



The
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**Storying Selves in Turbulent Times: Exploring Four Young Somali Men's Experiences of
Identity and Belonging Through Self-Representing Narratives**

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Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with gaining critical insights into the ways in which identities are constructed, challenged and negotiated, through the self-representing narratives of four young Somali men. The research draws upon a critical approach to narrative research in which the participants share and analyse their own stories. A participatory research approach was adopted, in which the young men were invited to create self-representing artefacts that were not only data within themselves but also acted as tools to facilitate reflective conversations. These artefacts and reflective conversations created the narratives that are discussed in this thesis. Storying and counter-storying are used to critically reflect on these narratives and the socio-political context in which they are framed.

The narratives in this thesis explore the impact of race performativity, the racialisation of religious practices, and the impact of historical and cultural dislocation on the construction of self and identity. Each of the young men reflect on the fragmented nature of their identities and their turbulent experiences of (not) belonging. One of the major themes across all of the narratives is how the experiences of race and racism shape the spaces the young men occupy and the stories they have chosen to share. The understandings that emerge from this enquiry illustrate the relationality and complexity of stories and the ways in which these stories are framed within spaces of Whiteness. Critical theories such as postcolonial theory, critical race theory and Black feminist theory formed a bank of theoretical resources that were drawn upon

throughout the thesis to offer different analytical lenses without imposes interpretations on the narratives. The research addresses contemporary and popular issues around Blackness, diasporic identities, nationalism, Islamaphobia and gender performativity.

The thesis does not intend to present a collective identity or shared narratives, but to provide a space for silenced and marginalised stories to be heard, and to offer an alternative way of doing ethical research that seeks to respect and honour marginalised and silenced stories.

The thesis also shows evidence of a personal and academic journey, through reflexive accounts and makes explicit the tensions of attempting to do decolonising work within a colonising space.

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PREAMBLE

Muhammed: *They don't even know his name but they are telling us about him*

Faisal: *Why does his name matter?*

Muhammed: *Because that is who he is, how do they know who he is if they don't know his name?*

Faisal: *His name doesn't matter, he's Black, he's just another Black boy... that's who he is*

Ahmed: *I don't want someone else to tell me who I am*

It was a blisteringly cold afternoon in December; Christmas break and we were talking about the media. Faisal and Ahmed brought in an article that they had been looking at in school which they were told to analyse. The article was about the nation's reaction to the Olympics and the debate was around whether or not the Olympics promoted patriotism. The discussion around this article was brief; the young men seemed to have no desire to engage with the text, something was distracting them. There was an uneasy feel in the room and I knew why. Earlier that week, a young man was stabbed to death in a gang-related attack not far from the centre¹ of Sheffield. This young man lived locally and we all knew him well. I wanted to create some level of normalcy, partly for the young men, but also for me. I had been volunteering within the community for a couple of years as a tutor prior to being asked to come to the centre and hold study support sessions for groups of young people. These young people were considered

¹ This was a space within the locality that was used as a makeshift community centre. Several activities took place here including study support.

'vulnerable' and 'at risk' by those who ran the classes at the centre, so there was an emphasis that I should work with them with 'caution'². On this occasion, I structured the support session in the same way that I usually do, first asking the young men if there was any specific homework they wanted support with or if they wanted to work through pre-prepared activities. We all gazed at the article. I asked questions and they responded, but this wasn't an ordinary session; we were just going through the motions. I knew they needed a space to talk about what happened, but I could not bring myself to initiate the conversation. Finally, after a few moments of silence Muhammed asked, "Muna, did you hear about what happened to Mustafa?" to which I responded with relief: "Yes, it is shocking, my prayers are with his family". The young men mumbled in agreement and we spent the following few moments praying for Mustafa and his family. Muhammed's question gave us all the permission we were waiting for to break the silence.

The young men briefly talked about where they were and what they were doing when they heard about his death and then sat again in silence. I watched on, moved by the way they comforted one another and allowed themselves the space to sit in silence and reflect. After a few moments Muhammed spoke again: "When the police were hanging around our football pitch we asked them about the attack. They just said it was Black boy who was killed and that it was gang related. He didn't say his name". He paused for a moment and continued, "They don't even know his name but they are telling us about him". Muhammed was visibly frustrated. No. He was angry. The exchange between the young men that followed (as noted at the start of this preamble) was poignant. The young men explained that the policeman knew the victim's name;

² I will explain later in the thesis how this positioning became problematic.

Mustafa, but in choosing to identify him by his race alone, defined Mustafa as no more than “just another Black boy”.

There is something in a name.

The significance of this one single omission to the young men was something that could not be ignored and this exchange between them haunted me. “I don’t want someone else to tell me who

I am” ... In that moment, I was with them. I felt the aching pain that lay behind those words.

Two more young Somali men were killed over the following months in similar attacks. The community was rocked, but the narratives remained the same. Mothers blamed fathers for being inadequate role models, fathers blamed mothers for suffocating young men with unreachable expectations, and the police blamed the lack of ‘cultural cohesion’, ‘integration’ and ‘growing gang- culture’.

Meanwhile, the centre became a haven for these young men and a place of reflection for me. It was no longer about study support, just support. We talked about the things that mattered to them. For two hours each week, they were offered a space where they could speak unapologetically or just sit and reflect. When I eventually decided to apply to do a PhD and I was asked by a friend “what do you want to spend the next three or more years thinking about?” Ahmed’s words echoed in my ears: *I don’t want someone else to tell me who I am.*

This serves an account of one of the key moments in defining the work that I would come to do. This exchange, is not word for word, but taken from my own memory of the exchange that took place with the young men who would later take part in this research.

I was working as a volunteer at the community centre at the time. I use the term 'community centre' loosely, as it was more a case of a council space that members of the community would rent on occasion to hold classes and events (the Somali community in the city has not had an identifiable community centre for several years). The exchange took place after a third young Somali man in the city died as a result of gang -related violence. Amidst the worry and hysteria in the community, it was in this centre that I heard the stories of those impacted the most.

These young men were hurt; understandably so. In the exchange above, they tried to communicate their frustration at recent events and the responses of those around them.

INTRODUCTION

Setting the scene

Before starting my doctoral studies, I volunteered as a youth support worker in a local community centre. One of the many activities I was asked to contribute to was a study support programme for young people who were considered 'disengaged' from school. I acted as a tutor and listening helper to an initial group of 12 young Somali men and women between the ages of 12-16, which later became a group of six young men. After two years of tutoring the group of 12 young people another tutor was brought in and the group was divided in two; three young men and three young women in each group. As the young men in the group were considered to have behaviour problems and found it difficult to engage with adults, however, they struggled to cope with the new tutoring arrangements. As I had built up a trusting relationship with the young men over two years, it was collectively decided that I could continue to work with all six young men and the new support tutor would work with the young women. This was an arrangement that seemed to work. The support sessions were held once a week on a Saturday morning. Although there is much to be said for the contextual framework and experiences of the young women, as I worked more closely with the young men and as they are the participants of this study, they are the focus of this narrative.

One thing that connected these young men was that they did not initially choose to come to the centre for support. Their parents had mandated the support sessions because they were either

struggling with their school work, or as was the case for the majority of the young men, they were involved (either directly or indirectly) in gang- related crime and their parents hoped that these sessions would 'keep them off the streets'. When I initially started working with the group of 12, the young men were understandably disinterested at first and resisted any attempt I made to get them to engage with the work. After a couple of months of refusing to acknowledge me and sitting in silence, playing on their mobile phones, one of the young men eventually asked me “Why are you even here? You're not even being paid, are you?” To which I replied: “No I'm not being paid, I'm just here to help”. I felt taken aback and in that moment, I wondered if he had a point. I had been there for two months and felt as though I could not teach young men who did not want to be taught, at least by me. The young man responded with a nod and returned to playing on his mobile phone. The following week the same young man who asked me the unnerving question and who later responded with a nod, came in the room and as I greeted him with "Assalamu alaikum, good morning Ahmed", he responded with "wa alaikum assalam, so you gonna tell us how you can help us?". It was in that moment that I realised that these young people were not looking to be taught, but to be listened to. My role was to support them with their English work, both language and literature, but the focus of the sessions soon became less about the school work and more about listening to their experiences both in and out of school.

During the final year when I worked solely with the young men, they shared with me stories about their schooling experiences and asked me questions about my own educational experience. At 23 years of age, I was the youngest volunteer at the centre and the closest in age to them, which I believe allowed them the freedom to be open with me without fear of

judgement. I share the same cultural upbringing as the young men, who are all Somali and raised in Britain and this often meant that I could identify with some of the experiences they shared. As a Muslim, I also share the same religious upbringing as the young men and as a woman this meant there were particular codes of conduct and behaviours that influenced my interactions with the young men and their interactions with me (I will give examples of this throughout the thesis).

When I started the doctoral programme, I continued my voluntary work at the community centre and once the young men heard that I had started a PhD they asked me a lot of questions about what it would entail. I knew that I wanted to do a piece of research that looked at identity and belonging, because as someone who has been raised in a dual-cultural environment, these were issues I was personally drawn towards. I also knew that these were issues the young men contended with, but I was reluctant to share my research idea with them. Though I wanted them to be a part of the research, I understood that it had taken three years to earn their trust and I did not want to put them or myself in a position where that trust could be compromised.

Nonetheless, I knew the importance of this research topic and if these young men were willing to share their stories with me, stories that they would possibly never have the opportunity to tell in their homes, communities or schools, it would be irresponsible and unethical for me to deny them the opportunity. I knew through working with these young men that the reason they found it so hard to trust was because they believed they were perceived to be something they are not and had never really been given the opportunity to challenge those presumptions. The purpose of this study was to give them that voice; an opportunity for them to talk about their experiences, in their own words.

When I invited the young men to take part in the research, they all initially agreed, but ultimately two of the young men were unable to take part, as one moved away from the city with family and the other was under the age of 16 and was not granted parental consent to participate. His parents did not give a reason and he was also pulled out of the support sessions. The remaining four young men became the participants of this study.

The stories we ‘hear’

This thesis seeks to offer critical insights into the lived experiences of four young Somali men in South Yorkshire. These young men have chosen to share their stories in a political climate where threats of extremism (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005) and youth violence (Osler & Starkey, 2005), have pushed discussions around identity and belonging to the forefront of political and public debates in Britain. These young men’s stories need to be heard now more than ever.

In current political and public discussions, young Black Muslim men, like the young men in this research, continue to be positioned as ‘dangerous’, ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ (Yuval-Davis, 2005; Wright, 2016). Discussions around young Black men often frame 'Blackness' as being synonymous with 'male', addressing gender more or less in the context of 'Whiteness', so that a 'crisis of Black social life' is presented as a crisis of masculinity alone (Mirza, 1992; Gilroy, 1993). This conflating of Blackness with masculinity is dangerous, not only because it neglects the experiences of Black women and femininities, but also because it condenses the experiences of Black men to only that of racialized masculinity.

Young Black men are overrepresented in academic literature in several ways. Much of the work around young Black men, particularly in the area of education, has focused on the underachievement of Black boys in relation to their White counterparts and in relation to Black girls. These discussions around underachievement in education have moved away from a focus on class to a stronger focus on gender and ethnicity (Lindsay & Mujis, 2006) which places Black boys at the forefront of the discussions (Farkas, 2003; Strand, 2007). There is a discourse of 'failing Black masculinity' (Reynolds, 2006) that has permeated its way not only into educational discourse, but also into government policies and media representations. The overrepresentation of Black men in the criminal justice system (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2007; Gillborn, 2008) and the psychiatric system (Institute for race relations, 2007), has heavily influenced the ways in which educational statistics on academic (under) achievement and rates of exclusion (Blair, 2001) have been explained by the government (Mocombe, Tomlin, & Wright, 2014). These statistics are also used to perpetuate a negative portrayal of Black men in the media, where antisocial behaviour and educational underachievement are referred to and conceptualised as a problem of disaffection (Lindsay, Pather & Strand, 2006).

Narratives such as these position young Black men as 'failures', perpetuating a deficit model that fails to take into account the multiple ways in which young Black men are disadvantaged throughout their childhood and adulthood, particularly due to a racist education system (Berman & Dar, 2013; Barnard and Turner, 2011). These narratives also silence the voices of the young men themselves, who may feel that such statistics are not representative of their lived

experiences. These distorted stories about them are then told back to them in the form of media representations and institutional practices (Barnard & Turner, 2011; Department for Education (DfE), 2012; 2014).

This thesis offers a space for counter-storying (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000); a space which allows unheard stories to be shared, and for dominant, accepted stories to be challenged.

Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000), talk about the importance of the counter space, where the ideology of racism is examined, racist injuries are named, and victims of racism can find their voice. Further, those injured by racism can discover that they are not alone in their marginality. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories as well as those of others, listening to how the arguments are framed, and learning to make the arguments themselves (p. 64).

Counter-stories are not, however simply a response to dominant narratives, as Ikemoto (1997) reminds us that “by responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse” (p.136). Instead these unheard stories are told for the purpose of sharing experiences of survival and resistance as well as to analyse, expose, and challenge majoritarian views of particular groups of people.

Thesis Structure

The very foundation of this research is that it is relational and emergent. Every stage of the research process was developed through a negotiation of thoughts and ideas between myself and the participants and the decisions made as part of the research design, implementation, reporting, and the dissemination take into account the collaborative and co-constructive nature of the research process. Structuring this thesis has been a constant struggle in trying to find balance in the midst of contradictions, clarity in clouds of uncertainty, coherence in inconsistencies and structure in the fractured. This thesis cannot be presented as clean, linear and rational. It is written in an attempt to give an honest account of the uncomfortable and fractured nature of the research process whilst trying to remain respectful to the research participants and their narratives as well as to myself as a researcher, scholar, and community member.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters and I will provide justification for the structuring approach for each chapter. Despite choosing to divide the thesis into chapters, it is important to note that the chapters are not there to compartmentalise the discussions of concepts. The themes and ideas discussed will often merge into various chapters throughout the thesis and these 'blurred' boundaries highlight the decolonising of the research process and the identities being

explored. The formations of chapters are also the result of my own struggles as a writer trying to find my 'voice' in the writing process. Despite designing this research with a decolonising methodology, I found strange comfort in the colonising 'rationality' of a 'traditional' thesis structure. There was something about being able to compartmentalise the research and disguise the discomfort that was enticing, but it did not work. My attempts at 'fitting' the research into a traditional thesis format were at the very least awkward; at most, unethical. I came to accept the uncomfortable and broken nature of decolonising research and the importance of embracing the unbounded and often contradictory voices of Somali and British, academic and community activist identities that shaped my writing style.

Chapter 1 gives a brief account of Somalia's historical relationship with Britain and the gradual increase in migration of Somalis to Britain. This chapter looks at the colonial history of Britain in Somalia and the implications of this imperial era. It also provides an account of the history of Somali migration into Britain and the changing identities and experiences of Somalis in Britain today. This chapter sets the historic context for the study whilst also contextualising the experiences of Somalis living in Sheffield.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical resources that the research draws on throughout. The chapter begins by discussing the challenge of constructing a literature review for research that is emergent, and the discomfort of working with literature that is simultaneously oppressive and critical to the research. It goes on to outline the critical emancipatory framework, which consists of critical race, postcolonial and Black feminist theories and these set the basis for the rest of the discussions in the thesis. The third section of this chapter opens with a discussion about

historical understandings of identity and how Western psychology has pathologised and oppressed people of colour. The section then goes on to use theories within the emancipatory framework to examine how Western psychology has been and continues to be challenged and shows how the selected critical theories explore notions of identity.

Chapter 3 tells the story of the methodology. The chapter presents a discussion of the literature on decolonising methodologies and situates my argument for using a narrative methodology. It also looks at critical social constructionism as being the basis for my epistemological positioning and how it underpins every aspect of the research. The ethical framework for the research is discussed in this chapter with insights offered into its development and function. The chapter then goes on to give a narrative account of the research design, implementation, and analysis with a particular focus on reflexivity as a tool and the potentially transformative nature of storytelling. The chapter concludes with a focus on the writing process and struggles with voice and power.

Chapter 4, 5, 6, and 7 are dedicated to the individual narratives of the research participants. Because the artifacts collected as part of the research are diverse and to respect the unique stories of the young men, each of the chapters were designed to present the young men and their stories as the central focus. Although theories were interwoven into the analysis and discussion, the stories themselves directed each chapter. Extracts from my research diary, which present my reflections on the artefacts and reflective conversations, are presented in text boxes, the purpose of which was to acknowledge my interpretation of their narratives whilst making explicit that these reflections and interpretations were distinctly different to the young men's own interpretations of their stories.

Chapter 8 provides further discussions on emerging themes and arguments. It also discusses the contribution this research makes to informing theory, policy and practice, and provides recommendations for further research and practice. The themes discussed in this chapter do not seek to draw links between participant experiences or make comparisons between stories, but to identify reoccurring themes and explore them further.

The thesis concludes with a closing reflection on the research process and a poem which highlights my experience of writing a thesis.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT MATTERS

The ties that bind: Strangers in each other's land

As this research focuses on the experiences of young Somali men in Britain, it is important to outline the context in which both their Somali and British cultures collide. In this section of the thesis, I offer a brief historic summary of the relationship between Somaliland and Britain. The first section looks at the colonial history of Somaliland and legacy of colonialism that has resulted in a fraught relationship with Britain. The second section looks at the migration of Somalis to Britain and the social, cultural, economic, and religious challenges the community has and continues to face here.

Britain in Somaliland

The arrival of the British

Somaliland is located in the horn of East Africa and has the longest coastline in Africa. It has always been in an ideal location for trading countries with direct routes to neighbouring countries in East Africa, as well as across the Red Sea to Yemen. It was Somaliland's strategic location which first attracted the attention of the British, who claimed ports in Yemen in 1839. When the

Suez Canal was opened in 1869, the Somaliland and Aden coasts became strategically important for monitoring seaborne traffic and trade. In the 1870s, the British, who were also in the midst of their own industrial revolution, needed a wide market for trade, thus they paid even closer attention to the East African coast. 1885 to 1890 saw Britain become more decisive and by 1890, through negotiations and agreements with Germany, it claimed Somaliland (North Somalia) as part of its 'Protectorate' for a period of time which became known as *the scramble for Africa* (Lewis, 2002).

British Somaliland and the 'Mad Mullah'

By 1890, Somaliland had come to be known as the British Somaliland Protectorate. The Protectorate was initially ruled from British India, but later by the British Foreign Office and Colonial Office, based in England. The colonisation of Somaliland was purely strategic; it was intended to act as a gateway to expanding the British Empire by increasing Britain's control of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait of the Suez Canal, which offered vital naval routes through the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea (Lewis, 2002).

Although the British claimed Somaliland as its Protectorate, resentment and anger towards the colonisers quickly grew. Britain was profiting from a thriving coastal trade, living in Somaliland and building missionary schools to preach Christianity to the Somalis. Religious leaders such as Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, who later became referred to by British writers as 'the mad Mullah', launched campaigns for holy war. Hassan established the Dervish State, an

Islamic army that was formed to fight against the Ethiopian, British, and Italian forces occupying all regions of Somalia. The Dervish State led by Hassan launched attacks against the British and in retaliation British forces launched a four-year expedition against him, ending in an indecisive British victory (Lewis, 2002).

A peace agreement was eventually reached in 1905, which lasted for three years. British forces had gradually withdrawn to the coastline by 1909. During the First World War, Iyasu, the then newly-crowned Ethiopian Emperor, decided to aid the Dervish by supplying them with weapons, aided by Germany, who supported the Dervish in constructing strong armour for their fighters. The Ottoman Empire also sent a letter of support to Hassan in 1917 promising their support and naming him *Amir* (leader) of the Somali nation. Hassan's popularity grew and at the height of his power in 1918, he had the British administration spending their entire budget trying to stop the Dervish activity of over 6,000 of Hassan's troops. The Dervish State fell in 1920 when the British used aerial bombs in a campaign to eradicate the group. Once the Dervish were no longer a threat, the British began to invest in infrastructure and created a less paternalistic set of public policies to keep the uprisings at bay. This was on the whole a successful strategy.

Imperial policies and the myth of 'decolonisation'

The British Protectorate

The British Protectorate was briefly occupied by Italy in August 1940, as part of the East Africa campaign of WWII but was later recaptured by the British in 1941. With resistance from the natives and guerrilla attacks from Italian troops attempting a recapture of Somaliland, Britain was forced to utilise more resources to protect its occupied space. In 1949 however, the British Cabinet held a meeting in Britain to discuss the development of larger and smaller territories. The Cabinet decided that as Somaliland was a relatively small territory, incapable of selfgovernance and independence, it needed to remain under British rule for the foreseeable future (Jones, 1949). The Cabinet met again in 1954 to discuss the issue of Somaliland and decided that it would be unlikely for territories such as Somaliland to ever achieve full independence (Lord Swinton, 1954), and this was reiterated in a further Cabinet meeting held in 1956 (Lennox-Boyd, 1956). In 1958, however, the Cabinet reversed its policy, seemingly deciding to grant Somaliland independence, with Somaliland officially being granted independence in 1960.

The decision-making processes of the Cabinet are particularly interesting to note. The historiography of these discussions and decisions offer meta- narratives that pay little attention to the specificity of the ways in which the political futures of different colonies, regions and protectorates were determined (Lewis, 2002). These narratives also demonstrate the disconcertingly chaotic and sudden decisions made by the Cabinet to grant independence, with Somaliland being a good example of this.

In May 1960, the British government declared that it would grant the British Protectorate of

Somaliland independence, on the condition that it unites with the Italian administered territory of Italian Somaliland. The colonial legislative councils of both territories met at a joint conference in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia (at this point, Italian Somaliland) and agreed to this proposal which was scheduled to take place on 1st July 1960. It was agreed that there would be a single elected head of State who would have full power to represent both territories and that there would be a national assembly of 123 members that would be representative of both territories.

On the 26th June, 1960, British Somaliland briefly gained its independence as the State of Somaliland, before uniting (as scheduled) with Italian Somaliland five days later on 1st July, 1960, to form what became known as the Somali Republic. Aden Abdullah Osman Daar became the First President of the Somali Republic.

Siad Barre and Somali Communism

On the 15th October 1969, Somalia's then President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated by his own bodyguards and this assassination was followed quickly by a military coup, spearheaded by General Mohamed Siad Barre who was the commander of the army. Barre and his army assumed power shortly after President Sharmarke's assassination and in entering into power immediately dissolved the parliament and Supreme Court and suspended the constitution developed at the start of the formation of the Somali Republic (Lewis, 2002).

Barre and his revolutionary army successfully implemented urban and rural literacy campaigns and dramatically increased the countries literacy rate during their time in power. They also developed strong links with the Arab world, joining the Arab League in 1974. Also in 1974 Barre became the chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) which was the predecessor of the African Union (AU). Although Barre had already been ruling as a one party government, this was made official in 1976 when the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) was declared. Barre and his party declared that their wish to adopt Marxism as a way to reconcile state ideology with the religious principles of the Somali people, in a way that would emphasize social progress, justice and equality. Although SRSP did encourage small scale private investments, the direction of rule was essentially communism (Lewis, 2002)

[A new era of conflict](#)

One of Barre's goals was to unite all of the formally-occupied Somali territories and in July 1977, Barre's government fought and seized the central and southern parts of the Ogaden region which bordered Somalia and Ethiopia. This was the start of the Ogaden War and by September 1977, Somalia controlled over 90% of the Ogaden region. Soviet intervention in support of Ethiopia meant, however, that by 1978, Somali troops had been pushed out of the Ogaden region. Only a few years earlier The Soviet Union had supported Barre and his regime and this shift in support meant that Barre had to form alliances elsewhere. Barre formed an alliance with the United States, who were the arch rivals of the Soviets during the Cold War (Lewis, 2002).

Barre's regime became unpopular and weakened over time. In the 1980s, as the Cold War drew to a close, Somalia's strategic importance diminished, as did its support from the United States. The government became increasingly totalitarian and several resistance movements sprang up across the country. Low-level violence soon led to a full-blown civil war. In 1991, after the breakdown of the central government and over a decade of internal violence, parts of the area that formally encompassed British Somaliland self-declared independence. The Republic of Somaliland was declared; however, to this day, despite the fact that Somaliland functions as an independent state, it is not recognised as such by any country or international organisation.

Somalis in Britain

Patterns of migration

Somalis have lived in Britain since the mid-19th century. The circumstances that have brought the Somali diaspora to Britain since then are varied, so this will be a brief outline of the key historic migration patterns of Somalis entering Britain. It is important to acknowledge that migration and population dispersion amongst Somalis did not happen because of colonialism; rather, it has always been a longstanding feature of Somali nomadic tradition (Hear et al., 2004) and so these migration patterns are to be taken as being for a number of different reasons.

The first group of Somalis to arrive in Britain were Somali merchant navy sailors who settled in the port areas of London, Cardiff, and Bristol in the 19th century. In the midst of WWII, Britain needed more workers to support them and this led to an influx of migrant workers coming to Britain from many of their occupied nations, including Somaliland. The Somali workers

gradually gravitated towards Sheffield to work in the steel industry. Into the 21st century, the migration patterns of Somalis entering Britain changed, with people entering Britain to reunite with families, European Somalis migrating from the Netherlands and Scandinavia, and more recently, the new arrivals of Somalis from South Somalia who have fled due to growing insecurity and violence in the country. Somalis now constitute one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the UK (Home Office, Research Development Statistics, 2007).

[Adjusting to a new culture/place](#)

Despite the fact we are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the UK and have resided in the country collectively for over a century, many Somalis have found it hard to negotiate the cultural and societal expectations that would enable them to maintain both a Somali and British identity. The period of the Somali civil war in 1990 and the consequent mass arrival of Somalis into Britain meant many changes for the Somali community (Fangen, 2006; Harris, 2004; Hopkins, 2006).

The civil war split up families through physical separation as a result of the war, or through the loss of lives. This meant that many women like my mother brought their children to Britain alone. Some women were now to become the heads of the household, a trend which forced many members of the Somali community to work against the gendered cultural roles to which they were accustomed (Warsame, 2002). Somali culture and social structure in Africa is built around gender roles and expectations, but these concepts became more fluid and ambiguous to

the Somali community in Britain, and as a result became difficult to understand and negotiate between the two cultural contexts.

Researching the Somali community

What is a community?

As the term 'community' is often used in this research and can be approached in various ways depending on theoretical perspective, it is important to clarify what I mean when I use the term in this study. 'The Community' can be approached broadly as values, in which commitment, solidarity, and trust are some of the elements brought together (Frazer, 2000, p.76). 'The Community' can also be seen as a set of variables or descriptive categories. These include locality, in which people share the same geographical space; interest, where they share commonalities beyond space such as religious beliefs; and communality, the sense of attachment to a group, place or idea where there is a 'spirit of community'. These categories are not necessarily distinct and do have the potential to overlap at times (Willmott, 1986; Lee & Newby, 1983; Crow & Allen, 1995).

Although these descriptive categories are useful when looking at the different types of 'communities', the definition that applies to this study is a concept developed by Anthony Cohen (1982; 1985) as 'communities of meaning'. Cohen argues that communities play a vital symbolic role in developing people's sense of belonging (1985, p.118). He states that members

of a community have something in common that distinguishes them from members of other groups. He argues that this separation between two communities may be marked by physical features, such as parts of a country or city, a river or road. It may also be marked by religious or linguistic features that almost create a coded language which no one outside the community can access. Cohen goes on to state that the marked divisions may not always be apparent: “They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of the beholders” (1985 p.12). A community may thus be seen in various ways, not only by the people on either side, but also by those on the same side.

This is useful for the research because it allows me to be aware that, by using the term ‘Somali community’ to refer to a shared set of cultural ‘meanings’, I am relying on my own understanding of what ‘community means’, which may not be shared by the participants of the research.

[Somalis in Sheffield](#)

The majority of Somalis living in Sheffield are from an independent state in the North of Somalia known as Somaliland, and they refer to themselves as Somalilanders. The Census (2011) indicates that 74% of Somalis who are of working age were born in Somalia, but less than 20% of all Somalis in Britain who are under the age of 16 were born in Somalia (there is no distinction made between Somalia and Somaliland as Somaliland is not internationally recognised). This indicates that there are a growing generation of British Somalis who were

born and raised in Britain. This is important to note in highlighting the intergenerational experiences that will be discussed in the thesis. The Somali community in Sheffield is amongst the largest in any city in Britain but has much less diversity in clan demographic than other cities. Most Somalis living in the city, particularly those who have been here for more than one generation, some from Somaliland.

The reason why this context is necessary for the research is because it's important to note that although the majority of Somalis in the city come from a single clan and originate from regions of Somaliland that are the same if not neighbouring, this does not mean that this is a homogenous, united community. For reasons that are political, as well as internally clan based, the Somali community in Sheffield is fractured and so although I do use the term 'Somali community' throughout this research, I recognise that this notion of community may be interpreted loosely, particularly by the Somalis that read this work. Just as this work is not intended to be representative of the experiences of young Somali men, it is also not intended to be representative of the experiences of the Somali community in the city.

[Disconnected research](#)

It would be incorrect to say that there is no research on the Somali community in Britain; there are numerous studies (Kahin, 1997; Hear & Sørensen, 2002; and Ali, 2012). Despite the plethora of studies available, however, the research remains inaccessible and disconnected from the community being researched. Research conducted on the Somali community - and in fact on

many other ethnic minority groups - is grounded in pragmatism and is typically published for political and policy considerations.

The 'race relations industry' in the 1970s can be seen to have been prompted by the imagined threat to public order of immigration. Much of the research on ethnic minority groups, especially post-1970, therefore focused more on those communities perceived to be 'problematic', and as a result undoubtedly the communities which were less 'problematic' remained unscrutinised. Earlier generations of Somalis who were seafarers were, on the whole, self-contained communities, so they attracted very little attention. Political events in Somalia during the 1980s meant that more Somalis entering Britain were arriving as refugees and asylum seekers. This community of people now became a 'problematic' group, something which is evident from the numerous reports that appeared documenting their difficulties. The focus of reports on the Somali community ranged from health, employment, and education, but were mainly quantitative in nature and produced with the purpose of 'problem-solving' rather than gaining insight into the experiences and culture of the people.

The Somali community still struggles to find a meeting point between their indigenous culture and that of British society. It is this distance between the two that increases their isolation. It is this isolation and the unwillingness of researchers to engage directly with the community that has produced a clear dissonance between the amount of information collected and its relevance. Studies conducted have usually been brief, small-scale, and often undertaken by local authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The information contained in these

reports is often fragmented and badly circulated. Although the reports often contain some essential information, the very fact that what is known about the Somali community usually comes in the form of statistical reports has a profound effect on the way the community is represented and perceives itself. Policy and statistically based research often represents the Somali community as victims of circumstance, focusing on the obstacles and problems they face and the devising of solutions.

Although there is no denying the necessity of such research; as there are real problems within the

Somali community that need to be overcome, this approach conflicts with the nature of the Somali people, who come from a culture of self-reliance. The predominance of problem-oriented research conducted by local authorities only reinforces the image of the Somali community as passive supplicants. Such research cannot act as an agent of empowerment. These types of documents do not reflect and give voice to the lived experiences of Somalis living in Britain.

Longer research documents such as theses, which do not necessarily carry a policy burden, provide more opportunities to look at the lived experiences of the Somali community, although these opportunities are often missed. Sarah Cox (2002), for example, used an ethnographic approach in her dissertation to look at Somali children in a nursery setting, while Kahin's (1997) biographical study on educating Somali children in Britain looked at the lived experiences of the actual participants. Sportan and Valentine (2008) also produced a mixed methods comparative study on post-colonial identities in the UK and Denmark. Although such research exists, it is rarely published and therefore less visible than policy documents, even

though these studies give more insight into the community as they go beneath the surface, thus having the potential to give voice and visibility to an otherwise hidden community; something which is not only important but also necessary.

This research seeks to add a new dimension to current research. Although I will not be researching the entire community, I will be sharing, through their own narratives, the experiences of four young Somali men, how they represent themselves, and how they believe they are represented by the wider Somali and British communities. This research does not rely on statistics, nor does it pose a hypothesis to test. It may contribute to the development of policy but this study is designed for policy makers. Rather, the premise of the study is to create a space for young men to share their stories and for them to represent these stories in ways that allow insight into the lived experiences of being a young Somali man in Britain from their own perspectives.

Summary

This brief account of the history of Britain in Somali and Somalis in Britain is important in contextualising the research in a number of ways. Not only is it necessary to highlight Britain's involvement in Somaliland and the lives of the Somali people for over a century, but also to take note of the way in which histories are told. Although I have my own understanding of the history of Somaliland; relayed through stories which have been passed down by generations, such histories are not considered official accounts. The single source I have used in the initial

discussion of Britain in Somaliland was by anthropologist Ioan Lewis (2002) who is recognised internationally as the leading academic authority on the history and culture of the Somali people. He has written dozens of books and although there are other White, European men like him who have written exclusively on the history and culture of Somalis, Lewis (2002) here is an example of the ways in which 'official' narratives of the oppressed are rarely told by the oppressed themselves. 'Official' histories often omit other ways of telling stories and the purpose of this thesis is to not only create a space for counter-stories, but to highlight the pervasive ways in which these stories are silenced in literature.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL RESOURCES

Starting again

The only way to describe my experience of engaging with literature throughout this research process is like that of a journey across an ocean. There were moments of calm, but also moments when I rode the waves, allowing the process to guide me, and moments where I felt myself swimming against a tumultuous tide. This chapter attempts to capture that journey. This is not a literature review; or at least it is not *just* a literature review. Just as I have incorporated a narrative voice in the chapters that precede and supersede this; this chapter too, tells a story.

Before initially developing a research design I began systematically reviewing what I believed to be relevant literature. I highlighted key terms such as 'identity', 'self', and 'narratives', conducted journal searches read books, found key writers and key texts and began to compile a

clear, linear review of the literature. But this literature review did not capture the complexity and interconnectedness of what I would encounter in this research. I had a section of literature on self and identity which were almost entirely based on Western psychological texts with snippets of cultural theory drawn in to discuss the concepts of ‘cultural’ and ‘racial’ identity. Postcolonial, Critical Race and Black Feminist theory were then discussed in isolation and had no real place in the review beyond critiquing their usefulness as theories in providing a critical lens to later discuss the data. The review did not capture the jarring effect of juxtaposing Western literature with postcolonial literature, nor did it capture the true entanglement and dis-ease that had come with grappling with complex ideas. Instead it re-presented and reinforced the hegemonic influence of Western knowledge that had surrounded my educational experience, knowledge which I was now using as the sole foundation on which to build and critique my research. I found myself grappling with ways to later incorporate the ‘non-Western’ literature I had engaged with, trying to find gaps in which these ‘alternative’ ideas could ‘fit’. I realised through this process that I had slipped into ‘unwitting imperialism’ (Jones & Jenkins, 2008) by placing

Western social theory and psychology as the precedent and non-Western ideas as ‘alternative’ or ‘additional’. This was not only naïve in its oversimplification, but dangerous in creating a colonial discourse that would then direct the rest of the research. I needed this to be an authentic literature review that embraced the complexity of the issues I would be exploring. This meant starting again. This chapter now captures a complex, entangled and multifaceted literature review that not only situates the research but also acts as a resource ‘bank’ from which to draw throughout the thesis. The chapter does not flow easily, but I have tried to create a space for all

the knowledge and ideas, whether Western or non-Western, that have influenced my understandings of the world.

Overview

The literatures that I have engaged with in this study are not situated in a single chapter. I have therefore chosen to refer to this chapter as a ‘theoretical resources chapter’, as it presents a range of theories and concepts that enable me to situate and frame my research, whilst acting as a resource to draw upon throughout the thesis. The chapter locates the research within existing literature and identifies areas to which this research may contribute.

The nature of an emerging research design means that it would have been unhelpful to assume that a literature review formulated prior to data collection would have been appropriate once the data was collected. I therefore limit this chapter to a discussion of the literature I engaged with prior to the data collection, and draw upon some of this literature, along with additional literature later in each of the narrative and further discussion chapters. Throughout this chapter I present a critique of the literature, whilst acknowledging the unease of bringing together not only different forms of literature, but also different forms of worldviews and knowledges.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I outline the purpose of a literature review and justify my decision to move away from a 'traditional format'; this being the consideration of themes that would be used to develop research questions and frame the analysis of data. In this chapter and throughout the thesis, I consider the nature of different knowledges and how my understanding of 'decolonising knowledge' has informed my engagement with the literature. It presents an account of my thought process in selecting the literature that felt most appropriate to the research; literature that ranges from academic theory to fictional prose and poetry.

The second section evaluates the socio-cultural theories of post-colonial theory, with a discussion of it in relation to de-colonial and anti-colonial theory, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist Theory. These bodies of knowledge collectively form the critical emancipatory framework that underpins the research. This section conceptualises and highlights the ways in which these theories interact with one another and the ways in which they can act as both resistive and restrictive tools for analysis. I do not discuss the theories in their entirety, but draw on particular aspects that are relevant to this study.

The third section seeks to critically evaluate key literature on identity through the lens of the critical theories expounded in Section two, as well as a Western psychological lens. I begin this chapter with a discussion of the ways in which Western psychology has pathologised the lived experiences of people of colour, particularly through its construction of the 'Black child'. I then go on to discuss the Postcolonial and Critical Race Theories (CRT) that will be used in this thesis to challenge and deconstruct these psychopathologies. The reason why I have chosen to begin with a Western psychological discussion of identity is to highlight the problematic ways

in which some of these concepts have been embedded into contemporary and popular discussions around race and ethnicity, particularly within education and childhood.

I have placed it in a single section as this is not literature I am comfortable using. Therefore in isolating it into a single section, I can recognise its relevance to the research without allowing it to be the dominant discourse to which the rest of the thesis merely responds. This is often the case in research that looks at the identity experiences of people of colour; as a decolonising project, however, I have chosen to prioritise the discussion of emancipatory critical theories. This section also explores the intersectionality of identities by considering the construction and performance of gender, race and religion.

Terminology

In the introduction to this literature review I refer to the texts I am using as ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’, and though I identified them as such, I had to ask myself why. What did I mean by ‘non-Western texts’? Why ‘non-Western’? Indeed, by claiming a text was non-Western I would still be allowing Western texts to be the standard by which other texts are judged, which made me feel uncomfortable. It would also have suggested that the texts I would be referring to would have been written in or referred to contexts outside of the West. Likewise, I could not refer to the literature I would be using as ‘alternative’, since it would insinuate that they were simply an alternative to the dominant version, which again would give precedence to Western literature. So how could it be termed Black literature? I understand that these terms are problematic and I understand that these terms are both limited and limiting. Throughout the rest of the chapter

(and the thesis) I refer to the literature I am using as ‘African-centred’, ‘Black’, and ‘Non-Western’ texts interchangeably depending on how the text itself is referred to in context. I make the distinction between African-centred and Black literature because the African-centred literature I use has either been written in Africa or speaks specifically about African contexts. ‘Black literature’, on the other hand, covers a range of contexts more broadly, including here in the UK, and refers to ‘Black’ in both the racialized and politicised sense (the term ‘Black’ will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, in Ahmed’s narrative).

In order to engage with the literature I have had access to and to critique the discourses that have been placed on and embedded into the experiences of the young men in this research, I have had to use terminology that I feel uncomfortable with, since this is the language in which the ideas I am challenging are framed. The fact that ‘Western’ literature (for lack of a better term) can be spoken about simply as subject-based literature, whilst literature that is ‘Othered’ needs to be identified through labels like ‘Black’, ‘Afrocentric’, ‘Global South’, and ‘Postcolonial’ says a lot about the value placed on these knowledges. I understand the problematic nature of using these categories and I recognise that in the process of exploration, critique, and resistance there may be instances where I find myself perpetuating such categories, even though that is not my intention.

The terms ‘Black’ and ‘White’ are also used throughout the thesis with an appreciation of the ambiguities and complexities inherent in them. In most instances, these terms, particularly ‘White’ are used in a descriptive manner based on phenotype and do not seek to delineate ethnic or religious backgrounds. I use the term ‘Black’ to refer to the ways in which people of colour

are addressed in particular types of literature and in instances where I share my own analysis and discussion, I use the term ‘people of colour’ as this is the marker of racial identity that bothers me the least.

‘Whiteness’ and ‘Blackness’ are also used throughout the thesis and are approached from a discursive rather than descriptive perspective. ‘Whiteness’ recognises the ways in which White people accrue, maintain and benefit from privilege (Abercrombie et al., 2012; Delgado & Stefanic, 2012) and Blackness is a racialized state in which those who are identified as ‘Black’ are also located as ‘other’ (Mirza, 1992).

