Framing the Chew: Narratives of Development, Drugs and Danger with Regard to Khat (*Catha edulis*)

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Known as the "flower of paradise," *qat* (in Arabic), *miraa* (its Kenyan name), or *chat* (in Ethiopia), is an evergreen shrub of the *Celastraceae*, which grows between altitudes of 1,500–2,500 m. In the wild, khat trees can grow as high as 80 ft in an equatorial climate, but the farmed variety is kept at around 20 ft with constant pruning (Kennedy 1987; Goldsmith 1999; Lemessa 2001). The leaves are picked and rolled into bundles of around 250–300 g in weight. Known as "bundles," or *madruf*, they are sold from roadside stalls, shops, and special cafes (*mafrishes*) across the khat belt. Khat users, known as *khateurs* in French, pick the leaves off the branches and stuff them into the corner of their mouths, where they are slowly chewed. The taste varies depending on freshness and the tannic acid content, which can be up to 10 % in dried material. The taste is astringent, though younger shoots are slightly sweet. In a typical sitting, one to three bundles may be chewed. Environmental and climactic conditions determine the chemical profile of the leaves, and there is significant variation between different types. In Yemen alone, 44 different types of khat are known (Al-Motarreb et al. 2002; Geisshusler and Brenneisen 1987). Fresh khat leaves may contain some 60 different cathedulins (Kite et al. 2003), but the most important psychoactives are cathine and cathinone. For both the economics and the culture of consumption of khat, it is significant that cathine is highly unstable and will degrade after 48 h, leaving a short window of opportunity for traders and users.

Khat is often listed as a stimulant, but this is an unsatisfactory description. The typical dose of a bundle of 200–300 g of young shoots and leaves, consumed in a sitting lasting to 4 h, takes the user through a variety of mental states with different physical effects. A first effect kicks in after 15 min, with a rise of the heartbeat, and a burst of energy that finds expression in animated conversation. A tingling excites the body; shivers ripple from the crown of the head to the bottom of the spine, all sense of fatigue and hunger is slewed off. After a couple of hours a more quiet,

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reflective state sets in, with an expanded sense of being, during which seasoned khateurs will be given to grandiose planning and flights of fancy. Conversation takes on sharper contours, and a sense of bonhomie unites chewing companions. Interestingly, the phenomenology of khat remains poorly explored in the English language literature, in spite of the recent rise in academic interest.

From the 1990s onwards, the question of what to do about khat has occupied a growing number of researchers, immigrant community activists, policy makers, and social policy functionaries. Every so often, the subject attracts the attention of politicians or journalists before dipping once again below the radar. Within the small pool of khat specialists, the question of how to proceed, how to regulate—or not—the importation, distribution, and consumption of khat excites a lot of passion. The debate is highly polarized, pitting innocent advocates, who praise khat as a pinnacle of cultural achievement, against crusading prohibitionists, who hold the leaf responsible for the moral decadence of migrant communities and the violent collapse of the Somali state. There are many shades of green between these two positions but, as with all emotionally charged discussions, opinions will vary according to context and circumstance. In order to secure the support of policy makers, the different factions have devised particular methods of presentation. The argument is then compacted so as to fit into particular generic forms that are recognized, read, and respected by the audience. It is of little use, for instance, when arguing for a ban on khat in the UK or Sweden, to refer to the Fiqh, the body of laws deduced from laws found in the Koran and Sunna, because Sharia law does not directly cover them. European policy makers deliberating on questions of public health do not consider the holy book of Islam a religious, legal or moral authority.[1]

In this chapter, I divide the literature into three distinct genres, each located in a different field of inquiry and action. In the first instance, I therefore want to present a meta-narrative, or a story about the way that khat stories are told. This is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather is an interpretive scheme, introduced to spell out how the presentation of information is linked to action. I will argue that the way in which information is framed and presented is accompanied by an awareness of consequences. The authors present their material according to conventions, knowledge of the audience, and familiarity with the discourse to which it contributes, and call implicitly or explicitly for action: typically for more funds to carry on the research.[2]

In the UK, the authors and activists in the khat community, chewers or not, are concerned with a phenomenon that is itself a consequence of a process which is clumsily captured by the term "globalization." In referring to the sudden availability of exotic products effecting significant changes to the patterns of consumption, it forms part of the unfolding story of modernity itself. Historians have identified the epochal changes that began with the European maritime expedition as a search for spices (Courtwright 1982). Substances that were treasured not for nutritious value,

[1] This has not stopped the Swedish anti-khat campaigner Renee Besseling from citing the Koran in her arguments to sway Islamic immigrants against chewing khat (Omar and Besseling 2008).

