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# Khat in the Western Indian Ocean

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## Introduction

- 1 Khat cultivation and consumption originated in the region surrounding the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean. It consists of the young stems and leaves of *Catha edulis* Forssk. consumed for their stimulating properties in the Arabian Peninsula, East and Southern Africa, Madagascar, and now by diaspora communities around the world.<sup>1</sup> It is usually consumed by chewing, whereby – as with betel nut and coca – a plug of masticated leaves and stems is built up in the cheek. There is much ambiguity in the way khat is discussed, both in communities where it is consumed, and in the writings of researchers and policy-makers, and it has accreted a wide range of contradictory associations. Some relate the substance to peaceful gatherings, others to Somali militiamen; some praise it as the economic savior of African and Yemeni farmers, others see its consumption as a drain on family resources; defenders equate its effects with those of coffee, while detractors equate them with those of stronger substances.
- 2 In this article we aim to make sense of this ambiguous crop and its importance for the Western Indian Ocean region (construed broadly to include the Red Sea Littoral), providing an overview of its role there, and analysis of the key discourse that informs debate about the substance, and influences how it is perceived and treated. There are many local histories of khat within the region, and we demonstrate particularities that emerge in locations as varied as Madagascar, Kenya and Yemen. However, there is convergence too: while some of this derives from khat's botanical and pharmacological properties, especial attention will be given to global influences – in particular, the global rhetoric of the 'war on drugs' – that have affected the region over the last century or so and help prompt the same issues to be discussed from Meru in Kenya to Antsiranana in Madagascar. And, as khat has gone global thanks to migrants from the region who continue to consume in Europe, North America and even Australasia, similar discussions also occur in the likes of Manchester and Minneapolis. Our comparative historical and

cultural focus on khat thus provides an engaging case-study of the often fraught and contradictory relationship of plants and people, and shows how gaining a full understanding of such a relationship requires examining holistically a plant's material qualities and the complex contexts in which it is used by people. To begin with, however, we focus on the former, with an introduction to khat's botany, pharmacology and its effects on human health.

## Botany and pharmacology of khat: A Biocultural Perspective

- 3 *Catha edulis* favors an altitude between 1500-2450 metres, and is found wild throughout eastern and southern Africa and Arabia, growing over 25 metres tall. The farmed variety is kept much shorter through constant pruning (see Gebissa 2004: 15). Kennedy describes *Catha edulis* as follows: '[It] is an evergreen tree with a straight and slender bole and white bark. The serrated leaves, ovate-lanceolate to elliptical in shape, are generally between 50-100 mm. long and 30-50 mm. wide. The plant has small petaled white flowers of yellowish or greenish tone. In Yemen the trees range from 2 to 10 meters in height, and some of them are claimed to be 100 years old' (1987: 177). In much of the production zone, high esteem is given to old trees: this is certainly true in Kenya, where old trees are reckoned to produce the finest khat (Carrier 2007: 37-39). The actual harvested commodity varies from region to region in what is considered edible: in Yemen and Madagascar often just the leaves and tender stem tips are chewed, whereas in Kenya small leaves and bark of stems are used. The stems are a mixture of green and purple hues depending on the variety; small leaves are normally dark, becoming greener as they mature. They can taste bitter, although the better the khat, the sweeter the taste.
- 4 Chemical analysis of khat has revealed several alkaloids, the most potent being *cathinone*, which increases dopamine, serotonin and noradrenaline release in the brain, affecting the central nervous system in a manner similar to amphetamine, being calculated as 'about half as potent as amphetamine' (Zaghloul et al 2003: 80). The United Nations has classified this alkaloid within Schedule I of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances,<sup>2</sup> making it subject to stringent international control. *Cathinone* transforms into *cathine* as the harvested stems and leaves dry, a much less potent alkaloid that has been placed in Schedule III, among drugs and alkaloids not as susceptible to being subject to international control measures. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the effects of khat's isolated alkaloids, and the effects of khat itself. Consumed as it generally is, chewed over a period of 2-5 hours, the release of its active ingredients is slow relative to other routes of administration, and the effects not so intense. The difference between the effects of *cathinone* and *cathine* and those of the actual plant are acknowledged in the UN Convention, as while the alkaloids are scheduled, the plant remains unscheduled, and so not subject to international restriction.
- 5 Generally, chewing khat renders one alert and acts as a euphoriant. Having amphetamine-like characteristics, it absorbs consumers into whatever task is at hand, whether that be socializing with friends, working late into the night or revising for examinations: khat can be used in many different contexts. A crucial factor is its perishability (see Carrier 2005a). *Cathinone* rapidly degrades into *cathine* post-harvest, and

once khat dries it loses potency (though there is a growing international trade in dried khat). Wherever it is used, therefore, consumers usually want it as fresh as possible.

- 6 As consumers themselves point out, chewing khat can lead to adverse health consequences, especially if chewing comes at the expense of adequate sleep and nutrition. Kennedy mentions the research of Halbach for the World Health Organisation, which « asserts unequivocally that certain ailments are ‘common’ among qat chewers: gastric problems such as stomatitis, esophagitis, gastritis, constipation, malnutrition, and cirrhosis of the liver » (Kennedy 1987: 214). The most frequently mentioned side-effect is insomnia. Kennedy’s research team conducted extensive surveys in the Yemen on khat and health. The data collected led him to conclude that ‘the argument that qat is responsible for the health problems of Yemen is exaggerated, but it also shows that they are not without foundation’ (ibid: 231). More recent research suggests a link with cardiac problems, especially when heavy and chronic consumption is combined with other cardiovascular risk factors (Graziani et al: 772-3). Khat is also commonly linked to sexuality, being described both as an aphrodisiac and as inducing male impotence (Carrier 2007: 209-10).
- 7 According to medical terminology popularized in part by the World Health Organization in the 1950s, khat is not physically addicting; in fact, few drugs are technically physically addicting according to their classification. Opiates and alcohol are considered physically addicting because of the way they operate on the body’s chemistry and produce distinctive ‘withdrawal’ symptoms of chills, fever, vomiting, etc. Under these criteria, even cocaine is not considered physically addictive. This manner of placing cocaine and caffeine into the same category of ‘psychologically, \*but not physically+ addicting’ substances means that deciding how dangerous a drug is to individuals and society requires much analysis and social judgment.
- 8 Regarding khat, there is evidence of a mild withdrawal syndrome after heavy use, and consumers can feel drowsy the morning after a chewing session (the khat ‘hangover’ is known as *bablass* in Kenya) and sometimes experience bad dreams as the alkaloids leave their systems. However, research suggests there is only a low level risk of dependency upon khat (Graziani et al 2008: 771). Social scientists further problematise the issue of addiction. Weir (1985) notes that Yemenis stop using khat when they go overseas, for example, without any negative consequences beyond a mild craving: indeed, her whole work critiques notions held by many outside scholars that Yemenis spend time and money on khat due to physical ‘addiction’. To her, adding a social and cultural dimension to analysis of Yemeni khat consumption is essential. The ‘qat party’ is an important social institution for Yemenis, where friendships are strengthened, business contacts are forged and political issues debated. Given the foregoing, it is unsurprising that so many people attend such parties, even those who are not actually all that keen on khat. Recent research in Madagascar suggests a similar picture: heavy chewers claimed they missed it and even craved it when they did not use it, but did not experience physical withdrawal symptoms. One man, who used to chew it on weekends or on days off, said that the impulse to chew was strong enough that he found he had to come in to work on weekends to remove himself from a setting that would make him want to chew: as with all such substances, context is a crucial factor in consumption and has to be brought into analysis. Furthermore, the historical trajectories khat has followed are also important, since they shed light on the broader framework of khat use and the ambiguities that surround it today.

