Khat-Chewing, Adiaphorisation and Morality: Rethinking Ethics in the Age of the Synopticon

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Abstract

In June 2014, the UK Government made khat (*Catha edulis*) a Class C drug under the UK Misuse of Drugs Act. Based on limited evidence, this decision went against the Government's own Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and has divided members of the British–Somali diaspora, where khat is a popular form of recreation. The Government's decision to ban khat highlights broader questions regarding how ethical legislation is implemented within post-industrial societies, exposing postcolonial power systems that 'Other' migrant groups through synoptic control. Based on qualitative interviews with members of the Somali diaspora and external agencies in Northern England, the research explores how this system fails to consider khat's complex moral position while framing users and those living within the diaspora as deviant.

Introduction

Khat *(Catha edulis)* is a plant-based narcotic whose leaves and stalks are chewed for recreational purposes along the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (Carrier 2005; Anderson et al., 2007), as well as in diasporic communities of people from these regions. The practice incites fierce controversy and involves chewing the plant and placing its contents within the side of one's mouth, causing a mild 'natural amphetamine' (Kalix 1992) called cathinone to be released and absorbed into the bloodstream through both the mouth and cheek tissues (Beckerleg 2006). Khat's effects have been linked to increased sociability as a social lubricant, while also being connected in some scientific studies to irritability, anxiety and weight loss (Kalix 1992). Within the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland[1] and the broader Somali diaspora living in the West, khat represents a polarising recreational

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[1] Somaliland is a semi-autonomous region in the north of Somalia; it was formerly a British protectorate known as British Somaliland and has been vying for independence from Somalia since the Civil war in the late 1980s.

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activity, idolised by some as being a site of communal togetherness, a pillar of Somali masculine identity and a central part of cultural expression (Klein 2007; Hansen 2013). Yet, at the same time, it is described by others as a hindrance to economic growth, a source of community/family breakdown and a site used by older- and middle-aged Somali men to maintain traditional patriarchal and patrilineal hierarchies that subjugate women and the young. Such moral ambiguity places khat-chewing within a liminal legislative position (Harris 2004; Klantschnig and Carrier 2018).

For example, within Islam, conservative *Wahabi* doctrine positions khat use as *haram* (prohibited) and prohibited in Islamic law, leading to the initiation of religious *fatwas* that instrumentalise khat use as a threat to the user's mind and body (Klein and Beckerleg 2007). Such conservative Islamic doctrine has spread from Saudi Arabia into East Africa over the last twenty-five years (Choksy and Choksy 2015), influencing extremist Islamist movements such as *Al Shabaab*, an affiliate of *Al Qaeda*, who denounce khat-use as felonious in all territories under their control (Klein 2013). However, in moderate forms of Islam, khat is interpreted as either *halal* (permissible) or *makruh* (discouraged), occupying a moral position whereby the practice is acceptable so long as it is not abused (Hansen 2010). This level of ambiguity stretches further into politics and law, with countries such as Yemen, Uganda, Somaliland and Kenya allowing khat to be a legally tradable substance. In contrast, countries in the West and certain states in East Africa, such as Eritrea and Tanzania, have banned the substance due to alleged links with terror groups and concerns over public health (McGongle 2013).

In Britain, the Government's decision to ban khat in 2014 linked the substance to crime and terrorism by depicting the khat trade as a source of funding for the terror group *Al Shabaab* and the *mafrish*[2], where the substance is often consumed, as a site of radicalisation (Klein 2013). While these claims resided on empirically impoverished evidence and contradicted the conservative ideological doctrine of *Wahhabism* discussed above, the act of linking a Somali cultural activity with terrorism played to populist political rhetoric around limiting migration and the strict policing of migrant communities (McGongle 2013). Similarly, the medical evidence used to sanction the khat ban connected the practice with mental health disorders such as schizophrenia and anti-social behaviour, most notably domestic violence (Patel 2008; Author A). Yet, this accusation was challenged by the Government's own Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), along with toxicology experts who cited that the social problems linked to khat correlated with the effects of living in areas of high social deprivation and economic inequality (ACMD 2013). Furthermore, the ban ignores the potential of khat to provide a site of connection for Somalis living in Britain. Here, attending the *mafrish* or partaking in 'the chew' as it is sometimes referred to helps foster a sense of social capital by allowing users to engage in critical discussion as well as the cultivation of an identity that can help overcome the feeling of marginality many users experience within British society (Farrah 2000; Harris 2004; Swain 2017; 2021a; 2021b).

