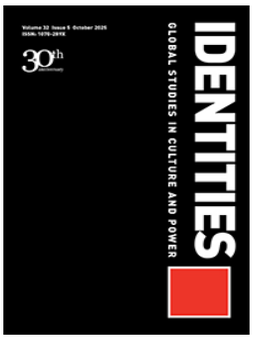

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Identities
Global Studies in Culture and Power

ISSN: 1070-289X (Print) 1547-3384 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/gide20

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Spencer Swain, Brett Lashua & Karl Spracklen

To cite this article: Spencer Swain, Brett Lashua & Karl Spracklen (24 Oct 2025): ‘Don’t forget the juicy fruits’: khat-chewing, diaspora, and identity amongst young British-Somali men in the North of England, Identities, DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2025.2579402

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2025.2579402

Published online: 24 Oct 2025.

IDENTITIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2025.2579402

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'Don't forget the juicy fruits': khat-chewing, diaspora, and identity amongst young British-Somali men in the North of England

Spencer Swain [a], Brett Lashua[b] and Karl Spracklen[c]

[a]Education, Languages and Psychology, York St John University, York, UK; [b]Sociology and Education, University College London, London, UK; [c]Social Sciences, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study examines how young British-Somali men in Northern England utilize khat-chewing as a cultural practice to negotiate hybrid identities formed by migration, marginalization, and transnational belonging. Drawing on 18 months of fieldwork, the research reveals how khat consumption within *mafrish* spaces functions as a ritual of cultural continuity, enabling participants to maintain symbolic ties to Somali heritage while navigating British urban life. These practices challenge binary notions of identity, illustrating how diasporic youth construct fluid, contextual selves that blend Somaliness with Britishness. Khat-chewing emerges as both a coping mechanism and a form of resistance, offering a sense of belonging amid experiences of exclusion, Islamophobia, and racialization. The study highlights the agency of young migrants in shaping diasporic spaces and identities, contributing to broader debates on hybridity, glocalization, and the politics of cultural expression in postcolonial Britain.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 7 March 2024; Accepted 20 October 2025

KEYWORDS Khat-chewing; migration; identity; diaspora; leisure; youth

Introduction

Khat-chewing, a cultural recreational practice in Somaliland, the Horn of Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula, involves orally absorbing cathinone—a mild stimulant—by chewing the tender leaves and stalks of the khat plant *catha edulis* (Beckerleg 2013; Hansen 2008). In Somaliland, khat is deeply embedded in cultural life and is commonly consumed in the *mafrish*—informal, male-dominated café-style spaces that provide opportunities for communal bonding

CONTACT Spencer Swain s.swain@yorksj.ac.uk Education, Languages and Psychology, York St John University York, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31, UK

(Green 1999). Much like alcohol in Western societies, khat has been understood to be a central resource for expressing masculinity and enforcing patrilineal authority through oral storytelling and knowledge exchange (D. Anderson et al. 2007; Swain, Lashua, and Spracklen 2024). This prominent cultural position within Somali heritage is something that accompanies diasporic communities to their new 'homes' in Northern Europe and North America, where khat use has been documented as being a crucial symbolic resource for reconstructing ties to Somaliland and reasserting a sense of cultural identity (Patel 2015; Swain 2021). Within Britain, khat spaces have been observed to replicate the performative functions of traditional *mafrish* in Somaliland, offering users a means to navigate heritage, gender norms, and social belonging through rituals that bridge the past and the present (D. Anderson et al. 2007; Swain, Spracklen, and Lashua 2018; Thomas and Williams 2013).

The prevalence of khat use among the Somali diaspora underscores the complex social landscapes through which young British-Somali men navigate questions of identity. This study builds on research into Somali integration in European contexts (Kallehave 2001; Spaaij and Broerse 2019) by examining how identity is shaped in everyday diasporic spaces. Historically, migration research has prioritized first-generation adults, often marginalizing the lived experiences of youth. This has resulted in what Sporton, Valentine, and Bang Nielsen (2006) describe as a 'ghettoised' view, neglecting young people as active participants in identity formation. In this context, youth are frequently cast as 'tied migrants', seen as passive followers of their parents' migration journeys (Huijsmans 2011). As Pinson and Arnot (2020, 830) observe, educational research on migrant youth remains a 'wasteland', rendering their experiences largely invisible, forging what Sayad (2004) and De Martini Ugolotti (2022) interpret as a 'mirror function' that reflects Europe's unresolved colonial legacies and postcolonial silences.