## A brief history of khat in the region and beyond

- 9 While khat is indigenous to eastern and southern Africa, there is debate as to the origin of its cultivation and the consequent diffusion of the practice. Kennedy (1987: 60-62) notes that it is reasonable to assume that it was first introduced to Ethiopia in the eleventh century (it seems likely that knowledge of khat's stimulant properties may have arisen sporadically throughout the region and led to some harvesting of wild trees). Although most writers accept that khat came to Yemen from Ethiopia, Kennedy proposes that there is evidence that it went in the opposite direction. In any case, he notes that khat was probably used recreationally on a limited basis by the 12<sup>th</sup> century in both countries, becoming widespread by the 14<sup>th</sup>.

### Khat in Yemen

- 10 Chewing khat has been an important social ritual in Yemen for hundreds of years, mostly among men, but also among women, and there is much cultivation within the country to support demand. Weir (1985) describes well the key social role played by the Yemeni khat party, a role so strong that even those not keen on khat's taste or effects find themselves obliged to attend. Academic accounts identify khat as embedded within a centuries-long tradition of Yemeni poetry—much of which (but not all) is laudatory (Wagner 2005, Weir 1985: 66, Caton 1993). These authors report that in the past Sufi mystics embraced khat as a divine gift because it facilitates a sense of union with God. Wagner (2005) reports that Sufi poets debated the merits of khat versus coffee as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Poems endowed these stimulants with medical and supernatural properties and associated them with strongly positive affective and aesthetic characteristics. Wagner (*ibid*: 24) quotes from a poem dated 1699 (second brackets in original):
- 11 Whenever I wanted my sight to rise to the sky, to existence, [khat] served as my stairs, [Allowing me] to cross the stars is one of its merits...
- 12 Wagner argues that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries this poetic debate was mainly playful, but that in the twentieth century poetic exchanges became serious, as the question of khat versus coffee resonated with discourses of modernity, development, national and Arab Muslim identity, and participation in the global economy.

### Khat in Ethiopia

- 13 Khat cultivation and consumption certainly have a long tradition in Ethiopia. It is mainly produced in the Hererge highlands in eastern Ethiopia, which borders northern Somalia – formerly the British Protectorate of Somaliland (Gebissa 2004:36-37). Gebissa (*ibid*: 76) quotes Richard Burton on khat in Ethiopia among the Harari in 1853: it is considered '[f]ood for the Pious, and literati remark that it has the singular properties of enlivening the imagination, clearing the ideas, cheering the heart, diminishing sleep, and taking the place of food.' Khat use in Ethiopia increased as Oromo pastoralists became sedentary farmers and began converting to Islam (Gebissa 2004: 52). Gebissa (*ibid*: 52) writes:
- 14 By 1910 khat-chewing had become a widespread practice among the Islamized Oromo, among whom the leaf quickly attained social, cultural and religious importance< Non-

Muslims, however, considered khat-chewing to be a sign of conversion to the Islamic faith.

- 15 Nowadays, khat use has spread throughout Ethiopian society, although it still has a strong association with Muslims, and it has become one of the nation's major cash crops: Ethiopian khat is sold nationally, regionally and globally, reaching as far as the UK and the USA (Anderson *et al* 2007).

## Khat in Somalia

- 16 Somali populated regions close to Ethiopia also have a long tradition of khat consumption, certainly a tradition that predates khat's more recent popularity in southern Somalia. Indeed, British concern at consumption in the Somaliland Protectorate led them to attempt one of the earliest pieces of legislation against khat in 1921 (see: *The Laws of the Somaliland Protectorate*, London, 1923: 291-2). As for southern Somalia, Cassanelli writes that while southerners once viewed khat-chewing as 'the somewhat eccentric and amusing habit of the northern nomads and traders', the idea spread in Mogadishu and elsewhere in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the substance offered protection against cholera and dysentery (Cassanelli 1986: 240); according to Cassanelli, this helped boost its popularity. Research conducted in the early 1980s in Hargeisa and Mogadishu showed that while khat was commonly chewed in both cities, the proportion of habitual consumers was still higher in the northern city of Hargeisa: 55 per cent of those surveyed in the latter, and 18 per cent of those surveyed in Mogadishu (*ibid*: 250). In Djibouti, formerly French Somaliland, khat is incredibly popular too (Gebissa 2004).
- 17 Throughout much of the world there is now an association of khat with Somalis. Partly this is due to the sensationalized media coverage of the collapse of the Somali state, which gave khat a prominent role. Hartley, a journalist in Mogadishu in the early 1990s, writes that '[o]ne of the common clichés produced by journalists and the US military at the time was that Somalia's war was fuelled by qat and that 'qat-crazed gunmen' were destroying the nation' (Hartley 2004: 236). Khat has become widely known in the West recently thanks to the great increase in the numbers of Somalis living in Europe, North America and Australasia. Newspaper reports in countries like the UK almost solely focus on khat use amongst the Somali diaspora, even though Yemenis and Ethiopians also consume khat there.
- 18 Much to the chagrin of Somalis who oppose khat, the substance is seen as a 'Somali-thing'.

