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Swain, Spencer, Lashua, Brett and Spracklen, Karl (2021) Khat-chewing, moral spacing and belonging: Sociological insights into the cultural space of the mafrish in the leisure lives of older and middle-aged British-Somali males. International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure, 4. pp. 1-22.

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Khat-chewing, moral spacing and belonging: Sociological insights into the cultural space of the *mafrish* in the leisure lives of older and middle-aged British-Somali males

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between khat-chewing and feelings of collective sociality amongst older and middle-aged men living in Britain's Somali diaspora. The research's core investigates the feeling of moral connectivity, a sense of belonging with others based around a shared reading of Somali-British identity. Here, the paper explores how the leisure practice of khat-chewing in the space of the *mafrish* symbolises this sense of belonging through promoting conventional understandings of Somaliness, connected to traditional readings of masculinity and identity. While such leisure is understood to offer a site of collective belonging for the older and middle-aged men who chew khat, it is also explored how khat-chewing creates conflicts, particularly amongst those who question the 'imagined community' constructed in such spaces. The analyses highlight how this leisure practice fractures families and the broader community, instigating a feeling of cultural dissonance amongst women and some youth, problematising the cultural foundations of identity and community constructed in khat-chewing sessions.

Keywords: Khat-chewing; Moral spacing; Liquid modernity; Belonging

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Introduction

Khat, otherwise known as *qat* in Arabic or *ch'at* in Amharic, is a shrub-like narcotic referred to in scientific circles as *Catha Edulis*[2] and consumed for recreation amongst cultures situated on the horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (Elmi 1983; Alem, Kebede and Kullgreen 2007). In Somaliland[3], chewing khat is a central part of the country's social fabric, representing a venerated cultural marker used to signify masculinity, identity, and elevated social status (Hansen 2010). Consequently, there is a symbolic association between khat use and power, initially established in the sixteenth century by religious and tribal leaders who imported the substance from Northern Kenya and Ethiopia, to consume at times of celebration (Green 1999). This aura, built around khat's association with patriarchal elites, has positioned the substance as a conspicuous form of leisure in Somaliland today that has led to its use in conveying status and a sentimentalised reading of hegemonic masculinity (Beckerleg 2010). Additionally, emerging research has also observed the importance of the practice in the diaspora, where khat use is understood to represent a diasporic conduit, consumed to strengthen ties with the homeland in preparation for an eventual return (Hansen 2013; Swain, Spracklen and Lashua 2018).

Despite khat-chewing's popularity, the practice finds itself shrouded in a web of conservative power dynamics that structure the activity around hierarchical identity markers (Anderson, Beckerleg, Hailu and Klein 2007) that exclude women and younger Somali men. Research has outlined how women are not permitted to partake in such leisure due to the belief that khat use serves as an affront to their femininity, characterising those who use the substance as masculine and undesirable (Beckerleg 2008). At the same time, some younger men (e.g., in the U.K.) express reservations about chewing khat in front of elders, due to their inability to converse on issues concerning Somali culture and history. This point is intensified in the diaspora, where khat sessions play an important role in reconnecting with Somaliland (Swain 2017a). The policing of such behaviour exposes how the social environment of the *mafrish*[4], represents a space guided by a strong commitment to tradition and the maintenance of hierarchies built around gender and age. Such complexity lends itself to further investigation regarding the duality of meanings surrounding the practice, one that both connects and divides Somali-British communities. This research, then, seeks to understand better the potential of khat use as a practice, and the *mafrish* as a site, of connection and sociality for older men struggling to adapt to life in Britain (particularly cities), while

[2] Khat or *Catha Edulis* to use its scientific terminology is a shrub like narcotic that grows in countries on the horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

[3] Somaliland is a semi-autonomous region vying for independence from Somalia. The country was formerly known as British Somaliland up until 1960 when it gained independence and united with Italian Somaliland to create the People's Republic of Somalia.

[4] The *mafrish* in the Somali dialect loosely translates as "the khat house."

also seeking to gain insight into how they become detached and isolated from others in their community.

The paper starts by providing an overview of the literature on khat, documenting the substance's scientific and socio-cultural dynamics before moving onto the theoretical lens that interprets the studies findings. This theoretical lens is divided into two parts. First, we discuss Zygmunt Bauman's work on liquid modernity which explains the impacts of excessive individualisation, increased wealth inequality, and uncertainty among members of the polis. The second part connects these ideas to writings on the city, charting increased social exclusion and the partition of space, as well as the potential of spatial settings in combatting such division through instigating sites of moral connection. From here, the paper moves on to discuss the ethnographic methods used to collect the data and some of the affordances and constraints of this approach. We finish by unpacking the contextual relationships that positioned the *mafrish* as a site of moral connection which allowed middle and older-aged Somali men to reconceptualise their identity and cultivate a sense of belonging with others. Conversely, our analysis shows how a feeling of cultural dissonance emerged amongst other sections of the community who expressed views that saw the *mafrish* as a site of selfishness and romanticised visions that were not universally shared.

Khat-chewing, Somali culture and identity

Research into khat-chewing started with studies that sought to understand the biochemical and neurological impacts of the substance on users (Kuczkowski 2005), particularly the potential relationship between the practice and illnesses such as depression and psychosis. Results found traces of the chemicals cathinone and dopamine, elements commonly found in pharmaceutical drugs such as amphetamines (Thomas and Williams 2013) that fuelled an emerging hypothesis connecting khat use to psychological ailments in the form of schizophrenia. This perspective was also driven by the prevalence of such illnesses amongst Somali male populations in western Europe (Graziani, Milella, and Nencini 2008; Klein 2013). Other researchers have voiced scepticism over these claims, arguing instead that the prevalence of such illnesses can be connected to contextual factors such as poverty, racial discrimination and the psychological trauma of fleeing a civil war (Thomas and Williams 2013). This debate's complexity highlights the difficulty involved in accessing khat's potency, something that has led to a mixed reaction within drugs policy circles. As a result, some legislative bodies strongly support a ban on khat use, while others see the substance as nothing more than a mild psychoactive sedative. The latter view is shared by Professor David Nutt, the former head of the United Kingdom's Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs, who publicly stated that moderate khat use was no more potent than drinking a cup of coffee. Such diverse

opinions have led to notable divisions in how to classify the substance from a toxicological standpoint, something that has caused many in the scientific community to voice concerns over the banning of khat in many western nations, including Britain, without further scientific investigation (Klein 2013; Swain 2017a).