This research examines how the intersection of age, gender, 'race', religion, and class influences the identities of young migrants across time and space (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Campbell 2020). Drawing on Hall's (1992) assertion that identity is not fixed but formed through ongoing cultural negotiation, the study focuses on khat-chewing as a socially embedded practice through which young British-Somali men articulate and rework their identities. The article begins by unpacking the cultural meanings of khat within Somali diasporic contexts before situating these ideas within the broader conceptualizations of diaspora. A methodological overview follows, outlining the fieldwork process, which comprised 51 semi-structured interviews with khat users, non-users, and professionals working in social and service contexts, supplemented by focus groups and 18 months of participant observation. This overview also includes a discussion of ethical considerations. The findings highlight how khat serves as a conduit for diasporic consciousness, enabling young men to perform

complex and often contradictory versions of Somali identity. While khat offers a sense of ontological security amid experiences of exclusion, it also generates tensions within families and the wider community. Ultimately, khat-chewing reveals how these men inhabit a liminal space – negotiating between inherited cultural scripts and the urban multiculturalism of contemporary Britain.

Khat-chewing and the Somali diaspora

Khat-chewing occupies a contested yet deeply embedded position within Somali cultural life. Before the Somali Civil War, the practice was tightly regulated under Siad Barre's authoritarian regime, confined to Fridays and communal events such as weddings, funerals, and religious celebrations like *maulids* (Samatar 1989a). However, after the regime's collapse in 1991, khat use expanded rapidly, reshaped by new political freedoms and shifting cultural norms (Hansen 2010; Walls 2009). For some, khat symbolized resistance to state repression, its widespread consumption embodying a post-authoritarian assertion of autonomy (Klein 2019). At the same time, infrastructural developments—especially enhanced trade routes between Ethiopian and Kenyan farms and Somaliland's urban centres—have made khat more accessible, fuelling its proliferation in major cities such as Hargeisa and Burco. Today, daily khat use is widespread among Somali men and increasingly among youth. However, female consumption remains culturally taboo, often rendered invisible due to dominant gender norms that conflate khat use with impropriety and a transgression of expected femininity (Ahmed et al. 2019; Hansen 2010).

The rise of khat consumption in Somaliland has extended into Somali diasporas across Northern Europe, North America, and East Africa, where use is widespread among older men seeking continuity with homeland cultural practices (D. Anderson et al. 2007; Carrier 2017; Klantschnig and Carrier 2018). In marginalized British urban contexts, however, khat chewing assumes additional significance as both a cultural anchor and a coping strategy amid systemic exclusion and structural violence. Abdullahi and Wei (2021) highlight the barriers faced by Somali refugees on arrival, including linguistic marginalization, racialized surveillance, constrained labour market access, and enforced welfare dependency. Concentrated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods characterized by unemployment, precarious housing, and overstretched public services (Osman et al. 2015), communities mobilize cultural practices to navigate adversity. Liberatore (2018) illustrates this need to overcome such negative stigma through documenting Somali youth's 'strategic identity construction', exemplified by political mobilization during the 2013 campaign against Barclays Bank's closure of remittance accounts, and how this led to a need to project an identity of the 'good

diaspora' based on professionalism, impartiality, and development-oriented values. Within such conditions, khat becomes one among several resources deployed to manage racism, Islamophobia, and social isolation (Markussen 2020). While government discourse frames khat as deviant, it also serves as a site of resilience used to create a fragile yet meaningful mode of diasporic belonging, affective solidarity, and collective care (Summerfield 2024).

Despite its central position within Somali social life, khat use remains a site of contestation in diasporic settings, underscoring Osman (2015, 2017) observation that cultural practices can generate intra-community conflict rather than simply sustaining a coherent sense of identity. Somali women's organizations have been particularly vocal, critiquing khat for diverting household income, undermining familial responsibilities, and contributing to domestic violence (Patel 2015; Swain 2017). Such interventions expose the gendered dimensions of migration, where women often bear the disproportionate burdens of care and financial insecurity. At the same time, conservative Islamic groups—especially those influenced by *Wahhabism*—denounce khat as haram, framing its psychoactive qualities as incompatible with moral discipline and religious duty (Klein 2013). These internal debates stand in contrast to the UK Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, which in 2013 concluded that evidence of harm was insufficient to justify prohibition (ACMD 2013). However, prohibitionist pressures intensified, fuelled both by lobbying from religious and community actors and by securitized narratives in Western policy discourses that linked khat to terrorism financing, particularly *Al-Shabaab* (Thomas and Williams 2013; Caulfield 2016). The resulting bans exemplify how khat has become entangled in moral panics and Islamophobic logics of risk and control.