Through engaging with the work of the late Polish social theorist Zygmunt Bauman's (1993, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) writings on morality, the article explores how ethical legislation within post-industrial societies like Britain has shifted from being institutional to consumer orientated and thus guided by the influence of aesthetics and performativity. Here, the khat ban and the subsequent stigmatisation of British Somalis are understood

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[2] The *mafrish* is otherwise referred to as the khat house – a space where khat-chewing is undertaken within the community.

to represent a new insidious 'weapon of ethical legitimation' that stifles the ability of the broader population to make moral decisions by themselves, reducing the propensity of many to define the moral position of khat-chewing through a situational and positional lens (Bauman 2000). In so doing, the article seeks to connect Bauman's work with postcolonial thinking that examines how such cultural interactions exclude Somali migrants within the power structures of the metropole. Through this perspective, the khat ban is understood to conform to a synoptic power system that positions khat users as dangerous due to their perceived inability to manage their lives through the reflexive principles of consumerism, causing them to be viewed as deviant in the eyes of the public.

The article starts by outlining the paper's theoretical position that centres on Bauman's writings on morality within 'solid' and 'liquid' modernity. From here, the paper adds a postcolonial lens to link Buaman's work with debates about epistemic justice and racialised colonial power systems. Next, the methods section introduces the reader to the ethnographic processes involved in collecting and analysing the fieldwork data, the sample size and the ethical considerations involved in undertaking the research. From here, the research findings are presented in two sections. The first examines the ambivalent views on khat-chewing amongst members of the Somali diaspora in Britain, documenting how the practice formulates feelings of moral togetherness, support, and destitution. In the second, we assess how the khat ban has overlooked situational perspectives on the substance and criminalised the practice through synoptic power structures. In so doing, the paper brings a unique theoretical lens to the debate on khat-chewing that firstly exposes the need to view the practice through a situational perspective that emphasises the importance of moral responsibility for the Other, while also illustrating how synoptic power systems aesthetically connect khat with images of crime, destitution, and deviance, racialising Somalis as dangerous and uncivilised.

Resisting Ethics: Theoretical Insights into Morality and Power

Zygmunt Bauman's (1989, p. 174) work on ethics and morality emerged as a critique of the functionalist ideas of Emile Durkheim, who positioned acts of immorality as a "deviation from the norm" caused by "unresolved managerial problems" within the administrative structure of society. In Bauman's opinion, the problem with this functionalist approach to ethics is its inability to engage critically with systemic processes of power. This critique is acknowledged by academics such as Kilminster (2017) and Dawson (2017), who position Bauman within the same lineage of thought as Marx in viewing the discipline of sociology and the study of ethics as a form of social criticism. In so doing, Bauman (1989) provides an empirical insight to complement his theoretical critique of Durkheim by engaging with a case study on the Holocaust. This work critiques the belief within functionalist sociology that the Holocaust represented 'a one-off event' attributed to a tyrannical regime and the figurationalist position, made popular through Elias's writings on the 'Civilising Process,' that such acts constituted 'a decivilising spurt' that deviated away from a lineal progression of civility and democracy within Western societies. Instead, in an analogous manner to Hannah Arendt (1963), Bauman (1991) explains how the Holocaust and other acts of human deviance are not an aberration from the civilising process but rather a sinister underlying by-product of the Enlightenment and its attempt to rationalise and order the world scientifically.

Bauman (1989) emphasises the role of bureaucracy as a sufficient condition for the immoral acts seen in the Holocaust, as 'traditional' forms of mass killing, seen in the

