

‘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

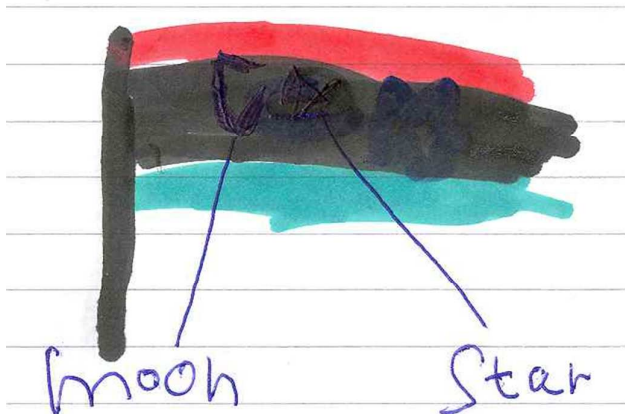


Figure 3: Mustafa's drawing of the Libyan flag that he ascribes to



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

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

Abstract

This paper draws on data from an ethnography exploring young children’s interactions in a multi-ethnic school in an urban area in the North of England. It focuses on the ways in which children explore and negotiate their identities against the shifting backdrop of local and global discourses about religion, race, gender and political change. In particular, 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 through their spoken interactions, drawings and writings the children 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 in 2011. Using MacFarlane’s (2007) concept of ‘translocal assemblages’ we show how discourses and media narratives that circulate amongst diasporic communities provide a set of resources that children use to make sense of themselves in local contexts.

Keywords:

The Arab Spring, the Libyan Uprising, Libyan Diaspora, identity, translocal 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 21st 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's¹ 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 ¹ 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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pattern childhood and the communication economy in which they are embedded.

For young children in the current climate, everyday meaning-making practices receive relatively little acknowledgement in formal and informal learning (Daniels, 2014). This is also true in culturally diverse settings. The work of Gutiérrez and her colleagues (2011) is an exception and has been influential in highlighting the hybrid, multimodal practices of dual language-learners. This work draws attention to the cultural artifacts as well as the social and linguistic practices that shape and are shaped by trans migratory flows of population.

These hybrid multimodal practices highlight the changing purposes and patterns of meaning-making across different contexts. Patterns that are repeated by children in different language groups as local and transnational meaning-making practices interweave to create rich and complex contexts for identity performance. Recognition of this complexity invites an approach that acknowledges how cultures and identities intersect with both formal and informal learning in specific contexts.

Accounting for context

New and emerging patterns of migration, coupled with the increased diversity and availability of new media challenge existing definitions of community. In his in-depth study of community ties in a suburb of Toronto, Wellman (2002) illustrated the transition from close-knit face-to-face relations to the more diverse ‘glocalized’ networks in which community is defined socially rather than spatially. Social connection, and ultimately one’s sense of belonging may begin to depend on ‘place-to-place connectivity, and not door-to-door’ (Wellman, 2002: 14). This is certainly the case for the diasporic youth who are the focus of a study by Rowsell & Burgess (2014). Rowsell and Burgess illustrate how their research participants drew on a wide range of linguistic and semiotic resources in communicating with those who are close and distant. This often connected to deeply-felt identifications with collectivities such as nationality, religious and ethnic heritage. Rowsell and Burgess argue that there can be no single template as each individual is positioned by, and

constructs meanings from, a range of influences such as family, peer group and popular culture. These young people clearly performed identity as much in glocalised networks as they did in their face-to-face relationships.