Diaspora, identity, and hybridity

The concept of diaspora has traditionally described the dispersal of ethnic groups from a perceived homeland, often due to forced migration driven by conflict or the pursuit of economic opportunities elsewhere. However, more recent critical scholarship reframes diaspora not simply as a spatial relocation but as a dynamic process of identity formation shaped by displacement, cultural negotiation, and transnational belonging (Bhandari 2021; McLeod 2020). Anthias (1998) reconceptualizes diasporas as transnational social formations that transcend the confines of the nation-state, while Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk (2005) describe diasporic subjects as being simultaneously 'from one place but of another'. This challenges essentialist understandings of identity as static and territorially bound. Gilroy's (1993) notion of the Black Atlantic further disrupts Eurocentric paradigms by emphasizing identity as shaped through movement, hybridity, and historical entanglements. Thus, diaspora must be understood as a continuing attachment – real or imagined – to

a place of origin and through the transformative encounters experienced along migratory routes (Brah 1996; Ratna 2014).

In light of such thinking. Anthias (2001, 632) highlights a key tension in diaspora studies, cautioning that specific conceptualizations risk homogenizing diverse populations by invoking primordial or absolutist notions of 'origin' and 'true belonging'. This critique highlights how diasporas are shaped by internal hierarchies—such as class, gender, religion, and nationalist or patrilineal structures— that produce boundaries within ostensibly unified communities (De Martini Ugolotti 2015; Pasura 2010). For instance, research on the Somali diaspora reveals complex distinctions: while early 20th-century Somali seamen migrated mainly for economic reasons, later waves, including those fleeing the civil war in the late 1980s and early 1990s, were displaced by conflict (Harris 2005; Sporton, Valentine, and Bang Nielsen 2006). These differing trajectories generate layered and sometimes contested senses of diasporic belonging (Summerfield 2024). Hall (1990, 235) captures this multiplicity, asserting that diasporas are 'defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity . . . by hybridity'.

Conceptualizing diasporas as unfixed and fluid complicates the understanding of identity among young British-Somali men. While multicultural frameworks emphasize the right of individuals to hold multiple affiliations without having their loyalties questioned (De Martini Ugolotti 2022; Fletcher 2015), dominant discourses in Britain often rely on populist, nationalistic notions of identity that privilege singular, ethnic 'origins' (Ratna 2020). These essentialist understandings offer ontological security and a perceived sense of solidarity, often at the expense of recognizing hybrid or transnational identities. For many within the Somali diaspora, emotional, cultural, and economic investments in Somaliland persist, reinforcing symbolic attachments to a national homeland (Kallehave 2001; Markussen 2020). These attachments are expressed through cultural markers—language, dress, and ritual – which foster what Brah (1996) calls a 'diasporic consciousness' grounded in a 'homing desire'. Crucially, this desire is not necessarily about returning but about maintaining identity through a connection to an imagined homeland shaped by collective memory rather than territorial fixity.

This argument builds on Demir (2016, 2017) concept of *foreignisation*, which describes how diasporic communities—focusing on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe – disrupt the epistemological and cultural frameworks of the Global North. Demir (2016, 2022) positions diasporas as agents of epistemic rupture, unsettling dominant narratives and political assumptions, identifying three key modes of intervention: First, through epistemological challenges, migrant communities contest Eurocentric discourses and the decolonization of knowledge production. Second, by exposing historical and contemporary entanglements, they highlight Europe's complicity in marginalizing non-European peoples, implicating the European public in constructing global

hierarchies. Third, through transnational Indigenous resistance, diasporic movements can align with the Global South's struggles to advance democratic autonomy. Such thinking aligns with scholarship (Ademolu 2021; Back 2013; Burdsey 2006) on diasporic identity, which critiques simplistic binaries between cultural preservation and assimilation—highlighting how, for Somali youth in the diaspora, identity is shaped relationally—with 'indigenous' neighbours—within a shared yet contested social habitus. This dynamic underscores diasporas as sites of cultural innovation and resistance that 'foreignise European publics by re-telling a counter-history of the homogenisation efforts and the ensuing violence'. (Demir 2017, 63).

Methods

This article draws on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2017 in one of the UK's largest Somali communities, situated in the North of England. Central to the research were the narratives of young British-Somali men, whose experiences form the anchor of the analysis, alongside insights from women, community elders, and anti-khat activists. Informed by approaches such as Bucerius's (2013) work on second-generation migrants in Germany, the study also included professionals with direct or institutional stakes in khat, including youth workers, social care practitioners, and local authority staff. Most young men were born in Somaliland and arrived in the UK as children; others had migrated from elsewhere in Europe (notably Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands), while a few were UK-born to parents displaced by the Somali Civil War. Participants represented a range of social and economic positions—from students and professionals to precariously employed or unemployed young adults – aged between eighteen and twenty-five, as they navigated complex transnational and local identities.

