

A Socio-semiotic Analysis of Qat culture in Yemen

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Abstract

Qat, *Catha edulis* has become synonymous with Yemen, as the phenomenon of Qat chewing in Yemen dates back hundreds of years in history. No social, cultural, or political gathering in the afternoon time can do without Qat. Afternoon time becomes the sign of Qat sessions and socialization. Despite Yemen's openness to other cultures and the recent revolution in all kinds of social media, Yemenis do not stop the habit of chewing Qat.

The purpose of the present research work is to analyze 'Qat' as a linguistic sign consisting of a signifier and a signified to understand its various social, cultural, and political signifieds that give it the semiotic power to dominate all aspects of life in Yemen and to ground the coinage of many lexical items that are culturally specific to Qat culture and Yemeni dialects. The present paper uses semiotics as a research method in which it adopts Saussure's linguistic model of sign, signifier, and signified and Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation.

Semiotically, this paper shows that the Yemeni people are not addicted to Qat as a drug, as might be assumed by some foreigners who are not familiar with the sign system of Yemeni culture. The Yemeni people are addicted to Qat as a polysemous sign that is associated with values, norms, rituals, enjoyment, relationship, and socialization at the connotative level.

Keywords: sign, signifier, signified, connotation, denotation, signification, Yemeni culture

Introduction

Qat (also known as khat, gat) is the Arabic word for *Catha edulis* (Kennedy 1987:66), green leaves grown in most parts of Yemen.

The history of Qat in Yemen is so controversial as there is no clear period for its origin and use, however, there is a consensus among scholars that Qat has been used in Yemen for centuries. Kennedy (p.62) points out that some authors believe that Qat was brought to Yemen from Ethiopia during the last invasion of Yemen by the Coptic Christian Ethiopians in the sixth century AD. Kennedy (p.64) cites another opinion of (Schopen 1977:52) that Qat appeared in Yemen in the 13th century as a stimulant, and was first used in the form of "tea" by Sufis and religious men to deepen their mystical experience.

Semiotically, the phenomenon of chewing Qat is one of the most important cultural signs in Yemen, as more than 90% of the Yemeni population chews Qat regularly. *Takhzeen al-Qat* in Yemeni Arabic is the expression for chewing Qat, which means chewing the leaves of Qat and holding them in the left cheek of the chewer for hours.

It is usually chewed as a natural stimulant in the afternoon - an institutionalized activity that lasts four or five hours, depending on the situation and the purpose of the Qat sessions. Qat chewers are seen everywhere, in streets, shops, hospitals, public places, government offices, airports, gardens, public transport, etc. No place is free of Qat in Yemen and no social gathering or meeting can do without it. Almost all Yemeni houses, hotels, clubs, headquarters of political parties, trade unions, mass organizations, and wedding venues have a majlis/diwan for daily Qat chewing.

The word "Qat" is used synonymously for Yemen and, in the media, Yemen is portrayed through the social behavior of Qat Chewing. Gatter (2012:571) points out that in 2011, international newspapers around the world noted that the youth revolution in Yemen was different from its counterparts in the Arab world, because it ended in the afternoon, which is the time of Qat sessions in Yemen. He points out that a headline in the Washington Post on February 5, 2011, read "*In Yemen, everything stops for Qat– including revolution*". On the same day, the headline in the *Arizona Daily Star* read: "*Addictive leaves take the starch out of popular uprising. Yemen protests lose momentum to khat-*

chewing". Reuters and the Israeli daily *Haaretz* suggested on February 10 that: "*Qat addiction may stem Yemen protests*" and on February 17, the *New York Times* characterized Yemen's protest as a stillbirth, titling: "*Qat got their tongues*".

All quotes from foreign media show the semiotic power of the Qat phenomenon on daily life in Yemen, which is perceived internationally. This reflects the need to analyze *Qat* as a sign to understand how it comes to have meanings and power in the Yemeni cultural context.