## Khat in Kenya

- 19 Another major production and consumption zone is Kenya, especially in a mountain range to the northeast of Mount Kenya, the Nyambene Hills, where it is cultivated by the Bantu-speaking Meru (Carrier 2007a, 2005a, Goldsmith 1999, Hjort 1974). Written accounts of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century show that khat was already being cultivated and consumed in the Nyambenes in pre-colonial times, while Meru oral testimony suggests that cultivation began at a much older date, testimony supported by the extreme age of some of the khat trees. These old trees provide a symbolic association with ancestors and form an important part of cultural identity, an identity strengthened by its great economic importance for the Nyambenes. Khat is also used in many ceremonies,

including marriage negotiations and circumcisions (Carrier 2005a: 540, 2005b: 208-209), a feature noted and tolerated by colonial authorities despite the disdain with which many officials viewed the substance (Anderson and Carrier forthcoming). While khat is a culturally integrated indigenous crop on the one hand, it has also become increasingly popular beyond Meru, in rural areas as well as urban centers. This trade developed over the last century, inspired by entrepreneurial Meru, Somalis and Arabs, many of the latter having previous knowledge of the substance through Indian Ocean connections. Furthermore, it is now an economically important international cash crop: several aircraft take supplies from Nairobi to Mogadishu and elsewhere in Somalia each day (Carrier 2005a), while it is also flown to the UK and Holland legally, and from there to the US, Canada, and elsewhere in Europe illegally.

## Khat in Madagascar

- 20 In Madagascar, the history of khat cultivation and consumption dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Clouet 1972: 593). Throughout the north of Madagascar, people have associated khat with people of Yemeni descent, referred to locally as ‘Arabou’, and Molet (1979: 212) states that khat ‘n’est connu et consommé que dans l’extrême-nord de [Madagascar], par imitation des Yéménites’. This migration of Yemenis to Madagascar probably coincides with the development of the port in the city of Aden in Yemen after the First World War (Weir 1985: 19). These Yemenis brought khat with them and planted it on a small scale in kitchen gardens. The first to grow it commercially, according to interviews, were the Creoles—white farmers of French descent who came over from Ile de la Reunion around the turn of the century—who established fields on Amber Mountain, particularly near the colonial town of Joffreville. They have maintained a strong cultural identity and some degree of social isolation, yet there has also been significant intercultural mixing. When the French were forced to leave the country in the mid-1970s amidst a socialist revolution, others took over the farms. The oldest and most productive establishment on Amber Mountain is owned by a family that bought land from a Creole family of mixed Yemeni, Malagasy, and Creole descent. According to Minguoy, while farmers in the area once survived well growing vegetables, after the French departed, ‘ce marché s’écroule faute de clientèle’ (2006), and many took to growing khat instead. And supporting this growth in production has been a growth in consumption: in the past 20 or so years khat-chewing has gained significant popularity among the broader Malagasy population—particularly among those identifying as coastal peoples, or ‘côtiers’.

## Khat elsewhere

- 21 Khat is not restricted to the above countries, however: Beckerleg’s research reveals its substantial history in Uganda (Beckerleg 2009), while Hirst documents the usage of wild khat by Xhosa in the Eastern Cape (Hirst 2003). Consumption also continues in Tanzania despite its illegality there (Carrier 2007: 242). And, as mentioned above, khat has diffused throughout the Western world, where it is consumed in its leafy form—often by immigrants from Somalia, Yemen, or Kenya. Khat has gone global.



## Key contemporary issues in comparison

- 22 As the foregoing overview suggests, the history of khat in the Western Indian Ocean region can be sub-divided into several specific histories. The trajectories it followed in particular areas are divergent in many respects; and today, khat farming, trade and use differ markedly in, say, Kenya, as opposed to Madagascar. Each region has its own localised relationship with the crop. There are variations in the way it is grown (in Kenya it is grown as a large tree; in Madagascar more as a shrub); in when it is consumed (in Kenya there appears no particular pattern, while in Madagascar consumption tends to take place between lunch and supper); and in the degree of concern shown towards its consumption.
- 23 There is also much convergence. Much relates to how khat was diffused throughout the region, especially the influence of Yemeni migrants who settled in East Africa and Madagascar. Their influence on khat culture is still felt linguistically, most obviously in the word *takssin* – used in Kenya for the plug of khat stored in the cheek while chewing – and *yazzina* – a word used in Madagascar for khat. Both words are derived from the Arabic word for ‘to store’, in reference to the plug. Khat’s botanical and pharmacological properties also lead to convergence, given that khat prefers certain climates and soils, and that the chief alkaloid responsible for its effects is ephemeral, and so demands a very swift trading network.
- 24 Another convergence derives from khat’s incorporation into the global rhetoric of the ‘war on drugs’. In this rhetoric, khat is conflated with other – usually prohibited – substances, and subject to campaigns to have it prohibited in turn. This forms the context in which proliferate polarized debates where khat is praised as a socially-cohesive marker of cultural identity, economic miracle and harmless stimulant, and demonised as an impediment to development and as a social menace. Such are the key issues and themes in the social life of khat.
- 25 This next section takes a comparative perspective, examining in particular, but not exclusively, Kenya and Madagascar, the latter being a khat production and consumption zone that has received little attention previously. The themes of comparison include: (a) perceptions of khat by locals, who tend to view it either as a positive source of cultural identity or as socially disruptive; (b) the spread of khat consumption and fear thereof; (c) the effects of khat on local economies; and (d) issues of legalization, the war on drugs, and khat’s association with terrorism.

## The social and cultural validation of khat: identity, integration and contestation

- 26 As we shall see below (section d), much that is published on khat, especially that appearing in the popular press, refers to its production and consumption as a social ‘problem’. There is a counter-narrative, however, focusing on khat’s positive social and cultural role. Such a narrative is promulgated by consumers, producers and traders, and by some outside researchers for whom khat consumption is seen as playing a positive role in terms of strengthening identity and forging social links.