The appearance of khat varies depending upon its origin, with the most popular type chewed in Britain being a variant known as *Miraa*, a crop that is grown and cultivated in Meru county in Northern Kenya (Anderson and Carrier 2009). In this region, khat farming is a vital part of the economy and source of employment, due to the demand for such products in markets located along the Horn of Africa, Northern Europe, Scandanavia and North America where large swathes of the Somali diaspora have settled since the Civil War in the late 1980s (Carrier 2005; Hansen 2010). *Miraa* is distinguishable from its Ethiopian counterpart, *Harari*, due to its shorter length and reputation amongst khat users for being less potent and therefore more conducive to encouraging conversation and storytelling. Khat is packaged into pieces comprising four separate bundles, each housing fifteen to twenty khat sticks (Swain, Spracklen and Lashua 2018). Individual khat sticks measure roughly eight to nine inches long and are bound together with a banana leaf to keep the contents fresh and secure. In khat-chewing sessions users peel the tender parts of the khat stalks as well as the soft leaves, depositing the materials into the side of their mouth along with a small amount of chewing gum to bind the contents into a ball (Osman and Soderback 2010). It is the process of continuously chewing that releases the chemicals dopamine and cathinone into the body (Kalix, 1987), causing the user to experience a mild feeling of euphoria, making them more talkative and sociable as a result (Gebissa 2004; Hansen 2010).

This feeling of sociality, or to use the Somali term *marquan* (getting high) is under-researched in the West, with limited insight into the potential of these spaces in helping to forge a feeling of community and belonging (Odenwald, Warfa, Bhui, and Elbert 2009). Despite this, research undertaken in Somaliland and neighbouring countries such as Kenya (Anderson and Carrier 2009) and Ethiopia (Gebissa 2004; Beckerleg 2010) has provided some insight into the relationship between khat use and sociality. Hansen's (2010; 2013) study in Somaliland is one example that explored how khat-chewing represented an activity that was similar to an oral newsletter, in that sessions allowed older and middle-aged men the chance to forge a sense of togetherness through discussions on political issues, personal stories and shared experiences of the past. Similarly, research by Klantschnig and Carrier (2018), and Carrier (2017), have uncovered the cultural importance of khat for identity construction, researching khat use in Eastleigh, a Somali neighbourhood on the outskirts of Nairobi. Here they have detailed how khat chewing constitutes a

form of cultural expression, helping users experience a sentimentalised connection with Somali culture that helps reinvigorate their sense of identity.

These insights conceptualise how the *mafrish* represents a crucial space that allows Somali men the potential to reconnect with their culture and identity, an understanding that can be seen to underline the importance of such leisure in coping with the challenges of integrating into the cultural fabric of host societies in the global North (Kallehave 2001; Kliest 2008; 2010). Markussen's (2020) research in Norway highlights the need for such a cultural resource by communicating how older Somali men living in the diaspora find themselves experiencing an identity crisis, instigated by a loss of status and standing. Externally these challenges are understood to stem from systemic racism and poverty that demean Somalis as deviant, untrustworthy and prone to violence. This image is cultivated through sensationalist media and the nationalism inherent with populist political rhetoric that serves to position Somalis, and other migrant communities, as vagabonds unwilling to adapt to the host society's values, yet willing to draw on state benefits to support themselves and their families. This has led to intense suspicion and discrimination, causing members of the diaspora to feel othered amongst host societies (Kallehave 2001; Spaaij 2015)

Mason's (2020) research into the relationship between law enforcement and Somali communities in Britain exposes this broader feeling of mistrust, by documenting the implementation of undercover operations designed to profile and arrest Somali men at ever-increasing rates. The fallout from this has led to significant attention in local and national media, fuelling an image of Somali neighbourhoods as crime-ridden and in need of intense policing. This has alienated Somali communities from the broader cultural fabric of British society, portraying Somali groups as deviant in the eyes of many within the general population. Similarly, Swain's (2017a) research into the morality of khat-chewing exposes how the British Government's ban on khat served to fuel this feeling of anxiety. The reason for this centred on the Home Office connecting the khat trade as a central element in the funding of the terror group *Al-Shabaab,* an *Al Queda* affiliate that has operated on the Horn of Africa since 2004. In addition to claims regarding funding, it was insinuated that *mafrish* in British cities were being used as recruitment dens to radicalise disenchanted Somali men against the West. The legitimacy of these claims has been fiercely contested, considering that *Al-Shabaab* has outlawed khat in all territories under their jurisdiction and publicly condemned the substance as haram (prohibited) in their fundamentalist *Salafi* teachings. The impact of such statements has been far-reaching and damaging to the reputation of Somali men, portraying them as disloyal and as an internal enemy.

