <sup>355</sup> *World Press*, Mar. 21, 2007 (“*Yemen: From nepotism to internal Jihad*”).
- <sup>356</sup> *World Press*, Oct. 14, 2005 (“*Drug smuggling and other crimes of the dictator*”).
- <sup>357</sup> *Yemen Observer*, May 26, 2007 (“*Drugs funding rebels, says al-Alimi*”).
- <sup>358</sup> There are dozens of rebel videos on *LiveLeak* and *YouTube* showing rebels posing in front of captured army supplies and weapons (e.g. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xCaF0pPVoM&feature=related>> and <[http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=fe1\\_1251496426](http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=fe1_1251496426)> (both consulted Mar. 8, 2011)).
- <sup>359</sup> Author’s interview in Ḥaraḍ, July 2, 2008.
- <sup>360</sup> Many additional roads linking even remote districts to the markets were built and financed by farmer cooperatives during the 1970s and 1980s.
- <sup>361</sup> See e.g. *Lichtenthäler* 2003, p. 91, 120 and 129.
- <sup>362</sup> *Ministry of Agriculture & Irrigation* 2005a, p. 42-49.
- <sup>363</sup> *Marliani, G.* (2005): Yemen Agricultural Census 2003. Draft report on data analysis for CSO and the European Commission, Ṣan’ā’, Feb. 2005, p. 102 (regarding irrigation pumps only the arid governorates of Mārib and al-Jawf with their intensive citrus cultivation had a higher percentage with respectively 31.7 and 31.6%).
- <sup>364</sup> *Marliani, G.* (2005): Yemen Agricultural Census 2003. Draft report on data analysis for CSO and the European Commission, Ṣan’ā’, Feb. 2005, p. 51.
- <sup>365</sup> The total population of Ṣa’da was 693,217 in 2004 with 85,190 households. Average household size was 8.14 persons (national average 7.14) (*CSO* 2007, Final Results, Population, Housing and Establishment Census 2004 (table 3: Distribution of resident population...)).
- <sup>366</sup> The agricultural census was carried out between 2002 and 2005, but is generally referred to as “2003 Census” as the field surveys took place in that year. *Central Statistical Organization* (2005b): Final Results of the 2002-2005 Agricultural Census (unpublished district tables on crops and land holdings). Department for Agricultural Statistics, Ṣan’ā’.
- <sup>367</sup> Personal communications with Ṣādiq al-Shamīrī, General Department of Irrigation and ‘Adnān Muḥammad al-Maṭārī, National Water Resources Authority (Ṣan’ā’, June 28, 2008).

- <sup>368</sup> Author's interviews with *qāt* wholesalers in the Sūq al-Layl of 'Amrān (June 28, 2008).
- <sup>369</sup> Personal communications with 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Murshid al-Salāmī, *qāt* transporter of al-Ḥarf (al-Ḥaṣāba market, Ṣan'ā' June 30, 2008).
- <sup>370</sup> Personal communications with 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Salāmī (Ṣan'ā' June 30, 2008).
- <sup>371</sup> Author's interviews with *qāt* merchants in the Sūq al-Layl of 'Amrān (June 28, 2008) and al-Ḥaṣāba market of Ṣan'ā' (June 27 and 30, 2008).
- <sup>372</sup> Personal communications with a brigadier who participated in the 2007/2008 military campaigns, speaking on condition of anonymity (Ṣan'ā', July 2, 2008).
- <sup>373</sup> Personal communications at a Ṣan'ā' *qāt* chew. He spoke on condition of anonymity (Ṣan'ā', July 2, 2008).
- <sup>374</sup> *The Seattle Times*, June 17, 2007 ("Yemen's government, Shiite rebels negotiate end to 3-year conflict") and *France 24*, May 13, 2008 ("The Houthis' insurrection"). During prior negotiations between government representatives and the rebels regarding the terms for ending hostilities in Ṣa'da, *qāt* apparently played an important role as catalyst. In March 2006, *The Guardian* described a Ṣan'ā' *qāt* chew that brought the opposing parties to one *mafrāj* (*The Guardian*, Mar. 6, 2006 - "Chewing the *qāt*").
- <sup>375</sup> *Yemen Times*, Sept. 6, 2007 ("Qat trees flare war in Sa'ada").
