

**'The naughty person': exploring dynamic aspects of identity and children's discourses before and during the Libyan Uprising**

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**'The naughty person': Exploring dynamic aspects of identity and children's discourses before and during the Libyan Uprising.**

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Abstract:	Drawing on data from a wider ethnography this paper focuses on the ways in which negotiate their identities against the shifting backdrop of local and global discourses. We explore how children of the Libyan diaspora take up the semiotic resources available to them in their daily negotiations about identity. We show how they perform identities dialogically, with each other and with adult professionals, talking about salient issues of religious, cultural and national heritage before and during the Libyan Uprising.

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Figures



Figure 1: Flag adopted by the Gaddafi regime



Figure 2: Flag adopted by the NTC

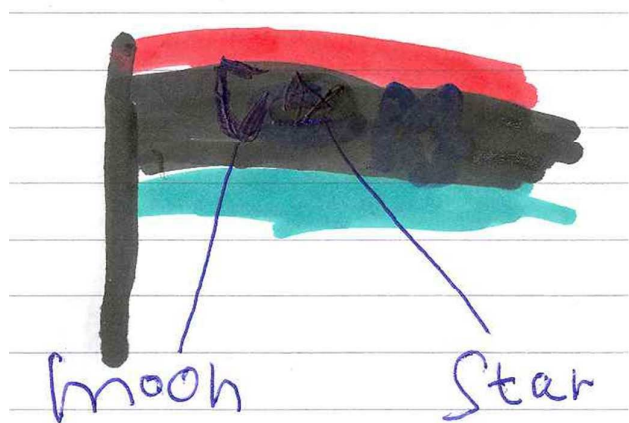


Figure 3: Mustafa's drawing of the Libyan flag that he ascribes to



Figure 4: Abia's picture of her family in Libya annotated by the class teacher

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3 **'The naughty person': Exploring dynamic aspects of identity and**  
4 **children's discourses before and during the Libyan Uprising.**  
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9 **Abstract**

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11 This paper draws on data from an ethnography exploring young children's  
12 interactions in a multi-ethnic school in an urban area in the North of England.  
13 It focuses on the ways in which children explore and negotiate their identities  
14 against the shifting backdrop of local and global discourses about religion,  
15 race, gender and political change. In particular, we explore how children of the  
16 Libyan diaspora take up the semiotic resources available to them in their daily  
17 negotiations about identity. We show how through their spoken interactions,  
18 drawings and writings the children perform identities dialogically, with each  
19 other and with adult professionals, talking about salient issues of religious,  
20 cultural and national heritage before and during the Libyan Uprising in 2011.  
21 Using MacFarlane's (2007) concept of 'translocal assemblages' we show how  
22 discourses and media narratives that circulate amongst diasporic  
23 communities provide a set of resources that children use to make sense of  
24 themselves in local contexts.  
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35 **Keywords:**

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37 The Arab Spring, the Libyan Uprising, Libyan Diaspora, identity, translocal  
38 assemblages, children's discourses, ethnography  
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3 If the study of childhood is considered as a socio-cultural project (James  
4 2013) then the contemporary conditions of late modernity are likely to play out  
5 through the actions and interactions of young children in both home and  
6 school settings, as well as in the spaces in between. These settings are quite  
7 specific contexts, comprised of particular communities brought together in  
8 distinctive geographical regions. However, from the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
9 onwards it has become increasingly problematic to see such distinctiveness in  
10 terms of a separation from wider global influences. In his foundational work  
11 on globalization, Appadurai (1996) draws attention to the influence of mass  
12 migration and new media in re-defining patterns of consumption, lifestyle and  
13 self-representation, pointing the way to a re-conceptualisation of the local.  
14 These influences impact on childhood and when we look closely at the lives of  
15 young children, we see how they are enacted in local settings, how they are  
16 instantiated in everyday routines and activities, and how they are patterned in  
17 various ways by wider discourses. In this study, we draw on ethnographic  
18 data gathered by Dr Ruth Barley, as part of her doctoral study which explored  
19 how a group of young children conceptualise and operationalise identity in  
20 one such local setting, and the part that this plays in their patterns of  
21 interaction (see Barley 2014 for details of the full study). The paper's second  
22 author was one of Ruth's<sup>1</sup> doctoral supervisors. In writing this paper together  
23 we have reflected on a section of data that emerged from Ruth's study.  
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40 Contemporary urban settings are often characterised by the plural nature of  
41 their population. Although this is not sufficient to define contemporary urban  
42 life, the condition sometimes referred to as 'superdiversity' is becoming  
43 increasingly more significant (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). Vertovec  
44 (2007:1024), writing about the British context, coined this term to describe the  
45 'new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-  
46 economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived  
47 over the last decade.' To acknowledge superdiversity is to recognise that  
48 more attention needs to be paid to the diverse social and cultural issues that  
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57 <sup>1</sup> As this is the name that the children knew Dr Ruth Barley by this is the name that will be  
58 used throughout the paper.  
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3 pattern childhood and the communication economy in which they are  
4 embedded.  
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8 For young children in the current climate, everyday meaning-making practices  
9 receive relatively little acknowledgement in formal and informal learning  
10 (Daniels, 2014). This is also true in culturally diverse settings. The work of  
11 Gutiérrez and her colleagues (2011) is an exception and has been influential  
12 in highlighting the hybrid, multimodal practices of dual language-learners. This  
13 work draws attention to the cultural artifacts as well as the social and linguistic  
14 practices that shape and are shaped by transmigratory flows of population.  
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21 These hybrid multimodal practices highlight the changing purposes and  
22 patterns of meaning-making across different contexts. Patterns that are  
23 repeated by children in different language groups as local and transnational  
24 meaning-making practices interweave to create rich and complex contexts for  
25 identity performance. Recognition of this complexity invites an approach that  
26 acknowledges how cultures and identities intersect with both formal and  
27 informal learning in specific contexts.  
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### 34 **Accounting for context**