- 27 In Kenya, approval of khat seems most strong in the area where it is most intensively produced: the Nyambene Hills. Clearly, the monetary worth of the crop gives the Meru inhabitants good economic reasons to approve of it (see below), and yet there is more to their approval than this: khat, known in Kenya as ‘miraa,’ is incorporated into their cultural heritage. Discourse concerning miraa’s cultural importance is well-formed in the Nyambenes, and especially emphasizes khat’s use within certain ceremonial contexts (Carrier 2007: 199-204). These include: the preliminaries to circumcision, where boys take khat along to elders to let them know that they are ready for the rite of passage, and the preliminaries to marriage, where a prospective son-in-law takes khat along to his prospective bride’s parents to request permission to marry her. In both contexts, the khat must be of the highest quality from the oldest trees – known as *mbaine* after an ancient Meru age-set – and tied in a special bundle known as *ncoolo* that is prepared differently to marketed khat. Instead of being tied up with banana leaves and fiber as in marketed khat, bundles are tied up in banana leaves with yam runners, and are invested with various symbolic meanings depending how the yam runners are knotted (Carrier 2007: 202). In all such usage, *ncoolo* bundles are offered by junior men to those senior, suggestive of a gerontocratic hierarchy maintaining elders as wielders of power in theory, if not in practice.
- 28 Such discourse has proved powerful for the Meru, and the British certainly were much impressed by khat’s ceremonial significance during colonial times, to the degree that though attempts were made to ban the substance in the rest of the country, they were happy to let ceremonial usage continue in Meru. Such discourse is not just a rhetorical device, however: it reflects the admiration that Meru of the Nyambenes have for the commodity. And for many people beyond the Nyambenes, khat is so associated with the region that it has become a diacritic marker of Meru identity.
- 29 Meru emphasize khat’s role in inducing peaceful social interaction, and contrast this with the often fraught sociability induced by alcohol. Indeed, khat’s role in facilitating social interaction is emphasized within Kenya and beyond. This comes out especially strongly in the Yemeni literature, notably in the work of Shelagh Weir (1985). She describes Yemeni khat parties as rather formal affairs with ‘a structural identity’ and name of their own (1985: 144). At such parties even seating positions have social significance: ‘the seating order reflects and affirms, to a greater or lesser degree, the ranking of the participants’ (ibid: 133). And such parties are not merely recreational: as well as for relaxation, one attends to strike business deals, expand one’s social networks, and even to meet local politicians. In short, the khat party is an important social institution.
- 30 Amongst diaspora communities originating in the region, khat consumption is also seen as a practice that maintains cultural identity and social solidarity. Indeed, it even reaches Australia where some researchers report it ‘is proving to be important as an identity marker. Through their use of *khat* East Africans are able to assert their desire to preserve distinct identities within a culturally diverse community’ (Stevenson *et al* 1996: 80). For UK Somalis, khat offers nostalgic links back to the Horn, as consumers chew watching videos of events back home, or listening to Somali music: indeed, the sights, sounds and smells of a chewing session in the UK appear little different to those of Mogadishu, even though the temperature outside is much cooler. Chewing sessions there are full of banter, serious discussions, friendships being formed, just as in Kenya, Madagascar and Somalia.
- 31 Yet not everyone sees khat as culturally and socially valuable. In Somalia, Madagascar, and Kenya, many see khat as a source of social discord and as something that should be

culturally disdained and politically discouraged. In the diaspora, much opposition to khat comes from within Somali communities, especially from family organizations who blame khat for marital break-ups (as men spend money and time beyond the family while chewing), violence (as chewers have short tempers when they lack sleep after a heavy session), and unemployment; khat is also held in contempt by Somalis who have embraced a more strict form of Islam (Carrier 2008). Quite how responsible khat really is for such social ills is debatable and vociferously debated, but many sincerely believe it to be socially disruptive. In short, while many celebrate khat as socially cohesive and compare it favorably to other stimulants and intoxicants, there are others – both in the diaspora and within its traditional zones of consumption – who disdain it as divisive. And amongst the latter, there is a great fear that khat use is spreading, particularly amongst the young.

### **'Even the young are chewing': anxiety over the spread of consumption**

- 32 Khat consumption is rising. From being restricted to certain geographical areas and to certain segments of society, khat travels far and wide geographically and socially. This rise in consumption has met with great concern locally and globally. This concern especially focuses on a perceived rise in consumption amongst those viewed as vulnerable or for whom it may be culturally inappropriate: the youth and women. An association of khat with youth is now widespread, and as they are seen as susceptible to such substances, the perception that 'even the young are chewing' is the source of moral panic, and often contrasted with models of restrained 'traditional' consumption. Also, in Madagascar, in a survey of people generally sympathetic to khat chewing, a significant number responded that women should not chew, and many were concerned that it took them from their daily homemaking responsibilities; women consumers are often portrayed negatively in Kenya and Uganda too, sometimes being labeled sex workers (Beckerleg 2008).
- 33 In Kenya, concern over youthful consumption was evident from the earliest written accounts of consumption in the Nyambenes. These accounts were written by the explorers and hunters Chanler (1896) and Neumann (1982 [1898]), who visited the Nyambenes at different times during the 1890s. Chanler (1896: 190) mentioned that Nyambene elders saw khat as something to be withheld from the young: 'The young men among the natives are not allowed to eat it, the reason assigned for this restriction being that if the young men were allowed freely to indulge in this plant, they would be apt to stay awake at night, and be tempted, under the cover of darkness, to gratify desires which the light of the day forces them to curb.'
- 34 This idea of an earlier restriction of khat to Meru elders became key during colonial times. For some colonial officers, the traditional use of khat by elders was acceptable; it was its increasing use by Meru youth and by anyone elsewhere that alarmed them. Various measures to shore up a restriction of khat to Meru elders were attempted, none of which proved successful: instead, khat's popularity throughout the colony increased. Nowadays, while Meru often still speak of khat once being the preserve of elders, for many – predominantly male – youth, khat has become *poa*, the Kiswahili word for 'cool' (Carrier 2005b), and a *takssin* has become as validated as other accoutrements of 'cool' such as hip hop, reggae, brand name clothing and *sheng*. The latter is a mix of languages

spoken particularly by the young that exhibits much linguistic playfulness in, for example, mixing Kiswahili grammatical structures with English words. And khat features prominently in *sheng* vocabulary: for example, the *sheng* word for khat's effects is *handas*, which is also formed into a verb with a Kiswahili structure, *kuhandasika* (i.e. 'to feel *handas*'). Khat is also the stimulant of choice for touts and drivers working on *matatus*, public service vehicles that blare out the latest hits on stereos and seem mobile representations of Kenyan youth culture. Khat not only helps such workers cope with demanding schedules, but also fits the image many of them try to convey.