The aims of the study

Qat is a cultural object that is a carrier of meaning in the signification system of Yemeni culture. Chandler (2017: 2) notes that to understand the meaning of something, we need to treat it like a sign. In this paper, the word "Qat" is treated as a sign from a semiotic point of view to understand its various cultural and social signifieds that give it the semiotic power to dominate all aspects of life in Yemen and to have its linguistic influence on coining new lexicons and expressions that are specific to Qat culture. This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Why is "Qat" a sign?
2. Why does "Qat" have meaning in the Yemeni cultural context?
3. What are the connotative meanings associated with the word Qat and Qat sessions?
4. What do the different types of Qat signify?
5. What linguistic influence does Qat culture have on Yemeni dialects?

Literature Review

A review of the literature from the last three decades to the present reveals extensive research on the phenomenon of Qat chewing in Yemen. However, it should be noted that almost the majority of previous research on the subject is medically oriented and focuses on the side effects of Qat on public health and the economic and social problems resulting from its excessive consumption. The literature also includes important anthropological, ethnographic, and ethno-pharmacological studies by (Weir 1985), (Varisco 1986), and (Kennedy 1987) respectively. Weir refers to the pharmacological effects of Qat and the social significance of daily Qat chewing. Kennedy's ethno-pharmacological study highlights the sociological, cultural, historical, and medical aspects of Qat

chewing and describes the phenomenon as institutionalized drug use. Varisco's study is more relevant to the current study as it relates to some of the meanings of Qat chewing in Yemen. Varisco refers to Qat as an identity marker for Yemenis.

The significance of the study

Although extensive research has been conducted on this phenomenon, there are no publications in the literature that address the issue of Qat in Yemen as a polysemous sign with multiple meanings using semiotics as a research method. The present study is the first to propose a new approach to the phenomenon of Qat and Qat sessions, as it uses semiotic tools to analyze the meanings of Qat in a similar way that we analyze language. The present study demonstrates the power of semiotics as a research method to analyze all forms of signs that communicate meanings. The present work is an important contribution as it fills an important gap in the literature by extending semiotic research to the analysis of a very popular phenomenon that has the characteristics of a sign in the sign system of Yemeni culture.

Research methodology

In the present paper, Qat is analyzed as a sign, and semiotics is used as a tool to figure out its meanings. Saussure's linguistic model of sign, signifier, and signified and Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation are used to show the different meanings of Qat in the sign system of Yemeni culture.

The term "semiotics" is derived from the Greek word "sêmeiōtikos", which means "interpreter of signs" (Hall, 2012, p.5). The co-founders of modern semiotics are the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), Chandler (ibid., pp.2-3). The term semiotics is associated with Charles Sanders Peirce while semiology is associated with Ferdinand de Saussure. However, it is "semiotics that is now generally accepted as the term to be used for the study of signs" (Berger 1999, p. ix). Eco (1976, p.7) states that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be conceived as a sign". Pelc (1994, p. 714) states that signs in language are only a part of theoretical semiotics, which deals with all kinds of signs. (Cited in Chandler 2017:4). Chandler (2017, p.20) refers to the "study of signs" as the most

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fundamental definition of semiotics. Morris (1946, p.217) divided semiotics into three branches: semantics (the study of the meanings of signs), syntax (the study of the relations of signs), and pragmatics (the study of the uses of signs), cited in Chandler (2017, pp.4-5).

Saussure lays down the foundations of modern semiotics in his *book Course in General Linguistics* (1916) as a science concerned with the study of the life of signs in society, and as a linguist he focuses on linguistic signs, arguing that "linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics....." (p. 16). He explains that a linguistic sign consists of a concept, which he calls 'signified', and a sound image, which he calls 'signifier' (p.67). According to Saussure (ibid., p.67), the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, since there is no natural connection between the linguistic sign and the object to which it refers.