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36 New and emerging patterns of migration, coupled with the increased diversity  
37 and availability of new media challenge existing definitions of community. In  
38 his in-depth study of community ties in a suburb of Toronto, Wellman (2002)  
39 illustrated the transition from close-knit face-to-face relations to the more  
40 diverse 'glocalized' networks in which community is defined socially rather  
41 than spatially. Social connection, and ultimately one's sense of belonging  
42 may begin to depend on 'place-to-place connectivity, and not door-to-door'  
43 (Wellman, 2002: 14). This is certainly the case for the diasporic youth who are  
44 the focus of a study by Rowsell & Burgess (2014). Rowsell and Burgess  
45 illustrate how their research participants drew on a wide range of linguistic  
46 and semiotic resources in communicating with those who are close and  
47 distant. This often connected to deeply-felt identifications with collectivities  
48 such as nationality, religious and ethnic heritage. Rowsell and Burgess argue  
49 that there can be no single template as each individual is positioned by, and  
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3 constructs meanings from, a range of influences such as family, peer group  
4 and popular culture. These young people clearly performed identity as much  
5 in glocalized networks as they did in their face-to-face relationships.  
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10 The same seems to hold for younger children, too, as the current study  
11 suggests. Here we note how children of the Libyan diaspora understand and  
12 reflect on the fluid nature of identity and in doing so actively construct their  
13 sense of self and others within the context of dominant structural constraints  
14 and discourses. These children are influenced not only by the relationships  
15 that they have with their families and their peers but also by the 'new media'  
16 that they are exposed to. In providing an account of this we draw on the work  
17 of McFarlane (2009) and his notion of the 'translocal assemblage'. McFarlane  
18 uses the Deleuzian idea of assemblage, conceived as a 'multiplicity that  
19 exceeds its component parts but which nevertheless retains elements of  
20 specificity.' (2009: 561), to provide an analysis of space and power suggesting  
21 ways in which complex and multiple forces coalesce as place-based events –  
22 events that are partly constituted by the exchange of 'ideas, knowledge,  
23 practices, materials and resources across sites' (McFarlane, 2009: 561). This  
24 perspective counters ideas of homogeneity, as it becomes clear that local  
25 interpretation always determines how ideas and things are understood,  
26 interpreted and how they interact with other forces. To put it another way, we  
27 might replace the idea of 'the global' as an undifferentiated universal space  
28 with an understanding that 'the global is situated, specific and materially  
29 constructed in the practices which make each specificity' (Law, 2004: 563).  
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45 In accounting for the context of this study the idea of a translocal assemblage  
46 allows us to focus on the ways in which socio-political events of global  
47 significance – in this case the Arab Spring and the ensuing Libyan conflict,  
48 take on meaning in the lives of young children in a particular site in the North  
49 of England. The assemblage, in emphasizing both spatiality and temporality,  
50 thus describes a 'topography of trajectories that cross or engage each other to  
51 different extents over time' (McFarlane, 2009:562) as children orientate  
52 themselves to media depictions of 'the naughty person' (Gaddafi) their sense  
53 of 'home' and shifting perceptions of what it means to be Muslim, acting these  
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3 out in the day-to-day run of play, interactions and structured learning activities  
4 at their 'local' primary school.  
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### 7 8 **The political backdrop**