- 35 For Kenyan youth, chewing sessions do not conform to the Yemeni model of fairly structured occasions: instead, most sessions take place in informal settings, often watching football or relaxing in a café. There is much bravado surrounding its consumption, and it is common to hear young chewers boast how they chew *mpaka che* ('until dawn' in Kiswahili). For those with work, chewing tends to fit around work hours, and is often limited to the weekend: indeed, employment seems to be a major factor in when and how often people chew, and the notion that Somalis in the diaspora chew more than they did in Somalia is probably explained by high rates of unemployment in the diaspora rather than the breakdown of 'traditional' cultural restraints, a hypothesis suggested by some (Griffiths *et al* 1997). For others, chewing can fill any time they have free providing they can afford some khat (and some varieties are cheap in Kenya) or obtain some from friends. At weekends, sessions often last into the night, sometimes accompanied by alcoholic drinks. Kenyan consumption patterns are varied, unlike in Yemen, Djibouti and Madagascar where there seems to exist a more or less set time for chewing khat, even for the young.
- 36 In northern Madagascar, khat is now similarly associated with the young, although until the early 1990s, consumption was mainly by men of Yemeni 'Arab' descent. When people of Yemeni origin were asked why they chewed it, often they said merely that it is 'Arab' custom. Others mentioned the feeling of alertness it provided and some the enjoyment of chewing with friends. Many concur that the taxi drivers were among the first non-'Arabs' to chew it, in order to keep themselves awake while working at night. Today, people often chew it in groups over several hours in the afternoon. People chew it anywhere from once to several times a week, either in friends' homes or in outside public areas. Some chew individually and this is not stigmatized, as it reportedly is in Yemen where there is great social pressure to chew in groups (Weir 1985).
- 37 As khat chewing gradually caught on two main categories of men began chewing: workers with stable incomes and *barbo*: youth reputed to be shiftless and in search of distraction. *Barbo* usually work in the informal economy, often with the stated goal of making enough money to purchase more khat. Some are students, but few have stable employment. Most are not practicing Muslims and drink beer after spitting out their wad of khat to 'kill the [stimulant] effect' (*mamono ny dosy*). This contrasts with the Yemeni chewers, generally practicing Muslims who drink cold water or milk while chewing. *Barbo* often chew khat in groups on the street—playing cards, sitting quietly, or conversing.
- 38 *Barbo* are regarded with suspicion and vilified, especially by those who have received more Western education, who are not originally from the north, and who are more Western-oriented in general. Many of these middle-to-upper class Malagasy don't know how *barbo* afford khat and suspect them of stealing. Ethnographic interviews reveal that this is not common, however. They appear 'lazy' because they chew through the afternoon, when most people work. Within communities where khat chewers reside,

there is little concern that khat chewing leads to criminal or other socially disruptive behavior. Because of their contentedness to work in the informal sector or not work at all rather than taking on a steady job, *barbo* are suspected of being a barrier to economic development. It is more likely, however, that there are just not enough jobs to absorb available manual labor, or enough professional jobs to encourage youth to attend school longer. Perceptions of khat consumption tend to follow class lines, with the working poor supporting the khat trade and the middle and upper classes treating it with disdain.

- 39 For the youth in Madagascar, khat chewing appears to have much the same cachet as in Kenya. There is a similar range of slang expressions associated with the substance, often used with much bravado. For example, *yazzina* has come to be used by youth to refer to khat and its consumption and effects, while *boulitska* refers to the wad of khat stored in the cheek. The latter term is derived from the French word *boule*. There also appears to be some bravado in the size of *takssin* in Madagascar: while in Kenya these tend to be discreet, around Antsiranana, huge specimens can be seen. This style of consumption is reminiscent of Yemeni consumption, evident from photographs published in Weir's book (1985). Again reminiscent of Yemeni consumption is the timing of chewing sessions in Madagascar. Most khat supplies are sold by midday in Antsiranana, which in itself limits when it is consumed as it cannot be bought later in the day and most chew it as soon as they have bought it. But even amongst youth there seems little urge to chew 'until dawn', despite there being bravado in its consumption. Young unemployed men met in Antsiranana in 2006 often spent their afternoons chewing – if they had the funds to afford it – but none thought it right to chew beyond 7pm: at that time: one should spit out the khat and eat a full meal.
- 40 Despite differences between consumption in Kenya and Madagascar, there is much convergence: khat, a commodity validated as 'cool' – perhaps because it is not 'respectable' in wider society – is chewed widely by youth with few formal work opportunities, who then become associated with it, so making it even less appealing to more 'respectable' types. And its consumption by youth leads to moral panic, becoming symbolic of the apparent decline of former restraints and the malaise of modernity.

### Production and effects on local economies: hegemony of western economic development model

- 41 Another key issue concerns economic development as khat production and trade is now a booming industry, and many rely on the commodity for their livelihood. In Yemen and Ethiopia, khat production has been in competition with coffee, and farmers often prefer khat because it requires less work and yields a much higher profit than coffee (Carrier 2007, Weir 1985, Kennedy 1987, Gebissa 2004:73).<sup>3</sup> Cassanelli (1986) noted that the acreage devoted to khat doubled in Ethiopia in the 1950s and increased dramatically in Yemen in the 1960s, when the revolution of 1962 interrupted coffee exports. Gebissa (2004: 66-70) recounts that khat served as a solution to land scarcity in Ethiopia in a region that experienced population increase, land concentration, and government price controls lowering the price of coffee. Weir (1985) wrote that production of khat increased further in Yemen in the 1970s when demand increased as Yemenis went to work in oil-rich Arab nations and began sending back remittances.
- 42 In Kenya, the Nyambene Meru had already developed a sophisticated cultivation technique for *Catha edulis* – training the trees to grow into a shape that provides plenty of

easily harvestable stems – by the time the British first arrived. While khat grows wild in much of Kenya, and is now cultivated in other areas, the Meru have a virtual monopoly, a monopoly protected by the prevalent perception that khat grown in the Nyambenes is superior thanks to Meru know-how and the types of soil and age of trees found in the district. In colonial times, the British also consolidated this monopoly by seeking to legally restrict cultivation to Meru (Anderson and Carrier *forthcoming*). They also attempted to control and formalise the trade in the 1950s through taxation and cooperative-style marketing; the latter proved a highly ineffective mechanism for trading such a perishable commodity, and the flexible networks of farmers and traders that had emerged before the British became involved proved much more effective, and continue to do so. As in Ethiopia and Yemen, khat generates much revenue, both for the Nyambene district, and for Kenya more generally. As well as a thriving national market for the product, Kenyan khat is exported far afield. In the Nyambenes many other crops are grown, including formal cash crops such as tea, coffee and cotton: these crops cannot compete with khat, a crop that receives little direct government involvement.

