

## YEMEN: CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE



International Conference  
11 & 12 January 2013

Organised by: The British-Yemeni Society (BYS)  
and London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI)



The British-Yemeni Society



LONDON  
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*Twenty-two years after unification, Yemen finds itself at yet another historical juncture. The political transition and the forthcoming national dialogue offer a rare opportunity for the country to address the multitude of social, economic, environmental, and regional problems it faces. This international conference brings together academic and professional specialists on Yemen to discuss recent research on the country and the challenges ahead.*

**Panel 7 - Rural Development: Land and Water  
Chair:** Professor Tony Allan (SOAS/King's College,  
University of London)

Dr Peer Gatter: **Politics of Qat in Yemen**

## Peer Gatter Politics of Qat in Yemen



Yemen - Challenges for the Future,  
11-12 January 2013,  
SOAS, University of London



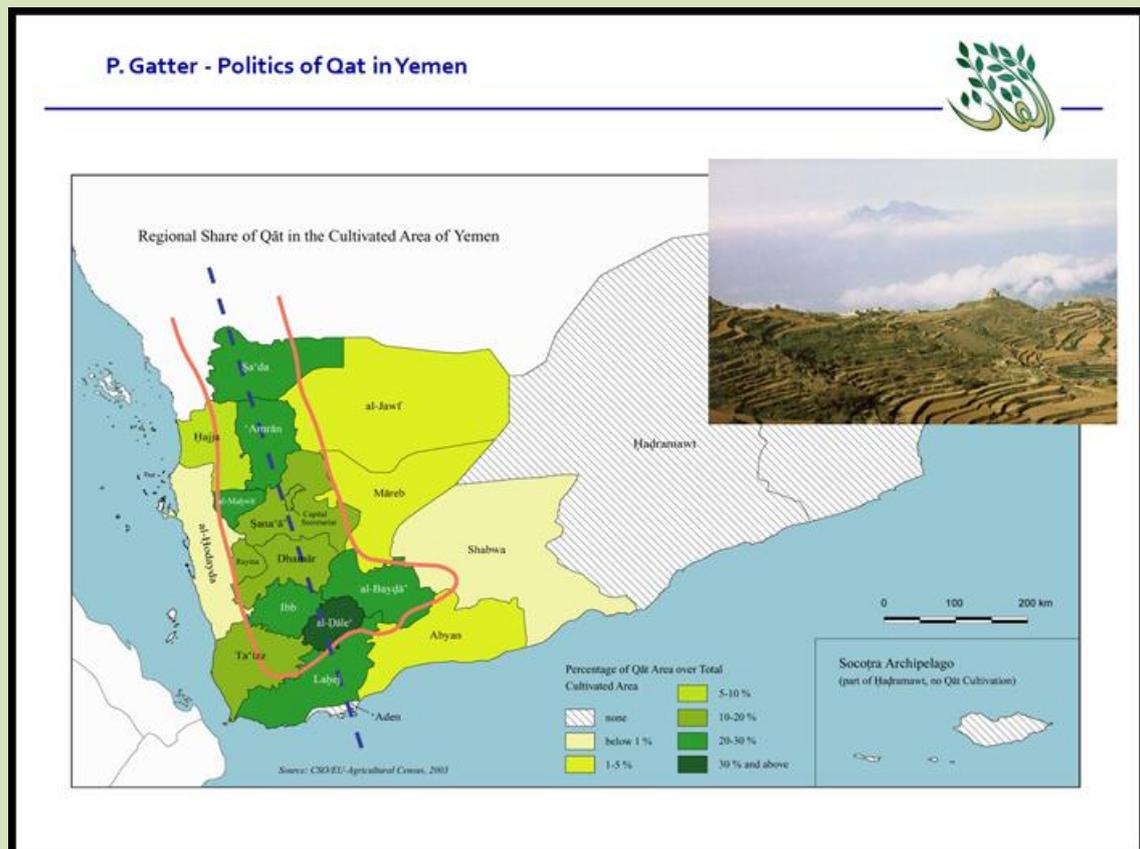


*Qat* is a psychoactive stimulant that is grown in many of the highland areas of Eastern Africa, ranging from the southern Sudan through Ethiopia and Kenya to Madagascar and the Transvaal. It is also grown across the Red Sea in Yemen's western highlands and in the 'Asir and Jazan mountains of Saudi Arabia.

While being considered a drug in most Arab states, as well as in many western countries, there is no viable legislation in Yemen today, effectively controlling its cultivation, consumption or trade. In Germany *qat* is considered a narcotic drug since 1998 and in Britain, where it is legal to date, its status is currently under debate in Parliament. To Britain *Qat* is imported mainly from Ethiopia.

Today, *Qat* very much shapes Yemen and influences all parts of life. It has an enormous impact on the country's society, its economy and even on its politics. The book I published on the subject in December 2012 is entitled „*Politics of Qat – the Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*“ and is comprised of two parts. The first analyses *Qat* politics on the Arabian Peninsula and in East Africa since colonial times and documents the underlying motivations for them. It also describes the ruling bargain between President Salih and the unruly tribes and the important role *Qat* played in this accord. The second part of the book analyses general Yemeni politics and selected political events during the tenure of President Salih and discusses the role the political, strategic, and economic interests linked to *Qat* played in them (e.g. Yemen's unity, the establishment of a northern hegemony over the south, the Sa'da war, and Yemen's 2011/2012 „Youth Revolution“).

Discussing the pros and cons of *qat* with Yemen policy makers and members of the Salih regime, many of whom chew *Qat* and have stakes in the *qat* industry, is not always easy. President Ali Abdullah Salih and the late Shaykh Abdullah bin Husayn al-Ahmar could become extremely ill-tempered when *Qat* was criticized by donors or the regional and international press. Criticizing *Qat* as a foreigner also in discussions with Yemeni academia or with ordinary Yemenis in the *Suq* (even with those critical of their own *Qat* habit and of just how much they chew and spend on it each day) can be quite hazardous. Then all the ills of *Qat* are quickly forgotten and the leaves become an issue of national pride.



Deep down, most Yemeni *Qat* users are however aware of the detrimental effects that the habit has on their lives and know all too well that the money they spend on it every single day, belongs instead to their children whose well-being and development it should assure. *Qat* does consequently not stand for true national pride – and likely never will – but much rather for a subliminal and universal feeling of guilt that has become a national trait of modern Yemen. In the hearts of Yemenis, coffee is linked to the country's historical grandeur and mythical past, whereas *qat* to its grim and painful present.

Coffee, even though from an economic point of view irrelevant today, thus surfaces frequently in Yemen's national symbolism, as on the coat of arms of the Imam (upper center) or on that of the republic (upper right). Also on Yemeni paper money and on coins (see the *Jumhuri* coins in the necklace) coffee is a popular motive, same goes for Yemen's passport (left).

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 its supporters *Qat* farming is the *perpetuum mobile* of Yemen's rural economy, curbing rural-urban migration, being responsible for large financial transfers to the country side, protecting the century old terrace cultures of the western mountains. They see *Qat* chewing an age-old social pursuit that has helped to preserve Yemeni identity in a rapidly changing world. For its opponents *Qat* is the main inhibitor of human and economic development in Yemen and is to blame for poverty and corruption, and the depletion of Yemen's water resources. It is responsible for high rates of absenteeism in government offices and child neglect during the afternoon hours of chewing.