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10 It is widely believed that the events referred to as the Arab Spring, had their  
11 origin in Sidi Bouzid in central Tunisia when on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2010 a  
12 vegetable seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself alight in protest against long  
13 term police harassment and political corruption. This action prompted Sidi  
14 Bouzid's inhabitants to rise up against the country's ruling authorities. The  
15 subsequent government crackdown prompted widespread rebellion  
16 (Noueihed, 2011). The Tunisian unrest sparked a revolutionary wave across  
17 the Arab Peninsula resulting in a revolt in Egypt and a civil uprising in Libya  
18 that culminated in the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. In Tunisia,  
19 rural areas protested against police harassment and political corruption, in  
20 Egypt the young urban middle classes, many of whom had been educated  
21 abroad, demonstrated against high rates of unemployment as well as legal  
22 and political repression, while in Libya tribal and regional factions, that had  
23 been oppressed under Gaddafi's regime, rebelled (Anderson, 2011).  
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27 The unrest in Libya commenced on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2011 when  
28 protests in Benghazi led to clashes with the government's security forces.  
29 Subsequently, protests spread to other major cities within the country  
30 precipitating a civil war between protesters seeking to oust Colonel Gaddafi  
31 and forces loyal to him. Eventually, with the support of NATO, the protesters  
32 formed an interim government, which became known as the National  
33 Transitional Council (NTC). As events progressed the NTC began to take hold  
34 of Libya's key cities. After taking control of Bab al-Azizia in August they  
35 overthrew Gaddafi's government. Gaddafi was subsequently killed on the 20<sup>th</sup>  
36 October 2011 after the NTC took control of his hometown Sirte. Three days  
37 later the civil war officially ended with the NATO withdrawal shortly afterwards  
38 (Ayan, 2011; Friedman, 2011).  
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54 Around the world the Libyan diaspora took to the streets to call for Gaddafi's  
55 downfall. For many this was the first form of political protest that they had  
56 taken part in. Men, women and children stood together in key cities here in  
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3 the UK, and further afield, raising awareness of their country's plight and  
4 calling for an end to the bloodshed (Black and Bowcott, 2011). As in many  
5 other cities across the UK, the Libyan diaspora who feature in this research  
6 staged a campaign calling on the local community to support their cause. In  
7 this way local events reflected and refracted issues that dominated  
8 mainstream media and strong personal resonances.  
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13 Many adults in the families that feature in this research had come to the UK to  
14 study and therefore still had close family ties and friendships in Libya. These  
15 friends and family members were directly affected by the uprising. In this  
16 sense they correspond to Wellman's (2002) description of a glocalized  
17 community, networked as much in place-to-place communities as in their  
18 specific locality. The events described inevitably became woven into their  
19 children's everyday lives. Drawing on data from a wider ethnography (Barley  
20 2014) this paper explores the discourses that a small group of Libyan children  
21 drew upon in negotiating and re-negotiating their identities against the  
22 dynamic and unfolding political events that dominated media depictions of  
23 Libya. These findings echo how the children in Beresin's (2010) study  
24 incorporated media representations in their school peer interactions.  
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### 34 **The study**

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36 The focus of Ruths study was on how young children conceptualise and  
37 operationalise identity and the part that this plays in their patterns of  
38 interaction. Analysis of the data produced revealed identity to be dialectical:  
39 anchored and transient; self-defined and ascribed; individual and collective.  
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43 They study was guided by ethnography's distinct *focus* on culture, the *process*  
44 of seeking to uncover emic perspectives, and narrative *output* (Wolcott 1999).  
45 Adhering to the participatory principles that are intrinsic to both ethnography  
46 and childhood studies (Cheney 2011) the children in the study were involved  
47 in developing its focus, the design of research tools, and later on in data  
48 collection and analysis.  
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53 The ethnography was conducted in the reception class of an inner city school,  
54 called Sunnyside<sup>2</sup>, in the North of England where the majority of children (all  
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58 <sup>2</sup> Names of places and individuals have been changed throughout to ensure anonymity.  
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3 aged from 4 to 5) are from a diverse range of cultural minority 'groups' within  
4 the city. Many pupils are new to the UK when they first arrive at Sunnyside  
5 and have a limited grasp of the English language. The majority of children  
6 from cultural minority families fall into two broad categories: refugees or  
7 asylum seekers, and children of International Post-graduate Students. A  
8 number of children are perceived as being from deprived backgrounds as is  
9 reflected in the high percentage that are entitled to free school meals (FSM), a  
10 measure described by Gillborn and Youdell (2000:10) as 'a crude proxy of  
11 poverty.' Over the course of the 2010-11 academic year, Ruth spent a day a  
12 week with Sunnyside's reception class. A total of 31 children took part in the  
13 study. During this time the events, referred to as the Libyan Uprising were  
14 unfolding. Thirteen children in the class were from Libya. All were in the UK as  
15 temporary residents whilst one or more of their family members undertook  
16 postgraduate study in the city. Just before the uprising started two of these  
17 children returned with their families to Libya.  
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28 While the study as a whole used a range of research methods that revealed  
29 the dialectical nature of identity, only two are drawn upon in this paper:  
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- 32 1. participant observation.
- 33 2. digital book creation, through which children's stories of 'Where I am  
34 from' were told through photos and typed text  
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37 This research activity was inspired by a child in the class (Mustafe) who asked  
38 if he could make what he described as 'A Libya book' after he initiated a  
39 conversation with the researcher about the unfolding situation in his country of  
40 origin. This activity was not intended to describe a fixed identity but was used  
41 to explore an aspect of identity (i.e. nationality) that the children wanted to  
42 discuss. The activity allowed children to explore nationality in a fluid way with  
43 some children depicting a dual-nationality and others describing how their  
44 nationality has and continues to change. In the full study this research activity  
45 was analysed alongside other activities that explored different aspects of  
46 identity or as the children described it 'being me' (see Barley [2014]). As in  
47 Moinian's (2009) study, the children in the current study conceptualise and  
48 operationalise a complex and dynamic understanding of *identity as*  
49 *performative, situated and dialectical* in their everyday lives.  
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3 Undertaking ethnography poses some specific ethical challenges (ASA 2011),  
4 such as entering and withdrawing from the field; maintaining an overt  
5 research identity; positionality; and reflexivity<sup>3</sup> (. Conducting research with  
6 children raises further ethical considerations, such as gaining and negotiating  
7 on-going informed consent; safeguarding; appropriately managing power  
8 differentials; and employing appropriate dissemination activities (Morrow et al.  
9 1996; Cocks 2006). Many of the above ethical issues also relate to  
10 researching ethnic minority 'groups' though some additional challenges are  
11 also posed. These include employing culturally appropriate research methods;  
12 being alert and able to respond to possible language and cultural difficulties  
13 (Salway et al. 2011).