Internally, older Somali men have also found their status eroded by challenges to conventional patrilineal hierarchies emanating from younger members of the diaspora (Kallehave

2001; Markussen 2020). Valentine and Sporton (2009) examined how second-generation Somali youth growing up in the diaspora disrupted conventional understandings of Somaliness by reconfiguring their sense of belonging and infusing a myriad of tastes and styles that forged a syncretic identity. In turn, this situation led to cultural preferences associated with western forms of consumer culture that - in certain instances - have eclipsed affiliations established around Somali culture taught in the home. This change has alarmed many Somali parents and elders, exposing anxiety centred around fears of youth losing a sense of connection with Somali culture (Sporton, Valentine and Nielsen 2006; Mason 2018). Of particular interest here is how this change has influenced relationships with older men, in particular, by allowing younger Somalis to disregard the guidance offered by elders. This change in power dynamics has become amplified by the inability of elders to traverse the host society, creating a feeling of redundancy in the eyes of their youth who are far more accustomed to navigating such environments. Subsequently, older men feel isolated rather than revered, eroding a patrilineal hierarchy around which their knowledge is seen as useful to younger members of their communities (Markussen 2020).

Similar challenges exist from Somali women, who increasingly question the patriarchal hierarchies associated with traditional Somali culture. Here, discontent stems from a lack of male responsibility within the domestic sphere, which is seen to be linked to high levels of unemployment and prolonged absences from the family home (Kapteijns 1999). There is now often pressure on Somali women and young girls to contribute to the day-to-day running of households as well as take on roles that were traditionally undertaken by men such as liaising with social institutions and dealing with matters regarding parental discipline (Kapteijns 1994; Fangen 2006). These changing gender roles evidence a shift within the domestic sphere, exposing a situation where Somali men increasingly have their authority questioned, and Somali women show a sustained willingness to stand together and call out domestic abuses (Hopkins 2010). While these changes are gradual, Somali women's involvement in protests against mistreatment in the domestic sphere has gained significant momentum, none more so than in their central role in lobbying the British Government to ban khat use in 2014. This willingness to challenge patriarchal hierarchies has left many older and middle-aged men struggling to adapt and in need of sanctuary where they can reconnect with conventional patriarchal gender roles to reclaim their masculinity (Swain 2017a).

Liquid modernity: Living with uncertainty

The sociological theorisations of Zygmunt Bauman have been widely influential over the last fifty years. Bauman wrote on a myriad of topics, including morality, democracy, freedom, globalisation, and the metamorphosis of modernity's social, political and cultural fabric (Bauman 1988; 1995;

1998a; 2000). The latter represents his most famous line of investigation, articulated firstly through the rubric of postmodernity (Bauman 1992), then liquid modernity (Bauman 2006). These writings provide insights into the social and political changes accompanying this transformation to modernity (Swain 2017b). Firstly, Bauman articulates the reduced influence of the nation-state as a paternal influence over its citizens' lives, a situation brought about by New Right economic thinking in the 1980s that led the U.S. Federal Reserve and many European governments to abandon Keynesian welfare strategies (Bauman 2000). This stripping back of the state allowed free market forces under an ideology known as monetarism to come to the fore, influencing economic policy by privatising state-run assets and industries. Bauman (2001) articulates how this shift in economic thinking alongside the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s represented the final nail in the coffin for state-centred modernisation leaving capitalism unchallenged as the dominant political ideology guiding human civilisation into the new millennium (Blackshaw 2005).

Secondly, Bauman (2000) articulates that liquid modernity has brought with it increased individualisation, instigated by the scaling back of the welfare state that had previously sought to care for its citizens from the cradle to the grave. As a result, members of the polis are now left to their own devices and forced to manage personal risk through consumerism, a process based on individual decisions regarding how best to navigate the social world (Smith 2000). However, this shift in reliance from the welfare state to individualised life strategies based on deciphering information provided by 'experts' and 'expert systems' underlines how fluid and forward-thinking liquid modern consumers have to be to survive (Bauman 2007). The problem in Bauman's opinion is that not everyone can undertake this individualised consumer-orientated approach to solving personal problems. In particular, there are those without the financial means necessary to shop for new identities that create a fleeting sense of community and security. Instead, for those without the economic means to consume, comfort is found in tradition, and the moral connection derived from the cultural meaning and relationships these remnants of the old social order bring (Bauman 1998b; Davis 2008). It is the use of such objects and rituals that allow Somali men to experience a sense of comfort in their identity, by using tradition as a tool to try to overcome the uncertainty they experience in British society.

Finally, in liquid modernity, capitalism has become truly global, with multi-national corporations no longer being welded to nation-states, as was the case with the Keynesian model of welfarism. Instead, international businesses conduct their operations across borders, reducing the power of the nation-state to regulate them. Technological advancement in economic markets, communications and financial transactions has allowed global organisations to move their investments from country to country depending upon which Government offers them the best deal

concerning tax rebates, subsidies and legislation on trade union laws (Bauman 1998a). In turn, this power allows companies to move their operations, making them unreliable as long-term partners for nation-states trying to develop stable industrial and economic strategies. Such increased power also highlights the vulnerability of workers whose jobs can now be moved to developing economies in the global South, where wages are low, and labour laws relaxed or non-existent (Bauman 2000; Swain 2018). In addition to capital, Bauman also explains how globalisation has led to increasing flows of people, particularly from the global South to economic hubs in the North. However, these migratory flows are complex, exposing inequalities centred around socioeconomic status that permit wealthy migrants in the form of business elites and tourists, while more impoverished migrants, such as those fleeing conflict, find themselves derided as vagabonds, in need of separation and strict policing in the inner-city neighbourhoods in which they settle (Bauman 1998b; 2004). This perspective is highlighted in the experiences of many Somali migrants who find themselves living in impoverished inner-city communities exposed to high levels of crime, poverty and social deprivation.