My use of language in this thesis recognises that there are no clear boundaries between the terms that I use, but I try my best to highlight when these terms are used in ways that are problematic. I also understand that particularly for this chapter in which I critique literature, it is necessary for me to use specific terminology. In later narrative chapters, however, I recognise the complexity of the terms in light of individual lived experiences. I have tried to be as clear as possible about my positionality in my use of these terms and explain why I have chosen to use a certain type of language. Nonetheless, I appreciate the complexity and messiness of language, particularly when discussing identity and race.

Part One: The problem of a literature review

A researcher cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field. (Boote & Beile, 2005, p. 3)

The main purpose of a literature review is to critique and review a range of literature in order to situate the research within the context of wider literature in the field of study, whilst also finding gaps in the current literature that may provide a niche for your own research (Wellington, 2000).

It is not enough to state that one will review the literature surrounding a particular field.

Literature reviews are subjective, which means that the process of selecting or excluding certain forms of literature cannot and should not be ignored.

Hart (1998) states that a review should be

...written from a particular standpoint, to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the research topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of documents in relation to the research being proposed (p.13).

I cannot disconnect myself from the literature I have engaged with, just as I am unable and unwilling to disconnect myself from any aspect of the research. It was therefore important that I reflected on my thought process as I worked my way around the literature and how a broad reading around the philosophy and psychology of self and identity through different lenses have challenged and empowered me. If I am to write from where I am, I must be honest about where that is.

[\(In\) betweenness- A hybrid literature review](#)

I approach my journey through the literature by first acknowledging the complexity of the knowledge that I have and need to employ. Having been raised and educated here in Britain, the knowledge that I have become acquainted with and have access to is largely Western. It is through this knowledge that I have been able to rationalise my experiences and the experiences of those around me. But there is and has always been an internal fire burning within me that yearns for something else, for the knowledge of my ancestors, for a way to speak about the unspeakable, to allow myself to be emotive without apology. As I tried and engaged with different sets of literature I held these two conflicting struggles, trying to find a balance or at least a compromise between my objective eternal persona and the internal force trying to break free. In this chapter I argue that the thesis as a whole is a product of that struggle.

The term "thesis" comes from the Greek *tithenai*, meaning 'something put forth', and in my quest to 'put something forth' this review needs to reflect who I am as a researcher. I am African, my participants are African, so discussing this aspect of our identities through an entirely Western lens would be inappropriate. African-focused literature is as (in) visible as African academics in the academy, and this Eurocentric space can be spiritually wounding for an African learner or researcher (Asante, 1991; Dei, 2002; Fanon, 1963; wa Thiong'o, 1993 Wane, 2008).

The work of African-centred writers; whether theoretical or literary, are rarely recognised within the academy, with only a few exceptions such as Chinua Achebe (1958) and Franz Fanon (1963) who, unless taught in subjects specifically related to postcolonial theory or race, are often referred to as supplementary or 'alternative' texts.

I do not draw on the work of African- focused literature as alternative or supplementary to Western literature; as this would only perpetuate the de-legitimisation of African knowledge. Instead I critically review both types of literature simultaneously, as the two are not entirely dichotomous but intertwine in a relationship that is both complex and fluid. Although I will be discussing both sets of literature, I will where necessary make clear distinctions between the two and explain why these forms of literature have been used alongside each other. I do understand that no knowledge is static or without influence and the African-focused literature that I discuss in the main body of the text is not devoid of Western influences. In fact, one of the lasting effects of colonialism is its penetration of the knowledge production of colonised peoples. Prioritising the work of people of colour in this thesis is nevertheless an important act of resistance that allows me to rupture the taken-for-granted and create a space in which I strive to decolonise the production of new knowledge.

I still acknowledge that part of decolonising the production of new knowledge is critiquing the ways in which Western knowledge systems have dominated and silenced others. What I ‘put forth’ in this thesis is thus not only a series of narrative accounts that contribute to debates around identity and belonging, but also a recognition that many forms of knowledge inform how we come to know ourselves and the world around us; knowledge that includes deeply embedded colonial rationality:

When any group within a large, complex civilisation significantly dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies), not only become the dominant ways of that civilisation, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as ‘natural’ or

appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions. (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 7)

Fanon (1968), a psychiatrist and one of the most prominent 20th Century thinkers on race, discussed the physical, psychological and spiritual domination of colonialism, and how it has resulted in colonised peoples being denied the opportunity to know themselves. Instead it is the coloniser who claims to 'know' the colonised and with this knowledge there is "a determination to objectify, to confine, to imprison, to harden" (Fanon, 1968, p.34). In writing this thesis (and particularly this chapter), my most difficult realisation was how easily I found myself falling into the pattern of only referring to Western texts on African lives and identities. Reading these texts felt normal and it was only in reading texts by writers such as Fanon that I realised how pervasive some of the Western texts I was reading were. However difficult it may have been to find African-focused and non-Western literature (which in itself says something about knowledge that is (in) accessible), it felt necessary. I had to disrupt the unquestioned dominance of Western knowledge. Fanon, like many of the authors of colour whose work I engage with in this thesis, situates his work in particular contexts. Although Fanon has written about the immediate issues of his time in France, Martinique and Algeria, in his work he speaks of the inability of his writings to speak to situations outside of the specifics of each of these contexts. I bear in mind the importance of context as I select and examine appropriate literature throughout this thesis, aware that the majority of the texts I refer to will not be specific to the Somali experience, also critically exploring why these texts still make an important contribution.

Part Two: Socio-Cultural theories

This section provides an outline of the theories that have informed the critical theoretical framework I will be using to inform the discussions that will take place throughout the thesis. The section begins with a discussion of epistemological oppression and offers decolonising knowledge and emancipatory praxis as tools for engaging critically with knowledge and practices that are both privileged and silenced. The discussion on emancipatory praxis (Coburn & Gormally, 2015) outlines a framework that will guide the way in which literature will be engaged with throughout the thesis. This model explains the importance of theory, action and reflection and through a discussion of critical social theory, explains how the process has transformative potential.

This section then goes on to outline and critique Postcolonial, Black Feminist and CRT as the primary theoretical bodies of work that I will engage with in this thesis. I outline the aspects of each theoretical approach that is most useful for this research, whilst acknowledging the ways in which these theories are themselves problematic. The purpose of this section is not to create a solid theoretical framework for the research, but to explore the theoretical options that offer critical lenses through which to engage with the stories of the research participants. The theories will not be given a priority space in this thesis, but will instead be used selectively to support the organic discussion and analysis of the stories provided by the participants and myself.

Power and epistemological oppression

In the first section of this chapter I discussed the types of literature I would be using and the difficulty of negotiating how these literatures could be discussed alongside one another when one set is given greater dominance in the academic space than the other. The restrictions placed on some knowledge constructions and understandings and the power given to other knowledge constructions may be discussed as epistemological oppression (Thompson, 2003). The theory of epistemological oppression focuses on the role of power in maintaining unequal participation and value in knowledge construction (Dotson, 2012).

CRT, and Postcolonial Theory- which I will discuss later in this section- draw on epistemological oppression to explore the ways in which particular social groups are excluded from knowledge construction and how this results in a lack of power to structure and understand their world (Sewell, 2016). Sewell (ibid) discusses the fundamental role of epistemological oppression in society and the ways in which it is embedded into all structures and institutions.

Sewell (2016) draws on Harding's (1991) Standpoint Theory (ST) to explain how some social groups, for instance white, middle class men, hold greater levels of epistemological power, and are thus alternative realities that do not support the maintenance of this social group(s)'s power are difficult for members of this social group(s) to understand. In contrast, Harding (1991) argues that individuals and groups in positions of oppression are in fact better able to view a wider range of realities than those who are part of a supposed dominant group. This is because whilst those in power maintain their positions through the exclusion of alternative epistemological positions and experiences, oppressed individuals and groups have little need to maintain systems of power through epistemological oppression as their own current epistemological positions hold no real

power in the construction of society (Harding, 1991). Harding here makes an important and yet troubling point; that the oppressed are better able to question power structures because, they have nothing to lose. I do not agree with Harding in that oppressed peoples are entirely powerless. In fact there is much evidence of the ways in which oppressed communities have and continue to resist oppressive systems. This is not to say that oppression comes in a single form, nor is it to suggest that groups that are oppressed in one context are also oppressed in others. What it does highlight, however, is that those placed outside of power structures are better positioned to question those structures, but they do not depend on those structures as much as those who lie within it.

Colonising Knowledge

During the colonial periods of the last 20th Century, education and research were used as fundamental tools for maintaining power through knowledge. The surest way to ensure that the knowledge produced by the elites would be filtered down to the 'irrational' masses was to create institutions that would control and monitor the production, application and order of such knowledge. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) describes the change in the ways in which individuals within societies are ordered and disciplined by institutions, using the example of the penal system in the form of prisons. In the case of colonialism it was also through institutions, and primarily formal education, that individuals and societies were ordered and disciplined.

Throughout most of Africa and particularly East Africa, White Christian missionaries introduced Western education for the purpose of enhancing the evangelisation of Africans as

Christian converts. Western knowledge presented through formal education was claimed by the missionaries as an act of civilisation, as it was their hope that converting Africans to Christianity would further the mission as well as later support colonial rule (Akena).

In converting Africans, Christian missionaries felt it necessary to move them away from indigenous knowledge and traditional education, as they believed that these knowledges; which they ultimately saw as practices and behaviours and not knowledges, were not only inferior, but also barbaric and primitive. In order to do this, they practiced a common conversion method used as far back at the 20th century known as ‘concentration versus diffusion’. This entailed isolating young Africans, usually men, by removing them from their homes and converting them in order to protect them from reverting to their traditional beliefs. Thus the primary aim of the missionary educational institutes was to impart Western knowledge, religion, and culture so that these graduates from such institutes would pass on the knowledge to their communities (Adyanga, 2011, p.17).

Westerman (1937), in his text *Africa and Christianity*, states:

These pagan Africans are more easily convinced to adopt a new faith, because in his own religion he has little to lose than people adhering to a high religion, and the adoption of

Christianity included for him membership in a higher class...The missionary is- and must be- inexorable in trying to exterminate everything connected with the old religion,

because his experience has taught him that any form of syncretism is the death of genuine

Christian life (p.134-135)

Ben N. Azikiwe (1934) explained the reasoning behind the controlled education of Africans through a missionary-style education system to produce submissive subjects and maintain colonial rule. He states:

So long as the African would be content at menial tasks, and would not seek complete social, political and economic equality with the Western world, he is deemed to be a 'good' fellow. But let him question the right to keep him in political and economic servitude, and let him strive to educate himself to the fundamentals of these modern problems, he is immediately branded as an 'agitator'. He becomes a 'bad' fellow for failing to stay in his 'place', which of course is the background (Azikiwe, 1934, p.146)

This quote outlines the way in which education was used as a means to control, but also as a means to resist power. It also demonstrates the use of violent and demeaning labels to position those who try and resist oppressive powers that 'place' them. This is particularly interesting in the context of this research, which not only seeks to explore the ways in which young men are positioned by oppressive structures, but also who find that their acts of resistance are met with labels that highlight the disruptiveness of their presence.

Decolonising Knowledge

While we should acknowledge that there are multiple sites where the struggle against oppression and exploitation might be taken up, Indigenous peoples must set the agenda for change themselves, not simply react to an agenda that has been laid out for us by others. (Smith, 1999, p. 210)

The study of knowledge as a concept is perennial and has been at the heart of philosophical thought for as long as philosophy has been around. In Western philosophy, the study of knowledge has been conducted through a discipline known as *epistemology*; which derives from two Greek words, *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (word or reason). Epistemology asks the following questions; what makes up knowledge? What kinds of things can we know? What are the limits to what we can know? And is it possible to actually 'know' anything at all? From these questions, it is evident that an understanding of the nature of knowledge is closely linked with an understanding of existence and the nature of being (ontology). I would also add that to explore the relationship between knowledge and existence, one must also understand the function of power. In considering power in the ways in which certain knowledges are legitimised and others denied, I would suggest that epistemology as a Western concept may not be a relevant category through which to make sense of African ways of knowing.

In the sociology of knowledge; that is the study of the relationship between knowledge and existence, Conway (2004) asserts that there must be an appreciation that knowledge production is never complete but is a continuously fluctuating, transitive verb. Knowledge must therefore be understood as a social phenomenon within the social circumstances in which it is produced

and suppressed (Dewey, 1916; Mannheim, 1936). Further, from an Islamic perspective knowledge (*ilm*) is multifaceted, consisting not only of what can be discovered, constructed, and experienced, but also the acknowledgement of what can be felt but not explained and the acceptance of what cannot be known (Akhtar, 2010).

Colonialism as a social phenomenon delegitimised African knowledge systems and debated the authenticity of African philosophies (Masolo, 1994). Power lies at the heart of these debates and refutations, as colonial narratives continue to essentialise and devalue African philosophies based on racial hierarchy. Such hierarchies position European philosophy, with Greek thought as the ontological beginning, as ‘civilised’ and African philosophy with no identified beginning, and as ‘uncivilised’ (Akena, 2012).

Obenga (2004) writes,

It is a mere prejudice to believe that the philosophical epoch of humanity begins among the Greek in the fifth century BC. This prejudice implies that other ancient people did not engage in speculative thought (p.31).

Many scholars have dedicated their work to the theorising of African philosophical tradition outside of Eurocentric logic (Gyekye, 1987; Masolo, 1994; Wiredu, 2004). In doing so, they claim a return to ‘indigenous knowledge’, defined by Kincheloe (2006) as multidimensional ways of knowing that bridge the gap between human beings and their environment. Indigenous knowledge is in essence ‘a lived world’ that is connected to history and ancestry, and which

acting as context-relevant tools for reclaiming ways of knowing that have been suppressed or marginalised by Western knowledge (Purcell, 1998). Although these scholars claim a return to 'indigenous knowledge' I question the extent to which such enterprise is possible and whether only indigenous knowledge can be used to resist Eurocentric logic? Can the Créole knowledge in the Americas, for example; that is not linked to indigenous peoples but to the ancestors of slaves, be thought of also as having been deliberately suppressed? Nonetheless, the multidimensional ways of knowing that are at the core of their philosophical thought are necessary for working with ideas that fall outside of Eurocentric logic, such as spirituality and the relationship between human beings and nature, which are at the heart of the African experience. This is not to say that there is one single understanding of African spirituality or that Eurocentric logic negates spirituality, but rather it highlights the fact that Afrocentric epistemology is rooted in spirituality, communalism, and ethics, which European neoliberal epistemologies do not fully accommodate. Neoliberalism as an ideology sees competition as a defining characteristic of human relations and defines citizens as consumers who have the right to choose and who must deal with the consequences of their choices. It promotes an individualistic worldview which fails to take into account structural inequalities that maintain unequal divisions of power.

In Njoki Wane's (2005) essay *Is decolonisation possible?* Wane gives the example of an exercise she does with her students to demonstrate the disturbing impact of colonialism. She asks the students in her class to write something about themselves on a piece of paper. She then asks them to tear the piece of paper into small pieces and to throw it all over the floor. Once the students throw the ripped pieces of paper onto the floor she asks them to find what they have

written about themselves by trying to find the pieces and fitting them together. The purpose of this activity was to powerfully highlight the effects of colonialism to her students and the ways in which it fragments identities of people all over the world. By asking them to then try and piece the fragments together, she wants the students to experience the difficulty of putting together fragments of an identity after the violence of a colonial encounter.

The deep effects of colonialism were also discussed by Fanon (1968), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, when he stated:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely by hiding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes a dialectical significance today. When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effects consciously sought by colonialism were to drive into the natives' head the idea that if the settlers were to leave; they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality. (p. 170)

Here, Fanon not only provides a critical analysis of the context in which the colonial mindset operates to position people against their own selves and their own histories, but he also explains that colonial logic presents itself as the only way forward, convincing those it has colonised so

that colonised peoples do not feel the need to metaphorically pick up and piece together the fragments of their histories that have been ripped apart.

The exercise Wane (2005) did with her students and Fanon's (1968) account of the lasting effects of colonialism, are important reflections to consider in relation to this research. The young men in constructing and analysing their artefacts will be attempting to somehow piece together a story that may be incomplete or fractured. As part of the decolonising endeavour of this project, it is also important to recognise the knowledges that frame the stories being told and to be reflexive of the ways in which we allow these knowledges to frame how we speak of ourselves.

Internalised Oppression

This notion of internalised oppression is based on the idea that oppressed peoples absorb experiences of racial inferiority through the skin and the mind; Fanon (1963) refers to this process as 'epidermalization'. This notion of epidermalization was developed by Fanon over sixty years ago as result of his analysis of the impact of colonisation on the people of Martinique and later also the people of Algeria. Epidermalization refers to the internalisation of self-loathing and pathological views, which Fanon argued happened as a result of colonised peoples being positioned as inferior whilst the colonisers culture identities and values were exalted. This inevitably results in feelings of inferiority, which gradually absorbs its way in.

There are significant similarities between Fanon's examination of the experiences of the people of Martinique and the racialised experiences of young Black men in Britain within the twenty first century. Most notably the labelling of young Black men as 'bad' as supposed to the 'good' White adults around them (Gillborn, 2007), with schools playing a crucial role in re-inscribing some of these labels of racial hierarchy, whether overtly or subtly (Gillborn, 2007). Psychiatry was used as a key tool by colonisers to manage this resistance (Keller, 2008) and with the increasing number of Black and minority ethnic people diagnose with having a mental health condition (Institute for race relations, 2012) it may be argued that similar methods are being deployed which locate pathologies in the minds of individuals as opposed to structures.

Emancipatory knowing and *praxis*

In thinking about the way in which knowledge might be decolonised, one starts to question if such knowledge can in turn decolonise and emancipate practice. Decolonisation is used as a metaphor here, to refer to a mechanism for change; the process by which dominant unquestioned knowledges can be challenged and silenced knowledges can be heard. This is not with recognition of the criticisms of using decolonisation as a metaphor. Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonisation is used too loosely as a metaphor within the social sciences, with calls to 'decolonise schools' or 'decolonise method'. They argue that decolonisation is a particular social justice movement that focusses on the repatriation of indigenous land and life, and should not be used in discussions that decentre settler perspectives. They assert that using decolonisation as a metaphor makes possible a set of evasions such as "settler moves to

innocence” that attempt to reconcile guilt and complicity (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.3). The work of Tuck and Yang focusses on the context of North America, where settler colonialism took place. As I mentioned earlier, colonialism has taken many forms and as such, methods of decolonisation need to be context specific. This research does not focus on settler colonialism and land but on the ways in which colonial knowledges continue to be tools of oppression. Decolonisation as a metaphor makes clear that in a quest to develop emancipatory knowledge and praxis, it becomes necessary to deconstruct colonial knowledge systems.

The concept of emancipatory knowing is not based on a single idea, but was developed through an eclectic process which brought together a number of different theories and perspectives. These included the critical theoretical works of Foucault (1979), Freire’s (1972) poststructuralist and postmodernist views, and White’s (1995) socio-political patterns of knowing. Emancipatory knowing; grounded on a universal human desire for liberation, requires the person seeking emancipatory knowledge to reflect on cultural, social and political injustices and how and why they came to exist (Oliver, 1992). Emancipatory knowing is grounded on the fundamental assumption that social oppressions are not neutral or fixed and that there is no such thing as value-neutral knowledge. It is also based on the notion that knowledge development is informed by power relations and that language is constructed to carry these power meanings and relations (Chinn & Kramer, 2011). This provides a key tool in which to look at the ways in which colonialism has infiltrated knowledge production and produced new forms of knowledge production as a means to maintain this power.

Brazilian educationalist and thinker Paulo Freire (1972) in his renowned text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* draws connections between educational practice, and human liberation. He focuses on the conditions that sustain privilege for some and disadvantage for others and explains that certain traits are characteristic of those who are privileged and those who are oppressed.

According to Freire (1972), those that are privileged, are powerful and unified, and have an ethic of self-interest. They use their power to sustain their own interests and prescribe reality so that the status quo is observed by all as the norm. The privileged fail to see those that are disadvantaged as human and therefore exploit them without apology.

Contrastingly, the disadvantaged are characterised by behaving and thinking according to the prescribed norms set by the privileged group, in doing so they internalise the consciousness of the privileged. This is not to say that oppressed people have no agency and cannot resist such prescribed norms. However, the disadvantaged, according to Freire, do not always realise they are being manipulated and exploited by the privileged and in turn are barred from realising their potential. Therefore, in the act of emancipatory knowledge and practice, a discussion of decolonisation must also be a discussion of internalised colonisation. It is not sufficient to critique the visible effects of colonisation. After all, once the colonising physical presence (troops, arms etc.) have left, the institutions and colonising discourses remain. It is these effects that become internalised. Emancipatory knowledge therefore needs to be linked to the psyche in order to wrestle with the complexity of embedded and internalised oppression.

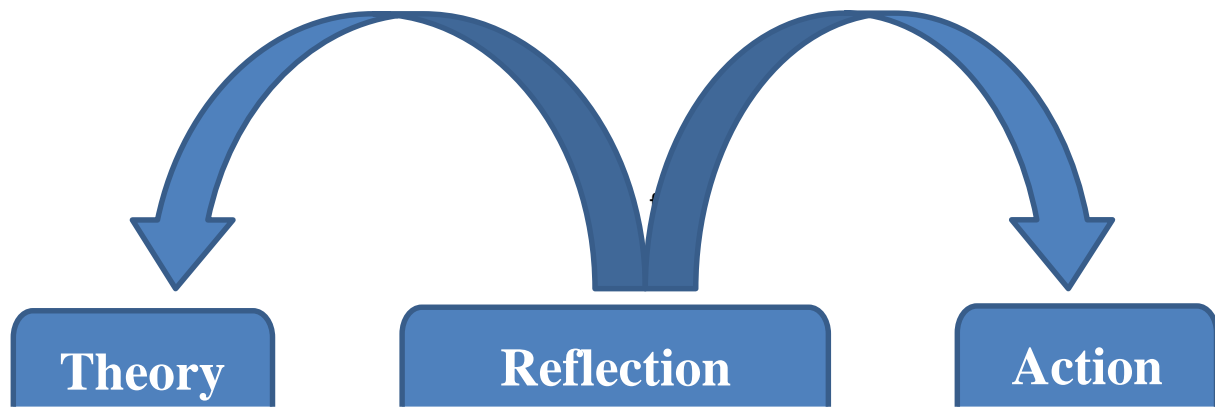
Freire (1972) focuses on collective and individual human development and as such emphasises that in order for the disadvantaged or oppressed to be liberated and to reclaim their humanity, they must develop *praxis* for critical pedagogy.

Freire (1972) states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (p.58).

The first condition for 'liberation praxis' is for oppressed peoples to be aware and accept that oppression exists; a process he refers to as *consciousness raising* (p.8). Oppressed peoples must then believe that change is possible and work towards developing transformative action (p.33). These actions bring about change and the experience of bringing about change, Freire argues, should inform our thinking. This process of liberated or critical praxis is a dialectical process that requires both critical reflection and action. Although Freire states that these two propositions are necessary for critical pedagogy to take place, it may be applied beyond education to liberation struggles more broadly. Effectively, it is not enough for oppressed peoples to liberate themselves; liberation also requires them to unite with others who are disadvantaged. It is a cyclical process, as demonstrated in the diagram below.



“The praxis: reflection and action upon the world, in order to transform it” (Freire, 1972, p.69)

Figure 1: Freire’s illustration of praxis in action

Freire argues that oppression is dehumanising and that to be fully human, a person must be given the means to control their own life. This model demonstrates the process through which theory and reflection are used to create transformative action, but also how action needs to be reflected upon and theorised in order to continually change.

Critical social theory

Critical social theory (CST) evolved from critical theory; a broadly Marxist theory developed through the synthesis of concepts set by philosophers at the Frankfurt School. The underlying premise of critical social theory is that knowledge must be practical and have the potential to liberate oppressed peoples (Kagan et al., 2011). This links back to the ‘emancipatory praxis’ model outlined above which underlines the importance of knowledge, reflection and action in creating transformative change.

The emancipatory endeavour of critical theory was in its orientation to critiquing and changing society, as opposed to traditional theory which would merely seek to understand and explain it. In the 1960s, Habermas (1987), a second-generation Frankfurt scholar, restructured critical theory by combining Marxian analysis with other philosophical and sociological perspectives to develop CST. Habermas’ concept of CST is grounded on communicative action and the principle that oppressed people must work to liberate themselves from both known and unknown societal oppressions. CST provided a framework to explain some of the ways in which societies create social injustices and how to conceptualise and study these political and social factors (Chinn & Kramer, 2011). CST is concerned with the everyday practices that sustain these power structures and so it is no surprise that a lot of the CST literature refers to the work of Freire (1972).

Freire’s pedagogy for liberation argues that oppressed peoples subsume the world view of the oppressor in their daily activities in their hope or quest to gain power and control. In reality, social conformity often results in oppressed groups being further marginalised, causing low

selfworth and self-esteem (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2007; Freire, 1972). Freire argues that it is essential that we ask the questions of 'how', 'what' and 'why' when discussing social power structures and relationships so we may understand the influence of these relations on the everyday lives of certain individuals and groups.

Habermas (1987) asserts that there are three human interests that are fundamental to everyday life; (1) the technical interest, that involves the capacity to create and use tools for daily living, (2) the practical interest that involves the communicative functions of life that enable us to understand and interpret (hermeneutics), and (3) the emancipatory interest that involves the recognition that something is unjust and attempting to make it right and obtain freedom.

Although CST has advanced knowledge by challenging traditional theory and classical Marxism, which only expressed the voices of White males, Postcolonial and CRT have moved one step further by responding to CST's inability to explain the social realities of people of colour.

Postcolonial theorists explore the alienation under colonialism and racism faced by people both in colonised lands and amongst the diaspora.

What is colonialism?

There is no single definition of 'colonialism'. Its definition depends on the context. In contexts such as the Americas, and Oceania, it is clear that colonialism was a means of erasure, not just of culture but also of peoples. This form of colonialism is known as *settler colonialism*. In places

such as India, colonialism was a means of stealing land and resources as well as impacting on culture. This is known as *exploitation colonialism* and differs to settler colonialism in that the colonisers did not necessarily intend to stay and occupy the land as an extension of their nation states, but occupied land primarily for economic means by creating conditions of economic dependency in order to benefit from cheap labour whilst stealing resources (Mbembe, 2008).

In the case of Africa, and particularly East Africa, *dependency colonialism* was used to penetrate social, cultural and political spaces, erasing histories and languages in order to ensure that the colonised could only understand themselves through the lens of what the colonisers told them about themselves. The purpose of this was that oppressed peoples would internalise their oppression and numbly exist within the structures of the oppressors. There was, however, much resistance to colonialism in East Africa, particularly in Somaliland, with people using spirituality to resist colonial ideas.

Positioning the 'Post' in Postcolonial

The term *Postcolonial* has not been hyphenated in this section and will not be hyphenated throughout the thesis in order to make the distinction between 'post-colonial' which arguably refers to a chronological period after the end of colonial rule and 'postcolonial'; a collection of theories that focus on the critical analysis of culture, history and literature in order to expose the violence of colonialism (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Mbembe, 2008). Even though colonialism in the formal political sense may arguably have ended (although settler colonialism continues to exist), social, economic and intellectual hegemony remains (Mignolo, 2009).

Postcolonialism; otherwise termed postcolonial studies, has made a major contribution to intellectual thought since the 1980s and has “taken its place with theories such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism as a major critical discourse in the humanities” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 8). Postcolonial theory has also contributed to many disciplines, including but not limited to history, anthropology, and education (Bhabra, 2007; Loomba et al., 2006).

Ashcroft et al. (1995) define postcolonial theory as:

Discussion of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe... and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which these come into being (p. 2)

The problematic nature of the ways in which postcolonial thought has been mainstreamed through Western academic disciplines has not gone unnoticed (Ahmed, 1996; Dirlik, 1994 and Gikandi, 1987). Postcolonialism has, in my opinion, become over-theorised in its quest to interrogate Western knowledge formations within the Western knowledge spaces of the academy. It has thus become another object of study like other conventional disciplines.

Postcolonialism and faith

It is also important in the context of the research to explain that another critique of Post colonialism is the way it positions faith, particularly Islam. Postcolonial writers such as Edward Said (1985) and Frantz Fanon (1968), who have written about the explicit and implicit

representation of Muslims, present themes and ideas that are also called for in Islam. For example, Fanon's (1963; 1968) works, is highly critical of colonialism and racism and in calling for equality and freedom, he writes about the impact of this oppression on the psychology of the oppressed. Edward Said, on the other hand, writes explicitly about the cultural facets of colonialism and the way that Islam and Muslims are represented in literature. Fanon's psychological approach and Said's culturally-oriented writings focus on freeing oppressed people from the inside to allow them to think and feel independently; this is fully supported by Islam, which through its religious scriptures declares the need for oppressed peoples to be liberated. Fanon writes: "the struggle for national liberty [in the Arab World] has been accompanied by a cultural phenomenon known by the name of awakening Islam" (Fanon, 1968, pp. 95-96).

Although in the context of these postcolonial writings it is clear that national struggle and religion both played a part in the fight against colonialism, this relationship was challenged after the publication of Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*. In fact, Rushdie's book has been viewed by many Muslims as an unacceptable attack on Islam. However, Rushdie identified himself as a postcolonial writer and received support from postcolonial critics such as Said, who supported the novel and criticised Muslims' reaction to it. Said commented that "to read Rushdie is really to read something completely new [and] post-colonial" (Said, 2001c, p. 416).

Postcolonial writers such as Amin Malak (2005) saw Said's stance as a reflection of his ambiguous stance on religion, despite the fact that one of his seminal pieces *Orientalism* (1985) having examined the representation of Muslims and Islam in literature.

In *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, Malak (2005) states that,

it is odd that ‘postcolonial theory’ cannot offer insights about the activism of Islam, despite the fact that one of its seminal texts, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* ... is prompted and permeated by a challenge to the colonial representations of Islam as biased constructions whose corrosive corollaries are discernible today in multiple insidious fashions across diverse domains of power (p. 17).

Malak later goes on to write that Postcolonialism involves a “marginalization of religion as a force or factor with its own complex dynamics [which] reflects privileging a secular, Europe-American stance that seems to shape the parameters of postcolonial discourses” (p. 17). Wail Hassan (2002) concurs with Malak and argues that postcolonial theory itself derives from and is built around the parameters of European traditions of thought. He states “postcolonial theory has developed out of four European traditions of thought: Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and feminism” (p. 47) and in being a European theory, postcolonial theory runs the risk of being neo-colonial as it “seems to inscribe neo-colonial hegemony by privileging the languages (and consequently the canons) of the major colonial powers, Britain and France” (p. 46). Hassan (2002) accuses postcolonial theory of sometimes becoming worse than colonial discourse, as he writes that “in its very attempt to challenge western epistemology, postcolonial theory sometimes homogenizes Asia and Africa in more subtle ways than the older paradigms or colonial discourse itself” (p. 46). In addition to this, Hassan goes as far as to say that postcolonial theory could even be accused of Eurocentric tendencies as he points at,

...postcolonial theory seems sometimes to deploy a sort of reverse Eurocentrism. The almost complete reliance on the western tradition of antihumanist critique of metaphysics - from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida - has meant that the 'non-western' Other remains inaccessible and unknowable (p. 51).

Hassan (2002) argues that due to this Western approach to understanding the 'Other' Postcolonial theory is limited and limiting in the way it deals with issues related to Islam. He concludes that although it is still very useful as a theoretic lens, "postcolonial theory needs to theorize its own limitations and its own horizons" (p.56). Although I take the criticisms of postcolonial theory into account, I recognise that as this research is itself an academic piece of work, the theoretical contributions offered by postcolonial theory provide an essential lens to frame the discussions in this thesis. Postcolonial theory thus remains a central focus throughout the thesis with an acknowledgement and critique of its problematic and at times contradictory nature.

Deliberating the 'De' in Decolonial

The terms *postcolonial* and *decolonial* have often been used interchangeably, however decolonial theorists have made the distinction clear. Coloniality refers to the power patterns that originate from colonialism and which continue to be exercised in the absence of physical colonial rule (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality mutates depending on the nature of the colonial regime.

Within this thesis, it is the coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of power and coloniality of being that are being expounded.

Mignolo (2009) puts forward that decoloniality as an analytic tool moves “away and beyond the post-colonial” as “postcolonialism criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy” (p.452) whereas decoloniality focuses on the practical project. Postcolonial theorists such as Said (1981), however, have stated that postcolonial theory not only provides an analytic lens but also a pragmatic lens through which to critique and challenge frameworks of oppression.

Mignolo (2009) states that decolonialism precedes Postcolonialism historically as it arose at the same time as colonialism in the Americas during the 16th century. One of the seminal texts in postcolonial studies, *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1981) describes the invention of the ‘*Orient*’ during the nineteenth century. The ‘*Orient*’ was described as a geographic region that was considered to be culturally and racially inferior to Europe. As Mignolo (2009) notes, however, without the invention of the Americas by the Europeans during the 16th century (referred to as *Occidentalism*) the invention of the Orient would not have been possible (p.56). Although postcolonial theory provides a useful lens through which to understand the effects of colonialism post-19th century, it therefore becomes problematic when applied to issues relating to post-19th century Latin America.

Decolonialist scholars such as Mignolo (2009) also discuss the notion of a *Eurocentred matrix of knowledge* that is too often presented as enlightened but which continues to silence the cultural and social lives of peoples who have been and continue to be subjects to colonial power.

Mignolo (2009) states that in order to rupture such a relationship for ‘restitution’ to take place, a more radical approach is needed. In effect, Mignolo (2009) argues that “epistemic disobedience” (pp.122-123) is necessary in order to de-link from “the magic of the Western idea of modernity” (pp.160-161). This takes me back to my initial discussion of the terms *epistemology* and *ontology* at the start of this chapter when I stated that perhaps a Western understanding of epistemology might not be the most appropriate means of understanding African ways of knowing. All knowledge is situated but I take a position of epistemic disobedience in this work, in that I delink from disciplinary and knowledge boundaries, both in terms of the literature drawn upon and also the methods and ethics employed.

Mignolo (2009) goes on to explain the notion of ‘the de-colonial option’ further and states that “thinking de-colonially means, precisely, to delink from thinking disciplinarily” (p.11). To illustrate this, Mignolo refers to the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), a Māori scholar. Mignolo states that Smith is not to be considered an anthropologist in the Western sense, but that she was including anthropological tools within Māori ideology to “engage in knowledge-making” that would “advance” the Māori cause rather than to “advance” a discipline (p. 172). Her work therefore had a decolonialising purpose.

The reason why I make reference to the ‘de-colonial’ option is to demonstrate that a process of decolonisation is not simply a theoretical endeavour, but a process by which the agenda is set by the colonised and not the coloniser. The literature encompassed throughout this thesis is deliberately eclectic to ensure that the lines between disciplines are blurred and that literature is

used to engaging in knowledge-making that is not specially geared towards the advancement of a particular discipline, but a process of self-representation.

The decolonial option cannot be entirely separated from postcolonial studies. Indeed, they share the similar goal of challenging and dismantling dominant Western narratives which are the product of colonial violence. The clear distinction between the two is that the decolonial options refuse to be tied to any discipline, which is contrary to the way in which postcolonial studies have been mainstreamed into Western academia and used to meet the agenda of particular disciplines such as psychology and sociology.

Throughout this thesis, I make reference to both postcolonial theory and decoloniality for distinct purposes. Postcolonial theory provides a crucial theoretical lens in which to approach a discussion of the issues pertaining to the effects of colonialism, within an academic piece of work, but I use such theory within a research design that is decolonial in its approach. By this I mean that I draw upon decoloniality in my desire to de-link from disciplinary boundaries in order to recognise the interconnectedness of disciplines and to use theories for a practical purpose.

I have made clear how postcolonial theory has been used as an academic tool to explore the violence of colonialism, and how decoloniality focuses more on the practice of moving beyond colonialism. However, there are no clear distinctions between theory and practice, particularly when writing for the academy (especially when it is then used for teaching) is considered praxis. Therefore, I use both postcolonialism and decolonialism within this work as both are necessary.

Anti-colonialism as an antithesis

Anti-colonialism moves one step further. Whilst postcolonial discourse focuses on the critical analysis of culture, history and literature and de-colonialism focuses on epistemic disobedience and the need to de-link from disciplines in order to progress, anti-colonialism concentrates on the need to clearly name, track, and resist enduring colonial relations. This according to anti-colonial theorists is something postcolonial discourse fails to do.

One key text that is referred to in anti-colonial work is Albert Memmi's (1965) *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In this book Memmi (1965) not only defines the categories of 'coloniser' and 'colonised' but he also goes into a detailed explanation of the subdivisions of each category. He divides the 'coloniser' into the "coloniser who refuses" (pp.19-44) and "the coloniser who accepts" (pp.45-76), and writes about the "two answers of the colonised" (pp.119-141).

There are two points in particular that Memmi refers to explicitly with regards to the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser that I would like to explore. The first is his understanding of colonialism as a system, not simply the actions of people; because of this the coloniser and the colonised are clearly distinguishable. He states that a "European living in a colony but having no privilege...does not exist" (1965, p.10). He states that it is the system that creates privilege and consequently, regardless of the feelings about the system, their presence on colonised land situates them amongst the colonisers (p.45).

Memmi writes:

...colonization does not depend upon one or a few generous or clear-thinking individuals. Colonial relations do not stem from individual good will or actions; they exist before his arrival or his birth, and whether he accepts or rejects them matters little. It is they, on the contrary which, like any institution, determine a priori his place and that of the colonised, and in the final analysis, their true relationship. (1965, pp. 38-39)

The second point is a discussion on privilege. Memmi (1965) states that it is at the expense of the colonised that the colonisers are privileged and that the relationship between the two is one sustained by power. Memmi writes:

He finds himself on one side of a scale, the other side of which bears the colonised man. If his living standards are high, it is because those of the colonised are low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labour and servants, it is because the colonised can be exploited at will and are not protected by the laws of the colony; if he can easily obtain administrative positions, it is because they are reserved for him and the colonised are excluded from them; the more freely he breathes, the more the colonised are choked. (1965, p.8)

These two points discussed by Memmi (1965) makes visible the dynamics of the relationship between the colonised and coloniser. These are important observations that highlight the systematic and interdependent nature of sustained colonialism. I draw upon this dynamic

relationship throughout the thesis and so anticolonial thought adds an additional dimension to looking at the colonial experience.

Although the merit of anti-colonial thought is the explicit 'naming' of oppression, critics such as Ashis Nandy (1983) argues that a formulation of 'anti' results in official forms of dissent which are shaped and enabled by colonialism, thereby being framed by the very oppressive structures it seeks to resist. This in my view places anti-colonial thought in a similar realm to postcolonial theory and decolonial thought, both of which unpack and critique oppressive systems whilst to an extent still being shaped by them. Because of this, as well as my understanding of decolonialising processes as the blurring of lines and resistance to binaries, I do not clearly distinguish between these schools of thought within the thesis. Instead, I choose to focus on the work of particular theorists who may or may not have positioned themselves as postcolonial, decolonial or anticolonial scholars.

Critical Race Theory

CRT, like postcolonialism, was created out of historical events and formed to intellectually challenge the contexts and discourses of racial oppression. Similarly to the seminal works of postcolonial theory such as that of Said and Fanon, CRT evolved in response to context-relevant circumstances; racism in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, for example. It sought to look beyond racist practices between individuals and focus on racially oppressive social structures and meanings in order to combat racism. Both CRT and postcolonial theory look at ways in which power is used in social structures to create dominant understandings of the 'other' to oppress

minorities and reinforce racism. Although CRT began as a movement in the discipline of critical legal studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), it has now spread beyond this discipline and is used widely, in education in particular (Gillborn, 2005). CRT builds on the insights of previous movements, specifically radical feminism and critical legal studies, drawing heavily on the work of European philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida as well as American radical tradition through the work of key figures such as Sojourner Truth and W.E.B Du Bois. Because CRT is rooted in a foundation of European philosophy and developed as an academic movement, it receives a similar critique to that of postcolonial theory. Despite this critique, however, CRT provides a useful lens to examine and challenge the ways in which systemic racism impacts on people's everyday lives.

Race as a social construct

Race; despite being scientifically refuted as a biological concept, continues to remain a signifier that forms part of a powerful political discourse, as Morrison (1992) states:

Race has become metaphorical- a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before. (p.63)

Omi and Winant (1994) concur with Morrison and argue that if we are to think of race as strictly ideological, we deny the reality of a systematically racialized society and how this impacts on the everyday lives of people. Additionally, Omi and Winant state that seeing race as a solely objective condition has shortcomings, as it oversimplifies and fails to problematize racial classification and who 'fits into' these classifications.