- <sup>376</sup> Author's interviews with Ṣa'da *qāt* merchants in the Sūq al-Layl of 'Amrān (June 28, 2008) and al-Ḥaṣāba market of Ṣan'ā' (June 27, 2008). *Yemen Times*, Sept. 6, 2007 ("Qat trees flare war in Sa'ada"). Also, al-Ḥawthī fighters have been accused of pillage and looting. Human Rights Watch has investigated several such cases. In August 2009, Ḥawthī fighters reportedly attacked the town of al-Malāḥīz, killing three soldiers there, point blank, and looted its market. They stole all the *qāt* and took 200 bags of wheat from a UNICEF school (*Human Rights Watch* 2010, p. 42).
- <sup>377</sup> *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 148.
- <sup>378</sup> *Yemen Online*, May 17, 2008 ("Sa'ada war extends to three more provinces").
- <sup>379</sup> *Yemen Times*, May 22, 2008 ("Safety precautions increased after assassination attempt on Sana'a Security Director").
- <sup>380</sup> Author's interviews with villagers in al-Rajm, Ghaḍrān and al-Sharya on July 23, 2008 (these hamlets and villages are located ca. 10 km east and 8 km east-north-east of al-Ḥatārish, the latter being a market town on the Ṣan'ā'-Mārib highway); *Yemen Post*, July 28, 2008 ("Sa'ada and Bani Hushaish: Pomegranates and grapes in fierce war zone"), and *Yemen Times*, June 16, 2008 ("Bani Hushaish residents' lives deteriorate as security measures escalate").
- <sup>381</sup> *Yemen Post*, June 2, 2008 ("Clashes between Houthis and army forces intensify; army changes tactics").
- <sup>382</sup> Author's interviews with villagers in al-Rajm, Ghaḍrān and al-Sharya on July 23, 2008.
- <sup>383</sup> *Armies of Liberation*, June 16, 2008 ("Sana'a governorate office source...") <<http://armiesofliberation.com/archives/2008/06/16/>> (consulted Mar. 19, 2011).
- <sup>384</sup> *Yemen Times*, June 30, 2008 ("Human 'identifiers' replace ID cards in determining Houthis").
- <sup>385</sup> Author's interviews with Ṣan'ā' *qāt* sellers in the market of al-Ḥatārish (June 28 and July 23, 2008) and with villagers in al-Rajm, Ghaḍrān and al-Sharya on July 23, 2008.
- <sup>386</sup> Personal communications with Qaḥṭān Yaḥyā al-Aṣbaḥī (National Water Resources Authority), July 3, 2008.
- <sup>387</sup> *Yemen Post*, July 28, 2008 ("Sa'ada and Bani Hushaish: Pomegranates and grapes in fierce war zone").
- <sup>388</sup> *Yemen Times*, June 2, 2008 ("Although government claims to have cleared Bani Hushaish district of Houthis, Houthi fighters threaten to hit Sana'a airport").
- <sup>389</sup> *Yemen Times*, June 26, 2008 ("From poverty to the center of the battlefield").
- <sup>390</sup> Personal communications with Ṣaddām al-Ashmūrī, July 13, 2008; and *Yemen Times*, June 28, 2007 ("Memoirs of a journalist visiting Sa'ada"). Also the rebels were accused of using children as fighters in this war (see e.g. *Yemen Observer*, Nov. 19, 2009 "Yemen children renews protest al-Houthi-related child abuse").
- <sup>391</sup> *Yemen Times*, July 17, 2008 ("Clashes renew as Houthis' lockdown of troops ends") and *Yemen Times*, July 21, 2008 ("Saleh declares an end to Sa'ada fighting").
- <sup>392</sup> Personal communications with Yaḥyā al-Sharaf, Director of the National Water Resources Authority (NWRA), Ṣa'da branch (Ṣan'ā', July 29, 2008) and *Yemen Times*, July 3, 2008 ("The cost of war on Sa'ada's economy") and *Yemen Times*, July 7, 2008 ("Hundreds killed in military operations against Houthis").
- <sup>393</sup> *Yemen Times*, July 3, 2008 ("The cost of war on Sa'ada's economy").
- <sup>394</sup> Personal communications with Yaḥyā al-Sharaf, Director of NWRA, Ṣa'da branch (Ṣan'ā', July 29, 2008).