In agriculture *Qat* plays an important role today. This map shows the share of *Qat* in agricultural area in the different governorates of Yemen. It is absent in the lowlands of the arid east and generally grown in elevations of above 800 meters in the western mountains and plateaus. The *Qat* cultivation zone is located within the red line which represents more or less these mountain areas. The blue line represents the irrigation divide. West of this divide *Qat* is grown mostly in rainfed farming and has been cultivated here since several hundred years. East of this line where there is too little rainfall, *Qat* is irrigated by tube-wells or by tanker trucks and has only been grown here since the introduction of tube well technology in the early 1970s.

P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen

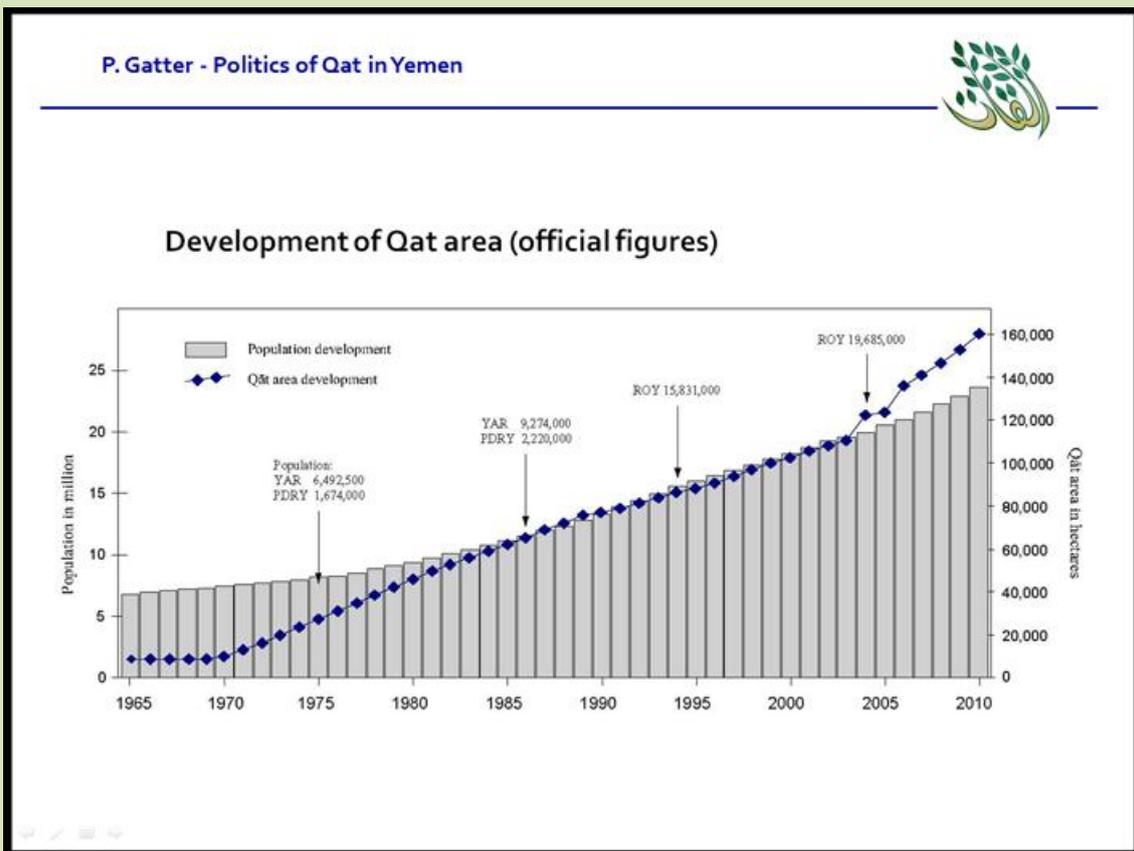


### Economic importance of Qat

- Qat officially represents **12%** of agricultural area (**153,000 ha**).
- In **1970** the area was estimated to be just **7000 ha**.
- Qat makes up more than **40%** of agricultural GDP ...
- .... and around **6%** of Yemen's total GDP.
- It stands for an average **10%** of household expenditures.
- In poor families the share reaches nearly **40%**.
- Qat officially represents **35%** of the value of agricultural production equivalent to **YR 153 billion** (USD 824 mil.) in 2005.
- Annual Qat production is around **160,000 tons**.
- An estimated **33,000 tons** are smuggled to Saudi Arabia each year (revenue of up to USD 1 billion). 5,000 tons were intercepted by Saudi forces in 2005.
- On average **72% of men** and **33% of women** chew qat (with considerable geographic differences).

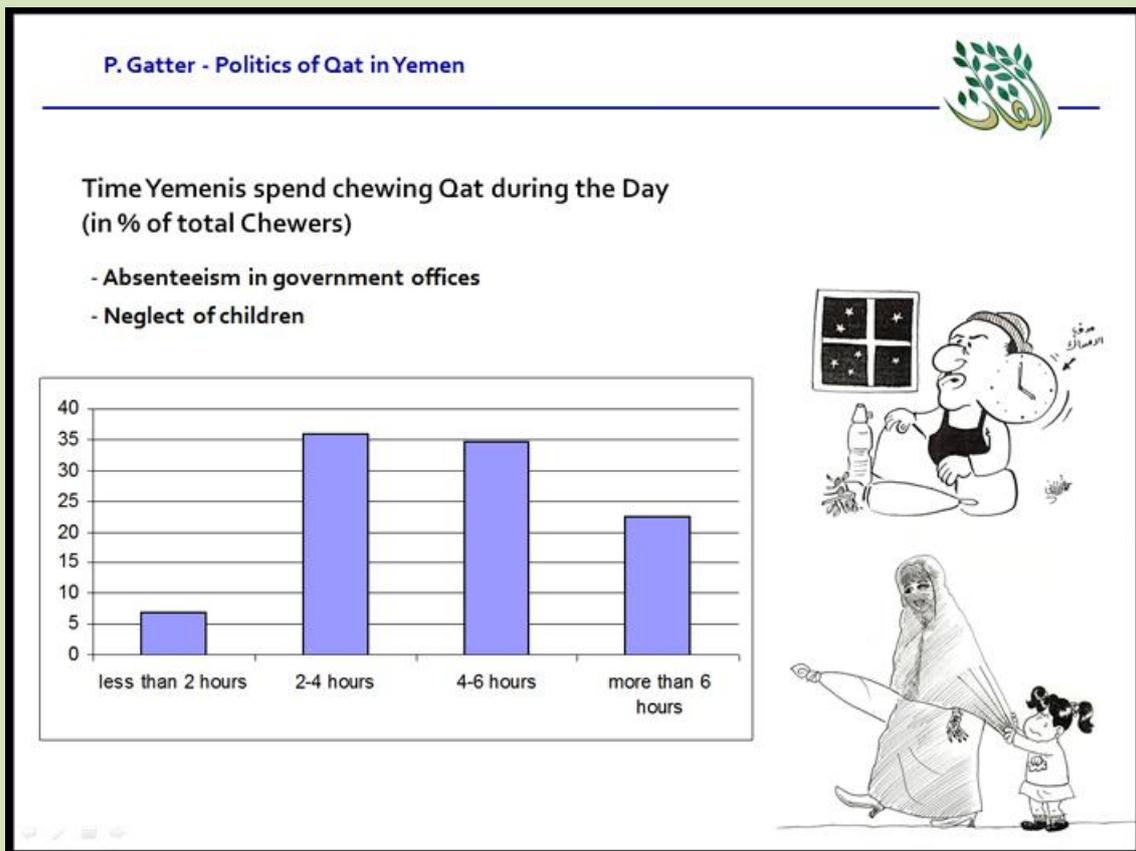
### *Economic importance of Qat*

- Qat officially represents 12% of Yemen's agricultural area (153,000 ha) in 2009.
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- On average 72% of men and 33% of women chew Qat in Yemen - with considerable geographic differences. In the eastern governorates such as Hadhramawt chewing frequency is considerably lower as the habit has only been made legal there after Yemen's unification in 1990.