Data collection involved eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork (Gobo 2008), comprising fifty-one semi-structured interviews, three focus group discussions (each with 4–6 participants), and sustained participant observation in a predominantly Somali neighbourhood in a northern English city. Fieldwork sites included khat-chewing sessions, community gatherings, and everyday social encounters. For legal and ethical reasons, the researcher refrained from directly consuming khat during these observations. The neighbourhood is pseudonymized as 'Brampton', and all participants selected their pseudonyms – an approach intended to foster agency and a sense of ownership over their narratives (Fletcher 2015; Murphy, Jerolmack, and Smith 2021). This practice also reflected a sensitivity to the ethical risks of arbitrary or humorous naming, which can trivialize cultural identities. As Ratna (2011) argues, careless use of pseudonyms—especially where gender, religion, and ethnicity intersect – can reproduce colonial logic

and further marginalize racialized groups. This ethical framing was integral to the study's decolonial and community-responsive methodology.

The ethnographic approach foregrounded the complex dynamics of positionality (Coffey 1999), particularly in relation to the lead researcher's biography as a white British male who grew up near the Brampton neighbourhood. His proximity to the area meant he already knew several participants, echoing the challenges identified by Willis (1977) in his study of working-class youth. While this familiarity enabled unique access, primarily through longstanding relationships with former school peers, it also required constant negotiation of insider – outsider status (Woodward 2008). As someone outside the British-Somali community, the researcher occupied a liminal space, navigating shifting boundaries of trust and belonging depending on social context (Armstrong 1998; Carrington 2008). This dual positioning demonstrates how ethnographic work is always filtered through the embodied presence of the researcher (Fletcher 2014), a point seen in the way local embeddedness provided entry points. However, whiteness and cultural difference limited engagement around identity-sensitive issues and placed boundaries on intimacy and disclosure with specific participants.

We approached this research with a conscious awareness of the ethical and political complexities involved when white researchers represent minoritised communities (Duneier 2004; Fletcher and Swain 2016; Young 2004). As three white, middle-class men, we acknowledge the profound asymmetries between our positions and those of our British-Somali participants. Our aim was not only to convey participants' narratives with respect and accuracy but also to challenge the dominance of academic paradigms that have historically marginalized Somali voices (Lawrence and Hylton 2022; Rollock et al. 2015). Somali Studies has long privileged research about rather than with or by Somalis (Samatar 1989b), prompting calls for a decolonial turn (Kusow and Eno 2015). Nevertheless, we recognize that our efforts cannot fully overcome entrenched racialized power imbalances within knowledge production. Instead, our task was to render these difficulties visible, foregrounding how our positionalities, assumptions, and practices were disrupted and reconfigured by those whose lives we sought to represent.

Khat-chewing: Somaliness and diaspora space

The lived realities of young British-Somali men revealed the complex terrain where identities emerge through the negotiation between local embeddedness and global consciousness, embodying Clifford's (1994) observation that diasporas think globally but live locally. This perpetual oscillation between belonging and otherness generated profound identity interrogation, persisting even as participants selectively adopted cultural markers of their 'new' society (Anthias 2001; Gilroy 1991). Within this contested space, the *mafrish*

and its associated khat-chewing rituals functioned as sites of identity recalibration, enabling users to reconstruct their habitus within Britain's sociocultural landscape to accommodate their multifaceted needs. Brah's (1996) conceptualization of 'diaspora space' illuminates how diasporic communities actively resist marginalization through strategic cultural practices. Her framework transcends simplistic migrant-host binaries, instead examining how power relations and positionality intersect to shape both 'insider' and 'outsider' experiences. Crucially, 'diaspora space' weaves together 'genealogies of dispersion' with the experiences of those who remain geographically static (Brah 1996, 209), revealing how migrant communities can inhabit spaces without surrendering to hegemonic narratives. This analytical lens exposes migration's transgressive potential in cultivating what Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk (2005) term 'diasporic consciousness'.