CRT recognises race and races as products of social thought and relations, not fixed, inherent or objective, but rather socially constructed categories that can be manipulated or denied when convenient, and which are strongly tied to relationships of power (Calmore, 1992). Hayman (1995) asserts that CRT also has postmodern threads in that it rejects realist conceptualist epistemologies that underpin traditional legal studies with an emphasis instead on the importance of context. This similarity is important to note, as CR theorists, like postmodernists, reject the notion of objective, universal truth, and argue that understandings of race, like other aspects of identities, are sociopolitical constructions that go through "relentless deconstruction and reconstruction" (Hayman, 1995, p.70). Where CRT differs from postmodern legal studies, however, is in its insistence that justice cannot be merely theoretical, but must be tied to lived experiences and the struggle must be continuous (Hayman, 1995).

CR theorists, particularly in law but also within the social sciences, have drawn attention to the ways in which different minority groups are racialized at different times, depending on shifting needs such as the labour market (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It is therefore important to recognise the situated nature of race and racism. This is why CRT provides an important lens to

look not only at the various ways in which minority groups are racialized at different times, but also the ways in which politics, systems and relationships work to maintain structures of power and oppression.

The application of CRT in education research also differs from its legal application in that it attempts to “...foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender and class by showing how these social constructs intersect on communities of color” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p.63). In exploring the multiple personal and cultural contexts that make up an individual’s identity, CRT in education research takes a liberating approach. It does this through the use of consciousness raising methods such as counterstories and through the development of counterspaces (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

Stories as counter-narratives

Although CRT grew out of historical events in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, the discussions were not initially intended to go beyond the legal institutions and therefore were not made accessible to the general public. Through their ability to tell compelling stories in which the legal issues had been embedded, however, CR theorists Derrick Bell (1987) and Patricia Williams (1991) were amongst the first in their field to create the means to enable their ideas to reach the public.

As much of CRT was (and still is) focused on the role of ‘voice’ and power as a means of racial justice, storytelling becomes a very powerful means by which to provide context for understanding feelings and interpretations (Delgado, 1989; Ladson- Billings, 1998). Stories are used in CRT as a means of enabling people to ‘name their realities’, CRT scholars have a broad understanding of the term ‘stories’ which incorporates the use of chronicles, parables, poetry, and fictional stories, to name a few. According to Delgado (1989), ‘naming one’s reality’ in legal discussions is important because it acknowledges that much of what might be considered to be ‘reality’ is socially constructed. Moreover, through the exchange of stories from teller to listener, one is able to get a better sense of another’s reality. Stories were also used in the context of CRT as a part of legal evidence gathering, particularly to enable White European Americans to hear different stories. The use of narratives in CRT added a different dimension to legal testimonies. Delgado (1989) asserts that the only way to challenge the seeing of the world through a unique lens is to listen; stories enable us to “see the world through others’ eyes” (p.2439).

Delgado also states that stories provide a means by which ‘othered’ groups can preserve their psychic self by deciding which stories are told and how they are told. Just as CRT argues that different minority groups are racialized at different times, Delgado (1989) asserts that narratives are also situated, stating that “truths only exist for this person in this predicament at this time and in history” (p.11). CRT draws many parallels to postcolonial theory in its recognition of both systematic and psychic oppression and in the emancipatory potential of creating counter narratives that challenge hegemonic discourse.

Counter stories in CRT came traditionally in the form of personal testimonies, oral discussions and archives and these various mediums enabled members of marginalised groups to tell previously untold stories in a safe space known as a counter space (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Villalpando & Bernal, 2002). These stories were used to question and cast doubt on myths and stereotypes held by majority group members.

What is extremely important about the use of counter-narratives in this research is the imperative place of power. This research is about young men identifying their experiences and choosing how these experiences are to be shared. Counter-narratives also enable us as readers to see through the eyes of these young men whilst recognising that how we interpret and understand their stories can only ever be through our own lenses.

Black feminist thought and intersectionality

The final theory I want to introduce as a guide and a discussion tool for this research is Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought is grounded on three main themes (Collins, 2002).

Firstly, Black feminist thought is framed and produced by the lived experiences of Black women.

Secondly, the stories and experiences of each woman are unique; though there are intersections and experiences between Black women. Thirdly, despite the commonalities that exist amongst Black women, the diversity of class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability and age offer multiple contexts from which their experiences might be revealed and understood.

Collins et al. (2011) believe that “the role of Black female intellectuals is to produce facts and theories about the Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman’s standpoint for

Black women” (p. 469). The reasons why I have chosen to include this theory are twofold: (1) for what it offered me as a researcher and (2) for what it might offer the research.

Reading Black Women to Write Myself

My first deliberate exposure to Black feminist theory and the work of Black feminist writers was in the first year of my PhD when I read bell hooks’ (1981) *‘Ain’t I a Woman’*. As hooks beckoned me into her pages with words that resonated so deeply with my own experience, I found solace in reading about the complex crossroads of intersectional identities. Through her words, I was able to recognise the tensions that I have had as a Black, Muslim, British woman embarking on research with young men and how I would negotiate my place in this work. I then moved my reading on to the work of Angela Davis (1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) who wrote about the ways in which Black female academics have been silenced, and rendered simultaneously invisible and vulnerable.

The writings of these women brought my pen to life in ways that I had never known before. They gave me permission to write myself into my work, not notes along the margins, or isolated ‘reflective boxes’ but to write myself in. I began this research hoping to create a space for my participants, not to give them voice but to allow their voices to be heard. But in sharing their stories, I made myself invisible. Reading the work of Black feminist writers enabled me to see the way in which female writers have fought for recognition in spaces that were not designed to include them. In reading the unapologetic stories of Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, bell hooks and

Angela Davis, stories of frustration, fury and love, I realised it was not just my participants who needed a space for their voices to be heard, as a Black female researcher, I did too.

'To the survival of Roaches'

One piece of literature I want to highlight as having the biggest impact on me is a poem by Audre Lorde that I read at the very start of the research process. The poem is entitled '*The Brown Menace or a poem to the survival of roaches*', which formed part of her 1974 collection *New York Head Shop and Museum*. This poem was written during a period of time in New York City where police brutality and killing of Black men was of growing concern. The poem addresses issues of white supremacy, anti-blackness and brutality. It speaks to the experience of living Black where Blackness is hated. Over four decades later and this poem could have been written to describe what is happening in the United States today as well as across Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific. Although the poem was written in a specific context, the power of the poem is as global as anti-Blackness. When I read this poem, I kept returning to the imagery of violence; both self-inflicted and inflicted on others, and the language of survival. I reflected on my own experiences of growing up in Britain and the countless times I internalised the need to survive in a space. I reflected on the young men in this research and the countless times they had spoken to me about survival. Much like the cockroaches in Lorde's narrative, they represent what it means to survive despite being threatened with destruction. I returned to this poem countless times during the research process and each time I reflected on what it means to 'survive'. What does it mean for these young men to take part in this research? What are the ways in which they have learned to

survive? How do I as a Black woman exist in academia? How do the choices we make allow us to survive? What can we do in this research to make sure we do not harm each other and ourselves?

Britain and the United States do not share the same history with regards to race, nor are the experiences of racism the same. Racism in both contexts is implicit and explicit, however; it is systematic and embedded in everyday interactions between people. I include Lorde's poem here because the more I reflect on the poem, the more I feel that the work that we do, the work that must be done, cannot be done with the exclusion of or at the cost of ourselves. By that I mean that we cannot talk about systematic violence without considering the ways in which we internalise such violence. We cannot talk about the binary of oppressed and oppressor without acknowledging that the oppressed internalises the oppression to become his own oppressor.

When we talk about surviving the battles that exist in the world around us, we must also talk about surviving the battle within. Although some may interpret the verse *your itch to destroy the indestructible part of yourself* to refer to the harm that Black men do to Black women, (which may well be what Lorde meant), I understand it to mean the ways in which Black men harm themselves and their own Blackness. Lorde's poem, just as the writings of all the Black feminist authors I have read give me the tools to consider care in this research. Later I discuss how this notion of care formed an integral part of my ethical framework.

The Brown Menace

Call me your
deepest urge
toward survival

call me
and my brothers and sisters in
the sharp smell of your refusal

call me roach and
presumptuous nightmare on
your white pillow your itch to
destroy the indestructible part
of yourself.

Call me your own determination
in the most detestable shape
you can become friend
of your image within me

I am you in your most
deeply cherished nightmare scuttling

through the painted cracks you create to
admit me into your kitchens into your
fearful midnights into your values at
noon in your most secret places

with hate you learn to
honour me by imitation as I alter--
although your greedy
preoccupations through your kitchen
wars and your poisonous refusal-- to
survive.

Survive.

[What Black Feminist Theory offers the research: Mapping intersectionality](#)

Black feminist theory and CRT together provide a set of theoretical resources that enable me to explore and discuss the intersectional experiences at the heart of this research.

The concept of the simultaneity of oppression is still the crux of a Black feminist understanding of political reality and, I believe, one of the most significant ideological contributions of Black feminist thought. (Smith, 1983, p.32)

Although the term ‘intersectionality’ was introduced by critical race scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, the concept of intersectionality is said to be traced back as early as 1832 in the writings of Maria Stewart, who discussed the combined effects of gender and race-based oppression. Former abolitionist Sojourner Truth also addressed this in 1851, having famously challenged hegemonic understandings of femininity at suffragette meeting, asking “Ain’t I a woman?” (Brah and Phoenix, 2004). The concept may have been coined in the context of North American critical legal studies, but it is rooted in and has developed within and outside the United States, with Black activists and feminists, as well as a postcolonial, queer, critical disability and indigenous scholars producing important work that reveal and challenge the complex processes that shape human lives (Bunjun, 2010; Collins, 1990; Van Herk, Smith, & Andrew, 2011). The concept initially explored oppression at the intersections of gender, class, ethnicity or/and race, bringing together anti-racist and anti-sexist positions as well as economic oppression as a result of capitalism. It has since been used by feminists to also include other social locations such as disability, religion, and sexuality (Brah and Phoenix, 2004).

Intersectionality challenges the notion that one type of oppression can be the major source of all hierarchies, instead arguing that race, gender, sexuality, class, and other social markers are intertwined and that power and oppression tie these markers through patterns of social relations. ‘Intersectionality’ denotes a loose definition of social groupings and counters the idea that individuals are statically placed into particular groups (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Collins et al. 2011). This understanding of intersectionality has been increasingly applied by critical feminist scholars (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Collins et al. 2011; Crenshaw 1989; Davis 2008)

Intersectionality also critiques other theories such as CRT for its failure to acknowledge and make visible the variations that exist within the 'non-White' population. Critical feminist understandings of intersectionality suggest that exploring alternative experiences to those within dominant discourse, not just in terms of race but also of gender (i.e. Black women) offers a fuller exploration of how power dynamics work (Crenshaw, 1993; Carbado et al., 2013). Critics have argued that CRT perpetuates the socially dominant position of maleness and fails to acknowledge the ways in which Black female experiences can contribute to understandings of a particular context (Mirza, 1992). Therefore, critics argue that in its silence, CRT has contributed to the misrepresentation of the experiences of Black women and perpetuates the silencing of their voices (Collins, 2000).

Intersectionality therefore plays an important role in exploring the intersections of racism, sexism and ableism (and much more) through women's perspectives. The reason why intersectionality is such an important theoretical lens within this research is because it makes explicit the multiplicity of our identities and the ways in which different forms of oppression can take place simultaneously (Cole, 2005, Acker, 2006). Sewell (1997) and Frosh et al (2002) were some of the researchers to explore intersectionality through research on young men's masculinities. In both pieces of research masculinity was not explored on its own, but through the intersections of race. Both researcher projects indicated that, masculinities were performed differently depending on racialized background. For the purpose of this research, intersectionality is used as a tool to explore the ways in which race, gender, culture (and at times religion) intersect in the identities that the young men construct, negotiate and challenge.

Summary

The section has considered what it means to decolonise knowledge and work towards emancipatory praxis. It has offered an outline of critical social theory and the importance and connectivity of knowledge, action and reflection. This section then examined the theories that together form the framework that guides this research and justified the selection of particular theories. The theories discussed will offer useful lenses for examining the themes that are identified throughout the thesis.

Part Three – Troubling Identity

Identity takes into account how individuals negotiate experiences in the past, the present, and in the future through their relationships with others and how they in turn see themselves (Howard, 2000; Polletta and Jasper, 2000). This section of the theoretical resources chapter will begin by discussing identity as a psychological concept, drawing primarily on the work of Western psychologists and outlining some of the ways Western psychology has historically created ideas around identity that have been oppressive to people of colour. It discusses the ways in which scientific racism created a discourse of ‘otherness’ that has become embedded within traditional psychology, as well as a number of other disciplines, including education. This section of the chapter recognises that Western psychology is not singular and that there are, in fact, many critical psychologists who challenge these pathologising discourses to develop new understandings around human psychology. The reason why the first part of this section primarily focuses on Western psychological theories which have pathologised people of colour is to situate the discussions around identity that will take place for the rest of this section.

The section then outlines a brief overview of Somali identity construction in order to discuss further theories that explore the notion of identity and draw on the critical theories mentioned in the previous section to highlight the tension within constructions of Somali identity.

Psychopathology of ‘Otherness’

Scientific racism in Education

Research that looks into identity construction and its intersections with race and culture cannot be understood without an examination of the legacy of scientific racism and the psychopathology of ‘otherness’. There is a long history in the social sciences; and in particular in psychology, of research that has framed non- Europeans as inferior and non-human (Long, 1774; Omi & Winant, 2014; White & von Soemmerring, 1799). Amongst the earliest and well-known research in psychology was the framing of intelligence as hereditary. It was believed that intelligence was biological and measureable through IQ tests. These tests were designed to compare the levels of intelligence of non-European children against European children and the lower scores of nonEuropean children were attributed to European children being naturally more intelligent. This test was used to mainstream and distinguish the differences between races and ethnicities in order to support an argument for European intellectual superiority (Carlson & Henderson, 1950; Kagan & Zahn, 1975).

Similarly, Francis Galton (1869), developed a 15-point scale of 'grade ability' which was used to calculate the difference between the ability levels of the 'Negro races' and the 'Anglo-Saxon'. This method was deeply rooted in eugenics and attempted to quantify and provide evidence for psychological differences between the 'races'. This test followed on from Galton's book '*The genius of man*', which was written after a series of trips to colonised Africa, where he noted his observations and returned to Europe to develop his eugenicist ideas.

Herbert Spencer (1862) took Galton's argument further and stated that unlike the European brains which were neurologically sophisticated, 'primitive' Negro brains were incapable of processing complex mental tasks required for living as a civilised human being. This was a developmental framework for a racial hierarchy that was used across disciplines including education, since it offered a justification for segregated education.

By the 1930s, the scientific community had more insight into the genetic makeup of human beings and found nothing to suggest that race was in any way biological. As a result of this new discovery, attention in education began to move away from racial testing to a more 'cultural deficit' stance. Culture, however, was still linked to biology, though not as explicitly as race had been (Richards, 2003); instead focusing attention on cultural attitudes towards schooling. The assumption was that achievement in school was likened to the cultural attitudes and values of different races and ethnicities (Demos, 1962).

Lee et al. (2003) state,

These assumptions, long held in both human development and cognitive sciences literature, have led researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to view whole communities of children and adolescents as being ill prepared for school and have led them to attribute these students' lack of success in school to problems in their families, communities or to internal problems with them as individuals. (p.6)

I argue that this cultural deficit model is still dominant within social science research, particularly research within education and the interventions that are often designed for ethnic minority children (Gillborn, 2008).

[A problematic psychology of identity development](#)

According to Western psychology, 'the self' consists of a collection of held beliefs that we as individuals possess about who we were, are and will be (Levin, 1993; Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). I use the term 'Western psychology' to refer to psychologists whose theories are still predominantly unquestioned and used within the discipline, however I acknowledge that there are multiple forms of Western psychology, many of which oppose and contradict one another.

Freud (1895) describes identity as the earliest expression of emotional bonds between objects.

Freud states that as we start to develop as children, we begin to make distinctions between ourselves and the outside world; this is the point at which we start to develop a sense of identity.

According to Freud, identity is therefore inherently relative to the objects we encounter.

More so than simply an encounter with objects, identities may be seen as the narratives or stories people tell themselves and others about who they are, who they are not, and who they would like to be (Cavarero, 2000; Ricoeur, 1991). The question of who people are or who they think they are is central to the kinds of relationships they form and the kinds of communities they build. Identity is rarely explored in isolation, but is typically coupled with an adjective or category to explore a particular aspect of identity. As Burke & Stets (2009) state:

An identity is the set of meanings that define how one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person (p.3).

Western psychology views social identity as the way in which an individual perceives themselves as a member of a socially recognised group; whether cultural, political, national, or religious and through this membership develop a sense of difference from other social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1985, Hornsey, 2008). Individuals and society are not two separate entities; rather individuals are always part of social relationships from the moment they are born and remain tied to networks of people throughout their lives (Burkitt, 1991, p.2). The self is interdependent in that it cannot be detached from the world, human relationships and its environment.

Critical Theories on Identity Construction

Somali Identity Construction

There is not one single Somali identity; like many post-colonial communities, it is fragmented and is made up of historical events, religion and colonial influences. The Somali identity has however, always been grounded on gender roles and expectations. This is despite the fact that gender attributes of masculinity and femininity have changed across time and space. Somali culture has always been deeply rooted in a patriarchal and patrilineal clan-based system in which age and gender structure the position and role of a person in society (Lewis, 1994, p.19) and in which men were ultimately deemed to have “a social status superior to women” (Gardner & Bushra, 2004 p.11).

Historically these gender roles or ideals were considered complementary in order to suit what was believed to be the 'natural' characteristics of men and women. Men were considered to be the breadwinners and heads of household, as well as being at the forefront of political decisionmaking, from which women were mostly excluded. 'Real men' or *raganimo* were often characterised through poetry and proverb by attributes such as strength, bravery and reason, as well as having oratorical skills (Hanson, 2008 p. 11-12). Oratorical skills and eloquence were particularly important expectations of masculinity, as the Somali culture is one that is deeply rooted in oral poetry, such that it is known across Africa as 'the Nation of Poets'. Poetry is used frequently in political and clan-based meetings, spaces inhabited by men. Eloquence of speech and proficiency in *gabay* (poetry) demonstrated a man's status and power.

Despite this being considered the basis of Somali masculinity, however, a view that many of the older generation held to be true, the view of Somali masculine identity more widely accepted by Somalis today is one that is more heavily influenced by religion, although many historic cultural expectations still exist. Somalia is a country in which the vast majority of the population are Muslim. Therefore, Islam has played a major role in the history and culture of Somalia and in redefining these gender expectations. Men, according to Islam, are characterised as caring, responsible, dignified and just, while women are given equal status in society although gender roles remain different (Warsame, 2002). While the vast majority of Somalis are Muslim, there are many, particularly among the older generation, who hold on to the historical cultural expectations more than the religious. Contrastingly, the younger generation, have less attachment to the customs of the past and characterise masculinity from an Islamic perspective. It is with reference to these historical, cultural and religious 'traditions' that Somalis attempt to constitute a gender ideal for men. These understandings often conflict and are fragmented, however, so it is within the interpretations and implementation of these gender ideals that gender relations in the West are often measured and understood by Somalis.

Identity as 'becoming'

This notion of identities as 'becoming' provides a useful lens through which to explore identity in a way that moves away from the assumption that identity is something "assigned to individuals" to an understanding that identity is more a case of 'becoming' than 'being' (Howard, 2000, p. 367). Stuart Hall (1996) makes the distinction between "naturalised" and complex constructions of identity (p.2). Identity in its most common understanding involves the categorisation of people

based on certain common characteristics such as cultural practice, genealogy and heritage. Hall (1990; 1996) describes this understanding of identity as ‘naturalised’, in the sense that identities such as Black, White, male, female are assumed to be fixed and are not questioned. In contrast, Hall argues that there is another possible approach to look at identity which does not see identity as static, but as a fluid process. He states that with this approach identity cannot be seen as something which is fixed, but as a construction which is continually changing and never complete. Hall (1996) refers to this as “lodged in contingency”³ (pp.2-3).

Other theorists such as Bhabha (1994) and Giddens (1990) concur with Hall and assert that identity changes through time and space and is reflexive rather than fixed. Although I agree with this perspective, I do not believe static ‘naturalised’ notions of identity can be easily dismissed. In his book *Black Skin, White Mask* Fanon (1963) writes about the ways in which we are ‘fixed’ in certain identities as we are gazed upon. This conceptualisation of identity carries weight in influencing the representation of individuals within a social imagination, and complexly shapes the ways in which individuals perform these identities. Giddens (1990) suggests that identity is not only performed and found in representation, but also lies in the capacity to maintain a narrative as an individual passes through different events in and situations in their life. He argues that it is not behaviour or the reaction of others that sustains an identity, but the capacity to keep a narrative going.

³ This understanding of identity ties in with the behavioural approaches developed by de Certeau (1984) which emphasised the function of everyday practicing.

Johnson (2009) puts forward that our identities develop through a constructive, culturally-based process. Who we are is as much about the context of where we are as it is about our experiences and interactions (Leary & Tangney, 2005). Identity, like culture, is part of what Bruner (1990) refers to as 'folk psychology'. In *Acts of Meaning*, Bruner explores the ways in which we use the tools we have to make meaning of the world around us. Although the term 'folk psychology' is in itself problematic, with a sense of underlying racism, Bruner attempted to explain what he meant by the term in his book. He states that meaning making does not depend solely on our natural innate capacity but that much of what we know is as a result of the culture in which we live. He argues that, unlike individualism which views the self as a container, culture provides the individual with a pattern of meanings in which they construct the world and shape their innate capabilities. Bruner states that meaning making is not an entirely private activity and that the cultural meaning making tools we have enable us to 'chunk' society into shared meanings in order to make it manageable, both collectively and individually. In essence, we deal with the complexity of the world using culturally identified presumptions.

Cultural identity theory explores the influence of culture, both on the individual and the collective community. The linguistic definition of 'culture' views cultural identity as a 'collective' identity of a group of people with a shared history and cultural codes. This understanding assumes that as 'one people', despite superficial differences, there is a stable, continuous and unchanging frame of meaning. This view of cultural identity has played an important role for much of the post-colonial diaspora as it provides a powerful tool of representation as a person seeks to find their cultural identity through what Frantz Fanon (1963) termed 'passionate research'. This view suggests that a person can reclaim the identity that was taken from them, through re-learning their history and is

based on the assumption that the cultural understanding of that history would remain unchanged. This suggests that identity and culture remain static, which is not the case, rather continually changing in and in a state of becoming.

Stuart Hall (1990) articulates this well when he states:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think. Instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity' lays claim. (p.222)

Bruner (1990) states that culture can be used to maintain a political power system and the individuals within that system. If cultural presumptions are the tools by which we understand the world around us, and if that culture changes over time as a result of colonial influence, it is therefore possible that an individual may come to understand their own identity through colonial eyes. This is evident in Fanon's (1968) insight into colonising experiences in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he refers to the effects of history in transforming cultural identity through (mis-) representation.

Cultural identity therefore recognises not only 'who we are' but rather how that is situated in history; the deep and significant differences that constitute 'what we have become'. It not only looks at discovering who we were, but also acknowledges that identity belongs as much to the future as to the past. Cultural identity does not deny the influence of history, but acknowledges

that like everything, identity undergoes constant transformation and is subject to the continuous influence of culture, history and power. This view of cultural identity provides a basis in which to understand the traumatic character and effects of the 'colonial experience' (Hall, 1996). It allows us to explore the ways in which colonialism and the dominant regimes of representation and power have transformed how postcolonial diaspora view their selves and how they believe themselves to be viewed by others. It recognises that identity is a product of the past as much as the present and that, as Edward Said (1985) suggests, colonisers had the power to not only influence the way in which the colonised are viewed by the world but to also make the colonised see and experience themselves as the 'other'.

Identity as relational

The nature of African philosophy, or what might otherwise be defined as African ontology, is an understanding of reality that is metaphysical and religious in nature. Although religious practices in Africa have always varied greatly, the philosophy of African life is framed around an understanding that we are surrounded by life forces; or the spirit of what surrounds us. This spiritual apparatus is used to recognise the interactions around us, with an understanding that the material only has meaning through the lens of the spiritual (Azenabor, 2010). Within this spiritual framework is also the understanding that nothing moves without affecting another; we live our lives in constant interaction and there can be no isolation in a world filled with life forces.

Our identities are formed through the discourses available to us, in which a set of meanings, representations and stories come together to produce a version of events (Burr, 1995, p.48). We

draw upon our communication with others and our subjectivity lies in the grammar of language. In other words, we are the product of our interpersonal and linguistic practices. Our sense of identity arises out of our culturally available narratives. In fact, we develop structures to make sense of our experiences. Thus, storytelling is central to how we represent our selfhood.

Language is a social and cultural tool and as such is also deeply political. As Bruner (1990) observed, culture allows us to 'chunk' our understanding of the world into categories using socially and culturally constructed 'norms'. This framework of 'knowing' can be a double-edged sword. The labels we give and the ideas evoked by cultural presumptions can not only allow us the possibility of knowing more, but also of being misled and controlled. The language we use is context situated and therefore inevitably flawed. The meanings we have access to are different from those of other groups and this can be used to clearly distinguish divisions between 'us' and 'them'.

There is a view of relational theory that situates an understanding of interactions and relationships within an Afrocentric worldview. This notion of Afrocentric relational theory

discusses the importance of valuing cultural pluralism and difference and provides an alternative perspective to relational theory that assumes a collective identity for people; an identity which emphasises the importance of spiritual, moral and humanistic social transformations (Bell, Bouie & Baldwin, 1998). In contrast to Western emphasis on rationality and cognition, Afrocentric relational theory values an affective approach to knowledge, which conceptualises emotion as the most direct experience of the self. It views all social problems, whether they affect individuals or larger groups, as being related to the practice of oppression. Like feminism, it counters the emphasis on individuality and autonomy and focuses on the connectedness between human beings.

Emotions play a fundamental role in understanding the self and the ways in which we construct our identities. Social theories of emotion suggest that interpretations of a situation precede emotion and that these interpretations are learned (Averill, 1997). What this means is that as James Averill (1997) states, emotions are socially constructed in that they originate in our judgement of situations and therefore are limited by time and transitory. Averill (1997) also states that because emotions are socially constructed, they are represented and performed through seemingly socially accepted actions in a particular social context. This view suggests that emotions permit us to respond to our contexts and that because of the social function of emotions, our responses are governed by social conventions. An example of this is the experience of passion and our assumption that this emotion permits us to behave in a way that is unconventional, acknowledging that we are somehow 'not ourselves' or able to control ourselves in that moment. Another example may be the social assumption in some parts of the world that men should not cry and how this impacts on how men express emotions publically as opposed to

in private (Squire, 2001). This takes us back to symbolic interaction and the versions of self, performed in public and private spaces. Anderson and Smith (2001) argue that the emotional is political in that “emotional relations shape society and space”; even if these emotions are often “unacknowledged” (p. 9).

However, emotions are not 'only' socially constructed. Affect theory (Seigworth & Gregg 2010) asserts that 'affect'; the experience of feeling or emotion is a process of relations within the temporary worlds we are constantly creating and by which we are constantly being created. It is an ongoing process that depends on encounter.

Seigworth and Gregg (2010) write:

Affect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter. The term ‘force’, however, can be a bit of a misnomer, since affect need not be especially forceful

(although sometimes, as in ... trauma, it is). In fact, it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra... (p.2).

Seigworth and Greg (2010) note the importance of recognising the subtleties of affect and taking account of the unnoticed. Postcolonial scholar Derek Hook (2005); who draws upon Fanon in his work, discusses the notion of the pre- discursive, particularly in relation to discourses of racism.

He states that racism cannot only be understood as discourse but must be recognised as a phenomenon that is psychological as much as it is political. Hook (2005) asserts that we must see the affective as discursive and the subjective as ideological. Hooks talks about the prevalence of the *body* in the work of Fanon and how experiences of racist encounters are first experienced by the body before being recognised through discourse. Butler (1997) in her work on gender performativity also discusses the notion of the extra- discursive as that which exists outside of the speakable but which is still bound by discourse.

Butler states:

What can we make of the way in which discourses not only constitute the domains of the speakable, but are themselves bounded through the production of a constitutive outside: the unspeakable, the unsignifiable (p.94)

Both Butler (1997) and Hook (2005) speak of the pre or extra- discursive as that which exists outside of but not separate from discourse. This offers a very useful lens in which to later pre/extra-discursive experiences of trauma.

Identity as gendered

Although gender identity is considered a private, subjective experience, it is connected to cultural identity in that societies have a set of gender categories that create a basis for assigning certain attributes (Myers, 1998). These attributes ultimately influence the way each gender is perceived or expected to act, so there is a 'performative' element to gender in a social context (Butler, 1990). As my research looks at the experiences of cis-men, I will be focusing on masculinity; however, it is important to note that as gender attributes are dependent on social understandings and practice, one society may understand of masculine attributes in a way that may be considered 'feminine' by another. There is also the feminisation of colonised men, which was, for example, used in India as a colonial tool of representation. Although my focus is masculinity, in order to understand the notion through the perspective of two different cultures, I will also need to consider femininity and the fluid, changing, and problematic understandings of these binaries.

Judith Butler (1990) builds on the notion that gender attributes are part of a larger social construct that influence what Jacques Lacan (1990) refers to as the 'symbolic ordering' of society. She states that gender 'performances' are examples of power relations, in which particular attributes for men are considered part of the social norm based on the socially constructed understandings around what is expected. It is therefore not seen as 'normal' to freely choose a gender attribute to 'perform'. A central concept in Butlers gender identity theory is that gender is constructed through repetitive performances and that discourses around gender create subject positions and linguistic structures in which to construct the self. The theory itself is very complex and nuanced and the structure or discourse of gender- like the experience of race/racism discussed in the previous

section- for Butler begins at the bodily and nonverbal. Butler (1997) does not accept identity as coherent or stable but refers to it as “a stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . . [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (p. 520).

Goffman (1959) in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* suggests that when individuals come in contact with others, they attempt to guide or control the impression that others might make of them by changing his or her appearance and manner in order to avoid embarrassment. Bourdieu (1998) refers to this as 'playing the game' and argues that this is a fundamental part of societal participation. This performance of the self in order to meet the socially expected 'norms' is termed as 'symbolic interaction' and alongside Butler's notion of gender performativity can be useful to explore how gender expectations from conflicting cultural and social norms are negotiated and performed in different spaces, at different times and with different people. This offers a useful lens within the research for exploring the expectations that surround the young men in this study and how they perform in relation to these.

Summary

This section has outlined my choice to use postcolonial, decolonial and anticolonial theory as both structural and political tools to guide the structure of the thesis and the arguments made therein. I explained my decision to use elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to note the effects of systematic racism as well as the use of counter-narratives to resist and challenge such

oppressive structures. Finally, I discussed the importance of intersectionality in this work, as outlined through the work of Black Feminist theorists, with an emphasis on interconnected identities, voice, and representation. Although I have discussed each of these theories individually, they are all interconnected in their shared emancipatory endeavour. This chapter has also shown the contradictory nature of using these theories alongside each other; the tensions of doing this have been made visible to the reader. I have tried to bring the theories together using appropriate signposting, but I recognise the strain and at times impossibility of aligning these theories. My intention was not to present a theoretical chapter that would solely focus on the postcolonial and critical race theories that would be the tools for my analysis; rather to situate the research within the literature that frames both the oppressive and emancipatory potential of this piece of work.

CHAPTER 3: OF STORIES AND NARRATIVES

If you don't like someone's story, write your own.

(Chinua Achebe, 1994)

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to share the story of the research process, including the ethical and methodological decisions that have informed it. In keeping with the narrative paradigm within which I have worked, this chapter, as is the case for the entire thesis, is written in a personal voice. In the previous chapter I examined the literature I had explored, and discussed the process I went through to select and critique the literature I refer to throughout the thesis. One of the aims of chapter two was to capture the turbulence and unease I felt as I worked through the literature. Similarly, this chapter offers insight into the research design and process and the challenges I encountered along the way.

Section one examines the nature of decolonising methodologies and explains the use of narratives as a potentially decolonising tool. Section two narrates the research and the development of both an ethical and storying framework. Section three discusses the processes of analysis and writing and the role of critical reflexivity in the research. It's important to note that the methodology is not solely contained within this chapter, but rather embodies my research and runs through it. This chapter, however, provides the central arguments for why the research was designed the way it was.

Part One

Critical Social constructionism

In order to understand the methodological choices within this study, it is important to explain the ontological and epistemological understandings that frame the study. Ontology is defined as understanding the nature of reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and epistemology considers the relationship between the researcher and reality; or how this reality can be known (Carson et al. 2001). Within a narrative paradigm, the boundaries between ontology and epistemology are somewhat blurred. Narrative approaches have been used in research within the social sciences for a number of purposes. Looking back at the works of the Chicago school, it's clear that stories and narratives within these ethnographic approaches were firmly entrenched in a realist paradigm that sought to offer 'realistic' descriptions of events (Riessman, 1992). In contrast to this, those that conducted research using a constructionist tenet of narrative inquiry, focussed on stories as tools used to produce meaning rather than claiming to express 'real' experiences (Burck, 2002). I believe that there are multiple realities and that these realities are constructed and shaped by how we perceive, understand, interpret, and act upon them (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Therefore, I adopt a constructionist narrative paradigm within this research, which focuses on the meanings produced through stories, not on descriptive accounts that claim to represent 'real' experiences.

I would also argue that just as realities are socially constructed and relational, they are also embodied and spiritual. My understanding of embodied experiences, are those of transpersonal encounters in which feelings and senses frame the momentary experiences. I refer to spirituality when I consider the inner psychic experiences that are connected with religion. The lines between

the socially constructed and the spiritual and embodied realities we live are blurred, with the sensual, psychic and responsive not always clearly distinguishable. How we interpret, understand and act upon these realities are dependent on the socio-cultural contexts in which these realities are framed but even within these frames, some experiences cannot be articulated.

My experiences and understandings of the world are framed through African and Islamic philosophies that centre on a premise of relationality and spirituality, but my epistemology is also influenced by Western Enlightenment understandings of logic and rationality that have framed my education. Because these lines are blurred, as a researcher I must examine my experience of the research and how it may differ from the experiences of those who participated in the study.

Social constructionism posits that within the contexts of culture, language and history multiple knowledges and realities of an experience are constructed, rather than a single universal truth which can be discovered (Burr, 1995; Willig, 2008). As there is no universal truth but a multitude of constructed 'realities', therefore there can be no real objectivity in research. This research is interpretative, with an acknowledgement that the choices and interpretations I have made throughout this research have been informed by my culture, beliefs, and history, as well as the lived realities of the participants and myself. I also understand that in reading the findings, others may construct alternative interpretations based on their own frames of reference.

Social constructionism moves away from a tradition of essentialist ideas and generalizable data that make claims to objective 'truth' (Riessman, 2002), to look at how knowledge, meaning and power are subjectively constructed within the research process. It also allows the space to

acknowledge the role of the researcher in co-constructing the narratives with the research participants. Social constructionism is not without criticism, however. Nightingale and Cromby (1999) critique social constructionism for denying the existence of embodied experiences and the influence of power as part of these experiences. This is a particularly useful critique of social constructionism when looking at the construction and experience of race and 'Blackness', which are (I would argue) both embodied and embedded in particular contexts.

Regarding race, I take an anti-foundationalist view in that there are not any 'real' biological differences upon which race is founded. This view is in line with that of social constructionism which recognises race a socially constructed concept. Despite the fact that social constructionism aims to denaturalise essentialist ideas of race, however, it still points to the construction of race, which is problematic. Through the use of categories that discuss the ways in which race is constructed, social constructionism risks simply producing a discourse that reproduces race as an 'object' as much as it claims to dismantle it (Nayak, 2006). In its focus on the construction of race as a concept, it risks negating the lived and embodied experiences of racialization (Swanton, 2010). This is particularly important in considering the effects of colonialism and the ways in which oppression was/is a psychic and spiritual experience, just as much as it was/is institutional and bodily.

I explored the idea of incorporating a 'post-race' paradigm in my work, in order to move away from a discussion of race that is framed around discourses that critique the social construction of the nature of race whilst simultaneously discussing Black subjects in relation to White subjects, thereby maintaining essentialist ideas of race. Nayak (2006) suggests that essentialism does not

disappear with the use of social constructionism, but can lie within it, as it is "displaced on the realm of the social and symbolic order" where meaning is deferred (p.420). A post-race focus would allow "writing against racial identity" (Ware, 2005, p.123) with a focus on experiences, but a danger in this would be that the political and activist mobilization around racial inequality could be silenced or undermined (Harries, 2014). I also considered employing a 'materialist ontology' that would allow me to consider race as emergent rather than fixed and as being produced by forces that are both bodily and material (Lim, 2008). A materialist ontology would allow me to focus attention on the visceral experiences of race that undoubtedly played an important role in this research.

I recognise post-race theory as a critique of the essentialism that lies within much of social constructionism and materialism as a means to focus attention on the visceral experiences negated in social constructionist analyses. I also recognise the usefulness of social constructionism in considering the ways in which narratives are constructed and maintained through systems power of power and how we make meaning of these experiences. I have titled this standpoint I have chosen to take as *Critical Social Constructionism* to recognise both the usefulness and limitation of a social constructionist standpoint.

Decolonising methodologies

Methodological Imperialism

The purpose of colonial research has always been to serve the colonisers, and this is demonstrated in the manipulative use of research throughout history to perpetuate the dominance of one group over another (Law, 2004). Colonial methods and rules often claimed methodological hegemony by carrying with them "a set of contingent and historically specific Euro-American assumptions" that instructed the researcher on what they should investigate and how they should see the data (Law, 2004, p.5). This is identified as methodological imperialism.

Colonial methodology also brought with it a 'categorising' imperative that developed as part of the development of anthropology as a discipline.

One of the main techniques used during the colonial period, particularly in research conducted in East Africa, was observations for the purpose of anthropological reports (Asad, 1973; Cohn, 1996; Tilley & Gordon, 2007). Different parts of Africa were colonised by different European countries and those colonial authorities may have used different methods, so it is important to state that oppression in its multiple forms may have been understood and 'researched' in multiple ways. For the purpose of this study, I focus specifically on East Africa, which is where Somalia is situated. Colonial researchers in East Africa took it upon themselves to 'see' the culture of the 'Other' for those who could not go there to see, thus anthropology (and later ethnography) became disciplines of 'culture collecting' (Smith, 1999, p.61).

In Oliver's (1934) writing on *The mentality of the African*, he discusses the importance of observation:

The main method up until now has necessarily been observation- observation of the behaviour of Africans in natural, everyday situations; and the result of this method has been the description of such behaviour. To this method, we owe almost all our present knowledge of the mentality of the African; and it seems likely that this must for a long time remain the chief source of knowledge. (p. 41)

The 'findings' of such anthropological research were recorded and presented to those in the homelands of the colonials, as well as being written into the books that would be taught back to the colonised. These observations provided the basis for researchers to develop descriptions and theories that heavily focussed on the mentality and psychology of Africans who were referred to as violent, impulsive, and a child-like race (Blaut, 1993; Schumaker, 2001), and did not focus on external issues such as social conditions (Mahone, 2006). The colonial researchers positioned themselves as onlookers from the outside, establishing themselves through their work as authorities on African culture; they felt no need to consult the people who were the objects of their research. These methods were used for a deliberate purpose, to justify and legitimise the agenda of the coloniser, which was to dominate and 'civilize' the supposedly 'barbaric' Africans (Blaut, 1993). The pervasive nature of colonial research is manifested in these 'historic' descriptions, in which many forms of textual racism have been normalised and remain largely unchallenged.

There have been some attempts, however, by the colonised to resist imposed colonially-informed ways of knowing. In Schumaker's (2001) text *Africanising Anthropology*, which tells the story of anthropological fieldwork that was centred at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in what is now Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) during the mid-20th century, discussed the role of local research assistants. Schumaker talked about how local research assistants in Zambia acted as intermediates between the researcher and the local informants and provided translation and interpretation work. Working as research assistants allowed some locals the power to reclaim some control by misleading the researchers and by providing inaccurate interpretations. Schumaker (2001) states, that "in all cases, the relationship between the researcher, the assistants, and the informants had to some degree, an antagonistic character" (p. 94). Although the acts of resistance to colonial research methods demonstrated in this example did have some effect on the data produced, the research assistants were still working with the colonial researchers within the framework of an oppressive research design. Their actions may have enabled them to manipulate the data collected, but it did not ultimately allow them to challenge Western ways of knowing.