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21 The participatory research approach adopted in this study meant that ethical  
22 practice was seen as an ongoing process that required continual  
23 (re)negotiation with research participants (Cheney 2011). Throughout the  
24 study Ruth positioned herself as an adult who lacked knowledge about  
25 children's worlds and needed to be taught.. In order to ensure full participation  
26 in the study, school multilingual support workers acted as translators enabling  
27 the voices of children with little English to be heard (for a fuller description,  
28 including negotiating the challenges of doing research via a translator see  
29 Barley [2014])

## 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 **Children's stories**

### 40 41 42 *1. The storytellers*

43 Four Libyan children's stories feature in this paper, two boys: Mustafe, and  
44 Kareem; and two girls: Abia and Saida. These children self-selected to take  
45 part in the study and shared their views and feelings about the changing  
46 socio-political position in Libya with Ruth.

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51 Kareem had no English when he first arrived at Sunnyside from Libya a few  
52 weeks after the start of the new school year. He struggled at first with the  
53 language barrier and got frustrated and upset when he couldn't communicate

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58 <sup>3</sup> Reflexivity is key to undertaking an ethnography. For a full discussion of how this was  
59 adopted in the current study see Barley (2014).  
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3 effectively with his peers before withdrawing into his own world or gravitating  
4 to the other Arabic speaking children in the class. In conversations (in Arabic)  
5 with other children from Libya Kareem could often be heard comparing life in  
6 Libya to life in the UK.  
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10 In contrast, Mustafe had been living in the UK the year prior to starting school.  
11 On arrival at Sunnyside he was friends with an Egyptian girl Aafia, whose  
12 family were also in the UK on temporary student visas. Mustafe was a  
13 talented footballer and soon made friends with the other older boys in the  
14 class. At the start of the year he regularly discussed 'being Muslim' with his  
15 peers. However, he didn't talk much about Libya with his peers until the start  
16 of the uprising.  
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20 The two girls who feature in this paper, Abia and Saida were inseparable at  
21 school. They had previously attended Sunnyside's nursery together and  
22 reportedly saw a lot of each other outside of school. Neither girl talked much  
23 about Libya until the uprising began when Gaddafi and the unrest began to  
24 feature in their drawings that they almost always produced together.  
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## 30 31 2. Before the conflict

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33 Fieldwork began before the Arab Spring commenced. At this point 'being  
34 Libyan' did not feature strongly in children's peer social interactions at school  
35 though, as we will see below, some children did make comparisons between  
36 living in Libya and England.  
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40 Kareem, like his Libyan peers, talked about his family's change in socio-  
41 economic status since moving to the UK, but a more frequent topic of his peer  
42 conversations was ethnic diversity which appeared to be very salient for him.  
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44 Ruth's fieldnotes illustrate this:  
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47 *In November we are in the outdoor play area during a morning session.*  
48 *Annakiya (a Nigerian girl) picks up a ball and asks me to play with her.*  
49 *We throw the ball back and forth to each other. After a few minutes*  
50 *Kareem comes up to us also with a ball in his hands and asks me to*  
51 *throw his ball to him. I throw Annakiya's ball back to her and then*  
52 *Kareem's ball to him and so on alternating between the two children.*  
53 *Fariido (a Somali girl) comes up to us and looks at Kareem and asks if*  
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3 *he will throw his ball to her so that she can also join in. He says 'No'*  
4 *and throws the ball directly back to me. As I throw it back to him*  
5 *Fariido asks him again if he will throw the ball to her and again Kareem*  
6 *replies saying 'No' but this time also shakes his head resolutely to*  
7 *emphasise his meaning. He then turns to me and says 'She black'*  
8 *offering an explanation for why he won't throw his ball to her. I tell him*  
9 *that isn't nice and that everyone can play. Kareem, however, keeps a*  
10 *tight hold on his ball and starts to back away from us.*