The liquid modern city: Division, conflict and the potential for moral connection

Bauman's work also exposed the complexity of the liquid modern city, where the metropolis has come to represent a setting that embodies an ideology of mixophilia by welcoming diverse cultures to boost tourism and commerce. This occurs through a neoliberal strategy that rebrands post-industrial cities as leisure destinations offering a broad array of cultural activities to attract consumers, create jobs and boost revenues (Zukin 1995; Riches, Spracklen and Swain 2018; Robinson and Spracklen 2019). Conversely, a feeling of mixophobia also exists, particularly concerning the prospect of coming into contact with the ubiquitous figure of the stranger (Bauman 2006). This reading of the city articulates how space is divided, and in need of constant policing to separate undesirables from more affluent areas (Flustey, 1994). Understandings of urban space, then, have shifted from a neo-Kantian perspective built around fixed meanings imposed onto geometric maps to a cognitive form of psychogeography, where experiences of space and place are constructed through cultural messaging and individual biographies, continually being interpreted and re-interpreted (Shields 1991; Scraton and Watson 1998; Spracklen 2019).

Bauman (2000) explains how cognitive spacing and the need to manage separation internally represents a change in how urban conurbations have historically managed difference. In traditional societies, strangers found themselves excluded by building walls, turrets, and moats that repelled a direct attack from the outside. Similarly, in solid modernity, state institutions' sought to manage difference through an anthropoemic strategy that excluded variance at the point of entry or through a system of assimilation that sought to subsume new arrivals into the broader monoculture of the

host society. In liquid modernity, however, cities are open to the forces of globalisation, making the management of space an internal issue, instigated within neighbourhoods rather than outside the city walls (Bauman 2006). Virilio (2005: 90), builds upon this assertion by stating how the modern metropolis has come to represent a "claustropolis where foreclosure is intensified by the exclusion of that stray, the outsider, what we might call a SOCIOCRUISER, who is threatening the metropolitan inhabitant's peace of mind." The city now represents a site of inequality and uncertainty, fuelling an emotional state that causes residents to fear an encounter with 'the other'.

'The other' in this context is understood by Bauman (2000) to connect with Simmel's (1908) multifaceted reading of the stranger, exposing the complicated relationship that characterises materialism, consumerism and social exclusion in contemporary society. Through this perspective, wealthy foreign investors, business executives and tourists find themselves welcomed into the city due to their economic and consumer spending power. They live in prime real estate and mix freely with other wealthy consumers in sanitised retail spaces that include cultural difference; yet, at the same time, exclude the poor and vulnerable. Alternatively, more impoverished communities, understood by Bauman (1998b) to represent the 'flawed consumers' of liquid modernity - made up of remnants of the white working class, refugees, and new migrant communities - find themselves stigmatised as vagabonds, in part, because of their perceived inability to live up to the demands of neoliberal citizenship that centre on individual decision making connected to consumption. Such ideologies lead to the exclusion of these groups based on their perceived lack of ingenuity and irrationality for not being able to self-regulate themselves. Subsequently, they find themselves confined within the modern city, occupying specific enclaves policed through various panoptic methods of surveillance and recurrent incarceration (Bauman 2004).

This need to control space resonates with work looking at the racialisation of cities and urban neighbourhoods. Puwar (2004) unpacks this relationship between 'race', space and separation by communicating the difficulties black bodies have occupying spaces associated with 'white' people: the presence of ethnic groups in traditionally white areas causes such bodies to be viewed as 'space invaders'. In this context, skin colour represents a distinct racialised marker, classifying which bodies are perceived as being out of place in specific cultural localities (Ratna, 2019). This perspective connects with Du Bois' (1996) concept of 'the veil', by documenting the one-dimensional manner through which black people are viewed in metropole societies, robbing such individuals of their individuality by characterising them as an object of difference. In this context, discrimination is normalised through social and media representations that portray black bodies as deviant and in need of constant surveillance and policing (Mowatt, Floyd and Hylton 2017; Thangaraj, Ratna, Burdsey and Rand 2018). However, it is vital to mention how this racism is often initiated through

covert methods, known as micro-aggressions that surreptitiously reveal themselves through dismissive looks or racialised humour that is less visible to onlookers, allowing perpetrators to avoid accusations of overt racism (Hylton and Lawrence 2016). In leisure research, this form of racialising space has been observed in the way minority ethnic groups feel less welcome in more affluent 'white parts' of the city, resulting in the avoidance of specific areas for fear of abuse or harassment (van Ingen, Sharpe, and Lashua 2018).

Nevertheless, it is vital to understand that spatial localities can unify by infusing a feeling of sociality that, in turn, creates a sense of connection and belonging amongst groups. This idea connects with Bauman's (2000) writings on moral spacing, a concept used to explain how members of the polis desire a feeling of connection with others, to help them to shelter from the insecurities and individualisation experienced under consumer-based capitalism. Through this perspective, people are understood to look for ways of establishing a shared sense of meaning with others, in the hope that this feeling can provide a sense of purpose and order to their lives. In other words, feelings of sociality allow those who frequent certain spaces to feel safe and less vicarious in the world they inhabit. Through this line of thinking, spatial localities become reconceptualised around symbolic markers that provide an emotional glue, which helps to constitute a tribe or 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). Bauman (2000) explains that these groups are not rooted in the same way as classic tribes from an anthropological standpoint, but instead are one dimensional in so much as they concentrate around specific symbols, totems and practices. Again, socio-economics play a significant role concerning what constitutes such symbols, with the wealthy consumers building moral connection around trendy fashion icons that are fluid and continuously disbanded and reformed in different guises. Disadvantaged groups, on the other hand, often turn to tradition as a method of forging more substantial bonds with others that are less prone to disintegration but far less fluid in their foundation (Bauman 2006).