The history of ethnography and anthropology centre on colonial methods of interference and control (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). This history is largely ignored in present day research, which often characterises ethnography and anthropology as an innocent practice of 'hanging around' a community in order to describe circumstances (Bowers, 1996). Just as important as the explicit connections to colonialism and the creation of the researcher's authority over the subjects of study, are the internal power relations amongst the research subjects that are created by research itself to hold oppressed communities in place (Parker, 2005). The practice of having local

informants or assistants that supported colonial researchers was commonplace. In some cases, informants would support the endeavour of the coloniser and would be obedient to the researchers' requests in order to be 'close' to the researcher, and in doing so would begin to see themselves as better than others in their community, nearer or 'as worthy' as the colonial researchers (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Unlike the work of Schumaker (2001), many accounts of the effects of colonisation on African peoples pays little attention to the agency of the indigenous peoples, rather seeking to portray them as victims (Kallaway, 2002). The focus on the marginalisation of colonised and previously colonised peoples with little reference to their work as active agents has been critiqued by many writers as simplistic and essentialised portrayals (Mohanty, 2003; Reynolds, 2002; Smith, 1999). Just as numerous accounts on the effects of colonisation make homogenous assumptions about the colonised peoples, however, some who claim to deploy decolonising methodologies, also quite often refer to the West as homogenous and 'other', thus placing all forms of Western knowledge in one category. This includes some Western knowledges that employ criticality such as feminism, although as Mohanty (2003) discusses, even within feminism many erroneous assumptions are made by Western feminism about women in the Global South as subject victims.

To move away from research conducted for and by the colonisers and towards research that meets the needs of indigenous and racialized peoples, there needs to be a realisation that Western research methods have failed to capture the experiences of colonized 'Others' (Chambers, 1997; Chilisa, 2005; Chilisa & Ntseane 2010; Escobar, 1995; Nitza, Chilisa, & Makwinja-Morara, 2010).

[Towards decolonial research](#)

The dominance of Western research approaches and ways of knowing has resulted in 'research' being one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary (Tuhiwai-Smith. 1999, p.1). Though some have resisted colonial research, many colonised peoples have over the years normalised being the subject of research and have accepted (or at the very least failed to challenge) Western ways of knowing.

The move towards decolonised methodologies is based on the recognition that research needs to be designed and conducted in partnership *with* those being researched as well as an emphasis on the need for the researcher to be reflexive. The claim that indigenous peoples can view their situations from a 'broader' perspective is an argument that is mentioned in some of the writings on decolonising methodologies (Dunbar, 2008; Kovach, 2009). One cannot assume, however, that a marginalised status immediately gives an individual a more encompassing view of the world than one who holds a more dominant position within research (Brah, 1996). Experience and identities do not always lead to an unmasking of power relations and as Foucault (1979) states, it is often necessary to have access to alternative oppositional discourses in order to allow space for reflexivity and to provide the tools to critique one's own circumstances. Foucault (1979) suggests that actions and physical things become objects of knowledge and are given meaning through discourse. He refers to discourse as a system of representation in which we can only have knowledge of things that have been given meaning. This meaning-making takes the form of practices that are often systemic.

The use of decolonising research approaches allows the researcher to become critical of their own practice and recognise the many ways in which they can be both an insider and an outsider in

research (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Such approaches, alongside critical theories such as those discussed in the theoretical resources chapter, are also useful for analysing dynamics of power between different groups of people and different forms of knowledge (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1997). Postcolonial theorists and writers such as Fanon (1968), Said (1978), Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988) were committed in their work to decolonise the normativity of Western forms of knowledge and contributed valuable critiques of colonial discourse on the construction of Africa, the Orient, and the Global South more generally.

With an aim of providing a platform for different stories to be shared, my research incorporates the principles of "decolonising research" as expounded by Tuhiwai-Smith (1999). Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) talks about the need to retrieve spaces of marginalisation and use them as spaces to develop indigenous research agendas. In her book, *Decolonising Methodologies* she explores research practices that offer alternatives to Western paradigms and which challenge racism and ethnocentrism. Throughout the book, she refers to indigenous people's case studies and her own work to demonstrate the changing needs and practices of indigenous people, whilst simultaneously offering a theoretical critique of colonial methodologies.

Although Tuhiwai-Smith does not offer a clear methodological framework in her book, her use of lived experiences alongside theory and her emphasis on the need for indigenous knowledge to interrogate colonial academic procedures are key to framing the decolonial effort of this study. In attempting to decolonise the design, implementation and presentation of the research, I hope to move beyond the colonial legacy of Africans as being the subjects of Anthropological research, in favour of an approach that incorporates the use of indigenous methods of collective knowledge

production in order to allow my participants and myself to construct and choose the narratives we choose to share (Fatnowna & Pickett, 2002).

The North of Somalia, the location in which myself and the participants were either born or raised, was a former British colonised land, and Britain, the location in which both my participants and I were raised and currently live, is the heart of the former colonial empire. It is therefore difficult, if not near impossible, to try and develop a research that is entirely indigenous. Being unable to see a clear dichotomy between the Western and African ways of knowing that have influenced my approach to research, I chose to acknowledge the interwoven yet often conflicting histories of the two. In doing so, I reach out to both in order to move towards a new synthesis that includes multiples perspectives and voices, through a critical and reflexive lens. When I refer to Western and African knowledges, I recognise that these are not two distinct categories, but that the tensions between them can at times results in a fragmented and uneasy approach to research. Fragmented knowledges are not new to those who are part of a colonised peoples and Smith (1999) states:

[There are those that] tell us that this is the end of modernism, and therefore the end of imperialism as we have known it. . . . People now live in a world which is fragmented with multiple and shifting identities, that the oppressed and the colonized are so deeply implicated in their own oppressions that they are no more nor less authentic than anyone else. While the West might be experiencing fragmentation, the process of fragmentation known under its older guise as colonization is well known to indigenous peoples.

Fragmentation is not an indigenous project, it is something we are recovering from.

(p.97)

Postcolonial theory and Critical Race theory are presented in this research as potentially decolonising tools that rupture hegemonic Western thought on what research is, and critique the use of methods that see "the world in one colour" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 212). Based on the critical emancipatory framework developed in the previous chapter one, this section provides an outline of how the framework has been used to inform the design, method, analysis and reporting of the research.

Storied lives: Why narratives?

The stories we tell about ourselves and how we conduct our lives - is who we are

(Bamberg, 2012, p.204)

Stories and narratives can be used to construct, deconstruct, reconstruct and even challenge identities. We all live storied lives and we tell stories about our life experiences (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1991; Etherington, 2004). Storytelling in everyday life has existed as long as humankind, as a means of communication, reflection, and meaning making (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

The word narrative in research can be both narrow and broad in meaning. In a narrow sense, narrative inquiry is the story of storytelling itself in order to analyse the plot, themes, and forms of

address within specific stories. This narrow definition is often used in research and though it can be a useful way of interpreting lived experiences, in the context of this research I found it too limiting. I have therefore adopted a broader understanding of narrative inquiry that looks at the act of telling or showing the subjective experiences, rather than specifically at plotlines and sequences of actions. Narratives are a creative means of expression in which people share and make sense of their experiences. The terms *stories* and *narratives* will be used interchangeably throughout the research as being synonymous in terms of reference to accounts, bearing in mind that the term 'narrative' will also be used to refer to the process of presenting the research.

It is hard to state the exact origin of narrative inquiry as a research method. It is suggested that narrative inquiry originated in opposition to the French structuralist theorists of the mid-to-late 1960s (Herman, Jahn & Ryan, 2005), or that it started with the special edition publication of *Critical Inquiry* entitled *On Narrative*, which was published and released in 1981. It has also been suggested that narrative inquiry made its breakthrough in publications by the likes of Bruner (1986), Sarbin (1986), and Polkingthorne (1988) in the late 1980s. Despite the ambiguity of its origin, narrative has become a powerful research approach and has been applied to research in various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, medicine, history, cultural studies, and law (Mishler, 2006).

My choice to use a narrative-based methodology originates in my desire to gain insight into how these four young men understand 'identity' and 'belonging' in the context of their everyday lives. I want to focus on the sense they make of and the meanings they attach to their everyday lived experiences (Lichtman, 2013). Realist assumptions made by positivist methods provide very

narrow and limited understandings of social life (Riessman, 2002). To acknowledge the complexity and 'messiness' of the social world, methodologies such as narrative are thus not only useful, but often necessary. Riessman (2008) notes that a narrative 'impulse' is present in every place, society, and time, so I find that the best methodology incorporates both Somali and Western understandings of narratives. Hiles and Čermák (2008) explain that narratives are necessary for the meaning-making process through which events and actions can be understood.

Although narrative in research is often described as a methodology, method, or mode of analysis, like Spector-Mersel (2010), I believe narrative research is just as much a way of viewing the social world as much as it is a way of carrying out research. Spector-Mersel proposed that a narrative paradigm is one in which “the core of narrative inquiry combines both a philosophical stance towards the nature of social reality and our relationship with it, and the mode in which it should be studied” (p.206).

Narrative methodology recognises the constructed nature of the social world as being multifaceted and fluid, thus approaching the social reality as a storied world made up of storied lives (Etherington, 2004; Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Sarbin, 1986). These stories construct and shape reality rather than just mirroring a representation of it (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The participants of this research are not a group of young men, but four individual young men with four unique stories. Narrative research respects the uniqueness of each individual story (Parker, 2005). Frank (1995) speaks of narratives as tools to "make sense of the world" in which we create a sense of self by telling and retelling our stories (p.111). Although our stories are individual and unique, they are nonetheless constructed inter-subjectively and are situated within

particular social fields (Polkinghorne, 1988). I therefore understand not only the role of social and cultural contexts in influencing the narratives of the young men, but also my role as a researcher and how my narrative may influence the narratives of the young men as much as their narratives influence mine.

Narrative inquiry provides me with the research tools to consider the cultural and social templates that guide or influence the structure, direction, and to some extent the content of the narratives (Bamberg, 2007). Narratives are not fixed and the stories people choose to construct about their lives are based on how they see themselves at a point in time. As these narratives are temporally located, they could change with every re-telling. Burr (1995) argues that meaning making through storytelling is acquired through language processes, so narrative research appreciates the linguistic and discursive structuring of 'experience' and 'self' that storytelling permits whilst maintaining a sense of individual subjectivity (Crossley, 2000, p.530). This is in line with a critical social constructionist view that recognises the relational construction of narratives and the self as well as the individual embodied experience.

Bruner (1990, 1996) argues that stories are culturally influenced and are a means of creating an individual's understanding of the world and their place in it. Stories are often used in narrative research as forms of politics to present 'voices' that are seen to be neglected within or excluded from dominant political structures. Stories often present opportunities for change or the prospect of developing new theories and new ways of talking about the self and the world we live in (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Denzin, 2004).

In a Western context, stories are often thought of as fictional written texts which follow a particular structure and contain key characters and a developing, chronological plot. But what about stories that are not written? Stories that follow no recognisable structure or sequence? Sarris (1993) and hooks (1996) note that stories do not always follow a chronological sequence and Carr (1986) states that the stories we tell and are told are based on the temporal nature of experiences in which we are concurrently both the tellers and participants of our life stories.

Narrative research, however, is not without criticism, one of which being the questionable nature of authenticity. Vice (2003) suggests that life is 'messy' and therefore to view life as 'storied' is to try and impose an order that does not exist. I would disagree with this and argue that stories can indeed be as messy as the lives we live and that order is not imposed, but as Parker (2005) argues, through telling stories we give space for imaginative possibilities.

Arguments have also been made that stories cannot remedy the painful realities of lived experiences (Billington, Hockey & Strawbridge, 1998) and that stories, even when articulated, can be still be silenced and that transformation is never certain (Bradbury & Miller, 2010). I would argue, however, that narratives can indeed influence social and psychological transformation when conducted in a critical way that allows the participant ownership of his story. This is especially the case in research with young people, where narrative approaches allow space for young people to find ways of thinking, feeling, and articulating their experiences (Billington, 2006). This research seeks to give young people that space to explore their experiences. By working with narratives in a way that changes the focus of power in the direction

of the participant and not the research, whilst acknowledging that stories do not happen in isolation but are co-constructed, we become more attuned to what Freeman (2003) refers to as the social construction of narrative.

Gergen (1989) argues that as a 'discourse-user' a person uses discourse for their own purpose, so there is a sense of agency (p.90). He argues that we are motivated by a desire for our own versions of events to prevail against competing notions, thus we present constructions of selves that would most likely warrant being given voice. In acknowledging the social construction of knowledge, meaning and power (Emerson & Frosh, 2009) and the subjective nature of storytelling, I have selected a methodology that would enable me to design and conduct a piece of research that would offer a space for the voices and the stories of the participants to be heard, whilst reflexively taking into account my part in the co-construction of their narratives.

Part Two

A narrative of the methodology

All qualitative research is situationally embedded in that it is historically, culturally, philosophically, theoretically, emotionally, physically, and temporally bound. This section of the chapter reflects on the narrative of the methodology. Through telling the story of the research, I discuss some of the challenges encountered and reflect on the ways in which these challenges informed the research design and delivery. In this section, I examine my role as a researcher and the ethical implications of using a decolonising methodology, which works with young men and their stories. I offer reflexive accounts of the research process and outline the strengths and limitations of the methods I have chosen to adopt.

There is no "non- lensed" view in research (Macklin & Higgs, 2010, p.65) so this is me, telling the story of the research, from the perspective of a researcher. I recognise that at every stage of the research process, the participants may have experienced and understood the research differently.

Developing an ethical framework

One of the first things I felt I needed to do as I embarked on this research process was to develop a strong ethical framework to act as a guide. I recognised that any attempt to decolonise research would require an awareness of the empirical as well as relational challenges that may be encountered and so I decided to develop a framework that would focus on the four main tenets that I believe are necessary for decolonising participatory work. Each of these different but equally important branches of the framework offer important lenses through which to consider ethics in research. The four components were developed as a result of considering the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that frame this research. At the centre of the framework are the religious and cultural values that I use to make sense of each of the four core components.

As a decolonising project, it is important to acknowledge the importance of ethics of representation as expounded by hooks (1992) and Spivak (2006) who recognise that decolonisation is a constant confrontation with a hegemonic system of thought, and that care must be taken to ensure that marginalised peoples are able to reclaim spaces in which they can self-represent. This was a hugely important factor in the way that I engaged with ethics in this research, not only in the design of the research and encounters with the young men, but also in the ethics of writing their stories and ensuring that I did not recolonise the space.

The university's ethics review states that all participants must have the right to withdraw, but bearing in mind my relationship with the young men beyond the research, there was always a chance that they may have felt obliged to take part. This links with the third core theme of ethics of care, as expounded by Noddings (1984) and Gilligan (1982) who acknowledge the interpersonal relationships and interconnectedness of both the researcher and the participants. Although the participants of this research are young Somali men, there are shared experiences between them and between them and me, so 'ethics of care' here is based on the recognition of these links whilst also ensuring that these shared experiences are not misrepresented as shared narratives. Individuals interpret experiences differently, so this links back to the ethics of representation in which individuals are permitted to tell their own stories without having alternative stories imposed on them.

The final core theme in the ethical framework is that of radical and emancipatory ethics.

Decolonising work is always tied to activism, so this component focuses on the social justice work of Freire (1972) who stresses the importance of communicative practices as a means to produce equity and work towards emancipation.

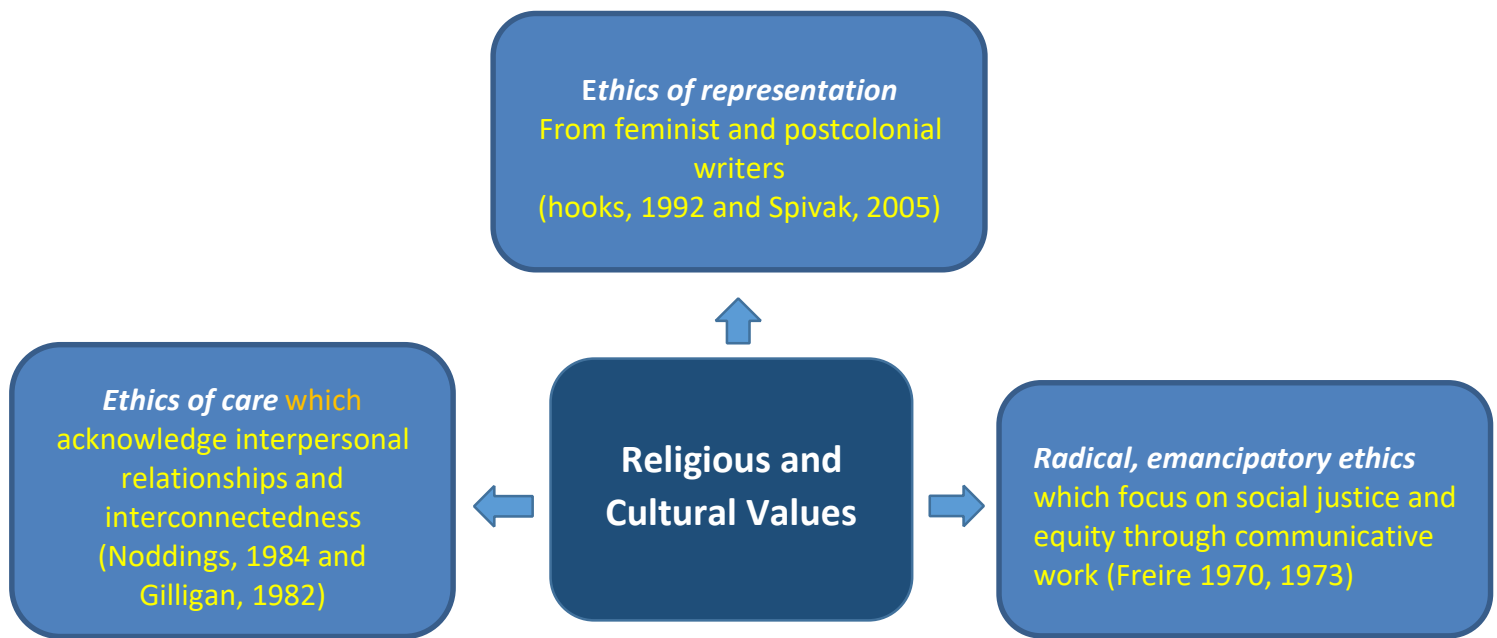


Figure 2: Ethical Framework

The ethics form

In order to discuss the research with the young men and gain consent, I first needed to go through the process of applying and being granted ethical approval from the university. This process was not as straightforward as I would have hoped. Narrative research is very much centred on relationships and personal stories, so care needs to be taken to ensure that such research recognises the situated, context specific and uniqueness of these experiences (Josseson, 2007). This was always intended to be a piece of research that would be emergent and driven by a shared focus between the participants and myself, so it made no sense to try and limit ethics to the standardised guidelines set by the institution, as I could not have known what ethical issues

would emerge over the course of the research process. I found myself completing the form as expected, but tried to make the focus as broad as possible and included notes for additional ethical considerations that the ethical form did not consider or provide space for that may have arisen. An example of such considerations included codes of conduct based on religious and cultural expectations, such not being in a closed room alone with any of the male participants. As the young men are between the ages of 14-18, they are considered young adults; as such it would be considered inappropriate for them to be alone in a room with me as an adult woman. This meant that either another woman (another volunteer at the centre) would have to be present in the room or the research would be conducted in a room with the door open. These were not necessarily gender dynamics of power, but rather religious traditions that have been upheld.

This information was included as part of the information sheet and consent form and the participants were given the opportunity to select which they would prefer. Giving the young men the right to choose as well as awareness of the ethical considerations of privacy are culturally specific considerations that applied to this particular context. As Bond (2000) states, “Being ethical not only involves wrestling with issues in a systematic and considered way but also taking personal ownership of the responsibility for acting ethically” (p.243). Because these and many other ethical considerations were not part of the standardised guidelines, a reflexive approach to ethics in this research proved equally if not more appropriate than the procedure (McLeod, 1994).

I attempted from the outset of the research to be honest and open with the research participants about the purpose of the research; however, I knew that as the research was loosely designed to be

flexible enough to be informed by discussions with the participants, by consenting the participants would agree to be a part of a process that required them to embrace some level of uncertainty (Estroff, 1995). The ethical issues that emerged once the research had begun could not have been initially anticipated. It is for this reason that ethical awareness, as much as reflexivity, is embedded throughout the research.

We're in it together: Participatory research

This research is in essence participatory and as such not only examines issues from social and political perspectives (Freire, 1970; Hall, 1990; Maguire, 1987) but places emphasis on improving the lives of those involved in the research process (Yeich & Levine, 1992).

Participatory research critiques the ways in which dominant ideologies place the blame for issues such as racism or poverty on individuals rather than social structures or the expectations and attitudes of dominant social groups. Participatory research allows those engaged in the research to begin to look at their situations from alternative perspectives (Hall, 1979, 1981; Maguire, 1987).

Participatory research consists of qualitative research methods that attempt to disrupt traditional social science methodologies (Brydon Miller, 2001) by considering integrated activities that “combine social investigation, education work and action” (Hall, cited in Brown & Tandon, 1983, p. 279). The premise of participatory research is to utilise methods that enable the researcher and participants to identify social problems, and then plan, implement and evaluate research around that problem in order to generate new knowledge. The reason why I chose to use it alongside a narrative methodology is because participatory research acknowledges that problem

identification originates with the community, or in this case the participants and allows for the flexibility required to work with those participants. Another reason why a participatory approach is appropriate for this research is because of its emphasis on accessibility; the requirement for researchers to link theory to practice and use everyday language in order to avoid academic imperialism (McTaggart, 1981).

It is not simply a case of 'taking part' in participatory research, but is based on the participants being actively involved in expressing their voice in ways that make a difference to decisions that may affect their lives (Batsleer, 2008, p.149). Participatory research is as much a process as it is a principle, and engaging with young people in research, particularly through critical dialogue, models a social participatory approach as expounded by Friere (1972). This type of research with young people acknowledges the role of those who take part in the processes through which knowledges are constructed, and recognises that 'young people are the most influential and active agents in the unfolding of their own lives' (Davies, 2005, p.10). Participatory research should involve collaboration with participants at every stage of the research process (O'Brien & Moules, 2007) and when young people are engaged in research and become actively involved, it creates the potential for future action and transformative theories (Merten, 2009).

However, participatory research is not without criticism. Theorists Cooke and Kathari (2001) in their book *Participation: The New Tyranny?* critique the process of 'consultation' in participatory research, arguing that this process allows the researcher to maintain control. They also argue that tradition participatory research focuses too heavily on localised issues and fails to examine systematic oppression. Critics of participatory research argue that care needs to be taken to avoid

the illusion that participation in traditionally participatory research is an antithesis to top- down research, as researchers not only maintain power in this process but also take the lead in developing new knowledge (Mohan, 2001; Moose, 2001; and Hailey, 2001). Academics are also urged to avoid colonial imperialism when conducting participatory research, wherein groups are treated as homogenous and Euro-centred ideals are the yardstick in which to interpret and analyse data (Cleave, 2001). Bearing these important criticisms in mind I cautiously name this as a participatory approach, whilst making clear that this approach has been adapted within a decolonial framework, that sought to encourage active participation that challenges traditional dynamics of power.

In using a participatory narrative research approach, I could work with the young men at all stages of the research process, in order to collectively inform the focus and direction of the research. The participants of the study are experts of their own lived experiences and in working with them to construct, analyse and present their narratives, they were also able to develop skills in research techniques that would otherwise have been considered 'professional' or 'expert' knowledge, reserved solely for the researcher (Healy, 2000). This makes the research more transparent and redresses the subject-object disparity that exists in traditional forms of research (Healy, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Vodde & Gallant, 2002).

Developing a research design

Gaining consent

Before the young men; who were between the ages of 14-18, gave consent to partake in the study, we discussed the information sheets and they asked a lot of questions about what it would entail. They also asked questions about how they would be portrayed in the research with one of the young men asking "are you only looking for the bad stuff?" to which I replied "no, this research is about you sharing your experiences, it's up to you what you choose to share". This question was understandable. I knew that I needed to design the research in such a way that it was flexible and open enough to give the participants some control so that this could be research done *with* and not *on* them.

The information sheet provided a deliberately brief outline for the research design, presenting three main stages: an open discussion, self- representing narratives, and reflective conversations, which will be outlined later in this chapter. The description for each of these stages was intentionally brief because I wanted the participants to also be involved in informing the design of the research. As we went through the information sheet and discussed the research questions, the young men openly expressed their concerns about taking part in any research because of their awareness of how young Somali men have previously been portrayed in it. Understanding their concerns, I assured them there was no pressure for them to take part and that they had the freedom to leave the research at any point. They agreed to be involved and as they and their parents (for those under the age of 16) signed the consent forms, I handed them a blank piece of paper. Although I'm aware that in research there is no such thing as complete equality in terms of

power, I wanted the young men to know that just as they consented to partake in the research and for me to share their narratives with others, that I would be willing to be held accountable for my role. This blank sheet of paper was for us to collectively discuss and write down what the young men could expect from me throughout the process, and by signing these conditions I would be agreeing to respect and meet their expectations to the best of my ability. I explained to them the limitations of what I could or could not agree to, both ethically and due the nature of this research being part of a doctoral thesis. It was finally agreed that I would be held to four main conditions:

<u>Agreement form</u>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Our stories can't be shared with other people without asking us first.2. Talk to us about what you are doing with our stories and show us so we know.3. When you write about our stories, let us check your understanding.4. When the research is finished, talk to us about how you will share it with the community.	
Signed:	Name of Researcher:
Signed:	Name of Participant:

Figure 3: Agreement form

The dominant theme in each of these conditions is the need for transparency and open communication throughout the research. Although these were expectations I feel that as a researcher I already had for myself, it was important that they were also expressed by the participants. This process of developing a shared agreement alongside the consent form may appear unconventional, but for young men who have on several occasions openly expressed that they do not trust authority, this move towards an open and honest shared understanding was necessary. This agreement was signed by both the young men and myself. It was a very liberating experience for both the participants and I because it gave them the security of knowing that I too had to sign and agree to something, which created a shift in power and gave me the comfort of knowing that the participants had the same view of research as I had.

Embracing the 'messiness'

Initially I spent a lot of time reading in ever widening circles, wondering how I could approach subjects as big as identity and belonging and if I would ever know what I was looking for. The benefit of using a narrative paradigm is being able to accept the inductive nature of narrative research, in which understanding is emergent. By creating a loose research design, you allow opportunities for greater levels of collaboration and participation as well as space for creativity and imagination (Josselson, 2007). It is also important when conducting narrative research to have a 'not-knowing' attitude that enables you to embrace stories and narratives as constantly changing (Freedman & Combs, 2002; Trahar, 2009).

Within a narrative approach, research questions are generated from experience rather than being informed by theory (Trahar, 2011). The following research questions and sub-questions are therefore based on the outcomes of the research rather than acting as initial guides to structure the research:

- 1 . How do the young men represent or understand their identities, and how do they feel they are represented by others?

- 2 . How do the participants negotiate or challenge their identities in different spaces?
 - i . How are identities 'performed' within the family home, the community space, at school and within the wider society?

- 3 . How do the participants use verbal and non-verbal language to construct, reconstruct or negotiate their identities?

I embraced the 'messy' nature of narrative research fairly early into the research design and realised that there would be times in which the cloudy narratives may become dense and other time when they may appear to be less thick. I do not believe it is my role as a researcher to search for clear skies or wait for the clouds to disappear, but to try and peer through and move slowly, narrowing my eyes enough to see and accept all I can see amidst these clouds.

Mindful of Stephens' (2009) statement that qualitative research needs to understand the role of context in shaping the research process, I designed the research to accommodate the creative and

oral nature of the Somali culture. The main two stages of data collection were the production of creative self-representing narratives by the young men followed by reflective conversations about those narratives. As well as maintaining a culturally appropriate research approach, another reason for choosing conversations to collect data as opposed to interviews, was because the participants have all been in negative 'interview-type' situations and so a relaxed conversational approach would be more appropriate to the type of relationship they have with me. It was important that the participants felt they could speak freely and openly without the structures and strict boundaries of formal structured interviews.

Carson (1986) makes the distinction between conversations as opposed to interviews by stating that interview questions are designed to gather information about practices and perceptions, whereas 'conversations' implies a revealing of something that may be held in common. As I wanted to gain insight into their narratives, as well as look at the practices and perceptions that influenced those narratives, I knew that I had to combine both interview and conversational approaches. By ensuring that the conversations were semi-structured, I was able to maintain the focus of the conversation while allowing enough fluidity to also capture the voices of the young men.

Outlining the stages

The very first meeting with the participants consisted of a discussion between them and myself about the research design. Because the research topic was so broad (and to aid Stage 2), it was

decided that the first stage would be an open discussion in which the four young men would discuss as a group what they understood 'identity' and 'belonging' to mean.

The second stage consisted of a set task in which the young men were asked to use any mode they wanted to represent an experience of belonging which represented an aspect of their identity. They were given three weeks to complete this and I remained in the office every Saturday for those three weeks in case they were confused or needed support.

The third stage was initially designed to be a one-to-one interview, however all four of the young men have been in 'interview' situations, whether with the police, social services or other local authority services, so I had to assure them that the research would not consist of any interviews. Instead we agreed that we would have 'conversations' that would reflect on the narratives constructed and co-analyse these narratives. The first set of reflective conversations took place two weeks after the data from Stage 2 had been collected to discuss it. This later included two more one-to-one conversations with each of the young men, one for checking the analysis of the data with them and the other as a conclusive conversation to ask the young men about how they would like to see their data represented, both in the thesis and in terms of dissemination. I tried to accommodate the requests of the young men where time and resources permitted. As a doctoral student on a three-year scholarship and therefore limited by time constraints, I knew I had to be conscious of making practical decisions.

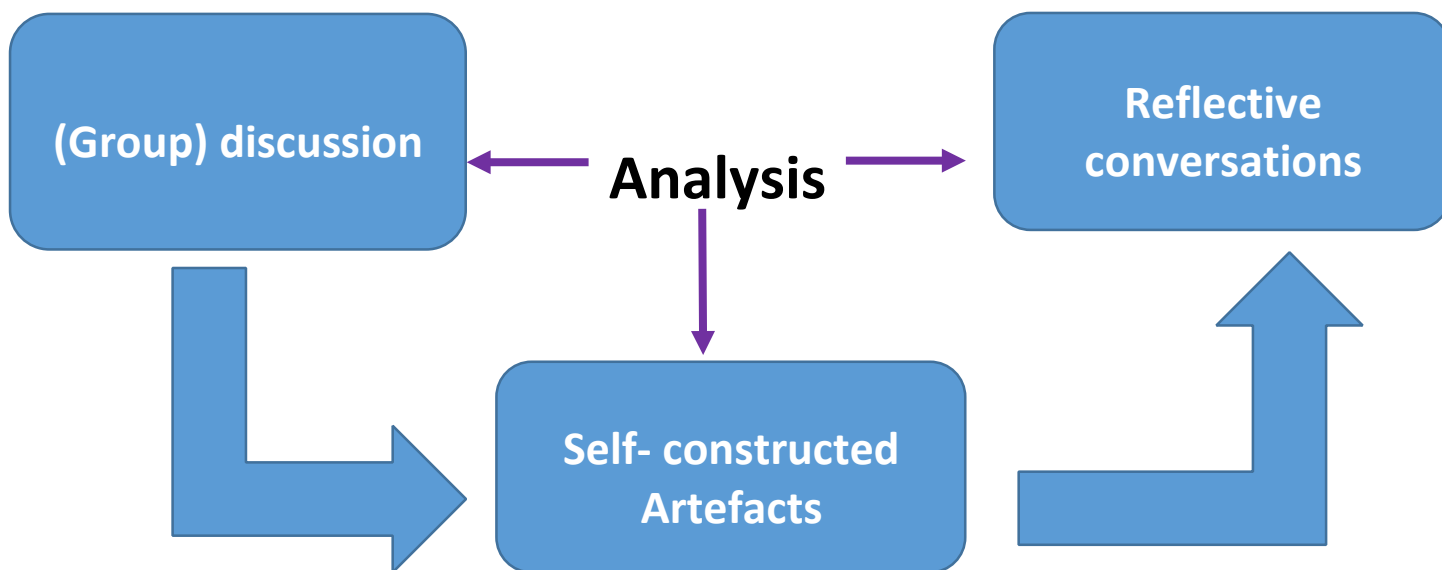


Figure 4: Analysis process

Initial group discussion

The initial group discussion was designed to discuss the broader issues of identity and belonging with the young men. I also wanted to discuss the second stage of the research with them to ascertain what they would consider appropriate ways for them to explore these themes.

The participants defined identity in very different ways. All the participants unanimously agreed that their primary identity was as a Muslim. Three of them then explained identity as also being

Somali. When one of the young men, Muhammed said "being British" was how he also defined his identity, this started a debate amongst the participants. The young men could not agree on what it meant to 'be British', or if as Ahmed suggested "living here automatically made you British".

The discussion resulted in the formation of themes that provided a guide by which the participants could structure their narratives in Stage 2 of the research. The themes that emerged from the discussion were race, religion, culture, nationality, masculinity, and family.

[Snapshots of 'moments': Generating stories](#)

I then explained to the participants that as part of Stage 2 they would be given three weeks to find creative ways to express their identities or experiences of belonging. The themes were given to them as suggestions for areas they could explore, though they were not limited to just these themes. I also showed them a variety of modes that they could consider using to present their narratives which included poetry, art (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), music, videos on their mobiles, etc.

The guidance was left deliberately open to allow them the freedom to be creative, but bearing in mind that such a loose structure may have confused them, I told them that I would be in the community centre one day a week for the three weeks they had to complete the task should anything be unclear or should they need guidance on modes of expression. Surprisingly, none of the young men came to see me during those three weeks. This made me feel uncertain, because I

wasn't sure if their absence meant they understood the task and were working on it or if they had become disinterested and would come to me at the end of the three weeks having produced nothing. This is always a dilemma in flexible research approaches, but I had to trust that whatever the outcome, even the possible absence of creative products, there would be data.

Three weeks had passed and not only did the participants complete the task, they completed it to a scale I could not have anticipated. Each of the young men produced several pieces of creative outputs ranging from visuals (sketches and photographs) to written texts (poetry and prose). It was both overwhelming and inspirational.

The purpose of incorporating a creative self-representation stage as part of the research design was for two reasons. The first was because as part of the Somali culture, storytelling takes various forms, such as oral poetry, songs and art, so I wanted to see if the young men would use these cultural modes of expression and if they would identify them as cultural storytelling. I also wanted to have a basis on which to develop the reflective conversations. I assumed through working with the young men that it would be unlikely that they would just sit down individually and share their experiences of belonging without having something at hand to support or prompt them. By incorporating a creative self-representing element to the research I was therefore able to centre the reflective conversations on the artefacts that had been created and draw on them to prompt further discussions.

The young men each brought in several artefacts, all of which could have been analysed in great depth. Due to practical reasons such as limited time, however, it would not have been possible to

look at each artefact in a level of depth that would do the narratives justice, so I made the decision to limit the number of artefacts to two per person. At the start of each of the one-to-one conversations, I presented the participants with all the data they had produced at Stage 2 and explained that they needed to select two of them. The participants then decided on which two artefacts they would discuss.

Lets talk! Reflective conversations

Through stories individuals and groups make sense of themselves; they tell what they are or what they wish to be, as they tell so they become, they are their stories. (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 388)

The third stage of the data collection process was reflective conversations. Three weeks after the participants completed stage two of the process, they were invited to take part in one-to-one conversations with me in order to reflect on the process of stage two as well as discuss the outputs. The reason why this process was termed a 'reflective conversation' is because the participants were asked to share the stories behind the items they produced in Stage 2. These items were not in themselves complete narratives; rather snapshots of moments and experiences that became narratives through the reflective conversations. Frank (1995) explains that it is by telling and retelling our stories that we can create a sense of self and make meaning of our lived experiences. The artefacts act as prompts to aid the telling of these stories, although even alone they present stories in themselves (Frank, 1995; McAdams, 1993).

These conversations were semi- structured and were intensive to allow the in-depth exploration of the narratives and to give the participants more of a 'voice' to enable them to tell as detailed a story as they wished (Charmaz, 2006; Clough & Nutbrown, 2002). It also allowed me as a researcher to ask questions about the narratives that would enable me to understand 'contextually bound' issues and how the participants made meaning of their experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The reflective conversations lasted approximately between 60 to 90 minutes for each of the participants. I did not intend to go beyond 60 minutes, but I also felt it would be inappropriate to end the conversation if the participant was keen to continue reflecting. The conversations were deliberately relaxed to maintain rapport and trust (Geertz, 1988). I was conscious, however, of Bryman's (2004) caution that building too much rapport with participants may result in them answering questions in a manner that they assume would satisfy my interests as a researcher. My only way of trying to manage this was through critical reflexivity and as suggested by Watson (2006), listening out for any ambiguous statements. All of the young men stated that they were dubious about the reflective conversation but once we started, they found it engaging. They had never been asked to share their thoughts and experiences so openly before and were grateful and eager to continue talking.

The conversations were designed to actively engage with the young men, and to create a space for them to share and begin to analyse their own narratives. It was not intended to be a tokenistic gesture in which I would listen to their stories and re-write them based on my own understanding. That is not what I was there to do. In order to ensure the conversations were a valuable tool and to ensure I was aware of and noticing 'voice', I adopted the "radical listening" approach suggested by Clough & Nutbrown (2002, p. 67). Rather than just hearing the stories of the young men,

radical listening meant that through critical interpretation and through verbal and non-verbal gestures to demonstrate active listening, I would be able to give a more 'faithful interpretation' of their stories (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002, p. 82).

The conversations were guided by some open-ended questions I had developed during the three weeks I had the data upon the completion of Stage 2. During this time I looked at all of the pieces of data and began an initial analysis based on my own interpretation. My interpretations were based on my analysis of the data; which were on the whole figurative or visual, and so I did not want my interpretation to influence the questions asked during the conversations.

I constructed general open-ended questions that would allow the participants to tell their stories, as well as explore context, feelings and attitudes. These questions acted as guides, but were not always required as conversation flowed and the participants often answered some questions without the need for them to be asked. These conversations yielded extremely rich thoughts and ideas and I often found that my interpretations of the data were within my own frame of reference and not those of the participants. The data from the reflective conversations as well as the self-representing narratives also informed later notes in my research journal in terms of emerging themes and emotions. Journal entries, images or feelings may take on meaning retrospectively and can become as useful in research as the other methods of data collection (Clough, 2002; Trahar, 2011). I often found myself jotting down thoughts and feelings after the conversations in my research diary and have used these throughout the thesis to acknowledge my positionality and reflexivity.

These reflective conversations also acted as the first stage of the analysis as the participants themselves were reflecting and questioning as they told their stories. Although only one set of reflective conversations were noted in the research design and were audio recorded, I did continue to meet with each of the participants throughout the transcription and analysis process and as I wrote up the findings, in order to back check and to ensure that so far as possible I was presenting the voices of the young men as they wanted them to be presented. It was important as participatory research that I collaborated and maintained communication with the participants at all stages of the research process and did not end contact time at the data collection stage (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narratives are based on events that are “in temporal transition” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and as Carr (1986) states “we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along” (p. 76). I was therefore aware that each time I met with the young men, their understandings of their stories may have slightly changed due to the temporally situated nature of storytelling.

The Reflexive Insider/ Outsider researcher

Narrative inquiries are always strongly auto-biographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines
(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121)

Though I share the same religious and cultural background as my participants, I am acutely aware that our gendered experiences of both religion and culture undoubtedly meant that I would on many occasions be positioned as an outsider in the research. As a Somali woman, my understanding and experiences have not only influenced my interpretations of their narratives, but also the interactive dynamics between myself as the researcher and them as the participants. There are particular cultural and religious codes of conduct between men and women, which will have undoubtedly been a major factor in influencing how they spoke to me and what they may or may not have chosen to share. I am also aware that my association with the participants of the research did not begin with this study and therefore the relationship I had built with them and the knowledge I already had of their lives and theirs of mine cannot be ignored.

Though it is sometimes argued that conducting research in a familiar setting may cause confusion in terms of boundaries and roles, as Spence et al. (2006) state, work in such a setting is ethical and legitimate so long as those involved know of the researcher role. In order to do this I needed to ensure that I made clear to the young men and those that worked in the community centre the times in which I was coming in as a researcher and when I was coming in as a youth worker and ensuring everyone understood the distinctions between the two roles.