The same seems to hold for younger children, too, as the current study suggests. Here we note how children of the Libyan diaspora understand and reflect on the fluid nature of identity and in doing so actively construct their sense of self and others within the context of dominant structural constraints and discourses. These children are influenced not only by the relationships that they have with their families and their peers but also by the 'new media' that they are exposed to. In providing an account of this we draw on the work of McFarlane (2009) and his notion of the 'translocal assemblage'. McFarlane uses the Deleuzian idea of assemblage, conceived as a 'multiplicity that exceeds its component parts but which nevertheless retains elements of specificity.' (2009: 561), to provide an analysis of space and power suggesting ways in which complex and multiple forces coalesce as place-based events – events that are partly constituted by the exchange of 'ideas, knowledge, practices, materials and resources across sites' (McFarlane, 2009: 561). This perspective counters ideas of homogeneity, as it becomes clear that local interpretation always determines how ideas and things are understood, interpreted and how they interact with other forces. To put it another way, we might replace the idea of 'the global' as an undifferentiated universal space with an understanding that 'the global is situated, specific and materially constructed in the practices which make each specificity' (Law, 2004: 563).

In accounting for the context of this study the idea of a translocal assemblage allows us to focus on the ways in which socio-political events of global significance – in this case the Arab Spring and the ensuing Libyan conflict, take on meaning in the lives of young children in a particular site in the North of England. The assemblage, in emphasizing both spatiality and temporality, thus describes a 'topography of trajectories that cross or engage each other to different extents over time' (McFarlane, 2009:562) as children orientate themselves to media depictions of 'the naughty person' (Gaddafi) their sense of 'home' and shifting perceptions of what it means to be Muslim, acting these

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out in the day-to-day run of play, interactions and structured learning activities at their 'local' primary school.

The political backdrop

It is widely believed that the events referred to as the Arab Spring, had their origin in Sidi Bouzid in central Tunisia when on the 17th December 2010 a vegetable seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself alight in protest against long term police harassment and political corruption. This action prompted Sidi Bouzid's inhabitants to rise up against the country's ruling authorities. The subsequent government crackdown prompted widespread rebellion (Noueihed, 2011). The Tunisian unrest sparked a revolutionary wave across the Arab Peninsula resulting in a revolt in Egypt and a civil uprising in Libya that culminated in the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. In Tunisia, rural areas protested against police harassment and political corruption, in Egypt the young urban middle classes, many of whom had been educated abroad, demonstrated against high rates of unemployment as well as legal and political repression, while in Libya tribal and regional factions, that had been oppressed under Gaddafi's regime, rebelled (Anderson, 2011).

The unrest in Libya commenced on Tuesday 15th February 2011 when protests in Benghazi led to clashes with the government's security forces. Subsequently, protests spread to other major cities within the country precipitating a civil war between protesters seeking to oust Colonel Gaddafi and forces loyal to him. Eventually, with the support of NATO, the protesters formed an interim government, which became known as the National Transitional Council (NTC). As events progressed the NTC began to take hold of Libya's key cities. After taking control of Bab al-Azizia in August they overthrew Gaddafi's government. Gaddafi was subsequently killed on the 20th October 2011 after the NTC took control of his hometown Sirte. Three days later the civil war officially ended with the NATO withdrawal shortly afterwards (Ayan, 2011; Friedman, 2011).

Around the world the Libyan diaspora took to the streets to call for Gaddafi's downfall. For many this was the first form of political protest that they had taken part in. Men, women and children stood together in key cities here in

the UK, and further afield, raising awareness of their country's plight and calling for an end to the bloodshed (Black and Bowcott, 2011). As in many other cities across the UK, the Libyan diaspora who feature in this research staged a campaign calling on the local community to support their cause. In this way local events reflected and refracted issues that dominated mainstream media and strong personal resonances.

Many adults in the families that feature in this research had come to the UK to study and therefore still had close family ties and friendships in Libya. These friends and family members were directly affected by the uprising. In this sense they correspond to Wellman's (2002) description of a glocalised community, networked as much in place-to-place communities as in their specific locality. The events described inevitably became woven into their children's everyday lives. Drawing on data from a wider ethnography (Barley 2014) this paper explores the discourses that a small group of Libyan children drew upon in negotiating and re-negotiating their identities against the dynamic and unfolding political events that dominated media depictions of Libya. These findings echo how the children in Beresin's (2010) study incorporated media representations in their school peer interactions.