Finally, the role of space as a site of moral togetherness connects with scholarship documenting the use of spatial environments to resist racial oppression. Brah's (1996) work on diaspora space provides a useful insight into this phenomenon, noting how indigenous symbols from a migrant community's country of origin help some groups challenge their exclusion within host societies. Through this perspective, traditional symbols and the rituals associated with them help migrants partake in forms of cultural expression that allow them to form a horizontal feeling of diasporic connection, not only with their country of origin but also with others in their communities experiencing similar hardships (Clifford 1994; Burdsey 2006). It is the security that is consequential from this moral connection that allows migrant groups the chance to challenge the discrimination they face within the host society (Gilroy 1993). Therefore, leisure can be seen to play a central role

as a space of resistance, a point documented by research in sports fandom that looks at the role of cultural symbols in helping to reinvigorate a sense of connection with a migrants' country of origin (Fletcher 2012). Similarly, other studies have assessed the role of leisure spaces such as clubhouses in allowing migrant groups the chance to perform an identity aesthetically through clothing or verbally through talking about their homeland with others (Carrington 2008; Joseph 2017; Fletcher and Swain 2016). In the context of this paper, one such leisure space is the *mafrish*. Before discussing the cultural environment of the *mafrish*, it is crucial to outline the ethnographic methods employed in studying leisure in this space.

Methods and Ethical Issues

The paper reports on eighteen months of ethnographic research[5] undertaken by the lead author in one of the largest Somali communities in the United Kingdom. During this time, participant-observations and thirty-five unstructured interviews were conducted to capture the voices, experiences and perspectives of members of the community. This approach sought to gain more in-depth insight into the relationship between khat use and the *mafrish* by exploring how leisure spaces provided a feeling of moral connection between users. Interviews were undertaken with various stakeholders, both inside and outside the community. Interviewees included elders, young people, women, religious leaders, police and local authority drug policy officers, all of whom offered diverse perspectives on khat that added to the broader investigation. Similarly, participant observations were undertaken in several locations within the neighbourhood such as various *mafrish*, the local minimarket, community centre, and Mosque, allowing for the development of insights into both the cultural environment of the *mafrish* but also the broader social dynamics of the local community (Lee 1995).

The use of participant observation as a data-gathering tool highlighted the intricate issue of positionality (Coffey 2009), specifically relating to the lead researchers biography and past experiences of interacting 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 took part in the research, a situation that mirrored 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,

[5] This research was undertaken between May 2014 – October 2016 as part of a PhD awarded in 2017.

depending upon the spatial environment and social circles they found themselves within. Such a contextual situation had affordances and constraints, with one advantage being that prior experiences of khat-chewing enabled access to spaces 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 individual members of the community, cutting off potential lines of investigation due to a lack of trust and rapport (Fletcher 2010).

Throughout, university research ethics protocols were followed to maintain the anonymity, confidentiality and safety of both the research participants and the researcher (Bryman 2001). The names of those who contributed to the research were anonymised, as was the neighbourhood where the study took place, which throughout the paper is referred to as 'Brampton'. It is also vital to mention khat chewing's legal status, a subject of controversy inside and outside the Somali community. Here, due to the lead author's long-term experiences of being around the Somali community in Brampton, he was aware of the debates surrounding khat's legal and moral status. This knowledge stopped the lead author from partaking in khat consumption due to its illegality and avoided alienating anti-khat groups by showing favouritism towards the practice. Ethical challenges were also managed by liaising with law enforcement and local community leaders (Bucerius 2013), informing them about the research agenda and reassuring them that at no point would the study involve the consumption or distribution of khat.

Marginality, mixophobia and a changing sense of community

From the start of the research process, members of the Somali community shared how they experienced external forms of racism that manifested a feeling of isolation from the city's broader cultural fabric and British society. These testimonies exposed how participants felt that they were read by others outside their neighbourhood as deviant and criminal, something that led to a distinct discomfort when it came to traversing areas of the city outside Brampton. This perspective was voiced forcefully by Muhammed, an elder who had settled in Britain during the Somali civil war in the 1990s:

> A lot of Somalis who came here after the civil war don't feel valued here. They have to live with a negative image that many people can't see past. Things like benefit scrounger, mugger, druggy all come to mind. This is very difficult because many of these people, particularly some of the men I know, were of influence back home. Teachers, lawyers, accountants, who are now subjected to this.

This feeling of devaluation intensified the sense of marginality that manifested itself in a broader notion of distrust and mixophobia (Bauman 2006) from those who feared and were suspicious of

Somalis. In this context, participants explained how this isolated them from the rest of the city, symbolising Bauman's understanding of flawed consumers in the way affluent sections of the city viewed Brampton as deprived, dangerous and in need of intense policing. In turn, this feeling fed distrust, with many male participants stating that they felt like they were living 'parallel lives' with other communities in the city. This perspective was re-articulated by a high-ranking member of the local police force, who spoke about how Brampton was viewed as a distinctly separate part of the city:

> It is strange, you have the city centre and the suburbs, but there is like a bubble around where they (Somalis) live. I suppose nobody really goes in or out unless you have to, it is a distinct space that is very much connected with the people who live there, it is known as being where they (Somalis) live, everybody I speak to sees it that way.

These insights exposed how the perceptions of space and place racialised Brampton through its association with the ethnic group who resided in the neighbourhood. As the research progressed, this association with Somalis came to be understood pejoratively, symbolising poverty, violence and crime rather than any of the many positive aspects of Somali culture.

This association led to a feeling of intense isolation and stigma when respondents left the neighbourhood, with many articulating how they had encountered racialised forms of abuse. In certain circumstances, this was described as overt, with participants recounting physical confrontations with members of the National Front and other ethnic groups such as African Carribeans and South Asians. However, others commented upon more subtle forms of micro-aggressions manifested through dismissive looks, inexplicable reactions or racially charged jokes. The following interview extract from Omar, a middle-aged man with two young children, exposed this form of discrimination and its effects upon members of the Somali community when traversing spaces outside their neighbourhood:

> I can give you an example when I first turned up to governors meetings at my daughter's school; people thought I was the cleaner or something. I had to tell them three or four times why I was in the room with them. All I got from the teachers and parents were suspicious glances; you could tell they were thinking who is this guy and what is he doing here?