examples of the Russian pogroms or the mob violence of *Kristallnacht*, were seen by the Nazi leadership to lack efficiency. Consequently, the Nazis used technical means to measure the 'successes' of the Holocaust; reports based on statistics sought to evaluate 'the progress' of work numerically, all the while saying "nothing about the nature of the operation or its objects" (Bauman 1989: p. 99). This process reduced the moral requirements of bureaucratic action to questions of 'loyalty' towards authoritative institutions. However, to facilitate the groundwork for such objectivist reasoning, Jewish people had to be 'othered' as an abstract entity, alien to the German state. As Bauman (1989: p. 189) argues, this method effectively separated 'the Jew' in everyday social encounters, who could be seen as a good person, from the abstract figure of 'the Jew', characterised as untrustworthy and disloyal. In each step of the Holocaust, rational, means-end, calculative action replaced moral reasoning through bureaucratic rationalities that sought to purge moral consciousness and instead implement the unquestioned following of orders from a higher consciousness. Such thinking connects with Foucault's (1977) work on panoptic power by documenting how top-down systems of governmentality instrumentalise the behaviour of populations. Subsequently, as stated by theorists such as Hirst (2014) and Dawson (2017), Bauman breaks the functionalist tradition of Durkheim and his notion of ethics as a science needed to guide society away from a state of anomie and instead exposes how society can sanction immoral social acts in and of itself.

The empirical case study of the Holocaust led Bauman to construct a sociology of morality that draws upon the work of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1985). Here, Bauman uses Levinas to position morality as a quality that emerges from the individual instead of societal manipulation, emphasising a moral philosophy based on being 'for' the Other before one can be 'with' the Other (Bauman, 1993: p.13). This idea centres on recognising the 'face' of another individual and the role this can play in awakening a sense of moral responsibility towards another person as someone worthy of care and respect. This moral connection, expressed forcefully through the concept of a 'moral party of two', requires agents to recognise the "loneliness of the moral person" and the need to be responsible for that person (Bauman 1993: p. 61). Through this lens, it is argued that "what societies do is manipulate morality rather than produce it' (Bauman and Tester 2001: p. 54), influencing ethical legislation through a process known as adiaphorisation. Adiaphorisation, in this context, refers to the removal of certain conditions of action from moral consideration by causing such acts to become seen as being "neither good nor evil' but instead "measurable against technical but not moral values" (Bauman 1991: p. 144). This perspective was evident within modernity when ethical behaviour became reduced to bureaucratic measures and language that members of the population followed without critically evaluating their actions.

Liquid Modernity: The Rise of Consumer Ethics and Postcolonial Power Systems

In his later writings, Bauman (2000) explores how similar power dynamics are enacted within liquid modernity, just implemented differently. Here, the metaphor of liquidity refers to the world's rapidity, permeability, and mutability after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of Communism. These changes have seen privatised market forces strip away the welfare state, placing greater emphasis on individual consumption within an environment characterised by globalised flows of technology, people, and capital. To understand this change and its impact on perceptions of deviance, Bauman (2005) engages with the psychoanalytical work of Freud and his notion of the 'pleasure principle'

to explain how consumerism has transformed the relationship between the state and its subjects from a model based on a top-down form of surveillance linked to disciplinary conditions enforced through bureaucratic rationalities to a system built on consumption and the need to procure information. To put this more lucidly, the security provided by the command-and-control methods enacted by the state in modernity is understood to have been dismantled for the most part and replaced by a consumer-orientated system promoting a form of excessive freedom (Bauman 2006). This shift in technologies of power highlights a dichotomy in how liquid modern consumers trade security for unbridled consumer freedom:

> Security is disempowering, disabling, breeding the resented 'dependency,' and altogether constraining the human agents' freedom. What this passes over in silence is that acrobatics and ropewalking without a safety net are an art few people can master and a recipe for disaster for all the rest. Take away security, and freedom is the first casualty. (Bauman and Tester 2001: p. 52)

Such a perspective exposes the intricacies of freedom as a relational concept, in how privatised market forces control populations by forcing them to rely on their ability to decipher and interpret information (Bauman 2011).

Consequently, Bauman (2000) theorises that we now, contra to Foucault, live in a society characterised by a system of power that the Norwegian criminologist Thomas Mathiesen (1997) terms the synopticon. This post-panoptic system of governance works through populations being regulated by the many, watching the few through bottom-up and horizontal forms of surveillance. The change in systems of power and surveillance discussed by Bauman (2007) exposes how liquid modern individuals must look to others to interpret the vast swathes of information they are exposed to in consumer societies. Subsequently, control is maintained through 'precarisation' (contingency) whereby consumers alleviate their insecurity about making choices by gravitating towards the advice provided by role models such as celebrities, lifestyle gurus and social media personalities who can demonstrate examples and guide them on how to deal with their problems as well as sanctioning various types of behaviours.

