

Geo-Ed

A 'culturally unsafe' space? The Somali experience of Christchurch secondary schools

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Abstract: School should be a 'culturally safe' place, particularly for those students in Christchurch who challenge the city's reputation as a culturally homogeneous space and are thus frequently open to discrimination. A case study focusing on Somali refugee adolescents highlights that Christchurch's secondary schools – like those elsewhere in New Zealand – are not a culturally safe, certain space for all students but rather spatially reconstruct inequalities of gender, class and ethnicity. Yet, Somali students are not passive victims, for they have actively renegotiated these spaces within their schools with varying degrees of success.

Key words: Christchurch, 'cultural safety', education, Somali refugee.

The 'garden city' and 'English city of the South' images used to characterize Christchurch evoke a particular geographical and cultural space embedded with Anglo-centric, middle-class values and norms. This imaginary geography has long been challenged by the diverse ethnic, gender and class identities of its residents yet it continues to shape the city's institutions. Drawing upon the experiences of Somali refugee adolescents, this article considers one site, Christchurch secondary schools, where these prevailing cultural values, norms and identities create exclusionary spaces in which some are made to feel unwelcome. It argues that while Christchurch may be a 'safe haven' from the persecution or hunger they faced before arriving, school is not a 'culturally safe' space for Somali refugees and others who embody cultural and religious difference (see Ramsden 1995).

The concept of 'cultural safety' was developed as a means to promote biculturalism within

New Zealand's nursing programmes. It incorporates three key understandings. First, each person offered a service (such as nursing or teaching) is part of a social, economic and historical framework. Second, it is the responsibility of the service provider, rather than those people made powerless by illness, poverty, age, youth, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disadvantage, to identify barriers and work towards eliminating them in the interests of improving service. Third, it is the user of the service, rather than the service provider, who holds the power to say whether or not they feel safe (Ramsden 1995). Although not previously applied in an educational context, 'cultural safety' shares many similarities with antiracism and radical multiculturalism educational philosophies (see Giroux 1994; Bishop & Glynn 1999) in highlighting the need to not only improve our understanding about the past and present contexts of the student, but also place the spotlight on teachers and their schools as

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the bearers of personal, corporate and dominant culture, attitudes, preconceptions and power (Ramsden 1995).

The contention that school in Christchurch is a 'culturally unsafe' public space for Somali refugee students builds on three decades of evidence that education in New Zealand remains a site for reinforcing inequalities of gender (Alton-Lee & Praat 2000; Jones 2000) and class (Harker 1990; Dale 2000), as well as cultural uniformity (Jones 1991; Humpage & Fleras 1999). In response to such evidence, a range of pluralist initiatives have been implemented both in education policy and in individual schools. Claiming to foster a more inclusive education system in New Zealand, school is increasingly constructed as a 'neutral' space in which individuals of any given gender, ethnicity, class or religion are treated in a non-discriminatory manner. Linked to this notion of neutrality is the concept of 'equality'; although increasingly articulated in terms of 'equal outcomes', the notion of 'equal opportunity' also remains strong (Simon *et al.* 2000). Some achievements have been made, but the policy principles and practical initiatives implemented have also made it harder to pin down the processes of exclusion that persist in schools. Under the guise of 'neutrality' or 'equality', educators and students continue to practise and defend institutionalized rules and procedures which are mistakenly based on a culture perceived to be 'normal' and 'neutral', but in fact reflect the priorities of the dominant culture. As a result, less powerful minority groups – who do not understand the supposedly 'neutral' rules and norms of education – are frequently excluded, however, inadvertently, from the official and unofficial curriculum of schools (Eckermann 1992).

This article is based on a small, Christchurch-based qualitative study that grew out of the need for better acknowledgement of the particular challenges refugee adolescents face in adapting to these unwritten rules. In consultation with the non-governmental agency, Refugee Resettlement Support (RRS), refugee adolescents were identified as a group 'falling between the cracks' and the research conceived as a platform from which to lobby the Ministry of Education. Despite a variety of initiatives targeting refugee students through

the 1980s and 1990s (see Kaa 1989; Jamieson & Peters 1997), education policy was still focused on meeting their language needs, rather than addressing the adaptation processes through which both refugee students and schools must pass. This reflected the broader context in which New Zealand resettles refugees: although it ranks highly in the world according to the number of refugees accepted per capita (up to 750 per year on the current refugee quota), the support available for refugees once they arrive is far less generous and heavily reliant on non-profit organizations and volunteers. Greater focus has been placed on resettlement in the 2000s, but funding and support still remains inadequate for the task of helping refugees to overcome years of psychological, emotional, physical and social deprivation (see Chile 2008).