This extract highlights how racial and socioeconomic factors marked the Somali community members as being different, excluding them from spaces associated with more affluent groups. These experiences were central in causing many participants to retreat from the distress and belittlement in such situations and to stay within Brampton because of the sense of security and protection felt around other Somalis.

However, challenges to older and middle-aged male authority also emanated from within the community. At the centre of this tension were Somali women who disrupted traditional patriarchal hierarchies by standing up to their husbands on issues regarding lack of finances and emotional support regarding childcare, sometimes leading to divorce. In response, a small minority of men were dismissive, blaming such problems on the effects of living in the liberalised environment of the global North and how this had led some women to disregard traditional values. However, other community members were more concerned about this issue, with many stating that it connected with an increased 'castration' of Somali men in British society. Mubarak, a community elder and former social worker, unpacked his thoughts on the problem:

> A lot of Somali men no longer have respect in the home. This is because a lot of them would rather be in the khat house [*mafrish*], chewing with their mates than spending time with their family or even working to support them. I am shocked at what this is leading to; ten years ago, people did not know what divorce was in this community, but in recent years it is happening more and more.

This insight exposed a broader concern shared by many in the neighbourhood that highlighted how certain Somali men were struggling to adapt to life in Britain, and as a result, finding their conventional role as figureheads within their community questioned. Consequently, some hoped to restore a sense of normality by retreating further into the confines of the *mafrish*, while others withdrew from domestic life altogether.

Such challenges also came from younger second-generation British-Somalis who were perceived as disrupting conventional patrilineal hierarchies through their embodiment of syncretic identities. Older and middle-aged Somali men expressed worries about their community's younger members, turning their back on Somali culture and traditions. These concerns presented themselves in various guises from dismissive comments about how youth in the neighbourhood dressed, particularly in remarks about how certain younger women no longer wore the hijab, to tastes in music and television that many saw as being increasingly centred on western consumer culture. Of particular interest was how many older and middle-aged men felt threatened by hybrid identities, in part, due to the belief that syncretic identities were threatening their connection with Somali culture and the idea of one day returning to the homeland. This was a topic of considerable debate, with many respondents measuring this 'loss of culture' through personal experiences such as the inability of younger members of the community to speak Somali fluently, or the lack of knowledge regarding the history and culture of Somaliland. Other concerns centred on the inability of individual youth to follow religious practices, such as fasting properly during Ramadan or attending Mosque regularly. Ahmed, a local youth worker in the city, provided his thoughts on the issue:

> A lot of elders are worried about the younger Somalis growing up here. Its something that everybody talks about, how these kids are different, how every year they become less and less Somali. I think it worries many of their parents because this (moving to Britain) was only supposed to be a short term thing. But now they worry whether they can return (to Somaliland) with their children and grandchildren, if they can't speak the language or understand the culture.

These comments exposed an internal fracture within Brampton between older and middle-aged first-generation migrants and younger second-generation British-Somalis. Here, perceptions of self differed considerably, with increasing numbers of younger community members questioning the need to follow Somali cultural values, exposing internal frictions in traditional patrilineal hierarchies centred on elders offering advice to the young.

The culmination of such frictions and fractures, both internal and external, exposed the precarious lives that many older and middle-aged Somali men faced in British society. Characterised through the lens of liquid modernity, their socioeconomic and migratory status left them feeling marginalised outside their neighbourhood. While inside their community, changing social hierarchies influenced by liberalised social and economic policies caused traditional structures to fragment, allowing women and youth more of an expression in their (increasingly British) identities. To escape these conflicts, many of these men sought sanctuary in a space that could provide them with security: the *mafrish*. Accordingly, the social environment of the *mafrish* became a crucial site in the research, to understand better how tradition provided a sense of sociality and moral connection with other men experiencing similar displacements.

The *mafrish* and moral space: A sanctuary of sociality

Khat-chewing's symbolic links to traditional masculinity and social status underscored leisure for older and middle-aged Somali men. The practice cultivated a feeling of cultural significance that helped reinvigorate their sense of identity and moral connection with others. In this context, the *mafrish* represented a space that helped users reconnect with a traditional reading of Somali masculinity, as noted in a research fieldnote:

> I make my way down the narrow corridors of Brampton flats. Abdi-Rahman, a tall thin man in his early forties, walks with me; he discusses his latest trip to Somaliland, recounting the beautiful beaches of Berra-Berra, one of the country's main port cities. The thought of sand-covered beaches sounds appealing, particularly given the damp that fills the air outside. On arriving at our destination, Abdi-Rahman presses the doorbell, its chime penetrates the evening air, cutting across the vacant landing where we are standing overlooking the main

thoroughfare towards the minimarket in the centre of the neighbourhood. Despite it being a Saturday evening, Brampton is quiet with only a few people walking around, probably heading towards the local minimarket to pick up a piece of khat [6]for the evening, or the local shisha bar to watch highlights of the day's sporting action.

After about a minute we hear the sound of footsteps making their way to the door, they stop and are replaced by soft muttering in Somali; Abdi-Rahman whispers his name back, and the door opens. We are met by the face of a middle-aged Somali male; he courteously welcomes us both, and we make our way inside into the living room area. Inside, we are greeted by the site of a dozen Somali males in a small room talking and debating with one another while chewing khat. I recognise a few of the faces: Abokor, a slim man with defined features, and Ibrahim, a tall, light-skinned man, are both older cousins of friends I knew from school, we exchange pleasantries, and they beckon me over to sit with them. However, for the most part, I do not recognise most of the participants, the majority of whom are middle-aged, between their late thirties to early fifties, with a few elders, made distinguishable by their greying beards.

