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

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Inclusion, Society & Education

RESEARCH GROUP

Introduction

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



Rationale (Khat, identity and Somaliness)

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

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

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

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



Rationale (Khat, identity and Somaliness)

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

Research methods

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

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



Conceptualising diaspora and identity

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

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





Findings – Khat use and Somaliness

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

Findings – Khat, hybridity and identity



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



Conclusion

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



Any Questions?



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