- <sup>395</sup> Author's interview with a colonel participating in the 2007 and 2008 military campaigns who spoke on condition of anonymity ((Ṣan'ā', July 2, 2008). See also *Yemen Times*, July 17, 2008 ("Clashes renew as Houthis' lockdown of troops ends").
- <sup>396</sup> *Yemen Times*, June 28, 2007 ("Memoirs of a journalist visiting Sa'ada").

- 397 Personal communications with Yahyā al-Sharaf, Director of NWRA, Ṣa‘da branch (Ṣan‘ā’, July 29, 2008).
- 398 *Yemen Post*, June 30, 2008 (“*Army Forces Advance in Sa‘ada Fronts*”).
- 399 Personal communications with Yahyā al-Sharaf, Director of NWRA, Ṣa‘da branch (Ṣan‘ā’, July 29, 2008) and *Yemen Times*, July 3, 2008 (“*The cost of war on Sa‘ada’s economy*”).
- 400 Personal communications with ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Murshid al-Salāmi, *qāt* transporter of al-Ḥaṣāba market, Ṣan‘ā’ June 30, 2008) and author’s interviews with *qāt* wholesalers in the Sūq al-Layl of ‘Amrān (June 28, 2008).
- 401 Personal communications with two staff of the Ṣa‘da National Water Resources Authority, speaking on condition of anonymity (Ṣan‘ā’, July 1, 2008).
- 402 Author’s interviews with Ṣa‘da *qāt* transporters at al-Ḥaṣāba market (Ṣan‘ā’ June 30, 2008) and *Yemen Post*, July 28, 2008 (“*Sa‘ada and Bani Hushaish: Pomegranates and grapes in fierce war zone*”).
- 403 Author’s interviews with Ṣan‘ā’ *qāt* sellers and *qāt* transporters from Ṣa‘da at al-Ḥaṣāba market (July 2 and 16, 2008 and Aug. 7, 2008) and author’s comprehensive survey of Ṣan‘ā’ *qāt* markets during Feb.-Oct. 2005.
- 404 Author’s interviews with a number of military officers speaking on condition of anonymity (‘Amrān, June 28, 2008 and Ṣan‘ā’ July 28, 2008).
- 405 Before the ‘Youth Revolution’, Yemenis generally referred to ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar as the president’s half brother, but their exact relationship is somewhat obscure. Some analysts write that al-Aḥmar is just the President’s “elder kinsman” or simply “from the President’s village” (Dresch 2000, p. 202 and 180).
- 406 Personal communications in a number of *qāt* chews during June-September 2008 in Ṣan‘ā’. These involved a vice minister and several deputy ministers as well as general directors of Yemeni line ministries, all speaking on condition of anonymity. See also *International Crisis Group* 2009, p. 15.
- 407 *Yemen Times*, Sept. 6, 2007 (“*Qat trees flare war in Sa‘ada*”).
- 408 He is married to the sister of the Yemeni “Afghan” Salafī leader Ṭāriq al-Faḍlī (Dresch 2000, p. 198).
- 409 E.g. *World Press*, June 11, 2005 (“*Yemen’s reformers versus the pact of evil*”) and *World Press*, Mar. 21, 2007 (“*Yemen: From nepotism to internal Jihad*”).
- 410 *Yemen Times* described the “popular army” as a force of 25,000 men, most of whom belong to the Ḥāshid tribal confederation (*Yemen Times*, July 14, 2008, “*As Hashid tribesmen gather to back government, Sa‘ada tribal leaders suggest truce*”).
- 411 *Yemen Times*, July 21, 2008 (“*Saleh declares an end to Sa‘ada fighting*”).
- 412 *Yemen Times*, July 7, 2008 (“*Hundreds killed in military operations against Houthis*”).
- 413 *Yemen Times*, July 21, 2008 (“*Saleh declares an end to Sa‘ada fighting*”).
- 414 *Human Rights Watch*, Oct. 24, 2008 (“*Yemen: Hundreds unlawfully arrested in Rebel Conflict*”).
- 415 Personal communications with Yahyā al-Sharaf, Director of NWRA, Ṣa‘da branch (Ṣan‘ā’, July 29, 2008) and *Yemen Times*, July 31, 2008 (“*Relative optimism as humanitarian aid slowly finds its way to Sa‘ada*”).