The spatial elements of the *mafrish* are reminiscent of pictures I have seen of Somaliland, with mattresses and pillows lining the circumference of the room, allowing users to sit comfortably on the floor while peeling their khat sticks. This behaviour represents an attempt to create an 'authentic' *mafrish* environment, similar to the type of experience that one might have chewing khat in Somaliland. On further observation, I notice the smell of frankincense emanating from a scented candle perched next to the window, with traditional Somali music being played at a level that does not inhibit conversation, an essential aspect of any khat-chewing session. Aesthetically, the room is decorated in a traditional Somali style, evidenced through the designs on the carpet located in the centre of the room used by members of the group to place their khat pieces. At the same time, the distinctive colours of the white, red and green striped flag of the Republic of Somaliland hangs, pride of place, on the door leading from the living room into the hallway.

The use of the *mafrish* to reconnect with Somali culture and tradition illustrates how this setting represented a diasporic space used by older and middle-aged men to mitigate their marginal position. They evidenced this by embodying traditional behaviours in the *mafrish* that included conversing proficiently in a Somali dialect, using khat without the aid of chewing gum to

[6] Although khat use is banned in Britain, many users still acquire the substance from local shops, café's and khat factories. As of the writing of this paper no one has been prosecuted for consuming or selling khat.

demonstrate that they could handle the substance's bitter taste, and the ability to talk in-depth about Somaliland and Somali culture. This embodiment was highlighted by Ishmail, who had lived in Britain since the early 2000s after making a secondary migration from Sweden:

> Khat-chewing is what Somalis are known for, everybody in the community coming together to chew and talk with one another. It keeps us connected with who we are; that is why I chew; it reminds me of who I am and where I came from.

This point also illustrates how chewing khat represented an act of resistance, allowing these Somali men to challenge their precarious position on the margins of British society by reinforcing connections with their homeland.

However, the research uncovered how khat-chewing played a more complex role in older and middle-aged men's leisure lives beyond acting as a site of resistance. This perspective connected khat use to a deep and horizontal form of moral connection built around a sentimentalised vision of one-day returning home to Somaliland. Here, the *mafrish* was understood by participants as a site around which this moral connection was cultivated in connection with a hegemonic reading of Somali masculinity developed around a historical relationship with men of importance. Throughout the fieldwork, users mentioned the role of khat sessions in telling stories about experiences of Somaliland or plans to visit and eventually settle in the country. Other debates, as explored in the following fieldnote, centred on the topic of clanship, a vital angle when discussing Somali politics:

> After making myself comfortable, I start to observe the inner workings of the *mafrish*. The first noticeable aspect is the topic of conversation, which for the most part centres on Somaliland, whether that be in the form of the country's history, or the prospect of one day returning to live there. This idea is put forward most forcefully by Abdi-Shakur, a slim, middle-aged man, who tells the group about his plans for building a family home while carefully peeling one of his khat sticks: 'We add an extension every couple of years, and we buy land to build on, to make the house larger. The plan is for my dad to go back and live there in the next few years.' In addition to the topic of Somaliland, the country's history is another source of particular pride, most notably in the ability of participants to recite tribal histories. Here, as a complete outsider to Somali clan politics, I often found people in the *mafrish* eager to educate me about the internal politics of the Isaaq tribe and the sub-clans Habr Je'lo and Habr Yunis. This level of discussion gravitated towards discussions about which sub-clans populated which areas of the city and internal histories regarding the biographies of important political figures. Interestingly, the use of khat-chewing sessions to talk about knowledge of Somali culture served to highlight this leisure space as a site where hierarchy was built around displaying

> knowledge of Somali culture and history. It reminded me, in a similar manner to how specific football teams or iconic boxers are discussed over a pint of beer in a British pub.

This field note shows how the *mafrish* came to symbolise a moral space that used tradition as the binding force around which men felt a sense of social connection with one another. Through this lens, khat-chewing acted as an anchor around which users congregated to express a sense of belonging. This feeling of belongingness was established through rituals performed as a kind of social hierarchy within the *mafrish*, where demonstrating in-depth knowledge about Somali culture, chewing khat in a 'proper' manner akin to Somaliland, and telling insightful stories about Somaliland all helped to build a feeling of social connection and community that allowed these men to feel connected and respected.

In this context, khat-chewing resonates with Bauman's (2000) work on moral spacing in liquid modern societies, in the way the *mafrish* came to symbolise a site of belonging that helped connect Somali men to an idea of imagined community. The use of the *mafrish* illustrates how a leisure space acted as a sanctuary around which users could escape their marginal position by building a form of comradeship with others experiencing similar anxieties. However, while this sense of moral connection binds those who value the social ties established in such settings, it is also important to realise that these tribe-like gatherings are also one-dimensional in their mentality. In other words, khat-chewing spaces are built around traditional social hierarchies and an imagined return to Somaliland that older and middle-aged Somali men aspire towards upholding. The problem with this idealised vision is that it only fits around one particular perspective, and is therefore not universally accepted by all in the community.

Khat-chewing and cultural dissonance

While feelings of sociality helped to unite older and middle-aged men around a traditional understanding of Somaliness and a mythical vision of returning home, others in the community voiced concern. These anxieties originated predominantly from Somali women who explained how, in their opinion, khat-chewing increased neglect, abuse and male absence from the family home. Raheema, a volunteer at the local community centre, shared her concerns:

> Khat leads to a lot of problems. I have had women coming to me to tell me that they have no money for food because their husband has spent the family's money on khat. You also see a lot of women complain about abuse; many will not go near their husbands after they have chewed in case they become violent or aggressive.