> It is now your task to watch the swelling ranks of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and watch them closely and avidly, in the hope of finding something useful for yourself: an example to imitate or a word of advice about how to cope with your problems, which, like their problems, need to be coped with individually and can be coped with only individually. (Bauman 2000: p. 30)

The implementation of such a system exposes how compliance is achieved "through enticement and seduction", appearing to members of the polis as an "exercise of free will, rather than…an external force" (Bauman 2000: p. 86). In other words, when confronted with unbridled freedom, consumers seek security in the aesthetic and performative actions of others around them or who infiltrate their consciousness through various forms of media.

Such thinking explains how adiaphorisation works within an aesthetic assemblage of messages connected to neoliberal power structures and synoptic control. Considering this, Bauman (1998a, 1998b) explores such exclusion through his concept of 'flawed consumers'—a prevailing social discourse that refers to poor consumers or those who cannot participate fully in consumer culture due to their limited financial resources. However, postcolonial scholars critique Bauman for not exploring 'race' and other intersections, such as gender, in sufficient detail (Rattansi 2017). This criticism focuses on how colonial systems of power still influence neoliberal societies and highlights the subsequent need to develop a

critical analysis of how colonial world systems reproduce global power hierarchies through the control of epistemological knowledge (Mignolo 2007; Blount-Hill 2021). In this context, where knowledge is produced and who produces it remains central in understanding how acts of deviance are interpreted and positioned within the assemblage of information systems that make up consumer societies and how this importation/exportation of information privileges Global Northern, Anglo-speaking and Western populations over those from the Global South (Bhabha 1994; Fanon 2005; Said 2006). Spivak (1988), in her book 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', explains that, epistemically, knowledge is never innocent but instead used politically to sustain global power relations that subvert the colonial Other as different, inferior, and uncivilised. Spivak's work resonates with research documenting the challenges of migrant groups negotiating their identities within host societies where questions of affiliation to British society are continually probed (Pasura 2022) and the necropolitics of asylum that instrumentalises which refugees are worthy of resettlement and those that are not (De Martini Ugollotti & Webster 2023). In this context, postcolonial thought documents how knowledge and information are constructed through a Western lens that subjugates the migrant Other, which lends itself to a better understanding of the relationship between the khat ban and synoptic control.

The Study—Methodology

This article was researched in the second-largest Somali community in the United Kingdom. In total, fifty-one people were interviewed for the research. This included thirty-five semi-structured individual interviews, three focus group interviews and interviews conducted during participant observations. Participants were members of the Somali community, including elders, khat users, anti-khat campaigners, women, younger community members, youth workers and religious leaders. Interviews were also conducted with those working for external agencies with a professional stake in khat-chewing, such as local authority drug officers, police officers and a documentary filmmaker. The interviews addressed several topics, from opinions on khat use to khat's relationship with family breakdown, anti-social behaviour, community and diasporic consciousness. They took place at multiple locations, such as participants' homes, cafes/restaurants, community centres, Mosques and Government offices and varied in duration from around forty minutes to two hours. Access to participants was granted through the lead author's contacts in the community, which included members of the local Somali community centre, mental health group and neighbourhood Mosque. Most interviews were recorded via electronic Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim, with a small amount transcribed through memory. All data from the interviews underwent a process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) that helped formulate the general dimensions around which the results and discussion section is constructed.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a data-gathering tool highlighted the intricate issue of positionality (Coffey 1999), specifically relating to the lead researcher's biography and past experiences with the Somali community. This point was evident in the lead author's experiences of growing up near the neighbourhood under investigation. As a result, he was familiar with many of the respondents who participated in the research, mirroring the work of ethnographers like Willis (1977), who encountered a similar issue in his study on working-class youth culture. However, the lead author is not British–Somali and thus had to negotiate their insider–outsider status continuously during the fieldwork (Woodward 2008), echoing the work of Armstrong (1998) and Carrington (2008), both of

whom navigated being both an outsider and an insider, depending upon the spatial environment and social circles they found themselves traversing. Such a contextual situation had affordances and constraints, with one advantage being that prior experiences of khat-chewing enabled access to participants that would have typically remained closed to many researchers. On the other hand, the researcher's white-British ethnic identity marked him as an outsider to specific participants, cutting off potential lines of investigation due to a lack of trust and rapport (Fletcher 2010). University research ethics protocols were followed to maintain the anonymity, confidentiality, and safety of the research participants and the researcher (Bryman 2001). The names of participants are anonymised, as is the neighbourhood where the study took place, referred to as 'Brampton' throughout the paper.

