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Swain, Spencer ORCID logoORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2191-0041> (2023) 'Don't forget the juicy fruits': Khat-chewing, diaspora and the glocal identities of British-Somali Youth. In: Leisure Studies Conference 2023: Re-creating Leisure, 11th-13th July 2023, Bournemouth University.

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‘Don’t forget the  
juicy fruits’:  
Khat-chewing,  
diaspora and the  
glocal identities  
of British-Somali  
Youth

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**Dr Spencer Swain**

**Education, Languages and  
Psychology**

**York St John University**

# **Inclusion, Society & Education**

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RESEARCH GROUP

# Introduction

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- Rationale for the study
- Research methods
- Diaspora, identity and khat-chewing
- Khat and diasporic consciousness
- Khat and glocalised identities



# Rationale (Khat, identity and Somaliness)

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- Khat
  - *Catha edulis* (shrub like narcotic)
  - Grown in East Africa (Mirra – Kenya; Herrere – Ethiopia)
  - Place contents into side of the mouth and chew
  - Chewed in *mafrish* – khat house (sessions – 6 hours – extreme days!)

(Alem, Kebede, & Kullgreen, 2007; Anderson & Carrier, 2009)

- Khat-chewing
  - Central part of Somali culture
  - Staple of masculinity
  - Used to form patriarchal and patrilineal hierarchies

(Beckerleg, 2008; Swain, 2017; Swain, Spracklen and Lashua, 2018; Swain, Lashua and Spracklen, 2021; Swain, 2021)



# Rationale (Khat, identity and Somaliness)

- Khat and identity
  - Before Somali civil war – khat heavily regulated (Fridays or wedding celebrations)
  - Since the civil war increase in khat use – resistance towards legacy of Siad Barre
    - The vast majority of the male population chew khat every day
    - Same with younger Somali men
      - Khat use by women is still discouraged and, in many cases, hidden.
  - Khat used in the diaspora – older Somali men use khat to maintain diasporic connection
- Khat, Somali youth and identity
  - Identity of migrant youth often marginalised – ghettoised approach looking at first generation migrants. (Gilroy, 1993; Ratna, 2020)
  - Khat in the UK – Banned/internal division (Swain, 2021)
    - Highlights questions
      - How do Somali youth use khat to negotiate their identity?
      - Internal politics of khat and understandings of Somaliness?

# Research methods

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- 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork
- 51 un-structured interviews
- Participant observations – khat-chewing sessions/local community etc
- Ethical issues
  - Positionality (insider/outsider – third space)
  - Legality of khat

Fletcher (2012); Fletcher and Swain (2016); Riches et al (2017)





# Conceptualising diaspora and identity

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- The global dispersal of a cultural community.
- Understandings of diaspora are diverse and open to interpretation.
- Particular type of ethnic category existing across the boundaries of nation-states instead of within them.
  - Offers an understanding of identity as syncretic and complex.
- However, perceptions of identity within the diaspora can be open to the spectre of essentialism and fixed notions of identity
  - Boundary creation and fixed notions of belonging.

(Fletcher, 2012; Brah, 1996; Ratna, 2020; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993)





# Findings – Khat use and Somaliness

- Khat used to create a traditional sense of Somaliness
- Observed how sessions involved replicating khat use in Somaliland:
  - Sitting on the floor
  - Talking in Somali dialect
  - Stories about Somaliland
- Conceptualised how the *mafrish* came to symbolise a diaspora space
  - Identities that promoted a connection with Somaliland
  - The idea of living in a country without conforming to its culture
- However, these identities were also questioned!



# Findings – Khat, hybridity and identity



- However – young British-Somalis found their identities questioned by others in their communities.
  - Established khat users – questioned how younger generation chewed
    - Juicy fruit chewing gum
    - Poor use of Somali language
    - Western music – cultural influences (Watching sports)
    - Lack of knowledge of Somali politics and the clan system
    - Khat seen as being out of touch with the lives of certain 2<sup>nd</sup> generation migrants
- More syncretic understanding of Somaliness – fusion with western influences
- Glocalised identities – infusion of global (Somali) and local (British) cultural influences within youth mafrish
- However – these glocalised identities marginalised leaving many young British-Somali men caught between cultures





# Conclusion

- Diaspora, identity and khat-chewing
- Khat and diasporic consciousness
- Khat and glocalised identities



Any Questions?

## A black stethoscope is positioned diagonally across a white computer keyboard. The stethoscope's chest piece is on the left, and its two earpieces extend towards the bottom right. The keyboard features standard white keys with black lettering, including letters, numbers, and function keys like 'command' and 'option'. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

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