The blue line in the graph shows – based on official government figures – how Qat area developed in the two parts of Yemen since the 1960s from below 7,000 hectares to about 160,000 hectares today (the grey bars represent population development). These figures are rather conservative estimates. Some leading Yemeni agricultural experts believe that since long Qat area has surpassed 200,000 hectares.

Source of Illustration: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 13.



Qat consumption has become a dominant and daily activity from a majority of Yemenis during the past decades. A country-wide survey on Qat chewing habits that I conducted on behalf of the World Bank in 2006 („Yemen: Towards Qat Demand Reduction“, World Bank 2007) found that 35% of Qat users chew 4-6 hours each day and that another 22% use Qat for even above 6 hours per day.

**Link to the English document:** [http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/WB\\_Qat\\_Demand\\_reduction.pdf](http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/WB_Qat_Demand_reduction.pdf)

**Link to the Arabic document:** [http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/WB\\_Qat\\_Demand\\_reduction\\_Arabic.pdf](http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/WB_Qat_Demand_reduction_Arabic.pdf)

This leads to absenteeism in many government offices. Staff comes in late due to the insomnia-inducing effects of Qat that make them sleep poorly. Many leave the office again at noon, as they need to rush to the Qat markets to buy their daily ration of leaves. Quite often they do not return to the office after that. The caricatures denounce the waste of time due to chewing and child neglect in the afternoon hours when also many women join chewing sessions.

P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



Qat is grown by 494,000 farmers  
(= 43.6% of Yemen's agricultural landholders )

- Qat provides thus work for 1.48 million persons within Qat growing households...
- ... and provides a direct income for ca. 3.9 million people in farming families (average household size of 7.9)
- Qat feeds an additional 139,000 agricultural laborers and their families (ca. 1.1 million people)

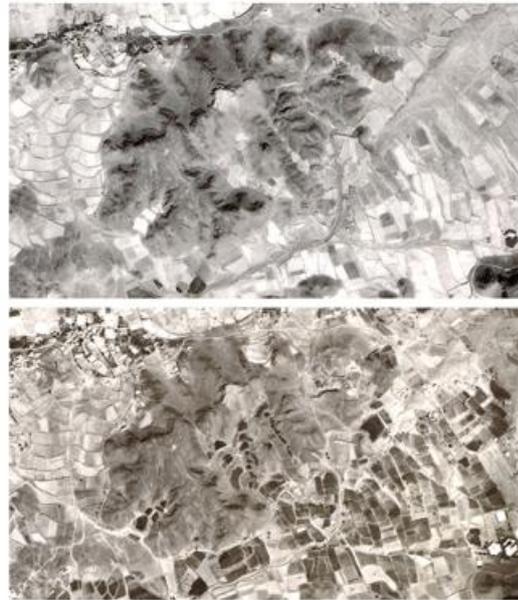
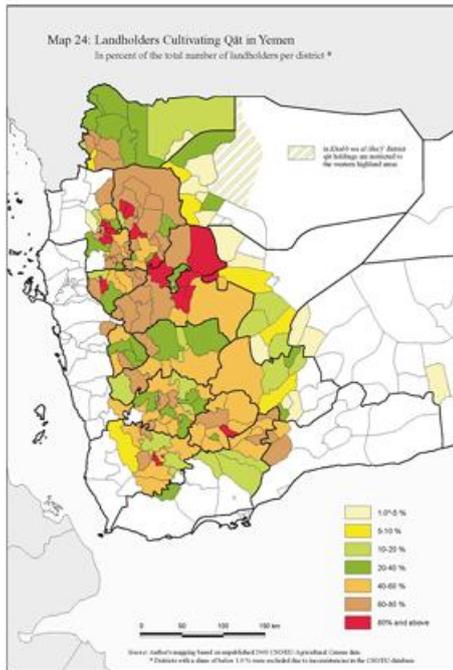


Qat is grown by 494,000 farmers, as was revealed by Yemen's 2003 agricultural census.  
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... among these farm laborers are those dusting qat with fine alluvial soil as a means of natural pest control (lower left), ploughman, irrigators, and of course those guarding Qat fields. Many Qat fields are visible from afar due to the watch towers that overlook the Qat bushes with their precious leaves (picture on the bottom, right).

## P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



The above map of the western part of Yemen shows the percentage of landholders growing Qat. In the areas around Sana'a, notably in Hamdan where many military officers come from and in Sanhan, President Salih's tribal area, over 80% of landholders grow Qat. These figures have been produced by 2003 CSO-EU agricultural census.

On the right you see two aerial photographs, the upper one dating from 1979, the lower one from 1994. This shows an area in Shamlan at the northwestern gates of Sana'a (you can see the buildings of the American school on the lower right). These pictures show how in a period of just 15 years, Qat nearly entirely replaced cereal farming in this area thanks to the introduction of tubewell technology since the 1970s. The dark colored fields in the lower picture are nearly exclusively Qat with only a few scattered fruit trees.

Source of map: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 650.

Source of aerial pictures: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 219.

P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



Qat supply industries feed an estimated 950.000 people

**Qat supply industries feed an estimated 950.000 people**

Also a number of supply industries profit from the Qat trade, ranging from ladder makers for Qat harvest (here in Hamdan north of Sana'a), banana growers as hollow stems as on this truck are used for wrapping up Qat in order to keep the leaves moist and fresh. But also farmers growing clover (*birsil* in Arabic) profit from the Qat trade. In some areas they no longer produce clover as fodder for animals, but sell it at much higher prices as packing materials for Qat, which is then dispatched over great distances to the arid and hot lowlands areas such as the Tihama, Aden and Hadhramawt.

On the lower left you see a mobile vendor of cushions, *matka* they are called in Yemen. They are used as armrest in Qat chews.

Not forgotten should also be Qat transporters and Qat sellers (alone in Sana'a there were nearly 14,000 Qat sellers in 2005 and another 5,000 in Aden). Qat market owners & helpers feed another estimated 120,000 persons.