Saussure develops his sign model exclusively to investigate the "nature of the linguistic sign". This linguistic sign model is transferred to the analysis of non-linguistic signs in the semiological tradition after Saussure (Noth, 1990, p. 59). Contemporary semiotics has been applied to study everything that communicates meaning. Barthes in his *Mythologies* (1972) uses semiotics to analyze the connotations of many cultural phenomena in French culture such as wrestling, toys, wine and milk, steak and chips, Garb's face, and advertisements for soap powder and detergent. In his *Elements of Semiology* (1968), Barthes applies semiotics to analyze the system of clothing, food, and cars. Danesi (2018) applies semiotics to examine the connotations of high heels, cigarettes, clothing, and objects. Semiotics has been applied to marketing, animal communication, advertising, movies, drama, theatre, drawings, dance, music, body language, social media, and so many other communicative systems.

Why Qat is a sign?

Afternoon time in Yemen has become a sign of Qat session, socialization, pleasure, and all types of social gatherings. The new social media such as Facebook, WhatsUp, Twitter, and all the other forms of social media have become essential elements in Qat sessions as they bring a lot of topics to be discussed and shared among the Qat chewers.

The recent revolution in all means of communication and social media, Yemen's openness to other cultures around the world, and the cancers common among Qat consumers cannot stop or eliminate Qat chewing. Qat dominates all segments of Yemeni society, doctors, university and school teachers, politicians, writers, poets, intellectuals, high thinkers, religious scholars, students, farmers, workers, the rich, the poor, men, women, and in many cases, children, etc. Qat dominates all aspects of life in Yemen because the centuries-long practice of Qat culture in Yemen has made it a sign that has many social, cultural, religious, and political meanings. As a sign, it refers to something other than itself, which gives it the semiotic power to be an integral part of the Yemeni nation. The high demand for Qat consumption indicates that Qat is a sign associated with social and cultural connotations.

Danesi (2018:9) points out that the fundamental aim of semiotics is to find out the constituents of a sign and to understand its meanings. He explains that a sign must have a definite physical form which he calls the signifier and refers to something which he calls the signified. He also explains that a sign evokes certain thoughts, ideas, feelings, and perceptions in people in different ways, which he calls signification or meaning. Qat, therefore, has the quality of a sign. Firstly, Qat has a distinctive physical form (signifier) which distinguishes it from other green trees. Second, Qat does not refer to itself as green leaves chewed every afternoon. It refers to all kinds of rituals associated with Qat sessions. Finally, Qat evokes certain thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in the Qat chewers in different ways. Qat is a sign because it has all three aspects – it has a physical structure, it refers to certain ideas, and it naturally evokes different interpretations in different people.

Why does Qat have meanings in the Yemeni cultural context?

The early meanings of Qat in Yemeni culture go back centuries in history when it is first used by Sufis and religious men in the 13th century "to deepen their mystical experience", (Kennedy, *ibid*, p.64). This view is consistent with that of Valrico (1986:6) who refers to Sufis and religious elites as early users of Qat to keep them awake to study and discuss religious topics. Semiotically, the association of Qat with religious practices for a long time has converted Qat into a signifier of religious practices and sentiments in a deeply religious country. Consequently, Qat derives its first positive meanings as a signifier of religious activities, which gives its consumption and distribution a kind of religious legality and support. Therefore, we can say that Qat started as a religious

signifier, and later, with time, the religious signifier is converted to multiple signifiers carrying a different kind of meanings due to the social, cultural, and political changes in Yemen.