Somali were one of the larger refugee groups serviced by RRS and their population included a significant number of adolescents. With support from the Somali community and relevant Christchurch schools, RRS provided access to refugee participants through an after-school study class with the exception of four students recruited directly through schools. The 'adolescents' were aged between 14 and 20 years, with all but two beginning their New Zealand education at a Christchurch secondary school. In total, individual or group interviews were conducted with eight female and nine male Somali adolescents and three Somali parents. Interviews were also conducted with 15 professionals, including two school principals, seven ESOL teachers, a school counsellor, Ministry of Education and Work and Income representatives and a social worker.

All of the refugee participants arrived in New Zealand under the refugee quota or family reunification category. Refugees are always vulnerable research participants due to the painful and traumatic experiences they have experienced and uncertainty about their rights in their host country (Hopkins 2008). A Somali interpreter working for RRS acted as a cultural advisor to ensure that I, a New Zealand-born, Pâkehâ, non-religious woman, was aware of these vulnerabilities and also avoided any misunderstandings regarding the Islamic faith of my Somali participants. The inclusion of adolescents also required special consideration,

with student interviews conducted either in the presence of a parent or under the auspices of a school or RRS but with informed consent gained from each individual student. Most of them were interviewed in groups of two or three people they already knew, so they felt more comfortable with the research process, and discussion avoided unnecessarily focusing on their preflight history given this was an inevitability traumatic time (see Hopkins 2008).

Based on these empirical data, the article first argues that schools tended to be conceived as a space in the 'present' time, with students said to be treated 'equally' regardless of their past circumstances or background. In that the refugee past of Somali students continued to have a presence in their everyday lives, this focus on the present meant many of the barriers they faced were not fully acknowledged. Second, the article asserts that the religious beliefs and practices of the Somali students contested the dominant understandings of state schools as a secular, religiously 'neutral' space. Third, it argues that the Somali students provided different interpretations of the gendered nature of 'private-public' space which correlate with Islamic norms of modesty and appropriateness and these understandings were often framed by teachers in terms of rigid boundaries between 'traditional' and 'Western' even while it did not reflect the reality of the students' lives (see Dwyer 1999). Having considered threats to the 'cultural safety' of Somali students, the article finally highlights the different ways in which the young Somali women and men reworked their own cultural boundaries within Christchurch's social spaces. Indicating that schools are 'border institutions in which teachers, students and others engage in daily acts of cultural translation and negotiation' (Giroux 1994, p. 329), it demonstrates that the Somali students responded to the cultural messages offered at school through both conformity and resistance.

'Present-past' space

With education regarded as a crucial mechanism for social mobility, school is increasingly constructed as a 'neutral' space where students treated in a non-discriminatory manner may

overcome their past experiences or background. While admirable on one level, Brough *et al.* (2003, p. 206) dispute this distinction between 'present' and 'past' spaces, arguing that for young refugees:

The past mingles with the present too in terms of the meanings and interpretations young people give to life events as they unfurl. Sense of success or failure, notions of freedom and independence, identity and physical and emotional security may be played out in the present, but contain salient meanings generated by the past.

Certainly, an emphasis on overcoming the past appeared to silence the continuing impact it had on the lives of Somali students. Like many refugees, they had endured multiple hardships, including war, civil conflict and long-standing poverty in their home country (Guerin & Guerin 2002). This history led many New Zealanders to assume that they came from 'primitive' backgrounds. Yet most Somali resettled in Christchurch were members of the middle- and upper-classes struggling with the loss of class status in Christchurch.

Most frustrating was the realization that the cultural capital gained from their middle-class experience in Somalia did not translate well in their lives as 'poor refugees' in Christchurch because they lacked the appropriate knowledge required for educational success. For example, the Somali education system privileged a more stratified approach to learning reliant on the memorization and recitation of notes taken under the teacher's instruction. Many students thus found it very difficult to adapt to the more student-centred approaches to learning evident in New Zealand schools, including group discussion and independent completion of exercises from text books. Some differences were appreciated – one student noted, '[if] you are right, and the teacher is wrong, you can tell them' – but most were still figuring exactly how they were expected to learn in New Zealand. A male student said: 'I think [I spent] two terms, three terms, most of the whole year, trying to understand what is really going on.'

