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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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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 diapora 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 marginaised 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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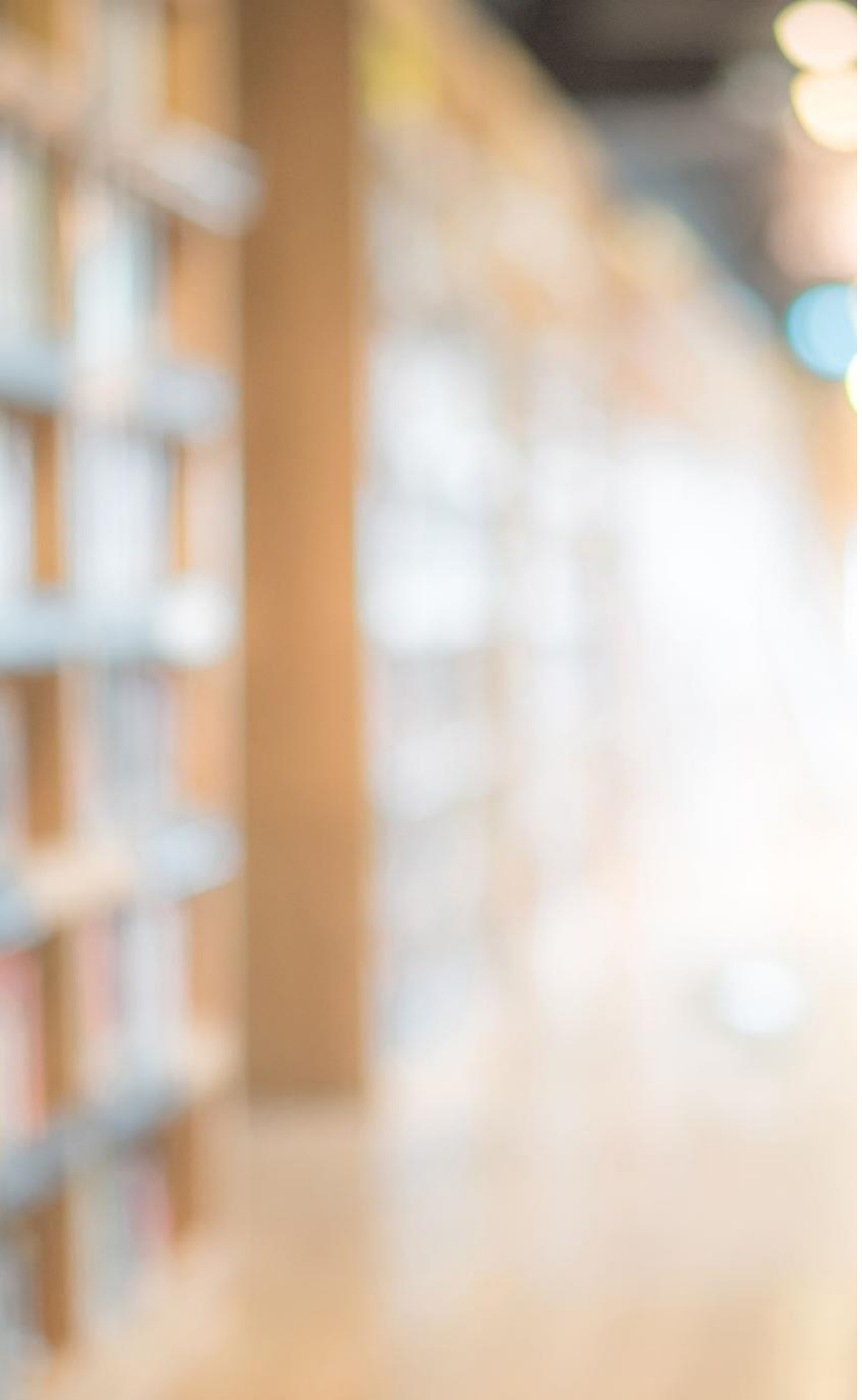

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