## How many people are fed by Qat ? (Number of household members)

<b>Qat farmers</b>	<b>3,920,000</b>
<b>Farm laborers</b>	<b>1,100,000</b>
<b>Qat supply industries</b>	<b>950,000</b>
<b>Qat transport &amp; marketing</b>	<b>634,000</b>
<b>Market owners &amp; helpers</b>	<b>120,000</b>

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**Total** **6,724,000**

= **34.2 %** of Yemen's population derive at least in part proceeds from Qat cultivation and trade



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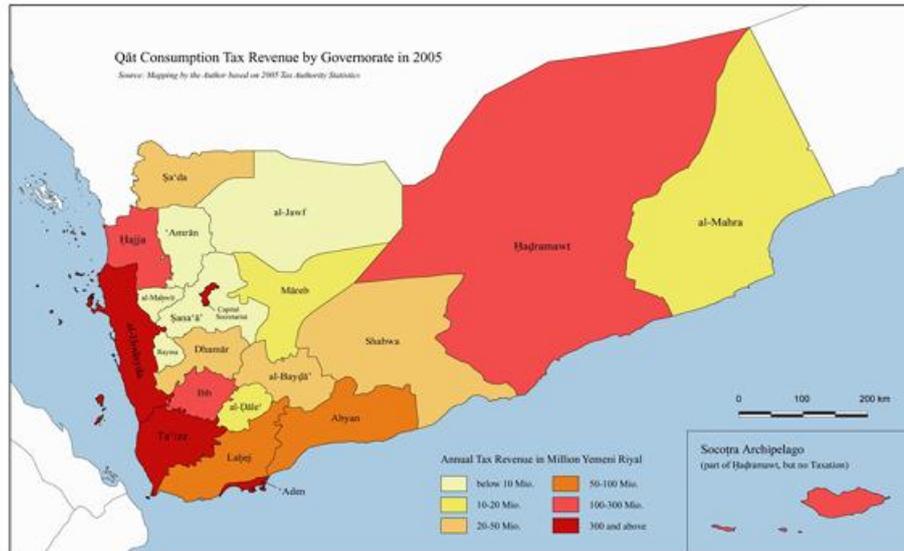
**Thus 34.2 % of Yemen's population derive at least in part proceeds from Qat cultivation and trade**

There are also countless hostels that put up Qat drivers who deliver the consignments from remote growing regions to the cities, and there are the so called „*lukandas*“, gathering places where benches are rent out to chewers for loafing around in the afternoons. The jobs these generate and the mouths they feed are not taken account in the above. The above does also not comprise the tens of thousands of petty merchants who profit from the commotion in Qat markets. To the masses of people these markets attract they sell diverse commodities such as snacks, sweets, drinks, toys, kitchenware, clothes, etc. Also many small businesses have been established around Qat markets such as restaurants, small gambling halls with video games, barber and telephone shops.

## P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



Government receipts from Qat could be tremendous, but tax system is inefficient.  
Qat consumption tax amounted to YR 3.4 billion in 2010 (USD 16 million).



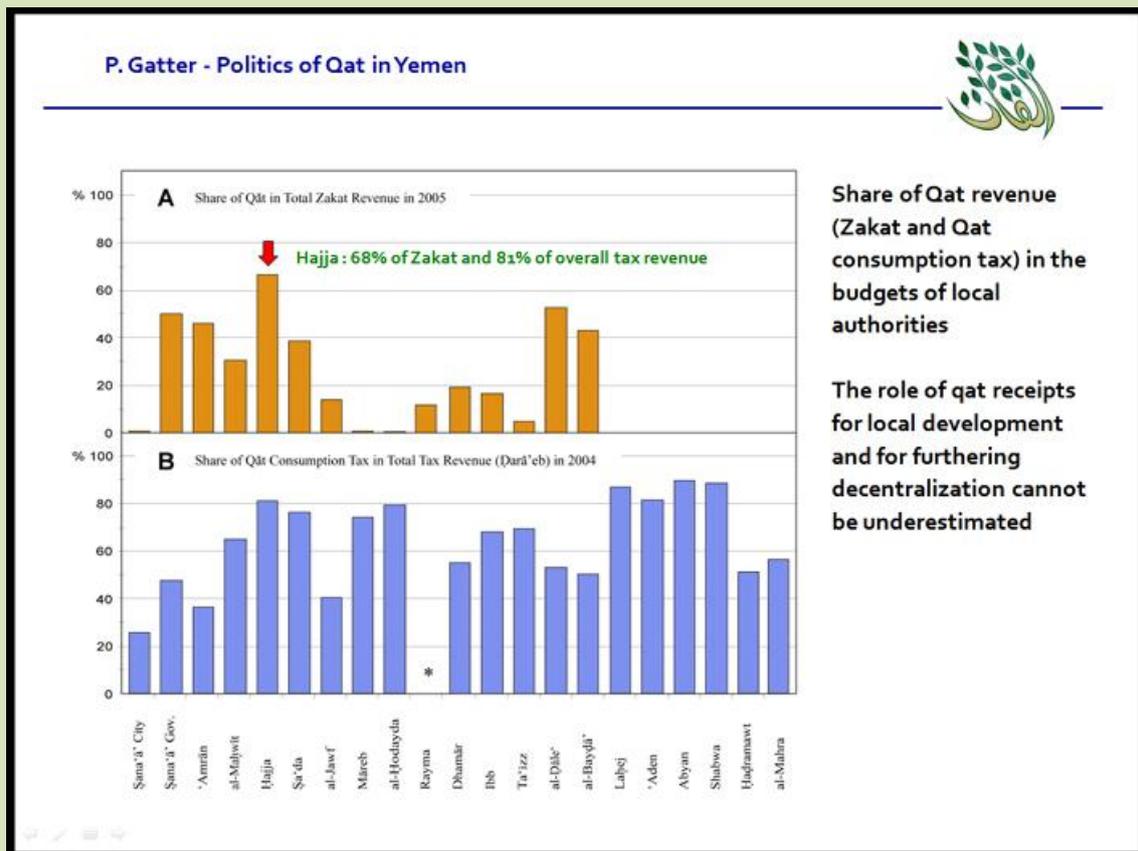
Government receipts from Qat could be tremendous, but the tax system is inefficient. Qat consumption tax revenue amounted to YR 3.4 billion in 2010 (USD 16 million).

This map shows the consumption tax levied on Qat sales (another tax is levied on Qat production - a religious tithe called Zakat).

The map here is less a mapping of the geographic distribution of chewing, but rather of the efficiency of Qat taxation. Areas with many checkpoints such as the capital Sana'a or as the desert lowlands of al-Hudayda, Aden and Hadhramawt (with few access roads where traffic can be easily controlled and Qat thus efficiently taxed) are areas of high Qat tax incomes (these areas are shown in red here).

In Sana'a Governorate which surrounds the capital there are vast Qat monocultures and as many as 87% of males and 54% of females over the age of 12 years are chewing Qat. Qat consignments however only cross few checkpoints on their way from the production sites to the markets and thus only few taxes are levied here. In addition a number of areas in Sana'a governorate have been exempted from the Qat tax as means of patronage of the Salih regime. This is true for Hamdan (home to many military officers), Salih's native Sanhan tribal area, and Khamir-Amran, the field of the al-Ahmar Shaykhly family.

Source of map: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 644.