The Moral Ambivalence of Khat-Chewing—Imposing Ethics

Brampton is situated within a city in the North of England; the neighbourhood has a long historical association with resettlement, starting with Jewish and Irish migrants at the turn of the last century and West Indian migration up until the late 1980s. Since the early 1990s, Brampton has been home to the city's Somali community, initially made up of migrants fleeing the civil war and then secondary migrations in the early 2000s from Somalis who had fled to other European countries (Sporton et al. 2006). Subsequently, considering the British Government's approach towards multiculturalism in the late 1990s and 2000s (Back et al. 2002), Brampton became a popular destination for members of the diaspora looking to reconnect with relatives and raise their children in the ways of traditional culture (Harris 2004; Valentine and Sporton 2009). Therefore, like other studies undertaken on Somali communities in Britain (see Harris 2004; Anderson et al. 2007; Mason 2018, 2020), Brampton has a strong association with Somali cultural traditions, evidenced through a local mini market known informally as the 'Somali Shop,' a Mosque situated in the heart of the neighbourhood, and a cultural school that provides classes on Somali heritage, language and traditions. Nestled within this cultural landscape is khat-chewing, with the district being home to numerous *mafrish* catering to various age groups.

Respondents stated that khat-chewing represented a divisive issue, a point communicated in the testimonies from those working for outside agencies brought in to canvas the community about the impending khat ban.

> The funny thing is that many of the community didn't even class khat as a drug, and many had varying arguments about why it was good or bad. So you have to appease these groups and make them realise that the ban has been implemented for the good of the whole population. (Michael—Senior Police Officer)
> I felt that from the people we spoke to, sometimes, we would be at large public events, and you would hear a wide range of views from the people there. My view was that within the Somali community, the views were polarised evenly. Women tended to favour the ban, not all of them, but a significant number. But it was men, predominantly older men, chewing, and the women saw that as a waste of time and money. The women saw it as a good thing that the ban was being implemented, and they thought that would be the end of it. I also came across younger men using khat, a cohort of guys in their twenties that would chew it as a social lubricant where they would meet up and chew with their friends. There was an awful lot of anger from that group, more than any other group; they were pissed off. (Graeme—Local Authority Drug Policy Officer)

Elders within the community commented on how khat occupied a space of moral ambiguity and how this issue had been growing within the diaspora for many years, leading to a divide among families.

> It's not really about the khat; my dad chewed, and other men before that have chewed. It only became a problem when they stopped being responsible for what they were supposed to be accountable for. It's like anything else; you can go down to the pub for a couple of pints, if you have got your shopping, look after your kids, look after your missus, then I don't think anybody will say anything to you. But if you were down there every day and weren't working anymore, it would be an issue, so obviously, it's a hard situation for the woman because she becomes the mother and father. (Hussein-Community Elder)

The complexity of these insights exposed the moral ambiguity surrounding khat, which was communicated in several ways by those living in the community.

On one side of the argument, the research found khat-chewing to be highly detrimental to the emotional wellbeing and economic security of others (namely women and young children) due to the insensitive and irrational way particular users choose to undertake the practice. Somali women spoke about how khat use was causing men to neglect their responsibilities in the domestic sphere, creating a palpable sense of animosity and resentment that caused households to become fractious and hostile. Idil (a middle-aged Somali woman) explained how khat-chewing sessions could last for days, causing certain men to go missing from their families for extended periods:

> The problem stems from the fact that some men chew khat and then go missing for days on end. Their wives cannot contact them and have no idea where they have gone. What is worse, they end up spending money on khat that is set aside for other things, such as food and clothes.

Others in the community documented the impact of khat use on household finances and how spending limited income on the substance impacted their ability to buy food and clothes. It was also explained how khat-chewing habits had led to specific users' becoming nocturnal, which caused women to describe how their husbands and fathers would chew khat at night and then sleep during the day, causing a knock-on effect for the household regarding mealtimes and domestic chores. This point came through strongly in Hodan's (social worker) testimony:

> The environment within families where the husband or son chews is awful; it is tense. I feel sorry for the wife and children because it causes arguments and fights over money and the male's responsibility in the house. I know lots of women who have to change mealtimes and cleaning times to fit around their husband's khat use.