[2] Or rather, financial support for a lifestyle that includes the production of research.

but their transporting effects. In the Medieval imaginary, paradise is often depicted as a place where spices abound (Schivelbusch 1992). At a time when European food culture was simple and the choice of staples narrow, spices like pepper, nutmeg or vanilla could open new dimensions of sensual experience and pleasure, and were often worth their weight in gold. Lifting the consumer out of the ordinary was a sensation both uplifting and mind altering.

It has also been argued that in societies haunted by famine, food played a very different role than in the contemporary post-scarcity society. Mass hallucinations, for example, have been attributed to the infestation of wheat with hallucinogenic fungi.

As Shivelbusch and others have demonstrated so convincingly, the quest for spices coincided with, or even precipitated, a change in consumer preferences; a consequence, perhaps, of the cultural and political changes associated with the rise of the European bourgeoisie. By the seventeenth century, stimulant beverages (tea, coffee, cocoa), nicotine, and sugar were transforming the European palate (and nervous system). With no nutritious value, oddly habit forming and mind altering, they have been classified as "soft drugs" (Goodman 2007), but are more fittingly described as *Genussmittel*: substances of pleasure.

If khat is only one more in the range of substances procured from exotic cultures, it differs in important respects. It came to Europe via people from East Africa and Yemen, and it has not been repackaged and adapted to European styles and tastes.[3] Though in the early period of contact Europeans were apt to copy indigenous forms of consumption—hence the popularity of smoking, chewing, and sniffing tobacco, all modes of administration found in different parts of the Americas (Goodman 2002)—they would very quickly be transformed as they were integrated into European social customs, be these coffee houses or the sweetening of cocoa. References to the exotic origins were relegated to packaging (Sheller 2004). None of these processes have occurred with khat, which has come to Europe with the reversal of population flows from the mid twentieth century onwards. While there were always risks attached to imported novelties—one remembers that one of Christopher Columbus's companions was arrested by the Spanish Inquisition for smoking—the twist now is that the initiative is no longer in the hands of returning conquerors, but incoming migrants.

Accompanied by a cultural package of beliefs and customs that must find accommodation in the dominant culture of the host country, these migrants change, in due course, the country they make their home, and are also changed by it. Furthermore, they introduce political complexities interwoven with identities that may appear indistinguishable to external observers. In the process, aspects of

[3] Arguably, with the exception of Hagigat, a pill form containing synthetic methcathinone, popular as a legal high in Israel—and of course mephedrone,4-methylmethcathinone. In 2010, this synthetic stimulant became the symbolic legal high in the UK and other European countries. Though brought under control in 2010, it continues to enjoy popularity as an MDMA substitute particularly in the nightclub and party scene. The active ingredients are the cathinone derivatives methcathinone and methylone.

cultural heritage, including the use of traditional *Genussmittel*, are also affected. Adapting to their cultural surroundings, migrants are reviewing their relationship with khat and adopting new narratives.

Khat Narratives

In many European countries where the status of khat has become a matter of political debate, members of the Somali community who advocate restrictions have risen to prominence. Some are former users, even self-declared "addicts," who claim to present an insider, or cultural, account, and also claim to represent the community. Because they are providing at least the appearance of authority and authenticity, these activists are welcomed by prohibitionist politicians, even if their overall political objectives are quite different.[4] In one London neighborhood, for instance, khat provided a common cause for conservative Muslims and groups opposed to immigration (Klein 2007). To underline the respective positions, natives tend to emphasize their ignorance about khat, cast metonymically as a foreign menace, while community members present themselves as insiders steeped in cultural knowledge and technical knowhow. In the welter of community studies that have been authored by UK Somalis over the past 10 years, one of the stated aims has been to introduce the khat phenomenon to a non-Somali audience.

The media has not missed the opportunity to shock and awe with stories about a new drug. Article headings such as "a legal form of crack cocaine," and another "khatastrophe," or "let the quat out of the bag" have provided newspapers with an opportunity to entertain and inform. Unusually for a legally permitted substance, khat has been presented time and again as a novel phenomenon, and the investigative journalists as heroic pioneers. The shrill tone has been echoed in the Spanish media (Klein et al. 2009), while in Sweden the reporting has been described as "one-sided and stable over time. It focuses exclusively on the direct negative effects khat use has on social relationships, mental and physical health, and employment" (Nordgren 2012). The words are often attributed to an affected family member or some authority figure from the migrant group (Omar and Besseling 2008).