The two graphs show the share of Qat revenue (Zakat and Qat consumption tax) in the budgets of local authorities in 2004 and 2005. The role of these receipts for local development and for furthering decentralization cannot be underestimated as it is the local councils that can decide over the use of these funds. Discussing local needs and planning local development projects fosters local decision making and democratic processes (This has been described in detail in:

[http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/Gatter\\_Decentralization\\_Qat.pdf](http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/Gatter_Decentralization_Qat.pdf)

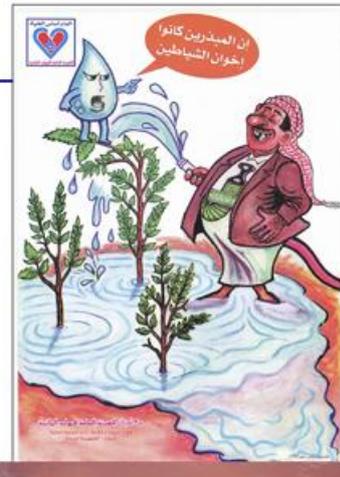
In only two of Yemen's 21 governorates the share of Qat in local tax revenue was below 40% during 2004 (lower graph). In many governorates Qat even accounted for more than three quarters of the tax income. An example is Hajja Governorate, where Qat accounts for 68% of Zakat revenue and 81% of general tax revenue. An effective taxation of qat cultivation is thus expected to boost local development.

Source of Illustration: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 510.

## P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen

## But this comes at a cost ...

- Qat is the main driver for water exploitation and depletion in many highland areas.
- Today **44%** of Qat holdings are irrigated by pumps and tanker trucks (nearly 100% in central highlands ).
- Qat irrigation and household water use have become direct competitors many in urban areas like Sana'a, Sada or Taizz.
- This is a source of increasing conflicts and an enormous challenge for policy makers.
- Yemen's government estimates that over **30% of revenge crimes** have their root in water disputes (Qat plays major role here).
- Government measures to control random well drilling were only successful in urban/suburban areas.
- The 2011/12 revolution triggered once again uncontrolled well drilling in areas of water stress, such as in the Sana'a environs, mostly for qat farming.



## But this comes at a cost ...

- Qat is the main driver for water exploitation and depletion in many highland areas.
- Today 44% of Qat holdings are irrigated by pumps and tanker trucks (in central highlands where there is little rain nearly 100% of Qat fields are watered with modern means of irrigation).
- Qat irrigation and household water use have become direct competitors many in urban and suburban areas of cities like Sana'a, Sada or Taizz.
- This is a source of increasing conflicts and an enormous challenge for policy makers.
- Yemen's government estimates that over 30% of revenge crimes have their root in water disputes (Qat plays major role here).
- Government measures to control random well drilling were only successful in urban/suburban areas.
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P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



**Qat's cost to national health is unknown**

- High incidence of cancer – often linked to pesticides (ingested through Qat or contaminated water).
- Awareness on Qat-related health threats is low among both farmers & consumers
- 72% of Qat farmers use pesticides (highest in al-Dhale Governorate with 93%).
- 15% use chemical fertilisers (highest in al-Baydha Governorate with 59%).



**Also Qat's cost to national health is unknown**

- High incidence of cancer – often linked to pesticides (ingested through Qat or contaminated water).
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- 15% use chemical fertilizers (highest in al-Baydha Governorate with 59%).

It is much less the consumption of Qat leaves itself that is dangerous, than the exposure to the pesticides with which they have been treated. Often highly poisonous substances that are smuggled illegally into the country are employed in Qat farming. They contain DDT and other highly toxic agents.

## P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



## Qat is held responsible for poverty and malnutrition

Qat chewers who feel that their Qat habit leaves not enough money for other family needs (2006 survey, n=3,523)

Governorate	Male	Female
Sana'a Gov.	34.5 %	47.6 %
Sana'a Capital Secretariat	44.3 %	48.5 %
al-Hodayda	32.5 %	58.9 %
Ta'izz	32.5 %	58.9 %
Marib	48.1 %	55.8 %
Aden	39.6 %	54.3 %
Hadhramawt (Wadi)	76.7 %	80.2 %
Hadhramawt (Coast)	51.4 %	86.5 %
TOTAL	48.4 %	62.0 %



**Qat is also held responsible for poverty and malnutrition**, in a country with one of the highest child malnutrition rates in the world. While in 2010 some 45% of Yemen's population lived below the poverty line, this figure has risen to nearly 60% by 2012.

The table shows figures of Qat chewers who feel that their Qat habit leaves not enough money for other family needs (2006 survey, 3,523 respondents)

Source of Illustration: Gatter, P. (2006): *Socio-economic assessment of qat chewing in Yemen. A survey of seven governorates. Report for the World Bank, San'a', Sept. 2006.*

P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



This picture shows 1,000 Yemeni Riyals worth of Qat on the left (ca. US Dollars 6 at the time).

Next to it you see what this money can buy in terms of food. A bag of rice, a bottle of oil, several potatoes, onions, carrots, tomatoes, eggs, apples, bananas, bread, yoghurt, and a can of beans. Enough to cover the daily needs of even a larger family.

P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



**What is the cost of Qat to national security?**

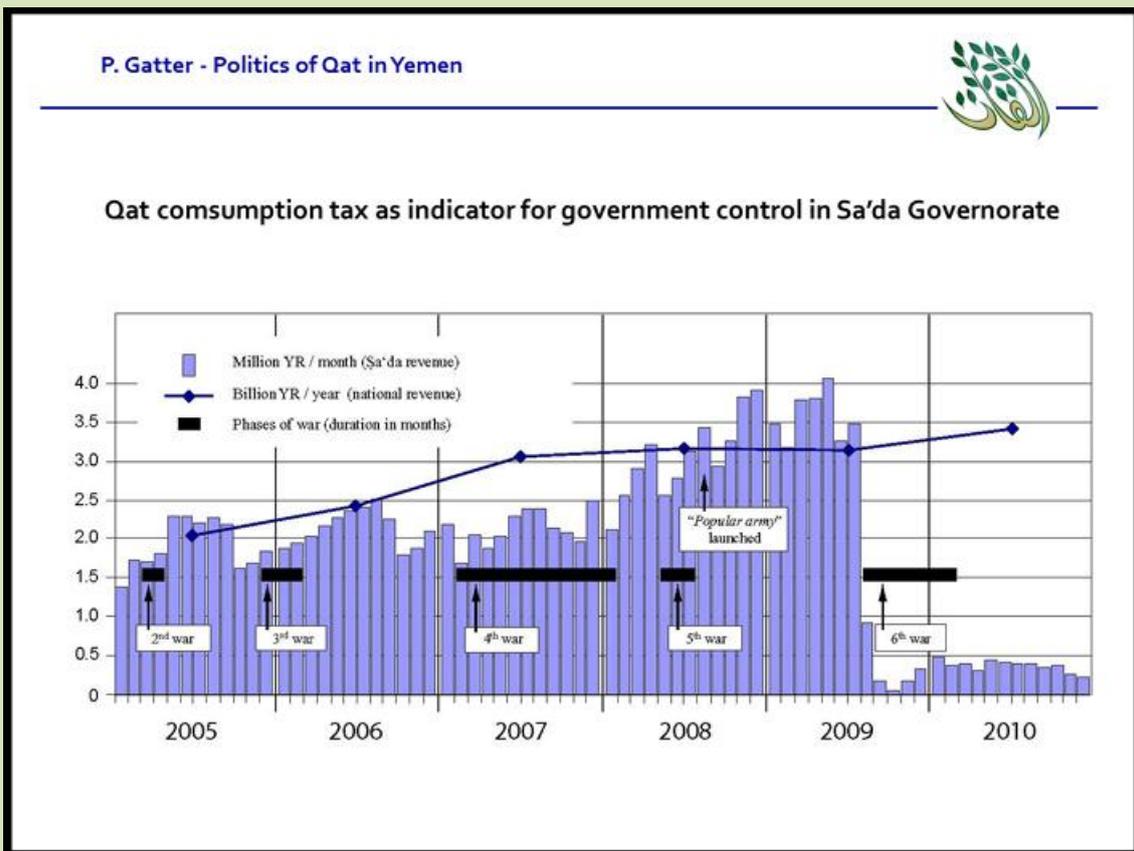
**Unrestrained Qat farming as part of a ruling bargain between Salih and the tribes.**