This confusion was not helped by the fact that a focus on the 'present' saw students

quickly mainstreamed according to their current age, rather than past experience of schooling. Given that many Somali adolescents have poor literacy in their own language resulting from disruptions to their education and the relatively recent adoption of Somali as a written language (Samatar 1991; Guerin & Guerin 2002), this was a major issue for the students and parents interviewed. A girl of nearly 16 of age could not understand the rationale behind mainstreaming:

‘When they put me in Sixth form I wasn’t able to take Sixth form, because I didn’t do Fifth form, and Fourth form and Third form, and I didn’t go [in] Somalia or even New Zealand ... so the whole year I didn’t learn anything. ... I was only going to school, [learning] nothing, and I was taking too eliter classes. So then again, the teachers put me in Seventh form and I have to tell my family, that I not ever go to school because I was thinking that’s not where I am, so the first you have to find where I am ...’

Having endured years of disruption and unreliability – because of civil war, a shortage of teachers and considerable corruption – within their home country and then the aimlessness of refugee camps, many Somali students also found it difficult to see the relevance of the time-driven, rule-bound environment of New Zealand educational establishments. For instance, a teacher noted: ‘they don’t see the connection between having a complete set of notes, having a folder and having it organized and success at school because they had no experience of this’. In this case, they were disadvantaged by a paper-based system that frequently favours style and organization over content (Harker 1984).

Although this teacher appeared relatively aware of her students’ past background, another teacher noted that ‘we get the odd handout’ about refugees from the Ministry of Education but ‘usually they seem to come to us for information’. This means many teachers were working with a limited understanding of their students’ past. As a result, some attributed the present behaviour of Somali students to personal disposition, rather than the ‘past’ spaces they had occupied. Teachers sometimes

assumed that Somali students were lazy or taking advantage of the more relaxed rules and punishments that New Zealand teachers and schools exhibited. One teacher also lamented that Somali students lacked ‘the understanding of what it was to behave in a *fair* way within [the classroom]’ because they sometimes demanded one-on-one instruction. The socially constructed notion of ‘fair play’ central to New Zealand national identity sits in contrast with the ‘survival skills’ that were more relevant for Somali in refugee camps.

To their credit, some schools made attempts to bridge the gaps in knowledge that resulted from the past histories of Somali students. For example, schools provided segregated classes and/or subject-specific support in class for Somali and other refugee students so that they were able to receive more individualized attention. Such measures were implemented, however, only when a large number of Somali students enrolled at once and lasted only a short time. While indicating that these measures seemed to help Somali students, some teachers emphasized the need for them to be treated ‘equally’ (the same as other students) as soon as possible, not least because non-refugee students complained about the ‘special’ treatment refugees received. The clash between the extraordinary past histories of Somali students and the explicit emphasis on ‘neutrality’ and ‘equality’ underlying Christchurch schools put these teachers in a very difficult moral position.

‘Secular-religious’ space

In addition to contesting the expectation that school be a ‘present’ space, Somali students challenged the notion that schools should be a site of religious-‘neutrality’. New Zealand state schools are not, of course, ‘neutral’ to religion for they reflect a dominant culture which is heavily influenced by Christianity. Important dates in the Christian calendar, such as Easter and Christmas, are taken as school holidays and the weekend break is organized to include Sunday, the Christian day of worship. Nonetheless, there is a strong belief that state and religion are best regarded as separate, with religion largely a personal choice that should be relegated to the private sphere. As a result, some schools are specifically

religion-based, but the majority of New Zealand state schools are 'secular' institutions that do not involve religious instruction or prayer.

In contrast, Somali students told how school in their home country was an explicitly religious space. Half the school day was devoted to religious study and time for prayer was incorporated into the school day, including the requirement for young men over the age of 15 – pray at the mosque on Friday afternoons. School in Somalia was consequently a 'safe' space where the religious needs of Muslim students were accommodated and indeed were integral to the school day. In New Zealand, these same religious needs frequently conflicted with school curriculum requirements. For example, young Somali males were usually absent from school on Friday afternoon because they attended the mosque. Missing out on a half-day's study each week created academic problems for the students and administrative ones for teachers. A young male told how a teacher informed him there would be a test set on Friday afternoon:

... and she said 'You have to make a time for this period, because [otherwise] you have to lose some marks for exam'. Sometimes, most of the exams are on Fridays, and she said 'If you can't make a time on Friday, I don't know what to do'.