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17 Around this time The United Nations Human Rights Council (2010:2) issued a  
18 statement calling for Libya 'to end its practices of racial discrimination against  
19 black Africans.' Further conversations with Kareem over a period of time  
20 revealed that the only ethnic minority individuals he had contact with in Libya  
21 were servants. He clearly articulated the type of work that these 'Black  
22 helpers' did, revealing his experience of an ethnically segregated society and  
23 emphasising that he didn't have Black friends there. When comparing his  
24 experience of ethnic segregation in Libya to the integration of a multi-ethnic  
25 school in England he struggled to relate the disparate social structures that  
26 inform these practices. This duality of structure consequently played a salient  
27 part in how Kareem interacted with his peers at Sunnyside.

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35 Van Ausdale & Feagin (2001) found that young children pick up on social  
36 discourses of discrimination and hierarchies of inequality that are prominent  
37 (both consciously and subconsciously) in wider society and incorporate these  
38 into their own identities and social interactions in a similar way to Kareem.  
39 Indeed, as Hall (2000:4) points out, identities can be understood as being  
40 'constructed within, not outside [of], discourse'. In this situation trans-national  
41 cultural discourses surrounding ethnic hierarchies played a part in how  
42 Kareem viewed his classmates. Before the conflict 'being Libyan' was not an  
43 important part of Kareem's conceptualisation of his identity but still the  
44 dominant social discourses prevalent in Libya were influential in how he  
45 viewed himself and others, thus entering into the translocal assemblage at  
46 Sunnyside.

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56 Before the conflict Mustafe described himself as 'being Muslim.' The way in  
57 which he did this is epitomised in the following scenario from Ruth's fieldnotes  
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3 *In early October a group of Muslim children, Aafia, Fazia (both girls),*  
4 *Mustafe, Amir and Mubarak (all boys), are drawing pictures at the*  
5 *writing table during a free choice session. As they are drawing the*  
6 *children are chatting about their different pictures. Aafia puts down her*  
7 *pencil and looks round the table at the other children before asking*  
8 *them 'Do you do this?' She then puts her hands over her face and*  
9 *bends down to the table and up again - going through the motions of*  
10 *Salah (prayer). The three boys watch her and then all join in. As they*  
11 *are doing this Aafia and Mustafe begin to recite phrases in Arabic.*  
12 *Almost as soon as they started the children stop and return to their*  
13 *drawings discussing the different places that they pray and comparing*  
14 *their experiences. Amir (who has just started to learn Arabic at Koranic*  
15 *school) is particularly interested in the prayers that Aafia and Mustafe*  
16 *recite and asks Mustafe about them. As Mustafe explains the prayers*  
17 *to Amir the two boys compare their experiences of 'being Muslim.'*  
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28 A number of children in the class regularly engaged in these discussions  
29 about 'being Muslim' and in doing so highlighted their collective religious  
30 affiliation. But they also showed the intersecting nature of identity, noting the  
31 differences between 'being a Muslim girl' and 'being a Muslim boy'; or 'being a  
32 Libyan Muslim' and 'being a Somali Muslim.' Notions of similarity and  
33 difference, inherent in identity, were openly interrogated amongst their peers  
34 with children discussing identity's dialectical nature in terms of collective and  
35 individual identities, self-defined and ascribed identities alongside fluid and  
36 fixed identities. Within this context, 'being Muslim' can be interpreted as a  
37 'superordinate identity' that comes to the fore in diverse social situations as a  
38 way of promoting a sense of togetherness (Gaertner et al. 1999).  
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47 Before the conflict 'being Arabic speakers' was important for the two female  
48 storytellers, Abia and Saida. Unlike our other storytellers Abia and Saida  
49 started reception after the Christmas break, previously attending the school's  
50 nursery together. Arabic was not only an important communication tool for  
51 these girls, who both spoke a little English on joining the class, but was also  
52 an important form of linguistic capital. The girls would use Arabic to  
53 purposefully exclude other children from their games attempting to create a  
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3 linguistic hierarchy within the class. One example of how they did this  
4 occurred at the writing table with a non-Arabic speaking child, Dekka.  
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7 *Dekka is drawing a picture chatting to me about her friends at school as*  
8 *Saida joins us at the table. She sits down next to Dekka, reaches over to*  
9 *get a pen and then says (in English) 'Dekka, you're not my friend.' Dekka*  
10 *doesn't respond to this so I ask Saida why Dekka isn't her friend. She*  
11 *explains to me that Abia and Sadira are her friends as they all speak*  
12 *Arabic commenting that, 'Sadira and I speak in Arabic and with Abia too.'*  
13 *She then goes onto explain that all of her friends speak Arabic informing*  
14 *me that they like to play secret games that the other children can't take*  
15 *part in.*  
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22 Social structures and discourses about linguistic hierarchies informed these  
23 two girls' peer interactions at Sunnyside. 'Being Arabic speakers' continued to  
24 be important, as we will see below, for these girls, becoming salient during the  
25 ensuing conflict in Libya.  
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### 29 3. *During the conflict*