Fahima (a young British–Somali woman) spoke about the worry caused by her brother when he went out to visit the local *mafrish* and how this impacted her mum and siblings' wellbeing:

> Whenever he goes out, he never lets anyone know where he is going. In the end, my mum ends up ringing him; she wakes everyone up because she shouts at him down the phone, telling him to come home and leave the *mafrish*. But he doesn't; he stays out all night and comes home when he wants. I cannot begin to tell you the worry he causes.

Here, khat was problematised as a disruptive practice that impacted people's lives and facilitated a distinct lack of moral responsibility for Others within domestic and communal spheres. In this context, it became evident that certain khat users placed their time in the *mafrish* over their family's financial stability and an emotional connection with loved ones. These divisions exposed the moral implications of khat use relating to emotional stress and financial hardship.

Like Patel's (2008) study on khat use in London, some respondents, including many women and anti-khat campaigners, communicated that not all khat users abused the substance. Here, although in some circumstances begrudgingly, it was acknowledged that certain users managed to hold down regular employment, support their families and partake in valuable roles within the neighbourhood. Furthermore, there was an underlying belief amongst many elders, including the local Imam, that the problems within the diaspora over the last thirty years surrounding khat use had more to do with the effects of forced migration and dislocation, something that mirrored studies on Somali migration in Scandinavia (Kallehave 2001; Markussen 2020) and the impact this trauma had on family breakdown and unemployment. Here, living amongst severe poverty, urban deprivation and hostile racism were understood to represent the main catalysts for family breakdown, unemployment and the rise in mental health issues impacting the community. In this context, khat was understood to have become a scapegoat for broader systemic problems connected to poverty, racism and alienation that had contributed to such discrimination.

At the same time, respondents spoke about khat's role in providing users with a sense of communal identity and diasporic connection, which many saw as vital in helping them cope with living on the margins of British society. Frequenting the *mafrish* was seen to help male users reinvigorate a sense of connection with others in the community and help forge a (re)connection with Somali culture. Furthermore, khat users explained how the ambience of social capital created in the *mafrish* helped generate a moral link amongst users who felt supported and respected.

> Somalis chew khat because it is a pastime. Like westerners have alcohol, and that hasn't been made illegal, but this (khat) is our pastime; it's what Somalis have been doing for generations (Faizal, Café owner)
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> I believe it is something to keep the identity, which has always been done back home and is something that they are so used to and brings everyone together. You can have an awful day, but as soon as you get to chew with your friends, you forget about what made you angry or depressed. (Omar, Youth worker)

These insights illustrated the role of the *mafrish* as a sanctuary for users, providing them with a space to express behaviours valued within their cultural heritage. In turn, this enabled many to embody a bold notion of Somaliness that provided a site of connection with other men experiencing problems related to cultural dislocation and marginality. Additionally, these insights exposed another side of khat-chewing that emphasised the activity's role in forging communal togetherness and belonging. Here, chewing khat was seen as a conduit that connected users to Somali culture, enabling recognition and approval for projecting a traditional form of masculinity that many felt was not respected within British society. Moreover, the embodiment of this identity helped form a sense of togetherness by forging a moral connection between those who attended the *mafrish*. Through this perspective, the research gained a greater insight into the moral link that khat-chewing sessions cultivated and how these forged feelings of togetherness with others experiencing similar anxieties about dislocation, marginality, and poverty.

Such findings showed that the ban had failed to engage with khat's situational and complex moral position and instead positioned the substance through a Eurocentric one-size-fits-all lens that served to control knowledge by instrumentalising debates about the practice through Western logic. This point highlights Spivak's (1988) assertion regarding Western power in epistemic debates over knowledge creation and the sanctioning of deviance in how sophisticated moral arguments about khat use became desensitised to the thoughts of the Somali diaspora and positioned it instead as criminal. Interestingly, many in the community, including those who identified as anti-khat, felt the ban had changed little and, in many cases, led to new problems emerging. These included a rise in the price of khat from £3 a bundle to £25–30, putting further strain on household finances and the impending fear that Somali youth would move onto more culturally problematic substances, such as alcohol or cocaine. Subsequently, a consensus emerged amongst many in the local authority's drug policy team that emphasised the view that educating users about the effects of khat would have represented a far better approach to managing the substance than criminalisation.