The study

The focus of Ruths study was on how young children conceptualise and operationalise identity and the part that this plays in their patterns of interaction. Analysis of the data produced revealed identity to be dialectical: anchored and transient; self-defined and ascribed; individual and collective.

They study was guided by ethnography's distinct *focus* on culture, the *process* of seeking to uncover emic perspectives, and narrative *output* (Wolcott 1999). Adhering to the participatory principles that are intrinsic to both ethnography and childhood studies (Cheney 2011) the children in the study were involved in developing its focus, the design of research tools, and later on in data collection and analysis.

The ethnography was conducted in the reception class of an inner city school, called Sunnyside², in the North of England where the majority of children (all

² Names of places and individuals have been changed throughout to ensure anonymity.

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aged from 4 to 5) are from a diverse range of cultural minority 'groups' within the city. Many pupils are new to the UK when they first arrive at Sunnyside and have a limited grasp of the English language. The majority of children from cultural minority families fall into two broad categories: refugees or asylum seekers, and children of International Post-graduate Students. A number of children are perceived as being from deprived backgrounds as is reflected in the high percentage that are entitled to free school meals (FSM), a measure described by Gillborn and Youdell (2000:10) as 'a crude proxy of poverty.' Over the course of the 2010-11 academic year, Ruth spent a day a week with Sunnyside's reception class. A total of 31 children took part in the study. During this time the events, referred to as the Libyan Uprising were unfolding. Thirteen children in the class were from Libya. All were in the UK as temporary residents whilst one or more of their family members undertook postgraduate study in the city. Just before the uprising started two of these children returned with their families to Libya.

While the study as a whole used a range of research methods that revealed the dialectical nature of identity, only two are drawn upon in this paper:

1. participant observation.
2. digital book creation, through which children's stories of 'Where I am from' were told through photos and typed text

This research activity was inspired by a child in the class (Mustafe) who asked if he could make what he described as 'A Libya book' after he initiated a conversation with the researcher about the unfolding situation in his country of origin. This activity was not intended to describe a fixed identity but was used to explore an aspect of identity (i.e. nationality) that the children wanted to discuss. The activity allowed children to explore nationality in a fluid way with some children depicting a dual-nationality and others describing how their nationality has and continues to change. In the full study this research activity was analysed alongside other activities that explored different aspects of identity or as the children described it 'being me' (see Barley [2014]). As in Moinian's (2009) study, the children in the current study conceptualise and operationalise a complex and dynamic understanding of *identity as performative, situated and dialectical* in their everyday lives.

Undertaking ethnography poses some specific ethical challenges (ASA 2011), such as entering and withdrawing from the field; maintaining an overt research identity; positionality; and reflexivity³ (. Conducting research with children raises further ethical considerations, such as gaining and negotiating on-going informed consent; safeguarding; appropriately managing power differentials; and employing appropriate dissemination activities (Morrow et al. 1996; Cocks 2006). Many of the above ethical issues also relate to researching ethnic minority 'groups' though some additional challenges are also posed. These include employing culturally appropriate research methods; being alert and able to respond to possible language and cultural difficulties (Salway et al. 2011).

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

Children's stories

1. *The storytellers*

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

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

³ Reflexivity is key to undertaking an ethnography. For a full discussion of how this was adopted in the current study see Barley (2014).

effectively with his peers before withdrawing into his own world or gravitating to the other Arabic speaking children in the class. In conversations (in Arabic) with other children from Libya Kareem could often be heard comparing life in Libya to life in the UK.

In contrast, Mustafe had been living in the UK the year prior to starting school. On arrival at Sunnyside he was friends with an Egyptian girl Aafia, whose family were also in the UK on temporary student visas. Mustafe was a talented footballer and soon made friends with the other older boys in the class. At the start of the year he regularly discussed ‘being Muslim’ with his peers. However, he didn’t talk much about Libya with his peers until the start of the uprising.