Similar insights were shared by other women, who went into considerable depth about the destructive role khat played in rupturing Somali households' social dynamics. Many stated that they had to alter their lives to accommodate khat chewing; examples included not cleaning the house in the day because it could disturb a husband, father or brother who was asleep because they had been up all night in the *mafrish*. Similarly, issues relating to liaising with schools or attending parents evenings without a husband or father were common, in part because they wanted to spend their time chewing khat than take an active role in their child's lives. In certain instances, women spoke about the threat of violent confrontations when they tried to reason with their husbands to stop spending so much time in the *mafrish*. Conversely, other women spoke about their experiences of spouses becoming more distant, spending increasing amounts of time away from the house and only returning to eat or change their clothes.

These female perspectives served to position khat use as selfish, demeaning and abusive towards others, exposing beliefs that accused users of giving up on their duty of moral responsibility towards their family and community. This symbolised a broader feeling of cultural dissonance, in which Somali women viewed khat and the *mafrish* with suspicion and mistrust, a view that ran counter to khat users who saw the *mafrish* as a symbol of unity. These perspectives again highlight the fragmentation of social bonds in liquid modernity, exposing the one-dimensional aspect of moral connection cultivated in the *mafrish,* and how these values contrasted with the views of Somali women. To put this clearly, khat users frequented the mafrish to reconnect with a hegemonic reading of masculinity and romanticised vision of one-day returning home to Somaliland. However, Somali women were more concerned with matters regarding the survival of their families in the challenging environment of a stigmatised inner-city neighbourhood. Subsequently, khat-chewing was seen by these women as escapism and the *mafrish* a space where men went to hide from their problems rather than confront them.

Significantly, this feeling of dissonance was not restricted to Somali women, as the research also uncovered differing views surrounding khat amongst younger second-generation British-Somalis. Abdi-Fatah, an eighteen-year-old born Holland who moved to Brampton when he was eleven, commented:

> Khat is a divisive topic among people my age. You have those who love chewing, spend every Friday and Saturday in the *mafrish*. Then you have others who don’t really get what all the fuss is about, spending hours on end talking about Somaliland and so on is not seen as fun.

Views such as this are a break with tradition, suggesting that sections of Brampton's youth were pivoting towards expressing more syncretic identities (Mason 2018). Divisions within the community concerned a rejection of conventional readings of Somaliness. At their core, these divisions centred

on criticisms of how elders were rooted in the past, imagining a mythical return to Somaliland – visions which younger generations often did not share. It is important to note that opinions on khat were divided amongst younger men, with many still undertaking the practice. However, the amount of younger Somalis moving away from khat-chewing as leisure was evident, and all younger interviewees saw this as inevitable, given that most of the younger generations had spent their entire lives in the global North.

As a result, affiliations with khat-chewing were not as widespread and pronounced amongst the young as it was in the case of older and middle-aged men. Here, it was common for the researcher to pick up comments relating to how such leisure was 'uncool' or for 'freshies'.[7] The use of such derogatory language served to expose again how the one-dimensional form of moral connection established in the *mafrish* failed to resonate with many younger members of the community who did not share their elders' desire to return to Somaliland. For many younger Somalis, this sentimentalised return did not make sense, given they had spent all of their lives in the global North. Added to this were negative experiences of Somaliland, where individual participants spoke about being bullied and made fun of when they returned to visit family, due to their inability to speak Somali with any great proficiency and other cultural markers such as their physical capital that revealed they cam from the West due to the way they walked. In short, increasingly, younger members of the community failed to understand the cultural importance of the *mafrish* because the moral connection forged in such spaces was seen as irrelevant to their lives and perceptions of the future.

Conclusion

We have sought to document khat-chewing's contradictory role in the Somali diasporic community in Brampton, by exploring how this leisure activity produced a sense of unity for older and middle-aged Somali men struggling to adapt to life in British society. We have shown its impact on isolating these men from others in their community. The different moral positions or ideologies about khat and the *mafrish* reveals a complex symbolism: hope and resistance to some, in addition to despair and uncertainty for others. Together, debates about khat in this one community in one city highlight the position of leisure in liquid modernity, in the way that economic forces centred around excessive individualism are leading to the increased fragmentation of communities. To counteract this, individuals choose to connect with symbols that help alleviate their uncertainty. However, these affiliations can cause group members to move further apart from others who do not understand or value the moral connection established. In our research, khat-chewing exposed the frictions and

[7] A term used to refer to newly arrived migrants.

fractures in the ways older and middle-aged Somali men chewed the substance to re-establish a dominant reading of identity and romanticise about one day returning home to Somaliland; however, Somali women viewed such leisure as repressive, stating they perceived it as a form of escapism that led to certain Somali men abandoning their duties as fathers and husbands. Similarly, the romanticised vision of returning home to Somaliland did not connect with growing numbers of younger members of the community, who did not have the same affinity for their homeland as their elders, in part because they had spent all or most of their life growing up in the global North.

These analyses indicate the complexity of leisure within liquid modern societies and especially within migrant communities in the U.K. Of particular interest moving forward is the need for more research exploring the role of tradition in allowing marginalised communities to shelter from the rapidly changing world of contemporary British society. It is hoped that Bauman's theoretical model as applied to understandings of khat-chewing and the *mafrish* can offer a useful lens for other researchers exploring leisure in other migrant or white working-class communities. The need for such research is paramount, considering the importance that meaningful leisure can provide disadvantaged communities. Similarly, such research is also vital toward understanding how communities are not monolithic but instead built around intricate relations with complex dividing lines. Further research is needed to chart and explore these lines to understand the potential impacts of leisure at a time of increased social divisions and growing inequalities.

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