[4] In the UK, one of the most vociferous proponents of khat control in 2011 was the Member of Parliament for Milton Keynes, Frank Lancaster. As a loyal member of the Conservative Party, he also supported strict reductions in immigration.

Travelers Tales

The role of the community spokesman shedding light onto a dark corner of urban Britain reflects the directional changes in the flow of goods and people occurring under globalization. But, in essence, these stories continue a long tradition in European literature of travelers' tales written up from expeditions by seamen, missionaries, and military men, all describing foreign lands and outlandish customs, mixing observation, science, and anecdote in an early example of infotainment. Naturally, the balance varies enormously, and particularly in relation to khat, where the first mention in the European literature includes sober descriptions of leaf size, stems, and growing conditions. Pehr Forsskål, the great Swedish/Finnish botanist, provides the first detailed account in his mapping of the vegetation of Yemen (Forsskål 1776).

Forsskål is not untypical of several generations of Europeans, including the last of the great explorers, Wilfred Thesiger, in not taking to khat. All we read about are complaints about the bitter taste, but no account of the effect. Considering that it was established scientific practice, from John Humphrey to Sigmund Freud, to closely observe and record the effects different substances were having on the user, this failure is surprising (Jay 2001). In part, this may be explained in what MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969), writing about alcohol, described as the importance of social learning when processing alcohol. Far from reducing drug effect to the pharmacology of drug and user, effect and behavior were revealed to be a social construct, and "drunken comportment" the product of cultural learning. Travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not have the opportunity to acquire that cultural knowledge and learn to become khateurs; unlike, for instance, the process by which marijuana users of 1960s California learned to integrate their substance use into their lives (Becker 1963). If the effect of drugs is the convergence of pharmacological factors, the expectations of the user, and the setting (Zinberg 1984), then khat failed to stimulate the early European experimenters because they simply did not know what to expect. Arguably, few travelers knew what to expect from ayahuasca, ibogaine or kava, yet all of these have impacted users. But the reason for this lack of appreciation is perhaps best articulated by the inveterate Victorian traveler Richard Burton in his detailed description of khat consumption and a balanced assessment of psychoactive risk:

> Europeans perceive but little effect from it, the Arabs however, unaccustomed to stimulants and narcotics, declare that they cannot live without the excitement. It seems to produce in them a manner of dreamy enjoyment...The people of Harar (Ethiopia) eat it every day from 9 a.m. till near noon, when they dine and afterwards in something stronger—millet beer and mead. (Burton 1856)

This view was supported by the US consul to Aden, who wrote about khat for the National Geographic Magazine in 1917 (Moser 1917). He was unable to perceive any effects after chewing "a huge amount," but found that he had trouble going to sleep at night. Khat is a mild stimulant, comparable to coffee, which originates in the same region, and receives favorable comment in the Arabic and Turkish

literature introduced by Krikorian (1984), including a mention by the famous Moroccan geographer Ibn Battuta from 1332. While these sources have yet to be made accessible to English-speaking audiences, they share with the European accounts an objective distance between the observer and the observed. There is no intention of interfering with the phenomenon of khat use itself, whatever its merits. At the time, the popularity of khat in Yemen and Eastern Ethiopia is compared to the prohibition in Saudi Arabia or in Ethiopia's highlands, and in each case is justified on religious grounds. But both license and sanction are part of the phenomenon described.

It has been noted that the tone changes in the early twentieth century as the role of the European observer morphs from visitor to colonial official (Gezon 2012). Where travelers write up and celebrate difference, officialdom sees only difficulties. This shift may well reflect a qualitative transformation in the pattern of consumption occasioned by contextual changes, including cultural dislocation of colonized populations and physical processes such as urbanization, internal migration, and the sedentarization of formerly nomadic populations. In British Somaliland, the governor, Sir Gerald Reece (1948–1954), lamented the lethargy and dissipation that was setting in among vigorous and healthy nomads once they had settled down. He worked hard to curtail the use of khat, which was one of the new-found vices, until he realized that all along his driver had been transporting khat in the boot of the Governor's car (Klein and Metaal 2010).