- 43 As khat is produced from trees – often quite large in size – in the Nyambenes rather than smaller shrubs, the small holder farmers who cultivate it can intercrop: khat trees provide protective shade for both cash and subsistence crops (Carrier 2007: chapter one). Its cultivation is therefore not always at the expense of other crops. Trees are harvested every three weeks or so, depending on rainfall and the type being harvested: Nyambene khat is divided into a myriad of varieties distinguished on account of where in the district they were harvested, where on the tree the stems grew, the length of the stems and the style of presentation. These varieties differ much in taste and effect, and fetch varied prices (Carrier 2006). In fact, a sophisticated industry has emerged in the Nyambenes, aided by an equally sophisticated transport system, providing on and off farm income for many in the Nyambenes, and many transporters and traders beyond. While those making a fortune from the crop are few – though they exist, especially amongst those exporting khat abroad – it provides greater rewards than non-indigenous crops such as tea, coffee and cotton (Goldsmith 1994). Farmers get better prices in general, and obtain more frequent payments unlike formal cash crops, for which payments are received in lump sums at certain times of the year; the district also benefits from cess raised from the crop and its trade. Profits potentially made from the crop have led to tension, most notably in 1999 when conflict erupted between some Meru and Somali over perceived exploitation of producers by the latter (Goldsmith 1999; Carrier 2007). Despite such tension and other concerns such as the use of child labour in its harvesting (Carrier 2007: chapter one), khat has been an economic lifeline for the district in the last hundred years or so, one that developed almost in spite of government measures rather than because of them.
- 44 As in many other places where khat is grown, it tends in Madagascar to be cultivated by small-holders (most farming under 2 hectares) and distributed through small-scale traders, though some farmers grow or trade significantly more than others. A well-maintained khat field must be weeded about once a year, but other than that, labor input is minimal, and so it is a good investment for just about any household that has available land. Khat plants become harvestable between 4-5 years after planting, and then the new growth on the ends of the branches is removed once or twice a week, since people consume only the most tender leaves. Many households supply all labor from planting to weeding to harvesting (and sometimes even to selling wholesale). Some larger land owners take on live-in workers to help with khat and other farm labor. Usually these are

young male migrant workers who have come from the south and live with a land-owning family for a few years before moving on. Absentee land owners hire people to watch fields for them. Small-holder households with little labor available sell to traders who harvest as well. For the traders, this extra work ensures they get the best quality khat. People all along the khat commodity chain are aware of differences between rainy and dry season quantities—and prices. In the dry season, mostly only irrigated khat makes it to market, and the price is double or triple what it is in the dry season. In the rainy season, even the rain-fed khat grows well and yields an abundant harvest. Khat provides income for many rural and urban households in northern Madagascar: it is referred to as the north's 'green gold,' allowing some rural households to afford vehicles and satellite dishes—generally unheard of in this country.

- 45 Despite khat being such a valuable commodity, throughout the region it is treated with great ambivalence by governments. Khat earns much foreign exchange for Ethiopia and Kenya, while even in countries ecologically unsuited to producing it but where it is consumed in vast quantities – Somalia and Djibouti – its trade offers opportunities for employment as importers, transporters and retailers, and brings money to the government from import taxes. Within Kenya there are similar contrasts between the zone of production and zones of consumption. Particularly in northern Kenya there is concern that so much of the little money circulating is spent on khat; such concern is largely countered as many local retailers – mostly female – rely on the commodity for their income (Carrier 2007). Governments in the region, aside from collecting tax and foreign exchange, offer little help to the industry: instead, they either seem to be outright hostile to the trade or remain aloof from it. While local discourse opposed to khat helps discourage governments from aiding khat production and trade, it is the history of colonial attempts to ban khat, the hegemony of a Westernstyle development model, and the global rhetoric of the 'war on drugs' appear most powerful in this respect.

### Legalization issues: Economic development, war on drugs, and terrorism

- 46 While khat itself has never been under international control, individual governments since the colonial era have struggled—often in vain—to prohibit khat production and/or consumption. Such attempts have to be set in the context of a growing international concern with psychoactive substances that began with opiates in the late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and expanded to include more and more substances.<sup>4</sup> Prohibition became the default solution to problems associated with such substances, and as a consequence, prohibition has been hailed as the answer to the 'khat problem'.
- 47 The earliest colonial attempt to control khat was effected by the British in the Protectorate of Somaliland in 1921. They banned cultivation of khat within the territory, and those wishing to consume legally had to possess a license.<sup>5</sup> These measures were quickly undermined by a vibrant black market the British could not contain and so was dropped.<sup>6</sup> By midcentury further measures were instigated to combat a substance now seen by many as having serious negative health and social effects: Kervingant (1959), writing about French Somaliland (later Djibouti) for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, claimed it causes increased susceptibility to disease, numbed mental faculties, and family breakdown as members may turn to begging, theft or prostitution to satisfy cravings. The author concludes with the recommendation that it is 'desirable that it