- Tribal Qat incomes undermine central government authority.
- A substantial share of Qat proceeds flows into purchasing arms, land and into drilling wells (armed conflicts over land and water are on rise).
- Qat smuggling finances the Sada insurgency.
- In the post-oil era the government must have a vested interest to better control the financial flows of the Qat trade.



**What is the cost of Qat to national security?**

- Unrestrained Qat farming was part of a ruling bargain between Salih and the tribes.
  - This ruling bargain included qat tax exemptions for certain Hashid tribal areas and for Salih's native Sanhan district, a lowering of the qat tax from 30 to 10 % just months after Salih came to power, import restrictions for qat, an elimination of qat from national statistics, and subsidies on irrigation equipment and on diesel (diesel is crucial for powering pumps for Qat irrigation).
- Tribal Qat incomes however undermine central government authority. Tribes that realize substantial profits from the Qat trade are less dependent on the patronage of the regime and more independent in their actions. The government has little leverage in these tribal highland areas.
- A substantial share of Qat proceeds flows into purchasing arms, land and into drilling wells (armed conflicts over land and water are on rise).
- Qat smuggling finances the Sada insurgency. If indeed Iran financially supports the Houthi rebels, this support is likely to be little compared to the gains the insurgents realize with Qat smuggling to Saudi Arabia. This Qat smuggling trade is - as mentioned before - believed to amount to around US-Dollar 1 billion annually.
- In the post-oil era and with the erosion of its ability of patronage the regime must have a vested interest to better control and tap the financial flows of the Qat trade. An improved system of taxation or even a government export monopoly to the non-Qat growing lowlands (as it is enforced in Ethiopia) should be in the regimes interest.



This graph shows the development of monthly Qat taxation in Sa'da province during the Houthi conflict. The blue bars represent Qat revenue, the black horizontal bars show the different periods of war. This shows that until the first half of 2009 the government could maintain its control over the major traffic axis of the province. Along these roads Qat is taxed at highway checkpoints. With the launch of a popular tribal army in 2008 the government could even strengthen its grip over the area.

The summer peaks that are visible in the data until 2007 reflect the higher availability of Qat in the markets after the summer rains.

The graph shows that only with the start of the 6th war in August of 2009, the government lost the province to the insurgents.

So it is interesting what one can show with Qat data.

P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



**Rising dissatisfaction in the South, in particular in Hadhramawt and Socotra**

Since the 1994 civil war, northern soldiers, administrators, oil workers and day laborers - most of whom are regular chewers - spread Qat in the south (Qat illegal in Yemen's east before unity).



- 1228 merchants sold Qat in Hadhramawt Governorate in 2005:
  - 98.9% were from northern Yemen
  - 53.9 % were active soldiers
  - 29.3 % were demobilized servicemen.

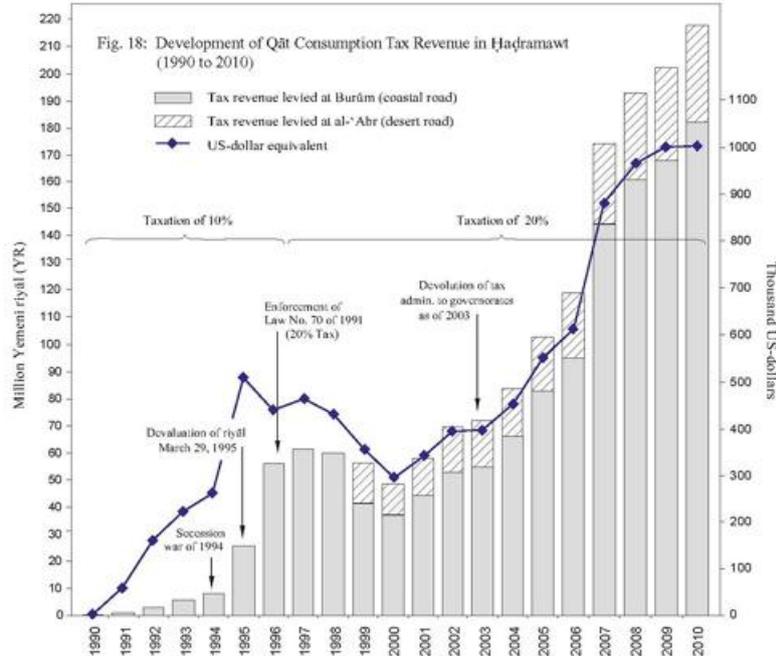
- Due to Qat consumption substantial financial transfers go from the economically marginalized south to northern Yemen and create further inequalities.



**There is rising dissatisfaction in the South with Qat, in particular in Hadhramawt and on Socotra Island. Qat consumption had been illegal here until unification in 1990.**

- Since the 1994 civil war, northern soldiers, administrators, oil workers and day laborers - most of whom are regular chewers – have spread the Qat habit in the south.
- Southern complaints of local councils, community elders, religious and tribal leaders go unheard in Sana'a. As trade is mostly controlled by the military, the central government has little interest and leverage in curbing this commerce.
- Some southerners claim that Qat is a means of northern policy makers to annihilate southern identity and to quell southern demands for self-determination.
- A survey showed that by 2005 already over 1200 Qat merchants were selling the leaves in Hadhramawt governorate.
- 98.9% of them originated from northern Yemen. Most of them had come as soldiers to the south. Locally they are perceived as occupiers.
- 53.9% of Qat merchants in Hadhramawt were active soldiers and another 29.3% were demobilized servicemen who had stayed in the south after the end of their military engagement.