The two girls who feature in this paper, Abia and Saida were inseparable at school. They had previously attended Sunnyside’s nursery together and reportedly saw a lot of each other outside of school. Neither girl talked much about Libya until the uprising began when Gaddafi and the unrest began to feature in their drawings that they almost always produced together.

2. Before the conflict

Fieldwork began before the Arab Spring commenced. At this point ‘being Libyan’ did not feature strongly in children’s peer social interactions at school though, as we will see below, some children did make comparisons between living in Libya and England.

Kareem, like his Libyan peers, talked about his family’s change in socio-economic status since moving to the UK, but a more frequent topic of his peer conversations was ethnic diversity which appeared to be very salient for him. Ruth’s fieldnotes illustrate this:

In November we are in the outdoor play area during a morning session. Annakiya (a Nigerian girl) picks up a ball and asks me to play with her. We throw the ball back and forth to each other. After a few minutes Kareem comes up to us also with a ball in his hands and asks me to throw his ball to him. I throw Annakiya’s ball back to her and then Kareem’s ball to him and so on alternating between the two children. 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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In early October a group of Muslim children, Aafia, Fazia (both girls), Mustafe, Amir and Mubarak (all boys), are drawing pictures at the writing table during a free choice session. As they are drawing the children are chatting about their different pictures. Aafia puts down her pencil and looks round the table at the other children before asking them 'Do you do this?' She then puts her hands over her face and bends down to the table and up again - going through the motions of Salah (prayer). The three boys watch her and then all join in. As they are doing this Aafia and Mustafe begin to recite phrases in Arabic. Almost as soon as they started the children stop and return to their drawings discussing the different places that they pray and comparing their experiences. Amir (who has just started to learn Arabic at Koranic school) is particularly interested in the prayers that Aafia and Mustafe recite and asks Mustafe about them. As Mustafe explains the prayers to Amir the two boys compare their experiences of 'being Muslim.'

A number of children in the class regularly engaged in these discussions about 'being Muslim' and in doing so highlighted their collective religious affiliation. But they also showed the intersecting nature of identity, noting the differences between 'being a Muslim girl' and 'being a Muslim boy'; or 'being a Libyan Muslim' and 'being a Somali Muslim.' Notions of similarity and difference, inherent in identity, were openly interrogated amongst their peers with children discussing identity's dialectical nature in terms of collective and individual identities, self-defined and ascribed identities alongside fluid and fixed identities. Within this context, 'being Muslim' can be interpreted as a 'superordinate identity' that comes to the fore in diverse social situations as a way of promoting a sense of togetherness (Gaertner et al. 1999).

Before the conflict 'being Arabic speakers' was important for the two female storytellers, Abia and Saida. Unlike our other storytellers Abia and Saida started reception after the Christmas break, previously attending the school's nursery together. Arabic was not only an important communication tool for these girls, who both spoke a little English on joining the class, but was also an important form of linguistic capital. The girls would use Arabic to purposefully exclude other children from their games attempting to create a

linguistic hierarchy within the class. One example of how they did this occurred at the writing table with a non-Arabic speaking child, Deka.

Deka is drawing a picture chatting to me about her friends at school as Saida joins us at the table. She sits down next to Deka, reaches over to get a pen and then says (in English) 'Deka, you're not my friend.' Deka doesn't respond to this so I ask Saida why Deka isn't her friend. She explains to me that Abia and Sadira are her friends as they all speak Arabic commenting that, 'Sadira and I speak in Arabic and with Abia too.' She then goes onto explain that all of her friends speak Arabic informing me that they like to play secret games that the other children can't take part in.

Social structures and discourses about linguistic hierarchies informed these two girls' peer interactions at Sunnyside. 'Being Arabic speakers' continued to be important, as we will see below, for these girls, becoming salient during the ensuing conflict in Libya.