At the same time, one should be aware of the subjective concerns of the writer troubled by the prickly issue of maintaining control over restive subjects. Khat chewing is identified with idleness, a waste of resources, and resistance to European authority, as "natives become difficult to handle and antagonistic to all forms of authority" (Peters 1952). Condemnation of native consumption cultures has been a continuous feature of imperialism, from the persecution of coca chewing by the Catholic Church in Latin America to the restrictions on alcohol in colonial Africa (Ambler 1990; Pan 1975).

Empires have vanished, the exotic substances and people have arrived in the neighborhood, but tales of travel to khat countries still succeed in drawing an audience. One of the most accomplished recent accounts is perhaps Kevin Rushby's book "Eating the Flowers of Paradise" (1998), which is both a wonderful travelogue through Ethiopia and Yemen and a vivid evocation of the complicated relationship between the user and his chew. The book contains lively descriptions of "scoring" khat, of the rooms in private houses where it is chewed, but also of the anxieties of the user, the sense of urgency of having to obtain a bundle, the anticipation, the sociability, the excitement, and then the effect as the khat kicks in and reality looses its moorings.

Many of the anthropological contributions retain a detached objectivity (Beckerleg 2010; Carrier and Gezon 2012; Goldsmith 1999; Kennedy 1987; Klein 2007; Varisco 1986; Weir 1985) even when crossing boundaries to engage in technical discussion in other disciplines; still, their work remains grounded in the primacy of the social and the cultural. Combining the "thick description" of local experience with contextual information on politics and economic reality, these

anthropological accounts provide a holistic counterweight to the material reductionism prevailing in other fields. Gezon, using a critical medical anthropology framework, argues that one cannot explain how people behave when using khat simply by reductive biochemical descriptions, but must consider questions of context and culture.

The rising number of studies conducted in the East African diaspora, particularly in the UK, are also partly in this tradition (Griffiths 1998; Warfa et al. 2007; Klein 2007; Patel et al. 2005). Funded, as they often are, by government agencies, they have a different orientation, and view the issue through a prism of social problems. In as far as they are groping for answers, these studies share a feature with the products of the second large corpus of work, which falls into the development discourse.

Khat as a Development Issue

This discussion stretches back to the science of political economy emerging in the eighteenth century with wealth creation as its central theme. For the colonial administrations of the different Imperial nations, but particularly the British Empire, economic development or progress becomes the dominant theme. First of all, revenue had to be generated to fund the administration itself. Secondly, promoting the welfare of colonial subjects, people deemed to be unable to govern themselves, had become the legitimating notion of high imperialism.[5] These paternalistic concerns mark a significant shift away from the more rapacious character of empire in preceding periods, where overseas territories served purely for economic benefit, and effected a colossal transfer of wealth from, say, the Americas or India to Europe. But they also entailed the systematic subordination of indigenous populations, followed by the structural relegation of their cultures along a social evolutionary scale that had assumed both the concepts and the authority of modern science. It was adamant in its superiority and increasingly immutable, particularly to representations of "native" interests.

As the lofty ambitions of the imperial mission could not be realized with the tight-fisted allocations made available by the foreign and commonwealth office, colonial administrators in many colonies turned to raising revenue with taxes on the various "vices" to raise capital. In West Africa, British administrators funded their benevolent government from duties on alcohol and tobacco imports (Heap 2002), and in the Far East from taxes on opium parlors (Brook and Wakabayashi 2000; Trocki 1999). In East Africa, the trade in khat was encouraged by the authorities

[5] Value for the imperial power at first: The perversity in the colonial discourse is that colonial officials are promoting policies designed to improve the material well being of a people who they have no mandate for, a people who never asked to be governed by the officials and their class, and whose interests are often in conflict with those of the administrators and of the imperial power.

who gained a fiscal benefit, for example, the Italian administration in Ethiopia, and discouraged by those who worried about the outflow of currency. The attempts by British and French colonial administrations to control the khat trade in Djibouti (1956/1957), Somaliland (1921–1957), Aden (1957/1958), and Kenya (1945–1956), were motivated, at least in part, by political and financial calculations. As bans invariably proved unenforceable and counterproductive, they were, in the best tradition of administrative pragmatism, speedily revoked.