- 416 Author’s interviews with Ṣa‘da *qāt* transporters and Ṣan‘ā’ fruit and *qāt* sellers in al-Ḥaṣāba market (Ṣan‘ā’, July 30 and Aug. 16, 2008) and *Yemen Post*, July 28, 2008 (“*Sa‘ada and Bani Hushaish: Pomegranates and grapes in fierce war zone*”).
- 417 *Press TV*, Dec. 14, 2009 (“*US fighter jets attack Yemeni fighters*”) and *Yemen Post*, Apr. 10, 2010 (“*Bloody 2009*”).
- 418 *Yemen Observer*, Nov 3, 2009 (“*Yemeni military crush al-Houthi rebels by tanks*”) and *Yemen Observer*, Mar. 13, 2010 (“*Rebellion alters Sa‘adah to ghost towns*”).
- 419 *al-Mu‘tamar*, Aug. 30, 2009 <<http://www.almotamar.net/en/6618.htm>> (consulted Sept. 2, 2009).  
Surprisingly in the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation no one was aware of the events in Ṣa‘da. There was also no knowledge of any expert mission having been dispatched there. Also queries in the Ṣa‘da branch of the ministry could not confirm such an incident (personal communications with Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh Mahyūb, Plant Protection Department and with ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Qarḥash, General Director for Plant Production, (Ṣan‘ā’, Sept. 8 2009).
- 420 Author’s interviews with *qāt* sellers and transporters in the markets of al-Ḥaṣāba (Ṣan‘ā’) and the al-Ḥudayda wholesale auction market (Ṣan‘ā’, Oct. 12 and Nov. 5, 2009 and al-Ḥudayda, Nov. 17, 2009).
- 421 Author’s *qāt* market survey in Ṣan‘ā’ and al-Ḥudayda (Sept.14, Oct. 12, Nov. 5 and 17, 2009, and Jan. 6 and 14, 2010), and *Saudi Gazette*, Nov. 25, 2009 (“*War deprives Yemeni elite of choicest chew*”).
- 422 *BBC News*, Nov. 4, 2009 (“*Yemen rebels seize Saudi area*”).
- 423 *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London-based), Dec. 21, 2009 (“*Saudi Forces intensify security Patrols*”).
- 424 *Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 18, 2009 (“*Yemen-Saudi clashes push up qat prices*”) and *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Nov. 22, 2009 (“*The Qat War*”).
- 425 *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Aug. 4, 2010 (“*Securing the Saudi-Yemeni border*”).

- <sup>426</sup> *Central Statistical Organization* (2005b): Final Results of the 2002-2005 Agricultural Census (unpublished district tables on crops and land holdings). Department for Agricultural Statistics, Ṣan‘ā’.
- <sup>427</sup> Tax Authority, Department of *Qāt* Taxation, Ṣan‘ā’. Annual *qāt* consumption tax revenue sheets by month and governorate.
- <sup>428</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Feb. 20, 2007 (“*Saleh orders military to end rebellion*”) and Mar. 11, 2007 (“*Troops tighten noose around rebels*”).
- <sup>429</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Nov. 27, 2007 (“*Amnesty for reformed Sa’ada rebels*”).
- <sup>430</sup> Annual tax revenue in Ṣa‘da increased from YR 16,888,200 in 2004 to YR 25,565,010 in 2006.
- <sup>431</sup> *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 150-152.
- <sup>432</sup> *CNN*, Sept. 21, 2009 (“*State-run media: Yemeni military kills 150 rebels*”) and *Salmoni et al.* 2010, p. 154/155.
- <sup>433</sup> Video posted on *Liveleak.com* 08/2009 (“*Brand new from Yemen: Ansar al-Haq (the Houthis): Yemeni Army prisoners*”) <[http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=fbf\\_1251865962&c=1](http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=fbf_1251865962&c=1)> (consulted Mar. 8, 2011).
- <sup>434</sup> Tax Authority, Department of *Qāt* Taxation, Ṣan‘ā’. Annual *qāt* consumption tax revenue sheets by month and governorate.
- <sup>435</sup> In other governorates located at a greater distance of the Ṣa‘da events, such as al-Ḥudayda, Dhamār, Ibb, Ta‘izz, or Aden, a regression in *qāt* revenue cannot be noticed (see e.g. figures 15 and 18).