3. During the conflict

Some children in the class were actively exposed to the unrest in Libya, such as Abia whose extended family were directly affected by the conflict, while other children, such as Mustafe and Kareem, unconsciously soaked up the news through their families' media engagement. These unfolding events became the focus of a number of research activities. The conflict started at the same time that the children began to collaboratively construct the 'Where I am from...' digital books with Ruth. In these, the political uprising features heavily in the children's discourses about the places they are from.

During the conflict Kareem continued to talk about his earlier experience of living in Libya. For example, when making his digital book he described the Libya he had left behind, highlighting what his house looked like and what he liked to do there with his friends. After describing this to Ruth he expressed concerns that it was not safe for his family to go back to Libya at the moment.

As Kareem watched scenes of the upheaval in Libya with his family on TV he started to initiate further conversations with Ruth in which he further expressed his concerns for the safety of his family and friends who were still

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in Libya. As the conflict continued Kareem became preoccupied by the pictures that he saw on the news of fires in Libya’s cities and fighters from both sides of the conflict. Interestingly though, Ruth did not observe Kareem initiating conversations with his peers about this situation. Kareem’s discourse of ethnic segregation remained important to him during this time, although ‘being Libyan’ began to feature more regularly in his identity discourses. An interest in media images of the Libyan conflict also became important for Mustafe - as did the symbolism embodied in the two Libyan flags that were increasingly used to represent the different sides in the conflict. Pulling together images to use when making the digital books in January 2011 Ruth inserted a picture of the solid green flag that was adopted as the Libyan national flag in 1977 by the Gaddafi regime (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Flag adopted by the Gaddafi regime

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



Figure 2: Flag adopted by the NTC

As 2011 progressed and the NTC began to take control of Libya’s key cities these two flags were often portrayed as symbols of the two different sides in the struggle. News coverage regularly featured the two flags pinned onto a

map to show how the fighting was progressing, and would also show images of freedom-fighters burning Gaddafi's green flag while adults and children alike held up the flag of the revolution making the peace sign with their other hand.

Not updating the picture library that was used to create the digital books with the NTC flag prompted an interesting discussion with Mustafe about his national identity.

As Mustafe looks at the flags we chat about the different countries that they represent. As he gets to the green Libyan flag of the Gaddafi regime he points to it and says 'That's Libya's.' I ask him if he wants to put it in his digital book to which he replies 'No, no I... well... there's... there's lots of Libya's flags.' I reply saying 'Yes, there is isn't there? Lots of them.' 'Yeah' he concurs as he looks again at the pictures trying to find the one that he wants to put in his digital book. When he can't find it he says to me 'It's black. Not all black... It's dark red and its black and its dark green... and in the middle black we put a shape which is like a banana. Like this.' He picks up my pen and draws a crescent in my fieldnote book. I suggest that he draws the flag saying that we can take a photo of it and then put it in his book. He begins to draw the flag and after drawing the outline of the flag with the crescent in it goes on to tell me 'and we put a star next to it', which he does. Mustafe colours in his flag and starts to describe to me what is happening in Libya saying 'But there's fighting now in Libya, so can you write that.' As I type what he tells me to he continues saying 'There is fighting and fires in Libya. So we can't go to Libya. We have to wait. ... We have to wait for a long time.' He stops colouring and looks through the picture library and then says to me 'I can't find fire.' We look through the picture library together and I point to a picture of a bonfire and ask him if this is the kind of picture that he is looking for. 'Is that Libya?' he asks. I tell him that I'm not sure but that it can be Libya if he wants it to be. He tells me though that he doesn't think that it looks like Libya. He continues looking at the different pictures. After looking through all of the pictures he stops at the picture of a policeman and thinks for a