Panoptic or Synoptic? The Khat Ban, Morality, and Postcolonial Power Systems

The relationship between deviance and modalities of power is well established within the academic literature, with research customarily engaging with the Foucauldian (1977) concept of panopticism to explore how marginalised communities are policed through surveillance and invasive police tactics (Korf et al. 2008). The use of such tactics was something that the study expected to find when it came to the policing of khat in Brampton. Yet, surprisingly, respondents stated how many felt comfortable continuing to chew khat and attend the local *mafrish* in the wake of the khat ban. Here, it was communicated that while the Police were a visible presence within Brampton, evidenced through regular patrols and the implementation of tactics such as stop and search, particularly on younger community members, there were no experiences of khat being policed overtly. On further investigation, respondents stated that they felt that the Police had a limited understanding of khat, both culturally and practically, leading to regular jokes about how many officers would have no idea what the substance looked like. This point was highlighted by Khalid, a middle-aged man who chewed khat regularly:

> I have never heard of anybody being stopped and cautioned for carrying khat; most people I know think the Police wouldn't even know what khat looked like. Plus, they [Police] have other things to deal with, like 'blues' (crack) that people all over the city are dealing with, and the ramifications of that, such as the gang feuds. I genuinely think that if they stopped me with khat, they would think I was going to cook it or something (laughs).

This absence of overt policing methods was something that law enforcement was also open about, particularly when addressing the issue of how the substance was regulated in the wake of the ban.

> Interviewer: So how is khat policed then?
> Graeme (Police): A part of it was to embed a caution system and educate officers about khat. It is very much like Cannabis in following the same process, three strikes and then that can lead to a conviction and a crime.
> Interviewer: So, has anybody been convicted or caught using the substance?

Graeme (Police): No, we have had just two street cautions in the city, that is it. This was because these guys had been pulled over for something else; it was only then that khat was discovered in the car. So quite by accident.

The absence of overt policing methods reoriented the research about the role of the khat ban and the underlying systemic power dynamics used to control the substance. This led the study to analyse how khat was being positioned aesthetically within the minds of the public and how rhetoric around the ban had sought to connect the practice with criminality, terror, and mental illness. Subsequently, this new research direction exposes a power dynamic centred on aesthetics and performativity instead of disciplinary control.

Here, Bauman's (2000) concept of the synopticon and its impact on ethical decision-making provided the framework through which we felt a detailed understanding of the khat ban and its impact on sanctioning khat could be better understood. Through this perspective, synopticism articulates how citizens regulate themselves through deciphering and then acting upon information, a point that connects with emerging scholarship within criminology and the sociology of deviance (Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney 2017; Smith and Raymen 2018; Irwin-Rogers 2019). In this context, this power system works by getting members of the polis to procure information and decipher the aesthetic and performative aspects of that information to encourage self-policing. This perspective exposes how imagery and the discourse surrounding it play a significant role in implementing a new form of adiaphorised logic that influences how consumers understand what is deemed ethical. Through this system, the public looks horizontally to those around them and vertically to those in the media spotlight above them to regulate their behaviour and position that of others. Such thinking led the research to look in greater depth at the arguments underpinning the khat ban and how this had been communicated aesthetically to the public.

Respondents spoke about how the khat ban and the rationale behind it had led to a negative perception of Somalis within the broader public consciousness, namely, in how linking the practice with terror groups like *Al-Shabaab* and the stigma of mental health had served to impose colonial images of Somalis as subaltern and impervious to Western values:

Yes, there was one piece of information that was disseminated that was simply untrue. The Home Office stated that khat contributes monies for terrorism, funding groups like *Al-Shabaab*. Bloody Hell! *Al-Shabaab*, the first thing they do in any territory they control is ban khat. They have shot people for dealing khat […]. I think there is a lot of lazy Government and Governance, lazy intelligence; it's like connecting dots which really don't exist. It makes things weightier by throwing in stuff that has its own weight by linking khat with *Al-Shabaab* and *Al Qaeda*; it makes people scared of Somalis in this country. (Saad – Community Elder)

There has never been any evidence to connect khat with mental health disorders; look at the work of the Government's own advisory body; they say khat is about as potent as coffee; what will they do, ban coffee next? Of course, they won't! It is just an excuse to ban khat that people will get behind. I see patients every day who are struggling. Is that down to khat? No. It's the poverty and racism they experience living here (Britain). (Faisal – Somali mental health worker)

Such anger and confusion also gave way to a broader realisation that such information had led to significant distrust and suspicion towards Somalis amongst the public, placing many within the vernacular of being violent, disloyal, and criminal. Here, respondents

who regularly chewed khat spoke about how they were reluctant to associate themselves with the substance outside their community, whether amongst work colleagues or non-Somali friends.