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31 Some children in the class were actively exposed to the unrest in Libya, such  
32 as Abia whose extended family were directly affected by the conflict, while  
33 other children, such as Mustafe and Kareem, unconsciously soaked up the  
34 news through their families' media engagement. These unfolding events  
35 became the focus of a number of research activities. The conflict started at  
36 the same time that the children began to collaboratively construct the 'Where I  
37 am from...' digital books with Ruth. In these, the political uprising features  
38 heavily in the children's discourses about the places they are from.  
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45 During the conflict Kareem continued to talk about his earlier experience of  
46 living in Libya. For example, when making his digital book he described the  
47 Libya he had left behind, highlighting what his house looked like and what he  
48 liked to do there with his friends. After describing this to Ruth he expressed  
49 concerns that it was not safe for his family to go back to Libya at the moment.  
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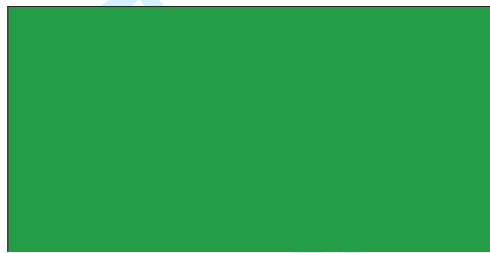
53 As Kareem watched scenes of the upheaval in Libya with his family on TV he  
54 started to initiate further conversations with Ruth in which he further  
55 expressed his concerns for the safety of his family and friends who were still  
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3 in Libya. As the conflict continued Kareem became preoccupied by the  
4 pictures that he saw on the news of fires in Libya's cities and fighters from  
5 both sides of the conflict. Interestingly though, Ruth did not observe Kareem  
6 initiating conversations with his peers about this situation. Kareem's discourse  
7 of ethnic segregation remained important to him during this time, although  
8 'being Libyan' began to feature more regularly in his identity discourses.  
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13 An interest in media images of the Libyan conflict also became important for  
14 Mustafe - as did the symbolism embodied in the two Libyan flags that were  
15 increasingly used to represent the different sides in the conflict.  
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19 Pulling together images to use when making the digital books in January 2011  
20 Ruth inserted a picture of the solid green flag that was adopted as the Libyan  
21 national flag in 1977 by the Gaddafi regime (see Figure 1).  
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33 *Figure 1: Flag adopted by the Gaddafi regime*

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35 However during the time period in which the digital books were made with  
36 children in the study, the flag of the Kingdom of Libya (Figure 2) had been re-  
37 appropriated by anti-Gaddafi protestors and the National Transitional Council  
38 (NTC), becoming a symbol of the Libyan revolution and new ruling authority.  
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52 *Figure 2: Flag adopted by the NTC*