In the 1960s, the creation of wealth, now termed development, modernization and growth, became both purpose and raison d'etre of the independent state right across Africa. But economic progress was often intermeshed with other goals, including nationalist expansion and religious idealism. When economic decline occasioned by the fall in commodity prices and deteriorating terms of trade during the 1970s diminished the capacity of African governments to determine domestic policies, their claim to the role of development agent was challenged by the international financial institutions. From the 1980s onwards, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed policy packages known as structural adjustment programs (SAPs) upon African governments that were characterized by a reduction in government spending and the fostering of exports, mainly minerals and agricultural commodities. Working with abstract notions of aggregate growth, the technocratic proponents could justify the deleterious social consequences of SAP in terms of ultimate good. In time, the tenets of neoliberal ideology were modified by the humanitarian concerns of a social development discourse that found expression in the Millennium goals, opening a space for considerations other than economic, and significant for the question of khat.

In the development discourse proper, dogma and social propriety are of marginal importance to the cost/benefit analysis. Core issues are the allocation of resources, yield, and return. In Yemen, for instance, where the khat industry employs 14 % of the labor force and accounts for at least 6 % of GDP (Lauermann 2012), the critical question is resource allocation. Khat is an important cash crop, particularly for poor farmers, and organizing the sale and occasions for chewing, from elaborately decorated cafes to the renting out of benches in urban areas, secures formal and informal sector livelihoods. Contested, however, is the use of water resources. This is not unique, as an imbalance between increasing water demand and existing limited water resources is being experienced in all countries of the Arabian Peninsula. But in Yemen, the largest proportion of irrigated water is used for cultivating khat (Almas and Scholz 2006). Water is pumped up from the aquifer on which the capital Sanaa is built at an unsustainable rate. Moreover, the ministry for agriculture subsidizes the diesel used by farmers for pumping the water. The question arises whether encouraging the depletion of scarce water resources for cash crop production is a sensible economic strategy (Gatter 2009).

In Kenya, one discussion focuses on land use by khat farmers. There is concern that farmers are pushing into areas that are ecologically fragile. Against a backdrop of rising demand for khat, farmers in many parts of the country are trying to cash in by planting small plots of khat on hillsides that have traditionally been left uncultivated. There are risks of exhausting poor soils and accelerating deforestation

(Gessesse 2009). It has also been argued that it is precisely the use of marginal lands that underlines the boon that khat has been for East African farmers. These are mainly small holders who cultivate khat as part of a diversification and income generating strategy. Production is in the hands of independent farmers, with no commercial enterprises or plantations involved. It is grown in addition to food crops, often replacing other cash crops like coffee that have failed to live up to promises and, in many cases, ended with farmers accruing debt (Feyisa and Aune 2003; Gebissa 2004). Khat can be planted in different soils, provides up to three harvests a year, and requires relatively little labor input. As the crop is hardy, there is little need for pesticides and other expensive inputs (Anderson et al. 2007; Gebissa 2004).

Across East Africa, khat farmers supply local and regional markets in Djibouti, Somaliland, and Sudan with a small, but important, flow to Europe and the Middle East. Strong underlying demand has secured price stability. There is no chance of dislocation from events beyond control and outside the risk calculus of African farmers; say, a bumper harvest in South America.

Furthermore, the distribution of khat creates income opportunities for traders and retailers, many of whom in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Madagascar or Somaliland are women. According to Lisa Gezon's recent study of khat in Madagascar, "Khat has provided expanded economic and relationship opportunities for many women" (Gezon 2012). The preparation of khat for export or for long distance trade has also engendered a processing industry employing thousands in urban centers like Nairobi and Addis (Anderson et al. 2007). Here, people sort out the khat stems trucked in from the country, weigh them, and roll them into banana leafs.

The transportation of khat from the field to produce markets, and from there to consumption centers, engages legions of transporters and long-distance trucking companies (Carrier 2005). This trade, from Ethiopia and Kenya to Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania, has created horizontal linkages in economies that are otherwise vertical (Klein et al. 2009). It has stimulated regional, economic integration that is a precondition for development. The story of khat illustrates once again how African farmers can respond once market opportunities and infrastructural facilities are in place.[6]

While khat exports and expansion were contingent upon infrastructural developments, governments in Ethiopia and Kenya have never provided direct assistance to the sector. Indeed, in both countries, khat farmers have been at best neglected by rural extension services. In Madagascar, senior government officers maintain a position of disapproval, while in Uganda, there is much ambiguity at official and street bureaucracy level, including confusion with cannabis prompting unwarranted arrests and confiscations (Beckerleg 2010a, b; Gezon 2012) In Somalia, the ban issued by the regime of Siad Barre led to khat farms being ploughed under in the north of the country, adding fuel to the fires of civil war.