> It is always tricky telling work colleagues about khat; some have never heard of it, and others always bring up if it's what the Somali pirates chew when they board a ship or that *Al Shabaab* sells it. Now that it's banned, I am wary of telling them that I chew it; I don't want to be labelled as a terrorist or loopy. If other Somalis ask, then that's no problem. I will tell them that I chew, but people outside, I am always worried they will get the wrong impression and see me in a bad light, which is strange. (Abdi Aziz, early 30s – Council worker)
>
> I find it strange talking to people outside the community about khat or that I do documentaries on it. Most white people are wary; I hear it all: terrorism, and mental issues, all that kind of thing. In my opinion, it is because khat is not commercialised; you see white people smoking shisha because they see rappers do it in their music videos, they become familiar with it because they see people they follow do it. That is why shisha cafes are getting big now. But khat it is portrayed so badly and linked to negative things, so people stay away and are reluctant to try it. (Murad, Male mid-30s – Documentary filmmaker)

These narratives exposed the level of distrust and suspicion attributed to khat use outside the Somali community as a result of the ban. This perspective reveals how synoptic systems of information and the aesthetic image they portray coalesce around postcolonial power structures that police Somali people and their cultural traditions through an aesthetic that characterises them in opposition to Western (British) values of civility.

These insights helped the research analyse how those outside the community misinterpreted khat users as irrational, criminal and deviant, pathologising Somalis as incapable of making rational decisions and placing them as deserving of their marginalised position within society due to their perceived lack of reflexivity. In this context, Bauman (1998b: p. 38) explains how: "in a society of consumers, it is above all the inadequacy of the person as a consumer that leads to social degradation and 'internal exile'". The logic of this perspective exposes how the negative public imagery associated with the ban positioned khat users as disloyal, criminal and mentally unstable, shaping attitudes amongst the public towards the substance as an activity undertaken by irrational people and, in doing this, increasing support for the ban. At the same time, the propensity of the polis to evaluate khat-chewing through a situational and positional moral lens was severely reduced. The adiaphoric aspect of such behaviour exposes how ethical decisions are open to a new system of manipulation that works through synoptic methods of information and the aesthetic portrayed to the consumer masses. Here, postcolonial ideas of power connected to Western knowledge systems helped the research expose how such information draws on a colonialist mentality that seeks to position non-Western cultures as inferior—infiltrating the minds of the general public through a consumer aesthetic that portrays khat and those who use it as deviant and uncivilised.

Concluding Thoughts

In solid modernity, people were made unaware of the endpoint of their actions by layers of bureaucracy that sought to control them through panoptic surveillance and instrumentalised rationalities. In liquid modernity, people are similarly unaware of the endpoint of

their ethical decisions, given that they are influenced by the consumer-guided processes of aesthetics and performativity that lead them to disassociate themselves from those they perceive as irrational. Subsequently, humanity becomes ignorant of the suffering and marginality that such systemic forms of violence cause, leaving those on the periphery to drift further from our sphere of moral responsibility. In this context, the khat ban represents a political reaction that centres on aesthetically connecting the image of khat and the Somalis who use it to racialised characteristics built around criminality, barbarism and mental instability. By drawing upon such imagery, any hope of getting the consumer masses to think about the practice in a situational and positional manner is lost. Instead, a politics of fear is evoked through the implementation of a Eurocentric logic that epistemically controls information and positions Somalis and their cultural customs as subalterns to British society. It is within this climate of fear that the consumer masses process this information and position khat as deviant, disassociating themselves from the practice and the people who partake in it. Consequently, synoptic power changes the processes through which understandings of deviance and ethics are understood, reinforcing postcolonial power systems of Western society and Western thought over formerly colonised peoples through increasing levels of social inequality and racism that continue to go unquestioned.

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