Brah's (1996) theoretical contributions enabled the research to decode how dominant discourses surrounding authenticity, belonging, and citizenship simultaneously constrain and enable identity formation, particularly in relation to Hall's (2000) conceptualization of 'new' and 'hybrid' ethnicities. Through this interpretive framework, the *mafrish* was understood to represent a crucial everyday space where young British-Somali men performed cultural loyalty through the embodied practice of khat consumption—a form of 'creative labour' that invested time and emotional capital in maintaining diasporic connections. This ritualistic engagement transcended mere substance use, generating a profound sense of place attachment and belonging that reinforced transnational ties to Somaliland and a broader Somali cultural identity, as documented in the fieldwork below.

> After soft Somali whispers precede the door's opening, revealing Faisal—tall, tracksuited, gracious – who ushers us into a living room pulsing with diasporic memory. A dozen young Somali men sit cross-legged on the floor, their animated debates punctuated by the methodical placement of khat leaves into cheek pouches. Despite available sofas, they choose the traditional posture, their bodies recreating the spatial practices of the 'homeland'. The room itself exudes a strong connection with Somaliland. Family photographs capture white-bricked buildings against desert panoramas, while the republic's tricolour flag – green with Arabic script, a white star on a black field, and a crimson base —hangs proudly beside a mirror. A handwoven rug sprawls centrally, its Arabic inscriptions and geometric patterns anchoring the space in Islamic aesthetics. Carved wooden masks and stone figurines of robed women populate the mantelpiece, silent witnesses to cultural continuity across continents. Frankincense smoke drifts from burning incense, its sweet intensity filling the air with ancestral aromatics. This sensory landscape transforms a Brampton apartment into a transnational space where homeland and diaspora collapse into one shared moment. But it is through khat that the most profound connections emerge. The young men's practised fingers strip leaves from stems with inherited precision, binding the bitter contents into compact wads that bulge their cheeks. They reach for bottles of *Shani*—Arabic strawberry cola – to

> temper the astringency of khat, their movements echoing the generations of ritual consumption that have preceded them. The circular seating arrangement facilitates the flow of conversation and substances, recreating the democratic intimacy of Somaliland's traditional gathering spaces. Each chew becomes an act of cultural transmission; each shared laugh or use of the Somali dialect is a bridge spanning geographic distance. In this modest living room, diaspora youth do not merely consume khat – they consume connection itself, tasting homeland through bitter leaves while their bodies perform ancestral rhythms of community-making. The *mafrish* emerges as more than a social space; it becomes a vessel for cultural DNA, preserving Somaliland's social fabric within Britain's inner-city urban sprawl. Through this shared activity, these young men temporarily collapse the distance between here and there, creating pockets of homeland wherever they gather to chew and remember together. (Fieldnote – youth *mafrish* located in Brampton)

Such insights record how behaviour connected users through the embodiment of authentic khat-chewing practices; this can be linked to the telling of oral histories about Somali culture and heritage, recorded in later one-to-one interviews.

> I believe that khat is all about keeping the identity; it has always been done back home and brings everyone together. Khat is what Somalis are known for. (Ahmed, 21 student)

> Chewing khat makes you feel like a proper Somali. I mean when you are in the *marfrish*, people tend to speak more Somali, and sometimes younger lads have been thrown out for using the wrong phrases or dialect … Chewing involves stories about back home, tribes, Somali history, the Civil War, and things like that; everyone is planning their next visit … One thing they like to talk about is whom they know. So, they will talk about a certain tribe and the person who knows all the different surnames to prove their knowledge of the past and their homeland. (Mohammed, 23, delivery driver)

> It is an issue of belonging to something, the need to belong to something is true for all kinds of people and these days, it will come in through being a part of the Mosque, a drug cartel, or a khat house. Khat helps a lot of the youngsters feel attached to Somali culture. They need that belonging, considering their marginal position in this country (Britain). (Fatah, community elder)

These narratives communicate how diasporic communities are frequently defined based on group demographics that are constructed around ethnic symbols and practices that provide solidarity while also offering practical and symbolic resistance towards monolithic understandings of identity that emphasize whiteness.

Britain's expanding minority ethnic populations navigate complex tensions between desires for integration and ancestral loyalties (B. Anderson 1991; Ratna 2014). Young British-Somali male khat users in Brampton exemplify this duality: khat consumption and *mafrish* gatherings simultaneously reinforce homeland connections while providing

spaces to process experiences of racism, Islamophobia, and marginalization (Markussen 2020). These practices represent strategic identity management, enabling cultural preservation alongside negotiations of integration and cultural exchange. Such dual belonging reflects broader patterns in which diaspora communities maintain transnational identities while confronting systemic barriers to full citizenship (Summerfield 2024).