By conducting the research in the setting I wanted to maintain some familiarity and comfort and the nature of the research was such that I had a commitment to the young people and remaining in the setting allowed me to build on the trust and respect I had already developed with them (Davies, 2005; Merten, 2009; Bridges, 2009). As an 'insider researcher' in this sense, I had somewhat of an advantage, as a non-insider may have required a longer period of time to gain the young men's trust (Brewer, 1999). Even though as an insider I had ease of access and trust, it

does not mean that this would guarantee better data, but may actually be more damaging, as the participants may have felt forced to partake or answer research questions based on preconceptions of what they feel I may be looking for based on their relationship with me (Gormally & Coburn, 2014). Again, the only thing I can suggest to overcome these challenging balancing acts is to be reflexive of my positionality and bias and to be aware of those of the participants.

Although my relationship with the participants prior to the research and a shared cultural understanding may present me as an insider, as a researcher, an academic and someone who is funded by an external source, my participants understood that I was approaching this research with more than one lens and for more than one stakeholder (Jaggar, 2000). I am neither entirely inside nor outside of this research, nor do I seamlessly move between the different positions that I hold, but find myself negotiating between necessary but often uncomfortable positions.

These interchanging roles are unavoidable, which is why reflection and reflexivity were essential parts of the research process (Trahar, 2009). I strove continually throughout the research to be conscious of my own positioning and to be self-aware and reflexive whilst interacting with the participants and at all stages of the research process, particularly whilst writing up, because in narrative research I needed to be aware of whose narrative was being told at which point.

Reflexivity in research is not easy, nor is it comfortable; it can at times be quite painful. In qualitative research objectivity is not the ability to 'put personal feelings and preconceptions' to

one side; rather, this is based on the researcher's ability to be reflexive as it is impossible to 'set to one side' something about which you are not aware (Ahearn, 1999).

Research is still inextricably associated with European imperialism (Smith, 1999). Through brief encounters and observations, Western intellectuals used research to claim ownership of our ways of knowing, whilst rejecting the people who developed those ways of knowing and denied us the opportunities to be creators of our own culture (Smith, 1999). Here, I deliberately use the pronoun 'our' to represent the history of colonialism that I share with the participants. As I seek to create a space for the participants' voices to be heard, I am aware that I am doing so through research and that such a process is in itself problematic. I reflect on the words of bell hooks (1990):

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Rewriting you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the heart of my talk (p.343).

These words are a harrowing reminder of how research has for so long been used as a powerful tool to manipulate oppressed voices to support the efforts of the oppressors. Research can just as powerfully liberate and give voice to oppressed voices as it can be used to shut them down, however. It is through engagement in reflexivity that I as a researcher can openly place myself, my values and my bias as critical to the research process (May, 2001). Critical reflexive approaches to research help account for researchers' values and foster understandings of

knowledge claims that challenge or contribute to prevailing constructions of reality. As a member of a community that has for so long been unheard and as a researcher within academia who is able to work within particular oppressive structures, I find myself in both a challenging and hopeful position. I can use my experience and values from both positions to find ways to act as an interlocutor and catalyst for crossing between the two positions and to understand how both positions become integrated into the research (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002; Creswell, 2003). Likewise, by acknowledging and being aware of the somewhat blurred lines and by addressing them in the research, I add depth to what would otherwise have been superficial reflections of methodological practice.

Part Three: The analysis

Making sense of the data

In narrative research, analysis is not a distinct stage within a research process, but is ongoing and continual. Although there were stages in which analysis took place in an explicit, deliberate way, there were also moments in the research process, such as the reflective conversations, in which analysis was more subtle. Clough (2002) states that 'data' and 'analysis' should not be separate but should be “seamlessly self- analytical” (p.15)

It was a long arduous task transcribing the conversation transcripts and I spent many hours listening and typing out what I could hear on the recordings. It was useful to have my reflective journal at hand as I transcribed the conversations to remind me of how I felt during our interactions and any non-verbal gestures I noticed. The sound files were transferred from the

dictaphone to my home computer and I initially transcribed the interviews as verbatim as I could, as background noise had influenced the clarity of some of the recordings. I then cross-checked with the participants, which was particularly useful as my interpretation of some phrases in Somali were corrected by one of the participants. Had I not checked this, it may have altered the meaning of that narrative. Although I transcribed all the conversations, I continued to listen to recorded conversations as part of the analysis process as this allowed me to reflect back on the tone used as I co-analysed what was being said.

Analysis

Once I completed the transcription, I began to explore the options for analysis. Unlike other forms of qualitative research, narrative research does not have a standard set of procedures for analysis (Riessman, 1993). Narratives may be analysed and represented in a number of ways, such as structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1982), narrative analysis/ analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1988), fictionalised representations (Clough, 2002) and dialogical/ performance analysis (Reissman, 2008). Because there are so many ways in which narratives may be gathered and analysed, it is imperative that the researcher is transparent about what they have done.

For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to adapt a method of analysis developed by Polkinghorne (1991) that focuses on narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. It is important to note that there is a distinction between an analysis of narrative and narrative analysis (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). A 'narrative analysis' relates to narrative inquiry which "understands lives as unfolding temporally, as particular events with a particular individual's life" resulting in a story

(Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p.636). An 'analysis of narrative', on the other hand, is based on general qualitative research which looks at any data that is presented in narrative form and analyses them into categories and themes. The artefacts as well as the conversations together form each participant's narrative of experience, but these narratives are fragmented and alone do not tell a story. I therefore decided to incorporate elements from both methods of analysis in order to analyse the conversations and artefacts as stories being told, whilst acknowledging the complex, contextual and fragmented nature of narratives.

As the data produced in Stage 2 ranged from poetry to visual arts. My initial analysis of each piece was purely interpretative. The data at this stage, though rich and dense within themselves, were looked at in relation to the participants' understandings and analysis as they used these artefacts to facilitate the stories they told in the reflective conversations. The pieces were thus not analysed in isolation, but by how they related to the stories being told through them. I found Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) concept of a 'three-dimensional space' a helpful framework for looking at the data. As the research was grounded on narratives, this approach allowed me to explore a temporal dimension in order to look at the narratives through a lens of 'becoming'. It also allowed for the analysis of social and personal matters and place/space.

Gergen (2003) cautions that a purely "analytical method of deconstructing stories into coded piles" could potentially undermine "the aims of the research" (p. 272) which would direct attention away from thinking about the experience. It is for this reason that I have chosen to look at the narratives as experiences that are embodied and relational as much as textual.

Narrative research does not focus on identifying 'truth' but seeks to represent the experiences of those sharing their stories. These experiences are presumed to be 'narrative truths' as opposed to necessarily 'historical truths' (Spence, 1982; Polkinghorne, 2005). Narrative analysis allows the researcher to pay close attention to the context of the storytelling as much as the storyteller (Mishler, 1986) and acknowledges that the notion of 'story' always entails an audience as well as a 'storyteller' and so the researcher must also pay attention to the assumed audiences of the particular narratives. Who is the story being told to and for? I was aware that the stories in the research were only the stories the participants chose to share, and that other alternative stories could have been shared in different circumstances (Clough, 2002).

Co-constructing narratives: Narratives as transformative

Narratives are inescapable and represent the ways in which we make sense of the world (Tamboukou, 2011). Narratives give us insight into the complexity of human lives and narrative research is full of insight and nuances of these lived experiences, that allow us to see that stories do not emerge in isolation but are composed and received in context (Reissman, 2008).

As a researcher engaged in narrative research I was able to study the complexity of the relational composition of people's lived experiences. In doing so, I was able to imagine the future possibilities of these lives. Chase (2005) states that narrative is a particular form of discourse that involves “retrospective meaning-making” and which “expresses emotions, thoughts and interpretations” (p.657). She also states that stories are enabled or constrained by social circumstances. Narratives are embodied in communication practices and it was through telling

their stories that the participants felt able to acknowledge and critique the relations of power and situational conditions that were at the centre of the stories they told (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). As narrative researchers, we are responsible for attending to the personal conditions of the participants and ourselves. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain personal conditions as “the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (p. 480) of the participants and the researcher. Researchers cannot take themselves out of the research and so my emotional responses were also important points for reflection.

Narrative research recognises that stories have very powerful properties (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narratives have the power to “promote human empowerment...challenge oppression, unnecessary suffering and discrimination” (Hiles & Čermák, 2008, p. 149) and can empower people to rediscover or imagine new futures (Freire, 1972). Stories also have a recuperative role (Atkinson, 1997; Frank, 2000) and can be used to 'remoralise' persons, relationships and communities (Frank, 2000, p. 355). As explored earlier in the thesis, however, stories such as those told by colonisers about 'natives' also have the potential to be oppressive and dehumanising. Within this thesis, I acknowledge this dual understanding of stories and storying in which stories may be both emancipatory and oppressive.

The participants of this research are young men who are talented, expressive and enormously misunderstood by the adults around them. As they shared their experiences of school, home and community, the common thread was that they felt disregarded and unheard. This research was never approached as an attempt to find answers, but to listen and relay the stories of the four young men. The study was grounded on valuing complexity and relied on working within

relationships built on trust and making connections. It was through collaborative efforts in coconstructing narratives (Spector-Mersel, 2010) that it developed into an opportunity for growth and learning that would benefit the participants, myself, and possibly even the wider social and academic community (Etherington, 2001, 2004; Rosenthal, 2003).

“Narrative imagination” as defined by Brockmeier (2009, p.227) is based on a notion of human agency in storytelling that allows a person to reach beyond their limits and opens up new possibilities. Our narratives are a product of our contexts, however, so Martin and Sugarman (1999) question the extent to which human agency and change can exist in a world that is culturally, socially and historically constructed. Although our narratives are contextually embedded and relational, agency, however constrained, is necessary for thinking about change (Bradbury & Miller, 2010) and creating space for imaginative possibility (White & Epston, 1990).

Throughout the research process I relied heavily on reflexive journaling and used it as a way of becoming aware of my positionality and changes to my understanding (MacNaughton, 2001; Ortlipp, 2008; Scheurich & Young, 1997). I also used the research diary to express my emotions and diffuse tensions to attempt to gain new perspectives. It helped to be able to take a step back at different points of the research, to talk things over with my supervisor, and share my concerns. His advice, guidance and reassurance were really helpful, especially in the moments where I felt too involved or felt too insecure to follow my own intuition in choosing a route to follow. I also found Connolly's (2007) advice helpful in which he states “doing this type of trauma or challenging research requires courage at the best of times, and fellow researchers must simply

understand that research involving this level of human interaction and human relationship is going to feel messy” (p.453). Connolly here uses the term ‘trauma’ to refer to the discomfort that can come with doing research that examines the personal experiences of individuals.

Throughout the thesis, the term ‘trauma’ is used to refer to the vicarious trauma felt as a result of hearing troubling stories. I understand, however, that ‘trauma’ brings with it a discourse that could be medicalising and damaging, so I use it with caution.

Ethics in research pays close attention to the emotional welfare of participants and rightly so, but researchers also need the support to work in potentially emotionally intense environments. In narrative research “the researcher is always partially naked and is genuinely open to legitimate criticism” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.423) and I would argue that maintaining a critically reflexive approach increases the trustworthiness and quality of the research.

Struggles with voice, stories and power

One of the main things I struggled with throughout the research process was voice. I acknowledge the powerful nature of storytelling and the research was designed in such a way that the voice of the participants would be at the forefront as much as possible. The intrinsic nature of a thesis; the expectation of a certain style, form and length, was a major factor to consider as a constraint on voice.

The ownership of stories also needed to be considered. The stories themselves belong to the participants, but the co-constructed and relational nature of the interpretation and analysis meant

that these lines were somewhat blurred. Josselson & McAdams (2007) states that although the texts themselves belong to the research participants, the interpretative authority belongs to the researcher. I would disagree with the latter point as it suggests that 'text' and 'interpretation' are distinct. I do understand that the ultimate presentation of the thesis is based on my final decisions and interpretations as researcher, however, and I accept responsibility for this. I also acknowledge that readers will form their own interpretations (Chase, 1996) and as Clough (2002) states that, “the stories require investment - of energy and emotion and intellect – and so will speak differently to different people” (p.18).

In order to maintain participant voice and make explicit my interpretations of the data, I aim to be explicit in my interpretations and include enough material from the original sources, so that the reader is able to understand where I stand and where my interpretations are drawn from, even if they don't agree with them. As a reflexive researcher, I am aware of the need to find balance between locating myself in the research and dominating it (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Lincoln & Denzin, 1995; Etherington, 2006). I have been engaged in a personal struggle with my own voice and at times found this balance difficult to maintain. I have encountered frequent clashes between my own personal, emotionally involved researcher, academic, and creative storyteller voices and have on many occasions found it difficult to reconcile these different motivations. In writing the thesis I attempted to subtly blend these different voices and came to realise that in allowing myself to develop a writing style that would allow the multiplicity of voices that were concurrently mine to come through, I had a much stronger sense of self in the thesis, though these voices were never in harmony.

One of the benefits of using a decolonising narrative approach to this research was the ability to examine and challenge power. It allowed me to critique labels such as West/Global South, and insider/outsider researcher as dichotomies that were neither fixed nor unchangeable. The approach allowed me to challenge hierarchical positioning in research relationships, instead opting for interdependence that enabled me to co-construct narratives with the participants

Writing up and feeling stuck

One thing I was not prepared for was the discomfort that would come with writing up. I had designed the research to the best of my ability to be participatory and communicative throughout. The participants had choice and power over the narratives they chose to share (or so I thought) and could come back to me throughout the transcription and analysis process to clarify points of misrepresentation or to take out things that they had said to me during reflective conversations as Muna, not as a researcher, and later felt were too personal to include. I felt as though I had done them no harm, that I was respectful and that I as a researcher felt safe in the knowledge that I was not abusing my power.

But then it came to writing up, and I was alone. The young men were ready to 'let go' of the stories they had shared and I was left to write and analyse them. Now, in addition to ethics of power, choice and representation, I was also forced to consider the ethics of ownership, authorship, and voice. When the participants told me that they no longer wanted to talk about their stories and that they were happy for me to write the thesis how I wanted, they said that it was

because the thesis was for academics and that they were more interested in how the research would be shared with the community; they wanted to be involved in this part only.

As I began writing the thesis, I found myself dissecting the reflective conversations to find aspects of their narratives that would 'fit' with the theories on self and identity, something that I quickly found would be hugely problematic. Although I made reference to postcolonial, decolonial, and anticolonial literature, the vast majority of texts I had included that conceptualised self and identity were Western texts, and I found myself using these understandings of self and identity as a framework in which to make sense of the narratives of the young men. By placing these dominant theories as the basis on which to analyse the narratives, I found myself moving away from what the data represented, and I couldn't see the voices of the young men or even mine in the sections I was writing. I decided to start again and this time to place the narratives at the centre and refer to theory only if and when it was appropriate.

Etherington (2004) suggests that being reflexive requires the researcher to have an awareness of their personal responses to experiences and to make decisions about how these experiences are used. Reflexivity requires not only an awareness of, but also an appropriate response to events and situations and an individual's personal, social and cultural context influences how they understand the world. All I could do was engage with the narratives using my knowledge of the participants, the analysis they provided, and my own interpretations. All stories are open to interpretation; I know that readers will form their own interpretations (Chase, 1996) just as I have. As Clough (2002) states, "the stories require investment - of energy and emotion and intellect and so will

speak differently to different people” (p.18). In writing their stories I found comfort and pain and in the process of putting together their stories and my interpretation, I relied on this comfort and pain to guide me.

The main challenge I found in working with these narratives was maintaining my quest to do research that brings stories from the margins to the centre (hooks, 1990). Scholars of colour and in particularly those doing indigenous work are routinely required to explain and justify their understandings and approaches against standard scientific theories and methodologies. I felt the fatigue of having the need to continually explain my approach against established research (Smith, 1999). I have tried to resist this in the write up and focus on centring the narratives of the young men, but there will undoubtedly be instances where I situate my arguments against scientific theories and methodology. I don't know if this need to perpetually explain and justify my position throughout this thesis is a response to both my PhD supervisors being White or being one of a few students of colour in a predominantly White institution, or questioning the extent to which my voice and the voices of those who are often silenced within these spaces could stand on their own. This has been my greatest challenge.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to share the story of the research process, including the ethical and methodological decisions that have informed it. In keeping with the narrative paradigm

within which I have worked, this chapter, as is the case for the entire thesis, has been written in a personal voice. In the previous chapter, I examined the literature I had explored and discussed the process I went through to select and critique the literature I would be referring to throughout the thesis. Just as that chapter (hopefully) captured the turbulence and unease I felt as I worked through the literature, this chapter offers insight into the research process and all the challenges I encountered along the way.

CHAPTER 4: 'POLITICS OF BELONGING'

MUSTAFA'S NARRATIVE

Introducing Mustafa

My name is Mustafa and I am 15 years old. I have two sisters and a brother. I was born in the UK but I go to Somalia every year with my family for a holiday. I like rapping and reading books about history.

Mustafa started attending the community centre because he had been excluded from several schools and his mother feared that he would become involved in criminal activities, just as his older brother had. The community centre was seen as a place to keep him safe. A month before I approached Mustafa to ask if he would like to take part in the research his brother was killed. I was reluctant to ask Mustafa, but when I approached the other young men about the research, Mustafa heard and wanted to take part and his mother also granted consent. She said that he needed to talk because he wasn't talking to the family.

During the initial group discussion Mustafa did not engage at all and it was only during the reflective conversations that he felt he was able to tell me why. He did not want to speak in front of the other young men, because his brother's reputation meant that he had to maintain a self-proclaimed 'hard man' persona, and he feared that the questions he wanted to ask or answer may have made him appear weak. Mustafa produced several artefacts as part of Stage 2 of the data collection, ranging from poems, short stories and letters. He decided that the two artefacts that would be discussed as part of his narrative would be a poem and letter.

Mustafa's poem

This poem is about people telling me where I do and don't belong and about me not knowing what that means (Mustafa, reflective conversation)

Untitled [POEM]

To tell my story I will start at the end,

Because my story was written before I was born.

I don't belong

I do belong

What is the difference?

Depends who you ask, where you ask, what you ask

Ask my parents and they say I am Somali, there is where I belong

Ask my parents and they say I'm not English, this is not where I belong

Ask my teachers and they say I am trouble, exclusion is where I belong

Ask my teachers and they say I don't have potential, this school is not where I belong Ask

the old men outside the mosque and they say I am ⁴*dagan ilis*, back home is where I belong

Ask the old men outside the mosque and they say I am not a Somali man

Wait....Somali man? What is that?

Am I not a Somali man because I speak English and not Somali?

Am I not a Somali man because I am friends with non- Somalis?

Am I not a Somali man because I help my mum?

What do they mean I am not a Somali man?

They never say. No parent, no teacher and no old men ever say 'why?'

So when they say I do belong or I don't belong,

⁴ Although the direct translation for *dagan ilis* is 'restoring culture' and is often used in reference to Somalis raised in the West who are encouraged to return to Somalia to 'relearn' the culture, Mustafa in his narrative, understands it to mean 'the lost generation'.

What is the difference?

“The Mustafa I knew was an outgoing, boisterous young man who was always the loudest in the room, nothing like the young man who had just walked silently into the room this morning with his back hunched as if he was carrying a heavy load. He was. There was so much frustration in his voice; I could almost imagine him writing this poem with the pen pushed so hard against the paper that it almost pierced through. Mustafa submitted his artefacts to me a week prior to us meeting ...a week of nervous anticipation waiting for what I knew would be a difficult conversation.”

[Research diary, June 12th 2014]

You asked me what I think about what it means to belong... I don't know, but I know what it feels like to not be allowed to belong (Mustafa, reflective conversation)

Mustafa's letter

Dear Mr English,

I am a visitor from a faraway land that you have welcomed and expelled at the same time. I write to you grateful but confused and lost. I want to know why you hate me, when I should hate you. I want to know why you don't trust me, when I should not trust you. I want to know why you don't hear me even when I speak with your words. All I have ever done was try to be free but I don't know what freedom is. I write to you to ask you to tell me who I am. Am I English? Or is the smile you show me every day a disguise for how much you wish I never came? I am reminded of you everywhere I go. Even when I go back home you are there. How can I be English? What will it take? I am reminded every time I go into a classroom that I am not English. That I can never be English. I am too

black to be seen. My home is filled with marks you have left but you have never turned back to see if we survived. I can tell you yes we have survived, but your mark is still with us all. I am more English than you will believe but believe me when I say I would rather go home. So Mr English tell my family I'm coming home, they will only believe it if it comes from you. But tell them I am too smart to belong there and too dark to belong here. Tell them that you don't hate me, just tell them you just don't understand why I don't hate you. I don't hate you.

Yours sincerely

A visitor.

“I felt haunted by his words... there was so much pain in his eyes as he spoke. He wasn't angry. I wasn't sure if he understood the colonial history but he clearly had. He spoke as if he had lived it... I guess he has, we all continue to. This was one of the hardest conversations I have had so far during data collection because there is so much I wanted to say...even though he wasn't angry, I was. But his words, though heavy to carry on the shoulders of a 15 year-old, showed signs of hope...I learnt so much about forgiveness from him.”

[Research diary, June 12th 2014]

Introduction

This poem and letter give rich accounts of Mustafa's experience of being 'othered'. The first artefact, the poem looks at how much of what we know about ourselves is often through the stories told by others. It looks at the ways in which Mustafa is positioned within and outside categories and how he begins to question what these categories mean. The second artefact, the letter, interrogates ideas of nationality and the racial discourse that surrounds what it means to be 'English'. This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the artefacts and explores themes of belonging and national identity as well as resistant subjectivities, and internalised otherness/displacement. The chapter discusses Mustafa's narratives of belonging based on both his lived experience and the wider cultural and social narratives that surround him. Direct quotes from the reflective conversation are used throughout the analysis to make Mustafa's voice explicit. The analysis and discussion also take into account my experience of the reflective conversations and my interpretation of Mustafa's artefacts and overall narrative.

Finding the words

In his poem Mustafa makes explicit the binaries of belonging and not-belonging that exist and how he is 'placed' in and out of these categories by the different people around him. In the reflective conversation, Mustafa contemplated these binaries and explained how unhelpful they are in their contradictory nature.

In the first part of our reflective conversation, Mustafa and I discussed his poem. Mustafa recounts the event that led him to write the poem:

*Have you ever felt like you're just stuck? I'm sick of everyone telling me what I'm not! ...
The other day I got excluded from school, yet again and my teacher as usual start goin' on
about how I'm never goin' to change and calls my mum ...as usual hooyo [mum] tells me
to stop causing trouble and reminds me that this is not our country so we have to be
respectful... not my country, not my school. I remembered what you said and decided to
write something about the bullshit they were saying*

In his narration of the events that led him write the poem, Mustafa raised his voice and looked visibly frustrated. He spoke about how the people around him seemed to 'know' him better than he knew himself. His narrative is one of choice (or lack thereof) and positioning.

In his letter, Mustafa speaks about the contradictory nature of national identity and the effects of space and colonial/racial discourses on subject positioning and identification.

Mustafa explained how he came to write the letter:

*The letter is like a sort of imaginary letter... I don't know who it's to...I guess to all the
white people around me, to my neighbour who always shouts, to the people in the streets,
to my teachers... no forget that, this is definitely to my teachers*

When I asked Mustafa to explain why he chose to write the letter, he said he didn't know. Unlike when he was speaking about the poem, Mustafa spoke calmly about the content of the letter. He said, *when people piss me off I write a letter like you said, and I don't send it but writing the letter helps*. Much of the work I did with the young men was around creative writing as a form of

expression and it was clear from Mustafa's narrative that those sessions influenced his approach. Rather than accept that Mustafa may have chosen to write a letter and poem to show me how much he has been paying attention in the sessions, however, I chose to believe that those sessions merely added to Mustafa's creative repertoire and that he selected the mode of expression that felt appropriate to him.

When Mustafa initially started coming to the centre, his mother said he was getting in trouble in school because he was always so angry. It took longer for Mustafa than any of the other young men to trust me and even when he did he never really actively engaged much in the sessions. Most of the young men in my group at the centre were there because their parents or teachers felt their 'aggressive' behaviour was having an adverse effect on their school work. It is important for me to say here that throughout the entire time I worked with these young men - even before a level of trust developed- I never experienced anything from them that I would identify as aggression; frustration perhaps, but not aggression. The support I was offering these young men was on the surface creative writing skills, but this organically developed into listening support.

The poem: Their stories are my story

I asked Mustafa to talk me through his poem, but before he did I asked him to explain what he meant by the first couple of lines *To tell you my story I will start at the end, because my story was written before I was born*. Mustafa said that these lines were actually added onto the completed poem. He said: *I felt like I needed to explain the poem and it makes no sense without those two lines*. Mustafa explained that these lines reflect how he feels about the positions and categories

people around him are placing him in and out of. He spoke of how he *knows* who he is *supposed to be* and how he is *supposed to act* because of this story that has been written for him to live out, whether he approves of it or not.

This subjection, as Butler (1997) describes, is to “be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully our own” (p.28). As Mustafa refers to his story as already ‘written’ he is speaking of a process of subjection in which he feels he has no power in how he is identified. We constitute our social identities through the social narratives that surround us and as Somers (1994) states, “all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making” (p.606). Mustafa in this poem is questioning the way he is positioned within these hegemonic social narratives that surround him. In saying *before I was born* Mustafa articulates how these predetermined expectations which are not of his own making, are re-enacted by him in his everyday life.

In the poem he goes on to discuss what it means to be Somali and British from the perspective of his parents, teachers, and elders in his community. In discussing the binaries set by each of these groups of people, Mustafa made reference to how space, behaviour, and language are used as a means to create these differentiating expectations. Each of the groups of people mentioned in the poem have distinct views on what it means to ‘be’ or ‘not be’.

The narratives of Mustafa’s parents were very much focused on national identity and place. They make reference to the ‘here’; the current space in which he resides, England being a place where

he ‘does not’ belong, and ‘there’; Somalia being the place where he ‘does’ belong. Mustafa explained that to his parents, the national identity ‘here’ is racial which is why they say, *we can never belong to a White country; we will eventually have to go home*. Mustafa understood what his parents were saying and explained that his parents would continually encourage him to feel a sense of belonging ‘back home’ because it would protect him from any difficulty he may face here. Mustafa acknowledged this narrative as being a powerful part of his self- concept, but explained that he could not understand why these binaries had to exist. He said *I get I’m not English but I am in England and I get I’m Somali but I’m not in Somalia, it’s hard to not be English and live here*. Mustafa stated that he understood that his parents wanted to protect him, but felt guilty because he could not help but be drawn to the idea of being English. He explained that he was raised in England and that this was “all he knew” and that Somalia was the place he was *supposed to live* but never has and perhaps never will.

Mustafa went on to explain how the narratives of his teachers, just as those of his parents, were focused on notions of belonging that were racialized and located in a particular space; this time the school. Both of the statements made by his teachers in the poem were negative and in both statements he is placed outside of the school, firstly because of his supposed behaviour and secondly because he *does not have potential*. Mustafa explains that he does not feel as though the school is a safe space for him and as we spoke about his experience of schooling he went back to the lines in the poem about his parents and said: *this is what they meant, I think this is what my mum meant when she said belonging to Somalia will protect me*.

Mustafa explained that he felt as though school was a racialized space and that his teachers had *bad expectations* of him because of racial stereotypes of ‘Black’ boys. When I asked what he meant by *does not have potential*, he said that he did not feel as though his teachers wanted him to be any different from what they already assumed him to be. This made him angry and was one of the main hegemonic narratives he could not understand or accept. Though Mustafa could accept the possible reasoning behind his parents’ narrative, there was a resentment towards his teachers because of his resistance to their narratives.

Bodies of (not) belonging

In the reflective conversation, Mustafa stated that the poem was not simply about being placed in and out of categories but how *people decide who I am, by just looking at me*. He explained that his physical body determined people’s perceptions of him just as much as the way people talked about his body did.

The body is not necessarily the physical but the experiences and interactions that happen with, on and through the body. When Deleuze and Guattari (1987) spoke about the body, for example, they were not referring solely to the physical human body, but a complex assemblage of elements organised into patterns of relating. Just like in the poem, the body to Deleuze and Guattari is an abstract term that is used to refer to both the physical body and organised bodies of knowledge. The body cannot exist without context and in the case of Mustafa’s narrative, the discourses of race, nationality and gender that surround him are the context of his subject formation. These discourses are the organising elements of his assemblage and it is through these discourses that he comes to know himself.

Mustafa parents remind him that his *Somalianness* is tied to him *belonging to Somalia*, just as he feels that his *not belonging* at school is linked to his supposed racial identity. He states that he understands who he *needs to be* in these spaces based on how he believes he is perceived.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that a subject, like all forms of being, is an assemblage that only emerges as an *effect* of its becoming. The body becomes an active agent - a self in its own formation, a shaped object of social relations of power. It is only when the body exists as a position already given and made actual that it can begin to strategically choose positions of action in order to transform as it wills. Mustafa is well aware that he is 'placed' through the discourses that surround him, but these discourses are not fixed.

Deleuze and Guattari speak of the subject assemblage as always acting within the constraints of existing as a "collective enunciation" (1987, p.79-80) or rather a collection of discourses and practices, and that the subject can locate himself within the multiplicity of these discourses to note the points at which their meanings shift and overlap. It could be argued that this is what Mustafa is doing.

Although Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage is a useful lens in which to understand the complex discourses and practices that surround the subject, the language used to describe this concept is metaphorical, suggestive, and elusive and this makes it difficult to use as an analytical tool. Also, the concept, with its emphasis on the internal interconnectedness of its many components, does not take into account the function of power within this relationality.

For this reason, Fanon's (1968) social theory in my opinion offers a more vivid and analytical consideration of the body as a political space. Fanon states:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. (Fanon, 1968, p.216f)

Fanon (1968) asserts that humanity is a function of being recognised by others in social relationships, in that we are human only to the extent to which we try and impose our existence on others in order to be recognised by them. For as long we have not been effectively recognised by that other - in this case the social relationships from which we are seeking recognition - our actions will be directed towards gaining that recognition. Fanon argues that an individual's worth and human reality is dependent on recognition from that other, thus that other will then reduce in meaning in that individual's life.

It is through his performance of sociability that Mustafa can position himself as a part of the social assemblage. Beyond exploring the complexity of the different ways in which he is positioned within and outside of particular identities, he also explores the ways in which, as Fanon argues, his being is defined by prescribed expectations and standards. Mustafa articulates how he is (not) recognised depending on the extent to which he meets the set expectations that reduce and compartmentalise how he is able to exist. This encounter as the 'other' and process of

recognition is simultaneously met with both fear and desire. This is because in being 'looked at' and recognised by presubscribed assumptions, an individual is brought into being, but this recognition also threatens to steal an individual's being by being objectified by their 'gaze'. For Mustafa, these simultaneously contradictory experiences of being both accepted and denied are the everyday tools by which he is able to understand and navigate his self in these spaces. He is acutely aware of the ways in which he is configured by the gazes from which he continues to seek recognition, but is troubled by the ways in which his self is also reduced through this process. This is echoed in the often contradictory feelings he expressed when he spoke about his response to his position, or his understanding of the logic of those around him. It is as if he is justifying the behaviour/attitudes of those around him as being necessary whilst simultaneously blaming them for the frustration he feels.

Spaces of (not) belonging

An individual's identities are not constructed along a single axis of difference (gender, race, class etc), but are rather intersectional (Crenshaw, 1999). In the case of Mustafa's narrative, these lines of difference are nationality, religion, gender, and race. Although these hegemonic narratives make certain subject positions available to inhabit, the actuality of social categories are a lot more complex, contradictory, fragmented and shifting (Frosh et al., 2002). These categories do not accumulate but instead inflect one another, resulting in social distinctions that contradict and shape one another (McCall, 2005). It is for this reason that we see individuals both identifying and disidentifying with particular groups and as stated in the section above, also having fluctuating emotional experiences and investments in different subject positions.

The identities that we construct for ourselves and that are constructed for us are situated and are performed both in and through difference spaces, such as the home, the school, the nation and diaspora. Because our identities are situated in particular spaces, one identity category may well be performed or denied to differentiate from another in a specific context and certain subject positions may become irrelevant or significant in a particular space (Valentine, 2007).

In his narrative of the poem, Mustafa discusses the ways in which his identities are formed and challenged based on his context. He explains that when he is at home, the most dominant discourse are those narrated by his parents, who remind him of his commitment to a symbolic place. He then states that within the school space there is a focus on his race and gender. He is brought into being as a *Black boy* and the perceived expectations of this constructed subject position influence his behaviour and his experience of this space. These spaces (home and school) both hold particular expectations of Mustafa, but when these spatial norms and expectations contradict (which they often do), Mustafa's performance in these spaces determine whether or not he is considered 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996), resulting in a process of exclusion that defines the person 'not to be' (Sibley, 1995). Mustafa must therefore perform these expected subject positions in order to 'be' in these spaces. It is important to note here that this is a discussion of the ways in which Mustafa is marked by others in a particular subject position and does not necessarily give insight into how he self-identifies.

Mustafa believed that his treatment at school and the reason for his 'exclusions' were because of the perceived persona of a *Black boy* that he felt pressured to perform. It was a presentation of

masculinity that was exaggerated to meet the expectations of that space. He related his schooling experience and the exclusions as likening to his brother's experience with the police.

He said:

It's not like I like being excluded but I'm used to it. I get angry sometimes and I make mistakes but when someone tells you you're nothing but trouble all the time what can you do? They always say I'm like my brother... they never liked him, but they are just like the police... they always watched my brother even when he did nothing wrong, that's I how I feel in school

Mustafa compared his interactions with his teachers to his brother's interactions with the police.

The Macpherson Report, published in 1999 as a result of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, discusses institutional racism within the policing system and highlights that this not only refers to explicit acts of racism, but also subtle, pervasive acts of indirect racism that happen on a daily basis. In Mustafa's narrative, he talked about his every encounter with his teachers as being laced with racist undertones. He talked about *their eyes always looking over at me like they knew I was about to do something and acting like they didn't see anything when someone was doing something to me but seeing everything I did even when they weren't in the room.*

Mustafa explained that his parents' narratives of Somalia and their encouraging him to adopt a sense of belonging to the space were built on both his parents' fear of his treatment here and a recognition of his obligations 'back home'. Mustafa, as a man, had to *know where he came from*. In Somali culture, it is the man who carries on the family name and the politics of his tribe, therefore Mustafa had responsibilities and expectations beyond himself. Studies on the return

migration of people from Somaliland show a clear distinction between the genders, with far more men returning than women (Hansen, 2004). Somali masculinity is centred on the political and economic contribution made by men and many male returners from Western countries believe that their 'homeland' offers more opportunities to fulfil these expectations of masculinity than the Western countries in which they reside (Hansen, 2004). This is why Mustafa acknowledged this role and saw the reiterated narratives of his parents as a reminder of what is expected of him as a Somali man.

The one context that Mustafa found the most challenging to negotiate was his interactions with the men in his community. This is not a physical space like the home or school, but is still very much a part of his everyday social reality. To Mustafa, the explanations offered by his parents made sense, however difficult it may be for him to entirely accept. Though he felt a level of animosity towards his teachers because of his treatment at school, it is the narratives of his parents that once again enabled him to make sense of this space. Mustafa saw neither the home nor school as spaces in which he could challenge the prevailing attitudes, so he negotiated his way around the two. His interactions with the men in the community, however, seemed to elicit a more overt and direct response from Mustafa. Mustafa explained that the men in his community go beyond what his parents and his teachers say to position him. In the interactions with the men in his community, the space and Mustafa's right to inhabit it is brought into question and more beyond. Mustafa says in the poem:

Ask the old men outside the mosque and they say I am not a Somali man

Wait....Somali man? What is that?

Am I not a Somali man because I speak English and not Somali?

Am I not a Somali man because I am friends with non-Somalis?

Am I not a Somali man because I help my mum?

What do they mean I am not a Somali man?

Here Mustafa speaks about how his identification as a Somali man is denied by the men around him. To Mustafa this is far more injurious and hurtful than the exclusionary narratives of space presented by his parents and teachers. Both the narratives of his parents and teachers centre on deeply rooted ideas around masculinity and space and Mustafa explains his attempts to navigate his way around them rather than questioning the purpose of these narratives. The narratives of the men in his community are different, however. These narratives not only question, but in effect deny Mustafa any attributes of masculinity; or at least Somali masculinity.

Mustafa spoke about the way in which the narratives of the men in his community made him feel emasculated:

You can't tell me I'm not a Somali man, what the fuck ... they always say me and the other Somali boys are not Somali men, they say we are just iyaal suug⁵ and they say that we don't act like men should act... it's like they just cut your balls off!

Mustafa talked about how frustrated this made him feel and how this resulted in him drifting even further away from the men in his community. He said because the old men would deny Mustafa

⁵ Translates to mean street roamers.

and his friends the right to claim an authentic Somali identity, Mustafa decided to stop trying to impress them. He said: *they've made up their mind so why bother* as he talked about their unwillingness to accept him and his peers.

What is the difference?

Mustafa concludes his poem by repeating the poignant question *what is the difference?* to show the ambivalence of his identities. Mustafa spoke about falling between the 'either' and the 'or' and as we concluded the reflective conversation on the poem, he said that he never comfortably *fit into* the subject positions that had been constructed for him. Whilst he may not have 'fit' into these subject positions, he also spoke about feeling a disapproved *connection* to the subject positions that had been denied to him. Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of ambivalence may help to explore this sense of in-between-ness that Mustafa describes. Bhabha (1994) defines ambivalence as culture which consists of opposing perceptions; a duality that presents a split in the identity of the colonised. He argues that the colonised 'other' becomes a hybrid of their own culture and that of the coloniser, but that they cannot either be like the original version of either cultural identity because of the acts of repetition and construction that redefine them, nor can they be identical to either culture by virtue of the differences that define them. The ambivalence of the colonial presence lies in its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as 'difference'. The colonised 'other' is therefore pulled into an imposed colonial discourse, whilst simultaneously recognising his difference and distance from the coloniser. This analysis of colonial in-between-ness offers an interesting interpretation to what Mustafa might be experiencing as he struggles between 'fitting in' and 'not fitting in'.

By ending the poem with *what is the difference?* Mustafa presents the constructed binaries of belonging and not belonging as being indistinct and blurred. Mustafa is aware of the complexity of his lived experience and recognises the contradictions that exist in and between these different social categories. As he negotiates his way around these subject positions, he questions if there is really any difference. Just as there are criteria that are used to place him 'in' a group, there are other criteria in a different space that are used to place him 'outside'. The question "what is the difference?" may thus be the same as Mustafa asking if one can belong and not belong at the same time. It is almost as if Mustafa sees his experience as a lived paradox. He has in effect internalised his otherness and displacement and occupies a space that is neither stable nor entirely welcomed.

Hall (1992) spoke about the problematic nature of having 'an identity' and argued that different social and spatial contexts produce alternative subject positions that may be occupied. Subject positions that often juxtapose and are thought unimaginable to occupy simultaneously, but are still claimed by people as a process of making sense of the self. It is not enough that an identity be claimed by an individual, as Bell et al. (1994) state; it is dependent (at least in part) on the identity of the individual being accepted or recognised by the wider community of practice.

Despite the fact that the poem ends with a question designed to bring to light the ambiguity of social subject formations, Mustafa is aware that the only way to secure his identities is to maintain the expectations of that subject position in order to be recognised as that subject in the relevant context.

The letter: Dear Mr. English

When I asked Mustafa to talk me through his letter, he began with an apology:

Sorry, I just re-read it and I didn't realise it sounded so bad...are you going to get in trouble if you include it?

I was taken aback by his apology and when I asked Mustafa why he would think there would be negative repercussions to his letter, he responded:

Well the letter is talking to an English person and your teachers are English right? I thought you might get in trouble if I say something bad about them...I know you understand but they won't get it.

In that moment I felt a sense of both heartache and relief. This young man was conscious of his audience. I knew that by 'English' he meant 'white' and as a narrative that is part of an academic text, in a Western university, I knew as well as he did that there was a high probability that those that would read his narrative would be the very people to which the letter referred. I assured him that as long as the letter was meaningful to him, it was meaningful to the project and we proceeded to discuss the content.

I felt a sense of relief in hearing him say *I know you understand*. As someone who holds more than one positionality in this project, I've been working with a sense of in-between-ness; not quite academic, not quite researcher, not quite English, and at times, not quite Somali. Both the participants and I understood that during the research process I would not be working with them

as a youth worker, but as a researcher. But as we discussed this letter, it was clear to both Mustafa and I that we were part of a shared collective experience. The issues Mustafa discussed were very much a personal account of his own experience, but the social and historical contexts he draws on such as everyday practices of racism and colonial heritage are inherent in the experiences of all the participants and myself. In that moment, for me to hear him say *I know you understand*, was an affirmation for me that I was part of his narrative.