- should be abolished, and for this purpose measures for the gradual prohibition of the use of khat will shortly be adopted in the territory' (1959: unpaginated). Gebissa (2004) reports that the French government in Djibouti first implemented policies to curb khat imports and consumption in 1952, but that consumption actually tripled in three years.
- 48 In the British Protectorate and Colony of Aden, which later became South Yemen, people consumed imported khat in great quantities. A ban on khat imports to Aden Colony (but not Aden Protectorate) in 1957 caused a flurry of reactions not only in Aden but also in Ethiopia, Aden's major supplier. A little over a year later, the ban was revoked because it had failed to prohibit consumption and caused the government to lose much revenue (Brooke 1960).
- 49 In Kenya, colonial authorities tried to control khat through a number of Ordinances in the 1940s and 1950s: these initially introduced a permit system for trade and consumption within Kenya, but then later attempted to prohibit it completely in northern Kenya where it was seen as most problematic. While such measures proved ineffective, other colonial officials, notably in Meru, pushed for an export drive to Aden to cash in on the crop (Anderson and Carrier, *forthcoming*): khat was caught between the aim of suppressing consumption, and that of promoting trade. From all this, it is clear that the legality of khat is shaped not only by social concerns, but also by economic concerns that are quite independent of khat's drug effects. Gebissa writes: 'Health reasons were cited to justify the [1957 ban in Aden] ban, but contemporary sources agree that the main reason was to prevent hard currency from draining into Ethiopia' (2004: 90).
- 50 Wherever khat consumption was banned during the colonial era, the result was not reduced khat use but rather loss of government income from taxes and from increased anti-smuggling expenditures. A fascinating dynamic is that the major supplier of khat – Ethiopia – was not a colony, and so its economy could not be controlled, nor could its economic gains help any Western empire to grow. Ethiopia had only been under European rule for a brief period from 1936-1941, when it was controlled by the Italian fascists.
- 51 After independence, during the socialist era in 1972, the British-educated Prime Minister of Yemen launched a campaign against khat that fell just short of banning it. Kennedy (1987: 21) surmises that this probably contributed to his political downfall three months later. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister was not the only one who disliked khat and found it an impediment to development. Even today, despite khat's national popularity, some educated Yemenis still campaign against it (Cooper 2000). The president himself has an ambivalent position on khat (Kandela 2000), and at times the media announces him praising khat (Ward 1999) and at others denouncing it (Cooper 2000).
- 52 Post-independence Somalia also banned khat in 1983. While a government pamphlet cited damage to the national economy and the social fabric as the main reasons for the ban, khat's association with government opposition, and 'the sense that qat was contributing to the undermining of the economy and, by extension, of the regime, may have been a major factor in the decision to ban it' (Cassanelli 1986: 251-2). This ban caused great resentment in northern Somalia towards the southern-based government (Dool 1998: 46), while allies of President Barre were allegedly allowed to smuggle in khat then sold 'by individuals from clans supporting the government' in Kismayu and Mogadishu (Goldsmith 1997: 476). The collapse of the Somali state in 1989 put an end to the charade of a ban, and khat became a significant revenue generator for 'warlords,' prompting some to label it a 'conflict good' (Cooper 2002: 936). More recently, Islamists who took control



temporarily of Mogadishu, Kismayu and other towns in 2006 attempted to restrict khat: their announcement that khat would be prohibited during Ramadan prompted demonstrations in Kismayu.<sup>7</sup>

- 53 However, it is not just in the traditional zones of consumption where khat prohibition has been enshrined in law: khat is now illegal in the US (since the early 1990s), Canada (since the late 1990s), and much of Europe (with the exception of the UK and Holland). In the US khat became illegal because it contains *cathine* and *cathinone*, which had been added to the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1988: the US, as a signatory, scheduled the substances (*cathinone* as Schedule I, the most restrictive category), and clarified on the Federal Register that by scheduling khat's constituent alkaloids, khat itself was being so scheduled. This was not a necessary step: in the UK the alkaloids face similar restrictions, while khat in plant form remains legal (as of 2009). In making this step, the US appears to have taken account of evidence concerning khat's potential for harm, evidence likely colored at the time by the media portrayal of khat in coverage of the collapse of the Somali state. Such an association with conflict still lingers in the US, thanks, in part, to the film *Black Hawk Down* which referenced the substance, and to a recent suggestion that khat funds terrorism. This suggestion, apparently based on highly dubious evidence, has been promulgated in the US by Harvey Kushner, a conservative college professor whose book *Holy War on the Home Front* (2004) features a chapter on khat. Kushner's 'evidence' seems to merely be the following syllogism: khat is mainly traded and used globally by Muslims from 'failed states'; we don't know where the money from khat goes; therefore khat is funding Islamic terror organizations.
- 54 There is thus much suspicion of khat in Western countries: it as a drug associated with immigrants, and is either banned or regarded with such jaundiced eyes that the threat of prohibition is ever present. This is so in the UK where a number of campaigns to ban khat have been launched, and where newspapers often conflate it with stronger substances: for example, *The Guardian* ran a piece on khat in 2004 with the headline 'This has the same effect as ecstasy and cocaine... And it's legal' above a photograph of a bundle. Such campaigns have resulted in the government conducting research into whether khat should be prohibited, and one such piece of research led the government in 2006 to conclude that a ban would not be appropriate.<sup>8</sup> However, more campaigning has led the government to ask for further research on the substance with a view to a ban, while a shadow minister from the opposition Conservative party has stated that her party would ban khat if they win the next election.<sup>9</sup> What makes the campaign especially powerful is that those driving it forward are Somalis themselves: effective lobbying by Somali groups who perceive khat as an impediment to Somali integration into life in the UK is the crucial aspect of the khat debate in Britain. These groups make their case in meetings with local MPs, in media articles, through petitions, online blogs and even on *Youtube*; their power should not be underestimated, as such groups played a role in bans in Canada and Scandinavia.<sup>10</sup>
- 55 In Kenya and Ethiopia, where the khat chewed by UK Somalis comes from, it remains legal, and appears immune to prohibition thanks to its economic importance. However, debate still rages over how it should be classified, encapsulated by a question often asked in Kenya: 'is khat a *drug*?' (Carrier 2008). Such is the power of the transnational rhetoric of the 'war on drugs' that being labeled a drug leads to khat's conflation with illegal substances, prompting further questioning as to why it is still legal. In Kenya this debate is decades old (since the 1930s), and while those attacking it use the language of the 'war

on drugs', the language of 'culture' and 'tradition' has often been invoked by those defending khat, especially by Meru. Both sides debate the pros and cons of khat consumption for the individual's and society's well-being in detail, while in effect the debate is rendered obsolete by the crop's economic power. In the words of Gebissa (2008: 798), 'the real issue is not « to ban or not to ban », but how to use the present khat-generated prosperity in a way that will also benefit the next generation.'