Denotation and Connotation

The concepts of denotation and connotation are very important in semiotic analysis. The two concepts describe the relationship between the signifier and its signified (Chandler 2007: 137). Denotation is the conceptual or literal meaning of a sign found in a dictionary. The connotation is the additional meaning assigned to a particular sign by its users. It "is used to denote the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign" Chandler (ibid:138). Denesi (2004:30) notes that the study of connotation is at the heart of modern semiotics, as most meanings of signs in cultural contexts are connotative and rarely denotative. Leeuwen (2005:274) notes that connotative signs signal ideas and values rather than referring to certain specific people, places, and objects. Barthes uses the concepts of denotation and connotation in "The Photographic Message" and in "The Rhetoric of the Image". He points out that a photograph has a denoted message and a connoted message. (Fiske 2010:81) points out that in photography, the denotation is what is photographed while the connotation is how it is photographed.

Qat at the Denotative Level.

The denotative level of meaning is referred to by Barthes (1967) as the first order of signification. At this level, the sign "Qat" involves the association of a sound image, i.e. the signifier (the physical part of the sign that can be heard, touched, and seen), and the signified, namely, the concept or idea of the sign (the green leaves that are chewed every afternoon). There is a conventionalized association between the former, the sound image of the sign, the physical part (the signifier), and the latter, the signified, i.e. the concept of the sign "Qat" (the green leaves that are chewed every afternoon). In other words, there is no logical connection between the signifier (the sound image of the sign "Qat") and the signified (the concept). At the first level of meaning (denotation), there are no socio-cultural meanings associated with the sign Qat, i.e. the sign carries only the conceptual or the literal meaning.

Qat at the Connotative Level.

Within a sign system, each sign acquires its history and connotations that are familiar to the members of the community of sign users as part of their social usage. (Chandler, 2017, p.27). Qat acquires its first connotations centuries ago in the history of its occurrence and consumption in Yemen. It is first used as a stimulant by Sufis and religious elites to keep them awake for long hours to read the Holy Qu'ran and hadith and discuss religious topics.

All socio-cultural meanings of signs are part of what Barthes (ibid.) calls the second order of signification (connotation). This level of signification uses the association of the sound image of Qat (the signifier) and its concept (the signified) in the first level as signifier and adds new signifieds to it. In other words, the association in the first level of meaning becomes the signifier for the signifieds in the second level. Semiotically, this signifier is attached to all kinds of religious rituals. Consequently, religious connotations are attached to Qat, giving it a religious legitimacy that led to its distribution and consumption throughout Yemen.

Just as many linguistic signs and cultural objects lose their old meanings or acquire new ones over time, the religious connotations of Qat tend to shrink as new types of connotative meanings have emerged. Over time, the denotative sign of Qat, the signifier and signified at the first level, transforms into a signifier with multiple signifieds at the second level, in which more connotations become associated with Qat and the old ones begin to dwindle. Kennedy (1978, p.vi) refers to some of the connotative signifiers of Qat highlighted in the testimony of a Yemeni farmer in 1975 at Gabal Saber (a famous mountain in the city of Taiz).

Qat widens the mind. It helps you recall things that have been forgotten!

It relaxes and helps you to comfortably breathe. It is the mind's paradise.

Qat makes people strong. They're able to withstand challenges and scale mountains.

The farmer's statement reflects the new connotative signifieds of Qat at the second level of signification. As a signifier, Qat signifies an intelligent mind, a sharp memory, good health, relaxation, overcoming life's challenges, and mountain climbing.

Due to social and cultural changes in society, Qat acquires new meanings at the connotative level. It is no longer a distinctive signifier representing the elite of a religious group like the Sufis, or a signifier of masculinity, as a high percentage of women across the country chew Qat regularly. Qat has become a part of daily life for all segments of Yemeni society.

Due to the various social functions that Qat sessions perform as a social space, Qat acquires new meanings at the connotative level that reflect cultural, social, economic, and political changes in Yemen. Varisco (1986: 8) points out that the new meanings associated with Qat chewing emerged as a cultural response to the acceleration of social and cultural changes after the Yemeni revolution in 1962. Contact with new technologies and Western cultures is seen as a cultural threat to Yemeni traditions and values. He states that chewing Qat is a uniquely Yemeni act that does not occur in any other Arab community, and it has a new common symbolism as a marker of cultural identity for Yemenis. From a semiotic perspective, Qat is seen as a signifier of Yemeni identity and traditional cultural values associated with being Yemeni.