Speaking to Mr. English

Before discussing the content of the letter, I asked Mustafa to talk to me about who ‘Mr English’ was. He said:

I said ‘Mr’ ‘cos I’m talking to a man, it would be weird to say ‘Dear Mrs English’ because I’m not talking about what women do, even though some of my teachers are women, but I mean when I think about English I think man anyway

Mustafa explained that to be ‘English’ was to be White and male, and though he acknowledged that White, English women; his teachers were also part of the narrative he was sharing, it was still very much a male dominated context he was referring to.

Mustafa then went on to explain what he meant by being a ‘visitor’:

My parents always say we’re visitors and that we will have to go back one day. I used to think that was a lie, that my parents were just saying that to scare me in case I messed up... but they were right. I remember the stories from my mum about how she came here

during the war in Somalia and how grateful she was to be safe...I was born here and I'm grateful I never saw any of the war in Somalia but I still feel like I came here with my mum during the war if that makes sense?

The narrative of 'going back home' that is reiterated by Mustafa's parents are not uncommon. Somali parents tell their children stories of Somalia in order to ensure that their children have a sense of belonging and connection and so that they will be ready for an inevitable return once peace and stability are restored to the country (Valentine et al., 2008). Mustafa is emotionally invested in this subject position and though he has visited Somalia several times growing up and spoke about feeling like 'an outsider' there, he still felt a sense of displacement and lost homeland. Echoing the stories of his parents, he understood the importance of emplacement.

He spoke about feeling as though he had shared the experience of his mother through the stories she had told him. It is through the stories his parents have told him that he is able to imagine a Somalia beyond what he has seen for himself. Pratt (2002), in her research with Filipino immigrants to Canada, discusses how parents' experiences of dislocation impact on their children's self-identities. Using Hirsch's (1997) concept of 'postmemory'; the notion that young people only 'remember' the stories of the past through their parents, Pratt demonstrates how experiences, particularly traumatic experiences, are passed down from parents to their children.

Mustafa's parents have not told him stories of the trauma they have faced, however. Like those that participated in the study of Valentine et al. (2009), Mustafa's parents only spoke to him of the positive experiences and would not speak to him of the hardship. Valentine et al. (2009) state that

parents are anxious in their study wanted to avoid burdening their children with negative postmemories and wanted to protect their children from the trauma. I believe this may be one of the reasons why Mustafa's parents do not speak to him of the hardship. It may also be the case that creating a positive image of Somalia may strengthen Mustafa's emotional bond to the land. Mustafa goes on to explain how he feels both *welcomed and expelled at the same time*.

Reiterating his comments on the poem, he said:

It's kinda like feeling like it's your right to be somewhere but at the same time you feel like you've come into someone's house uninvited"

Mustafa spoke of feeling as though he was an intruder. He could not understand why there was so much animosity and mistrust towards him. He spoke of what he had read about colonialism and about the war in Somalia and said: *I have done nothing wrong, I don't understand why they see me as bad*. In the first few lines of the letter Mustafa explained that he felt as though he had more of a right to be angry because of the colonial history of Britain in Somalia, but that he did not feel any anger, just confusion. After initially asking questions in the letter to try and understand the way he has been treated, Mustafa made a powerful statement: *I ask you to tell me who I am*. Here Mustafa recognises the power of those to which he is referring to in the letter. By asking them to tell him who he is, he positions himself as passive to his own self-identification.

When I asked Mustafa how it felt to be 'told' who to be he said:

We are strangers here. It doesn't matter how long we've been here or how good we speak

English...none of that matters. All they see is that we are Black. When people see you as a stranger all your life, you feel out of place and you start to see yourself as a stranger...it hurts.

The notion of a 'stranger' was something that Mustafa returned to several terms during our conversations. He equated the feeling of strangeness as being like a "camel living with cats". Through his analogy, Mustafa explained that he felt as though he was trying to be something he's not (a cat) but he's reminded of his difference by the people around him.

Now you don't know who you are so you listen to people so they can tell you who you are...I know I'm a stranger

Both Fanon (1963) and Du Bois (1994) discuss the notion of 'double consciousness' in their work. Du Bois and Fanon refer to double conscious as a form of cognitive dissonance; existing in two places at once and being in a constant state where you see yourself through the eyes of another. Both Fanon and Du Bois also talk about the violence of double consciousness, with Fanon likening it to a "haemorrhage" (p. 26) and Du Bois uses the imagery of the Black body being "torn asunder" (p.1). This imagery of amputation or violent separation of the body is echoes in Mustafa's narrative as he speaks of the "hurt" that comes with being positioned and in turn seeing yourself as a "stranger". Mustafa explored this idea of strangeness further as he began to think about what it means to simultaneously live within and outside of a nation.

'Imagined communities': What is a nation?

It is impossible to live amongst a nation and know the majority of its citizens. You cannot know their names nor do you meet them, yet you are convinced that you belong to a unique national community. This is what Anderson (1988) refers to as 'imagined communities'. A nation is cut off from surrounding nations by perceived boundaries that are both spatial and discursive. The notion of 'national identity' is based on the idea that there is a common history that is shared. This common history is based on selective recollection of past events that are deemed important to that specific community; what Halbwach (1992) referred to as *collective memory*. Though the term 'collective' is contentious to say the least it does allow the nation to reify abstract concepts (Burke, 1991) in order to find connections between theoretical discourses on national identity and the symbolic activities of everyday life.

Halbwach (1992) focused on the role of memory in constructing national identity. Hall (1994), however, emphasised the role of culture in constructing national identities. Hall describes nations as both political constructs and "systems of cultural representation" (1994, p.200), by means of which Anderson's (1988) 'imagined community' might be understood. This national culture is described as "a discourse - a way of constructing meaning with influences and organises both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves" (Hall, 1996, p.201). These discourses create meanings for the collective nation that enable individuals to identify with and be influenced by both the past and future identities that are constructed through it.

Hall (1996), states that the term 'nation' extends further than the idea of an 'imagined community'. He argues that national identity works to bring together modern political agendas and ideas of family and community. These two agendas are unified to create an idea that makes

policy and culture congruent. In unifying these two agendas whilst still maintaining an ethos of a collective/shared memory, however, national identities fail to acknowledge differences such as gender, social class, and race that exist within any given nation. A national identity seeks to unify all of its members by creating one single cultural identity, which replaces or negates their individual identities in order that they may be initiated as part of the ‘family of the nation’. National identity, or rather the nation’s cultural identity, thus fails to respect the cultural differences within its nation and rather than acting as a tool to unify its members, creates a set of complex relationships between various groups to create and maintain a structure of cultural power.

Cultural citizenship

The concept of cultural citizenship developed by Delanty (2003) addresses the subjective experiences of identification and belonging in a given society. Delanty states that cultural citizenship is developed through everyday practices and that citizen identities are rooted in the participation of social practices. Delanty focuses on cultural citizenship in relation to the ways institutions such as schools become a part of new politics of childhood governance by educating and disciplining children and youth to be ‘good citizens’. Delanty (2003) is very critical of what he refers to as the ‘govenmentalization’ of schooling and the ways in which it acts as a form of disciplining colonisation, meaning schools act as tools of colonialism. Delanty states that cultural citizenship is reduced to ‘cognitive competence’ and as a result, subjective experiences and feelings of belonging are ignored (Delanty, 2003, p.599).

This critical is echoed by Hart (2009) who argues that governmental programmes aimed at developing young people into 'citizens' are characterised by discrimination which alienate particular children and young people from the community in question. She argues that in order to encourage more inclusive and empowered citizen identities, there must be a process of equality, respect and mutual trust (Hart, 2009).

In (not) being English

Hall (1996) refers to the 'Narrative of the nation' here as selective stories and events that represent the shared experiences, memories and emotions that give meaning to a nation. These historical experiences connect with the daily lives of individuals in significant ways by presenting a national destiny; an accepted narrative that existed as part of the nation before us and will continue to exist after us. An example of this given by Hall (1996) is the discourse of 'Englishness' and how this represents and attempts to defines what 'being English' means. In Mustafa's poem the narrative of the nation is explicit and the repetition of the word 'English' demonstrates the weight and value the identification of that term represents. Throughout the letter, Mustafa discusses how much of the narratives of 'Englishness' actively exclude him:

Englishness of course means white, everyone knows that. I know that but I still don't want to believe it. I want to believe I can be English, I know I can't but I want to believe that I can.

Here Mustafa recognises that the racialized discourse which surrounds the hegemonic narrative of what it means to be 'English' and as such he states that it is not an identity that would enable him

to be recognised, even if he was to claim it. Ghassen Hage (2008) in his text discussing ‘the affective politics of racial misinterpellation’ makes reference to the work of Fanon as he explains how the process of racial misinterpellation works. He states that one claims to position themselves as having a particular subject position in a public space, only for their identity claims to be rejected. Hage (2008) also goes on to say that it is not enough to claim an identity, but that the identity must be ascribed and recognised by others.

He who is reluctant to recognize me is against me. In a fierce struggle I am willing to feel the shudder of death, the irreversible extinction, but also the possibility of impossibility (Fanon, 1963, p.193)

I am drawn to this quote from Fanon’s (1963) *Black skin, White masks*, which powerfully highlight to connection between the concepts of racial identity and recognition. Drawing on the work of philosophers such as Hegel, Fanon asserts that individuals who identify/are identified as Black desire mutual recognition as a fundamental condition of “self-worth, identity, and even humanity” (Bulhan, 1985, p.103).

Mustafa’s letter is partly about the need for recognition, but beyond that it tells a narrative of internalised otherness *and the danger of misrecognition*. Many theorists have discussed the notion that a part of recognition is reciprocity, which is the idea that we exist in relation to others (Fanon, 1963; Turner, 1991). The concept of reciprocated recognition suggests that we recognise ourselves by being recognised by others and that we continually change in relation to others and ourselves

(Wynne, 2000). In this sense, recognition is a dialogical process that is shaped by our evaluations of self; both internally and our interactions with our social world (Taylor, 1992).

Summary

This letter and poem offer rich accounts of Mustafa's experience of being 'othered' by the different people around him. The poem looked at how much of what we know about ourselves is often through the stories told by others. It showed the ways in which Mustafa is positioned within and outside categories and how he began to question what these categories meant. The letter then interrogated ideas of nationality and the racial discourse that surround what it means to be 'English'. This chapter offered an analysis and discussion of the artefacts and explored the themes of belonging and national identity, as well as resistant subjectivities and internalised otherness/ displacement. The chapter discussed Mustafa's narratives of belonging based on both his lived experience and the wider cultural and social narratives that surround him.

CHAPTER 5: 'DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS'

AHMED'S NARRATIVE

I am Ahmed and I am 16 years old. I have 2 sisters and I live with my mum. I come to the centre once a week and I like it. The teachers are fun and I can come and talk to friends about different things. The centre is different because I feel respected and Muna always listen to me when I talk.

Ahmed was 16 years old at the point of data collection. He is the oldest of his three siblings and came to the UK with his mother when he was six years old. Ahmed's favourite subject in school

is geography and his hobbies are art and playing computer games. He joined the support sessions at the centre because his mother said that he was continuously ‘getting into trouble’ at school and she wanted him to develop study skills. It became clear over time, however, that Ahmed willingly attended the centre because he was being bullied at school and the centre provided a safe learning environment for him.

Ahmed was the most timid of the young men in the study and would often sit quietly at the back of the room sketching on the back of his notebooks. He would show me his sketches and would say that he found it easier to draw than speak. Despite his shyness, Ahmed was a popular member of the group and made friendships with all the young men in the study. When he was invited to take part in the study, Ahmed was the only young man to ask if he could include his drawings. He produced several sketches as part of Stage 2 of the data collection and selected the two images below as the basis for the reflective conversations.

Introduction

This chapter examines the themes that emerged from the reflective conversations with Ahmed in which these two images acted as a starting point. The first section of the chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the first image. This section reflects the split nature of the image, by providing a split narrative in which one half explores the ways in which ‘Blackness’ is shaped and performed within a classroom context, and the other half looking at the way in which religion and culture are performed and negotiated, as well as the role of clothing on subject positioning and identification.

The second section of this chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the second image, which uses the metaphor of a lion to look at changing masculinities and the ways in which cultural and social understandings of masculinity are influenced by history, politics, media, and religion.

Direct quotes from the reflective conversations with Ahmed will be used throughout to contextualise the themes being discussed. My reflections, recorded as part of my research diary, will be included too.

Ahmed's drawing - 1



I don't want them to see me, I don't want to be different

I think this is what Du Bois meant when he was talking about 'double consciousness'. I feel as though this image is of two meeting worlds, or perhaps two living personas. I

have seen these two 'sides' of Ahmed. The image on the right is the Ahmed I know from the community centre and the image on the left is the Ahmed I see on his way to school. Clothing and the perceived image of who we are really does affect how people relate to us and how we in turn see ourselves. As a Black, Muslim woman I know this all too well and though I imagine masculinity will definitely be discussed by Ahmed in relation to this picture, I think the idea of religious and racial 'visibility' affects both men and women.

[Research diary, June 16th 2014]

Section 1: The racialized self

This section looks at the half of Ahmed's portrait that represents his racialized self. These analysis of this image draws on the work of Fanon, in terms of 'Phenomenology of Race' and 'the doubled self' (1967; 2004), Butler's *Subjection and performativity* (1990; 1997) and Althusser's *Interpellation* (1971). The terms 'Black' and 'White' are used throughout the analysis, but are done so with an appreciation of their complexity and ambiguity (Hall, 1996). White privilege is also referred to in this chapter, but is not based on an essentialising consideration of binary racialized identities. Nor is it intended to suggest that all White people accrue privilege equally. 'Whiteness' does not mean 'White people'. Whiteness is a racial discourse that is constantly in the process of construction and 'White' people are the socially constructed group that are for the most part the beneficiaries of such privilege (McLaren, 1997).

From Somali to 'Black': Interpellated Blackness

Ahmed was not born in the UK, but left Somalia as a child and arrived in the UK with his mother and siblings. Though his family still have strong ties to their Somali identity, Ahmed has conflicting feelings towards both his Somali and British identities having been raised in the UK.

The social structure of Somalia is based primarily on genealogy (tribes) and so many who come into the UK not only face a new culture and language, but also an unfamiliar discourse of race.

The only association Somalis have had with race prior to coming to the West was colonialism, in which those in power were Western and those that were powerless were 'us'. Here, I say 'us' because 'African' is not a marker of identity frequently used amongst Somalis, but a colonial marker placed upon us and so I use the term 'us' to identify myself as a member of the colonised Somalis. As race isn't a marker or form of categorisation in Somali society; the recognition of the Western colonials as being powerful did not also necessarily mean that the powerless were those that were Black, for Somalis have never had the need to define themselves as 'Black'. *When we first came hooyo [mum] always use to think everyone we saw who was White had power [laughs].*

During our conversations, Ahmed would often make light of his mother's understanding of race - as if he had a better understanding of race than she had. Although he often joked about how much admiration his mother seemed to have towards 'White' people, he spoke with resentment when he commented on the views of his mother and elders in his community when it came to talk about those considered 'Black'.

It's like Black is a dirty word.

Ahmed could not understand his mother's view of colonialism. He told me the stories his mother would tell him about the benevolent and charitable nature of the colonisers towards the poor and weak Somalis and this made him angry. The frustration Ahmed had towards his mother's view of the colonisers was, however, similarly expressed by his mother, who, as he recounts, could not understand the representation of 'Blacks' here in the West and why he would want to be 'one of them'.

She says everything bad here is associated with Black people

Ahmed reflected as he tried to make sense of why his mother fears his association with the word Black, *I think she's scared*. When asked about his own views of what it means to be 'Black' it was clear that Ahmed's views of race were greatly influenced both by the views of denial and caution held by his mother and elders in his community, as well as his own experiences in which race is *just how they see me*; 'they' being White people. Both he and his mother appreciate the gendered nature of race (Ladson- Billings, 1994; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1993) and so Ahmed recognises that the fears his mother has is not only of him adopting a 'Black' identity and in turn losing his Somali identity (she does not see the two as being mutually exclusive). Rather, she fears the consequence of how others, particularly 'Whites'; who she sees as powerful, will see and judge her son based on his identification as a Black male in a society that associates Black masculinity with danger and violence (Ferguson, 2001).

Both Ahmed and his mother recognise race through representation and recognition. His mother, upon entering a racialized society, sees and recognises the colonials in the Whites, but she does not see herself or her son in Black people or in the ways Blacks are represented and so this

association is more difficult for her to accept. For Ahmed, however, race is like a descriptor in which he is seen first and foremost as Black and so he has come to recognise all the expectations that this label holds. The ways in which these racial stereotypes are internalised and have become part of Ahmed's accepted norm could be understood by drawing upon Althusser's (1971) concept of 'interpellation'.

According to Althusser (1971), when subjects recognise themselves to have been 'hailed' or placed in categories by ideology, the individuals find themselves 'interpellated'. This process of interpellation takes place through social institutions such as schools or by the police, in which people are 'hailed' and placed in categories in order to enforce particular ways of acting and thinking about themselves as subjects. Althusser illustrates this by giving the example of a policeman shouting "hey you there!", and the person who turns in response becomes that 'you' through turning around (Althusser, 1971, p.174). A powerful contemporary example of this would be the 'stop and search' of Black men and how this perpetuates the stereotype of Black men being violent criminals (Ferguson, 2001).

This notion of interpellation builds on the work of Lacan (1948) who discusses how ideology consists of a 'symbolic order' in which we become part of an imagined reality by accepting the categories we have been 'hailed' into. In Ahmed's case, his being 'hailed' as 'Black' has never been vocal, but through the stereotypes in which he feels his blackness is made visible. The clearest example of this type of interpellation is Ahmed's experience of schooling, in which racialized/ gendered processes of 'Othering' are never vocalised, but nonetheless are embedded into everyday practices that become normalised and to an extent accepted.

Being 'Black' in the classroom

Inside of course I'm Somali at home and stuff, but outside it's hard not to be Black.

When I asked Ahmed to elaborate on what he meant by *it's hard not to be Black*, he made specific reference to his schooling experience. Ahmed has been expelled from three schools for 'aggressive' behaviour, but he is not academically underachieving. He talks about the classroom as a 'game' in which there are rules he must obey and expectations he must meet but also spoke of what happens when the game isn't played the way *it's supposed to be*.

In schools, like most settings in which Whiteness dominates, racialized thinking and practices continue to shape the experiences and opportunities of young people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gillborn, 2008). When Whiteness is the default setting of the classroom culture, then race only matters when it involves those who are not White (Armstrong & Wildman, 2008). This is the case for Ahmed, who recognises this racialized space in which he is 'hailed' and expected to maintain a code of conduct, not as a member of the class but as he states, a 'Black' member of the class. By seeing himself as positioned as a member of a group, the typical characteristics of that group in turn become the expected standard for his own behaviour (Turner et al., 1987). These are the set rules for the 'game'.

Here we are not only able to reflect on Althusser's 'interpellation' to understand how ideologies are reified through practice, but also to refer to Butler's work on 'subjection' and 'performativity' to better grasp the notion of the 'game'. When an individual is identified or labelled, this process

becomes a part of their own subjective experiences and identity formation. For Ahmed, through processes within the classroom, through systems of classification, his Blackness is brought into being and he is named thus.

Performing 'Blackness'

Research on racial identity recognises that White and Black students experience their group memberships differently (Gilborn, 2008). Cultural and racial identity is typically much less salient for White students (though not necessarily all white students), unlike Black students, whose racial identity is very much part of their self-concept ((Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2009) and so 'race issues' are seemingly a Black and not a White problem (Banks & Banks, 2009). In fact, an important aspect of White privilege is having the choice to ignore the ways in which race influences and structures the opportunities that people are given (Rankin & Reason, 2008). Because of the ways in which schools institutionalise race, Black and White students may have very different experiences of education (Hurtado et al, 2008).

Ahmed comments on his interactions with his peers as distinctly different to his interactions with his teachers. Race is an issue amongst his peers; however, it is based on a notion of duality that is acknowledged but not discussed. By this I mean there is a racialized classroom experience in which Ahmed and his Black peers are seen and see themselves as the 'Other', an experience that his White peers cannot identify with but may recognise. This concept of duality, in which we find ourselves lodged between the constant labels of the 'either' and the 'or', presents as Nicotera

(1999) states “the production of dichotomies in which cultural spaces are marginalised, identities are constricted and differences are devalued” (p.43).

It is important here to make the distinction between racialization and racial identity.

Racialization is a socially constructed in which race is the primarily means of defining oneself or being defined by others. It works as a mechanism for excluding by creating stereotypes based on race in order to create perceptions of superiority or inferiority (Schmidt, 2002). Racialization is a simple process in which simple identifications of a person’s race is made in a split second, by others, every day (Omi & Winant, 1994). This differs to the much more complex notion of racial identities (Pollock, 2004) which consist of an individual’s stories and histories that have contributed to a complex and perhaps a very private racial identity (Thandeka, 1999).

Ahmed does not expect his White peers to understand his experience. He shares a collective frustration with the other ‘Black’ boys in the class who recognise that their educational experience, as well as those of their White peers, are racialized. These feelings of frustration amongst Ahmed and his Black peers, which are never spoken about but are understood collectively, are not unusual. Individuals experience emotional responses to situations that affect their group, because part of having an identification with that group is that it becomes part of the individual sense of self, therefore giving the group identification some emotional significance (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). When members of the same group face similar struggles or share similar feelings, it enables individuals in that group to feel connected (Brewer, 1999). That is not to say that group membership is a comfortable space, nor is

it necessarily willingly joined, however, but may, as is the case for Ahmed, be a space of conflicting feelings of comfort and discomfort.

Knowles (2003, p. 21), asserts that it is the interactions between people that gives rise to the materiality of race, in a process she describes as 'race-making'. She makes a distinction between the representation of race and race as being produced through the ways individuals conduct themselves within specific social contexts (Knowles, 2003, p.49). Knowles presents race-making as both communicative and relational, involving social mechanisms such as language and interactions as well as cultural influences (Knowles 2003; Leonardo 2011).

She says 'us lot' will never change

In contrast to the interactions between Ahmed and his peers, the racialization of his interactions with his teachers are a lot more explicit and direct and are often expressed through practices and dialogues that are normalised within the racialized culture of the classroom. Although his visible presence in the room is an apparent statement of his identification, it is his actions that position him and other Black [*us lot*] boys in the class as part of the distinct 'other'. Ahmed recognises that these responses determine to a great extent the types of interaction between him and his teacher; interactions which have through routine performance become normalised.

As we discussed notions of 'normality' and maintaining a 'routine' in the classroom, Ahmed said:

It doesn't matter where I sit when I come in, I don't bother getting my things out, I know I'm going to be moved.

This unspoken daily interaction in which Ahmed is aware that upon entering the classroom the teacher immediately begins 'behaviour management', in which 'disruptive' behaviour is 'managed' by moving students to different parts of the room, appears to be of routine occurrence. He claims that his race identifies him as a 'disruptive' student and that he and his teachers are both aware that he must prepare himself for this inevitable move. Although he performs this identity, it is not fixed, but contextually and spatially embedded (Holt, 2010) and is influenced by the unspoken expectations of his teacher. He is in effect 'hailed' as Black (here meaning disruptive) by his teacher on a daily basis. In continuing to cite the conventions and ideologies demanded as a result of this 'hailing' and through the performance of moving between desks, Ahmed incorporates such expectations into his lived reality, making them appear to be natural and necessary.

'Out of place': Classroom as resistive or restrictive spaces?

In his last school, Ahmed was placed on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register because of his behaviour. The National level statistics from Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) (2002) states that the pattern of SEN and attainment in secondary schools are broadly similar and that Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi students present the highest number on SEN registers and the lowest level in terms of attainment. The suggestion that ethnic minority students are more likely to have SEN or likely to be seen as having SEN than their White peers, however, is highly contentious and the relationship between SEN and ethnicity is complex, with the evidence inconclusive.

Ahmed states that this is not uncommon and that many of the 'Black' boys at his current school have SEN. Youdell and Armstrong (2011) state that the label of SEN, and particularly the label of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) is frequently applied to those young people whose behaviour is 'out of place' within the school context. Holt (2010) defines the term socio-emotional differences as 'differences' that are socio-spatial and developed within continually shifting 'norms' of acceptable and appropriate behaviour, alongside the experienced and embodied differences of the individuals. These 'norms' of acceptable behaviour and embodied difference are often fundamentally interconnected. The racialized practices of the classroom embodied by Ahmed and the other 'Black boys' in his class are based on the internalised recognition that their identities are not only devalued socially but also within school spaces (Holt, 2010).

If the behaviour that is implicitly expected of Ahmed and the other Black boys, not only socially, but as Ahmed believes also within the classroom, does not 'fit' the explicit, or 'general' codes of behaviour, then inevitably their behaviour will be considered 'out of place'. This is evident in the constant moving around that Ahmed must do from desk to desk as insisted by his teacher. Fanon (1968) explains this well in his notion of the 'doubled self' – the feeling of being in two places at once, and how Black people must wear "White masks" to get by in a White world. Fanon discussed this in reference to colonised peoples (specifically in Algeria). Ahmed and the Black boys behave in a way that they believe they are expected to behave; they wear White masks, and although they may be 'out of place' in the classroom, they are also 'out of place' socially. The White masks they wear are not representative of the performance of Whiteness in order to be

‘accepted’ but rather the performance of Blackness, in order to reflect back what Whiteness expects to see.

Although Althusser’s interpellation can be used to understand the labelling or ‘hailing’ of Ahmed when he ‘turns’, what happens when he doesn’t turn? Ahmed recognises that even if he does not ‘act Black’, he has still been named and been categorised as Black. An example of this is Ahmed ‘acting Black’ because he does not want to be ‘seen’ by the teacher, knowing that if he doesn’t ‘act Black’ he will still be considered Black, but a Black that is hyper visible, a Black that is “different”. The distinction for Ahmed in being ‘seen’ and being ‘visible’ is that the former is an awareness that by not conforming to expectations he would be noticed by the teacher, and the latter is the awareness that once noticed by the teacher the interactions between them would ensure that he was also noticed by the entire class. He is no longer just seen by the teacher as being disruptive, but visible for all to see. Fanon explains this notion of the ‘doubledself’ by sharing an experience, in which a White child points to Fanon (1968) and says:

“Dirty Nigger!’ or simply ‘Look, a Negro!’ I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.... Sealed into that crushing object-hood....my body suddenly abraded into non-being” (p.112-113)

Here Fanon is not being ‘hailed’, he is ‘doubled’. As opposed to being ‘turned’, Fanon turns away from himself, resulting in him becoming doubled (Macherey, 2012). He is in two places at once, two spaces which are equally oppressive (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963). For the young men in this research, the implications of this ‘being turned’ is seen explicitly in particular spaces. For Ahmed

this is the classroom, where looks of suspicion from a teacher or daily behaviour management interactions result in Ahmed trying to make sense of the ‘othered’ space he is forced to occupy.

This sense of being ‘doubled’ relates to Du Bois’ (1994) notion of ‘double consciousness’ in which an individual sees himself through the eyes of others and as such behaves in a way in which the other expects. Both Fanon and Du Bois have made major contributions to the phenomenology of race. As Du Bois primarily discusses the experiences of Black people in the USA, however, Fanon, in looking at experiences in Colonial Africa, France, and the Caribbean, spans a broader cultural context to provide what I believe is a more detailed and complex clarification of Du Bois’ notion of ‘double consciousness’. Fanon expands on this notion by looking at the trauma that occurs when the self is categorised as inferior due to an imposed racial identity. In *Black skin White masks*, Fanon comments on the oppressive nature of imposed racial identities as he states “I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave, not of the idea that others have of me, but of my own appearance” (p.116).

This is the case for Ahmed and his mother, who upon entering a racially defined society must uphold a racial identity that is imposed on them, however damaging that may be. This racial identity is one of inferiority and subordination, and so as Ahmed is hailed, he becomes subjected to an identity through injury. This notion of ‘injurious interpellation’ as Butler (1997) states brings particular subjects into being by placing them in the field of subjectification which works to ‘fix’ their identity (Bhabha, 1994).

Throughout the reflective conversations that form the body of this research, Ahmed never identifies himself as one of the 'Black' boys in the class, but always uses the term 'like' to associate himself with the group. His similarities to the boys in this group in terms of their educational and social lived experiences gives him comfort and so he plays up to that particular group membership to feel connected (Mussweiler, Gabriel & Bodenhausen, 2000). He does not always play to that group membership if it is at the cost of other values that do not fit with the expected 'norm' of that group, however.

Here we see the complexity of having multiple identities in which one is placed at the forefront for a given purpose until the circumstances change and demand that another identity is called upon. In Ahmed's case, Black is his primary identity in the classroom, but when his cultural and religious values feel compromised in this setting, this Black identity is no longer a priority. These processes of re-layering or reconfiguring indicate not only the complexity of individual identities, but also demonstrates identities as constantly being in a state of 'becoming' (Hall, 1996).

Although Ahmed performs to what he believes is the expected behaviour of Black boys (disruptive), in order to maintain 'normality', he feels guilt over the repercussions of his actions as he reflects on the warnings given to him from his mother and elders in his community about the assumed behaviour of Whites and non-Whites. When his mother spoke of colonialism, she would often remind him that those in power were also the most highly educated and so in order to be like 'them' and equally as powerful, education was key. Although this is his mother's motivation, Ahmed is also aware that education and gaining knowledge is deeply rooted in his religious

identity as a Muslim, so he feels guilty that although by performing Blackness in the classroom so that he may be visible and accepted in this setting, he is compromising the religious values he holds, as well as the expectations of his mother.

Identification has been shown to predict important academic outcomes such as grades (Osborne & Rausch, 2001) and behavioural referral. Ahmed is conflicted between his wanting to be accepted as part of a collective group, and the consequences of 'playing the part'. *I have to get good grades so I do the work, but not in class*. Ahmed's perceives underachievement as an indicator of 'being' Black (Ogbu, 1987; 2003) and so must 'act white' in exchange for academic success. He refuses to 'act white in the classroom, however, for fear of isolation from his Black peers and hypervisibility towards his teachers; *I don't want them to see me. I don't want to be different*. By acting in the way that Ahmed believes he's expected to act, he is not seen. If he were to 'act White' in the classroom, however, he would be seen as disrupting the 'position' through which he has been hailed.

This suggests that in spaces of White privilege, such as many UK schools, a Black boy acting 'White' (Ogbu, 1987), (here understood by Ahmed to mean doing one's schoolwork) may be more disruptive to racialized discourse than to act Black (here understood to mean being disruptive).

This hints at the *normalised absence and pathologised presence* of young black people, and specifically here of young black students who are not 'disruptive', within spaces dominated by whiteness (Phoenix, 1997). Ahmed's unwillingness to compromise his Black identification in the classroom forges an oppositional identity in which he resists and strains the boundaries set by the

school and his peers for him to ‘act’ Black, by maintaining academic achievement beyond the physically confined walls of the classroom.

Section 2: The religious/cultural self

What they see is what they get

Ahmed’s second portrait is an interpretation of his cultural and religious identity. Ahmed highlights the distinction between his racial/national identity and his cultural/religious identity through the clothing represented in the portraits, but explains that these clothes are worn for very different reasons.

The clothing he wears which he associates with ‘Blackness’; namely loose fitting trousers, oversized shirts, chains and a cap or hoody represent the stereotypical image of ‘blackness’ he sees around him, both socially and through the media. He said:

I know that when people see me they automatically see me as Black, I can’t hide that, they see my skin colour and know I’m Black so I just dress the way my other Black friends dress innit so I don’t look different

Here, Ahmed states that because his supposed racial identity is accepted by others, he feels the need to dress in a way that would allow him to maintain that identity, in order to avoid the risk of becoming hypervisible. Unlike his racial identity, Ahmed’s Muslim identity is not immediately identifiable. He identifies strongly as Muslim, but explains the reason why he chooses to disguise this identity within the school space:

It's hard enough being Black, teachers expect us to be shit. They don't think we can achieve anything but that's cool, we don't need them to believe in us. But being Muslim is scary to them. I would rather they saw me as nothing than see me as someone dangerous.

Ahmed poignantly spoke about how he had no choice in being seen by his teachers as Black, but he did have a choice in whether or not he was seen as Muslim. Although his Muslim identity is visible in terms of his clothing when he is outside of the school premises, he customises his uniform to ensure that he dresses in a way he believe identifies him as being “*more Black than Muslim*”. He explains the fear he believes is associated with Islam in his school and explains that he could not avoid attention if he dressed or ‘acted’ Muslim. This threat of this unwanted attention made Ahmed feel uncomfortable and so he states that behaving in a way that is identifiable to his teachers as ‘Black’ then he can remain unseen. Ahmed’s fear of being hypervisible because of his religious identification is not unwarranted. He spoke of an experience he had in which his religious and racial identities were brought into question by his teacher.

...this one time I was fasting because it was Ramadan but I was the only one in my class fasting and I was tired so I laid my head down. The teacher sent me out of the class and said I was being disruptive. When I told her I was tired because I was fasting she said ‘that’s not my problem, you should be fasting at home not in school’ after that day I don’t tell her anything

Ahmed explained that this one incident made him realise that he could not perform an acceptable alternative to his Muslim identity and therefore he had no choice but to try and conceal it within the school space as much as possible.

Islamophobia: A 'new' form of racism

In order to better understand Ahmed's experience of being judged in school because of his racial and religious identities, it's useful to look at the concept of 'new racisms' to look at the ways in which, as Rich and Troudi (2006) argue, religion can often be linked to race in order to create different metaphors that marginalise and exclude certain social groups.

Racism depends heavily on discourses of Otherness and inferiority and as Reisigl & Wodak (2001) state:

...is based on the hierarchizing construction of groups of persons which are characterised as communities of descent and which are attributed specific collective, naturalised or biological traits that are considered to be almost invariable. These traits are primarily related to biological features, appearance, cultural practices, customs, traditions, language or socially stigmatized ancestors. They are- explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly- evaluated negatively, and this judgement is more or less in accord with hegemonic views. (p. 275)

Although the term ‘new racism’ is a useful concept in understanding how different forms of discrimination may intersect, when focusing on religion as racialized, it is important to note the tangible distinction between these two forms of racism. Modood’s (2005) refers to the two as ‘colour racism’ and ‘cultural racism’. Whilst colour racism (or old racism) is based on supposed biological differences, cultural racism (new racism) is based on cultural or religious differences that are manifested through physical appearance or action (Hopkins, 2004). Much like notions of superiority that are upheld by old racism, however, new racisms also reinforce cultural privilege. New racisms are not subtle, but are upheld by structures of hierarchy and difference that rely on generalisations as the basis for stereotyping. Modood (2005) asserts that in order to judge a particular group of people or culture as ‘inferior’, there must be a priori assertion that the group has a static shared culture that can be perceived to be ‘lacking’. To consider a group to have a shared cultural inferiority is no different to suggesting that the group has a shared biological inferiority. In this sense, the premise behind old and new racism is the same.

The racialization of Muslims in Britain is dependent on the aspects of culture that are practiced and racist incidents often depend on the physical features, whether phenotypical or an individual being labelled as ‘looking Asian’ (Modood, 2005, p.12), attire such as the headscarf, or actions in the selection of victims. Acts of racism towards Muslims in Britain are not always overt, though in recent years and with the changing political climate there have been a growing number reported hate crimes towards Muslims, particularly Muslim women (Modood, 2005).

Not just disruptive: The feared 'Other'

In Ahmed's case, his experience of Islamophobia in school is formed as a new form of racism as he feels as though once his Muslim identity is made visible through his clothing and his actions, he not only becomes the target of a racialized discourse but this intersects with "an irrational fear, distrust or rejection of those who are (perceived as) Muslim" (van Driel, 2004a, p. 10).

Schools are places that often reproduce greater societal systems of discrimination (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and Ahmed's fear or refusal to make his Muslim identity visible is based on his perception of how Islam has been portrayed in recent years through the media.

Look at the news, walk down the street... every day you hear something bad happening to Muslims. No one likes us here, they're scared of us because of what some idiot terrorists have done... it's not us but because they did that we have to hide being Muslim so they don't hurt us. I saw on the news that a Muslim woman had her scarf pulled off, what the hell. I feel sorry for the girls, people just see me as Black so I let them. If they don't know I don't tell them I'm Muslim. It's none of their business.

As the chairman of the Runnymede Commission, Gordon Conway states "If you doubt whether Islamophobia exists, I suggest you spend a week reading a range of national and local papers. You will find prejudiced and antagonistic comments, mostly subtle but sometimes blatant and crude. Where the media lead, many will follow" (Haque, 2004, p.3).

Ahmed explained that to his mother and to the elders in his community, dressing in a way that is deemed to be stereotypically Black, or as Ahmed referred to it *more hip hop*, was seen by them as a threat to Somali and Muslim identities. In a time in which Islamophobia is rampant and with government policies such as Prevent forcing educational settings to be more suspicious (Kundnani, 2014) in ways that may overtly force people but seemingly lend legitimacy to older, and more systemic forms of racism and suspicion. It is understandable therefore that Ahmed's mother shares the same concerns as the elders in his community. Ahmed explains that it is *bad enough being Black* and that he fears the unwanted attention that he may receive if his Muslim identity was to be made apparent. Ahmed's mother did not seem to share his concerns, however. He went on to explain that his mother felt it was important that he respected his Muslim identity and that it was an important part of who is.

She always says don't act Black, don't act like the Black boys... 'cos she worried I'll get excluded but when I tell her about things on the news about Muslims being attacked and threatened, she tells me to not worry and that Allah (God) will protect me. I know I shouldn't be scared but you know, I'm not scared I'm just, I'm just worried.

Ahmed spoke of his religious identity as being distinctly different to his racial identity, the former being an identity he values and the latter being an identity that is imposed, but also accepted. As he makes the distinction between the two, he commented on the way in which his experience in school is racialized:

The Asian and Arab guys ask the teacher if they can go pray when it's time for salah [prayer]...some of the Somalis too but I don't ask. I know it's wrong but I wait to pray at home. The teacher looks annoyed at them when they ask to go pray, I think the teacher is suspicious of them so I don't ask. She wouldn't believe me anyway, she'd just think I was lying, she always does"

Ahmed spoke of needing to make the distinction between himself and the Asian and Arab boys in the classroom:

Those are my brothers at the mosque and we're friends so it's cool but they're Asian or Arab, the teacher expects them to do all that... me, my Jamaican friends would think I was weird. They're not Muslim so when I go out to pray I'm the only Black boy asking to leave, you stick out you know, to everyone.

Here, Ahmed states that his decision to leave the classroom and pray or stay is governed by his positionality in that space. As previously mentioned, Ahmed refers to the classroom as a racialized space in which he is seen as *just a Black boy*, but when he is placed in a position in which he must choose whether or not to perform an action that makes his religious identity visible to others, Ahmed risks becoming more than a 'Black boy'. He explains that if he chooses to stay in the classroom he maintains that label, but if he chooses to leave the classroom to perform his prayers he becomes hypervisible, not only to his teacher but also to his peers.

Ahmed talked about how he would no longer ask to leave the classroom to perform his prayers and how this made him feel ashamed. He explained:

I just don't go now. I know it bad that I miss my salah (prayer) but I don't want people to say look at that Muslim guy doing that. At least if they just see me as Black I'm not alone, but I'm the only Black Muslim in my class, the rest are Asian. I see the way they look at me when I go, it's like I'm some kind of terrorist just because I pray...

Ahmed went on to explain that both he and the 'Asian' boys in the class were seen as a threat because they were Muslim but he said that it was worse for him because the Asian boys were not seen as aggressive; only 'Black' boys were, therefore that made him more of a threat.

Ahmed's drawing – 2



“I don't know how to be the man they want me to be”

“This image looks to me like a cross between a lion and a lioness... perhaps somehow relating to femininity and masculinity? There's something beautiful about the paradox of this image. The two parts seem to blend almost seamlessly to form one. I'm interested to hear Ahmed's interpretations... there are so many meanings that could be taken from this image”

This image captures Ahmed's understanding of masculinity and will be explored through the lens of gender performativity (Butler, 1997) and fluid masculinities. Butler (1997) refers to gender as being 'done' and asserts that gendered positions often intersect with other social categories such as age, race and social class (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). In Ahmed's narrative, gender is not discussed in isolation, but in relation to religious, cultural, and racialized understandings of gender and how these perspectives influence not only Ahmed's understanding of his own masculinity but also the choices he makes/that are made for him in performing masculinity in different spaces, which is what I understand to be the (re)enactment, articulation, negotiation, and resistance of intersecting perspectives on masculinity.