> I feel comfortable in the *mafrish*; I can talk with friends, share jokes, and discuss what bothers me. I think people inside there [the *mafrish*] will understand what I experience because they live a similar life to me [. . .]. The few times I have gone to a nightclub, I feel that I don't fit in. I am not comfortable. Everybody is drinking and acting crazy. I do not belong in that environment; it has nothing in common with me. When chewing khat, I can relate to the people around me. (Abokor, 19 years old, Student)

This commentary shows how cultural practices can transform strangers into a collective by positioning themselves against a common adversary. In this context, it can be seen how young British-Somali men who chew khat consciously transformed flats, playgrounds and non-places like car parks into racialized spaces adorned with signifiers of Somali culture (e.g. khat, the use of the Somali language and traditional music), creating an environment through which identity and sense of national sentiment are engaged.

This creative place-shaping illustrates how young khat users forge a collective identity by constructing 'local' meanings within 'non-local' spaces – what Hall and Jefferson (1976) describe as 'resistance through ritual'. In such contexts, khat consumption transforms mundane settings into culturally charged localities where users negotiate belonging and identity. Appadurai's (1996, 110) notion of a 'simulacrum of warfare' is useful here, suggesting that these rituals defensively rearticulate 'traditional' Somaliness in response to British exclusion. Demir (2016, 2017, 2022) concept of *foreignisation* offers a critical lens, positioning khat use as an epistemological intervention – disrupting dominant European narratives that pathologise Somalis as terrorists or culturally regressive. This framing exposes both historical colonial violence and contemporary racialized discourses on migration and integration. However, this analysis risks romanticizing what may equally represent cultural stasis or retreat from broader social participation. Brah's (1996) understanding of migration as a 'journey' reminds us that departure conditions shape diasporic identity yet may underplay agency. Her distinction between 'feeling at home' and 'declaring a place as home' (Brah 1996, 183) reveals unresolved host-ancestral tensions. Meanwhile, khat-chewing cultivates B. Anderson's (1991) 'imagined community', linking users to Somaliland but potentially obstructing their sense of belonging in Britain. As Demir

(2017, 61) reminds us, such diasporic actors are 'both outsiders and insiders to Northern spaces', uniquely positioned to contest their marginalization.

'Glocal' identities: khat and new ethnicities

In light of such thinking, it is essential to recognize that social identities emerge through ongoing processes of construction and negotiation, rendering them inherently contextual in their capacity to unite or divide. Hall's (1992, 277) observation that a 'fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy' illuminates this fluidity, particularly where 'systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily'. This theoretical framework proves essential for understanding how young British-Somali men navigate multiple identity markers shaped by intersecting personal, social, and cultural influences. Rather than treating identity as fixed, this perspective reveals the nuanced ways in which individuals negotiate belonging within diasporic contexts. The concept of diaspora itself transcends simple geographic displacement, representing connections derived 'from an original but maybe removed homeland' while creating new identities 'on a world scale which crosses national borders and boundaries' (Anthias 1998, 559–60). Simultaneously, these communities constitute 'composite formations made up of many journeys to different parts of the globe, each with its own history, its own particularities' (Brah 1996, 183). For young British-Somali men who chew khat, this complexity manifests in their simultaneous participation in broader African, Muslim, and Black diasporas while maintaining distinct experiences shaped by their specific British context. Understanding this multiplicity is crucial for examining how cultural practices, such as khat consumption, become vehicles for identity formation and expression.

Conceptualizing identity in a syncretic manner aided an unravelling of the nexus between (and relative significance of) place(s) of 'origin' and place(s) of 'settlement'. This helped the study better understand how global and local influences shape the identities of young British Somali men who chewed khat, connecting with Robertson's (1995) and Riegel's (2022) concept of 'glocalism'. An insight into the cultural dynamics of this form of multiculturalism is illustrated below:

> Sahara's entrance underscores its marginal position—its industrial facade concealing a vibrant social world within. The unmarked black door, stark white doorbell, and crackling intercom system create an almost clandestine atmosphere, suggesting spaces that exist parallel to mainstream British leisure culture. This threshold crossing feels ritualistic; the buzzer's release grants access not merely to a room, but to a carefully curated cultural sanctuary. The transition through orange and red curtains operates as a sensory portal. Sweet