[6] As was demonstrated by the expansion of cocoa farming in West Africa in response to opportunities during the late colonial era.

Government attitudes may merely echo the diffidence of international donors. Saudi Arabia has campaigned for decades against khat, eradicating crops in the region bordering Yemen and funding efforts by international agencies to impose controls. Interestingly, patterns of use persist in spite of these sustained efforts (Ageely 2009). Bilateral development assistance agencies, like GIZ, DfID, USAID or CIDA[7] have not only refused to support the activities of khat farmers, but have even invested in crop substitution programs. Concerned with a holistic interpretation of development, aid agencies consider khat, with its euphoriant and potentially habit-forming effects, unsuitable for assistance.

Overall, consideration about rural livelihoods and the urban informal sector, foreign exchange earnings for developing countries, and the benefits of crop diversification receive little attention in khat-related policy discussions. Neither the World Health Organization (WHO), nor the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), nor the discussions held in North America and Europe take such issues into account. This is not surprising; the African poor, be they rural or urban, are on the margins of global decision making and find it difficult to make their voice heard; secondly, as noted above, the khat economy has been driven by local demand and supply, with minimal external support and no technical assistance by the development community. It is a veritable proof of the ineffectiveness of development assistance. Thirdly, khat is one of very few African exports that is controlled down the entire commodity chain by African producers and traders. At no point do multinational companies take over. Hence, there are no loud voices clamoring in support of the trade.

The history of coca provides a disturbing parallel, not only because of similarities in pharmacological effect and mode of administration, but also the history of control. When coca leaves were added to the schedule of controlled drugs it was co-classified with cocaine, a substance of exponentially higher potency. Though coca has a long history and its use is widespread, neither farmers nor chewers were consulted in the decision to impose an international ban (Metaal, this volume).

Drugs Discourse

Indifference to African poverty may be justified as lying outside the terms of reference of expert panels deliberating on the classification of khat in a European country. When deciding to ban khat in the Netherlands, for instance, the ostensible reason provided by the Dutch government was that it gave cause to public nuisance (Klein 2012; De Jonge and Clary Van der Veen 2010). The terms of reference given to the working group of the UK Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs were to

[7] GIZ: Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit; DfID: Department for International Development; USAID: United States Agency for International Development; CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency.

look at the medical and social harm caused by khat to khat-chewing populations in the UK who are mainly of Somali, Ethiopian, and Yemeni descent.

In effect, the migrants and refugees who have escaped warzones and camps have far more political clout than the farmers and traders left behind. The wellbeing of diaspora communities, whose livelihood is guaranteed by social security provisions, trumps the survival strategies of indigent rural communities in Ethiopia or Meru. Sahan, for example, is a network of Somali women who meet on the premises of a community center in West London. Their leaflets and presentations to local councilors lament the availability of khat, which they say keeps the men away from their homes. Some of the campaigners do not shy from drastic measures. Abdi, a former user turned veteran campaigner for khat control, argues for criminalization of use, even if it leads to the incarceration of Somali men. "Better we lose them for a few years to prison than for a lifetime of use" (Middlesex University 2011).

The fortunate minority of émigrés then assumes the role of a victimized majority, who are suffering at the hands of khat trading profiteers. But they draw support from the third, and most dominant, discourse, with its assumption of all the privileges bestowed by contemporary science. It draws on medical research, chemistry, pharmacology, and social science to make up a discrete discursive field. It is what I suggest is the drugs discourse, with its particular narrative structure, consisting of several segments. It is centered on a notion of a problem, which has to be identified, analyzed, guarded against, and reversed. The authors seek to push the narrative along one of the different segments by providing research or practice based information. The show of modesty expressed by preceding qualifications, and the self-confessed limitation of the claims, are balanced out by the certitude with which the findings are presented.