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54 As 2011 progressed and the NTC began to take control of Libya's key cities  
55 these two flags were often portrayed as symbols of the two different sides in  
56 the struggle. News coverage regularly featured the two flags pinned onto a  
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3 map to show how the fighting was progressing, and would also show images  
4 of freedom-fighters burning Gaddafi's green flag while adults and children  
5 alike held up the flag of the revolution making the peace sign with their other  
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7 hand.  
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10 Not updating the picture library that was used to create the digital books with  
11 the NTC flag prompted an interesting discussion with Mustafe about his  
12 national identity.  
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15 *As Mustafe looks at the flags we chat about the different countries that*  
16 *they represent. As he gets to the green Libyan flag of the Gaddafi*  
17 *regime he points to it and says 'That's Libya's.' I ask him if he wants to*  
18 *put it in his digital book to which he replies 'No, no I... well... there's...*  
19 *there's lots of Libya's flags.' I reply saying 'Yes, there is isn't there?*  
20 *Lots of them.'* 'Yeah' he concurs as he looks again at the pictures trying  
21 *to find the one that he wants to put in his digital book. When he can't*  
22 *find it he says to me 'It's black. Not all black... It's dark red and its black*  
23 *and its dark green... and in the middle black we put a shape which is*  
24 *like a banana. Like this.'* He picks up my pen and draws a crescent in  
25 *my fieldnote book. I suggest that he draws the flag saying that we can*  
26 *take a photo of it and then put it in his book. He begins to draw the flag*  
27 *and after drawing the outline of the flag with the crescent in it goes on*  
28 *to tell me 'and we put a star next to it', which he does. Mustafe colours*  
29 *in his flag and starts to describe to me what is happening in Libya*  
30 *saying 'But there's fighting now in Libya, so can you write that.'* As I  
31 *type what he tells me to he continues saying 'There is fighting and fires*  
32 *in Libya. So we can't go to Libya. We have to wait. ... We have to wait*  
33 *for a long time.'* He stops colouring and looks through the picture library  
34 *and then says to me 'I can't find fire.'* We look through the picture  
35 *library together and I point to a picture of a bonfire and ask him if this is*  
36 *the kind of picture that he is looking for. 'Is that Libya?' he asks. I tell*  
37 *him that I'm not sure but that it can be Libya if he wants it to be. He*  
38 *tells me though that he doesn't think that it looks like Libya. He*  
39 *continues looking at the different pictures. After looking through all of*  
40 *the pictures he stops at the picture of a policeman and thinks for a*  
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3 minute before continuing to talk saying 'There's lots of people fighting.  
4 And there's lots of police killing.' 'Police killing?' I prompt 'Who are they  
5 killing?' 'Yeah' Mustafe replies 'With their guns.' 'Are the police good or  
6 bad?' I ask. 'They're good' Mustafe tells me 'But they're good at killing  
7 those who are very naughty. There's someone who is very naughty.'  
8 With further prompting Mustafe tells me that the police who he is  
9 referring to are the revolutionaries who are fighting against Gaddafi (i.e.  
10 'the naughty person') rather than the actual Libyan police force.  
11 Mustafe continues to colour in his flag and says to me 'I can't say it in  
12 English but I can say it in Arabic.' 'Say what?' I ask him. He then goes  
13 onto tell me that he has heard the protestors saying something when  
14 he watches the TV with his parents. I ask him if he can tell me it in  
15 Arabic to which he replies saying 'Libya harra mahama yatla barra'  
16 (Free Libya). He then tells me that as the protestors are saying this  
17 they hold up two fingers in the peace sign. He repeats the phrase as I  
18 write it down but is concerned that he can't explain to me what it means  
19 in English. I tell him I will ask someone who I work with to translate it  
20 for me. He agrees to this happy that I will be able to understand him.  
21 As he finishes his flag he tells me that this is the flag he wants in his  
22 Libya (digital) book as it is the flag that he also wants for Libya.  
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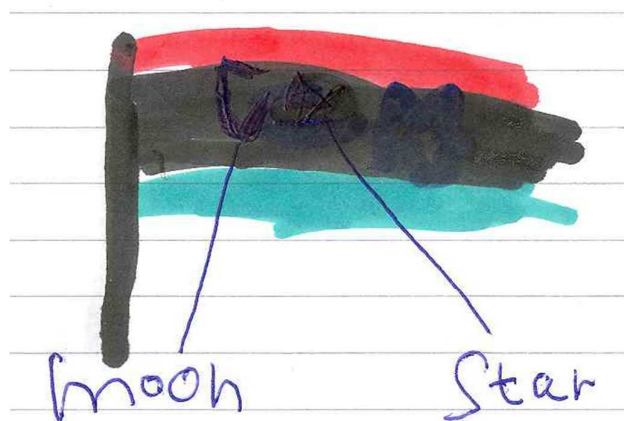


Figure 3: Mustafe's drawing of the Libyan flag that he ascribes to

Throughout the escalating Libyan uprising Mustafe discussed the Libyan flags with his peers at school and shared his views on the ensuing conflict. The

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3 NTC flag became a key symbol of Mustafe's national identity which he used  
4 as a way to talk to his peers about the situation in Libya as well as his national  
5 and socio-political identity in relation to 'the naughty person'. This resonates  
6 with Connolly's (2003) work in Ireland and highlights that young children are  
7 aware of the political and cultural symbolism of flags and actively appropriate  
8 their meaning when conceptualising their own identities.  
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13 As well as using the NTC flag in this way, Mustafe also increasingly used the  
14 imagery of fire to express this aspect of his identity and to communicate this  
15 to his peers. When showing his digital book to Fazia he explained that 'It's  
16 Libya but there isn't any fire'. He then went on to talk about the meanings  
17 behind the pictures and text in his book and why there *should* also be a  
18 picture of fire in it. The symbol of fire, with its connotations of danger and  
19 destruction, became important to Mustafe and also signaled his anxiety about  
20 the situation in his home country. As the conflict developed 'being Libyan'  
21 became a key feature of Mustafe's discourse about his own identity. Within  
22 this discourse he also positions himself as being anti-Gadaffi.  
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31 As mentioned above Kareem shared Mustafe's preoccupation with the images  
32 of fire and fighting; but unlike Mustafe, Kareem did not initiate conversations  
33 about the conflict with his peers, only referring to it if prompted by one of his  
34 classmates. However, as discussed above, he did initiate conversations about  
35 these events with Ruth. While both boys were concerned about the situation  
36 in their homeland, Mustafe was more visibly agitated about the events on TV  
37 than Kareem.  
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43 As the other children that Mustafe regularly interacted with did not understand  
44 the significance of Libya's flags to his identity, or share the meanings that he  
45 gave to them, this did not seem to impact on how his peers interacted with  
46 him at school. Mustafe's flag can therefore be viewed as a symbolic marker of  
47 identity that was not particularly salient in the context of Sunnyside. As  
48 Mustafe performed this aspect of his identity to a largely unappreciative  
49 audience he emphasised the meaning that he attached to this symbol and, in  
50 doing so, attempted to convey its meaning to his peers.  
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3 The fluid and uncertain nature of the events in Libya brought this aspect of  
4 Mustafe's identity to the fore in both his conversations with Ruth and his  
5 peers. This illustrates how children's identity performances shape and are  
6 shaped by the translocal assemblage, as ideas, artifacts and symbolic  
7 representations from elsewhere entered into the Sunnyside classroom. Before  
8 the uprising, Mustafe talked about 'being Libyan' with his peers but more  
9 frequently emphasised his identity in other ways - as 'being Muslim' or 'being  
10 a boy'. With the uprising, Mustafe's identity performances changed in  
11 response to the dynamic situation in his home country. Gilroy's (1993:122)  
12 understanding of identity as the 'changing same' is one way of framing  
13 Mustafe's fluid identity which was in a continual state of becoming.  
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18 It is interesting to note that some other children, most notably Abia and Saida,  
19 did share Mustafe's *dominant status*, at this time, of 'being Libyan' (also  
20 sharing his socio-political views about Gaddafi) and at times depicted scenes  
21 from Libya in their pictures and discussed this with their friends. Abia's picture  
22 of her family in Libya, which she decided to draw during a free choice activity  
23 session, depicts Gaddafi looking angry while her family are smiling  
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Figure 4: Abia's picture of her family in Libya annotated by the class teacher