After the reunification of Yemen in 1990, Qat has been used by both the government and the opposition as a political signifier to gain allegiance. In the days of elections, it was freely distributed by the ruling party and opposition forces. Voters are gathered by the ruling party in large tents in major cities and village centers to vote for the president of Yemen or the opposition parties. Moreover, Qat is used as a strong political signifier during the 2011 Youth Revolution days in favor of Saleh and the other political parties. Millions of dollars were spent to buy Qat for the supporters of Saleh and the opposition power. Moreover, Qat has become the main element in all political meetings of the government and opposition parties. Qat gains signification in all tribal and political conflicts, as all aspects of political and security instability in Yemen cannot be resolved without Qat meetings.

Qat meetings have become signifiers of many social events in Yemeni society, such as engagements, weddings, funerals, religious and national festivals, births, business and political agreements, reconciliation between disputing tribes, welcoming friends and guests, farewells and reception meetings, etc. In short, no social gathering in Yemen is conceivable without Qat. Qat is an important part of weddings, for example. Friends, relatives, and neighbors gather to celebrate the event and offer their heartfelt congratulations to the bride and groom and their families in large halls or large majlis/diwans set up for Qat chewing. In such social practices, Qat signifies a variety of

meanings, including marital bliss, celebration, and socialization, as many people meet and form friendships for the first time.

Qat is associated with the celebration of religious festivals, such as Eid al-Fitr (the festival following the month of Ramadhan) and Eid al-Adha (the festival following the time of Alhaj - the pilgrimage to Mecca). Chewing Qat is the most common way of celebrating religious and national festivals, as it is impossible to celebrate such festivals without Qat. In such festivals, the chewers buy the best quality of Qat to share the occasions with their family members, friends, and relatives. Semiotically, in such festivals, Qat signifies the happiness of religious festivals and the happiness of being with all family members, friends, relatives, and neighbors. In another social context, Qat appears as a signifier of business as almost no business deals are made in Yemen without Qat sessions.

Qat also becomes a signifier for tribal discussions as leaders of different tribes gather for Qat sessions to discuss various conflicts, especially those related to revenge. Adra (2011:3) refers to arbitrations between tribesmen taking place in "a large guest room (diwan or majlis) while the men chew Qat". In another social context, Qat is a signifier of literary, educational, political, poetic, artistic, and scientific forums. Many poets, storytellers, novelists, journalists, and high thinkers hold weekly gatherings to chew Qat, present some of their works and discuss many local and international issues. Moreover, many literary figures and researchers claim that they cannot write without chewing Qat; for them, Qat is a sign of inspiration and creativity.

Qat can mean different things to different people, depending on the context. For school and university students, Qat is a signifier of long learning, concentration, comprehension, high exam performance, and so on. For farmers, laborers, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, carpenters, plumbers, and many others, Qat is a signifier of mental and physical strength and high production. For farmers, laborers, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, carpenters, plumbers, and many others, Qat is a sign of mental and physical strength and high production.

Semiotically, Qat is a signifier with multiple signifieds that vary from one individual to another. All the connoted signifieds associated with Qat at the second level of meaning are not derived from the word Qat as a sign at the first level of meaning, but from the socio-cultural associations due to the centuries-long practice of the phenomenon of chewing Qat in Yemen.

The types of Qat as signifiers.

The Qat types are also signifiers, as they signify the social and economic status of the individual. The choice of Qat types by the chewers is also based on some cultural connotations. Cheap Qat types are suspected to be detrimental to the general mood and health of the chewers. At the same time, high-priced varieties are considered a sign of relief for the body and mind. The most expensive varieties of Qat have a symbolic value. This value derives from their positive connotations in Qat culture. They are associated with influential tribal leaders, judges, businessmen, and high officials. The low-priced varieties are also signifiers of the low income of people belonging to the middle and lower social strata of the social hierarchy system.