Since the creation of the drugs field by political fiat in the 1920s, there has been a process: A substance is identified by one of the dedicated drug control bureaucracies, subjected to a series of scientific analyses, and the results with recommendations are passed on for policy makers to decide upon. In some countries, a similar process is conducted at the national level, even though disconnects may occur between analysis and policy.[8]

They are scientific in the sense that they follow established protocols on what constitutes evidence, the establishing of facts, and the presentation of the information along genre-specific conventions. But built into the discourse is a mechanism to problematize the substance. Hence, we find few publications here on, say, the protective properties of khat use in sustaining communities through stressful situations, such as exile, war or social deprivation. Or how khat use in a socially sanctioned environment predicts abstinence from alcohol and other drugs. Nor do

[8] In the UK in 2008, the unpopular Gordon Brown government changed the status of cannabis against the advice of the ACMD experts. In Jamaica, the findings of the 2000 Ganja commission were discarded after warnings by the US ambassador about the consequences (Klein 2001).

we read about much about the positive attributes of khat as an appetite suppressant, for pain management, or for controlling fatigue.

In part this may be because journals like *Addiction*, *Drug and Alcohol Review*; *Drugs: Education*, *Prevention*, *Policy*; *the International Journal of Mental Health Systems*; *European Addiction Research*; *Social Science and Medicine* and so on, are targeted at practitioners, whose interest is in the effect and impact on their practice. It is primarily the problematic consequences of drug use that establish relevance for medical and paramedical professionals, and the efficacy of their interventions that creates interest. Once a substance has entered into the field, the discussion develops its own momentum. The key mechanism is analogy, made in the case of khat with amphetamine (Kalix 1987). After cathine and cathinone had been identified as the two active alkaloids with stimulant properties similar in chemical composition, a case could be made to treat it like amphetamine, which, in itself, had been brought under control because of its similarity to cocaine.

The authors of these papers participate in a social process that sets the frame for the discourse. Objectives for publication reach beyond the presentation of findings, including the desire to advance their careers and reputations as protagonists within a given domain of academic practice. But they also validate the pretensions of the discourse to which their contribution adds vigor. The considerable numbers of papers discussing the harmful properties of khat or its contribution to mental health conditions belong to, and are only publishable because, there is such a thing as a drugs discourse.

This discourse on drugs is not simply a response to the mind-altering, habit-forming quality of certain substances. It is because these qualities have been, first of all, defined as problematic, and secondly, because, having been found to be problematic, they become subject to state sponsored intervention. At issue, then, are not so much the risks and dangers presented by khat and its consumption, but the work of the scholars. What the discourse records instead is the diligence of researchers, the keen observation of health professionals, and the careful orchestration of macro measures by policy makers. It is, in short, a testimony of professional practice in relation to a particular set of problematized human behavior.

There are indeed suggestions that excessive khat use can be a contributing factor to mental health conditions, but such problems have been qualified by the confounding variables, principally PTSD, among affected populations (Kassim and Croucher 2006; Kroll et al. 2010; Odenwald et al. 2009, 2010). Questions about the relationship between uncertain residential status of asylum seekers, or sleep deprivation of people without permanent homes who are chronic stimulant users, remain unexplored. Such lines of inquiry fall strictly outside the professional interests of the discourse participants and are therefore abandoned.

Similar professional interests are paralleled in the discussion of somatic risks, where research suggests that khat use can be damaging to liver, kidney, and heart. There are contributing factors, including vulnerability, excessive use, and poor diet. The latter is particularly significant, as poor diet prevents the production of enzymes to metabolize the khat, leading to the accumulation of khat in the liver,

causing toxicity. These findings should prompt intervention that target risk groups with health information, screening for vulnerability, and the provision of services.

But the framing of khat as a drug, and the launch of a discourse within this discursive field, precludes such soft options. There are no service-related beneficiaries to lobby for health awareness campaigns, but there are drug treatment services reporting the "need" for khat support services. The policy process itself follows its own instrumental logic. The British Crime Survey, for instance, is a bi-annual household survey designed to establish levels of crime victimization but also of drug use prevalence. Amidst a range of controlled substances, researchers have included khat, even though it is as legal and as free of controls as a soft drink. In 2012, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs was assessing khat for the third time in 6 years, having twice before pronounced the risks of misuse not to warrant control.

It is also found in everyday discourses, particularly among immigrant communities. Some informants of Somali origin, for example, would insist that khat was not a drug and compared it to the pub. They did not mean its psychoactive effect, but that, like alcohol, khat was a culturally integrated, harmless form of leisure. Other informants, by contrast, emphasized that khat was a drug, and because it is a drug, it needs to be controlled.