[Synonymous with violence](#)

Ahmed spoke about his Black, Somali and Muslim identities in very complex ways. In the reflective conversations in which we discussed the first image (2a) he spoke about how his understanding of his religious and cultural identities were inseparable, but that they were distinctly different to his racialized national identity. In the narrative of this image (2b), however, there seemed to be a more complex relationship between what Ahmed perceives to be the expectations set by others (parents/ elders, society/ teachers) of particular forms of masculinity and Ahmed's everyday performance as a means to re(enact) or resist these expectations.

I don't fight, I just talk back sometimes but I get in trouble the same way the boys that fight do... you got to answer back though, you can't be weak...they want us to fight, they think it's what we do.

Ahmed spoke about violence frequently during our conversations and it was always in the contexts of what 'they' expected of him; 'they' being his teachers. Ahmed explained that it was not just his Black identity that was seen as aggressive, but that his Muslim and Somali identities also were. He explains the distinctions between the three:

When they see me as Black they just think I want to fight, when I am with my Black friends they just see me as a Black boy who wants to always fight. But when I am with the Pakistani boys it's different, they look at us different, it's like they're scared of us. The Pakistani boys don't fight but the teachers are scared of them... but when I tell them I'm Somali not Black they look at me sad. All the people in my class look at me sad because the only thing they know about Somalia is war so they think I grew up with fighting, I saw a little bit but I don't like it when they look at me sad, they look at me different.

I was taken aback by how nuanced Ahmed's recognition of a single term was. 'Violence' to him did not have a single definition but was tied to contexts and particular identities. This in turn, he argued, determined how he was perceived by the people around him. Ahmed went on to explain that he could not do anything about people seeing him as a threat because he is Muslim or feeling sorry for him because he is Somali, because he cannot change those aspects of his identity. The only aspect of his identity he talked about negotiating in the classroom was Blackness, because if the teachers and peers expected him to fight because he is a 'Black boy' then he could resist that expectation by refusing to fight. He argued that this was a challenge and

for the most part he would still be treated the same as the other Black boys, but because violence in this context was, in Ahmed's understanding, tied to an action, he felt that there was something tangible that he could do to try and change their perceptions.

In an analysis of how Ahmed understands and performs masculinity, it is useful to look at the notion of gender performativity discussed by Butler (1997) and to explore gender through the lens of it being relational in the sense that it is "always being reinvented and rearticulated in every setting, micro or macro... always in motion, always dynamic" (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005, p.7). Ahmed's decisions in the classroom are an articulation of this constant 'reinventing' of gender that Butler refer to, but like Butler, Ahmed recognises that his change in behaviour may not necessarily result in a change in the way he is perceived.

A different type of strength

Ahmed explained that another reason why he would behave well in the classroom was because as he said early, there is a religious and cultural expectation that he should treat an educational space with respect. Ahmed explained to me that Islam had taught him about the importance of respect, but that it was the old men in his community talking about what it means to be a Somali man that had taught him about bravery and resilience.

The old men (elders in community) always tell us to be Somali man you have to be strong and brave and they say Islam teaches us the same thing, but Islam is more about respect I think.

When I asked Ahmed to explain his understanding of respect in Islam, he spoke about his relationship with his mother as an example:

If you're man you got to take care of people. That is what Islam says. I'm the man in my house and I have to look after everyone, like my mum does too but you know I have to. Respect is having responsibility. I respect my mum and she respects me.

When I asked how and why he took this notion of respect into the classroom, he said:

Maybe just like with my mum, if I respect my teachers they will respect me and not be scared of me.

As Ahmed once again mentioned the word 'scared' I noticed that he was talking specifically about his Muslim identity. His Black identity created a relationship based on performance and punishment between him and his teachers, but he never spoke about his teachers feeling 'scared' of him during these interactions. It was clear that Ahmed was talking about the need for him to use what to him were Islamic principles to change the way in which the teachers viewed his Muslim identity. This is a very powerful strategy, because he is in essence saying, I will show you what Islam represents so that you can stop associating it with what it does not.

Summary

Ahmed's narrative presents an account of multiple identities and how his everyday interactions influence how these identities are understood and performed. The narrative initially explored the notion of imposed Blackness, then through the lens of interpellation and subjection went on to explore Ahmed's experience of performing Blackness in order to remain invisible (disruptive) in the classroom. Ahmed describes this process of a normalised performance of Blackness as *playing the game*. The narrative then explored Ahmed's resistance to 'playing the game' when his Muslim identity felt compromised or threatened. He identified his Muslim and Somali identity as being synonymous and felt that these were two identities he valued and needed to protect. This meant refusing to make his Muslim identity visible in the classroom through his physical appearance (clothing) as well as through his actions (not asking to go and pray). Ahmed explained that to be Black in the classroom was to be disruptive, but that to be Muslim in the classroom was to be a threat.

The narrative finally looked at the second image which explored the notion of changing masculinities. Here Ahmed spoke about the types of masculinity that were expected of him racially, culturally, and in religion. He narrated how these understandings of masculinities sometimes complement and at other times contradict one another and how he would make the decision to perform different types of masculinity in different spaces.

CHAPTER 6: 'MEMORIES, MYTHS AND METAPHORS'

FAISAL'S NARRATIVE

And a river of stories poured out, their memory flowing out of their mouths with the zigzag downward motion of a kite with a broken string (Farah, 2000, p. 37)

This is Faisal and I am 17 years old. I am 17 years old and I like art. I draw all the time and I like P.E. too. I live with my mum and come to the community centre every week. We get help with school work and we can talk. I don't really like talking but it is ok to talk here.

Introduction

At the point of data collection Faisal was 17 years old. Faisal is an only child and identifies as second generation Somali in Britain; his mother was born in Somalia but came to Britain when she was a teenager and gave birth to Faisal here. Faisal lives with his mother, his father having left when he was four years old. Faisal has been diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and receives additional support in school. He enjoys art and history in school, but struggles with physical education (P.E.) and drama. Out of all four participants, I had known him the longest, as he had been attending the community centre with his mother for several years before he started attending my classes. Faisal always attends the centre at the same time and he always sits in the same seat at the front of the room so that I can see him, but not the other young men. This routine and consistency is important to Faisal, which will become more apparent in his narrative. Faisal struggles with social interactions and so would not engage in group discussions very often and when he did he would contribute repetitive stories. I came to realise that Faisal needed familiarity to feel safe. It took him a while to interact with me, but over time I was able

to recognise what triggered Faisal's anxiety and would try and avoid doing that to ensure he felt comfortable in the space.

When I asked Faisal if he wanted to take part in the research, he was the only one of the young men to ask me about the structure of how the stories would be collected. My intention was for the research design to be flexible enough to work around how the young men wanted to work, but I realised that for Faisal to feel safe, I needed to create some structures. I explained the threestage process to him and because Stage 2 (the point at which the young men were asked to create their artefacts) was the most ambivalent, I explained to all of the young men that I would be in the community centre once a week for the three weeks they had to complete the task so that if they wanted to produce their artefacts in class or needed the task explaining further I would be available. This was intended to enable Faisal in particular to feel comfortable with the process and although neither he nor the other young men came to see me during those three weeks, I believe it was important for Faisal to know that there would be some routine and structure in place if he felt he needed it.

Faisal produced several short stories, poems and images. He initially chose one poem and one photograph as the basis on which to construct his narrative; however, during our reflective conversations Faisal decided that he no longer wanted the photograph to be included in his narrative, but instead decided to speak about his poem. This chapter provides an analysis of Faisal's poem through our discussions during the reflective conversations as well as through the use of appropriate theories. The poem uses animal imagery to explore the multiple facets of the

Somalia that Faisal imagines and hopes for. Faisal's narrative is one of symbolic uprootedness and reconnection. It is a narrative on the construction and reconstruction of collective memories of trauma and hope.

Faisal's poem

Poem [untitled]

Horn of Africa,

Once Strong like the tusk of an elephant,

Stampeding in togetherness,

Destroyed by conflict,

Torn and separated,

Naked and lost,

In this Bleak and lonely wasteland,

Laid in a pool of blood and scars,

Reminded of our once deep bond,

Try to overcome,

The pain and hunger,

Fuelled by pride and desire,

Slowly, Growing,

Into the tusk, It

once had.

“I love this poem. The imagery is so vivid and there is an air of hopefulness and pain... there is definitely pain. I don't know why but the imagery used brings back memories of my first visit to Somalia and seeing how connected to the land the people were...taking care of the animals and the land brought families together... it brought my family together. I will never forget those memories”

[Research diary, June 16th 2014]

Stories of stories

The reflective conversations with Faisal focused on his poem and in talking through the poem; Faisal narrated some stories he had been told by his mother and by the men in his family (his uncles and grandfather). In describing his decision to write this poem, he said:

I wrote this poem in bed. I couldn't sleep so I woke up and just wrote it. I had been thinking about Somalia all day that day, it was on the news and my mum had been crying.

I just wrote it and went back to bed. I didn't even think about it after... until now.

Faisal went on to explain that the metaphors and animal imagery he chose to use in the poem were based on the animals he knew were associated with Somalia. He understood that *gabay* (poetry) was part of his Somali heritage (Summerfield, 1993) and explained that the Somali poems he would often hear would use animal imagery as metaphors for the topic being

discussed. He explained that he wrote the poem to try and make sense of what he had been hearing and seeing on the news and how it contradicted with some of what he knew of Somalia through the stories that had been told to him.

All the stories and poems I hear involve animals so it made sense to include animal imagery in the poem, but the reason I chose an elephant is because it's big and strong and never forgets. I think Somalia is like the opposite of an elephant if you get me, because we are not strong anymore, we don't walk together anymore, and everyone has forgotten...well they don't remember. I think we can only be strong again if we come together and remember.

When I asked Faisal to explain what he meant by *everyone has forgotten*, he talked about Somalia not having a clear history, but that the stories told were as fragmented to him as what he knew of the country. Faisal makes the distinction between 'forgetting' and 'not remembering' by stating that *if they forgot it wasn't their choice, but they could choose not to remember*. This is a really interesting perspective Faisal takes on the notion of memory, in which he speaks about it as if it is collective, but that some memories cannot be forgotten whilst other memories we may choose not to remember.

Veena Das (2000) poignantly questions the ways in which forgetting may in fact be a political act:

How does one bear witness to the criminality of societal rule, which consigns the uniqueness of being to eternal forgetfulness, not through an act of dramatic transgression but through a descent into everyday life? Thus, how does one not simply articulate loss through a dramatic gesture of defiance but learn to inhabit the world, or inhabit it again, in a gesture of mourning? It is in this context that one may identify the eye not as the organ that sees but as the organ that weeps. (p.208)

Das' (2000) reference to the eye as being 'an organ that weeps' may be understood as representing the way in which trauma, fear and inferiority are internalised to the point that such complex trepidations are only witnessed in the silence of what is not said.

Halbwach (1992) states that there are three memory practices for organising knowledge of the past: autobiographic, collective, and historic memory. The autobiographic memory is based on personally experienced events; the collective memory contains events that are socially recognised to have taken place. In both the autobiographical and collective memory practices the individual has a role in shaping the past. They are first hand accumulators of their autobiographical memory and they are the retainers and distributors of collective memory. However, this makes the assumption that past memories are 'past' when many cultures and peoples experience the past as present; always with them and shaping their everyday. Faisal makes sense of his present through the stories of the past he is told. Faisal discusses about how the stories that are shared with him are part of a collective memory (or collective notremembering) but that there are elements of autobiographical censoring that influences the

stories particular people choose to retain or distribute. Halbwach argues that collective memory provides us with a social context and framework in which to locate and make sense of our autobiographical memory, so that the memories that are significant to us are in relation to and through the collective memory we have. Autobiographic memory is therefore mediated by our collective memory and the distribution of our collective memory, I would argue, is also influenced by our autobiographical experiences.

In contrast to autobiographical and collective memory, however, historic memory is shaped through the work of historians, so a person of authority (the historian) decides which events are recorded in texts and what counts as text, so that written accounts are privileged. Faisal recognises that the written historical accounts of Somalia were written primarily by Western authors, as the Somali language was only transcribed in the 1970s, thus oral traditions have been and continue to be crucial to cultural continuity amongst Somalis (Metz, 1993; Maleken & Ganyu, 2000). Although Faisal questions the authenticity of the Western accounts, throughout his narrative he continues to measure the stories he hears from his family members by the historical accounts in the texts he has read.

Fragmented stories

Narratives are key to meaning making, particularly for migrants (Tonkin, 1992; Portelli, 1998). It is through the narratives people choose to share that memories of events are exchanged. The stories we choose to share and the ways in which we choose to share them are invariably

influenced by wider cultural narratives. We draw on the accounts of others to fill in gaps we have in our memories in order to construct a particular memory for that group (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann & Czaplicka 1995; Zerubavel, 1995). In Faisal's case, the stories from his mother and the men in his community are the product not only of autobiographical experiences, but also wider cultural narratives which in turn influence the types of stories he is told.

Faisal talked about trying to *piece it all together* using the stories he had been told:

You get told stuff... some good and some bad and you sort of have to put them together to understand. I can't listen to one story and ignore another one, can I? I have to sort of use the stories they all tell me because when I tell my kids one day I'm going to be telling stories that has bits from both sides

Here Faisal talks about the fragmented nature of the stories he is told and how he must create a story from these fragments to pass on to his future children. This notion of inherited memories interestingly links back to Halbwach's (1992) discussion of collective memory. Having never been to Somalia, Faisal relies on the historic and collective memories around him to understand this history. It becomes clear, however, that the stories he is told, though different and at times contradictory, are haunted by power relations, violence, ongoing grief, and hope. These forms of inherited memories are not uncommon amongst communities from the African diaspora as

Morrison (1987) poignantly states “[n]ot a house in this country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief” (Morrison, 1987, p.5). This echoes the suggestion that not all memories are lived, but that the stories of others can also be taken to be our stories - their memories become our memories.

Faisal recognises the fragmented nature of the stories he is told and begins to question if it is even possible to piece them all together:

Their stories make sense to me, all of their stories but it always feels like something is missing. I know I’ll never know everything they experienced but I guess they tell me enough... I don’t need to know more do I?

Faisal reflects on the incompleteness of memories and although his question was possibly rhetorical, I felt as though he wanted me to reassure him that it was ok for stories to be broken. Remembering is not a homogenous experience, nor is it linear. Salman Rushdie (1981) in his book *Midnight’s Children* writes about the fragmented nature of memory and vision. He compares the act of remembering the separation from one’s homeland and the discontinuity of these memories to a “broken mirror” (p.10). Rushdie rejects the idea that the broken mirror is wholly flawed but suggests that it may in fact intensify and heighten the experience of remembering, however. Speaking about his own exile from India, Rushdie (1981) writes,

...shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numerous qualities (p.12).

Here Rushdie (1981) states that memories, however fragmented they may be, are powerful and important. They may not paint the entire picture, but they still paint a picture worth seeing.

Rushdie (1981) makes an interesting link to archaeology in his work as he moves away from the assumption that cultural narratives should be preserved to a re-articulation of memory and “fractured perceptions” (p.12) as an opportunity to represent the fractured nature of diasporic identities. This for me is very much what Faisal is doing. By listening to the stories around him and by acknowledging and valuing their incompleteness, he reflects on how these stories reflect the brokenness of his identity.

Different stories

Narratives do not provide a neutral medium in which to convey what lies within and outside of a story. As Frank (1995) notes:

...the truth of stories is not only what was experienced, but equally what becomes experience in the telling and its reception... stories are true to the flux of experience, and the story affects the direction of that flux (p.22)

Ochberg (1988) explains how narratives allow researchers to focus on how people talk about and present events, not only by what is said but also what is unsaid as this provides “an unmatched window into subjective experiences” (p.173). The decisions people choose to make in terms of the stories they choose to share or withhold demonstrates that there is human agency and imagination in narrativisation (Reissman, 2002). Frank (2000) refers to this as ‘survivorship’ or the means by which people, particularly those who have encountered trauma or disruption, are

able to regain control over their lives by deciding which narratives they choose to use as templates to recall their lived experiences. This allows the teller of a story to imagine a possible future (Chavez, 1994; Thompson, 1999).

The stories told to Faisal by his mother were very different to those told to him by the men around him. Faisal said:

The men in my family talk about Somalia with pride... it was a great country where men were men and the land was peaceful... that is what they tell me. They talk to me about tribes, about honour, about being connected to the animals and the land. They talk about Somalia as if it is paradise. But this can't be true. Hooyo (mother) tells me stories that are filled with pain... stories that her mother told her and things that she remembers from when she was little. She tells me about how Somalia was once a beautiful country but that the wars changed everything. She told me about land being destroyed, about murders, about starvation, about disease... all of the things her mum struggled with that she saw and all of the things I see on TV. My mum never talks about Somalia without crying... it never makes her happy. I hear these different stories and I just think how can people who lived in the same country see it so differently?

Faisal's reflections on these different stories steered the rest of the reflective conversations we had. Faisal was struggling to understand not only the stories he had been told, but also where these stories had come from and why there was such a difference in the experiences his family members chose to share with him. For the remainder of the reflective conversations Faisal did

not talk in great depth about the poem, although he made reference to it on occasion. This decision to move away from the poem to discuss the stories that provide the context in which the poem was written was not deliberate, but happened organically through our conversations. As Faisal spoke about these stories so passionately, it felt inappropriate to steer him back to discussing the poem, although he did refer back to the poem briefly at times.

Stories of pain: Open wounds

As Faisal recounts some of the stories told to him by his mother he explains that the civil war, which resulted in her and her family fleeing, was not experienced by his mother as a single war but as the product of colonial intrusion.

Hooyo does not separate the wars from colonialism. She tells me that Somalia was never the same after the White men came.

Faisal's mother was born in Hergaisa, the capital city of Somaliland. Unlike Southern Somalia, which had been colonised by Italy, Somaliland was colonised by the British and named 'The British Protectorate of Somaliland'. Somaliland gained 'independence' from Britain in the 1960s, but for a number of political and economic reasons the country had spurts of civil and military unrest that resulted in a 20-year civil war. Faisal's mother left with her father in 1991 at the age of 15 after her mother was murdered. Although Faisal's grandfather regularly visits Somalia, his mother vowed never to return.

She tells Faisal that *all she has ever known is war* and that even as a child, the stories her mother and aunts would tell her would be about the struggle of women and children being the victims of war. Faisal recounts a conversation with his mother:

It has never been easy for us [women]' she said. Ayeeyo (grandmother) used to tell her about the adaan [white] men and how they came to destroy us by taking away the men. Hooyo [mother] said "they took away the men because they knew that we [women] would suffer. First they educated the men, sent them to school so that they forgot how to use their hands and then when the White man left our men could not use their hands...we could not eat. Our men fought the White men and then each other and we were left to pick up the pieces"... she always tells me this. She tells me this is why she blames them, this is why she is angry.

Faisal's mother talked about the impact of colonialism on changing gender dynamics and how; she argues, this was a tactic used by colonisers to destroy the family unit. She talks about how the men were taken away and 'educated' and states that this strategy was used to distract the men from the pastoral roles they had traditionally fulfilled long enough for them to forget, so that once the colonisers had left, all that remained with them was what the colonisers had left; education. This echoes some earlier discussions in the theoretical resources chapter on the function of colonial (mis) education in which missionaries and 'educators' historically would use the act of separation to 'teach' particular groups of young men in order that they might go back and teach their villages (Kanu, 2007). This process was intended to slowly dilute the native knowledge and replace it with a colonial education, which would grow to be regarded as the superior. Faisal's mother talks about the separation of the Somali family being used for a similar

purpose, with education having been used as a means to teach the men Western literary skills so that they would forget the manual skills that for so long had secured their livelihood.

Faisal uses his mother's story to relate to his everyday experience and the way he understands the men around him today:

I get what hooyo was saying. Maybe that's why the men just stand around and don't do nothing, maybe they don't know how? I always thought they were lazy and just didn't want to work but maybe it is just that the work is different? Maybe they've forgotten how to work?

Faisal talked about trying to make sense of why the Somali men around him seemingly lacked ambition and why so many of them were unemployed.

Do you think they [men] still think like this? Do you think because they have forgotten how to work with their hands they don't know how to be men anymore?

Faisal talked about equating manual work with masculinity. He reflected on his mother's story and repeated the story several times, each time returning to the same point. He was resolute that his mother's story must be the only explanation for the perceived lack of masculinity around him. The way Faisal's mother talked about the effects of colonialism on the family unit and the way this story was interpreted by Faisal makes me think of what Aime Césaire (2000) terms a "thingified" state (p.42) in which individuals define themselves by the very thing that stripped them of who they were. 'Thingification' refers to the ways in which individuals inherit the colonial vision with all its neurotic insecurities and how these insecurities are manifested in their

everyday lives. Faisal's mother talks about how colonialism not only forced men to forget the work that they had traditionally done, but that it also made them believe that colonialism and the 'education' it brought with it was a means of survival.

Although Faisal's mother spoke of colonialism and its lasting effects on Somali life, both within Somalia and the diaspora, she does not talk directly about her lived experience in Somalia. Faisal stated that she refuses to talk about her experience because she does not want him to imagine such a place, but that he senses the pain she feels through the stories she chooses to tell him and how she tells those stories.

My mum doesn't like to talk about the war. She says she doesn't want me to hate where I came from, but when I ask her questions about Somalia she gets upset and tells me about how hard life was there. I can tell she never wants to go back but she doesn't hate it. She always tells me I should go one day and see for myself. She was raised during the war, Somalia is peaceful now, it might not be the same as it was.

Faisal talked about how his mother's memories of her homeland do not discourage him from one day returning and that his mother is supportive of him wanting to know his *roots*. He explains that her stories are of a past and not of Somalia today and so his experience of it may not be the same. He talked about how she would always cry when she talked about colonised Somalia and he could not understand why, since she had not directly experienced colonialism. I would argue that in telling such stories, however, his mother is mourning; mourning the loss of an imagined past and an imagined future. Loomba et al. (2006) refers to colonialism as "the most complex

and traumatic relationship in human history” (p.8) in that it has left its mark not only on relationships and ideologies, but also on the imaginations of the people.

Stories of pride: Myths as healing

Unlike the stories of pain shared by Faisal’s mother, the stories shared by Faisal’s uncles [his mother’s brothers] and his [maternal] grandfather provide a stark contrast:

My uncles talk about Somalia through gabays [poems] and maah maah [proverbs]. They talk about the olden days, when they used to ride camels and build houses and stuff like that, they always make me sit with them when they drink tea and they tell me these stories.

Poems and proverbs are an integral part of Somalia’s literary heritage and as oral communicators that has been the main medium for storytelling for centuries (Metz, 1993; Maleken; Summerfield, 1993). Faisal states that he doesn’t really understand many of the poems and proverbs he hears when his uncles speak them in Somali, so they explain them to him in English. These stories are not based on the direct experiences of his uncles, though they may have had similar experiences, but these stories were stories I also knew well. My father shared similar stories with me and my siblings. They were stories that were collectively recognised as being part of our cultural memory in the diaspora. What interested me about the stories shared by Faisal’s uncles were not the stories themselves, but why these stories had been chosen and the significance of these stories in preserving particular memories:

They always tell the same stories, like I ask them about their own experiences and they answer with these same stories. It like they would rather talk about ancient Somalia instead of Somalia now... if that even was what Somalia was like.

For those living in the diaspora, there is a moral and ethical ‘burden of responsibility’ to preserve some kind of cultural memory, which takes place through a process of storytelling (Tonkin, 1992; Portelli, 1998). It is through the telling of stories that memories are exchanged, identities are (re)constructed, and in which individuals feel a sense of ‘belonging’ (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann & Czaplicka 1995; Zerubavel, 1995). It cannot be assumed, however, that because individuals ‘belong’ to a particular dislocated or marginalised group that their narratives are homogenous, rather that they and the stories they tell are hybrid in this diasporic identification. It is human agency and imagination that governs what gets included and excluded in narrativisation (Reissman, 2002). That is not to say that the stories the themes within stories and the ways of telling these stories are not greatly influenced by wider cultural narratives (Chamberlain & Leydesdorff, 2004) but that the individuals have a choice about the stories they choose to share.

The stories shared with Faisal by his uncles are nostalgic memories of customs that shaped what were once the social lives of men in Somalia. In retelling these stories through poems and proverbs, there is a thread of cultural continuity and security that extends into their new lives in the West. It is almost as if these stories are means of cultural preservation. Unlike the stories told by his mother that offered perhaps a historical explanation for current experiences, the stories shared by his uncle are idyllic and though not necessarily based on historical events, are

metaphors for hope, peace and family. Chamberlain and Leydesdorff (2004) state that rather than illuminating particular problems with individual memories, cultural narratives within stories of the past provide insight into the priorities and values of migrants. Faisal believes that the stories told by his uncles are myths, but he nonetheless finds comfort in hearing them.

Can you imagine a world where men lie on the sand for hours with their camels and just watch the world? It doesn't exist but it sounds nice. I like hearing these stories; they make Somalia sound like it could be a nice place.

Faisal talks about the stories his uncles share with him as being healing:

I do want to go to Somalia one day, I know hooyo doesn't but I do. I want to see if it's really like the way men talk about it. I think Somalia can be like that again, but only if we fix it.

I would argue that myths are a powerful tool for collective healing. Mythical tales allow a collective curiosity that enables people to ask questions about the future as well as the past (Agnew, 2005). History is (re)created to fit this founding myth and questions about the future are provoked by the mythical history presented.

Histories, memories and future possibilities

History is neither neutral nor without its political and psychological effects. Green (2004) argues, “composing a past we can live with, and that gives us a sense of coherent identity, involves actively managing the memories of traumatic or painful experiences” (p.40). Stories therefore serve an important psychic function in that they give individuals a voice and enable them to share and name their experiences on their own terms. Stories that recount or reconstruct experiences of oppression are particularly powerful as they offer the teller of the story the opportunity to decide what plot they choose to share and how they choose to share it. For the listener or reader, it offers a window into an individual’s lived experience. Stories are always understood through an individual’s frame of reference, however, so it is not only the teller who has control over the story that is told, the listener has control over the story they choose to hear.

The stories Faisal has been told and has in turn chosen to share have been carefully selected, whether intentionally or not. These stories are tied to history; a history of pain and a history that has allowed for possibilities and hope. As James Baldwin (1955) poignantly states book *Notes of a Native son* "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them" (p.119). As stated in the first chapter of the thesis in which the history of Britain in Somaliland was narrated, histories often omit different ways of telling stories and in this narrative Faisal talks about having to navigate his way around the different ways of telling the history of Somalia.

Summary

This chapter presents a discussion and analysis of Faisal’s artefact and the fragmented stories that surround it. The chapter considers the gendered ways in which stories are passed down and

how histories are interpreted to offer stories of hurt as well as stories of healing. Faisal talks about the burden of carrying such stories and this leads to a discussion of the ways in which new stories can be constructed to create imagined future possibilities.

CHAPTER 7: “IF IT ISN’T WRITTEN, IT ISN’T REAL”: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

MUHAMMED

I’m Muhammed, but my friends call me Moe. I’m 16 years old. I like chillin’ with my friends and playing football. Sometimes I like going to the café with my dad and drinking tea with the older men. School is ok, but I don’t like English...Shakespeare and stuff. I live with my mum and dad and 2 little sisters in a small house and I was born here but my

mum and dad wasn't.

Introduction

Muhammed was 16 years old at the point of data collection. He was born in the UK and is the oldest of three. Muhammed enjoys school and loves to read, but is selective in what he reads. In his spare time he likes to go to the Somali cafes with his father and uncles and listen to their conversations about Somali politics and manhood. His father had been working abroad for most of Muhammed's life, but eventually settled in the UK with the family earlier this year.

During the initial group discussion, Muhammed was the only young man to identify himself first and foremost as Somali and he spoke of this identity with conviction. He identifies himself as someone who is patriotic even though he has never been to Somalia. Muhammed constructed several self-representing artefact which included poems and short stories, but for the purpose of the thesis he selected a poem and a film critique to be discussed. In this chapter, the poem and film critique, as well as the reflective conversations with Muhammed, explore the ways in which identities are represented through language and stories. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, critical race theory and socio-linguistic theory, the concepts of linguistic colonisations and the psychosocial concept of cultural dissonance will be explored.

Muhammed's poem

Dhigaalka far Soomaaliga Dhalashada

Afkaygiyo, dhigashada fartaydaan, kaga
baxay dhibaatoon, Hawlihii ku dhaafee,
iyadaa dhaqaalasha, dhidibbada u aaste
dheelliga u diidaye, dhulka wadajirkisse,
iyadaa dhammessee. Waa inaan ku
dhaataa afkayga, waa inaan ku dhista
afkayga, waa inaan ku dhaqdaa afkayga,
waa inaan ku dhintaa afkayga.

[Translation]

Settling the Somali language

The birth of my language, and the writing using my own
script, allowed me to overcome suffering and hardship, and
the countless and continual worries, a source of support for
our economy, refusing to fall over from imbalance, it provides
a formal promise and guarantee to unite the country.

I have to love my mother tongue dearly,

I have to take pride in my mother tongue, I have

to make practical use of my mother tongue,

I have to die with my mother tongue.

I remember this poem. My father used to perform it around the house. I couldn't have been more than 4 when I first started mimicking my father in tone and gesture. As a poet I love Somali poetry for the emotional labour that goes into not only constructing but performing each poem. The response to hearing a *gabay* is visceral... you do not simply hear the words, for a brief moment you connect to something so much bigger than you. I remember my father saying "remember each word not for what it is but for how it felt". It's interesting to me that Muhammed has chosen to include both the Somali text and translation. From what I know Muhammed does not speak Somali well, let alone write it so I'm intrigued to know why he has chosen to include both.

[Research diary, June 17th 2014]

Lost in

translation

This poem was not created by Muhammed, but is rather a well-known poem that many Somali parents share. It was however, constructed by Muhammed (and his father) into a written form.

The poem is traditionally performed orally, but Muhammed chose to present it in the form of a transcript written in Somali and then translated into English; both of which he constructed with his father. Explaining why he chose this poem and why he chose to present it in this way,

Muhammed said:

I wanted to write a poem about language but I didn't know what to write. I was talking to my dad about it and he told me a gabay (poem) about the Somali language I had heard it before... a lot of times. I never understand it all, just bits 'cos he says it in Somali but this time he translated it into English for me. My dad writes in Somali so I got him to write it

in Somali for me and I wrote the translation when he told me. You can't write down the way it sounds though, I wish I could write down the way it sounds.

Muhammed talked about the process he and his father went through to produce the written poem that would come to be used in his narrative. *Gabay* (poetry) is an integral part of way in which stories, moral lessons and memories are passed on through generations amongst Somalis. It is considered to be particularly important in developing a bond between fathers and sons, as the poems contain historic narratives and moral lessons that are often related to manhood and leadership. There are various types of poetry, each with their own unique rhythm and style of performance that also contain meaning relating to the story behind the poem. Muhammed explains that although the poem was written in Somali and translated into English, there was no way for him to express on paper the rhythmic nuances of the poem that he felt were important:

Even though my dad translated the poem into English so that I could understand, he said I wouldn't get the full meaning because the feeling behind the poem in Somali is different, I kinda got what he meant.

Muhammed's father explained to him that there is an emotional affect that comes with hearing and understanding the poem in Somali and because he could not fully understand it and required the poem to be translated into English, some of the emotional connection would undoubtedly have been lost. Muhammed also talked about how when he started writing the translation of the poem that he realised that it was the first time his father had actually told him the meaning of the poem in English. Muhammed had heard this poem a number of times and even though he never entirely understood some parts of the poem, he would not ask his father to explain, instead he

would “*just enjoy the performance*”. Unlike *maah maah* (proverbs) which are often used amongst Somalis to convey moral lessons and which are spoken with the same tone as speech, *gabay* (poetry) is performed in a number of ways, including the use of song-like rhythms and the incorporation of dance⁶. His father explained that the experience of hearing, seeing and feeling the performance was just as important, if not more important than the content.

When I asked Muhammed why he did not include an audio or video of the *gabay* being performed he said

“English is just easier for you innit. ‘Cos if you ask me questions about it, I can’t talk about it in Somali can I? I know this not the same but I don’t get it in Somali. I like it but I don’t get it so I can’t make you get it”

Muhammed acknowledged that the way the poem would have been experienced in its traditional form would have been very different and his decision to instead include text was not based on him valuing one form over the other, but for the sake of clarity in his explanation. He also took into consideration that he was constructing the poem for me and believed that it was important for me to understand his explanation of the poem, and the only way for him to do that was for him to understand the poem he was sharing. Perhaps if the poem was being shared for another purpose other than to contribute towards a thesis, he may have shared it in a different format without worry. It makes me think that perhaps the participants’ understanding of the thesis as a written text may have influenced or restricted the types of artefacts they chose to share. It also

⁶ Known as *buraanbur* and is performed specifically by women for special occasions such as weddings

makes me aware of the ways in which the young men, particularly Muhammed, took context into account as he constructed his artefacts.

“How I speak is not who I am”

Muhammed acknowledged that English was his first language, but he did not associate the language with how he identified himself. He said: *I just learnt it 'cos I was born here, I didn't have a choice. If you live somewhere of course you know the language.* In contrast to his seemingly dismissive explanation of his fluent English, Muhammed spoke about the Somali language with sadness:

My mum and dad speak and write Somali but me and my sisters don't speak Somali. Hooyo (mum) and abo (dad) wanted us to fit in so they never pushed us to learn Somali. I wish they did because now I would know how to speak it, but I don't. I know a little but not enough to you know, understand anything. How can I call myself Somali when I can't even speak it?

Muhammed was visibly frustrated as he spoke about his parents wanting him to *fit in* and believing that prioritising English would enable him to do that. Muhammed saw this as a lost opportunity that now meant that he was struggling to justify his ties to his Somali identity. We talked about the importance of language and he explained that to him language was identity; the Somali language that is. It was interesting to hear how differently he spoke of the two languages. Somali, a language he struggled to speak and understand but refused to let go of because it carried with it so much more than words; and English, a language he speaks fluently but sees purely as a tool for communication. This visceral approach to understanding and using the

Somali language as opposed to the pragmatic use of English could be explored through the work of John Berger (2008) and Wa Thiong'o (1986) who both assert that language cannot be reduced to a stock of words. Indeed for Muhammed, language is much more than words; it is a gateway between worlds.

Muhammed spoke about his experience growing up and his parents not encouraging him to speak Somali because they wanted him to be proficient in English. In Somalia men who are able to perform poetry (gabay) and speak Somali with eloquence were considered to have a high social status and Muhammed spoke about how his parents applied the same understanding to why they wanted Muhammed to speak English instead of Somali:

They didn't want us to speak even a little bit with a Somali accent. They said if we spoke English like English people we could fit in... it's like they think it's that easy. I didn't fit in, they just called me a coconut.

Muhammed explained that despite his parents' hopes that having a high language proficiency in English would enable him to *fit in*, he was actually teased for not being able to speak Somali. He went on to explain that the term *coconut* was a term that Somali boys used to describe him, meaning that he *looks Black but acts White*. The Somali language was something he was not given the opportunity to learn.

What is interesting to note here is the values and function of language expressed both by Muhammed and his parents, but towards different languages. Muhammed's parents wanted him to adopt the English language so the language would grant him access and opportunity to

everything this country has to offer. To Muhammed this aim was partly achieved in that he's a fluent English speaker, but he doesn't believe that language alone is enough to give him access and opportunity. For Muhammed, his yearning for the Somali language is based on the same values his parents hold for English: to be able to have access to a culture he knows little about and the opportunity to claim the Somali identity.

Muhammed talked extensively about what he termed *a loss* and said that *it's like breaking down a wall here so that people can see you but then even though you break down this wall, your parents build a bigger wall next to it*. This is an extremely powerful statement that I believe encompasses Muhammed's turmoil. He explained that the walls he was breaking down was the English language he was speaking, but that the wall his parents were building was the Somali language that was denied to him.

Although Muhammed discussed the reason why his parents wanted him to learn English, he did not speak about why they did not teach him Somali; he simply stated that they didn't. What I found interesting however was that the above artefact was based on a poem that Muhammed would hear his father recite. Though his father was not often around, this shows that Muhammed did have some exposure to the Somali language, although not directly taught or encouraged to speak. Despite being familiar with the oral performance of the poem, Muhammed made the choice to offer a transcript, however. I cannot help but think about the process by which a poem moves from oral performance to script, to translated script. I cannot help but see the loss in each stage of the process. Although by the end, the translated transcript is the easiest to understand

and access, so perhaps by going through this process Muhammed is adopting the values held by his parents.

Anchimbe's (2012) notion of 'linguabridity' suggests that young people who are raised to speak two or more languages; in this case Somali and English, and who are unable to draw lines between the two (or more) should be considered a linguistic group of their own. These young people are not considered to switch linguistic identities, nor are they involved in what might be termed 'linguistic victimisation' (Anchimbe, 2012), but are merely expressing languages that are part of them. Although this is the reality for many postcolonial communities, it is not the case for Muhammed. Muhammed recognises the dichotomy between the languages, one of which (English) is present and expressed daily, though not through choice, and the other (Somali) as present but not entirely reachable. This reference to Somali as 'the other' is deliberate in order to highlight the position the language has taken.

From spoken to written: Translation as ethical

Muhammed returned to the poem and said:

Look at the poem, the English one. It doesn't mean what it means, well it does and it doesn't. I can't explain but you get me. If someone English reads the English one its own then it's just a poem to them but when you read the Somali one you get it, you get what every line is telling you. It's telling you something different. The English readers don't need to know that.

Muhammed spoke extensively about what was lost in the process of moving the poem from its oral form to written and it was clear to me that he felt more comfortable talking about why he chose the poem than the actual content of the poem. He told me I would understand the poem in Somali, which I do, it is a poem I too have heard often and when he also said that the poem in English meant what it said and didn't, that too I also understood. The poem in Somali was developed during a particular time, in a particular context and from a particular point of view and because Muhammed did not choose to share the poem in Somali, I will not disclose what that poem means from my perspective. More importantly, I want to focus on why Muhammed choose to translate it and what he is conveying to the reader through his translation.

There is always a tension when words are translated from one language to another. The philosopher Ricoeur (1991) talked about this process extensively in his work. In his essay *Ideology and Utopia* (1991), he discussed the philosophical notion that translation is one's manifestation of obligation to others and society; obligations that may sometimes be contradictory. The reason why I make this reference to Ricoeur is because he talks about translation as a moral action and when Muhammed talks about the decision he made to translate this poem, I believe he made a moral decision. Ricoeur states that all speech acts in some way or another to convey a message and in doing so commits the speaker to makes a 'pledge' to the reader (1991, p.217).

When I asked Muhammed about the story behind the poem, or when I asked him to talk me through the poem, his response was never direct. I don't know if this is because he wasn't interested in the English form of the poem or if he felt detached from it, but his response would

always return back to him wanting to give the reader some information whilst acknowledging that something was still held back.

Muhammed said

The poem tells them enough... to get it, but they will never get it all

Muhammed went on to explain the way in which he believed the Somali language had changed over time and how this has resulted in words drifting away from their meanings.

See awoowo (granddad) knows Somalia back in the day. When he was little these stories and poems were the only thing they had, but then the colonisers came and forced them to write. But there are some things you can't write you know and because they did they lost that. They lost the stuff you can't write

Linguistic colonisation

Colonialism did not just involve the oppression of peoples, but also of their languages, therefore you cannot study the experiences of postcolonial communities without considering their linguistic realities. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) in their book *Language contact, Creolization and Genetic linguistics*, point out:

The history of language is a function of the history of its speakers, and not an independent phenomenon that can be thoroughly studied without reference to the social context in which it is embedded. (p.4)

Muhammed spoke about the Somali language as if it had now become two separate languages. He spoke of the oral Somali language as being ancestral and the written form being *modern* and *more accepted*. He referred to the written form as *Westernised Somali* and the oral form being *traditional* and he makes this distinction for two main reasons; because of the script of the written and the practice of the oral. This dichotomy between the oral and written Somali language was brought into being by colonialism. Somalia, like most African countries precolonialism, were oral communicators and it was colonialism that brought with it a new language (the written word in this case, which was thought of as distinct from the spoken). Not only was a written form of the Somali language developed in the late 1960s, but we had also been given colonial Latin letters with which to write our language; thus giving it supposed accessibility, but also enabling the colonial legacy to become entrenched. This new form of communication threatened and continues to threaten the oral heritage of Somalis and raises the questions of whether or not we should adopt this new form of language, resist it, or use it as a tool for writing back to the oppression (Tiffin, 1997).