The Linguistic Influence of Qat Culture in Yemen

Qat in Yemen has its linguistic influence on Yemeni dialects. New words and expressions have been coined to facilitate communication in Qat culture. These words and expressions are culturally unique to Yemeni dialects and many of them are hardly known to Arabic speakers in the other parts of the Arab world. These words are in the form of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and may vary from place to place.

The following tables show some of the vocabulary used in Qat culture in Yemen.

Word in Yemeni Arabic	Part of Speech	Transliteration	Meaning in English
يُفَوَّت	Verb	<i>yukhawet</i>	To buy or to sell Qat
مُقَوِّت	Noun	<i>mukhawet</i>	The one who sells Qat
مَقْوِي	Noun	<i>makwati</i>	Someone who sells a small quantity of Qat and has few consumers.
تَخْزِينُ الْقَاتِ	Noun	<i>takhzeen al-Qat</i>	The act of chewing Qat
يُخْزِنُ	Verb	<i>yukhazin</i>	To chew Qat

مُخَزِّنٌ	adj	<i>mukhazin</i>	To normally be in the condition of chewing Qat, usually with some other individuals,(rarely) alone.
تَخْزِينَةٌ	Noun	<i>takhzeenah</i>	The quantity of Qat sufficient for a single chewer
تَفْثِيحَةٌ	Noun	<i>taftheehah</i>	The act of chewing a few leaves of Qat in the morning
يُفَذِّحُ	Verb	<i>yufathih</i>	To chew a few leaves of Qat especially in the early morning which is not usually the time of chewing.
مَوَالِي	Adj	<i>mawlaee</i>	A heavy chewer of Qat.
مُبْحَشِمٌ	Adj	<i>mubahshim</i>	Someone who has chewed a big quantity of Qat and has feelings of euphoria and excitement.
يُبْحَشِمُ	Verb	<i>yubahshim</i>	To start chewing a big quantity of Qat
بِحْشَامَةٌ	Noun	<i>bihshamah</i>	The state of euphoria and excitement.
مَقِيلٌ	Noun	<i>maqyal</i>	An afternoon Qat chew
مُقِيلٌ	noun	<i>muqayal</i>	Someone who chews Qat in the evening.
يُقِيلُ	Verb	<i>yuqayal</i>	To chew Qat in the afternoon
سَمْرَةٌ	Noun	<i>samrah</i>	A Qat chew at night or after dinner. This term also refers to any social event held at night.
يَسْمُرُ	Verb	<i>yasmur</i>	To chew Qat in the evening after dinner until late at night.

سَامِرٌ	Adj	<i>samir</i>	The one who chew at night
بَوْرَة	Noun	<i>bawrah</i>	Very cheap due to lack of consumers.
مُبَوَّرٌ	Adjective	<i>mubawer</i>	Someone who doesn't sell his Qat due to
بَوَّارٌ	Noun	<i>bawar</i>	Very cheap due to the luck of consumers.
كَيْفُ / السَّاعَاتُ السُّلَيْمَانِيَّةُ	Noun	<i>kaif (It is also called al-saat alsulimaniyah</i>	The pleasant moments after a long chew.
تَفْرُطَة (لهجة صنعانية)	Noun	<i>tafrutah</i> (very common is Sana'a city)	women's Qat chews. This term is also used for any social occasion of women.
دِيْوَانٌ / مَجْلِسٌ	Noun	<i>diwan/majlis</i>	A long sitting room where the Qat chews take place.
رَازِمٌ	Noun	<i>razim</i>	Nightmare due to not chewing Qat
مَدَكِي	Noun	<i>madka</i>	To start chewing
يَدَكِي / يَتَّكِي	Verb	<i>yadaki /yattakki</i>	To rest on the left elbow usually to chew.
يَخْلِثُ	Verb	<i>yakluth</i>	To throw the mass of the leaves of Qat from the mouth.
مَتْفَلٌ	Noun	<i>matfal</i>	A small can of aluminum that is used for splitting the extra juice of the leaves of Qat from the mouth.
مُشِمٌ	Adjective	<i>mushim</i>	Smelly
بَغْرَة	Adjective	<i>baghrah</i>	Bad quality of Qat; (full of water)