> strawberry smoke announces the space before sight—an olfactory signature that immediately distinguishes this environment from typical British social venues. The dimmed lighting creates an intimate atmosphere, while old-school hip-hop and R&B maintain conversational volumes, fostering a connection over performance. This acoustic choice speaks to generational negotiations: American Black cultural expressions provide the soundtrack to the sociability of diasporic Somalis and Yemenis. The spatial organisation reveals deliberate cultural adaptations. Comfortable leather seating clusters encourage intimate dialogue, while Arabic-scripted beverages and traditional shisha pipes line the bar area, bridging material culture between homeland memories and contemporary British urban life. The clientele's demographic homogeneity (late teens to early twenties, exclusively Somali and Yemeni heritage) suggests that this space functions as an ethnic enclave within the broader multicultural city. Most striking is the transgression of traditional gender boundaries. Mixed-gender sociability unfolds naturally—couples sharing hookahs, animated conversations that cross gender lines, and women displaying uncovered hair and contemporary fashion. This spatial practice represents significant cultural negotiation, where second-generation diaspora youth claim autonomy from orthodox community expectations while maintaining ethnic solidarity. The shisha bar becomes a laboratory for cultural reinvention, where tradition and modernity intersect through embodied practice. (Fieldnote: Sahara's Shisha Bar, Brampton - Evening observation)

Fieldnotes like this highlighted the importance of acknowledging transethnic identity formations and their impact on younger members of the diaspora in Brampton (Anthias 2001; De Martini Ugolotti 2015; Pasura 2010). This demonstrates how not all parts of the diaspora 'sustain an ideology of "return"' (Brah 1996, 180) that, in turn, created a rift with elders regarding a desire to permanently 'return' to Somaliland.

The young men who chewed khat were acutely aware of this tension in their lives, with many speaking about their struggles to connect with Somali culture when they returned to the country to visit family.

> Well, I went back about five years ago; it was all right, but you get treated like an outsider because you are more privileged than everyone else. They see Somaliland as their country, and you are seen as coming across as a Westerner. (Sulieman, 22, unemployed)

> Well, my cousin told me that it's the way you talk, the way you walk, the way you act, and the way you dress that make us different. People will shout out to you 'dachenellis', which means 'rehabilitation community'. I was like, am I the only person you have seen from England? They didn't class me a Somali. While here (Britain), they will see me as Somali before British. (Ali, 21, University Student)

> It has not been easy for the Somali community, as well as their children, to identify with Somaliland for a very long time. Somali identity is still connected with a whole host of negative things: failed state, terrorist, sponger, piracy. All you must do is google 'Somali', and the stuff that comes up is very derogatory. It's not easy being Somali, but it is harder when you have never seen Somaliland, you can't speak the language, and you are in the process of

> becoming Dutch or Danish and then forced to become British; it is simply not working. It was tough for those kids to locate themselves. (Abdi Razaq, Community elder – Chair of Somali Community Group)

Set within and against these narratives, khat can be interpreted as a situating strategy, signalling one's attachment to what is regarded as 'home' instead of what might be perceived as an actual 'homeland'. For Ayan, a Female Social/Youth Worker, this was conveyed by young male khat users in the following way:

> I think many young people in the community recognise that they are caught in between; they don't like discussing it. I mean all the people in the *mafrish* who say they want to go back; you give them that chance and they wouldn't. They would always want to come back [to Britain] in the end. If they are in groups, chewing khat with their friends, they will always tell you they want to return to Somaliland; they fear being seen as disloyal to Somaliland. They don't want to be accused of losing their identity.

These insights help locate the identities of young male khat users as grounded not only in their parents' cultures and traditions but also in the globally mediated consumer spheres of music, fashion, and other consumer staples that saturate their personal and urban landscapes in the West.

However, we argue that these identities and symbols of culture should not be reduced to essentialist interpretations of ethnicity, whereby khat relates only to Somaliness, and Western consumer culture conforms just to a notion of 'Britishness'. Nor do we suggest that these notions are fixed, static or unproblematic. Instead, it is vital to recognize that diasporic identities are inherently comprised of a diverse array of cultures, ethnicities, histories, genealogies, migrations, and settlements and that these are inherently interwoven and interconnected (Gilroy 1993). This can be seen in how these young British Somali men chew khat, using consumables like chewing gum to neutralize the bitter taste, or while watching their football team on T.V. and listening to Western music:

> There is a big difference in how guys my age chew khat compared to the older generation and people who chew back in Somaliland. Our age group can't handle the bitter taste as much; we are not as used to fresh khat as the older guys. Don't forget the juicy fruits; without them, khat is very bitter. I don't know anyone in my age group who can chew [khat] without chewing gum, but the elders and people who chew in Somaliland can do it, no problem. (Duad, 22, Student)

> Khat is chewed differently amongst the younger generation compared to the elders. The younger guys will listen to music, not traditional stuff, but more everyday kind of hip-hop, grime kind of stuff. They watch a football match. The older guys are all about talking with one another, no music, no distractions, no phones, straight-up talking. (Hakim, Documentary Film Maker)