Somalis have traditionally been ‘oral historians’ (or storytellers) and entire families and villages would leave their homes and gather in large groups to listen to poets and storytellers who spoke to them of the past, and hopes for the future. In Somalia, the storyteller does not just simply tell stories, but demands a response from the audience. The audience was never passive, but actively involved in the performance of the story. Performances, language and content of stories varied across villages and tribes and even between genders. In rare cases when stories were written, they were carved into the walls of caves or written on the surface of one’s actual body. Because the language was oral no letters were written, but images and symbols would be associated with

the stories. This was to ensure that the stories would still bring people together so that the idea of the audience was retained.

Colonialism brought with it a homogenising influence that imposed Western customs upon the African continent. Language became less about custom and more about global accessibility.

Now in Somalia, the written form of the Somali language, which uses Latin script, is taught in all schools and is the main medium of communication where the English language is not spoken.

It seems to be the most obvious and most pervasive colonial legacy. By determining that a country which has been colonised must speak the coloniser's language, or in the case of Somalia, use the coloniser's script, it provides the terms by which their reality is constituted and names the way in which their world may be known. Language continues to be a means to maintain power and shape culture. As Wa Thiongo states, language carries culture and culture carries with it "an entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (cited in Currey, 1986, p.6) and so by claiming or altering the language of a people, the oppressors silence the realities of oppressed peoples. This process of oppression through the form of alternating, erasing or imposing language is referred to as 'linguistic colonialism' (Calvet, 1987)

Calvet (1987, p. 72) identifies the two stages of linguistic colonialism: "vertical" and "horizontal". The vertical stage refers to the spread of European languages to the 'upper classes' of the colonised peoples (i.e. those that worked for or represented the colonial power) before being spread among the 'lower classes'. The horizontal stage refers to the way in which

European languages were diffused from major/capital cities through to small cities and villages. This spread of language was mainly done through the education system and resulted in the development of a (new) language hierarchy, in which the language of the coloniser represented status and prestige. Those in the major cities and who worked for the coloniser were given status and those in the villages, who had little access to the language of the coloniser, were considered 'lower classes' and were not valued.

In Muhammed's analysis of the construction of the poem, he captured the complexity, unease and the simultaneous frailty and strength of language. He talked about the ways in which different formats (written and spoken) came to serve different purposes, but how he felt both were inaccessible in parts. As we moved on to discuss the second artefact, the tone of the discussion remained the same.

Wa Thiongo (1986) stresses that language does not passively reflect reality, but rather provides the tools in which an individual is able to make sense of their world. Colonialism worked to instil a particular set of oppressive values, the internalisation of which was an effective way of disempowering people.

Politics of language

There are two major approaches to consider when discussing the tumultuous relationship between language and identity in postcolonial African nation. The first, and most visibly represented in Africa is that of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986) whose work privileges African

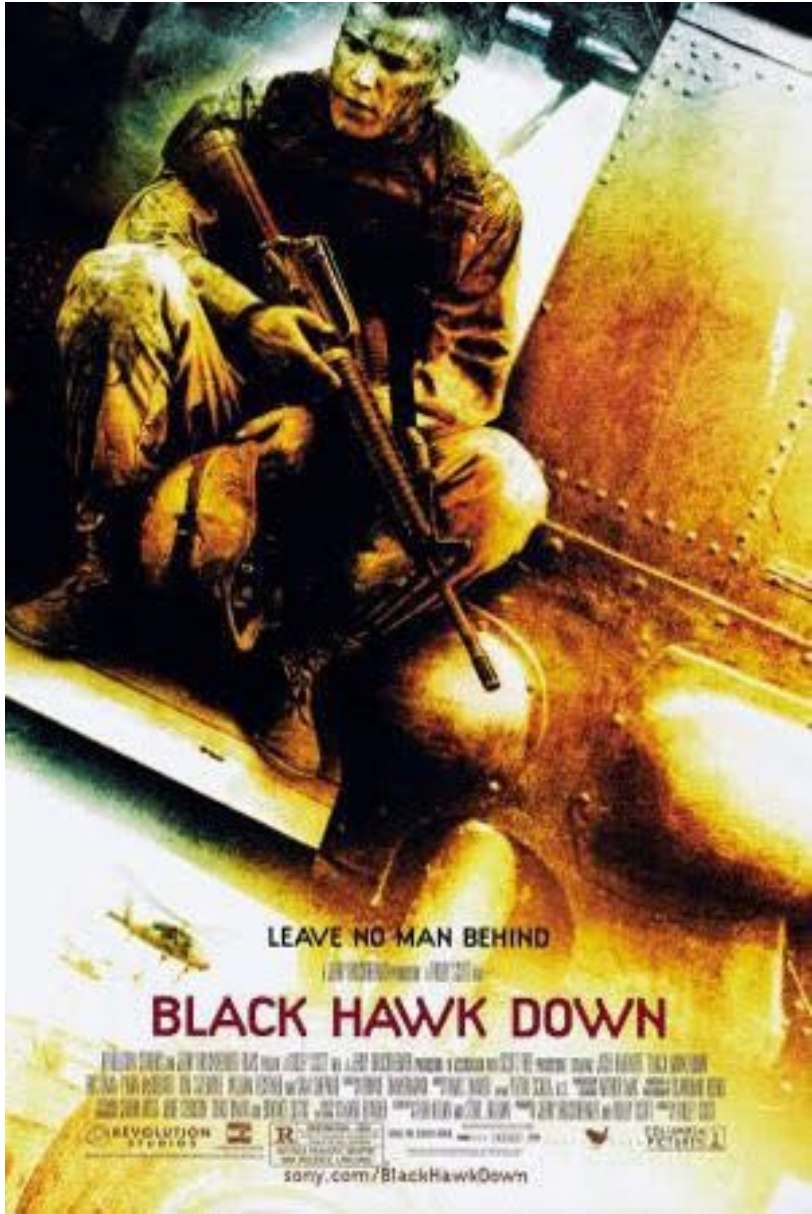
languages whilst shunning the English language for its association with colonialism. The second is the position of Chinua Achebe (1994) who argued that we should embrace the hybridity of languages that exist in Africa and the influences of English.

Wa Thiong'o (1986) in his book *Decolonisation of the Mind* argues for the survival of African languages, only being possible by actively resisting the use of English in within African nations. He asserts that the use of African languages play a fundamental part of African peoples' struggle against imperialism. In contrast Achebe (1994) argues that English in fact offers the best of both worlds as Africans are able to express the hybridity of their cultures. Wa Thiong'o refutes this claim that English should be used to enrich African cultures, claiming that we should not use other people's languages to enrich our own (Wa Thiong'o, 1994).

Achebe (1994) makes a valid point in that regardless of which side you are in the struggles against imperialism in Africa, it is hard to deny the widespread influence of the English language. And in the case of the Somali language, it is particularly difficult to resist this influence as the Somali language did not exist in what we know as its written form today, before imperialism and its modern day script uses Latin. The danger of this inscription of Englishness into the Somali language however, is that as Wa Thiong'o (1986) argues, imperialism is allowed to linger. This view is in accordance with the work of Fanon (1968) who states that to master a language, one must also adopt the culture of that language and its people. Fanon (1968) asserts "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all [emphasis added] to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation" (p. 17-18). The discontent expressed by Wa Thiong'o and Fanon with which I concur is not the use of the English language but the way in which English is distinguished as a hegemonic language that is valued above indigenous African languages.

In Muhammed's narrative, he speaks about how his parents prioritised teaching him English over teaching him Somali and the consequence of this in how he is now (un)able to define his place within the Somali culture. Wa Thiong'o (1986) asserts that by speaking the language of the oppressors (White colonialists), Black people come to define themselves in relation to that language. Muhammed's fears of becoming disconnected from the Somali culture, through lack of linguistic capability are very real concerns. Steyn (2001) states that one of the lasting effects of linguistic colonialism is that Black people have been taught to have contempt for their own language and by association their culture, beliefs and traditions; in essence who they are. Language is unavoidably tied to understandings of identity and culture (Creese, 2010). Histories and values that comprise an individual's identity and their knowledge acquired over time are all interconnected elements that are carried by language (Bagwasi, 2003; Wa Thiong'o, 1986).

The Stories they tell



Muhammed’s review of *Black Hawk Down*

When I was 10 years old I walked into my cousin’s bedroom and saw them watching a movie on their laptop. It was Black Hawk Down. I was a kid so it was a bit scary but I

remember my cousins talking about how the actors in the movie were African but weren't Black. This year me and my cousins went to go watch Captain Philips and I remember one of my cousins say that there was [sic] some Somali actors in it.

When we watched Captain Philips I just thought about Black Hawk Down. Why is it the only two movies about Somalia are about us being criminals? Why are they always the heroes? I watched Black Hawk Down again last night and it pissed me off. My mum and dad told me about that story and the Americans had no right to come in but in the movie they didn't even talk about that. They didn't talk about the people they killed, they just focussed on the Soldiers and their families they left behind. Talking about them like they are good and we are bad, fuck that. And I got what my cousins were talking about, none of them playing Somalis were even fucking Somali, they were Nigerians or Something and they didn't even say the Somali words properly, fucking pissed me off.

And then Captain Philips talked about us as pirates, boo hoo we are refugees, or pirates that's all they ever say and the White man again is the hero. Only difference between this movie and Black Hawk was that they got a Somali guy to play a Somali, even though it was just two.

The reason why I wanted to talk about these two movies was because it pisses me off how the only thing people know about us Somalis is the bad stuff, I mean Google Somali or Somalia and look at the pictures that come up. We are either dying of starvation, holding guns or we are chewing qat. On the internet, in the movies, in the books all the time we only hear bad things about Somalia and Somalis.

When I am with my friends we know that people look at us different. We don't look like other African boys, and we don't act like them. Sometimes when people see us they are

scared and sometimes when they see us they feel sorry for us but that is not because we have done anything. It's because of what they see and read about us.

Imagine if in Black Hawk Down the movie was about a Somali man saving his family? That was a true story but they would never tell that. Imagine in Captain Philips was about all the Somalis who worked on the ships for the British, like my granddad? They'll never tell that.

So what I'm saying is who we are we know but we can't make others know unless we start making our own movies, or writing about ourselves on the internet or something. I don't want to wait for the next movie to come out about a Somali being a drug dealer or killer or something, I'm sick of it. I know these movies are American but it's the same here, the way British TV always shows Muslims as bad, like we're all terrorists or something. Somalis aren't even on TV here but Muslims are and that pisses me off too you know. It's like everything we are they don't like even though we know what they show isn't true. We can't call ourselves British because when people see us they just see us as terrorists or refugees or pirates, nothing else.

I read this review of the films and I smiled because so many of his views echoes my own, but then it saddened me that so many of his views echoed my own. I remember growing up and not seeing anyone who looks like me on TV unless it was on the news and then these same images and narratives would circulate. There is something about the way we are portrayed in film and media than rendered us simultaneously invisible and hypervisible. I have never understood how little could be known about us as

Somalis and as Muslims and yet both identities are seen as a risk.

[Research diary, June 17th 2014]

A single narrative

When Muhammed moved on to talk about the second artefact, the tone of the conversation changed slightly. As we talked about the first artefact, the poem, Muhammed spoke as if he had accepted the limits to which he could discuss it and instead focused the conversation on exploring the impact of those limitations. By the end of that conversation it felt to me as though Muhammed was beginning to see it as more than a loss but also as a necessary restructuring. As we moved on to talk about his second artefact, a review of a film, I felt as though Muhammed was a lot less accepting of the circumstance. He was visibly frustrated and when I asked him why he chose to talk about representation in film and media, he said:

You asked us to think about belonging and I remember talking to my friends about how we don't belong here. Only way we can belong here is if we be like them and we can't be like them. We always look on TV and the only time you see us is in the news.

Muhammed explained that what he had chosen to discuss were not the movies themselves. Just like our first conversation, he wasn't interested in the specifics. What he did want to discuss was the role of representation in everyday life and the impact this has on how he experiences the world around him. During our conversation, we talked about visual representations, social expectations, recognition and belonging.

To begin, I asked Muhammed to have a think about why films in particular were important to him and why. Muhammed said:

We all watch films. Even if we are different we all watch films. I like watching sci fi movies because they have the best acting and CGI and you know it's not real so you enjoy it. Movies are not real even though some say they are they're not real.

We talked about the role of film and how stories told through movies could be interpreted by the audience. Muhammed explained that the reason he enjoys sci-fi is because he acknowledges that is not real and therefore accepts the narrative being told for what it is. But he goes on to explain that movies that claim to be based on actual historical events, like the two mentioned in his review, annoy him because he does not believe they actually capture the truth of what took place. We discussed the idea of 'truth' in the media for quite a while and I told him that in my opinion every story is told from a particular perspective, so the stories being shared may be somebody's truth. Muhammed paused, nodded his head in agreement and then said:

Yes but then where is the truth for the people in the movie who are bad? Why is it the truth of the White people always the one we have to watch?

Here, Muhammed not only captures the effects of seeing a single narrative, but what particularly interested me was the distinction he made in terms of race. He began to talk about the way in which those racialized were continuously portrayed as negative characters, either as criminals or as victims, which he related back to his experiences of everyday life:

It's like life, we are seen as negative because everything people know about us is negative. Maybe the reason why we are bad people in movies is because the White people making the movies really think we are bad?

One thing that Muhammed often commented on was the way in which in the American movies in particular constructed a single narrative of Black characters and in the two movies he discussed in his review, Muhammed talked about how the characteristics of Somalis in those movies echoed the stereotypical socially accepted characteristics. Hall (1996) explains the impact of representations such as this on identity construction:

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we came from”, so much as what we may become, how we have been represented and how that bears upon how we may represent ourselves. Identities are, therefore, constituted within, not outside, representation. (p.4)

If identities are constructed within and not outside of representation, as Hall (1996) asserts, then those who are able to inform the representation, also have the power to influence the identity constructions of those it represents. Gilroy (1993) cautions against what he terms ‘ethnic absolutism’ which refers to the ways in which ethnic groups or nations are conflated into singular, homogenous cultures. Gilroy argues that such a tendency to create singular, homogenous groupings renders other ethnic identities within the same nation invisible and does not account for the complexities and differences within a single ethnic group or nation. This tallies with Brah’s (1996) assertion that cultures are always permeated with power relations and are therefore sites of constant struggle. Gilroy (1993) refers to the notion of “culture as heritage” and the “fatal junction of the concept of culture and the concept of nationality” (p.2) as a ‘new’ form of racism. Although there are debates to the extent to which this form of racism is ‘new’, it

is clear that cultural differences are the main tools used to construct ‘otherness’ and exhibit ‘cultural racism’ (Balibar, 1991; Blaut, 1992). This is clear to see even in the UK today where culture as a concept is used to mark otherness, leading politicians and those in power to blame particular groups of people for not ‘fitting in’ with so called ‘British values’ and for lacking acculturation (Kundnani, 2014).

This echoes Muhammed’s analysis as he discussed the ways in which the racism he experiences in everyday life is re-presented in the films he watches. Muhammed went on to discuss the way in which some narratives change when those usually portrayed negatively act in a way that is seemingly accepted:

Mo Farah is like the only Somali on TV doing something good and they don’t even call him Somali, they call him British. It’s like when we do good things we’re British and if we do bad things we’re Somali.

Here, Muhammed recognises the narrative and portrayal of success of a Somali-born person, but also notices how the positive action is attributed to ‘British’ and not ‘Somali’. He went on to say that because Mo Farah was referred to as British and not Somali, he could not see this as a narrative he could feel connected to:

I can’t win Gold in the Olympics or do something that is seen as being British like that. If the only time we get to be on TV or seen is if we are British then I don’t want to be British. Only time we are seen is when we do bad stuff, rest of the time no one even knows Somalis.

Determined to no longer remain part of an invisible or misrepresented narrative, this sense of alienation and exclusion instilled in Muhammed an urge to create an almost “counter identity” (Sernhede, 2001, p.214). Muhammed talked about feeling conflicted in not wanting to fit with a stereotype but also questioning the extent to which his positive actions would be visible and recognised by those who continue to position him as the other.

He states:

You can only do what you can. I'm still going to try hard to be the best I can be and to make my family proud, but I know society will always see me how they want to see me

Summary

Muhammed’s narrative spoke of the dangers and possibilities of language and representation. The first artefact, the poem, explored the function of language as a gateway into culture. Muhammed reflected on the decisions made by his parents to prioritise teaching him the English language over Somali and the consequences of this. Literature on linguistic colonisation and politics of language were then used to discuss the ways in which colonialism resulted in the hegemony of the English language and the anti-colonial movements that continue to fight to reclaim their indigenous languages.

With the second artefact, the film review, Muhammed talked about the negative representation of Somalis in that particular film, as well as the negative portrayal of Black men in the media more generally. Muhammed spoke about the dynamics of power, with those producing the films about Black masculinity generally being White, and who perpetuates this racist stereotyping of Black men. This was then linked to a discussion on culture and the need to resist negative narratives, whilst also trying to find some way to 'fit in'.

CHAPTER 8: FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

Within the previous narrative chapters I have tried to find the balance between allowing the stories of the young men to speak for themselves, and carefully selecting theories that might offer useful lenses through which to examine the psychosocial contexts in which these stories were constructed. In this penultimate chapter, I want to bring together some of the prominent themes that emerged throughout the research and discuss them further. This chapter deliberately focuses on the themes in isolation from the stories told. This is with the hope of examining overlapping ideas without imposing an alternative interpretation of personal narratives. This chapter is an opportunity to further discuss theoretical ideas without taking away from the important analysis already conducted by the young men themselves.

1. The (im)possibility of Blackness

One of the core themes explored throughout the thesis is the notion of race, in particular the experience of 'Blackness' in relation to 'Whiteness'. Although this thesis was not designed to focus on race, any attempt to explore identity within the context of Britain needs to include a discussion of race and racism. Race, or more specifically 'Blackness', has been explored in this research as a performance, a mask, a wound and as a marker of (in) visibility. Throughout the thesis, I also use the notion of the 'subject' to explore race in an ontological sense as an element that contributes to the construction of the self. I have tried to avoid using the terms 'African subject' and 'Black subject' interchangeably, in order to make clear the distinction between the two, but these concepts do often overlap. Both terms are used with the recognition of power and the use of power in creating conditions that are informed by and which reproduce oppression and injustice; whether that is informed by processes of dehumanisation such as colonialism, or operationalisation such as racism.

One of the main theorists I have used to discuss the idea of the 'Black subject' is Frantz Fanon (1967). Fanon speaks of the Black subject with reference to the struggle against the subjection that questions the humanity of Black subjects. It is through Fanon's articulation of the Black subject that questions of what it means to be human or not human takes precedence. Fanon sees this as an existential predicament, in which the Black subject is placed within an anti-Black world and does not have the will to live but to survive (Sithole, 2016). By this he means recognising that as the humanity of the Black subject is brought into question in every aspect of life, the Black subject is understood as a form of living being that is rendered non-existent but has the possibility to emerge. In order to emerge, however, the Black subject must break away from survival and move towards having the will to live, an existential condition. This is to move

away from what Fanon refers to as the condition of the Black subject being determined as 'being without' and also as determined from without; which can be seen in the previous chapter which discussed the impact of media and societal portrayals of Somalis for example.

Throughout the thesis, the notion of Blackness and indeed the experience of the Black subject has been tied to 'being'; being visible, being heard, being human. The ways in which Black subjects have met with subjection have and continue to manifest in both explicit and hidden ways. Although it may be argued that the nature of subjection has changed from the raw and explicit form which was apparent during the colonial era, to the now hidden, everyday structural constitution of subjection that is not the case. Colonialism, although evidently violent, also has hidden elements of subjection in form of education of example, and although subjection today happens to through everyday structures, it also occurs in the raw violent forms of hate crime and the murder of young Black people for example. Fanon's understanding of subjection is useful for explicating the fact that while the forms may have evolved, the function of the old and new formations of subjection are one and the same.

The narratives in this thesis offer insights into the ways in which the young men negotiate the discourses around them that position them from without (i.e. overdetermined) and as 'without'. These are indeed narratives of young men who are trying to find as Fanon suggests, a way to live beyond survival.

2. Double consciousness: Seeing self as Other

Each of the narratives of the young men in this thesis account for the ways in which the participants have been constructed and construed as a problem through the relationships, spaces and histories in which their stories are framed. Du Bois (1997) coined the term *double consciousness* to examine the sense of *twoness* experienced by the individual who is both the subject and object of the problem. Du Bois was interested in the ways in which an individual navigates his way in a world where Blackness is constructed as a problem, whilst simultaneously not acknowledging or explicitly addressing Blackness as a problem (Kiguwa, 2014). Fanon (1963) argues that when a Black subject enters the world of a White man, his self-esteem diminishes and he loses confidence. This results in the altering of behaviour to emulate the White man.

Du Bois (1997) uses the metaphor of a *veil* to explain the state of double consciousness, whereby one becomes aware of or discovers their race and begins to see himself as others see him. The veil is both internal and external in that it refers to both behaviour and psyche; as such it is possible to live beneath or above the veil, but one cannot get rid of the veil entirely (Kiguwa, 2014). This is why both Du Bois (1997) and Fanon (1963) refer to Blackness as ‘problematic’, particularly because of the ways in which the world is built on White subjectivity and how this results in the Black subject seeing himself as an ‘other’ in the world. Because the Black man is construed as a problem, his experiences of Blackness are conflicted. The Black body is overcome with a sense of restriction and uncertainty and in a world where Whiteness has become normative, and so the Black subject assumes Whiteness as the normative standard to which he should be compared (Ahmed, 2007; Steyn, 2001).

The stories in the thesis offer examples of the ways in which the participants saw themselves as 'others' in their worlds as a result of the White subjectivities that were prevalent in the spaces that framed their narratives. The stories also recount experiences in which the young men were not permitted to belong or exist within a space. Fanon (1963), in his description of the dual self, refers to a state of non-existence in which one is no longer a man or human, but merely an object. This state results in a constant compulsion to find approval and recognition in the eyes of the White man who constructs the Black man as an object, as Fanon states: "all I wanted...to be was a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together" (p. 85).

3. 'Acting White': The 'coconut'

The artefacts produced by the young men articulate the tension between what is said about them and what they experience. Their reflections are unique and although each narrative discusses race in some form, they each express the complexities of race within their own everyday experiences (Hall, 1996). In the narratives, racism is used to speak about the ways in which experiences of (not) belonging are racialised and politicised. These stories do not discuss racism in isolation, but recognise the intersections of gender and religion (Kulz, 2014) and how the discourse of Blackness works to frame their gendered experiences and religious representations, particularly within the classroom.

One notion of racial performativity that I think would be useful to explore further is the notion of 'acting white'. For over 20 years, there have been sustained contentious discussions about the concept of 'acting white' within the school space with ideas around authenticity and identification

(Sullivan, 2004). Although Fordham and Ogbu (1986) are often the first point of reference when considering the introduction of this idea of 'acting white', it was McArdle and Young's (1970) work entitled *Classroom discussion of racial identity or how can we make it without 'acting white'?* that was the earliest piece of work to refer to the term. McArdle and Young, a school psychologist and social worker respectively, conducted a qualitative study which explored the experiences of Black and White students transitioning to a new high school. The study found that Black students often sought to gain equal opportunities and rights whilst resisting the need to fully assimilate to "white culture"; in essence "acting white" to get by (McArdle & Young, 1970, p. 137).

The work done by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) takes the discussion on 'acting white' to a new direction, which discusses the achievement gap between Black and White students within a cultural and ecological perspective. This research, like that conducted by McArdle and Young was based with a US context. Ogbu states in his work that substandard schooling and limited job prospects after school for Black American young people were some of the factors that contributed to the achievement gap between Black and White students in America (Ogbu, 1987). The reason why Fordham and Ogbu (1986) decided to conduct a piece of research that looked specifically at student achievement was because previous models of race and achievement emphasised genetic differences and Fordham and Ogbu recognised that these models failed to take into account the clear lack of evidence for genetic difference and the experiences of Black students who performed well in school.

In the study conducted by Fordham and Ogbu, the notions of "oppositional collective identity" and "oppositional cultural reference" (p.38) were used to discuss the strategies that Black

American students developed to resist systematic oppression and to protect themselves. Some of the narratives presented in this thesis echo some of these oppositional strategies. The young men shared the ways in which they negotiated spaces that did not allow them to feel included. An example of this is in the chapter 'performing Blackness' in which the young man spoke about working hard to maintain school grades. He made it clear that he did not identify hard work as being associated with the Black persona he was expected to perform in the classroom. Although Ogbu and Fordham put forth these concepts and explain why they might be useful, they do not discuss the different driving forces that may motivate students of colour to employ these oppositional strategies. For the young men in my research, these strategies came from tensions between performing a racial identity in order to be the 'normalised absent' and the moral values of hard work, honour, and respect instilled by the Islamic faith they practiced outside of the school walls. These young men do not, therefore, have an entirely collective oppositional identity or culture; instead they move fluidly between multiple spaces of identification. Fanon (1968) explains this as the two-dimensional aspect of the Black man, who is one way in the presence of White people and another way in the presence of his fellow compatriots.

In the narratives, there are a number of references to the ways in which the young men are perceived by those within and outside of their community. What was interesting to note was how the analogy of *coconut* was used to reference the ways in which the young men were perceived to be 'White'. The term 'coconut' deserves much-needed attention to unpack the complex and interwoven meanings this term carries. It is specific to the African context and is of a derogatory and offensive nature, that is used to describe an individual who is Black on the outside; referring to both race and ethnicity, and White on the inside; referring to behavioural attributes that are

perceived to be associated with those who are White (Rudick, 2008). This definition is also often associated with Black people who have a preference for speaking English over an indigenous or African language. What is interesting to note is that in the narratives, the references to *acting White* and *coconut* were used in discussion pertaining to academic achievement at school and proficiency in the English language.

Now of course, this is a rather simplistic definition of the term 'coconut'; language, as made evident in this research, is complex and carries with it multiple meanings. According to Fataar (2009), anything that resembles White culture and is perceived as inauthentic to Black culture; such as choice of attire, adopting westernised ways, choice in hairstyle (weave as opposed to natural hair, for example), perceived lack of *Ubuntu*, preference for (or proficiency in only) English, class position, friendship circles and taste preference could constitute as 'coconut' traits. This definition of 'coconut traits' suggests that the label of coconut is dependent on a simplification of racialized traits that present White culture as being homogenous and Black culture as being homogenous. Phiri (2010) clarifies that 'acting' as a certain race has little to do with your appearance or phenotype, but indicates a relationship between political and/or economic power that exists within a framework of superiority and how specific racialized subjects act this out. Phiri makes an assertion that the term 'coconut' reveals the performative nature of race. The narratives in the thesis also make reference to the performative nature of race, with the lines between performer and audience blurred.

Summary

This further discussions chapter offered the opportunity to examine some of the themes that were apparent across each of the narratives. The purpose of this chapter was not to suggest a collective identity or a shared narrative amongst the research participants, but to draw out apparent links in their narratives without taking away from the uniqueness of their experiences and the stories they have chosen to share. The chapter looks at the ways in which race and experiences of race and racism shape the spaces the young men occupy and the experiences they have chosen to share. The themes examine the notion of Blackness and the Black subject, how this subjection results in a doubled experience of the self and how acts of resistance, compliance or assimilation are interpreted and represented by both those who perform and those who observe the performances.

On reflective restatements

Conclusions seem to offer definitive summaries and endings to research. However, this thesis in its structure and content is an expression of becoming and so it would not be fitting to try and 'round up' the process in a clear and linear chapter. What I offer instead is a reflection of the process and an outline of the contributions this research makes. The purpose of this thesis was not to answer questions, or even to ask questions but to offer a space that might initiate dialogue and to think about how research might be done differently. I did not imagine that this project would open up wounds, begin to heal old wounds and potentially create new wounds. This thesis is much more than an academic project. What began as an exploratory study, evolved into a truly co-constructed piece of work. This final section of the thesis reflects on the purpose of the research and how that has evolved over the course of the process. It also offers recommendations on how some of the insights offered in this thesis might be useful for practice, and in particular for pedagogy.

The thesis presents the stories of four young Somali men who worked with me in co-constructing a research design that would enable them to not only share their experiences of belonging, but also a space in which we might examine these experiences. The stories all explored the broad

and fluid concept of identities in ways that recognised the complexity and fragmented nature of identities that are both constructed and imposed.

There have been challenges throughout the process, the most fundamental being the ethical and methodological choices made to ensure a commitment to honouring the young men in the community to which I belong. As a youth worker, working with these same young men for many years, I had to find a way to negotiate a new way of working with them as a researcher. I had to develop a way of working that would respect the relationships already formed whilst also being reflexive and recognising the troubling ways my role as a researcher now placed me very much as an outsider. I felt uneasy doing research within my own community and so designing a research approach that offered the flexibility to be moulded around the changing need of the participants, helped me to remove some of the pressure and guilt of doing something that might otherwise be seen as me colonising my own community or abusing the trust of the young men I worked with.

I have a personal commitment to ethics and my approach to research focusses on the need to respect and honour participants, not only at the stage of data collection but throughout the research process, and that includes writing up and disseminating the researching findings. These stories were not mine to tell, and I could not claim to be 'giving voice' to stories that already existed. What I did venture to do however, was to create a space in which stories could be used to initiate a new kind of dialogue; dialogue that recognises the multifaceted ways in which stories are constructed.

Academic writing often creates a paternalistic structure that excludes the groups of people who are often the topic of discussion. Although I understand that my community and the young people whose stories are captured in this thesis may not wish to read a piece of text of this length, I still tried to write in a way that would hopefully be accessible to those who have chosen to share their stories with me, should they wish to read it. Throughout the process I became aware of the importance of voice but also the importance of silence and understanding that spaces for silence were also necessary. This is evident in the data that was collected but not included in this thesis because the young men no longer wanted those aspects of their narratives made visible. It is also evident in the format and direction of the narratives told, in which some of the young men wanted to deconstruct and discuss their artefacts, whilst others choose to instead highlight the process over the artefact itself. The conversations were led by what the young men were willing to share, and part of the reason why the conversations were structured around the artefacts was because I knew that there would be places in their stories that these young men would not want to go. This structure allowed for these silences but also offered them the power to define the terms of their own narratives.

In writing up the thesis, I struggled most with the use of language and theory. I recognise the requirement of a thesis to situate research within theoretical discussions but in many instances, I found that the theoretical discussions overshadowed the narratives of the young men. Although I tried to write about the complexity of the experiences being shared, at times I felt as though the discussions were rationalising and making sense of these experiences in ways that felt too simplified and clean. As an activist scholar, I acknowledge the usefulness of appropriate theories in offering lens in which to explore issues from different perspectives, whilst being firm in my

belief that research does not belong solely within the academy. Research needs to touch the people we work with and so I tried to focus on the practice of doing research and the stories themselves; using theory loosely and only where appropriate.

The academy can be a colonising space and attempts to incorporate decolonising practices within this research required me to step outside of categories and blur lines between disciplines, but with this, I was tasked with the difficult use of language. Language is problematic if it 'fixes' you to something, but if it is used and interpreted too loosely it also risks being challenged and devalued, that in itself is also problematic. I used terms I did not feel comfortable using such as *Western* and *African* that created the assumption of clear binaries, and although I discussed the problematic use of such terms, I still used them because the terms; however blurred, were necessary for the context in which they were being discussed.

Impact and contribution of research

Upon reflection, the choices made within this thesis have clear implications for practice and make important contributions to pedagogy and a community activist agenda. The development of a creative and collaborative methodology was centred on an ethical desire to do research with young people in a way which would honour and respect their voices. As this research used a participatory approach, the young men were involved in decision making at every stage of the research process. As we fumbled towards a way of working together, the project unleashed a potential for these young people to participate and express themselves in ways that went against the labels of bad behaviour and educational exclusion that were imposed on them.

Research Methods

This methodology offered a new approach to working with not only young people but ‘othered’ communities in a way that would not position them as vulnerable or passive, but rather enable them to have control over the narratives they choose to share; this offers space for emancipatory potential. As an activist researcher I see this project as an intervention as the young men were given the space to perform and become something that may or may not align with how they have been perceived by others. The research highlights the pervasiveness of oppressive theories and practices within the academy; particularly within the disciplines of psychology and education. One of the challenges faced in the research was the use of critical literature such as postcolonial and CRT in a way that values these literatures and does not position them as alternative or supplementary resources.

Pedagogy

In my final year of completing the thesis, I was appointed in a permanent position as a Lecturer of Psychology Education, and within this role I found myself drawing on my research to inform my practice. Being the only woman of colour in my department, it was clear that the demographic of academic staff were not representative of the diverse student demographic we taught. I made a concerted effort to incorporate diverse literature in the modules I taught, and considered creative ways to teach and assess the learning of students. I also asked students to offer feedback throughout the modules and used this feedback to inform the development of the

modules for the following year. This practice stemmed from the ethics of care and respect, and the decolonising approach I took in this research.

The students I teach have been receptive to my teaching methods and many students of colour in particular have told me on numerous occasions how important it is for them to see an academic of colour, to be taught using literature that they can relate to and to have spaces in which their experiences are valued. My philosophy for teaching is that in order for students to engage with the learning process, they must be given the space to share their experience and must be part of the curriculum design process. I speak with my students frequently about what needs to be changed in modules for them to feel a sense of ownership of their work. In this research, the process was entirely collaborative and so the young men felt invested and continue to feel invested in this work. What I hope to achieve in my practice and what I see as a contribution to pedagogy this thesis makes, is the importance of working with and not on our research participants or students.

Self-care

However, the challenge of being a minority in a majority White institution is that you are considered the expert on race and racism. This carries with it a burden of responsibility. I recognise that as a Black, Muslim woman, my physical presence in a space makes an immediate political statement and I often feel a responsibility to make my peers aware of the ways in which their practices may be exclusionary and how their language can often be oppressive. As an activist scholar, I also feel a responsibility to not only reflect on my own practice but to also

challenge the systems that allow oppressive ideologies to be maintained. This is exhausting and at times it feels like I am fighting to survive in a system that was not designed to include me. I have had to find the balance between challenging institutional oppression; manifested overtly through exclusionary curriculums and methods of assessment as well as daily micro and macroaggressions, and knowing when it is important to step back and focus on self-care. Just as it was vital as part of the research process, self-care has become integral to how I navigate my way within the institution.

Policy

Not only are there implications for research and pedagogy, but this research also offers implications for policy. The first, being the question of whether policy should even be the space for some of the discussions in this thesis, such as Islamophobia and institutional racism. If some of the policies and the institutions these discourses of oppression come out of; in the case of this research, schools and universities, are institutionally racist, should policy be a space in which these issues are discussed? I would argue yes. The ethics and methodology of this research has a focus on practice, and as institutional practices; within which pedagogy falls are informed by policies, it is essential that the issues presented within this thesis are discussed within the context of policy in order to inform changes in practice. As an activist I recognise the importance of change being both from the bottom up, and top down as so it is important that policies that are used to monitor and evaluate institutional practices are critiqued as well as the everyday practices themselves.

Secondly, the thesis raises multiple questions and lessons for schools, namely what is taught on the curriculum and the kinds of histories and literature made visible or silenced, as well as the push for a nationalist curriculum, which as a concept itself risks making schools more Eurocentric. There is also the question of schools as institutionally racist and as mentioned earlier, how teachers function within these spaces. I would argue that there is the potential for different kinds of practice that should not be dependent solely on individual teachers being reflexive of their practice, but also requiring institutions to look inwardly and take responsibility for the training of teachers and evaluating the policies these teachers must work with. It is also important to recognise that teaching practices have changed and policy demands that have political agendas such as the insertion of 'British Values' into curriculums and Prevent training for staff, mean that teachers now more than ever are expected to label, and enact surveillance on the students they teach. These policy and practice demands are over manifestations of the many colonial and racist practices discussed within this thesis and in order for these practices to be challenged, there must be a willingness to have necessary but uncomfortable conversations about Whiteness.

Community learning spaces

This thesis' contributions are not limited what it offers the academy and educators but has also enabled me to engage in a different way with communities. As part of my research dissemination process, the participants and I decided that we wanted to present the stories back to the community. The young men attended as facilitators but chose not to identify themselves to the community as the participants of this research. Each of the narratives were presented and in a

workshop format, the members of the local Somali community who attended; who were sixty in numbers and consisted of a varied age groups, discussed the issues raised and shared their own experiences. Towards the end of this workshop the feedback from the attendees and the young men who facilitated the workshop was that they felt a need for a space in which discussions like this could continue and in which they could tackle local community issues in a safe, culturally appropriate space.

For a number of reasons the community talked about their mistrust for the local authorities and those within the community who had chosen to work with the local authorities. It is for this reason; as well as my personal commitment to improving the lives of those within my local area, that I took it upon myself a few weeks later to buy a lease on a property and use my own funds as well as donations from the community to set up a community learning space. This space is not solely for the Somali community but for all those that live within the area it is based. The hope of this space is that it caters to the changing needs of the community, and which values and respect the contribution that each person makes. As the community has donated and continues to contribute to the running of educational and heritage- based activities, there is a mutual investment and commitment to the space and to the relationships formed in the development of this space. This thesis has focussed on a commitment to relationships and this feeds into all the work that I do beyond this thesis.

Where I now stand

Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge

(Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture, December 7th 1993)

As Toni Morrison reminds us, words can hurt. I know this all too well and so do my participants. In every moment of this research process I have made choices and the words I have used have not always captured the difficulty of the choices I have had to make. I stand in this research as a Muslim, Somali, Black, British woman, who has been raised and educated in a number of ways and a number of spaces that contradict more times than they compliment. Each of these different facets contribute to 'who I am' and this is apparent in the thesis, as I write from, to, and within these intersectional experiences. The decisions I made throughout the research were underpinned by ethics of respect and honour at its core; underpinnings which gave me comfort during instances of irreconcilable tension. Tension caused by working within the rationalised, intellectualised space of a thesis with content and experiences that were visceral, spiritual, and wounding. My faith and care-based ethics have enabled me take the precautions necessary to protect my participants, but also to protect myself.

In the early stages of my doctoral journey I struggled to write about my position as a Black, Muslim woman, partly because despite the fact I was in a department with a large number of Muslim students who openly talked about faith-based practices and/or spirituality, it was not spoken about in the context of research. Religion was discussed between my peers and I as being part of the 'emotional' journey that comes with doing a PhD but not the 'practical' task of doing research or writing a thesis. I could not see the distinction between the emotional and the practical and so struggled to reconcile my spiritual and moral journey as an aside from my academic journey. For me this separation did not and could not exist. Islam is central to my cultural heritage and lived experiences, as well the experiences of the participants and the Somali community and so the idea of not acknowledging and representing faith and culture-based practices and embodiments in my work seemed oppressive. My reasons for wanting to write about my beliefs, convictions and moral guides, as well as the ways in which these practices have been racialized are not for narcissistic pleasure, but to share how my beliefs have shaped who I am, and have enabled me to write in a way that does not limit the knowledges that make this thesis what it is. I would like to take Morrison's (1993) statement further and say that oppressive language represents violence not only through what is said, but also what is silenced. As this thesis captures, there are stories that cannot be told, and stories that must be told, and sometimes these stories are the same.

I am not a writer

My tangled thoughts creep in silence,

Quietly contemplating what ought to be,
And I wake to see this world through different
eyes, Telling the story of each mornings light, But,
I am not a writer.

I breathe heavy at the thought of staining the page,
Stuttering through stages of hope and rage,
Pieces of me captured on a stage,
Exposed and elated by this coming of age,
But, I am not a writer.

These euphoric moments of holding a pen,
Are followed by shudders and shards, Like
shattered glass we can never be whole,
Like gaps between words we can never be told.
And I, I am not a writer.

Our histories were stolen, Our
languages lost,
The earth was our canvas, Our
blood was the art,
And we have not forgotten,
We carry this pain,
Our lives have been written with the blood of those slayed, So
I am not a writer.

This pen is a symbol,
Not of words but of wars,
Of pain we have lived through, Pain
you adore.

Our histories made romantic,
Our psyche enigmatic,
Our stories told by you,
Are chilling and yet static, So,
I am not a writer.

And yet...

I read your words as you continue to write me,
Hold me in ivory spaces only few can reach,
And I have been taught your theories of me,
Read tales of my toils,
As you pierced through my heart and used my blood as ink,
Every movement of that poisoned pen, causes me to ache.
You have been the writer, and you have held the words.

But your pen cannot carry the weight of all that I hold, You
cannot know the stories I have yet to tell.

Why must I breathe underwater?
Pushed down by the lead pens that continue write me, Why
must I close my eyes to love myself?
Knowing that I can build with words that were once stolen,
Knowing that I can teach myself to love again.

Some write because they cannot speak,
Caged by language or by walls,
But I write to write myself anew,
To see words on a page, not as stains but of starts,
I write to be hopeful,
Piecing together shattered glass, to find the stories in the cracks, I
write, not to make myself whole, but to write myself home.

I write... but I am not a writer.

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