Policy Decisions on the Status of Khat

That drift towards control, or rather the legal repression of people consuming and selling khat, is a logical conclusion, and built into the drugs discourse. By framing khat as a drug, the outcome is almost pre-determined. In the UK, where for decades a commonsense, laissez faire approach prevailed, authoritarianism is set to triumph. As so often with repressive policies, it is brought about by a bizarre coalition of unlike-minded partners. Prominent is the voice of Somali women suffering the depredations of their partners. It is alleged that their husbands, fathers, and sons waste funds from tight family budgets on khat, come home in a drug-fueled rage to beat spouse and children, and are too inchoate or unmotivated to find work. This presentation of self-inflicted, undeserving poverty dovetails with populist caricatures of asylum seekers. At a deeper level, it echoes a common disparagement of African masculinity.

It is not only figures from the conservative political establishment who are calling for controls on khat. They are joining common cause with the Islamic fundamentalists who reject the accommodation struck by Islamic teachers in Yemen and Ethiopia centuries ago and declare it to be haram (forbidden) to Moslems. One observer wryly remarked that campaigners for banning khat in the UK share both the appearance of long beards and hardened attitudes with the followers of Al Shabaab, the Al Quaida-linked faction of Islamic extremists who brutalize khat chewers and murder khat traders in Somalia (Ghelleh 2012).

A ban on khat would present Jihadist groups with the biggest political success in Britain for over a decade. Ironically, it has been facilitated by the bustling activism of conservative politicians, and a rightwing instinct to be tough on drugs. Moreover, the destruction of a lucrative export trade further undermines the fragile economy of East Africa and gives another distal spur to immigration. The question of trade-offs has to be recognized; a UK ban on khat imports will, by destroying economic opportunities, become another push factor to the population outflow from the region.

Control Regimes

In 15 EU countries, then, khat is a controlled substance. In the cases of Sweden and Norway, where controls were introduced in 1989, the reasoning derives from the scheduling cathinone and cathine on the recommendation of the WHO Expert Committee in 1985. A subsequent review (2002) concluded, however, that at the current state of knowledge the risks of harm from khat use did not merit further controls. Classifications and penalties vary, though it is not a police priority anywhere. Possession alone is an offense for quantities of 5 kg in Norway and 1 kg in Denmark. In Sweden, prison sentences have been imposed on khat "traffickers" importing quantities in excess of 200 kg. In the spring of 2011, the recreational use of khat was prohibited in the Netherlands. The UK followed two years later; up until then, it was imported as a vegetable and subject to a Value Added Tax. It could be purchased from corner shops, green grocers, and small supermarkets in the UK. Most notable, perhaps, were the vibrant khat cafes or mafrishes where khat could be purchased and consumed on the premises. Against the advice of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, the government decided to impose a ban. The impact on the Somali community, as well as on Kenyan exporters, is likely to be severe.

The Complexity of Drug Terminology

The complex causal chains of policy decisions made within a simple control paradigm reveal that the term "drug" is not a scientific category, but a construct, and that it triggers a chain of political actions that invariably lead to control. The term "control," as it is used in English, is, however, a misnomer. Experience with other substances shows that the opposite happens, as long as there are both market demand and willing supply chains.

It could be argued that the consequences of legal restrictions are more injurious to public health than non-intervention. Extrapolating from the experience with other controlled drugs, the following can be anticipated: (1) deterioration in the

quality of the product and adulteration, (2) the replacement of softer with harder drugs, and (3) criminalization of supply chains.

It is also fairly well established that the impact of criminalizing the culturally-entrenched customs of minorities leads to conflict with the law and aggressive policing. It furthermore fuels racism and alienation and sets up structural disadvantages for stigmatized communities. Some of these trends can be seen in countries that have banned khat, such as Canada. In Scandinavia, early prohibitions (Finland in 1981, Sweden and Norway in 1989; Denmark in 1993) have not led to a marked improvement in the social conditions of the Somali migrants. It appears that far from attracting Somalis from khat-ravaged countries, the migration flows the other way: towards the UK.

In response to the impending calamity, it is therefore suggested to consider alternative ways of framing the issue. Instead of describing khat as a drug, a term that neither its psychoactive effect nor any potential complications justify, a different category could be used, such as the German term *Genussmittel*. It should be acknowledged that consumption of khat, like the consumption of many other substances, entails risks to wellbeing. Chewing too much khat will affect one's sleeping pattern because it keeps the user awake. So will drinking too much coffee. These are not harms for which the police should be called out.

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