> The way the youngsters chew here compared to Somaliland is the time. Here, they will chew from six at night until the morning. When I saw people chewing back home, it was more of an afternoon thing, between prayers. But most guys are back with their families by teatime. (Mukhtar, Social Worker)

Binary cultural frameworks, as Back (2013) and Ratna (2020) argue, fail to capture the fluid realities of diasporic existence adequately. Young male khat users in Brampton navigate identity formation through intricate negotiations that resist simplistic categorization. Their emerging subjectivities arise from complex intersections of local and transnational forces, generating hybrid identities that transcend conventional ethnic, generational, and national demarcations. These young men increasingly share cultural practices and aspirations with multiethnic peers, creating commonalities that often diverge from their parents' experiences.

This process produces what might be understood as an 'imagined distance' from Somaliland – a cultural and psychological space reflecting the diasporic condition of being embedded in British society while maintaining selective, often symbolic, ties to Somali heritage. Such thinking resonates with Demir's (2017, 54) analysis of transnational Indigenous movements, where identity becomes a mode of resistance to the categorizing logic of European modernity. Such resistance involves a complex calibration: asserting British belonging while preserving cultural specificity, engaging Western consumer norms alongside traditional values, and navigating multilateral social positions that resist fixed identity categories. In this context, young male khat users emerge, as Demir (2017, 61) puts it, 'as both insiders and outsiders to Northern spaces' in the way that 'diasporas are uniquely placed both in terms of the foreignisations they bring to the Global North and the entanglements of the North and South which they expose'. These identity practices unfold within larger structural constraints – Islamophobic and racialized discourses in Britain, internal questions about khat within the diaspora from conservative religious groups and women, and shifting ideas of nationhood and tribalism in Somaliland. Rather than experiencing cultural erosion or linear assimilation, these young men are actively constructing adaptive, context-sensitive identities. Their engagement with khat becomes a vehicle through which transnational belonging and contemporary British realities are negotiated, contested, and reimagined.

Conclusion

This research has shed light on the complex and dynamic ways in which young British-Somali men navigate identity, belonging, and cultural continuity through the practice of khat chewing in Northern England. Far from being a mere leisure activity, khat-chewing emerges as a deeply symbolic and socially embedded

ritual that enables participants to negotiate their hybrid positionalities between Somali heritage and British urban life. The *mafrish*, as a diasporic space, serves not only as a site of cultural preservation but also as a platform for identity performance, resistance, and community building. The study demonstrates that khat-chewing serves as a conduit for diasporic consciousness, allowing young men to assert a sense of Somaliness while simultaneously adapting to the multicultural realities of their British environment. These practices challenge essentialist and binary understandings of identity, revealing instead a fluid, contextual, and often contradictory process of self-making. Participants do not passively inherit cultural traditions; rather, they actively reinterpret and reconfigure them in response to their lived experiences of marginalization, racism, and exclusion. Notably, the research highlights the tensions and negotiations that arise within diasporic communities, particularly between generations and across gender lines. While some valorize khat-chewing as a marker of cultural authenticity, it is also contested by others – especially women and conservative religious leaders – who critique its social and moral implications. These internal debates underscore the heterogeneity of the Somali diaspora and the multiple, sometimes conflicting, meanings attached to cultural practices.

The concepts of 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996) and 'foreignization (Demir 2017) prove especially useful in understanding how young British-Somali male khat users inhabit and shape their social worlds. Through khat-chewing and associated rituals, they create affective and symbolic connections to Somaliland, even as they remain embedded in British society. This dual orientation reflects a broader pattern of 'glocal' identity formation, where global cultural flows and local experiences intersect to produce new, hybrid subjectivities. Moreover, the study contributes to broader debates on migration, integration, and multiculturalism by foregrounding the agency of young migrants in shaping their identities and communities. It challenges deficit-based narratives that portray migrant youth as culturally dislocated or socially disengaged, instead revealing their strategic and creative engagement with both heritage and host cultures. In doing so, the research calls for more nuanced and context-sensitive approaches to understanding diasporic life, particularly in relation to leisure, ritual, and everyday practices. Ultimately, this paper argues that khat-chewing among young British-Somali men is not simply a cultural relic or a problematic habit but a meaningful practice through which diasporic identities are constructed, contested, and lived. It reflects the broader struggles and aspirations of a generation caught between multiple cultural worlds, striving to forge a sense of belonging and coherence in the face of structural and symbolic exclusion.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Spencer Swain http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2191-0041

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