minute before continuing to talk saying ‘There’s lots of people fighting. And there’s lots of police killing.’ ‘Police killing?’ I prompt ‘Who are they killing?’ ‘Yeah’ Mustafe replies ‘With their guns.’ ‘Are the police good or bad?’ I ask. ‘They’re good’ Mustafe tells me ‘But they’re good at killing those who are very naughty. There’s someone who is very naughty.’ With further prompting Mustafe tells me that the police who he is referring to are the revolutionaries who are fighting against Gaddafi (i.e. ‘the naughty person’) rather than the actual Libyan police force. Mustafe continues to colour in his flag and says to me ‘I can’t say it in English but I can say it in Arabic.’ ‘Say what?’ I ask him. He then goes onto tell me that he has heard the protestors saying something when he watches the TV with his parents. I ask him if he can tell me it in Arabic to which he replies saying ‘Libya harra mahama yatla barra’ (Free Libya). He then tells me that as the protestors are saying this they hold up two fingers in the peace sign. He repeats the phrase as I write it down but is concerned that he can’t explain to me what it means in English. I tell him I will ask someone who I work with to translate it for me. He agrees to this happy that I will be able to understand him. As he finishes his flag he tells me that this is the flag he wants in his Libya (digital) book as it is the flag that he also wants for Libya.

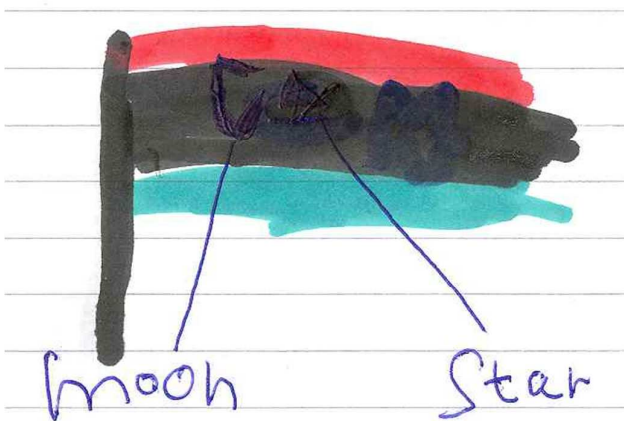


Figure 3: Mustafe’s drawing of the Libyan flag that he ascribes to

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

NTC flag became a key symbol of Mustafe's national identity which he used as a way to talk to his peers about the situation in Libya as well as his national and socio-political identity in relation to 'the naughty person'. This resonates with Connolly's (2003) work in Ireland and highlights that young children are aware of the political and cultural symbolism of flags and actively appropriate their meaning when conceptualising their own identities.

As well as using the NTC flag in this way, Mustafe also increasingly used the imagery of fire to express this aspect of his identity and to communicate this to his peers. When showing his digital book to Fazia he explained that 'It's Libya but there isn't any fire'. He then went on to talk about the meanings behind the pictures and text in his book and why there *should* also be a picture of fire in it. The symbol of fire, with its connotations of danger and destruction, became important to Mustafe and also signaled his anxiety about the situation in his home country. As the conflict developed 'being Libyan' became a key feature of Mustafe's discourse about his own identity. Within this discourse he also positions himself as being anti-Gadaffi.

As mentioned above Kareem shared Mustafe's preoccupation with the images of fire and fighting; but unlike Mustafe, Kareem did not initiate conversations about the conflict with his peers, only referring to it if prompted by one of his classmates. However, as discussed above, he did initiate conversations about these events with Ruth. While both boys were concerned about the situation in their homeland, Mustafe was more visibly agitated about the events on TV than Kareem.

As the other children that Mustafe regularly interacted with did not understand the significance of Libya's flags to his identity, or share the meanings that he gave to them, this did not seem to impact on how his peers interacted with him at school. Mustafe's flag can therefore be viewed as a symbolic marker of identity that was not particularly salient in the context of Sunnyside. As Mustafe performed this aspect of his identity to a largely unappreciative audience he emphasised the meaning that he attached to this symbol and, in doing so, attempted to convey its meaning to his peers.