This student chose to miss prayers at the mosque in favour of sitting the test. He was then forced to decide between the values of his home culture and those of the educational culture. It is in this way that the Christian bias within the school system continued to disadvantage Muslim students such as Somali, seemingly based on the assumption articulated by one teacher that: 'Well, they've got to conform to our society, because they're going to live there'.

This fact sits in tension with other initiatives that appeared to accommodate Somali needs. For example, some schools responded to the need for Somali students to pray at regular times during the school day by designating a room to be used for prayers. While the school accommodating the largest number of Muslim students offered two single-sex, permanent prayer rooms, schools with only a few Muslim

students were provided with whatever office or class space was available. This meant that the same room was not used each time and students often ended up praying in the classroom among their classmates, opening them up to ridicule. Somali students also found that prayer room provision could be withdrawn if they did not conform to expected behaviour for the allotted prayer space. While it is possible that some mischief was occurring, such moves seemed to assume that Somali students were trying to 'trick' teachers and demonstrated little awareness of the varying degrees of religiosity or the fact that Somali children do not have to pray five times a day until the age of 15.

'Private–public' space

New Zealand expectations that religion remain a 'private' interest have been further challenged by Islamic prohibitions concerning the interaction between men and women. 'Public' and 'private' spaces tend to be gendered but in different ways dependent on cultural context. Femininity in Somali culture is constructed in terms of the private/home even more so than in New Zealand, with Islam influencing Somali understandings of 'private–public' space and affecting the bodily experience of both young Somali women and men. For example, Somali parents and students told how males and females over the age of 15 usually socialize separately, unless they are direct family members. There is no 'dating' between the sexes, marriage takes place only after parental consent and young women are offered less freedom than young men to go out alone or with friends. Strict Muslim families were consequently distraught to find that the two state single-sex schools for girls in the city could not always accommodate their daughters, because of their popularity and 'neutral' zoning and entrance requirements. As a result, the young women had to enrol at a coeducational school where mixed-sex interaction was unavoidable. There appeared to be little recognition by schools that such 'neutral' entrance rules created significant discomfort for Somali and other Muslim students, contributing to school becoming 'culturally unsafe' for them.

One area of particular concern was the New Zealand expectation that males and females participate in physical education classes together. Some of the young men really appreciated the opportunity to play sport: 'they have soccer team, sports team, you can play here on sports team for school, and I like there's lots of teams for basketball and soccer so that's good'. But they attempted to protect their 'safety' by refraining from physical activities, such as swimming, when women were present. A father described his eldest son's reaction to the expectation he must play sport with women: 'He was ... surprised, very, very, shocked, he couldn't say no, he couldn't understand it, so it was a surprise ... It's not our culture'. Despite their attempts to avoid it, these young men continued to be subjected to greater exposure to young women and their bodies than was culturally appropriate for them.

It was the young Somali women, however, who found it most difficult to transcend the different cultural delineations of 'private' and 'public'. This is because, in embodying such difference personally through their clothing, their religion and culture were readily identifiable by mere visual inspection (Guerin & Guerin 2002). Somali women don long, colourful gowns, which conceal their arms and legs, and a scarf or head-dress that covers their hair. This modest clothing functions as a way to 'protect' the sexuality of Somali women by covering those body parts considered to be attractive to men, both Somali and non-Somali. In this way, bodies are considered private in ways considered out-dated in New Zealand society. Somali men, while usually avoiding short trousers for modesty's sake, wear Western style clothing. Their attire thus does not act as a distinctive 'marker' of both 'difference' (external boundaries) and 'sameness' (internal boundaries) to the same extent as the women's clothing, even though their physical characteristics might (see Dwyer 1999; Humpage 2000).

The wearing of Western clothing was not essential for women to participate in physical activity, but the social implications of dressing differently from other participants still constituted a barrier for Somali women from taking part in sport. It also led them to having little positive interaction with non-Muslim students because they were perceived as being at

odds with the prevailing social and religious norms. Symbolizing the intrusion of alien beliefs contrary to the prevailing religious tradition, female Somali students were obvious targets for abuse or criticism (Dwyer 1999; Roald 2001). This was the case even when schools made policy adjustments to accommodate modesty requirements. Some schools allowed Somali girls to wear mufti, but educators told how this solution angered a small number of non-Muslim students because they were not granted such leniency concerning uniform. Two Christchurch schools provided modified uniforms for Somali students in an effort to defuse such complaints of discrimination. But the young women's 'difference' was still represented by their longer skirts and head-scarf, raising the question of whether school uniforms, which are intended to blur socio-economic boundaries between students, are inappropriate in an increasingly multicultural New Zealand.