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3 The other children, such as Abia and Saida, who strongly subscribed to and  
4 operationalised this aspect of their identity were all female January starters.  
5 Mustafe, like most of the male September starters, chose not to interact with  
6 the younger girls such as Abia and Saida. Consequently, their common  
7 national and socio-political identities were not as important to Mustafe's  
8 patterns of interaction as other aspects of his identity, such as age and  
9 gender.  
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15 During the conflict an anti-Gadaffi rhetoric started to feature in both Abia's and  
16 Saida's peer interactions at school. At the same time 'Being Libyan' became  
17 an important feature of their identity discourses, replacing earlier notions of  
18 'being Arabic speakers'. Although using Arabic as a way to exclude non-  
19 Arabic speakers from their games still featured in their peer interactions  
20 during the conflict, 'being Libyan' added a further layer to their interactions  
21 that set them apart from other Arabic-speaking classmates. Like Mustafe the  
22 socio-political dynamics of 'being Libyan' featured in these girls' interactions.  
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### 28 **Discussion**

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31 In sum it might be said that the comfortable surroundings of the reception  
32 class of Sunnyside were by no means impervious to a wide range of religious,  
33 ethnic and political discourses from the world outside. Ideas, discourses  
34 family and peer relationships as well as home media consumption provided a  
35 fluid translocal context that these young children produced and skillfully  
36 reworked in their social interactions and activities at school.  
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41 Throughout this study children regularly talked about their own identities with  
42 their peers. In these conversations they repeatedly used phrases such as  
43 'Being Libyan' or 'Being Muslim' to describe themselves. Over the course of  
44 the year these 'Being...' phrases became a standard feature of children's  
45 identity discourses. The data presented here show how children's identities  
46 were performative, situated and dialectical, as they used linguistic and  
47 semiotic resources drawn from their home, school and media lives, reflecting  
48 a complex interweaving of translocal discourses. The work suggests that  
49 identity can be viewed as in a continual state of becoming (Hall 2000).  
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51 Consequently, social situations such as the Libyan Uprising are dynamic  
52 agents in the fluid performance of identity.  
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3 Previous ethnographies, such as Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2001) work in  
4 America, and Connolly's (2003) in Ireland, reveal that young children  
5 understand and reflect upon this fluid nature of identity and in doing so  
6 actively construct their understandings of self and others. These studies show  
7 that children are competent social actors who understand and employ  
8 'conventional' markers of difference and can apply social meaning to abstract  
9 social discourses. Further to this, these studies have also revealed that  
10 children are aware of, and at times actively perpetuate, wider social  
11 discourses of discrimination and hierarchies of difference, such as discourses  
12 that have been reported as widespread in Libya of racial discrimination and  
13 racial segregation (UNHRC 2010).  
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17 This paper adds to previous ethnographic work by showing how salient  
18 volatile, spatially distant, socio-political contexts can be in young children's  
19 identity (re)negotiations with their peers. Within the dynamic context of the  
20 conflict in Libya socio-political dynamics of 'being Libyan' came to the fore in  
21 children's peer interactions as they linked local and global contexts in their  
22 peer interactions. For three of the four children featured in this paper this  
23 appeared to be the predominant shaping force in their identity at this time. By  
24 unearthing this rich and nuanced account of young children's experiences of  
25 identity (re)negotiation within a global and volatile socio-political context this  
26 study unearths how global contexts play an important role in young children's  
27 daily peer interactions in a spatially distant local context.  
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