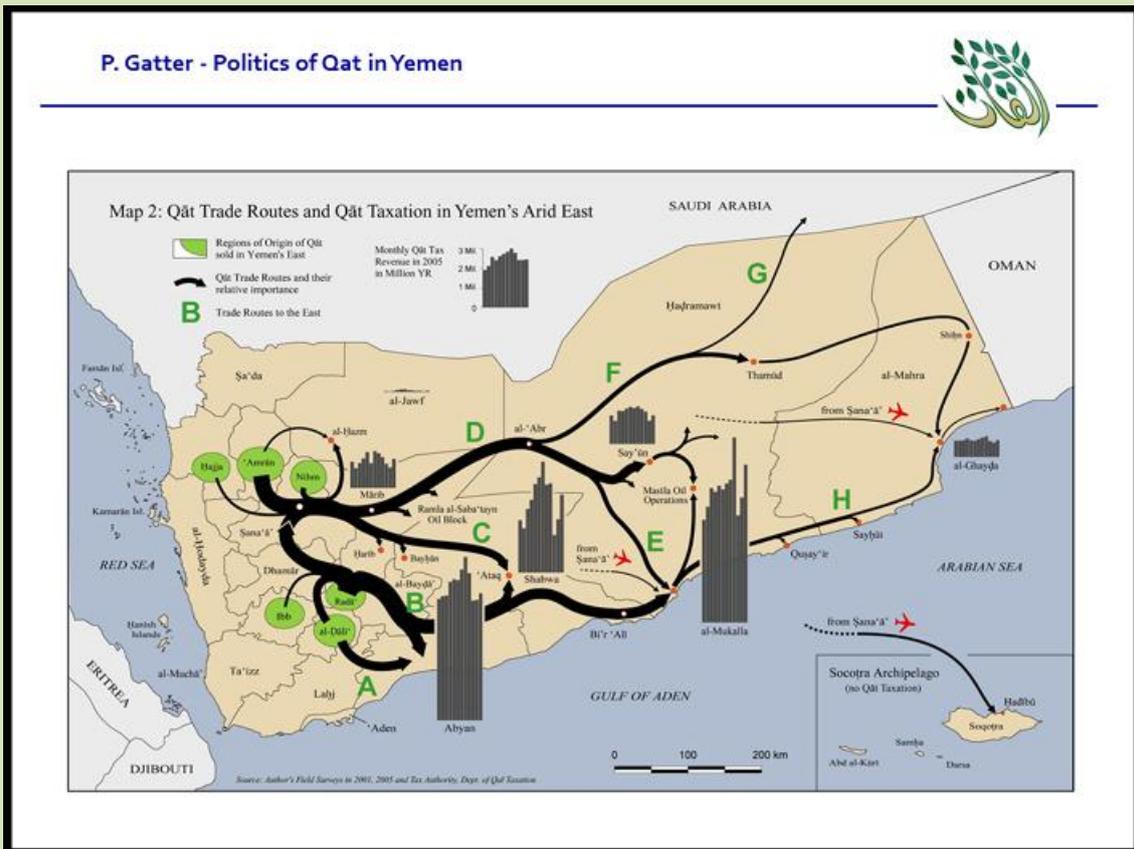
## P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



This graph on annual Qat tax revenues illustrates the rise of chewing in Hadramawt. While before the 1993 civil war there was hardly any Qat consumed and thus taxed in this governorate, consumption rapidly increased with the deployment of tens of thousands of northern troops and administrators to the south in the aftermath of the war.

Following the devolution of tax collection to the local level in 2003 (as a part of the decentralization reform) tax incomes once more increased since taxation of Qat in local hands is more efficient than in those of Sana'a tax collectors.

Source of Illustration: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 424.



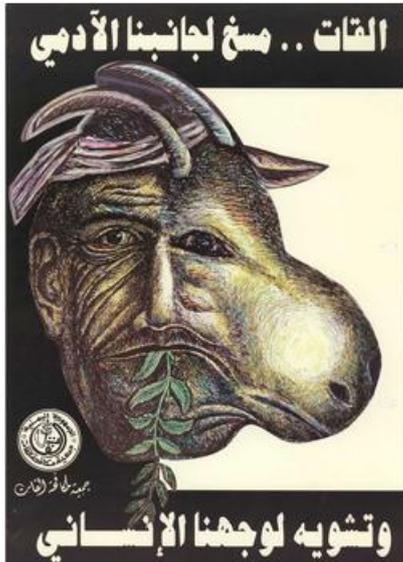
In the south a whole new system of Qat trade evolved. The map shows the areas of origin of Qat in the western highlands (green) and the routes of trade to the east. It also shows the points of Qat taxation, each with a diagram of annual Qat revenue (each of the grey bars represents a month).

Source of map: Gatter, P. (2012): *Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*, p. 648.



### Fighting Qat is difficult ...

- Being anti-Qat is often perceived as being anti-social and non-Yemeni.
- Some southern Yemeni Qat critiques even experienced intimidation by security forces warning them that "questioning qat is questioning national unit".
- The anti-Qat movement gained momentum in Yemen's revolution via *facebook* and *twitter* (fighting the "little dictators", "revolution against one's self").



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- Being anti-Qat is often perceived as being anti-social and non-Yemeni.
- Some southern Yemeni Qat critiques even experienced intimidation by security forces warning them that "questioning Qat is questioning national unit".
- The anti-Qat movement gained momentum in Yemen's revolution via *facebook* and *twitter* campaigns. Fighting Qat became part of fighting the "little dictators", such as public utility heads of army commanders, all seen as being part of a corrupt regime. By fighting Qat the activists declared a "revolution against one's self".

Left a 1998 qat awareness poster of the *Aden Society for Struggling Against Qat* that awarded the small NGO countrywide attention. The poster was designed by the Adeni artist 'Ali al-Dharhani and reads "Qat ... it transforms our humanness and deforms our human face".

Right: Activists of the Taizz-based *Qat Hazards Control Society* with campaign materials.

## P. Gatter - Politics of Qat in Yemen



### Qat Politics

- Qat politics in Yemen are mostly aimed at rent seeking in times of revenue crisis or are embarked upon when politically rewarding (drought of early 1970s, low oil price 1998, GCC membership talks 2006).
- They are thus for the most part window dressing for the donors (e.g. "Qat Research Unit" 1996, National Qat Conference 2002, Law on Agricultural flatlands 2008).
- They are short-lived and tossed over board once the revenue situation improves.
- They are often characterized by *ad hoc* measures and are not sustainable (Qat uprootings, arrest campaigns of soldiers 1999, dead dogs against Qat 2009, market demolitions).
- They are often rather utopian (e.g. draft law in Dec. 2012 to eradicate Qat cultivation by 2033) and have little effect in tribal areas.
- Qat politics are also used as means of patronage for clients of the regime (qat tax policy / tax exemptions, qat import restrictions, subsidies for diesel and irrigation equipment).
- A "Qat ruling bargain" between Salih and the tribes has profited both sides and imparted highland Yemen several decades of relative stability.
- In sharp contrast to Saudi Arabia, religious leaders play no role in Qat politics in Yemen.
- Free Qat to buy loyalty (army, elections, revolution).