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The fluid and uncertain nature of the events in Libya brought this aspect of Mustafe’s identity to the fore in both his conversations with Ruth and his peers. This illustrates how children’s identity performances shape and are shaped by the translocal assemblage, as ideas, artifacts and symbolic representations from elsewhere entered into the Sunnyside classroom. Before the uprising, Mustafe talked about ‘being Libyan’ with his peers but more frequently emphasised his identity in other ways - as ‘being Muslim’ or ‘being a boy’. With the uprising, Mustafe’s identity performances changed in response to the dynamic situation in his home country. Gilroy’s (1993:122) understanding of identity as the ‘changing same’ is one way of framing Mustafe’s fluid identity which was in a continual state of becoming.

It is interesting to note that some other children, most notably Abia and Saida, did share Mustafe’s *dominant status*, at this time, of ‘being Libyan’ (also sharing his socio-political views about Gaddafi) and at times depicted scenes from Libya in their pictures and discussed this with their friends. Abia’s picture of her family in Libya, which she decided to draw during a free choice activity session, depicts Gaddafi looking angry while her family are smiling



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

The other children, such as Abia and Saida, who strongly subscribed to and operationalised this aspect of their identity were all female January starters. Mustafe, like most of the male September starters, chose not to interact with the younger girls such as Abia and Saida. Consequently, their common national and socio-political identities were not as important to Mustafe's patterns of interaction as other aspects of his identity, such as age and gender.

During the conflict an anti-Gadaffi rhetoric started to feature in both Abia's and Saida's peer interactions at school. At the same time 'Being Libyan' became an important feature of their identity discourses, replacing earlier notions of 'being Arabic speakers'. Although using Arabic as a way to exclude non-Arabic speakers from their games still featured in their peer interactions during the conflict, 'being Libyan' added a further layer to their interactions that set them apart from other Arabic-speaking classmates. Like Mustafe the socio-political dynamics of 'being Libyan' featured in these girls' interactions.

Discussion

In sum it might be said that the comfortable surroundings of the reception class of Sunnyside were by no means impervious to a wide range of religious, ethnic and political discourses from the world outside. Ideas, discourses family and peer relationships as well as home media consumption provided a fluid translocal context that these young children produced and skillfully reworked in their social interactions and activities at school.

Throughout this study children regularly talked about their own identities with their peers. In these conversations they repeatedly used phrases such as 'Being Libyan' or 'Being Muslim' to describe themselves. Over the course of the year these 'Being...' phrases became a standard feature of children's identity discourses. The data presented here show how children's identities were performative, situated and dialectical, as they used linguistic and semiotic resources drawn from their home, school and media lives, reflecting a complex interweaving of translocal discourses. The work suggests that identity can be viewed as in a continual state of becoming (Hall 2000). Consequently, social situations such as the Libyan Uprising are dynamic agents in the fluid performance of identity.

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Previous ethnographies, such as Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2001) work in America, and Connolly's (2003) in Ireland, reveal that young children understand and reflect upon this fluid nature of identity and in doing so actively construct their understandings of self and others. These studies show that children are competent social actors who understand and employ 'conventional' markers of difference and can apply social meaning to abstract social discourses. Further to this, these studies have also revealed that children are aware of, and at times actively perpetuate, wider social discourses of discrimination and hierarchies of difference, such as discourses that have been reported as widespread in Libya of racial discrimination and racial segregation (UNHRC 2010).

This paper adds to previous ethnographic work by showing how salient volatile, spatially distant, socio-political contexts can be in young children's identity (re)negotiations with their peers. Within the dynamic context of the conflict in Libya socio-political dynamics of 'being Libyan' came to the fore in children's peer interactions as they linked local and global contexts in their peer interactions. For three of the four children featured in this paper this appeared to be the predominant shaping force in their identity at this time. By unearthing this rich and nuanced account of young children's experiences of identity (re)negotiation within a global and volatile socio-political context this study unearths how global contexts play an important role in young children's daily peer interactions in a spatially distant local context.

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For Peer Review

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