- 56 A similar debate exists in Madagascar, and has done for some time: while Clouet considered khat's medical consequences as not severe enough to warrant a ban, in his view the social consequences of consumption were 'catastrophiques' and provided some support for prohibition (1972: 594). Today whether khat is or ought to be classified as a hard drug ('drogue dure') or a mild drug ('drogue douce') is commonly discussed in Antsiranana, both within the khat production-distribution-consumption network and among professionals in town. Opinion is divided, with those in the khat network arguing that it is not a hard drug and is no worse than caffeine. However, professionals, including a psychiatrist, a psychiatric nurse, and a judge, tended to believe that it was, or should be, classified a hard drug. Those in the psychiatric profession claimed it made people crazy. A visit by Gezon to the psychiatric hospital (a 12-bed establishment with 7 patients at the time of the visit) revealed that 5 out of 7 of the patients were there for drug-related reasons. Staff claimed that khat was perhaps not dangerous in itself, but led to mental unbalance when combined with other substances, like alcohol and marijuana. According to the judge, khat made people lazy and led to petty crimes, such as theft. Others, particularly practicing Christians and well-educated people far removed socially from khat chewing environments, admitted they were not sure, but would not be surprised if it were a hard drug. Medical doctors, on the other hand, wanted to see more evidence before declaring khat a health menace. Recent rumors of a possible ban caused alarm amongst both producers and consumers, as reported by the Malagasy newspaper *L'Express de Madagascar* in 2008 (Solofonandrasana 2008). The stakes are high for producers and traders who now rely on the substance for their livelihood, and many would agree with a producer interviewed for the *L'Express* article: 'C'est avec l'argent du khat que je paye la scolarisation de mes enfants et de couvrir quelques besoins de la famille'.
- 57 Thus, as the foregoing discussion suggests, issues of legality exist within the context of several complex factors, including public discussions of public health and the social effects of addiction; issues of morality related to religion, ethnicity, and citizenship; political concerns and associations with terrorism; and economic questions about khat's ability to provide tax revenue for governments and export earnings, which produce hard currency and raise the nation's GDP (see also footnote 3).

## Conclusion

- 58 Two decades after Cassanelli spoke of khat as a 'quasilegal' commodity brimming with ambiguity (1986), little has changed: debates surrounding the substance are ever more polarized, while consumers keep on consuming, and producers keep on producing. If anything, since the collapse of Somalia and the spread of a Somali diaspora, khat has become yet more sensationalized and demonized as a noxious 'drug' and even a source of terrorist funding. Meanwhile, social scientists, including the authors of this paper, continue to call for critical evaluation of khat's reported dangers, pointing out the importance of examining khat within the local, national, and global dynamics of poverty

and its social effects, as well as struggles over access to resources and the right to define religious and ethnic identity. What is unambiguously clear is that khat has become increasingly critical to the survival and even flourishing of many small-scale farmers and traders in the Western Indian Ocean region. It provides a livelihood to those on the margins of national and global economic development schemes.

- 59 Thus, the fate of this plant is far from decided. On the contrary, it remains a central, yet contested element in Indian Ocean strategies for survival and self-definition in the 21st century.

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## NOTES

1. While khat has become the most commonly used term for the substance globally, it is often seen written as *qat* (a transliteration from its Arabic name), and is more commonly known as *miraa* in East Africa.
2. The Convention is available online at: [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention\\_1971\\_en.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1971_en.pdf) (accessed July 18, 2009).
3. There has been debate about whether khat has displaced coffee as a crop in Yemen. Kennedy reported that khat's detractors, often foreign planners and Yemeni officials, blame khat for displacing coffee and thus for being harmful to the country by being a barrier to export earnings (1987 : 159). Kennedy argued effectively that this case has been dramatically overstated with little evidence to back it up. He noted that coffee and khat grow in different micro-ecological zones (see also Ward 1999) ; that khat only occupies less than 5 % of arable land ; and that though coffee production had declined, it had not been replaced with khat. Weir (1985 : 34-37) makes similar arguments, writing that khat has more likely displaced grain crops, which were costly to produce and, thanks to inexpensive imports, cheaper to buy.
4. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *A Century of International Drug Control* (Vienna, 2009), offers an historical survey of international regulation that began with the 1909 Shanghai Opium Commission.
5. *The Laws of the Somaliland Protectorate* (London, 1923), 291-2.
6. E. Gebissa, *Leaf of Allah : Khat and Agricultural Transformation in Hararge, Ethiopia 1875-1991* (Oxford, 2004), 54-5.
7. See report of September 22nd, 2006 on BBC website : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/5369958.stm> (accessed May 2009).
8. The recommendations of the UK's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs which the government accepted in 2006 are available online at: <http://www.drugs.gov.uk/publication-search/acmd/khat-report-2005/>
9. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jun/15/drugspolicy.somalia>
10. In Australia, where khat can be imported by permit holders, there are similar campaigns. See, for example: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/02519724063019500678500.html>

## ABSTRACTS

The paper introduces khat as an Indian Ocean phenomenon, understandable only in historical perspective, and yet utterly contemporary. Its history frames contemporary issues: its rising popularity; the economic relief it brings farmers and traders; cultural significance as an identity marker; disdain, suspicion, and/or intolerance of it as a 'drug.' In this paper we explore regional

linkages and disjunctures regarding these issues, examining khat use in the western Indian Ocean, especially in Madagascar and Kenya. We argue that certain global concerns link experiences of khat throughout the Indian Ocean region (and extend to expatriate communities from these countries throughout the world). These include global issues of the war on drugs, fear of Islamic terrorism, and the hegemony of the western economic development model. Individual histories of use, contemporary concerns, and contemporary cultural expressions also distinguish these experiences from each other in significant ways.

Cet article présente le qât (khat), phénomène de la culture de l'océan Indien qu'on doit comprendre dans une perspective historique, et en même temps lié à l'actualité. L'histoire du qât soulève en effet des questions d'importance contemporaine : sa popularité croissante, les ressources économiques qu'il procure aux agriculteurs et aux commerçants, une signification culturelle qui en fait un marqueur d'identité, et enfin le mépris, la suspicion et/ou l'intolérance auxquels il est en butte en tant que « drogue ». Dans cet article, nous mettons en lumière les similitudes et les différences concernant ces questions dans la région de l'océan Indien occidental, en considérant en particulier Madagascar et le Kenya. Nous montrons que certains faits rapprochent les expériences du qât à travers toute la région de l'océan Indien (et s'étendent même aux groupes de migrants venus de ces pays dans le monde entier), y compris des questions d'intérêt mondial comme la lutte contre les drogues, la peur du terrorisme islamiste, et la domination du modèle de développement occidental. Pourtant, les histoires personnelles des usagers, les questions de société et les expressions culturelles contemporaines, dessinent aussi des différences significatives.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Kenya, Madagascar, Indian Ocean, Qat

**Mots-clés:** qat (drogue)

**Geographical index:** Kenya, Madagascar, océan Indien

**Subjects:** anthropologie