### Qat Politics

- Qat politics in Yemen are mostly aimed at rent seeking in times of revenue crisis or are embarked upon when politically rewarding (e.g. during the drought of early 1970s, or when Yemen suffered from a low oil price of below US Dollar 10 per barrel in 1998, and when the GCC opened membership talks with Yemen in 2006).
- Qat politics are thus for the most part window dressing for the donors (as in the case of the founding of a "Qat Research Unit" in 1996 which however lacked staff and funding, or in the case of the 2002 National Qat Conference that produced a number of Cabinet decrees that were however never implemented, or the law of banning Qat in Agricultural flatlands 2007/2008 which was a stillbirth from the start).
- Qat politics are generally short-lived and tossed overboard once the revenue situation improves.
- They are often characterized by *ad hoc* measures and are not sustainable (Qat uprootings, arrest campaigns of soldiers 1999, dead dogs against Qat (in 2009 soldiers of Dhamar's governor were instructed to throw dead dogs into Qat fields and insult farmers in order to discourage them from growing Qat). Another example are Qat market demolitions, but Qat sellers reappear a few days later in the same location as security organs quickly lose interest).
- Qat politics are often rather utopian (e.g. draft law of Dec. 2012 to eradicate Qat cultivation by 2033) and have little effect in tribal areas.
- Qat politics are also used as means of patronage for clients of the regime (Qat tax policy / tax exemptions, qat import restrictions, subsidies for diesel and irrigation equipment).
- A "Qat ruling bargain" between Salih and the tribes has profited both sides and imparted highland Yemen several decades of relative stability and President Salih a 33-year rule.
- In sharp contrast to Saudi Arabia, religious leaders play no role in Qat politics in Yemen. In Saudi Arabia Qat is considered a narcotic drug on the basis of the Quran. In Yemen most religious figures are very careful of taking a stance vis-a-vis Qat. Even al-Qaeda did not dare to tamper with Qat in the territories it occupied in southern Yemen. After initial unsuccessful attempts to close down Qat markets the militants had to back off. They could not risk outlawing the popular drug without enraging the population. They also learned of the mistakes made by the Islamist al-Shabab militia in Somalia that had tried to outlaw Qat and lost the population's support over it.
- Free gifts of Qat are used by the regime to buy loyalty (this is done in the army, during times of elections, and was tried in Yemen's "Youth Revolution" of 2011).



### Yemeni Revolution – Pro Salih Camp at al-Tahrir



This picture shows how the regime uses Qat during times of turmoil. This is one of dozens of tents that were set up by the Salih regime in early 2011 for Qat chewing on Sana'a's Tahrir Square. To attract large crowds of people to come out in support of the president, free Qat worth several million US-Dollars was distributed here over a several week period.

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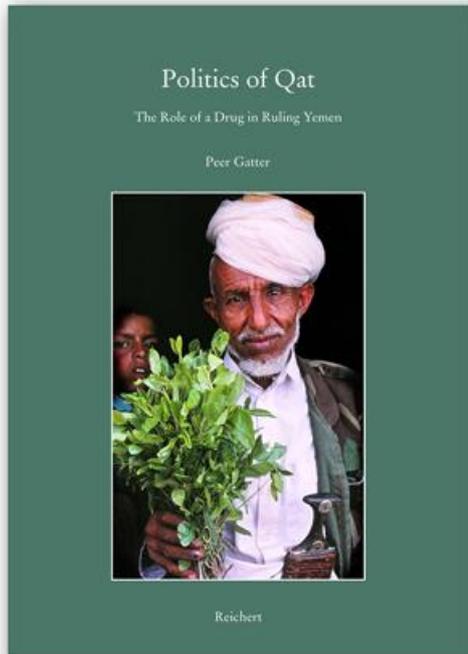
### Recommendations

- Any measures need to be realistic – they must take into account that all meddling with the supply side is likely to create unrest (Minster al-Arhabi: “war on a fourth front”).
- There needs to be awareness that restricting Qat cultivation may cause poverty in many highland areas and trigger massive migration to the cities.
- Therefore research on agricultural alternatives (crops with low water demand) and on income generating alternatives beyond the agricultural sector needs to be fostered.
- Donors must realize that Qat policy in Yemen becomes opportune mostly during times of revenue crisis – such moments need to be seized to bring about gradual change.
- A joint donor approach regarding Qat is needed.
- Qat should become a cross cutting issue in development projects in Yemen just like gender equality or poverty reduction.
- Yemeni NGO initiatives that target the Qat demand side should be supported (capacity building in awareness raising, community mobilization, campaign logistics, PR work).
- Lobby with government to include Qat education at all ages in school curricula.
- Reform and enforce Qat taxation to promote local development with these revenues.
- Develop an integrated pesticide policy and enforce existing laws regarding pesticides.
- Foster exchange with East African countries that also have a Qat problem.
- Create of a national Qat coordination, research and documentation center.

### Recommendations

- Any measures need to be realistic – they must take into account that all meddling with the supply side is likely to create unrest (Minster of Planning al-Arhabi warned in 2008 of creating a “war on a fourth front by banning qat cultivation” in addition to the Sa’da war, the southern question and al-Qaeda).
- There needs to be awareness that restricting Qat cultivation may cause poverty in many highland areas and is likely to trigger massive migration to the cities.
- Therefore research on agricultural alternatives (crops with low water demand) and on income generating alternatives beyond the agricultural sector needs to be fostered.
- Coffee which is often quoted as an alternative to Qat is much more water intensive and needs irrigation much more regularly than Qat. Qat can go for long periods without water. Also coffee growers are very dependent on the volatile world market prices for coffee. As there is no import of Qat to Yemen, Qat prices in Yemen are much more stable - which is very attractive to farmers. The Ismaili Qat substitution project in the Haraz mountains showed that the only farmers who were really successful in substituting Qat were those who found alternatives beyond the agricultural sector, e.g. in quarrying or as transport entrepreneurs.
- Donors must realize that Qat policy in Yemen becomes opportune mostly during times of revenue crisis – such moments need to be seized by donors to bring about gradual change.
- A joint donor approach regarding Qat is needed.
- Qat should become a cross cutting issue in development projects in Yemen just like gender equality or poverty reduction.
- The lesson from many drug campaigns around the world is that targeting the supply side has little effect (e.g. opium, cocaine). It is thus important to target the demand side, as has been successfully done in Europe with smoking.
- Yemeni NGO initiatives that target the Qat demand side should thus be supported (capacity building in awareness raising, community mobilization, campaign logistics, PR work).
- Lobby with government to include Qat education at all ages in school curricula.
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The presentation is based the book:  
*"Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug  
in Ruling Yemen"*

The table of contents and introduction  
(English/Arabic) as well as selected  
chapters are available for download at:

[www.qat-yemen.com](http://www.qat-yemen.com)

The book is available on Amazon.com

Author's website and Qat publications: [www.qat-yemen.com](http://www.qat-yemen.com)

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Dr Peer Gatter is a political scientist and scholar of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies with a focus on water politics and the political economy of the Middle East. Following his studies at the Universities of Tübingen, Tehran and Georgetown, he worked as journalist reporting mostly from Afghanistan, Iran, West Africa and Northern Ireland. Since 1999 he worked for nearly a decade in and on Yemen for the World Bank and UNDP. He was an advisor in the Ministries of Planning and Water & Environment and his portfolio included decentralization, agricultural reform, water, biodiversity, and last but not least, *qat*. He organized Yemen's "First National Conference on Qat" (2002) ([link English](#) / [link Arabic](#)), carried out a country-wide assessment of *qat* chewing in Yemen for the World Bank in 2006 ([link English](#) / [link Arabic](#)) and is author of the book "*Politics of Qat – The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen*" (2012). Since 2008 he is working for the German development cooperation (GIZ) on water policy and intercultural relations in Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, and Germany.