Conclusion

In summary, the Yemeni people are not addicted to Qat as a drug, as might be assumed by foreigners unfamiliar with the sign system of Yemeni culture. The Yemeni people are addicted to Qat as a polysemous sign associated at the connotative level with values, norms, rituals, enjoyment, relationship, and socialization.

This paper attempts to analyze "Qat" in different social, cultural, and political contexts as a sign to understand the various connotative meanings that give it the semiotic power to dominate all aspects of life in Yemen. The study uses semiotics as a research method because it has the means to analyze all forms of linguistic and non-linguistic signs that communicate meanings. Saussure's concepts of sign, signifier and signified and Barth's concepts of denotation and connotation are used as semiotic tools to answer the following questions:

1. Why is "Qat" a sign?
2. Why does "Qat" have meanings in the Yemeni cultural context?
3. What are the connotative signifieds associated with the word "Qat" and Qat sessions?
4. Why are the types of Qat signifiers?
5. What is the linguistic influence of Qat culture on Yemeni dialects?

Qat is a sign in the Yemeni cultural sign system because it has all the characteristics of a sign. First, Qat has a characteristic physical form (signifier) that distinguishes it from the other green trees. Secondly, Qat does not refer to itself but refers to something else. It refers to all the cultural and social rituals associated with it. Qat is first used by Sufis and religious men in the 13th century in the form of tea for religious purposes. Semiotically, the association of Qat with religious practices for a long time transformed Qat into a signifier for religious practices. Consequently, Qat acquires religious connotations that lend religious legality and support to its consumption.

Due to the various social functions that Qat sessions perform as a social space, Qat acquires new meanings at the connotative level that reflect the cultural, social, economic, and political changes in Yemen. After the reunification of Yemen in 1990 and during the youth revolution in 2011, Qat was used as a political signifier by both the government and the opposition to gain political support.

Qat sessions have become signifiers of many social events in Yemeni society, such as engagements, weddings, funerals, religious and national festivals, births, business and political agreements, reconciliation between disputing tribes, welcoming friends and guests, farewells and reception meetings, etc. In short, no social gathering in Yemen is conceivable without Qat.

Qat is a signifier of literary, educational, political, poetic, artistic, and scientific forums as many poets, storytellers, novelists, journalists, and high thinkers hold weekly gatherings to present their works and discuss many local and international issues in Qat sessions. Qat types are also signifiers, as they signify the social and economic status of the individual. Cheap Qat types are suspected of having a detrimental effect on the general mood and health of the chewers. At the same time, high-priced varieties are considered to be a sign of relief for the body and mind.

Qat culture has its linguistic influence in the form of coined lexical elements such as new words, phrases, and expressions that are culture-specific to Qat culture. These linguistic elements have become part of the daily spoken dialect in Yemen and are hardly used by the rest of the Arabic speakers in the other parts of the Arab world. The current paper is very useful for new researchers in the Arab world who are interested in the field of semiotics, as it will help them to think of similar social, cultural, or linguistic phenomena and analyze their meanings using similar semiotic tools. Further research is needed to investigate the linguistic influence of Qat culture in Yemen to look at the different linguistic elements used in most parts of Yemen as the lexical elements may vary from place to place. In this paper, only some illustrations of the linguistic elements invented by Qat culture in Yemen have been given, as it is difficult to cover all aspects of the linguistic influence of Qat culture in all Yemeni cities.

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