- <sup>436</sup> *Yemen Times*, Mar. 29, 2011 (“*Breaking news: Armed groups take over Yemeni towns despite Saleh’s regional support*”). Mannā‘, a former GPC member and ally of President Ṣāliḥ served during 2009 as government mediator in the Ṣa‘da conflict. In January 2010 he was arrested in Ṣan‘ā’ on charges of supporting the rebels with weapons. In April 2010 he was blacklisted in the US (The White House, Office of Foreign Assets Control, Executive Order 13536 - Blocking Property of Certain Persons Contributing to the Conflict in Somalia, April 13, 2010). After being released from prison in June 2010, he left the GPC and in early March 2010 joined Yemen’s “Youth Revolution”.
- <sup>437</sup> Personal communications with Qaḥṭān Yahyā al-Aṣbaḥī, Policy Team Leader, Responsive Governance Project (USAID), May 23, 2011.
- <sup>438</sup> *United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (2009): Yemen Situation Map: Estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons, as of 22 Sept. 2009. See also *US State Department, Humanitarian Information Unit* (2009): Yemen: Sa‘dah Complex Emergency (Sept. 25, 2009, U83 8-03 STATE-HIU).
- <sup>439</sup> *Yemen Times*, July 21, 2008 (“*Saleh declares an end to Sa’ada fighting*”).
- <sup>440</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Nov. 1, 2008 (“*Sa’adah rehabilitation costs estimated at YR 35 billion*”).
- <sup>441</sup> Personal communications with Yahyā al-Sharaf, Director of NWRA, Ṣa‘da branch (telephone interview, Dec. 18, 2010).
- <sup>442</sup> Some 60 different types of grapes are grown in Yemen and those of Banī Ḥuṣhaysh and Ṣa‘da are regarded as the country’s finest varieties.
- <sup>443</sup> *Yemen Post*, July 28, 2008 (“*Sa’ada and Bani Hushaish: Pomegranates and grapes in fierce war zone*”).
- <sup>444</sup> Author’s price surveys in Ṣan‘ā’ markets (June and Nov. 2007 and Feb., April, July and Oct. 2008).
- <sup>445</sup> Author’s price surveys in Ṣan‘ā’ markets (see above) and *Yemen Observer*, Oct. 11, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisins in danger*”).
- <sup>446</sup> Personal communications with ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiḥ Qarḥash, General Director for Plant Production, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 12, 2011).
- <sup>447</sup> “*Eid without Yemeni raisins is considered to be tasteless and vapid*”, writes the *Yemen Times*. “*Raisins have become very associated with Eid to the extent that Eid won’t be celebrated unless raisins are involved!*” (*Yemen Times*, Nov. 3, 2005 - “*Eid celebration - time for Yemeni raisins*”). Raisins have a long tradition of use as sweets and as traditional medicine in Yemen and have in more recent times also been used for making a juice consumed in *qāt* sessions due to its ‘empowering effects’.
- <sup>448</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Oct. 11, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisins in danger*”) and *Yemen Post*, Oct. 13, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisin farmers lose as domestic market gets dumped by Chinese products*”).
- <sup>449</sup> Author’s interviews with raisin dealers in the Sūq al-Milḥ of Ṣan‘ā’, Oct. 13, 2008 and *Yemen Observer*, Oct. 11, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisins in danger*”).
- <sup>450</sup> *Yemen Post*, Oct. 13, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisin farmers lose as domestic market gets dumped by Chinese products*”) and *Yemen Times*, Oct. 13, 2008 (“*Yemeni farmers threaten to swap grapes for qat*”).
- <sup>451</sup> *Yemen Post*, Oct. 13, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisin farmers lose as domestic market gets dumped by Chinese products*”).
- <sup>452</sup> *Yemen Observer*, Oct. 11, 2008 (“*Yemeni raisins in danger*”) and *Yemen Times*, Oct. 13, 2008 (“*Yemeni farmers threaten to swap grapes for qat*”).

### VIII. *Qāt*, Governance and Political Stability

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<sup>453</sup> Personal communications with Muḥammad al-Ghashm (Ṣan‘ā’, Oct. 15, 2008); *Yemen Times*, Oct. 13, 2008 (“*Yemeni farmers threaten to swap grapes for qat*”), and *Yemen Observer*, Oct. 18, 2008 (“*Import of raisins banned*”).

<sup>454</sup> Personal communications with Yaḥyā al-Sharaf, Director of NWRA, Ṣa‘da branch (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 12, 2011), see also *National Yemen*, Feb. 13, 2011 (“*Food security in Sa‘ada*”).