Some of the teachers, however, questioned why the young Somali women continued to wear such clothing, suggesting that: '[w]hen in Rome, do as the Romans do, kind of thing'. They believed that the Somali community could make life less difficult for their young women by relaxing restrictions on their clothing, demonstrating the difficulty teachers had in reconciling their culturally specific ideals concerning 'gender equality' with the Somali women's own culturally specific needs to monitor their own behaviour as regards clothing and sexuality. Indeed, teachers often constructed the Somali students, whether male or female, as passive victims rather than participants in an active process of interacting with and negotiating the spaces within their schools. This may be associated with the refugee experience being framed as involuntary, rather than the result of an active choice, as well as media images associating Islam with patriarchy and terrorism (Dwyer 1999; Hopkins 2007).

Negotiating 'unsafe' spaces

Brough *et al.* (2003) note that the resettlement process is enormously difficult for young refugees, for they 'must locate themselves within a new social, cultural, geographical and adult space, yet also try to find security within

the spaces of their own families and ethnic communities'. In the case of the Somali students, young men and women tackled this process of location and negotiation in different ways as each group reworked and 'protected' their own cultural and religious practices in the geographical and social space that Christchurch represented (see Roald 2001).

For instance, the modest clothing worn by the young Somali women set them apart from their non-Muslim counterparts and provided opportunities for discrimination. But they continued to wear such clothing because it was bound up with the religious beliefs that provided them with a sense of 'safety'. To understand why, it is necessary to consider that the modest clothes they wore were not 'traditional' for most of the middle- and upper-class urban Somali women who resettled in Christchurch. Indeed, there was a ban on long skirts and head-scarves and the introduction of a school uniform which included trousers for both sexes during the seven years Somalia spent as a 'Scientifically Socialist State' between 1970 and 1977 (Samatar 1991). In a country where 98% of the population were Sunni Muslim (Bell 1998) and where the Qu'ran was an important part of a student's schooling, religious faith was so central to many Somali cultural practices that external markers, such as clothing, were a relatively unimportant demonstration of religious conviction.

Years of famine and civil war resulted in Somali now residing in Christchurch leaving their homeland and finding refuge in neighbouring countries. As a result, many found solace in the Islamic faith while in the refugee camps. At this time, many Somali women adopted the modest dress code that Islam promotes, as an outward sign of their inner faith. They found that it is necessary now that they no longer lived in a country where Islam dominated the society and could therefore be taken for granted to a large degree. Resettlement in New Zealand – where Christianity dominates religious and social life – furthered this need for external signs of faith and culture. A 19-year-old female student explained it this way:

... we are wearing this because it is something to me, it's not something like somebody

has to make you do it, but it is something each person does believe it, like here in New Zealand you can do whatever they want to but if ... every person believes religion, some form of belief, if you don't do it, you are thinking of hell after, because you believe in your judgement day.

This young woman's religious and cultural beliefs were clearly influenced by her parents and Somali children are expected to obediently respect parental wishes. Yet, her desire to follow her faith was no less significant. For young Somali women like her, the long gown and head-scarf are more *liberating* than Western clothing because they protected them from cultural shame and freed them from the prying eyes of men (Dwyer 1999; Roald 2001). In that their clothing provided them with a 'safe' space in an often hostile and unsafe environment, the young Somali women in Christchurch thus continued to resist pressure from both teachers and 'Kiwi' students to 'fit in' by dressing in Western attire. The 'false universalism' of the liberal rights discourses articulated by teachers in this study, however, tended to ignore this agency and negated the importance of religio-cultural differences and identity (Freedman 2007).

Indeed, the literature regarding young Muslim women in Western countries is often characterized by a 'culture conflict' model where young women are defined as 'caught between two cultures' of home and school or perhaps as more active 'cultural synthesisers' between opposing environments (see Brah 1996; Dwyer 1999). However, the Christchurch study highlighted a more ambiguous reality. The continued *inclusion* of young Somali women and girls within their home culture benefited them academically; close monitoring of their lives and their heavy involvement in familial and religious activities forged a strong group identity that made it difficult for Somali girls to drop out of school or get into serious trouble. The young Somali women thus appeared to study harder and spend more time in school, which enhanced their likelihood of academic success.

The young Somali men experienced a different journey of negotiation and adaptation. Their religious and cultural beliefs were less visible,

with no male equivalent of the head-scarf. Their responsibilities for transmitting and reproducing their religious and cultural traditions were also less restrictive on their time or personal freedom. This meant the young men had greater opportunity for positive interaction with New Zealand students and society and were much more likely to indicate that they had 'Kiwi' friends with whom they socialized outside of school than the young women. The emphasis on sport at New Zealand schools had provided a particularly important space within which the young Somali men were able to mix freely with other students. Ironically, however, the interaction with non-Muslim students and the adoption of some aspects of Kiwi culture that enabled the young Somali men to negotiate the 'unsafe' spaces of school also proved 'culturally unsafe' for them. This is because it involved them entering cultural spaces where activities – such as drinking alcohol, smoking and going to parties – were undertaken that fundamentally challenged their religious beliefs. An 18-year-old boy said his friends did not pressure him to drink or smoke and the problem 'comes from my side, not from them'. This is because his greater knowledge and experience of non-Somali cultural practices placed him in the situation of leading a double life, leading to considerable cultural ambiguity.

Somali young men are not the first to be caught in this ambiguous transitional state (see Hopkins 2007), but in the Somali case, familial dislocation and the mental and physical toll of years in refugee camps resulted in many lacking the positive male role models needed to provide cultural socialization and reinforcement. The type of roles through which young Somali men 'do' ethnicity and gender were not as readily transferable or adaptable to the New Zealand context as the feminine roles of nurturing and socializing. For example, young men aged 12 and over were recruited into the army in Somalia, where they felt they had a real and powerful role in life. This occupation, which endorsed both notions of masculinity and also national/ethnic identity, is clearly not valid in New Zealand; instead these young men were put into school and expected to behave like 'Kiwi' children. Although still expected to play their formal prayer role at

the mosque on Friday afternoons, migration and resettlement also left Somali young men without many of the daily props and support mechanisms of Islam that could help them 'make sense' of the cultural ambiguity in which they were enveloped.

As a result of these factors, educators and RRS reported that young Somali males appeared more inclined than their female counterparts to truant and drop out of school because they were bored in class or found school too difficult (see also Hopkinson 1996). This is a problem associated with male students across the board but one enhanced by the disadvantages the young Somali men faced as refugees, making their chances of educational or employment success very low. Somali males, but not females, had also been involved in the few episodes of criminal and violent behaviour brought to the attention of teachers and the police. Again, this is not only the case for Somali men, for the city as a space has traditionally permitted greater sexual and other freedoms for young men than young women, while at the same time involving them in gender practices that may actually be hostile to their well-being, such as drinking alcohol and driving recklessly (see McDowell 1999; Hopkins 2007). But it is clear that the greater leeway for ambiguity in the young men's cultural identity had severe consequences on their academic adaptation and continued integration in both the New Zealand and Somali communities.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the way in which questions of identity are very often connected to place and space by demonstrating that schools in Christchurch represent a contested space, where identities of 'race' or ethnicity, gender and class intersect. In challenging dominant understandings of 'past-present', 'secular-religious' and 'private-public' space, Somali students found school was often an 'culturally unsafe' place. They attempted to negotiate this space through bodily practices that provided some form of 'safe' haven. However, in continuing to be dominated by the Anglo-centric, middle-class norms of Christchurch's dominant group, school proved to be an

ambiguous space in which the 'safe' and 'unsafe' were not always certain or well-defined. This was clear from the way in which young Somali male and females tried to negotiate these 'unsafe' places in different ways, but with similarly ambivalent results.

In addition, discussion has illustrated that while Christchurch schools were willing to implement some practical measures to accommodate the most obvious religious and cultural practices of Somali students, the structural, temporal and ideological constraints under which they worked prevented them from endorsing a more radical form of inclusive schools where alternative and, sometimes, oppositional paradigms could flourish (Giroux 1994). They thus failed to question the underlying assumption that policies of 'neutrality' and 'equality' are necessarily the most appropriate response to cultural diversity and thus expected Somali students to transform themselves to fit the dominant ideology. That the students negotiated, instead of simply accepting, this expectation demonstrates their tenacity rather than the existence of a 'culturally safe' place for them to learn and participate.

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